

Santiago Chame*

On the Megarians of *Metaphysics* IX 3

<https://doi.org/10.1515/agph-2021-0086>

Abstract: In this paper, I compare the Megarian thesis of *Metaphysics* IX 3 with other sources on the Megarians in order to clarify two questions: that of the unity and nature of the so-called Megarian school and that of Aristotle's broader argument in IX 3. I first review the disputed issue of the status of the Megarian school and then examine two hypotheses regarding the identity behind Aristotle's allusion in IX 3. Third, I explore the connection between Megarianism and Plato's *Euthydemus*, a task that helps us to contextualize Aristotle's anti-Megarian polemic. Lastly, I build on the preceding argument in a re-examination of the Eleatic hypothesis with regard both to the Megarians as a whole and to the thesis that Aristotle transmits.

1 Introduction

One of the most important testimonies we have on the so-called Megarian school is found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, as follows:

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.* IX 3, 1046b29–32).¹

The task of providing some context to this succinct thesis is problematic. Testimonies on the Megarians are scarce and difficult to interpret. Much of what we know of them we owe to the doxographic tradition (principally Diogenes Laertius) and other late sources. This explains why many recent Aristotelian scholars, when

¹ Εἰσι δὲ τινες οἱ φασιν, οἷον οἱ Μεγαρικοὶ, 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. Translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

*Corresponding author: Santiago Chame, University of Verona, Department of Human Sciences, via San Francesco, 22 – 37129 Verona, IT; ORCID-ID 0000-0002-8163-8342, santiago.chame@univr.it

commenting on the passage, choose to ignore the relation between it and other sources on the Megarians.² Other scholars, more focused on the Megarian school, have posed a wide range of hypotheses on this passage.³ In this paper I intend to review some of these interpretations and add some novel considerations in the light of recent scholarship on the matter. This will, I hope, help us interpret the passage from two perspectives: that of Aristotle's argument and that of the vexing issue of the unity and nature of the Megarian school.

In what follows, I will first review the main lines of interpretation regarding the disputed issue of the status of the Megarian school (Section 2). This analysis represents a necessary condition for carrying out the exegesis of Aristotle's passage. I will then examine two hypotheses regarding the identity behind Aristotle's allusion in IX 3 (Section 3), a task which will lead us to analyze the main arguments of the passage. Next, I will explore the connection between Megarianism and Plato's *Euthydemus* (Section 4), in order to better grasp the context of Aristotle's anti-Megarian polemic. Lastly, I will build on the preceding argument in a re-examination of the Eleatic hypothesis with regard both to the Megarians as a whole and to the thesis that Aristotle transmits (Section 5).

2 The Question of the Unity of the Megarian School

The first question we must ask is: does something like a Megarian school even exist? If we turn to Ps. Alexander's commentary on the passage, we read that "Aristotle could mean by Megarians the disciples of Euclid: he in fact had his school in Megara" (Al. *In Met.* 570, 25–30 Hayduck = SSR II B 16).⁴ 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

² 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 f. n14). 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 IX 3. Makin 2006, 61, and Beere 2009, 91 n1, redirect the reader to Sedley's 1977 paper and Döring's 1972 edition of the testimonies, without further comment.

³ Döring 1972, Giannantoni 1990, Muller 1988, 2008 and Mársico 2013.

⁴ In what follows, I will cite the testimonies of the Megarians providing the original source together with the corresponding numeration of Giannantoni's 1990 *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*, abbreviated as SSR.

Isthmus, philosopher, introduced the school that was called Megarian after him, also called dialectic and eristic. He was a disciple of Socrates; after him Ichthyas and then Stilpo were in charge of the school” (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), and his successors were 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. [...] He upheld that the good is one (ἔν τὸ ἀγαθόν) although it is called by many names: sometimes prudence, sometimes divinity, sometimes intelligence, and so on. He also rejected what is opposite to the good, saying that it does not exist (τὰ δ’ ἀντικείμενα τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀνῆρη, μὴ εἶναι) (II 106, 5–15 = SSR II A 30).

We will have to return to this 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.

The traditional view of the Megarian school takes Diogenes’s testimony at face value; that is, it holds that the school’s doctrine resulted from a synthesis between Socratism and Eleaticism. We know that Euclid was a companion of Socrates, that he was on friendly terms with Plato,⁵ and composed several Socratic dialogues.⁶ Doxographers such as Diogenes write that he attracted followers and

⁵ 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). Moreover, 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. Finally, DL II 106 = SSR II A 5 states that after Socrates’s death, his companions (including Plato) took refuge with Euclid in Megara.

⁶ DL II 108 = SSR II A 10. Diogenes II 64 states that Panaetius doubted the authenticity of Euclid’s dialogues, but this judgement 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) and we have lexicographical references which were likely extracted from Euclid’s works (SSR II A 11–13). Cf. Mársico 2013, 107 n22. On the Socratic dialogue as a genre see Rossetti 2003. On Euclid’s dialogues see Rossetti 1980 and Giannantoni 1990, IV 36–39.

was the founder of a school or circle.⁷ Some testimonies relate Euclid and his followers not only to Parmenides but also to Zeno⁸ and Melissus,⁹ prompting modern interpreters to argue that this Eleatic component was a distinctive feature of the school.¹⁰ This view was widely accepted in the 19th and early to mid 20th centuries,¹¹ and its influence can be seen, for example, in Ross's commentary on the section of *Met.* IX 3 quoted earlier. 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'" (Ross 1924, II 244). Ross's claim seems to harmonize well with Aristotle's characterization of the Megarians as deniers of change in *Met.* IX 3, 1047a14.

The Eleatic interpretation, however, was thoroughly criticized by von Fritz 1931. His work signaled a shift that dominated 20th-century scholarship on the

7 DL II 106 = SSR II A 22.

8 "The school 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. 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. The allusion to Plato is also of interest, since it could be used to support Schleiermacher's (1824, 140–41) old thesis of an influence of Plato's Theory of Forms in Megarianism. The connection with Parmenides and Zeno is also present in Seneca's testimony (*Ep.* 88, 43–45 = SSR II A 33). Editors of the testimonies of the Megarians usually include only the mention to Zeno, but Seneca mentions Parmenides before, at the beginning of 88, 44: *Parmenides ait ex his, quae videntur, nihil esse uno excepto universo*.

9 As in the testimony of Aristocles: "there came others who [...] believed that it is necessary to disdain perception and representations, 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 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" *perì philosophías*, fr. 2 (apud Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XIV 17, 1, 756b–c) = SSR II O 26.

10 There is an interesting detail which 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.

11 For a detailed analysis of the modern interpretations of the Megarian school up to the mid 20th century, cf. Cambiano 1971. More recently, the Eleatic interpretation has been defended by Montoneri 1984 in his translation of Döring's edition, which includes a commentary and a few additional testimonies which are absent in Döring's work, by Bredlow 2011 and partially by Mársico 2013, 27–35, in her recent edition of the testimonies of the Socratics.

Megarians. Von Fritz's basic thesis denies the connection between the Megarians and Eleaticism, taking it to be a later construction by doxographers. Some of von Fritz's most important claims were picked up by Döring 1972, 83–87, who produced the first edition of the fragments of the Megarian school, by Muller 1985, 14 f., 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 challenged the traditional view which held that Diodorus Cronus belonged to the Megarian school in an important paper, though his position has been met with criticism.¹² The influence of this interpretative line can be seen in recent Aristotelian scholarship of *Met.* IX 3, which does not consider the ancient association between the Megarians and Eleaticism when analyzing the passage (see note 2 above).

