Aristotle: Movement and the Structure of Being

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Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Department of Philosophy

ARISTOTLE: MOVEMENT AND THE STRUCTURE OF BEING

a dissertation

by

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2012
Abstract: This project sets out to answer the following question: what does movement contribute to or change about being according to Aristotle? The first part works through the argument for the existence of movement in the Physics. This argument includes distinctive innovations in the structure of being, notably the simultaneous unity and manyness of being: while material and form are one thing, they are two in being. This makes it possible for Aristotle to argue that movement is not intrinsically related to what is not: what comes to be does not emerge from non-being, it comes from something that is in a different sense. The second part turns to the Metaphysics to show that and how the lineage of potency and activity the inquiry into movement. A central problem is that activity or actuality, energeia, does not at first seem to be intrinsically related to a completeness or end, telos. With the unity of different senses of being at stake, Aristotle establishes that it is by showing that activity or actuality is movement most of all, and that movement has and is a complete end. Thus, it is movement that leads Aristotle to conclude that substance and form are energeia, and that unity of being is possible.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Fr. Arthur Madigan and David Roochnik for accepting the task of correcting and improving my work, and I am indebted to all of those who planted its seeds and supported me in cultivating them, especially John Sallis, William Wians, and Rudolf Bernet. I am indebted to you and to others, whose questions and advice have guided me; to you, whose examples of limpid prose, rigorous passion, and intellectual courage have inspired me to follow in my own fumbling way; to those who stayed up late to discuss ideas like these, for the beauty of understanding, and for friendship, especially Jon Burmeister, Erin Stackle, and Will Britt, and others too many to say; to those who did not follow these ideas, to whom my thoughts, and I myself, remained partly inaccessible while I was working on them, but who loved me all the same; to Maureen especially. I cannot repay you, nor would you wish me to. I follow you and devote this work to you.
PART ONE

Chapter One:  Introduction

The question of being since Parmenides has been asked principally on the site of unity and multiplicity. The marvel that unity exists at all amid the many overlapping forms of multiplicity of the world has as its complement the marvel that there is multiplicity at all when all things are one and a single event. We can articulate the same living body into organs and limbs, into colors, into relationships and habits, into biological systems, each configuration traversing the body differently, and relating it differently with the surrounding world. At the same time, the body and things vary as a whole: the sound of a thunderclap passes through my body, my footstep leaves a print in the moss, and the moss leaves its texture on my foot, the air that whirls and lifts around me is connected without gaps to the sea storm brewing offshore across the world, the shadow of the Earth passes over the face of Mars and its weather system changes. Being is full, a long, single event.

The genetic problem of the unity of being can be expressed as follows: multiplicity implies unity, and unity implies multiplicity. On the one hand, as soon as there is unity, it is possible to count the multiple that has been unified—two arms, ten fingers, two ears. The whole of which they are parts gives us a way to articulate them. But without the whole body they are not multiple parts, they are dust and earth. If they are knowable, multiples cannot not exist on their own, for to be multiples they must be divided up into unities: this, this, this. Multiplicity cannot be separated from unity.

On the other hand, as soon as there is unity, and it is possible to say or know that there is unity, the word, the saying, the knowing will be different from the unity itself. One gives rise to two, which gives rise to three, which gives rise to the ten thousand things. Thus unity generates multiplicity. If there is unity but it is impossible to grasp, then immediately ontology or metaphysics is impossible, for being will remain forever beyond understanding, and as we cannot say that ‘there is’ unity, both unity and multiplicity collapse. Then we could neither say there are things—multiple unities—nor could we say there is pure flux—a single multiplicity.
The question arises necessarily: what is there ‘before’ multiplicity, beneath unity? This question cannot be answered by pointing out beings, for this would merely reduplicate the problem on a different level. To paraphrase Wittgenstein, we have to start at the beginning, and not try to start further back.

And yet, what is the beginning? The prospect that nothing is to be known before or beneath the distinction between unity and multiplicity is the prospect that we can never know whether what we name in speech and deed has any anchor in being. For the appearance of both on the stage of thought coincides with my ability to articulate them. Thus, we face the same problem: beneath the unified multiples or multiple unities, in short, beneath the being(s) we articulate, we find ourselves unable to say either that there are things or that there is flux. Worse, if we cannot grasp this, then what allows us to say that what we name is a unity or a multiplicity? We could neither speak the truth, nor could we speak falsely. Thus, being seems suspended over an abyss; distinctions between beings and between kinds of being—the ontological edifice—is without foundation.

It is understandable to attempt to shore up ontology by defining its limits rigidly, insisting on the homogeneity and univocity of being. Through this, though the being we grasp might be very small, it seems certain, reliable. It is also understandable to seek a picture of being in which there are gaps, in which the canvas shows through, in which being is woven together with what is not, but in predictable, stable ways. Thus the being we can grasp might come into contact with that which eludes us, the abyss drawn up into meaning the way silence is meaningful in music.

It is into this situation that Aristotle enters. He has two main criticisms, which change the ontological situation almost entirely. The first is that unity and multiplicity are not things in the sense presumed above—a table over here, a rock over there, unity here, the word ‘unity’ over there. They are not passive objects, they are activities. Multiple things can be at work doing the same activity, the way a flute and its player are one single operation, or the way the heart, blood, and veins are one by being a single movement.
Aristotle’s other main contribution is the multiplicity of aspects. A water hose might be red like fallen leaves, cold like rain, rubber like shoes, round and long as a large snake. There is a difference between what I do as a teacher, what I do as a mammal, and how as a heavy body I fall toward earth when I leap from one rock to another, though these are not separable from one another. These aspects each are the whole being, but as-it-is-in-a-certain-way: I am entirely a doctor—I completely fulfill the meaning of the word doctor, and all of my functions—my digestion, my posture, my thoughts, my concerns—are organized in the pattern of doctoring. There are multiple irreducible and overlapping ways of being a unified thing—all of them the same being, all of them different beings. These multiple aspects are different, but each of them is, and none is essentially exclusive: being a teacher does not make me weightless, and there is no contradiction between them.

For Aristotle is not the philosopher of contraries, but the philosopher of difference. His famous phrase, that being is said in many ways, means that difference is irreducible and at the heart of being. Unlike for Hegel, for Aristotle it is not possible to derive the categories with which we describe things from one another—place cannot arise from quantity, nor can quantity arise from quality. Aristotle’s discovery is that difference is not accomplished by negation: negation is a kind of difference, and for it to have meaning at all, it leads back to positive difference. Being does not imply or require non-being. Saying this does not make it homogenous or identical, nor does it ‘close being off’ to something other, for ontology is not tautology. The different aspects of being have relationships to one another, but these relationships are neither logically derived nor causally (in the modern sense) determined. The medium of their relationships is not logic or causality. If it was, logic and causality would be the medium or site of being—they would be being in the fundamental sense. But it is the other way instead: logic and causes arise on the site of being.

In the later chapters of Metaphysics VII Aristotle formulates the problem of unity, at first as a problem of relationship between objects that appear complete already, between this rock here and that shape there, between material and form or shape. This is the problem expressed by the word hylomorphism. At the end of Metaphysics VIII, however, Aristotle shows that the
problem cannot be solved in that way. He does not propose a solution that would occur on the level of objects, on the level of unities or multiplicities. He does not say a God accomplishes it, or that there is some third spirit that mingles with things and makes them into wholes. He does not solve the problem so much as dissolve it. He dissolves it by saying that the material and form are one and the same, the one being the thing insofar as it is in-potency, the other insofar as it is at-work or active. This transforms the problem of unity and multiplicity completely: different things, that is, the being, described entirely in and through a particular aspect, are one and the same.

There is something deeper than constituted unities and multiplicities, but in grasping what we abandon the traditional problem, in favor of something that appears at first to be anarchic and much less stable: active overlapping beings. A new version of the problem of flux emerges: first, activity is not limited to one body, the way a woman, without changing insofar as she is an artist, expresses her being-an-artist in the transformation of other things. Second, she is simultaneously and entirely a mammal, a mother, a marathon runner, and a student. Which is she? How can she be doing any one thing if she is all these things at once? Like tree blossoms, her being has exploded into a dazzling multiplicity of beings, none of which seem to have priority, because she is entirely them, and they are perfectly fulfilled in her. This, however, is a radically different problem than we confronted before, for something is grasped in each case. It is a problem of plurality, not a problem of raw manyness.

The way out of this difficulty is through the very terms that got us into it: some of these activities depend on one another—being an artist, mother, runner, and student each depends in its own way on being a mammal, while being human might be expressed in being an artist better than in being a mammal. So while she is painting, the activity of painting is what she is in a special sense: she is at-work (energei) painting, she is actually, or really painting. Meanwhile, she is still entirely a mother and a runner, and, indeed, a painter, in a way different than and irreducible to her being at-work: she is these things in-potency (dunamei).

Aristotle establishes much of this account of being, and much else besides, through an examination of movement. The task of this dissertation is to show how and why.
The idea of understanding unity and multiplicity by looking at movement is startling, but intuitive. Movement unifies: my shoes and I form a single mobile contour, two dancers become one in a gesture, a crowd speaks with one voice, my blood, my muscles, my stomach are one living thing through movement. Movement also articulates things into parts: it is movement that makes the joints appear, distinguishing one part from another.

There is something else, too: when I catch a moving thing in the corner of my eye, a leaf, an animal, a blossom, I have an inchoate sense of movement. In that apprehension I sense movement, but also some thing that is moving, though I know not what—I glimpse something that is neither yet a unified thing nor a multiplicity. Now, when I turn to look at the moving thing, a dancer, her unity and plurality are changing, being negotiated, they are at-work. Her moving is neither a liquid or intangible flow that I grasp, nor a partial being—her movement is full, a fulfillment, but at every moment she is expressed as tending toward something, as direction, orientation. This oriented completion, _telos_, is Aristotle’s response to the problem of unity and multiplicity.

I. Method

Our entry into this ontological picture will be to trace the lineage of being-at-work (_energeia_) and potency (_dunamis_) back to its source in Aristotle’s analysis of movement, and work out some of the implications of this lineage.

Normally these terms, and with them the analysis of movement, are subordinated to or made dependent on form and material, as though the latter two were ontologically prior. As conceptually rich as form and material are in Aristotle, it is clear both that they are not self-sufficient concepts. At very least, two things should give us pause in making the assumption of their priority: 1) hylomorphism is a term that is much-repeated, and perhaps for this reason, little understood. It states a problem, not a solution: Aristotle argues explicitly that the unity of material (_hulē_) and form (_eidos_ or _morphē_) is not self-explanatory, that it cannot be understood using those terms alone, but only through potency and being-at-work—terms proper to the analysis of movement, and 2) the fact that when material is not simply asserted as self-evident, that is, when there is an argument for its existence, this occurs in a discussion of movement in the
Physics. Thus, it cannot be assumed in advance that potency and being-at-work are subordinate to form and material. Indeed, we have reason to think that the energetic terms are prior, since they are the solution to the problem posed in the word hylomorphism, and since we get a grip on the existence of material because of a certain relationship between them.

Having this lineage, however, means the energetic sense of being is independent of the discussion of form and material, that is, that energetic being is an irreducibly different sense of being than categorical being.

Thus there are two tasks: First, to trace this lineage requires me to show that the link between energeia and dunamis and movement is an organizing principle of Aristotle’s writings. This is a daunting task, and requires considerable textual work.

In establishing that Aristotle can and should be read this way, my task cannot be to discharge all possible objections. Since this reading has not, to my knowledge, been advanced as a starting point of an interpretation, existing interpretations do not provide a rigorous proving ground for it, and defending this position against these interpreters risks putting words in their mouths. It is inappropriate to attack them without giving them a chance to agree first.

Still, some passages are overdetermined or encrusted with interpretation that need to be chiseled off to allow these passages to point us in different directions. For this reason it is necessary to engage some of these interpretations in the body of this dissertation.

The main examples of this are: reading Physics I with Physics III as a single argument for the existence of movement, and the formal point that the argument of these passages of the Physics parallels the core books of the Metaphysics, books VI-IX. Readings of Physics III.1, especially, are so encrusted with assumptions that one can hardly see the argument of the passage. It seems one hardly needs to read it to understand it—all one needs is to follow a phrase or a clause here or there; entire conversations emerge from such fragmentary readings.

The critical approach here, then, is limited to liberating the reading of these passages enough to give a positive account. In doing so, a certain automatic or assumed way of interpreting energeia and dunamis will be replaced with what will seem at first to be a less systematic, more unstudied and uncertain interpretation. As the argument of the dissertation
progresses, however, my hope is that this will allow a different constellation of concepts, a different pattern of relationships to establish itself.

The second task of this dissertation is the formal strategy to work out with Aristotle the meaning of *energeia* and *dunamis* through the examination of movement. Aristotle carefully delimits the field of inquiry in setting up this problem, for example, ruling out the use of most of our familiar concepts to understand movement properly, and founding the inquiry into *dunamis* and *energeia* on the analysis of movement. So it is necessary to set forth these boundaries, what resources he uses, and what kinds of thinking he rules out.

This means chapters have two goals, which I hope will both adequately be fulfilled: establishing *that* this is the argument of the passage, and interpreting and drawing conclusions from it. In the interest of space, one will sometimes be fulfilled at the expense of the other, and I expect what appears here will not satisfy every reader. Thus, I resign myself to the hope that this work can open up the reading of Aristotle in a way that provokes us to thought, and that it establishes a compelling enough infrastructure for you, reader, to cultivate your own understanding along these lines.
Chapter Two: Synopsis of This Work

Several of the insights that distinguish Aristotle’s ontology have at their core the study of movement: the simultaneous unity and manyness of being (e.g. while material and form are one thing, they are two in being), wholeness or completeness (telos), and actuality (energeia).

The first part of this dissertation works through the argument for the existence of movement in the Physics, which requires several of the most radical innovations in Aristotle’s ontology. For movement to be, we must distinguish between different beings—material and form—of a numerically single thing. Thus, a being must be multiple in aspect while at the same time being one thing. Aristotle accepts Parmenides’ requirement that being not mix with non-being, but he rejects the argument against movement, defining it with no reference to non-being, using the terms potency and actuality.

There is still a difficulty, however, for these things—potency and actuality—are in turn defined through movement. Thus, the second part turns to the Metaphysics to show how the sense of being as potency and activity (energeia) develops within the analysis of movement. Aristotle’s conception of actuality and potency are and remain concepts proper to movement, and their compatibility makes the unity and completeness, the telos of beings possible. It is because movement has and is an end (telos), and activity is movement most of all, that Aristotle can argue that activity (energeia) is an end or completion, telos. Thus movement is the basis for Aristotle’s argument that form and substance are energeia.

I. Part One

The introduction set the investigation of movement within ontological problem of unity and multiplicity. For movement to exist, being must have a certain structure. The analysis of movement leads Aristotle to his two major contributions to the problem of being: being-at-work and the many senses or aspects of being. To say this is to make a point about the architecture of Aristotle’s argument. Thus, this dissertation must show both that this is the architecture of the argument, and then also to interpret it.
This introductory part closes with a review of existing interpretations of potency and being-at-work or actuality, *energeia*. The standard readings take the two to be incompatible or opposed, expressing this concept in four ways: that *energeia* is the actualization of potency, that potency is the privation of *energeia*, that *energeia* is the agent and potency is the patient, and that the two are ways or modes of existence of form and material. After offering criticism of each type in turn, the chapter turns to a refutation of the incompatibility hypothesis in a reading of *Metaphysics* IX.3-4.

II. Part Two

Part Two opens with the problem that structures the dissertation: movement is defined by potency and *energeia* (the energetic sense of being), but the latter two are defined as or by movement. This is not a dead-end but it does require us to clarify Aristotle’s own method, which is to start with what is familiar and confused, and through a series of distinctions, work out what is clear by nature. Thus, there will not be independent access to the energetic pair apart from movement, but using them we understand both movement and those concepts with increasing clarity.

To intensify the difficulty, Chapter Two examines how strange Aristotle’s conceptual framework is to us, and through this aims to sharpen our focus on what is striking about the framework that he does use. The discussion examines and sets aside a number of common ways of defining or interpreting movement: Aristotle does not reduce movement to locomotion, to time and space, impulse, relation, sameness and difference, or non-being.

Chapter Three begins the interpretation of the argument for the existence of movement in *Physics* I by addressing several objections to the approach, particularly the argument that Aristotle seems to say movement needs no proof, and therefore that he finds it philosophically uninteresting. In response, the chapter shows that in Aristotle first philosophy and the study of nature are difficult to distinguish from one another, and shows that movement is not a first principle of physics, but that investigating movement is necessary to the study of nature.

Chapter Four follows the first part of the argument for the existence of movement, which occupies the entirety of *Physics* I. The book opens with the ontological question: how many
beings are there? Aristotle begins his own answer by looking at the ontologically primary form of movement: coming-to-be, *genesis*. By making distinctions, Aristotle shows that non-being is not necessary to the description of movement. Yet Aristotle must make what appear to be enormous sacrifices to accomplish this: being and non-being must both be definite and limited by aspect, and being must be composite, both one and many, for movement consists of two beings—the underlying, and form—which are one in number. It is through this argument that the existence of material, *hulē*, is established. The chapter closes with two arguments: that the material-form pair are explained by and replaced by the potency-being-at-work pair by which movement will be defined, and that the determinate specificity that limits both being and non-being, the thing ‘insofar as’ it is X is being-at-work, discovered in the analysis of movement.

Chapter Five works through the second part of the argument for the existence of movement, namely the definition, for it belongs to the same act to say that something is and what it is. We seek movement to understand nature. In this search Aristotle carefully distinguishes the categorical sense of being from the energetic sense (*energeia* and *dunamis*), and makes it clear that it is through the energetic pair alone that movement is to be defined. The definition of movement is not a set of criteria that will allow us to pick it out as though from a rack of things on a supermarket shelf. Instead, if it is possible to distinguish movement within the world, then we have proof that it exists. The proof begins by showing how the energetic terms help us understand how moving things affect one another. Aristotle proceeds by distinguishing the underlying thing from the thing-insofar-as-it-is-potent: potency is not a property, but an entire being grasped in a certain respect, wood grasped as planks for something. This is why it is meaningful to say that movement is the being-in-completion of potency. Contrary to the standard reading, Aristotle does not say the potency is destroyed in being moved, just as the plank is not destroyed in making it into a floor. Aristotle uses *energeia* to mean the being-at-work of the actor or the patient, and *entelekheia* to mean the whole complex of actor-patient in movement, and therefore the complete meaning of all related movement words and movement-beings, as a builder, building-tools, building-materials, building-project, building-design, building-clothes, and building-company all depend on building in the full sense.
III. Part Three

Part Three opens with a description of the place Aristotle’s investigation into potency and being-at-work occupies in the core books of the *Metaphysics*. These books move through the different senses of being, incidental, categorical, energetic, and alethic, to find the primary sense of being, on which the others depend. The examination of the categorical sense in *Metaphysics* VII is a logical one, concentrating on material and form as the predicative structure of assertion, namely, that a form is said to be of or in material. But the categories cannot account for the unity of material and form normally called hylomorphism, for in speech these are two different beings. Thus, when Aristotle shows that their unity only makes sense by thinking them in and through potency and being-at-work, he is at the same time showing that it is necessary to go beyond the analysis of speech to understand speech.

Chapter Two engages a very significant objection to the idea that movement is important to understand being-at-work, namely the argument normally printed at the end of *Metaphysics* IX.6 that movement and being-at-work are different concepts. The text of the Passage, however, is extremely unreliable: not only is it badly damaged, it only shows up in one of the less reliable manuscripts, and it is crossed out. Moreover, not only is the argument of the surrounding passages oblivious to the distinction, in no other passage does Aristotle refer to it. Finally, the argument that establishes the priority of *energeia* over potency relies on the distinction not having been made. As Burnyeat puts it, the Passage should not be cited as an example of Aristotle’s doctrine: it is a freak performance.

Nevertheless, the Passage should not simply be set aside, and Chapter Three uses the problem it raises to address misconceptions about the relationship between completeness, *telos*, potency, and being-at-work: contrary to a very prevalent assumption, movement is not incomplete or imperfect, it distinguishes parts from one another in the same moment as organizing or unifying them. Similarly, potency is not intrinsically incomplete: a man can master the violin, and animals have the ability to live.

Thus, we turn in Chapter Four to a full account of the different senses of potency to work out their focal meaning. Since the lack of a potency limits what can be the case, the presence of a
potency must play an architecturally positive role. A potency for running can be opposites in two senses: either running or not, or the person who is training can change from not being a runner to being one. Next, the energetic sense of being unites different beings, for my ability to play the flute depends on and is in a way the same as a flute’s ability to be played. Yet a higher sense of potency is exemplified in the flute player who never loses this ability, or the singer who can sing an opera without losing her voice. Potency is the name for the source of a spontaneous upsurge into movement, into being, which occurs when conditions are ripe, and it is when this is so that we name a being according to this potency: it is when someone is able to run a marathon without outside help that we call her a marathon runner. This spontaneity of potency is what allows Aristotle to extend the account of potency and being-at-work to material and form, finally reinterpreting the latter, as promised in *Metaphysics* VII and VIII.

Working out material and form in this way allows us in Chapter Five to formulate the task for understanding being-at-work that Aristotle faces in the later chapters of *Metaphysics* IX: he must show that being-at-work unifies material and form, that it is itself unified or complete, *telos*. When we try to relate being-at-work to completion, however, we find a tremendously difficult problem. For being-at-work was originally a synonym for use, and as such it appears to lack its own meaning and structure, which it inherits entirely from potency. This is the inverse of the Megarian problem, which, Aristotle argued, assimilated potency to being-at-work. Furthermore, if we try to interpret use as having its own structure, that structure would be to subordinate one thing to a further, external end, and being-at-work draws our attention to this even more strongly, by highlighting the fact that it produces a different being, a *work*. Thus, it seems that neither potency nor being-at-work can be *telos*. If this is so, then being falls apart.

Since the *words* being-at-work, *energeia*, and being-in-completion, *entelekheia*, are composed in such a way that they converge, Chapter Six examines the words based on their usage and philology, and addresses the controversy over how each of the parts of *entelekheia* are meant to fit together.

Finally, Chapter Seven turns to the argument in *Metaphysics* IX.8 that being-at-work is more primary than potency. Describing how being-at-work is primary in time allows us to
understand what completion, *telos* means. For Aristotle gives us a picture of how nature is not the pre-existing program of a being, but comes to be in a thing through a development full of indeterminacy. Aristotle then takes up the apparent conflict between being-at-work and accomplishment which was formulated in Chapter Five. It is the argument that being-at-work is movement that allows him to show that it can be *telos*. For, on the one hand, being-at-work is the *telos of potency*. On the other hand, movement already has something of its *formal telos* when it is underway. Indeed, movement itself is not structurally dispersive, but on the contrary, it is a *telos*, an accomplishment. When the being at-work produces a further object, like a house or artwork, Aristotle argues, the being-at-work and the work or *telos* are *in* the same thing. So when there is no other work apart from the being-at-work, it means that the being-at-work *is* the *telos*. This argument accomplishes much more than expected, however: it shows that thinghood and form are being-at-work.

Part Three closes with an epilogue that draws together the two main insights traced out in the dissertation, namely an aspectual account of being, and the concept of energetic being, both of which are uncovered in the study of movement. Aristotle does not set out to solve the problem of unity and multiplicity using the terms by which it is posed. Instead he reconfigures the problem altogether and focuses us on something else. Being is neither simple unity nor sheer multiplicity, it starts out right away having kinds. Being is multifaceted: diverse activity and conditioned spontaneity.
Chapter Three: The Compatibility of *Dunamis* and *Energeia*

The purpose of this chapter is to establish that *dunamis* (potency, capacity, or power) and *energeia* (activity, actuality, or being-at-work) are compatible, at least in the works of Aristotle. The significance of the words *dunamis*, *energeia*, and *entelekheia* for Aristotle’s thought, and for the history of philosophy and science, is undeniable. They are, at very least, central to Aristotle’s *Physics*, in which they define movement and thereby bring it for the first time within the reach of science. They are also central to the works *On the Soul*, in which they define and articulate the soul, and to the *Metaphysics*, in which they are one of the most important of the four ways that being is said. Aristotle devotes an entire book of the *Metaphysics* (Met. VIII) to showing that the form-material structure of categorical predication should be understood through *dunamis* and *energeia*. He devotes another book (Met. IX) to marking out what they themselves mean. The English descendants of these words, and words influenced by them, such as energy, activity, actuality, power, force, possibility, perfection, matter, and form, are concepts whose importance is so extensive that it is hard to assess.

Yet for all this, it is not immediately clear what these words mean. Aristotle had to invent new words to express the concept *energeia* and *entelekheia*, and thinking these first principles is one of the very highest acts possible for human beings, accomplished only by leaving behind the familiar ideas with which we must begin. Aristotle, for example, does not use potency to mean ‘force,’ as we might be inclined to do.1 Similarly, this essay does not attempt to settle the debate over whether *energeia* means actuality or activity, or both at once—this is a matter of translation that appears to reduce it to concepts which we think are obvious and easily understood, to ideas we are quite comfortable with.2 To the extent that we think they are obvious, I propose that we

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1 Force is a quantity of motive power, usually transferable, or able to be generated or destroyed by relations between beings. There is only one chapter in the corpus that speaks of potency as having a quantity, and this likely not Aristotle, but a later scholar (*Physics* VII.7).

approach them in completely the opposite way that Aristotle says we must, and further, I suggest that that we have almost certainly misunderstood them by fusing or replacing them with modern concepts. Thus, I translate *energeia* with ‘being-at-work,’ which is more literal, more vivid, and provokes us to think the identity of being and working, which brings us closer to the concept.\(^3\)

I. **Potency and Being-at-work Are Both Different and the Same**

We can, however, get a good start on them by sticking to formal distinctions. Aristotle is very clear that potency (*dunamis*) and being-at-work (*energeia*) are different. He rejects the argument of the Megarians, for example, saying, “it is clear that potency and being-at-work are different (for these assertions [of the Megarians] make potency and being-at-work the same [*tauto*], for which reason it is no small thing they are seeking to abolish)” (*Met.* IX.3 1047a20).\(^4\) Yet this claim comes only three chapters after the claim that they are one and the same: “the extreme or limit [*eschatē*] of material and the form are one and the same, one potentially, the other actively… and what is in potency [*to dunamei*] and what is in activity are in a way one” (*Met.* VIII.6 1045b18, cf. 1045a21).\(^5\) In both cases he uses the word *auto*, same. Potency and being-at-work are both the same, and different.

The question, of course, is this: how are they the same, and how are they different? This gives us a framework through which to work out their meaning. Yet, considering their importance and the amount of discussion devoted to them directly and indirectly, it should come as some surprise that a received opinion on this question, namely that they are opposites, is false. This opinion takes several forms, but each form presumes them to be mutually exclusive or incompatible, that is, incapable of being the case at the same time.

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\(^3\) When it is useful to translate them, *energeia* shall be rendered being-at-work following Sachs, and *dunamis* shall be rendered potency, ability or possibility. Aristotle distinguishes between potency in the primary sense and possibility in *Met.* V.12. The variation in in translating *dunamis* is simply for the sake of the naturalness of the English phrase.


\(^5\) The passage, at greater length, runs: ἡ ἐσχάτῃ ὑλή καὶ ἡ μορφῇ ταὐτὸ καὶ ἐν, δυνάμει, τὸ δὲ ἐνέργεια, ὥστε ὁμοίων τὸ ἐν τοῦ ἐνὸς τί ἄττιν καὶ τοῦ ἐν εἶναι: ἐν γὰρ τί ἐκαστόν, καὶ τὸ δυνάμει καὶ τὸ ἐνέργεια ἐν πῶς ἐστίν. Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.
This received opinion seems to have the advantage of making it look easy to grasp: if they are opposites then they are clearly different, and they are the same if potency (dunamis) aims at or turns into being-at-work (energeia). Together, then, this position implies that potency can in some significant sense be derived from and thus reduced to the concept of being-at-work through negation or opposition.

However, it is not just that Aristotle fails to oppose actuality or being-at-work and potency, it is, in fact, that he argues that they cannot be opposed to one another: what is at-work and what is potent cannot be mutually exclusive. Instead, for them to be the same and one (Met. VIII.6 1045b18), it must be the case that being-at-work (energeia) and being-potent (dunamei) are the same; they must both be there precisely at the same time. Thus, Aristotle refers to their compatibility twice, saying: “There is what is-at-work alone, what is-in-potency, and what is-in-potency and at-work” (Met. XI.9 1065b5, cf. Physics III.1 200b26).

An exceptionally clear way to show that potency and being-at-work are compatible is Metaphysics IX.3-4, at the conclusion of an argument against the Megarians. Before turning to this, however, it is necessary to examine the theses that hold potency and being-at-work to be opposites, and respond to an objection.

A reminder, then: the purpose of this essay is to further our understanding of potency and being-at-work by attending to the formal relationship between the two. I shall argue that potency, dunamis, and being-at-work, energeia, cannot be incompatible or opposed, showing, along the way, something of how it is possible for them to be compatible.⁶

I shall sometimes refer to the consensus position as the incompatibility hypothesis, and sometimes as the opposition hypothesis. Here’s why: The relationship between dunamis and energeia cannot be formulated simply in terms of sameness and difference because they are both different and the same. So another term is necessary. The term ‘opposition’ alone will not work, for, while the opposite of ‘difference’ is ‘sameness,’ it is unclear what the opposite of opposition might be. Aristotle uses ‘opposite’ (enantion) to describe things that cannot be present at the same

⁶ Though ἐνέργεια and ἐνεντέλεχεια are not the same, and the difference in meaning is important in other ways, for our purposes in this paper, they are equivalent. See G.A. Blair, “Aristotle on ‘Εντέλεχεια: A Reply to Daniel Graham,” American Journal of Philology, 114 (1993), 91-97 [“Reply”].
time (Met. V.10 1018a22). Said in other words, opposed terms are incompatible. Thankfully, unlike ‘opposition,’ the word ‘incompatible’ has an opposite, namely ‘compatible,’ and ‘compatibility’ allows its terms to be both the same and different, which is clearly the case with potency and being-at-work.

II. The Opposition Hypothesis

In the first paragraph of his essay “On Potentiality,” Agamben writes: “In both his metaphysics and his physics, Aristotle opposed potentiality to actuality, 
\[\text{dunamis to energeia,}\]
and bequeathed this opposition to Western philosophy and science.” The consensus position in analytic, continental, and historical readings is that \(\text{dunamis}\) is the opposite of, or a deprivation of \(\text{energeia}\). It is held in different forms by Aquinas, Brentano, Ross, Akrill, Blair, Menn, Agamben, Heidegger, Sachs, Waterlow, and Beere.

Opposed are “contradictories, contraries, relative terms, lacking and having, and the extremes from which things come into being and into which they pass away; and whatever things do not admit of being present at the same time in something that is receptive of both of them” (Met. V.10 1018a20-24). Concerning relation, see below. In this context, Aristotle lists ‘relative terms’ as a kind of opposition, but this is not the kind of opposition that is claimed by the hypothesis that I wish to reject. In Met. V.15 Aristotle argues that the very being of what is relative by number or potency refers to something else—an argument clearly compatible with a thing being potent. Yet potency is not here one of the objects related, but that by which one of the related terms is referred to the other. Thus, here potency and being-at-work are not ‘related’ to one another in any of the senses Aristotle lists, and they are certainly not themselves individual or separate beings.

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7 Giorgio Agamben, Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 177 [Potentialities].

8 For example, Brentano, Franz, On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle, trans. Rolf George (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 43. [Senses of Being]


10 Cf. Agamben, Potentialities, 177.

11 “Here we are dealing entirely with a being that is directly opposed to the ἔργον and its having been produced, namely ὀνανόμης.” In the passage that follows, he goes on to say that the presence of ἔργον is
This hypothesis has taken several forms, which I call the Actualization, Privation, and Modal, and Relational forms of opposition. More precisely, the theses are:

(i) that potency is converted, extinguished or exhausted in becoming actual (the actualization or extinction hypothesis),
(ii) that potency is privation, is defined by privative negation, or cannot be potency without privation (the privation hypothesis),
(iii) that being-in-potency and being-in-actuality are different ways or states of being which cannot exist at once (ways of being or modal hypothesis).

One of the opposition hypotheses is not a logical opposition, but a causal one, namely:

(iv) that actuality happens to or acts upon potency, conceived as something passive that undergoes actuality (relation or agent/patient hypothesis).

This first section of the paper consists of a description of each, along with some objections peculiar to each.

III. The Actualization Hypothesis

Ross and the tradition following him argue that movement is the process of actualization by which potency is turned into actuality. They hold that when a thing actually is, its potential is gone—it has been used up, or converted into actuality.¹⁸ According to Ross:

And motion in general is the actualising of the potential. Thus it is part of the nature of movement that the potential has not yet completely lost its potentiality and become actual; that is the difference between movement and activity. In each moment of activity, potentiality is completely cancelled and transformed into

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¹⁵ Sachs argues that “Aristotle's definition of motion was made by putting together two terms, actuality and potentiality, which normally contradict each other.” Joe Sachs, “Motion and its Place in Nature” in Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, §6 [“Motion”]. See also §3.

¹⁶ Waterlow argues for both actualization (“change is from potential to actual in some definite respect.”), and privation hypotheses (“unless it retains something in common with not-being (so that ‘potentially P’ carries some of the same message as ‘not-P’) it will be of no use to explain change.”) in Sarah Waterlow, Nature, Change and Agency in Aristotle’s Physics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 110 [Nature].

¹⁷ Beere, Doing and Being, 173. See also the discussion, below.

¹⁸ “But [the state of potentiality] can obviously not exist after the activity, for if the activity has passed nothing remains that can be realized through this activity,” Brentano, Senses of Being, 43.
actuality; in movement the transformation is not complete till the movement is
over.19

In general this hypothesis is that there is a kind of transition between potency and
energeia. To take another example, Heidegger understands movement as a kind of transition—
“the capability begins by way of passing over beyond itself,”—but argues that it at the same time
changes into actuality and remains what it is.20

The reasoning for this position seems to be something like this: motion is always moving
from something and to something. The ‘from’ and ‘to’ seem to indicate opposite ends of a
continuum, the way hot is the contrary of cold, which in the first book of the Physics, Aristotle
calls deprivation (that from which), and form (that to which). To defenders of this position, it
seems that potency and being-at-work are opposites because potency is in a sense ‘that from
which’ motion proceeds, so activity must be ‘that to which’ a thing proceeds. In general, this
interpretation tries to bend a simple observation about motion—that it begins in one place and
ends in another—into the definition of movement, and to make it an insight into the fundamental
relationship between dunamis and energeia.

However, as Sachs notes, this hypothesis alters the text of Aristotle’s definition of
movement, substituting ‘actualization’ for a word conventionally translated ‘actuality’
everywhere else in the corpus. Ross says, “entelekheia must here mean ‘actualization,’ not
‘actuality’; it is the passage to actuality that is kinēsis.”21 To distort the text like this is to despair of
understanding what Aristotle means.22

Much worse, it is well-established in the secondary literature that opposing dunamis and
energeia in this way makes the definition of movement circular.23 anyone who holds that
movement is a passing over, a realization, or a transformation, is saying that movement is a

19 David Ross, in Aristotle, 84.
20 Heidegger, Force, 164-165. Another example is “This passing over beyond itself of a capability into
enactment...”
University Press, 1960), 359 [Aristotle’s Physics].
22 Sachs observes: “Ross’ decision that entelekheia must here mean “actualization”’ is a desperate one,
indicating a despair of understanding Aristotle out of his own mouth.” Sachs, “Motion,” §3.
23 This was originally argued by Kosman, L. A. “Aristotle’s Definition of Motion,” Phronesis, 14 (1969),
40-63 [“Motion”].
motion of some kind. Movement, then, cannot be defined as a motion from potency to being-at-work: there is no movement, no change, no “shift” from being able-to-think to thinking, according to Aristotle.²⁴

It is also inadmissible to define movement by these words, and then to turn around and define these words as movements: dunamis and energeia are not themselves movements or proto-movements.²⁵

The error is due to missing a key distinction Aristotle is at pains to make, that movement is ‘from’ potency in a different sense than it is from its formal “starting point.” For the way an educated person comes from a person is very different than the way education comes out of ‘uneducated.’ Movement proceeds from potency as from a source. And potency is what makes it possible for the hypokeimenon to underlie the opposites “from which” and “to which.” This is key to the next incompatibility hypothesis.

**IV. The Privation Hypothesis**

Not all variations of the opposition hypothesis define movement as realization or transition, however. But those that do not usually oppose potency and being-at-work in a different way, by taking potency to be the deprivation of activity. Aquinas’ argument is representative of this privation hypothesis: movement, he says, occurs only when a thing is both

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²⁴ Aristotle expresses this by saying that it is not correct to say that dunamis goes toward (βαδίζει εἰς) entelekhoeia, but that we lack the words to express this event. Having defined movement by energeia / entelekhoeia and dunamis, we cannot turn around and explain the difference or relation between them by appealing to movement. His reluctance to use the word ‘alteration’ in On the Soul II.5 confirms this: he says that it is not correct to say that a thing is altered when its potency is like the entelekhoeia, but that since these kinds of potency have no name, “it is still necessary to use such words as ‘be acted upon’ and ‘be altered’ as though they were appropriate” (Soul II.5 418a3-4, cf. 417b1, 6-8, 13-15), Sachs, Joe, trans., Aristotle’s On the Soul and On Memory and Recollection (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 2001) [“Soul”]. Thus, though Aristotle uses words like badizei, ‘go toward’ and metabolei, ‘change’ to describe how a potent thing begins to act (for example, κινεῖται τὸ κινητόν τούτο δ’ ἐστὶν δυνάμει κινούμενον, οὗ καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ, τὸ δὲ δυνάμει εἰς ἐντελέχειαν μαθίζει, ἐστὶν δ’ ἤ κινησις ἐντελέχεια κινητοῦ ἀτελῆς. τὸ δὲ κινοῦν ἡ ἐνεργεία ἐστὶν Physics VIII.5 257b6-9), these are loose and metaphorical, and as Aristotle points out, cannot actually mean movement. Thus, bringing someone who knows to contemplate is not alteration. Aristotle even hesitates to call learning an alteration, since in one sense something does change—a person loses his ignorance—but in another sense it ‘comes to be’ precisely what it is, that is, able to know, and this does not seem to be a change (Soul II.5 417b14-17).

²⁵ Heidegger does this, for example, by saying that “Δύναμις is indeed… that from out of which change and transition occurs” but two pages later, says, that “The being present of something capable as such… is a mode of being in movement.” Heidegger, Force, 184,186.
able to be a man and is not-yet a man. Potency, according to him, is inextricable from the privation opposite the form, so its presence coincides with incompleteness. Thus, movement is the being-present of something that is still absent and for that reason still potent: a house in potency, then, is essentially ‘not a house’. Put otherwise, for him potency is or is defined by an absence of something, and movement is accomplished by the presence of this absent thing. Sachs expresses this paradoxical idea clearly as follows: in movement “a potentiality, which must be, at a minimum, a privation of actuality, is at the same time that actuality of which it is the lack.”

On this account, movement is a mixing or coincidence, or even, on some accounts, an identity of being and non-being, the being of the negation of a particular being. Motion, then,

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27 Aquinas distinguishes between potencies for movement and potentiality in his discussion of *Metaphysics*. He also interprets the passage on the Megarians (below) to be saying that a thing is potential when nothing impossible results from assuming that it is, instead of saying that no impotency exists when it actively is the case. This temporal distinction seems to allow him to evade the contradiction of tying potency to the opposite of the form that actively is. See Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. J. P. Rowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1962), [*Commentary on Metaphysics*].

28 The more sophisticated interpreters in the standard interpretation notice that even though (they believe) potency passes into activity, potency and activity nevertheless remain different: potency both becomes activity and is not absorbed in activity. How is this possible? Heidegger suggests the following solution: “δύναμις ἐχειν means... it holds itself in this capability and holds itself back with this capability—and thereby precisely does not enact” (Heidegger, *Force*, 156). A thing is not potent, Heidegger argues, it has potency. He says that this means that a thing that has potency holds it back from activity. Heidegger’s solution continues: when a thing acts, it lets potency flow over into activity, but for activity to happen, it must still hold on to potency, and in so doing hold back from acting. He has posited having as the continuity that holds potency and being-at-work together. Agamben’s solution in *Potentialities* is even more tortured: he defines potency as the ability to not act, and therefore defines impotency as potency. Therefore, in passing over into its opposite, potency negates its impotence and in so doing, retains its negativity and impotency precisely by becoming fully active.

29 Sachs, “Motion,” §3.

30 Sarah Waterlow argues that for Aristotle change is tied “down to an inbuilt terminus, and hence to the dubious status of a being vowed to its own non-being” Waterlow, *Nature*, 107. Waterlow goes on to argue about potency that “unless it retains something in common with not-being (so that ‘potentially P’ carries some of the same message as ‘not-P’) it will be of no use to explain change” (110). Yet this is an over-hasty conclusion, and does not follow, since a thing can be able to know or know potentially, and know at the same time. Her further argument, that something “potential is potentially just what it would be if actual” (110) takes potentiality to be an actuality in the mode of negation or not-being, but to have no independent character apart from negation, in effect, that it is defined as negation or a kind of negation. This makes it impossible to account for the positive
would be a kind of synthesis of being and nothingness, spurred by the being present of that
which is not yet, by the presence of an absence.\footnote{Put more generally: since form and energēia are identified with being, the variations of the opposition hypothesis all lead to the conclusion that potency and matter are or are infused with non-being.} When it comes to movement, the Privation Hypothesis usually holds that potency is either purged or destroyed from a thing, as though removing the ‘not’ they supposed to be inherent in potency, or that the thing was lifted out of potency and into actuality.

Yet this position is also deeply problematic. For example, if any change occurs, it is not in the reduction or disappearance of potency: the very idea that movement can generate a “second potentiality” that is a “first actuality” shows that a thing moves or at least that it can move when its dunamis is increasing, not when it is being removed: learning is a movement in which the ability to think increases, not a movement in which this ability is destroyed (cf. Phys. VIII.5, Soul II.5).\footnote{A typical evasion of this obvious point is to multiply the number of potencies required for a description: you have on potency to be a speaker because you are human, another for being able to speak well, and so on. Such multiplications require justification.}

The position also significantly compromises our conceptual resources: for example, there is a deprivation (sterēsis) of form, such as uneducated or not-seeing, but there is also a deprivation of potency, namely uneducable or blind. This means that defining potency by negation leaves us unable to distinguish ‘not-seeing’ from ‘able to see’ and either of these from ‘blind.’\footnote{If dunamis was already defined by or as lack, its negation or sterēsis would lead to two untenable positions: either 1) the negation of ‘not-seeing’ would be its opposite, namely ‘seeing,’ instead of ‘blind,’ which was demanded, or 2) the negation of ‘not-seeing’ would still be ‘not-seeing,’ making it impossible to distinguish ‘able to see’ from ‘blind.’ The privationist could appeal to time here, saying that potency is a privation, not in the simple sense, but temporally: something able to see is something that is not yet seeing. This reverses the dependence of time on movement that Aristotle argues for in Physics IV.}

character of potency, as what reaches toward a form or what will be unless something gets in its way. Incidentally, this commits her to the actualization hypothesis already described, namely “that change is from potential to actual in some definite respect” (Waterlow, Nature, 110).

\footnote{If dunamis was already defined by or as lack, its negation or sterēsis would lead to two untenable positions: either 1) the negation of ‘not-seeing’ would be its opposite, namely ‘seeing,’ instead of ‘blind,’ which was demanded, or 2) the negation of ‘not-seeing’ would still be ‘not-seeing,’ making it impossible to distinguish ‘able to see’ from ‘blind.’ The privationist could appeal to time here, saying that potency is a privation, not in the simple sense, but temporally: something able to see is something that is not yet seeing. This reverses the dependence of time on movement that Aristotle argues for in Physics IV.}
Finally, the two passages that are normally taken to establish this position (Physics I.7-9 and III.1 201b5-15) either do not support this interpretation or they actually support its refutation.\(^3\)

**Physics I.7-9**

The primary text for the privation hypothesis can only be Physics I.7-9. There Aristotle sets out the opposition mentioned between form and its opposite deprivation, sterēsis. This is part of the demonstration that movement is not simple, but composite, for the ordinary ways of talking about coming-to-be distinguish between three elements: (1) the ‘musical’ form, eidos, that comes to be, (2) its ‘unmusical’ opposite or lack, sterēsis, out of which the form comes to be, and which thereby ceases to be, and (3) the underlying thing, hypokeimenon, the ‘man’ staying itself through the change, the coming-to-be thing, which loses the sterēsis and comes to have the form (Physics I.7 190b10).\(^3\) These can be schematized as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Form} & \quad \leftrightarrow \quad \text{opposite lack (deprivation)} \\
& \quad \downarrow \\
& \quad \text{Underlying/material}
\end{align*}
\]

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\(^3\) The first, as we shall see, does not argue that potency is defined by deprivation, but shows instead that they are different. The second, instead of arguing that movement only occurs when there is some potency remaining, and therefore that potency is the not-yet being of actuality, it aims to establish that movement only occurs when there is actuality.

\(^3\) Scholars argue over whether this analysis of coming-to-be into its elements can account adequately for the coming-to-be of ousiai (independent things, substances), and not just of properties. The full discussion of this point and the variety of positions on it, is appropriate for a different essay. If, however, this three-fold structure is not an abstract schema, but can only be understood relative to a particular event of coming-to-be, then it can apply to any kind of change. A human being (the hypokeimenon) could change from sick (the sterēsis) to healthy (the eidos), or earth (the hypokeimenon) could change from being flesh (the eidos) to not being flesh (the sterēsis). One difference between these two examples is that the coming-to-be and passing away of a substance is not between contraries, which lay out a continuum between them, but between contradictories. Another, Aristotle suggests in Metaphysics VIII.5, is that when the thinghood of a thing changes, what is there returns back into its material in a different way than before. Thus, while Aristotle is clear that the material of a human being is not water and earth, but flesh and bones, the latter are only flesh and bones by being parts of a whole, living, active human being, so when this being perishes they are no longer flesh and bone. Similarly, when a hand is cut off, it is not possible to say it is a hand.
A human being changes from unmusical to musical. Where might *dunamis* appear in the schema? If this passage was to support the opposition hypothesis, it would have to argue that potency is or is fused with or inseparable from the deprivation, *sterēsis*. Put otherwise, Aristotle would have to argue that potency is or is inseparable from the shapelessness opposite form.

Yet this interpretation is impossible. For 1) Aristotle claims these distinctions let him agree with Parmenides that non-being is not, and that nothing comes to be from it, and at the same time claim that movement exists (*Physics* I.8 191b12-20). Now non-being, called deprivation, cannot make anything come to be, while *dunamis* is precisely what makes things come to be: it is the source of change. 2) As the source of movement, then, *dunamis* must either be the underlying thing or of it, or the form. Since Aristotle describes the *hypokeimenon* like *dunamis*, as “not a contrary” but something that “inherently yearns for and stretches out toward [the form] by its own nature,” *dunamis* should be of or in the *hypokeimenon* (*Physics* I.7 190b33, I.9

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36 The argument is this: when considered *simply*, Aristotle says, what is not simply is not, and nothing comes to be from it. Yet nothing prevents us from considering what is not in another way, namely as part of a composite. In this way *it* is incidentally because it is the non-being of a form that is, in an underlying thing that is (*Physics* I.8 191b7). Thus, education does not spring out of nothingness, nor does the lack of education produce it: it arises from the human being who gets educated.

37 That the underlying thing and the form are related as *dunamis* is to *energeia* can be seen from *Met*. VIII.6 “the highest level of material, *hyle*, and form, *eidos*, are one and the same thing, the former potentially, the latter actively” (*Met*. VIII.6 1045b18), and from *Met*. IX.6 “some of them are related in the manner of a motion to a potency, others in the manner of thinghood to some material” (*Met*. IX.6 1048b8).

38 That Aristotle does not oppose *dunamis* to *energeia* is also apparent by his use of *dunamis* in the solution to the problem of non-contradiction. Some people, he says, think that contraries are present at the same time, since they see opposites come to be out of the same thing. He answers that this is a false conclusion: “For being is meant in two ways... the same thing at the same time can both be and not be, but not in the same respect. For it is possible for the same thing at the same time to be contrary things potentially, but not in full activity” (*Met*. IV.5 1009a31). The passage can be clarified by example: ‘hot’ can be potentially and yet not actually, for what is cold can be hot. Thus, that which is capable of contraries is something actually cold (i.e. not hot). Yet contraries of which this thing is capable are: hot and cold. Therefore, it follows necessarily that a thing that is actually cold is also at the same time and in the same respect capable of being cold. Aristotle’s solution does not rely on a thing being actually and potentially cold at the same time, but implies it. The passage cannot support varieties of the opposition hypothesis. It is not possible, as Agamben might suggest, to read this passage as saying that a thing is and is not at the same time because it is actually (‘is’) and potentially (‘is not’) the same thing at the same time. To do so one would break the law of non-contradiction that Aristotle is denying in the passage. It would make the passage say that a thing is actually and is not actually (i.e. because it is potentially) the same thing at the same time.
Furthermore, 3) the argument against Parmenides allows Aristotle to argue that movement has no essential reference to what is not, sterēsis: everything comes to be, Aristotle says, from the underlying thing and the form, or, as he puts it differently: everything comes to be from potency and being-at-work (Physics I.7 190b22, I.8 191b30, cf. III.1).

In sum, it might seem possible to derive an opposition between dunamis and energeia by analogy with the opposition described in Physics I.7-9 between eidos, which simply is, and sterēsis, which simply is not. Yet the passage that was supposed to bolster the opposition hypothesis actually undermines it.

Physics III.1

The privation hypothesis also conflicts with the opening of the passages on the definition of movement: “There is what is at-work alone, what is potential, and what is potential and at-work” (Met. XI.9 1065b5, cf. Physics III.1 200b26). By listing what is at-work alone, and what is potential alone, Aristotle is implying that the third group consists of those that are both.

Nevertheless, a passage a page later, at Physics III.1 201a19-23, is usually read as supporting the incompatibility of dunamis and entelekheia. Waterlow and Beere, for example, appeal to this passage in support of incompatibility. Beere translates it this way:

“Since, in some cases, one thing may be in capacity and in fulfillment F—although not simultaneously, or not in the same respect, but it may, for instance, be in capacity hot and in fulfillment cold—therefore many things will act and be acted on by one another.” Beere, Ibid., 173.

This, he argues, shows Aristotle appealing to or stating the incompatibility of dunamis and entelekheia to make a point about change. Thus, this comment is a sudden and unsupported assertion of an absolute claim about the character of being-in-potency or being-in-work—one which does not further his point in that passage in any way. Unfortunately, both his translation

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40 ἐστι δὲ τὸ μὴν ἐνεργεία μόνον τὸ δὲ δυνάμει τὸ δὲ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνεργεία. Cf. the parallel phrase in the Physics, which also uses the dative: ἐστι δὴ [τ]ὶ τὸ μὴν ἐνελεχεῖα μόνον, τὸ δὲ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνελεχεῖα “There is what is by being-completely alone, and another by being-potential and being-completely” (Physics III.1 200b26).
41 Waterlow, Nature, 115. She does not argue for the position, but uses it as a premise.
and the Greek he supplies alter the passage, inserting dashes which are presumably intended to make the key part of the passage resemble a universal comment. Still, even translated this way, it supports the hypothesis of compatibility instead.

Above, we saw that for Aristotle some things are both potentially and completely (Phys. III.1 200b26). Referring to these, he says that

Since some things (enía tauta) are both in potency and in entelekheia not at once or not according to the same thing, but for example hot in entelekheia and cold in potency, then many things will already be doing [something to] and undergoing [something] because of one another, so that all will be at once doing and undergoing. (Physics III.1 201a19-22)

Things have potencies that cannot actually be at the same time: a wet thing is necessarily capable of being dry, a healthy thing capable of being sick, a resting thing capable of moving (cf. Met. IX.7). When something is capable of being different than it actually is, then it can affect and be affected by other things at the same time as it affects them, as when a hot thing heats a cold thing, and is at the same time cooled by it or by something else (cf. GA IV.3 769b15-25). Thus, some or all movements happen because of the interaction of different beings. So the passage reads roughly this way: “in the ways that they are not potentially and actively the same thing at the same time, but are instead able to be something they are not actively being now, then things will act on and be acted upon at the same time.”

An alternative account seems, at first possible, but in fact makes the passage unintelligible. One might say that the relation between this passage and the opening passage, in which Aristotle distinguished what is at-work alone, what is in-potency, and what is in-potency and at-work: those opening distinctions, he suggests, might be interpreted as between what is only one or the other and what admit of being both at all. Thus, we might seek to make room to

42 The phrase epei d'enia tauta kai dunamei kai entelekheiai estin, “since some things are both dunamei and entelekheiai…” is a restatement of the phrase at the beginning of that chapter “there is what is entelekheiai alone, and what is dunamei and entelekheiai” (Physics III.1 200b26) or “There is what is at-work alone, what is potential, and what is potential and at-work” ἔστι δὲ τὸ μὲν ἐνέργεια μόνον τὸ δὲ δυνάμει τὸ δὲ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνέργεια (Met. XI.9 1065b5). To add “oux hama de” adds to “some things” the qualifier “not at the same time.”

43 ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐνία ταύτα καὶ δυνάμει καὶ ἐντελεχεία ἐστίν. οὐ γὰρ ἕμα δὲ ἢ ὁὐ κατὰ τὸ αὐτό, ἀλλ’ ὁὐν θερμὸν μὲν ἐντελεχεία ψυχρὸν δὲ δυνάμει, πολλὰ ἢδη ποιήσει καὶ πείσεται ὡς’ ἄλληλον· ἣπεν γὰρ ἕσται ἦμα ποιητικόν καὶ παθητικόν. ὡςτε καὶ τὸ κινοῦν φυσικῶς κινητόν· πάν γὰρ τὸ τοιοῦτον κινοῦν κινούμενον καὶ αὐτό.
interpret the passage on mutual affection that we are examining as offering a universal statement of the condition of the beings that are in-potency and at-work, namely that they cannot be so at the same time.\textsuperscript{44}

There are several problems with this line of argument, however. For this reading to be possible, it would have to be 1) an unsupported dogmatic assertion, 2) a clear, unequivocal, universal assertion about all entelekheiai and dunamei. 3) The passage illustrates that whatever moves other things is moved by them at the same time: cold things cool hot things even as hot things heat cold ones. Now, if Aristotle was asserting that a thing cannot be passively in-potency and being in active completion at once, then, on the other hand, the refutation discussed below would obtain. On the other hand, he would end up saying that being-potent in both active and passive senses is incompatible with being actively complete. This would produce exactly the opposite point that Aristotle needs it to make. Potency is a source of change in another, or in itself as other. Where Aristotle is saying that things move each other and are moved by each other, this interpretation would end up saying that when a thing is hot it could neither heat another thing nor be heated (nor, for that matter, could it be hot).\textsuperscript{45}

My argument, by contrast, naturally pairs enia tauta with kai dunamei kai entelekheiai oux hama de. Since the passage is already talking about movement, we are decidedly not talking about things that are entelekheia alone, but about things that are both. The cases, then are “the ones that are both, just not at once.”\textsuperscript{46} The passage, then, does not say that potency and entelekheia are incompatible, it limits itself to “some cases,” namely the ones in which something is potent for

\textsuperscript{44} I am indebted to Christopher Frey for this suggestion.

\textsuperscript{45} With respect to the interpretation that the ‘ways’ or Modal Hypothesis gives to this passage, it is simply not possible to link this to the special sense of the dative dunamei and entelekheiai for which they argue: what would i) making a point about a development from dunamei to entelekheiai here—a development that is not a change and which must be distinguished ontologically from the sense proper to change—and ii) asserting that they are essentially not both at once, have to do with the argument of the passage that iii) all things are moved by each another in moving the others?

\textsuperscript{46} The problem that motivates the passage, on this reading would be something like: “your definition of movement doesn’t mention agent and patient, but you’ve used the example of building: how does that work out? Does your definition make the agent change? If so, why, and if not, why not? Since there must be some things, like builders and teachers, that don’t move, or at least not in the way they move other things” …a problem that gets taken up again in Physics III.3, and in the argument for unmoved movers.
something that they are not at the moment actually being. In such cases a thing only *happens* not to be both at the same time.\(^{47}\) Clearly this does not rule out the possibility that a thing would be both in *dunamis* and in *entelekheia* at the same time and in the same respect, but actually implies their compatibility: if they were simply or obviously either always together (as the Megarians hold) or always incompatible, there would be no need to limit the observation to ‘some cases.’

**V. The Relation Hypothesis**

Immediately another form of the incompatibility hypothesis suggests itself: the Relation Hypothesis, which holds that potency and being at work are related as something passive is related to something active. Put otherwise, it holds that *energeia*, whether as movement or as *ousia*, “happens to potency.” The language of form being applied to material, or any other such language, such as informing, or being imprinted on, is one of the things that falsely appears to reinforce the relational hypothesis of potency and *energeia*. It can be included among these hypotheses since active and passive are opposites, and because it holds that the same thing cannot be active and passive in the same respect at the same time (*Met. IX.1*).

Though it does not admit of the same refutation as the others, this hypothesis cannot be reconciled with three of Aristotle’s arguments: 1) that potency is also an ability to be *unaffected*, 2) that *potency* is the source (*arché*) of movement also in the sense of the ability to act, so it must be identified with the agent as well, and in general 3) that potency is for both acting and for being acted upon: both agent and patient have complementary potencies and activities (*Met. V.12 1019a17-22, IX.1 1046a10-19, Phys. III.3 202a13-20, b18-23*). Again, the first means that potency cannot be identified with the affected object, the second demands that potency, far from being the opposite of *energeia*, must be the *source* of *energeia*, at least in the sense of movement, and the third shows that both agent and patient have both *energeia* and *dunamis*.

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\(^{47}\) Hussey argues for the same position, both by translating “Since some things are the same things both actually and potentially, not at the same time or not in the same part, but e.g. hot in actuality, cold in potentiality...” and glossing the passage by saying that this implies “reciprocal action involving both the active and passive potentialities of each: X will warm Y, and Y at the same time will cool X.” Hussey, *Aristotle: Physics Books III and IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 60-1 [*Physics III and IV*].
Furthermore, as noted above, if form and material are to be one, as they are in *Met.* VIII.6, then what is potent and what is at-work must be or be able to be a single thing (*Met.* V.15, VIII.6, cf. XIV.1). But to the extent that relation is between discrete things, one cannot say that potency and *energeia* are related to one another: ‘relation’ can only be used analogously when referring to potency and *energeia*.

**VI. The ‘Ways of Being’ or Modal Hypothesis**

The ‘Ways of Being’ Hypothesis is, at present, the best-defended of the theories of opposition.\(^4^8\) It holds that *dunamis* and *energeia* are two ways to be the same thing, which cannot be the case at the same time. The strongest argument for it, it seems to me, has not yet been put forward, namely this: when the activity of working ceases, it is not there, but it does not ‘go anywhere else,’ and it apparently comes and goes instantly. Why would this *not* apply to the *ability* to work? Now, as it turns out, Aristotle himself argues that potency is *not* like *energeia* in precisely this respect. For the argument against the Megarians establishes two things: i) that potency remains even when the activity is not there, and ii) that the appearance or disappearance of a potency, say, for building or running, requires justification (*Met.* IX.3).

This hypothesis makes being-potent and being-at-work into *states of being something*. In other words, it makes *dunamis* into a *kind of energeia* or actuality—an actual state of being which excludes a different actual state of being. Thus, it preserves the incompatibility hypothesis by eliminating the most meaningful and interesting distinction between them.

On the other hand, if there is a limit distinguishing the state of being-in-potency from the state of being-in-*energeia* and making them mutually exclusive, then in the change from one to the other either something is preserved, that is, there is something underlying the movement, or nothing is, and the next state comes to be from nothing. Both alternatives, however, are changes, which potency and *energeia* are used to define, so the ‘Ways’ Hypothesis ends up being an Actualization Hypothesis. Defenders of the ‘Ways’ hypothesis say that there is a change in the sense of a development—a change that is not a change. Yet this is precisely how Aristotle

describes movements like learning and growing (Phys. VIII.4, Soul II.5). It is nevertheless change: he does not distinguish between change and ontological change.

Even worse, however, is that, if it were true, the ‘Ways’ Hypothesis would make its proponents posit a third category between being and non-being. If being potentially hot is incompatible with being actually hot, what happens to its potency? It must either be destroyed, or hover between being and non-being. If they argue it is destroyed, the refutation of the position follows quickly, but if they do not, and argue that it neither is nor is not, they are at odds with Aristotle.

For, in his discussion of the principle of non-contradiction in Metaphysics IV.7, Aristotle rejects just this idea of something being neither one nor the other. He says “neither is it possible that there be anything between contradictories, but about any one thing whatever, it is necessary either to affirm or deny one of them” (Met. IV.7 1011b23). Aristotle goes on to argue that “if there is a middle ground, neither what is nor what is not” will be true or false (Met. IV.7 1011b29). Thus, in a manner of speaking, to put “something between contradictories seems to make all things false” (Met. IV.7 1012a27). The same point is also clear in Physics I.8, where he affirms that something either is or is not: “we do not abolish everything’s either being or not being” (Physics I.8 191b26-7). Dunamis and energeia are not exceptions to this rule: Aristotle brings them up in the sentence immediately following the latter assertion. Since to be potent and not to be potent are contradictories, a thing is either dunaton or adunaton, capable or incapable.

Metaphysics IX.6-7

There is a refinement of this argument that takes the form of a two-level hypothesis. This variation on the Modal or Ways-of-Being Hypothesis makes the ordinary senses of potency and being-at-work compatible, but argues that they have another meaning, according to which they are incompatible. Beere’s is the most completely worked out position of this kind. Like Ross he

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49 Beere resists this idea for the potency for movement, saying: “this is not to say that, in the production of an F from something that has the power to be made into an F, the thing’s power to be made into an F is thereby destroyed.” Beere, Doing and Being, 173. It is notable that he conceives a power as a property or distinct item in or belonging to a being. This eliminates the distinction between the categorical sense of being and the energetic by making potencies indistinguishable from categorical attributes.
argues that there are two levels of meaning for *dunamis* and *energeia*, but based on their declensions:

1) In the sense concerning movement, *dunamis* and *energeia* are compatible.
2) In the dative case, however, being-in-potency (*to dunamei on*) and being-in-work (*to energeiai on*) are supposed to be incompatible.50

The second, higher, level of analysis is supposed to be the ‘ontological’ level: when a thing is active, it is being-in-work. When it is not at work, the claim goes, its being shifts or changes to being-in-potency—a shift that is, however, neither a movement nor an alteration.

