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The Non-kinetic Origins of Aristotle's Concept of Ἐνέργεια

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Abstract: In this paper, I argue that Aristotle was already aware in his earlier texts of the fundamental distinction between motion and activity and of the criterion which structures this contrast. Moreover, I will present textual evidence which suggests that Aristotle's original concept of ἐνέργεια applies primarily to activities which contain their ends in themselves, and not to motions, which are different from their ends.

Keywords: Aristotle, activity, motion

There is a persistent tendency among scholars to conflate the notions of motion and activity when reading book Θ of the *Metaphysics*.¹ This view has been recently challenged in an important article by Gonzalez (2019), who argues in favor of considering non-kinetic, complete activity as a distinct and ontologically prior sense of ἐνέργεια.² In this paper I also intend to challenge the aforementioned tendency, but from a different perspective. My purpose is to show that Aristotle was already aware in his earlier texts of the fundamental distinction between motion and activity and of the criterion which structures this contrast. Moreover, we will see that these texts suggest that Aristotle's original concept of ἐνέργεια applies primarily to activities which contain their ends in themselves, and not to motions, which are different from their ends.

I will begin, in Section 1, by analyzing the closing paragraph of *Met.* Θ 3 (1047a30–b2). This significant passage is usually read as an indication that motion constitutes the original sense of ἐνέργεια, from which the ontological or 'useful'

1 Cf. Graham 1987, 98, Charlton 1990, 8, Menn 1994, 92, 111, Makin 2006, 134–138, Burnyeat 2008, 222–224, Beere 2009, 200, 227–228, Anagnostopoulos 2011, 409, Charles 2015, 190, 204, Lefebvre 2018, 481, Sentesy 2020, 139, 158 and Unlu 2021, 6–8.

2 Gonzalez's main opponent is Burnyeat 2008. In his paper, Burnyeat claims that the distinction between motion and ἐνέργεια is foreign to Aristotle's argument in book Θ. Cf. n. 8 below.

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sense, which is identified with actuality, can be extracted. I will challenge this interpretation and suggest that a correct understanding of the closing lines of chapter 3 helps us clarify the larger structure of the argument of book Θ . This is that motion is not the original sense of ἐνέργεια, but its most *manifest* case, and therefore, in the context of Θ , we must begin with motion, an improper sense or kind of ἐνέργεια, in order later to address the proper, more fundamental non-kinetic sense of ἐνέργεια.

I will then, in Section 2, support this claim by turning to Aristotle's original conception of ἐνέργεια. In effect, one of the most influential justifications for the identification between motion and activity in the broader context of book Θ is that of Menn (1994), who claims that in Aristotle's earlier texts there are no signs of the distinction between motion and activity. I will analyze two crucial passages of the *Protrepticus* which contradict Menn's reading and which support my interpretation that Aristotle upheld the distinction between motion and activity already in his earlier writings.

Finally, Section 3 builds on the preceding argument to claim that, contrary to what is usually held, Aristotle's original conception of ἐνέργεια is not structured in terms of motion but that it rather corresponds to complete activity (τελεία ἐνέργεια).

1 Motion and 'Ἐνέργεια in *Met.* Θ 3, 1047a30–b1

At *Metaphysics* Θ 3, 1047a30–b1, Aristotle states the following:

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

This is a crucial text, which proves fundamental for any interpretation of Aristotle's broader argument in book Θ .⁴ At first sight, Aristotle appears merely to reiterate

³ All translations are my own. I am grateful to Claudia Mársico for useful discussion on this passage.

⁴ Frede 1994, 181–182 mentions this “obscure remark” in support of his thesis that book Θ presents a transition from a basic motion sense of ἐνέργεια to an ontological sense (actuality). He claims that this can be seen by the use of the term ἐντελέχεια at the beginning of the passage, which would refer univocally to the ontological sense, given that it is “a technical Aristotelian term to mark actuality as opposed to potentiality” (181) (this is also the view of Menn 1994, 92). But this claim is by no means self-evident. On the contrary, ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια are used interchangeably by Aristotle. The

what has been said in Θ 1, 1046a1–2, that is, that the term ἔνέργεια applies to other things which are different from motions.⁵ But the passage adds some important clarifications. From this passage, we get a clearer idea of why book Θ begins with δύναμις and ἔνέργεια with reference to motion in the first place, the main reason being that the extension towards non-motion cases of ἔνέργεια has taken place above all from motions (ἐκ τῶν κινήσεων μάλιστα, 1047a30–31).

This important claim is often understood as an indication that the original concept of ἔνέργεια (which would comprise all sorts of activities) is inherently related to motion, and that it was only at a relatively mature stage that Aristotle discovered the concept of a non-kinetic kind of ἔνέργεια. Although many scholars hold this view,⁶ it is perhaps most clearly expressed by Menn 1994, 74, 76, 92,⁷ who reads the passage as summarizing the progression carried out by Aristotle in book Θ , “from ἔνέργεια-as-motion and its corresponding δύναμις to ἔνέργεια-as-ἐντελέχεια and its corresponding δύναμις” (emphasis by the author) which would “recapitulate the path he himself had taken from the original sense of the δύναμις-ἔνέργεια contrast to something deeper” (92). For Menn, the passage quoted above says that “the word ‘ἔνέργεια’ originally applies to κινήσεις (whether narrowly ‘changes’ or more broadly ‘activities’), and that it applies by extension to the οὐσία that an agent produces in a matter” (111). If we read the passage this way, it is natural to think (as Menn and many others do) that the contrast between the initial and useful senses of δύναμις and ἔνέργεια in Θ is one between a primary capacity/activity sense and a further potentiality/actuality sense.

But the text does not necessarily yield this conclusion. On the contrary, Aristotle could be simply stating that the motion cases of ἔνέργεια are the most frequent, the ones which are more easily recognizable, and not the most basic or

issue is of course controversial, but we need only note that there appears to be no functional distinction between the two terms. Any argument that tries to establish such a distinction would need to explain why Aristotle uses the two terms interchangeably (for example, in the parallel versions of Aristotle’s definition of motion in *Phys.* III 1, 201a9–b15 and in *Met.* K 9, 1065b14–1066a6, which use both terms, and in the recurrent use of ἔνέργεια after the definition of motion in *Phys.* III 1, 201b9–10, III 2, 201b35–202a3, and III 3, 202a14–15). The simplest explanation of this occurrence seems to be that Aristotle regarded both terms as functionally equivalent. Cf. Brague 1991, 114 and Coope 2009, 290 n. 2. See also Blair 1967, 110; 1992, 88–89, 104, and especially 114.

5 “For δύναμις and ἔνέργεια extend beyond (ἐπὶ πλεόν) those [cases] which are said only according to motion (κατὰ κίνησιν)”, *Met.* Θ 1, 1046a1–2.

6 Cf. Graham 1987, 184–185, Rist 1989, 106–107, Berti 1990, 47–51, Code 2003, 252, Makin 2006, xxviii, 133–135 and Burnyeat 2008, 224.

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

original cases (developmentally speaking). In fact, there are good reasons to doubt that, for Aristotle, motion is ἐνέργεια in the proper sense of the term. Motion is sharply distinguished from ἐνέργεια later in book Θ (*Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–36),⁸ and there are parallels to this distinction throughout the *corpus* (most notably in the *Physics* and *De Anima*, but also in earlier works, as we shall see). In the immediately following line (1047a32), Aristotle affirms that ἐνέργεια *seems* (δοκεῖ)⁹ to be above all motion, not that it is motion. This implies that, beyond misleading appearances, motion and ἐνέργεια are two clearly different instances (note that both terms are preceded by the article at 1047a32). Moreover, it is this fact which motivates the opinions of those who, guided by this more accessible or immediate case of ἐνέργεια (wrongly) believe that motion and ἐνέργεια are co-extensive (1047a32–b1).¹⁰ It seems to me that what Aristotle is saying in this passage is not

8 Burnyeat 2008 has claimed that this passage does not belong to book Θ on both philological and conceptual grounds (Jaeger 1957 had already detailed some of its textual difficulties in the apparatus of his edition of the *Metaphysics*, noting moreover that the passage is absent in EJ. However, and in contrast to Burnyeat, Jaeger believed that the passage could be a later addition by Aristotle himself to a previous version of the *Metaphysics*, as shown by the use of his famous *Doppelklammern*). Though the results of his research have been widely accepted by scholars (Witt 2006, Makin 2006, Beere 2009, Berti 2017, Anagnostopoulos 2017), they have been questioned recently by Natali 2013 and Gonzalez 2019, who claim that the passage constitutes an integral part of Θ 6 and of Aristotle's whole argument in Θ. Both authors are in agreement with Ross 1924 II, 253, who believes that the passage presents sound Aristotelian doctrine and that it is correctly placed at Θ 6.