Recent years have seen a reaction to the strongest version of von Fritz's thesis,¹³ which not only denies any sort of Eleatic influence on Euclid but, further, denies all unity to the Megarian school as a whole.¹⁴ Although the relation between the Megarians and Eleaticism remains disputed, few scholars deny that there was a philosophical group that started with Euclid and had a particular interest in dialectics 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.¹⁵ This feature is well attested in the available testimonies and supports the exist-

¹² Muller 1988, 44 n24, and Döring 1989 disputed the results of Sedley's work, and Denyer 2002 provided further evidence in favor of identifying Diodorus as a member of the Megarian circle.

¹³ Döring 1989, 309, for example, argues 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. The only unity of the group is found in the succession scheme between the diverse 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 the one of the Academia or the Peripatos.

¹⁴ Mársico 2011, 356; 2013, 28 f., argues that von Fritz's thesis collapses in circularity: first, it downplays the metaphysical aspect of Megarian philosophy by denying its Eleatic heritage; second, 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. Even more recently, Brancacci 2018 has argued in favor of acknowledging the Eleatic component of Euclid's thought, criticizing severely von Fritz's arguments and his methodological approach.

¹⁵ See for example Muller 1988, 39, 113 f., and Döring 1989, 310.

ence of such a thing as a Megarian group.¹⁶ 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 IX of the *Metaphysics* was composed.¹⁷

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 2018, 162, notes 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 with methodological concurrences. Determining the exact nature of the unity between the diverse Megarian exponents is a particularly difficult matter, but a closer look at Aristotle's testimony will prove helpful in understanding more fully the unity of the Megarian circle.

16 Diogenes distinguishes this dialectical character already in Euclid: "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 to 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, who inculcated the fury of discussion in the Megarians' (οὐδ' ἐριδάντεω Εὐκλείδεω, Μεγαρεῦσιν ὃς ἔμβαλε λύσσαν ἐρισμοῦ)" (II 107 = SSR II A 34). This testimony, obscure by the lack of context, seems to suggest that Euclid subscribed to some kind of dialectic with a purificatory scope, although of a different kind than Plato's middle conception of dialectics. The predilection for dialectical argumentation can also be seen in the cases of Bryson (*Soph. El.* 171b3–172a7 = SSR II S 11), Polyxenus (Al. *In Met.*, 84, 16–21 Hayduck) and Eubulides (DL II 108 = SSR II B 13), the second generation of Megarians, and in Diodorus Cronus and Stilpo of Megara, exponents of the third generation of Megarians. On Diodorus and Stilpo, see Sections 3 and 5 of this paper respectively. Finally, the dilemmatic structure of Euclid's argument against reasoning by way of comparison resembles the rigid and disjunctive interrogations to which Euthydemus and Dionysodorus subject their interlocutors in Plato's *Euthydemus*; as we will see in Section 5 below, it is likely that the brothers were representatives of the Megarian circle. The resemblance between Euclid's and the brothers' argumentative patterns seems to reinforce the connection.

17 The name 'Megarians' (Μεγαρικοί) also appears in titles of ancient texts: cf. e.g. Theophrastus (Μεγαρικός, DL V 44 = SSR II A 35) and Epicurus (Πρὸς τοὺς Μεγαρικούς, DL X 27 = SSR II B 17). It should also be noted that neither Eubulides of Miletus nor Diodorus Cronus (the two philosophers which are usually thought to be behind Aristotle's allusion, cf. Section 3 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. I thank an anonymous reviewer for their comments on this issue.

3 Two Hypotheses Regarding *Met.* IX 3: Eubulides of Miletus and Diodorus Cronus

Before we move forward, it is important to note that, traditionally, it has been thought that Diodorus Cronus (or a proto-Diodorean position) is behind Aristotle's allusion.¹⁸ 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 motion,¹⁹ which is 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 (κυριεῦον λόγος),²⁰ long believed to be a veiled reference at play in chapter 3, more specifically at 1047a10–17. However, Giannantoni 1981 and 1990 rejects this reading. In addition to chronological issues,²¹ he points to several incongruences between the thesis of IX 3 and Diodorus's Master Argument.²² Based on this, he hypothesizes that either Eubulides of Miletus or one of his immediate associates should be taken to

18 Döring 1972, 38 f., 133–35, 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 f., and Mársico 2013, 196–99 n133. Döring states that the doctrine which features at IX 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.

19 SE *Adv. math.* X 48 = SSR II F 12; X 85–102 = SSR II F 13.

20 Cf. Epict., *Dissert.* II 19, 1–5 = SSR II F 24; Cic. *Fat.* 6, 12–7, 13 = SSR II F 25; Al. *In An. Pr.* 183 f., Wallies = SSR II F 27.

21 Giannantoni 1990, 73–76, reminds us of Sedley's argument regarding the chronology of Diodorus (cf. Sedley 1977, 79 f. 109 n37). Sedley argues that Diodorus could not have died earlier than 285 BC, contesting the traditional dating of 307 BC. We know that book IX of the *Metaphysics* was most probably 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 IX 3 ultimately refers to Diodorus simply because he does not think that he was a Megarian.

22 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. note 33 below) is explicitly rejected by Aristotle at *Met.* IX 4, 1047b3–6. According to Giannantoni 1990, 271 f., 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 Kalbfleisch = SSR II F 27).

be the reference behind Aristotle's 'οἱ Μεγαρίκοι'.²³ Eubulides was undoubtedly a contemporary of Aristotle, and we have several testimonies that refer to a direct polemic between them.²⁴ Eubulides is famous for formulating a series of dialectical arguments,²⁵ and it is not hard to imagine that the argument which features in IX 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 IX 3 is better read independently of Diodorus's Master Argument.²⁶ 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 seems not to be specifically concerned with modality or time, which are central aspects of both 1047a10–17 and the Master Argument.²⁷ 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.²⁸ In this first section,

²³ Cf. Giannantoni 1990 IV, 84 f.

²⁴ "Eubulides was in disagreement with Aristotle and attacked him vehemently on many occasions". DL 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.

²⁵ DL 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". The arguments take their names from the examples that illustrate them, although some of them share the same structure (like the Sorites and the Bald Head). They emphasize certain paradoxes regarding the truth or falseness of propositions. On this point see Moline 1969 and Wheeler 1983. Moline in particular analyzes the Sorites as an eristic argument put forward by Eubulides against Aristotle's doctrine of the mean.

²⁶ Sedley 1977, 107 n25, Makin 2006, 72, and Berti 2017, 398 f. n9, agree with Giannantoni. Schuhl 1960, 34, Hintikka 1973, 199–204, 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.

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ It seems to me an error to translate δύνασθαι at 1046b30–31 as 'possibility' (as does Weidemann 2008, 131 f.; 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, i. e. 1046b29–

Aristotle exemplifies the Megarian thesis by reference to housebuilding and refutes it by way of examples of other capacities such as sensation and sight (1047a7–10).²⁹ 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.³⁰

Although there is indeed proximity of content between Aristotle's second argument against the Megarians (1047a10–17) and the Master Argument, there are important differences between them. It will be helpful to examine Aristotle's argument in a little more detail, as it will help us make progress on the question of the motivation behind the Megarian thesis. The argument is complex and there has been much scholarly discussion on it; I will focus on simply showing in which way it differs from Diodorus's arguments.

