



# UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI VERONA

*DEPARTMENT OF*

*HUMAN SCIENCES*

*GRADUATE SCHOOL OF*

*HUMAN SCIENCES*

*DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN*

*HUMAN SCIENCES*

Cycle / year XXXV/ 2019

TITLE OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

## **BEING BEYOND MOTION:**

## **AN INTERPRETATION OF ARISTOTLE'S CONFRONTATION WITH THE MEGARIANS IN *METAPHYSICS* Θ**

IN *CO-TUTELLE DE THÈSE* WITH THE UNIVERSIDAD DE BUENOS AIRES

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*BEING BEYOND MOTION:  
AN INTERPRETATION OF ARISTOTLE'S CONFRONTATION WITH THE MEGARIANS IN METAPHYSICS* Ⓟ

PhD thesis  
Verona, 2 February 2023

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents an interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of *δύναμις* and *ἐνέργεια* from the perspective of his confrontation with the Megarians. The first part of the thesis provides a detailed analysis of the extant sources of the Megarians. It also connects these sources to some crucial passages from Plato's *Euthydemus* and *Sophist* which function as important precedents of Aristotle's distinction between *δύναμις* and *ἐνέργεια*. The examination of the connection between the Megarians and the early stages of the *δύναμις-ἐνέργεια* distinction shows that Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians is not limited to *Metaphysics* Θ 3. On the contrary, this latter passage is part of a wider discussion that involves the Megarians, Plato, and Aristotle, and concerns fundamental ontological issues, such as the question of the unity of being and the relation between being and becoming.

The second part of the thesis presents a close reading of the most significant passages of book Θ of the *Metaphysics*, which is dedicated to the elucidation of the concepts of *δύναμις* and *ἐνέργεια*. Particular attention is paid to chapter 3 of book Θ, the site of Aristotle's famous anti-Megarian polemic. My interpretation of the chapter will be based largely on the work done in the first part of the dissertation. I will show that this crucial chapter plays a pivotal role in the internal structure of the treatise, connecting the initial analysis of the motion sense of *δύναμις*, carried out in chapters 1–2 and 5 of book Θ, with the later analysis of the senses of *δύναμις* and *ἐνέργεια* that extend beyond motion, which takes place in chapters 6–9.

My reading of Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians will prove useful interpreting of some of the most obscure and contentious passages of *Met.* Θ 6 and 8. Above all, it will help us reject the common tendency to conflate the notions of motion and activity in the context of Aristotle's wider argument in *Met.* Θ. This will also allow us to reject the dominant reading of Θ, which contends that the treatise carries out a transition from a capacity-activity sense of *δύναμις* and *ἐνέργεια* towards the modal notions of potentiality and actuality.

I will claim that the most crucial contribution of *Met.* Θ is the introduction of the concept of motionless activity. This notion allows Aristotle to break the rigid ontological dichotomy upheld by his Megarian opponents and to secure the existence of an ultimate active cause of all that is. In other words, by way of the concept of motionless activity, Aristotle can uphold the self-sustaining and determinate character of being without

sacrificing its active character: that is, without severing its connection with motion, generation, and physical reality.

## SUMMARY (ITALIAN)

Questa tesi dottorale presenta un'interpretazione della dottrina aristotelica su δύναμις ed ἐνέργεια dalla prospettiva del suo confronto con i megarici. La prima parte della tesi consiste in un'analisi dettagliata delle fonti sui megarici stessi. Tali fonti vengono messe in rapporti con alcuni importanti passi dei dialoghi platonici *Eutidemo* e *Sofista*, nei quali vengono individuati notevoli precedenti della distinzione aristotelica tra δύναμις ed ἐνέργεια. Segue un esame comparato tra i testi megarici, i citati precedenti platonici, e le prime attestazioni della distinzione aristotelica tra δύναμις ed ἐνέργεια nel *Protrettico*, il quale permette di inferire che l'influenza della scuola megarica su Aristotele non si limita a *Metafisica* Θ 3: al contrario, è possibile affermare che questa sezione della *Metafisica* fa parte di una discussione più ampia che coinvolge parimenti i megarici, Platone e Aristotele chiamando in causa questioni ontologiche fondamentali, come quelle dell'unità dell'essere e della relazione tra essere e divenire.

La seconda parte della tesi presenta una lettura accurata dei passi più significativi del libro Θ della *Metafisica*, dedicato ai concetti di δύναμις ed ἐνέργεια. Un approfondimento è rivolto al capitolo 3 del libro Θ, passo in cui ha luogo la celebre polemica anti-megarica di Aristotele. L'interpretazione che viene proposta muove dalle conclusioni raggiunte nella prima parte della tesi. *Met.* Θ 3 viene ad assumere un ruolo cerniera all'interno del trattato, poiché connette l'analisi iniziale svolta da Aristotele nei capitoli 1–2 e 5 del libro Θ, secondo cui la δύναμις sarebbe legata al movimento, con il successivo esame dei sensi di δύναμις ed ἐνέργεια che vanno oltre il movimento, nei capitoli 6–9.

Il raffronto tra Aristotele e i megarici permette altresì di gettare luce su alcuni dei passi più oscuri e controversi di *Met.* Θ 6 e 8. Soprattutto, esso permette di prendere le distanze dalla tendenza consolidata ad assimilare le nozioni di moto e di atto riscontrabili in *Met.* Θ. Ciò consente anche di respingere la lettura maggioritaria del libro, quella per cui il trattato mostrerebbe una transizione da un senso iniziale di δύναμις e ἐνέργεια nei termini di capacità-attività ad un senso ulteriore secondo le nozioni modali di potenzialità e attualità.

Infine, si argomenta che il contributo più importante di *Met.* Θ è l'introduzione del concetto di attività non-cinetica: questa nozione permette ad Aristotele di superare la rigida dicotomia ontologica sostenuta dai suoi avversari megarici e di porre una causa

attiva e ultima di tutto ciò che è. In altre parole, attraverso il concetto di attività non-cinetica, Aristotele può sostenere il carattere autosufficiente e determinato dell'essere senza sacrificare il suo carattere attivo, cioè senza recidere il suo legame con il movimento, la generazione e la realtà fisica.

## SUMMARY (SPANISH)

Esta tesis doctoral presenta una interpretación de la doctrina aristotélica de la δύναμις y la ἐνέργεια desde la perspectiva de su confrontación con los megáricos. La primera parte de la tesis ofrece un análisis detallado de las fuentes de los megáricos. Además, se conectan estas fuentes con algunos pasajes cruciales de los diálogos platónicos *Eutidemo* y *Sofista* que funcionan como importantes precedentes de la distinción aristotélica entre δύναμις y ἐνέργεια. El examen de la relación entre los megáricos y las primeras etapas de la distinción δύναμις-ἐνέργεια demuestra que el enfrentamiento de Aristóteles con esta escuela socrática no se limita a *Metafísica* Θ 3. Por el contrario, este último pasaje forma parte de una discusión más amplia que involucra a los megáricos, a Platón, y a Aristóteles, y que concierne cuestiones ontológicas fundamentales, como la cuestión de la unidad del ser y la relación entre el ser y el devenir.

La segunda parte de la tesis presenta una lectura detallada de los pasajes más significativos del libro Θ de la *Metafísica*, dedicado a la elucidación de los conceptos de δύναμις y ἐνέργεια. Se presta especial atención al capítulo 3 del libro Θ, lugar de la famosa polémica antimegárica de Aristóteles. Nuestra interpretación del capítulo se basa en gran medida en el trabajo realizado en la primera parte de la tesis. Se muestra que este capítulo desempeña un papel fundamental en la estructura interna del tratado, conectando el análisis inicial del sentido de δύναμις vinculado al movimiento, llevado a cabo en los capítulos 1–2 y 5 del libro Θ, con el análisis posterior de los sentidos de δύναμις y ἐνέργεια que se extienden más allá del movimiento, realizado en los capítulos 6–9.

El análisis de la confrontación aristotélica con los megáricos resulta útil para interpretar algunos de los pasajes más oscuros y controversiales de *Met.* Θ 6 y 8. Sobre todo, nos permite rechazar la frecuente tendencia a identificar las nociones de movimiento y actividad en el contexto del argumento de *Met.* Θ. Esto también permite cuestionar la lectura dominante de Θ, según la cual el tratado lleva a cabo una transición desde un sentido de δύναμις y ἐνέργεια en términos de capacidad y actividad hacia las nociones modales de potencialidad y actualidad.

Finalmente, se sostiene que la contribución más importante de *Met.* Θ es la introducción del concepto de actividad no-cinética. Esta noción permite a Aristóteles romper la rígida dicotomía ontológica defendida por sus oponentes megáricos y asegurar la existencia de una causa última activa de todo lo que es. En otras palabras, mediante el

concepto de actividad no-cinética, Aristóteles puede sostener el carácter autosuficiente y determinado del ser sin sacrificar su carácter activo: es decir, sin eliminar su conexión con el movimiento, la generación y la realidad física.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I am grateful to Claudia Mársico, my tutor at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, for her guidance and friendship. This dissertation is the result of years of extended discussion with her. I am especially grateful for her many suggestions and comments, too many to list, which were absolutely crucial in the process of writing the dissertation.

I would also like to thank Linda Napolitano Valditara and Alessandro Stavru, my tutors at the Università degli Studi di Verona. They provided fundamental insights that helped me overcome a number of obscure points which were present in my original Research Project. Linda Napolitano Valditara offered numerous and acute comments on previous versions of this thesis. Her reading of early drafts helped to improve the dissertation substantially. Alessandro Stavru was a source of continual aid during my doctorate, offering sound advice and helpful discussion on numerous issues. Finally, they both gave me warm support throughout my stay at Verona, for which I am very grateful.

I thank Fabián Mié and all the members of his seminar on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, for the intense and illuminating discussion on *Metaphysics* Θ throughout the year 2021. I thank Fabián Mié in particular for his comments and suggestions, and for our amicable dialogue.

I thank Silvia Fazzo, Arianna Fermani, Franco Ferrari, Lucia Palpacelli, Lidia Palumbo, Stefano Pone, Livio Rossetti, and Francisco Villar for their helpful comments on versions of the diverse chapters of this dissertation.

I thank Damian Randle, who revised the English of this dissertation. His careful readings and his many keen suggestions helped to simplify, clarify, and embellish the arguments presented in this thesis.

My greatest debt is to my wife, Hedda Macek, for her unrelenting companionship and loving support throughout the writing of the thesis. I cannot thank her enough. I am grateful to my daughter Eloísa and to my son Teodoro, who were born during the course of my doctorate, for bringing endless joy to our lives.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Sergio Chame and Carmen de Errasti, for their support, their advice and their love.

## NOTES ON CITATIONS

I cite the testimonies of the Megarians providing the original source and the corresponding numeration of Giannantoni's *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae* (1990), abbreviated as *SSR*. I have followed Giannantoni's text, with occasional departures, which are indicated in footnotes.

I cite Plato's works by Stephanus page. I have followed the text of Burnet's Oxford edition.

I cite Aristotle's works by book, chapter, and Bekker page. I refer to the books of the *Metaphysics* with Greek letters. I use Roman numerals when referring to books from other works of Aristotle. With regard to the *Metaphysics*, I have generally followed the texts of Ross (1924) and Jaeger (1957). Discussions of textual issues are generally located in footnotes. I have also followed Ross's editions of Aristotle's *Physics* and *De Anima*.

All translations, including those of recent bibliography, are my own unless otherwise noted.

## ABBREVIATION KEY

### Works of Aristotle

<i>APo.</i>	<i>Analytica Posteriora</i>
<i>APr.</i>	<i>Analytica Priora</i>
<i>Cat.</i>	<i>Categoriae</i>
<i>DA</i>	<i>De Anima</i>
<i>DC</i>	<i>De Caelo</i>
<i>De Int.</i>	<i>De Interpretatione</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Ethica Eudemia</i>
<i>EN</i>	<i>Ethica Nicomachea</i>
<i>GA</i>	<i>De Generatione Animalium</i>
<i>HA</i>	<i>Historia Animalium</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Magna Moralia</i>
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metaphysica</i>
<i>PA</i>	<i>De Partibus Animalium</i>
<i>Phys.</i>	<i>Physica</i>
<i>Poet.</i>	<i>Poetica</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politica</i>
<i>Protr.</i>	<i>Protrepticus</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	<i>Rhetorica</i>
<i>SE</i>	<i>Sophistici Elenchi</i>
<i>Top.</i>	<i>Topica</i>

### All other classical authors and texts

I follow the abbreviations of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Hornblower, Spawforth & Eidinow, E. 2012). For authors and works which are not included in the list of abbreviations of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, I follow the abbreviations of the *Greek–English Lexicon* (Liddell, Scott & Jones 1940).

## **INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER 1

### The distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια and the significance of Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians

τὸ γὰρ ἔν και τὸ εἶναι ἐπεὶ πλεοναχῶς λέγεται,  
τὸ κυρίως ἢ ἐντελέχειά ἐστιν.  
(Arist. *De Anima* II 1, 412b8–9)

The concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια are of the utmost importance in Aristotle's philosophy. They play, for instance, an essential role in Aristotle's physical and psychological investigations: Aristotle's definitions of motion<sup>1</sup> and of the soul<sup>2</sup> are structured in terms of δύναμις, ἐνέργεια, and ἐντελέχεια. But they are also of crucial significance in the context of his *Metaphysics*. Of the fourfold division of the senses of being in *Met.* Δ 7 (restated at the outset of E 2), two are dismissed in E, 2–4. Aristotle contends that accidental being and being as truth and falsehood should be left aside in the context of an inquiry regarding the first causes and principles of being *qua* being (1028a2–4). This leaves us with the other two senses: being according to the categories, and in particular according to the category of substance, and being in capacity (δύναμει) and in act (ἐντελεχεία in Δ 7, 1017b1, ἐνεργεία in E 2, 1026b2).<sup>3</sup> Aristotle devotes books Z and H to the study of substance and book Θ to the study of being in capacity and in act.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Phys.* III 1, 201a10–11: “motion is the ἐντελέχεια of that which is capable as such”, ἢ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια, ἢ τοιοῦτον, κίνησις ἐστιν. Cf. also the subsequent discussion of motion in 201b9–10, III 2, 202a1–2, III 3, 202a15 which makes use of ἐνέργεια and *Met.* K 9, 1065b15–1066a7, where the definition is restated with use of the term ἐνέργεια instead of ἐντελέχεια. On the relation between the two terms, see section 7.5.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *DA* II 1, 412b4–6: “So, if it is necessary to state something which is common to every soul, it would be that it is the first ἐντελέχεια of an organic natural body”, εἰ δὴ τι κοινὸν ἐπὶ πάσης ψυχῆς δεῖ λέγειν, εἴη ἂν ἐντελέχεια ἢ πρώτη σώματος φυσικοῦ ὀργανικοῦ.

<sup>3</sup> I have chosen, for the time being, to translate here the dative expressions ἐντελεχεία ὄν and ἐνεργεία ὄν by the expression ‘being in act’ in order to not commit myself at this stage of the argument with a specific interpretation of the concept of ἐνέργεια (the two most common alternatives being represented by the opposing translations of ‘actuality’ and ‘activity’). My own interpretation will be presented and thoroughly argued for in the second part of this dissertation. The reader should disregard any Thomistic resonances in the translation of ἐνεργεία as ‘in act’.

Book Θ is sometimes seen as an appendix to the treatment of substance in Z and H. It is true that H promises a solution in terms of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια to an *aporia* that had arisen regarding the unity of form and matter in relation to composite substances.<sup>4</sup> And one could understand Θ as providing an explicit answer to this *aporia*.<sup>5</sup> But the purpose of Θ does not seem to be confined exclusively to this particular problem. The notions of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια cut through all categories and express a particular way of speaking of that which is, as *Met.* Δ and E show; together they represent an independent sense of being which merits its own independent treatment.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the concept of ἐνέργεια appears to be required to extend the investigation on being beyond the realm of sensible and material substances, and in particular, to understand the particular nature of the Unmoved Mover.<sup>7</sup>

The stakes could not be higher. The concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια seem to be fundamental in Aristotle's metaphysical project. But how should we understand these concepts? What is their precise meaning? The opening lines of *Metaphysics* Θ promise an answer to these questions (cf. *Met.* Θ 1, 1045b32–34), but if we turn to Aristotle's arguments in this book, we find only puzzlement.<sup>8</sup> Aristotle devotes large parts of Θ to

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Met.* H 6, 1045a20–25: “It is manifest that those who usually proceed with definitions and explanations in this way cannot provide a solution to this difficulty. But if, as we say, there is on the one hand matter and on the other shape, and one is in capacity and the other is in act, the question will no longer seem to be a difficulty” (φανερὸν δὴ ὅτι οὕτω μὲν μετιούσιν ὡς εἰώθασιν ὀρίζεσθαι καὶ λέγειν, οὐκ ἐνδέχεται ἀποδοῦναι καὶ λῦσαι τὴν ἀπορίαν· εἰ δ' ἐστίν, ὥσπερ λέγομεν, τὸ μὲν ὕλη τὸ δὲ μορφή, καὶ τὸ μὲν δυνάμει τὸ δὲ ἐνέργεια, οὐκέτι ἀπορία δόξειεν ἂν εἶναι τὸ ζητούμενον).

<sup>5</sup> So Kosman (1984; 2013) and Gill (1989; 2021).

<sup>6</sup> As argued by Witt (2003, 2–4).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Met.* Λ 7, 1072a25–26: “There is surely something which moves without being itself in motion, being eternal, substance, and ἐνέργεια (ἔστι τι ὃ οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ, αἰδίων καὶ οὐσία καὶ ἐνέργεια οὐσα)”. See also 1072b24–30. The connection between Θ and Λ is underscored by Berti (1990), Menn (1994) and Gonzalez (2019). I will discuss this issue further in section 9.2 below.

<sup>8</sup> Bonitz and Ross go as far as to claim that Aristotle *himself* is confused; they claim that he confuses the notions of δύναμις as principle of change (the initial sense to which chapters 1–5 are dedicated) and of δύναμις as potentiality (the ‘useful’ sense of δύναμις which is the subject of chapters 6–9), and cite Θ 3, 1047a10–29 as evidence (Bonitz 1849, 380; Ross 1924, II 245). They argue that in this passage Aristotle is speaking of δύναμις as potentiality, and not as a mere principle of change, noting that in the second half of the chapter he abandons the previous verbal form δύνασθαι in favor of the substantivized adjective τὸ δυνατόν. This would contradict, according to these authors, the very program of Θ outlined in chapter 1. But the fact is that chapter 3 (and its appendix, chapter 4) are a parenthetical discussion which goes beyond

the analysis of δύναμις in relation to motion, which, he claims, is not directly useful for the purposes of the treatise (1045b36–1046a1). It is not clear why he begins his analysis with this kinetic concept of δύναμις, or how this discussion is connected with the further discussions of the concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια which go beyond motion. Furthermore, Aristotle’s treatment of ἐνέργεια in  $\Theta$  is obscure and its interpretation is highly controversial, as we will see. All of this explains the wide disagreement among scholars regarding both the interpretation of *Met.  $\Theta$*  and the very meaning and function of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in the context of Aristotle’s thought.

My purpose in this dissertation is to clarify Aristotle’s distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. I believe that previous interpretations carried out by scholars have neglected crucial aspects of Aristotle’s treatment of these notions. One of these aspects concerns one of the most obscure and difficult passages of *Met.  $\Theta$* : chapter 3, the site of Aristotle’s famous anti-Megarian polemic. This chapter provides important indications that help to contextualize Aristotle’s argument in  $\Theta$  and to understand more fully the nature of both notions.<sup>9</sup>

A fundamental premise of our study concerns my approach to the chapter: in contrast to practically all contemporary commentators,<sup>10</sup> I will read Aristotle’s discussion in the light of the extant testimonies and sources of the Megarian circle. This will allow us to reconsider the problem of the genesis and the development of both concepts, and to better understand the structure of book  $\Theta$  as a whole.

*Met.  $\Theta$  3* represents a parenthetical discussion in the midst of book  $\Theta$ , dedicated to the elucidation of the notions of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. The peculiarity of this discussion is that it constitutes a dialectical confrontation with an opposing philosophical group. My first claim is that this confrontation provides a privileged view on Aristotle’s original conception of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction, which is precisely the object of the Megarian attack. This original conception is the distinction between a capacity and its

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the treatment of δύναμις as principle of change, addressed in  $\Theta$  1–2, 5. I will defend this claim in chapters 6 and 7 of this dissertation.

<sup>9</sup> A similar strategy has been pursued by Witt (2003, 15–16). Her interpretation of the chapter, however, is significantly different from my own, mainly because she does not take into account any sources on the Megarians beyond Aristotle’s remarks in  $\Theta$  3. Discussion of Witt’s interpretation will be provided in chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>10</sup> See for instance Gomez Cabranes (1989, 101–109), Witt (2003, 17–37), Reale (2004, 1118–1119), Makin (2006, 60–81), Beere (2009, 91–117), Berti (2017, 398–399 nn. 9–16).

corresponding exercise. Such an original conception is found in Aristotle's earlier works, particularly the *Protrepticus*, and can be traced back to some discussions in Plato's *Euthydemus* and *Sophist*. I will argue that Megarian philosophy is connected both with these important Platonic precedents, and with Aristotle's early formulation, which resurfaces in Θ 3. As we will also see, a correct understanding of this connection will be crucial for our interpretation of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction.

Our examination of the connection between the Megarians and the early stages of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction will show that Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians is not limited to Θ 3. On the contrary, this latter passage is part of a broader discussion that involves the Megarians, Plato, and Aristotle, and which concerns fundamental ontological issues, such as the question of the unity of being, and the problem of the possibility of motion.

My second claim is that Aristotle's discussion with the Megarians plays a crucial role in the structure of the argument of book Θ. I will show that Θ 3 is a pivotal chapter: the passage not only secures the existence of inactive δυνάμεις but also connects the initial analysis of δύναμις as a principle of change with the later analysis of the properly ontological concept of δύναμις. That is, the chapter binds the two halves of the treatise together and establishes the conceptual basis for the later discussion in chapters 6–9. This is the section that most interests Aristotle, for it articulates crucial aspects of his theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, such as the priority of the latter concept over the former.

Thus, Θ 3 serves a crucial double purpose for us. Firstly, it helps us in the interpretation of the original and most basic form of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast. Secondly, it helps us to understand better the transition that takes place in book Θ, from the initial motion sense of δύναμις towards the ontological, non-kinetic sense of both δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.

Our interpretation of Aristotle's argument in Θ 3 will allow us to challenge a well-entrenched interpretation that contends that the notions of capacity and activity are intrinsically bound up with motion both in Aristotle's earlier texts and in the context of the main argument of Θ. By way of this intrinsic association between motion and activity, scholars usually go on to argue that the useful and proper sense of ἐνέργεια (and its correlative δύναμις) should be understood as *actuality* (correlated with *potentiality*).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> An analysis of the main variants of the potentiality-actuality interpretation will be provided in chapter 6 of this paper. It is important to note that not all authors share the same terminology: Beere (2009, 155–156)

This interpretation proves untenable if we correctly understand the terms in which Aristotle confronts the Megarians in  $\Theta$  3 and if we follow the traces that relate this passage to the precedent discussions we spoke about above. Indeed, this earlier set of discussions shows that Aristotle’s original and most proper concept of ἐνέργεια is that of a specific kind of activity, distinct from physical motion. This does not rule out that δύναμις and ἐνέργεια are concepts that involve a modal dimension.<sup>12</sup> But, as we will see, this modal aspect of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια depends on a primary, more fundamental sense of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια as capacity and activity.

Several consequences follow this reading. First of all, this interpretation helps us better understand the fundamental distinction between motion and ἐνέργεια, a topic that has been the object of much discussion and polemic in recent years.<sup>13</sup> This crucial distinction affects  $\Theta$ , and a correct understanding of it will enable us to understand properly the internal structure of  $\Theta$ . Moreover, it will aid our interpretation of the most difficult and contended sections of  $\Theta$  6 and 8, which introduce the “useful” or ontological senses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.

This interpretation will also allow us to confront and challenge one of the most frequent interpretations of book  $\Theta$ . This is that in the treatise, Aristotle carries out a transition from a set of particular cases or instances of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast towards a more general schema, embodied in the properly ontological concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια (*i.e.*, potentiality and actuality). These ontological concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια would unify all the particular instances of the contrast covered in *Met.*  $\Theta$  1–6.<sup>14</sup> Our study will show that, contrary to this interpretation, Ross’s idea of a horizontal move from an initial concept of δύναμις towards a further and distinct concept

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rejects the modal terms ‘potentiality’ and ‘actuality’ as translations of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, but still follows Frede (1994) in conceiving the useful sense as a distinct modal sense; on the contrary, Ross (1924, II 240), while endorsing the capacity interpretation, still speaks of potentiality.

<sup>12</sup> I use the term ‘modal’ in this context in the general sense of ‘mode of being’, and not in the specific logical sense of possibility and necessity.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance Kosman (1984; 2013), Berti (1990; 2017), Menn (1994), Burnyeat (2008), Anagnostopoulos (2017), Gonzalez (2019). On this issue, see ch. 8.2.

<sup>14</sup> This is the view held by Frede (1994) and defended by Makin (2006). Witt (2003) and Beere (2009) are also in agreement with some of Frede’s most central takes on book  $\Theta$ .

of δύναμις in Θ 6 is more textually justified.<sup>15</sup> As a result, a clearer picture will emerge of Aristotle's argument in book Θ.

Finally, by providing evidence for favor of the capacity-activity interpretation of book Θ, I will also make clear the intrinsic, fundamental connection between this text and Aristotle's theological project, *i.e.*, with *Met.* Λ. The notion of non-kinetic activity not only proves crucial in the context of the argument of Θ but also sets the stage for the treatment of immaterial substance and of the Prime Mover in Λ 6–7.

Although much of this dissertation will revolve around book Θ of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, it is neither an exhaustive commentary on this book nor an analysis of the diverse applications of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in Aristotle's various philosophical and scientific inquiries. The guiding thread of my investigation will be Θ 3, which will prove to be a much more complex and crucial text than it might appear at first sight. As we said before, this text will allow us to connect Aristotle's argument in book Θ with the early stages of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction. This is crucial for a proper contextualization of the treatise. Our analysis of Θ 3 will also assist our examination of the main passages of book Θ (particularly, chapters 1, 6, and 8), and to provide a new and—we hope—illuminating perspective on this much-discussed text.

In summary, our study will present an analysis of the dialogical and intertextual relation between Aristotle and the Megarians, as a way of uncovering the structure of Aristotle's discussion in Θ. This analysis will provide a new perspective on Aristotle's doctrine of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. However, this approach relies on some methodological assumptions which should be properly justified.

## **1.1. Methodological considerations**

There are three main methodological concerns in this thesis. The first is related to the problem of the development of Aristotle's conception of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. The second concerns the question of the relationship between Aristotle and the Megarians. The third is related to our approach to the sources on the Megarian circle.

### **1.1.1. The issue of Aristotle's philosophical development**

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<sup>15</sup> I will speak in more detail of Ross's interpretation (and Frede's criticism to it) in ch. 6.

In the outline we offered above, we spoke of Aristotle’s original conception of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction. This might induce some wariness in the reader, especially given the recent widespread rejection of developmental and chronological interpretations of Aristotle.<sup>16</sup> Although this is a broad issue, into which I cannot go in detail here, I would like to make two clarifying claims.

The first is that, in my view, there is no substantial variation or “development” of Aristotle’s conception of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast in the course of his works. That is, I claim that Aristotle’s early thematization of the contrast is in fundamental agreement with the mature view that appears in book Θ of the *Metaphysics*.<sup>17</sup> Developmentalists<sup>18</sup> usually read the argument in Θ as a progression from an early “physical” notion of δύναμις, understood fundamentally as a principle of *change*, towards a later “metaphysical” modal notion of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, translatable as potentiality and

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<sup>16</sup> Developmental readings were first introduced by Jaeger in his 1923 groundbreaking work *Aristoteles, Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung*. Jaeger’s core premises were widely accepted for a considerable period (see for example the works of Mansion 1927, von Arnim 1931, Gohlke 1933, Bignoni 1936, Oggioni 1939, Nuyens 1948, Wundt 1953, Berti 1962). But his specific developmental view was then the subject of wide criticism (cf. for instance Reale 1958, Düring 1954; 1966, vii–viii, Owen 1960; 1965, and the contributions in Calder 1992). Today, few Aristotelian scholars rely on chronological readings when interpreting Aristotle. For some criticism of the most radical views against Jaeger’s program, see Code (1996) and Menn (1998).

<sup>17</sup> In this I agree with Yepes Stork (1989, 107–108): “there never was an internal contradiction in his [sc. Aristotle’s] conception of act and potency. We could speak, yes, of a ‘growth’, of a going ‘from less to more’ in the development of this doctrine, but what is evident then is that his philosophical doctrine was not changed with the passing of time. This necessarily implies that the unity of his thought is extra-historical, and that we do not obtain it as the final product of a temporal development” (*nunca llegó a haber contradicción interna alguna en su concepción del acto y la potencia. Se puede hablar, sí, de un ‘crecimiento’, de un ir ‘de menos a más’ en el desarrollo de esta doctrina, pero lo que es evidente entonces es que su doctrina filosófica no se vio cambiada con el paso del tiempo. Ello conlleva necesariamente que la unidad de su pensamiento es extrahistórica, y que no la obtenemos como producto final de un desarrollo temporal*). According to this author, Aristotle’s doctrine of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια emerged “all at once” (*toda entera*, 1993, 161) that is, all its major features and aspects are already contained in his earlier texts (“the notion of act emerges already sufficiently explicated and elaborated for us to say that it is almost complete”, *la noción de acto surge ya suficientemente explícita y elaborada como para que se pueda decir que está casi completa*) (1989, 107).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Gohlke (1924), Wundt (1953), Graham (1987), Menn (1994). It is interesting to note that Jaeger, arguably the father of developmentalism, criticized the results of Gohlke’s application of the genetic method to the issue of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in his 1928 review of Gohlke’s work. Cf. also Berti (1958).

actuality.<sup>19</sup> My argument differs substantially from this reconstruction, since I believe that book Θ carries out a transition from a particularly accessible—though improper—application of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction (related to the sphere of motion) towards a more obscure—though proper—application (which goes beyond motion). The two applications are not on the same level, ontologically speaking, but this does not imply a relation of temporal priority of the former over the latter. As I will show, Aristotle *was already aware* of the distinction between the different applications in his earlier works. Thus, the structure of Θ does not reflect a supposed progression in Aristotle’s philosophical development but rather his own methodology of proceeding from what is most known to us toward what is most known by nature.

In other words, given that there is no contradiction or incongruence between Aristotle’s apparent early works and his mature works on the issue of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, there is no need to make distinctions regarding different stages on his view on this conceptual pair. Parallel to this position are two suggestions: that there is no incongruence between the two halves of *Metaphysics* Θ, and that the different senses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια explored in the treatise can be articulated coherently.

I will, however, rely on the assumption that a broad distinction between Aristotle’s early and mature works can be established. This is because a fundamental hypothesis of this thesis is that the polemic relation between Aristotle and the Megarians was a crucial element in the original configuration of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction. That this polemic relation has a series of Platonic precedents also contributes to our interpretation, according to which the distinction was influenced to a significant extent by the Megarians’ dialectical arguments. This realization will help us understand the logic behind Aristotle’s distinction and allow us to confront questions regarding the purpose of the distinction, its diverse senses or applications, and the structure of Aristotle’s argument in book Θ.

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<sup>19</sup> This reading has been criticized recently by Lefebvre (2018, 14–22): “That potency has a primary sense, that of principle of motion, does not mean that Aristotle establishes a chronological anteriority, within his thought, of one sense in relation to the other [...] What appears therefore is less a chronological difference than a difference, by no means negligible, of point of view” (*Que la puissance comporte un sens premier, celui de principe moteur, ne signifie pas qu’Aristote établit une antériorité chronologique, au sein de sa pensée, d’un sens par rapport à l’autre [...] Ce qui apparaît est donc moins une différence chronologique qu’une différence, nullement négligeable, de point de vue*) (20).

The distinction between early and later works is, of course, controversial: there is no unanimous consensus regarding the dating and chronology of Aristotle's works. However, given that I do not believe that there was a philosophical development of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια pair, strictly speaking, different datings and chronologies would not particularly affect my argument. The text that I will assume to be among the earliest of Aristotle's philosophical production is his *Protrepticus*. As many authors have done, I will connect the discussion in this work with Plato's *Euthydemus*.<sup>20</sup> Fortunately for our purposes, the *Protrepticus* is a work on which there is a relative consensus regarding its early character and its authenticity, especially on the fragments which appear in Iamblichus's *Protrepticus*. This view has been further confirmed by a recent attempt to authenticate the fragments in Iamblichus, carried out by Hutchinson and Johnson (2005). The reader can turn to this work for a detailed overview of the state of the discussion regarding the problem of the authenticity of this text.

### 1.1.2. The relation between Aristotle and the Megarians

One key passage which provides the basis for our study: *Metaphysics* Θ 3. This passage includes a direct mention of the Megarians, and is dedicated to the refutation of an argument allegedly put forward by them. This significant piece of evidence confirms that there was some kind of interaction between Aristotle and the Megarians. Here, two questions arise: what is the meaning of Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians in Θ 3? And, more broadly, what was the nature and extent of the interaction between Aristotle and the Megarians?

In order to answer these questions, we must begin by comprehending the thesis that Aristotle transmits in Θ 3. Aristotle provides no context to the thesis. So contrasting this testimony with other testimonies on the Megarians appears to be a sensible way to flesh out Aristotle's brief presentation of the Megarian thesis and the ensuing discussion. But, oddly enough, practically no scholars have undertaken this task. There is an implicit consensus among scholars that, given the obscurity of the Megarian school, we should

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<sup>20</sup> Jaeger (1928), De Strycker (1968, 159–160), Schankula (1971), Graham (1987, 190–191), Rist (1989, 105–106), Yepes Stork (1989) and Menn (1994). I have not found any work in the literature which disputes the connection between Plato's *Euthydemus* and the passages in Aristotle's *Protrepticus* which concern the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction.

only rely on Aristotle's discussion in  $\Theta$  3 and leave aside all other sources on the Megarians.<sup>21</sup> Reale (2004, 1118–1119) provides a clear example of this position in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "Given that the history of the doctrines of the Megarian school is largely unknown, it cannot be established with exactness whether, and to what degree, Aristotle did develop his own doctrine of potency-act by reflecting upon and criticizing Megarian doctrines. — Within such uncertainty, we can only try to understand our chapter on its own, without risking non-verifiable historical hypotheses".<sup>22</sup> One of our main tasks in this thesis is to challenge this assessment by Reale.

Two things should be noted here. Firstly, we can reject the core premise of Reale's judgement. That is, that reflection on the doctrines of the Megarians constitutes a "non-verifiable historical hypothesis". Fundamental work has been carried out on the Megarians in recent decades. Several editions and compilations of the testimonies have appeared in different languages.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, monographs on the Megarians have emerged in recent years.<sup>24</sup> This field of study is relatively new, and much work is still to be done. We can, though, state that there are sufficient elements to reconstruct, with a reasonably acceptable degree of certainty, some of the crucial aspects of Megarian thought.

Secondly, there are also reasons to believe that this intertextual approach is preferable to a purely immanent reading, such as the one proposed by Reale and many others. The fact is that there is practically no consensus on the exact meaning of the thesis

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<sup>21</sup> This position is the one shared by many recent English-speaking commentators of the passage, such as Witt, Makin and Beere. Witt (2003, 22) states that we lack the elements to offer any kind of contextualization for the Megarian thesis (she briefly mentions Diodorus Cronus and Sedley's paper on this philosopher at 126–127 n. 14). Both Makin (1996, 2006) and Beere (2009) present their own reconstructions of the motivations behind the Megarian thesis, but they do so without reference to other sources besides  $\Theta$  3. Makin (2006, 61) and Beere (2009, 91 n. 1) redirect the reader to Sedley's (1977) paper and Döring's (1972) edition of the testimonies, without further comment.

<sup>22</sup> *Poiché è mal nota la storia delle dottrine della Scuola Megarica, non si può stabilire con esattezza, se e fino a che punto Aristotele abbia maturato la propria dottrina della potenza-atto meditando e criticando le dottrine megariche, né si può dire che sia stata impossibile una polemica Diodoro-Aristotele. — In tanta incertezza, non resta che cercare di intendere il nostro capitolo di per sé, senza azzardare ipotesi storiche non verificabili.*

<sup>23</sup> Döring (1972), Montoneri (1985), Muller (1985), Giannantoni (1990), Mársico (2013).

<sup>24</sup> Montoneri (1985), Muller (1988), Mársico (2013), Gardella (2015), Villar (2021).

among scholars who read the text solely by itself. There are three main lines of interpretation: some scholars associate the thesis with the modal notions of possibility and actuality (reading the argument in the light of Aristotle's seemingly modal discussion of τὸ δυνατόν at 1047a10–29).<sup>25</sup> Other scholars interpret the thesis as an Eleatic position that denies all change and generation (reading the thesis in the light of Aristotle's characterization of the Megarians as deniers of change at 1047a14).<sup>26</sup> Other scholars believe that the thesis criticizes Aristotle's notion of capacity from either a temporal perspective,<sup>27</sup> or from a mainly linguistic point of view.<sup>28</sup>

This plurality of interpretations, which are often irreconcilable, speaks against the purely immanent strategy. Without complementing the passage with external sources, interpreters must introduce many elements to render it comprehensible. And, of course, given the paucity of the chapter, each interpreter will choose a different path for its reconstruction.

There is an additional difficulty: although scholars claim to read the passage solely by itself, they usually implicitly compare the Megarian thesis of Θ 3 with Diodorus Cronus's discussion of the possible,<sup>29</sup> or with the Megarians' alleged Eleaticism.<sup>30</sup> They thus present a biased reading of the passage, which relies on a distorted and incomplete view of the Megarians (even though they claim not to do so).

For all these reasons, I believe that an interpretation of Aristotle's testimony on the Megarians and the ensuing discussion in Θ 3 must be read together with a careful reconstruction of the so-called Megarian school. As we said earlier, this is possible precisely because we can now use reliable editions and compilations of the testimonies on the Megarians, which contemporary Aristotelian scholars seem wildly to ignore.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Witt (2003, 9–10).

<sup>26</sup> Ross (1924 II, 244).

<sup>27</sup> Makin (1996; 2006, 60–64).

<sup>28</sup> Beere (2009, 91–99) reads the Megarian thesis as concerned with the specific problem of the ambiguity of can-statements.

<sup>29</sup> This can be seen particularly in Witt (2003) and Beere (2009).

<sup>30</sup> Ross (1924 II, 244), Berti (1958, 498).

<sup>31</sup> As stated above in n. 21, the only works contemporary scholars seem to acknowledge when commenting the Megarian thesis (only in passing, and without further comment) are Döring's (1972) edition of the Megarian testimonies (which has been largely superseded by the commented editions of Muller 1985, Giannantoni 1990 and especially Mársico 2013) and Sedley's (1977) paper on Diodorus Cronus (which has

### 1.1.3. Methodological problems regarding the so-called Megarian school

When approaching the sources of the Megarians, we face a fragmentary, secondary *corpus*. We have few direct sources on the Megarians, such as direct quotes or fragments of their work. Instead, we rely on a large number of testimonies by later sources, which relay anecdotes, alleged confrontations, and brief mentions of theoretical positions. The sources are heterogeneous and span several centuries. Most of our sources are distanced from the time of the Megarians by several centuries, though we have sources closer and even contemporary to them. One of our oldest sources is, in fact, Aristotle's discussion of a Megarian thesis in chapter 3 of book  $\Theta$ .

Our approach to this inorganic array of texts is possible, first of all, because of the painstaking work of editors and compilers, who have reunited all testimonies in several editions. The first complete compilation is the one by Döring (1972), which was the basis of the translations of Muller (1985) and Montoneri and of the edition of Giannantoni (1990).<sup>32</sup> More recently, Mársico (2013) has provided a new Spanish edition that arguably supersedes the preceding ones. This body of work has been fundamental for establishing the texts on the Megarians and is what makes our study possible.

This, however, does not imply that there are no important hermeneutical challenges when addressing the material on the Megarians. One of those challenges is the risk of excessive speculation. In order to avoid this risk, I will focus almost exclusively on those texts which are certainly attributed to the Megarians in the chapters dedicated to them (below, chapters 2 and 3). That is, I will focus on sources where either the Megarians as a whole or a specific Megarian philosopher is mentioned. We intend to obtain, through the careful examination and reciprocal comparison of these sources, a synthetic view of the common and basic set of principles that unify the diverse Megarian exponents. This will then allow us to revisit some texts whose attribution to the Megarian circle is a matter of debate in chapter 4.

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been subject of harsh criticism by Muller 1988, 44 n. 24 and Döring 1989; Witt, Makin and Beere seem oblivious to this discussion).

<sup>32</sup> The first attempts to study the Megarians as a whole in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were the partial collection of Ritter & Preller (1857 [1828], n° 229–241), the synthetic studies of Henne (1843), Mallet (1845), and Zeller (1844–1852), and Nestle's (1922) translation of the principal texts on the Megarians.

This approach implies that I will not rely on a single piece or set of pieces of evidence to establish a general interpretation of the Megarians. Although some testimonies are more significant than others, I intend to analyze them and compare them with the wider context of all the extant sources. It is also important to consider the context in which each testimony is posed: most occur within a context which is not primarily concerned with the Megarians but with another issue. Others are decidedly hostile towards the Megarians. Still, the recurrence of certain themes and perspectives allows for a reconstruction that can go beyond the specific characteristics of each testimony.

I will also attempt to provide an outline of the development of the Megarian circle by surveying the commonalities and differences within their diverse exponents. I will organize the testimonies into three phases spanning the whole history of the circle, from the early 4<sup>th</sup> to the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC. The first phase corresponds to Euclid and his companions, the second to the dialectical successors of Euclid such as Eubulides of Miletus, the third to the contributions of Diodorus Cronus and Stilpo of Megara. This organization will be important in addressing the problematic issue of the identity behind Aristotle's allusion in *Met.* Θ 3. This is a crucial matter, since it severely affects our interpretation of the chapter as a whole.

Our study of the Megarians will begin by addressing the recent debate on the nature and structure of the Megarian circle. This debate involves a series of methodological concerns, given that those who deny all unity to the Megarian circle usually downgrade the value of doxographic information. I will address this issue when commenting on this position later. My claim here, though, is that the unanimity among such a variety of ancient sources on certain points regarding the Megarians suggests that we are facing an important philosophical group with a set of clearly recognizable features. Our task as interpreters is precisely to provide an integral and consistent perspective on the sources of that ancient philosophical group which the ancient tradition knew as 'οἱ Μεγαρικοί'.

## **1.2. The structure of the dissertation**

This thesis is organized into two parts, with four chapters each. The first part examines the philosophy of the Megarians and its relation to the early configuration of Aristotle's distinction between *δύναμις* and *ἐνέργεια*.

The first part is divided into two sections. The first section provides a general overview of the philosophy of the Megarians. Chapter 2 will focus on the origins of the Megarian circle. In 2.1, I will address the problem of the existence and the nature of the Megarian group. In 2.2, I will analyze the main lines of thought of the initiator of the Megarian line: Euclid of Megara.

Chapter 3 focuses on the peculiar dialectical method of the Megarians. In 3.1, I examine the first and second-generation Megarians, while 3.2 deals with the third generation of Megarians. Section 3.3 presents a synthesis of the philosophy of the Megarians.

The work done in chapters 2 and 3 constitutes the basis of the rest of the dissertation. Indeed, most interpreters hold distorted views of the Megarians. This hinders their interpretation of Θ 3 and of other crucial texts which concern the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction. Our detailed analysis of the extant sources of the Megarians has the intention of avoiding such distortions.

The second section of Part 1 discusses the relation between the Megarians and the early phases of the δύναμις and ἐνέργεια distinction. Chapter 4 analyzes the Platonic precedents of Aristotle's distinction. Section 4.1 addresses Plato's thematization of δύναμις in the *Sophist*, in particular the definition of being as δύναμις in 247d8–e4. Crucial for our purposes will be to contrast this definition with its immediate context, the famous Gigantomachy, the battle between the Gods (also called the Friends of the Forms) and the Giants (also called the Children of the Earth). Our analysis of this passage will lead us to revisit the much-discussed issue of the identity of the Friends of the Forms (section 4.1.1). I will argue that the hypothesis which sees them as representatives of the Megarian circle is more robust than other interpretations.<sup>33</sup> This suggests that the discussion which takes place in the *Sophist*'s famous Gigantomachy is related to Plato's opposition to the Megarians' radical conception of being, represented by the Friends of the Forms. Finally, in 4.1.2, I will pick up some of the main points of the previous discussion and analyze the points of contact and the differences between Plato's view on δύναμις in the *Sophist* and Aristotle's perspective on δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.

Section 4.2 addresses an even more crucial precedent of Aristotle's doctrine: the distinction between ἔχειν and χρῆσθαι in the *Euthydemus*. As in the case of the *Sophist*, I

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<sup>33</sup> This view dates back to Schleiermacher (1824, 140–141) and Zeller (1859<sup>2</sup>, 179–180, in particular 180 n. 2). For a recent defense, cf. Muller (1988, 87–100) and Mársico (2013, 28, 78 n. 49, 90 n. 70).

will suggest that this dialogue constitutes to a substantial degree a response to the ontological and dialectical perspectives of the Megarians (section 4.2.1).<sup>34</sup> Indeed, I will show that the distinction between a capacity and its exercise—originally devised by Plato in the *Euthydemus* (section 4.2) and recovered by Aristotle in the *Protrepticus* with his terminology of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια (section 5.1)—originated as a response to an eristic argument of Megarian extraction, which focused on the issue of ambiguity. As we will see, this argument is closely related to the Megarian thesis of Θ 3, as is the discussion which follows, particularly in the first section of the chapter (1046b33–1047a10). Finally, in section 4.2.2, I will provide further analysis of the eristic arguments in the *Euthydemus* and will relate them to the issue of the Megarians alleged Eleaticism.

Chapter 5 analyzes Aristotle’s early formulation of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction. We will see that this formulation draws heavily from Plato, particularly from the texts analyzed in chapter four (section 5.1).

Section 5.2<sup>35</sup> has the purpose of challenging an opposing view regarding Aristotle’s early perspective on δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. In contrast to the opinion of many scholars, I will claim that Aristotle was already aware in his earlier texts of the fundamental distinction between motion and complete activity. In other words, I will contend that the concept of ἐνέργεια is not reduced to motion (even to an alleged broad notion of motion capable of including complete activities) in his earlier texts. This will be fundamental for our interpretation of Θ in general.

One of the main contributions of Part 1, section two, will be to contextualize the passages of the *Euthydemus* and the *Sophist* within Plato’s anti-Megarian efforts. The striking consistency between the sources available on the Megarians, the arguments which feature in Plato’s texts, and Aristotle’s discussions (both in the *Protrepticus* and in Θ 3) suggest that the arguments posed by the Megarians were a crucial element in the configuration of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction, ranging from its Platonic precedents to Aristotle’s argument in *Met.* Θ.

Thus, chapters 2 to 5 present an analysis of the philosophy of the Megarians and its relation with the early configuration of Aristotle’s theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. The

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<sup>34</sup> With this view, I position myself together with Hawtrey (1981, 23–30), Dorion (2000), Mársico and Inverso (2012, 42–58), Gardella (2013) and Villar (2016).

<sup>35</sup> A modified version of this section of the dissertation has been published in Chame (2022b).

work done in chapters 2 to 5 constitutes fundamental preliminary work for our examination of Aristotle's argument in  $\Theta$  in the second part of the thesis (chapters 6–9).

Part 2 of the dissertation presents a close reading of the central passages of book  $\Theta$ . It articulates the relation between the various senses of  $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$  and  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$ . Chapter 6 analyzes the program and the structure of *Metaphysics*  $\Theta$ , such as it emerges from Aristotle's programmatic statements in  $\Theta$  1 and  $\Theta$  6. In this chapter, I will address the question of the role of  $\Theta$  3–4 in the context of the treatise. I will claim that these chapters constitute a parenthesis in the argument of  $\Theta$  1–2, 5, and that this parenthetical section allows Aristotle to connect the initial motion-analysis of  $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$  ( $\Theta$  1–2, 5) to the latter non-kinetic analysis of  $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$  and  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$  ( $\Theta$  6–9). In addition, section 6.2 presents a discussion of the  $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$  sense of  $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$ , such as is described in *Met.*  $\Delta$  12 and  $\Theta$  1.

In chapter 7,<sup>36</sup> I will comment on  $\Theta$  3, in order to elucidate precisely the connection between the two halves of  $\Theta$ . Particular attention will be given to the issue of the identity behind the Megarian thesis and its meaning (section 7.1). The chapter also presents a detailed analysis of Aristotle's arguments against the Megarian thesis (sections 7.2, 7.3) and of the positive elaborations on  $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$  and  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$ , which follow the refutation of the Megarians (sections 7.4, 7.5). Section 7.6 presents a synthesis of Aristotle's argument in *Met.*  $\Theta$  3.

Chapter 8 will focus on Aristotle's argument in  $\Theta$  6. My intention in this chapter is to explain the analogical relation between the various senses of  $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$  and  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$ . The chapter presents an analysis of the discussion of this issue in the literature and an outline of my interpretation (section 8.1). Particular attention will be given to the  $\kappa\acute{\iota}\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ - $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$  distinction of  $\Theta$  6 1048b18–35 (section 8.2). This will allow us to return to the original formulation of the *Protrepticus* and show that the notion of complete activity retains a certain degree of priority over the remaining senses of  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$ . My interpretation of this passage will be supported by an examination of some crucial parallel texts of the *Physics* (8.2.1) and *De Anima* (8.2.2).

Finally, chapter 9 focuses on Aristotle's argument in *Met.*  $\Theta$  8, where he argues in favor of the priority of  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$  over  $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$ . Our analysis of this crucial doctrine will allow us to provide further insight into the distinction and the articulation of the various senses of  $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$  and  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$  (9.1) and to address the issue of the being of eternal or

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<sup>36</sup> Parts of this chapter have been published in a different form in Chame (2022a).

non-perishable substance (9.2). This latter analysis will help us judge properly the range and scope of Aristotle's discussion with the Megarians.

A central claim of this dissertation is that Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians is not confined to  $\Theta$  3 but represents a central aspect of the development and configuration of his doctrine of  $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$  and  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$ . I will justify this claim by showing the connections between the early phases of the  $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$ - $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$  contrast and Megarianism. These connections are part of a philosophical dispute around fundamental questions such as the problem of the unity of being, the relation between one and many, and the problem of the possibility of motion. All these issues reemerge in  $\Theta$  8, particularly in the final part of the chapter, dedicated to the extension of Aristotle's analysis of being towards eternal substances.

## **FIRST PART**

### **The origins of Aristotle's concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια and their connection with Megarian philosophy**

### ***First section: the philosophy of the Megarians***

This section provides a general overview of the philosophy of the Megarians. As anticipated, this will prepare the ground for our further study of the relationship between Megarianism and Aristotle's theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. A correct understanding of the sources on the Megarians will allow us to do two things. The first is to establish a connection between their peculiar philosophical perspective and the early precedents of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast in Plato, which were decisive for Aristotle. The second is to develop the ground for our interpretation of the Megarian thesis as transmitted by Aristotle in *Met.* Θ 3. Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of the problem of the existence and the unity of the Megarian circle. The rest of the chapter focuses on the philosophy of Euclid of Megara, founder of the Megarian line. Chapter 3 will focus on Euclid's successors and their particular dialectical methodology. The chapter closes with a synthetic appraisal of the philosophy of the Megarians.

## CHAPTER 2

### The origins of the Megarian circle

#### 2.1. The problem of the existence of a Megarian school and the question of its unity

The first question we must ask is: does something like a Megarian school even exist? As we will immediately see, ancient sources seem to firmly believe so. This was also the standard position of 19th century scholarship. However, there has been much discussion on this matter in the 20th century, and to this day many scholars believe that the very notion of a “Megarian school” is a fiction composed by late ancient doxographers, who struggled to make sense of a fundamentally heterogeneous plexus of sources. In this section I will present some of the main arguments for and against the idea of a Megarian ‘school’ or ‘circle’, in order to clarify the discussion as much as possible. My intention is to show that, although the Megarian circle was not as rigid and institutionalized as Plato’s Academy or Aristotle’s Lyceum, the Megarians certainly formed a single philosophical group with shared interests and with deep methodological concurrences.

Let us begin with Aristotle’s testimony in *Met.* Θ 3. Aristotle speaks plainly, and without the need of further explanation, of οἱ Μεγαρικοί (1046b29). If we turn to Ps. Alexander’s commentary on *Metaphysics* Θ 3, we read that “Aristotle could mean by Megarians the disciples of Euclid: he in fact had his school in Megara” (Alex. Aphr. in *Met.* 570, 25–30, ed. Hayduck =SSR II B 16). This commentary was probably written by Michael of Ephesus in the 12th century and is congruent with the Suda (10th century): “Euclid, Megarian, of Megara on the Isthmus, philosopher, introduced the sect (αἵρεσιν) that was called Megarian after him, also called Dialectic (Διαλεκτικήν) and Eristic (Ἐριστικήν). He was a disciple of Socrates; after him Ichthyas and then Stilpo were in charge of the school (τὴν σχολήν)” (Suda s.v. Euclid =SSR II A 1). Both testimonies are in agreement with Diogenes Laertius:

Euclid was a native of Megara on the Isthmus, or according to some of Gela, as Alexander states in his *Successions of Philosophers*. He was familiar with the writings of Parmenides (οὗτος καὶ τὰ Παρμενίδεια μετεχειρίζετο),<sup>37</sup> and his successors were

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<sup>37</sup> The verb μεταχειρίζω can be translated in various ways. It has the meaning of “to handle”, “to have in hand”, and from this sense its meaning is extended towards “to practice”, “to pursue”. Τὰ Παρμενίδεια

called Megarians, then eristics, after that dialectics; Dionysius of Chalcedony called them this way first because they arranged their discourse (λόγος) by way of questions and answers. Hermodorus states that Plato and the rest of the philosophers came to him after Socrates's death, being afraid of the cruelty of the tyrants. He upheld that the good is one (ἐν τὸ ἀγαθόν) although it is called by many names (πολλοῖς ὀνόμασι καλούμενον): sometimes prudence, sometimes divinity, others intelligence, and so on. He also rejected what is opposite to the good, saying that it does not exist (τὰ δ' ἀντικείμενα τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀνήρει, μὴ εἶναι) (II 106, 5–15 =SSR II A 30).<sup>38</sup>

We will have to return to this crucial passage later, but we must begin by noting that Diogenes's testimony is particularly noteworthy in that it introduces the two elements which usually guide the discussion on the Megarian school: the question of the unity of the school and the connection between the Megarians and Eleaticism. Both aspects are deeply related, since scholars who deny that there is any sort of Eleatic influence in Megarianism tend to understate the unity and the continuity of the Megarian circle.

Diogenes marks the origin of the Megarians in Euclid of Megara. We will analyze this figure in more detail in the next section, but we must begin by noting some basic facts on which there is agreement among interpreters. First of all, we know that Euclid was a companion of Socrates. Most sources state that Euclid was originally from Megara, a city quite near to Athens (approximately 40 km).<sup>39</sup> Numerous anecdotes underscore

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could refer either to the writings of Parmenides or more generally to his doctrines. Mársico (2013, 109 FS 83), for example, translates the line as follows: “Euclid practiced the beliefs of Parmenides” (*Euclides practicaba las creencias de Parménides*). In contrast, I have chosen to translate it in as a neutral a way as possible in order not to condition beforehand our interpretation of the Megarians in terms of the Eleatic interpretation of their thought (on which, see below).

<sup>38</sup> Given the importance of this testimony, here is the full quote in Ancient Greek: Εὐκλείδης ἀπὸ Μεγάρων τῶν πρὸς Ἴσθμῳ, ἢ Γελῶος κατ'ἐνίου, ὡς φησιν Ἀλέξανδρος ἐν Διαδοχαῖς. οὗτος καὶ τὰ Παρμενίδεια μετεχειρίζετο, καὶ οἱ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ Μεγαρικοὶ προσηγορεύοντο, εἴτ' ἐριστικοί, ὕστερον δὲ διαλεκτικοί, οὓς οὕτως ὠνόμασε πρῶτος Διονύσιος ὁ Χαλκηδόνιος διὰ τὸ πρὸς ἐρώτησιν καὶ ἀπόκρισιν τοὺς λόγους διατίθεσθαι. πρὸς τοῦτόν φησιν ὁ Ἐρμόδωρος ἀφικέσθαι Πλάτωνα καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς φιλοσόφους μετὰ τὴν Σωκράτους τελευτήν, δείσαντες τὴν ὀμότητα τῶν τυράννων. οὗτος ἐν τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἀπεφαίνετο πολλοῖς ὀνόμασι καλούμενον· ὅτε μὲν γὰρ φρόνησιν, ὅτε δὲ θεόν, καὶ ἄλλοτε νοῦν καὶ τὰ λοιπά. τὰ δ' ἀντικείμενα τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀνήρει, μὴ εἶναι φάσκων.

<sup>39</sup> Diogenes claims in the passage quoted above that some, such as Alexander in his *Successions of Philosophers*, say that Euclid was originally from Gela, in Magna Graecia. But this could be explained by the typical association between Megarianism and Eleaticism in ancient sources. Doxographers may have

both Euclid's many contacts with Socrates and his devotion to him. For example, Aulus Gellius (*NA* VII 10, 1–5 = *SSR* II A 2) relates that Taurus (head of the Academy by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) used to exhort his students with a peculiar anecdote: according to Taurus, Euclid used to go to Athens at dusk dressed up as a woman in order to bypass an edict which forbade the citizens of Megara from entering Athens. He did so in order to participate at least in part in Socrates's discussions. At dawn, he returned to Megara, once more disguised in woman's clothes. Beyond the question of the veracity of this story (one could wonder if Euclid used to traverse 80 km in total in the span of one night), the anecdote serves the purpose of stressing Euclid's dedication to Socrates. The anecdote also provides a clue on Euclid's datation: the edict referred to in the story is believed to have been in place in the year 432 BC, in the context of the Peloponnesian war. If he had been around 20 years old at the time (which seems reasonable, given that the sources place Euclid as one of Socrates's older companions), his birth would have been around 450 BC.<sup>40</sup> Finally, Euclid also appears as one of the most prominent followers of Socrates in the testimony of Dio Chrysostom, together with Plato, Aristippus, Aeschines, Antisthenes and Xenophon.<sup>41</sup>

Secondly, we also know that he was on friendly terms with Plato. Plato includes Euclid among those present in Socrates's last living moments in *Phaedo* 59b–c. In this passage, Plato states that both Euclid and Terpsion (an obscure figure of which we have no information besides his connection to Euclid and his closeness to Socrates) had come from Megara (*Μεγαρόθεν*, 59c2). This testimony is particularly valuable, since Plato is reporting what are certainly historical facts, that is, the list of those present in Socrates's last living moments.<sup>42</sup>

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intended to emphasize the proximity between the two philosophical tendencies by claiming that Euclid was born in the same area as Parmenides and Zeno of Elea.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Mársico (2013, 99 n. 9) for some discussion and references on this anecdote and the issue of Euclid's chronology.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Dio Chrys. *Or.* VIII 7, 1 = *SSR* I H 1: "Diogenes of Sinope, having escaped from his homeland, came to Athens looking like those of most humble condition; and there he found a good number of the then companions of Socrates: Plato, Aristippus, Aeschines, Antisthenes and Euclid from Megara. Xenophon, in turn, was away because of Cyrus's expedition".

<sup>42</sup> Brancacci (2018a, 162–163) notes that Plato also mentions Antisthenes among those present (59b8). It is known that relations between the two philosophers were not good, and in fact, this is the only mention to Antisthenes in the whole Platonic *corpus*. This suggests that Plato is reporting accurately the list of those present before Socrates's death.

Both Euclid and Terpsion appear in the introduction of the *Theaetetus* (142a–143c): Plato makes Euclid the composer of the dialogue, based on his notes (ὑπομνήματα, 143a1) of Socrates’s oral reconstruction of his discussions with Theaetetus. The work is then read by a slave to both of them. The companionship between Plato and Euclid can also be inferred by Diogenes’s testimony quoted above: there, Diogenes states that after Socrates’s death, his companions (including Plato) took refuge with Euclid in Megara.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, the sources tell us that he composed several Socratic dialogues.<sup>44</sup> Diogenes (II 108 =SSR II A 10) tells us that he composed six dialogues: *Lamprias*, *Aeschines*, *Phoenix*, *Crito*, *Alcibiades*, and *On Love* (Suda s.v. Euclid =SSR II A 10 repeats this catalog and adds “among others”, καὶ ἄλλα τινά). Although Diogenes II 64 claims that Panaetius doubted the authenticity of Euclid’s dialogues, this judgment seems unjustified, given that we have other testimonies which confirm his authorship (Suda s.v. Euclid =SSR II A 10, and Stob. III 6, 63 =SSR II A 11, confirmed by Censorinus). We also have lexicographical references that were likely extracted from Euclid’s works (SSR II A 11–13).<sup>45</sup>

Euclid’s relation with Socrates, his companionship with Plato, and his authorship of *sokratikoi logoi* are accepted by most scholars, but, as we mentioned earlier, other aspects of Euclid’s philosophical origins and activity are a matter of fierce debate. The centerpiece of this debate is, once more, Diogenes Laertius’s testimony. We can better understand this polemic by sorting interpreters into two groups: the first one I will call the ‘traditional view’, and the second one the ‘revisionist view’.

The traditional view of the Megarian school takes Diogenes’s testimony at face value; that is, it holds that there was indeed such thing as a Megarian school, whose doctrine resulted from a synthesis between Socratism and Eleaticism. There is evidence

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<sup>43</sup> Although many testimonies present a disputatious and confrontational Euclid (see section 2.2.2 below), there is one famous anecdote, reported by many sources, which shows him as an agreeable and mellow character: “Thus Euclid, when his brother said to him after a quarrel, ‘Damned if I do not get even with you’ answered, ‘But as for me, may I be damned if I cannot persuade (πείσαιμι) you’” (Plut. *De coh. ira* 14, 462c =SSR II A 15, trans. Helmbold modified). This is perhaps closer to the testimonies that portray an amicable Euclid, with excellent relations with Socrates and his fellow Socratics.

<sup>44</sup> On the Socratic dialogue as a textual genre, see Rossetti (1974; 2003). For its philosophical implications, see Napolitano Valditarà (2018). On Euclid’s dialogues see Rossetti (1980) and Giannantoni (1990 IV 36–39).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Mársico (2013, 107 n. 22).

that would seem to support this view. Firstly, Diogenes and other sources transmit that Euclid attracted followers and was the founder of a school or circle (σχολή, αἵρεσις, *disciplina*).<sup>46</sup> Secondly, we have already shown evidence that supports Euclid's Socratic affiliation. Thirdly, numerous testimonies relate Euclid to the Eleatic tradition. Euclid and his followers are connected in the sources not only to Parmenides, as in Diogenes's testimony, but also to Zeno of Elea. For example, Cicero states the following in an important passage to which we will return later:

The school (*disciplina*) of the Megarians was renowned; its initiator, according to what I read (*cuius scriptum video*), was Xenophanes, whom I mentioned before, then came Parmenides and Zeno (from whom they later were called 'Eleatics'), then Euclid of Megara, the disciple of Socrates, from whom they took the name of Megarians. They said that good is only that which is one, similar and always itself the same (*qui id bonum solum esse dicebant quod esset unum et simile et idem semper*). They also took much from Plato (*hi quoque multa a Platone*) (Cic. *Acad.* II 42, 129 =SSR II A 31).

The connection with Parmenides and Zeno is also present in Seneca's testimony:

Listen how much evil is due to small subtlety and how hostile it is to truth. [...] Parmenides says that, of this things that are perceived, nothing exists but the whole (*ex his, quae videntur, nihil esse uno excepto universo*). Zeno of Elea casts down every affair: he says that nothing exists. Close to them are the doctrines of the Pyrrhoneans, the Megarians, Eretrians and Academics, who introduced a new science: knowing nothing (Sen. *Ep.* 88, 43–45 =SSR II A 33).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See for example Diogenes's testimony quoted above and VI 24 =SSR II A 28: in this last testimony, Diogenes Laertius relates that Diogenes of Sinope called the school (σχολή) of Euclid bile (χολή), in an obvious play on words. This derogatory expression may be related to the obfuscation experienced by interlocutors when engaging with Euclid and the Megarians, famous for their eristic ways. On the Megarians as a school, see also Cicero's testimony cited below.

<sup>47</sup> Editors of the testimonies of the Megarians usually include only the mention to Zeno, but Seneca mentions Parmenides before this, at the beginning of 88, 44: *Parmenides ait ex his, quae videntur, nihil esse uno excepto universo*.

Lactantius picks up Cicero's argument (or his source) and, although he mentions neither Parmenides nor Zeno, establishes a doctrinal relation between the Megarians and the Eleatics:

With justice, therefore, among the philosophers it is not unknown Euclid, who was the founder of the Megarian doctrines, who disagreeing with the others said that the supreme good is that which is always similar to itself and the same. He certainly understood what is the nature of the supreme good, although he did not explain in what it consists (Lactan. *Div. inst.* III 12, 9 =SSR II A 31).

Finally, Aristocles connects the Megarians also to Melissus of Samos, and to some of the general tenets of Eleaticism:

There came others who [...] believed that it is necessary to disdain perceptions (αἰσθήσεις) and representations (φαντασίας), and only trust in reason (τῷ λόγῳ). In fact, this was said first by Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno, and Melissus, and then by the followers of Stilpo<sup>48</sup> and the Megarians. For this, they considered that being is one and what is different is not, that nothing is generated, nor destroyed, nor is moved in any way. (Aristocle. *Peri philosophías*, fr. 2 [apud Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XIV 17, 1, 756b–c] =SSR II O 26).

An analysis of the philosophical content of these texts will be carried out in the next section of the chapter.<sup>49</sup> Here, we must simply note that all these sources present the connection between the Megarians and the Eleatics as certain. It should also be noted that Cicero's testimony predates the testimony of Diogenes by roughly three centuries.

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<sup>48</sup> On Stilpo of Megara, see section 3.2.2 below.

<sup>49</sup> Although all these sources seem to be broadly in alignment with Diogenes's testimony on the unity of the good, they present significant variations, which we will explore below. For example, Cicero stresses, in contrast to Diogenes, that the requisite for something to be good is to be one and the same, without necessarily implying a strict identification between τὸ ἓν and τὸ ὅν. The allusion to Plato is also of interest, since it could be used to support Schleiermacher's thesis of an influence of Plato's Theory of Forms in Megarianism. On the other hand, Aristocles's testimony goes further than all the rest and identifies the doctrine of the school with the Eleatic thesis of the unity of being and the consequent denial of change.

These testimonies prompted modern interpreters to argue that this Eleatic component was a distinctive feature of the school.<sup>50</sup> This view was widely accepted in the 19th and early 20th centuries,<sup>51</sup> and its influence can be seen, for example, in Ross's commentary on the Megarian thesis of *Met.* Θ 3. There, he states, "The Megarian paradox was probably reached by a very simple piece of reasoning, natural for followers of Parmenides, 'A thing is what it is, and therefore cannot be-what-it-is-not'" (1924, II 244). Ross's claim seems to harmonize well with Aristotle's characterization of the Megarians as deniers of change in *Met.* Θ 3, 1047a14.

The Eleatic interpretation, however, was thoroughly criticized by von Fritz (1931), whose work signaled a shift that dominated 20th-century scholarship on the Megarians. With his groundbreaking article, von Fritz inaugurated a period in which the core assumptions of the traditional interpretation were revised. The arguments he presents revolve around two central aspects. The first one consists in denying the relation between Euclid and the Eleatic tradition. According to von Fritz, the association between Euclid and the Eleatics is not based on testimonies that detail personal contacts between them, but is instead the product of the perception of philosophical affinities by the later doxographic tradition. The second aspect, deeply related to the first one, revolves around the very notion of school. Diogenes Laertius (I 19 =SSR I H 6) mentions the Megarians among the ten διαδοχαί that trace their origins to Socrates. But the seemingly artificial character of this classification seems to point to its later creation. Von Fritz argues that the testimonies on the Megarians contradict each other regarding the relations between

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<sup>50</sup> One interesting detail concerns the testimony of Ps. Alexander quoted earlier. While both Bonitz and Hayduck print Εὐκλείδην in their edition of Ps. Alexander's commentary, they note that it does not appear in most manuscripts: M has Εὐκλείδην, while ALFS have Ζήνωνα. This discrepancy is especially telling, since this mistaken mention of Zeno points to an already ancient association between the Megarians and the Eleatics.

<sup>51</sup> The Eleatic interpretation can be traced back to Hegel (1842, 111–112) and Zeller (1859<sup>2</sup>, 174, 184–185). It was defended by von Arnim (1898, 21–25), Gomperz (1925 [1902], 137–138), Natorp (1907, coll. 1001ff.), Nestle (1922, 40ff.) and Robin (1973 [1923], 205). For a detailed analysis of the modern interpretations of the Megarian school up to the mid 20th century, cf. Cambiano (1971), and Giannantoni (1990 IV, 53–55). More recently, the Eleatic interpretation has been defended by Rankin (1983, 190ff.), Montoneri (in his 1984 translation of Döring's edition, which includes a commentary and a few additional testimonies absent in Döring's work), Canto (1989, 57–58), Dorion (1995, 54), Bredlow (2011) and partially by Mársico (2013, 27–35) in her recent edition of the testimonies of the Socratics. I will address in more detail the Eleatic interpretation in the following section of the chapter.

the diverse members of the school, and that there is no single place or institution that unified the diverse members. He adds that there are significant variations among the philosophical positions of the various members of the school. Döring (1989, 309), following this line of thinking, goes even further and states that the diverse members of the so-called Megarian school not only lack a common theoretical framework, but that they do not even constitute a community of philosophical interests. All these elements seem to go against the characterization of the Megarians in terms of a school.

Von Fritz believes that the traditional view of the Megarians has exaggerated the Eleatic component of their thought and minimized its Socratic heritage. According to this author, there is no need to resort to the Eleatic hypothesis, given that all the major aspects of Euclid's philosophy can be traced back to Socrates. His peculiar mode of argumentation (which we will analyze in the next section) is, according to von Fritz, fundamentally Socratic in nature, a peculiar variant of the Socratic ἔλεγχος. Moreover, his concern with the nature of the good and with ethical notions in general<sup>52</sup> show that, rather than being concerned with metaphysical speculation, Euclid continued the ethical investigations of his teacher Socrates.<sup>53</sup>

Some of von Fritz's most important claims were picked up by Guthrie (1969, 499–507), by Döring (1972, 83–87), who produced the first edition of the fragments of the Megarian school, by Muller (1985, 14–15) who translated and expanded Döring's edition, and by Giannantoni (1990, IV 36–39, 44–50), who also expanded Döring's work in his comprehensive edition of all the extant sources on the Socratics. Döring also influenced D. Sedley (1977), who in an important paper challenged the traditional view which held that Diodorus Cronus belonged to the Megarian school. His point of departure is also, to a large extent, Diogenes's testimony, specifically the lines where Diogenes claims that Euclid's successors were called “Megarians (Μεγαρικοί), then eristics (εἶτ' ἐριστικοί), after that dialectics (ὕστερον δὲ διαλεκτικοί)”. Sedley contrasts this passage with Diogenes's classification of the diverse philosophical schools, stated earlier in book I 13–19 of his *Lives*. At I 17 Diogenes states that “among the philosophers, ones received their

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Diog. Laert. II 106, 5–15 =SSR II A 30, Cic. *Acad.* II 42, 129 =SSR II A 31 and Lactan. *Divin. inst.* III 12, 9 =SSR II A 31 on the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν; *bonum*); Diog. Laert. VII 161 =SSR II A 32 on virtue (ἀρετή).

<sup>53</sup> This is also the view of Giannantoni (1990 IV, 57–59), who connects Euclid's tenet of the unity of good with the Socratic topic of the unity of virtue (ἀρετή).

name from their city, such as the Elians, the Megarians, the Eretrians and the Cyrenaics”, while the “dialecticians are those who were occupied with the extreme subtlety of arguments”. One could take this last statement as a sort of wider classification which contains the diverse schools, but Diogenes goes on to mention the Megarians and the dialecticians as seemingly diverse schools a few lines below, when distinguishing the schools which were occupied with ethical matters. Furthermore, at I 19, he claims that Euclid founded the Megarian school, while the dialectical school is said to have been founded by “Clitomachus of Calcedony”.<sup>54</sup> All of this seems to incline Sedley to believe that what usually is regarded as one school (the Megarians) should be divided at least into two distinct schools: the Megarian and the Dialectical. Diodorus would belong, according to Sedley, to the latter.

This perspective, however, has been met with harsh criticism by Muller (1988, 44 n. 24) and Döring (1989).<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Denyer (2002) has provided further textual evidence for identifying Diodorus as a member of the Megarian circle.<sup>56</sup> In addition to the arguments which can be found in the works of these authors, we could add that we should take Diogenes’s words with caution. It is doubtful that his rigid classification reflects a real division between philosophical schools. This is one of the most important results of von Fritz’s research: we should take the doxographical sources on the Megarians and on the ancient “schools” with caution. The very notion of “school” is questionable since there is clearly a series of important differences between institutionalized schools such as Plato’s Academy and Aristotle’s Lyceum, and the

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<sup>54</sup> Mársico (2013, 76 n. 12) follows the conjecture by Roeper and reads “Clinomachus <of Thurii and, according to others, Dionysius> of Calcedony”. The reasoning behind this conjecture is that the reading of the manuscripts conflicts with what Diogenes himself states in II 112 =SSR II I 1 and with Suda *s.v.* Socrates =SSR II I 2–3. In these testimonies, Clinomachus is first of all presented as a follower of Euclid. He also appears to be especially concerned with dialectical argumentation in general. Moreover, the Suda mentions that the Megarian school adopted the name “dialectical” because of Clinomachus. Regarding Dionysius, Diogenes says in II 106 that Dionysius of Chalcedony called the Megarians dialectics first “because they arranged their discourse (λόγος) by way of questions and answers”. It is unclear if Dionysius himself was a Megarian or not; however, he is strongly associated with dialectic in Strab. XII 4, 9 =SSR II P 1 and Diog. Laert. II 98 =SSR II P 2.

<sup>55</sup> The issue has also been recently addressed by Gourinat (2021).

<sup>56</sup> Denyer focuses on a passage from Eustathius, *Od.* 28, 46–29, 22, whose source in turn is presumably Suetonius. This passage explicitly refers to Diodorus as a Megarian, unlike other testimonies which refer to Diodorus by the term *διαλεκτικός*.

Socratic schools, which had a much looser structure. By using a laxer term such as “circle” or “group” to refer to the Megarians, we can explain the variations among the diverse exponents of the group without compromising its unity.

If we go back to von Fritz’s position, we note that its influence has been decisive, not only in recent scholarship on the Megarians (as in the case of Döring, Muller and Giannantoni, mentioned earlier, and, more recently, Gardella 2015, 42–54), but also on recent Aristotelian scholarship of *Met.* Θ 3. In fact, most recent commentators do not consider the ancient association between the Megarians and Eleaticism when analyzing the passage (see previous n. 21), in what seems to be a tacit acceptance of von Fritz’s position.

Recent years have seen a reaction to the strongest version of von Fritz’s thesis,<sup>57</sup> which not only denies any Eleatic influence on Euclid but, further, denies all unity to the Megarian school as a whole.<sup>58</sup> Two important works in this respect are those of Mársico (2011, 2013) and Brancacci (2018a). Mársico (2011, 356; 2013, 28–29) argues that von Fritz’s thesis collapses in circularity: firstly, it downplays the metaphysical aspect of Megarian philosophy by denying its Eleatic heritage, and secondly, it denies unity to the group by contrasting Euclid’s de-ontologized thought with the mostly ontological contributions of later exponents of the group such as Stilpo of Megara or Diodorus Cronus. Mársico (2011, 356) claims “that it is necessary to consider the Eleatic influence as we try to understand the basic points of his [*sc.* Euclid’s] position”.

Brancacci’s main criticism of von Fritz is methodological. He questions von Fritz’s choice of equating the associations between philosophers or philosophical schools which appear in ancient sources with the connections established by modern

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<sup>57</sup> As stated before, Döring (1989, 309) argues that the various members of the so-called Megarian school not only lack a common theoretical framework, but that they do not even constitute a community of philosophical interests. The only unity of the group is found in the succession scheme between its exponents, although he does concede that the dialectical orientation of the group is present throughout its history. One could wonder if this methodological concurrence does not speak in favor of a stronger kind of unity than that of succession, which would still not necessarily imply a strict unity such as that of the Academia or the Peripatos.

<sup>58</sup> Brancacci (2018a, 161–162) also notices that this position took hold of a large part of 20<sup>th</sup> century exegesis on the school: “modern historiography has passed through a stage of hypercriticism in dealing with the Megarian school. Some scholars have come to deny its unity and continuity, if not its existence, stretching the data deriving from ancient sources”.

interpretations. Brancacci notes that ancient sources have a privileged status *per se*, since the ancients had access to material that is mostly lost to us. The case of Cicero, for example, is paradigmatic, since he certainly had access to a large amount of ancient Socratic literature (completely lost to us, except for a handful of fragments) and its posterior elaborations. Recall *Acad.* II 42, 129 =SSR II A 31, where he qualifies his judgment of the Megarian school with the expression “according to what I read (*cuius scriptum video*)”. Moreover, Cicero frequently cites the *Socraticorum libri*, cf. *Academica*, I 16: *ad virtutis stadium cohortandis consumebatur, ut e Socraticorum libri maximeque Platonis intellegi potest; De divinatione* I 122: *in libris Socraticorum; De officiis* I 104: *sed etiam philosophorum Socraticorum libris*.

Of course, this does not mean that ancient sources are immediately trustworthy, or that they could not contain serious factual errors. Still, Brancacci argues that the interpreter’s task is to judge these sources carefully, contrasting them with other sources through a meticulous hermeneutical approach, only to conclude *afterwards* that the content is trustworthy, dubious, or directly false. According to Brancacci, von Fritz’s method seems to be the inverse: because those ancient sources which do not contain verifiable factual information have no more value than any other modern interpretation, they should not be regarded as trustworthy information on the character of and the relations between ancient philosophical schools.

Brancacci goes on to claim, as does Mársico, that the Eleatic component of Euclid’s thought is fundamental for a correct interpretation of the Socratic philosopher. In summary, according to this view, we should take into account (with caution) the testimonies that relate the Megarian group to an ontological position of Eleatic inspiration and thus preserve the unity of the group, which was emphatically sustained by the ancients, who certainly had more elements than us on which to make their judgment.

After this overview of the main points of discussion regarding the unity and the nature of the Megarian school, we can try to establish some preliminary conclusions. Although the relation between the Megarians and Eleaticism remains disputed, few scholars today deny that there was a philosophical group that originated in Euclid and had a particular interest in dialectic and eristic arguments. Indeed, there is agreement among interpreters regarding this last point: most believe that a particular concern with dialectical arguments constitutes a common denominator of the Megarians, and this belief

is held even among those who reject the Parmenidean interpretation.<sup>59</sup> This feature is well attested in the available testimonies and supports the existence of such a thing as a Megarian group.<sup>60</sup> Aristotle's testimony seems to be clear on this matter: the expression 'οἱ Μεγαρικοί' at 1046b29 seems to indicate a well-defined and easily recognizable group or circle of philosophers, active by the time book Θ of the *Metaphysics* was composed.<sup>61</sup>

Upholding the unity of the Megarian circle does not imply that Euclid founded a formally structured school, in the way of Plato's Academy or Aristotle's Lyceum, or even in the way of the later Hellenistic schools. As Brancacci notes (2018a, 162), the Socratic schools were less unified and more loosely structured, without a defined physical space or regular teaching location. However, this looseness does not exclude the possibility of a circle of philosophers with shared interests and methodological concurrences.<sup>62</sup> Determining the exact nature of the unity between the diverse Megarian exponents is a

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<sup>59</sup> See for example Muller (1988, 39, 113–114) and Döring (1989, 310).

<sup>60</sup> Diogenes distinguishes this dialectical character already in Euclid at II 107 =SSR II A 34, a text to be discussed below. The predilection for dialectical argumentation can also be seen in the cases of Bryson (Arist. *SE* 171b3–172a7 =SSR II S 11), Polyxenus (Alex. *Aphr. in Met.* 84, 16–21, ed. Hayduck) and Ebulides (II 108 =SSR II B 13), the second generation of Megarians (to be analyzed in section 3.1), and in Diodorus Cronus and Stilpo of Megara, exponents of the third generation of Megarians. On Diodorus and Stilpo, see sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 respectively.

<sup>61</sup> The name 'Megarians' (Μεγαρικοί) also appears in the titles of ancient texts, e.g., Theophrastus (Μεγαρικός, Diog. Laert. V 44 =SSR II A 35) and Epicurus (Πρὸς τοὺς Μεγαρικούς, Diog. Laert. X 27 =SSR II B 17). It should also be noted that neither Ebulides of Miletus nor Diodorus Cronus (the two philosophers who are usually thought to be behind Aristotle's allusion, cf. section 7.1.2 below) were originally from Megara; this suggests that the term 'Megarians' was used to refer to a school or circle of philosophers, and not necessarily to a city of origin.

<sup>62</sup> Cambiano (1977, 36) states that it is important to clarify the diverse ways in which the term "school" can be understood. He distinguishes four senses: a school could refer to a group of thinkers which share *a*) a way of life, *b*) a doctrinal core composed of a series of fundamental propositions, *c*) an interest in a determinate subject or field of research, *d*) a shared methodology of discussion or research. I believe the Megarian circle share without a doubt at least the latter three characteristics. In contrast, Cambiano focuses on the incongruences of the testimonies regarding the relations of filiation between the diverse Megarian philosophers and puts into question almost all the testimonies which relate Stilpo and Diodorus to the Megarian circle. As a result, he dismisses the idea of Megarianism as a unified instance. Although the same objections already raised regarding von Fritz's arguments apply to Cambiano's reading, we may add that the systematic questioning of the ancient testimonies only serves the purpose of obscuring our understanding of Aristotle's discussion in Θ 3.

particularly difficult matter, but a closer look at the available testimonies will prove helpful in understanding more fully the unity of the Megarian circle.

Two other things should be noted before we move on to analyze the philosophical content of the testimonies of the Megarians. The first one concerns the structure of the school and its members.<sup>63</sup> The doxographers present rigid and often conflicting succession schemes of the diverse Megarian exponents. Euclid is indeed connected to a large number of philosophers in the sources.<sup>64</sup> Given that it would be mistaken to consider the Megarian circle as a formally established institution, it seems safer to claim that the relations between exponents were flexible and not like master-disciple relations.

This, however, does not mean there are no common threads linking the diverse figures. All of them seem to have a connection, direct or indirect, to Euclid. Furthermore, although not all of the Megarians were originally from Megara (Bryson of Heraclea, Eubulides of Miletus, and Diodorus Cronus being famous examples), the city of Megara did function as an important center for the Megarian circle throughout its history. Euclid certainly attracted followers in Megara; Stilpo, the most relevant figure of the last generation of Megarians, was originally from Megara, and he most likely used to teach (at least in part) in the city. It is also possible that Diodorus Cronus was active in Megara. Diogenes Laertius II 111–112 =SSR II F 1 claims that he used to discuss with Stilpo in the court of Ptolemy I Soter, who occupied Megara in 308 BC. Finally, there are clear

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<sup>63</sup> An overview of the composition of the Megarian circle can be found in Döring (1972, 171), Gardella (2015, 97–99) and Villar (2021, 94–95).

<sup>64</sup> Clinomachus of Thurii, Eubulides of Miletus, Pasicles of Thebes, and Ichthyas are mentioned as disciples of Euclid. According to Diogenes Laertius, Eubulides was a teacher of Alexinus of Elis, Euphantus of Olynthus and Apollonius Cronus, who, according to the testimonies, was a teacher of Diodorus Cronus. He is, thus, an important mediator between the Socratic origins of the group and the later generations who established discussions with Aristotle (cf. II 109–11 =SSR II B 5).