9 Cf. Bonitz' Index (1870, s.v. δοκεῖν): *quoniam τὸ δοκεῖν ab hominis alicuius opinione pendet, non ex ipsa rei natura, δοκεῖν perinde ac φαίνεσθαι opponitur veritati rei*. Sentesy 2020, 15 n. 30 overlooks the key term δοκεῖ and thus interprets the passage as saying that “*energeia* is, in the strictest sense, *kinesis*”. This shift in meaning is crucial, for it allows Sentesy to claim that motion is the primary and most fundamental sense of both δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. For some criticism of this position, see n. 35 below.

10 Both Frede 1994, 181–182 and Menn 1994, 76 n. 5 relate Aristotle's allusion at 1047a32–b1 to Plato. Frede recalls *Sophist* 247d8–e4, where Plato states against the Giants that the “capacity (δύναμις) to by nature act upon anything else, or to be acted upon” (εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν ἕτερον ὄτιοῦν πεφυκὸς εἴτ' εἰς τὸ παθεῖν) constitutes a mark of the real. But to establish a connection with 1047a32–b1, Frede must of course interpret ποιεῖν and παθεῖν in kinetic terms. Hence, something which is not capable of acting upon some other thing or of being affected (i.e., which is not capable of being in motion) cannot be real. Thus, as in Aristotle's reconstruction of the argument of those who think that motion is equal to ἐνέργεια, it is not possible to assign movement to things that are not. The implication is that there is an intrinsic association between motion and being. But the *Sophist* passage provides no clear indication that Plato is referring to *physical* motion (i.e., what Aristotle calls κίνησις at 1047a32). He seems instead to be referring to some other sort of action, capable of explaining the interaction between non-bodily entities such as the soul (see also 248b6–7, where the definition of 247d8–e4 is used against the Friends of the Forms). Accordingly, and contrary to 1047a32–b1, there would be things which are *not* capable of being in motion (in a physical sense) but which *are*: namely the soul and its virtues (cf. Bolton 1975, 93–95 and Gerson

that κίνησις constitutes the original and most basic sense of ἔνέργεια, but that it simply represents its most common manifestation.¹¹ This explains both the fact that previous philosophers wrongly believed ἔνέργεια to be motion and Aristotle's choice of beginning his analysis with δύναμις in relation to motion, for it is the immediate and accessible character of motion which allows us to understand the more obscure, though more fundamental, notion of non-kinetic ἔνέργεια.

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

Menn supports his reading of this passage by way of a particular interpretation of Aristotle's earlier texts, where, he claims, Aristotle "had not yet distinguished activity from motion, and so referred to all activities as κινήσεις" (106). This implies that, at least for the early Aristotle, the capacity-exercise distinction (which is in fact the most original form of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction, cf. Section 2 below)

2006, 297–298 for a fuller defense of this interpretation). So the association between physical motion and being implied at 1047a32–b1 appears not to be Plato's. On the other hand, Menn 1994, 76 n. 5 connects Aristotle's allusion to the fifth hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, where Plato states that things that are not cannot be said to be in motion (163e) but can be said to be knowable (160c). But it is doubtful that one can claim from this passage that "Plato assumed that all activity was motion" (76 n. 5), especially if we take into account the *Sophist* passage quoted above (Menn, like Frede, interprets this passage in kinetic terms, cf. 74).

In summary, it seems that Aristotle is referring not to Plato but to other philosophers, perhaps some sort of materialists who *did* associate motion with being in an intrinsic manner. Lastly, the idea that previous philosophers wrongly believed ἔνέργεια to be equivalent to process can also be found in *EN VI 12*, 1153a15–17. I am much indebted to Fabián Mié for his comments which helped shape this note.

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

is inherently associated with the notion of process,¹² *i.e.*, that all activities, insofar as they are activities, are understood as motions.¹³ This claim is particularly important in Menn's interpretation, for it allows him to dispel the apparent incongruence between *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b6–9 and the κίνησις-ἐνέργεια distinction which immediately follows at 1048b18–35.¹⁴ For Menn, in the analogy of b6–9 Aristotle is “reverting to the terminology of the *Protrepticus* and the *Magna Moralia*”, citing *Protrepticus* XI 56.22–57.23/B80–83¹⁵ and *Magna Moralia* II 7 as evidence (1994, 106–107 and n. 44). According to Menn, this would explain why

12 By ‘process’ I mean a specific kind of activity which is oriented towards an external τέλος and which necessarily takes time in reaching said τέλος. Processes are necessarily composed of a series of parts, or stages in their realization (*i.e.*, the achievement of the τέλος). This of course is Aristotle's standard conception of motion, which is essentially distinct from another sort of activity which is unlike processes, such as thinking and sight: these activities have already reached their τέλος throughout their exercise and thus are (in principle) not necessarily temporally extended. Cf. *EN* X 4, 1174a13–b14. When Menn claims that Aristotle uses “κίνησις broadly to cover all activities” (106) he does so in order to differentiate activity (understood primarily as motion) from the actual existence of beings, *i.e.*, the resulting product of a process of production or coming to be (1994, 110: “In a strict sense, the only ἐνέργεια here [*sc.* in the case of housebuilding] is the γένεσις of the house, that does not persist once the house is complete, and is not the τέλος but a means to the τέλος”). Cf. also Charles 2015, 204–205. The explicit association between activity and *process* in Aristotle's earlier thought can be found in Menn 2002, 93–95.

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

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

15 In what follows, I will cite the fragments of the *Protrepticus* according to Pistelli's 1888 Teubner edition of Iamblichus' *Protrepticus*, while also providing the equivalent numeration of Düring's 1961 reconstruction. Cf. also D. S. Hutchinson and M. R. Johnson's fairly recent (2005) authentication of the *Protrepticus*' fragments which feature in Iamblichus.

Aristotle would place all the previous examples of the capacity-activity sense (housebuilding, sight, being awake, contemplation) of the first part of Θ 6 under the κίνησις to δύναμις heading. But we should note that it is by no means clear that Aristotle had a specific “early” terminology which reduced all activities to motion. Moreover, this interpretation does not hold if we consider some passages of the *Protrepticus* not included by Menn in his analysis.¹⁶ These passages show that although Aristotle certainly applies the capacity-exercise distinction to both motions and non-kinetic activities throughout his works, he is already well aware in his earlier texts of the intrinsic and fundamental difference between the two kinds of activities.¹⁷

As we shall promptly see, the original formulation of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction, such as it appears in Aristotle’s earlier texts, does not concern the problem of change, nor is it necessarily related to it. Rather, it concerns the ambiguity of verbs which denote subjective activities such as knowing, learning, and seeing.¹⁸ Two activities seem to occupy most of Aristotle’s attention in the *Protrepticus*: seeing (ὄρᾶν) and thinking (φρονεῖν, θεωρεῖν), which are two main examples of non-kinetic activity throughout the *corpus*. Furthermore, the *Protrepticus* and other early texts show that Aristotle systematically opposes this kind of psychic activity (seeing, knowing, and thinking) to motion (in particular to the example of housebuilding). Contrary to what is usually believed, it is not the case that non-kinetic activity derives from motion, but it is motion which derives from this original concept of ἐνέργεια, a claim which is perfectly consistent with Aristotle’s recurrent statement that motion constitutes an incomplete (ἀτελής) instance of a complete (τελεία) or unqualified sense of ἐνέργεια (ἐνέργεια ἀπλῶς) (*Phys.* III 2, 201b31–35, VIII 5, 257b8–9; *DA* III 7, 431a7; *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b29–30; *K* 9, 1066a20–24; *EN* X 4, 1174b16–17).¹⁹

¹⁶ The passages in question are VII 43.5–25/B68–70 and XI 58.15–17/B87. Menn makes reference to VII 43.5–25/B68–70 in a note (1994, 108 n. 47), without much comment, and with the limited scope of explaining the equivalence between ἔργον and ἐνέργεια. XI 58.15–17/B87 is absent in his paper.