Aristotle's second argument revolves around the example of generation, which allows Aristotle to expand on the modal implications 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 someone were to say that something which cannot come to be is or will be (ἢ εἶναι ἢ ἔσεσθαι), they would be lying (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. Aristotle uses a single word (δυνατόν) for the concepts of capacity and possibility (and, conversely, ἀδύνατον for incapacity and impossibility), but it is clear that he is aware of the distinction between the two senses:

1047a10 – are better understood if we read them primarily in terms of powers or capacities and their corresponding exercise, as do Gomez Cabranes 1989, 102, Menn 1994, 94 n31, Witt 2003, 20–23, Makin 2006, 60, and Beere 2009, 94 n6.

29 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.

30 Muller 2008 loses sight of the fact that the thesis in IX 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 the Master Argument provides the key to understanding the Megarian polemic in IX 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.

Aristotle has defined ἀδυναμία in *Met.* V 12 firstly as that which is deprived of δύναμις (ἀδυναμία ἐστὶ στερήσις δυνάμεως, 1019b15–16), which, 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. This definition reappears at the beginning of the argument (ἀδύνατον τὸ ἐστερημένον δυνάμεως, 1047a11). But a second definition of both δυνατόν and ἀδύνατον is offered in V 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 ἀληθές 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 with relation to the primary (πρώτη) sense of δύναμις, as principle of change in another (1020a). Aristotle thus distinguishes in V 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).

However, in the context of this argument, Aristotle is deliberately conflating both senses.³¹ 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 is 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 to be does come to be results in contradiction.³² 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 *impos-*

³¹ This is the position of Gomez Cabranes 1989, 104 n69, Witt 2003, 28–30, Reale 2004, 1120, Beere 2009, 109–11, and Berti 2017, 399 n14.

³² 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 n26.

sible 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 δυνάμις as a capacity reveals itself to be at the same time an account of the possible. Given that all change and generation is impossible if we reject the existence of subsistent non-enacted δυνάμεις, we must accept, says Aristotle, the distinction between δυνάμις and ἐνέργεια (1047a17–18), which is exactly what the Megarians deny (1047a19–20).

Compare this account with Diodorus's Master Argument. First of all, it is evident that Diodorus's argument does not deal with a physical account of δυνάμις, but exclusively with the modal concept of possibility. 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;³³ 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 *t*₁, of course with the caveat that *it has* to be actual at time *t*₁ since nothing impossible follows the possible.³⁴ 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

33 Although the argument was much discussed in ancient times, its original structure is unknown. The clearest formulation of the argument 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”), and said to contradict each other. Diodorus allegedly kept the first two and extracted the conclusion that “there is nothing possible except for that which is or will be true” (μηδὲν εἶναι δυνατόν, ὃ οὐτ' ἔστιν ἀληθές οὐτ' ἔσται Epict. *Dissert.* II 19, 1–2 = Döring fr. 131; SSR II F 24. Giannantoni misprints the line at II 19, 1, 3). Still, 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 and 1996, Vuillemin 1996, Denyer 1996 and 2009, and Weidemann 2008 for more specific attempts to reconstruct the argument.

34 δύναται λέγειν καὶ περὶ τῶν δυνατῶν, τοῦ τε, ὃ διδωρῶριον λέγεται, ὃ ἢ ἔστιν ἢ ἔσται, Al. *In An. Pr.*, 183f. 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 in the previous note (“possible is that which is or will be true”, δυνατόν εἶναι ὃ οὐτ' ἔστιν ἀληθές οὐτ' ἔσται, *Dissert.* II 19, 1 = SSR II F 24). Regarding the ἀληθές which appears in this last testimony, it would be mistaken to believe that it refers to a specific linguistical domain, as opposed to the ontological formulation which appears in Alexander. As Giannantoni 1981, 262f., notes, such a clear-cut distinction between the linguistical and ontological realms is foreign to ancient logical thought.

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. There is, however, another way in which Aristotle's second argument can be connected with Diodorus, which also involves some difficulties. As we saw 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" (εἰ κινεῖται τι, ἤτοι ἐν ᾧ ἔστι τόπω κινεῖται ἢ ἐν ᾧ μὴ ἔστιν· οὐτε δὲ ἐν ᾧ ἔστι (μένει γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ), οὐτε ἐν ᾧ μὴ ἔστιν (οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ)· οὐκ ἄρα κινεῖται τι, SE *Adv. math.* X 87 = SSR II F 13). 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" (κεκίνηται δὲ κατὰ λόγον· τὸ γὰρ πρότερον ἐν τῷδε τῷ τόπῳ θεωρούμενον, τοῦτο ἐν ἑτέρῳ νῦν θεωρεῖται τόπω· ὅπερ οὐκ ἂν ἐγεγόνει μὴ κινήθέντος αὐτοῦ, SE *Adv. math.* X 86 = SSR II F 13). 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 (X 85 f. = 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.³⁵

All of the above seems to suggest, as is argued by Giannantoni, that Diodorus should not be taken to be the reference behind the 'οἱ Μεγαρίκοι' of IX 3. In fact, the parallels between *Met.* IX 3, 1047a10–17, and Diodorus's conception of possibility,³⁶ 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 IX 3.³⁷

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. The etymology of this term is obscure,³⁸ but there is broad consensus that the term ἐνέργεια was coined by Aristotle himself.³⁹ If

35 Mársico 2013, 182 n120, argues that other authors, 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.* IX 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.

36 Compare Aristotle's expression at *Met.* IX 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, ὁ οὐτ' ἔστιν ἀληθὲς οὐτ' ἔσται and Al. *In An. Pr.* 183 f. Wallies = SSR II F 24: δύναται λέγειν καὶ περὶ τῶν δυνατῶν, τοῦ τε, ὁ Διοδώρειον λέγεται, ὃ ἢ ἔστιν ἢ ἔσται.

37 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 (X 112–18 = 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.

38 For different attempts at reconstructing the etymology of the term see Bonitz 1849, 387, von Fritz 1963/[1938], 67, Graham 1987, 186 f., Blair 1992, 17–20, Beere 2009, 94 n6, and 161–63.

39 Menn 2009, 249 n77, and Menn 2021, 244 n83, suggest 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 εὐργεσίας, not ἐνεργείας; the latter term was originally introduced as an

Aristotle reports the argument such as it was 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.⁴⁰ 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.

4 Plato's *Euthydemus* and the Megarians' Eristic Dialectics

When defending his choice of identifying the οἱ Μεγαρικοί with Eubulides, Giannantoni states that Eubulides's arguments

resumed analogous procedures to those of Zenonian dialectics, and therefore were in so many aspects akin to the Eleatizing eristics 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]).⁴¹

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 IX 3. As others have shown,⁴² 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 shall see, it is this original formulation that Aristotle defends from Megarian attack in IX 3. The connection between the two texts becomes even more evident if we take Giannanto-

emendation by Reiske in his 1773 edition. More recently, Avezzi 1982 prints the textually correct εὐεργεσίας and offers a satisfactory translation of the passage, showing that the emendation is unwarranted.