Other figures are related to Euclid in a more diffuse manner. Bryson of Heraclea appears in the Suda (*s.v.* Socrates =SSR II S 2) as a disciple of Socrates himself, and companion of Euclid, although the dating makes this implausible. Elsewhere the Suda (*s.v.* *Phyrro* =SSR II S 2) states that Bryson was a disciple of Clinomachus. Diogenes states that some believe that Euclid was also the master of Stilpo, although he is also said to have studied with one of Euclid's disciples, such as Trasymachus of Corinthus. In contrast, the Suda says that Stilpo was a disciple either of Pasicles of Thebes or of Euclid himself. On the place of Stilpo in the Megarian circle cf. Mársico (2013, 215 n. 157) and section 3.2.2 below. The conflicting and disorderly nature of all this information shows that we are probably dealing with somewhat artificial material, composed retrospectively by doxographers.

doctrinal continuities that we will explore in the following sub-sections, chief among them being their eristic-dialectical praxis.<sup>65</sup>

In what follows I will focus on the foremost exponents of the group: Euclid of Megara, Eubulides of Miletus, Diodorus Cronus, and Stilpo of Megara.<sup>66</sup> My intention is not to carry out an exhaustive analysis of all extant sources, but only of those relevant to the ontological and dialectical character of the Megarian circle. As mentioned earlier, this resource will be fundamental to our effort to contextualize Aristotle's anti-Megarian polemic in *Met.* Θ 3 and its Platonic precedents.

## 2.2. Ontology and language in Euclid of Megara

In the previous subsection, I argued for the existence and the relative unity of such a thing as a Megarian circle. In what follows I will explore the philosophical positions of the Megarians, with particular attention to their perspective on the relationship between ontology and language. First, I will go into further detail on the philosophical content of Euclid's testimonies and then examine the positions of the most important later exponents of the Megarian circle.

Our study of Euclid is particularly important. Although most of our evidence on his thought is indirect (only a fragment transmitted by Stobaeus seems to be a direct quote, cf. *infra* p. 58–59), it is possible to reconstruct a general philosophical position from the available testimonies. This core position resurfaces under new forms in later exponents of the group; as we will see, Euclid's conception of being and its particular relation to language constitutes the core, recurring theme of Megarianism.

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<sup>65</sup> There is also a textual basis for this claim, given that the Megarians are systematically called 'eristics' (ἐριστικοί) in the sources. A few examples: Diogenes Laertius reports a judgment by Timon according to which Euclid was disputatious (ἐριδάντεω). This qualification also applies to Eubulides in II 108 (οὐριστικός). Aristotle accuses Bryson of being eristic (*SE* 11, 171b3–172b7 = *SSR* II S 11). On the term ἔρις see Chantraine 1968–80, 372. The Megarians were also famously called dialecticians, as we already saw in *Diog. Laert.* II 106 = *SSR* II A 30.

<sup>66</sup> We lack testimonies on many of the Megarians. There is very little information on Megarians such as Phillipus of Megara, Pasicles of Thebes, Clinomachus of Thurii, Dionysius of Chalcedon, Ichthyas, Euphantus of Olynthus, and Apollonius Cronus. Diocles of Megara is mentioned among the Megarians in the *Suda*, but we have no information about him beyond this testimony (it is also possible that Διοκλείδης could be a misreading of Εὐκλείδης, cf. *Suda s.v.* Stilpo = *SSR* II O 1).

We must once more return to Diogenes Laertius. The philosophical content of II 106 =SSR II A 30 can be summarized in two theses: the unity of the good and its intrinsic plurivocity: “He [*sc.* Euclid] upheld that the good is one (ἐν τὸ ἀγαθόν) although it is called by many names (πολλοῖς ὀνόμασι καλούμενον): sometimes prudence, sometimes divinity others intelligence, and so on”. The two theses present two different sets of issues. I will begin with the first thesis, which I will call the ontological principle, in order later to address the second one, which I call the linguistic principle.

### 2.2.1. The ontological principle

The exact nature of τὸ ἀγαθόν in Diogenes’s testimony is unclear, and its interpretation depends on how one understands its relation to the previous affirmation that Euclid “was familiar with the writings of Parmenides”. Defenders of the traditional interpretation of the Megarian circle will not hesitate to associate the doctrine of the unity of the good with a form of numerical monism (as, among others, do Mallet 1845, Gillespie 1911, and Montoneri 1984). According to this reading, Euclid would be claiming, as the Eleatics allegedly did, that there is only one thing which is. Euclid would identify this entity with the good.

This idea would be reinforced by the closing line of the passage: “He also rejected what is opposite to the good, saying that it does not exist (τὰ δ’ ἀντικείμενα τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀνήρει)”. Here Euclid specifically denies *being* (μὴ εἶναι) to that which is opposite to the good: this seems to suggest that his conception of the good has clear ontological implications. The fact that Euclid initially speaks of the good and not simply of being, as in the case of the Eleatics, would be explained by Euclid’s Socratic heritage; thus, we would be facing an ethical rendering of the Eleatic One, or an ‘ontologization’ of the Socratic good.

This reading relies on two assumptions: first, that the ontology espoused by Parmenides in his poem can and should be interpreted as a form of numerical monism (*i.e.*, that only one single entity exists). The second assumption is that it is licit to ascribe this doctrine to the whole of the Eleatics, as a core tenet upheld by Parmenides, Zeno, and Melissus, that Euclid and the Megarians would pick up and develop further.

Both assumptions are questionable. In the first place, it is unclear that the ontology of Parmenides could be understood as a strict form of numerical monism.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the very concept of ‘monism’ seems to be ambiguous, since τὸ ἓν can signify various ways of being one. Rapp (2006) distinguishes seven kinds of monism, of which not all are incompatible with the existence of a plurality of beings. The most important contrast between these various senses of being one is the contrast between the traditional numerical monism and the type of monism that Rapp, following Curd (1998; 2004, xviii), calls “predicational monism”. This latter kind is summarized by Rapp (2006, 164) in the following way: “everything that is has one and just one predicate that holds in a particular strong way”, which can be further specified by the claim that “the involved predicate is usually an informative and classifying predicate so that predicational monism implies a sort of essential predication”. This interpretation of monism would imply that, in the case of Parmenides, the predicate “to be” is applied necessarily to something which is *essentially one*, and which admits of only one (essential) predicate. This would commit Parmenides not to the existence of *one* entity, but to the necessary unity and self-identity of (each) being. According to critics of the traditional interpretation of the Megarians, this reconstruction of Parmenides’s monism would contradict Euclid’s alleged numerical monist position in Diogenes’s testimony. This would, in turn, invalidate the Eleatic interpretation of the latter passage.

The second assumption concerns the so-called Eleatic school. Recent scholars of the Megarians (cf. in particular Gardella 2015, 29–34 and Villar 2021, 89ff.) who oppose the Eleatic interpretation of this passage claim, to begin with, that there is no “Eleatic school” to which to connect Euclid. In this, they follow Cordero (1991), who asserts that the concept of an Eleatic school was invented by Plato in the *Sophist*. At 242d4–6, the Stranger connects the Eleatic group (Ἐλεατικὸν ἕθνος), which he says traces its origins to Xenophanes, to the claim that all things are one single thing. But Cordero shows that this reconstruction fits none of Xenophanes, Parmenides, or Zeno. We have already shown that the Parmenidean monism could be considered a form of predicational monism, and not necessarily a kind of numerical monism. It is known that Zeno argued against the notions of both ‘multiplicity’ and of ‘unity’. Only Melissus of Samos might appear close to Plato’s reconstruction, given that numerous sources show him upholding

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<sup>67</sup> Against the traditional interpretation of Parmenides’s monism, see Mourelatos (2008 [1970], 130–133) and Barnes (1979).

the unity of being, as a corollary of his thesis of the infinite being.<sup>68</sup> But still, this does not suffice to claim that there was such a thing as an Eleatic school.

The rejection of these two suppositions has prompted critics of the traditional interpretation to claim that the passage of II 106 can be interpreted solely as a development of the Socratic theme of the unity of virtue. Although the passage speaks of the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν), another passage from Diogenes restates the point in terms of ἀρετή. At VII 161, he states the following: “Ariston of Chios did not introduce many virtues, as Zeno did, nor one which is called with many names, as the Megarians (οὔτε μίαν πολλοῖς ὀνόμασι καλουμένην, ὡς οἱ Μεγαρικοί), but relative ways of being” (Diog. Laert. VII 161, =SSR II A 32). The testimony does not mention Euclid by name, and speaks instead of the Megarians (οἱ Μεγαρικοί). But there is a clear structural proximity between the two passages: there is something (the good or virtue) which is one (ἓν) and which is called (καλούμενον) with many names (πολλοῖς ὀνόμασι).

The Socratic character of the thesis of the unity of virtue is widely known. In this respect, we can recall *Protagoras* 329c2–d1, where Plato states the following:

You [sc. Protagoras] said that Zeus bestowed justice and shame on mankind, and then many times in your discourse, you spoke of justice and prudence and holiness and all the rest as all being summed up in one thing, virtue (ἀρετή). Will you then explain precisely whether virtue is one thing, and justice and shame and holiness are parts of it, or whether all of these that I have just mentioned are different names of one and the same thing (πάντα ὀνόματα τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐνὸς ὄντος). This is what I still want to know (trans. Taylor, modified).

This passage occurs in the broader context of Socrates’s discussion with Protagoras on the transmissibility of virtue. Socrates’s whole argument against Protagoras is intended to show that virtue has no parts; Socrates shows that whoever has one of the alleged parts of virtue necessarily has the other. Still, what is most interesting from the quoted passage, and what prompts scholars to stress the Socratic character of Diogenes’s testimony on Euclid, is the particular reference to the merely nominal plurality of a single entity. In this sense, there would be no need to resort to an Eleatic interpretation since the question of the unity of virtue and of the good would be within the horizon of Socratic reflection.

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Simplicius, *in Phys.* 29, 22; 109, 20, ed. Diels, and *in Cael.* 557, 16–18, ed. Heiberg.

But are the arguments of those who support the exclusively Socratic reading sufficient to dismiss the Eleatic interpretation? This conclusion follows immediately neither from the rejection of the numerically-monist interpretation of Parmenides nor from the denial of the existence of an Eleatic school. Before turning to the other sources which establish a connection between Euclid and Parmenides, Zeno, and Melissus, we should note the following:

a) Euclid's thesis in Diogenes's testimony does not directly imply a form of numerical monism, so there would be no contradiction between this testimony and Parmenides's thesis of the unity of being, interpreted as a kind of predicational monism. Diogenes transmits that Euclid said that what is *opposite* (ἀντικείμενα) to the good does not exist: This rejection does not necessarily imply the denial of that which is different, but not contrary, from it, as Gardella (2014) notes.<sup>69</sup> On the contrary, the predicational interpretation of Parmenides seems to accord well not only with Euclid but with the Megarians as a whole. They seem committed to the principle of the necessary unity and self-identity of (each) being. So in this case we would be facing a sort of continuity and not a contradiction between Parmenides and Euclid.

b) Cordero's rejection of the existence of an "Eleatic school" does not rule out the presence of strong points of contact and even continuity between Parmenides, Zeno, and Melissus. Beyond their substantial differences, all three could be seen as preoccupied with the running theme of the necessary unity of being, conceived either pluralistically (as is plausible in the case of Parmenides and Zeno) or monistically (as in the case of Melissus). The point is that there is a deeper point of commonality expressed in various ways by different Eleatic philosophers. This deeper commonality would be the one which the Megarians adopted and developed, in diverse and sometimes contrasting ways.

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<sup>69</sup> Pluralist interpretations, first introduced by Schleiermacher (1824) and followed by Zeller and more recently Muller (1988), argue that the Megarians upheld a variation of Plato's Theory of Forms, on the basis of Plato's reference to the friends of the forms in *Sophist* 248a (Schleiermacher) and later testimonies of Stilpo, which seem to suppose the existence of a plurality of intelligibles (Zeller and Muller). I will analyze this position in section 4.1.1 below.

c) The fact that the thesis of the unity of virtue can be traced to Socrates does not imply that it pertains exclusively to the domain of ethical speculation. Scholars who defend this reading emphasize this proximity to Socrates in order to trace a distinction with the ontological interpretation of the Eleatic reading. But this seems to be a false opposition. The broader Socratic reflection on the unity of virtue is not deprived of ontological implications,<sup>70</sup> nor does Euclid's ontological formulation appear to be foreign to ethical speculation. Connecting Euclid's thesis of the unity of the good with the Socratic motive of the unity of virtue does not automatically rule out a Parmenidean influence in Euclid.

This shows that although it would be wrong to commit Euclid to the alleged 'Eleatic' claim that there is only one entity (the good), it cannot be ruled out that certain Eleatic premises could have been operative in Euclid's ontological thought. Chief among them would be the claim that *being is necessarily unified and self-identical* (a claim which does not necessarily contradict ontological pluralism). This is a particularly important point for us, since this reconstruction—which we have so far only anticipated and still have to develop fully—will help us make sense of many of the patterns of eristic argumentation that feature in the testimonies on the Megarians.

Before moving on, let us turn to the remaining testimonies, which provide information on Euclid's ontological profile (quoted above at pp. 39–40). According to Cicero, as we saw earlier, the Megarians “said that good is only that which is one, similar and always itself the same” (*qui id bonum solum esse dicebant quod esset unum et simile et idem semper*), and that “they also took much from Plato” (*hi quoque multa a Platone*) (*Acad.* II 42, 129 = *SSR* II A 31). In contrast to Diogenes, Cicero stresses that the requisite for something to be good is to be one and the same, without necessarily implying a strict identification between τὸ ἓν and τὸ ὅν. Lactantius builds on Cicero's testimony and states that “the supreme good is that which is always similar to itself and the same” (*summum bonum, quod simile sit et idem semper*). Both testimonies underscore the necessary unity and self-identity of the good. A wider interpretation of Euclid's ontology cannot be

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<sup>70</sup> The point of *Protagoras* 329c2–d1 is restated slightly differently in 349b. In this passage, the ontological implications of the discussion are more visible: “The question, I think, was this: are ‘wisdom’, ‘prudence’, ‘courage’, ‘justice’, and ‘holiness’ five names for one thing (πέντε ὄντα ὀνόματα, ἐπὶ ἐνὶ πράγματι ἔστιν), or does there some underlying separate thing or entity with its own particular power, unlike any of the others, correspond to each of these names?” (trans. Taylor, modified).

extracted from these testimonies but we will see that if we read them together with the sources of the later Megarians, a clearer picture will emerge. In this, the ontological condition ascribed by Cicero and Lactantius to the supreme good is extended to all that is, that is, to all beings insofar as they are said to be. In this reading, the thesis presented in these testimonies straddles the ontological and ethical domains.

Cicero also claims “that Euclid took much from Plato”. This information is, of course, very obscure, but two things should be noted. First, Euclid’s notion of the good does seem to have points of contact with Plato’s conception of the Form of Good in *Republic* (507b, 508e–509b), especially if we admit the ontological reading of Euclid’s testimonies. Euclid affirms the fundamental unity of the good and claims that that which is opposite to it does not exist. This suggests that there is an ontological priority of the concept of good, such as in the case of Plato. Secondly, Cicero’s allusion may be taken as support for Schleiermacher’s thesis of an influence of Plato in Megarianism. According to this view, Plato’s influence would result in the Megarians’ espousal of a particular version of the Theory of Forms. This peculiar version would be represented in the famous Gigantomachia of the *Sophist*: here Plato speaks of “the Friends of the Forms” as those who rejected change and only upheld the existence of pure and eternal forms. Schleiermacher did not hesitate to identify these “Friends of the Forms” with the Megarians, although this position has been met with serious criticism (on this, see below 4.1.1.).

The testimony by Aristocles (*SSR* II O 26) distances itself from all the previous ones insofar as it introduces a clearer connection between Megarianism and numerical monism. Although Aristocles does not mention Euclid, he does mention Stilpo, a later Megarian exponent, and extends the position to the Megarians as a whole: “This was said first by Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno and Melissus, and then by the followers of Stilpo and the Megarians”. He then claims that the Megarians “considered that being is one (τὸ ὄν ἓν εἶναι) and what is different is not (καὶ τὸ ἕτερον μὴ εἶναι), that nothing is generated, nor destroyed, nor is moved in any way” (*Peri philosophias*, fr. 2 [*apud* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XIV 17, 1, 756b–c] = *SSR* II O 26). Note that in contrast to Diogenes, Aristocles speaks directly of being (τὸ ὄν) and not of the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν), which seems to support the ontological reading of Euclid’s thought. He also claims that all that is merely *different* (and not opposite) to being does not exist, which could seem closer to a numerical monist position such as that of Melissus. This impression seems strengthened by the rejection of all generation, corruption, and motion and by the earlier claim that the whole

philosophical line that allegedly goes from Xenophanes up to the Megarians “believed that it is necessary to disdain sensations (αἰσθήσεις) and appearances (φαντασίας), and only trust in reason (τῷ λόγῳ)”, which are standard Eleatic *topoi* already in ancient times.

Aristocles’s testimony seems to reunite a somewhat disorderly series of elements, synthesizing heterogeneous information such as the relation between the different philosophers, their rationalistic tendencies, and their commitment to a unified ontological principle. For this reason, it should be read with caution, but we can still note that there is no *fundamental* incongruence between this testimony and all the previous ones we analyzed. It introduces subtle differences and stresses the ontological dimension of Euclid’s commitment to the unity of being (“the good” in Diogenes and Cicero), but it does not depart from the general scheme that can be extracted from Diogenes, Cicero, and Lactantius: the commitment to the unity of the ontological principle.

### 2.2.2. The linguistic principle

We must now turn to the second thesis presented in Diogenes’s testimony, the linguistic principle. Diogenes says that although the good is one (ἐν τὸ ἀγαθόν), it is said by many names (πολλοῖς ὀνόμασι καλούμενον). This succinct statement contains *in nuce* the whole of the Megarians’ conception of the relation between language and reality. In effect, the expression introduces a stark contrast: the unity of the principle and the multiplicity of names that refer to it. This contrast will grow into an unbridgeable gap between the ontological and linguistic domains in later Megarian reflection.

The good is one, and that which is opposite to the good is not (μὴ εἶναι). However, the good which is one can be referred to by many names. How is this possible? How can a plurality of terms correspond to the radical unity of the good? In Euclid, the relation between ontology and language is inherently problematic, for language threatens the unity of being.<sup>71</sup> For Euclid, there is no single name that corresponds directly and transparently to any single entity (as in the case of the good in Diog. Laert. II 106). This implies that λόγος is inherently suspicious, and so every λόγος should be submitted to serious scrutiny.

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<sup>71</sup> This is also the reading of Muller (1988, 138–150), Mársico (2013, 27–35), Gardella (2015) and Villar (2021, 99–100).

This scrutiny takes the form of a Socratic dialectical exchange, that is, an exchange structured in the form of questions and answers. This is a clear expression of a typical *modus operandi* of the so-called Socratic schools, which consists in picking up and developing a particular facet of that infinitely rich, complex, and mysterious character that was Socrates. Euclid seems to have been particularly taken by the Socratic ἔλεγχος, and pursued this methodology to an extreme, as a form of purely negative and refutative dialectic. Diogenes’s testimony is interesting in this respect, since it presents Socrates himself as a critic of this radical take on dialectic:

When Socrates saw that Euclid had seriously occupied himself in eristic arguments (ἐσπουδακότα περὶ τοὺς ἐριστικούς λόγους), he said to him: “Euclid, you may use them with sophists, but in no way with men”, given that he thought that hair-splitting (γλισχρολογία) discussions on these issues were useless (ἄχρηστον), as Plato states in the *Euthydemus* (Diog. Laert. II 30 =SSR II A 3).

In the testimony, Socrates appears to see no constructive value in Euclid’s eristic arguments (ἐριστικοὶ λόγοι). However, the fact that Socrates claims that they could be used with sophists shows that they could be deemed helpful in the context of refuting those who claim to possess knowledge that they do not truly have.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the value of Euclid’s eristic arguments seems to be primarily negative, as a way of refuting the opponents’ apparent knowledge.

The mention of Plato’s *Euthydemus* is particularly significant.<sup>73</sup> It shows that Diogenes was probably interpreting Euclid’s dialectical procedure through the lens of Plato’s own appraisal of the eristic dialectic of the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in the *Euthydemus* (on which see section 4.2 below). This reflects quite plausibly an ancient judgement of Euclid’s and the Megarians’ general approach to dialectic, which was considered excessively disputatious, concerned with obfuscating details and hair-splitting arguments. This procedure differs from the original elenctic

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<sup>72</sup> Villar (2021, 110) notes that it would be a mistake to interpret ‘sophist’ in this passage as “paid instructor”. He claims instead that it has a pejorative connotation, transmitting the idea of pretentiousness or false and apparent wisdom, as in, for example, Aristophanes’s *Clouds* (in particular 331, 1111, 1307).

<sup>73</sup> The reference to the *Euthydemus* is removed in the editions of the Megarian testimonies of Döring, Muller, Giannantoni and Mársico, without apparent justification (the only exception is Montoneri 1984, fr. 25).

procedure of Socrates, and of course, from Plato's own interpretation of this method. But, as in the case of the dialectic of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Euclid's dialectic share some of the fundamental characteristics of the Socratic *ἔλεγχος*, above all its dialogical structure.

Diogenes's mention of the *Euthydemus* also seems to imply support for the idea that this dialogue could have been a fundamentally anti-Megarian piece. I will explore this idea in detail in section 4.2.1, but it is interesting to note that this testimony establishes a clear link between the hair-splitting mode of argumentation of Euclid and the eristic dialectic of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in the *Euthydemus*.

The irritation that Euclid and the Megarians' peculiar eristic dialectic could cause in their interlocutors can be seen in another testimony that we have already cited in n. 46: "Diogenes the Cynic called the school (σχολή) of Euclid bile (χολή)" (Diog. Laert. VI 24 =SSR II A 28). As we said in n. 46 above, Diogenes uses this derogatory expression (built on a play of words between σχολή and χολή) probably to stress the frustration experienced by the interlocutors of Euclid and his companions. This frustration was caused by the Megarians' incessant questioning and their systematic exploitation of syntactic and semantic ambiguities (which we will explore in detail later), put forward in order to refute a given interlocutor.

The only testimony which provides some specific information on Euclid's dialectic is found again in Diogenes Laertius:

Euclid opposed demonstrations not in the premises but in the conclusion. He also denied (ἀνήρει) reasoning (λόγον) by way of comparison (παραβολῆς), saying that something is established from similar things or from dissimilar things. If it is from similar things, it is necessary to turn towards them instead of those that are similar to them, and if it is from dissimilar things, the comparison is forced. Because of this Timon says the following, when he attacks the whole of the Socratics: "But I am not worried by those charlatans, nor any other one, nor Phaedo, or whoever, nor by the disputatious Euclid (ἐριδάντεω Εὐκλείδεω), who inculcated the fury of discussion in the Megarians (Μεγαρεῦσιν ὃς ἔμβαλε λύσσαν ἐρισμοῦ)" (II 107 =SSR II A 34).

The testimony does not explicitly state that Euclid proceeded dialectically, that is, by way of questions and answers with a given interlocutor. But it is not hard to imagine that Euclid's argument against reasoning by comparison could have been put forward in a

dialectical context. Thus, Euclid would present a disjunctive alternative in the form of a question to an opponent and would go on to refute him when he chooses either of the two terms of the disjunction. This is a particularly frequent procedure in Plato's *Euthydemus*, which, as we anticipated above, was quite plausibly composed as a critical portrayal of the Megarian circle.

Euclid's argument also relies on the running Megarian theme (of evident Parmenidean extraction) of the insurmountable gap between opposing terms, that is, on a radical interpretation of the principle of excluded middle. This is also a typical feature of the arguments put forward in the *Euthydemus* by Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, who frequently present their arguments in a dilemmatic structure. In the case of the present testimony, Euclid is said to reject all sorts of comparison between two things, given that, if they are truly two different things, then they are fundamentally distinct and cannot be related. A variant of this argument can be found in *Euthydemus* 285d–286b, on which see section 4.2.2 below.

Diogenes also states that Euclid directly opposed the conclusion of any given demonstration, and not its premises.<sup>74</sup> This is consistent with an eminently refutative praxis: to prove an argument's fundamentally flawed character, it is enough to show that something absurd follows from its conclusion.

Finally, the testimony quotes an alleged judgment by Timon, who, in his general criticism of the Socratics, claims that the disputatious or eristic (ἐριδάντεω) Euclid transmitted “the fury of discussion (λύσσαν ἐρισμοῦ)” to the Megarians. This is a significant piece of evidence: it speaks clearly of the dialectical and even eristic nature of the Megarian circle, which to an outside observer could seem to be a group of excessively disputatious individuals.

There is only one testimony that appears to transmit a direct fragment from Euclid. It is found in chapter six of the third book of Stobaeus's *Anthologium*. It goes as follows:

Sleep is a newer and younger δαίμων, easy to persuade and to escape from (εὔπειστος καὶ ῥάδιος ἀποφυγεῖν). But the other one is gray-haired and old, completely intrinsic (ἐμπεφυκώς) to the oldest of men, difficult to persuade and unmerciful (ἄσπειστος καὶ ἀπαραίτητος). It is difficult to be set free from this δαίμων, when he appears only once

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<sup>74</sup> As Villar (2021, 111) notes, the terms λῆμμα and ἐπιφορά are probably not Euclid's own words, which are more proximate to the later vocabulary of the Stoics.

(ὅταν ἄπαξ παρῆ), since he listens to no argument [and in general cannot hear anything], for he is deaf. Also, you could not manifest yourself by pointing to something (οὔτ' αὖ δεικνύων αὐτῷ ἐμφανίσαις τι ἄν), for he is blind (Stob. III 6, 63 =SSR II A 11).

The text's lack of context makes it obscure.<sup>75</sup> It concerns some issues that I cannot properly address here, such as Euclid's conception of the Socratic δαίμων, and its implications in the context of Euclid's ethical thought.<sup>76</sup> However, the text is important in seeming to contradict Diogenes's statement of Euclid's rejection of reasoning by comparison. Indeed, the cited text appears to compare sleep and death in a way reminiscent of both Homer's *Iliad* (XIV 231) and Hesiod's *Theogony* (211–216 and 758–766). But the contradiction may only be apparent, given that Euclid appears to establish a stark contrast between sleep and death:<sup>77</sup> this would accord with his tendency to establish strong oppositions according to the principle of excluded middle.

### 2.2.3. The ontological scope of Euclid's dialectic

Let us recapitulate. Given the paucity of the testimonies, it is difficult to present a definitive picture of the ontology and the philosophy of language espoused by Euclid. We have seen that there are good reasons to believe there was a certain degree of Eleatic influence in Euclid's thought. This does not imply that Euclid and the Megarians were somehow neo-Eleatics, as the testimonies of Cicero and Aristocles may appear to suggest. On the other hand, his commitment to dialectic seems to suggest that he was concerned with the problematic nature of language as a means of addressing reality. Put these two elements together and we have the following pattern: Euclid postulated a unitary principle

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<sup>75</sup> It has been argued that it could be a fragment of one of Euclid's dialogues, such as his *On Love* (Meineke 1867, IV 260, followed by Nestle 1922, 171) or his *Crito* (Brancacci 2005, 145). In contrast, Mársico (2013, 113 n. 33) emphasizes that the absence of context hinders our judgment of the scope of the passage (“insofar as we are unaware of the context in which the text was presented, it is difficult to project its scope, and we do not even know if it represented an opinion which was effectively held by the character who served as a spokesperson for Euclid's position” (*en tanto desconocemos el contexto en que el texto se presentaba, es difícil proyectar sus alcances, y ni siquiera sabemos si representaba una opinión efectivamente sustentada por el personaje portavoz de la posición de Euclides*). Cf. also Montoneri (1984, 45–46).

<sup>76</sup> For an interpretation of Euclid's conception of the δαίμων, see Brancacci 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Villar (2021, 113, and the references in n. 143). A contrary view can be found in Brancacci (2005, 145).

that contrasts with the plurality proper of the domain of language. Philosophy, in this context, consists in drawing attention to this unbridgeable gap between fundamentally separate domains by way of a dialectical methodology of eminently negative or refutative scope.

Before concluding, I would like to consider the reading of Villar (2021, 107–108) on this issue. This author contends that Euclid did not sustain the thesis of the unity of the good as a metaphysical doctrine, but rather as a hypothesis that allowed him to construct his refutations. The core of his thought would not have revolved around metaphysical considerations; Euclid would have been concerned primarily with the problematic issue of the incapacity of language to express reality.

According to this interpretation, the problematic contrast between the unity of a principle and its many names would simply be an effective way of underscoring the fundamentally deficient character of language. This deficiency would be represented primarily by the problem of synonymy.<sup>78</sup>

This is a compelling idea, but it seems to me that Euclid’s worries over the deficiencies of language *have a metaphysical ground*, which stems from the Eleatic problem of the unity of being. In effect, the problem of synonymy confronts us with the deeper issue of the relation between one and many, a source of perennial preoccupation for ancient philosophers.

It is true that Euclid may not have been committed to a comprehensive positive theory on the nature of reality. But this does not imply that his dialectical arguments did not stem from a specific core premise regarding the radical unity of being. This premise would be *fundamentally ontological in character*. On this view, Euclid’s preoccupation

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Villar (2021, 108): “The good and virtue may have been mere examples used by Euclid to focus on a more general question: that various names can be used to signify one and the same thing. Thus, the fundamental problem [...] that Euclid would have signaled could have been the issue of synonymy. In summary, I believe that it is unnecessary to carry Euclid’s position to the extreme of identifying him with a statement regarding the nature of the real” (*El bien y la virtud podrían haber constituido meros ejemplos que Euclides empleaba para hacer foco en una cuestión más general: que varios nombres pueden ser usados para significar una cosa idéntica y única. Podría ser la sinonimia, por tanto, el problema fundamental que Euclides habría señalado [...]. En síntesis, considero que no es necesario llevar la propuesta de Euclides hasta el extremo de comprometerlo con una afirmación respecto de la naturaleza de lo real*).

with the multiplying character of language would be connected with the deeper problem of the relation between one and many.

In summary, Villar's view deflates the perspective of the Megarians to a mere linguistic approach, and runs counter to several testimonies which seem to ascribe at least some sort of limited ontological perspective to Euclid and to other Megarian exponents such as Diodorus Cronus and Stilpo of Megara.

The metaphysical ground of the dialectical methodology of the Megarians will become clearer as we delve deeper into the philosophy of later exponents of the circle. Although these later exponents add many innovations with regard to Euclid's original formulations, they remain within the same horizon of thought. We will see that the Megarians are deeply committed to exploring the consequences that follow from a radical conception of the unity of being (a claim which should not be confused with numerical monism, as we saw). This *fundamental association between unity and being* is the decisive element that guides Megarian philosophy as a whole.

## CHAPTER 3

### The dialectical method of the Megarians

There is one characteristic which cuts across all of the Megarians who came after Euclid: their predilection for eristic arguments and dialectical argumentation in general. Euclid's followers developed a particular kind of dialectic that aimed to manifest the broken nature of the relation between language and reality, since, as Euclid had shown, language necessarily compromises the unity of being.<sup>79</sup> Our aim here is not to provide a detailed analysis of all extant sources on this dialectical praxis. In this chapter, I will address only some representative examples of the dialectic of the second and third generations of Megarians, particularly the famous arguments ascribed by the doxographic tradition to Eubulides of Miletus. This philosopher in particular is especially relevant for our purposes as one of the two Megarian exponents who is usually associated with Aristotle's anti-Megarian polemic in *Met.* Θ 3, the other being Diodorus Cronus.<sup>80</sup>

I will begin, though, by analyzing two less-known but important exponents of the early phases of the Megarian circle: Bryson of Heraclea and Polyxenus. I will then turn to Eubulides and examine his dialectical arguments, particularly the "Veiled Figure" argument, also called "Electra" in the sources. Next, I will address the two main exponents of the third generation of Megarians: Diodorus Cronus and Stilpo of Megara. The chapter closes with a synthetic view of the philosophical orientation of the Megarian circle as a whole.

#### 3.1. The first and second-generation Megarians

##### 3.1.1. Bryson of Heraclea and Polyxenus: biographical information and the problem of their placement within the Megarian circle

Information about the lives of Bryson of Heraclea and Polyxenus is scarce and conflicting.<sup>81</sup> First, it is unclear whether these philosophers belonged to the first or second

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<sup>79</sup> This point is rightly underscored by Muller (1988, 138–150) and Mársico (2013, 35–44).

<sup>80</sup> I will address this question in detail in section 7.1.

<sup>81</sup> An analysis of the problem of Bryson's biography and chronology and a discussion of the literature on the issue can be found in Giannantoni (1990 IV n. 10). Döring (1972, 157–163) (followed by Giannantoni)

generation of Megarians. The Suda (*s.v.* Socrates = *SSR* II S 2) states that Bryson could have been a direct disciple of Socrates and that he introduced the “eristic dialectic” (ἐριστικὴν διαλεκτικὴν) together with Euclid.<sup>82</sup> It also mentions, however, that, according to some, he was a disciple of Euclid. This latter possibility concurs with other sources that claim that he was the master of Pyrrho (Suda *s.v.* Pyrrho = *SSR* II S 2; Diog. Laert. IX 61 = *SSR* II S 2)<sup>83</sup> and of Theodorus the Atheist (Suda *s.v.* Theodorus = *SSR* II S 2), both of whom were active between the late 4<sup>th</sup> and the early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC.

Regarding his teaching activities, he is said to have taught in exchange for payment (he is called ‘sophist’ by Aristotle, cf. *HA* VI 5, 563a7 = *SSR* II S 1), a fact which could help explain his large number of alleged disciples. He is also connected to Plato by Athenaeus (XI 509b–c) in an interesting passage in which there is further mention of his receiving payment in exchange for his teachings.<sup>84</sup> Diogenes Laertius suggests that he did

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denies that Polyxenus belonged to the Megarian circle, and confines him to an appendix. In contrast, I follow here the readings of Montoneri (1984, 256–260), Muller (1985, 71–73, 180) and Mársico (2013, 131–136), who include Polyxenus within the Megarian group. If we adopt the looser notions of “circle” or “group” instead of “school” with regard to the Megarians, there is no good reason to ignore the thematic continuity between Polyxenus and the remaining Megarians, an example of which surfaces in this case in the proximity of both Stilpo’s argument against the Forms and Polyxenus’s early formulation of the Third Man argument.

<sup>82</sup> This formulation recalls the Suda (*s.v.* Euclid) and Diogenes Laertius (II 106), where “eristics” and “dialectics” are said to be two of the alternative names of the Megarian circle. Against Sedley’s interpretation which claims that the Megarians, the eristics and the dialectics are different schools, we should note that the above cited testimony seems to present a synthetic picture which conjoins the eristic and dialectic tendencies of the Megarians. Cf. Mársico (2013, 118 n. 43).

<sup>83</sup> Diogenes states that Pyrrho studied with Bryson, but mistakenly claims that the latter was a disciple of Stilpo. This is impossible, since Stilpo, born around 360 BC, was a contemporary of Pyrrho, also born at approximately the same time. The allusion to Pyrrho is of interest, since it seems to reinforce the connection between the Megarians and the later sceptics. We have already seen this association in Seneca’s testimony (cf. *supra*, p. 39). Beyond the association mentioned by Diogenes, the connection could have revolved around the Megarians’ argumentative patterns, which frequently served the purpose of highlighting *aporiai* and the intrinsic limits of language and knowledge in general.

<sup>84</sup> “This is why the comic poet Ehippus in *The Shipwreck Victim* makes fun of Plato himself and of some of his acquaintances (τινὰς τῶν γνωρίμων) for abusing the legal system to extort money, bringing out the fact that they dressed expensively and were more concerned with how they looked than the degenerates in our own time are. He puts it as follows:

Then a sharp young man stood up,  
someone from the Academy who’d studied with Plato, that is,

not write anything (I 16 =SSR II S 7), while Athenaeus (IX 508c–d =SSR II S 7) claims that, according to Theopompus of Chios, Greek historian and rhetorician active at the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, Plato had taken much from Bryson’s dialogues.<sup>85</sup>

Regarding Polyxenus, there is an anecdote transmitted by Diogenes Laertius (II 76–77) which makes him a contemporary of Aristippus, while other sources claim that he was part of the court of Dionysus of Syracuse.<sup>86</sup> This places Polyxenus proximate to the first generation of Socratics, which would make him a contemporary of Euclid. Polyxenus is also said to be a companion of Bryson in Plato’s *XIIIth Letter* (cf. 360b–c). This information could be taken as evidence that Bryson was also part of the first generation of Megarians.

As in the case of Bryson, Polyxenus is called ‘sophist’ in the sources (cf. Diog. Laert. II 76–77; Plut. *Regum* 176c–d; Alex. Aphr. *in Met.* 84, 16–21, ed. Hayduck). Plutarch also calls him ‘dialectic’ (διαλεκτικός, 176c10). As we just saw, this is also the general portrayal of Bryson in the sources: the two philosophers appear to have been paid teachers particularly skillful in dialectical and eristic argumentation.<sup>87</sup>

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one of the Bryson-Thrasymachian-money-grubbing (Βρυσωνοθρασυμαχειοληψικερμάτων);  
terrified by the need, he joins the art of collecting-payment  
and is capable of saying things not altogether unthoughtful” (trans. Olson, modified).

The testimony accords with other testimonies on Bryson which suggest that he did receive payment in exchange for his teachings, but its critical character (the whole testimony is an attack on Plato and his associates) makes it less reliable than other sources.

<sup>85</sup> “In fact, Theopompus of Chios says in his *Against Plato’s School*: ‘One would find that the majority of his dialogues are useless or full of lies. Most of them are actually by other authors, and are excerpts from Aristippus’s discourses, while others come from Antisthenes’s, or from those of Bryson of Heracela in a number of cases” (trans. Olson, modified). This testimony is also in the context of a work highly critical of Plato, but it still places Bryson nearer to the first-generation Socratics than to their disciples. Cf. Mársico (2013, 121 n. 48) for an assessment of the apparent accusation of plagiarism in the testimony.

<sup>86</sup> E.g., Plato, *Socratic letter II* 310c–d and 314c–d.

<sup>87</sup> Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* VII 13–14 =SSR II B 12) makes Bryson a practitioner of logic together with other exponents of the Megarian circle: “And Panthoides and Alexinus and Eubulides and Bryson, as well as Dionysodorus and Euthydemus of Thurios, whom Plato mentions in his *Euthydemus* Alexinus, Eubulides, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, were inclined towards the logical (τὸ λογικόν) part”.

The discordance of the sources makes reconstructing the placement and the biography of these two philosophers a difficult, perhaps insoluble, task.<sup>88</sup> But there is a content-level continuity between their theoretical positions and the general Megarian approach to philosophy, which we have already outlined in our previous analysis of Euclid. Let us now analyze in more detail the few testimonies we have on their peculiar dialectical praxis. This will provide insight into the development of Megarianism from Euclid's ontological elaborations towards the eristic dialectic of Eubulides.

### 3.1.2. The eristic arguments of Bryson of Heraclea

Bryson is perhaps most famous for his attempts at squaring the circle, as reported by Aristotle (*SE* 11, 171b3–172a7 = *SSR* II S 11).<sup>89</sup> We cannot delve into the specifics of this argument, of which not much is known. What interests us is that Aristotle calls the argument “eristic, that is, sophistical” (ἐριστικός καὶ σοφιστικός): he claims that Bryson did not demonstrate his argument by means of the relevant premises (in this case, those of geometry) but with general principles, which make the argument fallacious. According to Aristotle, this criterion distinguishes proper dialectal reasoning from mere eristic reasoning.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> This explains the fact that there is disagreement among scholars on the placement of Bryson and Polyxenus with regard to the Megarians, as mentioned in n. 81 above. Döring (1972), for example, places the two philosophers in an appendix.

<sup>89</sup> In ancient times, the squaring of the circle was a much-discussed geometrical problem. The challenge consisted in constructing a square with the same area as a given circle by using only a finite number of steps and only with compass and straightedge. The task has been proven to be impossible in 1882. Mársico (2013, 124 n. 54) notes that, according to Plutarch (*De exil.* 607f), Anaxagoras had occupied himself of the problem. Oenopides of Chios, Antiphon, Hippias and Hippocrates of Chios are also connected to the argument, which was ridiculed by Aristophanes in *The Clouds*, 1003ff. For references and general discussion, cf. Mársico (2013 124 n. 54).

<sup>90</sup> “The eristic (ἐριστικός) argument is related to the dialectical as the wrong diagram is to the geometrical, given that it reasons from the same things than the dialectical, and the wrong diagram [is made] from the same things than the geometrical. But the former [*i.e.* the wrong diagram] is not eristic, since it draws wrongly according to the principles and conclusions established by the art, while the one which concerns the dialectical does so with regard to other things [*i.e.*, other principles], and so it is manifest that it is eristic. For example, the squaring of the circle by way of lunules is not eristic, while Bryson's [attempt] is eristic. Because it is only possible to adapt the former to geometry, through the principles which are proper to it,

Aristotle, together with the later commentary tradition,<sup>91</sup> regards Bryson's arguments as prime examples of the eristic kind of dialectic. This seems to suggest that Bryson focused on and developed the dialectical facet of Euclid's thought. This will be a constant in the second generation of Megarians, as in the case of Eubulides.

We have, however, more details of another argument transmitted by Aristotle: one that is quite directly connected to Euclid. The passage is found in *Rhet.* III 2, 1405b6–11 =SSR II S 9:

Metaphors should also be derived from things that are beautiful, the beauty of a word consisting, as Licymnius says, in its sound or sense, and its ugliness in the same. There is a third condition, which refutes the sophistical argument (σοφιστικὸν λόγον); for it is not the case, as Bryson said, that no one ever uses foul language, if the meaning is the same whether this or that word is used (εἴπερ τὸ αὐτὸ σημαίνει τόδε ἀντὶ τοῦδε εἰπεῖν); this is false; for one word is more proper (οἰκειότερον) than another, more of a likeness, and better suited to putting the matter before the eyes. Further, this word or that does not signify a thing under the same conditions; thus for this reason also it must be admitted that one word is fairer or fouler than the other. Both, indeed, signify what is fair or foul, but not *qua* fair or foul; or if they do, it is in a greater or less degree. (trans. Freese).

Aristotle is describing the conditions necessary for composing a good metaphor. In addition to the sound and the sense of the words as criteria for choosing a term for a metaphor, he adds a third category which, he says, refutes a sophistical argument by Bryson. The third category consists in the differences between various synonymous terms which refer to the same thing. There are some which are more proper, or which reflect an aspect of the given thing to a greater or lesser degree. We can infer from this that Bryson thought that there was *no difference* between synonymous terms. If this is so, then, according to Bryson's reasoning, there would be no foul terms, since they have

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while the latter can be adapted to many principles, not knowing what is possible and impossible for each thing" (*SE* 171b34–172a7).

<sup>91</sup> *E.g.*, Ps. Alex. in *SE* 76, 16–20, ed. Wallies: "Bryson's squaring of the circle is eristic, that is, sophistical, given that it does not arise from the principles which are proper (οἰκείων ἀρχῶν) to geometry, but from other more common (κοινωτέρων) principles"; Them. in *APo.* A 9, 75b37–76a2, ed. Wallies: "And no one would say that Bryson's squaring of the circle is a geometrical demonstration, for it makes use of truthful but common axioms (ἀξιόματι ἀληθεῖ μὲν κοινῷ δέ)".

synonymous counterparts which are not considered to be foul. In the end, both the foul and the inoffensive terms refer to the *same thing* (τὸ αὐτὸ σημαίνει), so there is no reason to consider one of them foul and the other inoffensive.<sup>92</sup>

This argument is connected with Euclid's concern regarding the multiplicity inherent to language and its relation to the good. Without the ontological connotations of Euclid's conception of the good, we see that Bryson extrapolates the structure of Euclid's argument and applies it to the more general problem of synonymy, that is, the problem of the multiplicity of terms that refer to a same thing. The mechanics of Bryson's argument point to the fundamental problem of language, which necessarily multiplies that which is one.

Bryson's argument has a clear refutative scope: it intends simply to problematize a simple and common fact of language, that there are foul terms. In other words, the argument is designed to reach a paradoxical consequence that turns a common occurrence into an absurd one. Still, we should note that the argument functions within the broad frame of the central premise of Megarianism: the problem of the unity of being (non-monistically interpreted) and its relation with the multiplying force, which is language. The result is a host of paradoxes, from which absurd consequences follow. This result undermines all positive attempts at scientific knowledge, in this case, with regard to rhetoric.

It is interesting to note that Aristotle mentions two arguments by Bryson, in different contexts and with different subjects. What this suggests is that Bryson (who could have been either a near-contemporary of Aristotle, if we are to believe his discipleship with Euclid, or his predecessor, active in the first half of the 4th century, if we place him within the first generation of Megarians) was famous precisely for composing *specific eristic arguments* intended either to refute a given interlocutor or to underscore the intrinsic difficulties of the complex relation between ontology and language.

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<sup>92</sup> The issue is connected to the wider 4<sup>th</sup> century problem of ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων, the adequacy of names. The issue was also addressed by another Socratic philosopher, Antisthenes of Athens, who believed, according to Aristotle, that there was a “proper discourse (τῷ οἰκείῳ λόγῳ), one for each thing (ἓν ἐφ’ ἑνός)”. For an analysis of this doctrine see Brancacci (1990, esp. 240–249), Cordero (2001), Mársico (2005, 115), and Chame (2017, 61–62; 2021). The issue can also be found in Plato's *Cratylus* (for a connection with Antisthenes cf. Mársico 2005, 28–37). See also our discussion of Diodorus Cronus in section 3.2.1 below.

### 3.1.3. Polyxenus: the Third Man argument

There is a continuity between what we have just seen and Bryson’s alleged companion Polyxenus. Alexander of Aphrodisias claims that Polyxenus introduced the Third Man argument, the famous argument directed against Plato’s Theory of the Forms.<sup>93</sup> Polyxenus’s version of the argument has important points of contact with Stilpo’s critique of the Platonic Theory of the Forms, which we will analyze in section 3.2.2. For now, I will focus only on its dialectical character and its relation to the general philosophical framework established by Euclid. Alexander’s testimony goes as follows:<sup>94</sup>

Phanias says in his *Against Diodorus* that Polyxenus the sophist introduced the Third Man, saying that “if man exists by reason of participation and communion with the Form (κατὰ μετοχήν τε καὶ μετουσίαν τῆς ιδέας),<sup>95</sup> that is, the man-itself (αὐτοάνθρωπος), it is necessary that there should be one man whose being would be in relation to the Form (ὅς πρὸς τὴν ιδέαν ἔξει τὸ εἶναι). But it is not the man-itself (αὐτοάνθρωπος) who participates in the Form, for he is the Form (ὃ ἐστὶν ιδέα), and neither is the particular man (ὁ τις ἄνθρωπος). It remains thus that a Third Man exists whose being is in relation to the Form” (Alex. Apher. in *Met.* 84, 16–21, ed. Hayduck).

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<sup>93</sup> Von Fritz (1931, 722) believes that Polyxenus could indeed have been the first to compose the famous argument: this would be consistent with a chronology placing him in the first generation of Megarians. Cherniss (1944, 293) denies this possibility, given that Polyxenus’s argument is different in content from the versions that feature in *Republic*, *Parmenides* and *Timaeus*. But although different, they could be seen as sharing a set of fundamental premises, and Plato could have developed his version of the argument on the basis of a previous Megarian formulation.

<sup>94</sup> Alexander’s mention of Polyxenus’s argument occurs in the context of an overview of the diverse formulations of the Third Man argument: he first analyses a version found in Eudemus’s *Περὶ λέξεως* (84, 2–7) then a version attributed to “the Sophists” (τῶν σοφιστῶν, 84, 7–16), afterwards Polyxenus’s version (84, 16–21) and finally Aristotle’s version as it appears in the *Περὶ ιδεῶν* (84, 21–85, 3).

<sup>95</sup> The terms μετοχή and μετουσία are not used by Plato (μετοχή is used once in a non-technical sense in the *Seventh Letter*, 345a1, while μετουσία is absent in the *corpus*), a fact which inclined Burnet (1914, 259 n. 2) to believe that the argument was not truly directed against Plato’s Theory of the Forms. But as Gardella (2015, 79) notes, both terms are clearly related to Plato’s standard terms used to denote the concept of participation, such as μέθεξις, μετέχω and μέτοχος, and Alexander uses the term μετουσία when commenting on Aristotle’s version of the Third Man argument (84, 1) and on the similarities between Eudemus’s and Aristotle’s versions (85, 5).

Before analyzing the content of the argument, we should note two things about the source from which Alexander extracts Polyxenus's argument. The first is the author of the source: Phaenias of Eresus was a Peripatetic philosopher, fellow countryman, and colleague of Theophrastus.<sup>96</sup> The source of the testimony is a work against Diodorus, presumably Diodorus Cronus. This context is particularly significant since it shows the extent of the polemic between the Megarians and the Aristotelian tradition. The polemic began with Aristotle himself, as can be seen from *Met.* Θ 3: here, he is probably responding to an eristic argument composed by Eubulides of Miletus or one of his direct associates. Alexander's testimony shows that the confrontation continued with the successors of both philosophical lines: Theophrastus and Phaenias on the side of the Peripatetics and Diodorus Cronus on the side of the Megarians.

The second thing to note is that Polyxenus appears within the context of an anti-Megarian piece. This seems to reinforce the impression that Polyxenus was indeed part of the Megarian circle and not a generic sophist.<sup>97</sup>

In his argument, Polyxenus starts from the Platonic assumption that there are particulars and Forms. He then presents an exclusive alternative: either a particular man or the man-itself participates in the Form. He rejects both possibilities and thus forces us either to deny the mechanism of participation or to accept a third man who would participate in the Form. In contrast to Aristotle's version of the Third Man, which Alexander also mentions in 84, 21–85, 3, Polyxenus's argument does not seem to imply an infinite regress; it simply forces us to accept a third man of unclear ontological status, neither Form nor particular.

That a Form cannot participate in itself seems rather a straightforward claim: the Form *already is* itself. However, the argument does not explain why or how did Polyxenus deny that the particular could participate in the Form. In order to overcome this hermeneutical difficulty, Montoneri (1984, 84–85)<sup>98</sup> connects the argument to Alexander's immediately previous discussion of a version of the Third Man attributed to

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<sup>96</sup> He was admitted to the Peripatos around 332 BC. On Phaenias, see Wehrli (1957).

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Muller (1985, 227 n. 477).

<sup>98</sup> In his treatment of the testimony, Montoneri (1984) also provides a thorough review of some of the most relevant hermeneutical discussions on the passage at 85–91. See also Gardella (2015, 79–81).

“the Sophists” (τῶν σοφιστῶν, 84, 8).<sup>99</sup> According to this version,<sup>100</sup> when we state that “a man is walking”, we are not referring to the Idea, for it is unmovable, nor to the particular, for we do not know to which particular, sensible being, the term ‘man’ refers.<sup>101</sup> It follows that the term refers to an intermediate third man, neither Form nor particular. Montoneri believes that this linguistic critique of Plato’s theory is also operative in Polyxenus’s version, which explains why Alexander does not give the reasons behind Polyxenus’s rejection of the participation of particulars. Thus, Polyxenus would also claim that a particular cannot participate in the Form because the terms are obscure regarding their references: we do not know which individual constitutes the reference of the term ‘man’.

In this reading, the core issue appears, in either formulation, to be the problematic relation between universal terms and their application. The attractiveness of this proposal is that Polyxenus’s argument, so interpreted, is consistent with the Megarians’ general philosophical orientation: he would be extending the Sophists’ linguistic formulation and extracting its ontological implications.

The proximity between Polyxenus’s argument and Megarianism is apparent in various ways. First, the argument seems to stress the unbridgeable gap between particulars and Ideas. This concurs with the dichotomous way of reasoning that can be

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<sup>99</sup> It is interesting to note that Montoneri, following De Strycker (1949), connects these sophists to “the similar eristics who appear in Plato’s *Euthydemus*” (*eristi simili a quelli che compaiono nell’Eutidemo platonico*, 84 n. 104). Since it is likely that the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus were in fact Megarian exponents, the connection would establish a historical and doctrinal continuity between the versions of τῶν σοφιστῶν and of Polyxenus. Thus, Polyxenus would have formulated his argument on the basis of the eristic refutations carried out by his fellow Megarians. The fact that both arguments are presented successively by Alexander seems to reinforce this possibility, and it strengthens the case for Polyxenus being in the Megarian circle.

<sup>100</sup> The version appears in similar terms in Arist. *SE* 22, 178b36–179a10. Here Aristotle relates the argument to the issue of the different forms of predication, that is, the categories. Aristotle’s point is that there is no single sort of universal predication, but different kinds of predications which fall under different categories. In his commentary of the *Sophistical Refutations*, Ps. Alexander (*in SE* 158, 20–26) relates this argument to the one reported by Alexander: in order to illustrate the sophistical argument mentioned by Aristotle, he uses Alexander’s example of the walking man.

<sup>101</sup> Alexander claims at 84, 13–16 that the separation between the singular terms and the particular individuals is a premise upheld by those who endorse the doctrine of the Forms. The Sophists would exploit precisely this premise in their argument.

found already in Euclid. The argument also relies on the idea that beings are necessarily unified and self-identical. Both Forms and particulars are characterized as self-sufficient and separate: this seems to imply that any sort of relation between them compromises their unity. That is why a third, separate, instance is required to explain the mechanism of participation.

We also have traces of Polyxenus's formulation in the arguments of a later Megarian exponent, Stilpo of Megara. The above reconstruction shares the same features as Stilpo's argument against Plato's Theory of the Forms. In his argument, Stilpo stresses the insurmountable distance between universal terms and the particulars to which they are allegedly applied. The result is an opposition between two essentially unrelated domains, which implies the rejection of participation.<sup>102</sup> The opposition has both a linguistic and an ontological dimension. The former concerns the difficulty of applying universal terms, as in the Sophists' formulation of the Third Man argument, which precedes that of Polyxenus. The latter concerns the ontological aspect of this linguistic phenomenon: there are two essentially distinct spheres, Ideas, and particulars, with no possible reciprocal relation, that is, without the possibility of participation.

If we read Polyxenus's argument together with Euclid's general approach to philosophy and with Stilpo's own critique of Plato's Theory of the Forms, a clearer picture emerges. This allows us to comprehend the argument as a typical application of Megarian dialectic. Polyxenus would start from a few core notions (the radical unity of being, the essentially pluralizing character of language) that would then guide his refutation of a competing positive doctrine. Polyxenus's argument is not presented by Alexander in dialectical form (that is, in the context of an exchange with a given interlocutor). Still, it would not be surprising if the argument was intended to be posed in such a way. Its dichotomous structure and its refutative character certainly seem to suggest so.

Although Bryson of Heraclea and Polyxenus are two important Megarian exponents, we have little information on their lives and the details of their arguments and refutations. Still, our analysis of their extant testimonies helps us understand the

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<sup>102</sup> This interpretation does not imply that neither Polyxenus nor Stilpo rejected the Forms *per se*. Interpreters have long believed that the Megarians in fact upheld some variation of Plato's Theory of the Forms. In this reading, their arguments would be limited to criticize participation (μέθεξις), and not the Forms themselves. On this issue, see section 4.1.1 below.

development of the Megarian circle from its origins in Euclid. As we have seen, in these philosophers, we witness a radicalization of the eristic character already present in Euclid. But to grasp more fully this transition, we must now turn to the most famous exponent of the second generation of Megarians: Eubulides of Miletus.

### 3.1.4. Eubulides of Miletus. Biographical information and dialectical orientation

Unlike the cases of Bryson and Polyxenus, which appear in some sources as part of the first generation of Megarians, the sources place Eubulides closer to the second generation of Megarians. Although it is difficult to establish an approximate chronology, he is presented in the sources as a disciple of Euclid. He is also linked to Demosthenes and Aristotle. This information would make him active around the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.

The significance of Eubulides for our study is paramount. He is probably the reference behind Aristotle's allusion in *Metaphysics*  $\Theta$  3 (on which see sections 7.1.2 and 7.1.3). This view is supported by Diogenes Laertius's testimony, who claims that he "was in disagreement with Aristotle and attacked him vehemently in many opportunities" (II 109 =SSR II B 8).<sup>103</sup> We lack details about the content of this confrontation, but the doxographic judgment surely reflects a theoretical disagreement between them.<sup>104</sup> This seems to accord with Eubulides's famous proclivity for dialectical argumentation and for the composition of specific eristic arguments, which we will analyze shortly.

Eubulides is also crucially important because he is a mediator between Euclid and the later Megarians. According to Diogenes Laertius, he was a teacher of Alexinus of Elis, Euphantus of Olynthus and Apollonius Cronus, who, according to the testimonies, was a teacher of Diodorus Cronus (II 109–11 =SSR II B 5). So Eubulides is a crucial figure connecting the first Megarians to the very last of them, particularly Diodorus Cronus.

Much of this information on Eubulides is found in Diogenes Laertius:

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<sup>103</sup> This confrontation is also reported by Aristocles (SSR II B 9), Athenaeus (SSR II B 10), and Themistius (SSR II B 11).

<sup>104</sup> Mársico (2013, 70–71 n. 31) suggests that although Eubulides could have been the initiator of the Megarians' confrontation with Aristotle, the polemic in  $\Theta$  3 would correspond with a discussion with Diodorus Cronus. On this possibility see section 7.1.1 below.

Eubulides of Miletus was of the succession (διαδοχῆς) of Euclid, and he composed numerous arguments in dialectical manner (πολλοὺς ἐν διαλεκτικῇ λόγους ἠρώτησε), such as the Liar, the Disguised, Electra, the Veiled Figure, the Sorites, the Horned One, and the Bald Head, and because of this the comic poet said the following:

The eristic (οὐριστικός) Eubulides of the horned questions  
And who entangled the rhetoricians with his false arguments (ψευδαλαζόσιν  
λόγοις)  
Went away carrying along the babbling ‘r’ (ῥωβοστωμυλήθραν)<sup>105</sup> of  
Demosthenes  
For it seems that Demosthenes studied with him and ended his difficulty in  
pronouncing the letter ‘r’ (II 108 =SSR II B 13).

The testimony presents Eubulides as being “of the succession of Euclid” (τῆς δ’ Εὐκλείδου διαδοχῆς). It is not immediately clear if he was a direct disciple of Euclid or of one of his associates. Still, given that no other philosopher besides Euclid is mentioned, it is plausible that he was his teacher. The second crucial piece of information is his dialectical activity: he is said to have composed many arguments ἐν διαλεκτικῇ, that is, dialectical arguments in an interrogatory form. Diogenes then presents a list of the most famous arguments ascribed to Eubulides. Although the arguments are presented as self-standing units, as having a definite set of premises and a conclusion, they were probably carried out in dialectical contexts. Eubulides is called eristic (οὐριστικός), a fact which suggests that the arguments were put forward to refute an opponent. The lines ascribed to a comic poet refer explicitly to the Horned One argument and indirectly to the Liar, through the expression ψευδαλαζόσιν λόγοις.<sup>106</sup> With these arguments, he is said to have

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<sup>105</sup> I follow the reading of Döring (1972, 16 fr. 51a), Muller (1985, 29, fr. 51a) and Mársico (2013, 69 *FS* 133 and n. 26), who read the mss. ῥωβοστωμυλήθραν instead of Meineke’s ῥωποπεπερήθραν. Still, it should be noted that the former term is very peculiar and that it does not respect the metric of the verse. Muller considers that Diogenes’s source replaced the original ῥωποπεπερήθραν, a *hapax* by the comic poet, by scribal error. This original term would have the sense of “vain blabbering”, and is parallel to a passage in Plutarch (*Dem.* 11, 850b). The strangeness of ῥωβοστωμυλήθραν may have forced Diogenes to introduce the final line explaining its relation to Demosthenes’s well-known difficulties with pronunciation, using the term ῥωβικός. Diogenes’s testimony is picked up in the *Suda* (*s.v.* *rhombosomyléthra* =SSR II B 1), which confuses Eubulides with the comic poet of the same name, altering the sense of the passage.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Muller (1985, 111).

entangled the rhetoricians (τοὺς ῥήτορας κυλίων). All of this presents Eubulides as a highly-skilled dialectician.<sup>107</sup> This concurs with his teaching of Demosthenes, whose inability to pronounce the ‘r’ was apparently resolved by Eubulides.<sup>108</sup>

That the arguments were probably carried out in dialectical contexts seems to be confirmed by a testimony of one of Eubulides’s students, Alexinus of Elis. Diogenes II 109–110 =SSR II C 1 claims that he studied with Eubulides and that he was “most eager for strife” (φιλονεικώτατος). His dedication to dialectical refutation can also be seen in his nickname ‘Ἐλεγχῖνος’, a play on words between ‘Ἀλεξιῖνος’ and ‘ἔλεγχος’. Other sources also call him eristic and dialectic.<sup>109</sup> What is particularly interesting is that he appears to have put forward some of Eubulides’s arguments according to a strict methodology that revolved around rigid yes/no questions:<sup>110</sup>

Heraclides says that, although in his doctrines he [*sc.* Menedemus] was a Platonist, he made fun of dialectic (διαπαίζειν δὲ τὰ διαλεκτικά). So that, when Alexinus once inquired if he had stopped beating his father, he said, “Why, I was not beating him and have not stopped doing so” (ἀλλ’ οὐτ’ ἔτυπτον, φάναι, οὔτε πέπαυμαι); and upon Alexinus insisting that he ought to have cleared up the ambiguity by answering “Yes” or “No” (πάλιν τ’ ἐκείνου λέγοντος ὡς ἐχρῆν εἰπόντα ναί ἢ οὐ λῦσαι τὴν ἀμφιβολίαν), “It would be absurd”, he said, “for me to conform to your rules (τοῖς ὑμετέροις νόμοις ἀκολουθεῖν) when I can simply stand at the gates (ἐξὸν ἐν πύλαις ἀντιβῆναι)” (trans. Hicks, modified)

The testimony is on Menedemus, a philosopher active around the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC. His clashes with Alexinus are consistent with our chronology for this last

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<sup>107</sup> The Suda (*s.v.* Demosthenes =SSR II B 1) calls him “Eubulides the dialectician” (διαλεκτικός). The same is the case in the testimonies of Plutarch (*X orat.* 8, 1, 845 =SSR II B 3), Apuleius (*Apol.* 15 =SSR II B 3) and Athaeneus (X 437d–e =SSR II B 6).

<sup>108</sup> The connection between Eubulides and Demosthenes is found in the testimonies of Philodemus (*Rhet. hypomn.* col. IV 7–12 =SSR II B 2), Plutarch (*X orat.* 8, 1, 845 =SSR II B 3), Photius (*Bibl. Cod.* 265 =SSR II B 3), Apuleius (*Apol.* 15 =SSR II B 3) and Lucian (*Dem. enc.* 12 =SSR II B 4).

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Aristocle. *Peri philosophías*, fr. 7 *F.Ph.G.* III 219 [*apud* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XV 2, 4, 791c–d] =SSR II C 14; Ath. XV 696e =SSR II C 15.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Fronto *Ep.* 2, 16 =SSR II C 9, where Alexinus and Diodorus Cronus are connected to arguments such as “the horned ones, sorites, the liars (*ceratinas et soritas et pseudomenus*)” which are “intricate and entangling formulations (*verba contorta et fidicularia*)”.

philosopher, having being a disciple of Eubulides.<sup>111</sup> The testimony presents Menedemus and Alexinus as engaging in a dialectical exchange; in this exchange, Alexinus puts forward an argument in the form of a question that could be related to the Horned One.<sup>112</sup> Both arguments rely on the complex question: a question that entails a presupposition which is forced upon the interlocutor. Menedemus tries to escape refutation by refusing to offer a direct answer, to which Alexinus replies that he must answer either yes or no. This strict requirement is necessary for entrapping the opponent, and it most probably was a structural feature of this kind of refutation. Menedemus says that this requirement is one of Alexinus's "rules" (ὕμετέροις νόμοις), which seems to suggest that it was a specific element in the context of a determinate dialectical procedure adopted by Alexinus and others (note the plural ὕμετέροις). Menedemus does not conform to this usage or rule (νόμος) and thus "stands at the gates" of Alexinus's 'territory' (a play on words between νόμος and νομός).

A paradigmatic example of this way of arguing can be found in Plato's *Euthydemus* (276a–277c, 283b–288c), to which we will turn later. However, the two fundamental points here are that Alexinus is represented as using Eubulides's arguments in the context of dialectical exchanges, and that these exchanges were structured in the form of strict yes/no questions. It seems logical then, to assume that Eubulides's arguments also shared these structural features.

Sextus Empiricus also stresses Eubulides's commitment to dialectical argumentation: "And Panthoides and Alexinus and Eubulides and Bryson, as well as Dionysodorus and Euthydemus of Thurios, whom Plato mentions in his *Euthydemus* Alexinus, Eubulides, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, were inclined towards the logical

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<sup>111</sup> Alexinus, probably one of the last Megarian philosophers, was engaged in several polemics with the Stoics. The relationship between the two schools is rich and complex. The Megarians exercised a powerful influence in the Stoics—Zeno of Citium is said to have studied with Diodorus Cronus (Diog. Laert. VII 16 =SSR II F 3), and both lines appear as defenders of a propositional conception of logic, in opposition to the predicate-oriented logic of the Aristotelians—but, as the case of Alexinus shows, their relation was also conflictive. According to the sources, Alexinus had several disputes with his contemporary Zeno of Citium, and Ariston the Stoic is said to have written a book entitled *Against Alexnius's replies* (Πρὸς τὰς Ἀλεξίνου ἀντιγραφάς, Diog. Laert. VII 163 =SSR II C 5). There are also testimonies which show that Chrysippus was critical of Alexinus (Stob. IV 20, 31 =SSR II C 7; Plut. *Comm. not.* 10, 1062f–1063a).

<sup>112</sup> See for example the testimony by Aulus Gellius (*NA XVI* 2, 9–10) on the Horned One, which is parallel to the testimony by Diogenes Laertius on the exchange between Menedemus and Alexinus.

(τὸ λογικόν)” (*Math.* VII 13 =SSR II B 12). It is interesting to note that Sextus includes Eubulides among several other Megarian exponents such as Bryson, Panthoides and his student Alexinus, together with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, famously portrayed in Plato’s *Euthydemus*. These men appear to have taken the “logical part” of Euclid’s philosophy to the extreme, focusing on the composition of arguments and strategies for refuting their theoretical adversaries; no traces of a positive doctrine can be associated with these Megarian exponents.

### 3.1.5. The dialectical arguments of Eubulides of Miletus

As we saw above, Diogenes gives us a list of seven arguments attributed to Eubulides: the Liar, the Disguised, Electra, the Veiled Figure, the Sorites, the Horned One, and the Bald Head. Many of their names indicate their content, particularly the subject or example which structures the argument. Some of them are variations of the same argument, such as the Sorites and the Bald Head, and the Disguised, the Electra, and the Veiled Figure. This reduces the list from seven to four main arguments: the Liar, the Veiled Figure, the Sorites, and the Horned One. Although Diogenes mentions Eubulides as the author of these arguments, some of them may be older or by other contemporary philosophers.<sup>113</sup> Still, they are not mentioned in Plato’s work, whereas they do appear in Aristotle.<sup>114</sup> This could be taken as an indication that they appeared in the period between Plato’s death and Aristotle’s early compositions, precisely the time in which Eubulides was probably active. In any case, Eubulides was famous in ancient times for putting forward these apparently unsolvable puzzles.

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<sup>113</sup> Moline (1969, 393 n. 3) notes that the Sorites could have developed from Zeno’s argument which states that if a bushel of wheat makes a noise in falling, then every grain must make a proportionate noise (the argument appears in *Phys.* 250a19–25). But in this case, according to Moline, the argument would be an instance of the simpler fallacy of division, and thus Zeno could not be properly credited with the Sorites.

Other later philosophers (Megarian or not) are said to be the authors of some of these arguments. For example, Diogenes also says in II 111–112 =SSR II F 1 that, according to some, Diodorus Cronus was the original author of the Veiled Figure and the Horned One. He also makes Chrysippus the author of the Horned One in VII 186–187 =SSR II B 13.

<sup>114</sup> This important fact is noted by Muller (1985, 113), Mársico (2013, 142 n. 78) and Villar (2021, 122). The Veiled One appears in *SE* 24, 179a33–34, the Sorites in *SE* 25, 179a35, the Liar in *SE* 25, 180b2–7, *Phys.* VII 5, 250a19–25 and VIII 3, 253b14–22. It should be noted that Aristotle relates the argument to Zeno in *Phys.* 250a19–25.

We have almost no direct evidence on the structure of Eubulides's arguments, but there are parallel sources which shed light on them.<sup>115</sup> The following are some representative formulations of the arguments:

1) The Liar: "If you say that you lie and that you are saying the truth, are you lying or are you saying the truth?" (Cic. *Acad.* II 29, 95–30, 97); "though I tell the truth in nothing else, there is at least one true thing in that which I am going to say: that I am lying" (Lucianus, *Ver. hist.* I 4); "The Liar consists in confirming the falseness through the truth, for example if someone says 'I say that I lie, and I lie; then I say the truth'" (Ps. Acron. *Schol. in Hor. Ep.* II 1, 45); "The argument is similar to the one which deals with the question whether the same man can lie and be truthful at the same time, but it presents apparent difficulties because it is not easy to see whether the qualification 'absolutely' should be applied to 'be truthful' or to 'lie'. But there is no reason why the same man should not be absolutely a liar yet tell the truth in some respects, or that some of a man's words should be true but he himself not be truthful" (Arist. *SE* 25, 180b2–7, trans. Forster, modified).

2) The Veiled Figure:

"Stoic – Do you know (οἶσθα) your own father?

Buyer – Yes.

Stoic – But if I put a veiled figure before you and asked you if you know him, what will you say?

Buyer – That I don't, of course.

Stoic – But the veiled figure turns out to be your own father; so if you don't know (ἀγνοεῖς) him, you evidently don't know your own father (δῆλος εἶ τὸν πατέρα τὸν σὸν ἀγνοῶν)" (Lucianus, *Vit. auct.* 22–23, transl. A. M. Harmon).

3) The Sorites: "It cannot be that if two is few, three is not so likewise; nor that if two or three are few, four is not so; and so up to ten. But two is few, therefore so also is ten" (Diog. Laert. VII 82, transl. Hicks); "[the Academics] should be criticized first for their use of an extremely captious kind of argument, one that usually finds very little approval

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<sup>115</sup> A compilation of these parallel sources (absent in the editions of Döring and Giannantoni) can be found in Muller (1985, Annex I), and Mársico (2013, *FS* 143–187).

in philosophy, in which something is added or subtracted little by little and progressively. They call this ‘sorites’, because they produce a heap by the addition of single grains” (Cic. *Luc.* II 16, 49, trans. Brittain modified);

4) In the case of the Horned One, we have an explicit reference to Eubulides in the testimony of Diogenes Laertius, VII 186–187 =SSR II B 13, who also ascribes this formulation to Chrysippus: “The philosopher (sc. Chrysippus) proposed this kind of arguments: [...] ‘if you have not lost something, you have it. You have not lost horns; therefore, you have horns’. Other say that this argument is by Eubulides”.

All four arguments exploit a problematic phenomenon involved in the everyday use of language. As Villar (2021, 121) notes, the Liar relies on the phenomenon of self-reference; the Veiled Figure, on referential opacity; the Sorites on the issue of vagueness; the Horned One on the phenomenon of the complex question.<sup>116</sup> These ways of reasoning are usually considered to be fallacious, and had already in ancient times prompted a negative reaction to Eubulides. According to this view, these clever arguments had little philosophical merit.<sup>117</sup> But this does not need be the case. The arguments present legitimate limit-cases which reveal some of the inherent and apparently insurmountable obscurities implied in language.<sup>118</sup> This appears to be highly consistent with the

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<sup>116</sup> The arguments seem to involve other issues as well. Wheeler (1982) for example contends that they are related to Eleatic premises. I will analyze below some of the problematic aspects involved in the the Veiled Figure.

<sup>117</sup> Moline (1969, 392 n. 2) traces this judgment back to Cicero’s *Lucullus* (e.g., XVI 49 on the Sorites). In more recent times, this view can be found, for example, in Zeller (1859<sup>2</sup>, 189), for whom most of Eubulides’s arguments “appear as pure sophisms, which have no further purpose than to embarrass opponents (*erscheinen als reine Sophismen, die keinen weiteren Zweck haben, als den Andern in Verlegenheit zu bringen*)”. See also von Fritz (1931, 710). Suspicion of this reading was already expressed by William and Martha Kneale (1962, 114–115): “All [of Eubulides’s arguments] are interesting, and it is incredible that Eubulides produced them in an entirely pointless way, as the tradition suggests. He must surely have been trying to illustrate some theses of Megarian philosophy, though it may be impossible for us to reconstruct the debates in which he introduced them”.

<sup>118</sup> This is particularly the case of the Sorites. Two important essays on this argument are those of G. Sillitti (1977; 1984). In her second paper, she discusses the works of Barnes (1982) and Burnyeat (1982) on this issue. I cannot properly address this polemic here; the reader should turn to these texts for further discussion of the Sorites.

Megarians' general approach to philosophy, as we have seen. It thus seems natural to read Eubulides's arguments in line with the Megarians' general principle of underscoring the distance between language and reality. Far from being pointless gimmicks, Eubulides's arguments were part of a philosophical program that had an important negative purpose: denouncing their contemporaries' false pretense of knowledge and stressing the irreconcilability of the unity of being and the plurality of language.

A detailed analysis of the four arguments goes beyond the limits of this work.<sup>119</sup> However, let us take a closer look at one especially relevant argument: the Veiled Figure (also called the Electra or the Disguised). This argument is important for us because it is connected with Plato's original discussion in the *Euthydemus* (276a–282d), in which the primary contrast between a capacity (δύναμις) and its exercise (χρῆσις) was established (cf. section 5.1 below). As we will see later, this contrast constitutes a crucial precedent of Aristotle's theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.

### 3.1.5.1. The Veiled Figure

We have already cited Lucian's version of the Veiled Figure. He also provides an analogous version of the Electra, which is particularly informative:<sup>120</sup>

The Electra is the famous Electra, the daughter of Agamemnon, who at once knew and did not know the same thing (ἦ τὰ αὐτὰ οἶδέ τε ἅμα καὶ οὐκ οἶδε); for when Orestes stood beside her before the recognition she knew that Orestes was her brother, but did not know that this was (Lucianus, *Vit. auct.* 22–23, transl. A. M. Harmon).

In this case, there is no veil, but rather Electra's own incapacity to recognize her brother after their long separation.<sup>121</sup> The resulting paradox is that Electra simultaneously knows and does not know her brother. One way of interpreting the argument is that it exploits

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<sup>119</sup> For discussion of the arguments see Kneale (1962), Moline (1969), Wheeler (1983) and Villar (2021). Moline in particular analyzes the Sorites as an eristic argument put forward by Eubulides against Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. Wheeler connects the arguments to the Megarians' Eleaticism. Villar (2021) provides a detailed analysis of all four arguments at 124–131.

<sup>120</sup> There are no surviving versions of the Disguised, but it presumably had an analogous structure to the Veiled Figure and the Electra. Cf. Montoneri (1984, 110).

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Aesch. *Cho.* 212ff.; Soph. *El.* 1106ff.; Eur. *El.* 215–431.

the ambiguity of the verb ‘to know’ (οἶδα):<sup>122</sup> Electra does not know who is before her, for she does not recognize her brother; but she also does know who her brother is. These are two different uses or senses of the term ‘to know’: one means ‘to recognize’, the other ‘to possess some knowledge’. The argument would conflate the two senses and thus claim that there is a contradiction (knowing and not knowing) when instead there are two different kinds of ‘knowing’, on different levels.

This interpretation can be found already in Aristotle. His treatment of the argument is particularly interesting, for he appears to provide two different ways of avoiding refutation by this argument.<sup>123</sup> The first one relies on the distinction between a substance and its accidents; the second one is analogous to the previous account that we have offered, which views the argument as relying on the phenomenon of semantic ambiguity.

Let us see Aristotle’s first solution. He criticizes this argument in *SE* 5, 166b28–32, and 179a26ff. as a fallacious way of reasoning that does not distinguish what is accidental from what is substantial. He comes very close to citing the Veiled One in 179a33–34. In this passage, Aristotle provides a list of questions that facilitate this kind of eristic argument, and among them he appears to cite the Veiled One: “Do you know that one who is approaching us, or the one covered by a Veil?” (ἄρ’ οἶδας τὸν προσιόντα, ἢ τὸν ἐγκεκαλυμμένον;, 179a33–34). When commenting on this passage, Ps. Alexander (*in SE* 161, 12–14, ed. Wallies) gives a fuller account of the argument, which coincides with the dialectical formulations which appear in Lucian:

- Do you know (οἶδας) that one who is approaching us and who is covered by a veil?
- No.
- (the veil is lifted) But then, do you know this man?
- Yes.

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<sup>122</sup> So Kneale (1962, 114): “It [*sc.* the argument] raises the question about different uses of the word ‘know’, and about the propriety of assuming that, if X is identical with Y, whatever can be said truly of X can also be said truly of Y”. See also Montoneri (1984, 109–110) and Gardella (2015, 56–57).

<sup>123</sup> Montoneri (1984, 110) mentions that Epicurus also criticizes the argument in a fragment of book XXVIII of his *Περὶ φύσεως*. In this fragment, Epicurus considers that the argument is merely a linguistic trick, unworthy of serious consideration.

– Then you know and not know (οἶδας καὶ οὐκ οἶδας) the same man.<sup>124</sup>

According to Aristotle, the argument relies on the ascription of a predicate to an accidental feature (the fact that someone is covered by a veil or not) instead of the substance (the man who is behind the veil):

It is manifest in all these arguments that a same thing is not necessarily true of the accident (συμβεβηκότος) and also of the object (πράγματος) [...] in the case of the one who approaches us, it is not the same “being one who approaches us covered” and “being Coriscus”; for it is not true that if I know Coriscus and I not know the one who approaches, I know and not know the same individual (ὥστ’ οὐκ εἰ οἶδα τὸν Κορίσκον, ἀγνοῶ δὲ τὸν προσιόντα, τὸν αὐτὸν οἶδα καὶ ἀγνοῶ) (179a35–b4).

This solution depends on Aristotle’s own distinction between substance and accident, which is most likely rejected by the Megarians (arguably because this distinction introduces multiplicity in the midst of being). It also fails to provide a clear criterion for when a predication is valid and when it is invalid or eristic, as Dorion (1995, 366–367) notes.

But, as we noted earlier, Aristotle also relates the argument to the phenomenon of ambiguity at 175b15–27. The passage is preceded by the claim at 175b7–15 that arguments that rely on the ambiguity of terms should be responded to by way of “making distinctions” (διελών, 175b7), that is, making manifest the ambiguity at play. Aristotle claims that these arguments, put forward in dialectical contexts, require that the interlocutor answers either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (ναί ἢ οὐ, 175b9); but one must “necessarily add something to the answer” (ἀνάγκη προσαποκρίνεσθαι τι τὸν ἐρωτώμενον) in order to avoid being refuted.<sup>125</sup> This is the strategy adopted by Menedemus when confronting the Megarian Alexinus, as we saw above.

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<sup>124</sup> An even more complete formulation can be found in 125, 18–30, ed. Wallies. He says there that this argument was put forward by the Sophists (οἱ σοφισταί). On the fact that the Megarians were also called sophists, see *infra*, p. 131 n. 211.

<sup>125</sup> This is exactly what Socrates does when responding to the dilemmatic questions of the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in the *Euthydemus* (cf. the parallel use of προσαποκρίνεσθαι, a *hapax* in Plato, at 296a1). This tactic is severely reproached by the brothers, since it neutralizes their eristic mechanisms (e.g., 293b–c, 295a–296d). The connection between the *Euthydemus* and Aristotle’s

Immediately afterward, Aristotle explains why some other strategies for responding to these arguments are defective. He mentions the case of an argument in which the resulting refutation is that Coriscus is at the same time cultured and uncultured (μουσικὸν καὶ ἄμουσον, 175b19–20). This is very similar to the case of the Veiled Figure, in which the result of the argument is the contradictory claim that one knows and does not know (οἶδα καὶ ἀγνοῶ) the same person. We can imagine that the argument would begin with a question as to whether or not Coriscus is cultured. The interlocutor would be refuted regardless of his answer, given that the very term ‘cultured’ admits two senses: in one sense Coriscus is cultured (for he has, for example, some grammatical knowledge) but in another sense he is not (for he may lack some mathematical knowledge). By rejecting the distinction between the different senses of the term, the questioner could take the answer in absolute terms and then show that it is in itself contradictory: Coriscus would be and would not be cultured at the same time.

Aristotle then notes that if one intends to solve this problem by stating that *this* Coriscus is learned because he has some specific knowledge, but that *this other* Coriscus is unlearned because he lacks some other knowledge, then, according to Aristotle, one will be refuted, for there is actually only one Coriscus. For Aristotle, the proper solution in this case is to note that the term μουσικός *is not being used in the same sense in the two cases*, as he had explained earlier in 175b7–15.

If we accept that the Veiled Figure relies on the core issue of ambiguity, then we can relate it to a remarkable passage in Plato’s *Euthydemus*, a work which is closely related to Aristotle’s *Sophistical Refutations*. One specific set of arguments, to which we will pay much attention later, presents the particular problem at play in the Veiled Figure. The whole section, from 275d to 277d, deals with the ambiguity of the term μανθάνειν: this term can refer, as Socrates explains in 278a6–7, both to the act of acquiring some knowledge and to the act of exercising an already acquired knowledge. The brothers present a dichotomous question regarding who learns, the wise man or the ignorant (πότεροί εἰσι τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ μανθάνοντες, οἱ σοφοὶ ἢ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς;). The refutation ensues as Clinias offers both answers: firstly, he says that the wise man learns, and upon refutation, he argues that those who are ignorant learn, only to be refuted again. The core of the refutation is that the same term (μανθάνειν) denotes two different kinds of activities

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*Sophistical Refutations* is underscored by Dorion (1995, 47–53, 91–105, 330–331). On this matter see 4.2.1 below.

that presuppose two mutually opposing conditions, *i.e.*, being on the one hand ignorant, and on the other hand already possessing some knowledge. The former state corresponds with the first sense of *μανθάνειν*, that is, ‘to learn’, while the latter state corresponds with the second sense of *μανθάνειν*, ‘to understand’. By concealing this distinction in the dialectical context, the brothers can choose either of these senses in order to refute the answer given by their interlocutor.

The common denominator between this set of arguments and Eubulides’s Veiled Figure/Electra is that the contradiction pursued by the argument is based upon the semantic ambiguity of verbs which denote cognitive activities such as knowing, recognizing, understating, or learning. The closeness of both arguments, to which we will return later, will be central to our understanding of the Megarian influence in the *Euthydemus* and Aristotle’s later discussions regarding the *δύναμις-ἐνέργεια* pair.

One important consequence follows this interpretation. The exploitation of ambiguity seems to presuppose some of the Megarians’ core philosophical tenets, which we have analyzed in the earlier sections. For Euclid and the other first-generation Megarians, the unity of being is compromised by the plurality involved in language. This fact, combined with a strict interpretation of the principle of excluded middle, leads to several paradoxes involved in the everyday use of language: if many terms refer to the same thing, then they are not different strictly speaking, as in the case of Bryson and his rejection of the existence of foul terms (a conclusion which would seem absurd to any sane person). If a same term refers to many things, then several contradictions follow, such as in the case of the Veiled Figure (one knows and does not know the same thing at the same time). Eubulides’s other arguments also seem to rely on this set of core tenets: the Liar and the Horned One rely on a rigid conception of the principle of bivalence, which again admits no third instance, and the Sorites stresses our inability to establish a clear relation between single and discreet beings and obscure notions such as “few” or “many”. This suggests a continuity between Euclid’s original insights and the eristical praxis of his immediate successors. This seems to indicate is that the ontological orientation developed by Euclid provided the ground for the dialectical method perfected by followers of his, such as Eubulides of Miletus.

### **3.2. The third generation Megarians**

The commitment to dialectic and refutation typical of the second-generation Megarians developed new facets in the final stages of the Megarian circle. The two foremost exponents of the third generation of Megarians are perhaps the most famous ones of the entire Megarian line: Diodorus Cronus and Stilpo of Megara. Their common denominator is their thematization of logical and ontological complexities, in a way that goes beyond the merely refutational dialectic of previous Megarians such as Bryson, Eubulides, or Alexinus.

Our study of these two philosophers has two purposes. The first one is negative: it will help us to reject, later, a common reading of  $\Theta$  3, according to which Diodorus Cronus is the figure behind Aristotle's "οἱ Μεγαρικοί". The second one is positive: it will complete our appraisal of the Megarian circle and, we hope, will further confirm our general interpretation of it. This will allow us to offer a general synthetic assessment of the philosophy of the Megarians in the final section of this chapter. This, in turn, will provide the ground for our examination of Aristotle's polemic with the Megarians in *Met.*  $\Theta$  3.

Space does not allow an exhaustive study here of all the issues that concern Diodorus and Stilpo (such a task could be the subject of a self-standing doctoral thesis). I will instead focus on tracing the main lines of continuity between Diodorus and Stilpo and the previous Megarians, without neglecting their innovations and their differences.

### 3.2.1. Diodorus Cronus

Diogenes Laertius (II 111 =SSR II F 1) says that Diodorus Cronus was a disciple of Apollonius Cronus, who was, in turn, a disciple of Eubulides.<sup>126</sup> He claims that he was skilled in dialectic (διαλεκτικός), and credits him with the discovery of the Horned One and the Veiled One. Beyond the exactness of this reconstruction (which we have already questioned in part), the testimony helps us place Diodorus as a late exponent of the Megarian circle, a member of the third generation of Megarians.