Beere makes this claim, and can only make it, based on *Met.* IX.6-7, where, he argues, Aristotle makes the distinction between potency and *energeia* in the sense of movement and in the sense of being.51 On his reading, these chapters would have to establish a strong distinction between these levels, for on one level they are supposed to be compatible, while on the other they are supposed to be incompatible.

However, Aristotle does not distinguish, either explicitly or implicitly, between two levels of these words that might correspond to their different cases.52 Or at least, if this is what he is doing, he makes a complete mess of it by both implicitly and explicitly equating the dative sense with others. He starts off the examples in *Met.* IX.6 by saying

1) "*energeia* is the being there, though not the way (*mē houtōs hōsper*) we say [it is there] in capacity (*dunamei*),"

Potency is dative here, but *hē energeia* clearly is nominative. Beere is quite right to say Aristotle doesn’t quite oppose being-in-potency to being-in-*energeia* here, since here *energeia* is not dative.

50 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 173.
51 Aristotle does not say that this further sense of *energeia* and *dunamis* is the ontological, only that the two apply to more than movement (cf. *Met.* IX.1, 6). The other piece of textual evidence Beere cites in his support is from *Physics* III.1 201a20-3, which we have just examined.
52 Although in those chapters Aristotle does seek what being-in-potency means, he does not seek what being-in-*energeia* means, only that he will make distinctions about *energeia*. It is through the distinctions about being-at-work that we will find out what being-in-potency is.
More importantly, the word ‘not’ does not imply opposition or incompatibility, it implies difference, and opposition is only one kind of difference. For example: red and magnitude are not the same, but the same thing is red and 4’ wide; material is not form, but a thing is both wood and a table: material and form must be compatible, or tables would never exist.53

Aristotle continues by saying that

2) X and Y are there in capacity (dunamei), and adding that “[all these things are around] in energeia too.”54

This is the only dative pair in the passage, and it seems to say that things are around in both ways, exactly the opposite of what Beere’s reading leads us to expect. Aristotle concludes the examples by saying

3) “within this distinction [of pairs], let the energeia be marked off as one part, what is able (to dunaton) as the other.”

Here ἡ energeia (nominative) is paired with to dunaton (substantive), instead of, as before, the dative to dunamei on. This indicates rather clearly that the dative case and the substantive use of the word are the same. Thus, the passage in which Beere says Aristotle distinguishes between different cases or levels of these terms in fact conflates them: contextually dunamei is equated with to dunaton, and to energeiai with ἡ energeia, and meanwhile these are paired indiscriminately with each other, dunamei (dative) with both energeia and energeiai (nominative and dative), and energeia with to dunaton (substantive). The passage wouldn’t work unless they were being used roughly synonymously.

It gets worse for the Modal Hypothesis, however, for when Aristotle sets out, in the very next chapter, to say exactly “when each thing is in-potency, and when not.” If Aristotle’s exposition was too dense and confusing in the previous passage, here he can distinguish clearly the meaning of the dative. Yet, he says “there is something that is potent (dunaton), and this is

53 In fact, as we saw earlier, material and form are one and the same thing, in a particular respect, and the way to grasp their sameness and difference is by understanding them through potency and being-at-work (Met. VIII.6).
54 ‘Being around’ is Beere’s reading of to de energeiai.
healthy in potency (dunamei).”\(^55\) There is no distinction between the potency you have and being-potent. The dative and accusative cases of the word are not distinct. In other words, for a thing to ‘have’ a potency or capacity just is what it means for it to be in-potency (dative).

Finally, the passage is very clear that a thing is in-potency only when it is already in the condition in which it is at-work on its own being that thing.\(^56\) In other places, too, Aristotle appears to say explicitly that the dative senses of these words are compatible: for example, to define movement, Aristotle first distinguishes different dative senses of being: “There is what is-in-work alone, what is-in-potency, and what is-in-potency and is-in work” (Met. XI.9 1065b5, cf. Physics III.1 200b26).\(^57\) The appearance of the dative here, in the definition of movement (where the phrase to dunamei on appears), and in the passage from Physics III.1 discussed above, tells against the hypothesis that Aristotle intends to distinguish between the sense of potency related to movement and a further ontological sense.

To his credit, Beere’s defence of his position begins by admitting immediately that the first sentence quoted above “does not quite say that being-in-capacity and being-in-energeia are… incompatible.”\(^71\) But he holds the position emphatically nonetheless, without, however, giving positive textual reasons for it. Beere criticizes other writers for making the analysis too complex

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\(^{55}\) ἔστι τι δ’ δυνατόν ἔστι, καὶ τούτ’ ἔστιν ἴσχυσιν ψυχής.

\(^{56}\) One might object that what is potent is incomplete, and opposed in that sense to being-at-work, which is complete. This position conflates two different distinctions. The complete/incomplete distinction seems to stand thus: there are kinds of dunamis that are essentially or structurally incomplete, such as being built, digesting or learning, because these have a limit (Met. IX.6) because they require an outside source (Met. IX.7), so their energeia is movement. Other kinds of dunamis are not incomplete, such as being a house, seeing, knowing, and living.

\(^{57}\) ἐστι δὲ τὸ μὲν ἐνεργεία μόνον τὸ δὲ δυνάμει τὸ δὲ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνέργεια. Cf. the parallel phrase in the Physics, which also uses the dative: ἔστι δὴ [τι] τὸ μὲν ἐνεργεία μόνον, τὸ δὲ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνέργεια “There is what is by being-completely alone, and another by being-potential and being-completely” (Physics III.1 200b26). If they were mutually exclusive, he would not need to specify that some things are only at-work and not in potency, and he certainly would not say that some things are at-work and in-potency.
or reading too much of their own metaphysical apparatus back into its examples. His analysis, admirable in other respects, seems to be open to the same criticism on this point.

The multiple-level interpretation of potency and being-at-work is untenable: there is only one level. In this passage, Aristotle does not make them incompatible in this passage any more than he makes thinking incompatible with the ability to think (cf. Met. IX.6 1048a33).

VII. Refutation of the Hypothesis of Incompatibility

Aristotle's refutation of the Megarians in Met. IX.3-4 also applies to the incompatibility hypothesis. He does not admit of a mixing of being and non-being, but like Parmenides holds that a thing must either be or not be (Physics I.8 191b28). Therefore, we have a choice: either 1) a thing actually sitting has the potency to sit (compatibility hypothesis), or 2) a thing actually sitting lacks the potency to sit (incompatibility hypothesis).

Now, the Megarians hold the contrary of the privation hypothesis against which I have been arguing. They do not argue that potency and being-at-work are incompatible or mutually opposed. Instead, they argue that potency and being-at-work coincide utterly, so that someone is able to sit or build only when she is actively sitting or building, and when she is not, she does not have the potency.

Potency and entelekheia, for example, are so similar that Aristotle remarks on it, saying "one must divide up the senses of potency and entelekheia; so far we have been speaking about them as unambiguous." (Soul II.5 417a22-24). This is what leads Aristotle to engage the Megarians in Met. IX.3-4.

Aristotle argues that the Megarians go too far, not because they say that a thing is potent and active at once in the same respect, but because they argue that a thing cannot be potent when it is not also active. For this leaves them with no way to distinguish potency and energeia. This forces them to deny the existence of movement (Metaphysics IX.3 1047a12).

As Witt argues, Aristotle's refutation of the Megarians works by linking two senses of potency together necessarily, namely capacity and possibility. This argument works by showing that lacking the ability to build means being unable to build, and that this inability, to adynaton,
just means impossibility.\textsuperscript{58} Thus, Aristotle argues, if someone lacks the ability to sit, this incapacity to sit implies that sitting is impossible for him, so that if he is now standing he will never sit. What lacks a potency is incapable of happening and therefore cannot be:

[a] if what is lacking a potency is incapable, what is not happening will be incapable of happening; [b] but of what is incapable of happening, it is false for anyone to say either that it is so or that it will be so (since that is what incapable means). (Met. IX.3 1047a12-13)

Clearly, the same argument applies to the opposition hypothesis: if the lack of a potency is inability or impotence, and this implies or is the same as impossibility, then the refutation of the opposition hypothesis arrives immediately: if potency and energeia are incompatible or opposed, it follows that when one is sitting his ability to sit will be eliminated, so that sitting is impossible for someone precisely when and because he is actually sitting.

To put this in a more detailed way: Aristotle accepts Parmenides’ argument that a thing must either be or not be (Physics I.8 191b28). Therefore for Aristotle either 1) a thing actually sitting lacks the potency to sit, or 2) a thing actually sitting has the potency to sit. Therefore, cannot coherently argue 2) that someone actually sitting has the potency to sit at the same time and in the same respect, for if they did, they would be asserting what their hypothesis denies, namely that potency and actuality or activity are compatible. But if they argue 1) that someone actually sitting has no potency to sit, then it follows that sitting is impossible for him precisely at the same time as he is actually sitting. Both alternatives are incoherent. Therefore the premise must be rejected.

Unlike the refutation of the Megarians, the self-contradiction of the incompatibility hypothesis does not depend on the existence of movement to have its force, but it also makes

\textsuperscript{58} Though in what follows I shall use these words to translate dunamis, it is important to remember that the argument gains considerable intuitive force from these being the same word. Witt defends the viability of the distinction by appealing to Aristotle’s own distinction in Metaphysics V.12 between what is not necessarily true, what is true, and what admits of being true (1019b34). She also points out that Aristotle links potency with possibility in On Interpretation 12, and On the Heavens I.12. See Witt, Ways of Being, 125 n.3. See also Cynthia Freeland’s “Aristotle on Possibilities and Capacities,” Ancient Philosophy 6 (1986), Simo Knuuttila, Modalities in Medieval Philosophy (London: Routledge, 1993), chapter 1.
movement impossible. Thus, it follows immediately from Aristotle’s argument against the Megarians that potency and being-at-work cannot be opposed or incompatible.\(^59\)

My suggestion, that this argument refutes both the identity and opposition hypotheses, is not just a tangential reading. Aristotle’s conclusion from this is an explicit denial that potency and being-at-work are either identical or incompatible.\(^60\) He argues that if something is capable of sitting, and admits of sitting, if it so happens that sitting is there in it, it will in no way be incapable of it: thus, “what is potent is that which would be in no way incapable if it happened that the being-at-work of which it is said to have the potency was there” (Met. IX.3 1047a25-7).\(^61\) Put otherwise, things must be potent for something when they are at-work-doing that thing: that

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\(^{59}\) Much like the two-level hypothesis discussed above, someone wishing to argue that potency and actuality are opposite or incompatible might try to parry by distinguishing a ‘metaphysical’ sense of potency (translated either ‘potentiality’ or ‘possibility’) from the ‘physical’ sense of potency (translated by ‘power’ or ‘force’), that sense in the definition of movement is the latter, and that it is opposed to activity. If one is objecting that my argument here has a metaphysical basis, then I can reply in turn, that the idea that potency and activity are opposed appears to be a metaphysical claim, that is, an a priori claim. But on the level of an intuitive claim, compatibility has much more force, for it seems that a person who is pushing a bucket is most obviously capable of pushing when he is actually doing so, and that it is not clear that someone is capable of pushing when he is not. It is precisely this that lends plausibility to the Megarian position. Yet, if this is the case, then the objection is all the more implausible. For an account of the plausibility of their position, see Stephen Makin, “Megarian Possibilities” Philosophical Studies 83 (1996): 253-276 (“Possibilities”). Charlotte Witt defends their position up to a point as well, and has reservations about whether Aristotle would agree that they hold the preposterous conclusions Makin ascribes to them, in Witt, Ways of Being, 125 n.2.

\(^{60}\) Aristotle’s conclusions are often followed by their justification. In this case, the justification occurs in the chapter after his conclusion. Thus, the statement of his position in IX.3 is, in some measure, what he defends in Met. IX.4, in which he works out the relation between possibility and potential, and the implication of impossibility for what is potentially or actually the case.

\(^{61}\) ἕστι δὲ δύνατὸν τούτο ὃ ἐὰν ὑπάρξῃ ἢ ἐνέργεια ὃς λέγεται ἔχειν τὴν δύναμιν, ὥστεν ἔστιμι ἄδύνατον (Met. IX.3 1047a24-5). It seems tautological to say that what is potent is what is not impotent. Agamben, however, interprets potency as inseparable from, and therefore essentially the ability not to act, that is, potency is impotency. Only for this reason, he argues, does potency remain when it is active, for potency must hold itself back from full activity, if it is to act again in the future. Therefore his account is that potency (which is impotency) negates itself in becoming active, and thereby becomes potent precisely in ceasing to be what it is. But it seems clear from this passage that potency is precisely not something that withholds itself from activity. Such restraint would only be necessary if either potency itself became activity, or if potency was the opposite of activity. If we suppose neither, as I have argued, then this complex solution is unnecessary.

\(^{62}\) What does it mean to say that things are being-at-work alone? It does not mean that a thing has no potency, or that nothing of it is in-potency, it means that their being is not defined as being-in-potency, as, for example, prime material is defined, nor is it defined as being-in-potency together with being-at-work, as are, for example, ‘snub’ (convexity in a nose), or windlessness (stillness in an expanse of air),
is, as Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* XII, “it appears that everything at work is capable, while not everything capable is at work” (*Met. XII.6* 1071b24, cf. *Physics* III.1 201b5-15). The *dunamis* and *energeia* for the same thing are both present at the same time.

It is clear, then, not only that Aristotle does not oppose potency and being-at-work or *entelekheia*, but also that on his argument they *cannot* be opposed or incompatible.

**VIII. Conclusion**

In this paper I offered an analysis of the primary incompatibilist positions, removed textual support for these positions, and showed that Aristotle’s response to the Megarians refutes the incompatibility hypothesis. In that argument, Aristotle does not object to *dunamis* and *energeia* being at the same time, but only argues that the Megarians go too far by doing away with their difference altogether.

We have seen, first, different forms of opposition or incompatibility, and put forward some criticisms of each. We saw then that the passage from the *Physics* I.7-9 that seemed to

or life (the being-at-work of the body), but solely as being-at-work (as are, perhaps, numbers, the prime mover).

Dialogically this is a difficult passage, and one might try to object that Aristotle withdraws or controverts just what I quote here, since he presents it as an impasse. But the passage that follows does not controvert the idea that potency and being-at-work are at the same time—in fact, it dramatically affirms that both must necessarily be-at-work always. What Aristotle corrects is precisely not that what is at work is also always potent—this remains affirmed—but instead the false conclusion that this implies that potency is prior. Again, the statement that what is at work is also capable remains, and only the question of priority is corrected. The full passage is as follows: “And yet there is an impasse: for it seems that, while everything that is at work is capable of it, not everything that is capable of it is at work, so that the potency would take precedence. But surely if this were so there would be no beings at all, since it is possible to be capable of being and not yet be. Nevertheless, there is the same possibility if things are the way those who write about the gods say, who generate all things out of night, or the way of those who write about nature, who say “all things were together.” For how will things have been set in motion, if there were not some responsible thing at work? ...And this is why some people, such as Leucippus and Plato, bring in an everlasting activity, for they say that there is always motion. But why there is this motion, and what it is, they do not say... Now to suppose that potency takes precedence over being-at-work is in a sense right but in a sense not right (and in what sense has been said [in *Met. IX.8-9*])... so... it is necessary for something to persist always at work in the same way. But if there is going to be generation and destruction, there must be something else [which has potency] that is always at work in different ways. Therefore it must necessarily be at work in a certain way in virtue of itself, and in another way in virtue of something else, in virtue, that is, of... the first [mover]... and obviously both together are responsible for what happens in different ways always. And without a doubt motions are this way.... And if it is not this way things will come from night and from “all things together” and from not-being...” (*Met. IX.6* 1071b24-IX.7 1072a21, Sachs, trans.).
promise the strongest confirmation of the incompatibility thesis did not provide it, but showed rather the opposite, and the same was true of the passages from *Metaphysics* IX.6 and 7. We then saw that Aristotle’s argument against the identity hypothesis of the Megarians tells with equal or greater force upon the incompatibility hypothesis.

Yet *dunamis* cannot be the same as *energeia*. The motivation for arguing that potency and being-at-work are opposed or incompatible seemed to be the fear that if they were not, then nothing would prevent them from being identical. They seem to have been opposed for the sake of securing this difference. Thus, working out what potency and *energeia* are will require us to discover a kind of difference that is not opposition.⁶⁴ Perhaps for this reason, to get a grip on it is not an easy task. Aristotle forces us to look for a way to think *dunamis* as existing with *energeia* and as being neither merely the same as it nor simply opposed.

We need to sketch the path to working out the meaning and relationship between these terms in Aristotle’s *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. This problem demands that we give a method for reading Aristotle, but could serve also as an example for how to read Aristotle in general.

Having seen that it is possible to develop such a reading, we need to know how to proceed with this reading. How does Aristotle work out the meaning of *dunamis* and *energeia*, and their ‘relation’ to one another?

⁶⁴ Cf. *Phys*. III.3, and *Met*. IX.1 for examples of such difficulties.
PART TWO

Chapter One: Inquiry In and Through Movement

To get underway in the study of *dunamis* and *energeia* it is necessary to examine movement. Aristotle devotes book IX of the *Metaphysics* specifically to *dunamis* and *energeia*, yet it is not possible to start the study there, for the argument of that book begins with the sense of *dunamis* proper to movement, its primary sense, and with the sense of *energeia* that is movement, and from there works out how they from there extend to other things. Thus, to understand *dunamis* and *energeia* it is necessary to understand movement, and their function in movement.

When we turn to Aristotle’s account of movement we do not find an explanation of these words through an appeal to movement. Instead, we find a proof of the existence of movement through an appeal to them. After all, Aristotle defines movement as *the being-at-work (energeia) of a potent thing (tou dunamei ontos), as such*. Thus, he expresses the structure of movement using the very terms we hoped movement would clarify; instead of making the meaning of any of these, more obvious, Aristotle seems to make it less accessible by referring them to one another, making of them a kind of circle. We cannot undertake the understanding of *dunamis* and *energeia* without movement, but movement is not grasped through concepts that are readily available to us: it can only be grasped through understanding *dunamis* and *energeia*. The turn to movement, therefore, is not merely preliminary to the study of *dunamis* and *energeia*: to study one is to study the other.

This circle, however, is not a closed circle. Three things hold it open: the words *dunamis* and *energeia* themselves, the experience of movement, and the differences and relationships between the words, as expressed in the structure of movement. After some general remarks, we shall work out more precisely both this difficulty and how to get out of it.

I. Preliminary Remarks

The first reason that movement (*kinesis*) does not form a closed circle with *dunamis* and *energeia* is that *dunamis, energeia, and entelekheia* have meanings that we can partly recognize. One cannot suppose that the meanings of these words are those of ordinary Greek—consider Aristotle’s complex relationship with inherited opinions (*endoxa*), and consider also that he
created the words *energeia* and *entelekhēia* from ordinary Greek words. Nevertheless, though we have reasons to say that the common meanings of each of these words are of limited usefulness, they nevertheless would have made some sense on their own. Thankfully, Aristotle goes out of his way to say something about their meaning, though not much, as we shall see in a later chapter. So while it will not be possible to grasp their meanings solely on philological grounds, it will be possible to gain some insight this way.

The complex relationship between Aristotle’s terms and ordinary Greek has a loose resemblance to the relationship between these terms and our English translations: what he tries to communicate is and can be expressed in ordinary Greek or in ordinary English, but only roughly.¹ For us this means that in many cases key terms should remain untranslated, except where elucidation would be very helpful; such elucidation, while it can be accurate, is usually provisional and will not survive being generalized or removed from its context. The distinctions Aristotle makes between them, and the relationships between them, however, are more likely to apply elsewhere, though here too one must be cautious.

The second reason that it could actually be helpful to put *kinēsis*, on the one hand, and *dunamis* and *energeia* on the other, into a circle of inquiry, is that we have ample experience of movement. This experience is continuous, unrelenting; it is unclear at first whether there is anything to be distinguished from it, that is, it seems as though the whole of the cosmos moves. Even what appears to have ceased moving and be resting is in its most basic character *something that moves*. To be motionless, therefore, has two relevant meanings: to be at rest, and to be beyond movement and rest altogether. For rest has its meaning only as a moment of a moving thing, as “a deprivation in what admits of motion,” (*Physics* V.2 226b10-18). But it is not at all obvious whether or not there is anything that transcends movement and rest altogether.

The matter is complicated by our own natural constitution: we are living things, and for us to live is (also) to move: if nothing appears to be moving, nevertheless our hearts beat, our

¹ Take, for example, the ongoing disagreement over how to translate *entelekhēia*, e.g. as complete reality, full actuality, being-at-work-staying-itself, being-in-its-end, and being-at-its-end. A similar disagreement over how to translate *energeia*—sometimes it can only be translated activity, and other times actuality, e.g. *NE* VII.12 1153a12, *Pro* III.5 204a20, III.6 206a14—led Beere to argue against translating it at all. Cf. the introduction to Beere, *Doing and Being*. 
blood circulates continuously. If we grasp eternal ideas, such as Gödel’s incompleteness theorems, we do so as moving things, whose minds will soon turn to something else. If movement seems to be indeterminate or difficult to grasp, it is in part because it is difficult to distinguish from anything in our experience.

Furthermore, while our familiarity with this experience gives access to movement, familiarity also covers over its problematic and questionable character: we do not realize that we do not understand movement. For example, if asked what movement is, we are inclined to respond as Descartes did, that it is “nothing other than the action by which some body travels from one place to another,” and we do not notice that this is to define movement as a motion of some kind.²

However, to add irony to irony, our alienation from the stakes and terms of Aristotle’s inquiry can help us get around this fog of familiarity. The concepts we normally deploy to understand movement, to explain it through something we think is more fundamental, or to reduce it to something else are absent from Aristotle’s account of what movement is. As we shall see in the next chapter, in his account of movement Aristotle denies us concepts such as space and time, impetus, relation, sameness and difference, being and non-being. But being deprived of our familiar explanations forces us to think what he is saying more deeply.

Finally, while we have an experience of movement that leads us into the question of *dunamis* and *energeia*, it is not this experience that Aristotle aims to clarify, but the being of movement and, through this, *dunamis* and *energeia*, perhaps being itself. He makes it clear in the first chapter of the *Physics* that we are not investigating our *experience of nature*, but the principles that make nature what it is. He describes this study by characterizing the condition of our original experience through a distinction between what is clearer and more familiar to us and what is clearer and more distinguished to us by nature (*ta saphestera tē phusei kai gnōrimōtera,"

² René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, trans. Valentine R. Miller and Reese Miller (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), II.24, cf. II.25 [*Principles*]. Joe Sachs comments, as follows: “The use of the word ‘passes’ [travels] makes this definition an obvious circle; Descartes might just as well have called the motion the action by which a thing moves. But the important part of Descartes’ definition is the words ‘nothing more than,’ by which he asserts that motion is susceptible of no definition which is not circular...” Sachs, “Motion,” §1.
This statement is not part of an attempt to work out the structure of experience or of phenomena in which clarity happens, nor is it an attempt to work out what clarity itself is. It is a description of the relationship between what things are by nature and how they initially appear to us. Its purpose is to outline how we come to know, and it gives us a guiding insight that will allow us to grasp the method and structure of Aristotle’s investigation.

We shall turn to this in some detail in a moment, but it is important to notice that both of the terms Aristotle uses to describe clarity and knowing here have the sense of ‘distinct’: *ta sapheستera*, the things that are clearer, more distinct, more manifest, and *ta gnörimōtera*, those well-known, noble or distinguished ones, the familiar ones or kinsmen. In a word, Aristotle’s account of movement is accomplished by distinctions, that is, by putting these things into determinate structural relationships that, as we inquire into them, clarify each other, more and more sharply distinguishing themselves from one another even as they hold together more strongly as a whole. Like a well-cut joint, the more precisely they are distinguished, the more accurately they are cut, the better they can fit together.

II. Two Interpretive Difficulties

Aristotle’s account of movement occupies the next few chapters. This account quietly brings up two difficulties that appear to cripple any explanatory project, and which need to be noted before our discussion can get underway. Doing so shows how provocative the argument is, because it raises two question marks over the relationship between movement, on the one hand, and on the other i) the elements (*stoikheion*) of movement—material, form, and in some way

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3 If the way that *ousia* is prior in being to the other categories indicates what makes a thing clearer by nature—a formulation admittedly significant in assumptions—then one could argue that what is clearer by nature is what does not in its being depend on other things, while what is less clear by nature does. For example, the category of ‘sort’ or ‘kind’ has no meaning unless there is a more primary being of which it is said. Thus, the ‘sort’ is less clear by nature, since to be at all something else must be, that is, because its being depends on and implies another being.

4 Aristotle is not a phenomenologist in the traditional modern sense: that conception of phenomena implies a dative of appearance, the one in or to which things appear, and borrows from Kant (and through him Augustine) to the extent that this dative ‘subject’ of appearance accomplishes a synthesis or gathering of phenomena even as it articulates and distinguishes them. The dative of appearance is there in Aristotle’s formulation only at the beginning of the road of inquiry, that is, there is a dative of appearance when comes to what is clearer and more familiar to us, but *not* when it comes to what is clearer by nature.
sterēsis, and ii) the structure or definition of movement expressed through dunamis and energeia, the sources (arkhai) of movement. The difficulty is, in a word, that it is through movement that we distinguish or grasp both the elements and the sources of movement. If explanation is the act of referring or reducing something to more recognizable terms, Aristotle’s account of movement is not at all an explanatory project. Instead, it is an inquiry, which gains access to movement by successive groups of distinctions. A closer look at these difficulties will offer us a guideline for reading Aristotle in such a way that we can enter the hermeneutic circle formed by these terms.

It is in what I shall call the Descriptive Argument that Aristotle distinguishes the elements of movement: form (eidos), the deprivation or non-being of this form (sterēsis), and the underlying material (hupokeimenon or hulē). Among scholars, this discussion of movement “is generally agreed to constitute [Aristotle’s] formal introduction of the notions, fundamental in his thinking, of matter and form.”

It is through the study of movement that these terms are distinguished from and set into relationship with one another.

By itself this might not constitute a critical circularity, for example, if Aristotle was merely using the discussion of movement as an occasion to expound an independent doctrine of form (eidos), material (hulē), and deprivation (sterēsis). However, in the discussion of place in Physics IV.4, Aristotle indicates that the relationship between material and movement is much more radical; it is because of movement that we say that material exists at all:

just as, if something is altered, there is some being, now pale, that before was dark, and now hard that before was soft, which is why we say material is something (dio phamen einai ti tên hulēn), so too place, through a similar appearing (phantasias), seems to be something, except that that [material’s being said to be something] is because that which was being air—this now is water (ho èn aër, touto nun hudôr) (Physics IV.4 211b31-36)

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This suggests that the introduction of the concepts of material and form in the discussion of movement was no accident: it may be that ‘the wood of something’ (hulê) and ‘the look of something’ (eidos) show up at all only because something moves or changes.⁶

Here, however, we must point out that the elements that we had hoped would explain, reduce, or relate movement to something more recognizable, are themselves discovered first of all through movement. There is the possibility that they only exist, that is, that they are only something in and through movement. This poses an interpretive obstacle that risks being impossible to surmount. What is Aristotle’s method, and what could such an argument, which threatens to collapse into a cycle of self-reference, be meant to accomplish? Before we turn to a possible answer, however, it will be useful to intensify the difficulty.

Scholars usually minimize the importance of movement to the discussion of dunamis and energeia in Metaphysics IX, occasionally noting the fact that Aristotle makes the account of these terms start with movement, but failing to turn to the physics to understand what the terms mean in the definition of movement.⁷ Heidegger is in this respect a notable exception, saying “Aristotle achieves this essential meaning of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια precisely through a treatment of κίνησις, with a view toward movement. This is shown quite unmistakably in his investigation of κίνησις (Phys. III.1-3).”⁸ Yet Heidegger does not follow up on this promising comment, either by expanding on it in further remarks, or by turning to examine the chapters he mentions.

When we turn to other work on the Physics, we find scholars to be acutely concerned about the circularity of the definition of movement. Their worry is really about whether or not an interpretation of this definition smuggles in an understanding of movement. The most notorious example is in the widespread interpretation of entelekheia as ‘actualization’ in the context of the

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⁶ Either a new look takes primacy by arising in our phenomenal field (phantasia) and calling us to remark on it, attributing it to some material, or it is through imagining (phantasia) change that we grasp or posit an underlying thing, a material of the change.

⁷ Thus, in his book on Metaphysics IX, though it argues that energeia is both doing and being, at once and in the same way, Beere turns to the definition of movement only briefly, on p. 158 and 204. For the understanding of energeia, the very slim conclusion he draws is the suggestion that in the definition of movement energeia must mean ‘activity’ instead of ‘actuality.’

⁸ Heidegger, Force, 42.
definition, since ‘actualization’ is another word for movement. They take up this task as though it was evident that Aristotle could not have given a circular definition. This is a legitimate concern, and indeed, a definition should not be circular in that way, and Aristotle’s is not. Yet scholars overlook the more complex form of circularity sketched above.

Scholars usually assume that a definition succeeds if it defines movement in more recognizable terms—terms that we already understand. In doing so, they confuse precisely the two things Aristotle is at pains to distinguish at the opening of the Physics, namely what is more familiar to us, and what is more distinct by nature. Thus, while they are at pains to avoid one kind of circularity, they do not notice that the definition of movement forms a different kind of circle.

That the definition of movement is circular is clear from the relationship between Physics III and Metaphysics IX. In book III of the Physics Aristotle defines movement as: “the entelekheia of a potential being, as such” (Phys. III.1 201a11). In Metaphysics IX, however, he defines dunamis as a source of change: “[potency] is a source of change in another or in itself as other” (Met. IX.1 1046a11). Now, since in both of these contexts Aristotle uses the words kinēsis and metabolē interchangeably, he seems to have given a circular definition, in the end: “movement is the entelekheia of a being that is a source of movement in another or as other.” The same problem arises for energeia or entelekheia (taking the two to be the same in this formulation) when Aristotle says that energeia is thought most of all to be movement (Met. IX.3 1047a30-32).

This means that the definition is not defining movement in more basic terms. It also cannot be doing another thing scholars take it to do: recent scholarship takes this formula as a set of criteria that help us distinguish one thing from another, that is, as a kind of formula that will

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9 See especially Kosman, “Motion,” 40-63.
10 ἡ τοῦ δυνάμεων ὄντος ἐντελέχεια, ἡ τοιούτων, κίνησις ἐστιν
11 ἡ ἔστιν ἀρχὴ μεταβολῆς ἐν ἄλλῳ ἢ ἡ ἄλλο.
12 In the first four books of the Physics, and in Metaphysics IX, Aristotle uses movement, kinēsis, interchangeably with change, metabolē. In the Physics, see II.1 192b11-20, III.1 200b12, 200b33-201a3, 201a8-10, III.2 201b21-23, in the Metaphysics, see IX.1 1046a1-11, and especially IX.2 1046b22, where a soul is described with a source of kinēsis. In book five of the Physics, he distinguishes these, and kinēsis comes to mean most properly motion as we normally understand it, namely motion in place.
help us pick out the right class of objects, i.e. this is a movement, that is an object. Yet when the relation of the definition to its terms is taken into consideration, it is completely unable to help us pick out what is a movement and what is not; the criteria-approach cannot help us here.

The definition is not, for all that, viciously circular, since movement is not a single term, but is expressed as a structure: it is not simply dynamis, or simply energeia or entelekheia, but the entelekheia of a being-in-dynamis, as such. Furthermore, dynamis is a source of change, metabolē, not simply or only kinesis.14

When we turn back to Metaphysics IX, however, we find ourselves in deeper difficulty: Aristotle says that his strategy is to discover or to develop new senses of dynamis and energeia by extending their meaning from movement to other things. In two related passages in book IX, he says 1) that his task is to examine the sense of potency and/or being-at-work proper to movement, and that following this, by making distinctions about being-at-work, he will make clear how they come to apply to other things (Met. IX.1 1045b32-1046a4).15 Later, he says 2) that though being-at-work starts by meaning primarily movement, the name energeia stretches toward or converges in meaning with entelekheia because, he argues, the end or completion (telos) of a thing is a being-at-

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13 Taking definitions to be criteria with which we pick something out seems to have two sources: 1) the idea that things in the world are instances of classes, so that the act of speaking is an act of classification, and 2) the idea that definitions are instructions for action, as, for example, are ostensive definitions, which work by pointing out or working with examples. The both premises are evident in Wittgenstein’s classic example of successful language use, with which he opens the Philosophical Investigations: “Now think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked “five red apples”. He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked “apples”; then he looks up the word “red” in a table and finds a colour sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers—I assume that he knows them by heart—up to the word “five” and for each number he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer.—it is in this and similar ways that one operates with words.” Wittgenstein, L. Philosophical Investigations (New Jersey: Basil Blackwell & Mott, 1958), §1 [Philosophical Investigations]. Both of these are quite at odds with Aristotle’s account, both of things (which he does not take to be examples of classes), and of language (which can be either theoretical or political, e.g. a legislative act).

14 The difference between kinesis and metabolē is intricate and not relevant for our current purposes. However, based on Physics V, one may say that kinesis has a pros hen sense, namely change in place. This is the most stable of the kinds of change, since the underlying thing need not itself be altered in its movement. The least stable kind of change isgenesis, since it involves a change in the underlying thing. This, it might be said, is the pros hen meaning of metabolē, and the one that interests Aristotle more when it comes to the investigation into being. We shall return to this in a later chapter.

15 Because in the same sentence he listed the categories, the passage seems to imply that the other things to which dynamis and energeia apply are or include the categories.
work (*energeia*) (IX.3 1047a30-32, and IX.8 1050a21-23). It is as a result of this argument that Aristotle draws together the categorical analysis in book VII of the *Metaphysics* with the energetic analysis, concluding that being-at-work is thinghood (*ousia*) and form (*eidos*). Thus, starting from movement, *energeia* and *dunamis* come to apply to other things, specifically thinghood and form.

It is clear that to argue for such a transition from one set of senses to another it is necessary to understand the first group of senses, that is, to understand movement, or at least to understand the sense of these terms as they apply to movement. This, however, is precisely what Aristotle seemed to deny us, for example, by defining movement using *dunamis* and *energeia*, and in turn defining *dunamis* as a source of movement, and calling *energeia* movement most of all. If we cannot start with a definition that we know picks out movement, if we do not have the understanding of movement in hand in advance, it seems impossible for us to grasp how it would stretch out to apply to other things. *Dunamis* and movement form a circular system of reference; Aristotle extends this circle to work out what being is, without having its terms clear, distinct, or firmly grasped.

**III. The Method of Inquiry**

This, however, is perfectly consistent with the method Aristotle outlined at the beginning of the *Physics*. Aristotle is emphatic that we do not to start with something that is already clear by nature, but with what is familiar and clear to us. The methodological challenge he notes is not how to find something perfectly evident from the start, but how to proceed to from this to what is less familiar, but clearer by nature. The method he describes in *Physics* I.1 starts with our vague sense of what is the case, a familiar, general whole (*to katholou holon*) of things jumbled-up or poured-together (*ta sugkexymenta*). The only method he offers for retrieving knowledge from

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16 The passages pointing out the convergence of these meanings are: ἐλήλυθε δ’ ἡ ἐνέργεια τοῖνομα, ἢ πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν συντιθεμένη (IX.3 1047a30) and ἢ δὲ. ἐνέργεια… συντείνει πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν. (IX.8 1050a21-3). The words *suntithemi* means to put together or agree, and suggests that Aristotle intentionally designed the words to do so. For its part, *suntieno* means to stretch together or draw tight, and to urge or strive, and also both together, namely to be bent on or directed at one thing.

17 We must investigate, in a later chapter, how the sense is extended from movement, that is, to what extent the meaning of these terms changes in shifting to other things.
goals, things—most especiallyParmenides’ understanding of movement in his appeal to our experience of movement in opposition to Parmenides’ argument in Physics I.2. At least at the start he does not need to give us criteria—especially in the form of difficult and complex technical terms—that will help us pick out what things are moving and what are not—we do this easily already because of our familiarity with moving things. The purpose of the definition, then, is not to have an answer from the start, but to use distinctions 1) to lead us to understand first principles, causes, elements, and beings, 2) by

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which a thing can be understood clearly. We need to show, however, that the approach derived from *Physics* I and the *Posterior Analytics*, can be applied both to the account of movement in physics in general, and to the inquiry into *energeia* and *dunamis* in first philosophy.

There is much evidence, thankfully, that the method of inquiry into nature is consistent within the *Physics* and between the *Physics* and *Metaphysics* IX. Two examples should be adequate to establish this: 1) like *Physics* I and *Posterior Analytics* II.19, *Physics* III opens with the argument that one begins with general (*katholou*) things and grasps singulars (*idiai*) later (*Physics* III.1 200b22-25). 2) *Physics* I.1 suggests that the way of inquiry will be to make distinctions, while Aristotle says explicitly that the task of *Metaphysics* IX is precisely to make distinctions (*Met.* IX.1 1045b32-1046a4). This practice gives rise not only to differences between things, but also to the identification of things, as *Posterior Analytics* II.19 suggests.19

A key worry here is how primary *dunamis* and *energeia* are, and whether such primary terms can be defined if there is nothing more basic than they. If, as scholars seem to say, Aristotle implies that one cannot define *dunamis* or *energeia*, he does so by saying that they should be “clear by looking at particular examples directly” and that one can see both of them “at one glance, by means of analogy” (*Met.* IX.6 1048a35). Still, Aristotle approaches them by making distinctions, and such distinctions are made in the midst of our experience of the world.20

Aristotle gives us a both a description of the elements of movement, and a definition that can only be understood when we have grasped the principles by which they are expressed. At the same time, the description and definition must lead us to understand these principles. In a word, Aristotle uses these distinctions to give us access not only to the phenomenon of movement, but also to its principles. Both the description and the definition are probes that allows us to penetrate into the phenomenon of movement. They allow us to make distinctions

19 Notably, such a practice of “dividing at the joints” (*Met.* VII.17) leads Aristotle to identify *energeia* with *entelecheia* and *ousia* (*Met.* IX.8 1050a16-23).
20 Aristotle distinguishes the way of inquiring after *ousia* from others, observing that it cannot be demonstrated, but must be pointed out in some other way: τις ἄλος τρόπος τῆς δηλώσεως (*Met.* VI.1 1025b14). Also, for simple things there is no way to teach or search for them, but some other way of searching: φανερὸν τοῖνοι ὅτι ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων οὐκ ἔστι ζήτησις οὐδὲ διδαξίας, ἀλλ’ ἐπερος τρόπος τῆς ζητήσεως τῶν τοιούτων (*Met.* VII.17 1041b9).
within it that will let it show up more clearly for us, and thereby they allow us to grasp movement more concretely in all its determinations.

If the description of the elements of movement and the definition of movement were simply circular, and their aim was to help us distinguish movement from rest, we would have to dismiss it. My reading of the aim of Physics III.1, however, shows that the inquiry is not really circular, but a hermeneutic probe, consisting of access-distinctions. Thus, like the words themselves and our experience of movement, the articulations expressing the structure of movement hold open what appears to be a closed circle of reference, and allow us to enter into the interpretation of movement.

IV. Hermeneutical Advantages of This Approach

In approaching a text, the reader’s prior suppositions are necessary, but not sufficient to open up its meaning. There are two hermeneutic advantages of adhering to what we called access-distinctions: 1) on such an account it will not (yet) be clear what these distinctions give access to, so that getting clear about what is not yet clear is a primary task for such an interpretation. So to grasp that and how they give access to something, one must suspend judgment on the final meaning of these distinctions and therefore resist asserting one’s own assumptions.

Furthermore, 2) these distinctions and that to which they give access will only make sense once most or all of them are made, the way a number of stars in a constellation must be in place before they become a coherent shape. One way to describe the genesis of the form or

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21 For example, that Aristotle was speaking about the same world that we live in today, and that he would agree to this statement. (Though Aristotle’s understanding of the causes and principles of events might differ from ours, this does not immediately imply that the world is a different one. One might in phenomenology still distinguish between ‘my world,’ ‘our world,’ and ‘the world’ that cannot be closed to any in the past or future who say ‘I’ or ‘we.’) This would make a certain kind of conversation possible between the reader and Aristotle, by allowing them to lead one another to understand the world better, and by founding the reader’s ability to evaluate his arguments. Yet, such suppositions must themselves be changeable and open to evaluation as the reader continues his engagement with Aristotle.

22 As is beautifully illustrated in the ninth part of Ondaatje’s poem The Nine Sentiments: “I hold you the way astronomers / draw constellations for each other / in the markets of wisdom // placing shells / on a dark blanket / saying ‘these / are the heavens’.” Michael Ondaatje, “The Nine Sentiments” in Handwriting (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Inc., 1998), 41.
Gestalt involved in understanding is to say that it has come to be when someone becomes able to add or remove points in the constellation reliably and accurately. Put otherwise, a complete way of seeing the world arises as a whole, as Wittgenstein argues in §141 of On Certainty: “When we first begin to believe anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole.)”

Thus, together with the suspension of judgment, adherence to the method of distinctions makes it less likely for a reader to smuggle in his misinterpretations of particular cases and found his misinterpretation on them, since these would conflict with the contour of the whole that emerges. This method, of course, is difficult to adhere to, and the discussion that follows undoubtedly contains errors. The reader must examine for himself what I set out to argue.

One way that I shall use this method is to concentrate on distinctions Aristotle makes that are not clear to us. With these it is imperative that we not attempt to reduce them to something we already (think we) understand. By trying to uphold them, on the one hand, and trying to figure out what it means to uphold them, on the other, we have a better chance of working out their proper sense.

Let this discussion suffice as a statement of the hermeneutical situation in which Aristotle places us in the investigation of energeia and dunamis. Not only must we turn to movement to understand these terms, when we do so we find that the understanding of movement cannot, at least at first, be separated out from the understanding of these terms. Put otherwise, at the outset we find that thinking energeia and dunamis will just be to think movement, and thinking movement will just be the thinking of these. However, as we come to understand movement, we find not only must we understand energeia and dunamis, we must understand them in a way that applies to things that seem not to be movements. In short, setting out from movement, the ring of thought comes to establish something further about energeia and dunamis, which gather together phenomena other than movement, and overflow the cup of inquiry. By the same token, setting out from energeia and dunamis to think movement also transforms the understanding of movement,

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and we come to realize that there is something that is in a way still movement, and not
movement: movement starts out as change from opposite to opposite in specific respects, but
thinking it through *energeia* and *dunamis*, we come to grasp a kind of movement that is precisely
the-being-toward itself of things, the way that they are themselves complete.

By expressing the structure of movement in these terms, Aristotle opens it up and offers
some grip that allows us to deepen and sharpen our experience of movement. The other edge of
the same stroke gives us more ability to use this experience to understand the terms that
articulate the structure of movement, and begin to draw some conclusions. To approach openly
the question of what movement is, and to rouse our experience of movement to philosophical
alertness, however, it is still necessary for us to remove the clutter of the pre-conceived *theoretical*
investments, to which we turn when we are expected to produce knowledge about it. Doing so
will help immeasurably in the investigation of *energeia* and *dunamis*, for they are often secretly
interpreted within and through these assumptions. Getting clear that these investments are
*irrelevant to the investigation at hand* will allow us a space we do not need to continually and
repeatedly defend by fending off such confusions.
Chapter Two: Ways of Conceiving of Movement that are Absent from Aristotle

As remarked in the previous chapter, in one way it is to our advantage that the principal explanatory terms or frameworks to which we readily turn in thinking about movement are absent from or excluded explicitly by Aristotle’s analysis. Among these should be included: the homogeneity of motion, time and space, impulse, relation, sameness and difference, negation and non-being. The lack of these allows Aristotle’s account to be challenging and unexpectedly radical, since we cannot reduce movement to other concepts, and since the strangeness of his account can help us get around the fog of familiarity that envelops our experience and thinking of movement. The absence of these things, however, deserves some comment. Such comment shall be limited here to sketching common ways they play a role in our understanding of movement, and how they each are incompatible with or rejected in Aristotle’s account. Clearly it is not possible to encompass all interpretations, or even all of the relevant ways of relating these terms to movement. The objective of the chapter, then, is only pedagogical, to bring the question of movement more clearly to the fore by disentangling it, estranging it from other problematics.

I. The Homogeneity of Motion

It is commonly assumed in physics and philosophy of physics that all changes are reducible to motion in place. The further premise, that there is only one form of potency, namely force—either the ability to exchange force with other objects through contact, or an ability of a thing to generate momentum in itself as an equal reaction to an opposite body—renders the science of movement perfectly universal because every form of movement is the same: it makes it seem possible to formulate universal laws or models that describe all motion.

Aristotle is sometimes criticized, sometimes praised for not sharing this conception. He uses movement (kinēsis) in both a broad and a narrow sense. The broad sense is roughly synonymous with change (metabolē), and includes all forms of change: coming-to-be and passing-away, alteration, growth and diminishment, and motion in place. The narrow sense of kinēsis is of
local motion.\textsuperscript{24} Though they all are \textit{kinēseis} in the broad sense, Aristotle does not reduce the four primary kinds of movement to each other (Cf. \textit{Phys.} V). Indeed, while, say, increase in quantity implies a movement, how-much and place are not, for Aristotle, the same: they are different categories—one expressed by number, the other by surface and other bodies—and therefore different kinds of being. Put otherwise, they are basically different properties said to be in a being. Because the heterogonous structure of being is at the fundament of Aristotle’s physics, movement is heterogonous, having many irreducibly different kinds.

Put otherwise, even though Aristotle argues that the other forms of movement depend on and can be traced back to motion in place, still, motion in place cannot account either for alteration, say in color or sort, nor for coming-to-be or passing-away, say of the soul or animating principle of an animal’s body.\textsuperscript{25}

\section*{II. Space and Time}

Unlike Aristotle, physicists in the modern era did not attempt a definition of movement, but aimed only at working out its properties. Descartes defied anyone to attempt a definition, saying “movement… is nothing other than the action by which some body travels from one place to another.”\textsuperscript{26} Joe Sachs comments, as follows: “The use of the word ‘passes’ [travels] makes this definition an obvious circle; Descartes might just as well have called the motion the action by which a thing moves. But the important part of Descartes’ definition is the words ‘nothing more than,’ by which he asserts that motion is susceptible of no definition which is not circular…”\textsuperscript{27} If there are, apart from Aristotle’s, any other genuine attempts to define movement, they are largely unknown. This led Rémi Brague to say that, “instead of speaking of ‘the Aristotelian definition of

\textsuperscript{24} Coming-to-be (genesis) and destruction on the one hand, and \textit{kinēsis}, on the other, have different kinds of priority in Aristotle’s work—the first seems to have priority in ontology and the discussion of phenomenology or ideas (cf. especially \textit{Phys.} I.7-9 and II.1, \textit{Met.} VII.7-9), whereas \textit{kinēsis} in the narrow sense has priority for a very different reason, namely since the body that is moved in place does not need to change what it is as it is moved along (cf. \textit{Phys.} V.1-2).

\textsuperscript{25} The myth that at death a body loses 21 grams of weight is an attempt to translate the event of passing-away into a change of place and a physical quantity: something that has a certain mass moves out of the body.

\textsuperscript{26} Descartes, \textit{Principles}, II.24, cf. II.25.

\textsuperscript{27} Sachs, “Motion,” §3.
motion,’ as if there were others, one should simply speak of the definition of motion, which happens to have been formulated by Aristotle.”28

Yet the pseudo-definition accomplishes something: it reduces movement to space and time, which are taken to be prior categories, entities or forms. A common philosophical response to the failure of this definition, is to define movement as the synthesis of space and time. This preserves their priority over movement, but may not help us much to understand movement.

The priority of space and time accords perfectly with and is occasionally believed to be reinforced or proved by the mathematical formula for velocity: distance / time. This formula, however, is not a definition of movement, nor could it ever be intended to be. For on the one hand, its terms are measurements: both the distance and the time represented in the equation are the product of a measurement accomplished by a movement of the scientist and his instruments—a movement that is exactly not the movement of the object supposedly represented by the equation. The equation covers over the conditions of its own possibility, occluding consciousness of the physicist and his practices. More importantly, it is the movement of measuring that is the real content of the equation. Thus, properly speaking space and time are not prior in the equation: movement is prior.

Aristotle famously makes time depend on movement, but not to be the same as movement (Phys. IV.10-11). Time is ontologically dependent on movement, but differs from it in the following way: time is that articulation of movement that generates numbers.29 Expressed very loosely, if it were possible to think movement without reference to a mind’s pronouncement of time, then clearly movement would already in some way be articulated: the sunlight on the fields in the evening changes to starlight, whether this is perceived or not. Furthermore, motion is articulated in relation to me and my being-in-the world: the sun appears to emerge from the trees when I stand in this spot.

28 Rémi Brague, “Aristotle’s Definition of Motion and its Ontological Implications,” trans. Pierre Adler and Laurent d’Ursel, Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal 13:2 (1990), 1 [“Definition of Motion”].
29 I address the complexity of this account in my paper “Time as the Number of Motion in Aristotle’s Physics.”
Many have accused Aristotle of presupposing time in his account of movement, but it seems to me that these usually miss the mark, or their criticisms fail to understand or engage parts of his argument (such as his explanation of what it means for all movement to be ‘in’ time, and why this nevertheless does not make movement dependent on or equiprimordial with time). Engaging in this debate is a subject for another inquiry, so if only in the current inquiry, as a matter of principle, it is preferable to take Aristotle seriously on this point, to ask if his argument genuinely works, before presuming otherwise.

Aristotle argues that (homogenous) space does not exist, but that (heterogenous) place does. More interestingly, in *Phys.* IV.4 he argues that the only reason we say there is place is because there is change, because where there was one thing there is now something else.\(^{30}\) Place depends on movement.

Suitably, it turns out that this way of reading Aristotle on time and place fits his definition of movement—the being-in-completion of the potent being, as potent—in which there is no reference to time or space. Nor do they appear in his numerous explanations of the definition.

**III. Impulse**

Impulse is a common concept in the thinking of movement. It contains a complete account of objects in their material character, which can be distinguished into two concepts: force,

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\(^{30}\) It is formulations like this, which seem difficult or impossible to formulate by using the concept of movement instead of time, that lead people to argue that time must be prior to movement. Strictly speaking, however, this cannot prove the priority of time, but at most only that all movement happens *in* time, or, more accurately, that the articulation of movement gives rise to time, that time is something that arises in and belongs in speech, *logos*, which is precisely what Aristotle argues. What is hard to notice is that by saying ‘before’ and ‘after’ we are taking up a fundamentally different relationship with what is there, with what we experience to be, namely one in which through language we, as it were, set past and present before us simultaneously, and look at what happens as though from the side, from a third-person point of view, shift, as it were, into a kind of fifth dimension in which past and present are laid out like a line. Needless to say this is not how we *experience* time. Either all experience happens only in the present, or the present is constituted in the ongoing synthesis and differentiation of retention and protention. Either way, we do not have an experience of the real simultaneity or juxtaposition of two events. One cannot replace time with movement in such articulations because to remain itself, movement on its own does not allow us to take this kind of distance (though it may admit of other kinds of position-taking). Far from showing that time is prior to movement, this may even show the reverse.
and its generation, impression or transfer. To describe impulse more accurately, it will be useful to investigate velocity a little further. Velocity is a fundamental characteristic of bodies for modern physics in much the way that movement is for Aristotle: for certain things, being at all implies that they can be moved or are already in a state of movement. This is what it means to be in movement; even rest is understood as a special case of movement. Velocity is a state of being that can be changed, and similarly, a thing’s potency can be increased, decreased, or destroyed.

Velocity is defined as a movement over a certain distance in a certain time. Galileo’s hypothesis that bodies continue in this state of motion or rest until an outside force is impressed upon them shows that impulse is not part of the modern conception of velocity, but is instead a limit of or an event modifying velocity—it is the change in velocity that impulse explains. By contrast, dunamis in Aristotle can describe the ability of a thing to move at all, even when it is not actively being moved. Yet Aristotle argues that dunamis in a higher, more proper sense is a positive ‘power’ of not being affected, that is, the ‘power’ not to be moved (Met. V.12, IX.1). For example, one who fully has the potency of thinking (that is, who has it entelekheia), has an ability to think that cannot be destroyed or resists being removed from him by change. On a superficial level, this more proper sense of dunamis makes it resemble the modern concept of inertia (a concept that fuses velocity and mass) more than it resembles force. Yet, at the same time, Aristotle defines dunamis as a source of movement (Met. V.12, IX.1). These considerations suggest that the concept of dunamis is not force, but might have something in common with all three—velocity, inertia, and force.

The modern conception of force is properly speaking as that which actively initiates movement, or the quantity of energy stored up that can do so: this force-energy is actual only at the moment of generation or impression, and lapses immediately into inertial or potential energy.

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31 That which makes a thing unaffected or unchangeable is called a potency, so the source of being changed might more properly be called a source of being unchanged: “things are broken and crushed and bent and in general destroyed not by being potent but by being impotent and falling short of something” (Met. V.12 1019a28-31). This remark is repeated at the beginning of Metaphysics IX: potency is “an active condition of being unaffected for the worse or for destruction by the action of a source of change” (Met. IX.1 1046a13-14), Joe Sachs, trans., my italics.
as soon as its appearance or transfer ceases. There are two ways of describing impulse: either force is impressed by something else, or a thing’s mass generates the thing’s momentum because its own force is aroused in an equal and opposite reaction to an impression. Aristotle’s distinction between the ability to be moved and the ability to move something else shows, however, that dunamis is both active and passive. The potent thing does not need to be set in movement, or its energeia released through contact. All that is required for movement to occur is the right circumstances—those in which what is potentially will be on its own. Moreover, as a source of movement, it is precisely not altered or transferred.

If dunamis means strength, however, then it will be close to the idea of force and the communication of force. The only place in the Physics in which dunamis means strength is VII.5, which may be spurious. This chapter is in conflict with Aristotle’s argument in several other places in the Physics. He seems to describe something like impetus when he rejects the idea that a thing could be carried along by itself (Phys. IV.8 214b16). On the other hand, he struggles with the question whether contact is necessary for continuous movement, as, for example, in projectile motion. In some places he offers decisive arguments against the need for contact (notably in Phys. VII.1-2, VIII.10), but appears to affirm a thesis based on the necessity of contact which he

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32 Since Galileo, the change of the state of inertial velocity called acceleration, is taken to be the result of force. Force explains movement i) on the model of an “efficient cause,” or more exactly, of a pressure applied to something from outside, through ii) the concept of a transfer of a quantity of energy from one thing to another. This means that i) in the concept of impulse, the source of movement is identified with or defined as one of the four causes—of the other causes, only material remains, not as a cause or source of movement, but as the resistance to movement. Aristotle’s account of cause is any answer to the question ‘what is responsible for this?’ and he distinguishes answers to this question into the four causes: 1) the material underlying a change, 2) its look, shape, form, or pattern, in other words, its configuration, 3) the outside source (arché) of the source of movement, 4) the telos or the ‘for which’ of movement. In the concept of force, however, cause is reduced to the concept of pressure. Though the modern natural philosophers admit that a thing’s design or configuration is crucial to what happens, they do not call this a cause of movement, since they do not take it to initiate the movement. De la Mettrie says “Everything depends absolutely on difference of organization.” Similarly, according to Descartes the reason animals act differently is that their organs are arranged differently (DM VI, 32). See Julien Offray de la Mettrie, Man a Machine, trans. Gertrude Carman Bussey, rev. M. W. Calkins, M. Carret and George Santayana (Open Court Publishing Co., 1912). See also Descartes, René, Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, 4th ed. trans. Cress, Donald Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998. By reducing or restricting energeia and dunamis to the concept of application, of one thing acting upon another, by interpreting them through the concept of impetus, this hydraulic or economic conception of force takes the meaning of what are distinct concepts in Aristotle, namely source (arché) and cause (aitia), to be the same.
attributes to ‘some people,’ namely of circular replacement (VIII.10). Clearly he is struggling both with the preconditions for a notion of impulse, and also with a distinction between velocity and acceleration. Yet nowhere in these sections does he refer to 

dunamis,

and in general the definition of movement does not appear to be affected at all by the outcome of these deliberations. Physics

VII is anomalous in another way, as the only place in the Physics and Metaphysics in which 
dunamis

is clearly addressed as a quantity—a quantity, no less, which is proportionate to the distance a thing is moved when pushed. To say this appears to confuse two fundamental ways of saying being—the categorical (the character of quantity), and the energetic (being-potent).

Another incongruity between 
dunamis

and force is that a thing is potent both for movements and for things that are not movements: Aristotle distinguishes between being something that can walk, is to be something that can move, but being a person that can think or see is not, according to him, the same as being able to move.33

More interestingly, the highest kind of potency, Aristotle argues, is the ability to be unaffected (Met. V.12, IX.1). This is clearly the opposite of the concept of force and the transfer of force that is contained in the idea of impulse.

IV. Relation

Since the demise, at Einstein’s hand, of the idea of absolute space and time, movement has been assumed to be relative.34

More precisely, from the idea that movement is motion in place, and that motion in place is reducible mathematically to and explicable solely through the more fundamental concepts of space and time (an assumption Aristotle rejects, and we shall see

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33 However, some scholars argue that Aristotle’s distinction between movement and activity is not at all what we would assume it to be, that is, they argue that his distinction seems not to be between movement and an activity that is not movement. Instead, they argue, Aristotle’s distinction is between activities that do not contain their telos, or are not ends in themselves, and those that do and are: if the telos of a horse is not eating but galloping, then Aristotle would call eating a movement, and galloping an entelecheia or energeia. Cf. Charles Hagen, The "Energieia-Kinēsis" Distinction and Aristotle’s Conception of "Praxis," Journal of the History of Philosophy, 22:3 (1984), 263-280 ["Energieia-Kinēsis Distinction"]). Hagen borrows from Terry Penner the claim that telos is what distinguishes kinēseis and energeiai. See Penner, “Verbs and the Identity of Actions—A Philosophical Exercise in the Interpretation of Aristotle,” in Oscar Wood and George Pitcher, eds. Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 405-11 ["Verbs and Actions"].

34 This idea of relative movement was already fully present in Newton: he responded to it by positing a parallel underlying absolute space and time.
shortly), comes the idea that the moved being changes its position relative to other beings while remaining identical and unchanged itself. Movement, on this account, is interpreted as extrinsic, which allows being to be static, solely intrinsic.

Yet beings to which force is applied to not remain the same: a tennis ball flattens, and then returns to its original shape. Thus, pure relativity of movement is plausible in general only through a vagueness of thinking that abstracts from the concrete conditions of movement. Gravity, for example, will never affect a whole object in the same way, since parts of it will always be closer to and more affected by other things than other parts will be. Moreover, objects affect themselves gravitationally as well as electromagnetically, and these affects are distributed unequally in any complex body. In short, movement is never merely extrinsic to a body.

Now, Aristotle takes all material things to be beings of movement. By being material things, their being-moving is inseparable from being what they are: movement is not extrinsic to things, but belongs to being, and to the being of material beings. More technically speaking, for Aristotle relation is a category said to be in a being: it is a property of something. Moreover, although some beings or kinds of movement are incidental to what a thing is, for example, tables fall to the ground, not as tables, but as wood, Aristotle also argues that other movements are essential to what a thing is, for example, to be a flower is to grow and bloom, to be an animal is to sense and to move around. We shall dislodge the idea of relation from interpretations of specific passages in the chapters that follow.

V. Sameness and difference

Since before Aristotle’s time, thinkers have attempted to understand movement through the concepts of sameness and difference. Some took movement to be caused by these, and others have taken movement to be an identity of sameness and difference. Aristotle’s terms for movement—dunamis and energeia—are clearly not words for ‘same’ or for ‘different,’ and each of them is one in one way and more than one in another way (Phys. III.2, Met. VIII.6, IX.1). More directly, immediately following the definition of movement, Aristotle argues that, on the one hand, difference is not sufficient to begin a movement. He argues that movement is not itself difference, but only associated with it because both of these are difficult to catch sight of and are
therefore thought to be indeterminate—an association he rejects (Phys. III.2). Finally, Aristotle argues that being the same and one does not exclude movement, since if all was one, for example, water, it could nevertheless move (Phys. I.3 186a16-8). In short, Aristotle does not take same and different to be the terms through which to understand movement. It is perhaps the reverse, since movement forces us to understand dunamis and energeia in a way that makes us re-think what same and different are, and how they are related.  

VI. Negation and non-being

Nor does Aristotle conceive of movement through being and non-being. We shall have the chance to look at this more closely in what follows, so let these comments suffice: Parmenides argues that coming to be and therefore movement is not, not because that which might emerge from it is not, but because it did not exist before then. Put otherwise, Parmenides takes movement to imply what is not: he grasps generation as a temporal structure connecting a being, which is now, to its own non-existence in the past.  

Aristotle argues that he can preserve Parmenides’ premises concerning being and non-being and still argue that movement is. Thus his argument is a rejection of a mixture hypothesis, an argument that movement is not mixed with non-being.