⁴⁰ This point is rightly underscored by Muller 1988, 138–50 and Mársico 2013, 35–44.

⁴¹ Giannantoni 1990 IV, 84 f.: “[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. SE *Adv. math.* VII 13 [= II B 12])”.

⁴² This idea, which can be traced back to Jaeger 1928, has been defended by De Strycker 1968, 159 f., Schankula 1971, Graham 1987, 190 f., Rist 1989, 105 f., Yepes Stork 1989, and Menn 1994.

ni's suggestion one step further and claim that the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus were in fact representatives of the Megarian circle, and that Plato had the Megarians in mind when composing the dialogue. Giannantoni deems this hypothesis unlikely (Giannantoni 1990 IV, 62), but recent scholars have provided strong reasons which seem to confirm the impression that they were Megarians. If this were so, we could affirm that the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια had – since its early precedents in Plato and throughout its development (as it is clear from IX 3) – a direct relation with eristic arguments of Megarian origin. Moreover, if we accept this interpretation, we would be able to see that the eristic arguments of the *Euthydemus* provide the background for the Megarian thesis, which would in turn help us to understand the possible motivations behind it.

Let us first turn to the issue of the identity of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. 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 *Soph. El.* 177b12 and *Rhet.* 1401a26. We also have some mention of them in the doxographic tradition, particularly in Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. 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.⁴³ Plato does call them “new sophists” (καινοὶ σοφισταὶ) 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.⁴⁴

⁴³ This is the interpretation of Sprague 1972, 294 f., 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 n15), sophistic antilogy (Chance 1992, 21) and sophistic argumentation (Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi 2014, 85 f.). 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.

⁴⁴ 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, 233–39). Most recently, 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 most comprehensive and detailed case for this interpretation has been put forward in Dorion 2000. This author points out that the eristic dialectics of the brothers do not resemble the μακροὶ λόγοι of the traditional sophists but rather seem nearer to the Socratic ἔλεγχος.⁴⁵ 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. Moreover, the brothers are said to be masters of eristics (*Euthd.* 272b10), and the Megarians (who were also routinely called sophists, as Dorion 2000, 37 n14, observes) are consistently described in the sources as ἐριστικοί.⁴⁶ This harmonizes well with two important testimonies to which Dorion draws our attention: one by Diogenes Laertius, who connects the *Euthydemus* with Euclid,⁴⁷ and one by Sextus Empiricus, who places both Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in the company of Megarians such as Alexinus, Eubulides, and Bryson as practitioners of logic.⁴⁸ Finally, there is the not-negligible connection between some of the arguments that feature in the dialogue, and Aristotle's *Soph. El.*, which Dorion contends are principally directed against the Megarians.⁴⁹

According to this interpretation, one of Plato's primary purposes in the *Euthydemus* would be to denounce the Megarians' eristic dialectics, which he views as a deviation from the proper kind of dialectics. The Megarians were cer-

the brothers are two generic sophists, she seems to accept many of Dorion's conclusions. For an opposing view, see Muller 1988, 40 n18 and 135 f.

45 This is also the opinion of Hitchcock 2000.

46 Cf. DL II 30 = SSR II A 3; DL II 106 = SSR II A 22; DL II 119 = SSR II O 27; Suda s. v. Socrates = SSR II S 2; Suda s. v. *rhombostomylēthra* = SSR II B 1; Arist. *Soph. El.* 11, 171b3–172a7 = SSR II S 11; Athenaeus, XIII 584a = SSR II O 18; Aristocles, *perì philosophías*, fr. 7 (apud Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XV 2, 4, 791 c–d) = SSR II C 14.

47 DL 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*." 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).

48 SE *Adv. math.* VII 13 f. = 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.

49 Cf. Dorion, 1995, 47–53. The parallels between the arguments of the *Euthydemus* and the *Soph. El.* 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.

tainly contemporaries of Plato, and it would not be strange for him to portray a competing philosophical position (which, moreover, traces its origins back to Socrates himself) in such a way as to establish a distinction between it and his own perspective on dialectics. This would explain why the dialogue alternates between exemplifications of the wrong kind of dialectics pursued by the brothers (275d–278e, 283b–288c, and 293b–304c) and protreptic discourses 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.⁵⁰

As we said above, the connection between the *Euthydemus* and the Megarians is particularly important, for there is indeed a close link between this dialogue and the development of Aristotle's theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Menn 1994 shows that Plato's response to the brother's eristic arguments constitutes an important precedent of the original formulation of the distinction, which is structured in terms of a contrast between the possession of a capacity and its active exercise (the same terms as in Aristotle's polemic against the Megarians in IX 3).

There is one specific dialectical exchange that seems to have made a strong impression on Aristotle. At 275d–277c, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus carry out an eristic dialectical exchange with the young Clinias. Euthydemus asks a dichotomous question regarding who actually learns: the wise man or the ignorant (πότεροί εἰσι τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ μανθάνοντες, οἱ σοφοὶ ἢ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς;); and before Clinias can reply, Dionysodorus whispers the following to Socrates: “Let me tell you, Socrates, beforehand that, whichever way the boy answers, he will be refuted” (*Euthd.* 275e4–6). Following this warning, Euthydemus refutes Clinias as he 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 their eristic argument revolves around the ambiguity of the term μανθάνειν,⁵¹ which can

⁵⁰ 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 dialectics of the brothers and his own take on dialectics (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. This identification is favoured by Hawtrey 1981, 190–96, Canto 1989, 33–37, Palpacelli 2009, 220–226, and Mársico and Inverso 2012, 90–93. It is opposed by Chance 1992, 200 f., and Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi 2014, 141 f. On the connection between the Megarians, the *Euthydemus* and Isocrates, see Villar 2016 and 2020a.

⁵¹ Strictly speaking, the passage contains two arguments. The first argument (275d–276c) revolves around the question whether the wise or the ignorant learn, but at 276d–277c, the focus shifts toward whether the learners learn what they know or what they ignore. Although there

refer both to the act of acquiring some knowledge and to the act of exercising an already acquired knowledge. Facing this ambiguity, Socrates distinguishes two senses or uses of the verb ‘to learn’. One refers to a man “who having originally no knowledge about some matter, in the course of time acquires such knowledge,” the other “when, having (ἔχων) already knowledge, through that knowledge the same matter is examined (ἐπισκοπῆ), whether in speech or in action” (277e–278a). Socrates states that this second sense is usually called “understanding” (συνιέναι) rather than “learning” (μανθάνειν), but that it is occasionally called learning too, and concludes that “the same name is used for people who are in the opposite conditions of knowing and not knowing” (278a6–7).

