**Why Privation Is a Form in a Qualified Sense for Aristotle[[1]](#footnote-25525)**

In Aristotle's account of change, lacking a form is called privation (*Physics* I.7 191a14). For example, someone takes on the form of being musical only from previously having the privation of being unmusical. However, he also states that “shape and nature are spoken of in two ways, for the privation too is in a way form” (*Physics* II.1 193b19). I will demonstrate that these seemingly contradictory statements are not actually in tension. Since all perceptible matter must be enformed, we would have trouble discussing things that have yet to undergo generation, like menstrual fluid, and things that have undergone corruption, like corpses, if we did not cite the privation as a sort of form. I will argue that, given his commitment to hylomorphism, Aristotle is committed to privation being a form in a qualified sense. It cannot be a form in an unqualified sense because privation often spoils the matter such that it can no longer be reformed. The fact of the matter is we cannot draw a bright line between privation and form because the two are contraries and can be said to hold to different degrees at different points on a spectrum.

**Keywords**: change, form, hylomorphism, matter, menstrual fluid, privation

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In section 1, I will give an overview of Aristotle’s account of change. Next, I will introduce the passages that seem to be in tension with one another. In section 2, I present my solution to the puzzle: privation gives matter a basic shape but does not actualize any of its potentialities. First, I will demonstrate that what Aristotle says about perceptible matter always being enformed in *Generation of Animals* and *On Coming-to-be and Passing Away* makes it clear how privation must be a form in some sense. Next, I will explain what Aristotle means by *haplōs* (unqualified) by looking at its use throughout the corpus. Because Aristotle’s use of *haplōs* in the *Physics* means ‘in the fullest sense of the word,’ privation and unqualified form exist at opposite ends of a spectrum. Next, I will show that what he says regarding privation in *Metaphysics H* explains why it is not a form in an unqualified sense. While forms actualize potentialities, privation often negatively affects the matter, making it lose some of its potentialities. Finally, I will explain why privation is a form in any sense. To do so, I will refute Aquinas’s argument that privation is not an inchoate form.

**1. Aristotle on Privation and Forms**

I begin this section with Aristotle’s account of change in *Physics* I, where privation is an essential part of the account. Next, I introduce the potentially problematic passages where he says that privation is a form in a sense, and I explain why they are a problem for his hylomorphic theory.

**1.1Aristotle’s Account of Change**

There are two kinds of change for Aristotle. The first is unqualified generation and corruption, or what is sometimes called substantial change. The second is qualified generation and corruption, or what is sometimes called alteration or non-substantial change. Substantial change is the creation or destruction of a substance, i.e., a biological entity. For example, the birth and death of a human being. Non-substantial change is the creation or destruction of artifacts or a substance taking on or losing a non-essential feature. For example, a human becoming musical or a lump of bronze becoming a statue.

Both kinds of change are discussed extensively in the *Physics*. In *Physics* I.8, Aristotle responds to the claim of earlier thinkers, like Parmenides, that something cannot come to be from what is not. He writes:

We ourselves are in agreement with them in holding that nothing can be said without qualification to come from what is not. But, however, we maintain that a thing may come to be from what is not in a qualified sense. For a thing comes to be from the privation, which in itself is something which is not—this not surviving the coming to be. Yet this causes astonishment and it is thought impossible that something should seem to come to be from what is not (191b14-18).[[2]](#footnote-3)

Coming from[[3]](#footnote-27504) what is not without qualification would be generation *ex nihilo.* Aristotle agrees with previous thinkers that generation of that sort is impossible. However, he differs from them in holding that things come to be from what, *in a sense*, is not. Indeed, he believes that the distinction of privation from matter is what saves his account from making the same mistakes that theirs made (*Physics* I.9 192a3-5).

Basically, possessing privation is failure to possess a feature or form. We are given a fourfold definition of privation in *Metaphysics* Δ.22:

We speak of privation in many ways: (1) if something does not have one of the attributes which a thing might naturally have, even if the thing itself would not naturally have it, e.g., a plant is said to be deprived of eyes. (2) If, though either the thing itself or its genus would naturally have an attribute, it does not have it, e.g., a blind man and a mole are in different senses deprived of sight…(3) If, though it would naturally have the attribute, and when it would naturally have it, it has it not…(4) The violent taking away of anything we call privation (1022b22-32).[[4]](#footnote-1317)

(2) and (3) are going to be Aristotle’s uses of ‘privation’ that I will be investigating in this paper, because, while we do use senses (1) and (4) in ordinary life, they are not as technical as the others are.[[5]](#footnote-8420) Plants lack eyes, but that is not a defect. If a human lacks eyes, then it is a defect. Likewise, taking away someone’s money is depriving them of it, but in a material and not metaphysical sense. Obviously, blindness is privation. Privation also includes concepts like unmusical, footless, and dead.