Aristotle rejects the mixture hypothesis in two stages: in his description of the elements of movement, he distinguishes ‘what is not’ (sterēsis) from the elements that are essential to movement, so that “everything comes to be out of the underlying thing and the form” and not from non-being (sterēsis) (Phys. I.7 190b20). Then as part of his proof of the existence of movement, he defines movement using potency and being-at-work—that is, in terms that differ even from these (Phys. III.1). This double argument first delimits and locates what exactly is thought not to be (namely, the form), setting it clearly in relation with that which comes to be the form in the relevant sense (namely, the hypokeimenon, the underlying thing), and distinguishing both of these from that out of which a thing comes to be in an accidental sense (namely, sterēsis, the non-being of the form). Then it abandons these descriptive terms or elements, which have

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35 This is much like the Stranger in Plato’s Sophist, who shows that same and different are not mutually exclusive, but imply each other. Plato, Sophist, trans. Seth Benardete in The Being of the Beautiful (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

36 Aristotle’s rejection of the argument that the structure of movement is or depends on time applies here as well.
some relation to what is not, and defines movement by terms that are not themselves beings, but not separable from being either since it is in and through them that what is is. The argument shows Aristotle rejecting the argument for the non-existence of movement by rejecting the thesis that movement implies or is defined by non-being. But it also applies to the argument that movement is the identity of being and non-being. From these things, it should be clear or at least plausible that we should avoid the habit of reading non-being back into Aristotle’s account of movement.
Chapter Three: Preliminary Remarks on the Problem of the Being of Movement

The opening chapter of Part Two showed that Aristotle aims to discover *energeia* and *dunamis*, and *kinēsis* through one another, and argued that we should start the inquiry, as Aristotle does, with movement. Chapter Two showed that in this inquiry Aristotle avoids using the resources we would normally expect. To follow his line of investigation without this conceptual support, we need a sense of what resources he does use, and how they are organized together into a structured whole, in other words, we need an overview of Aristotle’s inquiry into movement. Thankfully, it is not necessary to assemble this account from diverse parts of his works, for there is a single coherent arc that constitutes the most concentrated engagement with movement in the corpus: the argument for the being of movement.

Before we turn to this argument, it is necessary to respond to the question whether in it Aristotle engages movement with sufficient rigor to support an inquiry into *energeia* and *dunamis*, and thus into *ousia* (beinghood, thinghood, substance) and *phusis* (nature). Even though Aristotle claims explicitly that we must understand movement if nature is to come out of hiding, we must examine in a preliminary way whether his account might be able to do this, or whether, as some seem to argue, it appeals to experience in a way that would obstruct useful inquiry. For some take Aristotle merely to presume from experience that movement is, as though the existence of movement left the metaphysical situation unchanged, as though movement could be absent from or added to the commonwealth of beings without any alteration in the concept of being. Yet, as we shall see, the being of movement is a major figure in Aristotle’s account of being: movement cannot be conceived without being, and movement plays a role in shaping his account of being from the opening chapters of the *Physics* to the culminating moments of *Metaphysics* IX.

One of the standard interpretations of *Physics* I takes the discussion of the existence of movement and coming-to-be to begin and end with the claim that its existence is clear from examples (*Phys*. I.2 185a11). This cannot be Aristotle’s own argument.37 Yet it seems plausible,

37 An apologist for this position, if asked why Aristotle might wish to make a stand on proof by examples instead of engaging in argument, might say that he does so either as i) an admission that
because the existence of movement seems to be a presupposition of physics. It is easy to assume from this that movement itself cannot be part of the investigation into nature. Many scholars argue that this is Aristotle’s position, and what he says in *Physicae* I.2 185a1-16 and VIII.3 253b5-8 resembles this idea.38

If this is so, however, Aristotle may be accused of either of two things: 1) his investigation into movement is superficial because in taking the being of movement to be already evident, it would presume what being is, what movement is, and the difference between them, or 2) physics is clearly distinct from and radically subordinate to the study of being, in a way that is supposed to be evident from the outset. Showing that Aristotle does not take the being of movement to be given, and that he does not from the start presume a clear distinction between the study of being and the study of movement, is important for any argument that he thought deeply about the being of movement. These are the things I endeavor to show in what follows.

First, then, for Aristotle movement is not a presupposition of physics, but part of the study of nature, and a starting principle of the study of being. He engages movement in two

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38 Remi Brague puts the argument this way: “His point is not to show that motion does ‘exist,’ that ‘there is’ motion. This is a basic truth that induction suffices to establish and that Aristotle puts at the very basis of his enterprise of a physics.” Rémi Brague, “Definition of Motion,” 3. Brague argues that instead of showing that motion exists, Aristotle has to show that it has enough dignity to be named by ‘it is,’ estin, that is, that he needs to show that it has the (temporal) consistency and continuity necessary to be. This reading presumes that Aristotle’s criterion for being is temporal, overlooking Aristotle’s arguments that time depends on movement (*Physicae* IV.10-11), and that movement is indefinite (*Physicae* III.2) and not itself a being.
closely related senses of the word ‘being’ – the being (existence) of movement and its being (what it is, ti esti).

This distinction helps make sense of the two stages of Aristotle’s investigation: 1) In *Physics* I, he argues against Parmenides that movement can exist by working out a way to describe it coherently. Parmenides claimed that movement cannot be, because it implies what is not; Aristotle replies that the description of movement is coherent by showing that what is not is not essential to movement. 2) in *Physics* III.1, through a definition of movement Aristotle shows that there are beings whose full being (*entelekheia*) can only be movement.

The coherent description of movement is not sufficient to show that it exists: to show that it exists requires that we be able to say what it is. This is why, after the chapter devoted to the definition of movement, Aristotle claims to have shown that it is possible for movement to be: 

“There remains, the way stated, that it [movement] is a certain being-at-work, but a being-at-work of such a kind as we have said, difficult to see, but admitting of being” (*Physics* III.2 201b35-202a2).³⁹ Thus, the task Aristotle undertakes in the first book of the *Physics* is only completed if the definition of movement in the third book is successful. Before turning to this argument, we need to look more closely at the objections to this interpretation.

I. The Ambiguity of the Distinction Between Physics and Metaphysics

One tradition of scholarship, which I shall call the standard reading, holds that Aristotle takes movement to be the first principle of physics, and for this reason does not need to prove that it is possible to be. These scholars appeal to the analogy Aristotle appears to draw between the current science and geometry to make this argument:

Now to consider whether being is one and motionless is not to be examining nature. For just as it no longer belongs to the geometer to give an account to someone who rejects his starting points, but either to a different science or to one common to all knowledge, so is it with the one considering origins... But for us, let it be assumed [*hupokeisthô*] that the things that are by nature, either all or some of them, are in motion, which is obvious from examples. Nor, at the same time, is it appropriate to resolve all errors... for instance, the squaring by means

³⁹ Sachs, trans., *Physics*, modified.
of segments belongs to the geometry to refute, but that of Antiphon does not belong to the geometry. \(\text{Physics} \ 1.2 \ 185a1-5, \ 11-16\)\(^{40}\)

In short, they argue, the possibility of the science of nature is secured by assuming from examples that movement exists. Physics, they hold, studies one kind or region of beings—the kind that move and change. Thus, the existence of the discipline presumes the existence of movement. Therefore, they argue, physics should not try to refute Parmenides argument against movement, and instead, this refutation should be referred to another science.

In other places, Aristotle draws an analogy between the study of geometry and the study of nature, which purports to show that physics can assume its principles \(\text{Physics} \ 8.3 \ 253a33\). Moreover, in the \textit{Metaphysics} states repeatedly that physics studies things insofar as they move (cf. \textit{Met.} VI.1 1025b17, 23, XI.3 and 4), implicitly contrasting it with the study of things insofar as they \textit{are}. These seem to establish both the argument that movement is a first principle of physics, and that the being of movement must be assumed. It also seems to establish that movement and being are radically different.

If this interpretation is simply true, however, there is a difficulty, an ambiguity about the nature of philosophy that cannot be avoided: the passages that define nature as the study of beings as moving define first philosophy as the study of being as being: “the primary sort of knowledge is about [attributes and sources of] things to the extent that the things underlying them are beings, \textit{but not insofar as they are anything else}” \(\text{Met.} \ 11 \ 1061b31\). From this claim, a systematic difficulty immediately follows: \textit{what science divides the sciences}? For it seems it should not belong to the science of being as being to stray from this subject to discern and group certain aspects of being—being insofar as they move and have material (physics), or beings insofar as they do not move or have material, but have no \textit{ousia} either (mathematics). In other words, it should not be first philosophy that works out the principles which form the different sciences, such as movement, number, part and whole, material, unity, separability. Put otherwise, if first philosophy is only the study of being as being, then it is unclear what kind of thinking Aristotle

\[^{40}\] Sachs, trans., \textit{Physics}.
himself is doing when he distinguishes the sciences, for such thinking could be neither physics nor first philosophy nor mathematics.

If this is right, it will not be possible to determine an answer to this question—what kind of thinking is Aristotle engaged in while he discusses the relationship between sciences—in general: instead, we must return to the physics to work out what Aristotle is doing in this particular science. Yet the problem suggests that the structure of scientific inquiry, and the division of the theoretical sciences, specifically between physics and first philosophy, is either not completely worked out, or not as stable as Aristotle elsewhere seems to imply it to be.

Nevertheless, Aristotle indicates at several places that the distinction between physics and metaphysics are unclear. For example, the proofs for the existence of god in the Physics VIII and Metaphysics XII are proofs for the first mover, and depend on it being the cause of all movement. Yet, he says in several places that the first principle of thought and of being are not demonstrable, but must be known in another way (cf. Pos. An. II.19). Furthermore, he argues that the science that studies the final cause, namely, the good, is not first philosophy but natural philosophy, since ‘final cause’ implies movement (Met. XI.1 1059a35-7). In the Physics the argument purports to show the necessity of the first mover from the hypothesis that contact is necessary between mover and moved and the necessity of continuous movement. Clearly this would not be to take the first mover to be a final cause to which things tend, but instead a cause from which things proceed. Meanwhile, he says in Metaphysics VI.1 that if there is not a separate, unmoved being, a god, and a science of this god, then physics will be first philosophy. The distinction between the physics and first philosophy does not seem clear outright.

II. The Stakes of Aristotle’s Investigation of Movement

41 In the Metaphysics, the argument for the existence of God proceeds in two ways: from motion, as it does in the Physics, on the one hand, but on the other, from the question of how a composite can be whole.
42 “…this sort of cause [that for the sake of which] is the good, and this belongs among actions and things that are in motion, and it moves things first—for that is the sort of thing an end is…” τοιοῦτον γὰρ τὸ ἄγαθον, τούτο δὲ ἐν τοῖς πρακτικῶς ἰδαρχεῖ καὶ ταῖς οὕσιν ἐν κινήσει: καὶ τοῦτο πρῶτον κινεῖ— τοιοῦτον γὰρ τὸ τέλος… Met. XI.1 1059a35-7.
43 Aristotle also criticizes both the necessity of contact (Phys. VII.1-2) and the hypotheses that try to uphold the idea that contact is necessary, for example, the theory of cyclical replacement (Phys. VIII.10 267b18-22).
Furthermore, the opening of the *Physics* clearly includes movement in the study of being as a whole, that is, the study of nature. Aristotle begins with the following question: how many beings are there? He argues that this is the same as to ask: what are the primary beings from which things are, namely, the sources (*arkhai*), causes (*aitiai*), and elements (*stoikheia*)? Both the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics* are inquiries into these (*Physics* I.1, *Met.* I.1 181a24-982a3). Let us concentrate on *sources*. It is important to note from the outset that in *Physics* I.1 and 2, Aristotle does not characterize the study of nature as an inquiry only into principles of certain things, for example those of moving things. Instead, as we saw, Aristotle uses ‘the study of sources, *arkhai*’ to mean ‘the study of nature’ (*Physics* I.2 185a2-5). Similarly, he opens the *Metaphysics* by making first philosophy an inquiry into sources, causes, and elements, making it an inquiry into the highest ones, that is, the ones that are *arkhai* most of all.

This word, *arkhē*, can mean ‘source’ or ‘origin,’ in the sense of a thing’s governing principle. Aristotle describes it as a ‘beginning of movement or rest,’ from which a thing might first move (*Met.* V.1 1012b34-1013a18). To the extent that *arkhai* are the goal of inquiry, the domain of knowledge will not just include objects, but it can also include the events of coming to be, moving, and passing away. In short, the question that opens the *Physics* and *Metaphysics* from the start does not exclude, but on the contrary suggests that the study of events is part of the study of being and beings. While Parmenides’ poem expressly excluded from the inquiry into being events such as coming to be and moving, the way Aristotle articulates the task of inquiry includes them from the outset.\(^4\)

Furthermore, in the final book of the *Physics*, Aristotle claims that all forms of knowledge involve movement. In this passage Aristotle is offering provisional arguments\(^5\) to establish that it is impossible for everything to be either always at rest or always in motion. He begins the rebuttal this way:

\(^4\) In book V, in a different context, Aristotle narrows his discussion of kinds of change, removing coming to be and passing away, alteration, and quantitative change, leaving only motion in place, as in a certain sense the primary kind of movement.

\(^5\) Aristotle indicates that the arguments are not conclusive by summing up his discussion with a tentative expression, namely that “*one might believe from these things and others like them*” that it is impossible for everything to be either always at rest or always in movement (*Physics* VIII.3 254a3), my italics of course.
To say that all things are at rest... would be a feeble kind of thinking, and a dispute (amphitêsis) involving a whole and not a part, 46 [disputing the claims] not only of natural but of every knowledge, so to speak, and of every opinion (alla pros pasas tas epistêmas hês eipein kai pasas tas doxas), since they all make use of what is in movement. (Physics VIII.3 253a32-253b1) 47

All knowledge begins with or makes use of moving things. What is at stake in the argument for the existence of movement is nothing less than the possibility of knowledge at all. If knowledge is of principles, causes, and elements, and these are of moving beings; what moves and what is known cannot be separated except in speech.

Aristotle goes on to suggest that it is impossible for everything to be always in movement, if “nature is a source of rest, just as of movement” (Physics VIII.3 253b11). Put otherwise, the principles sought by physics are principles of moving and of staying still, and they have a kind of motionlessness that is neither rest, nor is it opposed to movement, since it is the source of each. Such principles will not be understood if movement is banished from philosophical inquiry.

On Aristotle’s account, however, Parmenides banished movement from what is because it seemed to mix being with non-being—something comes to be that previously was not—arguing that this was self-contradictory. This meant, however, that to the extent that they were beings that move, it was impossible to know beings. In the first book of the Physics Aristotle’s argument that movement is possible makes it possible to include it in the realm of being. This argument secures, for the first time, a way for movement, moving things, and their principles to be and to be known. This means, however, that if movement is to be possible, Aristotle needs to refute Parmenides’ argument.

I have tried to show that the distinction between physics and first philosophy is a vexed and not a simple issue, and that it is not presupposed at the beginning of the Physics. On the contrary, the study of nature begins with the very question that begins the Metaphysics.

46 The whole to which Aristotle refers could be the cosmos, individual things, or a system of science (as Ross suggests with his translation). Since Aristotle has and will shortly argue again that moving things are necessarily composite, it is likely that the whole he means is the individual thing. This signals the importance of the relationship between movement and the analysis of whole and part.

47 Sachs, trans., modified. We shall only be able to discuss a few reasons for this in the current project.
III. Why Movement is not a First Principle of Physics

If the distinction between the sciences, particularly between physics and first philosophy, is not clear from the outset of natural philosophy, then physics cannot assume its principles: though the claim that physics assumes its principles seems plausible, nevertheless it is false. On a textual basis, it seems plausible because Aristotle draws an analogy between geometry and the study of nature that appears to let physicists assume that movement is. I shall argue that it is false because this analogy does not accomplish what it should.

I shall show that for Aristotle movement is not a first principle of physics, then that the analogy is not intended to show what the standard interpretation requires of it, that Aristotle draws a conclusion that is incompatible with that interpretation, and finally that he explicitly takes up the very problem that that interpretation was supposed to put to rest, namely whether movement can exist or not.

First, According to Aristotle, movement is not a principle of physics, for two related reasons. First, if movement was such a principle, Aristotle could not say in book III that the study of movement aims at a more primary principle: nature, phusis, and he would be unable to define it there using more primary terms (dunamis and energeia/entelecheia). Second, Aristotle says that archai, principles or origins must be of something else. But movement is not an origin of something else: it arises from origins. Movement is the thing or one of the things that comes from the archai, the origins we are seeking.

2) The interpretation we are challenging, namely that physicists can simply assume the existence of movement, misreads the analogy on which it is based. Aristotle draws an analogy between the current science—physics—and geometry, saying that a geometer does not have to refute someone who rejects his starting points. The first problem is that, in the course of that argument, the science in question is not called the science of movement, with movement as one of its starting points, it is called the science of origins (epistêmê peri archon): like geometry, Aristotle’s

48 Aristotle uses entelecheia and energeia in exactly the same context in two different books: Physics III.1, and Metaphysics XI.9 1065b14-15.
49 As we shall see, in the analysis of coming-to-be Aristotle distinguishes two sets of archai: a) form (eidos), privation (sterêsis), and underlying thing (hypokeimenon), and b) potency (dunamis) and either being-fulfilled (entelecheia) or being-at-work (energeia).
analogy goes, the science of *arkhai*, ‘origins, principles,’ does not have to refute someone who, like Parmenides, makes its principles impossible.\(^50\) Thus, it is not movement that physics ought to assume, but the existence of origins.

Second, because the science in question is the science of *origins*, the analogy with geometry breaks down. While geometry proceeds from clear axioms (which are origins, *arkhai*) to generate further results based on these assumptions, the science of *arkhai* asks about the starting places for science, what origins there are, and how many there are.\(^51\) This means that physics, the science of starting points, cannot assume its starting points, even if they seem to be self-evident, *because its very purpose is to study them*. We see here Aristotle deliberately undermining the reassuring analogy he sets forth. In short, the science of origins is exactly unlike geometry in the relevant respect. Therefore one cannot just posit or assume the principles of physics, he must argue for them.\(^52\) Ross puts it this way: “for Aristotle, physics, though it is not first philosophy, is yet philosophy and cannot shield itself behind such an argument.”\(^53\)

3) From the analogy with geometry Aristotle immediately draws a completely different conclusion than what scholars in the standard interpretation would expect. They would expect him to accept as self-evident the principles of the science, namely, that movement exists, that because an origin is an origin of something, being is many, and that the study of principles is possible. However, far from dismissing in this way the obstacles to physics by assuming there are principles, Aristotle says that we need to engage some of these obstacles. He concludes from the analogy that it is not appropriate “to resolve all errors, but only as many as someone falsely concludes, demonstrating from first principles.” (Physics I.2 185a16, emphasis added).\(^54\) He proceeds to devote the next two chapters to refuting Parmenides’ argument that being is one and

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\(^{50}\) Parmenides makes origins impossible by arguing that being is one, so if origins must be of something then for origins to exist, being must be multiple.

\(^{51}\) In this, Aristotle agrees with Socrates’ account of the divided line in the Republic of Plato.

\(^{52}\) One assumption, of course, is that in this book Aristotle is doing physics, that he is not just working out the principles, causes, and elements that physicists will go on to assume. That the science of origins is physics, seems to be clear by the very analogy discussed above: “Now to examine whether being is one and motionless is not to be examining nature. Just as the geometer... so it is with the [science] of origins.” (Physics I.185a)


\(^{54}\) Sachs, trans.
changeless, which would be unnecessary if he thought it was sufficient to assume the existence of principles. Furthermore, in chapters seven and eight Aristotle actually claims to undo Parmenides’ argument against the possibility of movement by distinguishing principles that make it possible to describe movement without contradiction. There he explicitly relates this discussion to the refutation of the argument against movement, aiming to show that “only in this way can the impasse of the ancients be resolved” (Physics I.8 191a23). Aristotle does not refer the refutation of Parmenides to another science, he aims to refute him here.

Thus, in short, in this first book of the Physics, Aristotle argues against at least two of Parmenides’ conclusions, namely that that being is one and that it is motionless. It is important to note that, since he sets himself the task to refute only what someone concludes from first principles, this implies that Aristotle accepts some or all of Parmenides’ first principles, while rejecting some of his conclusions. Since Parmenides’ book on nature is the source of the question of being, it is appropriate that Aristotle engages him in his own books on nature, but it means that for Aristotle the study of being either coincides with or begins with the study of nature. It is, according to Aristotle, his most substantial direct engagement with Parmenides (Met. I.3 986b27).

4) Aristotle gives us a clear reason why he goes on to engage the Parmenides and the other Monists: “though they are not writing about nature,” he says, the Monists “happen to raise impasses pertinent to it” (185a18). In chapter 8, Aristotle says clearly what impasse he has in mind. In the preceding chapters he has narrowed the difficulties to one, which he calls “the impasse of the ancients.” This impasse, which Parmenides’ argument happens to raise concerning nature, is that that movement is not. Aristotle devotes chapter eight to showing that he has found the only way of resolving it.55

In conclusion, Aristotle does not presume that movement exists. Nor does he say that physics can assume it as a principle. Instead, his own argument demonstrates that the student of nature must establish the existence of movement. Sarah Broadie characterizes Aristotle’s

55 We might well ask why Aristotle says that the Monists ‘happen’ to raise relevant problems, when it does not at all appear to be an accident on the part of Parmenides. To this, it would be best to respond by drawing on Aristotle’s own words: Aristotle accepts certain of Parmenides’ first principles and wishes to preserve them, but disagrees with certain of his conclusions, which he wishes to show are not inherent in these principles, and happen to be false.
engagement with the problem of movement this way: “Aristotle remarks on the lack of sophistication which led them into the difficulty, but he in no way suggests that having once been gripped by it they were wrong to take it so seriously. From this we may assume that he regards it as a problem requiring to be solved before the concept of change can be accepted as sound and coherent.”56 Aristotle’s position on the problem of movement in the *Physics* is far more precarious, and far more is at stake in it, than we are at first likely to notice.

Chapter Four:  The Elements of the Description of Movement

Since Aristotle does not use the concepts we would expect a philosophical account of movement to use, the previous chapter asked the question whether Aristotle engages movement as merely empirical or as a philosophical subject, and argued that it is the latter. Our task now is to examine the resources he uses in his inquiry into movement. More exactly, we need to work out how he sets up the problem of movement, and what he uses to gain access to movement. We shall do this through setting out the argument in which he uses and relates them to each other.

The most coherent and most significant arc of argument in which he grapples with the question of movement is in the first three books of the Physics. The argument of this and the following chapter shall establish that these—specifically Physics I and III.1-2 must be read together as part of the same argument. Current scholarship on these books does not occupy itself with either the problem of working out the unity of these books or the unity of the argument for movement. Since there is in the literature little opposition to such a reading, in this chapter we shall look at the entire argument to show its stages and the way they hold together. This will allow the resources with which Aristotle grapples with the being of movement in these passages to come to light.

This overview shall be followed by some remarks drawing out parts of this argument that require closer examination. Subsequent chapters will take up these different aspects to work out the importance of movement for the study of being.

The argument for the being of movement begins in Physics I.2 with logical considerations, and occupies the rest of Physics I. The argument is not, however, completed in Physics I: it continues in Physics III.1 with a different approach he names in Physics I.8, and concludes in Physics III.2, where Aristotle describes why the being of movement is difficult to grasp, and that, confusions notwithstanding, movement admits of being.

Though the appearance of movement is indeed strongly confirmed by ordinary experience, Aristotle does not take its existence to be obvious, or established. If the study of movement or of moving things, and so ultimately of natural things, is to be possible, Aristotle
must first show that it is possible for movement to be at all. Thus, his sustained refutation of the monists is a deep engagement with the question of movement.

He refutes the monists first by removing the problem of non-being from the analysis of movement in two ways: 1) by making both ‘what is not’ and ‘what is’ determinate aspects of the saying of being, and then through this making ‘what is not’ incidental to the formal-categorical description of movement by arguing that everything comes from the underlying and the form, and not essentially from non-being. This allows him, 2) in Physics III.1, to define movement through \textit{dunamis} and \textit{entelekheia}—terms with no reference to non-being.

I. The Framework of the Question of Movement

The reason that movement appears in the Physics shows clearly its importance to first philosophy. The question Aristotle asks at the beginning of the Physics is “How many beings are there?” This question demands an answer not only to what beings there are, but to \textit{what being is}. For, 1) if being is one, then to rule out that it is multiple we must understand being. But, 2) if being is more than one, only if we understood what being is would we be able to distinguish them, for only by understanding being will it be possible to count beings. The question that opens the Physics requires first philosophy for its answer.

A second surprise about the question of the number of beings, is how Aristotle’s begins his own answer. Upon completing his review of the previous thinkers, Aristotle begins again, saying: “I tackle it this way,” he says, “first going through all coming to be [\textit{pasës genescôs})” (Phys. I.7 189b30). He takes up being through an examination of \textit{coming-to-be} (\textit{genesis}), either as a whole or each by each. Being—at least in number—will be understood through coming-to-be.

Parmenides argued that movement in general does not exist by arguing that coming-to-be is self-contradictory. Aristotle follows the same order, showing that coming-to-be is possible, and then giving a definition of movement. This seems to indicate a kind of priority of coming-to-be (\textit{gignesthai}) over motion (\textit{kinësis})—a priority that Aristotle reverses later on. Indeed, the word \textit{kinësis} has two senses: its general sense includes all forms of change (\textit{metabolë}), including coming-to-be and passing away, increase and diminution, alteration, and motion in place. I translate this
sense as movement. The narrower sense, motion in place, has a different kind of priority, for which Aristotle argues in Physics V.2.

II. The Method of Proof

To make sense of Parmenides argument, and the proof of movement by examples, which came up in the previous chapter, we might be inclined to make a distinction between existence and possibility as follows: through argument we may establish that movement is possible, but only through experience can we establish that it is. This might help to make sense of the Parmenidean impasse, which arises directly from a certain way of describing coming-to-be (genesis), in which we say that what was not now is. Since this articulation is self-contradictory, the possibility of movement is ruled out from the start. Seen in this way, Aristotle’s project in Physics I would be to secure the possibility that movement exists by giving a consistent, non-contradictory way of describing what moves. Once this has been accomplished, we might say, in Phys. III.1 he argues that movement exists through an articulation of a definition that appeals to experience for its validity.

No matter how easily this idea springs to mind, it cannot be right. It sneaks into the interpretation a conception of a priori and a posteriori that is foreign to Parmenides and to Aristotle. Parmenides does not argue that movement is impossible, he argues that it is not. Similarly, Aristotle does not argue that movement is possible, but that it admits of or accepts being (endekhomenēn d’ einai, Phys. III.2 202a1). On the other hand, we cannot assume in advance the existence of a stable framework that relates possibility (as distinct from potency, dunamis) and being-at-work or actual being (energeia), that could be the invisible and unacknowledged structure of the proof. This not least because such a stable relationship between them has not been accomplished yet: it is a towering accomplishment for Aristotle to connect the two, much later, in the last of the core books of the Metaphysics, book IX.

Let us describe Aristotle’s method of proof briefly. The first stage of the argument does indeed clear the way for the existence of movement. It accomplishes this through a critical

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57 Seen correctly, the very act of speaking establishes the existence of movement, but only once it has been established what movement is, for which reason Aristotle begins on the territory claimed by those who deny the existence of movement.
examination of how people describe moving things, an analysis of speech to uncover how movement appears to us in logos. Through a series of distinctions Aristotle shows that in these descriptions movement is not self-contradictory: Distinguishing the ways the phenomenon of movement is articulated, Aristotle divides movement into two looks or elements of appearance—one of which he says is ‘what is not as what is not,’ and a third element underlying them, disentangling thereby what is from what is not. It is only by distinguishing the elements of theoretical experience that the evidence of examples can be accepted as knowledge. The elements of the description of movement are: a) that which changes, b) that from which it changes, and c) that to which it changes—all presuppose what change is, without saying what it is. None of these says what change is; they do not even count, individually or together, as an articulation of the essence of movement. So distinguishing them brings us no closer to understanding what movement itself is. Aristotle disentangles elements of our experience within these experiences themselves, to make the experience of movement possible. This establishes neither an a priori possibility nor does it merely appeal to a posteriori evidence.

What is necessary for the proof of the existence of movement is a definition, as Aristotle says in Metaphysics VI.1: “it belongs to the same act of thinking to make clear both what something is and whether it is” (Met. VI.1 1025b18). Therefore, the second stage of the argument must be the definition of movement. Aristotle accomplishes the proof, then, through an argument in which definition occurs within experience. The proof works by making distinctions among the things in our experience: if we can make the distinctions that make up the definition of movement, we can say that movement is, “difficult to see, but admitting of being” (Phys. III.2 202a1).

58 Aristotle implies that Parmenides is mistaken not in his premises but in his conclusions, as we shall discuss below. Cf. Physics I.2 185a16, I.8.
59 Sachs, trans. The appeal to the a priori proof or a posteriori evidence fails for another reason: the attempt to prove the existence of movement a priori would start with a definition and seek to establish the possibility of movement. The argument that the existence of movement is simply clear a posteriori, by examples, would depend on the idea that we just know it when we see it.
60 οὐκ εἰσὶν μὲν ἵδειν, ἐν δὲ ἐξουσίαν δ’ εἶναι.
Once he defines it, Aristotle observes that movement seemed to be something indefinite \((aoristos\;\tau\iota)\).\(^\text{61}\) He points out that his definition succeeds in making movement visible by showing that it is neither otherness, nor inequality, nor non-being, nor any of the other indefinite principles, as other thinkers had supposed \((\text{Phys. }\text{III.2}\;201b23)\).

Aristotle sees the task of working out a consistent way of describing movement as the first stage in showing it is possible for movement to be, while the second stage is an account of what it is. In this inquiry he has two tools: the examination of speech, and the method of distinctions. These, too, are not entirely separate.\(^\text{62}\) But he clearly begins with the examination of \(\text{logoi}\), investigating, learning from, and correcting the ways that things are said to get access to the things themselves. In so doing he shows that there are oppositions that we name in speech that have no being in things. He clearly follows this discussion by making distinctions that only have sense, can only be accomplished, if the world is the basis of the distinctions.

\section*{III. The Argument Against Parmenides: Movement and the Determinacy of Being}

To work out why the description of movement seems self-contradictory, and why making it consistent would be necessary, we shall sketch the impasse about the existence or possibility of movement. If Aristotle argues that it is possible for movement to be, as I suggested, he has to engage Parmenides’ argument against the existence of movement. He calls it the \textit{aporia} of the ancients:

\[^{61}\text{In this passage, Aristotle gives another reason movement seems to be indefinite, namely because the potency of movement is something incomplete. Put otherwise, the movement is the complete being-at-work (\textit{entelecheia}) of an incomplete potency (\textit{dunamis atelēs}).}\]

\[^{62}\text{In \textit{Physics} I, investigations of ways that things are said sometimes concentrate on the meaning of words (e.g. \textit{Phys. }\text{I.2 }185a22-186a5 on the meanings of being and one, and \text{I.3 }186a34-187a on predication and attribution), other times compound expressions (I.7). He is clearly engaging the problem of the significance of words, and thereby the relation between speech and things, for example, in his discussion of attribution and predication (\textit{categorēnai}): “why would it [the word ‘being’] signify [\textit{sēmaineī}] being rather than not-being?” (186b7). Still, the examination of speech does not, for Aristotle, exclude things. Michael Frede makes this argument clearly in his discussion of the \textit{Categories} in “Categories: Title, Unity, Authenticity,” \textit{Essays in Ancient Philosophy}, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) [“Categories”]. In our context, for example, the analysis of the structure of predication or attribution at 186a34-187a is at once about the structure of speech—that it says something of something else—and about the things it articulates or means (\textit{sēmaineī}). These are not treated separately because in logos beings come to light and are shown to be what they are.}\]
They say that none of the beings either comes into being or is destroyed, since it is necessary that what comes into being come either out of what is or out of what is not, and out of both of these it cannot come; for what is could not come to be, since it is already, and from what is not, nothing could come into being, since something must underlie [what comes into being]. (Phys. I.8 191a27-33)³⁶³

Things must come to be either out of what is or what is not. Yet if a thing came to be from out of what is, then it must have been before it came to be: no coming to be could have occurred. But, on the other hand, nothing can come to be from what is not: it must come to be from what is. Therefore, coming-to-be is impossible.

Aristotle accepts these premises but, as promised, rejects the conclusion. In the course of his response he highlights two of the key things he agrees to: 1) things are not a mix of being and non-being: “we do not abolish everything’s either being or not being” (Phys. I.8 191b28). This statement is broader than, but implies acceptance of the premise, above, that what comes to be comes either out of what is or out of what is not.⁶⁴ Movement is neither a synthesis nor a fusion nor a compound of being and non-being. Furthermore, 2) “we and they say that nothing comes into being simply from what is not” (Phys. I.8 191b13). The only path remaining for him is to disagree with or qualify the statement that nothing comes to be from what is. Again, the only option Aristotle has for establishing the existence of movement is to argue that things come to be from what is.

The simplest way to express Aristotle’s counter-argument in Physics I is to say that being is definite and composite, and not composed of ‘what is not’. Since this distinction between one way and another has to be sufficient to allow movement to be, clearly it must be a distinction between modes of being, not just modes of saying being (as though these two were separate). That is, to overcome the puzzle of the ancients and establish the being of movement, Aristotle makes being itself multiple, plurivocal. Its multiplicity means that being is not strictly identical with

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⁶⁴ This is because all change, including coming to be, is from something and to something. Referring to this requirement that things must either be or not be, Aristotle works out the same point in further detail at Phys. V.5 235b8-18 using the example of coming-to-be (genesis): “Since every changing thing changes from something to something, what has changed, when it has first changed, must be in the condition to which it has changed... Then since one of the changes is in respect of a contradictory, when something has changed from not-being to being, it has left not-being behind. Therefore it will be in the condition of being, since everything must either be or not be.”
itself: it differs within itself without negation, without the admixture of non-being. This is why Aristotle argues that the articulation of being is always definite, that is, that we only say aspects, which differ necessarily from other aspects: we grasp being in its definite character, only partially.

The Simplicity of Being and Non-being, According to Parmenides

Now, Aristotle takes Parmenides to hold that what is is the same everywhere and that there is no distinction either between things or ways that things are. If what is not could have characteristics, it, too, would have to be simple.

Two things make plausible Parmenides’ argument that being is simple or general (haplōs): first, this error of generality is in a way understandable since what he is seeking is itself a general structure, namely of becoming. Second, and more interestingly, what makes Parmenides’ argument so plausible is that 1) non-being appears to be simple, and that 2) it seems that what is and what is not, being and not-being must be symmetrical, e.g. both particular or both general.

What I mean by 1) is this: after Stephanie’s death, she precisely is not. But being-not does not belong to Stephanie, since she is not. She does not have death after life. Moreover, unlike the way she is here or there in a definite way when she exists, “Stephanie not being” seems neither to be here nor there; it seems to be everywhere in an indefinite way. The negation of the individual is not the existence of a particular “not-being of Stephanie.” Instead, the individual seems to be dissolved in or referred to non-being simply or in general. It seems to be the case that what simply is not can have no properties that individuate it: after Stephanie’s death, it also cannot be said of her (as something that now is) that she is brown, or tall, or even that she once was. Thus, from this perspective it seems plausible to say that non-being is always simple or general by being indeterminate or infinite.

Now, if non-being and being are symmetrical, it follows from this that being, too, would be simple, not least since its opposite is not, that is, since there is nothing other than being. Thus, along this line of thinking, ‘what is not’ is the source of the generality that comes to inhere in the concept of being, even as, or because it eludes determination, and this generality is what ultimately dismantles the thinking of movement. In short, unless ‘what is not’ can be particular,
unless we can distinguish particular kinds of non-being, then the thinking of movement remains at an impasse.

Again, the impasse about the being of movement depends on the erasure of the distinction both between beings and kinds or modes of being: being is one simply, generally, and there is no diversity in the way of speaking it. Being is univocal.

**The Plurality of Being, According to Aristotle**

Thus, to Parmenides’ assertion that being is one, Aristotle replies that “one itself is meant in more than one way, just like being” (*Phys. I.2* 185b5). His primary objective is not to refute Parmenides by appealing to the sense that there are many individual objects (though he brings this up). Instead, he begins on Parmenides’ territory, by discussing the meanings of ‘being’ and ‘one’ within *logos*. He works out two sets of distinctions in ways of saying being, and later between ways of speaking of movement.

The first stage begins with the claim that being is said in many ways (at *Phys. I.2* 185a22-5), and proceeds with an inquiry into the structure of *logos*—a logical inquiry in the broad sense. The first distinctions of beings in *logos* are between the basic categories, namely between *ousia*, quantity and quality (e.g. *Phys. II.2* 185a22-25), and between the elements of the structure of categorical *logos*, namely attribute and underlying thing (e.g. *Phys. I.3* 186a30). Not only are the words one and being themselves meant in several ways, such as thinghood (*ousía*), amount, and kind, but the idea of a form (*eidos*) requires something that is said to be or to have it, namely the underlying thing. In other words, when one thing is said to be another, that those two things must not (only) be the same, but be different. This is a remarkable and daring idea, which must have been met with incredulity at the time, but which has been for a long time almost completely taken for granted.

In both cases, Aristotle shows not only that form and underlying thing are distinguishable, but that they require or imply one another, and that that when taken individually according to their distinct meanings, the senses of being cannot yield a unity that

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65 He also examines different ways things can be unities: by being continuous, being indivisible, or having the same *logos* or articulation, as do robe and cloak.
does what Parmenides appears to want it to do: things are one, for example, neither in quantity nor quality. Thus, Aristotle aims to show that the argument that everything is one, and that therefore movement cannot be, equivocates or conflates different senses of being and one, by showing that there is no single sense of being or one according to which everything is one.

That Aristotle’s aim is to make both being and non-being determinate is confirmed at the end of Physics I.3, where Aristotle rejects the idea that being and non-being are simple. He says, first, that nothing forces us to think there is anything that simply (haplōs) is not; ‘what is not,’ mē on, is not simple or general. Second, he argues, to the extent that non-being has meaning at all, it is only as some definite thing that is not. Therefore, he says: ‘what is not’ means ‘not some particular thing’ (mē on ti). The word ‘not’ requires completion, implies some other thing to give it meaning. Third, he extends this statement to being as well, asking “who understands by ‘what is itself’ anything but ‘what is an individual something’ (to hoper on ti)” (Phys. I.3 187a6). In other words, being and non-being are symmetrical in that they are both determinate. It is not clear from these passages whether this symmetry is thoroughgoing or analogous: both are definite, but the reasons or ways they are definite could well be different. We can see Aristotle pushing language here, seeking general formulae, such as to hoper on ti, that would allow him to name the singularity or individuality of the definite individual, in general. Elsewhere he uses ‘a this,’ tode ti, and this idea is implied in the word ‘thinghood,’ or ‘substance,’ ousia.

IV. The Descriptive Argument for the Composite Character of Movement and Being

Aristotle argues for the determinacy of being in two ways: the first is through an analysis of the structure of predication, as we just saw. The second is through an analysis of the elements of our descriptions of movement. The first, Logical Argument for the determinacy of being is followed by a second argument for the determinacy of being and non-being, which we shall call the Descriptive Argument for movement. It is through this argument that Aristotle accomplishes

66 Though it is grammatically easier to translate τὸ μὴ ὄν as ‘non-being,’ the English term suggests both a generality and an entity. Therefore, it is better to translate as ‘what is not’. Aristotle’s original difficulty, however, includes the problem of the generality and being of what is not, so to preserve or highlight this difficulty I shall sometimes use ‘non-being.’

67 Charlton, trans.
the argument for the definiteness of non-being discussed in the previous section. Together, what they accomplish is 1) to provide a definite way to think what is and what is not as particular, and 2) to show that what is not is inessential to the description of the elements of movement, and that the path to understanding movement is entirely through what is.

The Descriptive Argument does three things, though not always in order: 1) it lists the different ways people ordinarily speak about coming-to-be to find how they distinguish its parts from one another, 2) it groups the elements distinguished in these locutions into three kinds, and 3) interprets the results of these distinctions and groupings. For the sake of space, we shall discuss the latter two, which move the analysis beyond an account of linguistic habit and make a surprising and definite claim that our grasp of the elements of what moves, and perhaps being itself, is unstable.

Going through the ordinary ways of speaking, Aristotle shows what we already mentioned, that the ways of distinguishing the parts of coming-to-be in ordinary speech always fit into three kinds: (1) the ‘musical’ form, eidos, that comes to be, (2) its ‘unmusical’ opposite or lack, sterēsis, out of which the form comes to be, ceasing to be in the process, and (3) the underlying thing, hupokeimenon, the ‘man’ staying itself through the change, the coming-to-be thing, which loses the sterēsis and comes to have the form in it (Phys. I.7 190b10)⁶⁸ These can be schematized as follows:

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\text{Form (eidos/logos)} \leftrightarrow \text{Opposite Deprivation (enantion/sterēsis)} \\
\text{Underlying (hupokeimenon)}
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⁶⁸ In a passage that appears to conflict with the reading here, Aristotle says “the underlying subjects are either contraries or in-between… and are declared affirmatively, such as naked, baregummed, and black.” τὰ δ’ ἵπποκλήματα ἣν ἀντίστημι ἢ μεταξὺ (καὶ γὰρ ἢ στέρησις κεῖσθαι ἕναντι), καὶ δηλούμεναι καταφάσαι, οἷον τὸ γυμνὸν καὶ νοσόν καὶ μέλαν. (Met. XI.11 1068a6-8), Sachs, trans. Yet the use of the idea of underlying subjects in the plural indicates that Aristotle is not calling this underlying thing an opposite, nor is he obviously grouping the underlying together with the opposite deprivation as opposite principles. Considering a different account altogether, namely the account of the indefinite dyad as the constitutional structure of beings. This is precisely to invert the structure of the analysis above, in which case the form and deprivation would be the underlying things, and what is called the underlying in this analysis would be the this (tote ti) or thinghood (ousia). A full assessment of this account is beyond the scope of the current discussion, however.
Having shown that being and one must both be specified and made determinate, Aristotle distinguishes three things that are in one way one, and in another way many. These are not defined by an appeal to some pre-existing set of terms, not even between material and form, they are defined completely within the linguistic grasp of movement, and refer essentially to movement: (a) the look or form (eidos), that emerges through the process of coming to be, e.g. white, (b) that underlying thing, that which comes to be or have that eidos, e.g. a rabbit, and (c) that from which or out of which the form comes to be, say, brown or black. Because each of these phenomenal elements presupposes movement, to distinguish them does not at all give us the essence of movement. It is even unclear whether we can say that they are essential to movement.

As mentioned above, this passage is widely recognized as the first articulation of the concept of material (hulē) in the history of philosophy. It is remarkable that material gets its original articulation as one of the letters (elements, stoixeion) of movement. Movement is

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69 Scholars argue over whether this characterization of coming-to-be can account adequately for the coming-to-be of ousiai (independent things, substances). The full discussion of this point and the variety of positions on it, is appropriate for a different essay. If, as I contend here, this three-fold structure is not an abstract schema, but can only be understood relative to a particular event of coming-to-be, then it can apply to any kind of change. A human being (the hupokeimenon) could change from sick (the sterēsis) to healthy (the eidos), or earth (the hupokeimenon) could change from being a human being (the eidos) to not being a human being (the sterēsis). One difference between the two is that the coming-to-be and passing away of a substance is not between contraries, which lay out a continuum between them, but between contradictories. Another, Aristotle suggests in Metaphysics VIII.5, is that when the thinghood of a thing changes, what is there returns back into its material in a different way than before. Thus, while Aristotle is clear that the material of a human being is not water and earth, but flesh and bones, the latter are only flesh and bones by being parts of a whole, living, active human being, so when this being perishes they are no longer flesh and bone. Similarly, when a hand is cut off, it is not possible to say it is a hand (See also On Generation and Corruption, which argues that in the passing away of something, another thing is coming to be, even though no thing is opposite to another).

70 That it is not easy to arrive at these three is clear from the fact that Aristotle accomplishes if by two sets of distinctions, of which, it later becomes clear, one of the terms overlaps. He distinguishes two senses of ‘what comes to be,’ namely the white (because it is what emerges) and the rabbit (because it was something else before, and it is what has become white), and two senses of the genitive thing ‘that of/from which it comes to be,’ namely the rabbit (because the white is ‘of’ it), and the brown or black (because a thing comes to be white by being taken out of or away from being black). “That which comes to be” has two senses: the form that emerges, and the (underlying) thing that becomes, while “that from which a thing comes to be” also has two senses, namely the underlying thing, and the opposite deprivation. The opposite deprivation is more properly called “that from out of which,” because it is left behind as a thing comes to be, whereas the underlying thing is precisely what remains.

71 Charlton, Physics I and II, 70.
conceptually, phenomenologically, and ontologically prior to material (Physics IV.4 211b31-36). It is also remarkable that Aristotle has no reservations defining form here entirely as that which comes to be, that which emerges in a change. It is worth suggesting that by treating form this way Aristotle may be following Parmenides’ argument about movement very closely. Phenomenologists would argue that taking form to be that which emerges is an authentic account of the movement of showing-forth proper to phenomena, though this interpretation should be qualified, not least since here Aristotle is not using movement to investigate appearing, but instead using appearing to investigate movement.

Now, the previous argument held that the act of speaking implies that being is multiple in speech. In the current argument, Aristotle establishes the definiteness and differentiation of being in a way inseparable from movement. Aristotle says the being of these three phenomenal elements is different, not because of some supporting argument that makes them into different entities, but only because they can be distinguished and turn out to have incompatible characteristics—e.g. the underlying thing remains, while the deprivation disappears (Phys. I.7 190a16 and I.8 191a2). In other words, Aristotle proceeds with the remarkable assumption that our mere ability to distinguish them in particular cases is sufficient to show that they in some way are, and how they differ.

Form, opposite deprivation, and underlying can only be distinguished if being and non-being are definite. In the course of working out their relations, we come to think of them as definite, particular, different kinds of being. If one starts thinking with this structure, it leads us in a path of thought path that, the more it is applied, the more we are extricated from the impasse concerning the elements of movement. For example, form and deprivation or non-being are linked to one another through a logical opposition. This opposition makes both definite, preventing us from linking movement to simple non-being.

The form ‘hot’ depends for its meaning on its opposite, ‘cold.’ These contraries describe a continuum, temperature, but at the same time ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ are contradictory concepts. They are definite opposites, so that the opposite of the form is not something that simply is not, the opposite of ‘large’ is not nothingness. The limitation of mê on to something definite is
accomplished by the naming it *sterēsis*, deprivation, the opposite logically connected to a definite form. That form is linked to its opposite means that form is not simply identified with being, either, for if it was, then the problem above would arise, and the opposite would simply, or generally not be. In this way, the *sterēsis*, too is a kind of form, because it is logically implied by a positive form (*Phys.* II.1 193b20). The deprivation opposite to the form is not definite simply, but in opposition. To be shapeless (*sterēsis*), for example, is not to have no shape at all, but not to have this particular form, say, the shape of Athena. In other respects the bronze already has a shape.

In short, Aristotle showed that the *mē on* has meaning only as a definite not-being, now named *sterēsis*, the not-being of something that is. Thus, *sterēsis* depends for its meaning on the thing, the *eidos* that is not. Yet it also and perhaps more crucially depends on the underlying thing, and not the other way around.

By discovering this structure in ordinary language Aristotle shows that instead of ‘what is not’ or non-being as such or in general there is this not-being of day in the sky, namely night, and the not-being of sight in that animal, namely blindness. By tying the lack or deprivation to the form opposite it, Aristotle gives us a positive and definite way of thinking non-being, effectively cutting up non-being into pieces, (much as the Stranger does in Plato’s *Sophist*). Again, within this three-fold structure there is a concept of non-being, which is impossible to think simply or in general: non-being is particular, and so is form and being.

**Grasping being ‘as’ something**

In *Physics* I.8 Aristotle concludes from this analysis that both being and non-being are particular. The ancients were at an impasse about movement, he says, because they failed to think ‘as’ or ‘insofar as’ (*Phys.* I.8 191b10). He draws an analogy between what comes to be and a doctor: we can speak, he says, of a doctor doing something, or of something happening to him insofar as he is a doctor. We can also speak of these things insofar as he is something else, but in each case we specify in what respect he does something or something happens to him. For example, we might say that a doctor cures someone insofar as he is a doctor, but builds a house as a builder who only incidentally also happens to be a doctor. A man may even cure himself insofar as he is a doctor, but he does not heal as a doctor: he heals as a patient, as a living animal
who in this case happens also to be a doctor. Thus, Aristotle remarks, in the same way “it is clear that also ‘this comes into being from what is not’ means what is not insofar as it is not... likewise, neither does a thing come into being from what is, nor does what is come into being, except incidentally.” This passage does not distinguish between, say, material and form, but between forms or activities as different aspects of things. Put otherwise, Aristotle articulates here one of the original demands to identify eidetic aspects as aspects.

Why does this work? Being can be said simply, but only in a particular respect. This respect must be specified by distinguishing it from others, or its difference must be implied: being cannot be isolated in speech—even saying being simply implies a community of beings. Any articulation, if it is said simply or without qualification, must be said in a particular respect, such as material and form, which can be distinguished from and which implies other respects. Here these respects are not different attributes, that is, they are not distinguished as different properties, they differ because they are parts of the assertoric structure of speech.

Saying ‘insofar as’ allows Aristotle to distinguish between what is ‘incidentally’ and what is ‘simply.’ Thus, 1) things do not come to be from what is not, but they do come to be from what incidentally is not (Phys. I.8 191b13). For example, the absence of heat in a spoon is not what the heat comes from: the heat comes from something hot. At the same time, what comes to be hot is not coldness: instead, what comes to be hot is the silver of the spoon. Thus, the change is described only by what is. It is hard to over-emphasize this point. Movement is not composed of being and non-being, what is and what is not. ‘What is not’ is not essential to movement or to being.

It is still necessary, however, 2) to account for the non-being of heat in this spoon, for something now is that was not before. What does it mean to say ‘not’? How is the non-being of

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72 Sachs, trans.
73 He gives the following somewhat difficult example: if ‘animal in general’ comes to be, it does not come from ‘animal in general.’ For its part, a dog comes to be both from a dog and from ‘animal in general.’ But since there is no such thing as an ‘animal in general’ the dog does not come from this as ‘animal in general,’ but as a dog. Thus in one sense ‘animal in general’ (and for that matter, ‘dog in general’) comes to be, not as ‘animal in general,’ but incidentally, when an animal comes from an animal, e.g. when a dog gives birth to a dog. But in another sense, non-incidentally, it never comes to be, either from what is (since there is no such thing as ‘animal in general’ or from what is not (since nothing comes to be from what is not, insofar as it is not). Physics I.8 191b20-29).
heat related to the spoon, and how is it related to heat, if it is incidental to them both? What is it to address the non-being of heat insofar as it is not? The name Aristotle gives to this phenomenon is sterēsis (deprivation, lack). The deprivation of something is something addressed as not being. For example, the silver of the spoon is not there when it has taken on a tarnish. The tarnish is the not-being-silver, the absence of silver that is there on the spoon. But tarnish is something definite; the silver color which is not, is not there. Some definite thing is addressed as the non-being of something else; one thing is addressed as not-being that other thing.

Thus, when Aristotle says he agrees with Parmenides that non-being is not, what makes his argument consistent is that he has shown that is possible and necessary to consider something simply because it is addressed in a particular respect (Met. V.7 1017a18). Thus, ‘red’ would simply not be there in a green shirt. That is, when ‘red’ is considered determinately as e.g. red in the shirt, what is not simply is not. Since it is not, what is not cannot truly be said to be or to be in anything, so it is misleading to say that, for example, the lack of education is in a person.

Now, deprivation names both features and states of affairs: on the one hand, the absence of silver on the spoon, on the other hand, the lack of a helmsman on a ship. In both cases, however, it can be named only within a definite broader context; thus, sterēsis is the not-being of something in a context that suggests or calls for it.

Put more loosely, mē on, what is not, non-being is not itself something, but a verbal shorthand that leads us to much more complex positive meaning. A proper description of the world will not be a description of things that are and are not, because what is not is not. Aristotle locates the proper meaning of sterēsis in what is not there when it naturally would be (Met. V.12 1019b16-19, IV.2 1004a16-17): the words ‘non-being’ refer us to a positive meaning, namely to what is and what would naturally be there. For a girl to be deaf is not for her to carry around ‘hearinglessness,’ it means when we call her name she keeps looking intently at her finger painting, it means she gestures a lot and makes different sounds than her schoolmates, it means

74 The presumption that one of any pair of opposites is the deprivation of the other seems necessary to this argument, but could conceivably be contested. One way to characterize the problem of speaking about non-beings is proposed by Heidegger, Martin, “On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις in Aristotle’s Physics B, 1” Trans. Thomas Sheehan, in Pathmarks, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1998), 225-7 [“Physis B, 1”].
she dances to a different rhythm than we hear in the music. The not-being-educated of a child is not properly speaking a negative being in the world or in the child, but a being-not of something else. It is a difference between what we expect to happen and what happens. The world is full: what is there is her shape or pattern of activity, the clumsy way she plays with blocks, the sounds she makes when we speak with her. But what is there cannot just be this. It is in addition her potential to learn by playing with her blocks, to learn to speak by making those noises. We apperceive this potential in her gestures.

In short, by arguing that one must consider things through the concept ‘insofar as,’ Aristotle makes the articulation of a thing’s being determinate and finite in such a way that neither being nor non-being will be said simply or generally (haplōs), and so that what is not as what is not leaves us in the thick of being. Difference is not a species of negation; negation is a species of difference. This is a way of saying that being and difference are inseparable because of the word ‘as,’ because being is definite, that is, grasped only determinately, in and through definite aspects.

Aristotle has reason to think that Parmenides would be persuaded by this argument. For the hidden premise that makes Parmenides’ argument seem to work is that all coming-to-be is coming-to-be-something, and that it is this something that before the change is not, and afterward is. That is, Parmenides conflates the two. This insight is also the first step of Aristotle’s counter-argument: it is not the same to say ‘being’ and ‘being-something,’ or ‘coming-to-be’ and ‘coming-to-be-something.’ All being is being-something. Nevertheless, coming-to-be can be simple or complex: being-something is complex or composite.75 This means that simply coming to be has a different meaning for Aristotle, namely becoming some thing at all, as distinguished from something becoming different.

The difficulty is that Parmenides’ refutation seems only to work for coming into being simply or generally. Since for Parmenides being has only one sense, he does not distinguish between what comes to be and that which comes to be that thing, as though his argument was unable to allow for descriptions such as ‘the rabbit was brown (or not white)’ and came to be

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75 The investigation of this question, of the apophantic as, is beyond the scope of this discussion.
white.’ For example, it works if at one moment there was nothing, and the next there was a rabbit, or at one moment there was black, and then there was white. It is as though Parmenides was so dazzled by the arrival of the something that came to be, that it obscured the something-there which came to be it. Put otherwise, coming-to-be tends to erase or obscure its place or origin.

This is phenomenologically accurate: our attention is caught up in movement first. One can be aware of movement without being aware of where something is, or what is there. In fact, it is accepted in quantum physics that determining a thing’s position and the speed of its movement are mutually exclusive acts. A batter perceives the direction of a baseball and the arc of his bat before he can say what pitch it is or where it is, a soccer player can be unaware of a pass until it is at his feet, but receive and turn with it, avoiding attackers, without thematizing where they are. Similarly, we look at the crashing of the waves and their riding up the shore before we notice that each wave is a shape of the same water. We are caught up in movement and carried upward toward what appears—that is new emerges in being like the crest of a wave.

As becomes clear in Physics II.1, Aristotle does not try to return thinking to being or coming-to-be simply, but to start thought where it is carried, with the being-something and the coming-to-be-something of beings. His attempt is not to turn our attention away from the risen shape and back to the sea, but to understand what makes it rise and fall in those forms. The principles of its rising and falling are the things that make the sea the sea.

V. Composite Being and the Underlying Thing

Now, making non-being definite by opposing form and deprivation does not on its own get us out of the problem of something coming from nothing: if there was only the form and its opposite, then coming to be would be simple, and Parmenides argument that movement and generation implies non-being would still be correct. What is necessary is to show that being is composite, but what makes it composite is the underlying thing. It is the structure of the underlying thing, one in number but two in form, that solves the riddle of Parmenides: “For this nature having been perceived, their entire mistake would have dissolved” (Phys. I.8 191b34).

The most significant accomplishment in this argument is not, as Ross holds, the discovery of the opposite deprivation, sterōsis, but the discovery that there is an underlying,
remaining thing, *hupokeimenon* (Phys. I.7 190a13). The idea of a negative opposite is already clearly apparent in the dualists. Aristotle interprets this duality, without argument, as an emerged form and its opposite, something that ‘is not’ any longer. By doing this, he re-casts the dualists as describing the process of emergence proper to genesis. In this respect, he only needs to show that *sterēsis* genuinely is not when it is considered as something definite, that is, as the not-being of that definite thing.

What Aristotle does need to argue for, however, is the existence of the underlying thing. From this point of view, the most urgent and most difficult concept to retrieve is one that we now take to be totally obvious, more obvious than negation or deprivation, namely, the underlying thing, which we interpret as “matter.” But this is neither an opposite, nor separate from the forms or attributes said to be in it, and as a result it can only be grasped as something different from form only by analogy.

Aristotle’s most obvious argument for the existence of the underlying depends on the distinction between form and opposite deprivation: if form and the opposite lack are the only two principles, then movement will not be possible, for heat and cold cannot move or affect each other (Phys. I.7 190b33). What changes, Aristotle argues, must be a third being: the being underlying the change of forms. If one puts cold butter into a hot pan, it is not the cold that becomes hot, it is the butter. The underlying, then, must a) be something other than the form that comes to be, and b) take on different forms, from which it is inseparable. It can only do this if its form is twofold. It is the doubleness of the underlying thing that makes movement composite.

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76 Ross, *Aristotle*, 69. Heidegger might agree with Ross on this point, as his attention to *sterēsis* in the essay on Physics B, 1 indicates. There Heidegger argues that *sterēsis* is the trace in Aristotle of a more fundamental account of nature than metaphysics can provide.

77 Furthermore, if form and lack are the only principles, then being cannot be composite either. If the only terms used to describe coming-to-be are being and non-being, then, Parmenides’ argument follows: what comes to be could only come from what is, or from what is not, and neither is possible. For if being is these two then what is, is, and what is not, is not—being and non-being would be simple. In a word, if being is two, then it is one. Only if being is three can being be definite, particular. In the concepts of *dunamis* and *energeia/entelecheia* Aristotle gives a different account of how being is twofold that seeks to escape this difficulty.

78 The ὑποστάσεων in the word ὑποστάσεων suggests that the changing forms are ‘above’ or more visible than the being that changes. This could point to the way that we tend to notice movement before we grasp what thing is moving.
Thus, the underlying is what makes it possible for change to be compound and definite, and not simple and indefinite, as the impasse of the ancients held it to be. Being part of a composite requires each part to be distinguished from the others, by specifying its determinate character.

In fact, Aristotle takes the underlying thing to change the ontological status of ‘what is not.’ Only because of the underlying thing can Aristotle say that in a way non-being has being: “in this sense even the not-white is said to “be” because that to which it is incidental is” (Met. V.7 1017a18). Non-being will be neither determinate nor incidental to anything unless there is a being with a definite character that does not depend on it, and which can in an indirect way be said to ‘have’ the privation or non-being. This being with a definite character is the underlying thing. Put more loosely, hot and cold have no meaning unless there is air or water which are hot and cold. *Non-being can be considered as a definite element if it is of a changing composite.* It is incidentally, not because it is the non-being of a form that is, but because it is in or of an underlying thing that is (Phys. I.8 191b7). More exactly, *what makes coming-to-be understandable is not privation, but the composite character of coming-to-be, and its composite character is due to the underlying thing.*

Thus, the key to disentangling the description of coming-to-be from Parmenides’ account of non-being is not merely to show that non-being is definite, but to exhibit the double character of the underlying being, which we shall only be able to sketch here.

My claim, then, is that Aristotle shows that movement is not contradictory by arguing for the existence of the underlying thing through the description of the elements of movement. It is in making this argument that Aristotle reveals an unstable relationship between our ways of grasping being.

**Aristotle’s Interpretation of the Description of Movement**

At the same time as giving us a way to think being and non-being as definite, Aristotle has given two different arguments for the underlying thing. The underlying thing has a double determination, a ‘logical’ one and a ‘genetic’ one: it is 1) that of which we predicate forms, and 2)
that which remains while these forms change. But these two determinations are not equivocal: they converge in meaning.\textsuperscript{79}

The underlying thing is numerically single, that is, it is one being or \textit{ousia}. Its duality is, then, of form: the same thing may be specified by multiple forms. Though it is one in number, it is two in form.\textsuperscript{80} The double character of the underlying thing, then, is that it is both the form and itself.\textsuperscript{81} This reading is implied by the examples, in which the underlying thing is not called an unknown \textit{X}, but a man, and so on, and it is also confirmed by Aristotle’s references to the form of the \textit{material} (\textit{Met. VII.1036a31-4}).

Aristotle interprets these results in a very provocative way, however. The underlying thing, he says, has in a way two forms, i) its own form, ‘woman,’ or ‘bronze,’ and ii) the form it has: ‘educated,’ ‘uneducated,’ ‘statue,’ or ‘shapeless.’ It is definite, then, not by being an opposite of either the form or the deprivation, but in a different way. But its characteristic of being twofold (\textit{ditton}) is not a superficial difference. Aristotle takes \textit{one} being to be \textit{two} in being. By this argument, number and being are not the same, and are in fact not even symmetrical: number is secondary to the apprehension of being. It is because of this strange duality, this asymmetry of being and number that our grip on being, or being itself is unstable: being and being-something are both the same and different.

It comes as a great surprise that Aristotle seems to take this idea from his interpretation of Parmenides himself. Parmenides, he says, “set down the causes as being not only one but in some way two” (\textit{Met. I.3 984b3}).\textsuperscript{82} While this seems a strange or clearly false interpretation to us,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79} That this is the case is reinforced, for example since Aristotle names the underlying in the sense of change “material,” while elsewhere, material is called that of which something is said. However this might be, it is not the duality Aristotle is after.
\item \textsuperscript{80} In a very different way, the form is also twofold, to the extent that it implies its opposite. That is, because the form is something, its absence, too, has an articulable shape or pattern, but indirectly.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Some argue that the underlying thing is inseparable in thought from the deprivation. They would argue that its double character, then, is that it is a form and also its opposite deprivation at the same time, but in different ways. This cannot be the case. Aristotle explicitly rejects the idea that the opposite remains: when daytime comes, it is not that night remained and just got very small. Not only does the inability of the person to speak disappear, but in addition, as we have said, the inability never was \textit{there} strictly speaking anyway: something positive was there instead.
\item \textsuperscript{82} καὶ τοῦτο κατὰ τοσοῦτον ὅσον οὐ μόνον ἐν ἄλλῃ καὶ ὧν πούς τίθησιν αἱτίας εἶναι. In this part of \textit{Metaphysics I}, Aristotle is rephrasing in slightly different and more general terms the examination of
\end{itemize}

93
it is helpful to remember that Aristotle had access to Parmenides’ poem in its entirety, so it might be more accurate than we can assess. Presumably Aristotle means that, in the poem, to the extent that being is one, there is only one cause, but to the extent that there is perception, being has two principles, e.g. hot and cold. If this is right, then the underlying thing appears in place of Parmenides account of the unity of being, while form and deprivation are interpreted as appearances.