There are two possible chronologies for Diodorus Cronus. Giannantoni dates his birth around 350 BC and believes that he died not earlier than 285 BC. This is also the

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<sup>126</sup> There is practically no information on Apollonius Cronus: sources (Diogenes Laertius and Strabo) mention him only to indicate that he was the teacher of Diodorus. On the origin of the epithet 'Cronus', which seems to have been passed from Apollonius to Diodorus, see Mársico (2013, 154 n. 99).

opinion of Sedley (1977). In this, both authors disagree with the traditional view that he died in 307 BC.<sup>127</sup> The traditional dating is based on Diogenes Laertius's testimony, which contains an anecdote on Diodorus's death:

When he [*sc.* Diodorus] resided in the court of Ptolemy Soter, he had certain dialectical questions (διαλεκτικούς ἠρωτήθη) posed to him by Stilpo, and, not being able to solve them on the spot, he was reproached by the king and, among other slights, the nickname Cronus was applied to him by way of mockery. He left the banquet and, after writing a discourse on the logical problem, ended his days in despair. About him, the following was transmitted to us:

Diodorus Cronus, what sad fate  
Buried you in despair,  
So that you hastened to the shades below,  
Perplexed by Stilpo's riddles?  
You would deserve your name of Cronus better  
If C and R were gone<sup>128</sup> (Diog. Laert. II 111–112 =SSR II F 1, trans. Hicks,  
modified).

The testimony places Diodorus as a contemporary of Stilpo, and presents the two philosophers as active members of Ptolemy Soter's court. Because Stilpo seems never to have been in Alexandria (Diogenes states that he rejected an invitation by Ptolemy in II 115 =SSR II O 14), the anecdote is sometimes interpreted as occurring during Ptolemy's stay at Megara in 307 BC. This would place Diodorus's birth much earlier than 350 BC. But Diogenes's testimony seems to be a typical later anecdote intended to connect a philosopher's life events with one or more of their distinctive characteristics, in this case, Diodorus's dedication to dialectical argumentation.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, an earlier chronology

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<sup>127</sup> This view can be found, for instance, in Zeller (1859<sup>2</sup>, 176 nn. 2, 4).

<sup>128</sup> The final line is a play on words, by eliminating the 'c' and the 'r' the result is ὄνος, *i.e.*, donkey.

<sup>129</sup> Diogenes (II 111) also repeats an epigram authored by Callimachus which attacked Diodorus. This epigram has been used as to date Diodorus's philosophical activity, by assuming that he must have been alive by the time of its redaction, around 280 BC. This, however, is not strictly necessary, above all because the frequent trope of disqualification of an intellectual could be meaningful beyond a particular confrontation with Diodorus. The epigram is limited to underlining the ridicule, suggested by the mention of Momo, a figure which is associated with mockery and which proclaims Diodorus's wisdom, is one of the senses of his epithet 'Cronus' (the other being foolishness).

contradicts his contacts with Zeno of Citium and other contemporary philosophers, of which we have much information in the sources.<sup>130</sup>

An earlier chronology is favored by those who claim that Diodorus's was the polemical reference in Aristotle's discussion of the Megarian thesis of *Met.* Θ 3. But as I will argue later, there is little evidence in support of this interpretation. Therefore, I will accept the chronology by Sedley/Giannantoni, and consider that Diodorus was active between the late 4th and early 3rd centuries.<sup>131</sup>

Diodorus's philosophical activity was very rich, and we have numerous testimonies which speak of it, in contrast to some of the previous Megarians. His philosophical positions could be placed in four main categories: *a*) linguistic concerns with ambiguity; *b*) logical considerations on the validity of inferences; *c*) logical concerns regarding the possible (the famous Master Argument); *d*) arguments against the possibility of motion.<sup>132</sup> Diodorus's addressed all four areas of concern by means of specific dialectical arguments, from which paradoxical consequences follow. With this, Diodorus appears to continue the Megarians' choice of highlighting diverse *aporiai* through dialectical argumentation. The arguments also have subtle eristic undertones, which suggests that Diodorus's continued the Megarian tradition of defying commonly accepted notions through clever arguments with perplexing conclusions.

I will not be able to address all of Diodorus's arguments here. Treatment of the Master Argument and of Diodorus's arguments against motion will be deferred to 7.3.1, where I will compare them to *Met.* Θ 3 1047a10–17. I will now focus on the first area of reflection by Diodorus, which builds upon the theses and arguments developed by preceding Megarians. This will help us trace a line of continuity that will contribute to our understanding of the group and of the Megarian thesis that Aristotle transmits in *Met.* Θ 3.

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<sup>130</sup> Cf. Diog. Laert. VII 16, 25 =SSR II F 3; Suda s.v. Zeno =SSR II F 3; Numen. fr 2 Leemans [*apud* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XIV 5, 12–6, 14, 729c–731b =SSR II F 4). On the contact between the Megarians and Stoicism, see n. 111 above and pp. 88–90 below. On the chronology of Diodorus, see also Sedley (1977) and Giannantoni (1990 IV, 74–76).

<sup>131</sup> Regarding Sedley's (1977) interpretation, according to which Diodorus Cronus was not a Megarian but member of a distinct Dialectical school, cf. *supra*, pp. 42–44.

<sup>132</sup> Diodorus's arguments against motion are connected with another of his theses, the postulation of indivisibles. Though this latter concern could be taken as an independent source of philosophical interest for Diodorus, I will analyze it together with his arguments on motion in 7.3.1.

### 3.2.1.1. Diodorus Cronus and the problem of ambiguity

We should begin with a testimony from Aulus Gellius (*NA XI 12, 1–3 =SSR II F 7*):

Chrysippus says that every word is by nature ambiguous, since two or more things may be understood from the same word. But Diodorus, surnamed Cronus, says: “No word is ambiguous, and there is no ambiguity in what one says or hears (*nec quisquam ambiguum dicit aut sentit*);<sup>133</sup> nor should it seem that anything is said other than what the speaker purports to say. But when I—he said—, meant one thing and you have understood another (*aliud sensi, tu aliud accepisti*), it may seem that the statement is obscure rather than ambiguous (*obscure magis dictum videri potest quam ambiguum*); for the nature of an ambiguous word should be such that he who speaks it expresses two or more meanings (*ambigui enim verbi natura illa esse debuit, ut qui id diceret duo vel plura diceret*). But no man expresses two meanings when he wants to express but one” (trans. Rolfe modified).

This interesting passage presents Diodorus’s position on the phenomenon of ambiguity. Much in line with the previous Megarians, Diodorus seems to deny that a term could have multiple meanings. This thesis could be read in line with Euclid’s original concern with the contrast between the unity of the good and the multiplicity of names that denote it. We saw that Euclid and his successors developed a particular dialectical praxis that underscored the unbridgeable gap between language and reality. And in this context, the phenomenon of ambiguity is crucial. In the case of Eubulides and Alexinus, the ambiguity of terms was the starting point of many of their refutations. They exploited the phenomenon of ambiguity in order to extract a series of paradoxes that run counter to commonly admitted notions. The same applied in the case of Bryson, who justified his claim that there are no foul words by way of pointing to the phenomenon of synonymy. This approach disrupts our use of language in such a way as to undermine the capacity of discourse to articulate reality.

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<sup>133</sup> The term *sentit* is not limited to a physical ‘hearing’, but includes the notions of perception and intellectual comprehension. This aspect is underscored in Mársico’s translation (2013, 171 *FS* 207): “no word is ambiguous and there is no ambiguity in that which is said nor in what it is thought of” (*ninguna palabra es ambigua y no hay ambigüedad en lo que se dice ni en lo que se piensa*).

Diodorus adds a gnoseological dimension to the problem, by claiming that there is an essential link between the term, its meaning, and the speaker's intention. For Diodorus, all three aspects coincide and constitute a unity that excludes the possibility of ambiguity. Diodorus does not admit that the phenomenon of ambiguity could be justified by the relation between terms and the external objects to which they refer is not admitted by him. Although there is no explicit allusion to the motives behind this view, it is consistent with the principles of Megarianism that we have seen at play in the previous exponents of the group, in which the relation between objects and their names is of an essentially broken nature.

For Diodorus, a speaker cannot possibly intend to communicate two things when using *one* term; terms can have only one application. As we saw in the case of previous Megarians, admitting that multiple terms refer to a single thing or that a single name has numerous references leads to absurdities which show that we should not rely on such assumptions. Given that we regularly experience language in a way that admits of ambiguity, this view plunges us into a state of complete *aporia*. According to Aulus Gellius, Diodorus is willing to admit that misunderstandings arise because of the obscurity (*obscuritas*) of discourse, but not because of ambiguity *per se*, since this is merely an apparent or false phenomenon.

Although Diodorus seems to uphold a strict identity between terms and their applications, we should not confuse this position with a sort of linguistic naturalism. This is the position of Diodorus's opponents, as in the case of Chrysippus in the testimony by Aulus Gellius. The contrast between Diodorus and Chrysippus should be understood in the broader context of the discussions of the problem of ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων, the correctness of names. The Stoic position is that every term is naturally related to the object, in such a way that there is a direct connection between them; this view traces its origins to Antisthenes of Athens and his thesis of the proper discourse (οἰκεῖος λόγος).<sup>134</sup> According to this perspective, each name had one meaning which had to be clarified by way of a detailed semantic analysis (a position which is related once more to Antisthenes's original method of the investigation of names, ἐπίσκεψις τῶν ὀνομάτων<sup>135</sup>). Diodorus rejects this possibility by claiming, first, that there is a strict correlation between

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. Diog. Laert. VI 3 =SSR V A 151. On this thesis see Brancacci (1990), Cordero (2001), Mársico (2014, 11–16) and Chame (2021).

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Epict. *Dissert.* I 17, 10–12 =SSR V A 160; Porph. *ad Od.* I, 1 =SSR V A 187.

a name and its meaning and, second, by showing that the use of names is purely conventional and not natural. This last position can be seen in a testimony by Ammonius, which presents one of Diodorus's most famous anecdotes:

And if this is correct, it is manifest that we shall not accept the opinion of Diodorus the Dialectician, who thought that every sound of the voice (φωνήν) is significant (σημαντικὴν) and as a proof of this claim called one of his servants 'but' (*i.e.*, Ἄλλα μὴν, 'but in fact') and another one by another conjunction (*in. Int.* 38, 17–20 =SSR II F 7, trans. Blank modified).

Many sources insist on the claim that Diodorus used to name his slaves after conjunctions and particles.<sup>136</sup> This tactic allowed him to uphold an extreme nominalist conception of language while conserving the strict unity between terms and their references. All names are meaningful for Diodorus, to such an extent that even conjunctions, which by definition have no semantic content, are meaningful.<sup>137</sup> There are clear eristic undertones to this idea: what would warrant Diodorus's claim is that he assigns conjunctions as names for human individuals. From this extreme case, Diodorus makes a general claim regarding the nature of terms, which are thus always meaningful according to arbitrary conventions. This procedure suggests that Diodorus's views on language remain within the eristic, ludic, and even mocking tone characteristic of previous Megarians.

Diodorus's opposition to naturalism can also be collected from a testimony by Stephanus:

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<sup>136</sup> Cf. *Simpl. in Cat.* 27, 15–21, ed. Kalbfleisch =SSR II F 7; *Schol. in Dionys. Trac. artem gramm.: Schol. Londin.* 12 =SSR II F 7; *Hdn. De nomin.* 2 [Anecd. Oxon., IV 328, 30–2] =SSR II F 7.

<sup>137</sup> This is Aristotle's position in *Poet.* 20, where he claims that articles and pronouns have no meaning in themselves. Diodorus's line of reasoning is in stark contrast with Aristotle's triadic conception of the relation between reality, significance and name, as developed in the first four chapters of *De Int.* In the case of Diodorus there is no true connection between a name and the object beyond the arbitrary designations by men. This position admits of legitimate limit cases, such as the extravagant example of using particles as names for human beings. Thus, the strict relation between name and object which Diodorus appears to sustain is only apparent, without true foundation beyond the mere intention of the speaker. This runs counter to both Aristotle's triadic conception and the Stoics' naturalistic position. Cf. also *Simpl. in Cat.* 27, 15–21, ed. Kalbfleisch =SSR II F 7.

Cratylus said that names exist by nature according to the first meaning, while Diodorus said that they exist not by nature but by convention (lit. setting down the meaning, θέσει) that is, according to the second meaning, simply and by chance. That is why he called his own slaves with names of conjunctions, addressing them as ‘Men’ and ‘De’ (Μὲν καὶ Δέ) (*In Int.* 9, 20–24 = *SSR* II F 7).

This testimony transparently articulates Diodorus’s view on the arbitrary nature of the application of terms. In line with the previous testimony, Diodorus uses connective particles as names for his slaves. Diodorus underscores the artificial nature of language and its inability to reflect transparently what is real; the absurd conclusion that even particles can be used to name human beings serves the purpose of showing the broken relationship between the linguistic and ontological domains.<sup>138</sup> The only guarantee of correspondence between terms and their objects is the subjective intention of the speaker, and not a natural, objective relation as claimed by Stoics. In other words, the strict correlation between terms and their references does not transcend the subjective sphere, and it is entirely independent of the external object.

Thus, we can see a strong continuity between the dialectical concerns of the earlier Megarians and those of Diodorus Cronus. This is a very important point, for it allows us a better grasp of the philosophical orientation of the Megarians as a whole. The Megarians seem to have been fundamentally preoccupied with the issue of the ambiguity of terms and their applications. Our hypothesis, which we will develop in detail later, is that this structural concern is the force behind the Megarian argument of *Met.* Θ 3. The Megarian thesis would be primarily concerned neither with the problem of the possible nor with the immobility of being, as is usually believed, but, as mentioned, with the fundamental problem of the ambiguity of terms.<sup>139</sup> All three cited issues are present in Diodorus Cronus (the issue of possibility is related to his Master Argument; the problem of immobility with his arguments against motion; the problem of ambiguity in the testimonies analyzed above). But the latter issue represents a major feature of Megarian thought, which runs through all the diverse Megarian exponents. Further confirmation of

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<sup>138</sup> This is the position defended by Mársico (2013, 171–174, nn. 107–110).

<sup>139</sup> This, however, does not rule out the possibility that the thesis involves a deeper concern with ontological issues. I will explain on this question in 7.4.1.

this can be found in the testimonies of the philosopher to whom we now turn, the once-famous Stilpo of Megara.

### 3.2.2. Stilpo of Megara

The testimonies are ambiguous regarding the place of Stilpo in the succession order of the Megarian group. He is said, variously, to have been a disciple of Euclid, of Thrasymachus of Corinth (Diog. Laert. II 113 =SSR II O 2), and of Pasicles of Thebes (Suda *s.v.* Stilpo =SSR II O 1).<sup>140</sup> The Suda claims that he was born in the time of Ptolemy Soter, and Diogenes Laertius places him in the latter's court, as we saw earlier in the anecdote regarding Diodorus's death. Both claims render implausible a discipleship with Euclid, as the latter's death is usually placed around 366 BC. The connection between them must have occurred through other intellectual figures, as Mársico (2013, 215 n. 157) suggests. Stilpo is said to have lived to an advanced age, so it would not be implausible for him to have been born around 350 BC. This makes Stilpo active towards the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC.

According to the testimonies available, Stilpo was the leading Megarian philosopher of his time. The Suda *s.v.* Stilpo =SSR II O 1 claims that he “directed (προέστη) the Megarian school (τῆς Μεγαρικῆς σχολῆς)” and that he wrote not less than twenty dialogues. Although Diogenes claims at I 16 that he left no writings, he nevertheless provides the titles of nine of his dialogues at II 120 =SSR II O 23: *Moschus, Aristippus or Callias, Ptolemy, Chaerecrates, Metrocles, Anaximenes, Epigenes, To his Daughter, Aristotle*.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> The Suda states that Pasicles studied with his brother Crates of Thebes. This does not seem to square with the fact that, according to Diogenes Laertius, Crates was a disciple of Stilpo (Diog. Laert. VII 2, VII 24=SSR II O 4). This would form a circle in which Stilpo was at the same time disciple and teacher, through Crates, of Pasicles. This is a good example of a case where von Fritz's arguments do apply: it is probable that the rigid schemes projected by later doxographies forced this kind of associations.

<sup>141</sup> Diogenes claims that the dialogues were ψυχροί, a term which could be translated as “cold” or “uninteresting in style”. Mársico (2013, 235 n. 190) recalls Aristotle's *Rhetoric* III 3, where he associates ψυχρός with an overly complex style in speech, which makes uses of composite or unusual words, long and inappropriate epithets and metaphors.

The phenomenon of the Σωκρατικοί λόγοι was outdated by the time of Stilpo, and we do not have information on the contents of his dialogues beyond their titles. On the titles see Mársico (2013, 235 n.

According to Diogenes, he surpassed all his contemporaries in dialectical capability. He apparently had such an influence that “nearly all Greece, with eyes upon him, began to ‘megarize’ (μεγαρίσαι)” (Diog. Laert. II 113 =SSR II O 2). He adds that according to Philippus the Megarian (a philosopher of whom we have no information besides this testimony), he influenced an astounding number of philosophers, including such figures as Menedemus (II 105, 125–126, 134), and Zeno of Citium (II 120, VII 2, VII 24), which confirms the close connection between the Megarians and the Stoics.

Our purpose here is to analyze Stilpo’s philosophical position as an example of the mature Megarian view on the relation between language and ontology. Stilpo does not depart from the core premises which were held by the previous Megarians, but rather refines and deepens their approach to the problem of language through a specific critique of the mechanism of predication.

Stilpo established a strict correlation between names and their references, in line with what we have already seen in the cases of Bryson, Eubulides, and Diodorus. For Stilpo, this position entails the denial of all sorts of relations between names. According to Plutarch, this radical position was criticized by Colotes, an Epicurean contemporary of Stilpo:<sup>142</sup>

[...] [Colotes] criticized Stilpo saying that he robs us of our life by the assertion that one thing cannot be predicated on another (ἕτερον ἑτέρου μὴ κατηγορεῖσθαι). “For how shall we live if we cannot call a man good or a man a general, but can only on one side call a man a man, and on the other good good and general general, or if we cannot speak of ten thousand horse or a strong city, but only say that horsemen are horsemen and ten thousand ten thousand, and so with the rest?” (*Adv. Col.* 22 =SSR II O 29, trans. Einarson and De Lacey).

We see here that Stilpo seems not to allow for any kind of combination of names, such as in the expression “a man is good”. The only kind of λόγος admitted by Stilpo seems to be tautological: “a man is a man”, that is, a kind of predication where no difference (ἕτερον) is introduced. The justification for this approach is provided by Plutarch some lines further:

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190). The dialogue *Aristotle* could refer either to the Stagirite or to Aristotle of Cyrene, mentioned in Diog. Laert. II, 113 as one of Stilpo’s competing philosophers.

<sup>142</sup> For a detailed analysis of the passages of Plutarch on Stilpo quoted in this section, see Mársico (2012b).

Stilpo's point is this: if we predicate 'running' of a horse, the predicate, he says, is not the same as the subject, but different. Neither if of a man we say that he is good, since the definition of the essence (τοῦ τί ἦν εἶναι τὸν λόγον) is one for man (μὲν ἄνθρωπον) and another for good (ἕτερον δὲ τῷ ἀγαθῷ). And again, the being of a horse and the being of running are different, for when asked for a definition of each, we do not assign the same to both. Therefore, those who predicate one thing on another make a mistake [...] for if good is the same as man, and running the same as horse, how can we predicate good on food and on medicine, or, by Zeus!, once more, [predicate] running on a lion and a dog? But if they are different, we err when we say that a man is good and that a horse runs (*Adv. Col.* 23 = *SSR* II O 29, trans. Einarson and Lacey, modified).

For Stilpo, each being, be it substance or attribute, has a linguistic expression that correlates to its essence (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι). An attribute like "good" is at the same level as the subject "man" in such a way that the combination of both terms ends up identifying diverse beings, from which absurd consequences follow: not always that there is a man, this man will be good, and not every good thing will necessarily be a man. There is an essential split between different beings, and their combination in attribution offers an inadequate representation of a thoroughly divided ontological domain.<sup>143</sup> In this sense, an "essential" definition would be the only proper way of addressing reality with precision through discourse. Thus, the only legitimate discourse seems to be composed of single terms that describe single entities, which hinders the possibility of developing positive theoretical constructs such as Plato's.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Muller (1985, 173) expresses himself accordingly: "C'est bien parce que l'être s'entend d'une seule façon que les Mégariques refusent l'attribution du divers; mais cet être n'est pas celui de la copule, c'est l'être de l'idée qui n'est pensable que dans la plénitude de son essence et de son identité à soi, de telle sorte que toute relation ou participation en devient inconcevable".

<sup>144</sup> It is worth recalling the allusion in the *Sophist* 251b–c to those that "take pleasure in saying that we must not call a man good, but must call the good good, and a man man" (χαίρουσιν οὐκ εἰδότες ἀγαθὸν λέγειν ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἀγαθὸν ἀγαθόν, τὸν δὲ ἄνθρωπον ἄνθρωπον); traditionally, it is believed that this passage refers to Antisthenes and his thesis of the οἰκεῖος λόγος. However, it strikes us as surprisingly similar to the structure of the argument and the examples chosen by Stilpo according to Plutarch ("but the essential definition of man is one, and of good another", μὲν ἄνθρωπον τοῦ τί ἦν εἶναι τὸν λόγον, ἕτερον δὲ τῷ ἀγαθῷ). On the identification of the ὀψιμαθεῖς of *Sophist* 251b6–7, cf. Brancacci (1999). This author argues against the view that this passage is an allusion to Antisthenes, and claims that Plato is alluding instead to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. At p. 390, Brancacci stresses the closeness between these two

It is worth noting that although Plutarch restricts this position to Stilpo, Simplicius (*in Phys.* 120, 12–17, ed. Diels =SSR II O 30) extends it to the whole of the Megarian group:

And because of their ignorance of these things the philosophers called Megarians (οἱ Μεγαρικοί) having taken as manifest the premise that things which have different definitions (λόγοι) are different, and that different things are separate (κεχωρισθαι) from one another, believed that this proved that each thing is separated from itself (ἐδόκουν δεικνύναι αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ κεχωρισμένον ἕκαστον). Because if one is the definition (λόγος) of Socrates musician and other of Socrates white, then Socrates would be separated from himself.

Simplicius is commenting on *Phys.* I 3, 186a25–32, precisely where Aristotle addresses the thesis of Parmenides that being is one. In opposition to Parmenides, Aristotle posits his theory of the various senses of being and the categories. This theory depends on the possibility of attributive predication, which enables the possibility of a definition structured in terms of a subject and its predicates. The fact that Simplicius ascribes the thesis which denies attribution to the Megarians (οἱ Μεγαρικοί) suggests that the presence of this type of thesis was widespread among the Megarian group. And this is consistent with what we have seen in the case of previous Megarians and their rejection of other phenomena, such as ambiguity, which also introduces multiplicity in the midst of (the unitary) being.

In line with the previous testimony, Stilpo insists on the inherent inadequacy that exists between universal terms and particular beings, and he rejects, according to Diogenes Laertius II, 119 =SSR II O 27, the existence of Forms:

Being a consummate master of controversy, he used to deny even the Forms (ἀνήρει καὶ τὰ εἶδη), and say that he who said “man” meant no individual (καὶ ἔλεγε τὸν λέγοντα ἄνθρωπον λέγειν μηδένα);<sup>145</sup> he did not mean this man or that (οὔτε γὰρ τόνδε λέγειν

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philosophers and the Megarians, but still claims that these two sophists did not belong to the Megarian circle. I will defend the claim that the brothers were indeed Megarians in section 4.2.1 below. If this is so, it would reinforce the interpretation which connects the passage to Stilpo’s critique of predication.

<sup>145</sup> The manuscripts read καὶ ἔλεγε τὸν λέγοντα ἄνθρωπον εἶναι μηδένα. The difficulty in interpreting this line has motivated various attempts of emendation (an analysis of these attempts can be found in Montoneri

οὔτε τόνδε). For why should he mean the one more than the other? Therefore, neither does he mean this individual man (τι γὰρ μᾶλλον τόνδε ἢ τόνδε; οὐδ' ἀρά τόνδε). Again, “vegetable” is not what is shown to me (τὸ λάχανον οὐκ ἔστι τὸ δεικνύμενον), for vegetable existed ten thousand years ago. Therefore, this is not vegetable (λάχανον μὲν γὰρ ἦν πρὸ μυρίων ἐτῶν· οὐκ ἄρα ἐστι τοῦτο λάχανον) (trans. Hicks, modified).

Although Diogenes presents the argument as a way of denying the Forms, I believe it is better to read it as a critique of the mechanism of participation (μέθεξις). In effect, Stilpo’s argument intends to demonstrate that there is an essential and unbridgeable gap between Forms and particulars.<sup>146</sup> This does not necessarily rule out the *existence* of Forms. He simply wants to show that there is no way of establishing a *relation* between Forms and particulars, that is, that there is no such thing as participation.

Stilpo focuses on the homonymy which exists between Forms and particulars. In Plato, what justifies this homonymy is that the particulars partake in the Forms. But Stilpo notices that the reference of a universal term such as ‘man’ is obscure: it is unclear whether a universal term refers to one given particular or to another. It is interesting to note that Stilpo uses demonstrative pronouns when referring to the particulars: he mentions “this [man]” (simply τόνδε) and “this vegetable” (τοῦτο λάχανον). The demonstrative pronoun reinforces the concrete aspect of the aforementioned entities: the particulars are here understood as contingent perceptible beings that can be referred to through deictic terms or gestures. In contrast, Forms have a universal and necessary character, independent from perception (“for vegetable existed ten thousand years ago”). Universal terms seem to correspond to this domain of necessary beings.

Stilpo believes that the contrast between the universal character of terms and the particular nature of individuals signals a fundamental incongruence between Forms and particulars. Thus, participation appears as a mere byproduct of semantic ambiguity (more

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1984, 214–217 and Mársico 2012b, 18–19). I follow here the emendation first introduced by Roeper (1854), followed by von Fritz (1931, 723), Döring (1972, 155–156), and Mársico (2012b, 19), who proposes to seclude εἶναι and introduce λέγειν before μηδένα. Thus, Stilpo would be denying the capacity of universal terms such as ‘man’ or ‘vegetable’ to refer to any concrete being.

<sup>146</sup> “L’argomento stilponiano intende dunque dimostrare l’incapacità dei concetti universali a fornire conoscenze determinate [...] La tesi che l’argomento stilponiano intende indirettamente dimostrare è quella del χωρισμός tra concetti universali da una parte e individui empirici dall’altra.” (Montoneri 1984, 218).

specifically, the ambiguity which explains the homonymy of Forms and particulars) and its illicit ontological projections.

With the dismissal of participation, Stilpo states that there is no reason for Form and particular to share the same name. Universal terms seem to refer to the eternal and static domain of Forms; particulars are referred to by demonstrative pronouns that denote single and concrete entities such as “this man” or “this fig”, which are actually perceived at the moment of enunciation.<sup>147</sup>

There is a close connection between this argument by Stilpo and Polyxenus’s Third Man argument, which we analyzed earlier. Polyxenus claimed that the individual man does not participate in the Form because it would require a third instance (third man) to link the man-himself, the Form, with the individual. Although Polyxenus does not offer an argument to explain why particulars cannot participate in the Form, we saw that his argument was likely connected with the preceding version of the Third Man listed by Alexander, attributed to “the Sophists”, which established a linguistic criterion against participation. In the case of Stilpo, we see exactly this same argument at play. For Stilpo, the incapacity of the particulars to participate in the eidetic realm is explained by the lack of linguistic coextension between individuals and Forms, a fact that establishes an insurmountable distance between the two spheres. This seems to confirm our previous reading of Polyxenus’s argument, given that both arguments appear complementary.<sup>148</sup> While Polyxenus’s perspective denies the possibility of a particular to participate in a given Form, Stilpo underlines the inherent incapacity of the Forms and their correspondent terms to name the particulars. The result is the rejection of participation as an explicative device capable of articulating unity and multiplicity.

Stilpo’s rejection of predication and of Plato’s Theory of Forms gives us an indirect view of the premises by which he carries out his refutations. What these testimonies reveal is Stilpo’s commitment to the radical unity of being, which entails the absolute lack of communication between the diverse entities. The point is that for something to be, it must be one and self-identical; it cannot be something other than what

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<sup>147</sup> “And once when Crates held out a fig to him when putting a question, he took the fig and ate it. Upon which the other exclaimed, ‘O Heracles, I have lost the fig’, and Stilpo remarked, ‘Not only that but your question as well, for which the fig was payment in advance’ (οὐ μόνον, ἔφη, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἐρώτημα, οὗ ἦν ἀρραβὼν ἢ ἰσχάς)” (Diog. Laert. II 108 =SSR II O 6, trans. Hicks). On this testimony, see Mársico (2012b, 23–24).

<sup>148</sup> This is also the view of Mársico (2012b, 21).

it actually is. It also cannot be combined with other entities or qualities through predication, since predication necessarily destroys its unity.

Stilpo is not concerned with how we can effectively know reality. But he does intend to refute intrinsically failed ways of doing so. And this refutation stems from one key premise: the radical unity of being and its essential contrast with the multiplicity inherent in language.

### 3.3. Synthesis of the Megarian position

After analyzing the main sources on the Megarians, we can now offer some general thoughts on the philosophical orientation of the Megarian circle.

Two deeply related structural elements are woven through the testimonies that we have seen. The first one is ontological: an ever-present theme of the Megarians concerns *the radical unity of being*, understood as *the necessary determination and self-sufficiency of all things that are*. This theme adopts different shapes in different Megarians: in Euclid, it seems to take the form of an ontological doctrine inherited at least in part from Parmenides; in the later Megarians it seems to constitute a crucial premise in the course of their refutations. In general, later Megarian thought seems to consider this unitary conception of being as a general starting point for philosophical reflection. The result of adopting this starting point is a series of paradoxes that establish a fundamental opposition between on the one hand the domain of experience, characterized by multiplicity and variation, and on the other hand the realm of pure philosophical insight, characterized by unity and invariability.

This perspective grounds the second structural element of Megarian thought: their position on language. The Megarians appear to believe that the contrast between the unity of being and the multiplicity of experience reveals itself primarily and paradigmatically in the domain of language. By definition, language involves multiplicity: there is multiplicity in the phenomena of homonymy, ambiguity, and in the structure of predication. Euclid underscored this multiplying nature of language in the early days of the Megarian circle by claiming that although the good *is one*, it is said *by many names*. This simple, basic insight is the motor behind the Megarian's obsession with dialectical refutation, to which all Megarians were dedicated. The Megarians realized that the opposition between being and language emerges in a series of linguistic phenomena, and that careful analysis of these phenomena resulted in seemingly unsolvable paradoxes. The

Megarians used these paradoxes to undermine all attempts to contradict their basic tenet, that is, to reject all attempts to bridge the gap between language and reality. Thus, the Megarians developed and perfected the exploitation of the semantic and syntactic ambiguities inherent in language to confound their epistemologically-optimistic contemporary opponents. And they did so by refuting their adversaries' positions by means of sardonic, mordant dialectical exchanges.

One could take this position as a precursor of skepticism, and there are certainly strong points of contact between the two views. One example is in the testimony of Seneca, who, after discussing Parmenides and Zeno, mentions "the doctrines of the Pyrrhonics, the Megarians, Eretrians and Academics, who introduced a new science: knowing nothing" (*Ep.* 88, 43–5). But the Megarians did not claim that true knowledge is impossible; they stayed one step short of such claims. They stood on the verge of the *aporia* and did not go beyond. The Megarians seem to leave it to others to try to extract any sort of positive result from the state of paralysis caused by their refutations, even if the positive result is the certainty that knowledge is impossible.

If we take these two elements, ontological and dialectical, into account, we find that there is among the various Megarian exponents a clear continuity that contradicts the deflationary views, so pervasive in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that denied all unity to the Megarian circle. The persistence of a well-defined set of core notions throughout the diverse phases of the Megarians circle seems to strengthen the impression that we are facing a relatively cohesive philosophical circle with a more or less well-defined philosophical program. This program revolves around the denunciation of their opponents' over-optimistic doctrines by way of a dialectical analysis of diverse *aporiai*. Of course, this view does not deny that there is a profound heterogeneity among the various exponents. It does, however, claim that they rely on a particular set of core notions that gives them unity and gives sense to an otherwise formless array of testimonies and sources.

In conclusion, our study appears to strengthen the impression that *there was* such a thing as a Megarian circle, which *did have* a predilection for eristic arguments and dialectical disputation, and that they *did adopt* several Eleatic premises in the course of their refutations and the composition of their arguments. The motivation for their approach to philosophy seems to have been mainly negative: the Megarians appear to wish to exploit, by way of dialectic, the inherent difficulties of their rivals' theoretical constructs. And the arguments of the Megarians were undoubtedly important and challenging enough to merit the attention of both Plato and Aristotle.

***Second section: the early configuration of Aristotle's theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια***

The purpose of this section is to analyze Aristotle's original conception of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. I will begin, in chapter 4, by analyzing two important Platonic precedents of Aristotle's theory: the definition of being as δύναμις in *Sophist* 247d8–e4 and the distinction between ἔχειν and χρῆσθαι in *Euthydemus* 275d–280d. Although the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction was clearly established by Aristotle, I claim that he did so on the basis of these Platonic discussions, which prefigured it in many important aspects. I will analyze Aristotle's appropriation of Plato's precedent elaborations in Chapter 5.

The contribution made by this section is important in two ways. Firstly, it contextualizes these original Platonic discussions within Plato's confrontation with the Megarians. In particular, Plato's discussion in the *Euthydemus* corresponds to an eristic argument of clear Megarian extraction. And, as we will see, this argument is closely related to the Megarian thesis of *Met.* Θ 3.

Secondly, our analysis of Aristotle's earlier works lays the foundations for our subsequent interpretation of his argument in book Θ of the *Metaphysics*. I will reject the standard interpretation of Aristotle's early thematization of the concept of ἐνέργεια, which claims that it is inextricably linked to the concept of motion (κίνησις). This will prove fundamental for a correct understanding of Aristotle's discussion of ἐνέργεια in *Met.* Θ 6 and Θ 8.

## CHAPTER 4

### Platonic precedents of the theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια and their relation to Megarianism

#### 4.1. The definition of being as δύναμις in *Sophist* 247d8–e4

It is widely known that, unlike ἐνέργεια, the term δύναμις is a common term in ancient Greek.<sup>149</sup> Its basic meaning is force, power or, more broadly, capacity. In his study of the term δύναμις in Plato's dialogues, Souilhé (1919, 190) traces this basic meaning to Homer. At pp. 22–23, he argues that the term gradually moved away from this physical notion toward more abstract applications. These include notions such as political power, the modal sense of possibility, and mathematical uses.<sup>150</sup>

The term acquires a more significant ontological dimension in Plato.<sup>151</sup> Plato is fundamental in the transition from the early physical sense of δύναμις toward Aristotle's conception of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια as one of the four senses of being. And there is one passage in particular that establishes a connection between δύναμις and the problem of being and which anticipates some aspects of Aristotle's later conception of δύναμις. This is the famous definition of being as δύναμις in the *Sophist*.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> There is a fair consensus among scholars that the terms ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια were coined by Aristotle. For a discussion of the etymology of these terms and of the relation between them, see section 7.5 *infra*. See also n. 227.

<sup>150</sup> For a more recent discussion of the different applications and of the evolution of the term δύναμις, see Lefebvre's exhaustive study (2018), which pays particular attention to the phrases κατὰ δύναμιν and εἰς δύναμιν as guiding threads to understand the plurality of meanings and applications of the term (cf. pp. 31–32).

<sup>151</sup> Plato's use of the term δύναμις is diverse and wide-ranging. Different aspects or senses of the term are explored in different dialogues. For reasons of space, I will focus on the use of δύναμις in the *Sophist*. For a detailed analysis of the other uses in Plato, see Souilhé (1919, ch. 2) and Lefebvre (2018, pt. 2).

<sup>152</sup> The passage receives less discussion in the literature than what one might wish. For example, Bluck (1975, 92) cites the definition in passing, without further comment. More attention is usually paid to the characterization of the two confronted parties of the Gigantomachia. For general comment on the passage and its context see Diès (1925, 286–290), Cornford (1935, 232–239), Ross (1951, 107–111), Taylor (1961, 42–53), Crombie (1963, 394–396; 419–421), Detel (1972, 74–77), Bluck (1975, 89–102), de Rijk (1986, 100–107), Movia (1991, 251–264), Cordero (1993, 246–252). The passage is analyzed in further detail by

At *Sophist* 247d8–e4, Plato states the following:

I say that something, of whatever kind, that possesses a δύναμις to by nature act upon anything else, or to be affected, no matter in what small degree, by the most insignificant thing, even if it is only once, is really (ὄντως εἶναι): for I pose that the mark to delimit the things that are is this: they are nothing other than δύναμις.<sup>153</sup>

The Stranger claims that one thing distinguishes what is from what is not: the possession of a δύναμις to act or to be acted upon. How should we translate δύναμις here? Initially, the terms ‘power’ or ‘capacity’ seem to fit well within the general sense of the passage: if something has the power or capacity to do something, then that thing *is*. On the contrary, if something does not possess this power or capacity, it simply *is not*.<sup>154</sup>

Several things should be noted here. First, the Stranger seems to distinguish the capacity for acting from the action itself. These two things should not be confused: something does not need to be necessarily acting in order to be: it simply must be capable of doing so *even to the smallest degree* (σμικρότατον), and *even if it is only once* (κἂν εἰ μόνον εἰς ἅπαξ). Although this capacity indeed must be exercised or actualized, it may be to a minimal degree and only once. One could suppose, then, that something could remain in a state of capacity almost always and still be. This means that its being does not depend on its acting, beyond the minimal requirement needed to grant that a capacity

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Migliori (2006, 59–63), Gavray (2006), Fronterotta (2007, 361–387 nn. 183–200; 2008), and Gonzalez (2011).

<sup>153</sup> λέγω δὴ τὸ καὶ ὅποιανοῦν τινα κεκτημένον δύναμιν εἶτ' εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν ἕτερον ὅτιοῦν πεφυκὸς εἶτ' εἰς τὸ παθεῖν καὶ σμικρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου, κἂν εἰ μόνον εἰς ἅπαξ, πᾶν τοῦτο ὄντως εἶναι: τίθεμαι γὰρ ὄρον ὀρίζειν τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις.

<sup>154</sup> Two other possible translations seem largely inadequate. The term ‘possibility’ does not capture the concrete aspect to which the Stranger is alluding. It is not in fact a matter of mere modal possibility, but the tangible capacity of causing a determinate effect in another thing, or of likewise being affected in a determinate manner by another thing. It would also be mistaken to translate δύναμις as ‘potentiality’, a term which is sometimes used to translate the Aristotelian concept of δύναμις understood as a modal state (in the sense of mode of being) in opposition to actuality (*i.e.*, ἐνέργεια). This latter translation not only supposes a particular interpretation of Aristotle’s theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, but also, extrapolates this theory to a context which is different in many respects.

does indeed exist.<sup>155</sup> If the capable thing never acted, then it could not be legitimately be said to be capable in the first place.

Secondly, we should note the extremely general terms in which the Stranger expresses himself: he speaks of a capacity of acting and to be acted upon. There is no explicit textual indication that this acting is physical in nature. This point is important, for some authors seem to believe that the Stranger is speaking here in physical terms.<sup>156</sup> We will see next why this interpretation is inadequate. But, for the moment, we must simply pause and acknowledge the broad nature of the Stranger's wording.

Thirdly, there is the problem of the extent of the definition (note the term ὄρον at 247e3). Here, two interpretations are possible: either the Stranger is offering here a fully-fledged definition of being,<sup>157</sup> or he is simply providing a mark of the real, a criterion to distinguish that which is from that which is not.<sup>158</sup>

In order to understand these three elements better, we must address their immediate context. The passage occurs in the midst of the so-called Gigantomachia, the battle between the Gods and the Giants. The battle serves as a starting point for the reflection on being, which the Stranger is undertaking after acknowledging in the famous

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<sup>155</sup> Contrary to the view of De Rijk (1986, 101), who claims that “the ‘being’ of a thing is simply the function that it performs”. This view collapses being into the mere action and suffering. As Fronterotta (2007, 372 n. 192) rightly claims, “being does not properly coincide with the processuality which derives from acting and suffering, but rather with the capacity of producing such processuality [...] the Stranger seems to understand here [...] the possession of a δύναμις in the ‘essential’ sense of a constitutive property inscribed in the very being of that which is, even coinciding with it” (*l’essere non coincide propriamente con la processualità derivante dall’agire e dal subire, ma piuttosto con la capacità di produrre tale processualità [...] lo Straniero sembra intendere [...] qui il possesso di una δύναμις nel senso “essenziale” di una proprietà costitutiva inscritta nell’essere stesso di ciò che è, anzi con esso coincidente*) (a similar point can be found in Pester 1971, 34, Gonzalez 2011, 69–70, and Lefebvre 2018, 312). Cf. also Migliori (2006, 114–116), who analyzes the association between the pair action-suffering and being in other Platonic texts.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Frede (1994, 181–182), Menn (1994, 74; 76 n. 5), and Beere (2008, 9–10). Frede and Menn connect this passage to *Met.* Θ 3, 1047a30–b1, where Aristotle speaks of κίνησις in physical terms (that is, in the technical sense of his definition of motion: ἐντελέχεια/ἐνέργεια of that which is capable as such). But this conception of motion is radically different from the ποιεῖν ἢ παθεῖν of Plato’s definition. This misguided parallel leads Menn to claim, wrongly, that “Plato assumed that all activity was motion” (76, n. 5). On this issue, see the rest of this section and section 7.5 below.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. De Rijk (1986, 101 n. 12), Movia (1991, 253), Fronterotta (2008), and Gonzalez (2011).

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Cornford (1935, 234 n. 1), Bluck (1975, 92–93), and Frede (1994, 181–182).

parricide of Parmenides the existence of some kind of non-being (241d). Two contrary positions are then presented and discussed: the extreme materialist position of the Giants, who claim that only that which is bodily or material is truly real (246a7–b3), and the extreme ‘spiritualist’ view of the Friends of the Forms (εἰδῶν φίλοι, 248a4), who believe in “certain intelligible and bodiless Forms” (νοητὰ ἄττα καὶ ἀσώματα εἶδη): that is, they claim that only the immaterial, eternal, and unchanging is real (246b6–c3). The criterion that distinguishes being for the Giants is that of resistance to contact (προσβολὴν καὶ ἐπαφὴν τινα, 246a10–b1), which establishes a distinction between bodily and non-bodily entities (the former are, while the latter are not). The Friends of the Forms, on the other hand, uphold an opposition between being and becoming: only what is not in a process of becoming, and is always itself the same, can be said to properly be. The Stranger then seeks to establish some middle ground between these two extreme positions. He begins by showing the Giants that there are in fact non-bodily or immaterial things which are (thus invalidating their ontological criterion).

The Stranger begins by asking the more civilized (ἡμερώτεροι, 246c10) Giants, represented by Theaetetus, if, given that they admit the existence of an animated body, they admit the existence of the soul and its moral qualities, such as its being just (δίκαια, 247a2) or prudent (φρόνιμα, 247a3).<sup>159</sup> The Stranger thus leads them to the admission of non-material entities such as the soul and its virtues. The reformed Giants will concede that the soul and its virtues are immaterial but they do not risk affirming that they are among those things which are not (247b7–c2) (this would be required by their materialist ontological criterion). So they seem to agree with the Stranger, at least in part. But the unreformed Giants of “the true earth-born breed” (247c4–5) would insist on their position, according to which “everything which they cannot fill their hands with, all this is just nothing at all” (πᾶν ὃ μὴ δυνατοὶ ταῖς χερσὶ συμπιέζειν εἰσὶν, ὡς ἄρα τοῦτο οὐδὲν τὸ παράπαν ἐστίν, 247c5–7).

In order to refute them, the Stranger needs to make them accept that “even one of the things among that which is, even if of little importance, is incorporeal” (τι καὶ μικρὸν ἐθέλουσι τῶν ὄντων συγχωρεῖν ἀσώματον, 247c9–d1). It is here that the Stranger introduces the definition intended to capture the connatural element (συμφυές, 247d3) of

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<sup>159</sup> The Stranger makes a distinction in 246d–e between two sorts of materialists: a first “civilized” set, who are rendered better by the Stranger and Theaetetus, and a second uncivilized group, who are unable to answer the Stranger’s questions properly. It is to the first group that the Strangers directs himself.

that which is immaterial or bodiless and that which is immaterial or bodily. That which confers being to both kinds of things is precisely their capacity of acting or of being acted upon.

The Stranger's strategy is evident: the soul is certainly capable of acting or of being acted upon, for instance, in knowledge, desiring, willing, etc. But neither the soul nor its actions are material or bodily. The Giants are forced to accept this or do away with the soul and its virtues. In other words, they are forced to admit that there is, in their own terminology, a "contact" between non-bodily entities, irreducible to sensible perception, which obliterates their materialistic criterion. Having reduced their opponents to this position, the Stranger goes on to address the Friends of the Forms (248a4–5).

This time the definition serves not to admit immaterial things into being—this is gladly assumed by the Friends of the Forms—but to admit some sort of *change* into the realm of being. In effect, the Friends of the Forms establish a stark contrast between two separate (χωρίς, 248a7) domains: the first consists of immaterial and unchanging Forms, and the second is the domain of becoming and of bodily beings. The latter domain is characterized by motion, and the Friends of the Forms exclude it from true being. Given that the Stranger wants to preserve the being of the latter domain, he uses the same definition of being offered to the Giants in order to force the Friends of the Forms to admit that the soul, an immaterial entity, is *active* in knowing, desiring, etc. That is, that *some sort* of becoming must be admitted within being.

The Friends of the Forms grant that a particular kind of communication or communion (κοινωνεῖν, 247a10–13) which corresponds to each domain: bodily beings are accessed through bodily perception (σώματι αἰσθήσεως, 248a10), while the communication with the Forms is carried out by the soul through reasoning (λογισμοῦ, 248a11). Whereas the former kind of 'knowing' pertains to the realm of becoming, which is not truly real for the Friends of the Forms, the latter pertains to the realm of true being (τὴν ὄντως οὐσίαν, 248a11), of eternal and immaterial Forms. Now the Stranger asks: are not both these kinds of contact a kind of suffering or acting (πάθημα ἢ ποίημα) which comes to be (γιννόμενον) in the reciprocal encounter of two different things (248b5–6)? That is, are they not subsumable under the definition of being as δύναμις offered earlier?

The Friends of the Forms reject this possibility. They deny that real things (that is, the Forms) can act or be acted upon, but they still grant that acting and being acted upon can occur in the realm of becoming (248c7–9). So, although they seem to accept the communion between the soul and the forms (248d3), they deny that this contact between

them could be characterized as an action or as being acted upon (248d7–8). Indeed, if this were so, it would mean that the Forms themselves, in being known, would be in some kind of motion (κίνησις, 248e4), since they would be affected by the action of something different (248d10–e5).<sup>160</sup>

The discussion reaches an impasse: the Friends of the Forms admit that the Forms can be known, but they do not admit that this knowing could be characterized broadly as an action or suffering. The Stranger appears then to reduce his opponents to a dilemma: either they accept that the soul affects the Forms when knowing (and thus they admit of some kind of motion in the midst of being), or they have to admit that there is no knowledge of the Forms, given that they are essentially unchanging. This latter alternative seems unacceptable to the Stranger, who explodes:

But then, by Zeus, are we really to be so easily convinced that motion (κίνησις), life, soul, prudence, have no place in that which is truly real (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν), that it has neither life nor thought (μηδὲ ζῆν αὐτὸ μηδὲ φρονεῖν), but stands, venerable and holy, devoid of intelligence (νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον) and motionless (ἀκίνητον)? (248e7–249a2).

For both the Stranger and Theaetetus, this is a nefarious result (249a3). On the contrary, the Stranger seems to be decidedly in favor of admitting some sort of motion in being, which, in the case of the Forms, corresponds to *a specific kind of motion*, which is entirely immaterial and different from the kind of motion which occurs in sensation, that is, in the domain of bodily being.<sup>161</sup> This definition of being thus also serves the purpose of refuting also the extreme position of the Friends of the Forms:<sup>162</sup> being is not a plurality of

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<sup>160</sup> For an overview of the different interpretations of this difficult passage cf. Fronterotta (2007, 378 n. 196). On Plato's belief that knowing is a special kind of motion, cf. *Timaeus*, 37a–c.

<sup>161</sup> It has been claimed that Plato is speaking here of motion in metaphorical (Diès 1909, 49, 60, Souilhé 1919, 154–155) or strictly logical terms (cf. for instance Moravcsik 1962, 37, 40, Mcpheran 1986, 246). But if we claim that the motion involved in knowing is a mere metaphor, then we are reducing all action and suffering to physical change, which is exactly the position of the Friends of the Forms. Moreover, Mcpheran's interpretation of knowing as a predicational and accidental sort of motion presupposes a distinction (of evident Aristotelian extraction) between essential and accidental properties; this distinction is nowhere to be found in the text (cf. Gonzalez 2011, 85–86). On Mcpheran's successive interpretation of the change of the Forms as a so-called "Cambridge change", cf. Gonzalez (2011, 79 n. 23).

<sup>162</sup> One could claim that the Friends of the Forms are not refuted, strictly speaking. They could still remain fixed in their position and deny that the activity of knowing could be characterized as a kind of action or

absolutely unchanging and eternal Forms, for they too are affected when being known by the soul.<sup>163</sup> What is common to all being (material or immaterial) is this: the capacity (δύναμις) to act upon, or be affected by, anything else.<sup>164</sup> This action or affection can be a kind of physical motion, as in the case of bodily sensation, but it can also be another sort of motion, an ‘intelligible’ motion, as in the case of the soul and its activities.

We can thus see clearly in the refutation of the Friends of the Forms that by ποιεῖν and παθεῖν the Stranger intends something that goes beyond (although it comprises) physical motion. In fact, it seems that in the course of the refutation of both opponents he is referring primarily to *a special sort of immaterial activity*, an activity that cannot be considered motion, strictly speaking. This is a crucial point for us, for it shows that Plato’s distinction between δύναμις on the one hand and ποιεῖν and παθεῖν on the other should not be interpreted in exclusively kinetic terms.<sup>165</sup> In other words, it shows that the concept

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suffering. But then, how do they conceive knowledge? At this point, they remain silent. We do not know what a possible answer by the Friends of the Forms could be, but given that there is no such answer in the dialogue, we could state that they are at least refuted within this exchange. The dialogue gives the impression that they have no means of answering the question posed by the Stranger.

<sup>163</sup> Is this “motion” of the Forms connected with the later passage on the reciprocal communication of the supreme genres of being? The issue is controversial. Fronterotta, (2007 91–92; 2008, 202–207), Gavray (2006, 47) and Gonzalez (2011, 92) seem to believe so. This view is rejected by Diès (1909, 116), Vlastos (1973), Movia (1991, 321 n. 20), Brown (1998), Politis (2006), and Brisson (2008). The issue of course goes beyond the scope of this section: the reader can turn to the above cited works for a full discussion on the matter.

<sup>164</sup> I thus interpret τὸ παντελῶς ὄν (248e8–249a1) not in extensional terms (as referring to the question: “which are the beings that can be said to be?”) but in intensional terms (that is, “what makes a being to be?”). Hence my translation “truly real” which could also be “the really real”, in contrast to the extensional reading “that entirety of that which is” (which would introduce an opposition between those things that properly are, *i.e.*, the Forms, and the things which are not, *i.e.*, the sensible things). A defense of the first translation can be found in Movia (1991, 253), Politis (2006, 162–163), Gerson (2006, 294–295) and Gonzalez (2011, 88–89). The second translation has been defended by Cornford (1935, 245), Moravcsik (1962, 31; 35–41), Owen (1966, 336–340), Cordero (1993, 250 n. 249), Brown (1998, 201ff.), Gavray (2006, 44), Fronterotta (2007, 379 n. 197) and Brisson (2008, 182).

<sup>165</sup> For a similar view, see Bolton (1975, 93–95), Gerson (2006, 297–298) and Gonzalez (2011, 83). The point is well put by Fronterotta (2007, 384 n. 200): “taking into account the ontological difference between sensible and intelligible, in the realm of the intelligible κίνησις does not consist in a concrete repositioning or in a real material change, nor less still in an effective alteration, but rather, as the Stranger has argued up to this point, in the condition of passivity of that which suffers an action by another, for instance, that of being known by an intellect though the act of thinking (...) and the rest of the argument will have to show

of δύναμις that appears in this passage should not be immediately assimilated to the original motion sense of δύναμις, which Aristotle will later define as a principle of change in another or in oneself *qua* other (cf. *Met.* Δ 12; Θ 1). The distinction between capacity and action is here—as it is in the *Euthydemus* and as it will be in Aristotle’s early works—a distinction between a capacity and its corresponding activity, which concerns especially the soul’s cognitive activities.<sup>166</sup>

The Stranger’s refutation of the Gods and the Giants confirms his definition of being as δύναμις. This concept of δύναμις is centrally that of capacity, and should not be confined to physical change. Δύναμις thus appears essentially connected to being, and it is this connection that allows Plato to go beyond the somewhat ‘primitive’ ontological perspectives of both extreme materialists and extreme idealists. Being is not to be identified with a specific item of that which is, but with *what makes things be in the first place*; and this is their δύναμις.

Does the Stranger introduce a proper definition of being in this passage, or is he simply using the definition as a provisional device in the course of his refutation of both the Giants and the Friends of the Forms? An answer to this question is not within the scope of this work.<sup>167</sup> However, it is important to note that this passage distinguishes the

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if this peculiar kind of ‘intelligible’ motion of the Forms plays a role in the ontology of the *Sophist*” (*tenendo conto della differenza ontologica fra il sensibile e l’intelligibile, sul piano intellegibile la κίνησις non consiste in un concreto spostamento o in un reale mutamento materiale né tantomeno in un’effettiva alterazione, ma soltanto come lo straniero ha fin qui precisato, nella condizione di passività di chi subisce un’azione da parte di altro, come per esempio quella dell’essere conosciuto da un intelletto tramite l’atto del pensiero (...), e sarà soltanto il seguito dell’esame a mostrare se questa forma assai peculiare di movimento “intelligibile” delle idee giochi oppure no un ruolo nell’ontologia del Sofista*).

<sup>166</sup> Lefebvre (2018, 324–325) believes that Aristotle’s early thematization of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast is primarily a “physical characterization” which applies to the “sub-lunar world”, and thus sees it as distant from Plato’s conception of δύναμις in the *Sophist*. But I will contend that this interpretation of the original Aristotelian conception of δύναμις is misguided; the physical notion of δύναμις is certainly the most frequent and commonly accepted notion (what Aristotle calls the κύριος sense of δύναμις in *Met.* Θ 1, 1045b36), but it is not Aristotle’s initial conception. In fact, the early appearances of this conceptual pair in Aristotle are much closer to Plato’s discussion in the *Sophist* than is commonly held. On this matter see chapter 5 below.

<sup>167</sup> The latter alternative points to the Stranger’s immediately following appraisal of the definition, when he appears to state that it may have a provisional character (247e5–248a2). This view has been defended by Diès (1909, 29ff.), Souilhé, (1919, 155), Taylor, (1961, 48–49), Crombie (1963, 395–396), Guthrie (1978, 140), Malcolm, (1983, 115–127), Movia (1991, 254), Lefebvre (2018, 320). In contrast, the first

distinction between an unexercised capacity and its corresponding action. This distinction is thematized from another point of view in the *Euthydemus* and will reappear in Aristotle's *Protrepticus*. But before turning to these texts, we must explore a question that may help us contextualize, and thus further understand, Plato's discussion in the *Sophist*. The question is: are the Friends of the Forms an allusion to the doctrines of the Megarians?

#### 4.1.1. Who are the "Friends of the Forms"?

The identity or historical affiliation of the Giants and the Gods has been much discussed in the literature. Let us leave aside the issue of the identity of the Giants and focus instead on the Friends of the Forms, who are more relevant for our purposes.<sup>168</sup>

When reading Plato's *Gigantomachia* in the *Sophist*, one immediately notices that the εἰδῶν φίλοι are very similar to Plato in some respects. They are committed to the existence of intelligible and unchanging Forms (246b7–8), they introduce a strict opposition, or better, separation (χωρισμός, cf. 248a7) between becoming and true being, *i.e.*, the Forms, and they assign sensible perception to the domain of becoming and scientific knowledge to the domain of being (248a10–13, recall *Phaedo* 79a, and *Republic* 544a). This apparent similarity to some orthodox claims of Plato's middle-period Theory of the Forms has prompted scholars to interpret this passage as a revision by Plato of some of his earlier beliefs.<sup>169</sup> As this is the consensus view, let us analyze the difficulties it entails, before addressing other possible identifications of the Friends of the Forms.

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alternative is defended by Lutoslawski (1897, 423), Cordero (1993, 47 n. 58), Gavray (2006, 47), Fronterotta (2007, 370 n. 192), and by Gonzalez (2011).

This is not the place to address this problem in detail. But we could note that the definition is neither challenged nor withdrawn afterwards, and that it is again confirmed in the conclusion of the discussion with the Friends of the Forms (249c10–d4). There is a parallel with the definition in *Phaedrus* 270c1–2, c10–d7, and it should be noted that Plato had already criticized the rigid opposition between forms and sensible particulars in the *Phaedo*, where once more the soul appears as a third instance which cannot be placed in either of the two alternatives (on which see pp. 110–111 below).

<sup>168</sup> On the identity of the Giants, cf. Diès (1925, 291–292 and n. 1), where the main lines of interpretation are presented.

<sup>169</sup> This reading is adopted by Cornford (1935, 242–248), Ross (1951, 107), Bluck (1975, 94), de Rijk (1986, 102), Cordero (1993, 248 n. 242), Fronterotta (2007, 373–375 n. 193).

Two objections could be made to this reading. The first was proposed by Taylor 1961, 44, who claimed that identifying the Friends of the Forms with Plato makes no dramatic sense. The Stranger claims at 248b6–8 that the Friends of the Forms are familiar to himself, but that their views will probably be strange to Theaetetus. But Theaetetus was a particularly distinguished member of the Academy. How can Plato be referring to his earlier self, or to some alternative Academic version of the Theory of the Forms, and claim that Theaetetus is unfamiliar with this view? If one replies that the dialogue is fictionally set in the year 400, before the Academy had come into existence, the objection still stands, for if there is any sort of allusion to Academic debates or Academic theories in the passage, then Theaetetus must be aware of it.

But a second objection was already hinted at by Schleiermacher (1824, 140) and Zeller (1859<sup>2</sup>, 180–181 n. 2), posited once more by Taylor (1961, 44–45) and picked up recently by Gonzalez (2011, 78–79). It concerns the content of the passage: is the representation of the Theory of the Forms which emerges from the *Sophist*'s passage truly analogous to Plato's middle-period version of this theory? Some of the crucial features of the doctrine of the Friends of the Forms *were already criticized by Plato* in dialogues such as the *Phaedo*.<sup>170</sup> There are two points to note here: first, the contrast between the two modes of knowing which pertain to each domain, as presented by the Friends of the Forms, is much starker than the one proposed by Plato in dialogues such as *Phaedo* and *Republic*. As Taylor puts it, “in both dialogues the world of bodily ‘becoming’ at any rate ‘partakes’ of the ‘intelligible real forms’, and sensation has the genuinely positive cognitive function of provoking reflection, and so leading to knowledge” (Taylor 1961, 44). But even more importantly, Plato confronts the rigid ontological dichotomy of the

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<sup>170</sup> This runs counter to the interpretations of Cornford (1935, 242): “The plain fact is that every feature of their [*sc.* the Friends of the Forms] doctrine (...) can be illustrated from Plato's own earlier works”; Ross (1951, 107): “the ‘Friends of Forms’ are Plato's earlier self and those who had accepted his earlier view”; Bluck (1975, 94): “It seems clear, though the question has been much debated, that the idealists' theory represents Plato's own theory of Forms, as propounded in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, which he now wishes to modify”; de Rijk (1986, 102): “modern scholarship *has made it certain* that the Idealist theory presented here represents the classic shape of Plato's theory of Forms as it is found in the earlier (pre-critical) dialogues, most clearly in *Phaedo* and *Republic*” (emphasis mine); Gardella (2014, 6): “The description of the doctrine of the *eidôn phíloi* notably resembles the presentation of his own [*sc.* Plato's] theory in *Phaedo* and *Republic* (*la descripción de la doctrina de los eidôn phíloi se asemeja notablemente a la presentación de su propia teoría en Fedón y República*)”.

Friends of the Forms already in the *Phaedo*. Gonzalez (2011, 78) notes that Socrates does establish a stark contrast between two kinds of being in the so-called ‘affinity’ argument (cf. in particular 79a6: δύο εἶδη τῶν ὄντων), one invisible and subject to change, the other visible and unchanging. But this distinction is subsequently subjected to harsh and decisive criticism by Simias and Cebes, precisely because this stark opposition *cannot explain the being of the soul*. They both go on to claim that although the soul is akin to the Forms, it is not identical with them, so they can claim that while the soul is invisible, it still can be thought of as perishable (85e–86d; 86e–88b). In order to preserve the immortality of the soul, Socrates is thus constrained to present a new argument, which presents a third instance, neither Form nor sensible, namely the soul (91e–95a; 103e, 105c–106b). As Gonzalez (2011, 78–79) puts it: “the soul emerges as something distinct from the world of genesis in being immortal and also distinct from the world of Forms in being itself alive and actively causing life in other things”. This view does not oppose, but rather *agrees* with, the position of the Stranger in the *Sophist*’s passage in question.<sup>171</sup> We can thus ask: how can Plato engage in self-criticism when the theory being discussed is not to be found in Plato’s own dialogues?

If the Friends of the Forms are not Plato’s earlier self, we must look for other candidates behind Plato’s allusion. That the philosophers alluded to by Plato must be existent opponents seems clear from the precise and minute description of their position offered in the passage. As Muller (1988, 95) argues, this speaks against a purely fictional creation. Moreover, some philosophical schools or traditions did defend claims similar to those in the passage. Initially, one could think of two possibilities. Either the Friends of the Forms stand for some 5<sup>th</sup> century philosophical school (as per the fictional chronological setting of the dialogue) or for some contemporaries of Plato. The first alternative has been defended by Burnet (1914, 91, 280) and Taylor (1926, 386) and can be traced back to Procl. *in Prm.* 729, ed. Cousin. According to this view, the Friends of the Forms are Pythagoreans, who believed in the ideal reality of numbers. But against this interpretation, we can note that it would be wrong to assign to the Pythagoreans a theory

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<sup>171</sup> Gonzalez (2011, 79) also points to the *Phaedrus*, where the soul once more appears as ungenerated and immortal, although in perpetual motion as a self-mover (245c–246a). It also describes divinity as “feeding by reason and knowledge” (διάνοια νῶ τε καὶ ἐπιστήμη ἀκηράτω τρεφομένη, 247d1–2), “beholding being” (ἰδοῦσα τὸ ὄν, 247d3) and “contemplating truth” (θεωροῦσα τᾶληθῆ 247d4), that is, as an essentially *active* being. Let us recall that the Stranger’s main objection to the position of the Friends of the Forms was that it excluded life and thought from being (248e7–249a2).

of reality such as the one implied in the theory presented in the passage, which involves the exclusion of change and sensible reality from being. Plato appears to be using εἶδος in a somewhat technical sense, and not as a broad term capable of capturing the Pythagorean theory of numbers. Moreover, it is unclear what would be the contours of such a “Pythagorean school”. As Ross (1951, 107) puts it, “one must hesitate before accepting the view that there was in Italy a school of the type that Taylor presupposes, a school that is not mentioned in any ancient writer other than Proclus”.<sup>172</sup>

One could also relate the εἰδῶν φίλοι to the Eleatics of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (as hinted by Dies 1923, 293–297 and, partially, by Cornford 1935, 243). But such an allusion would still be too general and abstract. The idea of an Eleatic school is questionable.<sup>173</sup> And although one could indeed relate the Eleatic tradition to some essential aspects of the Theory of the Forms, it would be wrong to assign such a theory to Parmenides or some associate of his, particularly the idea that they postulated a plurality of εἶδη. The same objections made to the Pythagorean reading also apply to the Eleatic reading.

We thus arrive at the second possibility: the Friends of the Forms stand, at least partially, for some contemporaries of Plato. The alternatives are the following: either Plato is referring to some variation of his Theory of the Forms inside the Academy<sup>174</sup> or some other philosophical group external to, though in contact with, the Academy. The first alternative is vulnerable to the arguments presented when analyzing the possibility that Plato is criticizing his earlier self: Theaetetus should be aware of the existence of such a theory, given that he himself was a member of the Academy. But the Stranger claims that he is unfamiliar with such a doctrine (248b6–8). So we come down to the last possibility, originally proposed by Schleiermacher and resolutely defended by Zeller: that the Friends of the Forms are an allusion to the Megarians.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> On the difficult issue of the existence of such a thing as a Pythagorean school, cf. Stavru (2011). See p. 127 n. 2, which presents a rich bibliography on the matter.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. *supra*, ch. 3, pp. 50–53.

<sup>174</sup> This position was defended by Ritter (1923 II, 131–134) among others, and, more recently, by Isnardi Parente (1999, 74–75).

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Schleiermacher (1824, 140–141), followed by Henne (1843, 84–92) and Zeller (1859<sup>2</sup>, 179–180, in particular 180 n. 2). More recently, this view has been defended by Muller (1985, 106, 182; 1988, 93–100) and by Mársico (2013, 31–32, 154 n. 90, 174 n. 111).

This interpretation has many advantages. First, it accords with Plato's usual strategy of concealing his contemporary adversaries.<sup>176</sup> The opposition of the contemporary Socratics was particularly concerning for Plato, given that they traced their lineage back to Socrates as much as he did. Plato does not mention Antisthenes by name, when it is clear that he is referring to him.<sup>177</sup> An allusion to the Megarians in the passage of the *Sophist* in question would fall within this strategic device, which had the purpose of delegitimizing the theoretical perspectives of his fellow Socratics. This seems to be a better explanation than recourse to fictional or indeterminate opponents, as in the case of other interpretations. Diès (1923, 295) can claim that Plato is referring to some fictional Eleatics, but why think that Plato is fabricating an adversary when he had actual contemporary opponents who held views such as the one which he is portraying?

This leads us to the second advantage of the Megarian reading. Correctly interpreted, the philosophy of the Megarians seems to coincide with Plato's portrayal of the Friends of the Forms. The affinities between them are numerous: both postulate a strict separation between the domain of being and the domain of becoming;<sup>178</sup> both believe in the determinate and self-identical character of that which is;<sup>179</sup> both reject sensation as a means of knowledge.<sup>180</sup> Both appear to reject any sort of relation between Forms and particulars, as in the case of Polyxenus and Stilpo's rejection of participation (μέθεξις). Furthermore, there is an allusion to the typical methodological procedure of the Megarians in 246b9–c2. After claiming that the Friends of the Forms uphold "intelligible and bodiless Forms" (νοητὰ ἄττα καὶ ἀσώματα εἶδη, 246b7–8), the Stranger states that they oppose the materialist conception of the Giants by "breaking the bodies, that is, that which they call truth, in little pieces in their reasonings" (σώματα καὶ τὴν λεγομένην ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἀλήθειαν κατὰ μικρὰ διαθραύοντες ἐν τοῖς λόγοις). This seems to be a reference to the Megarians' dialectical methodology, which relied on establishing radically univocal references to terms. It suffices to recall the Sorites argument by Eubulides or

<sup>176</sup> On this strategy, cf. Mársico (2010, 26–33).

<sup>177</sup> See for example *Theaetetus* 201c. Another passage usually related to Antisthenes is *Sophist* 251b–c, on which see n. 144 above.

<sup>178</sup> See the discussion on Polyxenus and Stilpo in sections 3.1.3 and 3.2.2 respectively.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Diog. Laert. II 106, 5–15 =SSR II A 30; Lact. *Divin. inst.* III 12, 9 =SSR II A 31; Simplicius (*in Phys.* 120, 12–17, ed. Diels =SSR II O 30). See also the discussion of Bryson, Polyxenus and Diodorus on the issue of ambiguity in sections 3.1.2, 3.1.3 and 3.2.1.1 respectively.

<sup>180</sup> Aristoc. *Perì philosophías*, fr. 2 [apud Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XIV 17, 1, 756b–c] =SSR II O 26.

Stilpo's opposition to the combination of terms in predication. Stilpo's argument "breaks into little pieces" that which appears as a composite object (with several attributes) in common experience.<sup>181</sup>

Many scholars have criticized this view, but, in my judgement, on insufficient grounds. In fact, most of the objections to this identification stem from a partial or mistaken reconstruction of the philosophy of the Megarians. For example, one recurrent objection is that the pluralist ontology of the Friends of the Forms contradicts the numerical monism of the Megarians.<sup>182</sup> But we have already seen why it would be mistaken to assume that the Megarians were numerical monists (cf. section 2.2.1, *supra*). Not a single testimony commits the Megarians to the thesis that there is only one being. So there would be no contradiction between their ontological perspective and the one espoused by the Friends of the Forms.

A second objection concerns the alleged lack of evidence that the Megarians adopted some kind of theory of Forms.<sup>183</sup> In this respect, Gardella (2015, 39) points to Diogenes Laertius's testimony, where it is said that Stilpo denied the Forms (ἀνῆρει καὶ εἶδη, II 119 = SSR II O 27).<sup>184</sup> But if we read this statement in the wider context of Stilpo's

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<sup>181</sup> Some scholars have seen a resemblance between this passage of the *Sophist* and Diodorus Cronus's theory of the indivisibles (e.g., Mársico 2013, 31–32). Though this is plausible, I am inclined to think that the passage constitutes a more general reference to the Megarians' ontological and linguistic conceptions. Indeed, the dialectical method of the Megarians relied on the premise of the self-identical, determined, and separate character of being. In this context, it is impossible to establish any relation between diverse beings and between the terms which denote them.

<sup>182</sup> Mallet (1845, XXXIII–LVIII), Gillespie (1911), Taylor (1961, 43–44) and Montoneri (1984, 46–47). For criticism of this view, cf. Muller (1988, 94).

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Ross (1954, 106): "we know very little about the Megarian school, and we have no independent knowledge of their having held such views as are here ascribed to the Friends of Forms"; Montoneri (1984, 46 n. 21): "This hypothesis (*sc.* the Megarian interpretation) (...) has been successively abandoned because of the fundamental objection that no other ancient source gives testimony that the Megarians had their own 'Theory of the Forms', similar to the one which is presupposed in the critique carried out by Plato in the *Sophist*" (*Questa ipotesi (...) è stata successivamente abbandonata per la fondamentale obiezione che nessun'altra fonte antica ci testimonia che i Megarici possedessero una propria «dottrina delle Idee» come quella appunto che viene presupposta dalla critica che Platone ne fa nel Sofista*).

<sup>184</sup> "On the other hand, none of the testimonies assigned to the Megarian group expressly attributes to them a Theory of Forms. On the contrary, the only reference to the Forms is found in the testimony of Diogenes Laertius on Stilpo, where it is expressly said that he rejected them (*anéirei kai eide* II.119, SSR II.O.27, FS 303)" (*Por otra parte, ninguno de los testimonios adscriptos al grupo megárico les atribuye expresamente*

critique of attribution and Plato's conception of the Forms, we note that it shows precisely the opposite of Gardella's view. That is, it demonstrates that Stilpo's arguments *suppose* the existence of Forms. Immediately after the claim that he rejected Forms, Diogenes represents Stilpo as admitting the reality of universal terms, but rejecting their application to sensible particulars.<sup>185</sup> In fact, Stilpo is attacking Plato's version of the Theory of the Forms, in particular one of its central components, that is, the doctrine of participation.<sup>186</sup> Therefore I suggest, along with Muller (1988, 100), that Diogenes's claim that Stilpo "denied the Forms" (ἀνήρει εἶδη) should be read as a denial of *Plato's conception of the Forms*, and not of Forms themselves. If this were not the case, how could Stilpo uphold the reality of universals? We should also recall that Stilpo rejected all sorts of combinations between terms through his denial of predication (cf. *Adv. Col.* 23 =SSR II O 29; see our discussion of this passage in 3.2.2). The position resulting from these passages is very close to that of the Friends of the Forms: a commitment to the existence of a realm of separate, self-standing, and intelligible essences.

Further confirmation of this view is found in Polyxenus's Third Man argument. As Muller (1985, 181–182) notes, his version of the Third Man argument differs from the traditional one in that it does not imply an infinite regress. In fact, Polyxenus does not admit any sort of relation between the domain of Forms and the domain of becoming, and so rejects participation which, on the contrary, is assumed in the traditional version of the argument (it relies on the similarity between particulars and Forms). The traditional version criticizes the separate character of Forms. But Polyxenus is perfectly content with the separateness of Forms; he criticizes instead the *connection* between Forms and particulars. That is why, in his argument, a third man is needed to establish a connection between essentially detached domains. This is perfectly consistent with the position of the Friends of the Forms. Polyxenus admits the existence, the reality of Forms, but opposes the *communion* between Forms and particulars. He postulates Forms as an

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*una teoría de las Formas. Por el contrario, la única referencia a las Ideas se halla en el testimonio de Diógenes Laercio sobre Estilpón, donde se dice expresamente que éste las rechazaba (anéirei kai eíde II.119, SSR II.O.27, FS 303)).*

<sup>185</sup> "Again, 'vegetable' is not what is shown to me (τὸ λάχανον οὐκ ἔστι τὸ δεινκόμενον), for vegetable existed ten thousand years ago. Therefore, this is not vegetable (λάχανον μὲν γὰρ ἦν πρὸ μυρίων ἐτῶν· οὐκ ἄρα ἔστι τοῦτο λάχανον)", Diog. Laert. II 119 =SSR II O 27; cf. the analysis of this passage in section 3.2.2 above.

<sup>186</sup> I am here in agreement with Mársico (2013, 33–34).

essentially separate realm, opposed to the realm of becoming, of particulars, which is characterized by plurality and ambiguity.

We thus see that the testimonies of Stilpo and Polyxenus seem to support the view that the Megarians could have postulated Forms. This is consistent with Euclid's original ontological perspective, particularly with his commitment to the unity of being.

Are the Friends of the Forms, then, Megarians? We have offered several positive arguments in favor of this identification. We have also found that the objections to it are grounded on a fundamentally misguided conception of the Megarians' philosophy. But, of course, I acknowledge the main limitation of this reading: there is no *explicit* mention of the Megarians in the Platonic passage. This could be partly explained by Plato's strategy of concealing his Socratic opponents, as argued above, but the lack of a direct mention makes our conclusion only plausible.

The Friends of the Forms certainly could represent different philosophical lines that agreed on the immutable and intelligible character of being. But it would be wrong to exclude the Megarians from this tradition of thought. Moreover, there are strong elements that suggest that the Megarians are those who most resemble Plato's portrayal. All this seems to support our reading: Plato had the Megarians in mind when presenting the Friends of the Forms in the Gigantomachia of the *Sophist*.

#### **4.1.2. Plato's definition of being as δύναμις and Aristotle's conception of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια**

Plato's definition of being as δύναμις is important for several reasons. In the first place, it represents a crucial step in the transition from the basic and commonly used application of δύναμις as a kind of physical power toward a more abstract application. Plato is the first one to use the concept of δύναμις in an ontological context. And it serves the purpose of *defining being*. This definition may or may not be provisional; this problem goes beyond the scope of this work. But it is still significant, for in its context it manages to capture the whole range of being, from the bodily entities posited by the Giants, to the Forms of the Gods, to the soul, its virtues, and its proper activities. This prefigures in some important ways Aristotle's own concept of δύναμις, which will also, centrally, be that of capacity, and is also applied to the whole of being: δύναμις is a basic notion in Aristotle's ontology capable of being applied to all being.

Secondly, it is interesting to note that Plato introduces not only the concept of δύναμις but also its counterpart, *i.e.*, its correlative *activity*. Plato does not and cannot speak of ἐνέργεια, for the concept rightly belongs to Aristotle. But Plato's conception of action (ποιεῖν) and affection (παθεῖν) has important parallels with Aristotle's ἐνέργεια. We will see that in the *Protrepticus* Aristotle uses the expression ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν to refer to the phenomenon of the exercise of a capacity. He also refers to this phenomenon with his novel term ἐνέργεια in the *Protrepticus*. Indeed, Aristotle's initial conception of ἐνέργεια is that of acting or being acted upon, much as how Plato presents these concepts. Moreover, both Plato and Aristotle especially emphasize a specific kind of ποιεῖν ἢ παθεῖν: the cognitive activities of the soul. The examples of ἐνέργεια in the *Protrepticus* are systematically those of cognitive activities, and we saw that the same was the case in the course of Plato's refutation of the Giants and the Gods.

But we should note here an important difference between both philosophers regarding the concept of δύναμις. Plato defines being in terms of δύναμις and thus prioritizes the capacity to act over the action itself. But Aristotle will reject this claim and hold that the act is prior and that the capacity is subordinated to it. For Aristotle, a capacity is *for* its corresponding activity: we have the capacity of sight for seeing, not the other way around. In contrast to Plato, Aristotle believes that being is characterized primarily by its realized capacities, and not by its non-enacted capacities. This is a particularly important difference that we will analyze further: it has important consequences for Aristotle's conception of the prime being, that is, the Unmoved Mover.

Finally, let us again stress the importance of the context in which Plato's definition of being as δύναμις emerges. Plato introduces this concept when rejecting two contrary ontological positions that establish a stark contrast between irreconcilable domains. The most significant of these positions is that of the Friends of the Forms, who, as we argued, were most plausibly Megarians. This means that Plato's use of the concept of δύναμις occurs in the context of what is likely an anti-Megarian polemic. The concept of δύναμις, with its corresponding action or suffering, is crucial for overcoming the extreme essentialist position of the Megarians and the several *aporiai* that follow this position, that we have analyzed in chapter 4 in particular. Both δύναμις and action introduce a third category that disrupts the rigid dichotomy of the Megarians; it opens the space for a mode of being that is active without necessarily being subject to generation or corruption. That is, it does not pertain to the ever-changing domain of becoming. This third instance will also be present in Aristotle, as we will see.

However, Plato's anti-Megarian polemic is not only confined to the *Sophist* passage that we have examined. Another important passage, this time in the *Euthydemus*, also constitutes an important precedent to Aristotle's doctrine of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. And, as is likely in the case of *Sophist* 246–248, it also involves a dispute with the Megarians.

#### 4.2. Ἔχειν and χρῆσθαι in the *Euthydemus*

The passage we will discuss now is vital to our argument in this thesis. At *Euthydemus* 275–280, Socrates establishes a distinction that prefigures Aristotle's early thematization of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια conceptual pair. Two points are relevant for our purposes: the specific character of the distinction and the context in which it emerges. The distinction is proposed as a direct result of Socrates's confrontation with the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, a pair of “new Sophists” (καινοί σοφισταί, 271b9–c1) whom he meets in the Lyceum. In what follows, I will present a close reading of *Euthydemus* 275–280 in order to comprehend properly the terms of the discussion in which the crucial distinction emerges. This task will help us in our later interpretation of Aristotle's early thematization of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in the *Protrepticus*.

In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates relays to Crito his encounter of the previous day with the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.<sup>187</sup> These are somewhat mysterious characters:<sup>188</sup> according to Socrates, they possess a wide set of skills and knowledge (he calls them πάσσοφοι, 271c6), around the theme of combat and dispute, both in the military domain and in the domain of speech (Socrates calls them παμμάχω at 271c7, “all-in fighters”). They are initially said to be experts in both military strategy and the composition of speeches in judiciary settings. However, they are soon said to be experts in both physical and dialectical disputation (271c2–272b4). Socrates states that they are always able to refute what is said (ἐξελέγχειν τὸ ἀεὶ λεγόμενον, 272a8–b1) by their opponents, whether they have claimed something false or—more surprisingly—

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<sup>187</sup> Note that, in contrast to other dialogues, where the events portrayed in the dialogue are mediated by numerous narrators (see for example *Symposium* 174a), in the *Euthydemus* it is Socrates himself who relays what happened just the day before. For a detailed analysis of the opening passages of the dialogue, cf. Villar (2021, 143–150).

<sup>188</sup> Socrates states that the brothers were originally from Chios, but that they later lived in Thurii, and that they have been wandering since “escaping” (φεύγοντες, 271c3) from this city.

something true (ὁμοίως ἔάντε ψεῦδος ἔάντε ἀληθές ἦ, 272b1). The brothers are said to have acquired this “wisdom” (σοφία, 272c9) when they were already old,<sup>189</sup> and they claim to be able to transmit quickly (ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ, 272b3). Socrates, who ironically claims that he himself desires to learn it, simply calls it “eristic” (τῆς ἐριστικῆς, 272c10).<sup>190</sup>

Socrates’s confrontation with the brothers is marked by a constantly ironic demeanor, as can be seen by the systematic use of the term θαῦμα and its variations.<sup>191</sup> His rejection of the brothers’ dialectical praxis is motivated by profound theoretical differences that we will explore in further detail later. But at the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates’s hostility seems to be rooted in his aversion to the brothers’ grandiose claim that they can “transmit virtue better than any other man, and to do so faster than them” (Ἀρετήν, ἔφη, ὃ Σώκρατες, οἴομεθα οἷω τ’ εἶναι παραδοῦναι κάλλιστ’ ἀνθρώπων καὶ τάχιστα, 273d8–9). Socrates states that if they do in fact possess (ἔχεται, 273e6) such knowledge and if they are telling the truth (εἰ ἀληθῆ λέγεται, 274a2), he will summon them “as if they were gods” (ὥσπερ θεῶν, 273e7) and ask them to demonstrate it. The brothers confirm that they do have such knowledge and, when Socrates finally asks for a demonstration, they gladly agree, for they are there precisely to “demonstrate and to teach” (ἐπιδείξοντε καὶ διδάξοντε, 274a10–b1) anyone willing to learn (ἐάν τις ἐθέλη μανθάνειν, 274b1). This provides the setting for the following discussion, which revolves around the crucial notion of learning (μανθάνειν).

Socrates next introduces a slight change of focus; he asks the brothers if they can convince the young Cleinias of the necessity of philosophy and the cultivation of virtue (ὡς χρὴ φιλοσοφεῖν καὶ ἀρετῆς ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, 275a6). He thus reinterprets the brothers’ capacity for transmitting virtue as the specific capacity for exhorting individuals towards philosophy and virtue. Socrates wants them to improve Cleinias, to make him as good as possible (ὡς βέλτιστον αὐτὸν γενέσθαι, 275a9). The brothers accept the challenge, with

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<sup>189</sup> Hawtrey (1981, 46) connects this characterization to the ὀψιμαθεῖς of *Sophist* 251b, on which see note 138 *supra*.

<sup>190</sup> Hawtrey (1981, 45) maintains that in the Platonic *corpus*, the term ἐριστικός appears first in the *Lysis*, the *Euthydemus* and the *Meno*. This would suggest, according to Hawtrey, a sudden interest in the subject by Plato. I will try to provide a plausible explanation for this sudden interest in section 4.2.1 below.

<sup>191</sup> Mársico and Inverso (2012, 19 n. 42) recount the following appearances: 271c, 273d, 274a, 276d, 277d, 279d, 283a, 283b, 283c, 286b, 286c, 288a, 288b, 289e, 294a, 295a, 299c, 303c and 305b, sometimes more than one time in each passage.

one condition: that the young Cleinias be willing to answer their questions (ἐὰν μόνον ἐθέλη ἀποκρίνεσθαι ὁ νεανίσκος 275c1). They thus avoid making the long protreptic speech that Socrates perhaps expects and set the stage instead for a dialogical exchange.

Socrates pauses his narration and explains to Crito that, given the astounding character of what happened next, and the awe-inspiring wisdom the brothers displayed, he needs to summon the Muses and Memory (Μούσας τε καὶ Μνημοσύνην, 275d1–2). This grave preamble gives way to a humble question by Euthydemus to Cleinias, which marks the beginning of the brothers’ “exhortation” towards virtue:

–Cleinias, which are the men who learn, the wise or the ignorant? (πότεροί εἰσι τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ μανθάνοντες, οἱ σοφοὶ ἢ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς;)

And the young man, given the difficulty of the question, blushed and in a state of confusion looked upon me, and I, perceiving his confusion, said to him:

–Go on, Cleinias, and answer bravely whatever appears to be the case to you; for he may be giving you an enormous aid (275d3–e2).