Socrates appears to refer to two different sets of actions, which are related to two opposite states or conditions, in this case having and not having knowledge (although being capable of acquiring it). This distinction is, of course, reminiscent of Aristotle’s discussion of first and second potentiality and actuality in *De Anima* II 5. But Socrates focuses on the second kind of action. Given that the object of the dialectical exchange is the acquisition of virtue, Socrates goes on and clarifies that “it is necessary not only to possess (κεκτηῖσθαι) goods of this kind so as to be happy, but to use (χρῆσθαι) them too, for without this use nothing from their possession (κτήσεως) comes to be useful” (280d5–7). As Menn notes, this distinction between a mere having (ἔχειν) and using (χρῆσθαι) constitutes the earliest configuration of the contrast between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, such as it can be seen in the *Protrepticus*. In this work, Aristotle states that ‘to live’ is said in two ways, “one which deals with δύναμις, the other with ἐνέργεια” (XI 56.15–16/B79),⁵² and exemplifies this contrast by way of the act of seeing (an activity which distinguishes living beings from non-living beings). Aristotle claims that the term ‘seer’ can refer both to those “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,” and to those “which are using the capacity (τὰ χρώμενα τῇ δυνάμει) and are looking at something” (56.16–19/B79). This same distinction applies to knowing and understanding: “on the one hand, we speak of using and of contemplating (χρῆσθαι καὶ θεωρεῖν), and on the other of possessing a δύναμις and of having the knowledge” (κεκτηῖσθαι τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχειν) (56.19–22/B79).

are subtle differences between them, both arguments rely on the ambiguity of μανθάνειν, as is observed by Spague 1962, 5–8, Canto 1989, 193 n68, Dorion 1995, 93 f., Palpacelli 2009, 86 f. n6, 98 f. n19, and Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi 2014, 68.

⁵² 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 Düring’s 1961 reconstruction. Cf. also D. S. Hutchinson and M. R. Johnson’s 2005 authentication of the *Protrepticus* fragments which feature in Iamblichus.

In this passage, Plato's distinction between the possession of a capacity and its exercise resurfaces, translated in Aristotle's novel terminology, i. e., δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. As in the case of Socrates's distinction in the *Euthydemus*, the distinction primarily concerns predicates and their application: "And so, whenever each of two things are said the same way, and one of them is called 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).

This original construal of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction resurfaces in IX 3.⁵³ As I already 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 especially concerned with *activities*, doings, such as housebuilding and seeing (these are the examples that feature both in IX 3 and in the *Protrepticus*, in particular 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: 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 IX 3, like the brothers of the *Euthydemus*, 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.* IX 3 consider that using the same word "for people who are in opposite conditions" (278a) is absurd, or at least unintelligible.⁵⁴

⁵³ Menn 1994, 94 n31, sees no connection between the *Euthydemus*'s passages and the Megarian polemic in IX 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 IX 3 retraces the earlier discussion regarding capacities which takes place at the *Protrepticus*, which in turn was heavily influenced by Plato's *Euthydemus*, as he himself demonstrates. The connection becomes even clearer if we admit the Megarian interpretation of the *Euthydemus*.

⁵⁴ 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 potenti-

Aristotle provides no context to the Megarian thesis. However, we can see that the argument which Aristotle transmits fits our description of the eristic dialectics of the Megarians, widely attested in the sources, and which can be seen in its pristine form in the *Euthydemus*. 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 dialectics are a way of displaying the numerous interferences and ambiguities that thwart any attempt to address reality through discourse. It is this concern with ambiguity that features in, for example, Eubulides’s famous Electra argument,⁵⁵ and that reappears in *Metaphysics* IX 3, where Aristotle defends the distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια from Megarian attack.

5 A Final Note on the Megarians and Eleaticism

Before concluding, there is one final question we must address. As we saw in the second section of this paper, the connection between the Megarians and the Eleatics is contested by many scholars. But is it possible that the Megarian thesis of *Met.* IX 3 was inspired by the Eleatics? In other words, was Ross entirely misguided in his interpretation of the Megarian thesis? The issue is of course controversial. But the question – which undoubtedly merits a much more thorough treatment than the one I can offer here – deserves to be posed.

There are some indications that there could indeed be a connection between the Megarians and a broad notion of Eleaticism, both in the *Euthydemus* and in Aristotle’s argument in IX 3. Let us first consider the *Euthydemus*.

There are two sets of arguments that seem to connect the eristics 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

ality). In contrast, the Megarians of IX 3 seem to contest the distinction between the possession of a capacity and its active exercise (in 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.

⁵⁵ Cf. DL II 108 = SSR II B 13. See for example the formulation transmitted by Lucianus, *Vitarum auctio*, 22–23 (trans. A. M. Harmon):

“Buyer – What do you mean by the Veiled Figure and the Electra?”

Stoic – The Electra is the famous Electra, the daughter of Agamemnon, who at once knew and did not know the same thing (ἢ τὰ αὐτὰ οἶδέ τε ἄμα 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”.

valid or invalid (cf. 272a7–b1, 275e5–6).⁵⁶ This, of course, is a noted feature of Zeno's philosophy, which makes eager use of antilogics (although, presumably, not in a dialectical context such as the one portrayed in the *Euthydemus*).⁵⁷

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.⁵⁸ 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 denies 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 to be destruction is in reality simply a change in attribute.⁵⁹

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

⁵⁶ On this point, see Kerferd 1981, 63–67, and Montoneri 1984, 61f. The argument also has a clear connection with the paradox of knowledge in Plato's *Meno*, where it is called an ἐριστικός λόγος (80e2).

⁵⁷ The influence of Zeno of Elea on the Megarians has recently been underscored by Gardella 2019, esp. 713–20. Zeno has been thought to be a precursor of eristics since ancient times, and we can see here in *Euthd.* 275d–277c a clear parallel between his distinct way of arguing and the eristic dialectics of the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.

⁵⁸ Cf. Dixsaut 2003, 57. The Eleatic inspiration of this argument is also noted by Canto 1989, 56 f. Chance 1992, 29, Palpacelli 2009, 88, 93f., and Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi 2014, 108 f., 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. note 16 above.

⁵⁹ The fact that Socrates is here tacitly distinguishing between the existential and predicative uses of the verb to be is noted by Burnyeat 2002, 61 f.

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.⁶⁰ 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 that 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 that which 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).⁶¹ The argument relies on the ambiguity of the existential and 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

⁶⁰ As argued by Sprague 1962, 13, Hawtrey 1981, 3, and Palpacelli 2009, 128. This kind of argument is identified and criticized by Aristotle in *Soph. El.* 167a. Although there are other elements at play in the argument, as Chance 1992, 85 f., rightly observes, it seems clear that the core of this particular eristic argument lies in the ambiguity of the verb to be.

⁶¹ 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 n150, Dorion 2000, 43, Burnyeat 2002, 51–53, Mársico and Inverso 2012, 66–72, 133 n48, 134 n49, 140 n58). 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 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 οἰκείος λόγος) and this passage of the *Euthydemus*.

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).⁶²

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 (ἐκάστω 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 it 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.⁶³ Moreover, the arguments and the Eleatic premises that

⁶² 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, 13f., Canto 1989, 56–58, 199 n105, 108, Chance 1992, 88f., Palpacelli 2009, 131f., and Mársico and Inverso 2012, 135 n50.