It is this, presumably, that leads Aristotle to make the very strange suggestion that Parmenides—who denied the existence of change altogether—may have caught sight of the origin of movement. This statement suggests that Aristotle discovered this structure of being in one way one and in another way two, in his interpretation of Parmenides’ poem, and saw how it could be used to describe movement.

It is because of this that Aristotle can give his answer to the question he started with: the number of beings is in one way three (hupokeimenon, eidos, sterēsis), and in another way two (hupokeimenon and either eidos or sterēsis). Being is unstable in number because there are different ways to grasp it. When we seek to grasp beings through their elements, we seem find three, but in fact there are only ever two (the underlying and some form, either the positive or the deprivation, or something in-between), and these are actually only aspects of one thing (the informed underlying thing) and are distinct only in speech. Our grasp of being is unstable: what we grasp changes, depending on how we begin to number it.

previous accounts of sources and causes in Physics I, this time searching not for the possibility of movement but for the four causes.

83 In this respect Aristotle takes phenomena very seriously; phenomenology and ontology are related.
84 Unlike the material monists, he says, Parmenides might have glimpsed “the other source from which the source of movement is” τὴν ἑτέραν ἀρχήν... ὀθεν ἡ ἀρχή τῆς κινήσεως. For example, parents are the other source of their child’s power to move. (Met. I.3 984a27). Even put together, however, the two sources identified by the two kinds of monist—formal and material—are “not sufficient to generate the nature of things” (Met. I.3 984b9)
85 That this structure of the underlying as both two and one is Aristotle’s solution to the problem of the being of movement is confirmed in Physics I.9, where he credits previous physicists for seeing that there must be an underlying thing, but criticizes them for making it only one. Those, such as Timaeas in the eponymous Platonic dialogue, who made the underlying thing into a dyad such as great and small, Aristotle says, did not in fact make it into two, presumably because great and small are one in the sense that they mark out a continuum of size (Phys. I.9 192a11). The other problem, he says, remains, namely that the great and the small cannot act on each other.
And yet, since the opposite deprivation is in a way logically contained in and implied by
the form, it is possible for Aristotle to let it be included or implied, but not as an independent
element or principle: since what is not is not, it omits itself from the analysis of moving things
and of being. Put otherwise, by showing deprivation to be a definite non-being, Aristotle reveals
it as an inessential element or principle of the complex activity and potential of the event. In this
way, Aristotle makes it possible to describe movement and coming-to-be-something without
including non-being in the essence of movement at all. Thus, he can say that “everything comes
to be out of the underlying thing and the form” (Phys. I.7 190b20).

We have seen how Aristotle uses the distinctions between form, its opposite privation,
and the underlying thing to undo the link between non-being and coming-to-be and make
movement possible in general. The double form of the underlying thing is the key to this
argument. Though the tripartite structure of form, opposite, and underlying thing forces us away
from Parmenides’ account by linking being and non-being in a definite composite structure, what
makes this possible is, in the end, the peculiar double structure of the underlying thing: it is both
in one way two, and in another way one.

This argument put to rest the Parmenidean argument against the existence of coming-to-
be and movement. This argument allowed physicists to set aside the impasse of the ancients. But
as soon as we grasp the argument fully, the paradoxical double character of the underlying opens
onto us an entirely different way of speaking about being. Put simply: The underlying thing is
one in number, but has a double potential, for the deprivation and for the form (Phys. I.9 192a).

Thus, while these distinctions make it possible to describe movement in way that is not
self-contradictory, they have not put the impasse completely to rest. Three things indicate that
this is the case: 1) it is now possible to describe movement with elements that do not refute its
existence, but we do not yet have definition of movement and have not marked it out in the
midst of the world, 2) the twofoldness of the underlying thing requires philosophical
description—a description that will require an account of energeia and dunamis, and 3) only
through this will it be fully clear how the three terms of the Descriptive Argument are related to
one another; otherwise put: how are the three terms of this argument related to the two terms of
the definition of movement?86

The Dependence of the Categorical Triad on the Energetic Dyad

Having begun chapter eight with the claim that “this is the only way of getting through
the impasse of the ancients,” Aristotle concludes the discussion of the three principles just
discussed by saying “This, then, is one way to go, but another is that one takes up the same things,
saying them as potent and at-work” (Phys. I.8 191a23, 191b27, my emphasis).87 This is rather
surprising: once we grasp the only way of getting through the impasse, we suddenly find the
possibility of another.

The problems that confront the hylomorphism that emerges from the Descriptive
Argument call for a further solution—most notably the problem just noted of how two different
elements could be combined into one thing and be the same thing. We can add the following
problems: if neither material nor form can change, far from yielding us an understanding of
movement, the analysis leaves it precisely unthought. Moreover, the articulate generality of form
means it cannot apply strictly to individual things, while it is only individual things that change,
while on the other hand, material is undefinable on its own, so it is unclear how it would be
possible to grasp whether it stays the same through a change.

In the Metaphysics, Aristotle promises that the solutions to similar descriptive-elemental
problems are to be found in the energetic sense of being. Aristotle’s argument in Met. VIII.6 that
the unity problem (cf. Part III.1, below) is solved since the extremity (eschatē) of material and form
are one and the same, the one by being-potentially, the other by being-at-work, parallels exactly

86 For instance, non-being is still, though only nominally, one of the elements of movement, while the
definition of movement does not refer to it at all. While Aristotle suggests that privation or non-being
could drop out of the account of movement and therefore not count as one of the beings. He will only
be able to conclude that ultimately non-being is not a principle once he has developed: i) an account of
movement in terms of dunamis and energeia that makes no reference to non-being, and ii) an account of
sterēsis that is fully concrete, not just opposed to form, but related to dunamis and energeia, which
Aristotle provides in Met. V.12.
87 εὲς μὲν ὁ δὲ τρόπος οὗτος, ἄλλος δ’ ὁτι ἐνδέχεται ταῦτα λέγειν κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν

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the transition between Phys. I and III. The formal-elemental description of the elements of movement, then, is not just one of the solutions to the problem—it depends on potency and being-at-work (energeia).

We have to qualify this assertion because this solution crosses from one way of saying being to another. The descriptive argument against the non-being of movement and the definition of movement are made in completely different terms, the first with form and underlying thing, and the second with potency and being-at-work. This shift in terms is a shift between senses of being that Aristotle distinguishes in Met. VI.2. In the Metaphysics, the transition is from one way of saying being to another, from the analysis of the hylomorphic structure of categorical being in Met. VII, through an account of how the potent-work structure of energetic being resolves the problems that arise for categorical being in Met. VIII, to an analysis of the meaning and relationship of potency and being-at-work in Met. IX.

The acuteness of the differences between these two senses of being is driven home by the differences of each of these from incidental being and being as truth. For example, potency cannot be opposed to form. Even to say this is a category error, since one would be comparing two different senses of being, much as it makes little sense to say that truth or apple trees are opposed to blueness. In general, as we saw in the introduction, potency is not to be interpreted through non-being or as a kind of non-being or sterēsis. The terms discovered as the different senses of being are not simply different words for the same things. The ultimate question about the systematic or unsystematic character of Aristotle’s philosophy hinges on whether and how these senses of being are related.90

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88 In Met. VIII Aristotle’s problem is not formulated principally through a discussion of form and the underlying or material in the sense of movement, but the same concepts in the sense of categorical articulation.

89 We refer here to the definition in Metaphysics XI.9, which is, word for word, almost identical to the definition in Physics III.1, except that the Metaphysics has energeia instead of entelecheia.

90 The argument that the categorical and energetic senses are independent is indicated by the idea that the categorical sense is the one in which the primary sense of being (ousia) is discovered, and on the other hand, that quality and quantity do not seem to be derivable from potency and being-at-work. At very least, it seems necessary to have the categorical analysis so that Aristotle can lead his students from the Platonic/Parmenidean discourse into his: it is necessary to pass through the descriptive argument, leaving non-being behind, before one can understand the discussion of potential and being-
Nevertheless, it may be helpful schematically to attempt to correlate the descriptive dyad to the energetic dyad, to get a glimpse of how the energetic account might solve the problem of elements. Just considering the problem of unity, for example, if we were to use the Descriptive Argument to lift us into the energetic concepts just mentioned, we might say that potency is the underlying thing seen as specified by the form or as “directed toward” the form in a quasi-transcendental way, or that being-at-work is the form considered as something achieved in an ongoing way by the underlying thing. This would be misleading, however, if the energetic concepts are more fundamental than the descriptive-categorical ones—a question we cannot here address.

This means that, if anything, potency would not simply be form, but would instead be a way of describing the hupokeimenon. It could not be the case that potency was the deprivation opposite to the form, since then it could not be that form and itself at once. The underlying thing, then, is inseparable from and may be a form, but it is, in a different sense, potency. Determining where one should situate being-at-work or energēia seems more difficult. It seems at first to be both the underlying and the form, since the form, e.g. ‘educated’ is accomplished by work, and since the underlying thing is what is at work. Another way to express this problem is to think about how the definition of movement might be related to the descriptive-elemental analysis of movement: the definition of movement shows that energēia or entelekheia are there while the movement is occurring, which would be precisely when a thing is on the way between the sterēsis and its eidōs, but another ways, we could say that the thing is energēia once the movement is complete and has attained its form, or that the underlying thing is at work being itself throughout the change.

This difficulty has its parallel in the problem “whether the thinghood (ousia) of the thing is the form or what underlies it,” and the question whether potency or being-at-work is primary, which Aristotle will wrestle with in Metaphysics VII and IX (Phys. I.7 190b25, 191a21).

at-work. One little-considered possibility is that the declared primary sense of being, to which the others refer, namely thinghood or ousia, is not self-explanatory or self-maintaining, since it depends on energetic and alethic being in different ways.
Thus, we can agree with Sarah Waterlow that the opening of book III is that other solution to the Parmenidean impasse, and add that the solution in Phys. I requires it.91 Put simply: it is incorrect to say that before a person is educated, what was there was a lack of education, or simply a man. What was there, instead, was a man able to know. The account of movement in terms of non-being falls away completely when the state of affairs is described through potency and being-at-work.92

The energetic solution to this elemental-descriptive problem is indicated already at the end of Physics I. Using images from Plato’s Timaeas, Aristotle’s description in Physics I.9 describes the elements of the formal analysis in vivid and active terms, and renames them. The hupokeimenon, the coming-to-be thing that remains itself through a change, is described as “a co-cause with the form of the things that come into being, like a mother,” which “inherently yearns for (ephiesthai) and stretches out toward (oregesthai) it [the eidos] by its own nature” (Phys. I.9 192a13-18).93 Similarly, the eidos and its sterēsis or enantion, which are, on the one hand that which comes to be, and on the other, that out of which it comes and which ceases to be—these are described as unable to yearn (ephiesthai) for one another, the form being “something divine and good,” and its opposite looked upon sternly “as upon a criminal” (Phys. I.9 192a13-18). By characterizing them as living beings, Aristotle re-describes these formal principles in active terms.

In this passage, Aristotle gives the hupokeimenon two names: he says it is the hulê, the material, that yearns for the form, and that it remains through changes because it is not simply the form, but instead has being as potency (hōs de kata tēn dunamin) (Phys. I.9 192a21-30). Being exact about how the hupokeimenon is twofold requires us to grasp potency and being-at-work,

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92 Waterlow goes on to argue about potency that “unless it retains something in common with not-being (so that ‘potentially P’ carries some of the same message as ‘not-P’) it will be of no use to explain change.” Yet this is an over-hasty conclusion, and does not follow, since a thing can be able to know or know potentially, and know at the same time. Her further argument, that something “potential is potentially just what it would be if actual” takes potentiality to be an actuality in the mode of negation or not-being, but to have no independent character apart from negation, in effect, that it is defined as negation or a kind of negation. This makes it impossible to account for the positive character of potency, as what reaches toward a form or what will be unless something gets in its way.
93 Sachs, trans.
dunamis and energēia. The only way that the underlying thing can be related to contraries is through potency: “it is possible for the same thing at the same time to be contrary things potentially, but not in full activity” (Met. IV.5 1009a33). Thus, the underlying thing, hupokeimenon, the material, hulē, is potency or is potent: “all things coming-to-be by nature or art have material, for the ability in each of them either to be or not to be is the material in each” (Met. VII.7 1032a20).

The yearning (ephisthēsai) of the material (hulē) points out the basic property of potency, namely to be a source of movement. The underlying hulē is not inert: when conditions are right it originates movement. In addition, to describe it as stretching out toward (oregesthēsai) the form points out the characteristic of potency that it is essentially, internally directed toward the activity of which it is the potency: the ability to see is essentially for the sake of the activity of seeing, and depends on it for its meaning and being.

I have argued that the terms eidos-sterēsis-hupokeimenon depend on dunamis and energēia to be understood. Put otherwise, the way the thought-engine eidos-sterēsis-hupokeimenon functions demands the energetic analysis to complete it, because, on the one hand, the threefold structure, and on the other hand, because of the nature of the underlying thing it requires, already depends on the energetic meaning of being. The energetic description, I want to suggest, promises to resolve the problems that the relationship between the terms of the formal description introduces, by showing how a thing (dunamis, hupokeimenon) can be in a way one, and in another, two.

94 ἐὰν αὖ ὅ τα γιγνόμενα ἢ φύσις ἢ τέχνη ἢ ἐχει ὑλὴν: δυνατόν γὰρ καὶ ἑνώ καὶ μὴ ἑνώ ἕκαστον ἄλλων, τούτῳ δ' ἐστὶν ἢ ἐν ἑκάστῳ ὑλῇ
95 My claim is that Aristotle’s discussion in Metaphysics IX.9 shows how the opposition of eidos and sterēsis can be overcome. The argument there is that whatever is potential is able to be opposites. For example, an animal (hupokeimenon, hulē) is able to be healthy (eidos) and for the same reason it is able to be sick (sterēsis) or any stage in-between. Being healthy or being sick, however, are ways that an animal is at-work (energeia), and cannot be separated from the animal that is healthy or sick: the same animal is both healthy and an animal, both one and two. Therefore the animal, the potency, is not the continuity between sick and healthy. Instead, the structure of its being-an-animal implies necessarily that no matter its current condition it can (dunamis) be either. It has or is a structure the activity (energeia) which can only be one of these at a time, and furthermore that it must be one of them.
96 There is immediately a problem: one might reasonably be confused about which sense of dunamis the formal description relies upon, since in VIII.4 Aristotle observes that potential is meant in more than one way, e.g. learning is potentially knowing in a different way than having knowledge but not at work with it (Phys. VIII.4 255a33). Some scholars distinguish them by calling one a power in the sense of a force that causes action, and the other they call potentiality, a metaphysical use of the word dunamis. We can only address this distinction in the chapters on Metaphysics IX, where Aristotle
A major problem with this is that Aristotle’s extant work does not include a systematic attempt to use the fully developed concepts of potency and being-at-work to work out the problems with the elemental-descriptive analysis. Lacking this, our speculative and rough remarks here will have to suffice, since this is not the place to offer a reconstruction of this argument. On the other hand, Aristotle’s silence might help indicate that the analysis of being into form and underlying material—the descriptive or categorical or analysis—is to be left behind once the senses of being as potency and being-at-work—the energetic analysis—is fully developed. We turn, then, to the definition of movement, and the culmination of the proof of its existence, which is accomplished in the terms of the energetic sense of being.

VI. The Relationship Between Movement and Being in the Descriptive Argument

In closing the argument of this chapter we need to collect and set out our answer to the following question: in the argument of Physics I, how is movement related to being? Aristotle presents natural philosophy before him as dominated by Parmenides’ argument against the existence of movement. The inability of philosophy to grasp movement is an unmitigated scandal. The attempt of other thinkers to make movement thinkable proceeded through various ways of separating being and non-being into two principles, but accepted Parmenides argument that movement is composed of being and non-being.

Aristotle rejects that conclusion, while keeping his premises. If movement exists, it must be composite, but not in the way Parmenides thought: its composite character does not consist of being and non-being, but only of being. Being itself must be multiple in such a way that it can be composite. Thus, movement requires a profound reinterpretation of being.

The composite character of movement requires us to distinguish between kinds of being. Being is not simple, it is internally differentiated: the underlying thing and its form are

works out this new use of the word. If one has to choose—and as we shall see later, it is not clear that one does—one would have to say that they are related in the metaphysical sense. The reason for this is that the potency in the sense of power is a source of change in an other, or in itself as other, while in the formal analysis no cause of change is described, and the yearning of the underlying thing would not cause any other thing to change, it would only cause itself to change. I respond to this problem indirectly in the chapter on dunamis.
complementary but irreducibly diverse. They are different kinds of being in definite relationships to one another. This means that movement requires being to be definite in an unprecedented way. As soon as we make this argument, however, we find that not only does being have to be definite and diverse, it must also be plurivocal. More exactly, the same being must admit of different articulations that cannot be reduced to one another: it is not only that there is an underlying thing and a form, but these are in a way two, and in another way one. That is, the diversity of being depends on and implies a diversity of aspects of being. Thus, movement requires us to distinguish aspects as aspects.

The definite character of being is established by arguing for the underlying thing by two routes: the form-underlying structure of categorical articulation, and the description of the elements of coming-to-be. Since there are these two routes, it might seem unclear whether for Aristotle being is plurivocal because of movement, or because of categorical-metaphysical considerations. This question will not be resolved here, but I shall try to make it plausible that being is multiple because of movement.

One argument against this proposition might hold either that the form-underlying pair is established through logical argument in the Physics and later only applied to help sort out the elements of movement. It would have to take the distinction between the different senses of categorical being (quantity, quality, and so on) as basic or assumed, and argue that the only way to combine these is to look at how language applies predicates to a subject to arrive at the idea of a form said of an underlying thing. Difficulties within this argument will be clear in what follows. Another argument against the proposition above could hold that, in spite of using the same words, the two ways of arguing for the multiplicity of being are simply different. This argument is less plausible than the first.

One could respond that Aristotle brings up the distinction between the predicated form and the underlying thing in the context of an objection to Parmenides’ argument that being is unchanging and one, and that the singularity of being matters here because it makes movement impossible. Thus, the logical register of the first argument formally serves the argument for movement.
A further and stronger claim would be that the distinction between form and underlying depends on movement. I shall try to make this plausible in two stages. First, based on predication alone it seems impossible to make a stable distinction, let alone any claim to priority, between the predicate and subject. An ongoing problem among the sophists and in the dialogues of Plato is the symmetrical character of identity. Using the word “is” (eimai) in a sentence could well make an equal claim on the corresponding terms: to say the tree is red could equally well mean that red is the tree. The claim that one of these is prior and the other secondary is not (immediately) evident from an analysis of the grammar of sentences. Some things may be established by looking at broader patterns of use, e.g. we just don’t say that red is the tree, while we do say the tree is red. This is not as stable a solution as we might think, however, because ‘tree’ is also used as predicate: we do say that the plant is a tree, so even what seems at first to be a subject and not a predicate, in other circumstances can be a predicate.

Aristotle’s argument, that being a thing (ousia) is contained in the articulation of redness, then, seems to imply that we just know that some of these contain or imply the others. This would mean we have some other criteria that differentiates these predicates and makes some (tree, elephant, bird) more primary than others (red, light, large). This is a difficult problem, both for the ancients and for us. A remarkable demonstration of this problem can be found in Plato’s Sophist and Statesman. In these dialogues, the predicates are unstable. In looking for definitions of the sophist and the statesman, the predicate-differentia switch around in order and importance: a bird could first be differentiated from other things by the number of feet, and then by wings, or again by wings and then diet and then feet. Either way, the Stranger’s dazzling display of different ways to hunt down the definition of these people leaves us no account of how we come to know what cuts to make in our attempt to find the definition of the thing. Aristotle’s biology is not as strict: the non-living and living, the plant and animal are continuous, and divided roughly according to how they come to be.

Aristotle has a brilliant response to the problem in his response to Democritus in Met. VIII.2: among the many attributes of a thing, what, he asks, makes a threshold a threshold? Is it
the size of the stone, the position, the kind of stone, the color? Aristotle’s answer is: what makes a threshold a threshold is the way it functions, its *energeia*, and this is due to its position.

However, this conclusion does not quite give us what we want. The problem that we face is not merely how to choose between ‘apple’ and ‘red.’ It is not merely a decision about which predicate is primary. It is instead how to account for the argument that apple and red are both predicated of something that is not defined by its being a predicate. Expressed in terms of the *Categories*, what we are not looking for in our current situation is how to establish the primacy of secondary substance over other forms or predicates. What we are looking for is what establishes the existence and priority of primary substance, the *tode ti*. Can merely logical argument establish it? If so, this argument is not presented in the *Categories*.

One way to respond to this problem would be to say that the way to distinguish between the underlying thing and the form is to appeal to change: the form changes, while the underlying thing remains. This is plausible, but Aristotle does not quite make this argument.

And yet, the argument of the threshold could very well help to establish what we need. In *Met.* IX.3 1047a33-1047b1 Aristotle cites with approval the argument that only what moves is. The reason he agrees with it is not, as the Stranger argued in the *Sophist*, because what moves has power (*dunamis*), but instead because it is active, at-work. It is hard, for example, to imagine an activity that is not particular or definite. On this argument, the definiteness of something is due to its *energeia*, the primary sense of which is movement. This definite particularity is precisely the *this*, *tode ti*, or its source. Therefore, we need to look at movement to discover the underlying thing, the *this* of which forms are said.

If this is right, movement is very likely what motivates Aristotle to argue that being is multiple, not just because the elements of coming-to-be require the multiplicity of being, but because in addition it is the specificity, the singularity of being-at-work that establishes the existence of what underlies forms in speech.
Chapter Five: The Culmination of the Argument for the Existence of Movement

I. The Role of Physics II

The second book of the Physics consists of a characterization of nature considered through the structure of categorical speech: using the concept of responsibility (aitia) it picks out the senses in which one can say that beings are responsible for an event, being, or state-of-affairs. This discussion does not devote itself to establishing the existence of movement or nature. For example, in Physics II.1, Aristotle says that to try to demonstrate that nature exists to someone who denies it would be like trying to describe colour to a blind person. For this reason it does not play a primary role in the argument for movement, which it is our current task to work out.

Still, Physics II is a continuation of the investigation of nature through its logical entities. It discusses what nature is by examining it through aitiai, ‘things responsible for...’ or ‘causes.’ The word gets its meaning from a legal context, namely that to which we point and accuse of being the very one which acted in this or that way, which shows up as what is responsible for.... Thus aitia is a word basically related to eidos, the look or form that appears, and part of the investigation through the categorical-predicative structure of logos, that is, the distinction between the predicated thing (eidos) and the underlying thing (hupokeimenon, hulē), that Aristotle introduced in response to Parmenides in Physics I.

The account in Physics II has three key moments: 1) the characterization of nature as form more than as material, 2) the distinction of the four causes in artificial things: one material, and three formal causes: a) that of or in which the categories are said, namely hulē, material, and b) that which is said of or in the underlying material, namely eidos, form, c) the outside source (archē) of the source of movement (also an eidos), and d) that archē for the sake of which a thing is done, that is, its telos. Aristotle also argues that causes b)-d) coincide in natural things, but not in artificial things. The book closes with 3) a defense of the argument that nature is purposeful, that it has teloi for which it acts.

Though sources (archai) appear in the discussion of Physics II, since Aristotle is addressing those beings as causes (aitiai), it is not their character as archai that concerns him. That
is, instead of studying what it is to be an arché, the concern is here merely to distinguish and to
name the beings that have or are sources, and distinguish the ways they can be related to that for
which they are responsible. In sum, to the extent that Physics II works with the categorical-eidetic
sense of being, and distinguishes the elements of nature and its events, instead of its sources or
archai, it is continuous with the Descriptive Argument, but, again, it does not describe the
elements of movement, nor does it mark out the definition or structure of movement, but instead,
it works out the beings or things that move, and their relations. Thus, we shall set it aside for the
moment.

Considered as the aitia that is responsible for a thing, nature is the thinghood (ousia) of it
(Met. VII.17 1041b29-33). In Physics III.1, however, nature is considered the source or origin (arché)
from which change and motion spring.97 In this Aristotle is merely carrying out the program
stated clearly in the opening sentence of the Physics, to seek the elements, causes, and principles.

Considered as arché, however, nature is related to (but not simply the same as) energeia
and dunamis.98 Nature as source initiates movement, while nature as cause is what is responsible
for something being a definite, primary thing. This archaeology is not a pursuit of distinct
elements or the beings that are responsible for events, but an analysis that undoes these more
obvious distinctions, for example, by considering two different beings—a teacher and a student—
to be one in potency or in activity (Phys. III.3).

II. The Preamble to the Definition of Movement: Categorical Logos

The third book takes up the discussion of archai. Aristotle begins by saying that it is
necessary to understand movement—and therefore energeia and dunamis—if nature is to be

97 In this section, Aristotle is not seeking a definition of change (metabolé), but is trying to discover what
motion (kinēsis) is. He does not clarify here why he is not seeking change, but begins to clarify the
relationship between them in V.1, saying “every motion is some kind of change...” but motion is
limited to change on a continuum between contraries such as between hot and cold, whereas change
encompasses also the genesis of things, which come from not-being into its contradictory, into being.
To work out why and how Aristotle distinguishes the senses of change and makes local motion
primary would be the task of another essay. Its primacy in Physics V-VIII, I suggest, is due to the
importance of the categorical analysis, and the absence of the work or energetic analysis that is the
subject of this dissertation.

98 Aristotle suggests in Metaphysics IV.2 that cause and source follow upon one another and are
therefore one and the same nature, but it does not follow that they are identical or indistinguishable in
some respect, for, as we saw, a thing can be both one and two in different ways (Met. IV.2 1003b23).
visible to us. The clear implication is that the arguments in Physics I and II were insufficient: the question of movement had not been resolved, and the question of nature had hardly been formulated.99 The analyses of elements and causes was broadly speaking an investigation of categorical being: form and underlying material (predicates and subjects of speech or change) in book one, and different beings or substances taken as causes in book two.

Aristotle does not step immediately into the definition of movement. The preamble does two things: it distinguishes the categorical sense of being from the energetic sense with which he will define movement, and he observes that movement occurs within the categories (Physics III.1 200b26-201a9).

First, then, he gives an overview of distinctions between ways being is said. This is a topographical remark that helps us locate the account of movement among the senses of being (incidental, categorical, energetic, and alethic, though only two are mentioned here).

There is, on the one hand, what is single by being-in-completion, and what is single by being-potential and being-in-completion, [ἐστι δὴ [τι] τὸ μὲν ἐντελεχεία μόνον, τὸ δὲ δυνάμει καὶ ἐντελεχείᾳ] and on the other hand there is the this, the so much, the such kind, and similarly with the other categories of being… Physics III.1 200b26-9100

99 The whole chapter is repeated, with a few changes, in Met. XI.9, to which we shall occasionally appeal in what follows.

100 The τι is not universally attested, and may have been added: “there is what is something by being-complete alone…”. The words entelekheia and dynamis appear as dative nouns which could either modify a substantive adjective to monon, or an implied to on. My translation takes a thing to be single, monon, by means of the thing specified. This is controversial, since on the standard reading a thing cannot be or be a this at all by being only potent. However, Metaphysics VII.16 1040b4 shows that Aristotle takes potencies to exist on their own. Furthermore, Spengler points out a parallel passage in Aristotle that lends plausibility to this idea: καὶ τὰ μὲν ἄνω δυνάμεως ἐνέργειαί εἰσιν, οἶνον ώς πρώτα οὐσία, τὰ δὲ μετὰ δυνάμεως, …τὰ δὲ οὐδέποτε ἐνέργεια ἐἰσιν ἄλλα δυνάμεις μόνον. “Some things are at-work without potency, such as the first beings, others [are at work] with potency, and others are never beings at work, but are only potencies.” (On Interpretation 13 23a23-26). Ross rejects this possibility of a potency that is never at work, by appealing to what he takes to be the “normal doctrine” of potentiality, that is, Aristotle’s argument that potencies are directed toward being at work. Yet the last phrase could well point out that there is no necessity for a potency to be at work: some potencies will happen never (οὐδέποτε) to be at work, incidentally, and yet still be a real potency. By contrast, Ross speculates: “What is relevant here, where Aristotle is leading up to the definition of motion, is to oppose the changeable to the unchangeable, and this the reading of our text does.” Since this is precisely the doctrine that I am challenging in my reading, I do not take this point to be established in advance.
Aristotle signals a change in approach by distinguishing between the ways of speaking about being. The terms by which Aristotle will define movement—dunamis and energeia/entelekheia—are not, however, categorical beings. The categorical beings are thinghood (ousia), kind, quantity, position, relation, and so on. These are either 'said of' things as subjects, the way being Socrates or being human are said substantially, nor are they said to be 'in' things as dependent beings or properties, the way a size or a color is in something or belongs to it (cf. Cat. 2).

By contrast, potency and being-at-work are neither the name or species of something, nor is potency an attribute said to be in or belong to a thing. This is an important and difficult point: for Aristotle, dancing-right-now is not a property of things, nor is it a class or category that beings have, as though a sidewalk or a koala could properly be said not to be dancing-right-now, or to be dancing a lot. Dancing is, instead, an expression of a being, the way the being is. For the same reason, being a dancer is not adequately described by saying a woman has the property of being able to dance. It may be true that in a sense she is able to be a dancer because she has a certain body and muscle mass, but unlike her attributes, her being-able-to-dance just is her being-a-dancer.

Movement and Categorical Being

Without discursive preparation, Aristotle makes three points, in quick succession, first about movement according to the category of relation, then about movement in categorical being in general, and finally that in each category a thing can be or not be. Often, this string of points is assumed to be different ways to express the same thing, or to be explanations for one another.101 Since the questions to which these points respond are not here explained, however, it is common to miss that each group is a different set of distinctions. To interpret the passage, two things are helpful: 1) to remember that relation is a category, and so an illustration of the point he goes on to

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101 Thus, some read the discussion of being or not-being a form as another way of talking about being-complete or potency, a significantly incorrect reading. I show in more detail in the appendix that what Aristotle distinguishes in this passage must be kept apart for the passage to make any sense. There I establish, for example, that the brief discussion of relation is not a veiled definition of motion: since enentelekheia/energeia are precisely the same being as the relevant dunamis, complete being or being-at-work do not 'happen to potency' as to another being.
make about movement in the categories, 2) that potency is a way of being, so it cannot correspond to non-being in the third point of this preamble. Altogether the argument of the passage is, 1) that the properties of moving things are definite in the categorical sense of being, that is, they are articulated by quality, quantity, relation, and so on, and 2) that movement cannot be defined by these categories, but only through the energetic sense of being.

The first, a discussion of relation—one type of categorical being—shows that even it applies to movement in a definite way: when it comes to relation, movement is thought, for example, in terms of agent and patient. This being so, relation cannot give us a definition of movement, since both terms include movement in their definition. This seems to be one of the reasons Aristotle brings it up here.

The other reason is evident in what Aristotle concludes from the discussion: movement is definite in both these senses of being. For, from the argument about relation, Aristotle immediately draws the conclusion that all movement occurs within the categories.

Why would Aristotle emphasize that movement occurs within the categories? He must navigate between the Scylla of defining movement entirely through the categories, and the Charybdis of making it completely unrelated to definite knowledge. First, if movement is defined entirely through categorical being (e.g., causes and elements), as we have seen in the previous chapter, then movement would be impossible: if it is bitten off into measurable and entire pieces of being, and perfectly reduced to the categories, then movement is not. Movement is not a quantity, but a change in quantity, therefore it cannot be defined categorically.

On the other hand, if it is completely unrelated to the categories, then determinate knowledge of it would seem to be impossible: movement would be swept into a void of unknowing. Since he will define movement using a non-categorical sense of being, we could well ask him how movement could be definite at all, and whether or how there could be determinate knowledge of it. For example, if movement had nothing to do with the categories, then how could you say that a flower gained a quantity of heat from the sun, or that its color changed from green to white?
As a result, then, of his argument that movement is not defined by relation, but that it nevertheless can be articulated in terms of relation, Aristotle argues that movement occurs entirely and can be fully grasped in each of the categorical senses of being:

There is, then, no movement apart from things: for what changes always changes either in thinghood, or in amount, or in quality, or in place, and there is nothing to grasp that is common to these, and is neither, as we say, a this, nor a this much, nor an of-this-kind, nor any of the other kinds of being; so that neither motion nor change will be anything apart from the things [the categories] named, since there is, in fact, nothing other than the things named. *Physics* III.1 200b34-201a3

Movement, and by extension the energetic sense of being, is never apart from the categories: the energetic sense of being does not demarcate a different realm of being, it articulates the same being, the same world, but in a different way or aspect. All change happens in the categories, that is, it admits of being specified by an aspect that a category points out. There is no way of grasping change on its own apart from them. In addition, change is not a being on its own.102

Aristotle’s phrase has a strange structure, however, which points out that movement is not reducible to the categories: he does not say that each movement is completely grasped or articulated through its category, nor does he say that there is nothing in common between movement in one category and movement in another. Instead, he says that there is nothing common to movement that we do not take hold of determinately in a specific category. Put positively: we do grasp what is common to movement between the categories, but we grasp it one at a time, category by category. Again, movement does not break down the walls that distinguish quality from quantity and relation. Yet we do grasp something that is the same in each. We do grasp change as something common among the categories, but we only ever do it by grasping a change in a particular category. This commonality may or may not be analogical.

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102 One might ask what one knows when he knows patterns of motion, for example, change in velocity through acceleration or deceleration, since such discussions seem to take motion to be some kind of object. Aristotle might reply that movement could be an object in a derivative sense, that is, in the same way that we can describe the features of secondary thinghood (*ousia*), but he would remind us that the articulation of movement nevertheless depends on something that is moving.
Thus, though motion is determinate and happens within the categories, it is not defined by the categories, but by *dunamis* and *entelekheia*. These are grasped *within* the categories, but they are not derived from, and not necessarily subordinate to the categories. That which is *common* to changes is not itself graspable in terms of this or that predicate category, but only *in* and *through* it. We can grasp change as something that happens in the different categories, but whenever we say something has changed, we always begin and remain with something determinate, that is, with a change in place, kind, amount, and so on. Yet, although we grasp that movement occurs by noticing that a thing has changed in size or position (categorically), movement is not definable through size or position or through any of the other categories, as we said.

This being so, we can grasp movement as a whole, it is not divided up into parts and dispersed among the categories. There are not many kinds of movement, one in each of the categories: movement is not partially in each category, but the nature of movement is complete in each.

After these remarks, Aristotle turns to an observation that things belong to the categories in two ways: either being or not being each of them. This corresponds not to being-at-work and potency, but to the description of the form-*sterēsis* pair worked out in *Physics* I.7-9, for that discussion, too, was confined to categorical being.

In the preamble to the definition of movement, then, Aristotle did two things: 1) he contrasted the categorical way of speaking of movement and the energetic way of speaking through which he goes on to define it. In general, the ways of saying being correspond to the ways of speaking of movement. Then 2) he demonstrates the determinacy of movement by making distinctions that articulate movement within the categories of being. After this brief discussion of categorical being, Aristotle re-emphasizes that we are using the energetic sense of being to define movement. Thus, he brings up the categorical sense here to leave it behind.

**III. Overview of the Passages Defining Movement**

The rest of *Physics* III.1 is divided as follows: 1) Aristotle offers the definition of movement and gives examples (201a9-19). Establishing this, which he does in the closing passage of the chapter, will complete the argument for the existence of movement, since it is necessary to
think what something is if we are to know whether it is. According to his custom, the argument, along with its refinement, does not come before, but after stating his position. 2) He shows that it can account for complex cases, that is, it works for something moving other things and being moved by them at the same time, suggests that this may not be true of all things, and then confirms and elaborates the definition (201a19-29). 3) He then gives examples to illustrate what he means by the ‘as’ in the definition, illustrating how potency is related to but different than the subject of the change (201a29-b5). 4) He closes the proof with an argument confirming that movement is entelekheia, since it only occurs when this is, and neither before nor after (201b5-15).

The Definition

Recalling the sense of being opened up by the words entelekheia and dunamis, Aristotle emphasizes that we must divide them up into the right kinds, genē.

Making sure (diēirêmenou) to distinguish between each kind of being-in-completion and being-in-potency… (Physics 201a9)\(^{(103)}\)

Movement is divided up into kinds; we must divide being-complete and being-potent into kinds. The passage is normally translated taking diēirêmenou to be perfect, “having distinguished…” Though the distinction was made before, however, preamble, as we saw, was not about the distinction between entelekheia and dunamis, but about how movement is related to, but, it turns out not exhausted by or defined in terms of the categories. It is only possible to define movement if we mark out the right kinds of entelekheia and dunamis. This necessity leads Aristotle to use the intensive present perfect diēirêmenou, and makes the whole clause a genitive absolute modifying the definition itself.\(^{(104)}\)

It is not possible to translate the passage, as “having divided each kind by being-complete and potential....” This, however, is the standard interpretation of the relationship

\(^{(103)}\) δημημένου δὲ καθ’ ἑκαστὸν γένος τοῦ μὲν ἐντελεχεία τοῦ δὲ δυνάμει...

\(^{(104)}\) It makes better sense of the passage to understand δημημένου as an intensive perfect participle, emphasizing a present sense, both because the other readings are implausible or inadmissible, and because doing so makes sense of why Aristotle would list kinds of movement immediately following the definition. ‘Each kind’ does not refer, strictly speaking, to the categories, as though, being-potentially and being-completely are divided up by the categories. It is not simply categories that divide the two, but particular, concrete movements, such as rolling, leaping, running, and so on.
between the energetic and categorical senses of being, namely that for each of the categories, a thing is divided up into having that attribute either in potency or in *energeia*. But it does not make grammatical sense to translate it this way. The word διαφέρω, ‘distinguish’ or ‘divide,’ names its criteria by using *kath* and the accusative case, with the object to be divided in the genitive. If Aristotle meant to use the distinction between being-complete and being-potential to make distinctions within the categories, then he would have said the opposite: διηρημένον δὲ κατὰ τὸν μὲν ἐντελεχεία τὸν δὲ δυνάμει τοῦ ἕκαστον γένους.

The passage immediately following lists the four most basic kinds of movement to which he refers: alteration, change in magnitude (growth and shrinkage), generation and destruction, and change in place. These examples show what is supposed to persuade us about the definition. We must divide up *dunamis* and *entelechēia* by each kind for the definition to make sense. The kinds of movement are clearly related to four basic categories—quality, quantity, thinghood, and place—but the genus of a movement is not simply a category, it is a category essentially folded toward, or considered with respect to movement—alteration, growth and diminishment, coming-to-be and passing-away, and motion in place. The kinds are, as it were, categories deployed beyond themselves in the direction of different movements.

In further examples, such as learning, ripening, rolling and leaping, Aristotle makes these even more specific. Movement is definite. This specificity requires us grasp the particular terms appropriate to this movement. Nevertheless, without being able to escape this specificity, an analogy between them can be formulated in energetic terms (cf. *Met. IX.6*).

Thus, we can only grasp movement by dividing *entelechēia* and *dunamis* into kinds, but these are not merely distinctions within each category: here the categories are distinctions within these. The difference is not trifling: what is at stake is what the framework is by which we understand or grasp movement. The basic terms by which we understand movement are not the categories, and clearly not the kinds of movement, but being-potent and being-complete.

The definition of movement follows:

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105 If this reading were right, its past reference might also lead us to think that the discussion of relation, and the discussion of form and deprivation was, in a way, a surrogate discussion of the distinction between the energetic terms.
Making sure to distinguish between each kind of being-complete and being-potent, the being-complete of being-in-potency \([\text{tou dunamei ontos}]\), as such, is movement. \((\text{Physics III.1 201a9-11})\)\(^{106}\)

For each of its kinds, movement is: the being-complete of the potential being, as potential being. The parts of the definition that require interpretation are: a) what being-in-potency \((\text{dunamei})\) differs from the being \((\text{to on})\) that is in-potency, b) what \(\text{entelekheia}\) means, and c) the meaning of the ‘as’ \((\text{hēi})\) clause.\(^{107}\)

To interpret the definition, we need to grasp what it is meant to accomplish. Most of the current scholarship on this passage takes its task to be to classify movement by finding a way to distinguish between movement and rest, or its product, or being. This follows exactly Wittgenstein’s picture of language use, in which, when someone asks for a cheese, I check a book which lists the attributes of each cheese, and pick out the correct one based on these criteria. This is why scholarship on the definition has concentrated on the ‘as’-clause, usually interpreting it to produce criteria that will prevent the definition from picking out something we do not normally think is movement, such as a house once it has been built, or the thing as it currently actually is.\(^{108}\)

This is a misreading of the passage caused by taking it out of its proper argumentative context, which is for it to be the completion of the argument for the existence of movement.\(^{109}\)

Nature is both a source of moving and resting, and it is nature that we seek through this

\(^{106}\) δημιουργού δὲ καθ’ ἕκαστον γένος τοῦ μὲν ἐντελεχεία τοῦ δὲ δυνάμει, ἢ τοῦ δυνάμει οὖντος ἐντελέχεια, ἢ τωιότον, κίνησις ἕστιν.

\(^{107}\) A question posed by the definition, which we will not be able to address directly in this chapter, is d) what the meaning of the dative \(\text{dunamei}\) is, its relation to the other variations of \(\text{dunamis}\), and to the dative and nominative cases of \(\text{entelekheia}\), for, having distinguished between two datives \((\text{dunamei} \text{ and } \text{entelekheiai})\), Aristotle uses only one dative in the definition \((\text{dunamei})\). See the discussion of potency in the chapter devoted to it, below.

\(^{108}\) Called the “product problem” by Anagnostopoulos.

\(^{109}\) Aristotle does not himself bring up the difficulties that these scholars read into these passages, at least not in the form most frequently presented in the literature. As we shall see, Aristotle’s explanation of the ‘as’-clause does not relate to the cessation of movement upon completion, but instead shows how (some) things do not move themselves. Furthermore, in the passage that distinguishes between ‘house’ and ‘activity of building,’ where according to these scholars he ought to be preoccupied with excluding the one from the definition of movement, Aristotle does not bring up the ‘as’-clause, but works out what the potential being \((\text{tou dunamei ontos})\) is that is at work.
definition of movement.\textsuperscript{110} So the question governing the passage is: what is it to have or to be a source of movement in oneself? Furthermore, as Physics III.2 states clearly, what is at stake is whether movement can be said to be at all. This is not the same as picking among the different cheeses in a market. Thus, the purpose of the passage is not to appeal to our familiar understanding of movement, but to say what it is and to show that it is. Instead of directly taking on the puzzles brought up in the secondary literature, then, it will be more useful to set out a different, positive account.

Aristotle confirms the definition by substituting more specific movements for the general terms—in place of the word *entelekheia*, and therefore also *kinēsis*, the specific activity or kind of moving:

...for example, of what alters, as alterable, [it is] alteration, of what expands and of what shrinks opposite to it (for there is no word in common for both of them), [it is] expansion and shrinkage, of what comes to be and passes away [it is] generation and destruction, of what displaces it is displacement. That this is movement is clear from this. Whenever what is built, as the very thing we say it to be <namely “what is built”>, should be *entelekheia*, it is being built, and this is building. (Physics III.1 201a11-18)\textsuperscript{111}

Put otherwise, the thing in potency, which we say is able to be built, whenever it has the being-complete proper to this ability, is being built, and this is building. These examples of *entelekheia* can help us understand what Aristotle means by it, but he repeats this point in more detail at the end of the chapter, so we shall return to it there.

That Aristotle uses the example of *building*, the paradigmatic artificial movement, to illustrate the meaning of *entelekheia* is conspicuous on this point. He has, three chapters before, in *Physics* II.7, just said that artificial and natural things differ precisely with respect to their relation to *telos* for natural things the completion (telos), the origin (arkhē), and the look (*eidos*) are the same in form, whereas in artificial movements the *telos* is separate and provided from outside, as

\textsuperscript{110} Aristotle points out that the natural condition of things is to move: “in our course on physics it was laid down that nature is a principle of rest no less than of motion, nevertheless motion is the natural state” (Phys. VIII.3 253b8-9).

\textsuperscript{111} ...οἷον τοῦ μὲν ἀλλοιωτοῦ, ἢ ἀλλοιωτόν, ἀλλοιώσεως, τοῦ δὲ ἀυξητοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀντικειμένου φθιτοῦ (οὐδὲν γὰρ δὸνα κοινὸν ἐπ᾽ ἀμφοῖν) αὐξήσεως καὶ φθίσεως, τοῦ δὲ γενητοῦ καὶ φθιρτοῦ γένεσις καὶ φθορά, τοῦ δὲ φορητοῦ φορά, ὃς δὲ τούτῳ ἔστιν ἢ κύνης, ἢ τετείχθαι ἔθλον. ὧταν γὰρ τὸ οἰκοδομητὸν, ἢ τοιοῦτον αὐτὸ λέγομεν εἶναι, ἐντελεχεία ἢ, οἰκοδομεῖται, καὶ ἐστὶν τούτῳ οἰκοδομῆσις.
it is here in the example of building. We can hear the discrepancy between natural and artificial things in the word *entelekheia*, when Aristotle uses it to define movement, and then goes on to describe the movement of building.

**IV. Movement involving several beings (201a9-201a27)**

Aristotle defined movement as, for example, the alteration of what is alterable. This seems nearly a tautology. The definition has no reference to multiple or separate beings. After all, it is not an account of the beings that move, nor is it an account of situations in which movement happens or the various relationships between agent and patient: these presuppose the existence and definition of movement. It is instead the definition of the being of movement, which is not a categorical being.

The passage that follows opens with an observation that some beings are capable of things in which respect they are not currently complete, proceeds to indicate how different things could move each other, and it closes by re-confirming the definition of movement, slightly modified to show how it can accommodate movements caused by one thing in another—a theme to which Aristotle returns in III.2-3 after the proof is complete.\(^\text{112}\)

Since some things (*enia tauta*) are both in potency and in *entelekheia* not at once or not according to the same thing, but for example hot in *entelekheia* and cold in potency, then many things (*polla*) will already be doing <something to> (*poēsei*) and undergoing <something> (*peisetai*) because of one another, so that all (*hapan*) will be at once doing and undergoing. So that even what moves naturally is moved, for every such thing moves what is moved and itself. (*Physics* III.1 201a19-23)\(^\text{113}\)

At the beginning of the chapter Aristotle mentioned that some things are both potentially and completely. He returns to that distinction here (*Phys. III.1 200b26*). There are certain kinds of potency that cannot actively be at the same time: a thing cannot in the same parts be both wet and dry at once. Since some or all movements happen because of the interaction of different beings,

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\(^{112}\) The passage would best appear at 202a3, introducing the discussion of the analysis of the transitive character of movement, i.e. of the relationship between mover and mobile.

\(^{113}\) ἐπεὶ δ’ ἔνια ταύτα καὶ δυνάμει καὶ ἐντελεχείᾳ ἔστιν, οὐχ ᾗμα δὲ ἢ σο ὑπάκα τὸ αὐτὸ, ἀλλ’ οὗν θερμὸν μὲν ἐντελεχείᾳ ψυχρὸν δὲ δυνάμει, πολλὰ ἦδη ποιήσαι καὶ πείσηται ἵπτ’ ἀλλήλων· ἂπαν γὰρ ἔσται ᾗμα ποιητικὸν καὶ παθητικόν. ὅστε καί τὸ κινοῦν φυσικῶς κινητόν· πᾶν γὰρ τὸ τοιοῦτον κινεῖ κινοῦμενον καὶ αὐτό.
when something is capable of being different than it actually is, then it can affect and be affected by other things at the same time as it affects them, as when a hot thing heats a cold thing, and is at the same time cooled by it or by something else. Thus, the passage reads roughly this way: “in the ways that they are not potentially and actively the same thing at the same time, but are instead able to be something they are not actively being now, things will act on each other and be acted upon by each other at the same time.”

This passage brings up one way that potency extends beyond how something now inheres or is completely (entelekheia), and uses this to show how movement extends beyond individual beings to involve several beings. Aristotle seems to begin his exposition and defense of the definition here because movements involving several beings, such as building, are the most familiar examples of movement.

In such cases of movement originated externally, it seems that whatever moves another thing does so by moving itself: a hand moves a stick only because the hand moves. Thus, the question arises whether or not everything moves. If it does, then it seems as though an account of causality becomes impossible, since everything will be moved by and affecting each other at once, and everything will become both cause and change in the same respect. Thus, the idea of mutual affection is inchoate and indefinite: what does it mean to affect another thing in just the same way it is affecting you?

Aristotle’s distinction between being in potency and being in completion, however, makes it possible to distinguish in a movement-complex different respects in which each of the beings is, and thereby to describe more definitely what is happening in mutual affection. This allows the different beings involved in movement to be distinguished precisely enough to make possible the science of causality announced in Physics II. So, on the one hand, Aristotle shows that the definition, which does not refer to different beings or causes (aitia), but instead to source (arkhē), can still apply when those beings are distinguished. On the other hand, a distinction between things in the sense of sources (arkhai) helps Aristotle preserve the science of causes (aitiai).
Aristotle then restates and elaborates on the definition of movement, as ‘the other hand’ of an observation about the distinction between what moves something and what is moved. Following most manuscripts, I read hotan entelekheiai on energei é auto è allo heí kineton, kinēsis estin at 201a28-29:

(1) On the one hand, it seems to some that all that moves [something] is moved, but, indeed, about this other things will show how things hold (exei) (for something is a mover and unmoved),

(2) and on the other hand, [it seems] the <being-complete> of to dunamei on, whenever in or through being-in-completion it should be-at-work, either itself or another as movable, is movement. Physics III.1 201a25-29.\(^{114}\)

The addition of ‘either itself or another’ as that which is movable to the definition allows Aristotle to deploy the definition to describe movements involving two beings—agent and patient. The passage confronts the fact that in some movements there are two potent beings, one

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\(^{114}\) δοκεῖ μὲν οὖν τίσιν ἄπαν κινοῦσθαι τὸ κινοῦν, οὐ μὴν ἄλλα περὶ τούτου μὲν ἐξ ἄλλων ἔσται δήλον ὅποιος ἔχει (ἔστι γάρ τι κινοῦν καί ἀκίνητον), ἢ δὲ τοῦ δυνάμει ὅντος ἄντελεχεια, ὅταν ἄντελεχεια δὲ ἐνεργῇ ἢ ἀυτὸ ἢ ἄλλο ἢ κινητῶν, κίνησις ἐστιν. This reading follows most of the manuscripts, and the major ones (EFJAP Porph.), which have the benefit of making the men... de... construction immediately intelligible and relevant. There are other variants: a) ὅταν ἄντελεχεια δὲ ἐνεργῇ ἢ ἀυτὸ κινητῶν, “by being at work or itself movable” (I) b) ὅταν ἄντελεχεια δὲ ἐνεργῇ οὐχ ἢ ἀυτὸ ἄλλο ἢ ἄλλο, “not as itself but as other” (P, T) (Ross, Aristotle’s Physics). c) Ross inserts οὐχ, seeming to make movement a deformation of or departure from being-complete (entelechëia): ὅταν ἄντελεχεια δὲ ἐνεργῇ οὐχ ἢ ἀυτὸ ἄλλο ἢ κινητῶν “whenever being-complete it should be at work not as itself but as moved.” Ross’s version also makes point (2) an unrelated or general assertion visited on the text, a non-sequitur: “...But the actuality of what is potentially...” Ross takes this reading without providing a philosophical or textual defense: he merely asserts that it is the only variant that “gives a good sense,” and notes that it was listed as a variant by Simplicius, who called it “safer” than the alternative (Ross, Aristotle’s Physics, 537). Yet, since Aristotle has defined movement as an entelechëia, there is no pressing reason to make entelechëia not itself when it is a movement, let alone make it not itself when it is of something, such as dynamis. If the term was energëia here, as it is in the definition in Met. XI, this modification would appear even more inappropriate. For Aristotle claims in Met. IX.3 that energëia appears most of all to be movement, and then that energëia converges in meaning with entelechëia. Another way to understand Ross’ reading is to observe that movement is shot through with otherness, since the entelechëia that is movement is of something that is not itself. In other words, it implies that movement is the identity of identity and difference. Now, if Ross’s reading was correct the ‘not... but’ formulation would force us to assume that the being would and could naturally be-at-work as itself, as the same thing that it is, so that there would be two ways for something to be entelechëia: as the same (thing) as itself, and as movable. To understand either side of the distinction, we would have to ask: what is it for it to be at work as itself—as to dunamei on, just as to on, or just as energëia? But it is not immediately clear what it would mean for a thing to be-at-work as something else. On my reading, by contrast, it makes sense that a thing would be at work in or on something else, e.g. a teacher in a student, but this analysis would be of moving entities, not specifically of movement. Similarly, what it would mean to be-at-work as itself is unclear, since being-at-work is what something is.
with the power to be moved, and the other with the power to move it, and that movement occurs should one or the other be at work as movable. This broadens the definition from one thing and one potency to include potency as the source of change in another. The definition did not include this, but uses dunamis to express an idea which is more like nature than potency strictly defined, namely as a source of change in the thing as itself (Met. IX.1).

One of the phrases in this short discussion is usually read as stating or assuming the incompatibility of dunamis and entelekheia. It does not do this, however, as we saw in the chapter on the compatibility of potency and being-at-work. If the two were simply either always together (as the Megarians hold) or always incompatible, there would be no need to limit the observation to “some cases,” that is, to the ones in which something is potent for something that at the moment it happens not actively to be. Furthermore, should it be Aristotle’s position, the definition of movement as the ‘being-in-fulfillment of a being-in-capacity’ would appear to be inherently contradictory and therefore incoherent.

For the first time in this chapter, Aristotle uses the word energeia, being-at-work. The words energeia and entelekheia are not quite used synonymously. Entelekheia in this context means ‘being-complete or entire,’ ‘holding fully,’ while energeia lends itself to the meaning ‘being-at-work, activity.’ Especially relevant here, energeia more easily describes movement in which the different beings involved are distinguished: we can say one thing is at-work upon something else, or of the thing which is changing that it is at-work insofar as it is potent. However,

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115 Thus, by referring to the unmoved mover, Aristotle is not here appealing to the prime mover discussed in Physics VIII, but to a discussion of the distinction and relation between mover and mobile he takes up in Physics III.2-3. In III.3 Aristotle concludes that the energeia of the agent can be simply the movement of the patient, so that one activity is in two beings in different ways, e.g. the activity of teaching that a teacher does is precisely the learning of the student.

116 Beere, for example, appeals to this passage to argue for incompatibility. However, in both his translation and the Greek in his footnote he inserts dashes: “Since, in some cases, one thing may be in capacity and in fulfillment F—although not simultaneously, or not in the same respect, but it may, for instance, be in capacity hot and in fulfillment cold—therefore many things will act and be acted on by one another.” The effect of setting this phrase apart in emphasis is to make the key part of the passage seem to be an appeal to an item of knowledge for which it does not argue, and which has no bearing on the point being made. Nor is it argued for elsewhere—a remarkable omission considering its importance to the study of nature and being. Thus, as we’ve seen, the reading that takes them to be opposed a) distorts the Greek, b) decontextualizes the phrase from the chapter, and c) makes the phrase irrelevant to the immediate argumentative context.

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entelekheia more naturally describes the whole complex of movement that includes both agent and patient. Aristotle will use these terms for the same reason in the description of building in the closing passage of Physics III.1. The use of hotan with the subjunctive energō is important as well, so the passage says that ‘should a thing be-at-work, then and only then will there be movement.’ This is, the point Aristotle argues for in the third passage of this chapter.

In the reformulation of the definition, the relative pronoun on, and the dative entelekheiai and energeiai that modify it indicate that the ἐνεργεια cláuse applies to the potent being: whenever a being of that kind is at-work as movable, the being-at-work is movement.

V. The ‘As’ Clause: The relationship between potency and the underlying thing

Aristotle says very clearly, in the passage that follows, that he is explaining the meaning and role of the word ἐνεργεια, ‘as.’ Yet he does not make it clear what is at stake in doing so. The passage begins with a distinction between being bronze and being able to be a man, and culminates in a distinction between the being that underlies movement and the potency, illustrating this by distinguishing between being visible and being a color. This, I argue, is the purpose of the passage: to establish that there is a difference between addressing something as a being and addressing this same being as potent for something. I shall call this the Aspect Distinction. It requires interpretation.

When we turn to the secondary literature for guidance, however, we do not find much help. Scholars usually try to read the ‘as’ clause together with a phrase in the third passage as Aristotle’s attempt to draw a distinction between a moving thing and the product or end of this movement. In this passage, however, nothing resembling this worry comes up, and, as I shall argue, nor does it in the third passage. Anagnostopoulos, says: “the idea that the quá phrase neutralizes a subsequent threat of picking out the products of change is in tension with the grammar of Aristotle’s definition and incompatible with his own explanation of the phrase’s function.”117 This is right, but for different reasons than he thinks. Aristotle does not worry about when movement ceases and the finished product begins, he brings up the fact that a lump of

117 Anagnostopoulos, “Change,” 35.
bronze does not change itself into a statue. It is necessary to supply the ‘as’ clause not, as much of the scholarship holds, to prevent the definition from applying to the product of movement, but to explain why some things do not move themselves, while others, namely natural things, do move themselves (Physics II.1).

We can grasp how this passage emerges from the previous one in the following way: the passage on movement involving several things introduced cases in which the potency (of natural and artificial things) did not wholly coincide with the way it was being-complete. The result was an argument that, while things that have a source of movement in themselves move themselves, things also affect each other, so that all movers (with a qualification to be examined later) would be moved by one another. All movement, then, appears to imply artificial movement.

The question arises, then, why some things grow and change on their own, while other things do not, that is, what the difference is between artificial and natural beings as sources of movement. Thus, one way to look at the argument of this passage is that it answers the question “why does bronze not move itself?” by distinguishing between being bronze and being potent, and in general between a being and the very same being insofar as it is being-potent. In doing so it accounts for all movement that is artificial.

The passage begins as follows. I leave ἥει (‘as’) untranslated:

By ἥει I mean this. <1> Bronze is in potency a man (dunamei andrias); <2> all the same it is not the being-complete of bronze ἥει bronze that is movement. <3> For it is not the same to be bronze as to be something in-potency (dunamei tini), while <2> if it were the same, simply and according to logos, movement would be the being-complete of bronze ἥει bronze, but it is not the same thing, as has been said… Since they are not the same, just as ‘colour’ is not the same as ‘visible,’ it is clear that movement is the entelekheia of the potent thing (tou dunatou), as potent. (Physics III.1 201a29-31)

Aristotle points out (1) that bronze has potency, (3) that being bronze and being potentially something are not the same, and that (2) the entelekheia of bronze as bronze is not movement. Instead of explaining this idea, unfortunately, Aristotle repeats (2), apparently
without revealing anything further.\footnote{Aristotle seems here to be partly joking. Helen Lang points out that in Aristotle’s Greek the verb ‘move’ never had a middle voice. Action upon oneself she argues, is never expressed in the active or middle voice, but is instead always expressed through a reflexive formulation, as we do in phrases such as “I got myself up,” or “I checked myself in to the infirmary.” On the other hand, the transitive use of ‘move’ was always expressed through active and passive verbs, since, as Lang observes, the middle voice of transitive ‘move’ is used only to for the act of taking another person for one’s own sexual pleasure. Presumably the intransitive middle-voice would have a related meaning. But, probably to the great amusement of his audience, his example of bronze ‘inherently moving itself’ would normally require using the middle-voice: thus Aristotle’s repetitive and evasive phrasing and his reference to the logos are playing with this meaning. The upshot seems to be this: Aristotle uses “the being-complete of bronze as bronze” to replace a phrase meaning “bronze moving itself for itself” in the middle voice. One way to read his objection in this passage, then, is not that in general being and being-potent are essentially different. It is instead that artifacts do not ‘generate’ themselves (middle-voice) at all, because in them, what they are and their being-potent are different. By contrast, the souls of living things are alive in potency and in energia.} The repetition leaves one option open: by saying that the two are not the same, simply, in *logos* or definition (since ‘able to be a man’ is not the definition of bronze), Aristotle leaves open the possibility that for some things they could be the same, that is that some things might be defined as being-something-potentially.

The “as” clause distinguishes the thing’s potency from its character as an underlying thing: Though bronze is capable of being a man, being completely or actually bronze is not being in spontaneous movement into the form of a man. If ‘bronze’ itself meant ‘potentially man’ then it would move itself.\footnote{According to this account, that life is the ability to live implies that it moves.} The reason it does not is that here the being-complete, the *entelekheia* in the definition of movement is of bronze, and bronze does not itself simply mean *able to be a man*. Thus the passage reads roughly as follows: even when it is moving or changing into a man, it is not changing insofar as it is bronze; it moves not insofar as it is bronze, but insofar as it is able. Movement here is the *entelekheia* of the bronze-able-to-be-a-man (*tou dunanei andrias xalkos*), not of bronze. If it made sense to say that there is an *entelekheia* of bronze itself, insofar as it is bronze, then this will not be movement, since bronze is not the same as able to be a man. But bronze must be reinterpreted energetically for this to be sensible.

The distinction here is not between phases of movement (as the existing discussion takes it to be), nor is it an attempt to state the metaphysical relationship between potency and *entelekheia*. The problem the passage confronts is solved by distinguishing between artifacts or inanimate things and natural, self-moving things. To do this, we must distinguish between the
being or definition of the underlying thing and its potencies, a distinction that does not apply to natural things insofar as they are natural, but does extend to apply to them as potent for something other than what they are.

More generally speaking, bronze does not move itself because its potencies depend on and refer to something that it is not, namely to the craftsman. Put otherwise, the potencies of bronze are not its own activities, are not what it is to be bronze, just as the materials arranged in the form of a chair are only accidentally a chair. So, just as the being of a chair is not in the materials, but is instead my activity of sitting in it, the being-potent of bronze is not its own, but depends on an outside source. Unlike houses and beds, however, the being of living things is potency and work, which is why they move themselves.