Euthydemus presents Cleinias with a dichotomous question regarding who is the one who learns. This seemingly innocent question presupposes more than meets the eye, for it tacitly forces the interlocutor to choose one of the two alternatives. This is related to the condition that the brothers had established earlier: that Cleinias be willing to answer their questions. It is implicit in this request that Cleinias must reply according to a specific set of rules, as will become evident as the dialogue moves forward. One of these rules involves answering only within the terms of the question, in this case the rigid alternative presented by Euthydemus.<sup>192</sup> This rigid framework sets the stage for the subsequent refutation, which, as Dionysodorus himself tells Socrates, does not depend on Cleinias choosing one of the two alternatives presented:

At this point, Dionysodorus, approached me and said to my ear, with a grin on his face:

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<sup>192</sup> Indeed, when Socrates himself engages the brothers later, they will reproach him for deviating from the limits imposed by them in their questions. They complain that Socrates is always adding something to the question and that he resists answering plainly by yes or no (cf. 287b, 295a–296c). As we saw in the case of Aristotle’s judgement of eristic arguments such as Eubulides’s the Veiled One, refusing to answer plainly and establishing distinctions is the only way of escaping the otherwise unavoidable refutation (Dionysodorus describes his questions as “ineluctable”, ἄφουκτος, 276e5).

–Let me tell you in advance, Socrates, whichever way the boy answers, he will be refuted (προλέγω ὅτι ὁπότερ’ ἂν ἀποκρίνηται τὸ μειράκιον, ἐξελεγχθήσεται) (275e3–6).

We now realize that Euthydemus’s conception of virtue is radically distinct from the one presupposed by Socrates. Indeed, for Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, virtue is nothing more than dialectical prowess, that is, the capacity to defeat an adversary in a dialectical exchange. This is completely independent of the truth or the falseness of the claims under examination. That is why Cleinias is refuted when giving *both* answers: firstly, he says that the wise man learns, and upon refutation, he argues that those who are ignorant learn, only to be refuted again. The refutation is obtained by having Cleinias accept all of Euthydemus’s claims, step by step, through mounting questions that lead forcefully to the conclusion that Euthydemus wishes to establish. In order to offer a firmer grasp on this procedure and help us understand the mechanics of the brothers’ eristic dialectic, I will now quote the first eristic scene (276a3–b5) in full:

While he was stating this, Cleinias made his reply, and so I was unable to tell the boy to be careful, and he answered that the wise are the ones who learn.

Euthydemus said:

–And are there persons whom you call teachers (διδασκάλους), or not?

He said that there were.

–Then the teachers are teachers of those who learn (τῶν μανθανόντων), as the lute-master and the grammarian were your teachers and of the rest of the young ones, while you were the learners (μαθηταί)?

He assented.

–Isn’t it the case that when you were learning (ἐμανθάνετε), you did not yet know that which you were learning? (οὐπω ἠπίστασθε ταῦτα ἃ ἐμανθάνετε;)

No, he said.

–Then you were wise (σοφοί) when you did not know these things? (ὅτε ταῦτα οὐκ ἠπίστασθε;)

Certainly not, he said.

–Then, if you were not wise, you were ignorant? (εἰ μὴ σοφοί, ἀμαθεῖς;)

Of course.

–Therefore, when you were learning that which you did not know (μανθάνοντες ἃ οὐκ ἠπίστασθε), you were learning because you were ignorant (ἀμαθεῖς ὄντες ἐμανθάνετε).

The boy agreed.

–Therefore, Cleinias, the ignorant learn, but not the wise, as you claim.

The first refutation consists in noting that in a process of learning, one is not yet in possession of the knowledge in question and so cannot be said to be wise but ignorant. In the course of the argument, Euthydemus contrasts the continual or processual aspect of learning (μανθάνειν) with its resulting state. He equates the former with a crude state of ignorance (*i.e.*, completely lacking the knowledge in question) and the latter with its opposite state, full possession of the knowledge or “wisdom” (σοφία). This stark opposition admits of no third instance, and so, when engaged in learning one is necessarily ignorant, for it cannot be said that the learner, while learning, has already completed the process of learning.<sup>193</sup> It may appear that Euthydemus introduces a temporal aspect into the discussion by claiming that in a process of learning one is “not yet” (οὐπω) in possession of the knowledge, but he collapses this apparent temporal distinction in the rigid dichotomy between two absolute states, ignorance and knowledge.<sup>194</sup> The idea that a learner could have acquired *some part* of the knowledge while learning is purposefully brought up neither by Euthydemus nor by the innocent Cleinias. The latter only follows Euthydemus’s lead and dutifully answers his questions, and so falls within the precise limits imposed by him. Cleinias is unfamiliar with this kind of agonistic exchange and so is easy prey for the brothers’ dialectical method, which plays fundamentally on the ambiguity of terms and their application.<sup>195</sup>

That Euthydemus has no real commitment to what has just been said is made evident by Dionysodorus’s immediately following intervention, which has the purpose of

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<sup>193</sup> Cf. Chance (1992, 29–30).

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Mársico and Inverso (2012, 112 n. 19).

<sup>195</sup> Chance (1992, 31) argues that the refutation is not achieved by the exploitation of the ambiguity of a single term or by a string of ambiguous terms, but from a more complex network of relations between the terms ‘to learn’, ‘wise’, ‘ignorant’, the activities of knowing, learning and understanding, and the context in which these elements are presented (*i.e.*, Cleinias’s education in the past). Although I believe that Chance is right in pointing to the numerous factors at play in the argument, I think that not all of them are at a same level: the core of the refutation concerns the problematic notion of ‘learning’ which is in itself obscure. On this regard see Sprague (1962, 5–8), Canto (1989, 193 n. 68), Dorion (1995, 93–94), Palpacelli (2009, 86–87, n. 6, 98–99, n. 19) and Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi (2014, 68). The ambiguity is concealed by the rapid succession of questions and answers, which prevents the interlocutors from establishing proper distinctions which would clarify the use of the terms at stake.

exploring the other horn of the initial dichotomous question (whether the wise or the ignorant learn):<sup>196</sup>

When he said this, like a chorus at the sign of its master, the followers of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus cried out loudly and laughed; and so, before the boy could draw a breath, Dionysodorus took up the argument and said:

–Well now, Cleinias, when the grammarian makes you repeat from memory, which of the young ones learn (ἐμάνθανον) the piece recited, the wise or the ignorant?

–The wise—said Cleinias—.

–So the wise learn (μανθάνουσιν), and not the ignorant (Οἱ σοφοὶ ἄρα μανθάνουσιν ἀλλ’ οὐχ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς), and you did not answer correctly to Euthydemus a moment ago (276b6–c7).

Euthydemus and Dionysodorus appear as a single unit, exchanging places in their confrontation with Cleinias. From the beginning of the dialogue, there is a constant use of the dual case when referring to them, as if they constituted a dyad. This dramatic resource runs parallel to the structure and the content of the brothers’ arguments, which rely on strict dichotomies picked up alternatively by one of the two brothers. In this case, the refutation is still based on the contrast between the completed state of possessing some knowledge and the incomplete state of being engaged in a process of learning (and thus not being yet in possession of knowledge), but Dionysodorus emphasizes one aspect that was absent in the first refutation. He notes that in the case of learning grammar, one must sometimes already “know” the text that one is studying in order to understand it correctly. In direct opposition to the first refutation, Dionysodorus seems to claim now that in a process of learning one must already have acquired *some* knowledge (*i.e.*, one is not in a state of total ignorance), and, given that knowledge/ignorance are taken in absolute terms, it means that one is wise (*i.e.*, not ignorant). It makes no difference to them that Dionysodorus apparently contradicts his brother’s position in his questioning of Cleinias. They rejoice that they have led Cleinias to contradict *himself*, for, strictly speaking, it was

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<sup>196</sup> The velocity with which Dionysodorus intervenes, right after his brother has finished his refutation, creates “the overall impression that the brothers are performing a well-rehearsed routine in which their teamwork has reached near perfection” (Chance 1992, 33). The schematic and pre-fabricated character of the brothers’ dialectic contrasts with Plato’s own take on dialectic, which requires the genuine engagement of the interlocutors, and does not have a pre-established result.

Cleinias who affirms the conclusions of both arguments. The brothers have only made a series of questions that the boy has answered.

This second argument exploits one of the ambiguities that Socrates will denounce later, at 278a. The sense of *μανθάνειν* intended in 276b4 is not strictly that of learning understood as the acquisition of some knowledge—as the transition from a state of ignorance towards a state of knowledge—but that of comprehending or understanding some subject. The passage could alternatively be translated as follows:

- Well now, Cleinias, when the grammarian makes you repeat from memory, which of the young ones *comprehend* (*ἐμάνθανον*) the piece recited, the wise or the ignorant?
- The wise—said Cleinias—.
- So the wise (*σοφοὶ*) *comprehend* (*μανθάνουσιν*), but not the ignorant (*ἀλλ’ οὐχ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς*), and you did not answer correctly to Euthydemus a moment ago.

Dionysodorus is claiming that in the context of a grammar lesson one must examine and reflect upon (*μανθάνειν*) an already acquired knowledge, such as a memorized text. This is clearly different from the sense of *μανθάνειν* intended in Euthydemus’s original question, which asked if the action of learning (*μανθάνειν*) corresponds either to someone deprived of knowledge or to someone already in possession of knowledge. Naturally, Dionysodorus gives no warning that he is changing the sense of the term in the course of the argument, and that is why the refutation, up to this point, is so effective.

The two arguments we have seen constitute a first unit, which is followed by a second pair of arguments that pick up the issue from a different perspective.<sup>197</sup> Socrates, Cleinias and their followers are in a state of shock and amazement (*ἐκπεπληγμένοι*, 276d3) after the last exchange, but Euthydemus insists and poses a different question: “Do those who learn learn what they know or what they do not know?” (*Πότερον γὰρ οἱ μανθάνοντες μανθάνουσιν ἃ ἐπίστανται ἢ ἃ μὴ ἐπίστανται;*, 276d7–8). It is not necessary to quote the whole passage, which once more takes place dialogically. Let us analyze the structure of the argument directly.

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<sup>197</sup> The two series of arguments share a parallel structure. The first argument of each series is posited by Euthydemus, and the second one, which comes right after the first one, is put forward by Dionysodorus. They also explore in turn one of the two senses of *μανθάνειν*, in a chiasmic pattern (1<sup>st</sup> argument: Euthydemus, *μανθάνειν* as learning; 2<sup>nd</sup> argument: Dionysodorus, *μανθάνειν* as understanding; 3<sup>rd</sup> argument: Euthydemus, *μανθάνειν* as understanding; 4<sup>th</sup> argument: Dionysodorus, *μανθάνειν* as learning).

The focus now turns to the object of knowledge. Cleinias answers that one learns what is not known, thus choosing the second of the two alternatives presented by Euthydemus in his initial question. Euthydemus takes up the previous example of grammatical knowledge and asks Cleinias if it is not the case that he knows all the letters. This is a continuation of Dionysodorus's previous argument. In that case, Dionysodorus took advantage of the fact that in the context of a grammar lesson one already knows some part of the object of knowledge (for instance, the letters that compose the words of the poem under study) to argue that the wise learn, and not the ignorant. In this case the fact that one already knows the letters serves the purpose of proving that one learns what one knows. The strategy is once more reliant on the absolute conception of terms and their meanings: Euthydemus seems to rule out the possibility of distinguishing between different kinds or degrees of knowledge (for instance a basic knowledge such as the knowledge of the alphabet functions as a prerequisite to the more complex knowledge of a poem); by denying these nuances, Euthydemus can extract a general claim such as "the learners learn what they know" from the limited and mundane fact that someone who is taking a grammar lesson, unless this is their first lesson and they are just beginning to acquaint themselves with the alphabet, already knows the letters.

As in the previous pair of arguments, Dionysodorus intervenes immediately after Euthydemus's conclusion, once more to explore the other horn of Euthydemus's dilemmatic proposal (277b5–c8). He returns to the meaning of *μανθάνειν* originally intended by Euthydemus in his first refutation, that is, as a process of acquiring knowledge, in order to prove that learners learn what they do not know. In effect, Dionysodorus opens his refutation by asking the following: "is not learning the gathering of knowledge from what one is learning?" (*τὸ μανθάνειν οὐκ ἐπιστήμην ἐστὶ λαμβάνειν τούτου οὗ ἂν τις μανθάνῃ*; 277b6–7). He then once more recalls the distinction between learning as a process (here equated with the activity of knowing, *ἐπίστασθαι*, 277b8) and being already in possession of the knowledge (*ἢ ἔχειν ἐπιστήμην*, 277b8–9), as the end-state of learning. According to this distinction, one learns when one is not already in possession of the desired knowledge (*μὴπω ἔχειν ἐπιστήμην*, 277c1): learners are among those who "do not have" (*μὴ ἔχωσιν*, 277c2–3), among those who acquire, and not among those who "already have" (*τῶν ἐχόντων*, 277c5–6). Thus, those who learn learn what they do not know (*i.e.*, what they do not have), and so Cleinias is refuted once more as he gives both answers to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus's dilemmatic questions.

It is precisely at this point that Socrates intervenes. The brothers have demonstrated their dialectical prowess, which is likened to a form of dance (276d6), a sports game (277b4), and to physical combat (277d1–2), all kinds of activities that seem to have no end beyond their mere exercise. This is in direct contrast to Socrates’s understanding of the task of orienting a young person towards virtue, which, in the context of the *Euthydemus*, takes the form of a protreptic speech that clearly has an ulterior motive beyond the speech itself: improving the listener. Socrates tries to convince Cleinias that what has just happened is a mere preparatory exercise and that the brothers are initiating him into the “sophistical mysteries” (τῶν ἱερῶν σοφιστικῶν, 277e3).<sup>198</sup> He thus expresses his dissatisfaction with the brothers’ demonstration and asks them to offer instead a true exhortation towards virtue. In order to explain what he intends by this kind of exhortation, Socrates begins by showing why the previous dialectical exchange was defective and then goes on to provide an example of exhortation. Let us first see Socrates’s appraisal of the brothers’ previous arguments:

First then, as Prodicus says, it is necessary to learn about the correctness of names (ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος). This is precisely what the foreigners are showing to you, that you did not understand the term ‘to learn’: people sometimes use it in one case, when from the beginning one has no knowledge about some matter, and in the course of time acquires such knowledge, but they also use the same term when, having (ἔχων) already knowledge, through that knowledge the same matter is examined (ἐπισκοπῆ), whether in speech or in action. This they call “understanding” (συνιέναι) rather than “learning” (μανθάνειν), but occasionally they call it “learning” (μανθάνειν) too. This, as they showed, has escaped your notice: that the same name is used for people who are in the opposite conditions of knowing and not knowing (ταὐτὸν ὄνομα ἐπ’ ἀνθρώποις ἐναντίως ἔχουσιν κείμενον, τῷ τε εἰδῶτι καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ μὴ) (277e3–278a7).

Socrates clearly explains the ambiguity upon which the previous arguments were constructed. This applies not only to the first set of arguments but also to the second set, concerned with the object of learning (278a7–278b2). The ambiguity concerns the term

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<sup>198</sup> The reference here to the “sophistic mysteries” is one of the two references to sophistry in the whole dialogue, the other being the description of the brothers as “new sophists” (καινοὶ σοφισταί) at 271b9–c1. If the brothers were indeed some kind of generic sophists one would expect that the theme would appear more frequently in the dialogue. On this issue see 4.2.1 below.

μανθάνειν, which, as we said earlier, has a ‘weak’ and a ‘strong’ senses. The former corresponds to the activity of acquiring some knowledge that one lacks (“learning”), the latter to the examination of or reflection on a knowledge one already has (“understanding”).

The distinction is presented as mere linguistic disambiguation, but it has clear ontological implications. The fact that the term μανθάνειν can refer to “people who are in opposite (ἐναντίως) conditions” presupposes that there are two opposite conditions to begin with. This disambiguation already points toward the distinction between two states, having and not having knowledge (though being capable of acquiring it), a distinction that plays a different role with regard to the kind of action to which we are referring. In the case of learning (weak sense of μανθάνειν), the contrast is between the absolute lack of knowledge and the resulting complete acquisition of knowledge. In the case of understanding (strong sense of μανθάνειν), the contrast is between merely having knowledge and the active examination of said knowledge, that is, between an inactive possession and the active use of said possession.<sup>199</sup>

Soon afterward, Socrates claims that the dialectical methodology put forward by the brothers does not transmit true knowledge and that it only serves the purpose of mocking an adversary (278b2–c1). He then engages Cleinias and presents his own perspective on exhortation. During this exchange, Socrates develops further the distinction he presented when explaining the brothers’ arguments.<sup>200</sup>

Socrates first asks Cleinias if it is the case that every person desires “to do well” (εὖ πράττειν, 278e3). It is interesting that he chooses this expression, which can refer

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<sup>199</sup> This distinction is entirely reminiscent of Aristotle’s discussion of what the tradition calls first and second potentiality and actuality in *DA* II 5 (cf. also *DA* III 4, 429b5–9). In Scholastic terms, first potentiality would be, for instance, the capacity which a human being has for acquiring some knowledge. This knowledge, when already acquired, would constitute a second potentiality (or first actuality) which can be further actualized in the active exercise of the knowledge. For example, a person can acquire grammatical knowledge (a transition from first potentiality to second potentiality/first actuality), but can also further actualize their grammatical knowledge by actively thinking “this is the letter A” (transition from second potentiality/first actuality towards second actuality). On this distinction, cf. section 8.2.2.

<sup>200</sup> Socrates underscores the fact that he is improvising (αὐτοσχεδιάζειν, 278d7), which marks a contrast with the seemingly well-rehearsed and prefabricated routine which was carried out by Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. This speaks once more of the radical distance between their own conceptions of dialectic: Socrates holds it to be a constructive process which entails the genuine engagement of both interlocutors, while the brothers see dialectic as a mere technical device which serves the purpose of refuting an adversary.

either to *a*) the state of being well or happy or to *b*) the actions required to attain happiness. Like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Socrates also chooses as a starting point an ambiguous term, but instead of trying to trick Cleinias by exploiting this ambiguity, he goes on to carefully distinguish both senses and claim that happiness is most associated with the second sense rather than to the first one. Indeed, Cleinias agrees with Socrates that everyone desires to do well (εὖ πράττειν), and then both agree that it is necessary to possess a series of material, moral and intellectual goods in order to attain happiness (279a–c). Wisdom (σοφία), which is understood as the capacity for being successful (εὐτυχία, 279d6), appears to be the most important of these goods, since the correct realization of all sorts of activities (flute-playing, writing, navigation, military strategy, medicine, 279e–280a) depends on wisdom.<sup>201</sup> The dialectical exchange subtly transitions from the idea of mere possession of goods to the problem of their correct or incorrect use (280b–d), and Socrates concludes that “it is necessary not only to possess (κεκτηῖσθαι) goods of this kind to be happy but to use (χρηῖσθαι) them too, for without this use nothing from their possession (κτήσεως) comes to be useful” (280d5–7).

Socrates has begun with the ambiguous expression εὖ πράττειν. But the ambiguity has now been resolved, for it is clear that it is the correct *use* of the goods one possesses that is required for happiness and not the mere possession of these goods. The possession of a series of material or moral goods is in a sense neutral, for they may be incorrectly used, rendering one unhappy. Thus wisdom, which guides the correct use of the goods, reveals itself to be the most important thing for attaining happiness.

This dialectical exchange allows us to understand better the contrast implicit in Euthydemus and Dionysodorus’s arguments. The duality at stake is the one involved in human action, particularly in the case of cognitive activities such as thinking. One can *possess the capacity* to reflect upon some knowledge, but one can also *put to work* this capacity and *actively use* the knowledge in question. And it is this distinction that crucially prefigures Aristotle’s original distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.

The contrast is not exclusive to the *Euthydemus*. First of all, it can be related to the definition of being as δύναμις of the *Sophist*, which we analyzed in section 5.1. In that passage, Plato states that anything that *possesses* (κεκτημένον) a δύναμις to act or to be acted upon (ποιεῖν ἢ παθεῖν) is real (ὄντως εἶναι). Of course, this statement occurs in a

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<sup>201</sup> On the specific character of the term wisdom (σοφία) in this and other related passages of the *Corpus Platonicum*, cf. Napolitano Valditara (2009, 272–273).

context clearly different from that of the *Euthydemus*. But there is an evident parallel that revolves around the idea of a contrast between the possession of a capacity (which is called plainly a δύναμις in the *Sophist*; the *Euthydemus* speaks of the possession of some goods or a given knowledge) and its correlative active use (ποιεῖν ἢ παθεῖν in the *Sophist*; χρῆσθαι in the *Euthydemus*).

The distinction between ἔχειν and χρῆσθαι also appears in exactly the same terms in *Tht.* 197a–c. In this passage, the κτήσις-χρῆσθαι distinction reappears in relation to the problem of knowledge. Plato presents once more the distinction between two kinds of knowing as two kinds of ‘having,’ κτήσις and ἔχειν, which nonetheless fits the same scheme of having a capacity and actively exercising it. What Plato calls ἔχειν in *Theaetetus* is called χρῆσθαι in the *Euthydemus*, while what he calls κτήσις in *Theaetetus* is called both κτήσις and ἔχειν in the *Euthydemus*. The basic structure remains the same in both cases.<sup>202</sup> The contrast established is clearly between merely having some knowledge on the one hand and actively ‘using’ it (*i.e.*, being actively engaged in the activity of thinking) on the other.

Finally, the distinction also features in *Men.* 87d–89a.<sup>203</sup> This passage also claims that the mere possession of goods is insufficient for attaining happiness; they must be *used correctly* (cf. 88a4–5: ὀρθῆ χρῆσις; 88e1: ὀρθῶς χρωμένη). The correct use of the goods must be guided by prudence (φρόνησις, 88b4) (recall Aristotle’s talk of wisdom in *Euthyd.* 278e–280d).

I have focused on the *Euthydemus*’s passage because it presents one crucial advantage with respect to the other passages: it introduces the distinction as a result of a dialectical exchange between Socrates and two eristic philosophers.<sup>204</sup> This exchange revolves around the ambiguous nature of terms and their applications, which is important in understanding what is the background and which are the philosophical problems that motivated the development of the ἔχειν/χρῆσθαι distinction. This will be vital for

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<sup>202</sup> Cf. Schankula (1971, 245).

<sup>203</sup> A detailed analysis of this passage and its relation to the Aristotelian notion of φρόνησις can be found in Napolitano Valditara (2009).

<sup>204</sup> The *Meno*’s passage is also related to an eristic argument regarding the possibility of inquiry and its relation to knowledge. This shows the proximity between both dialogues, which deal with similar issues and which are deeply consistent with one another. However, the *Euthydemus* presents a more vivid and detailed portrayal of the type of agonistic dialectical exchanges in which these eristic arguments were put forward.

correctly understanding both Aristotle's later elaborations and the Megarian thesis, which Aristotle confronts in *Met.* Θ 3.

The passage is also important for the context in which it occurs. Indeed, we must now turn to a crucial question that will help us connect the discussion that takes place in the *Euthydemus* to Aristotle's later discussions: the question of the identity of the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.

#### 4.2.1. Are Euthydemus and Dionysodorus Megarians?

There is much debate regarding the identity of the eristic brothers portrayed by Plato in his *Euthydemus*. Besides the *Euthydemus*, the sources on the brothers are few: Plato mentions Euthydemus in *Cratylus* 386c6–d1, Xenophon refers to Dionysodorus in his *Memorabilia* (III 1, 1), and Aristotle transmits an argument by Euthydemus in *SE* 177b12 and *Rhet.* II 24, 1401a26.<sup>205</sup> We also have some mention of them in the doxographic tradition, particularly in Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* VII 13, 48, 64). *Prima facie*, these texts do not seem to provide a clear indication of the philosophical background of the brothers. Given this, many scholars have taken the brothers to be sophists contemporary with Socrates and thus read the *Euthydemus* as an attack on sophistry in general.<sup>206</sup> Plato does call them “new sophists” (καινοί σοφισταί) at the beginning of the dialogue (271b9–c1), and both Prodicus (277e4) and Protagoras (286c2) are mentioned throughout the dialogue in connection with the arguments the brothers put forward. However, many scholars have opposed this position in recent times, contending instead that they were representatives of the Megarian circle.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> For discussion of this argument, cf. Brancacci (2018b).

<sup>206</sup> This is the interpretation of Sprague (1972, 294–295), Kerferd (1981, 53), Canto (1989, 26–33), Palpacelli (2009, 42–56) and, most recently, Brancacci (2019). Chance (1992) and Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi (2014) do not commit themselves to the interpretation of the brothers as 5th century sophists, but simply highlight the fact that they constitute the “antithesis to the genuine philosopher” (Chance 1992, 3), and that they are practitioners of eristic wisdom (Chance 1992, 17, 20; Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi 2014, 9 n. 15), sophistic antilogy (Chance 1992, 21) and sophistic argumentation (Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi 2014, 85–86). Moreover, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus fit quite closely with Plato's own definition of ‘sophist’ in the *Sophist*; Dorion (2000, 40) and Hitchcock (2000, 62), relate them to the 7th and 5th definitions respectively.

<sup>207</sup> The idea that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus should be considered Megarians is not new and has resurfaced periodically throughout the 20th century (see for example Gillespie 1911, 233ff.). Most recently,

The most comprehensive and detailed case for this interpretation has been put forward by Dorion (2000). This author points out that the eristic dialectic of the brothers does not resemble the μακροὶ λόγοι of the traditional sophists<sup>208</sup> but rather seems nearer to the Socratic ἔλεγχος.<sup>209</sup> Euthydemus and Dionysodorus intervene in the dialogue almost exclusively with rapid series of arguments in the form of yes/no questions. They also share a tendency to address the arguments at different stages of the dialectical exchange separately, without necessarily establishing a coherent continuity between them.<sup>210</sup> Moreover, the brothers are said to be masters of eristic (*Euthyd.* 272b10), and the Megarians (who were also routinely called sophists, as Dorion 2000, 37 n. 14 observes)<sup>211</sup> are consistently described in the sources as ἐριστικοί.<sup>212</sup> This harmonizes well with two important testimonies to which Dorion draws our attention, and that we have already analyzed in chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis: one by Diogenes Laertius, who connects the *Euthydemus* with Euclid,<sup>213</sup> and one by Sextus Empiricus, who places both Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in the company of Megarians such as Alexinus,

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it has been defended by Hawtrey (1981, 23–30), Dorion (2000), Mársico and Inverso (2012, 42–58), Gardella (2013) and Villar (2016). Although Palpacelli (2009, 51–56) thinks that the brothers are two generic sophists, she seems to accept many of Dorion’s conclusions. For an opposing view, see Muller (1988, 40 n. 18, 135–136).

<sup>208</sup> Plato’s critique of μακρολογία is found in *Gorgias*, 449c, *Protagoras*, 328e, 333c and *Hippias Minor* 373a. Dorion (2000, 45) notes that in *Gorgias* 471d–472c Socrates associates Polus’s mode of argumentation with the kind of refutation proper of legal discourses, in which the testimonies of witnesses are of major importance. This is far from the dialogic ἔλεγχος.

<sup>209</sup> This is also the opinion of Hitchcock (2000).

<sup>210</sup> Further discussion of the patterns of argumentation of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus can be found in Chame (2015).

<sup>211</sup> In particular Bryson and Polyxenus. Cf. Arist. *HA* VI 5, 563a7 =SSR II S 1, Diog. Laert. II 76–77; Plut. *Regum* 176c–d; Alex. Aphr. *in Met.* 84, 16–21, ed. Hayduck.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Diog. Laert. II 30 =SSR II A 3; Diog. Laert. II 106 =SSR II A 22; Diog. Laert. II 119 =SSR II O 27; Suda s.v. Socrates =SSR II S 2; Suda s.v. *rhombostomyléthra* =SSR II B 1; Arist. *SE* 11, 171b3–172a7 =SSR II S 11; Ath. XIII 584a =SSR II O 18; Aristocle. *Perì philosophías*, fr. 7 (*apud* Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XV 2, 4, 791 c–d) =SSR II C 14.

<sup>213</sup> Diog. Laert. II 30: “When Socrates saw that Euclid had been seriously occupied with eristic arguments, he said to him: ‘Euclid, you will be able to use them with sophists, but in no way with men’, for he believed that this hair-splitting way of arguing was useless, as Plato says in the *Euthydemus*’. As was noted earlier, the reference to the *Euthydemus* is removed in the editions of the Megarian testimonies of Döring, Muller, Giannantoni and Mársico. The only exception is Montoneri (1984, fr. 25).

Eubulides, and Bryson as practitioners of logic.<sup>214</sup> Finally, there is the not-negligible connection between some of the arguments in the dialogue and Aristotle's *SE*, which Dorion contends are principally directed against the Megarians.<sup>215</sup>

According to this interpretation, one of Plato's primary purposes in the *Euthydemus* would be to denounce the Megarians' eristic dialectic, which he views as a deviation from the proper kind of dialectic. The Megarians were certainly contemporaries of Plato, and it would not be strange for him to portray a competing philosophical position (which moreover traces its origins to Socrates himself) in such a way as to establish a distinction between it and his own perspective on dialectic. This would explain why the dialogue alternates between exemplifications of the wrong kind of dialectic pursued by the brothers (275d–278e, 283b–288c and 293b–304c) and the correct kind of dialectical argumentation put forward by Socrates (278e–283b and 288d–293a). These latter are intended to direct his interlocutors towards virtue and a correct understanding of the dialectical methodology involved in philosophy.<sup>216</sup>

Whereas for Plato the dialectical method constitutes a way towards “each thing that is in itself” (ἐπ’ αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἕκαστον) (*Resp.* 532b), for Euthydemus and Dionysodorus dialectic is a way of displaying the numerous interferences and ambiguities that thwart any attempt to address reality through discourse. This general theoretical

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<sup>214</sup> Sext. Emp. *Math.* VII 13–14 = SSR II B 12: “And Panthoides and Alexinus and Eubulides and Bryson, as well as Dionysodorus and Euthydemus [of Thurios, whom Plato mentions in his *Euthydemus*], were inclined towards the logical part”. Bekker proposed to seclude the line in brackets as a gloss. Still, it is rather suggestive that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus are placed together with a set of philosophers who are widely represented in the sources as members of the Megarian circle.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Dorion, (1995, 47–53). The parallels between the arguments of the *Euthydemus* and the *SE* are detailed by Dorion at 91–104. Cf. also Dorion (2000, 47–49). The idea that the Megarians were the main target of Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* can be traced back to Hegel (1842, 364).

<sup>216</sup> It should be noted that the dialogue may also be a response to Isocrates's criticism of the Socratics as eristics in *Against the Sophists* (1–8) and in the exordium of *Encomium of Helen* (1–15). By establishing a stark contrast between the eristic dialectic of the brothers and his own take on dialectic (exemplified in Socrates's protreptic speeches), Plato would be trying to counter Isocrates's judgment. The connection with Isocrates is mentioned by Dorion (2000, 49) and recent scholars have argued in favor of identifying the anonymous figure which features in the epilogue of the dialogue (304c–307c) with Isocrates. In favor of this identification are Hawtrey (1981, 190–196), Canto (1989, 33–37), Palpacelli (2009, 220–226) and Mársico and Inverso (2012, 90–93). Against it, Chance (1992, 200–201) and Sermamoglou-Soulmaidí (2014, 141–142). On the connection between the Megarians, the *Euthydemus* and Isocrates, see Villar (2016, 2020a).

framework explains the brothers' recurrent concern with the problem of ambiguity. As we saw above, this is a recurrent issue in Megarian dialectic, featuring prominently throughout the group's history, as in the cases of Bryson, Eubulides, and Diodorus, one we analyzed in chapter 4.

What this shows is that the distinction between ἔχειν and χρῆσθαι was likely elaborated in the context of Plato's confrontation with the Megarians, and specifically in relation to the problem of the ambiguity of terms and their different applications. This is a crucial realization, for I claim that it is this concern with ambiguity that reappears in *Metaphysics* Θ 3, where Aristotle defends the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια from Megarian attack.

#### 4.2.2. The *Euthydemus* and the Megarians' Eleaticism

Relating the *Euthydemus* with the Megarian tradition has an important advantage: it allows us to understand clearly that the apparently linguistic or merely dialectical confrontation that takes place in the dialogue has important ontological implications. One of these implications is related to the problem of the unity of being, which brings us back to the problematic issue of the alleged Eleaticism of the Megarians.

As we saw in chapter 2, the link between the Megarians and the Eleatics is contested by many scholars. However, the *Euthydemus*—if we accept the Megarian reading of the dialogue—provides some indications that seem to support this link. The purpose of this subsection is to explore these indications as a complementary analysis to our previous study of the issue. I will refer to some of the arguments from later in the dialogue, which I have not analyzed in the previous subsections. My intention is not to provide an exhaustive discussion of these arguments but rather to highlight their plausible Parmenidean extraction.

There are two sets of arguments that seem to connect the eristic of the brothers to Eleaticism. The first one we already saw, at 275d–277c: it is a clear case of ἀντιλογία in which two contrary or contradictory theses are presented as equally valid or invalid (cf. 272a7–b1, 275e5–6).<sup>217</sup> This, of course, is a noted feature of Zeno's philosophy, which

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<sup>217</sup> On this point, see Kerferd (1981, 63–67) and Montoneri (1984, 61–62). The argument also has a clear connection with the paradox of knowledge in Plato's *Meno*, where it is called an ἐριστικὸς λόγος (80e2).

makes eager use of antilogics (though presumably not in a dialectical context such as the one portrayed in the *Euthydemus*).<sup>218</sup>

As we saw, in this argument the brothers exploit the ambiguity of the verb to learn (μανθάνειν). ‘To know’ and ‘to ignore’ are taken to be mutually exclusive states, following an Eleatic logic of excluded middle, which denies all possibility of a relation between both contraries.<sup>219</sup> The brothers gather from this principle that terms must have a univocal reference, or we run the risk of equivocation. According to this principle, the action of ‘learning’ must correspond to *one* of the states mentioned above. Since equivocation appears to be unavoidable (does learning refer to the process of acquiring knowledge or to the exercise of said knowledge? Who learns, the ignorant or the wise?), the result is an *aporia* that puts into question the possibility of coming to know. Socrates recognizes this, and first distinguishes the various senses in which one can be called a ‘knower’ (277e–278a), and later points out that coming to know does not involve a concept of absolute non-being (285a–b) (the one the brothers espouse). Socrates makes this last point not explicitly but indirectly and ironically, claiming that the whole discussion is a mere verbal affair (285a), and that what the brothers deem destruction is in reality simply a change of attribute.<sup>220</sup>

The Eleatic inspiration of the brothers’ eristic dialectic can also be seen in the following arguments, which appear after Socrates’s first protreptic exposition. At *Euthyd.* 283c–d, the brothers continue with the argument against the possibility of knowing and put the following question to Socrates about the young Clinias:

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<sup>218</sup> The influence of Zeno of Elea on the Megarians has recently been underscored by Gardella (2019, esp. 713–720). Zeno has been thought to be a precursor of eristic since ancient times, and we can see here in *Euthydemus* 275d–277c a clear parallel between his distinct way of arguing and the eristic dialectic of the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Dixsaut (2003, 57). The Eleatic inspiration of this argument is also noted by Canto (1989, 56–57). Chance (1992, 29), Palpacelli (2009, 88, 93–94) and Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi (2014, 108–119) also highlight the dichotomous nature of the brothers’ arguments, which deny any middle status between contraries. We should also recall the dilemmatic structure of Euclid’s argument against reasoning by way of comparison, cf. pp. 57–58 above.

<sup>220</sup> The fact that Socrates is here tacitly distinguishing between the existential and predicative uses of the verb to be is noted by Burnyeat (2002b, 61–62).

Do you want him to become wise and not to be ignorant? Then you want him to become what he is not (ὄς οὐκ ἔστιν), and not to be what he now is (ὄς δ' ἔστι νῦν, μηκέτι εἶναι). Given that you want for him not to be what he is now, do you want something different than killing him?

This argument is described, with deep irony and even hostility, as “astonishing” (θαυμαστόν, 283b1) by Socrates, and causes the fury of Ctesippus, Clinias’s lover (283e). The fallacy is easily recognizable; it exploits the ambiguity inherent in the verb to be, which can have either a predicative or an existential sense.<sup>221</sup> Dionysodorus purposely confounds “becoming wise” (σοφὸν γενέσθαι) with “becoming that which is not” (ὄς οὐκ ἔστιν γενέσθαι), and so concludes that, since Socrates wants Clinias to become wise, he wants to kill him (*i.e.*, not be).

The argument seems to have a core premise: Dionysodorus relies on an absolute conception of being, which leads him to reject predicative attribution, for it destroys the unity of the being in question. And the following set of arguments (283e–286b), which deny the possibility of falsehood, seem to share this premise. Euthydemus argues that when one speaks, one does not say something other than the things which are (οὐκ ἄλλο λέγει τῶν ὄντων). Moreover, what one says is one (ἓν) of the things that are (τῶν ὄντων), different from the rest (χωρὶς τῶν ἄλλων). This allows him to state that when one speaks, one says what is (ὁ ἐκεῖνο λέγων τὸ ὄν λέγει) and, by way of equating “that which is” with “that which is true”, he concludes that “if one says the things which are, he tells the truth and says no lie to you” (εἴπερ λέγει τὰ ὄντα, λέγει τὰληθῆ καὶ οὐδὲν κατὰ σοῦ ψεύδεται, 284a7–8).<sup>222</sup> The argument relies on the ambiguity of the existential and

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<sup>221</sup> As argued by Sprague (1962, 13), Hawtrey (1981, 3) and Palpacelli (2009, 128). This kind of argument is identified and criticized by Aristotle in *SE* 167aff. Although there are other elements at play in the argument, as Chance (1992, 85–86) rightly observes, it seems clear that the core of this particular eristic argument lies in the ambiguity of the verb to be.

<sup>222</sup> Many scholars believe that this passage is an allusion to Antisthenes, since Proclus transmits an almost identical formulation of the argument and ascribes it to Antisthenes in his commentary of Plato’s *Cratylus* (*in Cra.* 37 =SSR V A 155). Many hold that the Athenian philosopher constitutes an important point of reference in the dialogue (Canto 1989, 56, 57 n. 150, Dorion 2000, 43, Burnyeat 2002b, 51–53, Mársico and Inverso 2012, 66–72, 133 n. 48, 134 n. 49, 140 n. 58). Moreover, Plato himself states that the argument is old and that it was put forward by Protagoras (286c). These references, however, do not undermine the Megarian interpretation of the dialogue, but simply prove—as Dorion (2000, 43) argues—that the brothers are composite characters, and that Plato attributed to them traits and doctrines that belonged to several

veritative senses of the verb to be, but it is also connected with the rejection of non-being in general. In the immediately following argument, Euthydemus claims not only that discourse is always truthful (since for Euthydemus being and being true are the same) but also that it is impossible to say something false (*i.e.*, something which is not), for “the things which are not do not exist in any way” (οὐδαμοῦ τὰ γε μὴ ὄντα ὄντα ἐστίν, 284b4–5).<sup>223</sup>

After a brief interruption by Socrates, the argument ends with a final refutation of Ctesippus, in which Euthydemus claims that it is not possible to contradict (ἀντιλέγειν, 285d7). The argument states that there are λόγοι (accounts or descriptions) for each of the things that are (ἐκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων), and that these λόγοι transmit the way in which they are (ὡς ἔστιν ἕκαστον), for no one speaks about something in a way in which is not (ὡς οὐκ ἔστι), nor manifests that which is not (τὸ μὴ ὄν) when speaking (as they had previously agreed). Three consequences follow. First, if two people provide the same account of the same thing, they cannot contradict each other (286a5–6). Second, if neither of them gives an account of a thing (τὸν τοῦ πράγματος λόγον), then they are not referring to the thing in question, and so there is no place for contradiction (286b1–2). Third, if they each give an account of things which are different, then one says something about the thing in question, and the other says nothing at all (τὸ παράπαν), and how can someone who says nothing at all (of the thing in question) contradict another one? (286b5–6). The whole argument clearly depends on a strict opposition between being and non-being, both conceived in absolute terms, ruling out the possibility of predicative attribution and the possibility of contradicting another one.

It is thus not difficult to see how this whole set of arguments can be thought to be ‘Eleatic’ in nature. Moreover, the arguments and the Eleatic premises that guide them are consistent with other testimonies on the Megarians such as that of Diogenes Laertius,

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philosophers. In other words, the fact that the Megarians were the main source of inspiration behind the eristic brothers does not rule out the possibility that other philosophers could also be alluded to by Plato. Villar (2020b), while acknowledging the Antisthenian resonance of these passages, surveys the differences between the core tenets of his philosophy (in particular, the thesis of the οἰκειὸς λόγος) and this passage of the *Euthydemus*.

<sup>223</sup> See also 284b7 “things which are not in any way” (τὰ μηδαμοῦ ὄντα). There is a parallel text in *Sophist* 236d–237a, where Plato makes an explicit reference to the Parmenidean nature of this premise. The Eleatic reading of this argument is adopted by Sprague (1962, 13–14), Canto (1989, 56–58, 199 n. 105, 108), Chance (1992, 88–89), Palpacelli (2009, 131–132) and Mársico and Inverso (2012, 135 n. 50).

where he claims that Euclid was familiar with the teachings of Parmenides and that he “upheld that the good is one although it is called by many names [...] He also rejected what is opposite to the good, saying that it does not exist” (οὗτος ἐν τῷ ἀγαθὸν ἀπεφαίνετο πολλοῖς ὀνόμασιν καλούμενον [...] τὰ δ’ ἀντικείμενα τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀνήρει, μὴ εἶναι) (Diog. Laert. II 106, 5–15 =SSR II A 30). Some of Eubulides’s paradoxes also seem to have an Eleatic inspiration, especially the famous Electra argument (cf. section 4.1.4). It is also tempting to connect these passages with other Megarian arguments: Stilpo’s critique of attribution;<sup>224</sup> his denial of Plato’s theory of Forms;<sup>225</sup> and Polyxenus’s Third Man argument.<sup>226</sup> There are important differences between these passages, but they all seem to rely on the principles that guide the eristic arguments of the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus mentioned above.

All of this seems to confirm our previous interpretation of the Megarians’ alleged Eleaticism (cf. section 3.3 above), which I will now restate: the Megarians and the eristic brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus seem to have adopted many Eleatic premises as the guiding principles of a large number of their refutations. These were not intended to support a specific positive doctrine but simply to underscore the difficulties involved in their opponents’ philosophical positions. This *does not necessarily imply* that neither the brothers nor the Megarians as a whole were neo-Eleatics, or that they upheld Eleatic tenets as part of a positive doctrine, although, of course, this possibility cannot be ruled out entirely.

It will be important to have this reconstruction in mind when we address the problem of how to interpret the Megarian thesis of *Met.* Θ 3. But we must now analyze how Aristotle recovers Plato’s original distinction between ἔχειν and χρῆσθαι. This will be fundamental for our study of book Θ of the *Metaphysics* in the second part of this thesis.

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. Plut. *Adv. Col.* 23 =SSR II O 29 and Muller 1985, 173. It is worth recalling that although Plutarch restricts this position to Stilpo, Simplicius (*in. Phys.* 120, 12–17, ed. Diels =SSR II O 30) extends it to the whole of the Megarian group.

<sup>225</sup> Diog. Laert. II 119 =SSR II O 27.

<sup>226</sup> Alex. Aphr. *in Met.* 84, 16–21, ed. Hayduck.

## CHAPTER 5

### Δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in Aristotle's early works

#### 5.1. Aristotle's appropriation of Plato's distinction between ἔχειν and χρῆσθαι

As we said at the beginning of the previous chapter, and in contrast to the term δύναμις, there are no testimonies of the term ἐνέργεια which predate Aristotle.<sup>227</sup> One of its earliest occurrences is found in the *Protrepticus*.<sup>228</sup> This work presents perhaps what is the first thematization of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια pair. These concepts are clearly the product of Aristotle's philosophical insight and, as we saw in the introduction, they have a crucial importance in the whole of his philosophy. But these early appearances are very proximate to the Platonic texts which we have just discussed in the previous chapter. In fact, it seems that Aristotle was deeply impressed by Plato's answer to the radical dualist position of the Friends of the Forms and by his replies to the eristic arguments of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Our purpose in this chapter is, first, to analyze the way in which Aristotle retraces some of Plato's previous elaborations in order to give shape to his concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Secondly, I intend to challenge the usual claim that Aristotle's early concept of ἐνέργεια is analogous to that of motion (κίνησις). This will be important for our later interpretation of the argument of book Θ of the *Metaphysics*.

Aristotle's main interest in the *Protrepticus* is to prove that a life of intellectual contemplation (θεωρία) is the best form of life for a human being. It is in this context that he expands on the particular character of human action. There are two sorts of activities to which Aristotle pays particular attention: sensation in general, on the one hand, and intellectual activity on the other. This is somewhat expectable, for these activities characterize life above all: animal beings are perceptual beings, and human beings in particular have reason. By focusing on these activities, Aristotle will be able to establish

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<sup>227</sup> Menn (2009, 249 n. 77; 2021, 244 n. 83) has suggested that the term could be attested before Aristotle, specifically in Alcidas's *On the sophists*, 28. But this can hardly be so. The manuscripts present εὐεργεσίας, not ἐνεργείας; the latter term was originally introduced as an emendation by Reiske in his 1773 edition. More recently, Avezzù (1982) prints the textually correct εὐεργεσίας and offers a satisfactory translation of the passage, showing that the emendation is unwarranted.

<sup>228</sup> On the problem of the authenticity and the chronology of this work, cf. section 1.1.1 above.

a hierarchy among actions. For instance, he will claim that productive activities are subordinate or inferior to activities such as sight and thinking (the former are subordinate to an end which is external to the activity itself, while the latter coincide with their ends), thus laying the ground for his protreptic aims.

However, Aristotle notes that human action is characterized by a striking duality. He realizes that an activity admits of two possibilities: it can be actively exercised, or it can remain latent, unexercised, as a capacity ready to be put into action when needed. At *Protr.* XI 56.15–22/B79, Aristotle states:<sup>229</sup>

It appears that ‘to live’ is said in two ways, one which deals with δύναμις, the other with ἐνέργεια; for, we call ‘seeing’ both the animals which have sight (ἔχει τῶν ζώων ὄψιν) and by nature are capable of seeing (καὶ δυνατὰ πέφυκεν ἰδεῖν), even if their eyes happen to be shut, as well as those which are using the capacity (τὰ χρώμενα τῇ δυνάμει) and are looking at something. And the same applies to knowing and understanding; on the one hand, we speak of using and of contemplating (χρηῖσθαι καὶ θεωρεῖν), and on the other of possessing a δύναμις and of having the knowledge (κεκτηῖσθαι τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχειν).

Aristotle establishes here an explicit distinction between two modes of seeing or thinking. The distinction is clearly one between a capacity or power and its active exercise, in the same vein as Plato’s in the *Euthydemus*.<sup>230</sup> There is a clear terminological continuity between both texts: Aristotle deliberately equates δύναμις and ἔχειν on the one hand, and ἐνέργεια and χρηῖσθαι on the other. He is translating Plato’s distinction into his novel terminology. So we have here a quite clear indication of what is that Aristotle understands by ‘δύναμις’ and ‘ἐνέργεια’ in this context: the possession (κτηῖσις) or ‘having’ (ἔχειν) of a capacity, and its active use or exercise (χρηῖσθαι).

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<sup>229</sup> In what follows, I will cite the fragments of the *Protrepticus* according to Pistelli’s 1888 Teubner edition of Iamblichus’s *Protrepticus*, while also providing the equivalent numeration of Dü ring’s 1961 reconstruction. In order to avoid ambiguity when citing Pistelli’s edition, I will use Roman numerals to indicate the chapter and Arabic numbers for page and line, separated by a period (e.g., *Protr.* XI 58.15–17/B87). Cf. also D.S. Hutchinson and M. R. Johnson’s (2005) authentication of the *Protrepticus* fragments which feature in Iamblichus.

<sup>230</sup> Several scholars have noted this parallel: cf. Jaeger (1928), De Strycker (1968, 159–160), Schankula (1971), Graham (1987, 190–191), Rist (1989, 105–106), Yepes Stork (1989) and Menn (1994).

There is a specific reason for which Aristotle recurs to this distinction at this point of his argument. He intends to show that the end (τέλος) of human life is to be located in the *use* of his capacities rather than in their bare *possession*. It is not enough to have some knowledge or virtue. It is necessary to put this knowledge or virtue *to work*, to be *actively engaged* in its exercise. This was also present in Plato, as we saw (cf. *Euthyd.* 280d5–7: “it is necessary not only to possess (κεκτηῖσθαι) goods of this kind so as to be happy, but to use (χρηῖσθαι) them too, for without this use nothing from their possession (κτηῖσεως) comes to be useful”).<sup>231</sup>

This can be seen in the following two fragments, where Aristotle establishes the priority of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις. At 56.27–57.6/B80, Aristotle states that, given that we discriminate between living and non-living beings according to whether they have perception or not, it follows that we can legitimately affirm that someone lives in two cases:

[...] in one sense, the one who is awake must be said ‘to live’ truly and primarily, and the one who is asleep is said to ‘live’ because of his capacity to change into this motion (διὰ τὸ δύνασθαι μεταβάλλειν εἰς ταύτην τὴν κίνησιν) on account of which we say that someone is awake and perceives some object.

It is sometimes held that the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction emerged as a response to the problem of the possibility of change. This view certainly accords well with the fact that Aristotle defines change in terms of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in *Phys.* III 1–3, and with his claim in *Phys.* I 8, 191b27–29 that the Eleatic challenge against coming to be can be overcome by way of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction. But this passage shows no sign of this issue; as Blair (1992, 24–25) notes, the distinction introduced in this passage is *not* a distinction that involves change, or that originated in a debate about change.<sup>232</sup> The

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<sup>231</sup> The continuity between Plato and Aristotle on this respect is analyzed by Napolitano Valditara (2009, 273–274).

<sup>232</sup> This is particularly evident for us, since we have seen that the distinction originated in the context of a dialectical exchange portrayed in Plato’s *Euthydemus*. This dialectical exchange dealt with the problem of the ambiguity of terms and, as noted above, both the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus and Socrates appear to hold such a distinction in the course of the dialogue (the former do so implicitly in 277c, the latter explicitly at 278a and 280d). This interpretation is also hinted by Graham (1987, 190): “It is possible that

discussion is limited to the ambiguity regarding terms and their application. This is perfectly clear in the following passage:

And so, whenever each of two things are said the same way (ὅταν οὖν λέγηταιί τι ταὐτὸν ἐκάτερον δυοῖν ὄντων), and one of them is called (λεγόμενον) this way because of acting or being acted on (ἢ τῷ ποιεῖν ἢ τῷ πάσχειν, *i.e.*, the exercise), we will then concede that the term belongs more strongly to this one (τούτῳ μᾶλλον ἀποδώσομεν ὑπάρχειν τὸ λεχθέν) (57.7–9/B81).

Aristotle is clearly establishing a distinction between two ways in which we can apply the same predicate to a subject, for example the two ways in which we can call a man a seer or a housebuilder, both if he has the capacity for seeing and if he is actively exercising this capacity, while establishing the priority of the activity over the mere possession of a capacity. The examples Aristotle introduces to illustrate his thesis are once more knowledge and sight:

for example, ‘knowing’ (ἐπίστασθαι) belongs more to the one who uses [his knowledge] than to the one who has the knowledge (μᾶλλον τὸν χρώμενον τοῦ τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχοντος), and ‘seeing’ belongs more to the one who is applying his vision than to the one who is capable of applying it (ὁρᾶν δὲ τὸν προσβάλλοντα τὴν ὄψιν τοῦ δυναμένου προσβάλλειν) (57.10–12/B81).

The two uses of “knowing” in this passage recall the distinction between two opposite states which was already implicit in *Euthyd.* 277e3–278a7. In this passage, Socrates distinguishes between the two senses of μανθάνειν and speaks of “people who are in opposite (ἐναντίως) conditions”. These opposing conditions had been already mentioned by Dionysodorus: in his exchange with Cleinias, he had stated that learners are among those who “do not have” (μὴ ἔχουσιν, 277c2–3) a knowledge, and not among those who “already have” (τῶν ἐχόντων, 277c5–6) the knowledge in question. This duality concerns activities such as learning, in which the resulting state of the activity is the acquisition of

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Aristotle developed the distinction to forestall sophistic refutations which traded on an ambiguity in verbs (especially of knowing and perception) and their nominal counterparts”. See also Graham (1995, 560–561).

a knowledge (a transition from not having towards having).<sup>233</sup> But the duality also applies to the contrast between the actual (though inactive) possession of a knowledge and its corresponding active use; this second contrast is related to activities such as thinking, and it is mentioned by Plato in his disambiguation of the brothers' arguments ("they use the same term [*sc.* *μανθάνειν*] when, having (*ἔχων*) already knowledge, through that knowledge the same matter is examined (*ἐπισκοπῆ*), whether in speech or in action", 278a1–4) and in his own subsequent exchange with Cleinias ("it is necessary not only to possess (*κεκτηῖσθαι*) goods of this kind so as to be happy, but to use (*χρηῖσθαι*) them too, for without this use nothing from their possession (*κτῆσεως*) comes to be useful", 280d5–7). This latter opposition, between having and using, is the one in which Aristotle is most interested, and which he appears to retrace in the passages quoted above.

So we can preliminary claim that in these passages *δύναμις* stands for 'capacity' or 'power' and *ἐνέργεια* for 'exercise' or, more plainly, 'activity'. However, there is an implicit acknowledgment of the modal counterparts of these notions, particularly in 57, 7–12/B81. In this passage, capacity and activity appear to be taken also as contrasting *states* or modes of being: one can be either in a state of capacity or in a state of activity, as a person can be said to 'know' either if he is asleep or if he is awake and actively pondering on some knowledge. Aristotle claims that, between these two states, the predicate 'knower' belongs more properly to the latter one, in what amounts to a prefiguration of his later doctrine of the priority of *ἐνέργεια* in regard to *δύναμις* (discussed in *Met.* Θ 8).

This modal aspect of capacities and activities is later highlighted by Aristotle by the dative constructions *δυνάμει ὄν* and *ἐνεργείᾳ ὄν*, which appear regularly in the second section of *Met.* Θ (chapters 6–9). However, to anticipate a point to receive further

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<sup>233</sup> Aristotle will later call this "having" *ἐνέργεια* too (cf. *DA* III 4, 429b5–9), in his discussion of what the tradition calls first and second potentiality, and first and second actuality. To understand how this is possible we will have to comprehend the relation between *ἐνέργεια* and *ἐντελέχεια*, and specifically, what is their common element. Although Aristotle uses the terms interchangeably, they emphasize different aspects of a same concept. *Ἐντελέχεια* emphasizes the notion of 'completeness' (this ultimately derives from the notion of *τέλος* upon which the term *ἐντελέχεια* is constructed), while *ἐνέργεια* the notion of 'activity' (this is also related to its etymology, precisely to its root term *ἔργον*). To understand the unity between both aspects, see our discussion of *EE* II 1, 1219a12–19 in the next subsection, and sections 7.5, 8.2, and 9.1.4 *infra*. On the distinction of *DA* II 5 and III 4, 429b5–9, see section 8.2.2 below.

discussion later,<sup>234</sup> it seems that, in the *Protrepticus*, there is no intrinsic *separation* between the notions of capacity and activity and their modal counterparts. A capacity *confers* a certain degree of being to the capable being (knower<sub>1</sub>), and this degree of being is inferior to the one which results from being actively engaged in the exercise of the capacity (knower<sub>2</sub>). This suggests that we are not facing two completely distinct senses or applications of the terms δύναμις and ἐνέργεια (one translatable as capacity and activity, the other as potentiality and actuality), but rather two aspects of a same application, which corresponds primarily to the notions of capacity and activity.

That Aristotle conceives the concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια primarily in active terms in the context of the *Protrepticus* can be confirmed in various ways. First of all, the terms appear frequently in conjugated form: Aristotle uses δύνασθαι at XI 56.25, 28/B80, ἐνεργοῦντα at 57.20/B83 and ἐνεργῆ at 58.13/B86. All these expressions reinforce the active character of both δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.

Secondly, there is the issue of the etymology of ἐνέργεια. The exact nature of this etymology is obscure: Bonitz (1849, 387) derives ἐνέργεια from the verb ἐνεργεῖν (a view shared by Berti 2017, 399 n. 16), von Fritz (1963 [1938], 67) from the adjective ἐνεργής, while Graham (1987, 186–187) and Beere (2009, 94 n. 6; 161–163) derive it from the adjective ἐνεργός. Blair (1992, 17–20) rejects these possibilities and claims that the terms result from the combination of the prefix ἐν- and the verb ἐργεῖν, the active voice of ἐργάζεσθαι. However, all reconstructions appear to locate the root of the term in ἔργον. Once more, the interpretation of ἔργον is in itself also controversial, but a commonly accepted translation is that of ‘work’.<sup>235</sup> The translation is adequate because it reflects in English the same phenomenon which occurs in Ancient Greek: the term ‘work’ can have a double reference, exactly in the same way as ἔργον: it can refer either to the resulting object of a process of production (as in a “work of art”) or to an activity (as in the “work” involved in housebuilding). Which of these applications is operative in the term ἐνέργεια? Here we should put emphasis on the prefix ἐν-, which precedes ἔργον: the prefix clearly gives the idea of being *at* work, being active or busy; this is true in the case of either of the aforementioned reconstructions, be it the verb ἐνεργεῖν, the adjective ἐνεργός, or Blair’s ἐν- ἐργεῖν. Thus, we conclude that, regardless of the exact etymology, the term

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<sup>234</sup> Cf. sections 7.4 and 8.1.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. Baker (2015) for a discussion of the main interpretative issues regarding ἔργον. I will expand on Aristotle’s conception of ἔργον below, pp. 153–155.

does not have a static connotation; it should be understood as *the active putting to work of a given capacity*.

Thirdly, we should note that Aristotle uses a wide range of analogous expressions when referring to the same concept, that of the exercise or use of a capacity. This is not entirely unexpected, since we are dealing with what probably amounts to the first appearances of the novel term ἐνέργεια, which was coined by Aristotle himself. In addition to ἐνέργεια, Aristotle not only uses Plato's χρῆσθαι (XI 56.20/B79; 56.24/B80; 57.23/B84), but other synonyms such as ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν (XI 57.8/B81; 57.22–23/B83) πράττειν (XI 57.24/B84) and ἔργον (VII 42.5/B63; 42.15, 19/B65; 43.6, 9/B68; 43.21/B70; XI 58.4/B85). All these terms clearly remit to the idea of activity.

The expression ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν is particularly significant. When reading this expression, we immediately recall Plato's definition of being as δύναμις in the *Sophist*. In fact, the definition established a clear contrast between a δύναμις and a corresponding action or suffering. This is of course should be understood as a contrast between a capacity and an activity. The parallel confirms, on the one hand, the proximity between Plato's and Aristotle's understanding of the conceptual distinction between the inactive possession of a capacity and its corresponding activity, which Plato calls δύναμις and ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν in the *Sophist* and ἔχειν and χρῆσθαι in the *Euthydemus*, and which Aristotle translates into his own terminology of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. But, on the other hand, it helps us refine our understanding of the kind of activity which Aristotle has in mind when introducing his concept of ἐνέργεια. When speaking of ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν in the *Sophist*, Plato seems to be referring to the particular kind of intellectual activity which is proper to the soul. If we then turn to the *Euthydemus* we note that, once more, the examples are consistently those of cognitive activities such as learning, knowing and thinking. And finally, the same examples occur in the *Protrepticus*, as we have seen.<sup>236</sup> All of this suggests that the original domain of application of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast is the realm of psychological activity.

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<sup>236</sup> As a side note, it is interesting to observe that Aristotle's distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια appears, as in the case of Plato's *Euthydemus*, in relation to the problem of the exhortation to virtue. This is not a casual fact, for it confirms that the distinction is concerned primarily with the domain of human action, and not with physical considerations, such as the problem of change. If we alternatively connect the distinction with the definition of being of the *Sophist*, we note that, although the context is primarily ontological, it is still applied primarily to the being of the soul and its activities.

We can thus conclude that the terms δύναμις and ἐνέργεια stand for capacity and activity in the *Protrepticus*. But although this much seems relatively clear, we face now a problematic issue, which concerns the analogous expressions just cited. Indeed, some of the parallel expressions which Aristotle uses to refer to his new concept of ἐνέργεια, in particular ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν, constitute the starting point of a widely held interpretation which claims that ἐνέργεια is, in this context, equivalent to a broad concept of motion (κίνησις).<sup>237</sup> As I have anticipated, I hold that this is a fundamentally mistaken view, and the next sub-section is devoted to justify my rejection of it. This is a particularly important issue with far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of *Met. Θ*, for it affects our understanding of Aristotle's argument in *Θ* 6 (the chapter devoted to the elucidation of ἐνέργεια) and, in particular, the much-discussed κίνησις/ἐνέργεια distinction of *Met. Θ* 6, 1048b18–35.

In the following discussion, I will forcefully anticipate some discussions of some key passages of *Met. Θ* and of some of the central issues which concern this book. This is done solely for the purpose of clarifying the exact nature of Aristotle's early concept of ἐνέργεια. I will provide a fuller account of these passages in the second part of this thesis.

## 5.2. The non-kinetic origins of Aristotle's concept of ἐνέργεια

Most scholars seem to believe that the original concept of ἐνέργεια is inherently related to motion, and that it was only at a relatively mature stage that Aristotle discovered the concept of a non-kinetic kind of ἐνέργεια.<sup>238</sup> In this reading, this original concept would

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<sup>237</sup> This is, indeed, Menn's reading, who regards the Aristotelian categories of ποιεῖν and πάσχειν as instances of a larger category κίνησις (cf. 1994, 107). Cf. also Unlu (2021, 2–3). On this issue cf. n. 276 below.

<sup>238</sup> Cf. Graham (1987, 184–185), Rist (1989, 106–107), Menn (1994, 92, 111), Code (2003, 252), Makin (2006, xxviii, 133–135) and Burnyeat (2008, 224). The only exception to my knowledge is Berti (1958), but he reversed his position in his 1990 essay on the concept of ἐνέργεια (cf. pp. 47–51). In this latter text, he upholds the usual claim that motion constitutes the original application of the term. Beere (2009, 12, 163–166) seems close to acknowledging the non-kinetic origins of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction in the *Protrepticus* (165–166), but he ends up conflating motion and activity in his discussion of *Θ* 6, most probably because he follows Burnyeat in dismissing the passage at *Θ* 6, 1048b18–35.

comprise all sorts of activities, and it would be insensitive to later distinctions between different kinds of actions, as in *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35.

What are the reasons which support this view? Most scholars seem to be conditioned by a particular interpretation of a crucial passage of *Met.* Θ 3, where Aristotle states the following:

The name ἐνέργεια, which is put together (συντιθεμένη) with ἐντελέχεια, has been extended (ἐλήλυθε) to other things from motions above all (καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἐκ τῶν κινήσεων μάλιστα), because ἐνέργεια seems to be mostly movement (δοκεῖ γὰρ ἡ ἐνέργεια μάλιστα ἢ κίνησις εἶναι) and that is why they do not assign movement (being moved, κινεῖσθαι) to things that are not, but they do assign other predicates, such as that non-beings are thought or desired, but not that they are moved, and this because they are not in act (ἐνεργεῖα) but will be in act (ἐνεργεῖα) [if they have motion] (*Met.* Θ 3, 1047a30–b1).

There will be occasion to discuss this passage in more detail.<sup>239</sup> However, let us focus for the moment on the fact that Aristotle speaks of an extension of the term ἐνέργεια, which took place “from motions above all” (καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἐκ τῶν κινήσεων μάλιστα). Scholars usually view this extension as a transition from an original motion application (the one which would appear in the *Protrepticus*) towards a further modal notion, usually translated as actuality, and epitomized in the term ἐντελέχεια. This view is perhaps most clearly expressed by Menn (1994, 74, 76, 92):<sup>240</sup> he reads the passage as summarizing the progression carried out by Aristotle in book Θ, “from ἐνέργεια-as-motion and its corresponding δύναμις to ἐνέργεια-as-ἐντελέχεια and its corresponding δύναμις” (emphasis by the author) which would “recapitulate the path he himself had taken from the original sense of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast to something deeper” (92). For Menn, the passage quoted above says that “the word ‘ἐνέργεια’ originally applies to κινήσεις (whether narrowly ‘changes’ or more broadly ‘activities’), and that it applies by extension to the οὐσία that an agent produces in a matter” (111). If we read the passage this way, it

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<sup>239</sup> Further discussion on this passage will be offered in section 7.5 below.

<sup>240</sup> Many recent interpreters rely on Menn in support of their own arguments, *e.g.*, Anagnostopoulos (2011, 412): “Menn (1994) has shown that in apparently early works, δύναμις and ἐνέργεια as a rule do not discriminate between activities that do, and those that do not, contain their ends”; Politis & Su (2015) rely heavily on Menn for their critical appraisal of Kosman’s position. Cf. also Unlu (2021).

is natural to think (as Menn and many others do) that the contrast between the initial and useful senses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in Θ is one between a primary capacity/activity sense and a further potentiality/actuality sense.

Let us defer for the time being the issue of the structure of book Θ and focus on the alleged contrast between an early ‘activity’ sense and a mature ‘actuality’ sense of ἐνέργεια. We should first note that the passage from Θ 3 text does not necessarily yield the conclusion put forward by Menn. On the contrary, Aristotle could be simply stating that the motion cases of ἐνέργεια are the most *frequent*, the ones which are more easily recognizable, and not the most basic or original cases (developmentally speaking). In fact, there are good reasons to doubt that, for Aristotle, motion is ἐνέργεια in the proper sense of the term. Motion is sharply distinguished from ἐνέργεια later in book Θ (*Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–36),<sup>241</sup> and there are parallels to this distinction throughout the *corpus* (most notably in *Physics* and *De Anima*, but also in earlier works, as we shall see). In the immediately following line (1047a32), Aristotle affirms that ἐνέργεια *seems* (δοκεῖ)<sup>242</sup> to be above all motion, not that it *is* motion. This implies that, beyond misleading appearances, motion and ἐνέργεια are two clearly different instances (note that both terms are preceded by the article at 1047a32). Moreover, it is this fact which motivates the opinions of those who, guided by this more accessible or immediate case of ἐνέργεια, (wrongly) believe that motion and ἐνέργεια are co-extensive (1047a32–b1).<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Burnyeat (2008) has claimed that this passage does not belong to book Θ on both philological and conceptual grounds (Jaeger had already detailed some of its textual difficulties in the apparatus of his edition of the *Metaphysics*, noting moreover that the passage is absent in EJ. However, and in contrast to Burnyeat, Jaeger believed that the passage could be a later addition by Aristotle himself to a previous version of the *Metaphysics*, as shown by the use of his famous *Doppelklammern*). Though the results of his research have been widely accepted by scholars (Witt 2006, Makin 2006, Beere 2009, Berti 2017, Anagnostopoulos 2017), they have been questioned recently by Natali (2013) and Gonzalez (2019), who claim that the passage constitutes an integral part of Θ 6 and of Aristotle’s whole argument in Θ. Both authors are in agreement with Ross (1924 II, 253), who believes that the passage presents sound Aristotelian doctrine and that it is correctly placed at Θ 6.

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Bonitz’ Index (1870, s.v. δοκεῖν): *quoniam τὸ δοκεῖν ab hominis alicuius opinione pendet, non ex ipsa rei natura, δοκεῖν perinde ac φαίνεσθαι opponitur veritati rei*. Sentesy (2020, 15 n. 30) overlooks the key term δοκεῖ and thus interprets the passage as saying that “*energeia* is, in the strictest sense, *kinesis*”. This shift in meaning is crucial, for it allows Sentesy to claim that motion is the primary and most fundamental sense of both δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. For criticism of this position, see section 8.2.1 below.

<sup>243</sup> On the identity behind Aristotle’s allusion in this passage, see section 7.5.

It seems to me that what Aristotle is saying in this passage is not that κίνησις constitutes the original and most basic sense of ἐνέργεια, but that it simply represents its most common manifestation.<sup>244</sup> This explains both the fact that previous philosophers wrongly believed ἐνέργεια to be motion and Aristotle’s choice of beginning his analysis with δύναμις in relation to motion, for it is the immediate and accessible character of motion which allows us to understand the more obscure, though more fundamental, notion of non-kinetic ἐνέργεια.

Thus, we note that the expression ἐκ τῶν κινήσεων μάλιστα at 1047a31 can be read in two opposing ways: either motion (equal to activity in a broad sense) constitutes the primary case of ἐνέργεια from a developmental point of view, in contrast with the further non-kinetic sense (most often taken to be either substantial form or Frede’s 1994 modal sense, *i.e.*, ‘actuality’), or it is simply the most immediate, but ultimately improper, case of ἐνέργεια, which can hardly be considered ἐνέργεια in the strict sense of the term (in line with the doctrine of the passage at 1048b18–35, which considers motion to be ἀτελής ἐνέργεια in contrast with complete activity, τελεία ἐνέργεια). In any case, the way we choose to interpret this passage has important consequences for our understanding of book Θ in general and of chapter 6 in particular.

Menn supports his reading of this passage by way of a particular interpretation of Aristotle’s earlier texts, where, he claims, Aristotle “had not yet distinguished activity from motion, and so referred to all activities as κινήσεις” (106). This implies that, at least for the early Aristotle, the capacity-exercise distinction is inherently associated with the notion of process,<sup>245</sup> *i.e.*, that all activities, insofar as they are activities, are understood

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<sup>244</sup> This is also the position held by Kosman (1984, 121; 2013, 37) and Blair (1992, 125). Lefebvre (2018, 17–19) also rejects the developmental reading of the passage, according to which Aristotle originally thought ἐνέργεια to be motion. He instead interprets it as a “very brief development on the (pre-aristotelian) history of the notion of act, by mentioning those who identified, wrongly, act with motions” (*un très bref développement sur l’histoire (pré-aristotélicienne) de la notion d’acte en mentionnant qu’on a d’abord identifié, mais à tort, l’acte et les mouvements*) (p. 18).

<sup>245</sup> By ‘process’ I mean a specific kind of activity which is oriented towards an external τέλος and which necessarily takes time in reaching said τέλος. Processes are necessarily composed of a series of parts, or stages in their realization (*i.e.*, the achievement of the τέλος). This of course is Aristotle’s standard conception of motion, which is essentially distinct from another sort of activity which is unlike processes, such as thinking and sight: these activities have already reached their τέλος throughout their exercise and thus are (in principle) not necessarily temporally extended. Cf. *EN X 4*, 1174a13–b14. When Menn claims that Aristotle uses “κίνησις broadly to cover all activities” (106) he does so in order to differentiate activity

as motions.<sup>246</sup> This claim is particularly important in Menn’s interpretation, for it allows him to dispel the apparent incongruence between *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b6–9 and the κίνησις-ἐνέργεια distinction which immediately follows at 1048b18–35.<sup>247</sup> For Menn, in the analogy of b6–9 Aristotle is “reverting to the terminology of the *Protrepticus* and the *Magna Moralia*”, citing *Protr.* XI 56.22–57.23/B80–83 and *MM* II 7 as evidence (1994, 106–107 and n. 44). According to Menn, this would explain why Aristotle would place all the previous examples of the capacity-activity sense (housebuilding, sight, being awake, contemplation) of the first part of Θ 6 under the κίνησις to δύναμις heading.

Thus, Menn recurs to a developmental explanation to resolve an apparent contradiction in Θ 6. But the fact is that there is neither a development of the concept of ἐνέργεια nor a contradiction in Θ 6.<sup>248</sup> First of all, we have already seen that the original formulation of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction does not concern the problem of change. Rather, it concerns the ambiguity of verbs which denote subjective activities such as

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(understood primarily as motion) from the actual existence of beings, *i.e.*, the resulting product of a process of production or coming to be (1994, 110: “In a strict sense, the only ἐνέργεια here [*sc.* in the case of housebuilding] is the γένεσις of the house, that does not persist once the house is complete, and is not the τέλος but a means to the τέλος”). Cf. also Charles (2015, 204–205). The explicit association between activity and *process* in Aristotle’s earlier thought can be found in Menn 2002, 93–95.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. Menn (1994, 76 n. 5): “[...] it seems defensible to say that Plato assumed that all activity was motion; this assumption was continued by the Hellenistic philosophers, and [...] was shared by Aristotle himself at one stage in his thought”; Menn 2002, 86–88, 93–95, especially 88 n. 4: “it would not be surprising if Aristotle had started by assuming that all ἐνέργεια is κίνησις, since this had been the normal background assumption before his time and would continue to be so for centuries after [...]. Everyone, including Aristotle, continues to assume that all κίνησις is ἐνέργεια; the only question is whether there are also other ἐνέργεια that are not κινήσεις”. In what follows, I will show that Aristotle was already aware in his earlier texts that there are, indeed, ἐνέργεια that are not κινήσεις.

<sup>247</sup> Menn argues that that the distinction between κίνησις and ἐνέργεια constitutes a “relatively fine point” (1994, 106), which serves the purpose of correcting the inexact use of κίνησις in 1048b8–9 (see Gill 1989, 217 for a variation of this position). For Menn, this minor and chronologically late distinction would not challenge the general dual scheme of activity/process on the one hand and actuality/substance on the other (embodied in the lines at 1048b8–9). But, as we will see, this interpretation clashes with Aristotle’s own indications throughout the *corpus* (most notably in *Metaphysics* Θ 6 but also in many other places, and as early as the *Protrepticus*), which show that the distinction between motion and non-motion capacities and activities is a crucial element in his ontology, and not a mere addendum, which would be somewhat irrelevant for Aristotle’s larger argument in book Θ.

<sup>248</sup> I will expand on the latter issue in the second part of this thesis (cf. chapter 8).

knowing, learning, and seeing. Two activities seem to occupy most of Aristotle's attention in the *Protrepticus*: seeing (ὄρᾶν) and thinking (φρονεῖν, θεωρεῖν), which are two main examples of non-kinetic activity throughout the *corpus*. Furthermore, the *Protrepticus* and other early texts show that Aristotle systematically opposes this kind of psychic activity (seeing, knowing, and thinking) to motion (in particular to the example of housebuilding).<sup>249</sup> Contrary to what is usually believed, it is not the case that non-kinetic activity derives from motion, but it is motion which derives from this original concept of ἐνέργεια, a claim which is perfectly consistent with Aristotle's recurrent statement that motion constitutes an incomplete (ἀτελής) instance of a complete (τελεία) or unqualified sense of ἐνέργεια (ἐνέργεια ἀπλῶς) (*Phys.* III 2, 201b31–5; VIII 5, 257b8–9; *DA* III 7, 431a7; *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b29–30; K 9, 1066a20–24; *EN* X 4, 1174b16–17).<sup>250</sup>

Having delimited the contours of the discussion, let us now examine in further detail both Menn's arguments in favor of his position and our reasons to reject them.

### 5.2.1. The prefiguration of the κίνησις-ἐνέργεια distinction in Aristotle's early works

Menn supports his interpretation of ἐνέργεια in Aristotle's early works by way of three main arguments. Firstly, he contends that the expression ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν, which runs

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<sup>249</sup> This becomes clear if we consider some passages of the *Protrepticus* not included by Menn in his analysis (to be discussed below). The passages in question are VII 43.5–25/B68–70; XI 58.15–17/B87; and 59.13–17/B91. Menn makes reference to VII 43.5–25/B68–70 in a note (1994, 108 n. 47), without much comment, and with the limited scope of explaining the equivalence between ἔργον and ἐνέργεια. XI 58.15–17/B87 and 59.13–17/B91 are absent in his paper. These passages show that although Aristotle certainly applies the capacity-exercise distinction to both motions and non-kinetic activities throughout his works, he is already well aware in his earlier texts of the intrinsic and fundamental difference between the two kinds of activities.

Further passages which support this view can be found in chapter V of Iamblichus' *Protrepticus* (in particular 34.17–18 and 35.18–22) and in his *DCMS* (70.16–21), although there is no consensus among scholars regarding their attribution to Aristotle's *Protrepticus*. Still, it should be noted that D. S. Hutchinson, who is working on the reconstruction of the *Protrepticus* together with M. R. Johnson, retains them to be from Aristotle's *Protrepticus* (private correspondence, 24/10/2022).

<sup>250</sup> This is the view defended by Gonzalez (2019, 141 n. 45). However, he seems to hesitate regarding the specific nature of Aristotle's early concept of ἐνέργεια: "It is possible that Aristotle had not yet developed at the time of writing this work [*sc. Eudemian Ethics*] the sharp distinction between *energeia/praxis* and *kinesis* defended at *Metaph.* Θ. 6" (2019, 167 n. 89).

parallel to the term ἐνέργεια in the *Protrepticus*,<sup>251</sup> indicates that there is an equivalence between ἐνέργεια and κίνησις in this text (1994, 95–96; 106 n. 44). Indeed, Menn claims that ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν is another way in which the early Aristotle—like plato—refers to change (74, 76 n. 5). The second argument focuses on the passage at 56.27–57.6/B80, quoted above (p. 140). Menn claims that the expression μεταβάλλειν εἰς τὴν κίνησιν contradicts *Phys.* V 2 (where Aristotle states that a change cannot be changed), implying that this text contains an immature theory of motion. The third argument is that in this same passage Aristotle appears to call being awake κίνησις, which seems odd given that in later texts being awake will constitute an example of a non-kinetic activity.

Although these arguments are not without force, they are far from being decisive. Indeed, there is one important passage, closely connected with the passage of chapter XI of the *Protrepticus* mentioned earlier, that seems to contradict Menn’s thesis that there are no traces of the motion/activity distinction in Aristotle’s earlier texts. At VII 43.10–20/B68–69, Aristotle states the following:

if it [*sc.* the activity of thinking (φρονεῖν)] is to be of productive character (ποιητική), it will produce something different from itself, as is the house with respect to the art of building, which is not part of the house; but thinking is part of the virtue [of the soul] and of happiness, for we say that happiness either comes from it *or is it* (ἢ γὰρ ἐκ ταύτης ἢ ταύτην φαμὲν εἶναι τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν). Therefore, according to this argument it is impossible for it to be a productive science (ἀδύνατον εἶναι [τὴν] ἐπιστήμην ποιητικήν), given that [in the case of a productive science] the end (τὸ τέλος) has to be better than that which comes to be [*i.e.*, the activity which takes place to attain the end], and nothing is better than thought (φρονήσεως) [...] Therefore, we must say that this form of knowledge is theoretical (θεωρητικήν), since it is impossible for production to be its end (ἐπεὶπερ ἀδύνατον ποίησιν εἶναι τὸ τέλος).

Aristotle wants to demonstrate that the activity of thinking (φρονεῖν) is the highest virtue of the soul, an argument which plays an important role in Aristotle’s protreptic goal of directing his audience towards the exercise of philosophy. In order to do so, Aristotle must show that thinking does not serve a further goal or purpose (for then that further goal would be worthier than the activity carried out to attain it), but that it is exercised *for its own sake*. This is why Aristotle introduces here a distinction between one set of

<sup>251</sup> Cf. *Protr.* 57.8/B81, quoted above in p. 141, and 57.22–23/B83.

productive (ποιητική) activities, such as housebuilding, and another set of theoretic (θεωρητική) activities such as thinking (φρονεῖν), to which he will later add contemplating (θεωρεῖν) and seeing (ὄρᾶν).<sup>252</sup> It is crucial to note that the criterion which Aristotle follows to establish this contrast is the relation which these activities establish with their end (τέλος). While productive activities are oriented towards and subordinate to an end which is different from the activity itself (such as in the case of housebuilding, which is towards an external end, *i.e.*, a house), the activity of thinking has no other τέλος than its own exercise, for if it had a further τέλος it would be better than the activity itself, and Aristotle is trying to prove that there is nothing better than thinking. Of course, this same criterion features in the κίνησις-ἐνέργεια distinction of *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35, and resurfaces in the later discussion of the priority in being of ἐνέργεια at Θ 8, 1050a23–b2 (to be discussed further below). This criterion plays a fundamental role in Aristotle’s conception of motion, demonstrating that what is at stake in these passages is not only the status of productions, but rather the status of motion in general with regard to complete activity.<sup>253</sup>

The passage not only confirms the distinction between the two kinds of actions but includes almost the same examples as feature in the passages of Θ 6 and 8 mentioned above. Aristotle concludes at 43.20–25/B70 that this special kind of activity, thinking and

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<sup>252</sup> The distinction is not exclusive to this passage; it also appears at IX 52.16–53.2/B42 and 53.15–54.5/B44, and in other apparently early works such as *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17, 38–39 and *Top.* 146b13–19. It is also an important distinction which appears continually in *EN*. See for example VI 4, 1140a2–17, where ποίησις is contrasted to πράξις; recall the use of πράξις at *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35. See also *EN* I 1, 1094a4–18 and X 6, 1176a30–b8. It should be noted that in the passage in *EN* VI 4, 1140a2–17, Aristotle states that the distinction was already established in the exoterical works (cf. 1140a2–3: “on this matter we can trust our exoterical works”, πιστεύομεν δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν καὶ τοῖς ἐξωτερικοῖς λόγοις). This is most probably a reference to the *Protrepticus* passage quoted above, given that there is no other citation available that makes this point (cf. Hutchinson and Johnson, in draft, C2¶xvi).

Rist (1989, 107–109) notices that in *Top.* 146b13–19 Aristotle does have the distinction between motion and activity in mind, but claims that it is absent in the *Protrepticus*. However, the passage quoted above, and the one I will quote below, show that the activities which feature in the *Protrepticus* are distinguished from motions such as housebuilding. This would invalidate Rist’s claim that “when Aristotle began to talk about activities (quite understandably) all activities are movements and all movements are activities” (107).

<sup>253</sup> See pp. 158–162 and section 8.2 below.

contemplation, is analogous to sight, since when one exercises the capacity of sight *nothing other than sight itself comes about*:

Thus thinking and contemplating (τὸ φρονεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ θεωρεῖν) are the ἔργον of virtue, and this is for men, of all things, the worthiest of choice, as it is also, I think, sight with regard to the eyes, which is something one would choose to have, even if nothing other than sight itself were to result from it.

What is most interesting from this last passage, beyond the explicit introduction of the example of sight, is that Aristotle describes contemplation as the ἔργον of virtue. This description should be read together with XI 58.3–10/B85, where Aristotle states that “the ἔργον of the soul, either alone or most of all, is reflecting and reasoning” (ἔστι δὴ καὶ ψυχῆς ἥτοι μόνον ἢ μάλιστα πάντων ἔργον τὸ διανοεῖσθαι τε καὶ λογίζεσθαι, 58.3–5).<sup>254</sup>

As in other passages of the *Protrepticus* (see for instance VII 42.5–23/B63–65), Aristotle is here using ἔργον as a parallel term to ἐνέργεια. However, and as it was noted above (cf. pp. 143–144), the term ἔργον presents a peculiarity: it can refer either to a specific kind of activity or to the resulting product of a process of production.<sup>255</sup> This much is clear if we consider a crucial passage of the *Eudemian Ethics*. At *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17, Aristotle tells us that in some cases the ἔργον is different from the exercise

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<sup>254</sup> The change in terminology (διανοεῖσθαι and λογίζεσθαι in the place of φρονεῖν and θεωρεῖν) need not worry us, for immediately after the passage at 58.3–5, Aristotle goes back to his previous terminology and states that “he who thinks and contemplates” (ὁ φρονῶν καὶ θεωρῶν, 58.8), that is, he who thinks correctly and has attained truth, is alive in the most complete and fuller sense (τελέως ζῆν 58.9). Aristotle is claiming here that contemplation (*i.e.*, philosophical insight) is the activity which best characterizes the human soul, the one which is most proper of a human being. Since the activity of contemplation constitutes the highest activity of the human soul, it follows that the one who thinks correctly and contemplates properly lives more fully, more perfectly. Later texts will restate the idea, with explicit mention of the term ἐνέργεια, as in *EN* I 7, 1097a22–1098a18, in particular 1098a7: “the ἔργον of man is the activity of the soul according to reason” (ἔστιν ἔργον ἀνθρώπου ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια κατὰ λόγον) and 1098a16–18: “human good comes to be the activity of the soul according to virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance to the best and the most complete” (τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθὸν ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια γίνεται κατ’ ἀρετὴν, εἰ δὲ πλείους αἰ ἀρεταί, κατὰ τὴν ἀρίστην καὶ τελειοτάτην).