¹⁷ It should be noted that Beere 2009, 12, 163–166 seems to acknowledge the non-kinetic origins of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction in the *Protrepticus* (165–166), although he ends up conflating motion and activity in his discussion of Θ 6, most probably because he follows Burnyeat in dismissing the passage at Θ 6, 1048b18–35. Long before, Berti 1958 had identified the early use of ἐνέργεια with the notion of complete activity, but he reversed his position in his 1990 essay. In this latter text, he upholds the usual claim that motion constitutes the original application of the term.

¹⁸ This interpretation is hinted by Graham 1987, 190: “It is possible that Aristotle developed the distinction to forestall sophistic refutations which traded on an ambiguity in verbs (especially of knowing and perception) and their nominal counterparts”. See also Graham 1995, 560–561.

¹⁹ This is the view defended by Gonzalez 2019, 141 n. 45. However, he seems to hesitate regarding the specific nature of Aristotle’s early concept of ἐνέργεια: “It is possible that Aristotle had not yet

So, if we return to the considerations regarding ἐνέργεια at the end of *Met.* Θ 3, we note that Aristotle wants to make two things clear. The first is that although the book begins with motion and deals extensively with it, we should be wary of believing that this is the proper concept of ἐνέργεια. The second is that we began with motion only because it is the most familiar (though ultimately misleading) application of ἐνέργεια, and not because it is its most original or primitive application. In other words, this passage, correctly understood, shows that Aristotle's argument in book Θ is in line with his general methodological principle of proceeding from what is most known to us towards what is most known by nature.

2 Aristotle's Early Conception of Δύναμις and Ἐνέργεια

As many authors have shown, the *Protrepticus*, which includes perhaps the earliest appearance of the term ἐνέργεια in the Aristotelian *corpus*, establishes a basic contrast between having a capacity and actively exercising it.²⁰ This original distinction can be traced back to Plato's *Euthydemus*, where it emerges in the context of a dialectical exchange between Socrates and the eristic brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. In the dialogue, Socrates introduces a distinction between simply possessing or having (κεκτηῖσθαι, ἔχειν) some knowledge and actively 'using' it (χρηῖσθαι), *i.e.*, being actively engaged in the activity of thinking. This is part of Socrates' reply to an eristic argument about the ambiguity of the verb 'to learn' (μανθάνειν), which appears at 275d–277c. Socrates' reply underscores the duality which characterizes human action, and it is this duality that reappears in the *Protrepticus*.²¹

developed at the time of writing this work [sc. *Eudemian Ethics*] the sharp distinction between *energeia/praxis* and *kinesis* defended at *Metaph.* Θ. 6" (2019, 167 n. 89).

20 This reading, which can be traced back to Jaeger 1928, has been defended by De Strycker 1968, 159–160, Schankula 1971, Graham 1987, 190–191, Rist 1989, 105–106, Yepes Stork 1989 and Menn 1994.

21 The contrast can also be found in *Theaetetus* 197a–c, where the κτήσις-χρηῖσθαι distinction reappears in relation to the problem of knowledge; Plato presents once more the distinction between two kinds of knowing as two kinds of 'having,' κτήσις and ἔχειν, which nonetheless fits the same scheme of having a capacity and actively exercising it: what Plato calls ἔχειν in *Theaetetus* is called χρηῖσθαι in the *Euthydemus*, while what he calls κτήσις in *Theaetetus* is called both κτήσις and ἔχειν in the *Euthydemus*. The basic structure remains the same in both cases. The contrast established is clearly one between merely having some knowledge on the one hand and actively 'using' it (*i.e.*, being actively engaged in the activity of thinking) on the other. Cf. Schankula 1971, 245.

We should not lose sight of the context of the discussion, nor of the examples that Plato chooses. Plato's distinction revolves around actions such as knowing and thinking. Cognitive activities are also Aristotle's prime examples in his earlier texts, as can be seen in, for example, *Protrepticus* VII 43.10–25/B68–70, XI 56.15–22/B79, XI 57.7–12/B81 and *Eudemian Ethics* II 1, 1219a13–17. This is especially relevant since these are examples of activities that Aristotle distinguishes explicitly from motion throughout the *corpus*. Though I will return to this point later, it is important to note that Plato's distinction also deals primarily with cognitive activities and emerges in the context of a dialectical exchange that revolves around the problem of the ambiguity of certain verbs that denote actions such as knowing and thinking.

Let us now examine how Aristotle recovers Plato's original distinction between ἔχειν and χρῆσθαι. Aristotle's main interest in the *Protrepticus* is to prove that a life of contemplation is the best form of life for a human being. This provides the opportunity for Aristotle to expand on the dual character of human action, and to introduce his novel distinction between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. At *Protrepticus* XI 56.15–22/B79, Aristotle states:

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

We can see that Aristotle deliberately equates δύναμις and ἔχειν on the one hand, and ἐνέργεια and χρῆσθαι on the other; the distinction is clearly one between a capacity or power and its active exercise, in the same vein as Plato's.²² This is also clear in the following two fragments, where Aristotle establishes the priority of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις. At 56.27–57.6/B80, Aristotle states that, given that we discriminate between living and non-living beings according to whether they have

²² This is further confirmed by the use of the verbal expressions δύνασθαι at XI 56.25, 28/B80, ἐνεργοῦντα at 57.20/B83 and ἐνεργῆ at 58.13/B86, all of which reinforce the active character of both δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. Aristotle's anti-Megarian polemic at *Metaphysics* Θ 3 which precedes the passage at 1047a30-b1 (and which includes the example of sight (ὄψις) at 1047a8) revolves around the verbal forms δύνασθαι and ἐνεργεῖν. Moreover, Aristotle uses χρῆσθαι at *Metaphysics* Δ 7, 1017b4–5 and χρῆσις at Θ 8, 1050a24: in the former passage Aristotle applies χρῆσθαι to seeing and knowing, in perfect accordance with the *Protrepticus*; the latter passage alludes to the exercise of both kinds of capacities, motion and non-kinetic alike, in perfect accordance with *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35.

perception or not, it follows that we can legitimately affirm that someone lives in two cases:

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

The reasoning behind this argument is very similar to the one at *Euthydemus*. It could be understood as a reply to the question ‘how can the same term be applied to two different and opposing conditions?’ (cf. *Euth.* 278a6–7). As Blair 1992, 24–25 notes, this is *not* a distinction that involves change, or that originated in a debate about change. The discussion is limited to the ambiguity regarding terms and their application: “And so, whenever each of two things is 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). Aristotle is clearly establishing a distinction between two ways in which we can apply the same predicate to a subject, for example, the two ways in which we can call a man a seer or a housebuilder, both if he has the capacity for seeing and if he is actively exercising this capacity, while establishing the priority of the activity over the mere possession of a capacity. The examples Aristotle introduces to illustrate his thesis are once more knowledge and sight, both being paradigmatic cases of non-kinetic activity: “for example, ‘knowing’ belongs more to the one who uses [his knowledge] than to the one who has the knowledge (μᾶλλον τὸν χρώμενον τοῦ τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχοντος), and ‘seeing’ belongs more to the one who is applying his vision than to the one who is capable of applying it (ὄραν δὲ τὸν προσβάλλοντα τὴν ὄψιν τοῦ δυναμένου προσβάλλειν)” (57.10–12/B81).