Thus, the discussion leaves open the possibility of other things, living things in particular, whose categorical being is indistinguishable from being a source of movement: a soul and being a source of one’s own movement are the same.120 For living things, the distinction between the aspect of being a thing and being a potential being may well collapse. But the effect of this collapse is to remove the separation of a thing from itself that constitutes the ontological structure of artifacts.

**Color and Visibility: The Aspect Distinction**

It is normally assumed that the ‘as’ distinguishes between being entelekheia and being dunamis. This reading takes the phrase bronze as bronze to be a way of referring to bronze entelekheia, whereas bronze as something else is bronze as potent for something. Two things rule this reading out: 1) we would expect, on this reading for the definition of movement to refer to a being insofar as it is potent (to on hēi dunaton). But instead movement is the entelekheia of the being in-potency (tou dunamei ontos entelekheia), insofar as it is potent (hēi dunaton). In other words, the passage does not contrast being potent or even movement with “being simply” or “being itself.”

2) The parenthetical passage, which is supposed to be an argument for the same point, does not distinguish between something like actuality and the potency in it, but between two potency-

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120 This even though the same thing can be named abstractly: human being itself and a human being are different, the former being the essence, the latter being a composite of that form and material.
entelekheia pairs, and the being underlying them. Moreover, 3) bronze is, as bronze and because it is bronze, able to be a man, that is, it is able to be a bronze man. This latter point is what we must turn to now.

The problem that leads to the confusion of the being with its potencies seems to be this: the nature or essential structure of bronze is necessarily ‘able to be a man,’ while, say, that of a bubble is not able to be a man. Still more simply, bronze is by nature able to be a man, wood is able to be hot or cold. Yet, being-able-to-be a man is not the same as being-bronze, and being able to be hot or cold is not the same as being wood. The difficulty is that when you grasp the one, you grasp the other, at least implicitly, the way when you grasp the being of ‘triangle’ you in some way grasp that on a flat plane its interior angles always add up to 180 degrees.

This problem is not removed by giving the correct differentiating properties that distinguish one kind of thing from a different kind of thing: being able to be in the position which defines a stone as a threshold is not the same as either the differentia (the correct position) or the underlying stone that has these properties. Put otherwise: the distinction between categorical being (bronze) and energetic (able to be a man) is not a distinction between essential and accidental categories. Potency and being-at-work are not properties, according to Aristotle, because they are not said to be in a thing (cf. Cat. 2). This is a profound disagreement with our contemporary and broad conception of properties, which corresponds roughly to what we can say truthfully about a thing.

121 On the standard reading, the ‘as’ clause is distinguishing between potency and entelekheia. But the primary distinction Aristotle is making here is not this. This is clear in the example he gives next: “This is clear of opposites: for on the one hand to be able to be healthy and to be able to be ill (kamnein) are different—for otherwise to be ill and to be healthy would be the same—but on the other hand the thing underlying both health and sickness (to nosoun), be it moisture or blood, is the same and one” (Phys. III.1 201a35-b3). The distinction between health and sickness, does not correspond to a distinction between the bronze in actuality and the bronze in potentiality for a man. It corresponds instead to the distinction between bronze and man. Thus, this common reading cannot be correct, since both opposites in this example are potencies, and Aristotle pairs each of them with an entelekheia, neither of which is the same as the bronze. Aristotle does not say that since healthy and ill are different, the potencies are different. He says the reverse, that if the potencies are different, the beings will be different. This strange point redoubles the rejection of the standard reading by indicating that potency in some way determines what actuality is, in other words, that entelekheia is of the potent thing.
Aristotle restricts his point about the bronze and potency very carefully: he does not argue that one (the bronze) is an essential property and the other (its potency) an accidental property, nor even that one is the being and the other is the attribute or property. He is not even arguing that actuality is different than potentiality (a point he posited from the start). Instead, he observes that the being of being-potent is different than the being that is potent. As we’ve seen, the passage shows that the being that we name, the bronze, is not the same as the potency which is nevertheless implied by and inseparable from it. The inseparability and even their mutual implication does not mean that they are the same. Therefore, the as Aristotle elucidates in this passage has the force of distinguishing between basic kinds of being—which I have been calling the categorical and energetic.

To interpret the Aspect Distinction, we turn to the end of the passage, where the point is stated the most simply. Here he distinguishes between color and visibility. Here, I suggest, we find Aristotle using his earlier distinction between categorical and energetic ways of saying being. The color of the thing might be classed under ‘what sort’ or quality. This is a categorical property belonging to the thing. Even if its color changes, the fact of its being-colored is a permanent and inalienable state that obtains simply because the thing is what it is, and for no other reason. Insofar as it is a being with properties, a thing has no relation of dependence to other beings, but instead it coincides with itself; it is discursively simple: the articulation of the colored being needs to refer only to that being. It is this apparent closure of categorical being that will inspire much criticism in the twentieth-century.

On the other hand, as visible the thing is named in and through its relation to potential and actual perception. A being addressed in this way is not grasped according to a property that inheres completely and in its own being, but is instead grasped transitively. Potency is potency for something, being-at-work is being-at-work doing something. For example, as visible a thing is grasped through a transitive aspect, through an active relationship between it and something else, or itself as something else (cf. the primary sense of potency Met. V.12, IX.1).

This transitive aspect of a being is most clearly visible in changes accomplished by the action of one thing on another, but is not limited to that. This is a dramatic step in the
interpretation of identity. One of the ways Plato discursively and provisionally opens up the concept of identity to philosophical analysis is by adding the word ‘itself’ to a name: the horse itself, justice itself, large itself.\footnote{122} Aristotle appears to interpret this “relation” between the thing and itself as an activity: a thing is at-work-being-itself, which is another way to express the meaning of entelekheia. To talk about a thing as visible is to grasp it through a different sense of being than to grasp it through its categorical properties.

The definition of movement, then, of necessity names a discrete being, a categorical being that shows up as what it is, and that is precisely this showing up, an eidos. Yet when it comes to movement, that which is-in-completion is not the look, the showing up, but something that is implied by its structure, something which is itself not an eidos: the potency. Thus, Aristotle will, in the next section have to confront this alternative: for kinēsis to be something, for it to be at all, it seems it has to show up as what it is, that is, it seems it must be a look, an eidos. This would seem to require that, if we are to find an entelekheia that is movement, we must look for it in what is already appearing there, for example, in the house there, or in the bronze. But this is exactly what Aristotle has just said is not the case.

Therefore we are more perplexed than ever about whether or not movement admits of being. For this argument seems to make it even more unlikely that movement is. Roughly speaking, Aristotle has argued that if movement is something, it must be the being-in-completion of something invisible, which is not its own appearance, which shows up only in the categories. We should reply: that seems to be the being-complete of nothing at all. But if it is not an eidos, how could it have a definition? The being in potency is not a look or something that appears, nor is it something discrete from such things. Nevertheless movement is still a structure, and admits of definition.

VI. The Proof: Movement occurs only when there is entelekheia

Movement is not simply a being (to on) that shows up, nor is it a potential being, to dunamei on, but its being-complete as potent (entelekheia hēi dunaton). The passage we just saw

\footnote{122 This can be seen in the contrast Heidegger draws between Plato and Parmenides in the opening essay of Identity and Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).}
distinguished the first two. It did this by addressing the objection that his definition would make bronze turn itself into a statue, in other words, why do not all underlying things, e.g. materials, change themselves? Put otherwise, how can there be an entelekheia of something that is not a being in the categorical sense—of something that does not itself show up distinctly or independently the way that quantity, kind, and place seem to do? In short, how is it possible to distinguish what is potent from the being that is potent? In response, Aristotle made a distinction: though they are numerically one, the underlying being and its being-potent are different in meaning, different kinds of being. Having distinguished the potent being from the simple, eidetic being, Aristotle must now show that being-in-potency has its own completion, and that this is movement.

The aim of chapter one is to show that movement admits of being, for immediately after this passage, in chapter two, Aristotle comments on what it accomplished, saying “movement is as we have said, difficult to see or know (idein), but admitting (endekhomenēn) to be” (Physics III.2 202a1-2).

Thus, Aristotle closes the chapter with an argument that movement is, because it only occurs when a certain kind of being is at work being complete, and neither before nor after (201b5-15). It argues that movement is an entelekheia of a certain sort by arguing that i) there is an energeia of the potent being (here ‘the buildable’ or ‘what is built’), which differs from that which emerges from it or is produced from it (the house), ii) that the telos of the potent being is this energeia, and iii) that this energeia/entelekheia is a movement. Therefore there is movement.

Here is the passage, with the steps of the argument distinguished:

That, on the one hand, then, [movement] is this, and that to be moved happens whenever the entelekheia should be this [i.e. what it is in the definition of movement], and neither before nor after, is clear.

For each [thing] admits of either being at work or not, as that which is built [does], and the being-at-work of that which is built, as what is built, is building.

For the being-at-work of that which is built is either building, or the house, but whenever the house should be [at work], that which is built is no longer [at work].

But that which is built gets built.
It is necessary, then, for the being-at-work [of that which is built] to be
building.
And on the other hand, building is some movement. *Physics* III.1 201b5–13.

**The Secondary Literature**

The purpose and therefore the very coherence of this passage has, however, largely been
missed in recent secondary literature. The current debates take it to address what has come to be
called the product puzzle, which we can formulate as follows: the definition of movement, they
think, must distinguish between when a thing is in movement and when, by accomplishing its
goal, it stops moving. Otherwise, they worry, it does not pick out what we know movement to
be. How do you distinguish between movement and the actuality produced by movement?
Where does the movement (the building) stop and the actuality or being (the house) begin? It is
tempting to think, on this argument, that the being starts when the movement stops, that is,
nothing that is an actual being is a movement: movement is not an actual actuality, but at best a
secondary, derivative, qualified one—a pseudo-actuality because it is somehow an actuality of
potency.

I agree with Alexandropoulos that this is a dubious interpretation, but disagree about
why.123 There are general problems with these questions, and textual problems as well. First, the
product problem is counter-intuitive, for if the concern is that the definition seems to make all
things be in movement, we should object that we, like many of Aristotle’s contemporaries, think
all beings, or (as Aristotle does) almost all of them, to be in movement, so it is reckless to presume
that this is his purpose.124

Thus, second, to make the product problem central, a reader has to limit the definition of
movement entirely to the most familiar cases of movement and rest, such as the materials being
changed into a house, and the house. Aristotle was explicit in *Physics* I.1 that we must move from
the most familiar cases to the truth, to what is clear by nature, so this limitation restricts
Aristotle’s insight in this chapter to its the most preliminary and superficial level. The only beings

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123 See Anagnostopoulos, “Change,” 33-79.
that some things are always in movement and some always at rest, while others stop and start moving
(cf. *Physics* VIII.3 254b5-8 and VIII.4).
Aristotle has mentioned so far that do not change are not products of movement like houses, but instead sources of movement.

Clearly, a definition of movement is not obligated to conform to or approve these familiar and unexamined assumptions. It may instead define the house as a being in movement and challenge us to deepen our understanding of what movement is. A good example of this is Aristotle’s distinction between movement, rest, and motionlessness: only things that move can be at rest, thus, what is motionless (Phys. III.2 202a3). Put otherwise, the being of such things is moved, its ontological character is defined by being in movedness. Thus, in defining the being of movement the relevant distinction between what movement is and what other things are does not correspond to the distinction between the movement of production and its product.

Movement cannot be defined by reference to different temporal stages of a moved being.

Textually, the standard reading of the passage as a solution to the product problem is problematic for four reasons. First, it fails to state the purpose of this passage, and indeed, to distinguish its purpose from the problem they want the previous passage to solve. The objection in the previous passage was that Aristotle’s account might make bronze move itself, but the reason that bronze would move itself is that it is actual as bronze already. Thus, the standard reading takes Aristotle to respond again immediately to the same question that he has ostensibly just solved through discussing the “as” clause. But it is unclear what additional contribution the latter passage makes to the problem, apart, perhaps, from giving the example of a house instead of a statue.

Next, turning to the passage at hand, the passage contains no evidence that its purpose is to solve the product problem. This will be clear from the discussion, below. For now, we can observe that the standard reading makes parts of the passage pointless. Aristotle’s concluding and climactic point is that building is a movement. But if the purpose of the passage is to distinguish the movement of producing from the non-moving being that it produces, the climactic point loses its force and purpose, because we would have to have presupposed this already.
Third, this standard reading takes a parenthetical remark out of context: interpreters mostly ignore the argument Aristotle says he is establishing in the passage and take their bearings instead from a fragment of an idea in the middle of what is normally taken to be a parenthetical remark: ἀλλ᾽ ὅταν οἰκία ἐστίν ὁ οἰκοδομήτων ἐστιν “but when the house should be, the buildable is not” (201b11). This passage is usually read as saying that the ability to be built is used up, and that its disappearance is what distinguishes between the movement of production and the product. In other words, the product is supposed to begin at the moment that it is impossible to build these materials any longer. As we shall see, this reading of the parenthetical remark in the passage does not fit with the point Aristotle says he is making at its opening, unless we supply some assumptions that are difficult to support, for example, that by οἰκοδομητὸν Aristotle does not mean ‘what is built’ but potency, that by ‘house’ Aristotle means ‘actuality,’ and that potency has to be used up or converted into actuality. For now, we can observe that to interpret the passage to say that the movement stops when the actuality starts is to make it into the exact contradiction of the point Aristotle says he is making, namely that movement occurs only when the entelekheia is there. They say movement is incomplete since it is still potent. But Aristotle’s argument is that there is only movement when there is completion.

**The Purpose of the Passage**

Thus, the reading which follows shows that Aristotle is not responding to the question of how to distinguish ‘house’ from ‘movement of production,’ but instead uses that distinction to make a different point. The passage is motivated, instead, by the objection 2) that Aristotle has not yet offered compelling evidence that movement is an entelekheia, and until he does so, the existence of movement has not been proved. Thus, the problem is: how could movement be an entelekheia, and how could an entelekheia be movement? We should be asking: “Aristotle, what makes you think that there is something whose being is movement?”

The problem going into the previous passage was that it was unclear how we could get a grip on potency in distinction from the being that is potent (dynaton). As long as this was unclear, it seemed impossible for movement to be. Now he needs to show, about this being in potency, as
potent, that there is a being-actively-in-completion of this, and that it is there when we say movement is.

On my reading, Aristotle’s argument is that what is built (οἰκοδομέων, to dunamει on) has its own being-in-completion (entelekhεια), which is different than the being-in-completion that is a house. In other words, the energεια or activity and the entelekhεια or full being of building materials is the movement of building, while that of the house is being lived in.

Thus, this passage supplies an answer much more naturally to this question than it does to the product problem, for Aristotle says the point of the passage is to show that movement is an entelekhεια of a certain sort, of a certain sort of being, namely of the potent being, as potent. By showing this, he shows that there is movement, for beings exist whose the being-at-work being complete are movements.

Another advantage of this reading is that it gives an elegant structure to chapter one. Upon giving the definition, Aristotle then addresses both of the most crucial parts of the definition of movement: the meaning and role of potency (the “as” clause and thereby the dative dunameι), and then the function of being-in-completion, entelekhεια, and its genitive, that is, the way that it is of or from the potential being. Finally, the claim in the next paragraph (in III.2) that he has shown that it is possible for movement to be would be completely unmotivated unless these passages constitute a proof of the existence of movement. My claim is that they do this by showing that there is something—the being in potency—the entelekhεια of which is movement. Therefore movement is the full being or meaning of certain kinds of things, which undeniably are.

The Passage

The passage is best translated, and articulated into the following arguments. The parenthesis from (1a) to (1c) is unnecessary:

(1) That, on the one hand, then, [movement] is this, and that to be moved happens whenever the entelekhεια should be this [i.e. what it is in the definition of movement], and neither before nor after, is clear.
(1a) For each [thing] admits of either being at work or not, (1b) as what is built [does], and (1c) the being-at-work of what is built, as built, is building.
(1a) For the being-at-work of what is built is either building or the house, but whenever the house should be [at work], what is built is no longer [at work].

(1b) But what is built gets built.

(1c) It is necessary, then, for the being-at-work [of what is built] to be building.

(2) And on the other hand, building is some movement. Physics III.1 201b5–13

According to his custom, Aristotle states his point and then offers the argument that establishes it: his point is that there is movement when there is an entelecheia of what is potent, as potent, and only then. This point is both limiting and affirmative: being moved happens only when entelecheia is there in the right way, and not when the being-in-completion is not there, e.g. once a house has been built. More crucially, movement and entelecheia not only happen at the same time, but that there is an entelecheia of what is moved, that movement is entelechيا.

Having in the previous passage distinguished the being-in-potency from the underlying categorical thing (the bronze), the work Aristotle does here is not so much to distinguish this from the product—this is already evident, but instead to point out that the being-at-work of what is built is no longer there when the product is at work.

In what follows I shall show Aristotle arguing that movement exists by showing that there is something—namely that which is moved, the movable, differing from the being that has the potency (the bronze of the previous passage)—which cannot be what it is unless movement is its being-at-work. If this was an argument from linguistic considerations, the argument could be

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125 If one tried to object that the phrase in parenthesis, ἐ γὰρ οἰκοδομῆσις ἡ ἐνέργεια τοῦ οἰκοδομητοῦ ἐ ὁ οἰκία, was ambiguous in subject, she would argue that the question of the passage could be either (i) what is ‘building’ (oikodomēsis)? The being-at-work, or the house? Or (ii) what is the being-at-work of what is built? But the first is impossible. While ‘building’ in English could mean the activity of building or the building produced, such as a house, in Greek it does not.

126 ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἔστιν αὐτῇ, καὶ ὅτι συμβαίνει τότε κινεῖται ὅταν ἡ ἐντελέχεια ἡ αὐτῇ, καὶ ὅτε πρῶτον ὤστε ὀστὲρον, δήλων ἐνέργεια γὰρ ἔκαστον ὀστὲ μὲν ἐνεργεῖ· ὃτε δὲ μὴ, οὐκ ἂν οἰκοδομητός. καὶ ἡ τοῦ οἰκοδομητοῦ ἐνέργεια, ἡ οἰκοδομητός, οἰκοδομητικής ἔστιν (ἢ γὰρ οἰκοδομής ἢ ἐνέργεια [τοῦ οἰκοδομητοῦ]) ἢ οἰκία· ἄλλ᾽ ὅταν οἰκία ἢ, οἰκετὴς οἰκοδομητόν ἔστιν· οἰκοδομητικὴ δὲ τοῦ οἰκοδομητοῦ· ἄνάγκη σοῦ οἰκοδομῆσαι τὴν ἐνέργειαν εἰναι· ἢ δ᾿ οἰκοδομής κίνησις τις. (Physics III.1 201b5–13) Hussey translates the passage as follows: “That change is this, and that change occurs just when the actuality is this actuality, and neither before nor after, is clear; for it is possible for each thing to operate at one time and not at another, e.g. the buildable, and the operation of the buildable, qua buildable, is the process of building. For the operation is either the process of building or the house; but when the house is, the buildable no longer is; but to get built is what the buildable does, so that the process of building must be the operation. And the process of building is a kind of change.”
expressed by saying that there are things whose proper names can only derive from movement and have their full meaning only in movement.

The argument has three parts: (1a) things can be at work or not. The work of what is built, the oikodomêton, differs from the outcome or product of the activity. (1b) There is something whose being is entirely determined as the subject of an activity, namely the oikodomêton. (1c) It is not the work of the house, but the being-at-work of this oikodomêton that is building.

The argument proceeds in this way: (1a) Aristotle asks: what is the being at work of that which can be built? What is built, oikodomêton, is often translated ‘the buildable.’ In English ‘work’ is ambiguous between the activity of working and the product. Two other English ambiguities are significant here: ‘building’ could be an activity or the product, while ‘what is built’ could be materials or the product. The latter two, however, are not the case in Greek, and Aristotle uses the difference between an oikodomêton and a house to decide what energeia belongs to movement.

The oikodomêton is a being, such as wood (hyle) or bricks, which is grasped in and through its potency (to be built). Thus, is not just wood: to grasp what it is, we do not perceive the ability to be built and from this get referred to wood as though to something else. Instead, we grasp the wood to the extent that it is potent: the buildability of the wood is in the wood and part of its very being. Some wood, for example, is less able to be built, and other wood is more able; some bricks are more fragile than others. On the other hand, the oikodomêton is not pure potency. It is this plank or this pile of bricks here; it is this plank considered insofar as it is taken up in the activity of building. Without leaving the circuit of its own activity, without referring to something that can be considered independently, building contains within it and implies definite beings, namely the oikomêta.

Now, unlike a growing, budding tree, this pile of wood lacks its own character and direction: unlike trees in a forest, the pieces of wood in the pile do not differentiate themselves, but are indistinct. Lying there, there is no activity (energeia) in them that is specific to them as boards. For, on the one hand, their being does not maintain itself and, left alone, they will rot and cease to be wood. On the other hand, they have been made ready, have been given new potency by
being sawed and planed into boards, and yet what they have been made ready for is unclear: they could be a wall, a door, a floor, but they do not have this function (ergon) yet. Nor are they being built into something.

Still, the oikodomēton is something. Aristotle asks: what is the energēia of these planks? We are tempted to answer that it is the house which they become. After all, once the planks have been assembled into walls and floors, then they are an ergon. A thing is most appropriate or potent (dynaton) when it is at work doing that which it is potent for.\(^\text{127}\) If the purpose of building in the first place is to have a product, wouldn’t this product be the energēia of the oikodomēton?

But Aristotle rejects this. His reasoning seems to be this: once they have been assembled and the house is there, the planks in it are not at work as planks. What is there are parts of the house, such as rooms, a kitchen, a hallway, which fit together very differently than planks fit together. To look at the floor as oikodomēton is not to see a floor, but instead to see pieces of wood, which are able to be made into something, such as a chair, a picture frame, or, indeed, a floor. So a carpenter examining them could say “These planks would make a great floor if we sanded them down some more.” Thus, the function (energēia) of the complete house is different from the energēia of what can be built. Aristotle puts his point briefly: since the being-at-work (energēia) of the house, i.e. being lived in, is not there at the same time as the being-at-work of what is buildable, i.e. being built or under construction, the energēia of each is different. In both cases, energēia is of something, and its meaning is inseparable from that which it is of.

Thus the second point, (1b) is the inverse: it is not just that the energēia in question is of something in particular, the meaning of that something is derived from energēia. It is also that something can be playable, that is, ‘playable’ has meaning only if playing is something. Thus, the very dense phrase οἰκοδομώται δὲ τὸ οἰκοδομήτων “that which can be built gets built” can be unpacked in several ways: i) getting built happens to something that is, i.e. to what can be built, ii) what gets built is not, say, a house, but instead what can be built, and, most crucially, iii) to be ‘what can be built’ is only to be the being that comes along with the activity (energēia) of getting built, that is, that the oikodomēton is essentially, depends essentially on the activity of getting built.

\(^{127}\) Martin Heidegger, “Physics B, I” 155-183.
Put otherwise, to be what is built, the buildable \( (\text{oikodomēton}) \) just means to be the subject of the activity ‘to get built.’ It can be something at all only if the \( \text{energeia} \) of building is something. But there are a great many things that are \( \text{oikodometā} \): nails, planks, bricks, paint. Thus Aristotle shows that some beings depend on movement.

**Remark on the Standard Interpretation**

We can now state a further reason to set aside the standard interpretation: you would get strange looks if you asked why the materials of a house you are living in are no longer under construction. As any homeowner knows, it is not because it cannot be built any more that a house is not under construction, but because people are no longer at work building it. *The movement of building stops not because the potency has run out, but because there is nobody at work.* This is the point implicit in Aristotle’s statements that each thing admits of either being at work or not being at work, and that there is movement only when there is *entelekheia*, but not before or after. There is no need to appeal to a metaphysical idea of kamikaze potencies, as Kosman suggests.\(^{128}\) This idea of potencies behind the standard reading of the passage is unintuitive; it creates more problems than it solves.

On this question, however, to make this passage contribute meaningfully to the problem of how to distinguish movement from the actuality it produces, the standard interpretation makes an awkward reading of the partial sentence άλλ᾽ ὄσταν οἰκία ἤ, οὐκέτ᾽ οἰκοδομητὸν ἐστιν “but when a house is, what is built is no longer” (201b11). Though the word \( \text{dunamis} \) is never used in the passage, this phrase is normally taken to show unequivocally that when a thing has reached its goal, the potency in the material has been used up, converted to actuality, or some such thing.

However, this reading omits the verb \( \dot{\text{enérgeia}} \) implied by the first part of the sentence: \( \text{ή γὰρ οἰκοδομής ἡ \dot{\text{enérgeia}} [τοῦ οἰκοδομητοῦ]} \) ή οἰκία- άλλ᾽ ὀσταν οἰκία ἤ, οὐκέτ᾽ οἰκοδομητὸν ἐστιν “For the being-at-work of that which is built is either building or the house, but whenever the house should be [at work], that which is built is no longer [at work].”\(^{129}\)

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\(^{129}\) Anagnostopoulos has pointed out that it seems possible to read the sentence as asking not about \( \text{energeia} \) but about what \( \text{building} \) is, as follows: “For either the \( \text{oikodomēsis} \) is the \( \text{energeia} \) or [the
The standard reading takes this phrase out of the context of the passage, and thereby corrupts its meaning. When we read it in context, however, that phrase has immediate meaning that we can verify with our own experience, and it has meaning as part of an argument, instead of being a bald metaphysical assertion about actuality and potency or a dogma arising from an unknown source, and with no supporting argument. Furthermore, reading the phrase in context allows all the sentences around it to have meaning and import, whereas on the standard reading, they are more or less superfluous.

The sentence sets up the following problem: what is the being-at-work of what is built? Is it the activity of building or the house? The implication is that both being built and the house have or are energyai. The question is what they are the energya of, i.e. of what is built, or of something else. Aristotle first settles the question whether the being-at-work of the house (i.e. people living in it) happens at the same time as the being-at-work of what is built (i.e. construction): they do not. This is a loose distinction, since clearly you can live in part of the house and build another part. The corollary of it, however, which he draws immediately, is that the energya of being buildable is not a house, but construction. Thus, the distinction between the being-at-work of the house and the being-at-work of what can be built is not established by this passage, as the standard reading must have it. It functions instead as a premise that Aristotle uses to establish a different point.

The Conclusion of the Argument for the Existence of Movement

What point does this passage establish? The argument he set out to show was “that to be moved happens whenever the entelekheia should be this [what it is in the definition of movement], and neither before nor after” (201b5). Aristotle already showed, by contrasting the house and what can be built, that the being-at-work of things is there at different times. He concludes: “It is

{oikodomēsis is} the house. But when the house is, the buildable no longer is; the buildable is being built. So the oikodomēsis must be the energya (201b10-13)” (Anagnostopoulos, “Change,” 54-57). This seems to take the ambiguity in the English word ‘building,’ which can mean either the activity of constructing something, or the completed edifice, and transpose it to the Greek word oikodomēsis. Whether or not this is a real ambiguity in the Greek, it is unclear what such a point would contribute either to the standard reading (which Anagnostopoulos calls “the product puzzle”), or to the stated argument of the passage, that movement starts and stops according to whether there is entelekheia of the buildable (oikodomēton) or not.
necessary, then, for the being-at-work [of that which is built] to be building.” (201b12). The statement echoes his examples of the definition of movement at 209a11-18, but what does this accomplish in the context of the current argument? He distinguished the *energeia* of the house from the *energeia* of the *oikodomēton*. Then he observed that building and what can be built imply each other. This sentence adds only that what can be built gets built, that it has an *energeia*, which is its way of being-in-completion. The argument of this passage, then, is that, though it might not appear to be the case, there is an *energeia* of what is buildable, of the potent being.

Aristotle adds “And on the other hand, building is some movement.” The foregoing analysis of the *energeia* of what is buildable does not presume that there is movement by trying to categorize or limit it in contrast to the product. Once what can be built is shown to have its own *energeia*, and building is shown to be this *energeia*, to prove that movement exists, Aristotle needs only to remark that building is a movement. The proof for the existence of movement takes the ability to distinguish what can be built from a house not as a purpose or goal, but as a starting place. This distinction would be impossible unless both existed.

**VII. General remarks on the words of the definition**

Some debate whether by *energeia* Aristotle means ‘actuality’ (and therefore *entelekheia*) or ‘activity.’\(^{130}\) This debate is founded on the discomfort of readers at Aristotle’s use of the word ‘*entelekheia*’ to define movement, which is produced by the nearly unquestioned\(^{131}\) use of the word ‘actuality’ to translate it. In other words, the question is based on what we think these two words mean in English, on the familiar meaning we associate with them. The word ‘actuality’ is overdetermined in English with a sense related to the word ‘actually,’ which is used merely for emphasis or correction, and ‘actual,’ which is used as a synonym for ‘real.’ The assumed sense is that actuality is complete in the sense of finished, with nothing to add and therefore fixed, ended, and static.

That Aristotle uses the word to define movement is a problem for interpreters such as Ross, Heidegger and Kosman, who take *entelekheia* to mean fixed and finished off. They need to

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\(^{130}\) See the introduction and chapter 8 of Beere, *Doing and Being.*

\(^{131}\) Cf. Joe Sachs’s introduction to his translation of the *Metaphysics.*
alter the definition of movement (e.g. in the definition Ross translates entelekheia as ‘actualization’ instead of ‘actuality,’ as he translates it elsewhere) or find another sense (Kosman takes it to mean that potency becomes something actual when in motion), or argue that Aristotle is distorting the being of movement to preserve this interpretation. Some\textsuperscript{132} declare that what Aristotle meant by entelekheia is clear, and dismiss his inconsistencies as a failure to fully grasp the concept he named. With good intentions, no doubt, their readings have to silence or ignore parts of the text that could otherwise instruct us. Instead of allowing Aristotle, who invented the word, and who introduces it here for the first time in the Physics, to show us what it means, as he does here, these readings import a sense of entelekheia into the text that was produced by the tradition of interpretation. The difficulties this produces for the interpretation of both entelekheia and energeia have led to a lively debate in some circles.

What can we learn about the meaning of entelekheia by how Aristotle uses it here? The passage implies that being-built (oikodomeitai) is the being-at-work (energeia) of what is built (oikodomēton), while building (oikodomēsis) is movement (kinēsis) and being-in-completion (entelekheia) of what is built as built. Thus, energeia and entelekheia differ very slightly: the first (oikodomeitai) describes the activity of building happening to something—the energeia is of that which undergoes the change, but it could also be of the actor, whereas the second (oikodomēsis) does not necessarily describe some active thing and some other passive thing, but only ‘building,’ a complete articulation of the complex of builder and built.

Much as the noun ‘moving thing’ and the adjective ‘movable’ depend on ‘movement’ for their sense, here the substantive to oikodomēton ‘what is built, the built thing, the buildable’ depends on something for its sense: as ‘what is built’ it does not have a complete sense, it is ateleis, basically incomplete, because building must happen to it, because something else must build it. As what is built, to oikodomēton, it can never be complete.

\textsuperscript{132} Cf. Graham, D.W., “The Etymology of Entelekheia,” American Journal of Philology 110 (1989) 73-80. Blair responds that “if Aristotle coined the word, it would be more plausible to take the word in Aristotle’s sense and see if that fit the way he used it better than the traditional meaning, and call the tradition wrong rather than the one who made up the word in the first place” (91). See Blair, “Reply,” 91-97.
On this argument, movement is the complete meaning or unified complex of actions toward which and upon which ‘what moves’ or ‘movable’ depend. The way that entelekheia is telos, then, is twofold: 1) by being the focal or pros hen meaning of these others, and 2) when the verb ‘have,’ echei, in entelekheia applies, that is, when ‘what moves’ has in it its full being or telos, it is moving, its being a moving thing is complete, having its full sense.

Perhaps the main problem that distorts our understanding of entelekheia, then, is that we no longer understand what Aristotle meant by telos. We usually understood as the last point on a line, the end of a linear progression, as form in the sense opposed to deprivation or sterēsis. In other words, while for Aristotle, the paradigmatic movement is circular—the movement of the stars, telos was reinterpreted through the modern account of rectilinear movement. The objections to teleology are, similarly, founded on the modern concept of movement as something imposed by force, violently or artificially, from outside.

Yet ‘telos,’ here, does not mean ‘at an end,’ or ‘finished,’ it means ‘complete,’ ‘fully there,’ ‘whole,’ ‘entire.’ The finality it hints at is like what makes us say ‘at last,’ in “at last we find water.” A thing is not entelekheia unless something pointed toward or implied it (pros hen), or reached out for it (oregesthai). That this is the meaning of entelekheia is what makes it possible for Aristotle to demonstrate the existence of movement in the final passage of this chapter. If this is right, then things that can be completed, that need something else to complete them can be entelekheia when that other thing is at-work on them. Again, far from being opposed to movement, entelekheia applies precisely to what is atele on its own.

Now, it ought to seem very strange for Aristotle to have to argue that what is built has an entelekheia, and that, conversely, entelekheia is of something, especially that it is of something incomplete. To us this seems axiomatic, because we think of it as meaning ‘reality’ or ‘actuality.’ To Aristotle, however, it has not yet been established. It makes sense, however, that we would have to argue for this, if someone is thinking of movement or building abstractly: when someone builds a house, what we notice at first is that before there was nothing there, and now there is a house (and as noted in the previous chapter, the ‘nothing there’ only makes sense as a projection
back from the house that is there later, or imagined to be there). In other words, it makes sense when we overlook the underlying stuff that the builder actually changes into a house.

The difference between two different words in this passage, *oikodometai*, or what is built, and *oikodomēsis*, building, is not slight. Unlike *oikodometai*, *oikodomēsis* does not refer to the agent-patient or completeness-incompleteness of the elements, but only to the complete movement of building, in which the two are not separable. The relation of the two is not immediately obvious, which is why Aristotle must argue at the end of the chapter that *oikodomēsis* (building) is the *entelekhēia* of something, namely of the *oikodomēton* (the built thing) by saying that getting built is what built things do, insofar as they are grasped as buildable.

That building appears in this way to be complete, *entelekhēia*, also leaves open the possibility that there can be movement that is complete, the completeness of which is not accomplished or originated by some other thing, neither of the agent-patient, nor by being of the complete-incomplete variety, but originated by the thing itself, which is therefore in some way complete in the same respect as it originates movement. This kind of movement is what is originated by nature, *phusis*, instead of by potency, *dunamis* (compare *Met.* IX.1 1046a10 and IX.8 1049b9). In a word, *dunamis* works in an account of artificial movement, but the *entelekhēia* that movement itself is suggests the sense of natural movement. This helps to clarify Aristotle’s claim that to understand nature we must understand movement: understanding movement in terms of *entelekhēia* and *dunamis* is not precisely the same as revealing nature, but it leads us toward it.
I. Outline of Part Three

Our purpose is to work out the meaning of *dunamis* (potency) and *energeia* (being-at-work). For this reason we are following Aristotle’s own method for working out the meaning of these words, which is to start with how potency and *energeia* are used in the account of movement and from there work out how they also apply to other things (*Met.* IX.1 104b33-1046a). Now that we have examined the account of movement in the *Physics*, we are almost ready to examine the account of potency and being-at-work that Aristotle gives in *Metaphysics* IX.1-9.

This investigation into the energetic sense of being plays an important role in the discussion of thinghood, *ousia*, in general, and being in the categorical sense in particular. This chapter is devoted, therefore, to a brief sketch of this relationship. The core books proceed from a study of being in the categorical sense to the study of being in the energetic sense, which is the parallel of *Physics* I-III. As in the *Physics*, the categorical sense depends on the energetic, for categorical being cannot account for its own composition. The energetic sense of being is the solution to this problem of whole and part.

In the subsequent chapter, we must examine the famous passage at *Metaphysics* IX.6 1048b18-35, which seems to say that *kinēsis* and *energeia* are mutually exclusive. This would contribute immensely to working out the meaning of being-at-work and movement, but seems to challenge the idea that movement can help us understand what being in the sense of *energeia* is.

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1 Aristotle also defines *dunamis* as a source of change: “[potency] is a source of change in another or in itself as other” (*Met.* IX.1 1046a11), and *energeia* is thought most of all to be movement (*Met.* IX.3 1047a30-32).

2 As a side note, this function adds to the case that potency and being-at-work must be compatible (Cf. Part I.3).
That chapter shall examine Burnyeat’s claim that “present-day scholarship should stop citing the Passage as a source of standard Aristotelian doctrine. It is a freak performance.”

No matter how dubious the textual status of the passage, its concern is important, namely: what is the source of completeness and incompleteness of what is at-work? As we shall see in the third chapter, the answer is not, as many scholars are tempted to think, that potency is itself incomplete. Instead, there are different kinds of potency, some of which are complete in themselves, others incomplete.

The fourth chapter turns to the many senses of potency, to work out what its focal (pros hēn) sense is, on which the others depend, namely being a source of movement in an other. The ease of expressing this in a phrase is proportionate to our lack of understanding of its meaning. It is necessary, then, to examine its different senses and work out in what way they depend on the focal meaning, that is, we must deepen our understanding of movement to see what potency means for things other than movement.

With these preparations, we can set out in Chapter Five what needs to be understood when we understand being-at-work, namely its relationship with completeness or accomplishment, telos. Aristotle’s invention of the words energeia and entelekheia, which occupies us in Chapter Six, will help, since the words were composed to converge in meaning. Finally, in Chapter Seven, we examine how the argument that being-at-work is prior to potency produces an excessive result, namely the conclusion that thinghood and form are being-at-work, and we look in particular at how this conclusion about being is decided through the analysis of movement. That being-at-work appears to be movement most of all is essential to the argument that it is or can be an active whole, a telos, and it is through this argument that Aristotle establishes that ousia is energeia.

II. Diverse Senses of Being

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3 Myles Burnyeat, “Kinēsis” vs. ‘Energeia’: A Much-Read Passage in (but not of) Aristotle’s ‘Metaphysics’” Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, 34 (2008), 276 [“Passage”].
The effort of first philosophy lies in working out the shape of the question of being. It is for this reason that philosophy is never a doctrine, but only a path, which begins in one place and ends in another, or in the same place as other.

Aristotle is mistaken for a systematic thinker not because he shows that everything has a satisfactory answer—he does not—but because he distinguishes different ways of asking about being, because he attempts to draw a map of the ontological question. This is a topology not in the sense that it distinguishes different regions of beings, but in the sense that it distinguishes multiple aspects of the same place, and shows that thinking must move from one to another. For Aristotle, the attempt to work out the structure of the question of being begins by distinguishing the senses of being, and proceeds from there by marking out how, when, and why we move from one sense to another. The senses of ‘is’ are not merely a grammatical curiosity produced by arbitrary linguistic conventions: at very least they point out the structure of assertion or accusation, *categorēin*. Categorical being can be expressed either by saying that it is the structure of things insofar as assertion is possible, or by saying it is the shape of the domain of speech insofar as, and to the extent that being appears within it.

So Aristotle articulates the different aspects of being by saying that “is” is plurivocal, spoken in many ways (*legetai pollakhōs*). Lit: “said manily”). We saw a claim like this in the second chapter of the *Physics*, where, in response to Parmenides’ argument (*logos*) that being is one, Aristotle replies: one in which sense? For being and one are said in many ways.

Yet there are two lists of the senses of being, one which articulates the categories, the other which articulates a broader group, of which all the categories only form a part.

But since being, simply stated, is said plurality, of which one is what happens to be joined or come along with (*to kata sumbebēkos*), another the how-it-is true or unconcealed (*to hōs alēthes*), and not being as the false, and beside these is the schema of the categories (*ta skhēmata tēs katēgorias*), such as the what, the what sort, the how much, the where, the when, and whatever also means this way, and still beside all these the potential and the at-work (*to dunamei kai energeiai*). (Met. VI.2 1026a33-1026b).4

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4 ἀλλ᾽ ἐπεὶ τὸ δὲ τὸ ἀπλὸν λεγόμενον λέγεται πολλαχῶς, ὡς ἐν μὲν ἢν τὸ κατὰ συμβεβηκός, ἐτερον δὲ τὸ ὡς ἀληθὲς, καὶ τὸ μὴ ὡς τὸ ψεύδος, παρὰ ταύτα δὲ ἐστὶ τὰ σχήματα τῆς κατηγορίας (οἷον τὸ μὲν τί, τὸ
Being is said variously: incidentally, truly, categorically, and potentially and at-work. All these are meanings of the simple statement ‘is.’ This passage lays out a program for inquiry that Aristotle follows almost exactly from book VI to IX. The only deviation in from this order is that the discussion of truth occurs twice: after the discussion of the incidental sense, where he says it will be, and again after the energetic sense, in book IX.10. These are the core books of the *Metaphysics*.

Thus, book VI distinguishes the senses of being and outlines a strategy for working out their relationships by looking for how different beings depend on or converge in meaning on a core or focal sense, just as a healthy vegetable or temperature or muscle tone or mindset all depend on health (*Met. VI.1*). This book also discusses how incidental being depends on the more primary sense of being, and sets it aside. Book VII is about categorical being. It ends in a failure to find the primary sense of being, and makes a new start. Book VIII shows how the categorical sense depends on the energetic, and book IX discusses energetic being, concluding with a compact discussion of how being is true.

A full discussion of this progression is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this investigation. Fortunately the details are not critical to our project of working out the meaning of potency and being-at-work. The discussion that follows is meant only to indicate the formal relationships between the different senses of being, and thereby to help set up one of the questions we shall address later, namely the way that potency and being-at-work function in working out part-whole relationships, or, put otherwise, their relationship with accomplishment or completion, *telos*.

**III. Problems of Categorical Being in Metaphysics Book VII**

Now, Book VII is supposed to be about the categories, and it opens with an emphasis on two crucial terms: “what something is, and a *this.*” Aristotle points out that the other categories depend on the determination of being as “some *this*,” *tode ti*: there is no color without a thing that...
has it, no amount or place without something that has that size there. Walking, or healing, similarly, are not beings in this primary sense, because they are not able to be by or according to themselves (kath’ auto),\(^6\) or be separate from something determinate that underlies them: the thinghood (ousia, “substance”).\(^7\)

Two chapters later, however, Aristotle poses the question of thinghood, ousia, again. To our surprise, this time the question has shifted from a discussion of which among the listed categories is primary, to a new trio of terms: material (hulē), the look (eidos) or shape (morphē), that is, the schema of the idea or kind, and what is out of these, the composite (to sunolon) (Met. IX.3 1029a4).\(^8\) Why does this shift occur, and what does it mean?

Aristotle is not merely importing Platonic terms—though the refutation of a certain kind of facile Platonism is occurring in this book. As we saw in II.4, above, a pair of terms appeared in Physics I as the structure of categorical predication, that is, the form is said of the underlying thing, the hupokeimenon. In the Physics, the underlying thing was called material when what it subtended was change. No hard distinction exists there between material and form: the material for the movement of education was a human being, which is clearly a form. Here in the Metaphysics, however, material is purely relative: it is defined, by its function in categorical predication, as that of which something is said. Material is

that which, in its own right, is not said to be either something or so much or anything else by which being is made definite. For there is something to which each of these is attributed, and of which the being is different from each of the things attributed (for everything else is attributed to thinghood, and it is attributed to the material), so that the last thing is in itself neither something nor so much, nor is it anything else; and it is not even the negations of these, for these too would belong to it as attributes. (1029a20-28).\(^9\)

Material is defined as the X that underlies determinate forms, of which they are said. Strangely, this implies that it cannot be an opposite of or negation of form: Material is not

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\(^6\) οὐδὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν ἔστιν ὁὐς ὁ μὲν περὶκος ὁ ὁὐς ἄνοιγμα δυνατόν τῆς οὐσίας (Met. VII.1 1028a23).

\(^7\) διότι ἦστι τὰ ὑποκείμενα ἁντί ὅρισμένον (τούτο δ’ ἦστιν ἡ οὐσία καὶ τὸ καθ’ ἑκατόν), ὄσπερ ἐμφαίνεται ἐν τῇ κατηγορίᾳ τῇ τοιούτῳ

\(^8\) τὴν δὲ μορφὴν τὸ σχῆμα τῆς ἑνδείας (Met. IX.3 1029a4).

\(^9\) Sachs, trans.
shapelessness. Such a negation is itself a kind of form, as we saw in *Physics* I.7-9 (cf. II.4.iv, above).

This means the shift from the different categories listed—quality, quantity, and so on—to an account of material and form and what is made of both, is not a change of topic, nor is it a shift to a different sense of being. Material, form, and composite are the architecture of assertion, the structure which makes categorical predication possible. Assertion depends on there being something of which other things are said: the character of this something will be the primary sense of being in the categorical sense. As Kant shows, a kind of underlying X is conceivable to which predicates cannot attach, or which does not obtain nameable properties. The underlying thing in the sense sketched here determines the character and possibility of the assertion of predicates and thereby of definite knowledge through the categories.

Thus, the question that Aristotle poses here is more radical than the first question which of the categories of assertion is primary. Here he is asking which one is thinghood, *ousia*, on which assertion depends, and to which it applies: form, material, or the composite? It will turn out that it is not possible simply to pick one over the other: they must be re-interpreted. For book VII ends in an almost complete failure.

Each term is a candidate for thinghood in a different way, and out of these candidates, three criteria emerge for finding thinghood: 1) it must be articulable in speech, *logos*. If it is not, then assertion fails, and knowledge of beings is impossible. 2) It must be a *this* (*tode ti*), or knowledge will not be of particular things, and things will not be particular either: “an *ousia* means something one and a *this*, as we assert.” (*Met.* VII.12 1037b28-29). No outside thing can explain why it is what it is, or we have the third man argument.10 3) It must underlie predicates, that is, things must be said of it, but it cannot be said of anything else.

The book ends in failure because none of the candidates satisfy the requirements for a thing being thinghood, *ousia*: a) form is a *logos*, and other things are said of it—it underlies them—

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10 Put otherwise: Lassie is a dog. Being Lassie is not the same as being a dog, but her being a dog cannot be other than what she is being or doing in being herself: her living and eating and playing is just what it is to be a dog. If being-a-dog was independent of her, then there would have to be something that relates being-a-dog to Lassie, and this thing would be different than Lassie. Thus, the problem repeats itself.
but it cannot be thinghood because it is neither ultimately underlying, nor a particular independent this, but appears to be a universal said in and of particular things, and separate only in speech. For its part, b) material is the ultimate underlying thing, and is not said of anything else, but it cannot be thinghood because it is neither itself a definite this, nor is it articulable. Finally, c) the composite cannot be thinghood because, though it is a this, which is separate simply, it appears to be derivative rather than fundamental, and not articulable in its own terms, but only as a combination of material and form. Thus, none of the elements of the structure of categorical assertion qualify, on their own terms, as ousia (cf. Aristotle’s review of what book VII accomplished, Met. VIII.1 1042a25-33).

IV. The Problem of Composition

In the course of this argument, the categorical structure is articulated in terms of distinct elements (letters, stoikheion). This means that Aristotle can reformulate the problem of ousia as a problem of combination. He does so in two ways: 1) by showing that form on its own is not sufficient to give us the essence or definition of a thing, or even to be a single, unified articulation: and 2) by showing that the problem of thinghood has to be understood not by counting material and form as two elements, but in another way.

The first Aristotle points out by observing that as articulations, definitions do not account for their own integrity and relationships. They cannot on their own account for their own unity or meaning:

The impasse I mean is this: why in the world oneness belongs to the articulation that we call definition, such as the definition of a human being as a two-footed animal, for let that be its articulation. Why is this one thing and not many, an animal and two-footed? (Met. VII.12 1037b11-15)

A definition might put words one after another, but what unites those words and makes them one thing or of one thing is not the words or their proximity to one another in a sentence, but something else. This means that though they articulate the ‘what’ of things, definitions or logoi, conceived just as words, do not contain this within them; they do not themselves give us the essence of things.
The second way the problem of thinghood is reformulated as the problem of combination occurs once material and form have failed as candidates. Instead of thinking of natural things as heaps of different features clustered together—two arms, two legs, lungs, a mouth, being a mammal, being able to speak—it is necessary to ask what makes them one and whole. The example Aristotle uses is the letters B and A: as a syllable B and A are not indifferent to one another, they are something more than just letters when they are together, they are changed by being together, they are a syllable, a unity.\footnote{In Plato’s \textit{Theaetetus}, we find the first use of the words ‘letter’ and ‘syllable’ used to describe the structure of things. It is Theaetetus that points out that most of the Greek consonants do not even have a sound except when they are combined with a vowel. In Greek there are 9 plosives (mutes/stops): \( \phi\beta\pi\tau\delta\theta\kappa\gamma \). These letters have no sound of their own without a vowel, and can’t be heard without other letters. The English name ‘consonant’ is for this reason a helpful description, for these letters only have sound together with others. In the \textit{Sophist}, we also find an account of letters that reinforces this analysis: there the Stranger observes that vowels pass through the other letters, and make it possible for the consonants to fit together (253a). Plato, \textit{Theaetetus}, trans. Seth Benardete, \textit{The Being of the Beautiful} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).}

One way to see this is to observe that letters change their sounds when they are combined differently. Compare “rang” and “range”: by adding the letter ‘e,’ the sound of at least three of the others changes. In Greek, the gamma in the word \( \delta\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omega \) changes in sound when it is doubled, so that no longer sounds like ‘gh’ but instead sounds like ‘ng.’ This means two things: 1) letters are neither indifferent nor independent parts, but their sound changes depending on their context, and therefore 2) the composite/syllable is not a sum of indifferent parts. When the whole changes, the parts change.

From this point of view, the problem with the preceding analysis of material and form was that each of the things distinguished in categorical predication was treated as a separate element, which by definition could not be called the same thing. If there are things that are wholes in the way a syllable is a whole, the analysis changes. The thinghood of something “is something, and is not an element” (\textit{Met. VII.17} 1041b26). Thus, thinghood is the cause, and nature is the source or principle of organization of composites, but is not itself an element (\textit{Met. VII.17} 1041b27-32).

V. Composition and the Inquiry into Potency and Being-at-work
But even this is not radical enough: book VIII of the *Metaphysics* poses this problem and its solution even more forcefully, by using the concepts of potency and being-at-work. This book changes the frame of the analysis to the context of movement. No longer is material defined as that to which things are attributed, as it was in *Metaphysics* VII. Instead, Aristotle says:

what underlies something is its thinghood, and in one sense this is the material (and by material I mean that which, while not being actively a *this*, is a *this* potentially)... but it is clear that material too is thinghood, for in all changes between contraries, there is something that underlies the changes (*Met.* VIII.1 1042a25-35).12

This shift in the way material is defined is a shift from an analysis of logos to an analysis of beings in movement. In both cases, perceptible things are the centerpiece of the discussion, but they are addressed differently (*Met.* VII.4 1029b3-13 and VIII.2 1042b9-12). The difference is that we are no longer discussing the sense of being according to the categories but are instead addressing being as potency and being-at-work.

Aristotle undertakes in VIII.2 a kind of proof of the existence and importance of being-at-work, *energeia*, in response to Democritus’ argument that nothing in nature is a real whole, but is formed out of parts that are indifferent to each other. When we are presented with the various definite forms or characteristics of a thing, such as having feathers or two feet or being a hunter of fish, we still do not know from this which of these forms express what a thing is, what characteristic defines it, if any. Thus, as Aristotle previously objected, “there is no ordering in the thinghood of the thing; for how is one supposed to think of one thing as following and another preceding?” (*Met.* VII.12 1038a33-4).13

For example, though they consist of the same materials, and are the same shape, “a threshold and a capstone, since these differ by being placed in a certain way” have a different being or thinghood, for “its being means its being placed in a certain way” (*Met.* VIII.2 1042b19-20 and 25-27). A core problem is how to determine which of the features or differences is the relevant one: “if thinghood is the cause of each thing’s being, it is among these differences that

12 Sachs, trans.
13 Sachs, trans.
one must look for what is responsible for the being of each of these things” (Met. VIII.2 1043a2-3). The way to determine this, however, is not given in the features, properties, or forms, but by what is at-work. For even though a threshold is not really a being in the sense of ousia, it has a kind of work or function, ergon:

Just as, among ousiai, what is attributed to the material is itself its being-at-work, so too in the other definitions, it is what is most nearly a being-at-work. For example, if one needs to define a threshold, we will say that it is a wooden plank or a stone placed in such-and-such a way... (Met. VIII.2 1043a4-8)

The solution to the problem of categorical being, the structure of assertion, is the energetic sense of being. These senses of being are independent. If they were not, being-at-work could not give us a way to grasp which of the categorical forms or predicates defines a thing.

This is not a tangential reading: Aristotle explicitly re-frames definition as an account of the thing either in-potency or at-work, or both. Wood and stone are a house in potency, while the being-at-work of a house is to be a sheltering enclosure for living bodies, while a house as a composite is an arrangement of wood and stone that shelters living bodies (Met. VIII.2 1043a15-25). Categorical predication is re-framed as a problem of potency and being-at-work, and the result is a solution to a problem that remained intractable within the categorical sense of being.

The second problem we faced was this: we have a set of forms said to be in or of a thing, but we cannot tell which of them matters, for they appear to be a set of indifferent forms. The being-at-work, energeia of the thing is what allows us to determine which of the forms are what it is. The first problem was that articulations do not inherently disclose how the multiple forms they name, such as two-footedness and animalness, are one thing instead of many, or, put another way, how several letters can be one word. The logoi cannot account for their own unity or coherence. Aristotle says: “Now it is clear that, for those who approach defining and explaining in this way that they are accustomed to, it is not possible to give an account of it and resolve the impasse” (Met. VIII.1045a21-3). The solution to the second problem of definition is the solution to the first: potency and being-at-work:
If, as we say, there is one thing that is material and one that is form, and the former has being as potency and the latter as being-at-work, the thing sought after would no longer seem to be an impasse. (1045a23)

Another way Aristotle expresses the solution is to say that the unity of definition, and therefore the structure of predication, is not given by the statement, but by the thing: “a definition is one statement not by being bundled together like the Iliad, but by being of one thing” (Met. VIII.6 1045a13-14). It is because the thing is one that the statement is of one thing. The unity of logos is derivative: the integrity of speech arises from things. Speech does not establish its own coherence. From a Platonic perspective, this is Aristotle’s solution to the problem of the participation of a thing in its form.

But how do we understand how one thing is of another without being, in effect, an additional or independent thing? How can an articulation both be different than the thing, insofar as it is an articulation, and the same as it, insofar as it is of it? How can the unity of a thing constitute the unity of an articulation?

If, as I am suggesting, the problem of the unity of different forms named in a definition is the same as the problem of how a statement is one, and how the forms named in the statement are one, then the path to a solution is the same. Put otherwise, if the problem of how the forms belong to one another and make a whole is the same problem as how the parts of an articulation, logos, constitute a whole articulation, and how the articulation is of the underlying thing, then the three ways of working out the problem are parallel.

Formally, then, the three problems of composition, which cannot be worked out through a discussion of categorical being alone, each move us into a discussion of potency and being-at-work in the same way. It is the same for Aristotle to say that 1) for structures like syllables (BA), the thinghood is not an element or letter, stoikheion that is added to B and A to make them one, but a nature that is a source, arkhé (Met. VII.17 1041b27-32), that 2) composite articulations, logoi, such as definitions, are not one on their own, but by being of one thing, and that 3) the thing that makes one form or feature in an articulation unified with the others, as two-footed and animal are unified, and at the same time the thing that is responsible for a particular thing being
articulable as a universal, is that these are materials that are in-potency, and the being-at-work of these is the individual independent thing, *ousia* (*Met.* VIII.6 1045a15-21, 1045b8-15).

This argument is confirmed by Aristotle’s conclusion. Recalling that some try to solve the problems of composition through an account of participation, Aristotle says:

The reason they say these things is that they are looking for a formulation that unites potency and complete being-at-work, plus a difference. But as was said, the highest level [*eschate*] of material and the form are one and the same thing, the former potentially, the latter actively, so that looking for what is responsible for their being one is like looking for a cause of one thing. (*Met.* VIII.6 1045b16-22).

It is not the case that form and material change each other when combined. If this is what is meant by hylomorphism, then Aristotle is not a hylomorphist. Instead, form and material properly understood are not two elements at all, so ultimately it does not make sense to say that you combine them. Everything that can be called an element is the material, and the form is something else, which is not an element. Platonists hold that the parts and the whole, the particular and the universal, must be united by something else: participation. Their *logos* distinguishes two elements—the form and the particular—and introduces a third—oneeness or participation—as though it were an element. But, just as a syllable is not composed of B and A plus combination, things are not composed of parts put together by adding another thing called unity. The thing-as-a-whole, the form, is not an element, it is already the being-together-of-the-parts. Parts are not even parts unless they are *in* a whole, and a whole is not a whole unless it is *of* parts. The whole, the form, the *logos* is the being-at-work of parts. Thus, the whole form that is articulated is *of* parts the way a being-at-work is *of* what is in-potency. This is a repetition of his argument that the nature and thinghood of a thing cannot be an element. Being-at-work and potency are sources, not elements.

**VI. Concluding Remarks**

The question of being formulated in book VI is progressively reformulated. Originally a question about the focal sense of being, it changes several times through the core books. It is first rephrased as the problem of *ousia*, thinghood, as Aristotle opens the account of categorical being.
Second, while remaining a question about thinghood, it is sought in the categorical sense of being, not in terms of the categories simply, but in terms of the material-formal structure of categorical assertion. The structure of assertion makes three requirements of thinghood: for it to be i) a *this*, ii) what it is for a thing to be (normally called a form or universal), and iii) what underlies assertion simply, that is, what is not said of anything else. When this inquiry fails to find *ousia* with the resources available to it within the categorical way of saying being, the question of being is formulated yet again as a problem of the relationship between parts and the whole of which they are parts. This leads to thinking thinghood, *ousia* through potency and being-at-work.

Either Aristotle’s method of looking for a focal sense in the study of being is limited to categorical being, or it applies not just to categories (how much, what sort, place, and relation) or to the structure of the categories (material, form, composite), but to other senses of being as well. Furthermore, if this focal method applies to the relationships between incidental, categorical, energetic, and alethic being, that is, if the whole of the study of being proceeds by finding what sense of being is primary, upon which others depend, then the energetic sense of being is at least more primary than the categorical.

However that may be, Aristotle does not think he has an answer to the problem of predication that can be formulated in predicative terms (either how much, what sort, and so on, or material, form, and composite). It is, furthermore, not clear whether the search for thinghood, *ousia* remains the same at all, or even whether we seek *ousia* any longer, once we make the shift to a discussion of the energetic sense of being (cf. the opening of Met. IX, where Aristotle seems to say that the study of *ousia* has been completed, only to bring up *ousia* in the culminating moment of the analysis of *energeia*. Cf. Chapter Seven, below).

Finally, precisely because potency and being-at-work promise to dissolve the problem of composition for the structure of categorical assertion, we should not expect the discussion of the native sense of these words to concentrate on composition. In any event, Aristotle devoted the entirety of *Metaphysics* VIII to this and related questions.
As an aside, the fact that that being-in-potency and being-at-work promise to dissolve the impasse of composition makes the argument for their mutual presence or compatibility impossible to escape. Aristotle claims that the limit or highest level of material and form are the same thing at the same time, because one is in-potency and the other is at-work (Met. VIII.6 1045b18-22, cf. Phys. III.1. Aristotle uses the dative formulation here, just as he does in introducing the definition of movement). Since material and form must exist at the same time—they are different ways of addressing the same existing thing—being-in-potency and being-at-work cannot be mutually exclusive. Nor can they be conceived as temporally dislocated into different stages, states, or phases.

The function of these words and of this sense of being in the plot of the core books of the Metaphysics must inform the inquiry into the meaning of potency and being-at-work. It prepares us also for the dramatic conclusion Aristotle reaches through the discussion of the relationship between being-at-work (energeia) and completion or wholeness (telos) and thereby actively-being-complete (entelekhēia) and being in the sense of thinghood (ousia).
Chapter Two: Is There a Distinction between *Energeía* and *Kinēsis*?

The idea that being and movement are mutually exclusive, which in Parmenides stems from a profound insight, is still attractive to thinkers today, usually not because of its profundity, but because it is the easiest solution to the problem.

Some, for example, presume being to be opposed to movement because to be moved seems to stem from being flawed or imperfect, while being is perfected or complete. If what is moved is affected by something else, the agent is more perfect because it does not change, while the patient is less perfect, because it does. More deeply, what is is assumed to be the same as itself, while movement is taken to depend on difference. Finally, if identity is being then difference must be non-being. Far from flowing easily from one another, this sequence of dichotomies requires extraordinarily deep discussion to establish each step, and even more difficult argument to connect them to one another. For example, the idea that sameness and difference are mutually exclusive is taken apart in Plato’s *Sophist*, while Aristotle begins his discussions of being by rejecting the idea that being is single or self-identical. It is, instead, multiple and different than itself; each thing that is itself, is itself by being a different, separate thing.

The structure of our current project has been to study movement in an attempt to understand the meaning of *energeía*, being-at-work, and *dunamis*, potency. To do this is already controversial, not only as an interpretation of Aristotle, but because it undermines various forms of opposition just articulated, that, following Parmenides, are assumed to exist between being and movement. These assumptions seem to find satisfaction in a section of *Metaphysics* IX.6 that makes a distinction between *energeía* and *kinēsis*. This paragraph, which, following Burnyeat we shall call the Passage, has come to be the most famous argument in book IX, in part because it allows us to reassure ourselves that in the end Aristotle does make movement and being mutually exclusive.

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14 See I.2 and II.2, above.
As we have traced it out, however, the path and architecture of the discussion of being already suggests that this is not the case. As we have seen, in Physics I Aristotle reworks the conception of being starting with an investigation into movement. There, he begins the search for being with the question of how many it is, and when he sets out to reach his own answer—that it is multiple—it is by investigating movement that he proceeds (Phys. I.2, 7-8). In the course of this argument, he disentangles the investigation of movement from an investigation into the categorical structure of assertion—a process that, we saw, is homologous with the progress of the argument in search of ousia in the core books of the Metaphysics.