<sup>255</sup> This double reference of the term ἔργον anticipates the two full-fledged applications of the term ἐνέργεια, substance and complete activity. The term ἐντελέχεια is used in later texts primarily to refer to the substance application, while ἐνέργεια refers primarily to the activity sense. But Aristotle uses ἐνέργεια to refer to the substance sense too. I will explain how this is possible in chapter 8.

or activity (ἕτερόν τι τὸ ἔργον παρὰ τὴν χρῆσιν), such as in the example of housebuilding, which is different from the house that comes to be. In this case the ἔργον, Aristotle tells us, is *the house, not the act of housebuilding* (οἰκοδομικῆς οἰκία ἀλλ’ οὐκ οἰκοδόμησις, a14–15). But in other cases, the ἔργον is the exercise (ἡ χρῆσις ἔργον, a16), such as in the case of sight, whose ἔργον is the act of seeing (ὄρασις).<sup>256</sup> The difference between the two kinds of action is that in one case the ἔργον is external and different from the action, while in the other the ἔργον *is* the activity. This is the same criterion which features in *Protr.* VII 43.10–20/B68–69, quoted above. *EE* 1219a13–17 makes the argument with ἔργον, while VII 43.10–20/B68–69 makes it with τέλος; still, Aristotle had made clear just before the argument of the *Eudemian Ethics* that “the τέλος of each thing is its ἔργον” (τέλος ἐκάστου τὸ ἔργον, 1219a8). The point is that motions like housebuilding, insofar they do not possess their end, are not included among the possible referents of ἔργον since to be an ἔργον is essentially to be a τέλος.<sup>257</sup>

The *Eudemian Ethics*’ passage is parallel to Aristotle’s argument in *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a21–28.<sup>258</sup> In this text, Aristotle introduces the distinction between different kinds of actions with a preliminary statement:

the ἔργον is τέλος, and the ἐνέργεια is the ἔργον, and that is why the name ἐνέργεια is related to ἔργον (τοῦνομα ἐνέργεια λέγεται κατὰ τὸ ἔργον) and stretches towards ἐντελέχεια (συντείνει πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν) (1050a21–23).<sup>259</sup>

<sup>256</sup> Plato also uses ἔργον to describe psychic activities such as seeing in *Resp.* I 352e–353d. This last passage is explicitly related by Vegetti (1998, 87 n. 64) to Aristotle’s conception of ἔργον. See also Napolitano Validatara (2009, 264–265).

<sup>257</sup> This is also the view of Baker (2015, 231; 238–248) who likewise emphasizes the intrinsic connection between ἔργον and τέλος (which Aristotle makes explicit in *EE* II 1, 1219a8 and *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a21). He rightfully claims that ἔργον is not in itself an ambiguous term (as in the view of Charles 1986, 135–139), but that it has one meaning (that of τέλος), although it may have two possible references: activities which are ends (seeing, thinking) or the complete result of an activity (a product in a process of production). In contrast, Senteny (2020, 155–156) believes that ἔργον has two senses, product and action, and that the action sense is fundamentally that of motion; but this goes against what Aristotle says at *EE* 1219a14–15 (“[the ἔργον of] housebuilding is the house, not the act of housebuilding”, οἰκοδομικῆς οἰκία ἀλλ’ οὐκ οἰκοδόμησις).

<sup>258</sup> For discussion on this passage, cf. section 9.1.4 *infra*.

<sup>259</sup> An analysis of the relation between ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια will be offered in section 7.5 *infra*.

He is restating what was only implicit in the *Protrepticus*, although explicit in the *Eudemian Ethics*, that is that ἔργον and τέλος coincide. Aristotle then goes on to restate the distinction between motion and activity, but instead of making the argument in terms of ἔργον, he speaks of that which is last (ἔσχατον), which is another way in which Aristotle refers to τέλος:<sup>260</sup>

Given that in some cases that which is last (ἔσχατον) is the exercise (χρῆσις) (such as in the case of seeing with regard to sight, where nothing different results apart from sight), while in other cases something [different than the exercise] comes to be (such as a house [comes to be] from the art of housebuilding, besides the activity of housebuilding), still in the first case it is no less an end, in the second case it is more an end than the δύναμις (ὅμως οὐθὲν ἦττον ἔνθα μὲν τέλος, ἔνθα δὲ μᾶλλον τέλος τῆς δυνάμεώς ἐστιν) (Θ 8, 1050a23–28).

Here, Aristotle confidently affirms that in the case of activities such as sight, ἐνέργεια is an end (1050a27). The same cannot be said of activities such as housebuilding, but it is still true that in this case the ἐνέργεια is *more* an end than the δύναμις (μᾶλλον τέλος τῆς δυνάμεώς ἐστιν, 1050a27–28) (and thus both kinds end up being prior to δύναμις in being, which is what Aristotle is trying to demonstrate in Θ 8). What this shows is that *there is a qualitative difference between complete activity and motion*. This difference concerns *their relationships with their ends*, since there is no doubt that the former is an end, while the latter, although not being an end in itself, can be granted to be more an end than the δύναμις since it shares, deficiently, the telic *structure* of complete activity (*i.e.*, it is *oriented towards, but not in possession of*, the τέλος).<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> “It was assumed that the τέλος is that which is the best and the last thing on account of which all other things are for” (ὕποκειται γὰρ τέλος τὸ βέλτιστον καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον, οὗ ἕνεκα τὰλλα πάντα, *EE* II 1, 1219a10–11).

<sup>261</sup> This position is consistent with what Aristotle says in the *Physics*. At III 2, 201b27–29, Aristotle argues that motion is indeterminate (ἀόριστον), neither fully ἐνέργεια nor fully δύναμις. It is instead a *qualified* ἐνέργεια: motion is the ἐντελέχεια of the capable *qua* being capable (ἢ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια, ἣ τοιοῦτον, κίνησις ἐστιν, *Phys.* III 1, 201a10–11), which is not in possession of its end, but is *on its way* to it. While the motion lasts, the end has not yet been attained, since the capable remains capable (in the case of a process of housebuilding, the materials still retain their capability to become a house because the house has not yet been finished, in which case the materials cease to have the capability to become *this* house). Aristotle claims that this is the cause of its incompleteness (201b32–33), which explains the fact that motion

### 5.2.2. Complete activity in the *Protrepticus*

*EE* II 1, 1219a13–17 makes the distinction between the diverse kinds of actions in terms of ἔργον, and *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a23–28 speaks of “that which is last” (ἔσχατον, 1050a24). But it is *Protr.* VII 43.10–20/B68–69 that presents the contrast explicitly in terms of the relation which each action establishes with its τέλος.<sup>262</sup> This same criterion, of course, features in *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35, Aristotle’s most complex and rich discussion on the distinction between motion and ἐνέργεια. This strongly supports our claim that Aristotle was well aware of the difference between motion and ἐνέργεια in his earlier texts.

Aristotle is making a point which he routinely makes throughout the *corpus*: although all activities, including motions, can be deemed to be ἐνέργεια in a loose sense, not all ἐνέργεια are motions. What differentiates the two kinds is that, while in the case of motions the end is different from the motion itself, in the case of activities such as thinking or seeing, the activity is carried out for its own sake and always coincides with its τέλος. This implies that, as early as in the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle realizes that *there is a sense in which activities are independent of motion*. The next step which complements this reasoning, already suggested in the *Protrepticus*’ passage and implicit in the parallel discussion in *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a15–b3, can be found in the *Physics*, *De Anima*, and *Metaphysics* Θ 6: motion is an incomplete (ἀτελής) or qualified<sup>263</sup> ἐνέργεια, opposed to complete (τελεία) or unqualified (ἀπλῶς) ἐνέργεια (*Phys.* III 2, 201b31–35; VIII 5,

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cannot be counted as ἐνέργεια ἀπλή (201b34–35), that is, ἐνέργεια without qualification; ἐνέργεια which is in possession of its end. On the contrary, for Aristotle motion is an ἐνέργεια of a sort (ἐνέργειά τις, 201b31), though incomplete (ἀτελής δέ, 201b32).

This account of motion is the one defended by Kosman (1969; 1984, 129–130; 2013, 70–71), Coope (2009), and Gonzalez (2019, 137–146). More discussion of Aristotle’s definition of motion will be given in section 8.2.1.

<sup>262</sup> Menn (1994, 108–109) quotes the passages of *EE* and *Met.* Θ 8 in full, but relegates *Protr.* VII 43.10–20/B68–69 to a note (n. 47). Instead of citing it in its entirety, he mostly paraphrases it and leaves out large sections of the passage, including the key lines at 14–17, which express the *criterion* that distinguishes the two kinds of actions, *i.e.*, the specific relation they establish with their τέλος. This obscures completely the parallel between this passage and Θ *Met.* 6, 1048b18–35.

<sup>263</sup> As stated in *Phys.* III 1, 201a10–11, motion is the ἐντελέχεια of that which is capable *as such* (ἢ τοιοῦτον). The ἢ τοιοῦτον clause introduces the qualification which distinguishes motion from ἐνέργεια simply speaking. Cf. section 8.2.

257b8–9; *DA* III 7, 431a7; *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b29–30; K 9, 1066a20–22). This key expression, correctly understood, shows that κίνησις is not a species of a broader genus ἐνέργεια, as Menn believes,<sup>264</sup> since it would be absurd to consider a species as an incomplete instance of some genus, as Gonzalez argues.<sup>265</sup> Instead, motion is a *derivative and incomplete* ἐνέργεια, dependent on the original and proper sense of ἐνέργεια, originally understood as a special kind of activity which is not different from its τέλος.

Of course, this contrast is clearly stated in *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35 and implicit in Θ 8, 1050a23–28, but we do not need to rely exclusively on these texts. For in *Protr.* XI 58.15–17/B87 Aristotle tells us that “*complete and unhindered activity* (τελεία ἐνέργεια καὶ ἀκώλυτος) certainly has in itself delight, so that the activity of contemplation (θεωρητικὴ ἐνέργεια) must be the most pleasant of all”.<sup>266</sup> As in *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35,

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<sup>264</sup> Cf. Menn (1994, 106 n. 43), followed by Makin (2006, 151), Beere (2009, 229–230; 2018, 878), Anagnostopoulos (2017, 206 n. 72), and partially by Sentesy (2020, 79) and Unlu (2021, 12).

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Gonzalez (2019, 141): “An ‘incomplete *energeia*’ is similarly not a species or kind of *energeia* but a defective *energeia*, one that is *not energeia* in the full or unqualified sense” (emphasis by the author). There is a relation of distinction and ontological priority between ἐνέργεια and κίνησις, and it is the former concept which explains the latter. This appears also to be the position of Iamblichus (reported by Simplicius), who upholds the separation and distinction between ἐνέργεια and κίνησις according to the ἐντελής-ἀτελής criterion (cf. *in Cat.* 303, 36ff.; 308, 32–309, 8, ed. Kalbfleisch). Simplicius presents his testimony against Plotinus’s view which objects that Aristotle did not include κίνησις under the genus of ἐνέργεια. Furthermore, Iamblichus cites Theophrastus in support of his view (304, 32–305, 13. An analysis of this passage can be found at Gonzalez 2019, 179–181).

<sup>266</sup> The idea reappears in *Protr.* XI 59.13–17/B91: “For the activity of our truest thoughts (ἡ τῶν ἀληθεστάτων νοήσεων ἐνέργεια), filled by the things that exist most and preserving always steadfastly the completeness (τελειότητα) afforded to us, that activity, out of all of them, is also the one that delights us most effectively”. Note that here Aristotle further explains the connection between the activity of thinking and the notion of completeness. Similarly, *Protr.* V 35.18–22 speaks of the necessity of using the *pure activities of the intellect* (ταῖς τοῦ νοῦ καθαραῖς ἐνεργείαις [...] χρηστέον). See also *DCMS* 70.16–21: “what is similar in nature to each thing is what is proper to it, and to the man of liberated status the dominant end (τὸ κύριον τέλος) of the activity (ἐνεργείας) in accordance with his proper way of life has its reference to himself and to nothing else external (πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔχει πρὸς οὐδὲν ἕτερον τῶν ἐκτός)”. These last two passages are thought to be quotes by Iamblichus of Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* by Hutchinson and Johnson (cf. n. 249 above; I am grateful to Douglas Hutchinson in particular for having brought these passages to my attention through personal communication).

Lastly, we should note that the connection between pleasure and complete activity is also underscored in *EN* X 4 (see in particular 1174b14–23), a passage in which Aristotle makes explicit use of

*EN* X 4, 1174b16–17 and *DA* III 7, 431a7, we have here a description of ἐνέργεια in its strict sense, τελεία ἐνέργεια (1048b22). The passage at *Met.* Θ 6 begins as a consideration of the larger structure of human action which Aristotle calls πρᾶξις (1048b18), though only τελεία πρᾶξις, or ἐνέργεια, can be properly deemed to be πρᾶξις. The other incomplete kind of πρᾶξις, κίνησις, is not πρᾶξις in the strict sense and can be called so only if we state that it is incomplete (ἀτελής). Although the *Protrepticus* does not articulate this distinction so clearly, its basic structure is already present. We have on the one hand the distinction between two different sets of actions, according to the criterion of the relation with their ends (*VII* 43.5–25/B68–70), and on the other the allusion to a complete kind of action (*XI* 58.15–17/B87), to which κίνησις (or ποίησις in the language of the *Protrepticus*) is opposed. Moreover, Aristotle is perfectly consistent with regard to the examples he chooses in all of these texts. The example of ἀτελής ἐνέργεια is systematically the case of housebuilding; the paradigmatic examples of τελεία ἐνέργεια are the acts of seeing (ὄρᾶν) and of thinking (φρονεῖν, θεωρεῖν, νοεῖν), the latter being also the kind of activity which characterizes the Prime Mover, which is, of course, unmoved.<sup>267</sup>

There is, however, one objection which could be made to this reading. In effect, one could claim that in Aristotle’s earlier texts (specifically in the *Protrepticus*) the criterion of being its own end is used solely to establish a restricted contrast between productive and non-productive activities. This view would be supported by Aristotle’s choice of terminology in *Protr.* *VII* 43.10–20/B68–69, that is, by the fact that Aristotle speaks of activities which are ποιητική, and not explicitly of motion. But although this reading may seem plausible at first sight, there are important reasons why it is fundamentally mistaken.

Firstly, we should note that Aristotle does not seem to establish such a stark distinction between ποίησις and κίνησις throughout his works. In one especially relevant

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the distinction between motion and activity. See also *EN* X 7, 1177a13–25, where Aristotle restates the point made in the *Protrepticus*’ passage quoted in the main text above. On the issue see Gonzalez (1991).

<sup>267</sup> The parallel and commonality between the activities of thinking and sight is further explained by Aristotle at *Protr.* *V* 34.17–18: “the insights are activities of the intellect (τοῦ δ’ αὖ νοῦ αἰ νοήσεις ἐνέργειαι), since they are sightings of intelligible things (ὀράσεις οὐσῶν νοητῶν), as the activity (ἐνέργεια) of what is able to see (τοῦ ὀρατικοῦ) is the sighting of visible things (ὄρᾶν τὰ ὀρατά)”. As noted in n. 249 above, this passage is thought to be genuinely Aristotelian by D. S. Hutchinson and M. R. Johnson.

passage—at *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a28–b2, which runs parallel to the ones cited before—Aristotle seems to take production and motion as equivalent. He states the following:

The act of housebuilding is in that which is being built, and comes to be and is at the same time with the house. So when what comes to be is something different from the exercise (παρὰ τὴν χρῆσιν), in those cases the ἐνέργεια is in that which is produced (ἐν τῷ ποιουμένῳ), such as the act of building in that which is being built, and the act of weaving in that which is being woven, and the same in the other cases (ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων); in general motion is in that which is moved (καὶ ὅλως ἢ κίνησις ἐν τῷ κινουμένῳ). But in the cases when there is not an ἔργον different from the ἐνέργεια (παρὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν), the ἐνέργεια is in them, such as sight in the one who is seeing, and contemplation in the one who is contemplating and life in the soul, and thus happiness, since it is life of some kind (Θ 8, 1050a28–b2).

The passage is a continuation of 1050a23–28, quoted earlier, and has the intention of further demonstrating the priority in being of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις.<sup>268</sup> Here, Aristotle once more restates the motion/activity distinction. The important thing to note is that, when referring to motion in opposition to complete activity, Aristotle makes a continuous argument that concerns housebuilding (1050a32), weaving (1050a32–33) and motion (1050a33–34) without introducing any meaningful distinction between the three terms; indeed, the allusion to motion seems to sum up the previous examples. The fact that κίνησις is preceded by the article and the adverb ὅλως suggests that Aristotle is speaking of motion in general, that is, that motion as such is carried out in that which is moved (ἐν τῷ κινουμένῳ, a34). This runs parallel (cf. ὁμοίως at 1050a33) to the cases of housebuilding and weaving, which are evident examples of production, in which the

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<sup>268</sup> When reading this passage (which involves several difficulties that I cannot properly address here), we must take into account that Aristotle’s main effort in this whole section of Θ 8 is to show that *even motions* (cf. 1050a16–17) are “more an end than [and thus prior to] the δύναμις” (1050a27–28). Aristotle is not claiming that motion *is* an end (a condition which he grants only to substantial form and complete activity) but that *a*) it takes place *in* that which will become the end, *i.e.*, the materials being turned into the house, and *b*) it comes to be and takes place with its end. These two claims have the purpose of emphasizing the closeness between a motion and its τέλος, without compromising their fundamental distinction. Cf. n. 261 above and Broadie 2010, 206.

motion is carried out in that which is produced (ἐν τῷ ποιουμένῳ, a31).<sup>269</sup> The following line would contrast this kind of activity with the complete kind, which is carried out not in something other which is moved, but in itself.<sup>270</sup>

The passage cited above is a parallel text to *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17, analyzed earlier. As we saw, in this passage Aristotle establishes a contrast between actions which have an external ἔργον (a notion which in this context is equivalent to τέλος, as noted above) and actions in which the exercise and the ἔργον coincide. The criterion which structures this distinction is the same one as in *Protr.* VII 43.10–20/B68–69 and *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35. But although Aristotle chooses examples of productions to illustrate those actions which do not contain their ends, the discussion is not limited to production, since Aristotle is here speaking in general terms of the two ways in which ἔργον is said (τὸ ἔργον λέγεται διχῶς, 1219a13).<sup>271</sup> This shows that although Aristotle chooses productive activities as the main examples of incomplete activities in *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a23–b2 and *EE* 1219a13–17, the criterion of end-having has a wider application than the narrow case of production in both these texts.

If the sharp terminological distinction between motion and production is not found in the most significant parallel texts to *Protr.* VII 43.10–20/B68–69, then we must conclude that the apparent reduction of the end-having criterion to production in this latter

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<sup>269</sup> It should be noted that the paradigm cases of motion in the whole of *Met.* Θ (and specifically in key passages in Θ 6 and Θ 8) are productive activities, in particular housebuilding (there are variations, such as weaving at 1050a32–33). The point is that the distinctive feature of motion is best captured in production, where the disjointed relation between the activity and its τέλος is most evident. See once more *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17 and *EN* VI 4, 1140a1–6. On the structural equivalence between ποιήσις and κίνησις, cf. Natali 1991, especially at 196–198.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. Gonzalez 2019, 169–170. Of course, no distinction between ποιήσις and κίνησις can be found in *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35, which includes several cases of production among the examples of κινήσεις. The same applies to the discussion that takes place in *EN* X 4, in which the main example of motion is housebuilding, a clear case of productive activity. Aristotle’s discussion of motion in *Phys.* III 1 also relies heavily on the example of housebuilding (cf. 201a15–19, b8–15).

<sup>271</sup> In his biological works, Aristotle uses ἔργον when alluding to generation and to the natural motions of living beings (cf. *PA* 639b19–21, 648a13–19, 694b11–14; *GA* 716a17–27, 731a23–34). In other works, he speaks of ἔργον as a general notion (cf. *DC* 286a8–9: Ἐκαστόν ἐστιν, ὃν ἐστιν ἔργον, ἔνεκα τοῦ ἔργου. See also *Pol.* 1253a23: πάντα δὲ τῷ ἔργῳ ὄρισται καὶ τῇ δυνάμει). If, as we noted above, the passage in *Eudemian Ethics* speaks in general terms of the two ways in which ἔργον is said, then it seems reasonable to assume that the doctrine of this passage applies to all the uses of ἔργον, and not only to productive activity.

passage must be a unique occurrence in the *corpus*. This seems implausible. Indeed, such a claim would have to be supported by additional evidence, but the fact is that it runs counter to the use that Aristotle makes of the motion/activity distinction throughout his works.<sup>272</sup>

Secondly, we should note that this view seems also to contradict Aristotle's treatment of ἐνέργεια in his earlier works. As we noted earlier, *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17 denies that an action such as housebuilding could be regarded as ἔργον, because in this case the ἔργον is located beyond the activity itself. In this passage, ἔργον seems to apply either to complete substances (a house) or to complete activities (seeing). In the *Protrepticus*, ἔργον constitutes a parallel term to ἐνέργεια, and both terms are used to describe actions in which action and end coincide (seeing, thinking). It is undeniable that Aristotle is aware of the peculiar telic condition of this kind of action in both works (*Protr.* VII 43.10–20/B68–69; XI 58.15–17/B87; *EE* II 1, 1219a8–17). The fact that Aristotle explicitly denies that actions which have an external ἔργον/τέλος could be deemed to be proper ἔργα, that is, ἐνέργεια,<sup>273</sup> suggests that in his earlier texts ἐνέργεια stands for those activities which have their end in themselves.<sup>274</sup> This implies that, in these texts, the end-having criterion serves the purpose of delimiting the contours of the concept of ἐνέργεια, and not merely of establishing a narrow distinction between productive and non-productive activities.

All of this supports the view that the *Protrepticus*' passage concerns the contrast between complete and incomplete activities in general, and not only the status of production. Indeed, what seems to be at stake in *Protr.* VII 43.10–20/B68–69 is the

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<sup>272</sup> The issue is particularly grave. If we were to accept the reduction of the end-having criterion to production in the *Protrepticus*, and went on to claim that in this text ἐνέργεια and κίνησις are coextensive, then it would follow that there is a contradiction between this text and all other texts in which the criterion appears. Why assume that Aristotle contradicts himself, when a much simpler explanation seems to be that the end-having criterion served the purpose of distinguishing complete and incomplete actions in general from the very beginning?

<sup>273</sup> Recall *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a21–23: “the ἐνέργεια is the ἔργον, and that is why the name ἐνέργεια is related to ἔργον” (ἢ δὲ ἐνέργεια τὸ ἔργον, διὸ καὶ τοῦνομα ἐνέργεια λέγεται κατὰ τὸ ἔργον).

<sup>274</sup> Note further that Aristotle uses κίνησις to allude to the activities of walking, learning, sitting down at *Protr.* XI 58.24/B88; these are standard examples of motions throughout the *corpus*. On the other hand, Aristotle systematically uses his new term ἐνέργεια to refer to the actions of thinking and seeing (cf. XI 56.16; 58.13; and 59.14), paradigm cases of non-kinetic activity. The easiest explanation for this change of terminology is that Aristotle was already aware of the distinction between motion and activity.

structural relation established by the diverse kinds of actions with their ends. As in any other motion, the work involved in production is on its way to its (external) τέλος, and ceases to be when the τέλος is reached, that is, when the object of production is finished. This structural feature also applies to the cases of substantial generation (where the resulting object is not an artifact but a living individual substance), alteration (where the result of the motion is a new quality or state), quantitative changes (in which there is a resulting increase or decrease), and locative changes (where the result is a new position). Conversely, in the case of complete activity the activity coincides with its end; there is no work other than the activity itself. This structural concern suggests that the passage has a wider scope than the mere status of production.

So why does Aristotle speak of ποιητική and θεωρητική activities in *Protr.* VII 43.10–20/B68–69? This could be simply explained by the wider context of the passage. The *Protrepticus* is not a physical investigation but an exhortation towards philosophy, which in this context is understood as a specific kind of activity without a further end. Aristotle wants to confront the commonly held assumption that one should dedicate oneself to activities that produce some good (such as a house or health) that is external to the action itself. To do so, he directs our attention towards those actions which do not have a further end beyond their very exercise (such as seeing or contemplating). This explains the productive/non-productive contrast of this passage. But, as noted above, there is no indication that the contrast does not extend to all sorts of actions which are oriented towards an external end. The point is that the doctrine is essentially the same in all the above cited texts. There is little textual support for introducing a distinction in the range of the application of the criterion throughout Aristotle's works.

This leaves us with why Aristotle uses ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν to describe activity in the *Protrepticus* and why he refers to waking as κίνησις, in contrast to later texts in which it is described as a non-kinetic activity. First of all, it is far from clear that the particular expression ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν refers exclusively to motions, or that it has a primary kinetic sense in this context. We have already seen that the same expression was used by Plato in the *Sophist*, and that in that context, it referred not to physical motions but to non-material or 'intelligible' activity. But there are also indications in Aristotle that these terms should not be regarded as equivalent to motion. For instance, Aristotle clearly states in *DA* II 5, 417b2 that being affected (τὸ πάσχειν) is not to be understood in absolute terms (ἀπλοῦν), and he states this precisely before introducing the distinction between common alteration and the specific case of sensation, which should not be understood in

terms of motion.<sup>275</sup> This strongly suggests that Aristotle does not conceive the notion of *πάσχειν* in exclusively kinetic terms.<sup>276</sup> But even if it were so, we could explain the use of this kind of expression by recalling the innovative character of the passages in *Protrepticus*. Aristotle is introducing a new term, *ἐνέργεια*, and is clearly trying to emphasize its *active* sense. It is also the case that the concept of exercising a capacity immediately elicits the idea of executing a motion, and not the idea of motionless activity (recall *Met.* Θ 3, 1047a30–b1). But if Aristotle had motion in mind when introducing his

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<sup>275</sup> Contrast Burnyeat (2002a, 66), who claims that in this passage Aristotle is still equating *πάσχειν*, *κινεῖσθαι* and *ἐνεργεῖν*, as in II 5, 417a14–15, and so treating perception/the transition to perception (cf. nn. 432–433 and 437 below) as “change (*kinesis*) in the sense of *Physics* III 1-3: actuality (*energeia*) which is incomplete in the sense that it is directed towards a result beyond itself (417a 16 [...]). The very words ‘alteration’ and ‘being affected’ imply as much, especially when II 5 is read in proximity to *De Generatione et Corruptione* I 7 and *Physics* III 1-3”. But it is doubtful that the equivalence between *πάσχειν*, *κινεῖσθαι* and *ἐνεργεῖν* of 417a14–17 is operative in this passage; as Anagnostopoulos (2021, 13–23) notes, such an equivalence seems to apply only to the first part of the discussion, which runs up to 417a21–22. This first part would be thus “premised on a fundamental falsehood” (14), since, as we have seen, there is a fundamental distinction between *κινεῖσθαι* and *ἐνεργεῖν*, and so it would be mistaken to conflate the two notions. The ensuing discussion (417a21 ff.) moves beyond this inexact premise and aims to show precisely in which way perception *should not* be deemed to be an ordinary alteration, *i.e.*, a motion in the sense of *Phys.* III 1–3. In any case, Aristotle’s “request for simplicity” (as Burnyeat calls it) at 417a14–15 shows that he does not consider *πάσχειν*, *κινεῖσθαι* and *ἐνεργεῖν* to be coextensive terms, which supports my claim that *πάσχειν* is not inherently or necessarily kinetic in nature.

<sup>276</sup> It also seems insufficient to claim that the expression *ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν* stands for an alleged categorical use of *κίνησις* (Menn 1994, 106–107; 2021, 247–248, Unlu 2021). Surely both motion and activity could be regarded categorically as actions or sufferings, but this does not support the idea that there is a broad sense of *κίνησις* capable of covering both motion and activity (or, going further, that this sense is the one at play in *Protr.* 56.27–57.9/B80–81 or in *Met.* Θ 3, 1047a30–32 and Θ 6, 1048b8). On the contrary, motion is quite clearly defined and conceived by Aristotle as an incomplete and derivative instance of a prior and proper case of *ἐνέργεια*. This explains both the commonality and the distinction between the two concepts. Motion and activity are both instances of the capacity-exercise structure (which yields actions and sufferings categorically speaking), but this structure corresponds primarily to complete activity, and only in a derivative way to motion. This doctrine, as was shown above, is already present in Aristotle’s earlier texts. What we should gather from this is that Aristotle *did not* consider complete activities *κινήσεις* in a broad sense in his earlier texts or in *Metaphysics* Θ. Finally, we should note that Simplicius (*in Cat.* 302, 5–17, ed. Kalbfleisch) explicitly rejects the idea of *κίνησις* as a distinct category. He claims that this mistaken view was held by Plotinus and that it departs from “Aristotle’s hypotheses” (οὐ ταῖς Ἀριστοτέλους ὑποθέσει προσχρῶνται, 302, 11). In support of his position he cites the authority of Boethus of Sidon (pupil and successor of Andronicus of Rhodes as head of the Peripatetic school) and Iamblichus (302, 16).

new term ἐνέργεια, why introduce it at all? As Blair (1992, 27) asks, why not state at XI 56.15–16/B79, “it appears that ‘to live’ is said in two ways, one which deals with δύναμις the other with κίνησις”? The answer is not hard to find: Aristotle believes that *neither thinking nor sight involves any sort of motion in its exercise strictly speaking*. This is a crucial point, established at VII 43.5–25/B68–70 and XI 58.15–17/B87.

An answer to this possible objection can also be offered by consideration of the mixed character of human *praxis*. As Natali (2002) argues with regard to a similar case in a passage of *Eudemian Ethics*, human *praxis* is necessarily composed of motions, but while some actions can be identified as the sum of one or more particular motions (like in the case of production, ποιήσις), others exceed the sum of motions and, taken in themselves, do not imply motion.<sup>277</sup> Natali finds this distinction to be at play in *Met.* B 2, 996a23–30, where Aristotle speaks of actions which occur *with* motion (μετὰ κινήσεως), in contrast to actions which occur through (διὰ) motion. While in the first case it is possible to trace a distinction between the action and the motions necessary for its development, in the second case action and motion coincide. For Natali (2002, 34), the difference in context (either ethical or metaphysical) explains why Aristotle sometimes uses the term κίνησις to describe certain actions which in other places he characterizes as opposed to motion. Sometimes Aristotle emphasizes the motions necessary for carrying out a given action and on other occasions he underscores the intrinsic independence of that particular action from motion. This explains why in *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle refers to *praxis* as κίνησις, in apparent contradiction to *Met.* Θ 6, as with the characterization of being awake in *Protr.* XI 56.27–57, 6/B80 and *Met.* Θ 6.<sup>278</sup> Nevertheless, the crucial point is that the contradiction is not conceptual; as *Protr.* VII 43.5–27/B68–72 shows, Aristotle had a clear grasp of the difference between motion activities such as housebuilding and non-kinetic, complete activities such as thinking, seeing and contemplating.

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<sup>277</sup> Cf. Natali (2002, 30–34). See also Polansky (1983, 167).

<sup>278</sup> The same applies to *MM* II 7 and *EE* II 1, 1218b35–36: “of the things within the soul, some are dispositions or capacities, others activities and motions” (τῶν δὲ ἐν ψυχῇ τὰ μὲν ἔξεις ἢ δυνάμεις εἰσὶ, τὰ δ’ ἐνέργειαι καὶ κινήσεις). One could read καὶ at 36 as explanatory, but this would be a unique occurrence in Aristotle; when ἐνέργεια and κίνησις appear together there is always some sort of indication that they are not the same; most often κίνησις is called an ἐνέργειά τις, and Aristotle usually adds that although κίνησις seems to be ἐνέργεια, it is incomplete. This καὶ is better read as a conjunction between two diverse things with different natures, and the fact they are put together could be explained by the same argument that was made above.

Finally, regarding the expression μεταβάλλει εἰς τὴν κίνησιν, there is no reason not to read the expression as in line with *DA* II 4, 416b1–3: “the carpenter [is not affected] by the matter, but it by him; the carpenter *changes only from inactivity to activity* (μεταβάλλει μόνον εἰς ἐνεργειαν ἐξ ἀργίας)”. This seems a much simpler explanation than the one adopted by Menn, which assumes that Aristotle contradicts here an important doctrine of the *Physics* (that there is no change of change).

We can, then, conclude that the distinction between motion and activity already exists in Aristotle’s earlier texts. The distinction is crucial in the *Protrepticus*, for it is the notion of non-kinetic activity (which is exercised for its own sake) which allows him to establish a connection between the human soul, philosophy, and the divine.<sup>279</sup> Furthermore, it appears that it was this particular case of complete human action (thinking, which is analogous to contemplation and to sight) which largely motivated the development of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction, and not motion-like activities such as housebuilding. In the passages we saw above, the capacity-exercise structure applies primarily to the duality that characterizes human action, which can either remain unexercised or be actively exercised. The kinds of actions to which Aristotle applies his new term ἐνέργεια are systematically those in which the action and the end coincide, such as seeing, thinking, understanding, and the like. Moreover, Aristotle makes clear that the activity most proper to humans is the complete kind of activity, which Aristotle expressly denominates τελεία ἐνέργεια (cf. *Protr.* VII 43.20–25/B70; XI 58.15–17/B87; 59.13–17; and n. 254 above). This kind is explicitly opposed to the sort of action in which the end is external; this latter kind is said to be inferior to the former, since, as *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17 tells us, those actions which do not contain their ends cannot be said to be ἔργον (a term intrinsically related to ἐνέργεια, and for Aristotle equivalent to τέλος), but only a means to the ἔργον. All of this suggests that activity proper constitutes Aristotle’s original paradigm of ἐνέργεια, and not κίνησις. We can therefore dismiss the idea that motion constitutes the original case of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction.

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<sup>279</sup> “Nothing divine or blessed belongs to humans except from just that one thing worthy of consideration, what there is in us of insight and intelligence (νοῦ καὶ φρονήσεως): for, of what is ours, only this seems to be immortal and this alone divine” (*Protr.* VIII 48.9–13/B108).

## **SECOND PART**

### **The role of Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians in *Metaphysics* Θ**

## INTRODUCTION

What is the result of our research so far? In part one, section 1, we have examined the philosophy of the Megarians. In section 2, we have studied some important Platonic precedents to Aristotle's doctrine of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, and we have explored the connections between these precedents and the Megarians. This has allowed us to understand more clearly the philosophical issues that motivated the development of the δύναμις and ἐνέργεια contrast in the first place. Indeed, I have argued in favor of the claim that the distinctions made by Plato and Aristotle constitute, at least partially, a response to a definite set of dialectical arguments and philosophical positions of Megarian extraction. Finally, we have examined the contours of Aristotle's original conception of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, such as it appears in his earlier works.

All of this was, however, preliminary work for our interpretation of book Θ of the *Metaphysics*. Indeed, *Met. Θ* is the place in which Aristotle provides the most thorough treatment of the concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in the entire *corpus*. But the book is obscure, and its argument is difficult to grasp. Although Aristotle presents a somewhat clear program of the investigation he intends to carry out in Θ 1 (a program that is restated at the beginning of Θ 6), the book's structure is certainly not straightforward. The reader faces many questions when approaching this text: why is Aristotle so concerned with establishing distinctions between different senses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια? Why does he begin with, and devotes so much attention to, the motion sense of δύναμις? And why is this necessary for our understanding of the "most useful" (Θ 1, 1045b36), non-motion sense of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια? These questions are related to even more central, doctrinal questions: *what is the nature* of the "useful senses" of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια? What is their relation to motion? What is the role of these concepts in Aristotle's wider ontological perspective?

To answer these questions, we must examine Aristotle's main lines of argument in *Metaphysics Θ*. We will see that the work undertaken above, in the first part of the dissertation, will be essential for this task. Although I will not present an exhaustive discussion of all the issues involved in the treatise, I will analyze its central passages. One passage will receive particular attention: chapter 3, the site of Aristotle's anti-Megarian polemic. This chapter will help us resolve many of the problematic questions outlined above. The chapter *a)* restates and defends Aristotle's original contrast between the inactive possession of a capacity and its corresponding active use; *b)* makes explicit what

was only implicit in Aristotle's early works, that is, the relation between the 'capacity' and 'modal' aspects of δύναμις; *c*) provides insights into the structure of Aristotle's argument in book Θ, and on the transition which takes place in the treatise, from the initial motion sense of δύναμις to the further non-kinetic senses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια; *d*) aids us in our understanding of the relation between ἐνέργεια and motion.

In order to interpret chapter 3 correctly, I will rely on the results obtained in the First Part of this thesis. This is one of the main differences of our study with regards to other interpretations of *Met. Θ*. Indeed, no work in the literature compares Aristotle's discussion in Θ 3 with the extant sources on the Megarians. We will see that this work of contextualization will prove essential for a correct understanding of chapter 3 and, consequently, of Aristotle's argument in book Θ as a whole.

## CHAPTER 6

### The structure of *Metaphysics* Θ and the problem of the useful senses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια

Aristotle's own remarks at the beginning of *Metaphysics* Θ 1 (restated at the outset of Θ 6) appear to divide the argument of the treatise into two halves. According to these remarks, the first half (chapters 1–5) of the treatise would deal with the sense of δύναμις that corresponds to the sphere of motion. The second half (chapters 6–10) would intend to go beyond this motion sense and explore the sense that Aristotle deems “most useful” for his current purposes. However, this neat division clashes with how Aristotle actually carries out his argument. First of all, chapter 10 seems to be on a different topic: here, Aristotle seems to be occupied not directly with δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, but with another of the ways in which being is spoken of, that is, being as truth and falsehood. Moreover, Aristotle continues to speak of the motion sense of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in Θ 6–8. And Θ 3–4 certainly seem to extend beyond the strict limits of an examination of the motion sense of δύναμις.

The structure of the treatise is, indeed, more complex than one might initially hope for. This perhaps explains the multitude of diverging interpretations regarding Θ found in the literature. Our first step in the analysis of Aristotle's argument in Θ is, therefore, a clarification of the structure of the treatise. This will help us evaluate some of the modern interpretations of this book, and lay the groundwork for our examination of its key passages, above all chapters 3, 6, and 8.

#### 6.1. The programmatic statements (*Met.* Θ 1, 6)

Aristotle begins book Θ by introducing the object of the investigation and the structure of the argument which follows (I divide the argument into five sections, which I will then analyze):

1) We have spoken (εἴρηται) about that which is primary and towards which all other categories of that which is are said, *i.e.*, about substance (περὶ τῆς οὐσίας). For all other things are said to be in regard to substance, the quantity, the quality, and the rest are said in this way; all of them include the notion of substance (πάντα γὰρ ἔξει τὸν τῆς οὐσίας λόγον), as was said in the preceding discussions (ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις λόγοις). 2) But given

that that which is is said, on the one hand, through<sup>280</sup> the what, the how and the how much, and on the other, according to δύναμις and ἐντελέχεια, that is, according to the ἔργον (κατὰ δύναμιν καὶ ἐντελέχειαν καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἔργον),<sup>281</sup> let us establish distinctions (διορίσωμεν) concerning δύναμις and ἐντελέχεια, 3) beginning by [the sense or kind of] δύναμις which is said most primary (μάλιστα κυρίως), although this is not what is most useful<sup>282</sup> for that which we now seek (πρὸς ὃ βουλόμεθα νῦν). 4) For δύναμις and ἐνέργεια extend beyond (ἐπὶ πλέον) those [senses or kinds] which are solely said according to motion (κατὰ κίνησιν). 5) But by way of speaking of this, in the discussion concerning ἐνέργεια the other [senses or kinds] will become clear too (*Met.* Θ 1, 1045b27–1046a4).

Aristotle recalls in (*I*) the study he has just carried out in the two previous books, *Z* and *H*.<sup>283</sup> These books have studied substance as the first category, upon which all other categories depend. But given that being is not only said in the sense of the categories, but also in the sense of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, we must now turn to these concepts in order to elucidate them (2). This reminds us of Aristotle's argument in *Met.* E, where he distinguished the four ways in which being (τὸ ὄν) is said. In this book, he left aside two of these ways, accidental being and being as truth and false, as incapable of being true objects of science. The two remaining senses, being according to the categories, and being as capacity and activity, are thus the object of the following books, *ZHΘ*.

Although these books constitute a unit that deals with the proper senses of being (τὸ ὄν),<sup>284</sup> it is unclear whether they constitute a completely continuous argument. Some scholars believe that the purpose of book Θ is to complete the study of substance carried out in *ZH*, in particular to address the problem of the unity of material compounds.<sup>285</sup> Indeed, Aristotle announces in *H* 6 that this problem can be solved by way of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast (cf. *Met.* *H* 6, 1045a20–25). However, other scholars consider that, at

<sup>280</sup> Reading τῷ with Jaeger, against Ross τὸ τὶ.

<sup>281</sup> Reading the second καὶ as exegetic.

<sup>282</sup> Reading Ab's χρησιμωτάτη with Jaeger and Ross, against EJ's χρησίμη, which is Bonitz' reading.

<sup>283</sup> Both Jaeger (1957) and Ross (1924) take εἴρηται at 1045b28 and ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις λόγοις at b32 to refer to the previous discussion on substance carried out in *ZH*.

<sup>284</sup> The unity of these books has been particularly underscored by Jaeger (1923) (see also the note to 1045b32 in the critical apparatus of his 1957 edition of the *Metaphysics*, in which he considers *ZHΘ* as an *unam methodum*).

<sup>285</sup> This is the view of Kosman (1984; 2013) and Gill (1989; 2021).

the outset of  $\Theta$ , Aristotle separates the study of ZH, concerning substance, from his present argument, concerning capacity and activity. They claim that there is no direct sign of the issue of the unity of substance in the programmatic statements, and note that Aristotle simply says that we should “establish distinctions” (διορίσωμεν) regarding δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, given that being is also said according to them. According to this view,  $\Theta$  constitutes a self-contained investigation, concerned with an independent sense of being which merits its own independent treatment.<sup>286</sup>

Another view concerning the treatise links it to Aristotle’s argument in book  $\Lambda$ . Indeed, book  $\Theta$  is crucial for extending the investigation on being beyond the realm of sensible and material substances, and the concept of non-kinetic ἐνέργεια proves fundamental in comprehending the particular nature of the Unmoved Mover.<sup>287</sup>

Thus, we note that the treatise could be read as serving at least three purposes. First and foremost, it focuses on the elucidation of two complex and fundamental concepts which seem to be particularly difficult to grasp. Secondly, book  $\Theta$  helps us understand better the problematic issue of the unity of material compounds. And finally, it allows us to comprehend the nature of immaterial substances in general and of the Unmoved Mover in particular.

In what follows, I will focus mainly on  $\Theta$  in itself and refrain from making large claims involving other central topics of the *Metaphysics*. This is certainly an economic interpretation that does not depend on wider claims regarding the aim and purpose of the *Metaphysics* as a whole. However, this does not imply that the book is not important for our understanding of substance or for extending the investigation on being beyond the realm of sensible and material substances, as noted above. We will give, nevertheless, some further attention to the issue of immaterial substances in our analysis of  $\Theta$  8 (ch. 9.2) because Aristotle’s argument in this chapter will be important for a fuller understanding of his overarching confrontation with the Megarians.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> As argued by Witt (2003, 2–4, 8–9), and Beere (2009, 22–23).

<sup>287</sup> The connection between  $\Theta$  and  $\Lambda$  is underscored by Berti (1990), Menn (1994, 105–106), and Gonzalez (2019).

<sup>288</sup> For reasons of space, I am unable to provide a thorough discussion of Aristotle’s argument in  $\Theta$  7. This is an important chapter in which Aristotle analyzes the conditions which determine when something can be properly said to be in capacity (δύναμει, cf.  $\Theta$  7, 1048b37) some other thing (1048b37–1049a18). He also addresses the question of whether the capable persists in the product as it becomes actualized (1049a18–b3). I would like to address this chapter and the broader connections between Aristotle’s doctrine of δύναμις

It is especially interesting that, when presenting the program of the book, Aristotle speaks first of ἐντελέχεια at 1045b33–35 and later of ἐνέργεια at 1046a2–4. The term ἐντελέχεια occurs six times across four passages in book Θ (besides the passage quoted above, at 1047a30–b2, 1049a5–6 and 1050a23) and is much less frequent than the use of the term ἐνέργεια (sixty-seven occurrences). In two of those four passages (1047a30–b2, 1050a21–23), the term is used simply to express its intrinsic connection to ἐνέργεια. We will have to see later what is the specific relationship between these two terms,<sup>289</sup> but we should note here that they seem to be used interchangeably in this context.<sup>290</sup> This suggests no change in meaning when using either of these terms in the programmatic statements.<sup>291</sup> This is also suggested by the gloss of ἐντελέχεια as τὸ ἔργον at 1045b33–34. As we saw in chapter 5.1 (cf. pp. 143–144), the term ἐνέργεια is formed upon ἔργον, which is used as a parallel term to ἐνέργεια in the *Protrepticus*. Thus, the gloss appears to reinforce the connection between ἐντελέχεια and ἐνέργεια. All of this seems to confirm that, at least initially, there is no substantial difference between ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια in book Θ.<sup>292</sup> We must postpone for the time being the question of why Aristotle privileges the former over the latter.

Aristotle goes on in (3) to announce that he will begin his analysis with δύναμις, specifically with δύναμις in relation to motion, which will be defined immediately after, at 1046a10–11, as the power or capacity which something has for bringing about change

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and ἐνέργεια and the issue of hylomorphism in future research. A recent work that addresses the role of Θ 7 in the wider context of Θ is that of Gill (2021).

<sup>289</sup> Cf. sections 7.5, 8.2 and 9.1.4 *infra*.

<sup>290</sup> This interchangeability is recurrent throughout the *corpus*. Note in particular the parallel versions of Aristotle's definition of motion in *Phys.* III 1, 201a9–b15 and in *Met.* K 9, 1065b14–1066a6, which use both terms, and the recurrent use of ἐνέργεια after the definition of motion (which uses the term ἐντελέχεια) in *Phys.* III 1, 201b9–10 (ἡ τοῦ οἰκοδομητοῦ ἐνέργεια, ἧ οἰκοδομητόν, οἰκοδόμησις ἐστίν); III 2, 201b35–202a3 (λείπεται τοίνυν ὁ εἰρημένος τρόπος, ἐνέργειαν μὲν τινα εἶναι, τοιαύτην δ' ἐνέργειαν οἷαν εἵπαμεν, χαλεπήν μὲν ἰδεῖν, ἐνδεχομένην δ' εἶναι); and III 3, 202a14–15 (ἐντελέχεια γὰρ ἐστὶ τούτου [καὶ] ὑπὸ τοῦ κινητικοῦ. καὶ ἡ τοῦ κινητικοῦ δὲ ἐνέργεια οὐκ ἄλλη ἐστίν).

<sup>291</sup> Regarding 1045b33–35, it should be noted that although both Ross and Jaeger print ἐντελέχεια without reporting any textual variant in their critical apparatuses, Michael of Ephesus (the so-called pseudo-Alexander) reads ἐνέργεια in his commentary of Θ (Alex. Apher. in *Met.* 565, 18–20, ed. Hayduck).

<sup>292</sup> I am thus in agreement with Reale (1962, 178).

in another or in oneself *qua* other.<sup>293</sup> Aristotle characterizes the initial sense of δύναμις as the one which is spoken of as μάλιστα κυρίως, which indicates that it is the most commonly known or most accessible sense of δύναμις, and states that this sense is not the most useful for the project he is now pursuing (1045b35–1046a1).<sup>294</sup>

We must be wary here of thinking that this initial motion sense of δύναμις constitutes the most basic or original application of this term. We have already seen in chapter 5 that Aristotle’s original conception of δύναμις is that of a capacity, but the sort of capacity that Aristotle had in mind was not circumscribed to the sphere of motion. This is important, for it helps us avoid reading μάλιστα κυρίως as “the strictest” or “the most proper” sense of the term.<sup>295</sup> It should be taken, rather, to denote the accessible and immediate character of the motion application of δύναμις: this sense is the most proximate to the senses and the one most easily grasped.<sup>296</sup> This helps us understand Aristotle’s strategy in Θ, which is in line with his general methodological principle of proceeding from what is most known to us toward what is most known by nature. In this case, Aristotle proceeds from the motion application of δύναμις to its most fundamental, though less accessible, non-motion applications.

The contrast between the initial motion sense and the further non-motion sense is explicitly stated in (4). This line has motivated much discussion. The traditional interpretation of it is that of Ross, who claims that the line is introducing an opposition between two distinct senses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. According to Ross, the initial motion sense is later contrasted to the useful sense, which, he claims, is “a potentiality in A of passing into some new state or engaging in some new activity” (1924, II 240; see also I, CXXIV). This implies that Ross has a further kind of capacity in mind, as opposed

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<sup>293</sup> Aristotle uses the term μεταβολή (change) when defining the κύριος sense of δύναμις, but κίνησις (motion) dominates throughout the book. It is clear that both terms are used interchangeably in this context.

<sup>294</sup> On my choice of reading Ab’s χρησιμωτάτη rather EJ’s χρησίμη: the notion of δύναμις κατὰ κίνησιν certainly has some degree of usefulness in the context of the investigation carried out in Θ, though it is certainly not *entirely* useful for Aristotle’s purposes. This idea seems to be captured better by the superlative than by the nominative χρησίμη. See Beere (2009, 23 n. 6) and Lefebvre (2018, 25 n. 2) for an opposing view.

<sup>295</sup> So the Londinienses, who interpret μάλιστα κυρίως as “in the strictest sense” (1984, 49).

<sup>296</sup> I agree with Anagnostopoulos (2011, 423) that by κυρίως Aristotle means in this context “the most established, familiar, and acknowledged sense of the term”. See also Berti (1990, 47); Menn (1994, 92); Kosman (2013, 37).

to the mere capacity for producing a change in another or in oneself *qua* other.<sup>297</sup> Many interpreters have followed the basic pattern of Ross’s interpretation, although they differ on which kind of capacity should be identified with the useful sense.<sup>298</sup>

Ross’s interpretation has been questioned by Frede (1994, 181, 184), who claims that the lines at 1046a1–2 refer not to a distinction between two senses of the terms δύναμις and ἐνέργεια,<sup>299</sup> but rather to the useful sense, which would be broad enough to cover both motion and non-motion senses. In Frede’s view, book Θ does not carry out a “horizontal” move, such as Ross’s, from an initial sense towards a further and distinct sense of δύναμις, but a “vertical” move, from a specific instance of the δύναμις and ἐνέργεια distinction (which would correspond to change) towards a broad “schema”<sup>300</sup> which would contain all the different applications of the distinction (motion and non-motion alike).<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Although Ross speaks of potentiality (a term frequently associated with the modal interpretation of Θ), he seems to hold that the useful sense of δύναμις is a specific kind of capacity.

<sup>298</sup> The useful sense is often identified with the non-kinetic kind of capacity and activity of which Aristotle speaks at 1048b18–35 (Kosman 1984; 2013, Blair 1992 and Gonzalez 2019). Anagnostopoulos (2011) also seems to accept Ross’s ‘horizontal’ reconstruction of the argument of Θ, but he believes that the useful sense of δύναμις consists in a specific kind of capacity for change, that is, substantial change (“the useful sense applies to pre-existent matter’s capacity to become substance”, 411).

<sup>299</sup> Beere (2009, 24), thinks that this characterization of the opening statements of Θ 1 “is a tempting misunderstanding”; he believes that Aristotle is not introducing a contrast between two kinds of capacities, but rather that he “extends the notion of capacity from capacities connected with change to other capacities” and that “all capacities whatsoever endow their bearers with being-in-capacity”. This being-in-capacity would be, for Beere, the useful sense of δύναμις. But as we will see next, the line in question seems to accommodate much more easily an approach such as Ross’s: this author contends that Aristotle opposes one initial kind of δύναμις (which would feature mainly in Θ 1–2, 5) to a distinct kind, introduced in Θ 6. Moreover, the fact that a capacity confers a certain degree of reality to a capable being does not imply that Aristotle establishes a sharp distinction between the capacity itself and the state of being-capable, as Beere does. On this issue, see 7.4 below.

<sup>300</sup> The terminology is that of Makin, (2006, 132).

<sup>301</sup> This all-encompassing sense would be the ontological concept of δύναμις, signaled by the dative constructions δυνάμει ὄν and ἐνεργείᾳ ὄν—so frequent in chapter 6 and so rare in chapters 1–5—which are translated as ‘potentiality’ and ‘actuality’ respectively. In Frede’s view, the ontological sense would go beyond the primitive and motion-related sense of δύναμις as a capacity for change. It would, in turn, explain how other kinds of things can be said to be δυνάμει, such as matter or capacities for particular kinds of activities which do not imply motion, such as sight. All these cases of δύναμις would be analogically related, following Aristotle’s argument in the first part of Θ 6, and this analogy would allow for a uniform use

However, 1046a1–2 gives little support to Frede’s reading. This has been carefully argued by Anagnostopolous (2011, 395–399), according to whom the lines at 1046a1–2 do not indicate that Aristotle is referring to the alleged broad useful sense. Instead, Aristotle seems to be claiming that δύναμις and ἐνέργεια *themselves* (either the terms or “blanket kinds” of the concepts) are not limited to the motion applications. This implies a contrast between the motion sense and other, non-motion senses. Thus, these lines do not seem to refer to a broader sense which would encompass all its applications (*i.e.*, “potentiality”).

So the lines seem to support, initially, the reading defended by Ross. But it remains to be seen what Aristotle understands precisely by the non-motion, “most useful” sense of δύναμις.<sup>302</sup> At (5), Aristoteles promises that this sense will become clear in the discussions on ἐνέργεια, that is, in Θ 6. In effect, this chapter begins with a new set of programmatic statements which reaffirm the initial program laid out in the first chapter. At 1048a25–30, Aristotle states that he has already spoken of δύναμις in relation to motion and that now the analysis turns to the question of what ἐνέργεια is and in which

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which would ‘range over’ the different kinds of δυνάμεις. In other words, the analogy would establish the unitary sense of δύναμις, *i.e.*, potentiality, according to which any δύναμις confers a certain degree of reality to the δυνάμει ὄντα in question (1994, 184).

Frede’s position is shared to different extents by a wide range of scholars, and has been defended to varying degrees in recent articles (Burnyeat 2008), monographs (Witt 2003, Beere 2009; 2018, 878, Lefebvre 2018, 27–28) and translations of book Θ (Makin 2006). Though these scholars introduce variations on Frede’s interpretation, they nevertheless share the fundamental insight of a transition from a motion sense towards a modal or ontological sense.

<sup>302</sup> Not all authors accept that the contrast between the two senses is one between a motion sense and a non-motion sense. For instance, Sentesy (2020) thinks that change captures the most essential aspect of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast. At p. 86 he claims that “the extended sense of potency and activity is material and form”. But this would correspond to what he calls the “categorical sense”. The extended “energetic” sense, the sense proper to δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, would remain within motion: “the analysis of potency and being-at-work in *Metaphysics* IX is, from beginning to end, an analysis of change”. But this position struggles with Aristotle’s explicit claim that the useful sense of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction goes beyond the motion sense (1046a1–2). The same objection applies to Anagnostopoulos’s interpretation, according to which the useful sense should be identified with the capacity for substantial change. Although it is true that Aristotle distinguishes generation from other sorts of motion in *Physics* V 2, no sign of this distinction appears in this context. Both Sentesy and Anagnostopoulos seem to be conditioned by M. Burnyeat’s (2008) exclusion of 1048b18–35, a passage where Aristotle explicitly distinguishes motion from ἐνέργεια. On this issue see 8.2. below.

way it is (τί τέ ἐστιν ἡ ἐνέργεια καὶ ποῖόν τι, 1048a26–27). Aristotle once more insists that through this analysis the notion of τὸ δυνατόν will also become clear.<sup>303</sup> In particular, we will see that we speak of δύναμις not only in the sense of that which by nature can move or be moved (ὃ πέφυκε κινεῖν ἄλλο ἢ κινεῖσθαι, 1048a28–29) but also in another (ἐτέρως) sense (1048a29–30).

This second programmatic passage gives the impression that the preceding chapters (1–5) deal with δύναμις κατὰ κίνησιν, and that from chapter 6 onwards Aristotle focuses on the useful senses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. But this apparently straightforward arrangement is not entirely precise. One big caveat is Aristotle’s discussion in chapters 3 and 4. These chapters do not deal exclusively with δύναμις κατὰ κίνησιν; they explore several topics which go well beyond this concept. Chapter 3 interrupts the exposition of δύναμις as a principle of change which is carried out in chapters 1, 2, and 5 in order to introduce the alleged Megarian thesis which questions the very distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια (Θ 5 seems to pick up directly the discussion of Θ 2 regarding rational and irrational capacities). Furthermore, Aristotle’s presentation of the Megarian thesis presents a conjugated form of ἐνέργεια, and if we take into account this conjugated form, the term appears ten times in chapter 3, while ἐντελέχεια appears twice in the chapter. This marks a contrast with the surrounding chapters (2, 4, 5), in which ἐνέργεια is conspicuously absent. This contradicts Aristotle’s claim that he would address the concept of ἐνέργεια after the analysis of δύναμις κατὰ κίνησιν, made at Θ 1 and restated in Θ 6, as we saw.

One way of explaining this anomaly is to consider these chapters as a parenthesis to Aristotle’s wider argument. This reading has an advantage: it allows us to examine Aristotle’s discussion in Θ 3–4 without reducing it forcibly to the confines of the motion sense of δύναμις. But the fact that the chapters are parenthetical should not lead us to believe that they are accessory to the central argument of the book. In fact, I believe that chapter 3, in particular, is a central piece that connects the two parts of the book: the analysis of

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<sup>303</sup> Note how Aristotle alternates between δύναμις and τὸ δυνατόν in the two programmatic passages; τὸ δυνατόν also features prominently in Θ 3, which also presents the infinitive δύνασθαι. The dative construction δυνάμει ὄν appears at the end of Θ 3 (1047b1) and prominently in Θ 6–9. To fully understand the relation between all these variants, we will have to follow Aristotle’s argument throughout Θ; however, I anticipate here that in my view there is no correspondence between a given terminology and a specific sense of δύναμις. I claim that the terminological variations are intended to underscore different aspects of a same concept, which is centrally that of capacity (δύναμις/τὸ δυνατόν). See. 7.4 below.

δύναμις κατὰ κίνησιν carried out in Θ 1–2, 5, and the analysis of the useful sense of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in 6–9.<sup>304</sup>

Both Bonitz (1849, 380) and Ross (1924, II 241) clearly saw that chapter 3 occupies a somewhat amphibious position in both sections of the argument of Θ. These authors believe that, particularly in the passage of 1047a20–29, Aristotle is referring to the useful sense of δύναμις and not to the motion sense. This is most understandable in the case of Bonitz, since he believes that the useful sense is that of possibility (*Möglichkeit*), and certainly the discussion in 1047a20–29 explores the modal (in the sense of logical modality) implications of his concept of δύναμις.

Bonitz's interpretation of the useful sense of δύναμις is questionable, and has been criticized by many scholars.<sup>305</sup> The main point of criticism is that the notion of possibility is too broad for it to be the useful sense; it contradicts Aristotle's discussion of δύναμις in Θ 7, where he claims that more than a mere possibility is required to consider something as something capable of being some other thing. If this were not so, one could claim that earth has the capacity for being a human being, *i.e.*, that earth is potentially a human being; but this statement, Aristotle claims, would be wrong. But beyond the particulars of Bonitz's own interpretation, he rightly noticed that the discussion in chapter 3 goes beyond the strict limits of the analysis of the motion sense of δύναμις. Acknowledging this is crucial for a correct understanding of the chapter.

As we stated earlier, the analysis of chapter 3 will help us answer much of the problematic questions which we face when reading book Θ. In particular, it will help us see that Aristotle's concept of δύναμις is centrally that of capacity. Particularly important is noticing that the concept of capacity which features in the chapter is not reduced to motion. That is, the concept of capacity of the chapter is not understood exclusively as a principle of change in other or in oneself *qua* other. This is because, as we will see, chapter 3 is intimately connected with Aristotle's earlier elaborations on δύναμις and ἐνέργεια: it retraces the original distinction between the possession of a capacity and its active exercise. This distinction is wider and more fundamental than the motion sense of Θ 1–

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<sup>304</sup> Chapter 10 seems to constitute a separate unit, dealing with a separate subject. However, it should be noted that Heidegger (1981, 11–12) famously claimed that “with this chapter, the treatise reaches its proper end; indeed, the whole of Aristotle's philosophy attains its ‘highest point’” (trans. Brogan and Warnek). This remarkable claim deserves a thorough analysis, which I cannot offer here.

<sup>305</sup> See for instance Frede's (1994, 179) discussion of Bonitz' position.

2. Noting this will be crucial for a correct understanding of the obscure discussion of ἐνέργεια which occurs in Θ 6; indeed, it allows us to dispel the impression that the non-kinetic sense of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια should be identified exclusively with the modal (in the sense of mode of being) notions of potentiality and actuality.

But what, then, is Aristotle’s purpose in devoting such effort at the beginning of book Θ to the motion application of δύναμις? We have already anticipated that a likely answer is that it allows him to present his argument pedagogically, as proceeding from that which is most known to us (the motion application) to what is most known by nature (the non-motion application). But to understand this structural feature of the treatise more fully, we must first examine the contours of Aristotle’s conception of the motion sense of δύναμις, such as it appears in Θ 1 and the parallel text in Δ 12.

## 6.2. The κύριος sense of δύναμις (*Met.* Θ 1, Δ 12)

At Θ 1, 1046a4–11, immediately after establishing the program of the treatise, Aristotle states the following:

We have already stated elsewhere (ἐν ἄλλοις) that capacity and being capable (ἡ δύναμις καὶ τὸ δύνασθαι) are said in many ways (λέγεται πολλαχῶς). Of these, those which are said homonymously should be left aside (for some are said so because of some similarity, as in geometry we speak of capable and incapable (καὶ δυνατὰ καὶ ἀδύνατα) regarding that which is or is not in a given way (τῷ εἶναι πῶς ἢ μὴ εἶναι)), while those which are related to a same kind, they are all principles of some kind, and all are said in relation to one which is primary, which is a principle of change in another or [in oneself] *qua* other.

He begins by referring to the discussion of δύναμις in Δ 12. Indeed, both passages run parallel and establish the same core idea: that all the different applications of δύναμις are connected to a primary concept: δύναμις as a principle of change in another or in oneself *qua* other. The “*qua* other” specification serves the purpose of distinguishing the kind of self-affection which is different from nature—defined as a principle of change in a thing itself *qua* itself (ἐν αὐτῷ ἢ αὐτό, Θ 8, 1049b10).<sup>306</sup> By “*qua* other” Aristotle alludes to

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<sup>306</sup> Some brief discussion on this issue can be found in section 9.1.2.

changes that are caused by and occur in a same subject, but in which a distinction can still be established between the active capacity (such as the art of medicine) and the passive capacity (the capacity a body has for being cured).

Before analyzing this primary sense, Aristotle notes that there are other homonymous uses of δύναμις but claims that they are irrelevant to the present discussion. As an example, he cites the case of the uses of δύναμις in geometry, which he claims are only similar in name (ὁμώνυμως, 1046a6) to the sense of δύναμις he now wants to examine.<sup>307</sup>

We should not forget that we are dealing with the sense of δύναμις that is said μάλιστα κυρίως, that is, with the sense that concerns motion. This sense, as we saw, is opposed to a further sense which goes beyond the sphere of motion. But in this passage, we learn that within the motion sense there are, in turn, numerous applications, all of which ultimately refer to the single concept of a principle of change, understood as (a) an active capacity for producing change in something other or in oneself qua other. These subsidiary applications include (b) the passive counterpart of an active capacity (1046a11–13), that is, the capacity a patient has for suffering a change produced by a corresponding active source (be it another or itself qua other), and (c) the capacity that a thing has for resisting a change, a corruption or a worsening carried out by something other or by itself qua other (1046a13–15), which Aristotle calls a ἔξις ἀπαθείας, approximately translatable as “a disposition of impassibility”. Moreover, he seems to mention as a distinct application of the term, the case in which (d) we say of any of the aforementioned capacities that they are done well (καλῶς, 1046a17). Aristotle claims that

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<sup>307</sup> The text at 1046a6–9 is obscure and there is no consensus among interpreters on its meaning. Owen *et al.* follow the punctuation of Bonitz, Ross and Jaeger, who introduce a comma after λέγονται in 1046a7 (so Makin 2006, 1, 22). This reading implies that Aristotle is introducing two cases of mere homonymy: one which corresponds to the uses of δύναμις in geometry, and another that corresponds to the logical notions of possibility and impossibility (Burnyeat *et al.* 1984, 50–51). This view is also the one preferred by Makin (2006, 22). However, Lefebvre (2018, 130 n. 1) recalls that Schwegler (1847, I 182) had suggested that the comma should instead be placed after ἐν γεωμετρίᾳ in 1046a8. This option was followed by Heidegger in his summer semester course of 1931 (GA 33, 59–60) and is adopted by Lefebvre. According to this view, Aristotle would not be introducing two different homonymous senses in this line (one corresponding to geometry and another one to possibility and impossibility); he would be alluding instead to the homonymous use of geometry and to other non-specified uses. Beere (2009, 38–39) considers that there is only one homonymous case, that of geometry, but follows the punctuation of Ross and Jaeger, which, as noted by Lefebvre, hampers the interpretation of the passage (cf. 2018, 39 n. 12).

all these applications presuppose the primary concept: “in all these definitions (ὅροις) it is present the account of the primary capacity (ὁ τῆς πρώτης δυνάμεως λόγος)” (1046a15–16).

How to interpret the relation between the primary and the subsidiary notions? Owen has proposed an interpretation in terms of what he calls “focal meaning analysis”.<sup>308</sup> This theoretical device was originally conceived by Owen to explain Aristotle’s procedure with regard to such notions as friendship, health, and (at a later stage of Aristotle’s philosophical development, according to Owen) being (τὸ ὄν). According to Owen, all these notions involve a plurality of meanings that focally remit to a single primary notion (πρὸς ἓν).<sup>309</sup> This relation is neither one of mere synonymy nor of mere homonymy: it is a third kind, in which the definitions of the terms at stake are “neither the same, nor merely different, but related in some structured way” (Makin 2006, 24). In the Londinienses’ commentary of book Θ, Owen suggests that Aristotle adopts the same strategy in Θ 1 regarding the notion of δύναμις (Burnyeat *et al.* 1984, 46–48).<sup>310</sup>

In justifying his interpretation, Owen begins by analyzing not Θ 1 but Δ 12. He notes that a mention of focal analysis is made only at the end of the chapter (1019b35–1020a6) and as a sort of *post scriptum*, but he claims that Aristotle’s description of the diverse senses of δύναμις/δυνατόν are carried out according to this method. He then goes on to present a scheme of the diverse meanings of δυνατόν in Δ 12, all of which remit to the focal notion of δύναμις (δύναμις<sub>1</sub>) understood as a “source of change in another or (in the same thing) *qua* other” (1984, 46):

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<sup>308</sup> The expression was first introduced by Owen in his 1960 essay, which was presented in the 1957 *Symposium Aristotelicum*.

<sup>309</sup> The replies to Owen’s proposal, beyond its application or not to Θ 1, are numerous; I refer the reader to Berti’s 1971 essay, particularly to note 5 in which he mentions the main responses to Owen in the period which immediately followed the publication of his essay. Some relevant later works are those of Hintikka (1971), Ferejohn (1980) and Irwin (1981) (this last author suggested that we replace the expression *focal meaning* with *focal connection*, precisely to avoid the impression that the πρὸς ἓν analysis concerns exclusively the semantic domain). More recent studies are those of Shields (1999), Yu (2001), Ward (2008) and Brakas (2011). The studies by Shields and Ward are now considered to have superseded certain aspects of Owen’s seminal theory. Shields introduced the concept of “core-dependent homonymy”, and Ward proposed that of “core-related homonymy”. According to Ward, the term would designate a middle ground between synonymy and non-synonymy which “would include those [things] that have a common term and some, but not all, common characteristics” (2008, 1).

<sup>310</sup> For detailed review of Owen’s analysis of δύναμις in *Met.* Θ 1, cf. Chame (2022c).

- Δυνατόν<sub>1</sub> – having δύναμις<sub>1</sub>
- Δυνατόν<sub>2</sub> – being subject to something else having δύναμις<sub>1</sub> over the first
- Δυνατόν<sub>3</sub> – neither δυνατόν<sub>1</sub> nor δυνατόν<sub>2</sub>, that is, privation. Owen points our attention towards 1020a3 (τὰ δὲ μὴ ἔχειν), developed previously at 1019a26–33 and 1019b5–10, 10–11. This last text presents a difficulty in relation to the notion of privation: if στέρησις is considered a ἔξις (1019b7), then everything which lacks something would be capable; but this would be by mere homonymy. Moreover, Owen connects this passage to the notion of ἔξις ἀπαθείας mentioned in Θ 1, 1046a13, that is, to the capacity which something has not to change by the effect of another or of oneself *qua* other.
- Δυνατόν<sub>4</sub> – having δύναμις<sub>1</sub> in some special way. Owen mentions 1020a3–4 (particularly the adverb ὠδί) and introduces a curious example: “he can inspire us, but only on Fridays? No, the prime example is ‘well’”. With this example, Owen seems to establish a distinction between the general conditions which can affect a capacity, as in the case of a temporal restriction (“only on Fridays”), from the condition that Aristotle seems to have in mind with ὠδί, that is, the capacity for doing something in a correct manner. In order to support his reading, Owen directs us to the adverb καλῶς in 1019b13 and 1046a16–19.

This classification of τὸ δυνατόν in Δ 12 corresponds roughly to the points *a–d* that we detailed above. A specific passive capacity presupposes a specific active principle that acts upon it; the capacity for resisting a change presupposes the active principle of change; the capacity for doing something well presupposes the active principle of doing it in the first place.

According to Owen, 1046a6–9 makes clear that the relation between the derivate senses and the primary sense is not one of mere similitude, which would result in mere homonymy. He claims that the homonymy which characterizes the diverse meanings of δύναμις is akin to that of the notions of health or medicine: as in these cases, any given case of δύναμις requires and may coincide with a case of δύναμις<sub>1</sub>. This is in contrast to the case of the relation between the primary sense of τὸ ὄν (*i.e.*, οὐσία) and its derivate senses, in which a derivative sense coincides directly with the primary sense (1984, 48). This means that in the case of δύναμις and its derivative applications, logical priority does not entail ontological priority (as in the case of τὸ ὄν). Of course, these are the two

elements (logical priority, natural priority) that Owen had distinguished in his 1960 essay on focal meaning analysis.<sup>311</sup>

The positions of recent scholars of  $\Theta$  on the use of the focal meaning analysis in the context of  $\Theta$  1 are varied. While Makin (2006, 17, 24) accepts Owens's reading in general terms, Beere (2009, 34–38) explicitly rejects it. According to Beere, the focal meaning analysis restricts Aristotle's investigation to the issue of meaning.<sup>312</sup> Beere proposes instead to follow Shields (1999), who proposes the notion of “core-dependent homonymy” as a substitute for focal meaning. This notion would not imply, according to Beere, a strict commitment neither to an analysis of a semantic type nor of an ontological kind.

Beyond the controversies among scholars, we should note that the main issue at stake in this passage is the ultimate reduction of the κύριος sense of δύναμις to the concept of an active capacity for producing change. That is, the motion sense of δύναμις should be understood primarily as a power for producing a corresponding motion. Although Aristotle does not explicitly say so in the chapter, this motion would be the corresponding activity (ἐνέργεια) of the capacity in question.

Two more issues are addressed in the chapter. First is the issue of the identity and the distinction between the active and passive principles in a process of change (1046a19–29). The distinction between active and passive capacities had already been suggested when mentioning the diverse senses of δύναμις, but here Aristotle claims that they, though different, coincide in a certain way: a capacity for affecting someone, as in the case of the capacity that fire has for heating some other thing, is in a certain way one with the capacity which some fuel has for being heated. There is a single act of heating that equally involves an active and a passive capacity. However, these two capacities, which appear as one in the act of heating, can still be located in different places: the active capacity in the agent and the passive capacity in the patient.

This passage is interesting because it stresses the need for two instances in any single process of change, an active principle and an opposing passive principle. It also makes use of an expression with which we are familiar from Plato's *Sophist* and Aristotle's *Protrepticus*: ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν. But in contrast to these texts, in  $\Theta$  1 the

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<sup>311</sup> Cf. in particular Owen (1960, 170–172).

<sup>312</sup> Cf. Beere (2009, 35 n. 3): “Owen calls this ‘focal meaning’, as have many others following him. This label presupposes that the issue is one of meaning”.

expression is reserved for kinetic capacities, that is, to the sphere of motion. This sometimes inclines interpreters to identify the expression *ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν* with motion, even more so because it occurs in the context of Aristotle’s definition and exposition of his concept of *δύναμις*. But here we should acknowledge the limits of Aristotle’s present discussion: his analysis of *δύναμις* is for the moment restricted to motion, and we are not facing a full and detailed perspective on this concept. The same consideration applies to the parallel text of  $\Delta$  12; this text also deals with the motion sense, and thus provides a partial insight into the concept of *δύναμις*. Moreover, it should be noted that Aristotle also speaks of *δύναμις* in  $\Delta$  7, 1017a35–b9. In this passage, Aristotle speaks of *δύναμις* and *ἐντελέχεια* as *senses of being*, and does not include a single case of motion among the examples mentioned; instead, they include only cases of complete capacities and activities (sight, knowledge) and cases of substance (the statue and the stone, the half-line and the whole line, the unripe grain and the ripe grain). The only example that could be deemed to be proximate to a motion case is that of the capacity of being at rest and the actual state of being at rest (*ἡρεμεῖν*,  $\Delta$  7, 1017b6); but even in this case there is no motion involved but rather stillness.<sup>313</sup> On the contrary,  $\Delta$  12, which only deals with the motion sense of *δύναμις*, presents, as it would be expected, motion examples such as housebuilding. So the use of *ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν* in  $\Theta$  1 and  $\Delta$  12 can hardly be taken as evidence for the claim that the notions of doing and suffering should be assimilated to motion. Moreover, it seems that in the case of kinetic doings and sufferings there is a priority of the active capacity over the passive capacity; in the case of non-kinetic capacities and activities, this does not seem to be the case.

The second issue addressed in the chapter concerns the notions of incapacity (*ἀδυναμία*) and privation (*στέρησις*) (1046a29–35). Aristotle claims that incapacity and the incapable (*ἡ ἀδυναμία καὶ τὸ ἀδύνατον*) consist in the privation (*στέρησις*)—that is, the absence—of a given capacity. Both a capacity and its corresponding incapacity are thus of a same thing and in a same respect. In this passage Aristotle appears to continue

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<sup>313</sup> This capacity is mentioned in *Met.*  $\Theta$  9, 1051a9. In this passage, the act of being at rest is said to be the opposite (*ἐναντίον*) of motion, and Aristotle states there that the capacity is one and the same for both actions. In contrast, the passage at  $\Delta$  7 speaks of an independent capacity for being at rest (*τὸ δυνάμενον ἡρεμεῖν*, 1017b6). See also *EN* VII 14, 1153b26–28: “This is why god always enjoys a single and simple pleasure, for there is not only an activity of motion, but also of immobility, and there is pleasure in rest more than in motion” (*διὸ ὁ θεὸς ἀεὶ μίαν καὶ ἀπλὴν χαίρει ἡδονήν· οὐ γὰρ μόνον κινήσεώς ἐστὶν ἐνέργεια ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀκινήσιος, καὶ ἡδονὴ μᾶλλον ἐν ἡρεμίᾳ ἐστὶν ἢ ἐν κινήσει*).

speaking of capacity primarily in physical terms. This can be seen above all in his immediately following explanation of the many senses of privation (1046a31–35), which seem to concern the absence, either natural or unnatural, of physical capacities.

Δ 12 also defines ἀδυναμία firstly as that which is deprived of δύναμις (ἀδυναμία ἐστὶ στέρησις δυνάμεως, 1019b15–16). This, as he goes on to explain, is a physical definition, dependent on the definition of δύναμις as a principle of change in another or in oneself *qua* other. But it should be noted that a second definition of both δυνατόν and ἀδύνατον is offered in Δ 12, in the modal sense of possibility and impossibility: ἀδύνατον is that whose contrary is necessarily true, and δυνατόν is that whose contrary is not necessarily false. The term δυνατόν can be further distinguished between *a*) what is not necessarily false, *b*) what is true (τὸ ἀληθές), and *c*) what can be true (τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον ἀληθὲς εἶναι) (1019b30–33). Aristotle says that the senses mentioned above are said of δύναμις in the sense of possibility and are not said in respect to δύναμις as capacity (1019b34–35). The ones that refer to capacity are said in relation to the primary (πρώτη) sense of δύναμις as the principle of change in another (1020a). Aristotle thus distinguishes in Δ 12 between two broad senses of δύναμις: a physical sense (δύναμις as a principle of change) and a logical sense (δύναμις as that whose contrary is not necessarily false). This distinction appears to be absent in Θ 1.<sup>314</sup> Still, the fact that Aristotle established the distinction in Δ 12 will be important for our analysis of the crucial argument against the Megarians in 1047a10–17 (on which, cf. 7.3 below).

Aristotle deepens his analysis of the κύριος sense of δύναμις in chapters 2 and 5. Although I will not analyze these chapters in detail, let us indicate their main points. Chapter 2 expands on the distinction between rational and irrational (active) capacities, that is, between capacities that admit of contraries and which involve an agent's reason and will, such as all τέχνηαι, and capacities that are only of one of the contraries, such as natural powers. The main example of a rational capacity is the case of healing, which can produce either health or sickness.<sup>315</sup> This is because rational capacities involve the knowledge of both contraries, the proper result and its privation (1046b20–21). The main example of an irrational capacity is fire, which can only produce heat. Chapter 5 picks up

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<sup>314</sup> Unless one chooses to read δυνατὰ καὶ ἀδύνατα in 1046a8 as referring to the modal notions of possibility and impossibility, as the Londinienses do (cf. n. 307 above).

<sup>315</sup> Although only one of the two contraries corresponds properly to the capacity (in this case, health). The other one, which is the privation of the first, corresponds to the capacity by accident (1046b12–13).

this distinction and explores the conditions in which a capacity is activated, which differs if what is at stake is a rational or an irrational capacity. In the latter case, all that is required is that an active and a passive capacity meet for the motion to take place (as in the case of fire and a given fuel). In the former case, there is an additional element, the agent's desire and choice (ὄρεξις ἢ προαίρεσις, 1048a11), since the agent can choose to produce any of the two contraries. Still, there is the same requirement of a given set of conditions for the motion to take place (for example, the presence and correct disposition of a given set of materials).

Thus, chapters 1–2 and 5 present a detailed and thorough analysis of the primary sense of δύναμις, understood as a principle of change. But, as was noted above, Aristotle's exposition of the primary concept of δύναμις is interrupted by a discussion that certainly goes beyond the limits of the investigation of this primary concept. This parenthesis, Aristotle's anti-Megarian polemic, is a crucial element in his wider argument in *Θ*, to which we now turn.

## CHAPTER 7

### Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians (*Met.* Θ 3)

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze Aristotle's argument throughout *Met.* Θ 3. I divide the chapter into five sections: 1) the introduction of the Megarian thesis (1046b29–33); 2) Aristotle's first set of arguments against it (1046b33–1047a10), which constitutes an argumentative unit; 3) Aristotle's second argument against the thesis (1047a10–17); 4) positive conclusions resulting of the refutation of the Megarian position (1047a17–29; 1047b1–2); 5) remarks on ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια (1047a30–b1). Each of these sections will be dealt with in a specific subsection of the present chapter.

#### 7.1. The Megarian thesis (1046b29–33)

At 1046b29, Aristotle interrupts the thread of the previous discussion and introduces a thesis that contradicts his view on the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια:

there are some who say, such as the Megarians, that a thing is capable [of acting] only when it is acting, and when it is not acting it is not capable [of acting], such as someone who is not building is not capable of building, but someone who is building is capable when he builds. And likewise in other cases (*Met.* Θ 3, 1046b29–32).<sup>316</sup>

The thesis is presented without context, and the rest of the chapter is structured as a refutation. The most striking fact of the passage is the reference to the Megarians. As we mentioned earlier, most recent scholars do not spend much time reflecting on the implications of such a reference, choosing to interpret the passage in exclusively immanent terms.<sup>317</sup> Alternatively, scholars relate the thesis to the Megarians' alleged Eleaticism, showing sensitivity neither to the variety of sources on the Megarians nor to the complex nature of their thought.<sup>318</sup> I intend, on the contrary, to read the thesis together

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<sup>316</sup> Εἰσὶ δὲ τινες οἱ φασιν, οἷον οἱ Μεγαρικοί, ὅταν ἐνεργῆ μόνον δύνασθαι, ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἐνεργῆ οὐ δύνασθαι, οἷον τὸν μὴ οἰκοδομοῦντα οὐ δύνασθαι οἰκοδομεῖν, ἀλλὰ τὸν οἰκοδομοῦντα ὅταν οἰκοδομῆ• ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων.

<sup>317</sup> As in the cases of Witt (2003, 10), Makin (1996; 2006, 60–64), and Beere (2009, 91–99).

<sup>318</sup> This is the case of Ross (1924 II, 244).

with the results obtained in the first part of this dissertation, where we analyzed the main threads of Megarian philosophy. This, I hope, will aid us in the interpretation of this difficult and obscure passage.

We must first make two preliminary claims. Firstly, it should be noted that some interpreters believe that the position presented by Aristotle should not be taken to be an exclusively Megarian position (Witt 2003, 18, Makin 2006, 60–61). This view depends on a particular interpretation of Aristotle’s use of οἶον in 1046b29: according to these authors, Aristotle would be mentioning the Megarians as one example (among many others) of those who upheld this thesis. But this view does not sit well with the peculiarity of the argument. In effect, the thesis does not seem to be part of a wider philosophical position but, as we will further see, it is a specific eristic argument, directed against the Aristotelian distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Indeed, nothing prevents us from reading οἶον as an explicative, closer to “that is to say”, rather than introducing a particular example of a widely held position.

Secondly, the fact that Aristotle speaks in general terms (“some”, τινες, followed by the generic οἱ Μεγαρικοί) is not unusual in the *corpus*. A particularly relevant passage in this respect is found in *Met.* H 3, 1043b24. There Aristotle mentions another Socratic school by evoking “the Antisthenians” (οἱ Ἀντισθένειοι), in the plural, exactly as in the case of the οἱ Μεγαρικοί. Aristotle is here referring presumably to Antisthenes himself; these Antisthenians are harshly described as ignorant or poorly educated (ἀπαίδευτοι). Likewise, in *Θ* 3, Aristotle qualifies the Megarian thesis as absurd by noting that many absurdities (ἄτοπα, 1046b33) follow from it. It is perhaps this stark opposition that explains Aristotle’s use of oblique references in order to allude to thinkers or schools of thought that disputed his philosophical elaborations, as in the case of the Socratic schools.

### **7.1.1. The identity behind the Megarian thesis and its meaning**

The question of the identity behind Aristotle’s allusion is not a trivial one since it has a profound impact on the interpretation of the chapter. Indeed, many scholars interpret the thesis as a form of radical actualism, that is, as stemming from an alleged commitment to

the belief that only that which is actual truly is.<sup>319</sup> My impression is that this position derives at least in part from an inexact association between the thesis and some of the arguments put forward by Diodorus Cronus. On the contrary, the way in which the discussion in  $\Theta$  3 is carried out (above all in the first section of the chapter, which runs from 1046b29 up to 1047a10) shows that the issues initially at stake in the chapter do not concern the problem of modality (logical or ontological) but the problem of the status of capacities and their distinction from their corresponding active exercise. This seems to suggest that Aristotle has another Megarian in mind, and not Diodorus Cronus.

### 7.1.2. Two hypotheses regarding *Met.* $\Theta$ 3: Eubulides of Miletus and Diodorus Cronus

The view according to which Diodorus Cronus (or a proto-Diodorean position) is behind Aristotle's allusion is widespread in the literature.<sup>320</sup> The basis of this interpretation is the apparent continuity of content between Aristotle's testimony and Diodorus Cronus's theoretical positions, as they emerge from the available testimonies. Diodorus Cronus developed a number of specific arguments against the possibility of motion,<sup>321</sup> which are to some extent congruent with Aristotle's accusation of the Megarians as deniers of change (1047a14). Furthermore, he is well known for his Master Argument ( $\kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\nu$

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<sup>319</sup> This tendency is common to those who read the thesis without referring to any external sources and to those who relate the thesis to the Eleatic tradition. An example of the former is Ch. Witt (2003, 10), who claims that, according to the Megarians, "only that which is actual exists". An example of the latter is D. Ross (1924 II, 244), who claims that the Megarian thesis was "probably reached by a very simple piece of reasoning, natural for followers of Parmenides, 'A thing is what it is, and therefore cannot be-what-it-is-not'". This seems to imply that the Megarians are committed to the existence of only that which effectively and actually is, and with the denial of the existence of that which is potential.

<sup>320</sup> Döring (1972, 38–39, 133–135) includes this passage and the corresponding commentary by Ps. Alexander among the testimonies of Diodorus Cronus. The same is done by Muller (1985, 47, 142–143), and Mársico (2013, 196–199, n. 133). Döring states that the doctrine which features at  $\Theta$  3 is an earlier doctrine regarding the possible which was later modified by Diodorus. Still, his interpretation of the passage depends heavily on Diodorus's conception of possibility, and in particular, on the Master Argument.

<sup>321</sup> Sext. Emp. *Math.* X 48 =SSR II F 12; X 85–102 =SSR II F 13.