In these passages, Aristotle is introducing the term ἐνέργεια, which is understood broadly as the exercise of a capacity. We are dealing with the first appearances of a novel term, most probably coined by Aristotle himself.²³ It is precisely because he is innovating that he uses a wide range of analogous expressions when referring to the same concept, that of the exercise of a capacity. In addition to the new term ἐνέργεια (which features prominently as a noun throughout the *Protrepticus*, and in conjugated form at 57.20/B83 and 58.13/B86), Aristotle uses Plato’s χρῆσθαι (56.20/B79, 56.24/B80, 57.23/B84), and other

²³ There is a fair consensus among scholars that ἐνέργεια was coined by Aristotle. Menn 2009, 249 n. 77; 2021, 244 n. 83 has claimed that there could be a previous attestation of the term in Alcidas’ *On the Sophists*, 28. But the manuscripts present εὐεργεσίας, ἐνέργειας being an emendation first introduced by Reiske in 1773 (εὐεργεσίας has been defended by Avezù 1982).

synonyms such as ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν (57.8/B81, 57.22–23/B83) πράττειν (57.24/B84) and ἔργον (VII 42.5/B63, 42.15, 19/B65, 43.6, 9/B68 and XI 43.21/B70, 58.4/B85). All of these different expressions are significant, but it is the particular expression ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν which inclines Menn to believe that there is an equivalence between ἐνέργεια and κίνησις in this text (1994, 106 n. 44). Indeed, Menn claims that ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν is another way in which the early Aristotle—like Plato—refers to change (74, 76 n. 5). The passage at 56.27–57.6/B80 also provides two further indications that Aristotle does think of activity in terms of motion in this context. The first is the expression μεταβάλλειν εἰς τὴν κίνησιν, which Menn argues contradicts *Phys.* V 2 (where Aristotle states that a change cannot be changed), implying that this text contains an immature theory of motion. The second is that Aristotle calls being awake κίνησις, which seems odd given that in later texts being awake will constitute an example of a non-kinetic activity.²⁴

Though Menn's arguments are not without force, there is one important passage, closely connected with the passage of chapter XI of the *Protrepticus* mentioned earlier, that seems to contradict his thesis that there are no traces of the motion/activity distinction in Aristotle's earlier texts. At VII 43.10–20/B68–69, Aristotle states the following:

if it [sc. the activity of thinking (φρονεῖν)] is to be of productive character (ποιητική), it will produce something different from itself, as is the house with respect to the art of building, which is not part of the house; but thinking is part of the virtue [of the soul] and of happiness, for we say that happiness either comes from it *or is it* (ἢ γὰρ ἐκ ταύτης ἢ ταύτην φασὲν εἶναι τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν). Therefore, according to this argument it is impossible for it to be a productive science (ἀδύνατον εἶναι [τὴν] ἐπιστήμην ποιητικὴν), given that [in the case of a productive science] the end (τὸ τέλος) has to be better than that which comes to be [i.e., the activity which takes place to attain the end], and nothing is better than thought (φρονήσεως) [...] Therefore, we must say that this form of knowledge is theoretical (θεωρητική), since it is impossible for production to be its end (ἐπεὶ περ ἀδύνατον ποιήσιν εἶναι τὸ τέλος).

Aristotle wants to demonstrate that the activity of thinking (φρονεῖν) is the highest virtue of the soul, an argument which plays an important role in Aristotle's protreptic goal of directing his audience towards the exercise of philosophy. In order to do so, Aristotle must show that thinking does not serve a further goal or purpose (for then that further goal would be worthier than the activity carried out to attain it), but that it is exercised for its own sake. This is why Aristotle introduces here a distinction between one set of productive (ποιητική) activities, such as house-building, and another set of theoretic (θεωρητική) activities such as thinking

²⁴ I will address each of these claims in Section 3 below.

(φρονεῖν), to which he will later add contemplating (θεωρεῖν) and seeing (ὄραν).²⁵ It is crucial to note that the criterion which Aristotle follows to establish this contrast is the relation which these activities establish with their end (τέλος). While productive activities are oriented towards and subordinate to an end which is different from the activity itself (such as in the case of housebuilding, which is towards an external end, *i.e.*, a house), the activity of thinking has no other τέλος than its own exercise, for if it had a further τέλος it would be better than the activity itself, and Aristotle is trying to prove that there is nothing better than thinking. Of course, this same criterion features in the κίνησις-ἐνέργεια distinction of *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35, and resurfaces in the later discussion of the priority in being of ἐνέργεια at Θ 8, 1050a23–b2. Although I will expand on this later (cf. note 31 and Section 3 below), it should be noted that this criterion plays a fundamental role in Aristotle’s conception of motion. This suggests that what is at stake in these passages is not only the status of productions, but rather the status of motion in general with regard to complete activity.

The passage not only confirms the distinction between the two kinds of actions but includes almost the same examples as feature in the passages of Θ 6 and 8 mentioned above. Aristotle concludes at 43.20–25/B70 that this special kind of activity, thinking and contemplation, is analogous to sight, since when one exercises the capacity of sight *nothing other than sight itself comes about*:

Thus thinking and contemplating (τὸ φρονεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ θεωρεῖν) are the ἔργον of virtue, and this is for men, of all things, the worthiest of choice, as it is also, I think, sight with regard to the eyes, which is something one would choose to have, even if nothing other than sight itself were to result from it.

What is most interesting from this last passage, beyond the explicit introduction of the example of sight, is that Aristotle describes contemplation as the ἔργον of virtue. This description should be read together with XI 58.3–10/B85, where Aristotle states that “the ἔργον of the soul, either alone or most of all, is reflecting

²⁵ The distinction is not exclusive to this passage; it also appears at IX 52.16–53.2/B42 and 53.15–54.5/B44, and in other apparently early works such as *EE* 1219a13–17, 38–39 and *Top.* 146b13–19. It is also an important distinction which appears continually in *EN* (see for example 1140a2–17, where ποιησις is contrasted to πράξις; recall the use of πράξις at *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35. See also *EN* 1094a4–18 and 1176a30–b8).

Rist 1989, 107–109 notices that in *Top.* 146b13–19 Aristotle does have the distinction between motion and activity in mind, but claims that it is absent in the *Protrepticus*. However, the passage quoted above, and the one I will quote below, show that the activities which feature in the *Protrepticus* are distinguished from motions such as housebuilding. This would invalidate Rist’s claim that “when Aristotle began to talk about activities (quite understandably) all activities are movements and all movements are activities” (107).

and reasoning” (ἔστι δὴ καὶ ψυχῆς ἥτοι μόνον ἢ μάλιστα πάντων ἔργον τὸ διανοεῖσθαι τε καὶ λογίζεσθαι, 58.3–5).²⁶

As in other passages of the *Protrepticus* (see for instance VII 42.5–23/B63–65), Aristotle is here using ἔργον as a parallel term to ἐνέργεια. However, the term ἔργον presents a peculiarity: it can refer either to a specific kind of activity or to the resulting product of a process of production. This much is clear if we consider a crucial passage of the *Eudemian Ethics*. At *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17, Aristotle tells us that in some cases the ἔργον is different from the exercise or activity (ἕτερόν τι τὸ ἔργον παρὰ τὴν χρῆσιν), such as in the example of housebuilding, which is different from the house that comes to be. In this case the ἔργον, Aristotle tells us, is *the house, not the act of housebuilding* (οἰκοδομικῆς οἰκία ἀλλ’ οὐκ οἰκοδόμησις). But in other cases, the ἔργον is the exercise (ἡ χρῆσις ἔργον), such as in the case of sight, whose ἔργον is the act of seeing (ὄρασις). The difference between the two kinds of action is that in one case the ἔργον is external and different from the action, while in the other the ἔργον is the activity. This is the same criterion which features in *Protrepticus* VII 43.10–20/B68–69, quoted above. *EE* 1219a13–17 makes the argument with ἔργον, while VII 43.10–20/B68–69 makes it with τέλος; still, Aristotle had made clear just before the argument of the *Eudemian Ethics* that “the τέλος of each thing is its ἔργον” (τέλος ἐκάστου τὸ ἔργον, 1219a8). The point is that motions like housebuilding, insofar they do not possess their end, are not included among the possible referents of ἔργον since to be an ἔργον is essentially to be a τέλος.²⁷

26 The change in terminology (διανοεῖσθαι and λογίζεσθαι in the place of φρονεῖν and θεωρεῖν) need not worry us, for immediately after the passage at 58.3–5, Aristotle goes back to his previous terminology and states that “he who thinks and contemplates” (ὁ φρονῶν καὶ θεωρῶν, 58.8), that is, he who thinks correctly and has attained truth, is alive in the most complete and fuller sense (τελέως ζῆν 58.9). Aristotle is claiming here that contemplation (i.e., philosophical insight) is the activity which best characterizes the human soul, the one which is most proper of a human being. Since the activity of contemplation constitutes the highest activity of the human soul, it follows that the one who thinks correctly and contemplates properly lives more fully, more perfectly. Later texts will restate the idea, with explicit mention of the term ἐνέργεια, as in *EN* 1097a22–1098a18, in particular 1098a7: “the ἔργον of man is the activity of the soul according to reason” (ἔστιν ἔργον ἀνθρώπου ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια κατὰ λόγον) and 1098a16–18: “human good comes to be the activity of the soul according to virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance to the best and the most complete” (τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθὸν ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια γίνεται κατ’ ἀρετὴν, εἰ δὲ πλείους αἱ ἀρεταί, κατὰ τὴν ἀρίστην καὶ τελειοτάτην).