In the Physics, Aristotle re-starts the inquiry using the Stranger’s word for being—dunamis—and coming up with two words of his own—energeia and entelekheia—to understand movement, and therefore nature. In the Metaphysics, these words promise to undo problems within the structure of assertion and composition in general, and thereby the inquiry into being. Yet their primary senses are to be a source of movement or to be movement itself.

Still, the existence of Metaphysics IX means that they also require study, not just as solutions to the problems of categorical being, but on their own terms. The investigation into these things themselves remains an investigation into being. They are, like what happens to come along (“accidental being”), and being as truth, a way of saying being that is distinct from the categorical.

This sense of being is determined by and discovered through the study of movement. Since their primary senses concern movement—as a source of movement (potency), or in the sense of being movement (being-at-work)—the lineage of the categorical sense of being must be traced back to movement, not to assertion, and not to a sense of being independent of these, to which we are supposed to have a priori knowledge or access.

Clearly, what we need to ask is: what sort of lineage is this? If what is clear by nature emerges at the end of an investigation, why not think about movement as a mere access to potency and being-at-work—a ladder that can be kicked away once the true concepts are grasped? How is movement related to being, not in the beginning, but in the end?
We will see how in determining the meaning of potency, it is not merely that we begin with movement, but its true sense in the account of movement remains even as it comes to apply to material (hulē). It remains for us to see if this is the case for being-at-work as well.

I. Scholarly Debate about the Passage

On the face of it, movement and being-at-work cannot be continuous in their meaning, for the most famous passage printed in Met. IX distinguishes between movement and being-at-work. Indeed, it appears to make them mutually exclusive. My argument here is to show that this is not the case.

The nature of this distinction has been hotly disputed since Ackrill argued that Aristotle is either inconsistent or the distinction does not work.15 Many, following Ackrill and Ryle, have taken the passage to offer a “tense test” as a criterion for discerning whether an action falls into the category of activity (energeia) or movement.16 The tense test appears to be the following: it is true to say both that someone is seeing and that she has seen, but not true to say that she is building and has built something. The former are energēiai, the latter are kinēseis.

Some scholars argue that energēiai are states, and not activities, while others argue that energēiai are ontologically distinct from movements because they are not states, but events, which, unlike movements, do not issue in a non-event, such as a product beyond themselves, but which are in themselves events.17 Other commentators have sought to make the distinction more sound

15 See especially J.L. Ackrill, “Aristotle’s Distinction between Energieia and Kinēsis” in New Essays on Plato and Aristotle, ed. Renford Bambrough (New York: Humanities Press, 1965), 121-142 [“Distinction between Energieia and Kinēsis”]. Zeno Vendler, in “Times and Tenses” Philosophical Review (1957) 143-60, problematized the distinction by observing that any movement can be described as an energēia: instead of saying that someone is walking from A to B, you can, for example, say that someone is going for a walk, which will satisfy the tense test for energēia. See also the attempt to distinguish achievements from accomplishments in Vendler, “Verbs and Times,” in Linguistics in Philosophy (NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 97–121, esp. 103. (This is the same article as “Verbs and Times,” in The Philosophical Review, 66 (1957), 143–160.)


17 D.W. Graham, argues that energēiai are states in “States and Performances: Aristotle’s Test,” Philosophical Quarterly 30 (1980) 117-130. This line of argument is also supported by Michael White. By contrast, Heinaman, in “Activity and Change in Aristotle,” Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, 13
through a more sophisticated interpretation of telos: movements are defined by starting and ending points, but energeiai are defined by having teloi. Still others have tried to undo the problem by suggesting that it is not, in the end, a tense test, or by arguing, as Pickering does, that Aristotle would have rejected the premise that a thing is either energeia or kinēsis.

I shall offer some remarks in support of the latter two points. The puzzle about how to distinguish movement from being-at-work through the tense test in this passage appears to have been dissolved by Burnyeat’s argument that, apart from resultative perfect, the Greek perfect is not primarily a tense, but an aspect. We shall return to this point, yet, the discussion here will not attempt to contribute to this debate directly, for reasons we shall shortly see.

On the other hand, as Pickering and Hagen hold, major problems in the literature on the passage would be dissolved if we do not assume energeia and kinēsis to be mutually exclusive. Yet these problems are not the problems that confront the current project. Our problem is whether the meaning of being-at-work changes from its meaning as movement to its full or proper meaning, or, which may or may not be the same thing, whether its meaning changes when it is used to understand form, eidos, and, since this may not be the same, being in the sense of thinghood, ousia. I shall argue that its sense stays the same.

But before we examine why and how, it is necessary to do an archaeology of the Passage, for if it is by Aristotle at all, it is clear that it was not originally part of Metaphysics IX, and, if Burnyeat is right, probably not from the Metaphysics at all.

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20 Myles Burnyeat, in “A Passage,” 219-292, points out that the perfect, in Greek should be seen as specifying aspect, and not as a tense (245-253). Jonathan Beere follows his suggestion in Doing and Being, 225-230. We shall return to this suggestion, below.
II. The Manuscript

The recent paper by Myles Burnyeat has upended a long line of interpretation that puts the Passage at the core of Aristotelian doctrine. He summarizes his article this way:

The now famous distinction between 'kinēsis' and 'energeia' in Aristotle 'Metaphysics' IX 6, 1048b18-34, should not be printed there. Absent from the superior Alpha MSS tradition, unknown to the majority of ancient and medieval commentators, its massive textual corruption suggests it derives from an annotation crammed in the margin of the inferior Beta tradition. I do not deny its Aristotelian origin or its philosophical interest, though I side with those who construe it in terms of aspect rather than tense and speculate that the distinction, unparalleled in the corpus, originated in a lost Aristotelian work on pleasure.

According to Harlfinger’s definitive study of the manuscript tradition, there are two lineages of the text of Aristotle’s Metaphysics, which he calls α and β. The α tradition has been found much more reliable than the β. Before Harlfinger’s study, Ross argued the following:

This passage occurs in most of the manuscripts (including Aβ), and a paraphrase of it occurs in a good manuscript of Alexander (F). It is omitted by EJTT and Bessarion, and is very corrupt in the other manuscripts. But it contains sound Aristotelian doctrine and terminology, and is quite appropriate to its context, and there is no apparent motive for its introduction, so that on the whole it seems safe to treat it as genuine.

Burnyeat’s article examines and rejects Ross’s claims on almost every point. The passage is not found in most manuscripts: it is not found in the α editions at all, but only in the β line. In Plate 1, below, I reproduce Burnyeat’s diagram, in which he has altered Harlfinger’s diagram of the manuscript tradition by putting square boxes around manuscripts without Metaphysics IX, and circles around those with the Passage. The letters without either marking denote manuscripts without the passage. It is clear that where the passage seems to appear in the α tradition, it is because those scribes had the β on hand.

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22 Ross, Aristotle’s Metaphysics, ii. 253.
23 From Burnyeat, “A Passage,” 233.
The absence of the Passage from α is remarkable: the second-largest lacuna between the manuscripts is 61 letters, while this passage is about 750. This means it almost certainly was not originally in the α editions, but that it was, instead added to the β.

In addition, the Passage is notoriously corrupt. On paleographic grounds, this means it was probably originally written in the margins of a text, where frayed edges, water damage, and fingers are more likely to damage it.24 When it came to the point of entering the β manuscripts, it was, no doubt already corrupt. Worse, even in the strongest β manuscript, the Aβ, the passage is crossed out (see Plate 2).

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The editors interpret this as a mark of deletion. Burnyeat suggests that, in the effort to produce the text with in-line commentary, the scribe wrote out the text first, leaving room for the commentary around the outside. On reaching this passage, however, the scribe noticed that the commentator (Alexander) didn’t refer to the passage at all, and signaled this by the mark of deletion.25

This brings up another of the anomalies about the passage: none of the commentators, with the exception of Michael of Ephesus (aka. Pseudo-Alexander, fl. 1100-1150) seem to know

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about the passage. He gets the idea from an unknown source, and refers to it in a commentary on pleasure in NE X.2.\footnote{Berlin Academy Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, vol. 20, 543. 22-30 Heylbut, cited in Burnyeat, “A Passage,” 277-279.} This, along with a discussion of the response of the Aristotelians to the account of pleasure in Plato’s *Philebus*, leads Burnyeat to suggest that the Passage originated in a lost work on pleasure. We shall return to this point in a moment.

As Beere puts it, on manuscript evidence alone, it is harder to account for the inclusion of the text than for its exclusion.

“The direct evidence in favor of accepting the Passage, from the β tradition, is outweighed by the direct evidence against accepting the Passage, from the α tradition... [so] we should begin with the assumption that the Passage does not belong here.” (227)

The Passage is not part of the argument of *Metaphysics* IX. This would be sufficient, for our purposes, to set it aside as a text that is relevant to the extension of *energeia* from *kinēsis* to other senses, such as *eidos*. Burnyeat insinuates that the text could have been an early attempt, and that Aristotle could have later rejected it. Yet, it would still be relevant to our broader question.

**III. The Possibility of Other Authors**

Although both Burnyeat and Beere offer compelling paleographical and philosophical arguments to show that it was added to the text, and that it conflicts with both the immediate context and other arguments of Aristotle, neither wishes to suggest that the text was written by someone other than Aristotle. While offering compelling evidence for it not being by Aristotle, they do not advance very strong arguments for it being by Aristotle. Burnyeat, for example, points to the fact that, like other passages by Aristotle, the passage uses the first person verb “I say”:

And I am inclined to agree also that the Passage is authentic Aristotle, both in style—Jaeger cites the first-person verb *λέγω* (1048b35), which is indeed a feature of Aristotle’s prose—and in thought. Who else would have such thoughts?\footnote{Burnyeat, “A Passage,” 227.}
Burnyeat later attempts to add some meat to the claim that nobody but Aristotle would have thoughts like this, by citing the tradition among the Aristotelians of disputing the account of pleasure as *genesis* in the *Philebus*, as Aristotle does in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.12, and in 1153a15-17, where he seems to make *genesis* and *energeia* mutually exclusive. This argument backfires, for it to indicates just as forcefully that others could well have written the passage. Burnyeat’s argument goes as follows: if we gloss *genesis* as *kinēsis* in these passages, then we have the opposition we’re looking for, and we can say that Aristotle could have written this text. Based partly on the commentary of Michael of Ephesus, and partly on this possibility, Burnyeat argues the passage probably came from a lost book on Pleasure, referred to by Diogenes Laertius.28

We can add that there is some precedent for investigating *genesis* by the name of *kinēsis*: Parmenides establishes the non-existence of the latter through the former, and Aristotle rejects the argument by accepting this conflation of *genesis* and *kinēsis* in *Phys. I.7*, in order to refute Parmenides argument for both. Yet none of these considerations show that Aristotle himself identifies *kinēsis* and *genesis*, except roughly or strategically. Indeed, he distinguishes them, famously, in *Physics V.*

It is an elegant suggestion, to say that the passage is by Aristotle because it is somewhat plausible to gloss ‘coming to be’ as ‘movement’ in other passages with a similar argument, but it is a tenuous one. Aristotle is responding to the *Philebus* in these passages, which use the word *genesis*. It is unclear what would motivate the change in terminology from *genesis* to *kinēsis* here, if, as Burnyeat suggests, this is the original context of the Passage. It is much more plausible that someone other than Aristotle substituted *kinēsis* for *genesis* either through a paraphrase of the argument or in a similar passage.

Now, having argued, on the basis of this possibility of a gloss, that the distinction is plausibly Aristotle’s, later in the essay Burnyeat shows very clearly that the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not refer to the distinction between *energeia* and *kinēsis*.29 These two arguments are not strictly contradictory, but they do interfere with one another. The result is that we ought to look

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28 Diogenes Laertius 5. 22 and 24; cf. Hesych. no. 15; Ptolemy el-Garib no. 17.
for positive reasons to count the Passage as being by someone else. We know of a number of other treatises on Pleasure:

Nor is Aristotle alone in having written a monograph On Pleasure. So too, apparently, did Speusippus (D.L. 4. 4: one book), Xenocrates (D.L. 4. 12: two books), Heracleides Ponticus (Athen. 512 A), Strato (D.L. 5. 59), and Theophrastus, who is credited (D.L. 5. 44) with one book... (On Pleasure according to Aristotle or On Pleasure in the Style of Aristotle), plus another entitled simply On Pleasure, and—last, but would that we had it!—On False Pleasure (D.L. 5. 46: one book). It would seem that the Philebus, like Plato’s Lecture on the Good, aroused a furore of discussion.30

David Sedley suggested that Theophrastus, for example, might have known about or conceived of the distinction, and points out a passage on nous:

“'For nous is unaffected', Theophrastus says, 'unless of course "capable of being affected" has a different sense: not "capable of being changed" (for change is incomplete), but "energeia". These are different, but sometimes it is necessary to use the same names..."31

Burnyeat remarks that “we might propose his crisp, Aristotelian style (which includes frequent use of the first person verb λέγω) as a possible originator for the Passage itself.”32 But he rejects the idea that the passage suggested actually implies the exclusive distinction between energeia and kinēsis. Burnyeat’s argument establishes that we do not have a sufficient reason to attribute the distinction to Theophrastus. Nevertheless, he is a plausible source.

No matter where the text came from, we have a clear motive for its insertion here. Earlier in Met. IX.6 Aristotle gives examples of being-at-work and potency, and divides them into two analogous groups. As movement is to potency, thinghood is to material (Met. IX.6 1048b6-9). But among the examples that fall under the category of movement, Aristotle includes contemplating, building, waking, and seeing:

Any student of Aristotle could think it misleading to say that God is kinēsis or that his contemplating is kinēsis. Especially since kinēsis usually refers to passive change (kineisthai), which would imply that God, the great Contemplator,

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30 Burnyeat, “A Passage,” 274.
32 Burnyeat, “A Passage,” 275.
undergoes change. A Byzantine cleric might well agree with Philoponus (*Aet. 4. 4*) that the very thought is blasphemous. Someone who knew the Passage might well think to write a marginal note to show that Aristotle knew better, that elsewhere *noēsis* is not *kinēsis* but *energeia*.

God cannot undergo change. But if contemplation was considered a movement, then the essence of God would be movement, and Aristotle’s account would be incompatible with Christian doctrine. The assumption that to change means to be affected by something else—an assumption Aristotle does not share—would worsen the problem considerably. The motive to make this distinction would exist whether the Passage was by Aristotle or not. Yet, if this is a strong enough motivation to introduce the Passage into *Metaphysics* IX, it is also a strong enough motive to gloss Aristotle’s discussion of coming-to-be in terms of movement (as Burnyeat suggests), and perhaps through this to compose the passage.

**IV. The Uniqueness of the Passage**

Such a scenario, however plausible, must for now remain speculative. Our task now is to see whether the distinction between *kinēsis* and *energeia* is philosophically consistent with Aristotle’s other arguments. To argue that it is not lends philosophical support to the argument that the Passage was not by Aristotle, or that at very least he came to disagree with it. If *energeia* is to be continuous with *kinēsis*, it is not necessary to show that it was *impossible* for Aristotle to have written the Passage, or that someone else did; all that is necessary is to put in question the doctrine that the two must be incompatible, enough to allow other evidence that they are continuous in meaning to be compelling. To do this, we could show that outside of the passage he made a point of their continuity.

There is much evidence that movement and being-at-work are continuous. Not only does the distinction in the passage appear nowhere else in the works of Aristotle, but it also conflicts with other claims in the corpus, especially in the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, and, in addition, with its immediate context in book IX. This is not to suggest, however, that the *concern* of the passage

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with the meaning of completeness and incompleteness is foreign to Aristotle, just that the solution presented here as a distinction between being-at-work and movement is corrupt.

It is worth noting, for example, that movement is defined as a certain kind of *energeia* or *entelekhēia*: “the *energeia*/*entelekhēia* of a potential being, as such, is movement” (Phys. III.1 201a11, and Met. XI.9 1065b17). It is not *simply* *dunamis*, nor is it *simply* *energeia* or *entelekhēia*, but the *entelekhēia* of a being-in-*dunamis*, as such. Far from being *unlike* being-at-work, movement is a sort of being-at-work.

More emphatically, Aristotle points out that *energeia* seems most of all to be movement, and points out that what moves seems to be most of all.35

And the phrase being-at-work, which is designed to converge in meaning with being-at-work-staying-complete [*entelekhēia*], comes to apply to other things from belonging especially to motions, since being-at-work seems to be motion most of all, and this is why people do not grant being-in-motion to things that do not have being... (Met. IX.3 1047a30-34)36

In addition, the very problem that might have led to the insertion of the Passage in *Met.* IX.6 is an illustration of this continuity. The aim of the first part of the chapter is to illustrate the meaning of the distinction between potency or being-in-potency, and being-at-work. Aristotle illustrates the distinction through a series of pairs: Hermes in a block of wood, a half line in a whole line, being a knower and contemplating, the ability to build and building, someone asleep and someone awake, someone with sight and seeing. The first in the pair is the capacity or the being-in-potency, while the other is the being-at-work. He concludes the examples by observing that at least some things are said to be in activity or at work analogously.37 The distinction he draws then seems to divide all of the examples into two groups: “some of them [things said to be

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34 ἡ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἑντελέχεια, ἡ τοιούτου, κίνησις ἔστιν
35 This seems to be an allusion to the Giants in Plato’s *Sophist*.
36 ἐξήλθος δ’ ἡ ἑνέργεια τούτου, ἢ πρὸς τὴν ἑντελέχειαν συντεθεμένη, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴ ἀλλα ἡ τῶν κινήσεων μᾶλλον: διόκει γὰρ ἡ ἑνέργεια μᾶλλον ἡ κίνησις εἶναι, διὸ καὶ τοῖς μὴ οὐδεὶς οὐκ ἀποδύσασθαι τὸ κινεῖσθαι
37 It is worth asking whether the same principle of analogy applies to potency, or whether its senses have a different organizing principle, since potency is investigated through a *pros hen* structure (*Met.* V.12, IX.1). We address this question below.
at-work or in activity] are related as motion to a potency, others as thinghood to some material” (Met. IX.6 1048b8-9).38

It may not be so scandalous that Aristotle here seems to say that contemplating is a movement. Either way, the scandal depends on but distracts us from the main point, namely that energeia is movement for potency. This is a flat-out contradiction of the argument of the passage, if the Passage is supposed to establish that the two are mutually exclusive. It is at odds with the preceding illustrations in another way, too, since, with the exception of building, in the Passage all of the same examples are or would be called energeiai in contradistinction to kinēseis.

More telling, perhaps, is that the distinction is unprecedented in Metaphysics IX, and it is not taken up in the relevant passages immediately following its introduction. Two chapters later, when Aristotle takes up the question of the priority of potency and being-at-work, in a number of places his argument takes the following form: a movement is prior to the potency for movement, therefore being-at-work is prior to potency: “what is at work always comes into being from what is in potency, by the action of what is at work... some mover is always first, and what causes motion is already at work” (IX.8 1049b25-27), and “something of what is in motion has always already been moved... [so] then it is clear from the same considerations that being-at-work takes precedence in this way too over potency” (IX.8 1049b33-1050a4). If movement was not being-at-work, the passage would not just be pointless, it would fail to make the point Aristotle says he is making.

Nor could we get around the problem by suggesting that he is using being-at-work here in a broad or loose sense instead of in a narrow or technical sense. No matter how you approach it, if movement and being-at-work were essentially different, if being-at-work some ‘proper sense’ excluded movement, then the argument of the passage would still fail, since it aims to establish that being-at-work as such is prior to potency. Moreover, movement plays a crucial role in the culminating argument of this chapter, and the book. We shall return to this argument, below.

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38 The whole sentence is: λέγεται δὲ ἐνεργεία οὐ πάντα ὑμοίως ἀλλ’ ἢ τῷ ἀνάλογον, ὡς τούτο ἐν τούτῳ ἢ πρὸς τὸ τοῦτο, τόδ’ ἐν τῷ δὲ ἐν πρὸς τὸ τόδε: τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὡς κίνησις πρὸς δύναμιν τὰ δ’ ὡς οὐσία πρὸς τινα ὑλήν.
If in fact kinēsis – energeia was an important distinction within the argument of the book, if the distinction truly was significant to the account of energeia in general, then Aristotle ought to have mentioned it here in book IX, and stuck with it. Instead, he says that we need to start the investigation with movement, calls being-at-work movement, and uses movement to determine the priority of being-at-work as such over potency, without ever mentioning such a distinction.

Based on considerations like these, it is sensible to hold, with Burnyeat and Beere, that the Passage should not be printed in book IX. Within the argument of this book there is no distinction between movement and being-at-work.

Burnyeat, especially, and Beere as well, have shown not only that the Passage does not belong in Metaphysics IX, but also that nowhere else in the corpus does Aristotle refer to or presuppose the distinction according to which kinēsis and energeia are distinct or mutually exclusive concepts—not in the Metaphysics, not in the Nicomachean Ethics, not in On the Soul. The passage is unique in the corpus. Burnyeat concludes:

We... have to admit that the passage is the sole place in the corpus where Aristotle’s now famous distinction between κίνησις and ἐνέργεια can be found.”39 In general, the Passage, and the distinction in which it occurs, is anomalous: “present-day scholarship should stop citing the Passage as a source of standard Aristotelian doctrine. It is a freak performance.40

We must resist closing off the question that the Passage raises, however. Even if the opposition between kinēsis and energeia is a freak performance, what the passage seems to be working out is relevant and helpful, namely the idea of completeness and incompleteness, to which we now turn.

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40 Burnyeat, “A Passage,” 276.
Chapter Three: Completeness

We have seen that the Passage that distinguishes between movement and being-at-work is an incursion into the text of *Metaphysics* IX. The distinction it presents is not repeated anywhere else in the works of Aristotle, and contradicts the argument of *Physics* III.1 and *Metaphysics* XI.9 that movement is being-at-work or a kind of being-at-work. This means we will have to use other resources to work out whether the sense of being-at-work that Aristotle seeks in IX is continuous with movement.

Unfortunately, it seems we cannot get a definition of being-at-work that expresses it in terms that are more primary, any more than we can get a reductive definition of potency, the way that we can get a definition of material as that which goes toward a form (*Met. IX.8 1050a16-17*). In II.1 we said that because of the semi-circularity of movement and the basic terms potency and being-at-work this would be better called an *access definition*, which, by making distinctions, allows us entry into the phenomenon. Aristotle articulated this access to movement in terms of something more primary by drawing a boundary through or around it, thereby determining it by making distinctions, by separating what is discontinuous (*diorisamenoi*). The normal account holds that Aristotle cannot define *energeia* in a similar way, that no definition of it is possible because it is a first principle. And yet, in *Metaphysics* IX.1 and 6 he uses the same word (*diorisamenos*) and the same strategy of making distinctions to bring the meaning or nature of these things to light (*Met. IX.1 1045b34, IX.6 1048a26*).

So, while it is true that there appears to be no reductive definition possible, no definition that reduces potency and being-at-work to or composes them out of something else, nevertheless, we are not entirely without theoretical resources in getting a grip on their meaning. In other words, even though there are no more basic terms with which to articulate *energeia* (or *dunamis* for that matter), we are not in the situation of having to appeal either to brute experience or to pure a priori concepts, or to some ineffable inner intuition to understand these things: this knowledge will come to us neither a posteriori nor a priori. Aristotle’s method is to cultivate our participation in the act of seeing (*theoreo*) by asking questions and making distinctions, and by doing this we find our way into and through the phenomena before us. This is why it is possible
to learn about \textit{energeia} and \textit{dunamis} from discussions of different phenomena, by making distinctions and leading them back to these principles.

\textbf{I. The Question of Incompleteness in the Passage}

Thus, notwithstanding its textual status and provenance, the Passage raises a very important question, which might help us get a glimpse of \textit{energeia} and of the importance of movement to the sense or senses of \textit{energeia} in addition to movement. The question is visible in the opening lines of the Passage. Burnyeat’s revised text of the first paragraph may be translated thus:

Since among actions [\textit{praxēon}] which are of a limit [\textit{peras}] none is complete or achieved [\textit{telos}], but all are among things for the sake of completion or achievement [\textit{to telos}],

for example, ‘slimming itself,’ and since these very things, when one slims them, are in movement [\textit{en kinēseī}], that <slimness> of which it is this movement is not there [\textit{huparkhontai}],

these are not themselves action, or at least not complete. For none is itself <a> completion or achievement. It is in the former thing that the completion and the action are there. \textit{(Met. IX.6 1048b18-35)}\textsuperscript{41}

The author of the Passage formulates the question of completeness as a question of action, \textit{praxis}, a word that does not appear anywhere else in \textit{Metaphysics IX}, and less than a handful of times anywhere in the book. This word is closely related to \textit{energeia}, but this relationship is too complex to describe here. The distinctions to which we should attend are two: 1) some things are limited, that is, they are for or of something beyond them, while other things are not, and 2) some things are incomplete and others are complete.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{ἐπεὶ δὲ τῶν πράξεων ὡν ἦστι πέρας οὐδεμία τέλος ἀλλὰ τῶν περὶ τὸ τέλος, οἰνὸν τὸ ἰσχνάϊνειν αὐτό, αὐτὰ δὲ ὅταν ἰσχναίην οὕτως ἐστὶν ἐν κινήσει, μὴ ὑπάρχοντα ὡν ἕνεκα ἢ κίνησις, οὐκ ἦστι ταύτα πράξεις ἢ οὐ τελεία γε (οὐ γὰρ τέλος): ἀλλ’ ἐκείνη ἐνυπάρχει τὸ τέλος καὶ ή πράξει. Burnyeat translates the passage this way (with modifications indicated): “Since of actions which have a limit none is an end, but all belong to the class of means to an end, e.g. slimming in the sense of the slimming process considered in itself [οἰνὸν τὸ ἰσχναίην [ἡ ἰσχνασία] αὐτό] (2), and since the things themselves one is slimming, when one is slimming them, are in process of changing in this sense, so that the results aimed at in the change are not yet present (3), these are not cases of action, or not at any rate of complete action. For none of them is in itself (4) an end. It is in that former thing [ἐκείνη without <π> ] (5) that the end and the [retaining ἡ] action are present (6).” (1048b18-23)

\textsuperscript{42} The identification of these distinctions could be helpful to bring together two crucial arguments in \textit{Metaphysics IX.8}. For, while completion, \textit{telos}, is the focus of the paragraph on the relationship between
The Passage identifies one with the other. This means that there are things in the world that are for or of something beyond them. What they are, their being, is structurally incomplete: they do not have their own being, they are not themselves. For example, the activity or potency of building is for or of a table. This means that, considered on its own, building is incomplete, because it is not itself that for which or of which it is. The point of the paragraph above is that what makes something incomplete is its being-structure, and that one way to think this structure is through telos. The point is established solely through describing the shape of a thing’s completion or accomplishment.

The Passage, then, asks the question: how is being related to wholeness, completion, accomplishment? To work this out it uses the telic structure of movement, here in contrast with energeia, and, in Met. IX.8, not in contrast but as the way to relate energeia to a telos. The importance of the question of completeness to being in general and to being in the sense of potency and being-at-work is clear from the fact that potency and being-at-work are meant to solve the problems of composition that come up in the inquiry into thinghood, ousia. In addition, its importance is visible immediately in the word telos in entelekheia.

II. Being-at-work and Incompleteness

According to the definition, movement is a being-at-work or being-complete of a certain sort of thing. The argument, then, is not that movement is inherently incomplete in a sense that makes it not energeia, or not entelekheia. Movement is an energeia or entelekheia of something incomplete, and because of this there are kinds of energeia that are incomplete: “motion seems to be a certain being-at-work, but incomplete, because what is in potency, of which <motion> is the being-at-work, is itself incomplete” (Phys. III.2 201b31-33).

How can we account for this completeness or incompleteness? Is it that there are different kinds of energeia, or is it that incomplete energeia is not itself? Aristotle says that movement is the being-complete of the incomplete thing: “movement is a being-complete of the incomplete moving thing [hē kinēsis entelekheia kinētou atelēs]” (Phys. VIII.5 257b6-9).

energeia and entelekheia (Met. IX.8 1050a15-23), the paragraph that follows it is entirely devoted to the distinction between what is for something beyond it and what is for itself—deriving the concept of telos from the idea of being toward itself (Met. IX.8 1050a23-1050b1).
This distinction within *energeia* shows that it does not have a fixed relationship with *telos*. That is, being-at-work does not immediately imply that a thing is complete: we must argue that it is related to *telos*, and work out how. This reading is confirmed by the fact that Aristotle does make such an argument in the passage in *Metaphysics* IX.8 1050a17-1050b mentioned above.

Does this mean that movement is an incomplete being-complete, as Sachs argues? Aristotle does not quite pose the completeness of movement this way as a paradox. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle uses the phrase ‘the complete being-at-work’ (*hēi* teleia *energeia*) (*NE* 10.4 1174b14-17) and ‘being completely at-work’ (*teleiotatē* *energeia*) (*NE* 10.4 1074b20, 22). The qualification suggests that being-at-work can be otherwise, but not that this is a contradiction. If Beere is right, that *energeia* is the genus, and movement or change is a species of it, then a distinction of this sort seems to be required: being-at-work could be complete or incomplete depending on that which it is of.

This, then, seems to be the case: saying something is *entelekheia* does not imply it is completed or accomplished in every way (*teleia*). Instead, like the other terms in Aristotle’s account of being, a thing can be in its completion, be *entelekheia* in one respect, and not in others. Similarly, *energeia* is not by definition something complete in every way, even when it is a completion of the potential of the thing.

How are we to make this distinction in the uses of these two words, *energeia*, and *entelekheia*? In two places in *On the Soul*, Aristotle refers to a sense of being-at-work that is different than it is as movement. He says “movement is a kind of being-at-work, though not in the full sense, just as is said in other places,” (*Soul* II.5 417a16-17) and “motion is a being-at-work of something incomplete, while being-at-work in the simple sense, that of something complete, is different again” (*Soul* II.5 431a6-7). We have no reason to believe that Aristotle is speaking loosely here. If potency has a definite diversity of senses, surely being-at-work can as well. Here,

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43 See Sachs commentary on III.1 in *Physics*.
44 See also the argument that pleasure is a complete *energeia*, in contrast to change (*NE* X.4 1174b8). These passages do not argue that change is not *energeia*, only that, unlike changes, pleasure is an *energeia* that is complete.
45 Beere, *Doing and Being*, 229-230.
46 ἢ γὰρ κίνησις τοῦ ἀτελοῦς ἐνέργεια, ἢ δ’ ἀπλῶς ἐνέργεια ἔτερα, ἢ τοῦ τετελεσμένου

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it seems that being-at-work has a simple sense and a complex sense. A key complex or compound sense is movement. Movement, then, is the being-complete of a complex or multiplicity, or, if it is actually different to put it this way, the being-complete of a complex of a particular kind, namely of potential being.

We must recall, however, that the potential being, for example, a building-block or a tile, is not necessarily numerically complex. It is not the case that the potential is one ‘thing,’ an element, a faculty, an attribute that is part of the other thing, the material. The block is a single thing, but it has several aspects, and it is in this sense that its being is multiple. Incompleteness seems to be possible when a thing is articulable into form and underlying thing.

III. Movement and Incompleteness

To work out whether movement is a self-contradiction, a complete-incomplete, we have to ask whether it is movement that is intrinsically incomplete, or something else. In the discussion in Nicomachean Ethics X.4, which happens to be the closest parallel to the Passage, Aristotle argues that movement can be a complete being, entelekheia, while its parts, each of the ta dunais onta, are not:

For every movement (e.g. that of building) takes time and is for the sake of an end, and is complete when it has made what it aims at. It is complete, therefore, only in the whole time or at the final moment. In their parts and during the time they occupy, all movements are incomplete, and are different in kind from the whole movement and from each other. For the fitting together of the stones is different from the fluting of the column, and these are both different from the making of the temple; and the making of the temple is complete (for it lacks nothing with a view to the end proposed), but the making of the base or of the triglyph is incomplete; for each is the making of a part. They differ in kind, then, and it is not possible to find at any and every time a movement complete in form, but if at all, only in the whole time. So, too, in the case of walking and all other movements. For if locomotion is a movement from here to there, it, too, has differences in kind—flying, walking, leaping, and so on. And not only so, but in walking itself there are such differences; for the whence and whither are not the same in the whole racecourse and in a part of it, nor in one part and in another, nor is it the same thing to traverse this line and that; for one traverses not only a line but one which is in a place, and this one is in a different place from that. We have discussed movement with precision in another work, but it seems that it is not complete at any and every time, but that the many movements are
incomplete and different in kind, since the whence and whither give them their form. *(Nicomachean Ethics X.4 1174a13–b23)*

The argument is not that movement is intrinsically incomplete—Aristotle suggests that a movement may be complete in the whole time—it argues instead that, unlike pleasure or sight, the *parts of a movement* are necessarily incomplete, since for each the limits are different. Movement is complete insofar as it is of or in relation to *potential beings* which can be distinguished into *parts*, as building (the *entelekhēia*) is to buildable thing (what is potent), and the activity of building (energeia) is to the builder (insofar as he is potent).

Nevertheless, when we examine the moving thing, we find the parts of the *movement* to be constitutively complex, multiple in such a way that each is incomplete: the act of putting mortar on bricks is not the same as putting the bricks on top of each other, but neither of these is the complete act of building on its own. In other words, though movement is an *entelekhēia*, it is of several parts, and in addition the movement itself can be marked out, and its sequences distinguished.

Indeed, we might even be able to say that movement is *that which distinguishes parts from one another*. Before the movement of building begins, the builder and what is built are neither of those things: here is a man, here is a tree. The man is not a builder, and the tree is not wood, board, or plank, until the movement of building grounds their relationship and unfolds this aspect of their being. These two things are neither together nor separate: they become related and distinguished into parts of a single movement-complex by the movement alone. Thus, the movement is what makes them parts at all, that is, what makes them both one and many at once.

Being-complete (*entelekhēia*) does not mean being complete in every respect, it can mean being the completion, the accomplishment of parts that depend on one another. This is why the soul is the being-complete of the body that has life as a potency (*Soul II.1 412a20, 27, 412b4*). Not every complex thing will be incomplete in this way, however. There may be complex *entelekhēiai* that are complete in their parts.

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47 Ross, trans., revised by J. O. Urmson.
The whence and whither of a movement, that is, the deprivation-form structure of movement is what determines whether the parts of the movement are incomplete. The whence and whither of each part of the movement is different than the whence and whither of other parts and of the whole movement. The planets, which move in a circle, proceed toward their origin, but it is possible to divide it into parts that depend on others to be complete. The activity of fluting a column starts with round stone and chisel and ends with a fluted column, but putting the stones together starts with well-shaped stones and arranges them. The event of building as a whole is still different: it is the coming to be of a building here.

Putting this suggestion together with the previous one, we have, then, with two kinds of incompleteness: 1) incompleteness of the several beings that are being-at-work-being-complete (entelekheia), and 2) incompleteness of the parts of the movement.

IV. Complete Potency

Thus, it is false to say that the distinction between potency and actuality is assimilable to the distinction between incompleteness and completeness. For there are potencies that are complete, and energeiai that are incomplete. In other words, the difference between completeness and incompleteness is orthogonal to the distinction between potency and being-at-work. Potency is not something incomplete in the midst of integral being; potency is not a flaw in being. The definition of movement the being-at-work or being-complete is of the being insofar as it is potent. It is the qualification that allows for the complexity that permits articulation into incomplete parts.

Some examples of potency will help to confirm this: there are potencies that are complete, such as seeing, knowing, and living, and others that are not, such as a student of singing or cuisine or physics. But the situation is more complex, as the example of the planets shows. These move eternally, but are in-potency: they have the potency to move in place (Met. IX.8 1050b15-28). This passage is sometimes mistaken for an argument that eternal or necessary things have no potency at all, but this is clearly not what Aristotle says. Instead, he distinguishes between things that are simply in-potency, and things that are in-potency in other ways, presumably in complexes:
…what admits of not being with respect to thinghood is destructible simply. Therefore nothing that is simply indestructible is simply in potency (though nothing prevents it from being potentially in some particular respect, such as of a certain sort or at a certain place), and so all of them are at work. (Met. IX.8 1050b15-18)\textsuperscript{48}

Aristotle distinguishes being in-potency in thinghood (\textit{ousia}) from being in-potency in other respects. Things that are indestructible can be in-potency at a different place, or be a different kind of thing. The planets have perfect potencies in the sense that they have the potential to be moved from somewhere to somewhere (\textit{Met.} IX.8 1050b21-2), but do not have the ability to lose this potency. These are complete \textit{and}, insofar as they are potent beings, they move. Thus, Aristotle suggests, the planets never grow weary, because their motion is not for contradictory things, that is, the motion does not articulate itself into different incomplete parts, for it is circular (\textit{Met.} IX.8 1050b22-27). The thinghood of destructible things, however, is potency and parts (articulated by movement) that are in-potency for a form, i.e. material (\textit{Met.} IX.8 1050b27-28).

Thus, in arguing for the priority of motion in place over other kinds of movement, Aristotle points out that to say that natural things are moving in place is to take them to be something complete: not only do you need to be a whole animal to move yourself, it is also that (even in contemporary physics) when we talk about local motion we tend to assume some kind of stable body.\textsuperscript{49} Unlike genesis, “locomotion is a motion that belongs to such things only when they are perfected” (\textit{Phys.} VIII.7 260b31).\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{V. Typology}

Potencies have two types: complete or whole potencies like seeing, living, knowing, and perceiving, and incomplete or partial potencies, for walking, heating, or building, namely potencies involving movement. There is a third subtype, however, namely potencies that \textit{can be}

\textsuperscript{48} Sachs, trans.

\textsuperscript{49} This is the case even when we say, for example, that the moon is spinning as it orbits the earth: the point is that when we consider a movement, we posit an inertial frame relative to something presumed to be \textit{inert}, motionless, complete.

\textsuperscript{50} Hardie and Gaye, trans., \textit{The Physics}. 

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completed or not. These potencies admit of being more or less complete as though in quantity\(^51\), such as the ability to play the violin, or to speak, or to run, and to be virtuous. They are perfected or made whole through movement. Thus, “the potential thing walks toward being-complete, and movement is a being-complete of the incomplete moving thing \(\text{hē kinēsis entelekheia kinētou atelēs}\)” (Phys. VII.5 257b6-9).\(^52\) The first clause does not say the same as the second: the first says that the potential thing becomes complete in the respect in which it is potential. To put it loosely: without ceasing to be potency, the potency gets stronger, more powerful, more whole, more potent. The second clause says that movement happens while this potency is not yet itself, when it is not yet whole, not yet fully capable. When the potency is complete, when the potent thing is fully capable, when the thing can be named through its potency, the movement ends. Incomplete potencies are related to differing or opposing poles: someone who has not yet learned a theorem might succeed in proving it, or fail. A thing moves along the continuum between these. This kind of potency implies that a thing is extended structurally, extended in its being from the \(\text{sterēsis}\) to the \(\text{eidos}\) or \(\text{morphē}\) opposite it.

For example, a woman training for a marathon is not yet a marathon runner. By running she increases her power, her capacity. Sometimes she will fail to complete the marathon or complete it badly, and sometimes she will succeed. Once her abilities are complete, and she can run a marathon without outside help or hindrance, then we call her a marathon runner. She was moving from not being a runner (one limit, the \(\text{sterēsis}\)) to being a runner (its opposite, the form). But once she is in or at that form, her running does not change her into being a runner any longer, since she is already that, and the movement has ended. The outcome of the movement is

\(^{51}\) “Now each [thing] may belong (\(\text{huparcheī}\)) to all [the categories] in two ways (\(\text{dichōs}\)): for example a \(\text{this},\) either its shape or its deprivation; or in kind either white or black, or in how-much either the complete (\(\text{to telēion}\)) or incomplete (\(\text{to atelēs}\))” (Physics III.1 201a3-6).

\(^{52}\) The passage, at greater length, distinguishes between mover and moved, arguing that it is not the mover or agent that is the moving thing, but the patient. The ground for this is not that movement is constitutively incomplete, but that movement is of the incomplete thing, rather than the complete one: \(\text{ἐπὶ διάφορα ὡς ἐνεργεῖται τὸ κινητόν, τὸν δὲ ἐστὶ δύναμις κινούμενον, οὐκ ἐντελέχεια, τὸ δὲ δυνάμει εἰς ἐντελέχειαν βαθύτατα, ἐστὶ δὲ ἡ κίνησις ἐντελέχεια κινητοῦ ἀτελής. τὸ δὲ κινοῦν ήδη ἐνεργεῖα ἐστίν... “it has been marked out that the moving thing is \(\text{<what is> moved}\) [i.e. it is not the mover]. For this \(<\text{moving thing}>\) is a moved thing in-potency, not \(<\text{a moved thing}>\) being-completely. For the potential thing walks toward being-complete, and movement is a being-complete of the incomplete moving thing. And what is moved is already being-at-work.” (cf. Phys. III.1)
the source: “As a whole, then, what is coming to be appears incomplete and moving toward <an/its> origin, so that in coming to be what is later is by nature prior.” (Phys. VIII.7 261a13-14)53

A moving thing can be located at some place between the two opposing poles, at only one place at a time. Therefore the thing’s potency reveals it not only to be structurally extended, but also limited in this way, finite. A woman cannot be both a marathon runner and partly one.

More radically, some potencies imply others. In such cases, things are not capable of being at work in every way that they are is potent at once: a thing cannot be all temperatures at once, it cannot be black, white, and grey at once, but it can only be one. This means that some potencies, e.g. for color, cannot be complete: they are structurally incomplete.

Contrast this with completeable potencies, and potencies that are inherently complete, ones for which the whole potency is at work at once: I am fully seeing, living, thinking. These potencies are not structurally incomplete. The word for incomplete is atelēs, while telos means complete or full or whole. So a better way to express the concept of incomplete potencies is to use the word “partial.”

VI. Concluding Remarks

Potency is a source of change in another, or in itself as other (IX.1, V.12). When is something in-potency (dunamei)? When from that moment on it requires no external source to be potent, when it requires no other source to be capable: of a student, once he is capable “once he is in this condition, if nothing prevents it, he is at work and contemplates” spontaneously (Physics VIII.4 255b6-7). For example, a baby is a soup-eater when we no longer have to hold the spoon for him. A woman is a marathon runner when she needs no more coaching or training to complete a marathon, and run it well. A soup-eater or marathon runner is a being-insofar-as-she-is-potent, that is, a being that can be at work, or a being that is at work. This is the way that potency is a sense of being. As we shall see in the next chapter, this analysis can be extended to categorical being, to thinghood (ousia) and to material and form: just as the movement of heating comes from ‘at-work-being-hot,’ heat as a property comes from heating.

53 Ὅλος δὲ φαίνεται τὸ γνώμενον ἀτελῆς καὶ ἐπὶ ἀρχὴν ἵνα, ὅστε τῇ γενέσει ὑστερον τῇ φύσει πρότερον εἶναι.
We must note two things: first, potency and energeia are not mere modes of categorical attributes. To call them this is to reduce them to the categorical sense of being, and in so doing to say that they are not a complete way of articulating being. Those who argue that they are presume that everything is a category, as though we just needed to add ‘soup-eating’ and ‘marathon-running’ to quality, quantity, place, and relation, or as though they and an enormous quantity of other actions were supposed to fit into the category ‘quality,’ while quantity and place remained simple. But this is not the case: potency and being-at-work already name an aspect of being that is independent of and inarticulable through the categories.

Second, we must point out that in one way we have been speaking loosely in this chapter: for ease of articulation, we have sometimes used potency as though it was a thing, a being, or a property. However, it is not accurate to speak this way about potency. Potency is not a feature of a being, the way a color or a certain weight are features, nor is potency an it, a this. It is accurate, instead, to say that potency, like being-at-work, is a way of addressing a whole being insofar-as-it-is potent for or at work doing a particular thing. Thus, a baby has color, size and shape, but to say a baby is a perceiving thing is not to name a feature of it, but to name its being, leaving it ambiguous whether you are naming it through its potency or its entelekheia (Soul II.5 417a22, cf. Phys VIII.4 255a32-b15). It is to the work of distinguishing and finding the primary sense of potency that we now turn.
Chapter Four: On The Many Senses of Potency According to Aristotle

I. Existing Accounts of Potency

The three most influential current accounts of potency in Aristotle are that of a) Stephen Menn, b) Charlotte Witt and Jonathan Beere, and c) Martin Heidegger. Each of these accounts, however, has a decisive flaw. Menn argues that the highest, metaphysical sense of potency is a minimal one: to be-in-potency is to be merely possible through the power of some other thing.54 This is an elegant interpretation, yet reducing potency to bare possibility leaves Menn unable to account for Aristotle’s argument that being-in-potency can be either i) the source of movement, or ii) material (Met. IX.6 1048b8). Furthermore, Aristotle’s normal approach is to say that the highest sense of a word is also its fullest, most complete sense, and this is just what he does in subordinating possibility to potency in Metaphysics IX.4. But Menn argues that the highest sense of potency is its most minimal sense, which is just the reverse. If potency has only two senses—potency and possibility, we should ask whether the meaning of potency as being is not its minimal sense, but its highest sense instead.55 Put more strongly: we should try to work out a sense of potency that is both maximal and ontological.

Witt and Beere argue that the ontological sense of potency is being-in-potency, a way of being opposed to and incompatible with being-in-energeia. For his part, Heidegger interprets potency as one of the mutually implied sides of the concealing-revealing structure of phenomenality.56 In doing so, he interprets potency through stereisis, taking it as a negation of energeia that is essential to energeia. As we saw in Part One, a fatal problem with these interpretations is that they oppose potency and energeia.

Thus, we need to resolve a formal-methodological deficiency in the existing accounts of potency in Aristotle: 1) Unlike Menn, this paper shows that the highest sense of potency is its fullest sense. Further, 2) here we start the account of potency with the senses of the word that

54 Menn, “Origins.”
55 This difference is visible in Witt’s account of powers and possibilities in Aristotle. See Witt, Ways of Being.
56 Heidegger, Force.
Aristotle distinguishes, instead of attempting to derive the meaning of potency by opposing it to being-at-work. 3) Unlike the received opinion, this interpretation allows potency to be compatible with being-at-work. Only through this is it possible to let potency’s primary sense be genuinely helpful in an account of being.

II. The Investigation of Potency in Metaphysics IX

In the confines of this chapter, we shall only have occasion to examine the different senses of potency that Aristotle distinguishes, and must stop short of a full articulation of being-at-work, which we seek in the sequel. The two most comprehensive accounts of potency in Aristotle’s work are in Metaphysics V.12, which distinguishes the senses of the word, and Metaphysics IX, which opens with the same distinctions. The proper sense of both potency and being-at-work, Aristotle says, is related to movement: one as its source, the other as movement itself (Met. V.12 1020a5, IX.1 1046a10, IX.3 1047a30).\(^{57}\) The plan of Metaphysics IX is to begin by

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\(^{57}\) To understand movement and therefore energeia it is necessary to investigate potency, for two reasons: since movement is the energeia of a potential thing, and since movement is this energeia as potent. However, since movement is precisely a being-at-work or a being-in-its-end of something that is in potency, to distinguish potency from energeia by referring to the definition of movement alone seems an impossible task, since they are inextricable from one another. So, as we shall do here, it would be necessary to look at other features of moving things, and trace these back into the account of movement. This problem can be illustrated in a preliminary way as follows: there are two available ways of understanding the relationship between potency and being-at-work when it comes to movement. 1) Either movement is the only being that potency can have, or 2) potency is something apart from movement, that can act—or more precisely, to be potent is to be something that can act. The first interpretation is standard in the literature. A good example of this position is Brentano’s argument, in his dissertation On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle, that potency has being as potency only during movement. Movement, he argues, is the production of a new potency by actuality, for example, the movement of learning produces the potency called knowledge. The exercise of knowledge, then, is not movement because no new potency is created. Knowing would be the activity of the new potency, but not as potent. Brentano does not specify, however, in what sense this new potency would still be potent. Brentano, Several Senses of Being, Part IV. Ordinarily this first interpretation supposes that energeia just means reality, actuality, and that, as its opposite, potency must have reality bestowed upon it by energeia. Put otherwise, it presumes that potency and being-at-work are distinct and incompatible states, which in movement somehow are fused. Thus potency has being only in movement, and not on its own, or only ambiguously. This interpretation is problematic not only because it opposes potency to being-at-work, but also because it makes this position indistinguishable from the Megarian thesis that Aristotle rejects, for it holds that potency only has being when “actualized,” so that a violinist is able to play violin only when he happens to be playing. Thus, without going further into Aristotle’s refutation here, it is clear that for him potency must have a kind of reality of its own—a reality that is not energeia or actuality. The second interpretation, proposed here, is that potency and being-at-work are more radically different, in one way, and
distinguishing the movement-related senses of potency and being-at-work through a discussion of potency, and then to make clear their other senses through a discussion centered on being-at-work.

According to the standard account in the secondary literature, this means that book IX is supposed to develop a further, ontological sense of these words. This is not an impossible reading. However, it is not how Aristotle states his goal. Instead, his aim appears to be less specific, namely to trace out how potency and being-at-work start with movement and come to apply to other things (Met. IX.1 1045b33, IX.6 1048a30). Unfortunately, he does not say immediately what other things to which he thinks they apply, nor why it is important to seek this out. This omission has, of course, generated a considerable amount of literature about how book IX fits with the other core books of the Metaphysics, and about what problems the book sets out to solve.

As it is, Aristotle says merely that potency and being-at-work are more than, or come to apply to other things, or come to mean more (epi pleon), from being motion most of all (Met. IX.1 1046a, IX.3 1047a31). The best candidate for these “other things” is set out clearly in chapter 6: potency and being-at-work are related sometimes as motion to potency, other times as thinghood (ousia) to some material (hule) (Met. IX.6 1048b8). The latter pair is either the goal he seeks in book IX, or a waymarker on the way to this goal. I shall argue that material is the main extension of the concept of potency that Aristotle seeks. The extension of being-at-work to form is not complete until Metaphysics IX.8. I shall also argue that this is not an extension from a non-ontological to an ontological sense of these words. Indeed, if to extend meant to change the meaning of these words, it would not be an extension at all. Instead, the discovery of the full senses of dunamis and energeia concerning movement presents us with another way to describe form and material.

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58 It should be noted that Plato and Aristotle are the thinkers who came up with the concepts of elements (stoikheion, or ‘letter’) and material (hulé, or ‘wood’), so unlike for us, for the Greeks the concept of potency was, by comparison, quite familiar. It is understandable, then, that Aristotle here would be interested in a diversity of ways to work out what they were.
Whether the sense of potency concerning movement is the same as the one relevant to material, foreign to it, or even incompatible with it, is not possible to answer in advance. A careful examination of the senses of potency will show that the reason the further sense seems foreign to the original is not because two senses of potency are basically different, but because we progress from our familiar and confused conception of potency to the discovery of its real, full sense. By understanding the potency of movement properly and fully we find it is different and more surprising than our ordinary familiar conception of movement grasped, and once we truly understand the potency of movement—potency properly speaking—it turns out that it applies to material easily and naturally.

To find out what potency is, the best way seems to be to suppose that we do not already know it, and that we will not be able to derive its meaning from familiarity—especially because of our temporal distance from Aristotle. To discover its meaning, then, we need to examine the different senses of potency to determine the sense on which the others depend—the sense concerning movement. It will turn out that this sense is a helpful way to interpret material. For now, then, our purpose can only be to trace out the senses of potency and how they extend to what is not normally considered to be movement.

III. The Senses of Potency

The Positive Character of Potency

Potency matters to ontology in at least three modal situations: when a thing is actively being a certain way and able to be so, when it is not active, but able to be so, and when it is incapable of being so. To matter in this way, potency must be, as it were, something alongside *energeia*, with complex relations of dependence and independence between them, without being separate things opposed to, or incompatible with one another. In a word, *dunamis* is different than *energeia* or *entelekheia*, but they must in some way be one and the same (*Met.* VIII.6 1045b18).

To frame and motivate the search for such a positive interpretation, and to show that there are resources to work it out, I offer a single consideration, taken from a passage that continues the refutation of the Megarians: *Metaphysics* IX.4. There Aristotle points out a complex and irreducible asymmetry between *energeia* and *dunamis*. He says:
i) if you are actually at-work sitting, then necessarily you must be able to sit\textsuperscript{59}

Although being-at-work implies being-potent, to say that something is at-work-being the case, and is in addition able to be the case, is not to say the same thing. Potency extends a little beyond being-at-work. At very least, being-potent adds to and thereby modifies what is actually the case by including in it the meaning that it need not be the case, that it may not necessarily or simply or always be the case.\textsuperscript{60} Yet it also changes the meaning of being-at-work. Without potency, what is the case would necessarily be the case, and so, Aristotle argues, what is now will necessarily be just the same in the future. But if there is potency as well as being-at-work, then being-at-work sitting does not determine a thing absolutely; actuality is neither the only sense of being nor the entirety of being.

This insight, however, that being-at-work implies being-potent in the relevant way, discovers a principle of symmetry. By contrast, the negation of actuality or being-at-work does not produce a negation of potency. The two are asymmetrical:

ii) if you are not actually at-work sitting now, we cannot conclude from this either that you are able or that you are unable to do so. We would have to determine this in some other way.

This means that we cannot simply read potency off of \textit{energeia} but have to grasp it in some other way. The necessity to do this shows that potency is different from and cannot be reduced to actuality or necessity. From the negation of being-at-work, nothing follows. By contrast, as we saw above, the negation or absence of potency has implications for what actually is at work, for

iii) the \textit{incapacity} to sit implies that sitting is and never will be the case.

\textsuperscript{59} If there are bodiless, separate \textit{energeiai} that do not have potencies, as some argue, presumably an exception would be made to this rule.

\textsuperscript{60} However, that the removal of potency makes something necessarily impossible suggests that necessity also depends upon potency, though in a different way than determinism depends upon causal forces in more recent debates. A full discussion of potency and necessity must wait for another occasion.
Together with the preceding points, this last helps us to mark out the place a positive account of potency should occupy. Potency is not simply deduced from being-at-work, since the latter’s absence implies nothing about potency, but if the reverse is the case, and a thing’s being-potent is removed, then its being-at-work will not be either. The fact that removing potency necessarily changes energēia shows indirectly that the addition of potency will also change energēia, but we still need to grasp what this means.

The implication of being-at-work is that there is also the appropriate potency, while the deprivation of a capacity implies the deprivation of being-at-work as well. Being-at-work implies the additional fact of being capable of being so, but being incapable implies a limitation of the actual. In short, potency is over and alongside being-at-work, and something on the existence of which being-at-work depends. It is here that an account of the compatibility of energēia and dunamis must discover this positive character, in the cases in which a thing is both potential and actual at the same time.

This positive character of potency is easier to see if it is removed, sterētai.61 Put otherwise, to be actually the case, what is at work needs and implies the relevant potency, so that when this potency is removed (i.e. sterētai), energēia also cannot be. Expressed positively, potency is something different than being-at-work that lets it be or not be, and on which it depends in some way if it is to be. Since energēia seems to depend on dunamis in this way, Aristotle is in several places at pains to show that potency is not prior to or more fundamental than being-at-work.

The conclusions, are these: a) energēia necessarily implies potency, but b) the lack of energēia has no necessary implication for potency. However, c) the deprivation of potency is impossibility, which means d) the deprivation of potency necessarily implies a deprivation of actuality, therefore e) positive potency has some kind of meaning for actuality, which we must determine more directly.

Both being-at-work and capacity exert necessary claims on one another, the first by being, the other by being removed. Potency is most conspicuous in the space between the

61 The sterēsis is visible here in the alpha-privative adynaton. It does not follow that potency is related to actuality only through sterēsis, however, nor does it follow that potency is in any way the limitation of actuality, as Aquinas would come to argue, since here sterēsis and not potency is the limit of actuality.
necessity implied by actuality and the necessity implied by impossibility, the space in which a thing is able to be the case, but not at-work being that way. But it is critically important to grasp that the nature of potency is there in each of the three situations described, that is, when a thing is at work, when it is not but is able to be, and when it is not able and impossible. Potency is not only an unexercised ability, nor is it a mere possibility that barely evades being impossible. It is something positive about being.

It is clear that conceiving of potency as the opposite of actuality makes such an analysis quite impossible. In addition, this subtlety and ontological positivity makes Aristotle’s account of potency quite different than many contemporary accounts. Potency has often, in the history of philosophy, been degraded into possibility, a kind of bare logical possibility, a faint reminder that things could still be otherwise, a sense which Aristotle subordinates to the robust sense of potency in Met. IX.4.62

Brentano, for example, observes that the modern concept of possibility “completely abstracts from the reality of that which is called possible, and merely claims that something could exist if its existence did not involve a contradiction,” making it “a merely rational thing.”63 One might add that this bare concept of possibility is generated as the negative image of the notion of logical impossibility. But possibility in this sense is not an aspect or part or power of things. For a real thing to be possible is for there to be a rich positive character of potency: for it to be really possible for a person to fly, unassisted, is for her to have a body structure very different from that

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62 The idea, for example, that there are possible worlds, and that all of these possible worlds actually exist, seems plausible when one’s concept of potency and actuality have shallowed out and almost entirely lost its meaning, so that potency is hardly distinguishable from what is actually the case. This, Lewis’s position, is a kind of inverted image of the Megarian thesis: where the Megarians held potency to be only where something is at work, Lewis holds that actuality is wherever there is possibility.

63 “There is a great difference between what we here mean by the potential [the dynaton or dynamei on] and what in more recent times is meant by calling something possible in contrast with real, where the necessary is added as a third thing. This is a possibility which completely abstracts from the reality of that which is called possible, and merely claims that something could exist if its existence did not involve a contradiction. It does not exist in things but in the objective concepts and combinations of concepts of the thinking mind; it is a merely rational thing. Aristotle was quite familiar with the concept of possibility so understood, as we can see from De Interpretatione, but it bears no relation to what he calls potential being...” Brentano, Senses of Being, 27-28.
of a human being. Aristotle argues that mere possibility depends on potency in the richer sense
(Met. IX.4).

Aristotle’s discovery here is part of a robust, positive account of potency, for which he
provides amply. What distinguishes the approach in the reading that follows, then, is that it
concentrates on how Aristotle’s account provides us with a non-derivative, positive sense of
potency that is both the same, but not identical to being-at-work, and different from it without
being opposed.

The Pattern of Many Senses

As we saw in III.1.ii, the argument for the heterogeneity of being is one of the most
lasting and provocative of Aristotle’s arguments. He holds that “being and one start out already
having kinds (γένη)” (Met. IV.2 1004a4).64 In the Physics his demand that Parmenides specify in
which sense being is one, is one of the great acts in the history of philosophy (Phys. I.2).
Nevertheless, his discussions of the several meanings of terms invariably aim to uncover a
relationship between these meanings, not by looking for their lowest common meaning, but by
the highest and fullest expression, a focal sense upon which other meanings depend. The lower
meanings are dependent on the higher without being derivative from or deduced from the
higher, or from each other. For example, for Aristotle, ‘what sort’ is not deduced from ‘how
much,’ or either of these from being a this (tote ti). His discussion of potency is the same in this
respect as each of the others in the discussions of terms in Metaphysics V: he distinguishes their
senses and thereby shows upon what core sense they depend.

Movement is part of the description of all three senses of potency. The primary sense of
potency is that 1) it “is a source of change in another or in itself as other” (Met. IX.1 1046a11, cf.
V.12 1019a16).65 This primary meaning leads to other, derivative senses that Aristotle
distinguishes: 2) a source of being moved by another, and 3) the ability to change into opposites,
for example, from being healthy to being sick, or from sickness to health.66 He puts it this way:

64 ὑπάρχει γὰρ εὐθὺς γένη ἔχον τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ἐν
65 ἦ ἐστιν ἄρχη μεταβολῆς ἐν ἄλλῳ ἢ ἦ ἄλλῳ
66 We could ask: is potency an ability to change, or an ability to be opposite things, and derivatively the
ability to change, or do these have the same meaning?
what is capable will mean in one way what has a source of motion or change... in something else or as something else, and in one way even if some other thing has such a power over it, and in one way even if it has a power to change in any direction whatever, whether for the worse or for the better. *Met.* V.12 1019a34-1019b3.\(^{67}\)

Potency implies two kinds of duality: 1) that something can be either of two opposed things, such as healthy or sick, and 2) that there are two things in complementary roles: an active one and one that undergoes a change.\(^{68}\) In both cases, potency constitutes the duality and the continuity or identity of those opposites, but in neither case is potency itself an opposite.

We shall work our way from lowest sense—the mere ability to be opposites—to the first, primary sense and then to the extended sense of *dunamis*. The extension of the concept is not articulated in *Met.* IV.5, the book on the senses of words, from which this quotation comes, but in *Metaphysics* IX. This on its own indicates that Aristotle is not working out a separate or independent sense of potency, and that the sense of potency that illuminates material is neither separate nor opposed to the sense related to movement, but is instead the full sense of potency as potency—and movement is the being-at-work of the potent being as *potent*.

### IV. The Capacity for Opposites

What is potent is usually, but not always, capable of opposites. There are two kinds of opposite that Aristotle implicitly distinguishes: on the one hand, acting or not acting, and on the other, producing opposite results. The planets, for example, only have the potency to act; their potency is not for contradictories. In fact, shortly after arguing that *energeia* is thinghood (*ousia*), Aristotle limits the potencies that are capable of (at least) this kind of opposition to a particular group, namely those for which the thinghood (*ousia*) is not *energeia*, but potency and also material (IX.8).\(^{69}\) To these potencies for acting or not acting, we have to add potencies that produce opposites, such as potencies having *logos* (*Met.* IX.5 1048a7).

\(^{67}\) Sachs, trans.

\(^{68}\) In *Met.* IX.9 he brings up another kind of opposition, namely between whether something is acting or not.

\(^{69}\) ἢ γὰρ οὐσία ὀλη καὶ δύναμις οὕσα, οὐκ ἐνέργεια, αἰτία τοῦτο. The passage at greater length, in Sachs’s translation: "Nor do they grow weary in doing this [revolve], since for them motion does not concern the potency for a pair of contradictory things, as it does for destructible things... for the cause of this is
It must be said that both of these categories are very problematic: the first because it conflicts with Aristotle’s argument that what is potent necessarily acts when the conditions are right, and even argues that the description of a potency includes in it the conditions of its action (Met. IX.5): a hot stone has the potential to heat things *that are cooler than it*, and will always do so when something cooler is next to it. On this account, it is unclear how this could ever *not act*. The second is problematic to the extent that Aristotle has to argue that if a potency has *logos*, for example, being a doctor or housebuilder, and can produce opposite results, ultimately that is not the source of motion, but instead desire or choice is (Met. IX.2 and 5). But if this is the case, in what sense is it really potency? However this question may be, we are left with the difficulty of working out what it is to be capable of opposites.