λόγος),<sup>322</sup> long believed to be a veiled reference at play in chapter 3, more specifically at 1047a10–17.

However, Giannantoni (1981, 1990) rejects this reading. In addition to chronological issues,<sup>323</sup> he points to several incongruences between the thesis of  $\Theta$  3 and Diodorus's Master Argument (which we will discuss further below).<sup>324</sup> Based on this, he hypothesizes that either Eubulides of Miletus or one of his immediate associates should be taken to be the reference behind Aristotle's 'οι Μεγαρικοί'.<sup>325</sup> As we saw in 3.1.4 and 3.1.5 *supra*, Eubulides was undoubtedly a contemporary of Aristotle, and we have several testimonies that refer to a direct polemic between them.<sup>326</sup> Eubulides is famous for formulating a series of dialectical arguments,<sup>327</sup> and it is not hard to imagine that the argument which features in  $\Theta$  3 could be one of them.

There are several reasons for favoring both Giannantoni's position and the more general idea (shared by many scholars) that the passage in  $\Theta$  3 is better read independently

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<sup>322</sup> Cf. Epict. *Dissert.* II 19, 1–5 =SSR II F 24; Cic. *Fat.* 6, 12–7, 13 =SSR II F 25; Alex. *Aphr. in Apr.* 183–4, ed. Wallies =SSR II F 27.

<sup>323</sup> Giannantoni (1990, 73–76) reminds us of Sedley's (1977, 79–80, 109 n. 37) argument regarding the chronology of Diodorus. Sedley argues that Diodorus could not have died earlier than 285 BC, contesting the traditional dating of 307 BC. We know that book  $\Theta$  of the *Metaphysics* was written during Aristotle's second stay in Athens (335–323 BC), and so it is difficult to imagine that, on Sedley's chronology, a young Diodorus was the target of Aristotle's refutation. For his part, Sedley does not believe that  $\Theta$  3 ultimately refers to Diodorus simply because he does not think that he was a Megarian.

<sup>324</sup> Giannantoni (1981, 271) points out that the thesis against which the Master Argument is directed (that there is something possible which is not nor will be, cf. p. 202 below) is explicitly rejected by Aristotle at *Met.*  $\Theta$  4, 1047b3–6. According to Giannantoni (1981, 271–272), the Master Argument was directed against Diodorus's own disciple Philo of Megara, who argued that what is possible is that which is capable of being realized, even when circumstances impede its realization (the famous example is the log which is capable of burning even though it is submerged in the ocean, and thus does not and will not burn, cf. *Simpl. in Cat.* 195, 31–196, 24, ed. Kalbfleisch =SSR II F 27).

<sup>325</sup> Cf. Giannantoni (1990 IV, 84–85).

<sup>326</sup> "Eubulides was in disagreement with Aristotle and attacked him vehemently on many occasions" (Diog. Laert. II 109 =SSR II B 8). This confrontation is reported also by Aristocles, *SSR II B 9*, Athenaeus, *SSR II B 10* and Themistius, *SSR II B 11*.

<sup>327</sup> As we have seen, Diog. Laert. II 108 =SSR II B 13 states that he was "the author of many dialectical arguments in an interrogatory form, namely, the Liar, the Disguised, Electra, the Veiled Figure, the Sorites, the Horned One, and the Bald Head".

of Diodorus’s Master Argument.<sup>328</sup> We should note that the passage at 1047a10–17, which is usually related to the Master Argument, is not strictly speaking a Megarian position but part of Aristotle’s own argument against the Megarian thesis which features in 1046b29–32. Moreover, the Megarian thesis does seem not to be specifically concerned with modality or time, which are central aspects of both 1047a10–17 and the Master Argument.<sup>329</sup> The thesis and the first set of arguments against it (1046b33–1047a10) revolve around the verbal forms δύνασθαι and ἐνεργεῖν, and seem concerned with a narrow concept of δύναμις, understood mainly as a capacity for diverse sorts of actions.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> With Giannantoni we find Sedley (1977, 107 n. 25), Makin (2006, 72) and Berti (2017, 398–399, n. 9). Schuhl (1960, 34), Hintikka (1973, 199ff.) and Montoneri (1984, 145) believe that Aristotle’s argument constitutes a source of influence on Diodorus’s Master Argument, and not the other way around.

<sup>329</sup> The Londinienses (1984, 61–62) distinguish six possible interpretations of the Megarian thesis, and uphold that the first section of the chapter (up to 1047a10) revolves around the fourth interpretation (“if x is not φ-ing now, he lacks the ability to φ”), while the second section (from 1047a10 up to 1047a29) would revolve around the sixth one (“if x is not φ-ing now, it is not possible that he ever will φ”). This last interpretation of the thesis introduces a temporal and logical aspect which is not explicit in the formulation of 1046b29–32. In effect, Aristotle introduces important developments on his concept of δύναμις in the second part of the chapter. But as stated above, this section corresponds to an Aristotelian elaboration in the context of his confrontation with the Megarian position, which goes beyond the limits of the original Megarian argument, analyzed and criticized in the first section. The second section has the purpose of addressing the modal implications of the concept of δύναμις (on which see section 7.3 below), and although it is true that the problem of modality is in some sense implied in the Megarian thesis of b29–32 (Aristotle would not address the issue if it not were so), it is not the central or defining aspect of it, which concerns the more reductive capacity-exercise scheme.

It could be argued that temporality is signaled in 1046b29–32 by the recurrent use of ὅταν, but to this we may reply that ὅταν here seems to have the function of a conditional rather than that of a mark of temporal indexation. For a reading of the thesis in terms of temporal indexation see Makin (1996, 2006).

<sup>330</sup> It seems to me an error to translate δύνασθαι at 1046b30–31 as ‘possibility’ (as does Weidemann 2008, 131–132); this presumably leads him to translate ἐνδέχεται at 1047a26 as ‘able’, when, in this context, the most natural translation of the terms δυνατόν and ἐνδέχεται is exactly the inverse. Moreover, it forces him to translate the verb ἐνεργεῖν, which undoubtedly has an *active* connotation, as ‘to be actual’. In this reading of the thesis, δύνασθαι refers primarily to issues of modality. Though these issues are certainly implicit in the discussion (which explains why Aristotle brings up the question of modality in his second argument against the Megarians at 1040a10–17), the thesis—and, in consequence, the first section of the discussion, 1046b29–1047a10—are better understood if we read them primarily in terms of powers or capacities and their corresponding exercise, as do Menn (1994, 94 n. 31), Witt (2003, 20–23), Makin (2006, 60), and Beere (2009, 94 n. 6).

In this respect, the example which immediately follows the thesis is eloquent: “for instance, someone who is not building is not capable of building, but someone who is building is capable when he builds” (οἷον τὸν μὴ οἰκοδομοῦντα οὐ δύνασθαι οἰκοδομεῖν, ἀλλὰ τὸν οἰκοδομοῦντα ὅταν οἰκοδομῇ, 1046b30–32). This example is clearly referring to the distinction between a capacity and its corresponding exercise, in this case the art of building. In addition, Aristotle refutes the Megarian thesis by way of examples of other capacities such as sensation and sight (1047a7–10).<sup>331</sup> To these examples he will later add generation (1047a10–14), changes in positions such as sitting and standing (1047a15–16), and locative changes such as walking (1047a23–24). What all of this tells us is that the issue at hand is primarily the status of, and the distinction between, the inactive possession of capacities and their active exercise.<sup>332</sup>

There is, however, a proximity of content between Aristotle’s second argument against the Megarians (1047a10–17) and Diodorus’s famous Master Argument. But the two texts present some important differences which show that it is unlikely for Diodorus (or for some approximate proto-Diodorean position) to be the reference behind Aristotle’s οἱ Μεγαρικοί. I will compare both texts in further detail in section 7.3.1 below, but for now let us simply note that although Aristotle expands on the logical aspect of his concept of δύναμις in 1047a10–17, he does not depart entirely from a conception of δύναμις as capacity. Indeed, Aristotle seems to be providing further insight on the modal implications of his core notion of δύναμις as capacity, and not introducing a separate sense of δύναμις as possibility. On the contrary, the Master Argument seems to deal exclusively with a conception of δύναμις as possibility, and to be foreign to the notion of capacity understood in physical or active terms.

All of the above seems to suggest that, as argued by Giannantoni, Diodorus should not be taken to be the reference behind the ‘οἱ Μεγαρικοί’ of Θ 3. In fact, the parallels

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<sup>331</sup> The third example of the first section (sensible qualities) seems to be secondary in nature and dependent on the example of sensation. The example does not depart from the general capacity-exercise scheme.

<sup>332</sup> Muller (2008) loses sight of the fact that the thesis in Θ 3 does not concern primarily the concept of possibility but that of capacity, as can be seen by the examples introduced by Aristotle. This explains why he assumes that Diodorus’s Master Argument provides the key to understanding the Megarian polemic in Θ 3. But it is Aristotle who connects the Megarian thesis to the question of modality, and so it seems safer to assume that it is this text which constitutes the original source of influence on later discussions which concern specifically the issue of modality, such as in the cases of Diodorus, Philo of Megara and the Stoics.

between *Met.* Θ 3, 1047a10–17 and Diodorus’s conception of possibility,<sup>333</sup> and between *Phys.* VI 10, 240b19–241a8 and his arguments against present motion, seem to suggest that Diodorus was particularly influenced by Aristotle, and not the other way around. On the other hand, we cannot be entirely sure regarding Eubulides since we have no evidence that he supported a position such as the one that Aristotle states. Still, the chronological congruence and the attested polemical relation between Eubulides and Aristotle make it likely that he or one of his direct associates composed the argument presented at Θ 3.<sup>334</sup>

Beyond the question of the identity behind Aristotle’s allusion, it seems safe to state that the Megarian thesis constitutes a specific eristic argument directed against Aristotle’s theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, with an eminently refutative scope. An additional indication that this is so is that the thesis presents a conjugated form of the verb ἐνεργεῖν. As we mentioned earlier, there is broad consensus that the term ἐνέργεια was coined by Aristotle himself. If Aristotle reports the argument as composed by the Megarians, we can state that it was a specific argument that takes Aristotle’s own technical term as a starting point. This interpretation fits well with the Megarian tendency, which emerges in Eubulides and other exponents of the Megarian circle, to compose specific eristic arguments in order to refute positive, competing philosophical positions. In his reply to this argument, Aristotle would be defending his theory from a particular attack that targets the core of his distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.

### 7.1.3. The thesis of *Met.* Θ 3 and the Megarians’ eristic dialectic

When defending his choice of identifying the οἱ Μεγαρικοί with Eubulides, Giannantoni states that Eubulides’s arguments

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<sup>333</sup> Compare Aristotle’s expression at *Met.* Θ 3, 1047a12–13 τὸ δ’ ἀδύνατον γενέσθαι ὁ λέγων ἢ εἶναι ἢ ἔσεσθαι ψεύσεται with Diodorus’s position as relayed by Epict. *Dissert.* II 19, 1–2 =SSR II F 24, μηδὲν εἶναι δυνατόν, ὃ οὔτ’ ἔστιν ἀληθὲς οὔτ’ ἔσται and Alex. *Aphr. in Apr.* 183–184, ed. Wallies =SSR II F 24 δύναται λέγειν καὶ περὶ τῶν Δυνατῶν, τοῦ τε, ὃ Διοδώρειον λέγεται, ὃ ἢ ἔστιν ἢ ἔσται.

<sup>334</sup> It is probable that Diodorus is in fact following Eubulides’s lead; Sextus Empiricus also claims that Diodorus Cronus denied motion by means of a Sorites (*Math.* X 112–118 =SSR II F 14). This is an important text because it shows that Diodorus probably made use of Eubulides’s argumentative structures in order to further his claims, and that he did so in a very adaptive way. All of this seems to reinforce the impression that Diodorus had inherited a rich and complex set of arguments, originally developed in the context of a polemical exchange between earlier Megarians and Aristotle, which he then reworked and developed.

resumed analogous procedures to those of Zenonian dialectic, and therefore were in so many aspects akin to the Eleatizing eristic of a Dionysodorus and of a Euthydemus (with whom, moreover, Eubulides is sometimes connected in the ancient sources: cfr. e.g. Sext Emp. *adv. math.* VII 13 [= II B 12]).<sup>335</sup>

This association, which Giannantoni does not pursue further, is of particular interest because Plato's *Euthydemus* does indeed provide the key for a better understanding of the Megarian polemic in  $\Theta$  3. As we saw in chapter 5, Plato's response to the eristic arguments put forward by the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus constitutes an important precedent in the development of Aristotle's original conception of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. And, as we have anticipated, it is this original formulation that Aristotle defends from Megarian attack in  $\Theta$  3. The connection between the two texts becomes even more evident if we consider the Megarian interpretation of the dialogue, which we have defended in section 4.2.1.<sup>336</sup> All of this suggests that the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια had, since its early precedents in Plato and throughout its development (as it is clear from  $\Theta$  3), a direct relation with eristic arguments of Megarian origin.

As we saw in chapter 5, Aristotle retraces in the *Protrepticus* Plato's original distinction between ἔχειν and χρῆσθαι, introduced in the context of a dialectical exchange with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Aristotle translates Plato's distinction into his novel terminology of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. It is not difficult to see that the Megarian thesis of  $\Theta$  3 does not depart from the terms of these early sets of discussion:<sup>337</sup> as I already

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<sup>335</sup> Giannantoni (1990 IV, 84–85): “[sc. gli argomenti di Eubulide] riprendevano procedure analoghe a quelle della dialettica zenoniana ed erano per tanti aspetti affini all’eristica eleatizzante di un Dionisodoro e di un Eutidemo (con i quali, del resto, Eubulide è talvolta collegato nelle fonti antiche: cfr. per es. Sext Emp. *Math.* VII 13 [= II B 12])”.

<sup>336</sup> Giannantoni deems this hypothesis unlikely (1990 IV, 62), but as we saw in 4.2.1, recent scholars have provided strong reasons which seem to confirm the impression that the brothers were in fact Megarian exponents.

<sup>337</sup> Menn (1994, 94 n. 31) sees no connection between the *Protrepticus*, the *Euthydemus* and the Megarian polemic in  $\Theta$  3, since for Menn, the Megarians are here replying to what he deems to be Aristotle's mature conception of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, and not to the original formulation of the distinction. He thus places them together with the Stoics as opponents of Aristotle's theory. But it is clear that  $\Theta$  3 retraces the earlier discussion regarding capacities which takes place at the *Protrepticus*, which in turn was heavily influenced

mentioned, the Megarian thesis is presented in terms of δύνασθαι and ἐνεργεῖν (terms which feature extensively in the *Protrepticus*, cf. XI 56.25, 28/B80; 57.20/B83 and 58.13/B86). This indicates that the thesis is majorly concerned with *activities*, doings, such as housebuilding and seeing (these are the examples that feature both in Θ 3 and in the *Protrepticus*, especially at VII 43.10–25/B68–70, but also in VII 44.13–26/B75–77 and 56.13–57.6/B78–80), much in the same way as in the *Euthydemus*.

Furthermore, the discussion also concerns the issue of the legitimate application of terms:<sup>338</sup> Aristotle states that if we follow the Megarian thesis, “no one will be a builder if he is not building, for to be a builder is to be capable to build” (1046b33–35). That Aristotle comes to this conclusion suggests that the Megarians of Θ 3, like the brothers of the *Euthydemus*,<sup>339</sup> deny the possibility of calling someone a housebuilder in two (opposing) ways: on the one hand, as being merely in possession of a capacity which remains inactive, and on the other as being actively engaged in the exercise of said capacity. This would explain why they state that one only has a capacity while exercising it; for the Megarians, this would be the only reference that the term ‘housebuilder’ (for example) admits. Like the brothers in the dialogue, the Megarians of *Met.* Θ 3 consider that using the same word “for people who are in opposite conditions” (278a6–7) is absurd, or at least unintelligible.<sup>340</sup>

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by Plato’s *Euthydemus*, as he himself demonstrates. The connection becomes even clearer if we admit the Megarian interpretation of the *Euthydemus*.

<sup>338</sup> Recall *Protr.* 57.7–9/B81: “And so, whenever each of two things are said the same way (ὅταν οὖν λέγηται τι τὰ τὸν ἑκάτερον δυοῖν ὄντων), and one of them is called (λεγόμενον) this way because of acting or being acted on (ἢ τῷ ποιεῖν ἢ τῷ πάσχειν, *i.e.*, the exercise), we will then concede that the term belongs more strongly to this one (τούτῳ μᾶλλον ἀποδώσομεν ὑπάρχειν τὸ λεχθέν)”.

<sup>339</sup> Cf. *Euthyd.* 278a5–7, where Socrates tells Clinias that he did not realize (διαλέληθεν) that “the same name is applied to people who are in opposite (ἐναντίως) conditions (τὰ τὸν ὄνομα ἐπ’ ἀνθρώποις ἐναντίως ἔχουσιν κείμενον)”. This, according to Socrates, was what the brothers were intending to highlight in their argument (“what they were showing you”, ὡς οὗτοι ἐνδείκνυνται). The perspective of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus is, as in the case of the Megarian thesis of Θ 3, destructive in nature: they are intending to underscore the difficulties involved in the fact that a same term can be used for different (and opposing) conditions. Socrates, on the contrary, attempts to resolve the ambiguity in his first protreptic exposition.

<sup>340</sup> The ambiguity which the brothers exploit in the *Euthydemus* concerns the distinction between the capacity which someone has for learning something and the capacity for exercising an already acquired knowledge (in terms of the discussion of *DA* II 5, first and second potentiality). In contrast, the Megarians of Θ 3 seem to contest the distinction between the possession of a capacity and its active exercise (in

Aristotle provides no context to the Megarian thesis. We can, though, see that the argument which Aristotle transmits fits within our description of the eristic dialectic of the Megarians, widely attested in the sources, and which can be seen pristinely in the *Euthydemus*. The dialectical method of the Megarians had the intention of displaying the various interferences that thwart any attempt to address reality through discourse. One of the main problematic issues on which the Megarians insisted on was the phenomenon of ambiguity. It is this concern with ambiguity that features in, for example, Eubulides's famous Electra argument,<sup>341</sup> and which reappears in *Metaphysics* Θ 3, where Aristotle defends the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια from Megarian attack.

## 7.2. Aristotle's first set of arguments: *reductio ad absurdum* (1046b33–1047a10)

We must now turn to Aristotle's first arguments in his refutation of the Megarian eristic thesis. The Megarians argue that one is only capable when *actively exercising* a capacity. Aristotle begins his refutation by noting that the Megarian position clashes with the fact that capacities such as housebuilding can be exercised at a given time (for example, when a housebuilder builds) and remain unexercised at other times (when a housebuilder is at rest). If one follows the Megarians, “no one will be [Ab ἔσται] a builder if he is not building, for to be a builder is to be capable of building, and the same for the other arts” (1046b33–36). This implies that we cannot say that a housebuilder at rest has the capacity to build a house, *i.e.*, that he *is* a housebuilder when he is at rest, since having the capacity to build (as an intrinsic property) is to be a builder. Note that Aristotle is not simply referring to the ambiguity regarding can statements (as in the reading of Beere 2009): he is claiming that no one *will be* a builder if he is not building. This indicates that Aristotle wants to preserve the idea of being a builder δυνάμει, or having a capacity to build, as one of two ways of being a builder.

Nevertheless, the Megarian thesis does not necessarily rule out the possibility that a man could somehow exercise a capacity at different times, that is, for him to be a housebuilder each time he is actively housebuilding, or to have the capacity to do so only

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scholastic terms, first and second actuality). But the procedure is the same in both cases, and there is a clear structural analogy between them which revolves around the core issue of ambiguity.

<sup>341</sup> Cf. Diog. Laert. II 108 = SSR II B 13. See for example the formulation transmitted by Lucianus, *Vit. auct.* 22–23. On this argument, see section 3.1.5. *supra*.

when he actively does so. This possibility, however, has implications that Aristotle considers untenable. For, in this case, δυνάμεις would come to be each time they are exercised and, conversely, cease to exist when not exercised. If the Megarians deny the existence of non-enacted capacities, it follows that they cannot offer a consistent explanation for this coming to be or destruction of a δύναμις:<sup>342</sup> “when one stops [housebuilding], will he not have the art? But will build once again at once? Acquiring it how?” (1047a3–4). On the contrary, Aristotle, while not denying that a δύναμις can be generated or destroyed (though only from the perspective of the possession of a subjective capacity, since a δύναμις *per se* cannot be generated or destroyed, 1047a1–2), offers a causal explanation for this occurrence: a δύναμις can be acquired by way of learning or lost by way of forgetting it, or by some affection (πάθει), or by the passage of time (1046b37–1047a2). Moreover, Aristotle states, crucially, that once acquired, a capacity can either be actively exercised or remain unexercised. This transition from inactivity to activity is what the Megarians fail to explain, and thus they are forced to admit that “if one is blind when one does not have sight, but has it by nature and if one still has it, everyone will be blind and deaf many times a day” (1047a8–10).

We must note that, up to this point, Aristotle’s refutation of the Megarians consists of a *reductio ad absurdum* that focuses on the failure of the Megarians to explain the commonly experienced fact that activities such as housebuilding or sight are exercised at different times.<sup>343</sup> Aristotle forces them to admit that δυνάμεις come into and out of existence apparently *ex nihilo*. In contrast, Aristotle’s distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια serves the purpose of explaining precisely this phenomenon by claiming that δυνάμεις can change between activity and inactivity, that they can be either actively exercised or remain unexercised. The distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια and the

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<sup>342</sup> As argued by Witt (2003, 24–25).

<sup>343</sup> Some authors consider this line of reasoning insufficient; see for example Rosen (1979, 115): “The Megarian objection surfaces in the treatment of *dynamis* because it is directed toward the denial of change and so primarily against kinetic possibility. Aristotle says that this thesis is patently absurd. However, the Megarians claim to deny the cognitive distinctness of *dynamis* apart from *energeia*, not the persuasiveness of the cognitively illusory phenomenon of change”. Cf. also Wheeler (1983, 287): “the conclusions the Megarians drew from the paradoxes are defensible. That is, the Megarians’ choices of what to give up when confronted with a set of inconsistent but plausible beliefs are no less rational than ‘modern’ choices, in the sense that they violate intuitions no stronger than the intuitions violated by ‘modern’ solutions to the paradoxes”.

possibility of changing from inactivity to activity offers the key to refuting the Megarians in the present dialectical context.

It is crucial for our purposes to acknowledge that this transition or change between inactivity and activity, excluding those cases in which a capacity is acquired or lost, does not imply motion. This is clear if we have in mind *DA* II 4–5, but it can even be traced back to the *Protrepticus* (XI 56.22–57.6/B80). The transition between inactivity and activity, which in both works Aristotle calls μεταβάλλειν (*DA* 416b1–3, 417b8–9, *Protr.* XI 57.2–6/B80), is not an instance of change, as many scholars have noted.<sup>344</sup> It is simply the switching between the inactive “having” of a capacity to its fully-fledged exercise.

The example of housebuilding, which dominates the first section of the chapter, certainly constitutes a case of motion, but it is not its motion-like character that is relevant in the context of refuting the Megarians. Aristotle wants to focus on the fact that a capacity (be it for housebuilding or for any other action) can alternate between inactivity and activity. At stake is the distinction between the dual character of capacities, a duality *independent of the phenomenon of motion*.

Further confirmation that this is the case is found in the other examples Aristotle introduces in this first section of chapter 3. After discussing the case of housebuilding, Aristotle argues that the Megarian thesis leads to the relativist position of Protagoras (1047a6). Aristotle uses this argument when discussing irrational capacities such as sensible qualities like cold, hot or sweet. If qualities could only be perceived if there is a subject actively perceiving them, sensible qualities and subjective perception would overlap. For Aristotle, this conclusion is another way of describing the thesis of Protagoras (*i.e.*, that things are according to the perception of an individual). In contrast, Aristotle argues that sensible qualities subsist δυνάμει independently from perception, that is, that sensible qualities have the capacity of being perceived even when not being actively perceived.

Aristotle draws a conclusion from this argument about subjective sensible perception: he states that if we follow the Megarian thesis, no living being will have the faculty of perception unless he is actively perceiving (ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδ’ αἰσθησιν ἔξει οὐδὲν ἂν μὴ αἰσθάνηται μηδ’ ἐνεργῆ, 1047a7–8). This is followed by the introduction of the specific example of sight (ὄψις) at 1047a8–10. These examples, perception in general and

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<sup>344</sup> Cf. Kosman (1969, 56), Gill (1980, 136), Waterlow (1982, 186), Blair (1992, 25–27), Menn (2002, 95). For a different interpretation of the passage see Burnyeat (2002a, 56).

sight in particular, are not without significance, since they constitute two leading examples of Aristotle's distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια: they feature prominently in the *Protrepticus*, in *De Anima* and in the second part of *Metaphysics* Θ. Furthermore, the example of sight, in particular, is one of the main examples of the non-kinetic sort of activity, as *DA* III 7, 431a4–7, *EN* X 4, 1174a13–b14, and *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b23–24 and 8, 1050a23–25 tell us.<sup>345</sup> Aristotle appears to mention this example in passing, simply as a way of making evident the absurdity of the Megarian claim (cf. 1047a9–10 “everyone will be blind and deaf many times a day”). But the inclusion of the example of sight does elicit a question: what is the *extension* of the capacity-exercise structure? Does it correspond only to changes, or to something else? In other words, does Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians involve a broader notion of δύναμις, which goes beyond the strict definition of δύναμις as a principle of change?

Many argue that in this chapter (as in the rest of Θ 1–5 and Θ 6 up to the κίνησις-ἐνέργεια distinction of 1048b18–35), Aristotle is working with a broad or undifferentiated notion of change which can accommodate both kinetic and non-kinetic activities such as sensation.<sup>346</sup> The assumption behind this position is that the capacity-exercise structure (and so all sorts of capacities and activities) can be broadly understood as κίνησις. But as we saw earlier (ch. 5.2), there is no textual justification for this position. On the contrary, this passage is better understood as concerning the original configuration of the distinction, which as we saw, does not concern the problem of change but *the more basic contrast between a capacity and its exercise*, which applies to kinetic and non-kinetic capacities alike. That is why, when defending his theory from the Megarians, Aristotle resorts to examples of motions such as housebuilding, and examples of non-kinetic capacities and activities such as sight, for *it is the status of what they have in common (the capacity-exercise scheme) that is at stake*. It is this primary structure that Aristotle is defending from the Megarians, and this reinforces the impression that the chapter is a

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<sup>345</sup> We saw in ch. 5.2 that already in *Protr.* VII 43.5–25/B68–70 sight is opposed to ποιήσις following the *telés/atelés* criterion of *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35.

<sup>346</sup> Thus Makin (2006, 134–135) and Beere (2009, 228). Besides Θ 3, Aristotle speaks of sensation at Θ 5, 1047b31–32. Here he does not, however, mention the example of sight. Neither sensation nor sight are mentioned in the discussions of δύναμις in Δ 12 and Θ 1, 2 and 4. On the contrary, sight does appear in Δ 7, 1017b2–3 as the first of a series of examples of τὸ ὄν δυνάμει and τὸ ὄν ἐντελεχείᾳ, which, as noted in section 6.2, p. 183, does not include a single case of motion.

parenthesis in the midst of the exposition of δύναμις as a principle of change, for the discussion is not limited to the motion sense of δύναμις.

### 7.3. Aristotle's second argument: the denial of change (1047a10–17)

The extension of the analysis beyond the strict motion sense of δύναμις can also be seen in Aristotle's second argument against the Megarians (1047a10–17). As I stated earlier, this argument goes beyond the initial treatment of the contrast between a capacity and its exercise and delves into the logical aspects of his concept of δύναμις. I will begin by briefly reconstructing the argument.<sup>347</sup> This will allow us to establish a critical comparison between the passage and Diodorus's Master Argument. In turn, this will help us strengthen our case, presented in the previous subsection, for denying the connection between the thesis of Θ 3 and Diodorus.

Moreover, reconstructing this argument is crucial for a correct understanding of the philosophical significance of the whole section 1047a10–29. Indeed, this section anticipates one of the main points put forward in Θ 6–9: that the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction can also be taken to describe the two ways in which beings are, namely in capacity (or potentially, δύναμει) or in act (or actually, ἐνεργεία). This issue will be addressed in the next subsection (7.4), on the basis of our present analysis of 1047a10–17.

Let us, then, turn to our passage. At 1047a10–14, Aristotle claims the following:

Further, if that which is deprived of δύναμις is incapable [/impossible, ἀδύνατον], that which is not coming to be will not be able to come to be in the future. And he who says of the incapable of coming to be either that it is or that it will be, he will speak falsely (because this was what “incapable” [τὸ ἀδύνατον] was shown to be), therefore these doctrines [οἱ λόγοι] deny both movement and coming to be.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> This passage has been thoroughly discussed because of its treatment of the issues of modality and time, notably by Hintikka (1973), Gomez Cabranes (1989), and more recently by Witt (2003), Makin (2006) and Beere (2009). My intention here is to explain the main features of the argument, and so I will leave aside many problematic issues that these authors discuss in their works.

<sup>348</sup> ἔτι εἰ ἀδύνατον τὸ ἐστερημένον δυνάμεως, τὸ μὴ γιγνόμενον ἀδύνατον ἔσται γενέσθαι· τὸ δ' ἀδύνατον γενέσθαι ὁ λέγων ἢ εἶναι ἢ ἔσεσθαι ψεύσεται (τὸ γὰρ ἀδύνατον τοῦτο ἐσήμαινεν), ὥστε οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι ἐξαιροῦσι καὶ κίνησιν καὶ γένησιν.

The argument revolves around the example of generation. This allows Aristotle to expand on the modal implications (from a logical point of view) of his concept of δύναμις. Aristotle says that, if we accept the Megarian thesis (which claims that that which is not active lacks δύναμις), then if something is not coming to be now, it is not only incapable of doing so, but *it is impossible* for it to come to be in the future (τὸ μὴ γιγνόμενον ἀδύνατον ἔσται γενέσθαι, 1047a11–12). And if one were to say that something which cannot come to be is or will be (ἢ εἶναι ἢ ἔσεσθαι), he will be stating something false (12–13). Thus, Aristotle concludes, this position denies all change and generation (καὶ κίνησιν καὶ γένεσιν, 1047a14).

The key term in the argument is ἀδύνατον, which can mean both incapable and impossible. Although Aristotle disposes of a single word (δυνατόν) for the concepts of capacity and possibility (and, conversely, ἀδύνατον for incapacity and impossibility), it is clear that he is aware of the distinction between the two senses, as can be seen in his discussion of δύναμις in *Met.* Δ 12, which we analyzed in the previous chapter (cf. p. 184 *supra*). Let us recall here that in this passage, Aristotle defines ἀδυναμία firstly as that which is deprived of δύναμις (ἀδυναμία ἐστὶ στερησις δυνάμεως, 1019b15–16). This, he claims, is a physical definition, and reappears at the beginning of the present argument (ἀδύνατον τὸ ἐστερημένον δυνάμεως, 1047a11). But he provides an additional definition of δυνατόν and ἀδύνατον in the modal sense of possibility and impossibility (1019b30–33). The point is that in Δ 12, Aristotle distinguishes between two broad senses of δύναμις: a physical sense (δύναμις as a principle of change) and a logical sense (δύναμις as that whose contrary is not necessarily false).

However, in the context of the present argument, Aristotle is deliberately conflating both senses.<sup>349</sup> Aristotle states that if one claims that that which is incapable (ἀδύνατον) of coming to be either is or will be, he will lie, and says that this inference is valid because “that was what ἀδύνατον meant” (1047a13–14). For Aristotle, ἀδύνατον is *a*) that which cannot come to be because it lacks the capacity to do so or *b*) that which entails a contradiction, *i.e.*, what is necessarily false. The argument shows that both aspects would be the same for Aristotle since for him nothing that does come to be entails a contradiction, and, conversely, to suppose that something that lacks a capacity to come

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<sup>349</sup> This is the position of Gomez Cabranes (1989, 104 n. 69), Witt (2003, 28–30), Reale (2004, 1120), Beere (2009, 109–111) and Berti (2017, 399 n. 14).

to be does come to be results in contradiction.<sup>350</sup> The question is whether there is something capable of being other than what it is, and whether this implies a contradiction or not (or in Aristotle's language, if anything impossible follows, 1047a25–26). If this modal dimension of capacities were not at play in the argument, Aristotle's conclusion (*i.e.*, that the Megarians deny change) would not follow: something could lack the capacity for coming to be now, but it would not be logically impossible for it to come to be in the future (and so, he would not be lying when stating this, as Aristotle claims, 1047a12–13). But if lacking the capacity for coming to be implies that it is *impossible* for that thing to come to be, then we can see how, if we follow the Megarian thesis, there will be no becoming.

We can thus see that Aristotle's account of δύναμις as a capacity reveals itself to be at the same time an account of the possible. We are not presented in this passage with two contrasting concepts of δύναμις, one corresponding to capacity, the other to possibility, but with a primary concept (δύναμις as capacity) with a modal implication (δύναμις as possibility). That is to say, the concept of capacity involves that of possibility, but the relationship does not hold in the reverse, for a mere logical possibility is not equivalent to a determinate capacity.

A further indication that confirms our interpretation is found in the example that Aristotle introduces after the argument, at 15–17. Here Aristotle states that, if we accept the Megarian view, “that which stands will always stand and that which is seated will always be seated, because it will not stand up, as it is seating. For what cannot stand up (ὅ γε μὴ δύναται ἀναστῆναι) will be incapable (ἀδύνατον) of standing up”. The example concerns the capacity for changing in position, as in the case of changing from being seated to standing. The Megarians claim that if an agent is not exercising a capacity, then the agent lacks that capacity (*i.e.*, it is unable to do so). This means that if someone is sitting down, that is, not engaged in the exercise of the capacity of standing up, then he lacks the capacity of standing up altogether, and so he is unable to stand up (now and in the future). Hence, what is sitting will always be sitting. This example shows that Aristotle does not depart from his general conception of capacities, and that the issue at stake is not the question of modality, but the question of the existence and subsistence of

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<sup>350</sup> The biconditional relationship between capacity and possibility involves a series of difficulties that I cannot properly address here. For some discussion on the topic see Ide (1992), and Witt (2003, 30–34, 128 n. 26).

non-enacted capacities. He simply wants to show that if we reject the existence of subsistent non-enacted δυνάμεις, grave consequences follow, such as the denial of all change and generation. This allows him to claim that we must accept the existence of non-enacted δυνάμεις, which amounts to accepting the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια (1047a17–18). And this, according to Aristotle, is exactly what the Megarians deny (1047a19–20).

### 7.3.1. Excursus: 1047a10–14 and the arguments of Diodorus Cronus

Compare this account with Diodorus’s Master Argument. Although the original structure of the argument is unknown, its clearest formulation is found in Epictetus, where three propositions are presented: 1) “every past truth is necessary”; 2) “the impossible does not follow the possible”; 3) “there is the possible which is not and will not be true”. These propositions are said to contradict each other, which is why Diodorus apparently kept the first two and rejected the third one. He thus extracted the conclusion that “there is nothing possible except for that which is or will be true” (μηδὲν εἶναι δυνατόν, ὃ οὔτ’ ἔστιν ἀληθὲς οὔτ’ ἔσται).<sup>351</sup>

First of all, it is evident that Diodorus’s argument deals not with a physical account of δύναμις, but exclusively with the modal concept of possibility. This alone suffices to establish a stark contrast between the two passages. But even if we compare the modal implications of 1047a10–17 with the Master Argument, the parallel fails. This is not the place to provide a detailed analysis (much less a reconstruction) of the Master Argument; our interest is primarily historiographical, so we cannot delve into the logical complexities that this argument involves. Still, if we follow Epictetus’s testimony, we can briefly state that Diodorus seems to accept that something can be merely possible at a time *t* and be actual at a time *tI*, of course with the caveat that *it has* to be actual at time

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<sup>351</sup> Epict. *Dissert.* II 19, 1–2 (=Döring fr. 131; *SSR* II F 24. Giannantoni misprints the line at II 19, 1, 3). Epictetus does not explain why the first three propositions are in conflict with each other, nor how Diodorus extracted his conclusion from the previous propositions. The reader can turn to Schuhl (1960) and Giannantoni (1981) for general discussion of the argument, and to Prior (1967), Hintikka (1973), Gaskin (1995; 1996), Vuillemin (1996), Denyer (1996; 2009), and Weidemman (2008) for more specific attempts to reconstruct the argument.

*tl* since nothing impossible follows the possible.<sup>352</sup> In Aristotle’s second argument the Megarian position appears to contradict this, since there is no way in which something merely capable of being (*i.e.*, not actively engaged in the exercise of a capacity) can be in the future, and hence no change can take place. So that which Diodorus admits, *i.e.*, that something can be possible without being necessarily actual in the present, appears to be rejected by the Megarians in 1047a10–14.

So much for the relation between 1047a10–17 and the Master Argument. But there is, however, another way in which Aristotle’s second argument can be connected with Diodorus, which also involves some difficulties. As we mentioned above, Aristotle accuses the Megarians of being deniers of change (1047a14), and we have testimonies that indicate that Diodorus composed a number of arguments against the possibility of motion. However, a simple contrast between Aristotle’s and Diodorus’s texts reveals that in this case there are also significant differences between their accounts. Furthermore, the similarities between them indicate an influence by Aristotle on Diodorus and not a direct polemical exchange between them.

First of all, it should be noted that Diodorus did not deny all change and generation, as Aristotle states in 1047a14. He only denied *present change*, having admitted, apparently, the possibility that change can have taken place in the past. Sextus’s presentation of Diodorus’s argument against motion goes as follows:

If something moves [κινεῖται], it moves either in the place in which it is or in the place in which it is not; but not in the place in which it is (for it stays in it) nor in the place in which it is not (for it is not in it); therefore, nothing moves (Sext. Emp. *Math.* X 87 =SSR II F 13).<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> δύναται λέγειν καὶ περὶ τῶν Δυνατῶν, τοῦ τε, ὃ Διοδώρειον λέγεται, ὃ ἢ ἔστιν ἢ ἔσται (Alex. Aphr. in *APr.* 183–184, ed. Wallies =SSR II F 27). This definition of the possible appears slightly differently in the conclusion of the Master Argument in Epictetus, as we saw above (“possible is that which is or will be true”, δυνατὸν εἶναι ὃ οὔτ’ ἔστιν ἀληθὲς οὔτ’ ἔσται, *Dissert.* II 19, 1 =SSR II F 24). Regarding the ἀληθὲς which appears in this last testimony, it would be mistaken to believe that it refers to a specific linguistic domain, as opposed to the ontological formulation which appears in Alexander. As Giannantoni (1981, 262–263) notes, such a clear-cut distinction between the linguistic and ontological realms is foreign to ancient logical thought.

<sup>353</sup> εἰ κινεῖται τι, ἤτοι ἐν ᾧ ἔστι τόπω κινεῖται ἢ ἐν ᾧ μὴ ἔστιν· οὔτε δὲ ἐν ᾧ ἔστι (μένει γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ), οὔτε ἐν ᾧ μὴ ἔστιν (οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ)· οὐκ ἄρα κινεῖται τι.

This argument is not incompatible, however, according to Diodorus, with his second claim, that motion could have taken place in the past:

but it is reasonable for it to have moved, for that which is first seen in a place is now seen in this other place, which would not have occurred if it had not moved (Sext. Emp. *Math.* X 86 =SSR II F 13).<sup>354</sup>

So we find here a first quite clear and direct contrast between both passages.

Moreover, Diodorus's argument against present motion appears in almost exactly the same way in Aristotle's *Phys.* VI 10, 240b19–241a8, after his refutation of Zeno's arguments against motion and of the theory of indivisibles. Sextus states that Diodorus also upheld the theory of indivisibles (ἀμερῆ), and that Diodorus's denial of present motion is a consequence of his postulation of indivisible things (Sext. Emp. *Math.* X 85–86 =SSR II F 13). The striking similarity between the *Physics*' passage and Sextus's version of Diodorus's arguments has led some scholars to claim that Aristotle's argument must be a polemical response to Diodorus (cf. Caujolle-Zaslowsky 1980). However, the early composition of this section of the *Physics* makes this implausible, and it seems more likely that Diodorus is, in fact, replying to Aristotle's arguments, or that he was at least heavily influenced by him.<sup>355</sup>

This brief excursus provides additional evidence in favor of our previous hypothesis: that is, that Diodorus Cronus should not be taken to be the reference behind Aristotle's allusion to the Megarians in *Θ* 3, and that the thesis that Aristotle transmits should be read independently from Diodorus's logical elaborations.

#### 7.4. The emergence of τὸ ὄν δυνάμει (1047a17–29; 1047b1–2)

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<sup>354</sup> κενεῖται δὲ κατὰ λόγον· τὸ γὰρ πρότερον ἐν τῷδε τῷ τόπῳ θεωρούμενον, τοῦτο ἐν ἑτέρῳ νῦν θεωρεῖται τόπῳ· ὅπερ οὐκ ἂν ἐγεγόνει μὴ κινηθέντος αὐτοῦ.

<sup>355</sup> Mársico (2013 182, n. 120) argues that other thinkers, likely of the same Megarian line, could have developed seminal versions of Diodorus's arguments. If so, Diodorus would be elaborating on a set of previous discussions regarding Aristotle's conception of motion. The passage of *Met.* *Θ* 3 would be a clear example of this prior confrontation, since it presents an objection to the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, the key concepts of Aristotle's definition of motion. The passage also makes ample use of the example of housebuilding, which also features heavily in the discussion of motion at *Phys.* III 1.

Aristotle has provided a first set of arguments that showed that a series of absurdities follow from the Megarian position. He then offered a second argument that commits the Megarians to a clearly untenable position: the denial of all change and generation. Aristotle seems satisfied with his refutation and so concludes the following:

Therefore, if it is not possible (ἐνδέχεται) to say that [*sc.* that what stands will always stand; this was the immediately previous argument put forward at 1047a15–17], it is manifest that δύναμις and ἐνέργεια are different (in fact, these discourses [οἱ λόγοι] make δύναμις and ἐνέργεια the same, and hence it is not a small thing that they seek to abolish), as it is possible (ἐνδέχεται) for something to be capable of being but not to be, and for something to be capable of not being but to be (ὥστε ἐνδέχεται δυνατόν μὲν τι εἶναι μὴ εἶναι δέ, καὶ δυνατόν μὴ εἶναι εἶναι δέ) and the same for the other categories (ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων κατηγοριῶν), being capable (δυνατόν) of walking and not to walk, and being capable (δυνατόν) of not walking and to walk (1047a17–24).

This remarkable passage makes several claims. Aristotle first establishes the conclusion from the previous refutation: that δύναμις and ἐνέργεια are different. Aristotle states that the opposite of this claim is in fact the essence of the Megarian position. Although they are not presented as explicitly saying so in 1046b29–32, we can see how this position is implied in their argument: if an agent is capable of doing something only when engaged in the exercise of the capacity in question, there is no such thing as a subsistent non-enacted capacity. Already in the *Protrepticus* δύναμις was characterized as this kind of non-enacted or ‘dormant’ possession (recall for example XI 56.15–22/B79), as a ‘having’ which is not actually exercised. The Megarians deny the existence of δύναμις so understood, and so they collapse this concept into the concept of ἐνέργεια. This implies, as Aristotle claims, that they abolish the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Here we see clearly Aristotle’s argumentative strategy: through the refutation of the Megarians, he can secure, by way of absurd, the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.

The second claim is perhaps the most crucial. Aristotle states that “it is possible (ἐνδέχεται) for something to be capable of being but not to be, and for something to be capable of not being but to be” (ὥστε ἐνδέχεται δυνατόν μὲν τι εἶναι μὴ εἶναι δέ, καὶ δυνατόν μὴ εἶναι εἶναι δέ). We should first note the careful alternation between ἐνδέχεται and δυνατόν. It is clear that δυνατόν is not limited here to the concept of possibility, but that it still retains its core meaning of capacity: Aristotle is signaling this with the use of

the more general and abstract ἐνδέχεται first. But although he speaks of δυνατόν as capacity, the concept is here extended not only beyond the motion application of δύναμις (capacity for producing change) but beyond any sort of active application of the concept; δυνατόν here applies to the first category, *to the category of being*. As in the case of doings, beings can also be said in two ways: as merely capable of being (but not being yet) or as actually being. This suggests that Aristotle is taking δύναμις and ἐνέργεια as corresponding *states*, something which was already suggested in the *Protrepticus*, as we saw earlier (cf. section 5.1, pp. 142–143).

Aristotle is here applying the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια structure both to the first category and to all remaining categories (cf. 1047a22 ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων κατηγοριῶν), proving that δύναμις and ἐνέργεια are trans-categorical notions. The other categories were certainly privileged throughout the refutation of the Megarians; the examples used by Aristotle were exclusively those of doings and of motions. But the example of generation, introduced in his second argument (1047a10–14), allows him to expand on the peculiar nature of things δυνατά: generation makes it much more evident that something must not be in a certain sense in order to come into being, a possibility which is expressly denied by the Megarians, since they reject the existence of subsistent non-enacted δυνάμεις. In other words, Aristotle is arguing in favor of considering things δυνατά as an instance of relative non-being: they are not, for they are not yet ἐνέργεια, but they *are* in a particular way, namely δυνάμει. Although Aristotle thinks of generation as a process of absolute (ἄπλῶς) coming to be out of non-being (*Phys.* I 7), it is clear that generation is not a form of *creatio ex nihilo* since, as he explains at *Met.* N 2, 1089a28–29, generation takes places from non-being in reference to δύναμις (τὸ μὴ ὄν καὶ τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν, ἐκ τούτου ἢ γένεσις ἐστίν).

Thus, Aristotle is signaling that the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια provides a solution to the Eleatic *aporia* against the possibility of coming to be, a feat which was announced in *Phys.* I 8, 191b27–29. This is a particularly significant application of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast, which goes hand in hand with the acknowledgment of the ontological aspect of his concept of capacity. Things in capacity are in a particular way, which differs from their actual being, their full-fledged realization. This is the sense in which we speak of things as “potential beings”.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Aristotle will further specify the ontological character of δύναμις in Θ 7. In this chapter, he picks up the argument of Θ 3 and contends that although δύναμις can be understood as a kind of non-being (*i.e.*, a kind

This thought is resumed at the closing line of the chapter: “of the things which are not, some are capable of being (literally: in capacity, δυνάμει), but they are not, for they are not in act” (τῶν γὰρ μὴ ὄντων ἕνια δυνάμει ἐστίν: οὐκ ἔστι δέ, ὅτι οὐκ ἐντελεχεία ἐστίν, 1047b1–2). This is a particularly significant line, especially because it presents the dative form δυνάμει. Aristotle seems to be making exactly the point that Frede raises in his essay: that δυνάμει ὄντα have “a certain degree of reality” (1994, 184–185). But is Aristotle introducing here a new sense of δύναμις, a distinct modal sense (in the sense of mode of being) that goes beyond the concept of capacity? Is Aristotle here alluding to the useful sense of δύναμις of which he spoke in Θ 1?

Here a clarification is due. As Anagnostopoulos (2011, 402) states, this argument undoubtedly constitutes an impressive philosophical achievement that has important consequences in Aristotelian philosophy. First and foremost, as was already mentioned, it allows Aristotle to solve the *aporia* of coming to be posed by the Eleatics. But it also helps us understand in which way δύναμις differs from ἐνέργεια. As Aristotle states immediately after the above-cited passage, “something is δυνατόν if it would attain the ἐνέργεια for the δύναμις it is said to have, [and] there will be nothing impossible” (1047a24–26):<sup>357</sup> being δυνατόν implies *being capable* (both from a physical and a logical point of view, as we saw in 1047a10–14) of attaining its respective ἐνέργεια. The point is that this capability confers a certain degree of reality on the being in question, and Aristotle uses the dative construction to highlight this fact. However, the question at hand is whether this modal characteristic or feature of things δυνατό should be identified with the new useful sense or kind of δύναμις announced in chapter 1. And here, in chapter 3, as will be the case in chapter 6, there is no indication that Aristotle is doing anything other than describing an important *aspect* of capacities and things in capacity in general. All things capable, be they rational active capacities such as τέχνη (or ἔξεις in general), non-rational capacities such as sensible qualities, or matter, share this same trait: they are a special kind of non-being which in a way *is*, namely δυνάμει.

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of being distinct from ἐνέργεια), it is far from being something undetermined. In effect, something qualifies as being δυνάμει (that is, in capacity or potentially) if it *will be* ἐνεργεία (in act, that is, the capacity will be exercised) *if the appropriate conditions are present*. This idea is already hinted in Θ 3, 1047a24–29, discussed below in 7.4.2. Moreover, Aristotle also anticipates some details on the conditions which determine when something capable is enacted in Θ 5. See nn. 288, 363–364 and 455.

<sup>357</sup> ἔστι δὲ δυνατόν τοῦτο ὃ ἐὰν ὑπάρξῃ ἡ ἐνέργεια οὗ λέγεται ἔχειν τὴν δύναμιν, οὐθὲν ἔσται ἀδύνατον.

It seems to me that we do not have sufficient reason to take this modal aspect of things in capacity as Aristotle's useful sense, especially if we try to individuate this ontological sense through the dative expression δυνάμει ὄν. Aristotle consistently speaks, here in chapter 3 but also in chapter 6, both of δυνάμει ὄν and of τὸ δυνατόν (compare 1047a20–22 and 1047b1–2), and there is no suggestion that he is referring to some other thing than “being in capacity” and “being capable” respectively. The point is that the expressions are equivalent, and something which is in capacity (δυνάμει; the “modal sense”) is capable (δυνατόν) of being in act, and, conversely, that which is capable of being in act is in capacity.<sup>358</sup>

This passage is crucial because it anticipates some of the major points of the second part of book Θ. This confirms the parenthetic nature of Θ 3, and shows that the chapter deals with the concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια on a very fundamental level. It helps us understand the connection between the notion of capacity and its logical and ontological modal aspects. Comprehending this relation properly will prove fundamental for a correct understanding of Aristotle's argument in Θ 6, a chapter that is remarkable in its obscurity.

#### 7.4.1. The Megarian thesis reconsidered

The passage also allows us to review the Megarian position and to revisit the issue of the relation between the thesis and Eleaticism. At first glance, the thesis of 1046b29–32 does not seem to be directly related to any sort of Eleatic premise, as we saw earlier. But the fact is that Aristotle *does* connect the thesis with what seems to be an Eleatic position later in his argument. Aristotle claims that the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast must be upheld given that “it is possible for something to be capable of being but not to be, and for something to be capable of not being but to be” (1047a20–22). The reverse of this thesis, *i.e.*, that something cannot be capable of being and not being, seems to be a direct implication of the Megarian thesis, and it is exactly what Aristotle seeks to deny. As noted above, Aristotle wants to admit some kind of relative non-being by way of the concept of

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<sup>358</sup> Cf. Anagnostopoulos (2011, 404): “the notions of capacity and ἐνέργεια appear to be intrinsically related to those of being δυνάμει and being ἐνεργεία respectively. The connection is this: δύναμις and ἐνέργεια carry the same signification in their adverbial dative uses specifying modes of being on the one hand, and in ordinary uses on the other”.

δύναμις, in such a way that it allows for things to not be in a given respect but to be in another one. The Megarians appear to uphold the exact opposite view: that things cannot be and not be at the same time.

If we read the original thesis together with this claim, we can see how it could be interpreted as deriving from Eleatic premises. Accordingly, the Megarians would state that merely having a capacity and actively exercising it are mutually exclusive states: that is, they would take the capacity-exercise contrast as an instance of a simple contrast between contrary states. They would then apply a strict logic of excluded middle and go on to reject the former state (merely having a capacity), for how can two mutually exclusive states be predicated of a same thing (a housebuilder, for example)? The only way in which they would admit such a thing as a δύναμις would be for it to coincide with its active exercise (the ontologically ‘positive’ state which is properly associated with its corresponding term). That is why, in Aristotle’s view, they “make δύναμις and ἐνέργεια the same” (1047a19–20).

The point is that the Megarians appear to identify the reference of a term with its ἐνέργεια, and reject that it could have an additional reference (*i.e.*, δύναμις), since this additional reference would be other than (*i.e.*, it would *not be*) the original and proper reference. This would apply to the case of terms that refer to actions, which is the case under discussion in 1046b33–1047a10: for the Megarians, the term ‘housebuilding’ would denote exclusively the activity of housebuilding, and so they reject that it could denote an alleged non-enacted state, *i.e.*, being a housebuilder δυνάμει. But it also applies to the case of the predication of the first category, which is alluded to in 1047a20–22. In this case, the Megarians would hold that being should be identified with the full-fledged, actual being of things, excluding the possibility of potential being. Thus, the initial contrast between capacities and activities is taken as a contrast between states, and in Parmenidean fashion, the Megarians admit of only one of the two states as the proper reference of a term, following a radical interpretation of the principle of excluded middle.

The fact that Aristotle connects the initial thesis with the problem of being in 1047a17–29 (especially at 20–22) suggests that the thesis could be inserted within the wider context of Parmenidean ontology, or at least with a series of Parmenidean premises. This would be consistent with the Eleatic orientation of many of the eristic arguments the Megarians, such as Eubulides’s Electra argument, Stilpo’s argument against attribution,

Polyxenus's Third Man argument, and many of the arguments of the *Euthydemus*.<sup>359</sup> It would also be consistent with the position of the Friends of the Forms in the *Sophist*: in this work, they upheld the existence of a stable domain of eternal and immaterial Forms and denied being to the domain of becoming, establishing a clear and strict contrasts between both realms. In this, they appear to follow the Eleatic logic that confines being to that which is self-identical, stable and determined (in this case, the Forms). This, as we saw, is consistent with the Megarians approach to ontology (cf. ch. 4.1.1). Finally, it is interesting to note that the concept of δύναμις provides the key to solving the *aporia* presented by both the Friends of the Forms and the Megarians of Θ 3; it is the postulation of such a thing as a non-enacted capacity which breaks the rigid scheme espoused by both the Friends of the Forms and the Megarians.

All of this seems to reinforce the impression that the Megarians were particularly influenced by the philosophy of Parmenides. This seems to vindicate at least in part the view of Ross, according to whom the Megarian thesis of Θ 3 was of Parmenidean inspiration. Although it would be mistaken to claim that the Megarians were some sort of neo-Eleatics, our study seems to confirm that Eleatic premises were operative in many of their dialectical arguments, and that the metaphysical ground upon which the Megarians carried out their refutations was essentially of a Parmenidean nature.

#### 7.4.2. A final note on τὸ δυνατόν and possibility (1047a24–29)

In the course of his argument in favor of acknowledging the ontological dimension of his concept of δύναμις, Aristotle provides an interesting characterization of τὸ δυνατόν (partially cited above):

something is δυνατόν if it would attain (ἐὰν ὑπάρξει) the ἐνέργεια for the δύναμις it is said to have (ἔχειν), [and] there will be nothing impossible (οὐθὲν ἔσται ἀδύνατον). I say that, if [a thing] is capable of sitting and is possible for it to be seated (εἰ δυνατόν καθῆσθαι καὶ ἐνδέχεται καθῆσθαι), and if it is the case that something is seated, there would be nothing impossible (ἀδύνατον). And the same for being moved and moving, being standing and to stand, being and coming to be, not being and not coming to be

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<sup>359</sup> On all these issues, see sections 3.1.3, 3.1.5, 3.2.2, and 4.2.2 *supra*.

(καὶ εἰ κινηθῆναι ἢ κινησαί ἢ στηῆναι ἢ στησαί ἢ εἶναι ἢ γίγνεσθαι ἢ μὴ εἶναι ἢ μὴ γίγνεσθαι, ὁμοίως) (1047a24–29).

Commentators usually consider that Aristotle is not providing here a definition of τὸ δυνατόν (for it would be circular; cf. Bonitz 1848, 387), but that he is proposing a “criterion for determination of possibility in doubtful cases” as Ross (1924 II 245) puts it (cf. also Beere 2009, 119). Some scholars call this the “principle of possibility” (cf. Witt 2003, 34); others call it a “test for possibility” (Makin 2006, 72).

Indeed, most scholars seem to believe that Aristotle is here referring to the concept of possibility, and not to capacity. Bonitz (1848, 386–387) considers that 24–26 is proof that Aristotle is presenting here the useful sense of δύναμις, which in his view would coincide with possibility, and excluding the concept of capacity. He states that the proper term for possibility is τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον, which is the one Aristotle uses in a parallel formulation in *APr.* I 13, 32a18–20.<sup>360</sup> But lines 24–26 show, according to Bonitz, that Aristotle is loose with his choice of vocabulary and that he also uses τὸ δυνατόν (which usually refers to the κύριος sense of δύναμις) to refer to the concept of possibility.

However, Bonitz’s view is too dependent on his interpretation of the useful sense of δύναμις as possibility, which implies a strict distinction between this concept and that of capacity. And as we saw, such a distinction seems not to be operative in Θ 3. In fact, in his second argument against the Megarians (1047a10–14), Aristotle uses the notions of capacity and possibility *together*. The present passage, where Aristotle introduces the criterion for being δυνατόν, serves the purpose of clarifying what was assumed in 1047a10–14, that is, that if a substance *has* a capacity, it is *possible* for it to enact said capacity (*i.e.*, nothing impossible would follow from this enactment; the same applies to the case of passive capacities, in which the enactment is carried out by an active external agent). So, contrary to Bonitz’s view, the passage refers not to the useful/modal sense of δύναμις (*i.e.*, logical possibility), but to the logical *aspect* of capacities (which we discussed in 7.3).

This interpretation also helps us understand why Aristotle continue to use the term δυνατόν in 1047a24–26: Aristotle is not referring here exclusively to the abstract concept of logical possibility (to which would correspond more properly τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον, as in

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<sup>360</sup> λέγω δ’ ἐνδέχεσθαι καὶ τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον, οὗ μὴ ὄντος ἀναγκαίου, τεθέντος δ’ ὑπάρχειν, οὐδὲν ἔσται διὰ τοῦτ’ ἀδύνατον.

*APr.* I 13, 32a18–20), but rather showing how the notion of capacity *entails* that of possibility.<sup>361</sup> Aristotle is referring not to mere possibility but to something stronger: the capacity something has to be other than what it is. It is an ontological distinction with a logical dimension, not a merely logical one.<sup>362</sup>

Further confirmation that this is the case can be found in the examples that follow the introduction of the criterion of δυνατόν. The first example is that of a change of position: if something has the capacity for sitting, and it is possible for it to do so (for example, there are no external impediments that would curtail the agent’s exercise of their capacity to sit),<sup>363</sup> and if it occurs that it sits, then there would be nothing impossible. Here Aristotle is replacing the abstract wording of 1047a24–26 with a concrete example of a motion. Further, he introduces a distinction between the physical and logical aspects of δύναμις (cf. 1047a26–27, εἰ δυνατόν καθῆσθαι καὶ ἐνδέχεται καθῆσθαι), a distinction which is absent in 1047a24–26. This suggests that both aspects were indeed taken together in 1047a24–26.

The other examples are also interesting. They are almost all motions (change in position, locomotion, generation), but Aristotle is careful enough to add the example of the first category, namely that of being (ἢ εἶναι [...] ἢ μὴ εἶναι, 1047a28–29). This is particularly significant for it connects the criterion for being δυνατόν with the previous discussion of δυνατόν as a kind of relative non-being (cf. 1047a20–22). It also reinforces the impression that Aristotle is speaking in quite general terms, and not focusing on a specific category but on all categories and on all sorts of beings. Finally, it appears to confirm the ontological scope of the current discussion, which is not limited to

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<sup>361</sup> Note that, in contrast to *APr.* I 13, 32a18–20, *Met.* Θ 3, 1047a24–26 presents the expressions ἡ ἐνέργεια and ἔχειν τὴν δύναμιν. These expressions are not only absent from the *Prior Analytics*’ passage, but go beyond its logical context (evident from the use of the term τεθέντος, which derives from the passive voice of τίθημι, “assume”, “suppose”, “lay down a thesis”). Cf. Gomez Cabranes (1989, 106–107).

<sup>362</sup> Cf. Gomez Cabranes (1989, 107), Reale (2004, 1120–1121).

<sup>363</sup> This point is expanded by Aristotle in chapter 5, where he analyzes the conditions under which a given capacity can be enacted. He focuses particularly in the distinction between rational and irrational capacities, noting that in the former case, to the two conditions needed in the case of irrational capacities (the possession of the capacity and the series of external conditions, such as the presence of the passive element in conjunction with the active one), we should add an additional condition: the agents’ desire or choice (ὄρεξιν ἢ προαίρεσιν, Θ 5, 1048a11). The issue is further addressed in Θ 7.

considerations regarding logical modality, but rather concerns the status of capacities and their distinction from their corresponding acts.

The criterion of 1047a24–26 appears again in the following chapter, Θ 4. Here, Aristotle intends to show that there are things that indeed *cannot and will not* be actualized. That is, he argues against the claim *that everything is possible*, including that which cannot occur (which seems to be the reverse of the position discussed in Θ 3, that is, that there are no capable/possible things). For example, Aristotle shows that it is impossible for there to be a common measure of the diagonal and the side of a square. The way of demonstrating this is to show that if a common measure were to be found, something impossible (*i.e.*, contradictory) would follow: in this case, the consequence would be that the same number is both odd and even (cf. *APr.* I 23, 41a26–27).<sup>364</sup> Thus, Θ 4 appears as an appendix to Θ 3, in which Aristotle discards a possible alternative view regarding the modal status of capacities.

### 7.5. On ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια (1047a30–b1)

In the course of his previous argument, Aristotle has made avid use of the concept of ἐνέργεια (1046b29–30, 1047a8, 1047a18–19, 1047a25). It does not come as a surprise, then, that he closes the chapter with a brief statement concerning this concept.<sup>365</sup>

We have already discussed this passage in ch. 5.2 (see in particular pp. 145–150). However, let us here make some further considerations, particularly on the passage’s relationship with the rest of chapter 3 and with the program of Θ as a whole. To facilitate our discussion, I will quote the passage once more:

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<sup>364</sup> It is important to note that Θ 4 does not depart from the conception of δύναμις put forward in the previous chapter: Aristotle is not speaking of *bare logical impossibility*, but of his *particular notion of capacity* (which *entails* possibility). Claiming that there is no common measure of the diagonal implies that *there is simply no δύναμις for such an actualization*; there is no set of conditions which, if present, will prompt the actualization of the alleged capacity.

<sup>365</sup> This passage (1047a30–b2) has longed puzzled interpreters who find it out of place, or unrelated to the previous part of the chapter. See for example Makin (2006, 79): “This passage is rather disconnected from the rest of the chapter, and interrupts the transition between Θ3 and Θ4 (Θ4, 1047b3, is a back reference to the body of Θ3)”. But as we just said, it seems natural for Aristotle to anticipate some crucial facts of the concept of ἐνέργεια after having referred to it in the course of his refutation of the Megarians.

The name ἐνέργεια, which is put together with ἐντελέχεια, has been extended to other things from motions above all, because ἐνέργεια seems to be mostly movement and that is why they do not assign movement (being moved, κινεῖσθαι) to things that are not, but they do assign other predicates, such as that non-beings are thought or desired, but not that they are moved, and this because they are not in act (ἐνεργεία) but will be in act (ἐνεργεία) [if they have motion] (1047a30–b1).<sup>366</sup>

The passage makes three claims. The first concerns the range of the term ἐνέργεια: Aristotle speaks of an extension (ἐλήλυθε) of ἐνέργεια from a motion application toward some other non-motion applications (ἐπὶ τὰ ἄλλα). The second constitutes a specification of the first one: Aristotle claims that motion constitutes an accessible but apparent (δοκεῖ) application or kind of ἐνέργεια. The third claim establishes a relation between the two terms that Aristotle coined for the concept of act: he states that ἐνέργεια “is put together” (συντιθεμένη) to ἐντελέχεια.

How to interpret the first claim? We have already established in ch. 5.2 that the extension of which Aristotle speaks in the passage should not be taken to indicate a transition from an initial activity sense towards a further actuality sense in Θ. Scholars usually justify this reading by claiming that Aristotle’s original conception of ἐνέργεια (from a developmental point of view) was that of motion, and thus take the extension alluded in the passage as a reflection of Aristotle’s own development from an early motion sense towards a mature ontological sense. But, as we saw, this interpretation of Aristotle’s early conception of ἐνέργεια is contradicted by Aristotle’s own remarks in the *Protrepticus* (cf. ch. 5.2 *supra*). Indeed, the present passage speaks not of a developmental or conceptual transition from motion to actuality but of a transition from a proximate but improper application of ἐνέργεια toward a more obscure but proper application of the term.

Aristotle explicitly signals this in his second claim, when he states that “ἐνέργεια seems (δοκεῖ) to be mostly movement”. He is referring to the manifest (though ultimately misleading) character of the motion sense of ἐνέργεια. We should note that this claim is closely connected to the discussion that took place in the immediate context of Θ 3.

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<sup>366</sup> ἐλήλυθε δ’ ἡ ἐνέργεια τοῦνομα, ἢ πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν συντιθεμένη, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἐκ τῶν κινήσεων μάλιστα: δοκεῖ γὰρ ἡ ἐνέργεια μάλιστα ἢ κίνησις εἶναι, διὸ καὶ τοῖς μὴ οὔσιν οὐκ ἀποδίδοσιν τὸ κινεῖσθαι, ἄλλας δὲ τινὰς κατηγορίας, οἷον διανοητὰ καὶ ἐπιθυμητὰ εἶναι τὰ μὴ ὄντα, κινούμενα δὲ οὐ, τοῦτο δὲ ὅτι οὐκ ὄντα ἐνεργεία ἔσσονται ἐνεργεία.

Indeed, the chapter begins with a reference to, and deals extensively with, the original capacity-exercise structure (1046b32–1047a10). This indicates that ἐνέργεια stands, in this case, for the original concept of ἐνέργεια understood as χρῆσθαι, exercise.<sup>367</sup> But the chapter goes on to focus on the narrower motion application of ἐνέργεια: in addition to the example of housebuilding, which dominates the first section of the chapter, Aristotle speaks of generation (1047a10–14, 29), changes in position such as standing or sitting (1047a15–17, 25–27), changes in location such as walking (1047a23–24) and motion in general (1047a28).

It is perhaps this dominance of the motion sense of ἐνέργεια in Θ 3 and in the immediately surrounding chapters (1–2, 5) which explains Aristotle’s statements on the relationship between motion and ἐνέργεια in 1047a31–32. Aristotle wants to dispel the wrong impression that motion and ἐνέργεια overlap. In order to do so, he explains that motion constitutes the most frequent application of ἐνέργεια, the one most proximate to the senses, but that the concept applies to other things besides motions.

Moreover, if we take into account the elaboration of the concept of ἐνέργεια both in the *Protrepticus* and in the later part of Θ, we note that this non-motion application constitutes the most proper and fundamental application of the term. Motion, in turn, reveals itself as an apparent and improper kind of ἐνέργεια, or as Aristotle puts it in *Phys.* III 2, 201b31–35 and *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b29–30, an incomplete (ἀτελής) ἐνέργεια.

So, one of the purposes of the passage is to dispel the misguided assumption that the concepts of motion and ἐνέργεια are coextensive. This assumption was apparently defended by some unknown philosophers, who are mentioned in 1047a32–b1.

Who are these philosophers? It is difficult to tell. According to Aristotle, these people are willing to grant that non-beings can be thought of or desired, but not that they can be in motion. This implies an intrinsic connection between motion and being: if something has motion, it must definitely *be*. This reasoning seems to take motion as a kind of criterion which distinguishes beings from non-beings. Now, this can hardly be Plato, as is claimed by both Frede (1994, 181–182) and Menn (1994, 76 n. 5). Frede links this passage with *Sophist* 247d8–e4, the definition of being as δύναμις, where Plato speaks of ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν. But, as we saw, Plato does not conceive of this kind of action or suffering as physical motion (*i.e.*, what Aristotle calls κίνησις at 1047a32) but rather as a specific non-kinetic, ‘intelligible’ activity. On the other hand, Menn (1994, 76 n. 5)

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<sup>367</sup> This simple fact is usually passed over by interpreters. An exception is Gomez Cabranes (1989, 102).

connects Aristotle's allusion to the fifth hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, where Plato states that things that are not cannot be said to be in motion (163e) but can be said to be knowable (160c). But it is doubtful that one could take this claim as evidence that the passage refers to Plato or, moreover, as evidence in favor of the claim that "the only ἐνέργεια Plato could imagine was motion" and that "Plato assumed that all activity was motion" (76, n. 5). This view is contradicted by the *Sophist* passage quoted above (Menn, like Frede, interprets this passage in kinetic terms: he explicitly equates Plato's concept of δύναμις with Aristotle's technical notion of δύναμις κατὰ κίνησιν, cf. 74).

In summary, it seems that Aristotle is referring not to Plato but to other philosophers, perhaps some sort of materialists who *did* associate motion with being in an intrinsic manner.<sup>368</sup> Lastly, the idea that previous philosophers wrongly believed ἐνέργεια to be equivalent to process can be also be found in *EN VI 12*, 1153a15–17.

Returning to the extension of which the passage speaks, it should be noted that our interpretation sheds light on the structure of the wider argument of book Θ. This passage, correctly understood, shows that Aristotle privileges the motion senses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in the first section of the treatise because of its accessible and immediate character. In other words, it is because the motion cases of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια are easily grasped that he begins his investigation of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια with motion. This means that the structure of the treatise follows a pedagogical intent, entirely in accordance with Aristotle's general principle of proceeding from what is most known to us (in this case, the motion application of ἐνέργεια) toward what is most known by nature (the non-kinetic application of ἐνέργεια).<sup>369</sup>

We must now analyze one final claim made in this passage. Aristotle refers not only to ἐνέργεια but also to ἐντελέχεια: "the name ἐνέργεια, which is put together with ἐντελέχεια, has been extended to other things from motions above all". What does it mean that the term ἐνέργεια "is put together with ἐντελέχεια" (ἢ πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν συντιθεμένη)? What is the relationship between these two terms?

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<sup>368</sup> On this point, I am much indebted to Fabián Mié. His comments on this issue were decisive in shaping the argument made above (all errors are of course my own).

<sup>369</sup> This is a fairly straightforward and common way of reading the general arc of Aristotle's argument in book Θ, adopted for example by Polansky (1983, 161) and more recently by Anagnostopoulos (2011, 424) and Senteny (2020, 87).

The belief that there is a semantic distinction between the two terms is frequent among scholars. According to this view, ἐνέργεια would carry the meaning of ‘activity’, and ἐντελέχεια would denote ‘actuality’.<sup>370</sup> But scholars who support this claim usually have difficulty in making this distinction fit with Aristotle’s own text. As we noted in section 6.1, p. 172 n. 290, Aristotle seems to use the terms interchangeably. Thus Bonitz (1870, s.v. ἐντελέχεια) has to admit that Aristotle is not systematic in his use of both terms and that he does not maintain the alleged distinction in all contexts. Menn (1994, 108) too, noting that Aristotle does not maintain the ἐνέργεια/activity-ἐντελέχεια/actuality distinction throughout book Θ, has to state that “it is not strictly proper for Aristotle to describe the actually existent οὐσία as existing κατ’ ἐνέργειαν: *he should say* that it exists κατ’ ἐντελέχειαν” (emphasis mine).<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> These are, in fact, the standard translations of the terms in Germanic languages: ‘activity’, ‘Tätigkeit’/‘Aktivität’ for ἐνέργεια and ‘actuality’, ‘Wirklichkeit’ for ἐντελέχεια. This choice of translation obscures the fundamental convergence of the two terms, of which I will speak below. On the contrary, Romance languages usually follow the original Latin translation of ἐνέργεια, the economical *actus* (translated as ‘acto’, ‘atto’, ‘acte’; ‘act’ is usually avoided in the English-speaking world apparently for its Thomistic connotations, cf. Kosman 1984, 121 n. 1). This translation is usually applied to ἐντελέχεια as well. This choice of translation seems closer to Aristotle’s synonymous use of the terms, but it is not without its difficulties. Although *actus* translates satisfactorily ἐνέργεια from a lexical point of view (*actus*, which is derived from *agere*, is semantically related to ἔργον, the basic term upon which ἐνέργεια is formed), this does not seem to be the case for ἐντελέχεια. In this respect, we can recall the interesting anecdote of Hermolaus Barbarus, Venetian intellectual of the 15th century AD. This scholar, who was unable to come up with a satisfactory translation of ἐντελέχεια, is said to have struck a deal with the devil in order to understand the precise meaning of term. Pierre Bayle states in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1820 [1697], 92–93) that the devil’s reply was given in an incomprehensible tone, and that Barbarus then chose the neologism *perfectihabia* as a translation of the term (which is evidently a literal translation of a possible, though uncertain, etymological reconstruction of the term, which would be composed by ἐντελής and ἔχειν; cf. n. 375 below). Leibniz recalls this anecdote in §48 of the *Monadology* and §81 of the *Theodicy*.

<sup>371</sup> Frede (1994, 181–182) also relies heavily on this sharp distinction in his interpretation of 1047a30–b1. He refers to this “obscure remark” (as he calls this passage) in support of his thesis that book Θ presents a transition from a basic motion sense of ἐνέργεια to an ontological sense (actuality). He claims that this can be seen by the use of the term ἐντελέχεια at the beginning of the passage, which would refer univocally to the ontological sense, given that it is “a technical Aristotelian term to mark actuality as opposed to potentiality” (181). But this claim is by no means self-evident. Ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια are used interchangeably and, as I will argue below, they seem to refer to the same concept or reality. Frede seems to take his translation of ἐντελέχεια as actuality as the starting point of his argument, rather than its point of arrival, as Gonzalez (2019, 159) observes. Moreover, Frede’s interpretation of this passage shows that

The issue is of course controversial, but we need only note that there appears to be no *functional* distinction between the two terms. Any argument that tries to establish such a distinction would need to explain the interchanging way in which Aristotle uses the two terms, for example in the parallel versions of the definition of motion, and in the recurrent use of ἐνέργεια after the definition of motion in *Phys.* III 1, 201b9–10 (“the activity of the buildable, insofar it is buildable, is [the activity] of housebuilding”, ἡ τοῦ οἰκοδομητοῦ ἐνέργεια, ἧ οἰκοδομητόν, οἰκοδόμησις ἐστίν); III 2, 201b35–202a3 (“there remains, then, the mode we have indicated, that it is some kind of activity, but an activity as we have said, which is difficult to grasp but which can be admitted”, λείπεται τοίνυν ὁ εἰρημένος τρόπος, ἐνέργειαν μὲν τινα εἶναι, τοιαύτην δ’ ἐνέργειαν οἷαν εἶπαμεν, χαλεπὴν μὲν ἰδεῖν, ἐνδεχομένην δ’ εἶναι); and III 3, 202a14–15 (“for it is the act of this, that which has the capacity to move. And the activity of that which can move is not different”, ἐντελέχεια γὰρ ἐστὶ τούτου [καὶ] ὑπὸ τοῦ κινητικοῦ. καὶ ἡ τοῦ κινητικοῦ δὲ ἐνέργεια οὐκ ἄλλη ἐστίν).<sup>372</sup>

So if the terms are used interchangeably, is there any difference between them? And if this were not the case, why did Aristotle coin two terms to refer to the same concept or reality? In order to confront these questions, we must turn to another crucial passage of book Θ that concerns the relation between ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια:

the ἔργον is τέλος, and the ἐνέργεια is the ἔργον, and that is why the name ἐνέργεια is said according to ἔργον and stretches towards ἐντελέχεια (*Met.* Θ 8, 1050a21–23).<sup>373</sup>

As is the case of 1047a30–b1, the passage concerns the name (τοῦνομα) ἐνέργεια. But in contrast with the former passage, this one is not limited to the claim that both terms are

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the reduction of capacity to motion is implicit in his position, since although he acknowledges the importance of non-kinetic activities in Aristotle’s theory, they seem to be largely irrelevant to the fundamental transition which takes place in book Θ, from the initial motion/capacity sense towards the non-kinetic/modal sense.

<sup>372</sup> In this respect, cf. Reale (1962, 178), Blair (1967, 110; 1992, 88–89, 104, and especially 114), Brague (1991, 114) and Coope (2009, 290 n. 2). As was stated in ch. 6.1 p. 172, the term ἐνέργεια dominates throughout Θ. The term ἐντελέχεια occurs only six times across four passages in book Θ, and in two of those four passages (1047a30–b2, 1050a21–23), the term is used simply to express its proximity to ἐνέργεια.

<sup>373</sup> τὸ γὰρ ἔργον τέλος, ἡ δὲ ἐνέργεια τὸ ἔργον, διὸ καὶ τοῦνομα ἐνέργεια λέγεται κατὰ τὸ ἔργον καὶ συντείνει πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν.

related (or “put together”, συντιθεμένη). It provides, first, an etymological justification for their connection. As noted before, both ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια were most likely coined by Aristotle, given that there are no previous attestations of the terms before him. And here he appears to indicate what is the etymological basis upon which he constructed the terms. Aristotle makes clear that ἐνέργεια is linked to ἔργον (ἢ δὲ ἐνέργεια τὸ ἔργον, διὸ καὶ τοῦνομα ἐνέργεια λέγεται κατὰ τὸ ἔργον).<sup>374</sup> The term ἐντελέχεια, in turn, clearly remits to τέλος.<sup>375</sup> Thus, by showing that “ἔργον is τέλος”, we see how the two terms are intrinsically connected. The equivalence between ἔργον and τέλος is no surprise for us if we remember *EE* II 1, 1219a8–17, a passage we analyzed in ch 5.2, pp. 153–155. There, Aristotle explicitly claimed that ἔργον and τέλος coincide, and, moreover, that the term ἔργον applies either to substances or activities which have their ends in themselves (that is, non-motion activities).

Although this argument appears to be primarily etymological in nature, it contains a conceptual justification that grounds the connection between the two terms. To comprehend this connection correctly, we must wait for our analysis of Aristotle’s treatment of ἐνέργεια in *Θ* 6 and 8. But we can anticipate here some of the general lines of our interpretation.

As we said above, Aristotle had already shown in his earlier texts that ἔργον refers either to the substance that results from a process of production or to activities where the exercise and the ἔργον coincide.<sup>376</sup> The common element in both cases is that both are complete, that is, in possession of their ends (τέλος). By claiming now that “ἐνέργεια is the ἔργον”, Aristotle is implying that ἐνέργεια also refers either to substance or complete activities. What this means is that the distinctive feature of ἐνέργεια is its completeness, which is why it can also be referred to as ἐντελέχεια, *i.e.*, that which is already in possession of its end (cf. *Met.* Δ 16, 1021b23–25). Conversely, when speaking of ἐντελέχεια, we ultimately refer to the completeness which is characteristic of ἐνέργεια.

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<sup>374</sup> On the different views among scholars regarding the exact etymology of ἐνέργεια, cf. pp. 143–144 *supra*.

<sup>375</sup> Regarding its exact etymology, we should note that Gill (1980, 130) and Graham (1987, 184 n. 5) derive the term from ἐντελῶς ἔχειν (with the meaning of “being complete”) (this position is adopted by Berti 2017, 399 n. 16, and criticized by Blair 1992, 80 n. 2), while von Fritz (1963 [1938], 66), Blair (1992, 79–82) and Menn (1994, 101 n. 38) believe it to be a composite of ἐν-τέλος-ἔχειν, literally meaning “having the τέλος within”. Either way, it seems clear that the term revolves around the core notion of τέλος.

<sup>376</sup> The same argument will be made in *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a23–b2 (on which, see section 9.1.4 *infra*).

That is why the term ἐνέργεια “stretches towards ἐντελέχεια” (συντείνει πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν, 1050a23), or, as Aristotle states in chapter 3, “is put together with ἐντελέχεια” (πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν συντιθεμένη, 1047a30–31).<sup>377</sup>

It remains obscure, however, why Aristotle coined two words to refer to the same concept. It may very well be that the difference between them is a matter of emphasis: ἐνέργεια would emphasize the active character of the concept, while ἐντελέχεια would stress its completeness. Blair 1992 defends the interpretation that the development of the notion involved three phases; an early phase in which ἐνέργεια was coined, followed by the coinage of ἐντελέχεια at the time of the *Physics*. Finally, by the time he composed *Metaphysics* Θ, Aristotle would have realized that ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια essentially overlapped with each other. Beyond the particulars of Blair’s reconstruction, we may very well agree with its conclusion that “ἐντελέχεια describes ἐνέργεια by way of circumlocution” (1967, 110; 1992, 89) since the defining aspect of both terms, as was shown above, is their completeness.

## 7.6. Synthesis of Aristotle’s argument in *Met.* Θ 3

Having analyzed in detail Aristotle’s argument in *Met.* Θ 3, we are in a position to establish some conclusions. The first is that the chapter is relatively detached from the argument put forward in chapters 1–2, 5. This is not a minor point, for it confirms that the passage goes beyond the restricted analysis of the motion sense of δύναμις. This realization has important interpretative consequences: above all, it allows us to read the chapter as concerning Aristotle’s wider theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.

We thus note that the first part of the chapter (1046b29–1047a10) retraces Aristotle’s original distinction between the inactive possession of a capacity and its corresponding active exercise. The capacity-exercise structure extends beyond (though it includes) the motion application of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, as can be seen by the examples chosen by Aristotle in this passage. It is interesting to note that the capacity-exercise structure is introduced in the form of the Megarian thesis of 1046b29–32: Aristotle is probably replying here to an eristic argument presented by the Megarians against the early configuration of the δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. This argument concerns neither the problem of logical modality nor that of the immobility of being but rather the issue of the *semantic*

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<sup>377</sup> Cf. Kosman (1984, 127 n. 14).

*ambiguity of terms* (in this case, terms that denote activities such as housebuilding or seeing). As we saw, this is a strong indication that the argument was put forward by Eubulides of Miletus or a direct associate of his, and not by Diodorus Cronus. However, the apparent semantic formulation of the argument conceals a deeper ontological concern related to the deeper problem of the unity of being. There are strong indications that the Megarian thesis should be considered within the framework of Eleatic thought, or at least that it relies on a series of Eleatic premises.

Through his reply to the Megarian argument, Aristotle provides crucial insights into his concept of δύναμις. In his second argument against the Megarians (1047a10–17), he elaborates on the relation between the notions of capacity and possibility, claiming that the former concept entails the latter. He also expands on the ontological dimension of capacities. In the second section of the chapter (1047a10–29) Aristotle argues that having a capacity confers a certain degree of being to the capable thing in question: capable things are in a specific way, namely δυνάμει. This way of being is diminished with regards to its counterpart, being in act (ἐνεργεία). So δύναμις reveals itself as a kind of relative non-being: things δυνατά are in a certain way, but they are not in another, for they are not yet in act.

This connects the discussion of Θ 3 with the elaborations of the second part of the treatise. Indeed, this conceptual frame will help us understand how Aristotle assimilates matter and substantial form with the concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.

Finally, the chapter closes with a crucial passage that concerns ἐνέργεια. This is expectable, given that ἐνέργεια has featured prominently throughout the chapter. This confirms, first, its parenthetic nature, for, according to Aristotle's program in Θ 1, ἐνέργεια should be dealt with only after the analysis of the motion sense of δύναμις is complete.

This closing passage warns us that it would be mistaken to restrict ἐνέργεια to its motion application. It suggests that motion is simply the most accessible instance of ἐνέργεια, a claim which helps us understand Aristotle's argumentative strategy in Θ. The structure of the treatise begins with the sense of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια which is most known to us (*i.e.*, the motion sense) and progresses towards the sense most known by nature (*i.e.*, the non-motion sense). The passage does not indicate what is the nature of this more fundamental, non-kinetic sense of ἐνέργεια. But it prepares the ground for its analysis in chapter 6 by establishing some fundamental premises that structure the ensuing discussion.

Thus, we note the richness of Aristotle's anti-Megarian polemic. Θ 3 is a pivotal chapter, in which Aristotle not only secures the existence of inactive δυνάμεις but also connects the initial analysis of δύναμις as a principle of change with the latter analysis of the properly ontological concept of δύναμις. The chapter also provides crucial indications as to the concept of ἐνέργεια. All of this seems to explain satisfactorily why Aristotle included a polemic with the Megarians in the middle of book Θ, the place which presents the most detailed treatment of the concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in the entire *Corpus Aristotelicum*.

## CHAPTER 8

### The three senses of ἐνέργεια: motion, substance, activity (*Met.* Θ 6)

We have finally reached *Met.* Θ 6, the crucial text in which Aristotle discusses the senses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια that “extend beyond motion”. There were two reasons for postponing the examination of this text until now. Firstly, we have largely followed the order of Aristotle’s exposition in book Θ, but secondly, we also should note that Θ 6 is a notably obscure passage. Aristotle’s argument is condensed and difficult to grasp: he (rightly) avoids offering a definition of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια and relies heavily on examples and analogies. Moreover, the passage is filled with textual difficulties, such as significant divergences among manuscripts regarding key terms, and, most notably, the famous passage at 1048b18–35, absent on many manuscripts and which was traditionally (that is, since Bonitz) heavily emended.