27 This is also the view of Baker 2015, 231, 238–248 who likewise emphasizes the intrinsic connection between ἔργον and τέλος (which Aristotle makes explicit in *EE* II 1, 1219a8 and *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a21). He rightfully claims that ἔργον is not in itself an ambiguous term (as in the view of Charles 1986, 135–139), but that it has one meaning (that of τέλος), although it may have two possible references: activities which are ends (seeing, thinking) or the complete result of an activity (a product in a process of production). In contrast, Sentesy 2020, 155–156 believes that ἔργον has two senses, product and action, and that the action sense is fundamentally that of

The *Eudemian Ethics* passage is parallel to Aristotle's argument in *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a21–28.²⁸ In this text, Aristotle introduces the distinction between different kinds of actions with a preliminary statement: “the ἔργον is τέλος, and the ἐνέργεια is the ἔργον, and that is why the name ἐνέργεια is related to ἔργον (τοῦνομα ἐνέργεια λέγεται κατὰ τὸ ἔργον) and stretches towards ἐντελέχεια (συντείνει πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν)” (1050a21–23). He is restating what was only implicit in the *Protrepticus*, although explicit in the *Eudemian Ethics*, that is that ἔργον and τέλος coincide.²⁹ Aristotle then goes on to restate the distinction between motion and activity, but instead of making the argument in terms of ἔργον, Aristotle speaks of that which is last (ἔσχατον), which is another way in which Aristotle refers to τέλος:³⁰

Given that in some cases that which is last (ἔσχατον) is the exercise (χρῆσις) (such as in the case of seeing with regard to sight, where nothing different results apart from sight), while in other cases something [different than the exercise] comes to be (such as a house [comes to be] from the art of housebuilding, besides the activity of housebuilding), still in the first case it is no less an end, in the second case it is more an end than the δύναμις (ὅμως οὐθὲν ἧττον ἔνθα μὲν τέλος, ἔνθα δὲ μᾶλλον τέλος τῆς δυνάμεώς ἐστιν) (Θ 8, 1050a23–28).

Here, Aristotle confidently affirms that in the case of activities such as sight, ἐνέργεια is an end (1050a27). The same cannot be said of activities such as housebuilding, but it is still true that in this case the ἐνέργεια is *more* an end than

motion; but this goes against what Aristotle says at *EE* 1219a14–15 (“[the ἔργον of] housebuilding is the house, not the act of housebuilding”, οἰκοδομικῆς οἰκία ἀλλ’ οὐκ οἰκοδόμησις).

28 For some recent discussions of the passage, see Makin 2006, 197–204, Beere 2009, 310–313, and especially Broadie 2010 and Sentesy 2020, ch. 6.

29 The argument also explains the connection between the two words that Aristotle coined for the same concept, ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια. Aristotle is not introducing here a distinction in meaning between the two terms (cf. n. 4 above) but showing exactly how they are alike. Their commonality is indeed etymologically grounded (ἐνέργεια refers to ἔργον, while ἐντελέχεια refers to τέλος; by showing that “ἔργον is τέλος”, we see how both terms are intrinsically connected) but, more importantly, conceptually grounded. Aristotle had already shown in his earlier texts that ἔργον refers either to the substance that results from a process of production or to activities where the exercise and the ἔργον coincide. The common element in both cases is that both are complete, that is, in possession of their ends (τέλος). By claiming now that “ἐνέργεια is the ἔργον”, Aristotle is implying that ἐνέργεια also refers either to substance or complete activities. What this means is that the distinctive feature of ἐνέργεια is its completeness, which is why it can also be referred to as ἐντελέχεια, i.e., that which is already in possession of its end (cf. *Met.* Δ 16, 1021b23–25). Conversely, when speaking of ἐντελέχεια, we ultimately refer to the completeness which is characteristic of ἐνέργεια. That is why, as Aristotle states in chapter 3, the term ἐνέργεια “is put together with ἐντελέχεια” (πρὸς τὴν ἐντελέχειαν συντιθεμένη, 1047a30–31). Cf. Kosman 1984, 127 n. 14.

30 “It was assumed that the τέλος is that which is the best and the last thing on account of which all other things are for” (ὕποκειται γὰρ τέλος τὸ βέλτιστον καὶ τὸ ἔσχατον, οὗ ἕνεκα τᾶλλα πάντα, *EE* 1219a10–11).

the δύναμις (μᾶλλον τέλος τῆς δυνάμεως ἐστίν, 1050a27–28) (and thus both kinds end up being prior to δύναμις in being, which is what Aristotle is trying to demonstrate in *Θ* 8). What this shows is that there is a qualitative difference between complete activity and motion. This difference concerns their relationships with their ends, since there is no doubt that the former is an end, while the latter, while not being an end in itself, can be granted to be more an end than the δύναμις since it shares, deficiently, the telic *structure* of complete activity (*i.e.*, it is oriented towards, but not in possession of, the τέλος).³¹

3 Complete Activity in the *Protrepticus* and Beyond

EE II 1, 1219a13–17 makes the distinction between the diverse kinds of actions in terms of ἔργον, and *Met.* *Θ* 8, 1050a23–28 speaks of “that which is last” (ἔσχατον, 1050a24). But it is *Protrepticus* VII 43.10–20/B68–69 that presents the contrast explicitly in terms of the relation which each action establishes with its τέλος.³² This same criterion, of course, features in *Met.* *Θ* 6, 1048b18–35, Aristotle’s

³¹ This position is consistent with what Aristotle says in the *Physics*. At *Phys.* III 2, 201b27–29, Aristotle argues that motion is indeterminate (ἀόριστον), neither fully ἐνέργεια nor fully δύναμις. It is instead a *qualified* ἐνέργεια: motion is the ἐντελέχεια of the capable *qua* being capable (ἢ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια, ἢ τοιοῦτον, κίνησις ἐστίν, *Phys.* III 1, 201a10–11), which is not in possession of its end, but is *on its way* to it. Take the case of housebuilding. When a process of housebuilding reaches its end (when the house is finished), the motion ceases to exist, and we have in turn an οὐσία, a house. While the motion lasts, the end has not yet been attained, since the capable remains capable (the bricks still retain their capability to become a house because the house has not yet been finished, in which case the materials cease to have the capability to become *this* house). Aristotle claims that this is the cause of its incompleteness (201b32–33), which explains the fact that motion cannot be counted as ἐνέργεια ἀπλή (201b34–35), that is, ἐνέργεια which is in possession of its end.

This account of motion is the one first introduced by Kosman 1969; 1984, 129–130; 2013, 70–71, recently defended by Coope 2009, and Gonzalez 2019, 137–146. In this reading, the most important element of the definition of motion is the *qua* clause (ἢ τοιοῦτον), which serves the purpose of explaining the incompleteness of motion (cf. Kosman 1969, Coope 2009, 282–283, Gonzalez 2019, 138). In a process of change, the capacity remains to some degree capable, and so we cannot claim that, when the motion takes place, the capacity has reached its τέλος or that it has been fulfilled (“The potential is incomplete in that it is only retained for as long as it is not completely fulfilled”, Coope 2009, 283). For some recent criticism of this view see Charles 2015; a full reply to Charles’s arguments must be postponed to another time and place.

³² Menn 1994, 108–109 quotes the passages of *Eudemian Ethics* and *Met.* *Θ* 8 in full, but relegates *Protrepticus* VII 43.10–20/B68–69 to a note (n. 47). Instead of citing it in its entirety, he mostly paraphrases it and leaves out large sections of the passage, including the key lines at 14–17, which

most complex and rich discussion on the distinction between motion and ἐνέργεια. This strongly supports our claim that Aristotle was well aware of the difference between motion and ἐνέργεια in his earlier texts.