A solution is available both by a theoretical path and one that proceeds by examples. Since opposites are contradictory, it will serve us well to examine Aristotle’s account of non-contradiction. In Met. IV, drawing on Physics 1.7-8, Aristotle uses potency to save the principle of non-contradiction when it comes to worldly things, that is, things able to be otherwise. He argues that the same thing at the same time is contrary things potentially, but not in full activity (Met. IV.5 1009a33). A stone *is* hot *and* cold in the sense that it *can be either* while it is at-work being only one.\(^70\) It is in this way that Aristotle can say that the same thing (e.g. a statue) can both be (potentially), and not be (at-work) at the same time. So in a certain way the statue comes to be out of not-being (at-work), but in another sense it comes out of being (potentially). Thus, he says, those who believe that contradictories and contraries obtain (*huparchein*) at the same time are in a way right, and in a way wrong (Met. IV.5 1009a22).

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\(^70\) This passage reinforces the earlier claim that potency and being-at-work must be compatible. For Aristotle claims that a thing is capable of these opposites simultaneously, while, say, a stone must *actually* be-at-work being hot or cold. So if it is hot, the thing must be capable of being hot, and at-work being hot at the same time. Thus, potency and being-at-work must be compatible with one another.
Potency is not a mix of these opposites, however. It does not yoke together contradictories into a kind of self-contradictory fusion or mixture. Nor could we define potency itself as the opposite of whichever of them happens to be the case, that is, as the opposite of the being-at-work (*energeia*), for then it would be impossible for a thing to be what it is at-work-being. If it did either of these, then potency would violate the very principle of non-contradiction that it is supposed to save. So potency must be something, and it is sometimes of opposites, but it is neither an opposite nor is it both of the opposites at once.

We can grasp this more rigorously by turning to *Metaphysics* IX.9, where Aristotle argues both that potency is a capacity for opposites, and that a thing is at the same time both potentially and actually one of these. It is clear from this passage that potency is the name for the fact that someone at-work being healthy implies that she can also be sick, and that, because of this, that health or sickness will necessarily belong to this being here at different times:

So far as *something* is meant as a potent thing, that very thing is capable of opposites. For instance, the very thing that we say to be potentially healthy is the same as what *we say to be potentially* sick, and *also* at the same time, for the same potency is of being healthy and falling ill, or of being at rest and of being at motion, or of building up and of knocking down, or of being built and of falling down. Therefore, the potent thing obtains under (*huparchei*) opposites at the same time, though the opposite things are unable *to obtain* at the same time, just as the *opposite* activities cannot obtain (*huparchein*) at the same time, for example being healthy and being sick. (*Met. IX.9 1051a5-13*)

In his description of the way potency is related to opposites, Aristotle avoids making potency into a being or into another state of being-at-work. He is careful *not* to say that potency is a continuum between healthy and sick that makes these the same, nor even that potency is the *kind* of thing that can be both/either healthy or sick. These ways of expressing the situation imply an indifference or independence of the potency to each way of being-at-work, as though potency was a third thing separate from the person at work being sick or healthy, which would be a mix

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71 ὡσα γὰρ κατὰ τὸ δύνασθαι λέγεται, ταῦτὰν ἐστι δυνατὸν τάναντια, οἷον τὸ δύνασθαι λεγόμενον ὑγαίνειν ταῦταν ἐστι καὶ τὸ νοσεῖν, καὶ ἀμα: ἡ αὐτὴ γὰρ δύναμις τοῦ ὑγαίνειν καὶ κάμνειν, καὶ ἱρεμεῖν καὶ κινεῖται, καὶ οἰκοδομεῖται καὶ καταβάλλειν, καὶ οἰκοδομεῖσθαι καὶ καταπλῆειν. τὸ μὲν οὖν δύνασθαι τάναντια ἀμα ὑπάρχει: τὰ δὲ ἑναντιὰ ἀμα ἀδώνατον, καὶ τὰς ἐνεργείας δὲ ἀμα ἀδώνατον ὑπάρχειν οἶον ὑγαίνειν καὶ κάμνειν
Potency is not a thing apart from the person who is healthy, or, which is the same thing, from her actively being healthy. Potency is not something other than the person at-work: 1) that very thing which is able to be healthy is also at the same time and for that very reason able to be sick, 2) that thing with this ability can only be one of these at any one time, either healthy or sick, or something in-between, 3) the thing with this ability must be one of these.

It is not possible to separate these propositions from one another, for they imply one another. Yet it is equally impossible to reduce them to a single expressive characteristic. Nevertheless, they are the same, and the name for this single complex is potency. Potency is specific and inseparable from the actual constitution of a particular body (as 2 and 3 show). Yet the potency implies that this body has something general about it, namely a continuity between hot and cold, healthy or sick (as shown by 1) that can be marked off in speech. Put more precisely, in this description, potency expresses the inseparability of a singular body from a general opposition that necessarily includes something counter-factual, namely what it is not and cannot now be. Potency makes room in the actual, relates other cases and what can be the case to what is the case.\textsuperscript{72}

V. The Unity of Potencies

In the first chapter of \textit{Metaphysics} IX, Aristotle observes that there are two ways potency is said of things: in one sense the potency of things is two, since a potency is in each thing, and in

\textsuperscript{72} This passage seems to conflict with \textit{Physics} III.1 in which Aristotle says τὸ μὲν γὰρ δύνασθαι ὑγαῖναι καὶ δύνασθαι κάμνειν ἔτερον—καὶ γὰρ δὲν τὸ κάμνειν καὶ τὸ ὑγαῖνον ταὐτὸν ἐστὶν—τὸ δὲ ὑποκείμενον καὶ τὸ ἕνεκεν καὶ τὸ νοσοῦν, ἢ μὲν ὑγρότης ἢ ἄμμα, ταὐτὸν καὶ ἕν. “Being-capable-of-health (\textit{to dunasthai hugiainein}) and being-capable-of-illness are different, for if they were not, being-ill and being-healthy would be the same, yet what underlies both the health and the sickness, be it fluid or blood—is the same and one.” (\textit{Phys.} III.1 201b). How to reconcile these? The passage in the \textit{Physics} establishes a difference between the underlying material thing (e.g. bronze, color) and that for which it is potent (a statue, being seen). On this analysis, the underlying thing has two kinds of potency or capacity: of health, and of illness. In this way, we grasp the distinction more easily between potency and the underlying material, by thinking potency or capacity as a kind of attribute inhereing in an underlying thing. In \textit{Metaphysics} book VIII, however, Aristotle extended the concept of potency dramatically by saying that material is “that which, while not being actively \textit{a this, is a this potentially}” (\textit{Met.} VIII.1 1042a28). This means that the blood is considered blood only insofar as it is able to be part of an animal. It is, after all, only \textit{as capable of} being an animal that blood is able to underlie sickness and health. Thus in the later text, potency is not any longer an attribute or a possession in something underlying; the capacities are located at a more fundamental level. See below.
another sense the potency of several things is one. This latter sense is unexpected for some common interpretations of potency: we are normally inclined to think that potency is a being or an attribute of particular beings, rather than a system of things or, as he says here, a way that these beings are one. Indeed, potency is not a state or attribute predicated of things at all, since it is not one of the categories. Instead, it is a way a being is, which it is because of other things as well as because of itself:

something is potential both through having the same potency to be acted upon, and through another <having the potency to be acted upon> by it. (Met. IX.1 1046a21)\(^73\)

One might mishear this passage as saying that when a thing has a potency two things must be present: its power to act, and the something’s power to be acted upon by it. However, this is not at all what the passage says. It says that a thing has a potency because it has the same potency to act upon something that something else has to be acted upon by it. When one thing is potent, it implies the following: 1) there is another thing with the same potency, and 2) this potency is the power to act and be acted upon in the relevant respect.\(^74\) Thus, a stone has the power of heat because 1) there are things that can be heated by it, and 2) it can be heated.\(^75\)

\(^{73}\) δύνατον γάρ ἐστι καὶ τῷ ἔχειν αὐτὸ δύναμιν τοῦ παθεῖν καὶ τῷ ἄλλῳ ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ

\(^{74}\) Put otherwise, the agent’s ability to act is there because there is something able to be acted upon by it in the relevant respect, and because it is able to be acted upon in this same respect. One might object that the hot stone loses its ability to heat when the potency of other things to be heated is exhausted. This description, however, is counter-intuitive, for the mere fact that two things have reached equilibrium of temperature does not imply that they have lost the potency for heating or being heated. The situation would be better described by saying that it is not the potency to heat or be heated which has vanished, but the activity of heating, or more exactly, that the activity of being hot (which means ‘hotter than’) is no longer there. On this interpretation the stone’s ability to heat is the same as its power to be heated, which is a more natural reading of the passage.

\(^{75}\) Of potencies of non-living things he says the following: ὅτιν ὡς δύναται το ποιητικόν καὶ το παθητικόν πλησιάζειν, τὸ μὲν ποιητὸν τὸ δὲ πάσχειν… “whenever, in the way they are potential, an acting thing and a thing that undergoes action come near each other, <it is necessary that> the one act and the other be acted upon.” (Met. IX.5 1048a7-8). This passage does not say that the activity is in one thing and the potency to be acted upon is in another. Nor does it say that the power to act is in one thing, while the power to be acted upon is in another. Aristotle begins with the words ὡς δύναται, “as they are potential,” highlighting that both the active and the acted-upon thing have the same relevant potential. This confirms the argument, above, that to be potent is to be able to act on or be acted upon in the same respect, by showing that the agent and patient have the same potency.
Therefore, since another thing must also have the ability to heat and be heated, separate things have in a way the same potency, though in different things. A stone and water both have the potency that implies they have temperature, namely that they can heat and be heated by one another. Potency as the capacity to change other things requires others. Put another way, when one thing moves another, the two already have or come to have something in common; the mutual movement of things is a way that being is one.76

That this is Aristotle’s position becomes clearer in chapter five of Metaphysics IX. There, of potencies of non-living things he says the following:

> whenever, in the way they are potent, an acting thing and a thing that undergoes action come near each other, it is necessary that the one act and the other be acted upon. (Met. IX.5 1048a7-8)77

This passage does not say that the activity is in one thing and the potency to be acted upon is in another. Nor does it say that the power to act is in one thing, while the power to be acted upon is in another. Aristotle begins with the words ἡσος δυνανται, “in the way they are potent,” highlighting that both the active and the acted-upon thing have the same relevant potential. For these things to be potent is to be able to act on or be acted upon in the same respect. They are one in a parallel way to the extent that the activity of heating is of the one and in the other (Phys. III.3). For example, a stone and water are one to the extent that both have the same potency, from which what we name temperature is derived, with its opposite poles of hot and cold, and the ability of things to change from one to the other.

This positive nature of potency—that a thing is potent because of a way it is the same or one with others—shows that potency is, but is not itself a being, because it is one thing in two beings.78

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76 It seems that multiple sources are required in a movement: the learner needs a potency for being changed, and the teacher needs the potency to change the learner. The sameness of different beings through potency has an analogy in being-at-work as well. The being-at-work of the learning student is at the same time precisely the activity of the teacher in the student. This leads Aristotle to add that the same thing—in this case, the activity that teaching and learning both point out—can belong to two things without being the same for each; for this teacher does not need to be learning, but the motion of learning is this teacher’s being-at-work in this student (Physics III.3 202b6-25).

77 ὅταν ὡς δύναναι τὸ ποιητικὸν καὶ τὸ παθητικὸν πλησιάζει, τὸ μὲν ποιεῖν τὸ δὲ πάσχειν…
VI. Potency To Be Unaffected

The sense in which potency is double, namely that the potency to heat is in this being, and the potency to be heated is in that other being, has a further determination. If the hypothesis that potency is opposed to or incompatible with actuality and perfection were correct, one would expect that in the chapters devoted to the meanings of potency Aristotle would describe potency as lacking or as falling short of a form. But in that chapter we find Aristotle arguing not just something different, but arguing precisely the opposite: potency, he says there, is not something lacking but something positive opposed to lack: “things are broken and crushed and bent and in general destroyed not by being potent but by being impotent and falling short of something” (Met. V.12 1019a28-31). Being immune to a disease is to be potent, while being able to get the disease is to be impotent. That which makes a thing unaffected or unchangeable is called a potency, so the source of being changed might more properly be called a source of being unchanged.

This remark is repeated at the beginning of Metaphysics IX: potency is “an active condition of being unaffected for the worse or for destruction by the action of a source of change” (Met. IX.1 1046a13-14). It seems to conflict with the two of the senses of potency distinguished above. Here it is not to be able to be something or its opposite, but to be the positive term of that pair.

More strikingly, however, is that Aristotle clearly means this to be a description of the sense of potency appropriate to movement (Met. IX.1 1046a). If so, there are these options before

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78 Now, one might object that this aspect of potency makes beings depend on other beings. In one sense it seems as though a thing’s potency changes immediately depending on the things around it, since a hot water bottle might be able to heat something, but when nothing nearby is cooler than it, or for other reasons nothing can be heated by it, the hot water bottle does not have that ability either. The objection would be that a thing’s ability to be heated seems as though it would change due to the presence or absence of other beings, and not due to a change in the being itself. But Aristotle has two replies available to him: 1) to resolve this problem, Aristotle will argue that the potency must have within it the criteria under which it can act. For example, the hot water bottle never had the ability to heat anything that is hotter than it. 2) A thing’s potency for being heated or heating does not change due to the immediate presence or absence of something heatable or hot. Instead, he could argue that this sense of potency is a permanent aspect of a thing, since a thing that can be cooled will always be able to be cooled because its being is, e.g. bodily, or has this kind of body. We shall return to this shortly.

79 Sachs, trans.
us: either he means that i) the highest sense of movement-potency is simply to be unaffected by other things, in which case the paradigm case of potency will be what actively stays complete and at rest, as natural things do insofar as they stay themselves by moving and maintaining themselves, ii) to be unaffected by other things but to originate change in them, as the first mover does, or iii) to be unaffected by other things but to originate change in itself, as the first mobile does. Unfortunately, here it is not possible to discuss which of these is true, or if any of them are false, but our current task does not depend on the answer.

Potency, in this sense, is properly that which is continuously active in a certain way as something that remains unchanged in a specific respect, and which may or may not change an other.

VII. The Spontaneity of Potency

So far, we have seen three positive aspects of potency when it comes to movement: 1) something healthy or able to be healthy implies in addition that it can be sick by undergoing some change, 2) for one thing to be potent implies that other things are potent, and in addition that when these are together, and without outside provocation, they will be at work (energeia) changing one another, e.g. heating or cooling, and 3) for each of these things the highest potency is to be unaffected, as, for example, a capable tenor does not lose his voice in singing an aria. But, according to Aristotle, potency has another positive sense, which is already implied in these, and which we might call its spontaneity. The spontaneity of potency we are about to discuss is the threshold of the extended sense of potency: it is necessary for and basic to the senses of potency proper to movement, but, as we shall see in the following section, it applies to other things as well, namely to material and form.

In similar and often-cited passages in the Physics and On the Soul, Aristotle argues that being is meant in two ways: a being that is able to know and one who is at-work knowing are both knowers in different ways. Thus, i) a person learning geometry potentially knows geometry in a different way than ii) a person who knows geometry but is asleep or not at-work knowing it. The difference he points out between these ways of being potent is that a person who knows will immediately (euthus) contemplate, that is, be energieia unless something prevents her, whereas a
person learning geometry needs another source for her to know (Physica VIII.4 255a32-255b6, cf. Soul II.5 417a11-13). Movement implies sources other than or outside of a thing; where a thing does not require other sources, there will not be movement, but, as we shall see, there may be activity. When these sources are there, it will immediately occur.

The full meaning of potency is actually in conflict with one of the derivative senses: where previously Aristotle said that the potency of one thing implies that of another, here he argues that what requires another source for it to be potent is not in-potency (dunamei) properly speaking. If we take the statement seriously, it means that something is potent, simply, when it is, in the absence of other enabling or obstructing sources, able to be at work.

This argument proceeds through examples of technē, poiēsis, and phusis in Met. IX.7. He begins by reaffirming that potency is something distinct from what is the case simply, saying, that potency is a meaning that inheres in things without being simply what they are (in the way we have seen above). He then argues that a thing is potent properly speaking only when, in the absence of obstacles, it is in-potency:

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80 There is a parallel passage in On the Soul II.5, in which Aristotle observes that we say that a being perceives, that is, that he is a perceiving thing, both when he is sleeping, and when he is awake and at-work perceiving. Yet it is also clear that “he perceives” is said of him differently, in the one case, he perceives by being potent, and the other, by being at work (Soul II.5 417a11-13). 2) In Physica VIII.4 Aristotle gives the example of learning: i) a person learning geometry potentially knows geometry in a different way than i) a person who knows geometry but is asleep or not at-work knowing it. The difference between these ways of being potent is that a person who knows will immediately (eũθύζ) contemplate, that is, be energēia or unless something prevents her, whereas a person learning geometry needs another source for her to know (Physica VIII.4 255a32-255b6). Put otherwise, in the case of learning there is a distinction between the different sources of movement and what is moved. This source can be a teacher, or it can be the thing that the person is to know, for example a truth of geometry. For not all knowledge is taught, but the truth itself can be a teacher, or can inspire a person to remove obstacles on the way to it (Met. I.3 984b10). And just as a doctor can heal himself, though he is healed as a patient and not as a doctor, a person can teach himself, but learn as a student and not as a teacher. The potency to be changed in this way is not passive, for the student is the one who is at work learning. The student’s ability to learn rises up when it is with knowledge that is at-work.

81 The sense of being a knower in potency nevertheless depends on the activity of knowing. Therefore, the clarification of this sense of potency depends on understanding its relation to energēia. Since movement depends on the sameness and difference between dynamis and energēia, Aristotle aims to develop an extended sense of both by starting from this complex and extending the sense to other things. This is why, once he introduces energēia to the description, Aristotle returns in the next chapter in Metaphysics IX to distinguish “when each thing in potency and when not... since it is not the case at just any time whatever” (Met. IX.7 1049a).
not everything can be healed, by either medical skill or chance, but there is something that is potential, and this is what is healthy in potency. But the mark of what comes to be in complete activity out of what has being in potency, as a result of thinking, is that, whenever it is desired it comes about when nothing outside prevents it, and there, in the thing healed, whenever nothing in it prevents it. And it is similar too with a potential house; if nothing in this or in the material for becoming a house stands in the way, and there is nothing that needs to have been added or taken away or changed, this is potentially a house, and it is just the same with all other things of which the source of coming into being is external. And of all those things in which coming into being is by means of something they have in themselves, those are in potency which will be on their own if nothing outside blocks their way, for instance, the semen is not yet potential, since it has to be in something else [the womb], and to change, but whenever it is already such [i.e. potential] by its own source of motion [and not another source], it is from that point on in potency, though in that previous condition it has need of another source… (Met. IX.7 1049a3-14)82

In both of the first two examples we see the description of potency start with the initiative of an outside source of movement, the builder or the doctor, and conclude with an innate potency, the power of the stones to hold together as a house, and the power of the patient to be healthy. It is crucial to understand that the being-in-potency, properly speaking is not the starting point opposite the goal or end of change. On the contrary, being-in-potency is the result of the change, at which the change aims, its goal or completion, its telos.

To the extent that a patient needs a doctor, she needs an outside source to get a hold of health, that is, to gain the potency or power to be healthy, and once she has it, she will be healthy unless something prevents her. It is not the doctor’s technē that heals, but nature: it is she who heals herself, and the expertise of healing is the activity of removing the obstacles to her being healthy. Next, in the example of building, potency here has the same meaning: the wood and stone is cut and sanded, the glue and mortar mixed, and once all the materials are prepared, they are potentially or in-potency a house.83

82 Sachs, trans., emended.
83 There is an ambiguity in this description, however, that must be cleared up. For Aristotle could either mean 1) that the wood and stone are potent for being a house once the material is shaped into something appropriate for being a house, such as beams and square stones, or 2) that the wood and stone are a potential house only when there is no work left to do in building the house, that is, when the materials have been fitted together, and from that moment on both are a house and are able to be a house on their own, with no need of a builder or other outside source to hold themselves together. Heidegger
We can now answer our question: what does it mean for something to be in-potency (\textit{dunamei})\footnote{The ways of being or modal interpretation of the dative formulation ‘in-potency’ takes it to be an actual state, e.g. being able to know, but not actively knowing, that is opposed to an actual state of being something, e.g. actively knowing. This interpretation seems inadmissible in the examples of being-in-potency that Aristotle gives in Met. IX.6. Let us look at one pair of examples: “Hermes in a block of wood or a half line in the whole, because they can be separated out, or someone who knows, \textit{even when he is not contemplating (if he is capable of contemplating)}” (Met. IX.6 1048a32, emphasis added). The modal approach as it is currently formulated takes being-in-potency to be an actual state opposite to energeia, that is, being-in-potency is a state defined as the non-being of the relevant activity. But this interpretation is impossible. It is not possible for a half-line to exist, except \textit{within a whole line}. Cutting a line in two and separating it from the rest of the line does not create a half-line, but several whole lines. There are only divisible whole lines. The half line in-potency clearly exists at the same time as the whole line of which it is a half, just as being a knower in-potency must be the case at the same time as being-at-work knowing.} Aristotle does not say here, as he did two chapters before, that in the absence of obstacles a thing is at-work (\textit{Met. IX.5} 1048a7-8). Instead, he says that in the absence of these obstacles, the thing is in-potency on its own. But otherwise, these two cases are strictly parallel.

Therefore, the most natural interpretation is to say that something truly in-potency is at-work doing what it has the capacity to do. The contrast, then, is between merely having a potency, and it being a full active condition that is or can be at work. A person with hands \textit{has} the ability to play the violin, but is not a \textit{violin-player}. For something to “possess a potency” is for it to be

makes the first argument, that \textit{dynamis} means appropriateness for... a \textit{telos} in the sense of an end, that is, a being-finished-off. Movement, he argues, is the change of the wood into a table, in such a way that the very appropriateness of the wood for a table becomes more and more \textit{visible} as the table takes shape. Put otherwise, wood is potency, that is, it is appropriate for being a table, but its appropriateness becomes most apparent, and reaches its completion when it is a table. Heidegger, “\textit{Physics B, I},” 355. Heidegger also argues that when the movement is completed, what is there is \textit{no longer} wood, but instead a table made \textit{out of} wood, that is, it is something wooden. So the full expression of the wood as wood (i.e. as \textit{dynamis}) is precisely to be the table, and \textit{dynamis no longer}. Therefore the \textit{entelekhēia} of something appropriate is its \textit{morpē}, namely the changing of the appropriate so that it \textit{breaks out} of its appropriateness. This point (1), however, cannot stand on its own, but must be folded into point (2), for the potency of wood and stone to be a house would increase as they are shaped by and fitted together into a house. More precisely, it is not until they fit together that they are themselves able to be a house. Before, they were only able to lie on the ground in piles, but now that they have been put together, they are together able to be a house. The final example, of natural things, follows the same pattern. Semen is not yet potential, but requires an outside source to be moved into a state of potency, and when it has been, it is from then on able to live. Thus to be able to live is to live, unless something gets in the way. It is notable that potency in the proper sense is the ability to live, for there is no separation, opposition, or contradiction between the ability to live and the activity of living. One arises continuously from the other, and they differ, as Aristotle pointed out at the beginning of this passage, yet to remove either the ability to live or the activity would be the immediate death of the thing. \textit{Potency and activity are so inseparable that a thing is not potent in the proper sense unless it acts without inhibition.}
possible on the basis of, say, the bodily constitution of the being, while the second is in some sense the being of that thing, which is still different from the exercise of that being. This applies to Aristotle's usual examples exactly: the builder, whether he is building or not, the knower, even if he is not now at-work knowing (Met. IX.6 1048a31). Thus, we can say that a thing is in-potency when its power gives rise to its proper activity simply and without reservation and in the absence of outside opposition or support. To be in-potency is to be in the condition in which activity spontaneously emerges at the appropriate time, or is currently emerging.

Two chapters before, having established the idea that what is potent acts unless prevented, Aristotle refined it. In Metaphysics IX.5, he went as far as to say that in describing a potency it is not necessary to add a set of conditions under which a thing could act, because unless these conditions are met, the thing "will not be capable of acting" (Met. IX.5 1048a16). In other words, a thing is potent properly speaking only when all the obstacles to it acting have been removed and activity is already flowing from it:

it is never necessary to add to the definition [of a potency] "when nothing from outside obstructs it," for having a potency or being potent is being capable of acting, and this is not in every way but when things are in certain ways, in which ways the obstructions from outside will be distinguished or cast out, since these are removed by some things in the definition. Met. IX.5 1048a16-22.86

This statement shows how close his position is to the Megarian position discussed in the immediately preceding chapters: potency and energeia are so very close that whenever a thing fulfills the proper description of its potency, that is, when it can be properly said to be potent it will surely be-at-work.86 It is for this reason that Aristotle points out that, far from being

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85 τὸ γὰρ μηθενὸς τῶν ἐξω κωλύοντος προσδιορίζεσθαι οὐθὲν ἐπὶ δεῖ: τὴν γὰρ δύναμιν ἔχει ὡς ἔστι δύναμις τοῦ ποιεῖν, ἔστι δ’ οὐ πάντως ἄλλ’ ἐγγύτατον πῶς, ἐν οἷς ἀπεριστήκεται καὶ τὰ ἐξω κωλύοντα: ἀναφέρεται γὰρ ταύτα τῶν ἐν τῷ διορισμῷ προσόντων ἔννοια.

86 He says this without any mention that a potency ceases to be potent at the moment it acts, as the opposition hypothesis would require. Instead, the argument 1) that having a potency or being potent is being capable of acting, τὴν γὰρ δύναμιν ἔχει ὡς ἔστι δύναμις τοῦ ποιεῖν, makes it plausible that for actions that have a source in an other, whenever that potency ceased, the acting would also, and 2) that the description of potency includes the context in which a thing acts, shows not only that potency is compatible with the thing being-at-work, but even that some or all being-at-work may require such a description, and therefore that the description of being-at-work in these senses includes the potency that it describes. This confirms the description of physics as a discipline that must study both a thing
opposites, *dunamis* and *entelekheia* can be confused with one another, as the Megarians had done. Potency and *energeia* are so very close that whenever a thing fulfills the conditions for being potent, it will surely be-at-work.

**VIII. Potency as Being**

We can confirm this reading and show how potency *is* through two examples: first, that being-in-potency in the sense we have just discussed is precisely what is called a first *entelekheia* in *On the Soul*. There, “having life as potency” *is* the being-in-its-completeness of a natural body (*On the Soul* II.1 412a20, 28). This idea is a serious problem with the conventional interpretation of potency and actuality as opposites. In II.5 of *On the Soul*, Aristotle points out that, far from being obviously opposed, being-in-its-completeness and potency so far appear to be the same, but that they need to be distinguished (*Soul* 417a21). He makes no attempt to argue that potency in this sense or what is in-potency *is not* actual or complete. Nor does he distinguish them absolutely. The distinction he makes is that there is a further condition that is also *entelekheia*, but even more so, *most of all* in-its-completeness, namely, being-at-work (*energeia*).

Second, in an example strictly parallel to this latter passage in *On the Soul* II.5, it is instructive to turn to Aristotle’s account of potency in *Physics* VIII.4. Aristotle makes the point very clearly that when a thing properly or fully *is* potent, when a thing’s being is this potency, or in our earlier language, when it is a being-in-potency, when this potency *is*, it is immediately at-work. He uses fire and lightness as examples: “by the time [a thing] is light, it will immediately be at work, unless something prevents it.”87 Here “being light” is potency. He goes on to say that “what is cold is potentially hot, but when it has changed [and become hot], by the time it is fire, it burns, unless something prevents it and gets in the way” (*Physics* VIII.4 255b6-9).

We can work this out as follows: the example of fire is an analogy to illustrate the distinction between two senses of the ability to know. The cold thing is analogous to the learner, for the cold thing cannot be hot on its own, just as the learner cannot know on his own. Strictly speaking, the analogy for knowing as potency, namely, the ability to know, should be the ability

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87 καὶ ἠδή κόψων, καὶ ἐνεργήσει γ’ εὖθυς

and its material, that is, all work done by and to a body or material (*Physics* II.2, *Soul* I.1 403a29-403b19).
to be fire or the ability to be hot. But the potencies Aristotle names are not ‘the ability to be fire’ and ‘the ability to know.’ Instead, knowledge as potency has as its counterpart being fire. To be potent in this way is to be fire. Now, if potency means a thing is capable of acting when it is not currently acting, just as knowledge as potency is not necessarily actively knowing, it should be the case that a thing can be fire, but not be burning. This is just what Aristotle claims: when it is fire, unless prevented, it will burn. What is potent in the full sense will be-at-work unless prevented.

If we read the passage as an attempt to figure out which is entelekheia most of all—potency or being-at-work—then the difficulty of answering the question is clear. What really is potent is so complete that it acts immediately and invariably when the conditions fit the potency. It is also the case that this makes potency difficult to distinguish from being-at-work. The two only ever seem to appear together, at the same time. In addition, a thing’s capacity to act usually recedes from view behind the activity, which stands forth, as it were, in front of it: we are distracted by or occupied by activity much the way we are distracted by movement. A basketball coach sees a great play and only through apperception develops a grasp of who it is and what her abilities are.

It is tempting to express the difference between them in terms of time: since a thing can be potent and not currently be-at-work, potency has a temporal extension and unity that being-at-work does not, that it has different temporal (and therefore also logical and modal) implications. For this reason it is tempting to say that potency is the real source or foundation of being-at-work. But in Met. IX.8 and 9, Aristotle is at pains to show that this is not true: it is not potency, but being-at-work that is primary in every sense except temporally, and when it comes to time, in one sense it is primary, and in another not. In arguing this, Aristotle is rejecting the idea that time is the basis for the interpretation of potency and being-at-work, and at the same time rejecting that time is the fundamental ontological category. That he would do this is already

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88 Similarly, lightness is a potency, and its being-at-work is to be up: “But the being-at-work of what is light is to be somewhere above, and it is being prevented whenever it is in the opposite place” (Physics VIII.4 255b11-13).
evident through the definition of time, through which it is discovered to depend on and arise from the articulate engagement with movement.

Thus, we have confirmed the interpretation above: knowledge and fire are, in different ways, both a being-in-potency and a being-at-work, and its being-at-work is to know or to burn.\textsuperscript{89} Being-in-potency is immediately to be at work in the conditions in which it is potent.

**IX. The Extension of Potency to Other Things**

Once Aristotle draws the discussion of movement-potency to a close in *Met.* IX.6, he reminds us that going through the different senses of potency gives us an unexpected result: the idea of potency is more than just the sense according to movement.

For the potential, both [senses] will be clear by distinctions, for not only do we say potential is what is natured to move another or be moved, or [either of these] simply, or in some particular way, but also in another way, because of which we went through inquiries into these [senses]. *Met.* IX.6 1048a28-32\textsuperscript{89}

Aristotle gives two sets of examples of the *energeia*-dunameis pair. The first are examples of things that are said to be potential (*dunamei*): a Hermes in a block of wood, a half line in a whole, someone who knows (*epistêmenai*), even when he is not contemplating (*theôrêsan*). He concludes by adding that “[all these things are around] in *energeia* too.”\textsuperscript{91} These beings in *energeia* are implied:

\textsuperscript{89} It is worth remarking that the analogy Aristotle draws between this human potency for knowing and the movement of fire shows that the ability to know in the highest sense is not supernatural or superior to nature, but that knowing has risen to the dignity of a natural potency. He says τὸ δὴ πῦρ καὶ ἡ γῆ κινοῦνται ὑπὸ τοῦν βία μὲν ὅταν παρὰ φῶςν, φόσι δὲ ὅταν εἰς τὰς αὐτῶν ἐνέργειας δύναται ὅντα “fire and earth are moved by something by force when they are moved contrary to nature, but are moved by nature whenever they are moved to be at work in the ways that belong to them potentially.” Knowledge when it is most complete is potent the way other natural things already are, and therefore what is potent is spontaneously at work just as earth falls and fire burns.\textsuperscript{89} From the ability to think, thinking arises the way the wind fills a sail, the way water flows to the sea: “it is by the soul’s calming down out of its native disorder that it becomes something understanding and knowing” (*Physics* VII.3 247b35-248a1). Sachs, trans.

\textsuperscript{90} καὶ γὰρ τὸ δυνατὸν ἀμα δὴλον ἔσται διαφοράς, ὅτι οὐ μόνον τοῦτο λέγομεν δυνατὸν ὃ πέρικε κινεῖν ἄλλο ἡ κινεῖσθαι ὑπ’ ἄλλου ἡ ἀπὸ τὸν τρόπον τινα, ἄλλα καὶ ἐτέρῳς, διὸ ζητοῦντες καὶ περὶ τούτων διήλθομεν.

\textsuperscript{91} ἔστι δὲ ἐνέργεια τὸ ὕπαρχειν τὸ πράγμα μὴ οὕτως ὃσπερ λέγομεν δύναμεν: λέγομεν δὲ δυνάμει ὅν ἐν τῷ ἐξώλῳ ἑρμῆν καὶ ἐν τῇ ὁδῇ τὴν ἡμίσειν, ὅτι ἀφανεῖται ἄν, καὶ ἐπιστήμονα καὶ τὸν μὴ θεωροῦντα, ἀν δυνατὸς ἢ θεωρήσαι: τὸ δὲ ἐνεργεία (*Met.* IX.6 1048a31-35).
the Hermes cut out of the wood, the separated line, and contemplating, that is, the being-at-work proper to knowledge.

Thus, though the second set of examples gives analogous pairs, one of which is the being-at-work (ἡ ἐνέργεια), the other of which is what is potent (to dunatom), it is indistinguishable from the first in purpose or meaning\(^{92}\):

the one building is to the one who can build as
the one awake to the one asleep, and
the one seeing to the one whose eyes are shut but who has sight, and
what has been formed out of material to the material, and
what is perfected to what is incomplete\(^{93}\)

Aristotle does not say that seeing is to the power of sight as building is to the capacity to build. Here in the key articulation of dunamis and energeia, Aristotle does not posit a potency as an entity or property that gets exercised. Potency is not a kind of metaphysical muscle. This is not a list of faculties or powers, but of beings insofar as they are potent or at-work. This is how they are a distinct way of saying being, not reducible to predication or a categorical metaphysics.

From the perspective of Scholastic Aristotelian doctrine founded upon the idea that movement and actuality (energeia) are mutually exclusive, this is an unsettling list, grouping as it does motions such as building with things not normally thought to be motions, such as being awake, seeing, being formed, or being perfect. It is most likely for this reason that someone introduced the Passage that separates movement from actuality, but separating them makes it impossible to grasp the basis of the analogy. Furthermore, this grouping is precisely what

\(^{92}\) Is this list actually different than the first? In the first, there is what is in-work and what is in-potency, and in the second there is a being-at-work and what is potent. But the sight and knowledge examples are exactly parallel: someone who is in contemplation (in energeia) is to someone who knows or has knowledge, even when not contemplating (in potency), just as someone seeing is to someone who sees or has sight, even when not seeing. It seems clear that the being that is said to be in-potency is precisely the being that is potent; the being-in-potency and what-is-potent are the same being, in the same respect. The same is true of energeia. A comparison of the Hermes and the block of wood to what has been formed out of material to the material yields the same result. Thus, the dative use of potency and being-at-work is not a new, privileged or ontological sense in contradistinction to the nominative.

\(^{93}\) The passage reads ...οὐ δὲ παντὸς ὑπὸν ἔτειν ἄλλα καὶ τὸ ἀνάλογον συνορᾶν, ὅτι ὡς τὸ ὀικοδομικὸν πρὸς τὸ ὀικοδομικόν, καὶ τὸ ἐγγεροφόρος πρὸς τὸ καθεύδον, καὶ τὸ ὄροι πρὸς τὸ μῦρον μὲν ὄμως δὲ ἔχον, καὶ τὸ ἀποκεκριμένον ἐκ τῆς ὑλῆς πρὸς τὴν ὑλὴν, καὶ τὸ ἀπειρασμένον πρὸς τὸ ἀνέργαστον. ταύτης δὲ τῆς διαφορᾶς θατέρῳ μορίῳ ἔστω ἡ ἐνέργεια ἀφορισμένη θατέρῳ δὲ τὸ δυνατόν (Met. IX.6 1048a35-b5).
Aristotle promised in the opening chapter of the book, when he says that the words come to include or apply to other things.

Aristotle points out that potential and being-at-work are not identical in each example. They are not, as it were, the same ‘stuff’ modified to fit each case, but they are different in different cases. They are called at-work only analogously. In what way are these only analogous? Aristotle does not say that things are potent only analogously. It is the being-at-work that is analogous: “Things are not all said to be-at-work in the same way, but only analogously, as this is in this or to this, that is in that or to that” (Met. IX.6 1048b6-8). For some, the being-at-work is, as it were the exercise or use or activity of its being-in-sofar-as-it-is-potent: the builder’s activity or being insofar as she is a builder is being-at-work building. For others, however, the situation is different: form and material, for example. Here Aristotle has more to say: for the way they are analogous is not purely heterogonous. It can be classified, up to a point: “for some are as movement to potency or as thinghood to some material” (Met. IX.6 1048b8-9)

Movement and thinghood (ousia) here are both being-at-work, while potency and material are being-in-potency. The idea that thinghood and material could be at-work and in-potency is visible as an analogy only once we have developed our understanding of these latter two beyond the familiar senses with which we start. Aristotle spends IX.7 justifying the idea that these are analogies, by showing that material and potency are not simply identical. The thrust of these arguments is that the meaning of energeia and dunamis cannot be reduced to a simple understanding of movement, on the one hand, or to material, on the other. Meanwhile, the analogy is only visible by a deepened understanding of both.

Thus, at least one way that potency and being-at-work have been extended from the expected or familiar sense is that they apply to or are ἰτί and ousia or eidos. Recall (in II.4, above) that the underlying thing is ambiguous between potency, material, and underlying or remaining thing, and that Aristotle describes it in the Physics as “a co-cause with the form of the things that

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94 λέγεται δὲ ἐνεργεία ὡς πάντα ὤμοιος ἄλλ᾽ ἣ τῷ ἀνάλογον, ὡς τὸ ὑπό τοῦ ἔντος ἢ πρὸς τοῦτο, τόδ᾽ ἐν τῶς ἢ πρὸς τὸ δὲ τὸ ὑπό τοῦ ἄλλον ἔντος ἢ πρὸς τὸ δὲ τὸ ὑπό τοῦ ἄλλου ἔντος ἢ πρὸς τὸ δὲ τὸ ὑπό τοῦ ἄλλου ἔντος.
95 “So it is clear from this that thinghood and form are being-at-work.” ὅστε φανερὸν ὃτι ἡ ὤσια καὶ τὸ ἐνδός ἐνεργεία ἐστιν (Met. IX.8 1050b).
come into being, like a mother,” which “inherently yearns for (ephiesthai) and stretches out toward (oregesthai) it [the form] by its own nature” (Phys. I.9 192a13-18).#6

Clearly the description of potency fits this description of material. The yearning for... and reaching for... expresses the same idea we see above, as what will immediately be-at-work unless prevented. It means, however, that material is not inert. As potency it implies activity and originates movement. For a form to be energeia then, is for form to be something material actively accomplishes, not always as a kind of movement, but sometimes as a maintaining or holding on (as indicated by the ekhein in entelekheia). For potency to be material is, for example, for wood and bricks to hold their shape and through that to hold together the building they compose, or for the organs of a body both to generate the different movements that make the body a single being, and to depend for their being on the whole body: as parts, material as potency has no identity apart from the whole.

The Priority of Potency and Being-At-Work Over Material and Form

We have discussed the different senses of potency and the primary or highest sense, which I have called loosely the spontaneity of potency, namely that whenever it is in the conditions in which it is potent, it will necessarily be at work on its own. We have also seen how once we grasp the full sense of potency, we see that potency comes to mean or apply to material. Thus, when Aristotle says that “potency and being-at-work apply to more (epi pleon) than only the articulations from movement” (Met. IX.1 1046a), he means that potency and being-at-work, properly understood, have meaning for form and material.#7

This result still requires interpretation, however, for, considered generally, there are several ways to interpret this relationship: 1) are potency and being-at-work modes of or implied by material and form? If so, potency and being-at-work must be grasped through material and form. Or 2) are material and form kinds or modes of potency and being-at-work? If so, to understand material and form you have to understand the other pair. Or 3) neither pair is reducible to or derived from the other.

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6 Sachs, trans.
7 ἐὰν πλέον γὰρ ἐστιν ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ ἐνέργεια τῶν μόνον λεγομένων κατὰ κίνησιν.
The last must be the case. For otherwise Aristotle would not insist on the idea that potency and movement are only analogous to material and thinghood or form. Material is not a kind of potency, nor is potency a kind of material. Nor is form or thinghood a kind of being-at-work, or being-at-work a kind of form or thinghood.

And yet, it is still true that material and form can only be understood through potency and movement or being-at-work. For not only does Aristotle use the language of potency and activity in Physics I.9 to indicate the solution to the problem of the multiplicity of form, material, and deprivation in numerically single moving beings, as we saw (in the opening chapter of Part III), he also uses it in Metaphysics VIII.6 to indicate the solution to the problem of the multiplicity of form and material in a single being.

The ability of potency to yield a deeper understanding of material was discovered not by introducing or discovering a new sense of potency, but by understanding potency more deeply. Like being-at-work, the meaning of potency is properly concerned with movement. However, in coming to understand this meaning, further applications arise which bring Aristotle to a threshold at which the full meaning of potency begins to appear, a threshold from which potency proceeds readily to apply to things not normally said to be potent or to move.

The analysis of potency in book IX, then, has this result: the way to understand the unity of form and material in the account of thinghood (ousia) in Met. VIII.6, is to grasp movement more completely through potency and being-at-work. Grasping what movement is, by working out what potency and being-at-work are and how they are “related” (though not as different things or relata), we are only grasping what movement is more fully, but at the same time and in the same respect, we are also grasping something more than movement, namely their ontological sense, which allows them to be found everywhere in being. Indeed, to the extent that dunamis has being, and energêia means thinghood or being (ousia), it is through this analysis of movement that we grasp being.

For all that, the ability of potency and being-at-work to reveal material and form in their relation to each other does not imply that the latter are the fullest or greatest meaning of the energetic sense of being. The categorical sense of being is not the fulfillment of the energetic:
indeed, we have seen good reason to think the reverse proposition is true. The proper sense of potency and being-at-work is to be found in themselves.

X. Concluding Remarks

We can, with this result, present the relationship between potency and being-at-work, and its extension to material and form more systematically, offer some interpretation, and set out the primary problem that remains for us to determine in the investigation of being-at-work. As we have remarked, potency and being-at-work are in a way one and the same (Met. VIII.6), but in another way different (Met. IX.3). Some beings are only at-work or actively-being-complete, some things are potentially or in-potency, while some are both in-potency and at-work (Phys. III.1, Met. XI.9). There is a relationship of entailment between being-at-work and being in potency (Met. IX.3 1047a24-6, XII.6 1071b24-5): if a thing is at-work sitting, it is not incapable of sitting: it must be capable of it, at the same time as it is at-work doing it.98

From these things, we can conclude the following: potency and being-at-work are the same insofar as they articulate a being who does this, whose being-at-work has this shape, this form, e.g. to say I am a speaking animal or a searching being is to say I am capable of speaking or searching, and that I do speak and search. Yet in another way these are not the same, even when they are both at the same time. Things can be potent and at-work at once, but a thing can be potent when it is not at work (cf. Met. IX.3-4, XII.6).

Thus, potency is not or passive or resistant to being at-work in a certain form: it is by being potent that a thing can change/be acted upon, and it is by being potent that a thing stays at-work and is unaffected by things that would undo the shape of its activity, while by contrast, it is by lacking a potency that a thing is destructible (cf. Met. V.12, IX.1). As a side note, possible is one sense of the word potent, but for Aristotle possibilities are not extrinsic, that is, there are no possible worlds: they are anchored in the potencies of particular beings (Met. V.12, IX.4).

98 Some translate the phrase “nothing impossible or incapable (adunaton) will result,” and go on to suggest that Aristotle is giving a criterion for determining if a thing is potent: if something impossible results from what we assume it is capable of and what it actually is, then we were wrong about its capacities. However, this argument depends on a concept of potency just to articulate the criterion, so it cannot be a criterion that illuminates what potency is.
Altogether this means that the relationship between potency and being-at-work is not of actualization, of replacement, privation, or purification. Nor is it a relationship of opposition or mutual exclusion. Potency is not flawed or incomplete. The way that they account for the unity of material and form provides the strongest possible confirmation of this argument: the form and material are both the same and different. The idea of opposition or mutual exclusion between the two is incoherent.

We saw that beings and numbers need an account of their unity:

...it is necessary to a number [or a definition, or an independent thing] that there be something by means of which it is one… (for either each is not one but is like a heap, or if it is one, it needs to be said what it is that makes one thing out of many)... [for] thinghood is also one in the same way... [not] as though it were a unit or a point, but each independent thing is a complete being-at-work-staying-itself, and a particular nature (Met. VIII.3 1044a2-10)99

The unity of number depends on the categorical articulation of things, that is, on material and form. And the limit, the end, the final level (eschatē) of material and form are one and the same. Material is potentially (dunamei) what form is actively (energeiai) (Met. VIII.6 1045b13-24). This is because material is a certain kind of source (Met. IX.1 1046a24, cf. Phys. I.9). Put otherwise, material is in potency because it goes toward (elthoi eis) a form, and whenever it is at work it is in that form (Met. IX.8 1050a17). Aristotle does not say that the form is in the material. Form is not imprinted in material the way a machine stamps a shape into plastic: the material arranges itself into a shape and insofar as it is potent it holds onto that shape. It does not go toward a form and away from being material. The material and the form are one and the same because one is the form, and the other is what is arranged in that form.

Material is that which is a this in-potency, not at-work (VIII.1 1042a27-8).100 The fullest articulation of this idea is in the second part of Met. IX.7. What is at stake is a problem of composition. We might assume with Democritus and contemporary materialists that if a thing has parts, then these parts must be more basic than the whole thing is. Thus, the whole is merely a composite whose being-character and properties can be derived from the characteristics of its

99 Sachs, trans.
100 οὔλην δὲ λέγω ἢ μὴ τόδε τι οὕσα ἐνεργεία δινάμει ἐστὶ τόδε τι
parts. Aristotle argues that there are beings that are ontologically basic, such as ‘human being’ and ‘tree,’ which at the same time have parts. For these things, the being of the parts depends on that of the whole.

His argument is that ‘white door’ and ‘wooden door’ are parallel articulations, that is, that just as a quality is an adjectival form said to be in a being, material is an adjectival being of a form. When we say “what is that?” we might answer “that is a door,” but there is something not quite right about answering ‘that is white,’ because we have not said what it is, *ti esti*. The word ‘that,’ like ‘this,’ *tode ti* names some being, *ousia*. Aristotle points out that something similar happens when we name material. When we name material along with what it is, e.g. a door, we do not say “what is that?” “that is wood,” (let alone “that is a tree”). Instead, we say that is a *wooden* door. We distinguish between the ‘what’ or the *that* (*ekinon*) of something and what is *thaten* (*ekinion*). Beere points out, helpfully, that Aristotle coins the new word *thaten* to make his point more generally, naming Aristotle’s conception of material an adjectival one.101

Now, when Aristotle articulates the candidates for thinghood, they turn out to be form, material, and composite. The material is in-potency, the form is being-at-work, *energeia*, while the composite is actively-being-complete, *entelekheia*. For example, the soul is the actively-being-complete of a body. It is not a body but something that belongs to a body, which is not separate from a body but not reducible to its parts (Soul II.2 414a16-21). The *entelekheia* naturally comes to obtain, *huparkhein* in what it is in potency and in appropriate material (Soul II.2 414a25).

A further remark: material is thinghood insofar as, in changes between contraries, something underlies: something is here, and now it is there. Much as time is different than, but dependent on movement, material is a concept that arises in and through an interpretation of movement, and lodges there. For similar reasons, then movement is prior to time, place, and material: we say that each of these exists because of movement (*Phys*. I.8, IV.4 211b31). It is also possible to grasp form as that which emerges in a movement (*Phys*. I.7-9). It follows that form is not the same as being, since there are other senses of being that are not derived from it. But,

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Aristotle says, “we still recognize everything on account of its form” (iv.5 1010a26). Thus, Aristotle uses appearing to investigate movement, instead of using movement to investigate appearing.
Chapter Five: The Task of Understanding *Energeia*

I. Being-at-Work as the Solution to the Problem of Completion

The problem of *energeia* or being-at-work that remains to us is to work out how it is related to being complete or accomplished, that is, to *telos* and thereby to *entelekheia*. We can perceive this problem by inquiring in two directions: through the relationship between *energeia* and nature, and through the relationship between *energeia* and form.

First, then, what accounts for the unity of diverse limbs, the unity of the body parts? When parts are one and continuous *by nature* they all are-in-potency (*Met*. VII.16 1040b14-15). Put otherwise, nature is what is responsible for what is a whole of parts (*Met*. VII.17). Nature alone is the thinghood in destructible things (*Met*. VIII.3 1043b23). On the other hand, Aristotle likens nature to potency insofar as it is a source of movement (*Phys*. II.1, *Met*. IX.8 1049b9-13). This means that nature has two aspects: nature as cause is *ousiai*, and nature as source originates movement.

Nature appears, then, to cover both sides of the form-material pair, but to be form more than material (cf. *Phys*. II.1). But what is the relationship between nature and being-at-work? For Aristotle seems to say that being-at-work has priority over nature (*Met*. IX.8 1049b9-13). But if nature is the form, then i) either being-at-work is prior to form, or ii) being-at-work is more primary than nature as source of movement, but not more primary than nature in another sense, either a) nature as the form or goal, the *telos* of movement, or b) nature as the *entelekheia* that is movement. Put in terms of a question about *energeia*, we do not know whether it is a form or *telos* of movement, or how it is related to *entelekheia*.

Now, form or nature is for Aristotle the structure that material is-in-potency; it is the shape that material can be *in*. When something is in-potency, then (unless something prevents it,) it is immediately at-work being itself, namely, the same being named by the form. Thus, Aristotle will say form and thinghood are being-at-work (*Met*. IX.8 1050b1).

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102 ἀλλ’ ὁμως δυνάμει πάντ’ ἐσται, ὅταν ἦν καὶ συνεχές φύσει, ἀλλὰ μὴ βίᾳ ἦ συμφύσει
103 ὀστε φανερὸν ὃτι ἡ οὐσία καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἐνέργεια ἐστίν.
That which is at-work,  *

energeia

*, is the organizing principle of structures or composites. Aristotle argues for this position in *Met.* VIII.2, and thereby solves, in a certain way, the problem of the ordering of predicates by picking out which is the *work* of the being. But being-at-work seems also to establish the singularity or this-ness of the thing, as we argued in the last chapter of Part II. Thus, if being-at-work is a structure, surely it is composite and articulable into parts, so we might think that it could never establish the singularity of each thing.

And yet, we saw briefly Aristotle’s argument that ontologically basic things can have parts, so this position is not self-contradictory from the outset. We saw that Aristotle locates the solution to the problem of unity in the relationship between potency and being-at-work, and worked out how this is possible through the analysis of potency in the previous chapter. But we have not yet worked out how being-at-work, *energeia* can be both multiple or articulated, that is, the principle of a diverse system, and at the same time single, unified. In other words, we have yet to see how *energeia* can be a whole of parts instead of a pure single unity which lacks parts. The primary questions that we must ask of being-at-work are, then, about its relationship with *telos*.

**II. Why Being-at-Work Appears To Be Incompatible With Completion**

As readers we tend to presume from the start that the being-at-work, actuality, *energeia* was obviously the *telos*, or at very least, that it is self-evident within the so-called system of Aristotelian concepts. If this was the case, there would be no need at all for *Metaphysics* IX.8-9. As it stands, far from it being the most obvious point, it is perhaps Aristotle’s most daunting task in book IX, and one that he repeats in several other places in the corpus (*Soul* II.5 and *Met.* XII.6, for example).

Being-at-work presents us with several conceptual difficulties at once. The origin of the word ‘being-at-work,’ *energeia*, was in the attempt to turn the word ‘use,’ *khrèsis*, toward something more important (cf. Chapter Six). The idea of use has two problems, however. First, it is conceptually thin, even empty: its entire meaning seems to depend on that articulated structure of which it is the use. Let us say a person developed a very complex instrument. How to use it is already implied in and entirely determined by the structure of the instrument. Thus, the
potencies of the instrument would be more primary in being than the use. In addition, using it amounts simply to deploying those potencies, allowing them to express themselves. Use seems to appear merely as releasing a potency into itself, an activity of letting a thing become what it is. In this way, the concept of use collapses into the determinations of that being which is used.

Second, if use means anything independent of that which is used, it seems as though to use something is to turn it into a means for something else. The structure of use is the deployment of a thing toward a further, transcendent end. But this means that the analysis of the structure of use can never give us sources or ends. In fact, following its logic calls into question the very existence of completion, telos, dissolving it in an infinite series of means.

This problem is not solved, but rather compounded by the word being-at-work. Apart from its origins in Aristotle as a variation on the word ‘use,’ the concept of being-at-work, energeia, is almost entirely derived from the idea of work or deed, ergon, which normally means some product of the activity. In this case, too, energeia seems not to be the real accomplishment, for the activity of working is never ultimate. The word ‘work’ splits into two, into the activity and the object which emerges from this activity. In the last passage of the current argument, Aristotle bends these two meanings together into a circle, identifying them. But to make the argument in Met. IX he says that both senses of work—the work activity and the work product—come into being and exist at once when one is building (Met. IX.8 1050a23-30). Far from it being obvious, it is strange and unlikely to talk about being-at-work together with accomplishment or completion, telos.

This problem of telos risks dissolving the very thing that distinguishes ousia. Being, to on, is grammically ambiguous between this being, and the being or being as such. There are irreducibly many kinds or ways of being, but as we saw sketched above, what is, in the primary categorical sense, is ousia, an independent or separate this that underlies predicates and is named in a logos. Its self-organized separateness and its unity (of predicates, of parts in a whole), are inextricable from it being an accomplishment, telos. So to say that ousia is energeia, to say that thinghood is being-at-work, as Aristotle will in Met. IX.8, is to risk undoing the very structured character of being that Aristotle seems to have worked so hard to establish.
Chapter Six: The Words Energeia and Entelekheia

We shall look at being-at-work, *energeia*, and at-work-being-complete, *entelekheia*, first through usage and philological considerations, and then, in the next chapter, through Aristotle’s argument for their relationship in *Met. IX.8*. Our aim is to understand their relationship with *telos*, completion or accomplishment, on the one hand, and being on the other.

There is no reason to think that the words *energeia* and *entelekheia* were commonly used at the time of Aristotle, and in fact scholars are in broad agreement that the words are Aristotle’s own coinage.

And the name being-at-work [*ἐνέργεια*], which is composed to converge [*συνιστάμενη πρός*] with holding-in-its-completion [*τὴν ἐντελέχειαν*], comes to apply to other things from motions most of all, since being-at-work seems to be motion most of all… (*Met. IX.3 1047a30*).

Scholars are also in agreement that *energeia* is both closer to words in common usage at the time, and that, presuming the works of Aristotle can be dated in this way, it was coined earlier on in Aristotle’s career than *entelekheia*, as early, in fact, as the *Protrepticus*. Thus, if *energeia* and *entelekheia* converge in meaning, then to understand *entelekheia* it will be most helpful to start with the meaning of *energeia*.

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104 Menn, for example, holds this position in Menn, “Origins.” Blair defends the same argument in “Reply,” *American Journal of Philology*, 114 (1993), 91-97, in which Blair disagrees with D. W. Graham not about whether Aristotle coined the words, about how to interpret the act and the results of doing so, accusing Graham of taking Aristotle to have coined new words for concepts that are already well-captured by existing and related words, making the act of creating a word superfluous. Cf. Graham’s “The Etymology of *Entelekheia,*” *American Journal of Philology* 110 (1989) 73-80 (“Etymology”), and “The Development of Aristotle’s Concept of Actuality: Comments on a Reconstruction by Stephen Menn,” *Ancient Philosophy* 15 (1995) 551-64. See also Beere’s account in *Doing and Being*.

105 In the *Topics*, cognates of the word ‘compose’ (*suntithemi*) refer to the grouping of syllables into words. This is a reminder of the process of translating oral speech into written speech, in which letters that are continuous with one another sonically (e.g. ‘hewasswifterthan’) are visually separated from one another and then placed in a sequence. Greek had not yet developed spaces between words, so grouping while reading was a much more important skill than it is for us.

106 ἔλθησε δ’ ἡ ἐνέργεια τοῖνοι, ἢ πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν συνιστάμενη, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἐκ τῶν κινήσεων μᾶλιστα: δοκεῖ γὰρ ἡ ἐνέργεια μᾶλιστα ἡ κίνησις εἶναι

The current debate about the meaning of *energeia* and *entelekheia* has been fueled in part by the resurgence of interest in Aristotle’s definition of movement. But it often gets going through a problem of how to translate the words in English. While almost everyone seems to agree that *entelekheia* should be translated by ‘activity,’ there is an ongoing dispute over whether *energeia* means ‘actuality’ or ‘activity.’\footnote{108} Often the debate proceeds by taking certain passages and testing to see whether it is ‘actuality’ or ‘activity’ that fits best. In response, Jonathan Beere recently argued that neither of these are sufficient on their own, and that in fact Aristotle’s attempt was to give us words that mean both at once.

Despite its other merits, and apart from real individual contributions, this dispute in general has two major methodological flaws: 1) it takes its starting place not from Aristotle’s usage, nor even from Greek, but from English, so that when it engages Aristotle’s usage, it does so on behalf of deciding between English words. That the English words are derived, in turn, from Latin translations of the Greek is no guarantee of the preservation of sense, but in fact gives us etymological traces of the modification in meaning that has occurred between the Greek and the English. It is clear, then, that unless through some tremendous luck these common English words completely and perfectly expressed the meaning of Aristotle’s original and technical Greek terms, approaching the words from this frame of reference would corrupt our understanding of Aristotle.\footnote{109}

Furthermore, and more importantly, 2) this dispute begins with the assumption that we already understand what ‘actuality’ or ‘activity’ are, and in addition that what Aristotle is aiming at is already familiar to us. Put otherwise, it assumes that our objective is to make clear from the

\footnote{108} The purpose of Anagnostopoulos’ analysis of change, for example, is to sort out which of the two terms means actuality, and which means activity (in Anagnostopoulos, “Change”). He argues that *energeia* cannot mean actuality, and that *entelekheia* cannot mean activity.

\footnote{109} Graham argues that the tradition understands the concept *entelekheia* was created to express—perfection or being at an end—and that as a result, Aristotle’s own characterization of its meaning and derivation is false (See Graham, “Etymology”). He tries to justify reading the interpretation of Aristotle against him by saying that we don’t know why our sentences are well-formed. For us to understand what Aristotle meant better than he himself understood it is one thing. It is quite another to say that the traditions inspired by philosophers are more perfect expressions of their thought than their own writings. But both are extremely dubious principles, especially in philosophical exegesis, and can hardly support the argument that a philosopher was wrong about how he came up with an idea. Blair rightly criticizes Graham for this idea, in Blair, “Reply”.

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start which ones among the readily available meanings of the words Aristotle intends to use, and through this to dispel any ambiguities which arise from equivocation. This task, no matter how laudable, is in conflict with the situation with which Aristotle says we are confronted; our goals and methods of inquiry are attempts to solve a very different problem than Aristotle describes.

Two things show this: i) the reason Aristotle would coin two related words to express what he is after is that there were no readily available Greek words or meanings that corresponded with what he was trying to point out. He simply was not in a situation in which there were available words or common meanings that expressed what he meant to say.

Similarly, as we have remarked (in II.1, above), ii) the methodological challenge Aristotle notes at the beginning of the Physics is not to find something familiar and clear from the start, but to proceed to from what is familiar to what is less familiar, but clearer by nature. The method he describes in Physics I.1 is to start with our vague sense of what is the case, a familiar, general whole (to katholou holon) of things jumbled-up or poured-together (ta sugkexymena). The only method he offers for retrieving knowledge from this—though it is a powerful one—is to take these undistinguished things (adioristōs sēmaineī) and define (horizei) and distinguish (diorizei) each thing from the others (Physics I.1 184b13).110 This description means that his objective is completely different from that of the ongoing scholarly dispute: to bring to light something that is not or may not be familiar, but which is instead something clear by nature. In a word, unlike those involved in this dispute, Aristotle seems to imply that we do not already understand that which he aims to clarify by the words energeia and entelekheia, since to get to this we have to start from but in some sense change our familiar meanings, or even to leave them behind and grasp something else that comes to light in the course of discussing them.

I. Energeia

Stephen Menn argues that in the Protrepticus, Eudemian Ethics, Topics, and Magna Moralia, Aristotle uses chrēsis and energeia interchangeably, to mean the exercise of a potency (dunamis) or disposition (hexis).111 Concentrating on some of the same passages, Blair defends the common

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111 Menn, “Origins,” 78.
argument that Aristotle coined *energeia* to mean ‘immanent activity.’ He observes that Aristotle considers several words to communicate his meaning, and settles on *energeia*. The word, he argues, has the advantage that it can include the sense of ‘achieving,’ or ‘doing,’ in *poiein* and at the same time ‘undergo,’ or ‘be affected,’ *paschein*, but avoids the sense of ‘making’ in the word *prattein*. The word *xřeštai*, ‘use,’ is too passive, while *ergon* can mean both the doing and the thing done. So, Blair argues, Aristotle ultimately derives the word from the active form of the verb *ergazesthai*, but instead of using *energia*, which could come from *energos*, which means effectiveness, or ‘what works’ *in the thing acted on*, and because he wants to express activity or what is working in the *agent*, he changes the spelling to *energeia*.