⁶³ This interpretation becomes even more plausible if we conceive Eleaticism as a form of essential or predicational monism, and not numerical monism, as in the view of Curd 2004, xviii (for a review of the diverse kinds of monism, see Rapp 2006, 162–66). In fact, the Megarians do not seem committed to the existence of *one* entity, but to the necessary unity and self-identity of (each) being. This also explains why several scholars have thought, since Schleiermacher in the 19th century, that the Megarians were behind Plato’s reference to the “Friends of the Forms” in *Sophist* 246a–249d (for a relatively recent defense of this interpretation, see Muller 1988, 93–100). However, this hypothesis, which had already been questioned in Gillespie 1911, is rejected by some recent scholars of the Megarian school (Montoneri 1984, 46f., Giannantoni 1990, IV 53, Gardella 2014, 6f.), and by many scholars of Plato (Cornford 1935, 242–48, Ross 1951, 107, Bluck 1975, 94, de Rijk 1986, 102, among many others), who usually choose to identify the Friends of the Forms with Plato’s earlier self (for criticism of this position see Diès 1925, 292–96, Cherniss 1944,

guide them are consistent with other testimonies on the Megarians such as that of Diogenes Laertius, 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 ἔν τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἀπεφαίνετο πολλοῖς ονόμασι καλούμενον [...] τὰ δ’ ἀντικείμενα τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀνήρει, μὴ εἶναι) (DL 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. note 55 above). It is also tempting to connect these passages with other Megarian arguments: Stilpo’s critique of attribution;⁶⁴ his denial of Plato’s Theory of Forms;⁶⁵ and Polyxenus’s Third Man argument.⁶⁶ 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.

Having reached this point, some clarification is needed. It is important to note that 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. It seems, rather, that Eleatic premises were adopted as the guiding principles of a large number of their refutations, and that these were not intended to support a specific positive doctrine, but simply to underscore the difficulties involved in their opponents’ philosophical positions.

However, what about the Megarian thesis of IX 3? At first glance, the thesis does not seem to be directly related to any sort of Eleatic premise. But the fact is that Aristotle *does* connect the thesis with what seems to be an Eleatic position later in his argument. After completing the refutation of the Megarians in IX 3, Aristotle claims that the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια contrast must be upheld given 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 δυνατὸν μὲν τι εἶναι μὴ εἶναι δέ, καὶ δυνατὸν μὴ εἶναι εἶναι δέ, 1047a20–22). The reverse of this thesis, i. e., that something cannot be capable of being and not being, seems to

439 n376, Taylor 1961, 44–47, Crombie 1963, 419–21, and Gonzalez 2011, 78f.). I will address this issue in detail in a further article.

⁶⁴ Cf. Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem*, 23 = SSR II O 29, and Muller 1985, 173. It is worth noting that although Plutarch restricts this position to Stilpo, Simplicius (*In Phys.* 120, 12–17 Diels = SSR II O 30) extends it to the whole of the Megarian group.

⁶⁵ DL II 119 = SSR II O 27.

⁶⁶ Al. *In Met.* 84, 16–21 Hayduck. Scholars disagree on the affiliation of Polyxenus to the Megarian circle: Döring 1972, 67–70, relegates the testimonies on this philosopher to an appendix, and Giannantoni does not include them in his edition. By contrast, Polyxenus is included in the works of Montoneri 1984, 256–60, Muller 1985, 71–73, and Mársico 2013, 131–36.

be a direct implication of the Megarian thesis, and it is exactly what Aristotle seeks to deny. Aristotle is arguing in favor of considering δύναμις as an instance of relative non-being; things δυνατά are not because they are not yet in ἐνέργεια (1047a24–26), but they *are* in a particular way, as potential beings (δυνάμει ὄντα, 1047b1–2). This allows Aristotle to overcome the Eleatic *aporia* against coming to be,⁶⁷ for he believes that generation takes place from non-being in reference to δύναμις (τὸ μὴ ὄν καὶ τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν, ἐκ τούτου ἢ γένεσις ἐστίν, *Met.* XIV 2, 1089a27–28). Once more, the Megarians thesis of 1046b29–32 speaks neither of generation nor of the unity of being, but of the ambiguity implied in Aristotle’s original distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Still, Aristotle relates this objection to the problem of non-being and to the problem of genesis, and it is tempting to assume that this set of issues lurks behind the Megarian thesis. If we accept that Eleatic premises are operative in many of the eristic arguments of the *Euthydemus* and that they can be traced in other Megarian sources such as Eubulides’s Electra argument, Stilpo’s argument against attribution, and Polyxenus’ Third Man argument, then it seems logical to assign them, to a certain extent, to the Megarian thesis of IX 3. Accordingly, the Megarians would state that merely having a capacity and actively exercising it are mutually exclusive states, and go on to reject the former, 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. That is why, in Aristotle’s view, they “make δύναμις and ἐνέργεια the same” (1047a19–20).

Ross perhaps arrived by a similar path at his judgment that the Megarian thesis was of Parmenidean inspiration, and one can see that he was not entirely misguided. Still, the alleged Eleatic influence in Megarian philosophy remains a hypothesis which, although it has much textual support, is far from certain. There is no conclusive evidence that the Megarians were positively committed to the beliefs of Parmenides, and it seems unlikely that they were in some way neo-Eleatics, as the testimonies of Cicero and Aristocles may appear to suggest.

It seems safer to admit a more reductive reading. An important number of the eristic arguments proposed by the Megarians clearly relied on some Eleatic tenets (the unity of being, the rejection of non-being, the *aporiai* of change). These arguments are broadly negative in nature, and do not necessarily commit the Megarians to any positive doctrine. Thus, within the limitations that the sources impose on us, we can present a more balanced approach to the Megarian school, one

⁶⁷ Aristotle announces that the Eleatic challenge against coming to be can be overcome by way of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction in *Phys.* I 8, 191b27–29.

that neither overstates nor denies the Eleatic influence in Megarian philosophy. This seems to accord with the thesis of IX 3 and – given how Aristotle pursues the argument in the rest of the chapter – it is probable (though not certain) for it to be of broadly Eleatic origin.

By way of conclusion, we can now turn to our initial concerns and extract two results from our review of the points of contact between the Megarian thesis of IX 3 and other Megarian sources. The first one concerns the problem of the unity and nature of the Megarian circle. 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 dialectics, the inherent difficulties of their rivals' theoretical constructs. The arguments of the Megarians were undoubtedly important and challenging enough to merit the attention of both Plato and Aristotle.

The second result concerns the interpretation of Aristotle's argument in *Met.* IX 3. As we saw, Aristotle's confrontation with the Megarians – which he had inherited to some extent from Plato – was an important element in the development of his theory of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Furthermore, the polemic against the Megarians provides Aristotle, in the context of book IX, with the opportunity to expand on crucial aspects of his theory, in particular the modal connotations of his concept of δύναμις. Moreover, his treatment of the notion of δυνάμει ὄν as a form of relative non-being anticipates the discussion of the second part of the book (chapters 6–9). IX 3 is a pivotal chapter: in it Aristotle not only secures the existence of inactive δυνάμεις, but he also connects the initial analysis of δύναμις as a principle of change with the latter analysis of the properly ontological concept of δύναμις. All of this seems to explain satisfactorily why Aristotle included a polemic against the Megarians in the middle of book IX, the place which presents the most detailed treatment of the concepts of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in the entire *Corpus Aristotelicum*.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ I gave versions of this paper at conferences in Buenos Aires, Verona, Brasilia and Madrid. I thank all those audiences for their comments. I am especially grateful to Claudia Mársico, Linda Napolitano Valditara, Alessandro Stavru, Fabián Mié, Silvia Fazzo, Arianna Fermani, Francisco Villar and Stefano Pone for extended discussions.