Aristotle is making a point which he routinely makes throughout the *corpus*: although all activities, including motions, can be deemed to be ἐνέργεια in a loose sense, not all ἐνέργεια are motions. What differentiates the two kinds is that while in the case of motions the end is different from the motion itself, in the case of activities such as thinking or seeing, the activity is carried out for its own sake and coincides with its τέλος. This implies that, as early as in the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle realizes that *there is a sense in which activities are independent of motion*. The next step which complements this reasoning, already suggested in the *Protrepticus* passage and implicit in the parallel discussion in *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a15–b3, can be found in the *Physics*, *De Anima* and *Met.* Θ 6: motion is an incomplete (ἀτελής) or qualified ἐνέργεια, opposed to complete (τελεία) or unqualified (ἀπλῶς) ἐνέργεια (*Phys.* III 2, 201b31–35, VIII 5, 257b8–9; *DA* III 7, 431a7; *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b29–30, K 9, 1066a20–22). This key expression, correctly understood, shows that κίνησις is not a species of a broader genus ἐνέργεια, as Menn believes,³³ since it would be absurd to consider a species as an incomplete instance of some genus, as Gonzalez argues.³⁴ Instead, motion is a *derivative and incomplete* ἐνέργεια, dependent on the original and proper sense of ἐνέργεια, originally understood as a special kind of activity which is not different from its τέλος.³⁵

express the *criterion* which distinguishes the two kinds of actions, *i.e.*, the specific relation they establish with their τέλος. This obscures completely the parallel between this passage and *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35.

³³ Cf. Menn 1994, 106 n. 43, followed by Makin 2006, 151, Beere 2009, 229–230; 2018, 878, Anagnostopoulos 2017, 206 n. 72, and partially by Sentesy 2020, 79 and Unlu 2021, 12.

³⁴ Cf. Gonzalez 2019, 141: “An ‘incomplete *energeia*’ is similarly not a species or kind of *energeia* but a defective *energeia*, one that is *not energeia* in the full or unqualified sense” (emphasis by the author). There is a relation of distinction and ontological priority between ἐνέργεια and κίνησις, and it is the former concept which explains the latter. This appears also to be the position of Iamblichus (reported by Simplicius), who upholds the separation and distinction between ἐνέργεια and κίνησις according to the ἐντελής-ἀτελής criterion (cf. *in Cat.* 303, 36 ff.; 308, 32–309, 8 Kalbfleisch). Simplicius presents his testimony against Plotinus’ view which objects that Aristotle did not include κίνησις under the genus of ἐνέργεια. Furthermore, Iamblichus cites Theophrastus in support of his view (304, 32–305, 13. An analysis of this passage can be found at Gonzalez 2019, 179–181).

³⁵ This point is misunderstood by Sentesy 2020, 56, 73–76, 154 n. 47 who claims instead, and contrary to Aristotle’s own words, that change itself can be regarded as complete. This leads him to severely misconstrue *EN* X 4, 1174a13–b23: according to Sentesy, in this passage “Aristotle either qualifies or resists the claim in the Passage [*sc.* *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35], that change (*kinesis*) is incomplete by arguing that it is incomplete in its parts, but complete as a whole” (2020, 15). But, as stated above (n. 31), the completion of a motion (such as housebuilding) is *not the motion in itself* but the resulting οὐσία (such as the finished house, which has already been built) towards which

Of course, this contrast is clearly stated in *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35 and implicit in Θ 8, 1050a23–28, but we do not need to rely exclusively on these texts. For in *Protrepticus*, XI 58.15–17/B87 Aristotle tells us that “*complete and unhindered activity* (τελεία ἐνέργεια καὶ ἀκώλυτος) certainly has in itself delight, so that the activity of contemplation (θεωρητικὴ ἐνέργεια) must be the most pleasant of all”.³⁶ As in *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35, *EN X 4*, 1174b16–17 and *DA III 7*, 431a7, we have here a description of ἐνέργεια in its strict sense, τελεία ἐνέργεια (1048b22). The passage at *Met.* Θ 6 begins as a consideration of the larger structure of human action which Aristotle calls πρᾶξις (1048b18), though only τελεία πρᾶξις, or ἐνέργεια, can be properly deemed to be πρᾶξις. The other incomplete kind of πρᾶξις, κίνησις, is not πρᾶξις in the strict sense and can be called so only if we state that it is incomplete (ἀτελής). Although the *Protrepticus* does not articulate this distinction so clearly, its basic structure is already present. We have on the one hand the distinction between two different sets of actions, according to the criterion of the relation with their ends (VII 43.5–25/B68–70), and on the other the allusion to a complete kind of action (XI 58.15–17/B87), to which κίνησις (or ποίησις in the language of the *Protrepticus*) is opposed. Moreover, Aristotle is perfectly consistent with regard to the examples he chooses in all of these texts. The example of ἀτελής ἐνέργεια is systematically the case of housebuilding; the paradigmatic examples of τελεία ἐνέργεια are the acts of seeing (ὄρᾶν) and of thinking (φρονεῖν, θεωρεῖν, νοεῖν), the latter being also the kind of activity which characterizes the prime mover, which is, of course, unmoved.

There is, however, one objection which could be made to this reading. In effect, one could claim that in Aristotle’s earlier texts (specifically in the *Protrepticus*) the criterion of being its own end is used solely to establish a restricted contrast between productive and non-productive activities. This view would be supported by Aristotle’s choice of terminology in *Protrepticus* VII 43.10–20/B68–69, that is, by

the motion strives. The notion of a “complete change” *qua* change goes against Aristotle’s own remarks in *Phys.* III 2, 201b31–5, VIII 5, 257b8–9 and *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b29–30; K 9, 1066a20–24, where he clearly stated that *it is motion, and not merely its parts*, which is incomplete. There are also explicit traces of this doctrine in *EN X 4*, 1174a13–b23. At b5–7, Aristotle claims that pleasure (which is analogous to complete activities such as sight) and motion are *different* (ἕτεροι) from one another, and that the former belongs to those things which are *whole and complete* (τῶν ὅλων τι καὶ τελείων), clearly implying that, on the contrary, motion *does not belong* to that which is whole and complete, *i.e., that it is in itself incomplete*. Sentesy 2020, 74–76 does not comment on the lines at b5–7 in his analysis of the passage.

36 The connection between pleasure and complete activity is of course underscored in *EN X 4* (see in particular 1174b14–23), a passage in which Aristotle makes explicit use of the distinction between motion and activity. See also *EN X 7*, 1177a13–25, where Aristotle restates the point made in the *Protrepticus*’ passage quoted above. See also Gonzalez 1991.

the fact that Aristotle speaks of activities which are ποιητική, and not explicitly of motion. But although this reading may seem plausible at first sight, there are important reasons why it is fundamentally mistaken.

Firstly, we should note that Aristotle does not seem to establish such a stark distinction between ποιήσις and κίνησις throughout his works. In one especially relevant passage—at *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a28–b2, which runs parallel to the ones cited before—Aristotle seems to take production and motion as equivalent. He states the following:

The act of housebuilding is in that which is being built, and comes to be and is at the same time with the house. So when what comes to be is something different from the exercise (παρὰ τὴν χρῆσιν), in those cases the ἐνέργεια is in that which is produced (ἐν τῷ ποιουμένῳ), such as the act of building in that which is being built, and the act of weaving in that which is being woven, and the same in the other cases (ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων); in general motion is in that which is moved (καὶ ὅλως ἢ κίνησις ἐν τῷ κινουμένῳ). But in the cases when there is not an ἔργον different from the ἐνέργεια (παρὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν), the ἐνέργεια is in them, such as sight in the one who is seeing, and contemplation in the one who is contemplating and life in the soul, and thus happiness, since it is life of some kind (Θ 8, 1050a28–b2).