Thus, taken together, *energeia* excludes from *ousia* the sense of ‘inert, passive,’ on the one hand, and ‘external,’ on the other.

This helpful line of interpretation still requires a supplement, however, for, given Aristotle’s argument in *Met.* IX.8 that *energeia* is thinghood or substance (*ousia*), the *en* in *energeia* cannot just mean what is actively working *in* the agent, but has to include the sense that the *energeia* is the thing itself.

When Aristotle draws attention to the way *energeia* and *entelekheia* are put together or composed in such a way that they are related to each other, he invites us to work out their similarity based on their syllables. Etymologically speaking, the common noun *energeia* is from the root *erg*, which means ‘work’ or ‘deed,’ and by extension *energeia* has been translated by ‘activity,’ as well as by ‘function,’ and more recently, ‘operation’ and ‘process.’ Yet, as noted, like the English word ‘work,’ *ergon* has two senses, both the activity of working, and the thing produced by this activity. Thus, it can also be translated as ‘the work,’ ‘the thing,’ ‘the matter.’

The adjective *energon*, ‘active, at-work, working,’ was not very common at the time of Aristotle. Its prefix *en*- has several meanings, which correspond to a dative sense: ‘in, at, with’ or even ‘by.’ Aristotle turns the adjective into a substantive that emphasizes the meaning ‘at-work’ while retaining the meaning of ‘thing.’ Literally translated, it means both ‘at-work-ness,’ and ‘being-in-work.’ Sachs’s translation ‘being-at-work’ is the closest nearly literal translation

112 Blair, “Reply,” 95.
113 For this sense, see especially the *Nicomachean Ethics* I.10, 12-13.
currently used. I take the word ‘being’ in the formulation to cover the substantivized sense, both the nature of ‘at-work-ness,’ and the being that is this working, while the ‘at-work’ clarifies that this being is an activity, a thing that is precisely activity. This said, the translation of *energeia* by ‘actuality,’ as long as the word is not reduced to common usage, and the word *act* is clearly heard in it, can suffice in situations that call for a looser, more familiar approximation.

II. *Entelekheia*

There is an ongoing dispute over the traditional translations of *entelekheia* that tends to favor a more literal rendering of its verbal complexity. This dispute arises out of a dissatisfaction with the word ‘actuality’ as an expression of its meaning; either ‘actuality’ means next to nothing, as Sachs claims, or it is misleading.

As we saw, Aristotle says the words *energeia* and *entelekheia* are assembled so that they would hold together (cf. *Met.* IX.3 1047a30-32 and IX.8 1050a17-24). The two words must, then, have similar or related meanings. Blair even claims that for every way of using one, you can find

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114 For example, in the introduction to *Doing and Being*, Beere argues that the relationship of *entelekheia* to *energeia* shows that the word means both activity and activity. Anagnostopoulos voices similar concerns in Anagnostopoulos, “Change,” 36-37. Heidegger’s influential reading is much like a combination of Blair’s and Graham’s, namely that *energeia* means being-at-work on the way to completion, whereas *entelekheia* means being-at-an-end or having its end within itself and therefore being finished or complete. This reading, as I note below, has been strongly contested by, among others, Francisco Gonzalez, “Whose Metaphysics of Presence? Heidegger’s Interpretation of *Energeia* and *Dunamis* in Aristotle” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 44:4 (2006) 533-568 [“Metaphysics of Presence”].

115 Joe Sachs argues that translating *entelekheia* as actuality is an impoverishment of its meaning for Aristotle. Aristotle went to the trouble of inventing a new, nuanced, and complex term to express a precise meaning, whereas the word actuality in English means ‘whatever happens to be the case,’ as the phrase “that can is actually white” suggests. See Sachs, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, li-lii, and Sachs, “Motion,” §6, where he argues: “Maimonides, Averroes, and Ross, who say that motion is always a transition or passage from potentiality to actuality, must call the being-on-the-floor of the pencil, the being-yellow of the pages, and the crumbled condition of the binding of the book actualities. Thomas, who says that motion is constituted at any moment by the joint presence of actuality and potentiality, is in a still worse position: he must call every position of the pencil on the way to the floor, every color of the pages on the way to being yellow, and every loss of a crumb from the binding an actuality... [yet] the things Aristotle called *actualities* are limited in number, and constitute the world in its ordered finitude rather than in its random particularity... the only actualities in the world, that is, the only things which, by their own innate tendencies, maintain themselves in being as organized wholes, seem to be the animals and plants, the ever-the-same orbits of the ever-moving planets, and the universe as a whole.”
an equivalent use of the other.\textsuperscript{116} Metaphysics XI.9, for example, quotes Physics III.1 almost word for word, but uses \textit{energeia} instead of \textit{entelekheia} in the definition of movement.\textsuperscript{117} Yet the words must differ in some way, since Aristotle created \textit{two} words, and since their convergence is a philosophical accomplishment that allows him to argue that \textit{energeia} is \textit{ousia} (Met. IX.8 1050a17-24).

\textbf{Telos}

This new word has three parts: ‘en’ ‘telos’ and ‘ekhein.’ The core of the word is ‘telos,’ which according to Liddell and Scott means fulfillment or completion, accomplishment, or being ready for action or use. The adjectival form \textit{entelēs}, ‘complete,’ ‘full-grown,’ ‘perfect’ or as an adverb, ‘at last,’ was used at the time, though never by Plato, and only once by Aristotle.\textsuperscript{118} The phrase \textit{hoi en telei} means a governor or magistrate, so \textit{telos} comes close to the sense of an origin, \textit{arkhē}, namely a source of action or event that directs or structures what arises from it. Yet \textit{telos} also has the sense of something given or paid in tribute or owed, and therefore necessary, and in the plural it means offerings or rites due to the gods in the Eleusinian mysteries. Linguistically, the whole sense of \textit{telos} is being the whole, the complete goal, what is ready, what is both necessary in the sense of a tribute owed, and the ordering origin of actions or events, which may itself be an action or event.

In Metaphysics V.16, Aristotle describes \textit{telos} as a form on the extreme opposite a lack: “the end is one of the extremes,” and it is because of this that it is possible to transfer the meaning from complete in the proper sense of “excellence lack[ing] no part of the fullness it has by nature” to a different extreme and be “completely ruined” or destroyed, and he says that this is the reason that “even death is by a transference of meaning called an end, because both are extremes, and the end for the sake of which something \textit{is} is an extreme” (Met. V.16 1021b21-30).\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{117} Cf. also Met. IX.3 1047a30, where \textit{energeia} is said to be movement, while in the \textit{Physics}, movement is the \textit{entelekheia}. In the passages of movement, some writers are of the opinion that the two are used interchangeably (cf. Physics III.2 202a2-4).
\textsuperscript{118} As Ross notes in his commentary to \textit{Aristotle’s Metaphysics}, vol. II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), 246.
\textsuperscript{119} Sachs, trans.
However, the kind of extreme that telos is, is not simply a logical opposite. For example, the opposite of cowardice is recklessness, but neither of these are telos, and the opposite of death is birth, but neither of these are telos or life. As Aristotle explains in the Nicomachean Ethics, virtue, and therefore telos, is an extreme of a different sort, since it is a mean between two vices: “Hence, in terms of its thinghood (ousia) and the articulation that spells out what it is for it to be, virtue is a mean condition, but in terms of what is best and done well, it is an extreme” (NE II.6 1107a6-8). The extreme that telos is, is not an end of a continuum. For example, a plant or animal can die by being too hot or too cold; when it is telos, however, it is the right temperature in-between. In this case, neither of the extremes are genuinely complete, but both can be called complete in a derivative sense. This is why Aristotle can describe telos through its opposite, saying that it lacks nothing, and yet it does not have an essential reference to a lack or an opposition.

A pervasive understanding of telos is that it is a kind of goal set for a creature in advance, external to it, and toward which it is confined to strive. Instead, the sense of telos Aristotle distinguishes means the inherent completeness or wholeness of a thing—a completeness that can coincide with the thing itself. One way to grasp this is through his discussion of telos in Met. V.16. There Aristotle says that a thing is complete when the telos gets it underway (hyparkhei), that is, when its completion is its underlying origin:

Moreover, <when> the completion, being good, gets underway in or on behalf of these things, these are called complete... (Met. V.16 1021b23)\(^\text{120}\)

The word hyparkhei is an ordinary Greek verb that can be translated by the word ‘belonging to,’ or ‘being there in person,’ ‘present,’ or ‘being ready.’ The lexicon gives it a more technical sense of hypokeimai, ‘being laid down,’ from which the participle hypokeimenon ‘the underlying’ gets its sense. However, we should take into account the word arkhē in hyparkhei. It is for this reason that the poets use the word to mean ‘begin,’ or ‘come to be, arise, spring up.’ A literal translation of hyparkhei would be ‘it springs up under’ or ‘it arises,’ drawing on its similarity to hypokeimai, and in more loosely but more technical English, as ‘underlying origin.’

\(^{120}\) ἔτι οὐ ὑπάρχει τὸ τέλος, σπουδάζων <ἀν>, ταύτα λέγεται τέλεια: κατὰ γὰρ τὸ ἔχειν τὸ τέλος τέλεια. Among other things, Stephen Menn works through this passage helpfully in Origins.
Now, properly speaking, Aristotle says, the study of telos belongs to the *Physics*, since to be a telos, to be that for the sake of which is precisely to be the origin and aim of movement: “…this sort of cause [that for the sake of which] is the good, and this belongs among actions and things that are in motion, and it moves things first—for that is the sort of thing an end is…” (Met. XI.1 1059a35-7). Thus, telos is arkhē.

**Ekhein**

Yet the word *arkhē* in *hyparkhei* presents us with an ambiguity in thinking through the concept of *telos*. Which belongs to which: does the thing belong to the *telos* which originates and organizes it, or does the *telos* belong to the thing? In the passage just quoted, Aristotle rephrases this same idea:

Moreover, <when> the completion, being good, gets underway in or on behalf of these things, these are called complete, for by the having the completion <they are> complete. (*Met. V.16* 1021b23)

A thing is complete, *teleia*, by having or holding onto *telos*. In other words, he uses ‘having’ (*ekhein*) as another way to express ‘beginning’ (*arkhē*) or getting underway (*hyparkhei*). We may be tempted by this to reduce beginning to having, *arkhē* to *hexis*, and investigate entelekheia through the structure of possession, making it more primary than the structure of *telos* and *arkhē*. Put otherwise, we might say that the structure of having or holding on to something is the way that a being is extended out toward something, a *telos* or *arkhē*, that it is not, that differs from it.

However, this elaboration is a parallel expression, not the revelation of the basis of the previous expression. Being a source, *arkhē*, is not secondary to, founded upon, or reducible to the structure of possession, *hexis*. For *hyparkhei* and *telos* could either be or originate the having that is named in the word *hexis*.

For example, it is misleading to say that an excellent man in the prime of life, strong and articulate *hexis* the completeness he aims at, as though it was a possession distinct from his own being, or an attribute that supervenes on an underlying being. It would be slightly more accurate

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to say that the completeness of a human being is there in him and from it his actions and speech spring up. More accurate than either of these, however, would be to say that he is complete, that his being is the very source that gives rise to these actions and words. Thus, the telos is there, and if at some point it was not, or was not complete, nevertheless it is not distinguishable from him as a possession when it is there. The telos is an ongoing accomplishment that the man is, both the goal of his activity and its source, the nature for the sake of which he acts.

Moreover, that the telos is not something added to or separate from the being of which it is the telos, is confirmed by the use of the word ekhein in en-tel-ekheia. The word ekhein means ‘to have’ or ‘to hold on’ to something. This ‘grip’ has a certain meaning, however, namely ‘to be in charge of, to keep,’ or even ‘to hold in guard, keep safe’ and in a related sense, ‘to hold fast, support, sustain, or stay.’ It is related to potency to the extent that the infinitive can mean ‘to be able.’ When a location is specified, it can mean, ‘to dwell’ there.

The most revelatory sense of ekhein for our current context is that in ordinary Greek the verb is frequently used instead of ‘be’: kalōs ekhei means “I am good,” or “things are going well,” in response to a greeting.122 Now, ‘having,’ ‘holding on,’ and ‘sustaining’ are movements that accomplish stability. Using ekhein as a synonym for being, then suggests that we ought not be misled into thinking that being is static or passive, but an accomplishment continually at-work, energeia.

En-

The prefix en- has the meanings we set out above, notably ‘in,’ and perhaps ‘at’ in the sense of being ‘there,’ coinciding with the being that is there, but not in the sense of being ‘at an end.’ A common misreading, following Diels, is that Aristotle formed the world entelekheia with the word entelēs ekhein, where entelēs means ‘at its end’ or ‘finished off.’ Graham and Heidegger, among others have held this interpretation.123 But Blair successfully controverts this position, pointing out, among other things, that if it meant ‘being finished or perfect, at an end,’ it would be pointless to go to the trouble of coining the new word entelekheia, since a number of other

variants of *telos* already mean ‘being finished,’ or ‘at an end.’

Gonzales gives a philosophical ground for rejecting Heidegger’s interpretation of *entelekheia* as ‘being-at-an-end’ and therefore ‘complete, perfect, finished.’

Now in addition to this we have already seen that *telos* is the *arkhē* of movement, and *ekhein* in the sense of being implies movement. Two more considerations express the point directly: 1) movement is *entelekheia*, 2) *entelekheia* is Aristotle’s word for the living soul, which cannot be said to mean its ‘being finished off’ or ‘at an end,’ but can be said to mean the wholeness or completeness of something, the continuing, living activity that an animal is. Another reading, that Blair defends, is von Fritz’s argument that the word derives from ἑν (ἐντελέος) τέλος ἔχειν, ‘have an end in itself.’

It is necessary to make sense of why, for Aristotle, saying that something is *entelekheia* is the same as saying it is, that it has being, as he does in the proof for the existence of movement in *Phys.* III.1. It is easier to understand the immediate ontological meaning of the word if Sachs is right to suggest that, perhaps in addition to meaning ‘in,’ *en*- refers to Aristotle’s reformulation of the Socratic question *ti esti*, ‘what is it?’ as *ti ἐν εἶναι*. Sachs argues that in *ti ἐν εἶναι* Aristotle uses the past tense ἐν to indicate progressive aspect, but with no past reference, since the progressive and the present are indistinguishable in the present tense:

Aristotle replaces the bare ‘is’ with a progressive form (in the past, but with no temporal sense, since only in the past tense can the progressive aspect be made.

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124 Blair notes that Aristotle “used τελείωμα once, τελείως three times, τελετή four, τελειότης five, τελείωσις six, τελέως twelve, τελευτή fifty-four, τελευτικός ninety-eight, and τέλος 198 times.” He points out that Graham makes the mistake of assuming that the tradition already knows the concept *entelekheia* communicates, namely being-perfect, being-at-its-end, and that Graham, after noting that Aristotle’s own account of its meaning and formation conflicts with this reading, actually argues that Aristotle mistook did not fully know what he was doing in forming the word. Blair writes, sensibly, that “if Aristotle coined the word, it would be more plausible to take the word in Aristotle’s sense and see if that fit the way he used it better than the traditional meaning, and call the tradition wrong rather than the one who made up the word in the first place.” Blair, “Reply,” 91. Blair also points out that doing so would make the description of movement as *entelekheia atelēs* self-contradictory: “it would be the equivalent of saying a “nonterminal termination.” It is one thing to be nearly or not quite at the end; but you cannot be at the end as not at the end” (Blair, “Reply,” 94).

125 Gonzalez, “Metaphysics of Presence,” 533–568. Since a substantial part of his argument occurs on the basis of and uses contradictions within Heidegger’s account of Aristotle, giving his argument would take us too far from our current context.
unambiguous) plus an infinitive of purpose... The progressive rules out what is transitory in a thing, and therefore not necessary to it; the infinitive rules out what is partial or universal in a thing, and therefore not sufficient to make it be.\footnote{Sachs, \textit{Metaphysics}, Ibid., lxxi-xxii.}

It is surely more plausible to accept his suggestion in this case than it would be for \textit{ti en einai} to mean ‘what something was being,’ for such a formulation seems purposeless and loses its reference to the Socratic question. On Sachs’ suggestion, the phrase reads ‘what it is for something to be’ or ‘what it is for it to go on being.’

Whether Sachs is right about this or not, however, it remains to be established that the \textit{en-} in \textit{entelech\ae}ia refers to \textit{ti en einai}. Two things recommend this reading, however: the first confirmation is that \textit{ekhein} includes the meaning holding on, sustaining, staying, and the second is that \textit{entelech\ae}ia includes sense of continuing and holding on because it is a pun on the word \textit{endelech\ae}ia, which means to persist or continue on, to endure.\footnote{On the word \textit{\v{e}ndo\v{e}le\v{c}eia} Ross does not remark on the pun, but suggests, following Diels, that Aristotle did not derive \textit{\v{e}nte\v{c}l\v{e}ceia} \textit{exclusively} from an alteration of \textit{\v{e}ndo\v{e}le\v{c}eia}, because it appears to be well-formed: “Hirzel, in \textit{Rhein. Mus.} 1884, 169-208, put forward the view that Aristotle in one of his dialogues ascribed to the soul, as Plato had done, \textit{\v{e}ndo\v{e}le\v{c}eia}, continuous movement, and that he later invented the word \textit{\v{e}nte\v{c}l\v{e}ceia} by a modification of \textit{\v{e}ndo\v{e}le\v{c}eia} in order to express the change in his view about the soul. Diels, in \textit{Zeitschr. Für Vergl. Philol.} Xlvii. 200-3, successfully controverts this view, and shows that \textit{\v{e}nte\v{c}l\v{e}ceia} is a correctly formed equivalent to το \textit{\v{e}nte\v{c}l\v{e}ceia}, ‘having perfection.’” Ross, \textit{Aristotle’s Metaphysics}, 246. It is also worth noting that the sense of ‘continuous movement’ is a suggestion of Hirzel, and, for example, does not make it into the Liddell and Scott lexicon. Blair suggests that \textit{\v{e}ndo\v{e}le\v{c}eia} is a later word that was coined from \textit{\v{e}nte\v{c}l\v{e}ceia}, but offers no evidence to substantiate the assertion.} This pun brings out those senses of the \textit{en-} and the \textit{ekhein} in the word, and makes the reference Sachs suggests to \textit{ti en einai} more plausible.\footnote{Sachs puts it this way: “The addition of \textit{ex\v{e}in} to \textit{enteles}, through the joint action of the meaning of the suffix and the sound of the whole, superimposes upon the sense of ‘completeness’ that of continuity” Sachs, “Motion,” §2.} Quite apart from this, that \textit{entelech\ae}ia is an answer to the question ‘what is it for it to be?’ is confirmed, for example, by the argument in \textit{Metaphysics} IX.8: since the word \textit{energeia} extends \textit{entelech\ae}ia, then \textit{ousia} is \textit{energeia}—this shows that Aristotle takes \textit{entelech\ae}ia to be the \textit{ousia}, which is \textit{to ti en einai}, ‘what it is for something to be,’ or ‘what a thing keeps on being in order to be’ (\textit{Met.} IX.8 1050a16-24, 1050a30-1050b1).

Sachs also argues that, in the word \textit{entelech\ae}ia, Aristotle substituted \textit{telos} \textit{ekhein} for the root \textit{erg-} in \textit{energeia}. Since Aristotle has coined both words, and points out that the two are designed to
tend toward one another or fit together, this is a plausible reading. Sachs summarizes the meaning of *entelekheia* this way:

[Aristotle] chooses a common noun (*energeia*) built on the root *erg* that signifies work. He finds the same meaning in the common verb *ekhein* that means to be by continuing or holding on in some way, and attaches it to an adjective (*enteles*) that signifies completeness, to form the coinage *entelekheia*, which redoubles its meaning by punning on a common word (*endelekheia*) that means continuity or persistence. [And drawing on the phrase *ti en einai*, Aristotle] remakes Socrates’s favorite question *ti esti* (what is it?) by changing the verb to the past tense (*en*), in which alone its progressive aspect can be made unambiguous.129

Based on these considerations, it seems clear that the standard practice, which translates both *energeia* and *entelekheia* with the word ‘actuality,’ should be abandoned. As we noted above, some authors translate *energeia* as ‘activity,’ but, as Beere has argued, this too is misleading. Instead, *energeia* seems best translated ‘being-at-work’ or ‘at-work.’ The meaning of *entelekheia* is not able to be captured in a single elegant English word or phrase, but perhaps it should be rendered by ‘being-complete,’ ‘staying-fulfilled,’ ‘holding onto/held by what it is,’ and other such formulae.

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Chapter Seven: Movement, *Energeia*, and Thinghood

The considerations above concerning *energeia*, *entelekheia*, and their relationship are based primarily on usage and etymology. Aristotle does not leave his expression of their meaning solely up to the etymological imagination, however. In *Met.* IX.8 he also makes an argument that displays their meaning and relationship. The argument of that chapter is that *energeia* is more primary than *dunamis* because its meaning converges with *entelekheia*. The basis of this argument is movement.

I. The Priority of Being-at-Work Over Potency

The argument that concerns us is the penultimate passage in the sequence that shows the priority of being-at-work over potency. The sequence goes from the least governing sense of their priority to the most governing. First, being-at-work takes precedence in *logos* since what is in-potency, properly speaking, is that which admits of being-at-work: for we must be able to say what the work is to say what the potency is.

Being-at-work takes precedence over potency in time in one way, but not in another. Potency is prior in time within the framework of a particular life: in some way I have the ability to walk before I walk, the ability to speak before I speak, the ability to build before I build a house. It should come as no surprise that philosophers who have elevated potency or possibility over actuality have tended to appeal to human mortality or founded their account of being on time.

This way of thinking of potency involves a moment of abstraction, since to say that I have the potency to walk before I walk is to base my assertion not on a full, real potency, which in the right circumstances will act unless something interferes, but instead on what *kind* of being I am, on my *material* character, or on the more abstract concept of *possibility* instead of on potency. For when I am born it is *possible* for me to walk, but I am not yet truly *capable* or potent. Until I am able to walk on my own, I am not capable of walking, not a walker in-potency, not a walking being, except in an abstract or universal sense.
This line of argument leads Aristotle to confront Meno’s impasse, that I cannot achieve knowledge unless I already know the thing I am seeking. If something comes to be, he argues, then it must have exited previously in another way, that is, not merely in possibility, but in potency (Met. IX.8 1049b30-1050a4). Thus, Aristotle remarks, even in this sense, potency is posterior in time to being-at-work, since something of what comes to be must already be: a student who gains the ability to add does so by doing the work of adding, with the teacher’s help. This is an argument based on the analysis of movement: since movement is a continuity, we can imagine it as a line. There will always be an infinitely divisible continuum before any given point on this line. If there is no continuum, there is no movement. Therefore, movement can have no starting point, and something of what is coming to be must already have existed (Phys. VI.6).

But being-at-work is prior in time in another way, since “what is at work always comes into being from what is in potency, by the action of what is at work, a human being from a human being” (Met. IX.8 1049b25-27). In time, then, the priority of being-at-work traverses a doubling of being: a human being-at-work generates a separate being with the potency to be human (Met. IX.8 1049b18-19). It is worth recalling here that destructible living things imitate the divine by doubling themselves, each “enduring not as itself but as one like itself, that is one with it not in number but in kind” (Soul 415b4-8).

II. The Ordered Natural Whole and Being-at-work

The passage we are most concerned with follows: a two-part argument that being-at-work takes precedence over potency in thinghood, ousia. The basis of both parts of this argument is the structure of movement. The first part of the proof (Met. IX.8 1050a4-1050b6) argues that what comes to be (genesis) is organized by an end, the telos, and that this end or accomplishment is being-at-work, and then that things whose telos is their own being-at-work are prior, while the second part (Met. IX.8 1050b6-1051a3) is based on a comparison between destructible things, whose movement is between contradictories, and the planets, whose eternal movement is not between opposites.

130 Cf. also Phys. VII 247b1-248a9.
Aristotle’s point in the first part of this passage seems to be, on the one hand, so obvious that to argue for it seems superfluous, and on the other hand, indefensible, impossible to justify on scientific grounds: he argues that living things aim at a goal.

It seems to us that the naïve and spontaneous way of understanding movement is to think that things come into being with purposes or goals that organize them: eyes are designed in advance for seeing, the birth and life of creatures coincides with an attempt to fulfill a purpose, which gives meaning to their actions. We have come to think of this nature, this purpose as a pre-existing program, a function hard-wired into a thing even before it was created, a fate in the sense of a pre-determined process or fixed goal of development. Thus, we take the idea to be so obvious that we do not realize how strange and tenuous it is.

On the other hand, through methodological bracketing, our physical scientific account of movement restricts its inquiry to the domain of blind efficacy: physicists can talk about how one thing pushes or impacts another, but research into goals or purposes of an event is presumed to be strictly speculative at best, laughable at worst, for the world of modern physics is a world of artificial movement. This concept was extended to organic life through Darwin’s supposition of random variation and the pressures of external natural selection: the organism has no intrinsic goals, only accidental ones built in by the long morphological history of the species.

Aristotle’s position admits of a more conservative formulation than either of these, which for that very reason is provocative. It is more conservative in that he does not presume either that things are actually already what they are, or that they are already what they will be. Things are not already what they are insofar as the physical/natural laws of the organism’s action and development are not already fully worked out or functioning in the organism at its birth. Instead, a tiger cub grows into its own full functioning, taking on its own self-sufficiency and principle, becoming, as it were, its own law as it matures. Neither are living things already what they will be, for the program, design, end, or goal of the organism is not hard-wired into the creature’s

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131 Darwin’s account of adaptive evolution, that is, morphological transformation through natural selection of random variations, appears to destroy the basis for such an argument by positing that variation is random: the eye came to be through a series of accidents. However, on the one hand, even sophisticated interpreters of Darwin’s account of evolution re-inscribe purpose in the life of organisms by presuming that the goal of living is to survive and reproduce.
development from birth. The form of a creature is not a blueprint or technical diagram, but the
look or shape of its functioning. It develops and completes this functioning not by a direct path,
but by doing what it is now capable of. In doing what it is now capable of, it develops new and
more complete capabilities.

For example, a baby does not already possess English or Japanese or Sanskrit in-potency.
What it has is the ability to gesture, grunt, cry, and listen, and by doing these things it develops
an ability to control and differentiate sounds—both its own and those of others—in relational
complexes that engage its world. Through play it slowly refines these sounds into definite and
ever-more precise noises and movements, which, it increasingly discovers, have their own
structure and principles of organization and unity. The same is true of abilities like walking or
hunting.

Aristotle’s description of how the different forms of poetry came into being is an
especially good illustration of the meaning of development and its relation to form and
accomplishment, telos. In chapter 4 of the Poetics he argues that poetry originates in people’s
natural dispositions, for example, a) our delight in understanding, such as in the moment of
recognizing who someone is, b) the way that our first acts of understanding occur through
enactment (mimesis), and c) that we like doing things that have harmonies and rhythms that
accord with our natural form of life.\(^{132}\) Little by little, as people talked together and repeated what
they had said before, through the improvisation of individual people these things get woven
together. But they fit together in different ways, so eventually two ways of doing this—comedy
and tragedy—became distinguished and each settled into a complete and stable form. It is at the
end of this development that comedy and tragedy have got a hold of their nature. Eventually once
they have indicated the pattern of the form of art, then it is possible to settle on very specific
details, like the number of actors, the length, and the rhythm or meter of speaking.\(^{133}\)

\(^{133}\) About rhythm, Aristotle says this: “at first they used the tetrameter because the poetry was suited to
the satyr-play and more appropriate for dancing, but when talking came in, nature itself found the
meter it was home in \((\text{autē hé phusis to oikeion metron eurē})\), for the iambic is the most speakable of the
meters” (Poetics 4 1449a23-25, Sachs, trans). Aristotle, Aristotle’s Ars Poetica, ed. R. Kassel (Oxford:
This idea is found in a number of other places in Aristotle’s work. According to Politics I.2, for example, “something’s nature… is the character it has when its coming to be is complete” (Politics I.2 1252b34-6). The point there is that since, without a community, an individual is not a human being, but is instead a beast or a god, the city is the end and nature of human beings, because it comes into being long after families and villages, and accomplishes what they set out to do. This is the meaning of Aristotle’s argument in our current context of the Metaphysics IX.8 that “things that are next or follow after (husteros) in coming into being are first in form and in thinghood” (Met. IX.8 1050a4-5). The ‘following after’ does not imply a temporal projection of thinghood, but an ordered movement, through which potencies are brought into being and brought to completion.

From this description it is clear that nature, which alone is the form of destructible things, is not ‘what is hard-wired’ into it, nor is it ‘what something is programmed to do,’ still less is it ‘what a thing is from the start,’ or ‘its pre-determined process.’ Nature, phusis, is what emerges, it is what comes forth. For phusis comes from phuein, which means to come forth, to bring-forth or give birth, to become.

If we take a living creature as the exemplar of nature, it is not like a table or any other artifact, which we can say is a product distinguishable from the process of building it. The way this being is coming forth itself has an order, pace, or pattern, but this pattern is precisely the being that comes forth. More accurately, then, nature is the form or shape:

nature in the sense of a coming-to-be proceeds towards nature. For it is not like doctoring, which leads not to the art of doctoring but to health… But it is not in this way that nature is related to nature. What grows qua growing grows from something into something. Into what then does it grow? Not into that from which it arose but into that to which it tends. The shape then is nature. (Phys. II.1 193b13-19)134

134 Hardie and Gaye, The Physics. Heidegger, in the translation in “Physics B, 1” emphasizes the structure of being-on-the-way more forcefully: “Furthermore, phusis, which is addressed as genesis – i.e., as deriving-and-placing-something so that it stands forth – is (nothing less than) being-on-the-way (odos) toward phusis. (And this), of course, not as the practice of medicine is said to be the way not toward the art of medicine but toward health. For whereas the practice of medicine necessarily comes from the art of medicine, it is not directed toward this art (as its end). But phusis is not related to phusis in this way (namely, as medicine is to health). Rather, whatever is a being from and in the manner of phusis goes from something toward something insofar as this being is determined by phusis (in the
Nature is that into which a thing grows more than it is the being from which it grows. That from which a thing grows is, here, as in Physics I, the underlying material, but in a different way, the privation, which, as we saw above in II.4, has a very different relationship with form. Nature in the sense of the form into which a thing grows is not present or does not obtain (huparchei) in a being from the start. Thus its presence or emergence can be incomplete, but it is complete to the extent that this pattern holds itself together, as a Gestalt. To articulate this idea, Aristotle uses phrases like ‘to bring forth as organized,’ or ‘to emerge composed or put together,’ (phuein sunestêkasi) and the word ‘natured’ (sumpephuken) which can be rendered ‘grown together in a natural whole’ (Met. VII.17 1041b30, IX.1 1046a29).

Why is this later, ordered whole more primary than the less ordered, less unified precursor? Aristotle’s discussion of the priority of being-at-work in time did not give us an answer. The closest it came was his claim that before any particular movement, there is an actually moving thing which moves it (Met. IX.8 1049b24-7). The time argument ought not to be confused with the current argument: time is not sufficient to tell us when a thing has achieved its nature. The present argument, however, allows us to say that what has its nature stands forth as a distinct, singular being, articulated into parts which actively hold themselves together. But how does it show that being-at-work is prior to potency?

III. The Problem with Being-at-work

Aristotle can show that being-at-work is prior in thinghood, ousia, because the completion, accomplishment, telos is being-at-work. But now this, too requires explanation—an explanation that Aristotle immediately sets about giving in the argument that follows.

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135 A loose interpretation of the previous argument about priority in time might tempt us to give one answer: on the level of multiple generations, without a man, the boy would not exist, without the more ordered being, the less ordered one would not exist. But this is true the other way as well: in the course of a single life, the boy must exist before the man does. And why should we privilege the species over the individual? The individual could not exist without the species, but the species could exist without the individual. But Aristotle makes none of these arguments.
In approaching this argument, we must bear two things in mind: 1) Aristotle’s is not holding that potency is an earlier stage in the development of a thing and being-at-work is the later stage. Aristotle does not say this in the previous section on priority in time, and he does not argue this in the section on priority in thinghood, ousia. Instead, he argues that potency is for the sake of being-at-work. The examples speak the clearest: having sight and seeing are clearly simultaneous, as is being a house-builder and the activity of house-building, but one is for the sake of the other.

More importantly, 2) as we saw above, being-at-work can be incomplete or complete so the relationship between being-at-work and accomplishment or telos is unclear. Worse than this, the relationship between being-at-work and accomplishment or completion is problematic both because of its origin as a near-synonym for the concept of use, and in the “product problem” of work—that it means both the activity and the object produced by it (cf. Chapter Five, above). Arguing that thinghood is being-at-work seems to undo the very idea of completion for which Aristotle seems to be arguing. It makes sense, then, that Aristotle begins the final part of his argument by returning to the concept of use, and completes it with a discussion of the product problem of work (Met. IX.8 1050a24).

IV. Being For The Sake Of Something

Let us summarize the argument so far: to see how being-at-work is more primary than potency in thinghood, ousia, we have to see how being-at-work is related to form and completion, telos. We are asking about thinghood, specifically, how being-at-work, energeia is related to completion or accomplishment, telos. The phenomenon Aristotle examines is coming into being, genesis. Why? For coming-to-be, like other forms of movement, has both completion and articulate structure or form. To show that the completion of something is being-at-work, then, Aristotle’s strategy is to look at movement.

To show this, he must show that form is being-at-work, because being-at-work seems to be, as we saw, either a relation to a further product, or a pure abstract activity which does not
have a form distinct from that of which it is the activity. The telos is energeia only if articulate structure, form, eidos is energeia.136

Thus, to make a single point, Aristotle must establish two things at once: that being-at-work is a completion, and that form is internal to movement itself, and therefore to being-at-work. The first seems simpler to point out, but as we just saw, it depends on the second if it is to have meaning or content, for being-at-work appears to be indeterminate or abstract. The second flies in the face of ordinary conceptions of movement, which take it to be indeterminate or mixed with nothingness (cf. Phys. II.2).

But movement has the following advantage: not only does it have something toward which it proceeds or for the sake of which it occurs, it also gives rise to a shape or form. Both its telic structure and its productive or natural (that is, emerging) shape allows Aristotle to argue that movement itself has form.

Thus, through the identity of being-at-work and movement, Aristotle shows that being-at-work is completion. He makes his argument by examining the structure of coming-to-be. He then argues, by examining the movement of learning, movement that something at-work has in it the structure or form of the completion. He closes by arguing that the work of being-at-work does not have to be something external or other than the being-at-work itself.

The first part of the structural analysis of coming-to-be is as follows. Paragraph breaks divide the parts of the argument:

and everything that comes into being goes up to ['walks toward'] a source and a completion
(since a source is the being-for-the-sake-of something, and the coming into being is for the sake of the completion), but the being-at-work is the completion, and it is for the enjoyment of this that the potency is taken on. (Met. IX.8 1050a7-10)137

This is a complex argument, which takes the following form: 1) what comes to be goes toward a source and an accomplishment, telos. As we saw, what comes later is the completion or

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136 He does not show that being-at-work is form, but that form is being-at-work.
137 Sachs, trans., modified. καὶ ὅτι ἀπαν ἐκ ἀρχὴν βαδίζει τὸ γεγονόμενον καὶ τέλος (ἀρχὴ γὰρ τὸ οὗ ἔνεκα, τοῦ τέλους δὲ ἔνεκα ή γένεσις), τέλος δ’ ἡ ἐνέργεια, καὶ τούτου χάριν ή δύναμις λαμβάνεται.
telos, but Aristotle makes it clear that a source, arkhē, emerges later as well. 2) The structure of coming to be is that a source is for something, and the completion or accomplishment is that for which both the source and coming to be are for. 3) Being-at-work is the accomplishment, and potency is acquired for the sake of it.

Let us discuss the argument outside the parenthesis first. In the first, going up to a source, here, becomes, in the third, taking hold of it: “it is for the enjoyment of this that the potency is taken on” (Met. IX.8 1050a10). We approach and grasp potencies and take them for ourselves so that we can enjoy being-at-work doing what they let us do. Being-at-work, then, does not replace having or being a source, that is, a potency or nature, it requires it.

Let us turn to the two claims in the parenthesis. Here there is an ambiguity: ἄρχη γὰρ τὸ οὗ ἐνέκα can be translated either as saying that a source is the thing for the sake of which [some unspecified thing] is—this is the normal translation—or it can be rendered as saying that a source is the being-for-the-sake-of something. At stake is the following problem: are source and completion the same, and therefore both energeia, or are they different, that is, the source is dunamis, the completion energeia? It comes down to whether Aristotle is using τὸ simply with οὗ or whether it reads as τὸ... ἐνέκα.

The passage is read overwhelmingly as saying that energeia is both the source and the accomplishment. Notably, Aquinas argues that it is the source because it is the accomplishment. But we should hesitate to accept this reading, for four reasons: 1) in Met. IX.3 Aristotle argued against the Megarians that potency and being-at-work are different. But to read the passage as saying that being-at-work is a source is to make it absorb the very thing that defines potency. 2)

\[138\] kai toutou xarin hé dunamis lambanetai
\[139\] It is at this conceptual crossroad that it becomes tempting to think of being-at-work as something that affects or acts upon potency, though this is false, since, though the two can be in different beings, they are not different beings. The teacher has an ability to teach, which is at-work, but her being-at-work is the learning in the student, who thereby is gaining the potency to play music by being-at-work playing music with the teacher’s help. Aristotle does not say that the for-the-sake-of-which is a source, and the source is the completion. He says: ἄρχη γὰρ τὸ οὗ ἐνέκα, τοῦ τέλους δὲ ἐνέκα ἡ γένεσις “a source is the being-for-the-sake-of something, and the coming into being is for the sake of the completion” (Met. IX.8 1050a8).


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Met. IX.8 opens with the claim that being-at-work is more primary than potency or nature, because they are sources. It would thus be very strange to turn around and, barely a page later, claim that being-at-work is a source of movement.

3) Now, there is a commonly-acknowledged sense in which being-at-work appears to be a source, for acting virtuously gives rise to a greater ability to act virtuously. But being-at-work in this case is not a source of movement, but of potency, and either way, to argue that being-at-work brings potency into being does not give Aristotle an argument for the priority of being-at-work over thinghood that he seeks in this passage. But since potency and nature are clearly named as sources, if the phrase is read in the way I am suggesting, namely as saying that the very being of a source is to be for the sake of something, energeia, then we clearly have the primacy in being that Aristotle was seeking. Finally, 4) Aristotle could easily say that that for the sake of which is the source, and that the source is the completion, or that they are the same. But he does not say this. Instead there are two different articulations, one concerning that for which, the other concerning genesis: ἀρχὴ γὰρ τὸ ὡς ἐνεκα, and τῶν τέλους δὲ ἐνεκα ἢ γένεσις. The passage immediately following this claim does not argue that being-at-work is a source, it argues, through examples, that being-at-work is an accomplishment, telos, and that the very being of potency is for the sake of the energeia—exactly the point that my reading takes it to be.

If this is right, Aristotle does not conflate the two concepts, but keeps them distinct: to be a source is to be for the sake of something, namely a completion or accomplishment. Thus, when you take on a source, you do it so that you can have the accomplishment.

The examples confirm this reading: creatures do not see so they may have sight, they have sight so they may see, have house-building so they may house-build, have theory so they may theorize. Two chapters earlier, Aristotle called sight, house-building, and theory potencies. Aristotle defined a potency as a source in VI.12, IX.1, and at the beginning of the current chapter.

141 “It is apparent that being-at-work is prior to potency. For I mean by potency not only the definition by which it is said to be the change-source in another or as other, but in the same way all change- or rest-sources. For nature is generated/comes to be in the same/in itself, for it is in the same genus as potency, a change-source, but not in another, but in the same as the same.” φανερὸν ὅτι πρὸτερον ἐνέργεια δυνάμεως ἐστίν. λέγω δὲ δυνάμεως οὐ μόνον τῆς ὁρισμένης ἢ λέγεται ἀρχὴ μεταβλητικῆ ἐν ἄλλῳ ἢ ἐν ἄλλῳ, ἄλλ᾽ ὅλως πάσῃς ἀρχῆς κινητικῆς ἢ στατικῆς. καὶ γὰρ ἢ φύσις ἐν ταύτῳ γίνεται: ἐν ταύτῳ γὰρ γένει τῇ δυνάμει: ἀρχὴ γὰρ κινητικῆ, ἄλλον ἐν ἄλλῳ ἄλλον ἐν αὐτῷ ἢ αὐτῷ. (Met. IX.8 1049b5-10).
The point, then, is that a source is for the sake of an end that is different from it. This is true even through you may generate or strengthen potencies through activity.

The priority in telos of being-at-work has several articulations, then, in this short passage: it is that for which sources (nature and potency) are, it is the accomplishment or completion of coming-to-be, and it is the reason for the coming-to-be of potency as well. Thus being-at-work is shown to be prior to potency in coming-to-be. Further, if the very being of a source is to be for the sake of something, then the argument establishes the priority of being-at-work based on the very being or thinghood of potency.

And yet, Aristotle is only partway through the argument. Upon what other basis does Aristotle need to establish priority in thinghood? On the basis of form and the categorical determination of thinghood sketched in Met. IX.7-8. And this is the next step in the argument, namely, an argument from the being of material and form in movement. More generally, we do not yet have the priority of being-at-work in thinghood because we do not yet have an argument from completion simply, we only have an account of the completion of potency. We need further argument to establish its priority in telos simply, and in fact Aristotle gives it.

But the argument leads to a much deeper, more striking conclusion than just that being-at-work is more primary. It accomplishes much more than we expected, for the claim that being-at-work was more thinghood could be easily established if thinghood had a character entirely separate and independent of being-at-work. But Aristotle says instead that thinghood is being-at-work. We end up discovering not that being-at-work is more thinghood than potency, but that thinghood and form are being-at-work.

**V. Form and Movement**

Aristotle’s argument concerning formal completion and movement has two steps: 1) the argument that the analysis of the relationship between potency and being-at-work gives us the relationship between material and form, and 2) the argument that material is in the form, even when the completion or form is itself movement. This argument relies on the idea that completion is a form.
Furthermore, 1) the material is in-potency because it goes toward the form, and when it is being-at-work, then it is in the form. 2) And it is the same way in other cases, including those for which the completion is movement. (Met. IX.8 1050a15-16)\textsuperscript{142}

The relationship between material and form is interpreted through movement. Material ‘goes toward’ (elthoi eis) form in two senses: 1) wood can be changed or moved from being just unarranged wood fiber or planks (the sterēsis), into being a table (the eidos, morphē). By this change, it is certainly not implied that being-in-potency changes into being-a-table. Nor does the material cease to be wood in becoming a table. Nevertheless, through this change it takes on another level of identity, namely its form, the pattern of its attachment with other pieces of wood, and ultimately the being-at-work supporting things that a table is. Thus, we say it is a wooden table. Again, it is not true to say that a thing changes from being material into being form, but the material changes from lacking a form to being formed (cf. Physics I.8-9).\textsuperscript{143} By drawing on the analysis of movement in Physics I.8-9, then, Aristotle brings up the premise that form and the completion, telos, of movement are the same.

But there is another sense, which is the primary sense here: Aristotle says that the material goes in the direction of the form, and by being-at-work it is in the form. We can express again by using the table as an example, 2) as the wood holds its own shape, by this very activity it is holding the shape of the table. Thus its being-at-work is in some way flowing toward the table, the sense or direction of the wood is, by its pattern of organization into the larger whole, drawn from the wood into this general shape. Thus, it is in a way true that the table is made out of wood, because its being-at-work is now directed toward the whole of which it is now a part. Being-at-work tends toward the form or whole accomplishment, telos. This is emphatically the case for living things: a heart outside of a human body is only equivocally a heart, that is, it is a heart only in shape, not in its shape-at-work. A heart is a heart only insofar as it contributes to and draws on the whole body through its movement.


\textsuperscript{143} See also II.4, on the elements of the description of movement, above.
The reference to movement in the next sentence should not mislead us, then, into thinking that the material-form pair just mentioned does not involve movement: in both cases it
does. What does movement contribute to the concept of material and form? Through the concepts
of potency and being-at-work, it contributes the idea that material is oriented toward and gets its
sense from the form. But a form orients the material only insofar as the material is-at-work, that is,
the parts must be at-work as the form, at-work in this definite shape.

When Aristotle says that the same is true when movement is the completion, it is because
he must still establish that being-at-work in every case exhibits or reveals the completion. It is
hard, at first, to recognize that movement itself is an ordered structure, the telos, in these cases. It
is hard to recognize because we typically think of telos as a destination of movement, a
destination at which, upon reaching it, movement ends. In other words, we think of movement as
inherently incomplete. Here Aristotle says explicitly what he implied in using the word being-in-
completion to define movement, namely that movement can itself be a completion, an accomplishment.

Aristotle argues that the same point applies in the rest of the cases in which something is
at-work, that whenever at thing is at-work, the form is there.\footnote{By saying that the same is true in other cases, Aristotle appears to be referring to the distinction two
chapters previous between two kinds of dunamis—energeia pair: potency—movement and material—
thenghood \textit{(Met. IX.6 1048b8-10)}. The implication was movement was being-at-work and that form as
being-at-work is thenghood.} Thus, when a student is learning, the form of her activity of learning just is the telos or goal of learning. When a teacher is helping a
student struggle through a math problem or writing task, to the extent that the student is
learning it is because their thoughts and work follows a certain order—the very order it will be
once they have mastered the lesson. Their movement has structure, it is articulate. The form or
structure of the movement dwells in or rises off of it: a young midfielder in soccer moves,
sometimes, the way a consummate midfielder does, and the complete form of this movement is
visible long before he is fully in it. For sometimes it is unclear what the young player is doing, or
whether it is working, but even when it is unclear why he made the run he did, or why he passed
the ball there instead of somewhere else, the things he wanted to do, or should have done, are
visible within his movement. The form exists, shows up, comes to be through being-at-work. This
is true even while he is still moving toward being a complete soccer player, that is, even though he is moving toward potency, toward being fully potent, for potency contains and accomplishes the being-at-work that is the form. If this were not so, then the potency could not be ontologically directed at the being-at-work.

It follows that, even though a student might be able to perform complex derivations in calculus only with the help of a teacher, or a collection of un-fastened planks might be able to support books only while the woodworker is holding them together with his hands, this is not to be in the telos, for the student is not a mathematician, and the planks are not a table. For material to be fully in the form, that is to be in the telos, to be entelekheia, it is not sufficient for it merely to be at work. The material must also be fully potential, that is, it must be a mathematician or a table in-potency to deserve the name.

Thus, when Aristotle argues that being-at-work tends toward being-complete, he is not talking about being-at-work alone, abstracted from potency:

For the work [ergon] is completion [telos], and being-at-work [energeia] is the work, and this is why the name being-at-work is said according to (or through) the work and converges with being-in-completion [entelekheia].

Being-at-work is the work from which it gets its name, and the work it is is the completion, so being-at-work tends toward being-in-completion. The word entelekheia is often interpreted as being more primary than energeia in the account of being—thus some translate it as ‘complete reality or actuality,’—but this primacy is assessed for the wrong reason. It is tempting to presume that it is more primary than energeia because energeia can have the meaning of ‘activity.’ So, the assumption goes, entelekheia must be more pure, more static than energeia because (misinterpreting the word telos) it is the ‘end’ of movement or activity. But it is, instead, more primary because it includes both potency and being-at-work. This is why it is, at first, confused with potency in On the Soul II.5.

VI. The Refutation of the Dispersive Concept of Movement

145 τὸ γὰρ ἔργον τέλος, ἥδε ἐνέργεια τὸ ἔργον, διό καὶ τὸνομα ἐνέργεια λέγεται κατὰ τὸ ἔργον καὶ συντέταινε πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν.
And yet this raises a problem, which Aristotle brings up by referring to an example of Hermes, the messenger. Scholars are at a loss about how to understand this problem, distracted, perhaps, by reference to Pauson, who was known for trompe l’oeil paintings. Presumably the question is about Hermes, whether in bringing the message to an other, the knowledge expressed in the message is within him or beyond him. In other words, can a messenger pass on a message he does not himself understand, or does the activity of bearing the message imply understanding?

The problem is this: potency is the source of movement in an other. This implies that the telos of potency will always be in that other. Being-at/in-work tends to mean being-in-completion because the work of a movement is its completion. But for a thing to be complete is for it to be-in-potency, that is to be the origin of movement in another: the problem we characterized as a problem of use is not an isolated concept: it is an interpretation of the structure of movement as a whole, including both being-in-work and being-in potency.

Thus, the very convergence of being-at-work and being-in-completion Aristotle just declared, seems to be torn apart because potency, like use, originates movement in an other. Put the other way, Aristotle’s Convergence Argument, that being-in-work converges with being-in-completion, is a necessary conclusion about the structure of movement. But it condenses in a single formula the exact contradiction of an entire account of movement according to which movement is dispersive—an account, moreover, which is part of Aristotle’s definition of potency as the source of movement in another, or in itself as other.

The idea that movement is dispersive is intuitive: not only for the reasons mentioned in discussing use, above, but also because potency seems to be over others: the movement of artificial creation makes something emerge in the things upon which you act, when we exert our own bodies we think it is usually by pressing against something else, the threat of hurting someone can establish one’s ruling power over them. More profoundly, a moving thing scatters others like a bowling ball does pins, the gesture of my arm seems to spread open a region of space, for it is the continuity of movement that establishes the idea of place. The act of re-imagining bodies as extension might not be drawn from an observation about the mutual exclusivity of bodies so
much as from the dispersive structure of movement. But if the essence of movement is dispersive, then it is not something. This is not the problem of Leibniz, that if it is not a being, then it is not a being. The problem is that if it is essentially and only dispersive, then nothing can unify the dispersion. But nothing can be pure scattering: a dispersion is a unified event of dispersion. So surely this experience of movement is not entirely false.

Yet the problem is that movement also gives us the experience of an aim, completion, telos, that seems to contradict just this. Yet the two concepts are not mirror opposites of each other: the telic structure of movement is not one of pure condensation, gathering, or identity, while the dispersive structure of movement is not simply externalization, scattering, or othering. After all, for there to be a gesture of my arm which opens up a place, there must be an arm. On the other hand, even apart from its gesture, the living of this arm is already both unified and dispersed: it is multiple and one at once, its one-ness is not pure dotlike self-identity, it is not a single one but wholeness, unity—words which imply the unity of.... Unity implies a background and constitutive diversity. Movement contains diverging structures: one of othering or dispersion, and one of identity or collection, but the concept of completion is not one side of this distinction, for the two imply one another. More accurately, movement is the name for the way each implies the other, movement is the event of dispersion and therefore collection (e.g. an arm’s gesture, a whole event of scattering pins), of being oneself by being another (e.g. reproduction, metabolism), and so on.

Aristotle does not seek to eliminate the dispersive concept of movement, for it is true that a teacher’s work is in someone else: the student. What he does, instead, is to use his argument that movement is a completion as an analogy to mark out an experience that grasps being-at-work as its own completion.

VII. Completion Being-at-work

The question Aristotle faces in the final part of the argument, then, is whether the completion of something can be in it. In answering yes, Aristotle shows being-at-work can be an accomplishment simply. At the same time, since eidos are energeia, which overwhelmingly
establishes that energeia is more ousia than potency. The basis for the argument is, again, movement.

And while for some <cases> the putting-to-use is ultimate (as for sight, the seeing, and nothing other than this <seeing> comes to be apart from sight), and for other <cases> something comes into being (just as, from house-building, besides the activity of house-building, a house <comes to be>) (Met. IX.8 1050a28-30)

When putting-to-use is ultimate, only the use comes to be. Here the question that closed Metaphysics VII.17 arises again. There, the question was: is the syllable something apart from the letters? Here it is: what is the status of use? Is it something? Aristotle starts by showing that some thing comes to be from movement, and based on this argues that the use, the being-at-work, is some thing: for the familiar kinds of being and movement, there is a work that comes to be.

The being-at-work of moving things produces a separate work or telos. This is not as obvious as it seems, and Aristotle has to argue against the following idea: if the movement was actually in the builder and not in the house-being-built, the work (the house), would be separate from the being-at-work that movement is. In a word, the structure of movement would seem to be scattered: work and being-at-work would split off from each other. If this was true, being-at-work could not be something whole, telos. But then telos, too would elude us, as would the unity of form and material and therefore categorical and accidental being, nature, and movement. It is hard to over-emphasize the implications of this line of thinking for metaphysics in general.

Aristotle argues that this is not the case by arguing that pure use or exercise has the same telic structure as movement, namely that the being-at-work and the work converge. On the one hand, the use is a completion, the khrēsis (and therefore energeia) is telos. On the other hand, for moving things the energeia is in the very thing that is coming to be the work:

nevertheless, the one <that is, seeing,> is no less a completion, and the other, <for things like building>, is more a completion than the potency is, for the activity of

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146 ἐπεὶ δ’ ἐστὶ τῶν μὲν ἐσχατὸν ἡ χρήσις (οὗν ὁμοιός ἡ ἐνέργεια, καὶ οὐθὲν γίγνεται παρὰ ταύτῃ ἔτερον ἀπὸ τῆς ὁμοιότητος), ἀπ’ ἐνίοτον δὲ γίγνεται τι (οἷον ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκοδομικῆς οἰκία παρὰ τὴν οἰκοδόμησιν)...
building takes place within the thing that is being built, and it comes into being and is at the same time as the house. (Met. IX.8 1050a28-30).147

Aristotle has already argued that the use or exercise is a completion since a potency is for its exercise. This is true for both cases. But this time he gives a completely different reason: house-building, the energeia, is of the house-builder, but it is in what is built or made (poioumenon), and the movement is in what is moved (kinoumenon). Furthermore, house-building comes to be and is at the same time as the house. What does this accomplish for him?

When the being-at-work creates something beyond the use or exercise, namely the house, that activity is still more completion than the potency. The following problem remains, however: that which is the completion most of all—the house—still seems to be something else beyond the exercise. If this is true for being-at-work in general, seeing would be for the sake of something further, such as the object of sight, or survival. This is why the argument that the being-at-work of movement converges with the work or completion is so important: because kinésis is energeia, what is true about it will be true when there is just an exercise.148

What has Aristotle accomplished to this point? Through the structure of movement he has shown that being-at-work is something, it exists, it is a work, a completion. This would be impossible if movement was not, or if it was a mix of being and non-being:

In those for which there is not some other work besides the being-at-work, the being-at-work springs up in themselves, as seeing <springs up> in the seer and theory in the theorizer and life in the soul, hence even happiness; for that’s a sort of life. (Met. IX.8 1050a34-b1, emphasis mine)149

Since being-at-work is the work, the being-at-work is native to the potent thing, the seer, the theorizer, the living being. Since the work is the accomplishment, the telos, the being-at-work

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147 ὁμοιος οὖθεν ἦτοι ἐνθα μὲν τέλος, ἐνθα δὲ μᾶλλον τέλος τῆς δυνάμεως ἐστιν: ἢ γὰρ οἰκοδόμησις ἐν τῷ οἰκοδομουμένῳ, καὶ ἄμα γίγνεται καὶ ἔστι τῇ οἰκίᾳ.
148 It is worth noting that the previous two paragraphs were about use or exercise, ἡ κρήσις, but only now, in giving the solution, does Aristotle use the word being-at-work, for the structure of use is different than being-at-work in this sense.
149 Furth, trans., modified. ὅσον δὲ μὴ ἔστιν ἄλλο τι ἔργον παρὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει ἡ ἐνέργεια (οἷον ἢ ὄρασις ἐν τῷ ὄραματι καὶ ἡ θεορία ἐν τῷ θεοροῦντι καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐν τῇ σωφροσύνῃ, διὸ καὶ ἡ εὐδαιμονία: ζωὴ γὰρ ποιά τίς ἐστιν).
is telos. Aristotle consolidates this argument in Met. IX.9 by showing that being-at-work is more choiceworthy than potency.

Though being-at-work is different than being-potent, it is not something else—the work of the potent thing here is not another being, but the very one which is potent. The word Aristotle uses for this is huparchein, hupo-archein, to begin, to originate or get underway, to arise or spring up from within or underneath, and also to devote oneself to something, to belong or obtain for it. The meaning of this word, in particular its connection to movement, is often entirely lost in being translated by a variation of the word presence. It is one of the fundamental words in Aristotle’s philosophical vocabulary. Being-at-work, energeia, springs up within the potent thing, within the seeing thing, and is devoted to or belongs to it. This is why the being is something, a completion, telos, with its own independent character. In this respect it does not depend on other things for it to be what it is, nor is its work dispersed into something else. Aristotle gives us another name for the way energeia springs up within a thing: it is a sort of life.\(^{150}\)

This brings Aristotle to the highest point of the description of potency and being-at-work in Metaphysics IX, the discovery not only that being-at-work is thinghood, ousia, more than potency is, not even that being-at-work is one of the ways of being ousia, but the other way around, namely that “thinghood and form are being-at-work” (Met. IX.8 1050b2).\(^{151}\) Being in the primary sense cannot be bestowed upon something, it cannot be extrinsic to it, it cannot occur to something else, as we might naïvely think form would occur to material. It must instead spring up within something of its own accord. The visible exemplar of this springing up is the way movement comes to be or springs up in a thing capable of movement. It is by studying movement that we find a name for the springing up: energeia.

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\(^{150}\) This echoes Socrates’ claim that the forms must in some way be alive.

\(^{151}\) ὥστε φανερὸν ὅτι ἡ οὐσία καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἐνέργειά ἐστιν.
Chapter Eight: Concluding Remarks

The introduction to this project started from the observation that the problem of being is usually posed on the ground of the question of unity and multiplicity, that the question of being is a question of structure. We traced out the elements of Aristotle’s answer that are worked out in his unswerving devotion to the study of movement. For movement to be, being must have a certain structure. In the course of this analysis, the following concepts arose: the many senses of being, material, simple yet determinate non-being (deprivation), potency, being-at-work, completion, nature. But the shift in the concept of being that Aristotle accomplishes through these can be articulated in two concepts: the multiplicity of senses of being, and being as activity, a sense of being within which we articulated potency and being-at-work, which is completion and therefore thinghood and nature most of all.

How do activity and aspect change the account of unity and multiplicity, parts and wholes? We can make the following tentative remarks: first, Aristotle’s insistence on being as activity is an argument that the unity of things has no basis outside or independent of them, but only within them (cf. Chapter II.4.vi, above). Words are not sufficient to account for the unity of things, since the words “the floor is yellow” do not on their own clarify what sense of being the word ‘is’ expresses, but, to the extent that the word ‘is’ suggests that identity is univocal, they simplify and to that extent block a path to the discovery of the thing. Moreover, activity can be either intransitive, the way a thing can grow by nature without changing its intrinsic character even as it is becoming what it is, or transitive, the way a potency to teach can be at work in another person. Thus, to say that being is activity allows new and varying unities between things that are in other respects counted as multiples.

Second, each aspect of being reconfigures the problem of multiplicity and different unities because it starts, as it were, at the beginning, namely that there are already unities and multiples, and that we will not find a layer of being or discourse on which there is only one or the other. To see how ‘one’ and ‘many’ are not mutually exclusive concepts, it is necessary to shift beyond the mere analysis of words. This shift offers us a much richer understanding of the act of
speaking, and the meaning of words, which Aristotle in fact offers, but which lies beyond our current argument.

For some multiplicities, the multiplicity is unstable, for some the relations between unities is unstable, and for some, the kinds of unity in the group are heterogeneous. The primary example discussed above is trio material—form—deprivation. The form-deprivation pair fall under the same law of unity, that is, they are counted according to the same formal criteria, but one of them does not exist: this is an unstable multiplicity. For its part, the material-form pair both are, and yet they are not the same kind of being, not counted according to the same principle or criteria—they are heterogeneous unities—and to make matters worse, in another respect they are counted as one, even though the form of the material varies. If Aristotle intended to solve the problem, he appears to have made it much worse. In fact, he has changed what the problem of unity and multiplicity is.

We can express Aristotle’s way out in the following way: being-in-completion or accomplishment, entelekheia, is a focal being of a constellation of beings, a focal meaning. For each focal meaning or kind of whole there is a different array of multiples/unities that compose it. The multiplicity of which a thing is the accomplishment cannot be derived from the law, logos, or articulation of the accomplishment. You cannot derive from health the particular constellation of senses of which health is the meaning or being: health does not tell you the difference and therefore the relationship between health and a healthy carrot, a healthy temperature, a healthy smile, a healthy running distance, a healthy thought, or a healthy curiosity or devotion. The accomplishment is not a self-contained being, but the accomplishment of something.

Movement gives us the concept of completion, telos, which makes entelekheia possible. There is no independent epistemic frame or standard, no set epistemic path to discover what the completion of each thing is, there is only the act of studying this particular movement. For thought, the only way into the being of completion is to live in the activity of the thing. This is not mysterious: it is by watching animals that I discover how they fit together, how their bodies work, what they are striving to accomplish, and how they fit into the ecological dynamic system, it is by the activity of practicing—which is both pathless and directed—that I become a violin
player. We begin by working with the working of the thing, and by its work it sets the terms of the investigation.

We do not start out dealing with pure disorder, pure multiplicity or chaos. Being starts out immediately having kinds. Though Aristotle argues that there are incomposite things (asuntheta), these are not ‘behind’ being, we do not start out thinking them as incomposites, and when we do, we think them within the various layered configurations of multiplicity and unity. We start out and remain always dealing with things joined in divided unities or multiples, and the way they arrive and articulate themselves, unstably, heterogeneously, diversely, is by being-at-work, for example, by moving. The work of philosophy is not to remove or solve this problem by finding a starting place from which to derive these multiplicities more stably, it is not to change the location of knowledge, but to combine what is multiple and distinguish what is one, and to come, through this, and all along the way, to make contact with what is neither a unity nor a multiple: that being-at-work by which they are both many and one, which comes within and before the distinction, by which they are at all.1

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1 In this way it seems that the chapter on truth that closes Met. IX is a mirror of Physics I.1. Physics I.1 describes the starting place for knowledge as being a mess of jumbled up and confused unities, our work being to combine and separate these appropriately. Met. IX.10 argues that for composites truth is a matter of combination and separation, while for incomposites like the what or essence of something, truth is a matter of touching or assertion, and falsity a matter of not touching (Met. IX.10 1051b18-24).
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