Comprehending Aristotle’s notion of ἐνέργεια by focusing solely on this text would be an almost impossible task, but, fortunately, we do not need to do so. We have already carried out an extensive analysis of Aristotle’s treatment of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction in his earlier texts in part 1 of the dissertation, and we have focused on the crucial chapters 1 and 3 of Θ in part 2. This preliminary work will allow us to approach Θ 6 with the necessary conceptual framework in order to shed light on Aristotle’s compressed argument.

The present chapter is divided into two main sections. The first analyzes Aristotle’s analogical account of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in Θ 6, 1048a25–b6. The second concerns the κίνησις-ἐνέργεια distinction of Θ 6, 1048b18–35.<sup>378</sup> However, it would be mistaken to take the two sections (and the corresponding arguments they examine) as unrelated to each other. Much of what I will claim in the first section must be complemented with claims made in the second one. The reader must consider this when facing individual claims made throughout the two sections.

#### 8.1. Aristotle’s analogical account of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια (Θ 6, 1048a25–b9)

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<sup>378</sup> Between these two passages, we find one on the way the infinite and the void (τὸ ἄπειρον καὶ τὸ κενόν) can be said to be ἐνεργεῖα (1048b9–17). I will briefly discuss the passage at p. 238, but for reasons of space I will not provide a thorough treatment of it.

### 8.1.1. The opening programmatic statement (1048a25–30)

At the outset of Θ 6, Aristotle reaffirms the program of the treatise, which was originally presented in Θ 1, 1045b27–1046a4:

Since we have spoken about δύναμις which is said in relation to motion, let us establish distinctions concerning ἐνέργεια, what ἐνέργεια is and in which way it is. For through these distinctions [the concept of] τὸ δυνατόν will also become clear, [in particular] that we speak of δυνατόν not only of that which by nature moves another or is moved by another, either without qualification or in some given way, but also of something different, which is why in our investigation we went through these [*sc.* the motion applications] (*Met.* Θ 6, 1048a25–30).<sup>379</sup>

Aristotle claims that he has already spoken of the sense of δύναμις which is said in relation to motion, a task which was carried out in chapters 1–2, 5, and that he now turns to the analysis of ἐνέργεια. He states that through this analysis the non-motion sense of δύναμις will also become clear. At 29–30 he adds, crucially, that he examined the motion sense of δύναμις precisely in order to arrive at its non-motion application.

These claims are consistent with what we have seen up to this point. The only apparent incongruence is Aristotle’s discussion in chapters 3–4, which goes beyond the analysis of δύναμις κατὰ κίνησιν and which is not mentioned here. But it is important to note that there is no conceptual contradiction between these chapters and the present discussion. Moreover, the closing paragraph of Θ 3 is in line with Aristotle’s claim both in Θ 1 and 6 that the analysis of the motion sense served the purpose of preparing the ground for the analysis of the non-motion sense of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction.

Aristotle speaks here of τὸ δυνατόν instead of δύναμις, and he claims that we speak of δυνατόν in another way (ἐτέρως) than motion. As in Θ 3, there appears to be no substantial difference between δύναμις and δυνατόν. He also speaks of ἐνέργεια in the nominative: the current investigation is of the concept of ἐνέργεια in itself, and Aristotle is interested in the question of what is ἐνέργεια and in which way it is (τί τέ ἐστιν ἢ

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<sup>379</sup> Ἐπεὶ δὲ περὶ τῆς κατὰ κίνησιν λεγομένης δυνάμεως εἴρηται, περὶ ἐνεργείας διορίσωμεν τί τέ ἐστιν ἢ ἐνέργεια καὶ ποῖόν τι. καὶ γὰρ τὸ δυνατόν ἅμα δῆλον ἔσται διαιροῦσιν, ὅτι οὐ μόνον τοῦτο λέγομεν δυνατόν ὃ πέφυκε κινεῖν ἄλλο ἢ κινεῖσθαι ὑπ’ ἄλλου ἢ ἀπλῶς ἢ τρόπον τινά, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐτέρως, διὸ ζητοῦντες καὶ περὶ τούτων διήλθομεν.

ἐνέργεια καὶ ποῖόν τι).<sup>380</sup> This will be important for our later analysis of Frede's view, according to which this chapter refers to the useful sense by way of the dative construction ἐνεργείᾳ ὄν.

### 8.1.2. Aristotle's first analogical account (1048a30–b6)

Although we could expect a positive account of ἐνέργεια, at 1048a30 Aristotle gives a rather oblique and indirect argument. First, he states that ἐνέργεια is that which is not δύναμις, only to supply this minimal and negative definition with a series of examples:

ἐνέργεια is the subsistence of the thing (τὸ ὑπάρχειν τὸ πρᾶγμα) not as we say that it is in capacity (δυνάμει). We say that something is in capacity such as the Hermes is in the wood and the half-line is in the whole, given that it could be separated, and [we say that] someone is knowledgeable even when he is not contemplating, but is capable of contemplating (ἂν δυνατὸς ἢ θεωρῆσαι). The other is in ἐνέργεια (ἐνεργείᾳ) (1048a30–35).

Ross 1924 II 251, suggests, rightly I believe, that we should not expect a definition of ἐνέργεια since we are dealing with a sense of being which cannot be reduced in terms of genus and differentia: ἐνέργεια is common to all being and being is not a genus.<sup>381</sup> Indeed, we are facing fundamental concepts that cannot be properly defined. That is why Aristotle tries to elucidate ἐνέργεια by way of stressing its intrinsic connection to δύναμις. “Ἐνέργεια is the subsistence of the thing (τὸ ὑπάρχειν τὸ πρᾶγμα) not as we say that it is in capacity”: this underscores the correlative aspect of the two concepts.<sup>382</sup> This abstract

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<sup>380</sup> The same expression is used at *Met.* H 1, 1041a6, but there the subject of enquiry was substance (οὐσία). Substance (that is, the first category) and ἐνέργεια are the two senses of being which remained after the exclusion of accidental being and being as truth and falseness in *Met.* E 4. Both senses are the subject of enquiry of ZH and Θ respectively. Cf. ch. 6, pp. 170–171.

<sup>381</sup> It then seems odd when Ross later calls both ἐνέργεια and κίνησις species of some wider instance that has no name (1924 II, 251).

<sup>382</sup> According to Reale (2004, 1128), this correlative aspect implies that neither of the two concepts can be properly characterized or comprehended without referring to the other. We can only grasp them in their reciprocal relation. Reale recalls the “definition” of δυνατὸν in Θ 3, 1047a24–26, which also made use of ἐνέργεια; here, when trying to elucidate ἐνέργεια, we are directed towards δύναμις.

formulation seems to be fleshed out by the examples which follow:<sup>383</sup> Aristotle signals that the Hermes in the wood, the half-line in the whole line, and simply having knowledge but not being engaged in contemplation (*i.e.*, not exercising said knowledge) are all cases of being δυνάμει.<sup>384</sup> Each of the examples presents two terms, and Aristotle focuses on one of them, which corresponds to δύναμις; the other term of each example corresponds, says Aristotle, to ἐνέργεια (1048a35). Thus, the actual statue of Hermes is in ἐνέργεια, while the piece of wood which can become the statue is in capacity (δυνάμει). The same applies to the remaining examples.

The first two examples, the Hermes in the wood and the half-line in the whole line, correspond to ‘substance’ cases of ἐνέργεια. Aristotle explicitly says so in *Met.* Δ 7, 1017b6–8: after mentioning examples of ἐνέργεια such as seeing and thinking, he states that the “same applies in the case of substances (τῶν οὐσιῶν); for we say both that the Hermes is in the stone, and that the half-line is [in the whole line], and that the whole grain [is in that] which is not yet ripe”.<sup>385</sup> There are subtle differences between both texts: in Θ 6 the Hermes is made of wood, while in Δ 7, it is made of stone. The third example of Δ 7, the unripe grain, is absent in Θ 6. But these minor differences do not affect Aristotle’s argument, which is basically the same in both texts.

The third example of 1048a30–35 corresponds to the ‘activity’ case of ἐνέργεια. The example of knowledge and contemplation is familiar to us from the *Protrepticus*, where it was the standard example of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast (together with seeing). The example corresponds to the basic distinction between having a capacity and being actively engaged in the exercise of said capacity. In this case, someone knows (or is a knower) in two ways: in capacity (when in possession of knowledge without putting it into work) or in ἐνέργεια (when actively reflecting upon said knowledge). As we saw

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<sup>383</sup> Cf. Reale (2004, 1128): “More than a definition, [this passage] is a characterization which gains sense by reason of the examples which support it” (*più che di definizione, trattasi di una caratterizzazione che acquista senso in funzione degli esempi che la sorreggono*).

<sup>384</sup> It should be noted that according to Ross and Jaeger, the lines 1048b32–35 appear in a margin of J. They are also absent in the commentary of Averroes, though present in the commentary of Ps. Alexander. The passage is essentially a gloss to the obscure claim at 104ba30–31; it could be a later interpolation by Aristotle or by some other Peripatetic. It is, however, fundamentally a parallel formulation of *Met.* Δ 7, 1017b6–8, discussed below.

<sup>385</sup> The fact that the first example is that of a statue confirms that in the context of this argument he includes artifacts among οὐσίαι.

in ch. 5, Aristotle is already aware that this kind of action is a complete action, that is, that it is already in possession of its end (τέλος). There is, thus, no reason to take this example as a ‘motion’ case of ἐνέργεια. Though I will discuss this point in further detail later, we can anticipate here that the way in which Aristotle regards the activity of contemplating in his earlier texts suggests that we are here facing an example of Aristotle’s strict conception of τελεία ἐνέργεια, and not of motion.

Aristotle begins by offering three examples, neither of which seems to be, *prima facie*, a case of motion. But motion does appear in the second set of examples, which feature at 1048a35–b6. Aristotle introduces these examples with a crucial remark which also helps us understand the immediately previous lines:

What we want to say will be manifest by way of induction (ἐπαγωγή) from the particular cases, and it is not necessary to seek a definition (ὄρον) of all things, but to see broadly by way of analogy (τῷ ἀνάλογον συνορᾶν)<sup>386</sup> (1048a35–37).

As stated earlier, no definition can be given of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. This is not necessarily a problem, for, as Aristotle explains, it is “not necessary to seek a definition of all things”. Still, it is possible to grasp these concepts through induction, that is, through the recollection of particular cases,<sup>387</sup> and to “see broadly” (συνορᾶν) through an analogy that can be established between them.<sup>388</sup> The particular cases alluded to by Aristotle are the following:

that as housebuilding is to the housebuilder (ὅτι ὡς τὸ οἰκοδομοῦν πρὸς τὸ οἰκοδομικόν), also he who is awake is to sleeping, and the one who sees is to having his eyes closed although having sight, and what has been separated from matter to matter (τὸ ἀποκεκριμένον ἐκ τῆς ὕλης πρὸς τὴν ὕλην), and what has been finished (ἀπειργασμένον) to what is unfinished (ἀνέργαστον). Of this distinction, let one part be defined as ἐνέργεια and the other as τὸ δυνατόν (1048a37–b6).

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<sup>386</sup> Reading τῷ as E, J. Ab transmits τὸ, which would render “to see broadly the analogy”, but given that a few lines further in b7 the same expression “τῷ ἀνάλογον” appears, it seems safe to rely in this case on E, J.

<sup>387</sup> On induction, cf. *Top.* I 12, 105a13, *APo.* I 18, 81b1.

<sup>388</sup> Reale (2004, 1128) places much emphasis on the fact that according to Aristotle the reality of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια must be “seen” directly in the particular cases.

The passage has the same structure as the one at 1048a32–35: Aristotle presents several examples, each comprising two terms each, and claims that one of the terms corresponds to δύναμις while the other to ἐνέργεια. But, in contrast to a32–35, he does not recur to the dative constructions δυνάμει (ὄν) and ἐνεργείᾳ (ὄν). He speaks plainly of ἐνέργεια (nominative) and of τὸ δυνατόν. This is important because it confirms our impression from Θ 3 that Aristotle alternates freely between these different expressions. This suggests that there is no substantial difference in meaning between dative and nominative uses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. As noted in ch. 6, the reading defended by Frede emphasizes a terminological distinction between dative and nominative uses. The purpose of establishing such a distinction is to support the claim that the useful senses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια correspond to a broad notion of being potential/being actual, which would cut across all applications of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast. But here the texts seem to be indifferent between the nominative and dative cases (cf. δύναμις 1048a25, δυνατόν 1048a27–28, 1048b6 and δυνάμει 1048a32; ἐνέργεια 1048a26, 1048a31, 1048b5 and ἐνεργείᾳ 1048a35, 1048b6<sup>389</sup>). This seems to accord better with the interpretation we presented when analyzing Θ 3: that the plain fact of having a capacity or of being capable confers a certain degree of reality to the capable things in question. Thus, the wood's capacity (δύναμις) to be shaped into a statue of Hermes confers on the wood the ontological status of being in capacity (δυνάμει ὄν). And in order for some being to be in capacity, it must have some given capacity (or to be capable, δυνατόν) to act or be acted upon or simply to be in a given way. *This renders superfluous the introduction of an additional and specific modal sense which would go beyond (and subsume) the diverse applications of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.*

This modal aspect of capacities and activities is also hinted at in 1048a30–32: there Aristotle spoke of ἐνέργεια as a determinate way in which things 'subsist' or are (ὑπάρχειν), which is different from being in capacity. This means that ἐνέργεια

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<sup>389</sup> EJ reads ἐνεργείᾳ at 1048b6, though it is crucial to note that Ab presents the nominative ἐνέργεια. This ambiguity occurs in several other passages of the *corpus*, in which the manuscripts present either the nominative or dative case of ἐνέργεια. This occurrence can be easily explained by the fact that the subscript iota, the mark which differentiates the nominative 'act' (ἐνέργεια) from the dative 'in act' (ἐνεργείᾳ), is generally absent in ancient manuscripts, which were written in *scriptio continua* and uncial script. It is thus up to the interpreter to decide which variant to use, since as Fazzo (2016a, 181) rightly notes, changes regarding the subscript iota hardly count as emendations.

(nominative) can also be taken to denote a specific mode of being.<sup>390</sup> And this is consistent with Aristotle's use of the concept of ἐνέργεια already in his earlier texts, as we saw (cf. in particular ch. 5.1, pp. 142–143).

As anticipated earlier, the examples listed by Aristotle in this passage include, in contrast to 1047a32–35, a clear case of the motion application of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Housebuilding was one of the main examples throughout Θ 1–5. It features prominently in Aristotle's anti-Megarian polemic. It is also the leading example in Aristotle's discussion of motion in *Phys.* III 1–3. The remaining examples are parallel to those presented in 1048a32–35: activity cases (being awake, seeing) and substance cases (what has been separated from matter and what has been finished) of ἐνέργεια. But they introduce some interesting nuances.

First, let us focus on the activity cases of ἐνέργεια. As in the case of 1048a32–35, the two examples are familiar to us from the *Protrepticus*. Seeing is recurrent throughout this work (to cite a few examples, it appears in VII 43.20–25/B70; XI 56.15–22/B79; 57.10–12/B81; cf. also *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17), and being awake is mentioned at 56.27–57.6/B80. In Aristotle's early works, seeing is clearly paired with thinking as a kind of action that does not have an end beyond the action itself. It is an example, then, of *complete activity, and not of motion*. Motions, as we will see in further detail in the next subsection (8.2), are always towards an external end that is beyond the motion itself. Thus it would be mistaken to take this example as a motion case of ἐνέργεια instead of a case of complete activity, or τελεία ἐνέργεια.

The example of being awake seems similar to the case of seeing: it is an action that does not seem to have an end beyond itself. But it is true that Aristotle calls waking κίνησις in the *Protrepticus*. How to decide, then, if we are facing a motion application or an activity case of ἐνέργεια? Indeed, several sorts of motions are involved in the state of being awake: for Aristotle, being awake is precisely characterized as the state in which one can move freely and willingly. He chose this example in the *Protrepticus* because he wanted to emphasize those actions which distinguish living from non-living beings, motion being one of these actions. But here we should not confuse the motions involved in an activity (such as the body's locomotion in waking) with the activity itself. Indeed, the same applies to the case of seeing: several motions are involved in seeing, but taken in itself, seeing does not share the structure of motion (*i.e.*, being necessarily directed

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<sup>390</sup> This is noted by Berti (1990, 52).

towards the attainment of an external end). These motions are *subsidiary motions*: they are involved in, but do not coincide with, the activity itself.<sup>391</sup>

The two remaining examples complement the one of the statue of Hermes in the wood (1048a32–33). Indeed, we are once more presented with substance examples of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, which can be largely understood in terms of matter and substantial form. Aristotle speaks of what has been separated from matter (τὸ ἀποκεκριμένον ἐκ τῆς ὕλης) and of what has been finished (ἀπειργασμένον). The first case clearly alludes to an individual substance's form, which can be separated (in thought) from its matter (cf. πρὸς τὴν ὕλην, 1048b3). The second case speaks of a substance as the *finished result* of a process of production or of genesis.<sup>392</sup> Indeed, the perfect participle ἀπειργασμένον refers to the complete state which is the result of a work (ἔργον).<sup>393</sup> The contrasting term in the example is precisely the unfinished or unworked (ἀνέργαστον) material that can be completed through the work.

Although Aristotle does not expand on this issue here, we see through this example how he lays the ground for the establishment of the fundamental aspect which characterizes ἐνέργεια in its proper sense: its completeness. By presenting an οὐσία case of ἐνέργεια in terms of what has been completed, he orients us to the issue of the relation between ἐνέργεια and τέλος. This relation holds properly in two cases: substance and complete activity. Indeed, in *Protr.* VII 43.10–25/B68–70 and XI 58.15–17/B87, Aristotle spoke of τελεία ἐνέργεια in relation to those actions which had their ends in themselves; in *EE* II 1, 1219a8–17 he claimed that ἔργον referred either to substances or to this kind of complete activity, being completeness their common denominator (recall that in this passage Aristotle explicitly equates ἔργον and τέλος, and that ἔργον is parallel to ἐνέργεια in his earlier works). And, the complete character of ἐνέργεια will be the element that distinguishes κίνησις from ἐνέργεια in 1046b18–35. All of this leads to Aristotle's argument in Θ 8 (which will be discussed in subsection 8.4), where he contends that only substance and complete activity constitute the proper cases of ἐνέργεια (the ones which could be said to be truly ends), while motion may be granted to be ἐνέργεια

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<sup>391</sup> This was already discussed in ch. 5.2, pp. 163–164.

<sup>392</sup> Recall that Aristotle seems to introduce no distinction between natural and artificial οὐσίαι in this passage. Cf. n. 385 above.

<sup>393</sup> The participle ἀπειργασμένον derives from the verb ἐργάζομαι. According to Blair (1967, 104), the rare active form of this term, ἐργεῖν, is the term upon which ἐνέργεια is formed.

only because it shares, deficiently, the telic *structure* of complete activity (*i.e.*, it is oriented toward, but not in possession of, the τέλος).

Aristotle first introduces three examples of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, to which he later adds five more. Between these two sets of examples, he includes a statement in which he contends that we should grasp these concepts through induction from particular cases, and that we should see broadly through an analogy. The analogy occurs between the eight different examples that he presents: all of them are composed of two terms, one of which corresponds to δύναμις while the other to ἐνέργεια. The eight examples could be classified into three distinct senses or cases of ἐνέργεια: a motion sense (housebuilding), a substance sense (the Hermes, the whole line, what has been separated from matter, what has been finished), and a (complete) activity sense (contemplating, seeing, being awake). We are thus confronted with the three senses in which ἐνέργεια is said, and which capture the different applications of the term.

### 8.1.3. The second analogy of 1048b6–9

Aristotle continues his argument and adds a further clarification of the analogy in the immediately following passage. This clarification could seem to contradict our interpretation. At 1048b6–9, he claims the following (I divide the text to facilitate the discussion):

(1) Not all things are said to be ἐνέργεια<sup>394</sup> in the same way, except by way of analogy (ἀλλ' ἢ τῷ ἀνάλογον), (2) as this in this or in relation to this, so that in that or in relation to that. (3) For some are as κίνησις to δύναμις, others as οὐσία to some matter.<sup>395</sup>

The passage has three parts (marked in the quoted text). The first one is related to Aristotle's earlier claim that there is no single definition of the concept of ἐνέργεια. By stating that not all things are said to be ἐνέργεια in the same way, he is referring to the different applications of the term, which were presented in the previous examples. However, he now claims that there is something that unifies all these different

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<sup>394</sup> Following Ab, against EJ's ἐνεργεία.

<sup>395</sup> λέγεται δὲ ἐνεργεία οὐ πάντα ὁμοίως ἀλλ' ἢ τῷ ἀνάλογον, ὡς τοῦτο ἐν τούτῳ ἢ πρὸς τοῦτο, τόδ' ἐν τῷδε ἢ πρὸς τόδε· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὡς κίνησις πρὸς δύναμιν τὰ δ' ὡς οὐσία πρὸς τινα ὕλην. This division of the passage is also the one carried out by Anagnostopoulos (2011, 419).

applications,<sup>396</sup> which is precisely *the analogical relation* that holds between them. This is indicated by Aristotle through the expression ἀλλ' ἢ, which here has the meaning of “except” or “but only”:<sup>397</sup> Aristotle is claiming that although no uniform or overarching sense of ἐνέργεια covers all its uses (which would render them ὁμοίως) there is, in fact, one way (and only one way) in which these uses can be said to be ὁμοίως; and that is by analogy. In other words, the sole unity to be found among the different applications of ἐνέργεια is analogical, which is consistent with the fact that δύναμις and ἐνέργεια are senses of being, and thus irreducible to a genus. The unity of being is not to be found in some supreme genus, for being is not a genus; it can only be established analogically.

What Aristotle means by analogy is clarified in the second part of the passage. Here he states that by analogy he intends a certain proportional relation between fundamentally distinct terms: “as this in this or in relation to this, so that in that or in relation to that”. This sort of analogy could be illustrated as follows: as A is to B, C is to D.<sup>398</sup> This means that the four terms in the analogy remain distinct, but that a common relation holds between the two pairs.<sup>399</sup>

As he did earlier with the abstract formulation of 1048a30–32, which was fleshed out with the ensuing examples at 1048a32–35, Aristotle provides at 1048b8–9 a more

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<sup>396</sup> This is the reading defended by Anagnostopoulos (2011, 416–422), which goes against the view of both Makin (2006), and Beere (2009). For these authors, the analogy presents two distinct first-order relations (Makin 2006, 132–134), one corresponding to motion and the other to substance. In each of this first-order relations δυνάμει holds in a specific way which is unlike the other. These two distinct first-order relations can be further related in a second-order relation which would amount to a mere similarity or proximity (not identity) between them. In contrast, Anagnostopoulos contends that the analogy establishes “a point of sameness”, and that it expresses “a single relation between being δυνάμει and being ἐνεργεία” (416) which runs through the diverse applications.

<sup>397</sup> On ἀλλ' ἢ, cf. Denniston (1954 [1934], 24–27).

<sup>398</sup> Cf. *EN* V 3, 1131a29–b17. Cf. also *Met.* Δ 6, 1016b31–35.

<sup>399</sup> Cf. Berti (1990, 53; 2022). Fazzo (2021, 128) argues that, for Aristotle, an analogy is the weakest form of unity that can be established among a plurality of things. Cf. also Rapp (2021, 25). It should be noted that this conception of analogy has important Platonic precedents. An especially relevant passage is *Ti.* 31b–32a: here Plato claims that two things cannot be put together well (καλῶς συνίστασθαι, 31b8) without a third element which brings them together. This third element is in effect the analogy (ἀναλογία, 31c3). Analogy is understood in this context as a mathematical proportional relation that manages to establish the greatest possible amount of unity (μάλιστα ἐν, 31c3) between different things. Furthermore, an analogical relation is also established between the faculty of knowing and the knowable objects in the *Republic*'s Divided Line passage (*Resp.* 509d–511e). I thank Linda Napolitano for discussion on this issue.

concrete formulation of the analogy presented in 1048b6–8. Here, the two pairs (“this in this or in relation to this, that in that or in relation to that”) are replaced by two of the different applications of ἐνέργεια which featured in the earlier examples: “For some [cases of ἐνέργεια] are as κίνησις to δύναμις, others as οὐσία to some matter”. Aristotle is arguing that the same *relation* between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια holds in the two cases, although they certainly constitute separate and distinct applications of the terms. The point is that an analogy can be established between the two examples, and that this analogy provides a certain amount of unity to the diverse uses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.<sup>400</sup> This unity, however, should not be interpreted as a unified “analogical sense” of ἐνέργεια, but rather as the only possible unity which can be established between the distinct applications of the concept. All cases of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια can be understood as a relation between a capacity and its correlative ἐνέργεια. In other words, being can be said in two ways, as a mere capacity or as its correlative act, towards which the capacity is oriented.

I spoke of the two terms of 1048b8–9 as ‘examples’ deliberately because I contend that that is precisely what they are: in my reading, the two terms of the analogy are not intended to capture the alleged two ‘modes’ of ἐνέργεια, activity and actuality respectively, but rather serve as a mere illustration of the proportional relation which holds between *all* the diverse applications of ἐνέργεια (which, as we saw, are not two but at least three: motion, substance, and activity). This goes against the most common interpretation among scholars, who claim that the analogy at 1048b8–9 covers the whole range of applications of ἐνέργεια.<sup>401</sup> Moreover, scholars usually see the lines as reflecting the transition which takes place in book Θ as a whole: from motion (the κύριος sense of δύναμις) towards actuality (the ‘useful’ or ontological sense). This view is common to

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<sup>400</sup> As Anagnostopoulos (2011, 419–420) observes, it would be wrong to take the two examples (motion and capacity, substance and matter) as two distinct first-order relations (as in the reading of Makin). The lines at 1048b8–9 should be read as specifying the abstract presentation of the analogy in 1048b6–7, in which it is clear that Aristotle refers to a single relation which holds in two cases (AB, CD). This is, in fact, the way in which the analogy of proportion works for Aristotle (see for instance *Poet.* 21, 1457b17–18: “by analogy (ἀνάλογον) I mean, when the second is related to the first, and the fourth to the third in the same way (ὁμοίως)”.

<sup>401</sup> See for instance Anagnostopoulos (2011, 420): “Clearly, ‘some’ and ‘others’ [*sc.* τὰ μὲν [...] τὰ δέ, at 1048b8–9], are most naturally taken to encompass and split up the class of things whose being called ἐνεργεία clause (i) [*sc.* 1048b6–7] describes”.

those who identify the useful sense with substantial form,<sup>402</sup> to those who conceive the useful sense as the unitary sense of ἐνέργεια, understood as a mode of being,<sup>403</sup> and to some of those who contend that the useful sense is a peculiar kind of activity.<sup>404</sup>

There are several difficulties with this view. The first one is that it is difficult to square with the examples presented by Aristotle in the whole passage 1048a30–b6. Indeed, the examples include not two but *three* applications or senses of ἐνέργεια. Scholars are thus forced to include the third ‘problematic’ case (*i.e.*, complete activity) in one of the two terms of 1048b8–9, either motion or substantial form. This has some unfortunate consequences.

If we contend that activity should be subsumed under the heading “as κίνησις to δύναμις”, then Aristotle would be in contradiction with the ensuing κίνησις/ἐνέργεια distinction of 1048b18–35. There, Aristotle explicitly claims that complete activity *is not* motion. However, scholars have come up with two main ways in which to overcome this incongruence: they regard this latter passage either as a mere addendum to the more important distinction given in the first part of chapter 6, or, going further, as a distinction utterly foreign to the argument of book Θ.

The first strategy is pursued by Menn (1994). He argues that the distinction between κίνησις and ἐνέργεια constitutes a “relatively fine point” (1994, 106), which serves the purpose of correcting the inexact use of κίνησις in 1048b8–9.<sup>405</sup> The main distinction in Θ, he claims, is between a broad ‘motion’ sense and a ‘substance’ sense of ἐνέργεια (the two terms of 1048b8–9).

It is clear that his interpretation relies on establishing an intrinsic association between the concepts of activity and change, albeit that ‘change’ should be understood

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<sup>402</sup> Graham (1987, 192), Charlton (1990, 18), Menn (1994, 133 n. 50).

<sup>403</sup> Frede (1994), Witt (2003), Makin (2006), Beere (2009), Lefebvre (2018).

<sup>404</sup> This is the case of Kosman, who believes that οὐσία stands in this context for complete activity (on this interpretation see *infra*). We should also mention the position of Gill (1989, 214–219; 2021, 190), who claims that the two terms of the analogy present two generalizations which can be applied to two distinct models: motion and complete actuality. In this reading, all the examples can be understood alternatively from the perspective of each model. For his part, Anagnostopoulos (2011) also reads the reference to matter at 1048b9 as alluding to the matter’s capacity to becoming substance, which he identifies with the useful sense.

<sup>405</sup> Gill (1989, 217; 2021, 191) also contends that the use of κίνησις at 1048b8–9 is a generic use, broad enough to include both motions and complete activities.

here in such a broad way as to include cases of activities that are explicitly denied to be motions in several places of the *corpus*.<sup>406</sup> As we saw in ch. 5.2, Menn defends this intrinsic association by stating that the original concept of both δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, such as it appears in Aristotle’s earlier works, is structured primarily in terms of motion, that is to say, that the initial concept of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια is that of a capacity for change and its correlative active exercise. Aristotle would be relying on this initial conception (*i.e.*, κίνησις broadly considered) in the analogy of 1048b6–9, which he would then later specify (or “correct”, in Menn’s terms) in 1048b18–35.

We have already argued in length against this view: in fact, we saw in ch. 5.2 that there is strong textual evidence to suggest that Aristotle was already aware in his earlier texts of the fundamental distinction between motion and activity. Thus, Menn’s argument, according to which the terminology of 1048b8–9 reflects an earlier stage of Aristotle’s thought, seems not to be supported by the texts themselves. We can thus dismiss Menn’s justification for including the examples of complete activity of 1048a30–b6 under b7’s heading of “as κίνησις to δύναμις”.

There is, however, another way in which scholars attempt to justify the alleged broad sense of κίνησις. Some argue that in the first five chapters of the treatise, which concern the motion application of δύναμις, Aristotle makes use of an undifferentiated concept of change, which would not be “sensitive to the more fine-grained distinction between incomplete changes and complete actualities” (Makin 2006, 135).<sup>407</sup> They claim that in Θ 5, for example, Aristotle speaks of sensation, which according to the distinction of 1048b18–35, should be classified as an activity, as opposed to motion. But this claim is only partially true; indeed, sight is a complete activity but sensation, as we saw earlier, involves a series of subsidiary motions that occur together with the activity. This connection between an activity and its subsidiary motions does not prevent us from establishing a distinction between them. So Aristotle could very well be considering sensation from the perspective of the motions involved in its exercise in the context of Θ 5, without necessarily forsaking the motion/activity distinction of 1048b18–35.

Aristotle cites both housebuilding and sight among the examples of δυνάμεις in Θ 3. But this does not imply that there is no distinction between them, or even more so, that

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<sup>406</sup> This last point has been influential recently, and has been adopted by Makin (2006, xxviii, 133–135), Beere (2009, 197, 200, 227–228), Anagnostopoulos (2011, 412), Unlu (2021, 11).

<sup>407</sup> Cf. also Beere (2009, 228) and Unlu (2021, 11–12).

what they have in common (for example, that both cases can be regarded categorically as actions or sufferings) could be regarded as ‘motion’ in a broad sense. The two examples, housebuilding and sight, are instances of the wider capacity-exercise structure. The chapter focuses on this larger structure, that is, on what both examples have in common. And we saw earlier that the capacity-exercise structure does not correspond primarily to motions; on the contrary, it applies originally to non-kinetic activities such as thinking and sight, that is, complete activities that contain their ends in themselves. Motion, on the other hand, is an incomplete instance of this structure.<sup>408</sup> Thus, their common structure corresponds to complete activity in the first place, not to motion. This contradicts the view that the capacity-exercise structure could be regarded to be motion in a broad sense.

As stated earlier, the other way in which scholars justify their view that Aristotle reduces activity to motion in 1048a30–b9 is by claiming that the motion/activity distinction of 1048b18–35 is not operative in this context. The most famous exponent of this view is Burnyeat, who in an influential paper (2008) claimed that the passage is incorrectly placed at the end of Θ 6. By removing it, Burnyeat finds no difficulty in claiming that Aristotle could consider actions such as seeing and thinking as motions.

We will speak in detail about this passage in the next section, putting Burnyeat’s interpretation into question. But for the moment we can reply to this strategy with the considerations made in ch. 5.2, where I claimed that the motion/activity distinction is found already in the earliest formulation of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast. Thus, even if we were to accept athetizing 1048b18–35, the claim that seeing or thinking could be motions would still contradict Aristotle’s earlier treatment of ἐνέργεια. In summary, arguing that activities such as sight and intellectual contemplation could be considered motions “in a broad sense” is a move simply not supported by Aristotle’s text.

So much for the view that activity should be subsumed under the heading “as κίνησις to δύναμις”. But there is another way in which scholars arrange the examples with respect to the 1048b8–9 analogy. Kosman (2013) and Natali (2013, 112–113) believe that the κίνησις-οὐσία analogy at 1048b8–9 corresponds to the κίνησις-ἐνέργεια distinction at 1048b18–35, thus making ἐνέργεια cases such as seeing and thinking fall under the οὐσία side of the analogy.

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<sup>408</sup> I have defended this claim in ch. 5.2, and I will provide further comment on the incomplete character of motion in the next subsection.

The main problem with this view is that it makes complete ἐνέργεια cases such as seeing identical to οὐσία cases such as what has been finished or what has been separated from matter. For Kosman, ἐνέργεια should be properly comprehended as the form of an οὐσία, understood as its “essential activity” (2013, 81). According to this scheme, the εἶδος of an οὐσία is the “principle of its active being”, the particular activity which is proper of said οὐσία: “the Form, we might say, is the principle of matter in operation; in instances of substantial being, it is the operation of the being that is substance”.<sup>409</sup> This kind of ἐνέργεια would be structurally identical to an activity such as seeing or thinking. However, as others have noted, it is not immediately clear how substance could be characterized essentially as an activity.<sup>410</sup> In fact, one would think that there is some difference between an activity such as seeing and the εἶδος of an οὐσία. Aristotle explicitly says that the examples presented are related analogically, and not that they are identical.<sup>411</sup>

It seems that we have enough reasons to reject the reduction of activity to either motion or substantial form, the two terms of the 1048b8–9 analogy. The implication of this is that the line does not collect the whole range of applications of ἐνέργεια. This should not be problematic: lines 1048b8–9 provide an example of the analogical relation presented in abstract terms in 1048b7–8 (ὡς τοῦτο ἐν τούτῳ ἢ πρὸς τοῦτο, τόδ’ ἐν τῷδε ἢ πρὸς τόδε). Given that the analogy of proportion is presented by Aristotle in the form of two terms, it is expectable for him to present a parallel example composed of two terms. But this does not exclude that other senses or applications of ἐνέργεια could be included in the same analogical relation. That is: as motion is to a specific kind of δύναμις (*i.e.*, the capacity for producing change in another), substance is to matter, and complete activity is to its own specific kind of δύναμις (*i.e.*, the capacity for actions which have their end in themselves).

In fact, no textual indication goes against this reading. Nowhere does Aristotle suggest that the lines at 1048b8–9 are intended to capture the whole range of applications of ἐνέργεια. If we take this line as simply an example of the analogical relation that holds between all the diverse applications of the term, we can respect the specificity of the

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<sup>409</sup> This view was anticipated by Blair (1992, 45).

<sup>410</sup> Cf. Makin (2006, 152–154), Politis (2015), Beere (2018), Charles (2018), Gill (2018).

<sup>411</sup> Cf. Gonzalez (2019, 162–164).

examples presented by Aristotle. We are thus confronted, through this argument, with the three main senses of ἐνέργεια: motion, substantial form and complete activity.<sup>412</sup>

It should also be noted, against the standard reading of 1048b8–9, that Aristotle introduces an additional sense of ἐνέργεια in the immediately following passage. At 1048b9–13, he states that “the infinite and the void, and other such like things, are said to be in capacity (δυνάμει) and in act (ἐνεργείᾳ) *in another way* (ἄλλῳς) from most of the other things which are, such as the one who sees and the one who walks and what is seen”. We have thus *a fourth sense* of ἐνέργεια, which is neither motion nor οὐσία (the two terms of 1048b8–9): the ἐνέργεια of the ἄπειρον, which can never be separated from its corresponding potency (the infinitely divisible can always be further divided, thus never reaching a limit, and remaining potential). It is interesting that Aristotle contrasts this sense of ἐνέργεια with the examples of sight and of walking. These are the two leading examples of the motion/activity distinction of 1048b18–35. This suggests some connection between the two passages, at least with regards to the continuity of Aristotle’s argument. Indeed, each of the two passages introduces or expands a different sense of ἐνέργεια not included in 1048b8–9.<sup>413</sup>

It remains unclear which is Aristotle’s useful sense of ἐνέργεια. Up to this point, he has limited himself to presenting its different senses and explaining the analogical relationship between them. In his analogical account (1048a30–b9), he has introduced two senses that were absent from the earlier discussion (with the exception of Θ 3): substance and complete activity. Both these senses seem to cover the requirement for the useful sense that Aristotle established at the outset of the treatise: both senses seem to extend beyond motion. But their specific nature and their mutual connection have not yet

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<sup>412</sup> This position is proximate to that of Berti (1990) and Yepes Stork (1993). Berti analyzes the three senses of ἐνέργεια in three different subsections in his paper. Yepes Stork does the same in his exhaustive study on Aristotle’s notion of ἐνέργεια: he devotes a specific section to each of its three senses (265–288 dedicated to movement; 289–326 dedicated to substance; 327–408 dedicated to complete activity). Although Berti gives some kind of priority to the sense of complete activity, given its importance for the thematization of the Prime Mover, Yepes Stork (1992, 511) appears to hold that there is no fundamental unity among the diverse senses. I will address the issue of the unity of the diverse senses of ἐνέργεια in further detail in the next subsection.

<sup>413</sup> My view here is consistent with that of Gonzalez (2019, 149–150). According to this author, the passage on the infinite and the void, which is usually ignored by commentators, provides a key step in the transition from the analogical account of ἐνέργεια at 1048a30–b9 to the κίνησις-ἐνέργεια distinction among πράξεις of 1048b18–35. I will return to this issue in n. 424 below.

been properly explained. In order to correctly understand this, we must further analyze Aristotle's argument in the remaining part of Θ 6 and in the discussion of the priority of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις in Θ 8.

## 8.2. The distinction between κίνησις and ἐνέργεια (Θ 6, 1048b18–35)

After the passage on the infinite and the void, Aristotle states the following:

Since among the actions that have a limit (πέρας) none is an end (τέλος) but relative to an end (περὶ τὸ τέλος), as thinness to thinning:<sup>414</sup> when things are thinning they are in motion in such a way that those things for which the motion takes places are not present. Therefore, this is not an action (οὐκ ἔστι ταῦτα πράξις), or not a complete one (ἢ οὐ τελεία γε), because it is not an end. But in the other one (ἐκείνη)<sup>415</sup> the end is present and the action, one sees but also thinks and conceives and has conceived (ὄρᾳ ἀλλὰ καὶ φρονεῖ καὶ νοεῖ καὶ νενόηκεν).<sup>416</sup> But one does not learn and has learned, nor is healed and has been healed. One lives well and has lived well, but also one is living well and has already lived well (εὖ ζῆ καὶ εὖ ἔζηκεν).<sup>417</sup> If not, it must cease at some time, as

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<sup>414</sup> Manuscripts read τοῦ ἰσχνάειν ἢ ἰσχνασία. If we take ἰσχνασία as meaning the process of thinning (Ross) the phrase seems tautological, which has led many editors to emend it. The fact that at 1048b29 Aristotle uses the term in the sense of the process of thinning seems to present further evidence that emendation is needed. However, Gonzalez 2019, 127 n. 16 argues that ἰσχνασία can refer both to thinness and to the process of thinning, being the former the sense used here and the latter at 1048b29.

<sup>415</sup> Not following Bonitz emendation; what does ἐκείνη refer back to? Natali says that it refers back to οὐσία which appears just before passage on the void (though with problems; how can οὐσία be πράξις?); Gonzalez says that it refers to τελεία πράξις, which seems to make more sense in the context. This was already the view of Brague (1988, 459).

<sup>416</sup> This line has traditionally been emended by editors (see for instance the editions of Christ, Jaeger and Ross; all of them follow Bonitz). They introduce the perfect forms ἐώρακε and πεφρόνηκε, which are missing in the manuscript and substitute ἀλλὰ with ἄμα, following the parallel structure in 1048b33 (ἐώρακε δὲ καὶ ὄρᾳ ἄμα τὸ αὐτό). Natali (2013, 107) argues against Burnyeat's dismissal of ἀλλὰ as non-sensical (2008, 276), saying that there is no need to emend the text, since "ἀλλὰ καὶ is used in a 'progressive' way (Denniston 1934, 21) and loses nearly all adversative force". If ἀλλὰ can be sustained, then there is no true need to add the missing perfects, as Gonzalez (2019, 126) notes: "Bonitz's emendation is a solution to a problem of his own making [by introducing ἄμα]".

<sup>417</sup> The Greek perfect signals not that the action takes place necessarily in the past, but the presently complete character of the activity itself. Hence, Burnyeat's 2008 translation of εὖ ζῆ καὶ εὖ ἔζηκεν as "x lives well and has achieved the good life". Also Gonzalez' 2019 "one is living well and has *already* lived

when one is thinning. Now this is not the case, but one lives and has lived. Therefore, ones should be called motions, the others ἐνέργεια. Because every motion is incomplete (πᾶσα γὰρ κίνησις ἀτελής), thinning, learning, walking, housebuilding. These are certainly motions and incomplete (αὗται δὲ κινήσεις, καὶ ἀτελεῖς γε). One does not walk and at the same time has walked (οὐ γὰρ ἅμα βαδίζει καὶ βεβάδικεν), nor builds a house and has built a house (οὐδ' οἰκοδομεῖ καὶ ὠκοδόμηκεν), nor comes to be and has come to be (γίγνεται καὶ γέγονεν), nor is moved or has been moved, but are different, and also moving and having caused motion (ἢ κινεῖται καὶ κεκίνηται, ἀλλ' ἕτερον, καὶ κινεῖ καὶ κεκίνηκεν). But one has seen and is seeing something at the same time (εἶδεν καὶ ὁρᾷ ἅμα τὸ αὐτό), and one conceives and has conceived (νοεῖ καὶ νενόηκεν). This kind I call ἐνέργεια, the other motion. What ἐνεργεῖν is and of what kind it is let it be clear to us from these and these.<sup>418</sup>

In this passage, Aristotle establishes a distinction between πράξεις that have a limit and thus are not an end but are relative towards (or on account of) an end, and πράξεις that are their end and are complete. The use of the term πράξις seems odd within the context of a non-ethical discussion such as the one carried out in book Θ, but it seems to be a rather broad use of the term, which includes actions such as thinning, healing, housebuilding, seeing, thinking and being happy.<sup>419</sup> Aristotle says that the first three cases have their end outside of themselves: they are in motion because the thing for the sake of

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well". The reader must keep in mind this peculiarity of the perfect since it is instrumental in the interpretation of the passage.

<sup>418</sup> On ἐνεργεῖν at 1048b35: this is the reading of Ab, against EJ's ἐνεργεία. Burnyeat (2008, 226) argues that the use of the dative case of ἐνέργεια goes against the doctrine of the current passage: "The main body of Θ 6 wants to know what it is for something to be in actuality (note the dative ἐνεργεία at 1048a35, b6, 10–11, 15), *i.e.* to be something actually, as contrasted with what it is for something to be in potentiality (δυνάμει, 1048a32, b10, 14, 16), *i.e.* to be something potentially. The Passage is about what it is to be an actuality (ἐνέργεια in the nominative), as opposed to a mere change (κίνησις): an entirely different question. As Jaeger remarked, the last sentence of Θ 6 ignores this second question and links back to the topic proposed at the beginning of the chapter; note EJ's dative ἐνεργεία again at 1048B35". I have already argued against this view (which is fundamentally that of Frede) in the previous subsection. Indeed, it seems expectable that Aristotle would speak here of the infinitive ἐνεργεῖν (which appears in Ab) since the immediately previous passage concerns ἐνέργεια understood as an activity. There is then no need to claim that the closing line contradicts or is unrelated to the previous passage.

<sup>419</sup> As to seeing (ὁρᾶν) and for an analysis of the importance of this passage in relation to the issue of visual metaphors in ancient Greek thought, see Napolitano Valditara (1994, 9–11).

which the motion takes place (thinness, knowledge, health, or a house) is not there. Thus, he says, contradicting the opening of the passage, that these examples are not actions at all, but the contradiction seems to be salvaged by an immediate clarification by Aristotle: these examples are *incomplete πράξεις*.<sup>420</sup> In contrast, in the case of actions such as seeing, thinking, conceiving, living well, and being happy, the end is present whenever they are exercised, and so one sees and at the same time has already seen, one conceives and has already conceived and one is living well and has already lived well. The same does not occur in the case of actions such as healing, walking or housebuilding, since one is building a house but has not already built a house (this would signify the end of the action). Aristotle says that these actions are to be called *motions* (κινήσεις) and the other ones *activities* (ἐνέργειαι). Generation and motion in general should be considered κινήσεις (“one does not come to be and has come to be, nor is moved or has been moved”) since *every* motion is incomplete. One is not walking and at the same time has completed walking, or is building a house and has completed building a house, or comes to be and has already come to be, or moves [something] and has already moved [something]. But one has seen and at the same time sees and conceives and has conceived.<sup>421</sup>

There are many things to consider regarding this passage. The first thing is the controversy among scholars regarding the state of the text and its placement. Traditionally, there has been some suspicion of the passage because it is absent from the two most ancient manuscripts, J (Vindobonensis phil. gr. 100, 9th century) and E (Parisinus gr. 1853, 10th century), the main exponents of the  $\alpha$  branch of manuscripts. The passage appears only in Ab (Laurentianus 87.12, 12th century), the main manuscript of the  $\beta$  branch. Moreover, editors have usually introduced numerous emendations to the

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<sup>420</sup> Burnyeat (2008, 262) claims that this is an exclusive disjunction, and so denies the possibility of an action being an incomplete πράξις. Gonzalez, on the other hand, claims that the second part of the disjunction is a qualification of the first part (2019, 143).

<sup>421</sup> Aristotle’s argument on the difference between perfect and imperfect uses has been called the “tense test” in much of the English-speaking literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, the fact that Aristotle seems to present a linguistic distinction in order to solve an ontological problem has made this passage very popular in the second half of the 20th century (cf. Ryle 1954, Ackrill 1965, Penner 1970, Charles 1986, Brague 1988, Natali 1991b among many others). However, Aristotle’s argument goes beyond a mere linguistic distinction and has deep ontological implications, as argued above. Consequently, it seems safe to say that the relation of an action to its τέλος is the most fundamental aspect of the distinction, and that the tense test is, in fact, an illustration. Cf. Natali (2013, 108–109).

text, judging it to be highly corrupted.<sup>422</sup> These two elements (absence from the oldest manuscripts, apparently corrupted text) may have influenced in Jaeger's decision to mark the passage with his famous *Doppelklammern*, suggesting that the passage may be a later addition by Aristotle to a previous version of the *Metaphysics*.

This traditional suspicion found new force in an influential article by Burnyeat (2008), in which he claimed that the passage, though probably of Aristotelian origin, is incorrectly placed in  $\Theta$ . According to Burnyeat, the doctrine of the passage is consistent neither with the argument made in  $\Theta$  nor with Aristotle's general conception of the notions of  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$  and motion. He therefore concludes that "present-day scholarship should stop citing the Passage as a source of standard Aristotelian doctrine" (276). Burnyeat's paper, which presents arguments of philological and philosophical order, has had a remarkable influence, to such an extent that Berti in his recent translation of the *Metaphysics* (Berti 2017) prints this passage in italics and points out in the notes his agreement with Burnyeat.

Burnyeat's thesis was recently questioned in depth by Gonzalez (2019). This author offers numerous arguments that aim to vindicate the placement of the passage in  $\Theta$  6 and its importance for Aristotelian metaphysics in general (some of Burnyeat's philological arguments were already questioned by Fazzo 2012, 128–134, especially at 133. Burnyeat's thesis was also criticized by Natali 2013). With this gesture, Gonzalez stands next to Ross (1924 II 253), who believed that the passage was genuine and correctly placed at the end of  $\Theta$  6.

I will not linger on the arguments presented by either Burnyeat or Gonzalez. For our purposes, it suffices to note that, though absent in EJ, the passage can be read without significant emendation following the manuscript in which it does appear, Ab, as Natali (2013) and Gonzalez (2019) show. If the text can be read without emendation and if we can rely on the  $\beta$  tradition of manuscripts, the only other thing that could prevent us from considering it authentically Aristotelian and correctly placed at  $\Theta$  6 are possible incongruences in the theory it presents.<sup>423</sup> But as Ross noted and Gonzalez stresses, the

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<sup>422</sup> Emendations were first introduced by Bonitz, who was later followed by Ross (who maintained Bonitz' text) and Jaeger (who included some additional emendations). Bonitz, however, shows caution when introducing his emendations: *Viderint igitur lectores an aliqua veritatis specie eae commendatur conjecturae, quas in adnotatione critica significavi* (1849, 397).

<sup>423</sup> On the importance of the  $\beta$  tradition of manuscripts, cf. Fazzo (2016b, 456).

passage presents sound Aristotelian doctrine which is necessary in order to carry out the analysis of immaterial substances in Θ 8 and of the Prime Mover in book Λ (on which, see 9.2 *infra*).

There is an additional argument for the placement and the relevance of the passage for Aristotle's theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. The doctrine of the passage is not unfamiliar to us. As we saw in ch. 5.2, there is an important parallel between the distinction established in 1048b18–35 and some passages from Aristotle's earlier works, such as *Protr.* VII 43.10–25/B68–70; XI 58.15–17/B87, and *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17. These texts suggest that Aristotle was already aware in his earlier works of the fundamental distinction between motion and activity and of the criterion that structures this contrast. Moreover, we saw in ch. 5 that Aristotle's original concept of ἐνέργεια applies primarily to activities that contain their ends in themselves, and not to motions, which are different from their ends.

To my knowledge, such a congruence between 1048b18–35 and Aristotle's earlier works has not been noticed by scholars. This is perhaps because most scholars assume, influenced by a misguided interpretation of Θ 3, 1047a30–b1, that Aristotle's original concept of ἐνέργεια is that of motion. This goes together with the conviction that in book Θ Aristotle carries out a transition from a (broad) motion sense towards an 'actuality' sense of ἐνέργεια. These two elements explain both their downplaying of 1048b18–35 and their unawareness of its relation to some crucial passages of Aristotle's earlier works.

We have already argued against both assumptions, specifically in ch. 7.5 and in the preceding subsection. In my view, Aristotle maintained a coherent view of ἐνέργεια throughout his philosophical development. And the distinction between complete ἐνέργεια and incomplete motions constitutes a central element in his understanding of the concept.

The early configuration of the distinction, as it appears in texts such as *Protr.* VII 43.10–25/B68–70 and *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17, was somewhat diffuse in terminological terms. In these texts, Aristotle speaks of ἔργον for that which he will later call ἐνέργεια, and he also uses ποιήσις instead of κίνησις. They present, however, the same fundamental distinction between two kinds of actions, ones that contain their ends in themselves and others that strive towards an external end. The passage at *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35 provides clear terminology which helps us better understand the fundamental character of the distinction. This is somewhat expectable since Θ 6 has the specific intention of

elucidating the concept of ἐνέργεια, a task which was not the main point of focus of Aristotle in the *Protrepticus* or in *Eudemian Ethics*.

Aristotle spoke of τελεία ἐνέργεια in *Protr.* XI 58.15–17/B87, when referring to the activity of contemplation. At VII 43.10–25/B68–70, he opposed this kind of activity to other sorts of activities, precisely according to the criterion of the relation between the actions and their ends. Now, at *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35, Aristotle claims that this latter sort of action, which in his earlier texts he qualified as ‘productive’ (ποιητική), should be simply called ‘motion’ (κίνησις). As we will see next, this terminological clarification fundamentally agrees with Aristotle’s discussion of motion in *Physics* III.

This continuity within Aristotle’s philosophical development strongly supports the inclusion of the passage in its current placement.<sup>424</sup> Aristotle’s argument in the first part of Θ 6 has introduced three main senses of ἐνέργεια, but it is only at 1048b18–35 that he explains the fundamental difference between them. The passage introduces the criterion which distinguishes ἐνέργεια proper from a derivative and improper kind of ἐνέργεια: motion. As the passage claims, motion is not πράξις (*i.e.*, activity) in the strict sense of the term: it can only be said to be πράξις if we state that it is incomplete.

The distinction is fundamental for fulfilling the program of Θ, that is, for extending the concept of ἐνέργεια beyond its motion application. Although the passage speaks of complete activities such as thinking and seeing, it also contributes to our understanding of the other full application of ἐνέργεια: substance. Indeed, both complete activity and substance share the same fundamental trait: they already have their ends in

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<sup>424</sup> There are two further signs of the passage’s correct placement. The first is its connection with the immediately previous passage on the unlimited and the void (1048b9–17). It seems logical that, after speaking of a case of ἐνέργεια which has no limit (τὸ ἄπειρον, b9), Aristotle goes on to speak first of those actions which do have a limit (πέρας, b18), and later of actions which also have no limit, but in a different way from the case of τὸ ἄπειρον, that is, which are unlimited because they have their ends in themselves whenever exercised (ἐνυπάρχει τὸ τέλος καὶ ἡ πράξις, 1048b22–23). Indeed, complete activities are not necessarily temporally extended and may, in principle, be exercised indefinitely.

The second concerns the impression the reader may have from the examples of 1048a30–b9. Aristotle introduces 1048b18–35 because activity could appear to be motion if one were to rely exclusively on the previous argument: by specifying the distinction, Aristotle confirms our initial impression that the examples of contemplating at 1048a34–35 and of seeing at 1048b2 are cases of complete activity, and not of motion. Although this seemed clear to us, taking into account the discussion of ἐνέργεια in Aristotle’s early works, it could seem unclear if we were to focus exclusively on the argument of 1048a30–b9. Both these arguments are articulated by Gonzalez (2019, 149–150).

themselves and thus can be said to be ἐντελέχεια (ἐν-τέλος-ἔχειν, or “to have the end within”), without qualification.

Let us now turn to the congruence between Aristotle’s views on motion in the κίνησις-ἐνέργεια distinction and his account of motion in *Physics* III 1–3. This will help us in our later examination of Aristotle’s argument in Θ 8, which further clarifies the relation between the three main senses of ἐνέργεια, and which will be fundamental for understanding what is Aristotle’s conception of the ‘useful’ sense of ἐνέργεια.

### 8.2.1. Motion as ἀτελής ἐνέργεια in *Phys.* III 1–2

We have already anticipated that in Θ 3, 1047a30–b2, Aristotle warns us of the risk of conflating the concepts of motion and ἐνέργεια. We argued that, in this passage, he suggests that motion is a merely an apparent or improper instance of ἐνέργεια. This view is confirmed in 1048b18–35, where he claims that motion should be distinguished from ἐνέργεια precisely because it is incomplete. He explains that its incompleteness resides in the fact that while the motion is being carried out, the end has not yet been achieved; there is a separation between the end and activity. In contrast, complete activities achieve their end at all stages of their realization: the activity and the end coincide.

This view is in essential agreement with what Aristotle says in the *Physics*: he famously defines motion as the ἐντελέχεια of the capable *qua* being capable (ἢ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια, ἧ τοιοῦτον, κίνησις ἐστίν, *Phys.* III 1, 201a10–11).<sup>425</sup> In other words, motion is the act of that which is capable *insofar as it remains capable*. This means that while the motion lasts, it cannot be said that the δύναμις has been fully actualized. In the case of housebuilding, for example, the materials remain to some degree capable, that is, they retain their capability to become a house because the house in question has not yet been finished. In the process of housebuilding, the materials are *still being turned into*

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<sup>425</sup> On the use of ἐντελέχεια in the definition of motion, it was already noted (cf. n. 290 above) that the parallel version of the definition at *Met.* K 9, 1065b16 presents ἐνέργεια instead of ἐντελέχεια, and that the subsequent discussion of motion in *Phys.* III 1–3 makes much use of ἐνέργεια. Any interpretation of Aristotle’s definition of motion which relies on the fact that he uses ἐντελέχεια in *Phys.* III 1, 201a10–11 must explain the use of ἐνέργεια in these passages. The simplest explanation seems to be that Aristotle regarded both terms as functionally equivalent when defining motion, and so uses them interchangeably (cf. Brague 1991, 114 and Coope 2009, 290 n. 2). Cf. ch. 7.5 *supra*.

a house, and so it cannot be claimed the capacity has reached its τέλος or that it has been fulfilled (*i.e.*, that they are in act, in this case constituting a completely actualized house).

On the contrary, when the process of housebuilding reaches its end, *the motion ceases*, and we have as a result a house, that is, an οὐσία. The same applies to all other sorts of changes: qualitative changes result in a new quality, quantitative changes in a new quantity, locative changes in a new location, and generation results in a new (natural) οὐσία. In this case, we are facing not the ἐντελέχεια of the capable *qua* capable (motion) but the ἐντελέχεια of the capable thing *simpliciter*.

This qualification, that is, the fact that in a process of motion the capacity in question remains in a state of capability, is the mark of motion's incompleteness (*Phys.* 201b32–33). And it is this qualification that explains the fact that motion cannot be counted as ἐνέργεια ἀπλή (201b34–35), ἐνέργεια simply speaking or without qualification. On the contrary, ἐνέργεια, simply speaking, is characterized by being already in possession of the end. An example is a finished house with regard to the bricks or complete activities with regard to their corresponding capacities; this latter sort is complete precisely because activities such as sight or thinking have reached their end throughout every stage of the exercise of the capacity. The conclusion is that motion is not ἐνέργεια in the full sense and that we can only call it ἐνέργεια if we state that it is incomplete, as *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35 claims.

This account of motion is the one first introduced by Kosman (1969; 1984, 129–130; 2013, 70–71) and recently defended by Coope (2009), and Gonzalez (2019, 137–146). For these authors, the most important element of the definition of motion is the *qua* clause (ἢ τοιοῦτον), which serves the purpose of explaining the incompleteness of motion (cf. Kosman 1969, Coope 2009, 282–283, Gonzalez 2019, 138). However, this view has been met with some criticism recently. For example, Sentesy (2020, 54) believes that the *qua* clause in the definition serves the purpose not of marking motion's incompleteness but of distinguishing between the categorical and the “energetic” aspects of being, that is, between the underlying thing (ὑποκείμενον), which is a subject of predicates, and the capable (τὸ ὄν δυνάμει), which is capable of changing.<sup>426</sup> But to this we may reply that the *qua* clause *already applies* to the capable in the definition (τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος [...], ἢ

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<sup>426</sup> “The ‘as’ clause directs us to the being insofar as it is potent, that is, insofar as it is organized in relation to a function. This distinguishes it from the being that we name insofar as it is the bearer of categorical properties” (54).

τοιούτων), *not* to the ὑποκείμενον. The correct reading of the definition is not, as in Sentesy’s second translation of it, “the fulfilment of *a being* insofar as it is capable” (my emphasis),<sup>427</sup> but (using Sentesy’s terminology) the fulfillment of a *potential* being (capable of being a house), *insofar as it is potential* (*qua* capable of being a house, *i.e.*, without ceasing to be capable). Sentesy thus forces the grammar of the line and downplays the fact that δυνάμει applies directly to ὄντος (note that δυνάμει is between the article and the genitive ὄντος).

Moreover, the passage in which he claims the distinction between the categorical and the energetic is operational (201a29–b4) reads clearly as a distinction between the plain capacity for being a given substance (the bronze with regard to the statue) and the capacity *insofar as* it is capable, that is, the capacity in the context of a process of change. But Sentesy 2020, 47, believes that the “product puzzle”, as he names the problem of the distinction between a motion and its resulting product, is irrelevant since, he claims, Aristotle “contradicts the idea that change and its product must be mutually distinct phases”, citing *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a28–30 as evidence. I have already argued against this interpretation in ch 5.2 (cf. pp. 153–155), and I will provide additional arguments in the next subsection of this chapter: indeed, the passage at 1050a28–30, correctly read, shows precisely that Aristotle *does* establish an emphatic distinction between a process of production (the incomplete action which merely strives for the τέλος) and its product (the τέλος).

Sentesy’s idea that there is no essential distinction between a motion and its resulting product leads him to claim, contrary to Aristotle’s own words, that change itself can be regarded as complete (2020, 56, 73–76, 154 n. 47). This, in turn, leads him to severely misconstrue *EN* X 4, 1174a13–b23: according to Sentesy, in this passage “Aristotle either qualifies or resists the claim in the Passage [*sc.* *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35], that change (*kinesis*) is incomplete by arguing that it is incomplete in its parts, but complete as a whole” (2020, 15). But, as stated above, the completion of a motion (such as housebuilding) *is not the motion in itself* but the resulting οὐσία (such as the finished house, which has already been built) towards which the motion strives.<sup>428</sup> The notion of a “complete change” *qua* change goes against Aristotle’s own remarks in *Phys.* III 2,

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<sup>427</sup> This formulation reappears in key sections of his argument, such as in the interpretation of 201b5–13 at p. 56.

<sup>428</sup> Or resulting quantity, or quality, or location.

201b31–35; VIII 5, 257b8–9 and *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b29–30; K 9, 1066a20–24, where he clearly stated that *it is motion, and not merely its parts*, which is incomplete. There are also explicit traces of this doctrine in *EN* X 4, 1174a13–b23. At 1174b5–7, Aristotle claims that pleasure (which is analogous to complete activities such as sight) and motion are *different* (ἕτεροι) from one another, and that the former belongs to those things which are *whole and complete* (τῶν ὅλων τι καὶ τελείων), clearly implying that, on the contrary, motion *does not belong* to that which is whole and complete, *i.e., that it is in itself incomplete*. Sentesy (2020, 74–76) does not comment on the lines at 1174b5–7 in his analysis of *EN* X 4, 1174a13–b23, presumably because it so blatantly contradicts his own interpretation.

Sentesy’s view on change seems to rely essentially on the claim that there is a distinction between capacities for becoming and capacities for being. This position has been defended by Heinaman (1994), Beere (2009), and recently by Charles (2015), who responds to some criticism on this view made by Coope (2009, 280–281). But first of all, there is no explicit reference to such a distinction in Aristotle’s definition of motion (a fact acknowledged by Charles 2015, 192). Moreover, it is hard to see how, if we were to accept such a distinction, the ἐντελέχεια of a capacity for change could be said to be incomplete (Coope 2009, 281). Sentesy (2020, 77, and n. 42) tries to solve this difficulty by claiming that change is in fact complete, but as we have already noted, this view is not supported by Aristotle’s text. Finally, this distinction renders the *qua* clause irrelevant (cf. Kosman 1969, 42, Gonzalez 2019 139 n. 43). If a motion is the ἐντελέχεια or ἐνέργεια of a capacity to become, what is the purpose of qualifying it as ‘*qua* capable’? As noted above, Sentesy would respond by pointing to the alleged distinction between categorical and energetic senses of being, but, as it was also noted, this view seems not to be borne out by the text.

Although the problem of Aristotle’s definition of motion deserves a much further analysis than the one I can provide here, let us simply note that the interpretation I have defended seems to accord well with Aristotle’s own text, and that, although it is not exempt from hermeneutical problems, it is highly consistent with Aristotle’s argument in *Met.* Θ and in crucial passages of his earlier texts, as we saw in ch. 5. This view, moreover, seems to be confirmed by Aristotle’s argument regarding sensation in *DA* II 5 and III 7, to which we now turn.

### 8.2.2. Motion as ἀτελής ἐνέργεια in *DA* II 5, III 7

Aristotle also speaks of motion's incompleteness in two crucial passages from the *De Anima*. The first occurs in *DA* II 5, a chapter that concerns the status of sensation in general (περὶ πάσης αἰσθήσεως, 416b33–34). The second occurs in III 7, a brief passage that retraces to some extent the argument of II 5 and adds an important clarification.

These are much-discussed texts and I will not go into many of their details. I will limit myself to examining how Aristotle establishes the contrast between incomplete and complete cases of ἐνέργεια.

The main problem of II 5 is the question of whether sensation should be understood as a type of alteration (that is, as a change of quality, which for Aristotle is one of the four kinds of motion, κίνησις) or as another sort of action. The problem is particularly difficult since it is commonly thought (note δοκεῖ at *DA* II 5, 416b34) that sensation consists in the senses being affected by an external sensible thing. If being affected in the case of sensation were an alteration in the strict sense, then this would imply that the patient must change when affected, for motion typically involves reciprocal motion of both the agent and the patient. But Aristotle wants to make clear that this is not the case, and a large part of the chapter is devoted to showing how sensation *should not* be understood as a typical alteration, that is, as motion in the sense of *Phys.* III 1–3.

Aristotle restates at 417a9–13 what we have already seen in the *Protrepticus*, that is, that sensation is said in two ways (διχῶς, 417a10). Sensation can be understood either as the inactive possession of the capacity to perceive or as the active exercise (ἐνεργοῦν, 417a12) of said capacity. This claim sets the stage for the further elucidation of the activity of sense perception, which will depend on two further clarifications: firstly the distinction between ἐνέργεια proper and motion, and secondly the issue of the transition from being in capacity towards being active.

After distinguishing between sensation δυνάμει and sensation ἐνεργείᾳ, Aristotle affirms at 417a14–16 that, up to this point, he has been speaking as if πάσχειν, κινεῖσθαι and ἐνεργεῖν were the same.<sup>429</sup> These are the three ways in which he usually refers to

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<sup>429</sup> This is if we read the present indicative λέγομεν, with most manuscripts, instead of the subjunctive λέγομεν. Förster (1912) indicates in his apparatus that the former variant appears in SUVWXYp, while the latter in EC. The latter variant is usually taken as an hortatory claim that would condition the ensuing discussion (cf. Burnyeat 2002a, 66). This would mean that in the following argument Aristotle would be considering motion, being affected, and ἐνέργεια as if they were the same. But this seems hard to square with the immediately following claim which specifies the way in which motion *is not* ἐνέργεια in the full

sensation: as some kind of being affected, as an alteration, or as an activity. He then makes clear that he is now abandoning this inexact uniformity by restating the *Physics*' claim regarding motion's incompleteness: "for motion is a sort of ἐνέργεια, although incomplete, as it has been said elsewhere" (καὶ γὰρ ἔστιν ἡ κίνησις ἐνέργειά τις, ἀτελής μέντοι, καθάπερ ἐν ἑτέροις εἴρηται, 417a16–17). This is a direct reference to *Phys.* III 2, 201b31–32. It seems clear to me that Aristotle is here recalling the distinction of that passage, which spoke of ἀτελής ἐνέργεια in contrast with ἐνέργεια ἀπλή (cf. 201b34–35), thus showing that the equation between motion and ἐνέργεια is inherently false.

The importance of introducing this distinction in the context of *DA* II 5 is precisely to show how sensation *should not* be understood as typical motion. This specific argument is carefully developed by way of the introduction of the so-called "triple scheme", the distinction between first and second potentiality and first and second actuality (in Scholastic terms).<sup>430</sup> At 417a21–29 Aristotle establishes a difference between δύναμις as a raw capacity or, in Scholastic terms, first potentiality (such as the capacity any human being has to know, since it pertains to its definition) and δύναμις as a specific dispositional capacity (ἔξις) or second potentiality, such as knowledge of grammar. Conversely, one can be in act (ἐνεργεία) in the sense of actually *having* knowledge as a disposition (ἔξις) (someone who can read actually knows grammar, even when sleeping and not exercising that knowledge; first actuality), and in the sense of the actual exercise of that knowledge (knowing that "this is the letter A", second actuality). It is not difficult to see that both second potentiality and first actuality converge.

Aristotle introduces the distinction between the different states or 'levels' of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in order to confine alteration in the strict sense of the term to the transition from first potentiality toward second potentiality. This transition is described as the result of the frequent alteration (ἀλλοίωσις) of learning and change (μεταβολή) from one contrary to the other (417a31–32). Thus, one goes from not knowing (but being

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sense of the term. On the contrary, if we read λέγομεν, we can understand the statement as an indication that "we are speaking (up to this point) as if motion, being affected, and ἐνέργεια were the same", and that Aristotle intends to abandon the equation between the terms in what follows. This reading, recently defended by Anagnostopoulos (forthcoming, sections 4–5), seem to accord better with Aristotle's ensuing argument.

<sup>430</sup> I will use this scholastic terminology in what follows to refer to the triple scheme, simply in order to facilitate discussion. My argument has no commitment to these translations, which I have generally avoided throughout this dissertation.

capable of knowing, since he is a human being) to knowing something, in the sense of having the disposition (ἔξις) for knowing, by way of learning. This kind of transition implies the destruction or replacement of one contrary by the other (417b2–3).

However, one can actualize this ἔξις further “in another way” (ἄλλον τρόπον, 417b1–2), that is, by actually exercising his knowledge (actually knowing that “this is A”).<sup>431</sup> Aristotle claims that the transition involved in this kind of actualization, from the possession of knowledge (second potentiality/first actuality) to its active exercise (second actuality), should not be regarded as common alteration. On the contrary, it should be seen as a development towards oneself and towards ἐντελέχεια (εἰς αὐτὸ γὰρ ἢ ἐπίδοσις καὶ εἰς ἐντελέχειαν, 417b6–7), a transition which preserves (σωτηρία, b3) the capacity (rather than destroying a contrary state, as in the case of common alteration).

Aristotle began by posing the question regarding sensation in general (πάσης αἰσθήσεως 416b32–33), but in the course of his argument he ended up focusing on the transition from sensation in capacity toward actual perception. It is unclear whether he considers that there is any difference between this transition (understood as the inception of perception) and actual perception in itself.<sup>432</sup> However, this problem does not affect our present argument; if there were such a difference, it seems clear that actual perception (such as seeing) is not a motion, as *Met. Θ* 6 1048b18–35 and *EN X* 4 claim, and here Aristotle explains that *even the transition* towards this complete activity should not be regarded as a case of motion in the sense of *Phys. III* 1–3.<sup>433</sup> On the other hand, if there were no such distinction, then Aristotle’s argument in *DA II* 5 could be read as

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<sup>431</sup> It is useful to recall that Aristotle characterizes ἔξις as ἔχειν καὶ μὴ ἐνεργεῖν at *DA II* 1, 412a26.

<sup>432</sup> Burnyeat (2002a, 72–73) claims that the transition, though distinguishable, can be merged with actual perception (see also Bowin 2011, 156–157, who builds on this point). This view is opposed by Heinaman (2007, section 4 and 176–180).

<sup>433</sup> I would like to make clear that I am not taking a stance regarding the exact nature of perception, or whether it could be considered a refined kind of alteration which would differ from standard alteration, or as some specific kind of qualitative assimilation of the sense-object. My claim is more limited, and is basically the one made above: that, according to *II* 5, *sensation should not be regarded motion in the sense of Phys. III* 1–3. However, I would still like to note the following: the fact that Aristotle speaks of the second type of transition as a kind of being affected (πάσχειν) is not necessarily an indication that it should be understood as some sort of kinetic alteration or being changed. Indeed, this reading presupposes that all being affected is an instance of κίνησις, something which Aristotle seems to deny in 417a14–16, where he claims that being affected, motion and activity *are not* the same.

complementary to *Met.* Θ 6 1048b18–35. Both texts would describe the peculiar way in which ἐνέργεια is distinct from motion.<sup>434</sup>

Our interpretation seems to find confirmation in a passage from *DA* III 7. At 431a4–7, Aristotle states the following:

It is manifest that the sensible thing (τὸ αἰσθητόν) makes the sensible faculty (τοῦ αἰσθητικοῦ) go from what is in capacity (ἐκ δυνάμει ὄντος) towards what is in act (ἐνεργεία). For [the sensible faculty]<sup>435</sup> is not affected nor altered; consequently, this kind is different from motion, for motion is the ἐνέργεια of what is incomplete, while ἐνέργεια in the strict sense (ἀπλῶς) is different, of what has been completed.<sup>436</sup>

Aristotle claims first (431a4–5) that the capacity of sensation is activated by reason of an external object. But at 431a6–7 he wants to make clear that we should be wary of conceiving the relation between the perceiver and the perceptible thing as an instance of typical alteration, that is, as a motion. For, if this were case, then the activity of sensation<sup>437</sup> would have to be the ἐνέργεια of the incomplete, that is, the act of the capable

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<sup>434</sup> This is the reading of Kosman (1984; 2013).

<sup>435</sup> The line at a5 is sometimes taken as referring to τὸ αἰσθητόν, that is, to the external object which affects the subject's sensible capacity (translating as follows: “for [the sensible thing] is not affected nor altered”, cf. Menn 1994, 110 n. 49, Boeri 2015, 155 n. 370). It is certainly true that in sensation the external object does not change while still affecting the senses of the perceiver. But this seems to be beside the point of the present passage. What is at stake is the activity of the perceiving subject, not the activity of the perceptible object which is required for perception to occur (although both activities are one in number, they are different in being, cf. *DA* III 2, 425b15–16). Indeed, Aristotle's description of perception as a kind of activity that is opposed to motion resembles other passages, such as *Protr.* VII 43.10–25/B68–70, XI 56.15–57.23/B79–83, and *DA* II 5, which clearly refer to the activity of the perceiver; this congruence supports reading the passage as referring to the sensible faculty, and not to the sensible object. This is the reading adopted by Movia (1979, 186, 388), Burnyeat (2002, 68 and n. 103), Polansky (2007, 482), and Shields (2015, 336).

<sup>436</sup> φαίνεται δὲ τὸ μὲν αἰσθητόν ἐκ δυνάμει ὄντος τοῦ αἰσθητικοῦ ἐνεργεία ποιοῦν· οὐ γὰρ πάσχει οὐδ' ἀλλοιοῦται. διὸ ἄλλο εἶδος τοῦτο κινήσεως· ἢ γὰρ κίνησις τοῦ ἀτελοῦς ἐνέργεια, ἢ δ' ἀπλῶς ἐνέργεια ἐτέρα, ἢ τοῦ τετελεσμένου.

<sup>437</sup> Aristotle seems to be conflating here the transition towards perception (the activation) with actual perception (the activity). Although a distinction between the two could be established, it seems to be irrelevant in the present context, given that Aristotle speaks of ἀπλῶς ἐνέργεια, which presumably refers to the complete activity of perceiving.

insofar it remains capable: the capacity would remain to some degree capable while being actualized (*i.e.*, while being affected), and the end of this process would result in a new quality or state (for instance, an actual physical alteration of the sense-organ, such as the actual reddening of the eye when seeing something red). Sensation, instead, is an ἐνέργεια of a different kind, an ἐνέργεια of what has been completed: the capacity is fully expressed in its being active, and it does not remain capable to any degree. In perception, the activity consists in development towards the capacity itself. There is no replacement of one contrary by another; active perception is simply the complete capacity (the faculty of sensation) in its fullest expression.

This implies that both the capacity (the sense) and its activity (actual sensation) are complete, though in different senses (the two levels of ἐνέργεια described in *DA* II 5, 417a21–29). Aristotle states that the activity (second actuality) of such a complete capacity (first actuality) is ἐνέργεια in the proper sense of the term: it is ἐνέργεια simply speaking or without qualification (ἀπλῶς ἐνέργεια).

It seems clear that this passage runs parallel with the one we saw at *Phys.* 201b32–35, where Aristotle spoke both of ἀτελής ἐνέργεια and ἐνέργεια ἀπλή. This adds to the previous parallel we saw in *DA* II 5. Moreover, the passage provides a further clarification by specifying that ἐνέργεια simply speaking is of that which has been completed. Motion, instead, is of that which is incomplete. Its incompleteness is found in the qualified nature of the actualized capacity: motion is not the act of the capable *simpliciter* but of the capable qua capable.

Many more things could be said about these passages. But let us focus simply on two facts that serve our current purposes. The first one is that the passages cited above rely on the distinction between motion and activity in order to support the claim that sensation is not a case of ordinary alteration. This speaks of a highly consistent theory concerning ἐνέργεια across *Phys.* III 1–3, *DA* II 5, III 7, and *Met.* Θ.

The second one concerns the distinction between levels of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια (the so-called triple scheme). Although this distinction is absent from Θ, it is important to note that it also revolves fundamentally around the criterion of completeness or end-having. Aristotle had introduced in his earlier works the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in order to describe the duality of human action. This duality corresponds in the *De Anima* to what the tradition calls second potentiality and second actuality. But in *De Anima*, Aristotle contends that both these modes of being are in a way complete, if we compare them to a more basic sense of δύναμις, understood as a raw capacity. Indeed, he

contends in *De Anima* that there is a sense in which a δύναμις can be said to have been already fulfilled, a sense in which we could say that it has reached its end, and so, that it is ἐντελέχεια. An example: a human being who lacks some knowledge (first potentiality) can acquire through learning a complete knowledge of a τέχνη (second potentiality/first actuality).

The crucial thing to note is that this complete being (a knowledgeable human being) *is also capable of some further activation*: for example, a human being can actively put his knowledge to work. This second sense of ἐντελέχεια/ἐνέργεια is the stronger of the two, a claim already made in the *Protrepticus* (in this work, Aristotle refers to the first sense simply as δύναμις). But this does not imply that the first sense cannot be said to be in itself complete, at least from a psychological perspective such as the one of the *De Anima*.

This argument shows two things. First, that the most defining aspect of the concept of ἐνέργεια is its relation to τέλος. This applies to either of the two senses of ἐντελέχεια/ἐνέργεια explored in *DA II 5*. Secondly, the argument seems implicitly to prefigure (or at least to be in strong agreement with) Aristotle's doctrine of the priority of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις. Indeed, the further activity that can be enacted by a complete capable being is the reason one has a complete capacity in the first place. In other words, a complete capacity is a capacity *for* its corresponding activity. And this will be precisely Aristotle's argument in *Θ 8*, which concerns the priority of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις.

### **8.2.3. On the scope of the κίνησις-ἐνέργεια distinction**

The distinction between motion and activity has revealed itself as a crucial element in Aristotle's theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. It allows us to understand properly the fundamentally derivative character of motion. Motion is structured according to a conceptual framework that is fundamentally independent of it: the capacity-exercise structure. This structure corresponds primarily to activities that contain their ends in themselves. This is a crucial realization: by underscoring motion's inadequacy, Aristotle redirects us to the proper concept of ἐνέργεια.<sup>438</sup> This concept is described in *Met. Θ 6*,

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<sup>438</sup> *Contra* Aubenque (1962, 441), who believes the opposite to be true: "The Aristotelian notion of act, from the very moment that Aristotle distinguishes it from motion itself, reveals its rootedness in motion"

1048b18–35 fundamentally as an activity, but we have reason to believe that it extends to the substance application of ἐνέργεια. For the criterion which distinguishes motion from activity is the relation that each action establishes with its end: activity is ἐνέργεια in the proper sense of the term because it is complete. And this feature is also present in the case of substantial form.

In conclusion, Θ 6 succeeds in going beyond the motion sense of ἐνέργεια and provides insight into its non-motion or ‘useful’ applications. However, some points remain obscure: are the two non-motion applications at the same level? Or is one prior to the other? And how is it possible for the same term to apply to what is essentially active (complete activity) and to what seems, at least at first sight, to be static (substantial form)?

To answer these questions, we must now turn to Θ 8. In this chapter, Aristotle not only provides further discussion on the relation between the various applications of ἐνέργεια but crucially extends the analysis from the narrow perspective of perishable substances toward the broader one of non-perishable substances. This extension will show that, with his concept of ἐνέργεια, Aristotle is able to break the strict dichotomy between being and becoming that was defended by some of his predecessors—in particular, by his Megarian opponents.

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*(La notion aristotélicienne d’acte, au moment même où Aristote la distingue du mouvement lui-même, révèle donc son enracinement dans le mouvement).*

## CHAPTER 9

### The priority of ἐνέργεια and the activity of non-perishable substance (*Met.* Θ 8)

All of the different threads of Aristotle’s argument that we have analyzed up to this point come together in Θ 8. In this chapter, Aristotle uses some of the distinctions made in Θ 6 in order to prove that ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις in being. The argument is complex, and I will not address all of the issues involved in the chapter. I will divide my argument into two sections. The first focuses on the chapter’s thematization of ἐνέργεια as being complete (section 9.1), the second examines Aristotle’s extension of the analysis toward immaterial substances (section 9.2). This will show that although substance and activity constitute the two full applications of ἐνέργεια, it is only the latter that is capable of truly transcending the domain of becoming.

#### 9.1. Substance and activity: ἐνέργεια as being complete (1049b4–1050b6)

##### 9.1.1 Preliminary considerations

Aristotle’s argument in Θ 8 is intended to demonstrate the priority of ἐνέργεια with respect to δύναμις (ὅτι πρότερον ἐνέργεια δυνάμεώς ἐστιν, 1049b5). Two main questions naturally arise: what does Aristotle understand by *priority* in this chapter? And what is the purpose of claiming that ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις in the context of Aristotle’s wider argument in Θ?

In relation to the first question, we should note that, at the outset of the chapter, Aristotle refers to a previous discussion on the several meanings of priority (“Given that it was already established the ways in which ‘prior’ is said”, ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ πρότερον διώρισται ποσαχῶς λέγεται, 1049b4–5). He is most probably alluding to Δ 11.<sup>439</sup> In this passage, Aristotle distinguishes several senses of prior, some of which reappear in Θ 8, while others are absent. For instance, Δ 11 refers to temporal priority, which is picked up and developed in Θ 8, while priority in place or in motion, included in Δ 11, are absent in Θ 8. Δ 11 also includes a complex discussion of priority “in nature and in substance” (κατὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐσίαν, 1019a2–3), which is understood fundamentally as existential (in)dependence: A is prior in substance to B if A can exist independently from B, and B

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<sup>439</sup> Another possible reference is *Cat.* 12, 13. The text is also related to *Met.* Z 1, 1028a31–b2.

is posterior in being to A if B cannot exist without A. Aristotle associates this criterion with Plato (ἢ διαιρέσει ἐχρήσατο Πλάτων, 1019a4),<sup>440</sup> and it seems to fit well with the discussion of the priority of immaterial substances in the last part of Θ 8 (1050b6–34).<sup>441</sup> However, Aristotle seems to rely mainly on teleological considerations in his initial discussion of the priority in being of ἐνέργεια (1050a4–b6). This teleological perspective introduces new complexities not included in Δ 11’s discussion of priority.<sup>442</sup>

On the second question, we must first note that the doctrine of the priority of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις is a structural feature of Aristotle’s theory. The original contrast between having a capacity and exercising it was introduced in the *Protrepticus* to capture the duality which affects human action. Aristotle saw that some terms that denote human activities admit of a double reference (the possession of the capacity to act and the act itself), but he did not hesitate to claim at that early stage that the activity should be considered prior when compared to the capacity.<sup>443</sup> This means that Aristotle considered the concept of ἐνέργεια, from its very origins, as more fundamental than that of δύναμις from an ontological point of view.

But stressing the priority of ἐνέργεια (particularly its priority *in being*) serves a crucial purpose within Aristotle’s argument in Θ, and beyond. Indeed, he contends that the ultimate ἀρχή of any given substance is not to be found in some δύναμις but in an ἐνέργεια. With this claim, Aristotle goes against many of his predecessors, such as the

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<sup>440</sup> Ross (1924 I, 317) states that there seems to be no passage in Plato that presents this criterion. He argues that Aristotle must be referring to an oral teaching by Plato.

<sup>441</sup> It should be noted, however, that the discussion at 1050b6–28 seems to complement the criterion of existential dependence with the notion of *causal priority*. This former notion is interestingly alluded to in *Cat.* 12, 14b9–13. On this issue see 9.2. below.

<sup>442</sup> Makin (2003; 2006, 192–196) addresses (and tries to resolve) some of the tensions between the criterion of existential independence of Δ 11 and Aristotle’s argument in Θ 8. Beere (2008; 2009, 293–324) claims that Aristotle presents not one but two criteria when discussing the priority in being of ἐνέργεια. Judson (2016, 148) claims that the discussion of immaterial substances (1050b6–28) introduces a new way in which ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις, distinct from the one presented in the previous discussion of priority in being. Judson relates 1050b6–28 to the discussion in *Met.* Α 6, 1071b12–21. I will provide some discussion on the views of these authors further below in 9.2.

<sup>443</sup> Cf. *Protr.* 57.10–12/B81: “for example, ‘knowing’ (ἐπίστασθαι) belongs more to the one who uses [his knowledge] than to the one who has the knowledge (μᾶλλον τὸν χρώμενον τοῦ τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχοντος), and ‘seeing’ belongs more to the one who is applying his vision than to the one who is capable of applying it (ὁρᾶν δὲ τὸν προσβάλλοντα τὴν ὄψιν τοῦ δυναμένου προσβάλλειν)”.