The passage is a continuation of 1050a23–28, quoted earlier in Section 2, and has the intention of further demonstrating the priority in being of ἐνέργεια over δύναμις.³⁷ Here, Aristotle once more restates the motion/activity distinction. The important thing to note is that, when referring to motion in opposition to complete activity, Aristotle makes a continuous argument that concerns housebuilding (1050a32), weaving (1050a32–33) and motion (1050a33–34) without introducing any meaningful distinction between the three terms; indeed, the allusion to motion seems to sum up the previous examples. The fact that κίνησις is preceded by the article and the adverb ὅλως suggests that Aristotle is speaking of motion in general, that is, that motion as such is carried out in that which is moved (ἐν τῷ κινουμένῳ, a34). This runs parallel (cf. ὁμοίως at 1050a33) to the cases of housebuilding and weaving, which are evident examples of production, in which the motion is carried out in that which is

³⁷ When reading this passage (which involves several difficulties that I cannot properly address here), we must take into account that Aristotle's main effort in this whole section of Θ 8 is to show that *even motions* (cf. 1050a16–17) are “more an end than [and thus prior to] the δύναμις” (1050a27–28). Aristotle is not claiming that motion is an end (a condition which he grants only to substantial form and complete activity) but that a) it takes place *in* that which will become the end, *i.e.*, the materials being turned into the house, and b) it comes to be and takes place with its end. These two claims have the purpose of emphasizing the closeness between a motion and its τέλος, without compromising their fundamental distinction. Cf. n. 31 above and Broadie 2010, 206.

produced (ἐν τῷ ποιουμένῳ, a31).³⁸ The following line would contrast this kind of activity with the complete kind, which is carried out not in something other which is moved, but in itself.³⁹

This passage is a parallel text to *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17, analyzed earlier in Section 2. As we saw, in this passage Aristotle establishes a contrast between actions which have an external ἔργον (a notion which in this context is equivalent to τέλος, as noted above) and actions in which the exercise and the ἔργον coincide. The criterion which structures this distinction is the same one as in *Protrepticus* VII 43.10–20/B68–69 and *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35. But although Aristotle chooses examples of productions to illustrate those actions which do not contain their ends, the discussion is not limited to production, since Aristotle is here speaking in general terms of the two ways in which ἔργον is said (τὸ ἔργον λέγεται διχῶς, 1219a13).⁴⁰ This shows that although Aristotle chooses productive activities as the main examples of incomplete activities in *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a23–b2 and *EE* 1219a13–17, the criterion of end-having has a wider application than the narrow case of production in both these texts.

If the sharp terminological distinction between motion and production is not found in the most significant parallel texts to *Protrepticus* VII 43.10–20/B68–69, then we must conclude that the apparent reduction of the end-having criterion to production in this latter passage must be a unique occurrence in the *corpus*. This seems implausible. Indeed, such a claim would have to be supported by additional

38 It should be noted that the paradigm cases of motion in the whole of *Met.* Θ (and specifically in key passages in Θ 6 and Θ 8) are productive activities, in particular housebuilding (there are variations, such as weaving at 1050a32–33). The point is that the distinctive feature of motion is best captured in production, where the disjointed relation between the activity and its τέλος is most evident. See once more *EE* 1219a13–17 and *EN* 1140a1–6. On the structural equivalence between ποιήσις and κίνησις, cf. Natali 1991, especially at 196–198.

39 Cf. Gonzalez 2019, 169–170. Of course, no distinction between ποιήσις and κίνησις can be found in *Met.* Θ 6, 1048b18–35, which includes several cases of production among the examples of κινήσεις. The same applies to the discussion that takes place in *EN* X 4, in which the main example of motion is housebuilding, a clear case of productive activity. Aristotle's discussion of motion in *Phys.* III 1 also relies heavily on the example of housebuilding (cf. 201a15–19, b8–15).

40 In his biological works, Aristotle uses ἔργον when alluding to generation and to the natural motions of living beings (cf. *Part. An.* 639b19–21, 648a13–19, 694b11–14; *Gen. An.* 716a17–27, 731a23–34). In other works, he speaks of ἔργον as a general notion (cf. *De Caelo* 286a8–9: Ἐκαστόν ἐστιν, ὧν ἐστιν ἔργον, ἔνεκα τοῦ ἔργου. See also *Politics* 1253a23: πάντα δὲ τῷ ἔργῳ ὀρίσται καὶ τῇ δυνάμει). If, as we noted above, the passage in *Eudemian Ethics* speaks in general terms of the two ways in which ἔργον is said, then it seems reasonable to assume that the doctrine of this passage applies to all the uses of ἔργον, and not only to productive activity. I am grateful to Eduardo Mombello for discussion of these texts.

evidence, but the fact is that it runs counter to the use that Aristotle makes of the motion/activity distinction throughout his works.⁴¹

Secondly, we should note that this view seems also to contradict Aristotle's treatment of ἐνέργεια in his earlier works. As we noted earlier, *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17 denies that an action such as housebuilding could be regarded as ἔργον, because in this case the ἔργον is located beyond the activity itself. In this passage, ἔργον seems to apply either to complete substances (a house) or to complete activities (seeing). In the *Protrepticus*, ἔργον constitutes a parallel term to ἐνέργεια, and both terms are used to describe actions in which action and end coincide (seeing, thinking). It is undeniable that Aristotle is aware of the peculiar telic condition of this kind of action in both works (*Protrepticus* VII 43.10–20/B68–69, XI 58.15–17/B87; *EE* 1219a8–17). The fact that Aristotle explicitly denies that actions which have an external ἔργον/τέλος could be deemed to be proper ἔργα, that is, ἐνέργεια,⁴² suggests that in Aristotle's earlier texts ἐνέργεια stands for those activities which have their end in themselves. This implies that, in these texts, the end-having criterion serves the purpose of delimiting the contours of the concept of ἐνέργεια, and not merely of establishing a narrow distinction between productive and non-productive activities.

All of this supports the view that the *Protrepticus*' passage concerns the contrast between complete and incomplete activities in general, and not only the status of production. Indeed, what seems to be at stake in *Protrepticus* VII 43.10–20/B68–69 is the structural relation established by the diverse kinds of actions with their ends. As in any other motion, the work involved in production is on its way to its (external) τέλος, and ceases to be when the τέλος is reached, that is, when the object of production is finished. This structural feature also applies to the cases of substantial generation (where the resulting object is not an artifact but a living individual substance), alteration (where the result of the motion is a new quality or state), quantitative changes (in which there is a resulting increase or decrease), and locative changes (where the result is a new position). Conversely, in the case of complete activity the activity coincides with its end; there is no work other than the activity itself. This structural concern suggests that the passage has a wider scope than the mere status of production.

⁴¹ The issue is particularly grave. If we were to accept the reduction of the end-having criterion to production in the *Protrepticus*, and went on to claim that in this text ἐνέργεια and κίνησις are coextensive, then it would follow that there is a contradiction between this text and all other texts in which the criterion appears. Why assume that Aristotle contradicts himself, when a much simpler explanation seems to be that the end-having criterion served the purpose of distinguishing complete and incomplete actions in general from the very beginning?

⁴² Recall *Met.* Θ 8, 1050a21–23: “the ἐνέργεια is the ἔργον, and that is why the name ἐνέργεια is related to ἔργον”, ἡ δὲ ἐνέργεια τὸ ἔργον, διὸ καὶ τοῦνομα ἐνέργεια λέγεται κατὰ τὸ ἔργον.

So why does Aristotle speak of ποιητική and θεωρητική activities in *Protrepticus* VII 43.10–20/B68–69? This could be simply explained by the wider context of the passage. The *Protrepticus* is not a physical investigation but an exhortation towards philosophy, which in this context is understood as a specific kind of activity without a further end. Aristotle wants to confront the commonly held assumption that one should dedicate oneself to activities that produce some good (such as a house or health) that is external to the action itself. To do so, he directs our attention towards those actions which do not have a further end beyond their very exercise (such as seeing or contemplating). This explains the productive/non-productive contrast of this passage. But, as noted above, there is no indication that the contrast does not extend to all sorts of actions which are oriented towards an external end. The point is that the doctrine is essentially the same in all the above cited texts. There is little textual support for introducing a distinction in the range of the application of the criterion throughout Aristotle's works.