<i>Adv. math.</i>	Sextus Empiricus, <i>Adversus Mathematicos</i>
<i>Al.</i>	Alexander of Aphrodisias
<i>Arist.</i>	Aristotle
<i>Cic.</i>	Cicero
<i>DA</i>	Aristotle, <i>De Anima</i>
<i>Dissert.</i>	Epictetus, <i>Dissertationes ab Arriano digestae</i>
<i>DL</i>	Diogenes Laertius
<i>Epict.</i>	Epictetus
<i>Euseb.</i>	Eusebius
<i>Euthd.</i>	Plato, <i>Euthydemus</i>
<i>Fat.</i>	Cicero, <i>De Fato</i>
<i>In An. Pr.</i>	Alexander of Aphrodisias. <i>In Aristotelis Analyticorum Priorum librum I Commentarium</i>
<i>In Met.</i>	Alexander of Aphrodisias, <i>In Aristotelis Metaphysica Commentaria</i>
<i>In Phys.</i>	Simplicius, <i>Simplicii in Aristotelis Physicorum libros octo Commentaria</i>
<i>In Cat.</i>	Simplicius, <i>In Aristotelis Categorias Commentarium</i>
<i>In Cra.</i>	Proclus, <i>In Platonis Cratylum Commentaria</i>
<i>Met.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysica</i>
<i>Phys.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Physica</i>
<i>Resp.</i>	Plato, <i>Respublica</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Rhetorica</i>
<i>Simpl.</i>	Simplicius
<i>SSR</i>	Giannantoni, G. 1990, <i>Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae</i> , 4 vols. Naples
<i>SE</i>	Sextus Empiricus
<i>Soph. El.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Sophistici Elenchi</i>
<i>Stob.</i>	Stobaeus

- Avezzù, G. 1982. *Alcidamante: orazioni e frammenti*. Bollettino dell' Istituto di Filologia Greca Supplemento 6. Rome.
- Burnet, J. (ed.) 1903. *Platonis opera*, vol. III. Oxford.
- Beere, J. 2009. *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta*. Oxford.
- Berti, E. 2017. *Aristotele, Metafisica*. Rome.
- Blair, G. A. 1992. *Energeia and Entelecheia. 'Act' in Aristotle*. Ottawa.
- Bluck, R. S. 1975. *Plato's Sophist. A Commentary by R. S. B.* Ed. by G. C. Neil. Manchester.
- Bonitz, H. 1847. *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis commentarius in libros Metaphysicos Aristotelis*. Berlin.
- . 1849. *Aristotelis Metaphysica. Commentarius*. Bonn.
- Brancacci, A. 2018. "Socraticism and Eleaticism in Euclides of Megara". In *Socrates and the Socratic Dialogue*. Ed. by A. Stavru/C. Moore. Leiden, 161–78.
- . 2019. "I fondamenti teorici dell'eristica di Eutidemo". *La Cultura* 57(1), 29–48.
- Bredlow, L. A. 2011. "Platón y la invención de la Escuela de Elea (*Sof.* 242d)". *Convivium* 24, 25–42.
- Burnyeat, M. F., et. al. 1984. *Notes on books Eta and Theta of Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Oxford.
- Burnyeat, M. F. 2002. "Plato on How not to Speak of What is Not: *Euthydemus* 283a–288a". In *Le Style de la Pensée. Recueil de textes en hommage à Jacques Brunschwig*. Ed. by M. Canto-Sperber/P. Pellegrin. Paris, 40–66.

- Cambiano, G. 1971. "La Scuola Megarica nelle interpretazioni moderne". *Rivista di Filosofia* 62(3), 227–53.
- Canto, M. 1989. *Platon, Euthydème. Traduction nouvelle, introduction, et notes*. Paris.
- Caujolle-Zaslavsky, F. 1980. "Le temps épicurien est-il atomique?". *Études philosophiques* 3, 285–306.
- Chance, T. 1992. *Plato's Euthydemus. Analysis of What Is and Is Not Philosophy*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford.
- Cherniss, H. 1944. *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*. Baltimore.
- Cornford, F. M. 1935. *Plato's Theory of Knowledge: The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato*. London.
- Crombie, I. M. 1963. *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines, vol. 2: Plato on Knowledge and Reality*. New York.
- Curd, P. 2004. *The Legacy of Parmenides. Eleatic Monism and Later Presocratic Thought*. Las Vegas.
- De Rijk, L. M. 1986. *Plato's Sophist. A philosophical commentary*. Amsterdam.
- De Strycker, É. 1968. "Concepts-clés et terminologie dans les livres ii à vii des *Topiques*". In *Aristotle on Dialectic. The Topics*. Ed. by G. E. L. Owen. Oxford, 141–63.
- Denyer, N. 1996. "Gaskin on the Master Argument". *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 78(2), 166–80.
- . 2002. "Neglected Evidence for Diodorus Cronus". *Classical Quarterly* 52(2), 597–600.
- . 2009. "Diodorus Cronus: Modality, the Master Argument and Formalisation". *Humana Mentis* 3(8), 33–46.
- Diels, H. 1882/1895. *Simplicii in Aristotelis Physicorum libros octo Commentaria*. Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, vols. IX & X. Berlin.
- Diès, A. 1925. *Le Sophiste. Texte établi et traduit par A. Diès*. Paris.
- Dixsaut, M. 2003. *Platon. Le désir de comprendre*. Paris.
- Dorion, L. 1995. *Aristote: Les réfutations sophistiques, introduction, traduction et commentaire*. Paris.
- . 2000. "Euthydème et Dionysodore sont-ils des Mégariques?". In *Plato. Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides. Proceedings of the V Symposium Platonicum*. Ed. by T. Robinson/L. Brisson. Sankt Augustin, 35–50.
- Döring, K. 1972. *Die Megariker. Kommentierte Sammlung der Testimonien*. Amsterdam.
- . 1989. "Gab es eine Dialektische Schule?". *Phronesis* 34(1), 293–310.
- Düring, I. 1961. *Aristotle's Protrepticus: an Attempt at Reconstruction*. Göteborg.
- Fritz, K. von. 1963/[1938]. *Philosophie und sprachlicher Ausdruck bei Demokrit, Plato und Aristoteles*. Darmstadt.
- . 1931. "Megariker". In *Pauly-Wissowa, Realenzyklopädie der classischen Altertums-wissenschaft*, suppl. V. Stuttgart, 707–24.
- Gardella, M. 2013. *Las críticas de los filósofos megáricos a la ontología platónica*. Buenos Aires.
- . 2014. "La metafísica megárica: unidad, identidad y monismo predicativo". *Dianoia* 59(73), 3–26.
- . 2019. "Sobre la Influencia de Zenón de Elea en el Grupo Megárico". *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 75(1), 697–724.
- Gaskin, R. 1995. *The Sea Battle and the Master Argument: Aristotle and Diodorus Cronus on the Metaphysics of the Future*. Berlin/New York.
- . 1996. "Reconstructing the Master Argument". *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 78(2), 181–91.