Presocratics, who—in his reading—believed that all being ultimately derives from δύναμις.<sup>444</sup> He also distances himself from Plato, who, as we saw, went as far as to define being as a specific kind of δύναμις in the *Sophist*.<sup>445</sup> So his argument in favor of the priority of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις goes against what seems to be a popular view that precedes Aristotle.

It is crucial to note that claiming that the origin of any given being is to be found in an ἐνέργεια allows Aristotle to explain the causality of being from an efficient perspective. He alludes to this type of causal priority of ἐνέργεια in two passages in Θ 8: the first one occurs in the context of his argument for the priority of ἐνέργεια in time (1049b17–1050a3, recalled in 1050b4–6), and the second one, I will argue, in his discussion of immaterial substances, in particular in 1050b6–28. The core idea for Aristotle is that each being comes to be by, and depends on, the activity of an actual being. This causal dependence between beings introduces a chain of efficient causes which, on

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<sup>444</sup> Cf. for instance Aristotle's characterization of Anaxagoras in *Met.* Λ 2 1069b20–24, Λ 6 1071b26–29, Λ 7 1072a19–20. In the passage from Λ 2 Aristotle links Anaxagoras to other Presocratic philosophers such as Empedocles, Anaximander and Democritus.

<sup>445</sup> Moreover, Aristotle also characterizes at least some of Plato's Forms in terms of δύναμις in *Met.* Θ 8, 1050b36–1051a2. This characterization is connected with one of his famous criticisms of Plato's Theory of Forms, according to which Forms are not actual causes of the beings which partake in them (*Met.* Α 9, 991a11). Aristotle argues that Forms cannot act; they are wholly separate from their corresponding beings. Now, in Θ 8, 1050b36–1051a2, he claims that if an action should be identified with an ἐνέργεια, then in the case of the Form of motion or the Form of knowledge, the actual motion and the actual knowing would be even more of a Form than the Forms themselves, for the latter would be simply the δύναμις for such actions. We thus arrive to an absurd conclusion which attempts to undermine the claim that Platonic Forms could be regarded as principles of being. Cf. also *Met.* Λ 6 1071b14–22.

pain of regression, must end in an ultimate cause<sup>446</sup> that is not caused by anything else and moves without being itself in motion: the Prime Mover.<sup>447</sup>

In other words, the true cause of all motion cannot be placed in a δύναμις since what is capable (δυνατόν) of acting is also capable of failing to do so (1050b10–11). It must necessarily be a continuous and eternal act (ἐνέργεια).<sup>448</sup> Thus, the argument for the priority of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις could not be of a higher significance in Aristotle’s wider metaphysical project.

But what is the distinctive character of ἐνέργεια that explains this priority over δύναμις? This is a crucial point: Aristotle will claim that the most fundamental aspect of ἐνέργεια is its *being an end*. In other words, the notions of ἐνέργεια and τέλος, for Aristotle, coincide. It is a *complete being* that functions as the cause of that which is *inherently incomplete* (since δύναμις is, by definition, what can be completed, what is capable of *attaining* its corresponding ἐνέργεια/τέλος). Moreover, the equivalence between ἐνέργεια and τέλος also allows Aristotle to associate ἐνέργεια and form (εἶδος).<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> The specific kind of causality of the Prime Mover is a matter of discussion. The traditional interpretation contends that the Prime Mover is fundamentally a final cause (a view recently defended by Laks 2000), but many scholars have recently claimed that it should be understood as an efficient cause (cf. in particular the works of Berti 1997, 2000, 2002. This view is also defended in various ways by Broadie 1993; Kosman 1994; Judson 1994; 2019, 185–186, Frede 2000, 43–47. Berti 2014 has replied to some criticism to his position made by Flannery 2011, Stevens 2011, and Gourinat 2012; 2013). The debate, however, is not strictly relevant to our present purposes; what matters for us is that the chain of efficient causes leads to a primary cause which determines and sustains all motion.

<sup>447</sup> This chain of efficient causes should not be interpreted in strict temporal terms. It is not the case that the Prime Mover is the original “ancestor” of all that is; it is instead the eternal cause which sustains all motion. This idea is closer to Aristotle’s argument in *Phys.* VIII and *Met.* Λ, 6–7.

<sup>448</sup> That is why Aristotle claims, against the Presocratics, that “the sun and the stars and the whole heaven are always acting, and there is no fear that they might stop at some time, which those who research nature fear” (ἀεὶ ἐνεργεῖ ἥλιος καὶ ἄστρα καὶ ὅλος ὁ οὐρανός, καὶ οὐ φοβερὸν μὴ ποτε στή, ὃ φοβοῦνται οἱ περὶ φύσεως, 1050b22–24). This fear would be caused, in Aristotle’s view, by their belief that the principle is δύναμις, and not ἐνέργεια.

<sup>449</sup> Cf. Θ 8, 1050a4–9: “that which is posterior in coming to be is prior in form and in substance (τῷ εἶδει καὶ τῇ οὐσίᾳ) [...] and everything which comes to be progresses toward the principle (ἀρχή), that is, toward the end (τέλος) [...] and the ἐνέργεια is the end (τέλος).” I will explore more thoroughly these connections in the next subsection.

Thus, ἐνέργεια reveals itself not only as the efficient cause but as the final and formal causes of its corresponding δύναμις. This is a major achievement of Θ 8 which, as I mentioned above, has important consequences for Aristotle's extension of his analysis of being beyond the domain of perishable substances.

### 9.1.2. A brief note on 1049b5–10

Before moving on, let us say a few words about the opening statements of Θ 8. Aristotle claims at 1049b5–10 that the priority of ἐνέργεια concerns not only the kind of δύναμις that was defined as a principle of change in another or in oneself *qua* other, but also a new kind, which Aristotle now introduces. In effect, he claims that this priority applies to the case in which δύναμις is a principle of change not in another or in oneself *qua* other, but *in oneself qua itself*. This, Aristotle states, is the case of nature (φύσις, 1049b8). This is a significant assertion, which we cannot analyze in detail here. But let us make some indicative claims about it.

One could expect that, at the outset of Θ 8, Aristotle would allude to all sorts of δυνάμεις, since he claims that ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις in general. But in this opening passage, he refers only to two distinct cases *within* the motion application of δύναμις. The only difference between these two motion variants is that in one case the principle of change is in another (or in oneself *qua* other), while in the other the principle of change is oneself *qua* itself. Indeed, Aristotle does not allude in this passage to any of the non-motion applications of δύναμις, such as matter (which is the capacity *for being*, not for becoming, a given substance), or the case of capacities for actions that do not involve change (such as thinking or sight). This means that the passage refers only to the κύριος sense of δύναμις, and not to the useful sense (which forcefully extends beyond the sphere of motion).

Why put so much emphasis on the κύριος sense of δύναμις at the outset of Θ 8? It seems to me that there is one main reason which concerns the argumentative structure of the chapter, as anticipated above. Focusing on δύναμις as a principle of change naturally leads us to the question of the ultimate origin of that δύναμις and of the change of which it is a principle. In other words, the κύριος sense of δύναμις allows Aristotle to introduce the perspective of efficient causality, which is decisive in his argument in the chapter (cf. 1049b23–29, 1050b4–6, and the discussion of immaterial substances, especially at 1050b6–28).

Aristotle will show that any being with a capacity for producing change (be it in another, in oneself *qua* other, or in oneself *qua* oneself) depends ultimately on an independent external *active* cause. This means that the original source of all motion (and of all beings which have the capacity for initiating motion) must ultimately be placed in an ἐνέργεια. Thus, the notion of δύναμις as a principle of change leads us to the necessary ἐνέργεια which lies behind it. This applies to the domain of perishable beings, but it also points toward the realm of immaterial beings. In effect, this perspective allows Aristotle to transcend the realm of change since, as we said, the chain of efficient causes must end in an unmoved principle that functions as the cause of all motion.

In summary, the κύριος sense of δύναμις, which is considered less useful in Θ 1, appears to be instrumental in introducing the causal perspective which will lead Aristotle to the establishment of a necessary stratum of immaterial beings, which are characterized fundamentally in terms of ἐνέργεια, and not of δύναμις, as we will soon see.<sup>450</sup>

### 9.1.3. Three kinds of priority: in definition, in time, in substance

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<sup>450</sup> A second reason could explain Aristotle's choice of focusing on the κύριος sense of δύναμις at 1049b5–10. The description of nature as a principle of change in oneself *qua* itself seems to contribute to our understanding of the unity of substantial compounds. This is a point which has been put forward by Gill (2021), and on which I cannot expand here. But let us simply note the following. It seems that the kind of motion that characterizes nature, or natural beings in general, implies that we are dealing *with unified wholes*. In the case of regular cases of motion, a distinction can be established between the agent and the patient. But in the case of the motion of nature (which presumably includes the natural motions of hylomorphic compounds) no distinction can be made. Natural substantial compounds affect themselves *qua* themselves in natural processes of growth, of changes in quality, locomotion, etc. And for this to be possible we must be dealing with unified wholes to begin with.

This means that the problems that concerned the unity of substantial compounds, which had emerged in ZH, can be solved by way of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast. Aristotle claims at H 6 that the concepts of matter and form should be understood in terms of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Now we learn that the processes of change that characterize substantial compounds require them to be constituted as unified wholes. We have here, therefore, a clear indication that there is no ontological separation between matter and form, since the agent of the changes experienced by a substance is to be identified with the form of the compound (*i.e.*, the ἐνέργεια which, as Aristotle claims, is prior to δύναμις), and the patient that undergoes this change is the matter (*i.e.*, the δύναμις). Both parts, then, would constitute a single entity, in which change occurs by itself and in itself.

With these preliminary considerations in mind, let us now turn to Aristotle's argument in chapter 8. He specifies at 1049b10–12 that the priority of ἐνέργεια with respect to δύναμις is threefold: in notion (λόγῳ), in substance (οὐσίᾳ), and in time (χρόνῳ). Priority in notion seems to be rather straightforward: the definition of a δύναμις necessarily presupposes its corresponding ἐνέργεια (1049b12–17). Being capable of seeing presupposes that there is an activity of seeing in the first place. In other words, a capacity cannot be known or defined without referring to the corresponding notion of the activity of which the capacity is capable.

The priority in time is not so straightforward. In effect, both δύναμις and ἐνέργεια exist in time, and there are good reasons to believe that δύναμις is indeed prior in time to ἐνέργεια. This requires some explaining by Aristotle.

He begins by introducing two examples: the generation of a sensible substance and the activity of seeing (1049b19–23), though it is the former example that guides the argument. He states that from the point of view of their coming to be, there is a sense in which the matter and the capacity to see (*i.e.*, the δύναμις) preexist the actual being and the seeing. Menses precedes the child, and the piece of bronze precedes the actual statue that is shaped from it. So there is a sense in which δύναμις is in fact prior in time to ἐνέργεια.

But, also, every coming to be requires the action of an already actual being (ὄντα ἐνεργείᾳ, 1049b23–24), which functions as its cause (1049b23–29). This applies to both examples, generation and activities such as seeing or housebuilding: the process of generation depends on the activity of an actual being which serves as its source, and a given capacity is bestowed to a subject by someone who actually has and exercises this capacity (such as an actual housebuilder who teaches housebuilding to another person). It is in this specific sense that ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις in time. Thus, the claim that ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις in time can be stated only with a qualification, for in one sense it is prior, while in another sense it is not.

Aristotle's argument for the priority in being of ἐνέργεια is even more complex and relies heavily on his previous argument, particularly on Θ 6. The argument is divided into two parts, the first concerning ἐνέργεια in the case of the substances (1050a4–b6) and the second concerning immaterial substances (1050b6–1051a3). I will now focus on Aristotle's first argument.

Aristotle's strategy to demonstrate the priority in being of ἐνέργεια consists in showing that ἐνέργεια is fundamentally an end (τέλος). This allows him to claim that

ἐνέργεια is an ἀρχή. This parallel is fundamental in securing the priority in being of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις, for if ἐνέργεια is a τέλος and if τέλος coincides with ἀρχή, then it would be possible to claim that ἐνέργεια is the governing (or final) cause of its corresponding δύναμις. And this would be sufficient to prove the priority of ἐνέργεια.

Broadie (2010, 199) claims that in order for the argument to succeed, “Aristotle must interpret *arche* in terms of final causality”, although “he gives no grounds for preferring this interpretation”. But Aristotle introduces the issue of finality quite explicitly in the following passage:

But it [*sc.* ἐνέργεια] is also prior in substance, first because what is posterior in coming to be is prior in form and in substance (such as a man to a child and a human being to seed; for the one has the form while the other does not), and because everything which comes to be progresses toward the ἀρχή, that is, toward the end (τέλος) (for the ἀρχή is that for the sake of which [the coming to be takes place] and the coming to be is for the sake of the end), and the ἐνέργεια is τέλος, and it is because of this that the capacity is acquired (1050a4–10).<sup>451</sup>

The argument picks up the distinction made on the occasion of proving the priority of ἐνέργεια in time, claiming that that which is posterior in coming to be is prior in form. In effect, the passage intends to establish a crucial equivalence between the notions of form (εἶδος), principle (ἀρχή), ἐνέργεια, and τέλος. Aristotle’s main point is that everything that comes to be (be it a process of generation, or the coming to be<sup>452</sup> of an activity) does so for the sake of its end (τέλος), which is equivalent to its ἀρχή (1050a7–8). The crucial concept here is that of “being for the sake of” (ἔνεκα): all that comes to be does so for the sake of its result, and this scheme applies to δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, for the ἐνέργεια is the end of its δύναμις. Thus, the ἐνέργεια reveals itself to be not only the efficient cause of

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<sup>451</sup> Ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ οὐσία γε, πρῶτον μὲν ὅτι τὰ τῆ γενέσει ὕστερα τῶ εἶδει καὶ τῆ οὐσία πρότερα (οἷον ἀνὴρ παιδὸς καὶ ἄνθρωπος σπέρματος· τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἤδη ἔχει τὸ εἶδος τὸ δ’ οὐ), καὶ ὅτι ἅπαν ἐπ’ ἀρχὴν βαδίζει τὸ γιγνόμενον καὶ τέλος (ἀρχὴ γὰρ τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα, τοῦ τέλους δὲ ἔνεκα ἢ γένεσις), τέλος δ’ ἢ ἐνέργεια, καὶ τούτου χάριν ἢ δύναμις λαμβάνεται.

<sup>452</sup> Although Aristotle uses the verb γίγνομαι here, *DA* 416b1–3 makes clear that it would be wrong to claim that sight “comes to be” when exercised; in fact, no change takes place when one passes from the mere inactive possession of a capacity to its active exercise. The point Aristotle is making is that the capacity of sight is for the sake of seeing, and not the other way around.

the coming to be of a δύνάμις (something which was anticipated in the argument of the priority in time) but also its formal and final causes.

This is further stressed by Aristotle in 1050a10–14, which focuses on the examples of sight, of housebuilding, and of contemplation. That is, on both complete and incomplete activities (motions). In all these cases, the capacity is for the sake of the correspondent activity: one has sight for seeing, the technical craft of housebuilding for housebuilding, and the capacity of contemplation for contemplating. But he also includes the case of substances, as can be seen in the following passage:

Again, the matter is in capacity because it can go to the form; and when it is in ἐνέργεια, it is in the form. And the same applies to the other cases, even (καί) those in which the end is a motion, which is why just as teachers consider that they have delivered the end when they have exhibited the student acting, so is the case in nature. For if this were not the case, it would be as the Pauson Hermes;<sup>453</sup> for it is unclear whether the knowledge is inside or outside, as is in that case (1050a15–21).<sup>454</sup>

The purpose of the passage is to underscore once more the core idea that ἐνέργεια is the end of its corresponding δύνάμις. This applies to the whole range of applications of ἐνέργεια. But Aristotle presents these applications in a peculiar way. He speaks first of matter and form and then of some “other cases, even (καί) those in which the end is a motion (κίνησις τὸ τέλος)” (1050a16–17).

It seems evident that in the first case ἐνέργεια is an end, since “the matter is in capacity (δυνάμει) because it can go to the form”, making clear that ἐνέργεια is, in this case, the form. This claim had already been made in H 6, 1045a23–24, 1045b16–19; Θ 6, 1048b8–9 and will be restated at Θ 8, 1050b2–3. The key to fully understand this claim is Aristotle’s argument in Θ 7. In this chapter, Aristotle argues that something is in capacity (δυνάμει) if it will be in act (ἐνέργεια) if the conditions which define it as a δύνάμις are present. This means that, if the appropriate conditions are present, the matter

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<sup>453</sup> According to Ross (1924 II 263–264), this is an allusion to a kind of trick painting in which the image stands out in high relief from the canvas.

<sup>454</sup> ἔτι ἡ ὕλη ἔστι δυνάμει ὅτι ἔλθοι ἂν εἰς τὸ εἶδος· ὅταν δέ γε ἐνεργείῃ ἢ, τότε ἐν τῷ εἶδει ἐστίν. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ ὧν κίνησις τὸ τέλος, διὸ ὥσπερ οἱ διδάσκοντες ἐνεργοῦντα ἐπιδείξαντες οἴονται τὸ τέλος ἀποδεδοκέναι, καὶ ἡ φύσις ὁμοίως. εἰ γὰρ μὴ οὕτω γίγνεται, ὁ Παύσωνος ἔσται Ἑρμῆς· ἀδηλος γὰρ καὶ ἡ ἐπιστήμη εἰ ἔσω ἢ ἔξω, ὥσπερ καὶ κεῖνος.

would *necessarily* go to the form (ἔλθοι ἂν εἰς τὸ εἶδος), and thus be in the form (ἐν τῷ εἶδει ἔστιν).<sup>455</sup> So claiming that the matter “can go to the form” means that if the necessary conditions are met, the matter will necessarily reach its end and thus *be* a fully-fledged substance.

However, “the other cases” require a qualification. Indeed, complete activities are ends, since their end has already been reached when exercised. But incomplete or poietic activities are *different from their ends*; how is ἐνέργεια an end in this case? This presents a difficulty that Aristotle must address. Indeed, the whole of the subsequent argument is directed to showing that motions can also be ends in a way, although in a *derivative* manner, wholly dependent on the external end toward which they are directed.<sup>456</sup>

Before we continue, two things should be noted about this passage. The first is that it would be wrong to read the lines at 1050a15–17 as capturing the whole range of applications of ἐνέργεια under two headings, motion and substantial form. Aristotle speaks of “other cases” (τῶν ἄλλων) and says that among these other cases, there are some in which a motion is an end. The clear implication of this is that some of the “other cases” *do not have motion as an end*. Moreover, Aristotle introduces immediately after this passage a distinct kind of ἐνέργεια, which is neither form nor motion: complete activities in which the end has already been reached whenever exercised.

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<sup>455</sup> At Θ 7, 1049a8–18, Aristotle illustrates the substance case of δύναμις-ἐνέργεια with two examples: a house and a human being. He explains that something is in capacity a house if a) there are no internal impediments to the capable thing (that is, the matter which will be produced into a house) and b) there is no need of adding or subtracting or changing anything to the capable thing. This capability is of course in need of an external efficient cause in order to reach the form; the external cause (the builder) turns the material (e.g., the bricks) into the house. In the case of a human being, there is no need of an *external* efficient cause, since the principle which determines its coming to be is inherent to that which is capable: in this case, what is in capacity a human being (the sperm in a particular set of circumstances and in a particular state, 1049a14–15) will go to the form (the actual human being) if there are no external impediments and if the capable thing does not need be modified in any way.

<sup>456</sup> This is also the reading of Broadie (2010, 204–205). She contends that motions (what she calls transitive activities) are a problematic case in the context of proving that ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις, since it is not immediately clear in which way motions can be said to be an end. Sentesy (2020, 149) also thinks that the relation between ἐνέργεια and τέλος constitutes Aristotle’s main worry in this passage, but, contrary to the view defended here, he goes on to claim that motions are indeed complete in a strong sense (on which, see pp. 245–248 above).

Secondly, the idea that ἐνέργεια could have a motion as an end may seem initially puzzling, but here Aristotle is referring to a specific set of cases, as can be seen from the examples that follow, such as the activity of teaching. Indeed, the result of a process of teaching is the acquisition of a capacity in the soul of the learner. When a student exercises this capacity, the teacher has shown that his teaching has reached its end. In this case, the exercise of the capacity consists, for the most part, of motions: for example, a student exhibits his knowledge of a τέχνη by carrying out the motions involved in its exercise. The same is true in the case of nature (mentioned by Aristotle in 1050a19): the result of a process of generation is the emergence of a living substance that in itself has the capacity for motion. It is in this restricted sense that Aristotle speaks of cases of ἐνέργεια “in which the end is a motion”.<sup>457</sup>

#### 9.1.4. Substance, activity, and the telic status of motion

Aristotle then addresses the difficulty mentioned earlier, regarding the telic status of motion. The solution to this difficulty is found in the doctrine of the distinction between motion and activity presented in the second part of Θ 6. However, the discussion of motion and activity in Θ 8 provides further insight that not only seems to confirm our previous interpretation of the distinction, but also helps us understand better the

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<sup>457</sup> It could be argued that one can learn capacities which do not involve motion in their exercise, such as mathematical or grammatical knowledge. When the student exercises these capacities, there would be no motion but the teacher would still have shown that his teaching has reached its end. However, how could one truly tell if a student has acquired the knowledge in the case of theoretical knowledge? Aristotle says in *Met.* A 1, 985b7–8 that the sign (σημείον) that distinguishes those who know from those who do not know (τοῦ εἰδότος καὶ μὴ εἰδότος) is their capacity to teach (τὸ δύνασθαι διδάσκειν). But teaching is a motion: it is an activity directed towards an external end which necessarily takes time for its completion. Moreover, Aristotle explicitly claims that learning, the passive counterpart of teaching, is a motion in *DA* II 5, 417a30–b2 and *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b24–25, 29–30, and Aristotle believes that teaching and learning, though different in definition, are two aspects of a same motion, “as the road to Thebes from Athens is the same as the road to Athens from Thebes”, since “their sameness belongs to this: the motion” (*Phys.* III 3, 202b13–14, 19–21). So, even in the case of non-poietic activities such as putting to work one’s mathematical or grammatical knowledge, the way to tell if a student has learned would be through a motion (teaching) (I am thus in disagreement with Broadie 2010, 202 n. 4, who thinks that Aristotle is using κίνησις at 1050a17 in such a broad way as to include complete activities).

fundamental analogical relation between complete activity and substantial form, that is, between the two full applications of ἐνέργεια.

Let us turn to the text. Aristotle introduces the distinction between different kinds of actions with a preliminary statement, already discussed in chapters 5.2 and 7.5: “the ἔργον is τέλος, and the ἐνέργεια is the ἔργον, and that is why the name ἐνέργεια is related to ἔργον (τοῦνομα ἐνέργεια λέγεται κατὰ τὸ ἔργον) and stretches toward ἐντελέχεια (συντείνει πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν)” (1050a21–23). This statement is, crucially, connected with the previous argument. Aristotle wants to highlight once again (cf. 1050a9) the extent to which the concept of ἐνέργεια corresponds with that of τέλος. He does so by noting that ἔργον, the term upon which ἐνέργεια is formed, *coincides* with τέλος.<sup>458</sup> As we saw in 5.2, this point was also made in *EE* II 1, 1219a8. This last passage is particularly illuminating because it goes on to claim, at 1219a13–17, that ἔργον refers both to substances and to complete activities, that is, to two instances that are characterized precisely by having their ends in themselves. This explains the fact that ἐνέργεια “stretches toward” (that is, signifies) ἐντελέχεια.<sup>459</sup> this latter term is precisely formed upon τέλος, and could be translated as “having the end within”.

As we said above, there are two cases of ἐνέργεια which can be clearly described as having their ends in themselves: substance and activity. But a third case is problematic: motion. The next passage intends to clarify the status of this problematic case:

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<sup>458</sup> In his discussion of this passage, Senteny introduces a distinction between two senses of τέλος (2020, 148, 157), one corresponding to the “fulfillment of a potency”, *i.e.* change, and the other to the “work-object”, *i.e.* the resulting οὐσία of a process of generation. But where in the text does Aristotle introduce such a distinction? Moreover, the distinction between two kinds of τέλος recalls the problem of the alleged contrast between ἐνέργεια as activity (the process which yields an οὐσία) and ἐντελέχεια as actuality (the οὐσία in question), which we have discussed amply earlier. Not only does Senteny appear to assert this distinction, but he goes on to claim “[e]nergeia does not [...] have a fixed relationship with *telos*; it is not simply, or by definition, complete” (79). But then, what should we make of Aristotle’s repeated use of the expression ἐνέργεια ἀπλῶς, *i.e.* ἐνέργεια simply speaking or without qualification (*Phys.* III 2, 201b31–35, VIII 5, 257b8–9; *DA* III 7, 431a7)? In the *De Anima*’s passage, ἐνέργεια ἀπλῶς is explicitly said to be of that which has been completed (τοῦ τετελεσμένου). How does ἐνέργεια not have “a fixed relationship with *telos*” in this case? And why does Aristotle consider that this is the most proper kind of ἐνέργεια (ἀπλῶς)?

<sup>459</sup> Recall  $\Theta$  3, 1047a30–31, where it was claimed that “the name ἐνέργεια is put together with ἐντελέχεια”.

Given that in some cases that which is last (ἔσχατον)<sup>460</sup> is the exercise (χρησις) (such as in the case of seeing with regard to sight, where nothing different results<sup>461</sup> apart from sight), while in other cases something [different than the exercise] comes to be (such as a house [comes to be] from the art of housebuilding, besides the activity of housebuilding), still in the first case it is no less an end, in the second case it is more an end than the δύναμις (ὅμως οὐθὲν ἦττον ἔνθα μὲν τέλος, ἔνθα δὲ μᾶλλον τέλος τῆς δυνάμεώς ἐστιν) (Θ 8, 1050a23–28).

As noted in ch. 5.2, this passage retraces the distinction that we saw in the *Protrepticus* and the *Eudemian Ethics*, and which is further clarified in *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35. In one set of actions, such as productions, there appears to be a distinction between the end (for example, a finished house) and the activity which is directed toward the end (the activity of housebuilding). In this case, the ἔργον (which is the same as the τέλος, as was established at 1050a21) *comes to be* as a result of the activity, which is only *a means* to it.<sup>462</sup> In the other set of actions, the τέλος *is* the exercise, which means that the τέλος has already been reached at every stage of the realization or the exercise of the activity. Aristotle confidently affirms that in the case of non-poietic activities such as sight, ἐνέργεια is an end (1050a27). The same cannot be said of activities such as housebuilding, but it is still true that in this case the ἐνέργεια is *more* an end than the δύναμις (μᾶλλον τέλος τῆς δυνάμεώς ἐστιν 1050a27–28) (and thus both kinds end up being prior to δύναμις in being). As noted in ch. 5.2, this shows that although they share a similar structure, there is a fundamental difference between complete activity and motion. This difference concerns their relationships with their ends. Thus, we note that this passage is highly consistent with what we saw previously in ch. 8 regarding the motion-activity distinction.

Aristotle insists on this idea in the following passage, which provides further insight into the relation between activities and their ends:

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<sup>460</sup> This is another way in which Aristotle refers to τέλος: “it was assumed that the τέλος is that which is the best and the last thing on account of which all other things are for” (ὀπόμεται γὰρ τέλος τὸ βέλτιστον καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον, οὗ ἕνεκα τὰλλα πάντα, *EE* II 1, 1219a10–11).

<sup>461</sup> I believe that Aristotle uses γίγνομαι here simply to refer to the fact that when seeing there is nothing beyond the activity of seeing (no further object, as in the case of production), exactly as in *Protr.* VII 43.20–25/B70.

<sup>462</sup> As Aristotle puts it in *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b19, motions are toward (or a means to) the end (τῶν περὶ τὸ τέλος).

The act of housebuilding is in that which is being built, and comes to be (γίγνεται) and is at the same time with the house.<sup>463</sup> So when what comes to be is something different from the exercise (παρὰ τὴν χρῆσιν), in those cases the ἐνέργεια is in that which is produced (ἐν τῷ ποιουμένῳ), such as the act of building in that which is being built, and the act of weaving in that which is being woven, and the same in the other cases; in general motion is in that which is moved (καὶ ὅλως ἢ κίνησις ἐν τῷ κινουμένῳ).<sup>464</sup> But in the cases when there is not an ἔργον different from the ἐνέργεια (παρὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν), the ἐνέργεια is in them, such as sight in the one who is seeing, and contemplation in the one who is contemplating and life in the soul, and thus happiness, since it is life of some kind (1050a28–b2).

When reading this passage, we must not forget that Aristotle’s main purpose in this whole section of Θ 8 is to show that *even motions* (cf. 1050a16–17) are “more an end than [and thus prior to] the δύναμις” (1050a27–28). Aristotle is not claiming that poietic activity *is* an end (a condition which he grants only to form and complete activity) but that *a*) it takes place *in that which will become the end, i.e.*, the materials being turned into the house, and *b*) it comes to be and takes place *with its end*. These two claims have the purpose of emphasizing the closeness between a motion and its τέλος, without compromising their fundamental distinction.

The first claim recalls the doctrine elaborated in *Phys.* III 3, 202a13–b22, where Aristotle argues that the activity of an agent is to be located in the patient, in order to avoid the problematic consequence that, if the motion were to be located in the agent, all that which moves would be itself in motion (202a30). But the point here in Θ 8 is different: Aristotle wants to show that, in a process of production, the patient (the materials of the house) is already becoming the τέλος (the house) *by reason of* the activity that takes place in it: the materials are not in a state of raw capacity but are already on their way to the τέλος. It is because they are being worked on that they are closer to the end than the moment before the motion began.<sup>465</sup>

<sup>463</sup> On the use of γίγνεται in this context, cf. n. 461 above and Broadie (2010, 206–207).

<sup>464</sup> This line strongly supports my reading that the passage concerns all motion and not only the specific case of production. As we have seen, Aristotle makes a continuous argument which concerns housebuilding (1050a32), weaving (1050a32–33) and motion (1050a33–34). There seems to be no meaningful distinction between the three terms. Cf. pp. 159–161 above.

<sup>465</sup> Cf. Broadie (2010, 206): “locating the activity of house building in the patient not only separates it from the agent in whom exist the skill and *dunamis* of house building, but also – which is more important –

The second claim, that motion occurs at the same time as its τέλος, applies only with qualification. This qualification is embodied in the *qua* clause of the definition of motion (cf. ch. 8.2.1 above). While the ἐντελέχεια or ἐνέργεια of the materials (without qualification) is simply the house (the τέλος), in the case of motion the materials still retain their capability to become a house because the house has not yet been finished. This does not entail that *nothing* of the τέλος is present in the motion: the τέλος is there, in its not being yet fully there. This is precisely the paradoxical nature of motion: as Gonzalez (2019, 138) puts it: “motion is this strange hybrid of a having-the-end that does not yet have the end, of an *entelecheia* that at the same time is not an *entelecheia*: as we are told explicitly at *Physics* 8. 5, 257b8, it is an incomplete *entelecheia*”. This paradoxical nature implies that motion cannot be considered ἐνέργεια in a strict sense, for it has not yet fully attained its end.<sup>466</sup>

Both these claims are intended to show the intrinsic connection (although not the identity) between the motion and the τέλος. Motion is not the end of its δύναμις strictly speaking, but certainly it is *more* an end than it: the activity is located in the patient (the house being built, *i.e.*, the τέλος) and occurs with it. This shows that even motions are not deprived of telic status (the expression is from Broadie 2010, 205); *motion is not an end but a sort of end*, or as Aristotle elsewhere puts it, not an ἐνέργεια simply speaking (such as the finished house or the act of seeing), but an ἐνέργεια *of a sort* (ἐνέργειά τις, *Phys.* III 2, 201b31; *DA* II 5, 417a16; *Met.* K 9, 1066a20–21).

Aristotle concludes his argument by stating “it is manifest that the οὐσία and the form are ἐνέργεια” (φανερὸν ὅτι ἡ οὐσία καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἐνέργειά ἐστιν, 1050b2–3). Though he seems to believe this is a fairly self-evident claim, we can see how it is connected with and results from his previous argument. Aristotle has shown that the key structural feature

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effects a rapprochement between the activity and the resulting house”. Cf. also Makin (2006, 203) and Charles (2010, 185).

<sup>466</sup> Thus I do not accept Charles’ proposal that motion is complete insofar it has attained the “success condition” of the corresponding potential (cf. 282–287 above). Cf. also Broadie (2010, 207–209), who claims that motion is a τέλος from the perspective of its having been completed (as one of the “two faces” of motion: the ongoing and the having been completed, *i.e.* the resulting house). According to Broadie, the completion of the motion does not imply that the activity is no longer present: “The actual house is beyond the ongoing activity, but it intimately includes the having been completed activity”. For his part, Sentesy (2020, 158, n. 56) relies on a distinction between capacities for change and capacities for being in his interpretation of the passage (on which see pp. 245–248 above).

of ἐνέργεια is its relation to the τέλος. In the immediately preceding argument, focused on the distinction between complete activities and motions, he has shown that ἐνέργεια is undoubtedly an end in the former case and more an end than the δύναμις in the latter, for although it is not an end, it is directed toward an external end (which, moreover, is an οὐσία in the case of productions). Given that the form is the final realization of its corresponding capacity (1050a15–16), no more argument is needed to establish that form is also an end, and so, an ἐνέργεια.

Acknowledging the essential connection between ἐνέργεια and τέλος allows us to understand better the fundamental transition carried out in book Θ, that is, the transition from δύναμις-ἐνέργεια κατὰ κίνησιν toward δύναμις-ἐνέργεια ἐπὶ πλεόν (cf. *Met.* Θ 1, 1046a1–2). The common feature which unifies the different senses of ἐνέργεια beyond motion is its completeness. Motion, on the other hand, reveals itself as inherently incomplete (though closer to the τέλος than a mere δύναμις). Of course, this also applies to the other side of the distinction, that is, to δύναμις. While the motion sense of δύναμις alludes to the capacity for producing change (that is, for attaining an incomplete ἐνέργεια), the sense of δύναμις which goes beyond motion alludes to the capacity something has for *fully being its end*, be it substance or complete activity.<sup>467</sup>

## 9.2. The activity of non-perishable substance (1050b6–28)

Aristotle has successfully shown that ἐνέργεια is prior in being to δύναμις in all three of its main applications. However, only two of these applications can be considered to be ἐνέργεια in the full sense of the term; only two of these senses extend beyond motion and are, presumably, “more useful” for Aristotle’s purposes.

As noted in ch. 6.1, the substance application of ἐνέργεια is indeed instrumental in solving a crucial difficulty that concerns substantial compounds of matter and form. And Aristotle does not hesitate to identify δύναμις and ἐνέργεια with matter and form in

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<sup>467</sup> This becomes especially clear if we take into account Aristotle’s considerations on δύναμις in Θ 7: being δυνάμει beyond motion implies that, if the necessary conditions are present, the δυνάμει thing will necessarily be in act (ἐνεργεία). This applies both to the capacity that some matter has for being substance and to the capacity a given substance has for engaging in complete activities. On the contrary, δύναμις for change only attains an incomplete kind of ἐνέργεια which is not an end properly speaking. This is, in essence, the distinction which Aristotle traces at the outset of Θ 1 between δύναμις κατὰ κίνησιν and δύναμις ἐπὶ πλεόν.

Θ 6–8. This, it could be argued, represents a main application of the useful sense of ἐνέργεια.

But the final part of Θ 8 provides an additional perspective. Aristotle’s argument in 1050b6–28 concerns the priority of eternal substances with regard to perishable ones. And this priority resides precisely in the fact that eternal substances are ἐνέργεια in a peculiar way, which is wholly independent of δύναμις.

The following discussion is limited in scope. I intend to present the issue without providing extensive discussion on many of its difficulties. My argument will be focused on showing that the concept of ἐνέργεια that corresponds to immaterial substances is that of complete activity, for this is the only sense of ἐνέργεια that can be conceived as independent from δύναμις.<sup>468</sup> Complete activities are, at least in principle, without a limit and can be carried out indefinitely. On the other hand, the substance application of ἐνέργεια (which strictly speaking corresponds to the notion of substantial *form*) is inherently related to matter and (substantial) change and so seems to be inadequate as an explanation of the being of non-material substances. As a preliminary conclusion, I will suggest that this could be taken as evidence of the identification of the useful sense of ἐνέργεια with complete activity and not with substantial form, which is arguably inseparable from matter.

### 9.2.1. Prior in a more fundamental way

Let us then turn to Aristotle’s text. He begins by claiming that ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις in being in a more fundamental way (κυριωτέρως) than the one he has previously established:

But it [*sc.* ἐνέργεια] is indeed prior in a more proper way too. For eternal things are prior in substance to perishable things, and nothing eternal is in capacity. The reason is the following: every capacity is at the same time for the contradictory; for while what is not capable of subsisting cannot subsist in anything, it is possible for everything that is capable not to act. So it is possible for what is capable of being both to be and not to be; so it is possible for the same capable thing to be and not to be. And what it is capable of not being can fail to be; and what can fail to be is perishable, either without qualification

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<sup>468</sup> This is also the position of Gonzalez (2019, 164–166).

or in that way in which it is said that it can fail to be, either with regard to place or with regard to quantity or quality; and without qualification is with regard to substance. So nothing that is imperishable without qualification is in capacity without qualification (but nothing prevents its being so in a certain regard, for example, in regard to quality or location); so all [eternal things] are in act; and nor are [in capacity] any of the things which are necessarily (and yet these are primary; for if these were not, nothing would be); nor then is motion, if any motion is eternal; nor if there is something eternally moved is it moved in accordance with capacity except for [the capacity for moving from] one place to another (for nothing prevents there being a matter for this). That is why the sun and the stars and the entire heaven are always acting, and there is no fear that they may stop at some time, which those who investigate nature fear. Nor do they get tired in doing this; for motion for them does not concern a capacity for the contradictory, as it does for perishable things, and so the continuity of the motion is not strenuous; for the cause of this is the substance which is matter and capacity, not activity (1050b6–28).<sup>469</sup>

This long, difficult passage contains a crucial argument in favor of the priority of ἐνέργεια with regard to δύναμις. But before turning to the content of the passage, we must note that there is a discussion among scholars around the relation between this argument and the preceding discussion of the priority in being of ἐνέργεια. Some scholars contend that it indeed continues Aristotle’s argument for the priority in being (Makin 2006, 208, Beere 2009), while others suggest that it introduces a new specific kind of priority (Judson 2016, 148).

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<sup>469</sup> ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ κυριωτέρως· τὰ μὲν γὰρ αἴδια πρότερα τῆ οὐσία τῶν φθαρτῶν, ἔστι δ’ οὐθὲν δυνάμει αἴδιον. λόγος δὲ ὅδε· πᾶσα δύναμις ἅμα τῆς ἀντιφάσεώς ἐστιν· τὸ μὲν γὰρ μὴ δυνατὸν ὑπάρχειν οὐκ ἂν ὑπάρξειεν οὐθενί, τὸ δυνατὸν δὲ πᾶν ἐνδέχεται μὴ ἐνεργεῖν. τὸ ἄρα δυνατὸν εἶναι ἐνδέχεται καὶ εἶναι καὶ μὴ εἶναι· τὸ αὐτὸ ἄρα δυνατὸν καὶ εἶναι καὶ μὴ εἶναι. τὸ δὲ δυνατὸν μὴ εἶναι ἐνδέχεται μὴ εἶναι· τὸ δὲ ἐνδεχόμενον μὴ εἶναι φθαρτόν, ἢ ἀπλῶς ἢ τοῦτο αὐτὸ ὃ λέγεται ἐνδέχεσθαι μὴ εἶναι, ἢ κατὰ τόπον ἢ κατὰ τὸ ποσὸν ἢ ποιόν· ἐνδέχεσθαι μὴ εἶναι, ἢ κατὰ τόπον ἢ κατὰ τὸ ποσὸν ἢ ποιόν· ἀπλῶς δὲ τὸ κατ’ οὐσίαν. οὐθὲν ἄρα τῶν ἀφθάρτων ἀπλῶς δυνάμει ἔστιν ἀπλῶς (κατὰ τι δὲ οὐδὲν κωλύει, οἷον ποιόν ἢ πού)· ἐνεργεῖα ἄρα πάντα· οὐδὲ τῶν ἐξ ἀνάγκης ὄντων (καίτοι ταῦτα πρῶτα· εἰ γὰρ ταῦτα μὴ ἦν, οὐθὲν ἂν ἦν)· οὐδὲ δὴ κίνησις, εἰ τίς ἐστιν αἴδιος· οὐδ’ εἴ τι κινούμενον αἴδιον, οὐκ ἔστι κατὰ δυνάμιν κινούμενον ἀλλ’ ἢ ποθὲν ποί (τούτου δ’ ὕλην οὐδὲν κωλύει ὑπάρχειν), διὸ αἰεὶ ἐνεργεῖ ἥλιος καὶ ἄστρα καὶ ὅλος ὁ οὐρανός, καὶ οὐ φοβερὸν μὴ ποτε στῆ, ὃ φοβοῦνται οἱ περὶ φύσεως. οὐδὲ κάμνει τοῦτο δρῶντα· οὐ γὰρ περὶ τὴν δυνάμιν τῆς ἀντιφάσεως αὐτοῖς, οἷον τοῖς φθαρτοῖς, ἢ κίνησις, ὥστε ἐπίπνον εἶναι τὴν συνέχειαν τῆς κινήσεως· ἢ γὰρ οὐσία ὕλη καὶ δύναμις οὐσα, οὐκ ἐνέργεια, αἰτία τούτου.

In favor of the first view, we must note the explicit mention of priority in substance in 1050b6–7 (τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἀίδια πρότερα τῆ οὐσία τῶν φθαρτῶν). Moreover, the criterion of existential independence (which in Δ 11 is associated with priority “in nature and in substance”, κατὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐσίαν, 1019a2–3) seems to apply rather straightforwardly to Aristotle’s argument in the passage (cf. 1050b19: immaterial beings “are primary; for if these were not, nothing would be”). However, this position has difficulty in explaining the precise function of κυριωτέρως at 1050b6. Indeed, if the argument continues the previous discussion of priority in being, then it is unclear how the priority of immaterial substances could be said to be “more proper” (κυριωτέρως). This is acknowledged by Makin (2006, 208), who argues that with κυριωτέρως Aristotle may be alluding to the more straightforward way in which the criterion of existential independence is at work in the 1050b6–28 argument.

This difficulty explains the second view. Indeed, Judson contends that the passage introduces a new form of priority, which relates to the *kind* of substance that characterizes eternal and perishable substances. Perishable substances are affected by δύναμις and are connected to matter, while eternal substances are characterized as being wholly ἐνεργεία and unconnected to matter (except for topical matter, on which see below). This interpretation accords well with the peculiarity of Aristotle’s argument in the passage, which goes beyond the mere application of the criterion of existential independence. On the other hand, it has difficulty in explaining Aristotle’s explicit mention of priority in substance in 1050b6–7 (τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἀίδια πρότερα τῆ οὐσία τῶν φθαρτῶν). Furthermore, no explicit mention of a new kind of priority is introduced in the passage.

Still, I consider that the two positions are not irreconcilable and, moreover, that they could be seen as complementary. Indeed, the first argument for the priority in being (1050a4–b6) hinges on the association between ἐνέργεια and completeness, while the second one (1050b6–28) uses this association to explain the priority of eternal beings with respect to perishable ones.<sup>470</sup>

Aristotle claims that immaterial substances “are primary; for *if these were not, nothing would be*” (1050b19). Here, Aristotle explicitly claims that perishable substances depend on immaterial substances for their existence. How should we understand this

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<sup>470</sup> This argument, which I here anticipate with the purpose of explaining the relation between 1050a4–b6 and 1050b6–28, will be more fully fleshed out in the remaining subsections of 9.2.

dependence? I believe that it is best understood as a kind of *causal dependence*, as Judson 2016 proposes. But it is fundamental to understand that the causal relation between eternal and perishable beings is explained by their ontological disparity regarding the criterion of completeness (which is the one developed in 1050a4–b6). In effect, the latter are affected by δύναμις and thus are incomplete, while the former are ἐνέργεια in the fullest sense, and thus are complete: they are themselves an end (τέλος). Moreover, it is their being completely ἐνέργεια without δύναμις (save for the peculiar capacity for moving from one place to another one) which explains their necessary and eternal character (for that which is affected by δύναμις can fail to be).

It is crucial to note that their being an end is fundamentally related to their active character. Immaterial substances should not be understood as some sort of “pure forms”;<sup>471</sup> on the contrary, they are perpetually active. But the kind of activity proper to immaterial substances is not oriented toward an external end. If their activity were of this kind, it could hardly be conceived as eternal (for it would end when reaching its external τέλος). This implies that the kind of activity of celestial beings is a complete kind of activity that is not developed or perfected throughout its execution, but that it is complete at every moment.<sup>472</sup>

The activity that constitutes the being of eternal substances explains their *causal* priority with regard to the perishable ones. In effect, eternal substances are eternally active and thus are the efficient cause of all motion, of all coming to be and destruction of perishable substances. This point is stressed by Judson (2016, 150–151), who connects 1050b19 to Aristotle’s discussion of the efficient causality of the celestial beings and of the Prime Mover in *Phys.* VIII and *Met.* Λ 6, 7.<sup>473</sup> Thus, their being complete implies that they are the cause of incomplete beings (*i.e.*, beings affected by δύναμις).

We can see then how the two discussions (the one about the criterion of completeness at 1050a4–b6, and the one about the causality of eternal substances at 1050b6–26) are related yet distinct. Both of them deal with the ontological difference between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Thus, both speak of the priority in being of ἐνέργεια with

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<sup>471</sup> The idea of a pure form independent from δύναμις is foreign to Aristotle’s thought (cf. pp. 283–285 below).

<sup>472</sup> I will provide more discussion on this issue below.

<sup>473</sup> Contrast Θ 8, 1050b19 with Λ 6, 1071b25, where Aristotle claims that, without the perpetual activity of immaterial substances functioning as their cause, “none of the things which are will be” (ἀλλὰ μὴν εἰ τοῦτο, οὐθὲν ἔσται τῶν ὄντων). See also the next subsection.

respect to δύναμις, for this priority is rooted in their ontological disparity. But while the former discussion merely establishes and explains this difference, the latter one introduces a causal perspective which further shows in which way ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις. And *this causal perspective is dependent on the complete/incomplete contrast introduced in the first discussion.*<sup>474</sup>

### 9.2.2. Ἐνέργεια independent from δύναμις

Let us now take a closer look at the argument of 1050b6–28. The thesis which Aristotle wants to demonstrate is that eternal things are prior in substance to perishable things. The key idea that supports this thesis is that *nothing eternal is in capacity* (δυνάμει). The core structure of the argument for this latter idea could be summarized as follows:

- 1) being in capacity implies being capable of both contradictories;<sup>475</sup>
- 2) that which is capable of both contradictories can fail to be one of the two contradictories (in the case of the capacity to be, something which is capable of being can fail to be);
- 3) eternal beings cannot fail to be what they are (*i.e.*, they cannot fail to act);
- 4) so nothing which is in capacity is eternal.

Simply put, the argument states that if something is affected by δύναμις, then it can fail to attain the corresponding ἐνέργεια, be it without qualification (*i.e.*, with regard to their very being) or in a given way (in place, quantity, quality) (1050b14–16). The situation is

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<sup>474</sup> Simply put: immaterial substances are ἐνέργεια, that is, a τέλος; their way of being a τέλος is being perpetually active (for this is the only mode of ἐνέργεια which is independent from δύναμις). Since they are active, they are a cause of motion and because they are the cause of motion, they are prior to that which is moved (*i.e.*, perishable substances).

<sup>475</sup> As Beere (2009, 321) notes, the talk here of a capacity for contradictories (ἀντιφάσεις, 1050b9 and 1050b25) should not be confused with Θ 2's argument concerning rational capacities (which uses the term 'opposite', ἐναντίος (cf. 1046b5, 1046b11), instead of 'contradictory', ἀντίφασις). Indeed, rational capacities can produce the opposite of that which they are capable of doing (a doctor can produce either health or sickness), though only accidentally. But here Aristotle is referring to the capacity of *not exercising* the activity which characterizes the being in question. Something which is capable of acting can also not act at all; this is the defining characteristic of capable beings, in contrast to fully active beings, such as immaterial substances, which cannot fail to act.

most grave in the case of the capacity that concerns substance: perishable beings are capable of both being and not being (1050b11–14). This, of course, is exactly the opposite of the case of eternal substances, which *cannot* fail to be what they are (1050b16–18). In contrast to perishable substances, eternal beings are not capable of not being, and thus are foreign to capacity: they are characterized by *an eternal acting that cannot fail to act* (ὡς ἐν ἐνεργεῖ, 1050b22).

We should pause here to note that this formulation recalls an important line we analyzed during our discussion of Θ 3 (cf. ch. 7.4 *supra*). At 1047a20–22, Aristotle claimed that we must accept the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια since “it is possible (ἐνδέχεται) for something to be capable of being but not to be, and for something to be capable of not being but to be” (ὥστε ἐνδέχεται δυνατόν μὲν τι εἶναι μὴ εἶναι δέ, καὶ δυνατόν μὴ εἶναι εἶναι δέ). This possibility, however, concerns only perishable substances, which are indeed affected by δύναμις. Eternal substances *are not capable of being while not being, nor of being capable of not being while being*.<sup>476</sup> Since they are unaffected by δύναμις, the only other remaining possibility is for them to be fully ἐνέργεια. And this is precisely what Aristotle claims in this passage. They are ἐνέργεια because they lack the central characteristic of capable or potential beings: their capacity for being other than what they are (either in substance, in quality, in quantity, or in place).

This argument establishes the necessary character of eternal substances (to which Aristotle explicitly refers at 1050b18–19). This necessity is connected, though Aristotle does not explicitly say how, with the claim that eternal substances are primary (πρῶτα) and that “if these were not, nothing would be” (1050b19). This argument provides the key for establishing the priority of eternal substances with regard to perishable ones, but unfortunately, the argument is not further developed here. Still, I believe it should be read, as Judson (2016, 150–151) proposes, together with Aristotle’s argument in *Phys.* VIII and *Met.* Λ 7, 8 (cf. in particular 1071b25). In other words, the line should be interpreted as referring to the causal dependence of perishable substances with regard to eternal

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<sup>476</sup> This idea is implied in Λ 6, 1071b25–26 (which is also a parallel text to 1047a20–21; compare ἐνδέχεται γὰρ δύνασθαι μὲν εἶναι μήπω δ’ εἶναι (1071b25–26) and ἐνδέχεται δυνατόν μὲν τι εἶναι μὴ εἶναι δέ (1047a20–21); compare also 1047b1 and 1071b19).

substances: if there were no perpetual motion by the celestial beings, then there would be no motion at all, no generation nor corruption in the sub-lunar world.<sup>477</sup>

This view seems to be further confirmed by the remaining part of the passage. Indeed, at 1050b20–28, Aristotle alludes to the activity that is proper to celestial beings. This activity is characterized as a specific kind of motion: eternal motion. Aristotle has already claimed at 1050b16–19 that nothing that is eternal and necessary is in capacity (*δυνάμει*), but at 1050b20 he adds that the same applies to motion (*κίνησις*), if there is indeed motion which is eternal. Moreover, nothing which is eternally moved (*κινούμενον αἰδίου*) is moved according to capacity, except for a specific kind of capacity: the one for moving from one place to another (*ποθὲν ποί*, 1050b21).

That Aristotle is referring to the motion of the heavenly bodies is made clear from the immediately following allusion to the activity (*ἐνέργεια*) of the sun and the stars and the entire heaven (*ἥλιος καὶ ἄστρα καὶ ὅλος ὁ οὐρανός*, 1050b22–23). Given that their activity is necessarily eternal, for it is unaffected by *δύναμις*, there is no fear that they may stop at some time (1050b23) (which is what the philosophers of nature feared according to Aristotle, 1050b23–24).<sup>478</sup>

The reference to the motion of the heavenly bodies seems to support our interpretation of the line at 1050b19. Indeed, the motion of the heavenly bodies is described as a necessary part of the causal chain that explains sub-lunar motion in, for example, *Phys.* VIII and *Met.* Λ 6–7 (cf. in particular 1071b12–22, 1072a10–17, 1072a21–26). Thus, Aristotle seems to be claiming in Θ 8 that without the motion of the celestial beings functioning as the cause of the motion of the sub-lunar world, there would be no motion at all, and this would imply that the ordered world of sub-lunar entities would simply not be as such. This, then, is the causal priority that entails an ontological priority of eternal substances with respect to perishable ones (*i.e.*, the existential dependence of the latter with respect to the former).

The conclusion of the argument returns once more to the ontological disparity that characterizes eternal and perishable substances. The motion of the celestial beings is

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<sup>477</sup> The argument of Θ 8 is not concerned directly with the Prime Mover, but with the heavenly bodies that are moved by it. But we could assume that the argument also applies to further stages of the causal chain, since the motion of the heavenly bodies ultimately depends on the causality of the Prime Mover.

<sup>478</sup> According to Berti (2017, 403 n. 55), Aristotle could be referring more specifically to Empedocles, cf. *DC* II 1, 284a24.

eternal and involves no effort, in contrast to the motion of perishable substances (1050b24–27). The reason is that the motion of the celestial beings is of a different kind, one that does not involve contradictories. These two diverse kinds of motion are explained by the very substances of the moving beings in question: while the substance of the celestial beings is solely ἐνέργεια independent from δύναμις, the one which corresponds to perishable substances is matter and capacity (ὕλη καὶ δύναμις, 1050b27).<sup>479</sup>

### 9.2.3. Heavenly motion and heavenly matter

An important qualification, however, should be made to the previous claim. For although eternal things are not in capacity simply speaking (ἀπλῶς), they are in capacity in a very specific sense: they are capable of moving from one place to another (ποθὲν ποί).

This introduces a series of difficulties. With this claim, Aristotle seems to be contradicting his doctrine according to which celestial beings are wholly independent of δύναμις. The situation seems even more dire because Aristotle links this sort of capacity to the notion of matter (1050b21–22). Finally, he seems to ascribe motion, which was previously considered to be an incomplete kind of ἐνέργεια in *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35, to that which is by definition complete (eternal substances are necessary and do not lack anything for being what they are). How can this be so?

The contradiction is avoided if we conceive the sort of motion and the sort of capacity that Aristotle assigns to the celestial beings as a specific kind of motion that corresponds solely to them. This specific sort is an eternal kind of motion essentially different from the motion of perishable substances.

We can understand this point better if we consider a parallel text at *Met.* Λ 2.<sup>480</sup> As is well known, this passage describes change in terms of three elements: the two extremes of the change (which are contradictory) and a third element: matter. This is the same scheme from *Phys.* I 6–9. However, the passage also includes an allusion to a *different sort* of change which corresponds to a *different kind* (cf. ἑτέραν, 1069b25) of matter.<sup>481</sup> This concerns eternal beings: the change from one place to another (ποθὲν ποί),

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<sup>479</sup> Cf. also 1051b28, where Aristotle claims that non-composite beings are “all in ἐνέργεια, and not in capacity” (πᾶσαι εἰσὶν ἐνεργεία, οὐ δυνάμει).

<sup>480</sup> This parallel has been explored by Fazzo (2013).

<sup>481</sup> The idea of a specific kind of “topical” matter also features in *Met.* H 1, 1042b6–8.

that involves a specific kind of matter, and which differs from substantial change (1069b25–26).

This same sort of change is alluded to in 1050b20–22.<sup>482</sup> But the upshot of Θ 8 is that it explains exactly how this change differs from typical change. Indeed, Aristotle claims that, in the case of the eternal motion of the celestial beings, the extremes of the transition (ποθὲν ποί, 1050b21) *are not contradictories*. The passage begins precisely by showing that, in contrast to perishable beings, eternal beings have no capacity for contradictories: “nothing eternal is in capacity. The reason is the following: every capacity is at the same time for the contradictory” (ἔστι δ’ οὐθὲν δυνάμει ἀϊδιον. λόγος δὲ ὅδε· πᾶσα δύναμις ἅμα τῆς ἀντιφάσεώς ἐστιν·, 1050b7–9).

The previous statement seems to commit Aristotle to the claim that eternal substances have no capacity at all (“nothing eternal is in capacity”, 1050b7–8). But the ensuing argument introduces a distinction. Aristotle goes on to claim that if there is something eternally moved, “then it is not moved in accordance with capacity, except for (ἀλλ’ ἢ) [the capacity for moving from] one place to another (for nothing prevents there being a matter for this)”. The emphasis of this passage should be placed on ἀλλ’ ἢ: indeed, there is *only one way* in which we can speak of a capacity for change in the case of immaterial substances: that is, in the case of their transition from one place to another. And this transition does not involve change between contradictories, for the different places in which a celestial being can be are not mutually opposing instances in a process of change. Moreover, Aristotle calls the capacity for this sort of change matter (ὕλη, 1050b22). This introduces, as in the case of Λ 2, a distinction between two kinds of changes and two kinds of capacity/matter involved in the change: one that corresponds to perishable substances (and which involves change between contradictories) and another that concerns immaterial substances (which does not involve change between contradictories).

In summary, the two passages argue that the kind of capacity and the kind of matter proper to eternal substances are different from the ones involved in standard cases

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<sup>482</sup> The argument is already hinted at 1050b16–18. There Aristotle states that, although nothing eternal is in capacity without qualification, nothing impedes for eternal beings to be in capacity “in a certain regard, for example, in regard to quality or location”. This implies that, although there is neither generation nor corruption of eternal substances, they can admit of other sort of motions, such as locative motion or a change in quality (although Aristotle focuses only on locative change).

of change. The difference resides in the fact that the two extremes of the change in the case of eternal beings (*i.e.*, ποθὲν ποί) *are not contradictories*.<sup>483</sup> Nor are they subsumable in terms of form and privation.

Given that ποθὲν ποί are not to be understood in this way, we must deduce that Aristotle is speaking here of a *different kind of motion*, one that involves a *different kind of matter*, that is, topical matter, which is matter only in a certain sense, and not strictly speaking.<sup>484</sup> This matter “comes to be”, but only in the narrow sense of switching from one place to another. This distinction allows Aristotle to avoid the contradiction between two seemingly irreconcilable claims: *a*) that eternal substances are immaterial and unchanging, and *b*) that they are affected by a peculiar kind of matter (*i.e.*, topical matter) and that they “move” “from one place to another” (ποθὲν ποί). This is reinforced by the expression ἀλλ’ ἣ which precedes the mention of ποθὲν ποί at 1050b21. As we saw earlier, this expression is best rendered as “except”: thus, Aristotle is introducing the only way in which we can legitimately claim that immaterial substances “change” and have matter.

This means that, although eternal beings are in perpetual motion, this kind of motion (and its correlative capacity) is not a typical case of motion, *i.e.*, the kind of motion which Aristotle describes in *Phys.* III 1–3. This latter kind of activity is directed toward an external end and therefore qualifies as an incomplete kind of ἐνέργεια. But the motion of the heavens does not strive to a further end, for it has no limit (πέρας); it cannot be considered to be closer to or farther from its goal at any given time.<sup>485</sup>

<sup>483</sup> Fazzo (2013, 169) also recalls *DC* I 3–4 and *Phys.* VIII 7 (specifically at 261a31–b2), as places in the *corpus* where Aristotle dismisses the idea that eternal substance is affected by contraries.

<sup>484</sup> Cf. Fazzo (2009, 132).

<sup>485</sup> Cf. *DC* II 1, 284a4–11: “there is something immortal and divine among those things which have motion, but motion of a kind which has no limit, and rather is itself the limit of the others. A limit is a thing which contains, and this motion, being complete, contains those motions which are incomplete and which have a limit and a cessation; having itself no beginning or termination, but being unceasing throughout the infinity of time, of the other motions of some is the cause, of others it offers the cessation” (ἔστιν ἀθάνατόν τι καὶ θεῖον τῶν ἐχόντων μὲν κίνησιν, ἐχόντων δὲ τοιαύτην ὥστε μηθὲν εἶναι πέρασ αὐτῆς, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ταύτην τῶν ἄλλων πέρασ· τὸ τε γὰρ πέρασ τῶν περιεχόντων ἐστί, καὶ αὐτὴ τέλειος οὔσα περιέχει τὰς ἀτελεῖς καὶ τὰς ἐχούσας πέρασ καὶ παῦλαν, αὐτὴ μὲν οὐδεμίαν οὔτ’ ἀρχὴν ἔχουσα οὔτε τελευτήν, ἀλλ’ ἀπαυστος οὔσα τὸν ἄπειρον χρόνον, τῶν δ’ ἄλλων τῶν μὲν αἰτία τῆς ἀρχῆς, τῶν δὲ δεχομένη τὴν παῦλαν). The parallel between this passage and Aristotle’s characterization of ἐνέργεια as having no limit in *Met.* Θ 6 1048b18–23 is noted by Kosman (2013, 204).

The specific status of this kind of motion is problematic. But for our purposes it suffices to note that it should certainly be distinguished from regular cases of motion. Furthermore, the matter involved in this motion is essentially different from that which affects the substances of the sub-lunar world. The difference between them is evident from the fact that the former motion is not strenuous or laborious, while the latter is. Regular motion is necessarily oriented to an external τέλος, and when the τέλος is reached the motion ceases. The motion of celestial beings is eternal, continuous, and has no limit. For this reason, it implies no effort.

Aristotle is explicit when explaining the cause of this distinction: “the cause of this is the substance which is matter and capacity, not activity” (ἡ γὰρ οὐσία ὕλη καὶ δύναμις οὐσία, οὐκ ἐνέργεια, αἰτία τούτου, 1050b27–28).<sup>486</sup> The substance of perishable beings is affected by matter and δύναμις (that is, by the matter and the δύναμις typical of perishable substances), while the substance of eternal beings is to be identified with its activity, its ἐνέργεια. This remark, which is not further explored in the chapter, is crucial to our understanding that the only sense of ἐνέργεια that can characterize immaterial substances is that of complete activity. Indeed, the notion of substantial form (which, as we saw, is one of the two full applications of ἐνέργεια) is arguably *inseparable* from its corresponding δύναμις. On the contrary, the notion of complete activity is, in principle, independent from its corresponding δύναμις: complete activities are complete at every stage of their realization and could be carried out indefinitely, for there is no external τέλος toward which to strive for. Complete activities are not further developed or perfected; throughout their activity there is no remaining δύναμις which must be completed.

We can thus see how this notion of ἐνέργεια seems close to the activity of the celestial beings. Indeed, Aristotle does not hesitate to claim that the celestial spheres are necessarily active (cf. ἐνεργεῖ, 1050b22) and that this activity is eternal. Moreover, he claims that this activity constitutes—or at least contributes to—their substance (1050b27–28, 1071b19–20). Although the activity of the celestial beings is characterized as a motion (κίνησις), we have already shown that it would be mistaken to take this kind of motion as the one described in *Phys.* III, 1–3 and *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35. There is, thus, only one

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<sup>486</sup> Cf. also 1071b12–22.

remaining possibility: that the ἐνέργεια that characterizes eternal beings is a kind of complete activity, which is already in possession of its end while being active.<sup>487</sup>

#### 9.2.4. On the activity of the Prime Mover

The previous argument can be complemented by some brief comments on the activity that characterizes the Prime Mover. Indeed, in a series of passages in *Met. Λ*, Aristotle characterizes the being of the Prime Mover simply as an ἐνέργεια.<sup>488</sup> Although there is a clear difference in hierarchy between the Prime Mover and the celestial spheres, understanding how the former can be said to *be* ἐνέργεια will help us see how Aristotle can claim that the substance of the inferior celestial beings is ἐνέργεια (ἢ γὰρ οὐσία [...] ἐνέργεια, 1050b27).

The core issue comes down to how to interpret ἐνέργεια when predicated on the Prime Mover. Indeed, there seem to be two alternatives: to take ἐνέργεια to mean either

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<sup>487</sup> It should also be noted that Aristotle considers that the celestial beings, the stars, the planets, *are living and thinking beings* (cf. *DC* II 2, 285a29–30; II 12, 292a18–293a14, in particular 292a20–21: “it is necessary to conceive them [*sc.* the celestial beings] as having life and πράξις”, δεῖ δ’ ὡς μετεχόντων ὑπολαμβάνειν πράξεως καὶ ζωῆς. See also *Simpl. in Cael.* 481, 1–488, 1, esp. 481, 5–26, ed. Heiberg). This runs parallel to the activity proper of the Prime Mover, which is life and thought (cf. *Met. Λ* 7, 1072b26–27: καὶ ζωὴ δὲ γε ὑπάρχει· ἢ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωὴ, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἢ ἐνέργεια. Cf. also *Met. Λ* 9, 1074b33–35: αὐτὸν ἄρα νοεῖ, εἴπερ ἐστὶ τὸ κράτιστον, καὶ ἔστιν ἢ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις). Living well (εὖ ζῆν) and thinking (νοεῖν), as we saw earlier, are prime examples of τελεία ἐνέργεια in *Met. Θ* 6, 1048b18–35 (cf. 1048b24–26).

<sup>488</sup> “There is surely something which moves without being itself in motion, being eternal, substance, and ἐνέργεια” (ἔστι τι ὃ οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ, αἰδῖον καὶ οὐσία καὶ ἐνέργεια οὐσα, 1072a25–26); “there is something which causes motion but is itself unmoved, and which is ἐνέργεια” (ἐπεὶ δὲ ἔστι τι κινούν αὐτὸ ἀκίνητον ὄν, ἐνέργεια ὄν, 1072b7–8, reading ἐνέργεια at b8 with EJ and Alexandru 2013); “it is necessary therefore for there to be a principle of this sort, whose substance is ἐνέργεια” (δεῖ ἄρα εἶναι ἀρχὴν τοιαύτην ἧς ἢ οὐσία ἐνέργεια, 1071b19–20); “its activity is in itself excellent and eternal life” (ἐνέργεια δὲ ἢ καθ’ αὐτὴν ἐκεῖνου ζωὴ ἀρίστη καὶ αἰδῖος, 1072b27–28).

It is unclear whether the whole passage at 1071b12–22 refers to the Prime Mover (as Berti 1997; 2000 believes) or to the inferior eternal substances (in particular to the eternal circular motion of the heaven, as in the view of Fazzo 2009, 120, 128–131; 2014, 141–142, 286 and Judson 2019, 199). But this issue does not affect our present argument, for Aristotle seems to characterize both the celestial spheres and the Prime Mover as being ἐνέργεια. On the possibility of reading the dative ἐνεργείᾳ instead of the nominative ἐνέργεια in all these passages (as does Fazzo), see below.

activity or something closer to the notion of actuality, that is, closer to the concept of form (εἶδος). The latter alternative is a fairly common strategy, associated with the idea that the Prime Mover is a “pure form”, detached from matter and δύναμις. The justification of this position relies on the assimilation between the concepts of ἐνέργεια and form (εἶδος). Indeed, those who defend the doctrine of pure form usually closely associate ἐντελέχεια (taking it as a technical term that denotes actuality) and εἶδος. They conclude, taking into account the argument of 1050a21–23, which relates ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια, that ἐνέργεια and εἶδος are to some extent coextensive or overlapping concepts.

This view, however, entails at least two important difficulties. The first is the following: how can immaterial substances be characterized in terms of form if form is an inseparable correlate of matter?<sup>489</sup> To regard the Prime Mover as a “pure form” implies an inconsistency with the very notion of form as it appears in, for example, *Physics* I and in the first chapters of *Metaphysics* Λ. It seems clear that Aristotle considers that form is always form of some matter, that is, that it always has a material correlate from which it is inseparable.<sup>490</sup>

The second difficulty is that it plainly contradicts Aristotle’s characterization of the Prime Mover. Indeed, he contends that the Prime Mover is “a way of life (διαγωγή) which is the best possible [...] since its activity is also pleasure” (ἐπεὶ καὶ ἡδονὴ ἢ ἐνέργεια τούτου, 1072b14–16), an intellect which “thinks itself” (1072b18), and to which belongs life (1072b26), “for the activity of the intellect is life, and its activity is that” (1072b26–27); he adds that “its activity, which is in itself, is a life best and eternal. Hence we say that god is a living being eternal and best, so that life and lifetime, continuous and eternal, belong to god; for this is god” (1072b27–30); and, finally, he states that “itself, therefore, thinks, seeing that it is the greatest thing, and its thinking is a thinking of thinking” (αὐτὸν ἄρα νοεῖ, εἴπερ ἐστὶ τὸ κράτιστον, καὶ ἔστιν ἢ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις, 1075a33–35).<sup>491</sup> All these passages confirm the impression that we are dealing with a being that is fundamentally *active*, and not a static “pure form”.

This situation has led interpreters to reject the “pure form” interpretation by scholars. Among them, the position of S. Fazzo (2012, 2014, 2016a) stands out. Indeed, Fazzo argues that the origins of the doctrine of the pure form can be traced back to

<sup>489</sup> For a detailed analysis of this inconsistency, cf. Ryan (1973). Cf. also Fazzo (2016a, 187).

<sup>490</sup> Cf. *Phys.* I 7, 190b17–20 and 192a13, *Met.* Λ 4, 1070b18. Cf. Ryan (1973, 212).

<sup>491</sup> I am here following Judson’s 2019 translation, with small modifications.

Alexander of Aphrodisias, and in particular, to Alexander’s “characteristic tendency to develop Aristotle’s own hylomorphism far beyond its original boundaries” (2016a, 186). According to Fazzo, this reading of Alexander has had a decisive impact on the history of  $\Lambda$ ’s textual transmission; she notes that this interpretation has motivated the privileging of the nominative ἐνέργεια in key places in  $\Lambda$ ’s text, such as 1071a8, 1071b22, 1072a5, 1072a25, 1072b5, 1072b8. Against this, Fazzo argues that it is preferable to opt for the dative ἐνεργείᾳ in the passages cited above (1071b22, 1072a25–26, 1072b27–28),<sup>492</sup> and to interpret the Prime Mover not as pure act (or pure actuality) but as purely *in act* (2016a, 183), *i.e.*, as an entity whose essence implies being eternally in act (189). In this way, the Prime Mover is revealed as an eternally acting entity, and not as pure actuality, understood as the highest point on a scale of ontological gradation of the real (from contingent entities, affected by δύναμις, passing through immaterial entities, that is, the celestial beings, until reaching the Unmoved Prime Mover).

But could not we reach a conclusion similar to Fazzo’s while maintaining the nominative ἐνέργεια? Indeed, we have argued earlier<sup>493</sup> for the claim that there is no substantial difference between nominative and dative uses of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια.<sup>494</sup> Our previous argument revolved mainly around δύναμις: we argued that having a capacity (δύναμις, or simply being capable, δυνατόν) entails being-in-capacity (δυνάμει) (and *vice versa*). But this argument applies likewise to ἐνέργεια: a being which acts (ἐνεργεῖ) is, in itself, being-in-act (ἐνεργείᾳ). In other words, the activity of a being confers to it a specific ontological status: that of being in act.

In effect, there is no need to confine the nominative ἐνέργεια to the notion of form, for we have seen that Aristotle clearly contends that there is a sense of ἐνέργεια that corresponds to a kind of activity that is different from motion. I thus see no difficulty in

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<sup>492</sup> Fazzo (2016a, 181) points out that such a choice can hardly be considered an emendation, given that ancient manuscripts, written in *scriptio continua* and uncial script, do not generally record the subscripted iotas (precisely the mark that differentiates between the nominative ‘act’, ἐνέργεια and the dative ‘in act’, ἐνεργείᾳ). Fazzo thus positions himself alongside Bekker (1831), Bonitz (1848) and Christ (1906 [1886]), who opt for the dative in 1071b22 and 1072a5 and distances herself from Ross (1924) and Jaeger (1956), who print the nominative in their editions.

<sup>493</sup> Cf. ch. 7.4, in particular pp. 206–208.

<sup>494</sup> *Contra* Fazzo (2009, 144 n. 50): “The hypothesis that I suggest is that there is a difference between *act* and *in-act*” (*L’ipotesi che dunque suggerisco è che ci sia differenza fra atto e in-atto*).

characterizing the Prime Mover simply as an ἐνέργεια (nominative), that is, to hold that its being *is* its activity.

That this is so becomes clear if we ask what its substance would be, otherwise.<sup>495</sup> It cannot be form (for it is inseparable from motion), and it cannot be motion (for the Prime Mover is unmoved). The only remaining possibility is complete activity. Moreover, the prime example of complete activity throughout the *corpus* is, as we have seen, the activity of thinking. And this is precisely the activity that corresponds to the Prime Mover.

In conclusion, it seems we do not need to resort to a concept of actuality to understand the being of the Prime Mover, for Aristotle disposes of a concept of ἐνέργεια as activity that does not entail motion. Nor must we necessarily reject the nominative reading of ἐνέργεια, for the nominative is perfectly able to express this non-kinetic, active sense of ἐνέργεια.

This thought is captured in the conclusion of Berti's 1990 essay on the concept of ἐνέργεια in Aristotle: "the only perfect immaterial activity that we know of is thinking, the highest—according to Aristotle—among all human activities: therefore, it remains only to conclude that god is thought (*nous, noësis*), as is stated in the book *Lambda*".<sup>496</sup> God is not a perfect actuality, a static substance, but a *necessarily acting or active substance*; his activity is the thought of thought, and this activity is life (*Met.* Λ 7, 1072b26–27). It is a substance eternally in act, as Fazzo points out, but which can also be simply said *to be act*. It is therefore alien to motion (ἀκίνητον): this is the distinctive mark and specific character of the kind of activity that is proper to it, and that constitutes its being.

This interpretation seems to support our previous claim that the being of the celestial substances should also be regarded as complete activity. In effect, it would be wrong to render their substance in terms of form, for they lack matter and δύναμις (more specifically, the matter and δύναμις that corresponds to perishable substances). Of course, the celestial beings are not complete in the sense of the Prime Mover, for they still depend

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<sup>495</sup> As Gonzalez (2019, 174 n. 99) does.

<sup>496</sup> [I]'unica attività immateriale perfetta che noi conosciamo è il pensiero, la più alta—secondo Aristotele—fra tutte le attività umane: perciò non resta che concludere che Dio è pensiero (*nous, noësis*), come si afferma nel libro *Lambda* (Berti 1990, 60). This section of the dissertation was written shortly before the death of E. Berti in early 2022: let these humble pages serve as a tribute to such an illustrious philosopher.

on it for carrying out their motion.<sup>497</sup> But in the hierarchy of beings that Aristotle presents, they are still characterized as completely active beings, that is, beings which do not move (in the sense of motion as *ἐνέργεια ἀτελής*) and which are not the form (*εἶδος*) of a given matter. They are, then, essentially distinct from perishable beings, which are necessarily tied up to *δύναμις*.

Thus, we can see that the notion of *ἐνέργεια* that allows Aristotle to transcend the domain of becoming is precisely that of *τελεία ἐνέργεια*, complete activity. The connection between this sort of *ἐνέργεια* and the divine appeared already at the very beginning of Aristotle's intellectual path, as we saw in ch. 5.2.<sup>498</sup> But it is only at the end of Aristotle's argument in *Θ* 8 and in *Λ* 6–7 that he provides further insight into this thought. His argument is difficult and compressed in both these passages. But for our purposes, it suffices to note that Aristotle's way of using his concept of complete activity seems to suggest that it could indeed be the (primarily) useful sense of *ἐνέργεια* announced in *Θ* 1.

The kind of priority in being that characterizes eternal beings is rendered “more proper” or “more fundamental” (*κυριωτέρως*) at 1050b6. This priority resides in the fact that the celestial beings are complete activity without *δύναμις*. Given the place of celestial beings in Aristotle's hierarchical cosmology, and given that what explains this position is their being complete active beings without *δύναμις*, why would we not regard the concept of complete activity as Aristotle's useful sense?

### 9.2.5. The solution the Megarian *aporia*

Our previous argument allows us to provide a wider perspective regarding Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians. Indeed, we saw earlier that the Megarian argument of

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<sup>497</sup> This assumes that there could be degrees of being complete. I do not see why this could not be the case, as long as the diverse complete beings in question share the fundamental character of having their end within themselves. Of course, one can establish a difference of degree between the different ends. Thus, the end of the activity of the celestial beings is of a higher degree of completeness than the activity of human beings, and the activity of the Prime Mover is more of an end than the activity of celestial beings. On this point, cf. Gonzalez (1991; 2019, 176–177).

<sup>498</sup> Recall *Protr.* VIII 48.9–13/B108, cited in p. 165 n. 279 above: “Nothing divine or blessed belongs to humans except from just that one thing worthy of consideration, what there is in us of insight and intelligence (*νοῦ καὶ φρονήσεως*): for, of what is ours, only this seems to be immortal and this alone divine”.

⊙ 3, which revolves around the issue of the semantic ambiguity of terms, involves a deeper concern with the problem of the unity of being. As we saw, this was a recurrent issue in Megarian philosophy, present across its diverse exponents. Many testimonies suggest that the Megarians reduced being to that which is self-identical, stable, and determined, and that they opposed any sort of relation between this unchanging domain of being and the domain of particular, mutable entities. The passage that presents this opposition most clearly is Plato's confrontation with the Friends of the Forms (*Sophist* 246a–249d), which, we argued, constitutes quite plausibly an allusion to the Megarians contemporary with Plato. But this view can also be found in the testimonies of Stilpo of Megara, which are consistent with those of Polyxenus and even of Euclid of Megara.

In the passage of the *Sophist*, the strict opposition between being and becoming upheld by the Friends of the Forms is put into question by the Stranger by means of the definition of being as δύναμις for acting or being acted upon. Thus, Plato confronts the rigid scheme of his opponents by way of the concept of δύναμις. But Aristotle has argued in favor of viewing ἐνέργεια as ontologically prior to δύναμις. Indeed, Aristotle's criticism of those who place the principle of being in δύναμις is that it is insufficient to explain the causal relations which structure reality. A principle which is δύναμις can fail to act; if the origin of all motion and all being is placed in a δύναμις, then there would be no motion at all, for the principle may not act.

The principle, Aristotle argues, must be an eternally *active* cause. That is, it must be fully ἐνέργεια. Thus, it is the concept of complete activity, which is in principle independent from δύναμις, that allows Aristotle to break the dichotomous ontological position of the Megarians. The principle is not a static and perfectly independent being, separated from all other beings, but *an eternal, active being that is connected to all that is through being its ultimate cause*. In other words, it is the concept of activity without motion that allows Aristotle to uphold the self-sustaining and determinate character of being without sacrificing its active character: that is, without severing its connection with motion, generation, and physical reality.

## CONCLUSION

One of the main aims of this dissertation was to show that Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians is not reduced to *Met. Θ 3*. I have argued extensively that this passage is a part of a larger discussion that concerns the Megarians, Plato, and Aristotle, one that revolves around fundamental ontological questions. In turn, this perspective has aided the interpretation of difficult Aristotelian texts that deal with the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, above all *Metaphysics Θ*.

The contours of the discussion can be outlined as follows. The Megarians attacked Plato's attempts to explain the problem of the unity of being and its relation with the multiplicity that characterizes the domain of becoming. Plato replied to these attacks in the *Euthydemus* and the *Sophist*, and, in doing so introduced the distinction between having a capacity and actively exercising it. This distinction, which originally served the purpose of confronting the Megarians' strict dichotomy between being and becoming, and their commitment to the univocal application of terms, proved to be a decisive influence in Aristotle's own philosophical path. As we saw, he based his own doctrine of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια largely on these Platonic precedents, and used this doctrine to confront similar problems: fundamentally, the problem of change and the issue of the unity of being.

Aristotle's own doctrine of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια was then the subject of direct criticism by his contemporary Megarians. These Megarians (most likely Eubulides of Miletus and his associates) were still committed to the radical unity of being, in particular to a kind of unity that allows of no combination or communication with that which is other than being (or what the Megarians consider to truly be). Aristotle dedicates *Θ 3* to answering the Megarian objection and claims that their position ends up denying all change and generation. Still, his answer is more complex, for he concedes to the Megarians that a self-sustained principle that does not change is needed. The difference is that, for Aristotle, this principle is not a static sameness but an active being that functions as the *cause* of all other beings.

In order to establish this, Aristotle introduces a radically innovative concept: motionless activity. As we saw, this represents the most fundamental (and original) sense of ἐνέργεια. The most distinctive feature of this concept is that of being complete, that is, of being in possession of its τέλος. It is this central characteristic that explains the extension of the concept of ἐνέργεια. In effect, the concept includes other crucial

applications that also revolve around the notion of being-an-end, that is, of being complete (ἐν-τελής).

One of those applications is that of substantial form. This concept runs parallel to that of complete activity, insofar as substantial forms are also complete. But it cannot explain the being of eternal or immaterial substances: these cannot be properly understood in hylomorphic terms. They are, instead, perpetually active beings foreign to δύναμις.

The other key application concerns motion: for Aristotle, motion represents a defective or incomplete instance of the proper kind of ἐνέργεια, which is identified with motionless or complete (τελεία) activity. Thus, motion appears as a secondary or derivative application of the core notion of τελεία ἐνέργεια. The importance of this insight cannot be overstated: Aristotle can explain and even define motion (something which no one had done before Aristotle and which, arguably, has not been repeated since) in terms of a concept that is in itself independent from and prior to motion.<sup>499</sup>

This plurality of senses of ἐνέργεια shows the plasticity of the concept and explains its outstanding philosophical output. The concept and its diverse applications are intimately related to Aristotle's own hierarchical conception of reality, which ranges from perishable substances that are subject to motion, to eternal substances that are fully ἐνέργεια independent from δύναμις, to the Prime Unmoved Mover, source of all motion and all being. My claim is that this hierarchical scheme, one of Aristotle's most important contributions to philosophy, is also, in part, an answer to the binary and rigid ontological scheme defended by the Megarians.

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<sup>499</sup> As Brague (1991, 107–108) provocatively states: “A fact of the history of ideas can draw our attention to the strangeness of the Aristotelian enterprise [*sc.* the task of offering a definition of motion]: it does not seem that Aristotle had any predecessor in this field. Moreover, one may wonder whether he had any successors. I have no intention of questioning the existence of a physics after Aristotle: its achievements are too obvious, and its validity confirmed a hundred times over. But one may wonder if this physics has ever tried to *define* motion, and if it has not been satisfied with the otherwise fruitful enterprise of studying its properties, and above all those that are measurable” (*Un fait d'histoire des idées peut attirer notre attention sur l'étrangeté de l'entreprise aristotélicienne: il ne semble pas qu'Aristote ait eu de prédécesseur en ce domaine. Bien plus, on peut se demander s'il a eu des successeurs. Je n'ai nullement l'intention de mettre en doute l'existence d'une physique après Aristote: ses conquêtes sont trop évidentes, et sa validité cent fois confirmée. Mais on peut se demander si cette physique a jamais cherché à définir le mouvement, et si elle ne s'est pas contentée de l'entreprise autrement féconde qui consiste à en étudier les propriétés, et avant tout celles qui sont mesurables*).

Although the Megarians are a somewhat elusive reference, which are alluded to explicitly only at Θ 3, we should not lose sight of the significance of the philosophical position they represented. That is, beyond historical considerations (which have been amply discussed above), we should note that Aristotle's doctrine of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια constitutes a response to a specific set of philosophical issues, such as the problem of the possibility of change, and the problem of the relation between one and many.

These issues, of course, were a constant source of concern for the Ancient Greeks. Their origins can certainly be traced to Parmenides and the Eleatic philosophers. But when trying to interpret the development and the configuration of Aristotle's doctrine of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, this reference is still too broad and abstract. Indeed, Aristotle is facing a series of opponents who are more concrete and determined. I hope to have demonstrated that the Megarians stand out among these opponents. This philosophical circle recovered some of Parmenides's most fundamental insights in order to develop a dialectical *praxis* that provided a serious challenge to both Plato and Aristotle. And their arguments, as Θ 3 shows, served a fundamental purpose in Aristotle's own argument in support of his doctrine of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. As we saw, the chapter not only refutes the Megarians by way of absurd; throughout the refutation, Aristotle presents crucial developments in the two concepts.

The Megarian *aporia* fundamentally concerns the relation between being and becoming, between one and many. Aristotle's strategy is to reject the rigid dichotomy upheld by his Megarian opponents by introducing a third instance: motionless activity. This is Aristotle's greatest achievement with regard to his doctrine of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Above all, it allows him to secure the being of the ultimate principle of all that which is. The Unmoved Mover is a kind of being which is not corruptible nor subject to any sort of change but which can be nevertheless regarded as eternal activity.

This means that, with his concept of complete activity, Aristotle can secure the existence of true being beyond motion. For Aristotle, being beyond motion does not mean a lost realm of uncommunicated and eternal εἶδη. On the contrary, being beyond motion is the highest form of active being: the noetic activity of the prime principle which functions as the ultimate cause of all that is.

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