This leaves us with why Aristotle uses ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν to describe activity in the *Protrepticus* and why he refers to waking as κίνησις, in contrast to later texts in which it is described as a non-kinetic activity. First of all, it is far from clear that the particular expression ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν refers exclusively to motions, or that it has a primary kinetic sense in this context. For instance, Aristotle clearly states in *DA* II 5, 417b2 that being affected (τὸ πάσχειν) is not to be understood in absolute terms (ἀπλοῦν), and he states this precisely before introducing the distinction between common alteration and the specific case of sensation, which should not be understood in terms of motion.⁴³ This strongly suggests that Aristotle does not conceive the notion of πάσχειν in exclusively kinetic terms.⁴⁴ But even if it were so, we could explain the use of this

43 Contrast Burnyeat 2002, 66, who claims that in this passage Aristotle is still equating πάσχειν, κινεῖσθαι and ἐνεργεῖν, as in *II* 5, 417a14–15, and so treating perception as “change (*kinesis*) in the sense of *Physics* III 1–3: actuality (*energeia*) which is incomplete in the sense that it is directed towards a result beyond itself (417a 16 [...]). The very words ‘alteration’ and ‘being affected’ imply as much, especially when *II* 5 is read in proximity to *De Generatione et Corruptione* I 7 and *Physics* III 1–3”. But it is doubtful that the equivalence between πάσχειν, κινεῖσθαι and ἐνεργεῖν of 417a14–17 is operative in this passage; as Anagnostopoulos (2021), 13–23 notes, such an equivalence seems to apply only to the first part of the discussion, which runs up to 417a21–22. This first part would be thus “premised on a fundamental falsehood” (14), since, as we have seen, there is a fundamental distinction between κινεῖσθαι and ἐνεργεῖν, and so it would be mistaken to conflate the two notions. The ensuing discussion (417a21ff.) moves beyond this inexact premise and aims to show precisely in which way perception *should not* be deemed to be an ordinary alteration, *i.e.*, a motion in the sense of *Physics* III 1–3. In any case, Aristotle's “request for simplicity” (as Burnyeat calls it) at 417a14–15 shows that he does not consider πάσχειν, κινεῖσθαι and ἐνεργεῖν to be coextensive terms, which supports my claim that πάσχειν is not inherently or necessarily kinetic in nature.

44 It also seems insufficient to claim that the expression ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν stands for an alleged categorical use of κίνησις (Menn 1994, 106–107; 2021, 247–248, Unlu 2021). Surely both motion and

kind of expression by recalling the innovative character of the passages in *Protrepticus*. Aristotle is introducing a new term, ἐνέργεια, and is clearly trying to emphasize its *active* sense. It is also the case that the concept of exercising a capacity immediately elicits the idea of executing a motion, and not the idea of motionless activity (recall *Met.* Θ 3, 1047a30–b1). But if Aristotle had motion in mind when introducing his new term ἐνέργεια, why introduce it at all? As Blair (1992, 27) asks, why not state at XI 56.15–16/B79, “it appears that ‘to live’ is said in two ways, one which deals with δύναμις the other with κίνησις”? The answer is not hard to find: Aristotle believes that neither thinking nor sight involves any sort of motion in its exercise. This is a crucial point, established at VII 43.5–25/B68–70 and XI 58.15–17/B87.

An answer to this possible objection can also be offered by consideration of the mixed character of human *praxis*. As Natali (2002) argues with regard to a similar case in a passage of *Eudemian Ethics*, human *praxis* is necessarily composed of motions, but while some actions can be identified as the sum of one or more particular motions (like in the case of production, ποιησις), others exceed the sum of motions and, taken in themselves, do not imply motion.⁴⁵ Natali finds this distinction to be at play in *Met.* B 2, 996a23–30, where Aristotle speaks of actions which occur *with* motion (μετὰ κινήσεως), in contrast to actions which occur through (διὰ) motion. While in the first case it is possible to trace a distinction between the action and the motions necessary for its development, in the second case action and motion coincide. For Natali (2002), 34, the difference in context (either ethical or metaphysical) explains why Aristotle sometimes uses the term κίνησις to describe certain actions which in other places he characterizes as

activity could be regarded categorically as actions or sufferings, but this does not support the idea that there is a broad sense of κίνησις capable of covering both motion and activity (or, going further, that this sense is the one at play in *Protrepticus* 56.27–57.9/B80–81 or in *Met.* Θ 3, 1047a30–32 and Θ 6, 1048b8). On the contrary, motion (κίνησις) is quite clearly defined and conceived by Aristotle as an incomplete and derivative instance of a prior and proper case of ἐνέργεια. This explains both the commonality and the distinction between the two concepts. Motion and activity are both instances of the capacity-exercise structure (which yields actions and sufferings categorically speaking), but this structure corresponds primarily to complete activity, and only in a derivative way to motion. This doctrine, as was shown above, is already present in Aristotle's earlier texts. What we should gather from this is that Aristotle *did not* consider complete activities κινήσεις in a broad sense in his earlier texts or in *Metaphysics* Θ. Finally, we should also note that Simplicius (*in Cat.* 302, 5–17 Kalbfleisch) explicitly rejects the idea of κίνησις as a distinct category. He claims that this mistaken view was held by Plotinus and that it departs from “Aristotle's hypotheses” (οὐ ταῖς Ἀριστοτέλους ὑποθέσει προσχωρῶνται, 302, 11). In support of his position he cites the authority of Boethius of Sidon (pupil and successor of Andronicus of Rhodes as head of the Peripatetic school) and Iamblichus (302, 16).

⁴⁵ Cf. Natali 2002, 30–34.

opposed to motion. Sometimes Aristotle emphasizes the motions necessary for carrying out a given action and on other occasions he underscores the intrinsic independence of that particular action from motion. This explains why in *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle refers to *praxis* as κίνησις, in apparent contradiction to *Met.* Θ 6, as with the characterization of being awake in *Protrepticus* XI 56.27–57.6/B80 and *Met.* Θ 6.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the crucial point is that the contradiction is not conceptual; as *Protrepticus* VII 43.5–27/B68–72 shows, Aristotle had a clear grasp of the difference between motion activities such as housebuilding and non-kinetic, complete activities such as thinking, seeing and contemplating.

Finally, regarding the expression μεταβάλλειν εἰς τὴν κίνησιν, there is no reason not to read the expression as in line with *DA* 416b1–3: “the carpenter [is not affected] by the matter, but it by him; the carpenter *changes only from inactivity to activity* (μεταβάλλει μόνον εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἐξ ἀργίας)”. This seems a much simpler explanation than the one adopted by Menn, which assumes that Aristotle contradicts here an important doctrine of the *Physics* (that there is no change of change).

We can, then, conclude that the distinction between motion and activity already exists in Aristotle’s earlier texts. The distinction is crucial in the *Protrepticus*, for it is the notion of non-kinetic activity (which is exercised for its own sake) which allows him to establish a connection between the human soul, philosophy, and the divine.⁴⁷ Furthermore, it appears that it was this particular case of complete human action (thinking, which is analogous to contemplation and to sight) which largely motivated the development of the δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction, and not motion-like activities such as housebuilding. In the passages we saw above, the capacity-exercise structure applies primarily to the duality that characterizes human action, which can either remain unexercised or be actively exercised. The kinds of actions to which Aristotle applies his new term ἐνέργεια are systematically those in which the action and the end coincide, such as seeing, thinking, understanding, and the like. Moreover, Aristotle makes clear that the activity most proper to humans is the complete kind of activity, which Aristotle

⁴⁶ The same applies to *MM* II 7 and *EE* 1218b35–36: “of the things within the soul, some are dispositions or capacities, others activities and motions” (τῶν δὲ ἐν ψυχῇ τὰ μὲν ἕξεις ἢ δυνάμεις εἰσὶ, τὰ δ’ ἐνέργεια καὶ κινήσεις). One could read καὶ at 36 as explanatory, but this would be a unique occurrence in Aristotle; when ἐνέργεια and κίνησις appear together there is always some sort of indication that they are not the same; most often κίνησις is called an ἐνέργεια τίς, and Aristotle usually adds that although κίνησις seems to be ἐνέργεια, it is incomplete. This καὶ is better read as a conjunction between two diverse things with different natures, and the fact they are put together could be explained by the same argument that was made above.

⁴⁷ “Nothing divine or blessed belongs to humans except from just that one thing worthy of consideration, what there is in us of insight and intelligence (νοῦ καὶ φρονήσεως): for, of what is ours, only this seems to be immortal and this alone divine”, *VIII* 48.9–13/B108.

expressly denominates *τελεία ἐνέργεια* (cf. *Protrepticus* VII 43.20–25/B70, XI 58.15–17/B87 and n. 26 above). This kind is explicitly opposed to the sort of action in which the end is external; this latter kind is said to be inferior to the former, since, as *EE* II 1, 1219a13–17 tells us, those actions which do not contain their ends cannot be said to be *ἔργον* (a term intrinsically related to *ἐνέργεια*, and for Aristotle equivalent to *τέλος*), but only a means to the *ἔργον*. All of this suggests that activity proper constitutes Aristotle's original paradigm of *ἐνέργεια*, and not *κίνησις*. We can therefore dismiss the idea that motion constitutes the original case of the *δύναμις-ἐνέργεια* distinction.⁴⁸

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