- Giannantoni, G. 1981. "Il κυριεύων λόγος di Diodoro Crono". *Elenchos* 2, 239–72.
- . 1990. *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*, 4 vols. Naples.
- Gillespie, C. M. 1911. "On the Megarians". *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 24(2), 218–41.
- Gomez Cabranes, L. 1989. *El poder y lo posible. Sus sentidos en Aristóteles*. Pamplona.
- Gonzalez, F. 2011. "Being as Power in Plato's *Sophist* and Beyond". In *Plato's Sophist. Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium Platonicum Pragense*. Ed. Havlicek, A./F. Karfik. Prague, 63–95.
- Graham, D. W. 1987. *Aristotle's two Systems*. Oxford.
- Hawtrey, R. S. W. 1981. *Commentary on Plato's Euthydemus*. Philadelphia.
- Harmon, A. M. (trans.) 1915. *Lucian. The Downward Journey or The Tyrant. Zeus Catechized. Zeus Rants. The Dream or The Cock. Prometheus. Icaromenippus or The Sky-Man. Timon or The Misanthrope. Charon or The Inspectors. Philosophies for Sale*. Cambridge, MA.
- Hayduck, M. (ed.) 1891. *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis In Aristotelis Metaphysica commentaria. Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. I. Berlin.
- Hegel, G. W. F. 1842. *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte. Zweiter Teil*. Berlin.
- Hintikka, J. 1973. *Time and Necessity*. Oxford.
- Hitchcock, D. 2000. "The Origin of Professional Eristic". In *Plato. Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides. Proceedings of the V Symposium Platonicum*. Ed. by T. Robinson/L. Brisson. Sankt Augustin, 59–67.
- Ide, H. A. 1992. "Dunamis in *Metaphysics* IX". *Apeiron* 25(1), 1–26.
- Jaeger, W. 1957 (ed.). *Aristotelis Metaphysica, recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruit*. Oxford.
- . 1928. Review of P. Gohlke, *Gnomon* 4, 625–637.
- Johnson, M. R./Hutchinson, D. S. 2005. "Authenticating Aristotle's *Protrepticus*". *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 29, 193–294.
- Kalbfleisch, K. 1907. *Simplicii in Aristotelis Categorias Commentarium. Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. VIII. Berlin.
- Kerferd, G. B. 1981. *The Sophistic Movement*. Cambridge.
- Makin, S. 1996. "Megarian Possibilities". *Philosophical Studies* 83(3), 253–76.
- . S. 2006. *Aristotle, Metaphysics Book Θ*. Oxford.
- Mársico, C. 2011. "Megaric Philosophy Between Socrates' Influence and Parmenides' Ghost". In *Parmenides, Venerable and Awesome*. Ed. by N. L. Cordero. Las Vegas, 353–61.
- Mársico, C./Inverso, H. 2012. *Platón, Eutidemo*. Buenos Aires.
- Mársico, C. 2013. *Filósofos socráticos. Testimonios y fragmentos I. Megáricos y cirenaicos*. Buenos Aires.
- Menn, S. 1994. "The Origins of Aristotle's Concept of Ἐνέργεια: Ἐνέργεια and Δύναμις". *Ancient Philosophy* 14(1), 73–114.
- . 2009. "Aporiai 13–14". In *Aristotle: Metaphysics Beta. Symposium Aristotelicum*. Ed. by M. Crubellier/A. Laks. Oxford, 211–65.
- . 2021. "Aristotle on the Many Senses of Being". *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 59, 187–264.
- Moline, J. 1969. "Aristotle, Eubulides and the Sorites". *Mind* 78, 393–407.
- Montoneri, L. 1984. *I Megarici. Studio storico-critico e traduzione delle testimonianze antiche*. Catania.
- Muller, R. 1985. *Les Mégariques. Fragments et témoignages*. Paris.
- . 1988. *Introduction à la pensée des Mégariques*. Paris.

- . 2008. “À propos du possible mégarique”. In Dunamis. *Autour de la puissance chez Aristote*. Ed. by J. Crubellier et al. Louvain-La-Neuve, 303–25.
- Palpacelli, L. 2009. *L'«Eutidemo» di Platone. Una commedia straordinariamente seria*. Milan.
- Pistelli, H. G. 1888 (ed.). *Iamblichus Protrepticus*. Leipzig.
- Prior, A. 1967. *Past, Present and Future*. Oxford.
- Rapp, C. 2006. “Zeno and the Eleatic Anti-pluralism”. In *La costruzione del discorso filosofico nell'età dei Presocratici*. Ed. by M. Sassi. Pisa, 161–82.
- Reale, G. 2004. *Introduzione, traduzione e commento della Metafisica di Aristotele*. Milano.
- Reiske, J. J. (ed.) 1773. *Oratorum Graecorum*, vol. VIII. Leipzig.
- Rist, J. M. 1989. *The Mind of Aristotle: A Study in Philosophical Growth*. Toronto/Buffalo.
- Ross, W. D. (ed.) 1924. *Aristotle's Metaphysics: Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 2 vols. Oxford.
- . 1951. *Plato's Theory of Ideas*. Oxford.
- Rossetti, L. 1980. “Ricerca sui 'Dialoghi Socratici' di Fedone e di Euclide”. *Hermes* 108(2), 183–200.
- . 2003. “Le dialogue socratique in statu nascendi”. *Philosophie Antique* 1, 11–35.
- Schankula, H. A. S. 1971. “Plato and Aristotle: εὐδαιμονία, ἔξις or ἐνέργεια?”. *Classical Philology* 66(4), 244–46.
- Schleiermacher, F. 1824. *Platons Werke. Zweiten Theiles, Zweiter Band*. Berlin.
- Schuhl, P. M. 1960. *Le dominateur et les possibles*. Paris.
- Sedley, D. 1977. “Diodorus Cronus and Hellenistic Philosophy”. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 23, 74–120.
- Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi, G. 2014. *Playful Philosophy and Serious Sophistry. A Reading of Plato's Euthydemus*. Berlin/Boston.
- Sprague, K. 1962. *Plato's Use of Fallacy*. New York.
- . 1972. *The Older Sophists*. Indianapolis.
- Taylor, A. E. 1961. *Plato: The Sophist and The Statesman*. Translation/Introduction by A. E. Taylor. Ed. by R. Klubansky/E. Anscombe. Edinburgh.
- Villar, F. 2016. “Los megáricos como sofistas erísticos: La respuesta platónica al ataque de Isócrates contra los socráticos”. *Eidos: Revista de Filosofía de la Universidad Del Norte* 25, 185–213.
- . 2020a. “Isócrates y el crítico anónimo del *Eutidemo* de Platón”. *Ágora – Papeles de Filosofía* 39(2), 169–91.
- . 2020b. “Argumentos antisténicos en el *Eutidemo* de Platón”. *Kriterion: Journal of Philosophy* 61(147), 699–721.
- Vuillemin, J. 1996. *Necessity or Contingency: the Master Argument*. CSLI Lecture Notes 56. Stanford.
- Wallies, M. (ed.) 1883. *Alexandri in Aristotelis Analyticorum Priorum librum I Commentarium*. Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, vol. II 1. Berlin.
- Weidemann, H. 2008. “Aristotle, the Megarics, and Diodorus Cronus on the Notion of Possibility”. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 45(2), 131–148.
- Wheeler, S. C. 1983. “Megarian paradoxes as Eleatic arguments”. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20(3), 287–295.
- Witt, C. 2003. *Ways of Being: Potentiality and Actuality in Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Ithaca.
- Yepes Stork, R. 1989. “El origen de la *energeia* en Aristóteles”. *Anuario Filosófico* 22(1), 93–112.