In order to understand how Aristotle avoids making the same mistake as Parmenides, we must first understand that, for him, non-substantial change is always change of some underlying subjectthat persists in one sense and changes in another (*Physics* I.7 190a9-10).[[6]](#footnote-4) If the subject of the non-substantial change were completely obliterated, then a change has not really occurred. Instead, it would be a replacement. If a non-substantial change is to take place, then the subject must go from one opposing state to the other, e.g., from hot to cold. Imagine putting an ice cube tray full of hot water into the freezer. It is incorrect to say that the hot is changing into the cold. Instead, the water of the ice cube changes from hot to cold. The water is the same material at the beginning and end of the process but is in different forms.

Rather than coming from nothingness, what Aristotle means by ‘coming to be from what is not’ is that alteration, or qualified generation, begins with privation. If a thing is to undergo qualified generation and come to have some quality F, then it cannot already have F.However, many things which are not F also cannot come to be F. There are several things which are not currently in a state of being black that are not capable of becoming black, e.g., my rendition of a song. What distinguishes a door from a rendition of a song is that the former can become colored and the latter not**.**  A door is the right type of thing to become black, even if it never does. My rendition of a song is not the right type of thing to become black, except homonymously.[[7]](#footnote-5) Therefore, the door is potentially black, while my rendition of “Paint It Black” is not. The sense in which a thing comes from what is not, for Aristotle, is that it comes to be F not merely from a state of not being F, but being potentially F.[[8]](#footnote-6) What makes something potentially F is the matter which constitutes it, for matter is the potentiality and form the actuality (*On the Soul* II.1 412a9-10).

These examples have all been about alteration, or non-substantial changes. However, because the *Physics* is about natural things, most of what Aristotle has said about generation and corruption is also true in cases of substantial change.[[9]](#footnote-21871) Substantial change proceeds from both what is and what is not in a qualified sense. Substantial generation proceeds from something that not only lacks life but is potentially alive. Likewise, substantial corruption only happens to substances that are/were alive. One difference is that substantial change does not include the persistence of an underlying subject.

A paradigm example of substantial generation is the birth of a human being. A human being cannot come to be from something that already is, because that is persistence and not generation.[[10]](#footnote-15838) A human being comes from what is in the sense that we are carried in the womb of one of our already existing parents. However, we also come from a state of not-being, in a sense, because the material out of which we grow is not yet a human being. Since I am in my forties, I cannot become an adult, because I already am one.[[11]](#footnote-23462) I can become deceased because that is a feature that I currently lack that will eventually become actualized. What can become an adult is a teenager, a child, a fetus, and menstrual fluid (for Aristotle).

The difference between substantial and non-substantial change is whether an underlying subject persists. A consequence of this is the possibility of reversing a change. The menstrual fluid is suited to become an embryo of the same kind as the creature it came from and nothing else.[[12]](#footnote-32007) Once it has been acted upon by a sperm (for Aristotle), it cannot become menstrual fluid again, because the menstrual fluid is consumed in the process of creating the embryo. A wooden door, on the other hand, is suited to become a table, a bed frame, or a range of different colors, because the wood persists. Substantial generation is a one-way process. I cannot become an adult, then menstrual fluid, then an adult again any more than I can be alive, dead, and then alive again.[[13]](#footnote-25699) However, the door can become black, then white, and then black again. Hence, alterations are two-way processes.

It should be apparent at this point that I take substantial change to be only generation and corruption of biological entities. Everything else is alteration. I know that *Metaphysics Z* is hardly conclusive about whether *ousia* are species or individual forms, but the constant example of *anthrōpos,* especiallyin VII.6, makes it clear that the souls of humans are a paradigm example of forms in an unqualified sense. I will say more about this in 2.3.2.

**1.2 Some Potentially Problematic Passages**

In *Physics* I.7, Aristotle constantly contrasts privation and form, yet there is a confusing passage in which he groups them together. Once he has identified the three components necessary for change, he states the following:

Now the subject is one numerically, though it is two in form—for there is the man, the gold, and the matter as a whole that can be counted. For it[[14]](#footnote-15897) is more so a ‘this’, and not an accidental factor in what comes to be. The privation, on the other hand, and the opposition are accidental (190b25-28).[[15]](#footnote-7)

The subject is one, for it is what persists throughout the process of change.[[16]](#footnote-3664) The man and the gold are examples of the matter, for the man is what is either musical or unmusical. The form is a ‘this’ because it is separable (*Metaphysics* Z.3 1029a28). The privation is accidental because it is not part of the essence of a human being to be unmusical, blind, immoral, etc. The form, however, which is essential, is two because the privation serves as a qualified form for the matter. For example, no one is born fully grown. It is essential to humans that they are born immature and subsequently mature. So, at some point prior to our deaths, we possess privation.

This passage is in direct tension with nearly everything he says in that chapter. For instance, when he says that “one is the account, then further there is its opposition, the privation” (191a14),[[17]](#footnote-8) he is clearly asserting that form and privation are opposites. Here, though, the substratum is one and the form is two because a new form replaces a privation, which was weakly serving as a sort of form. The previous quote is difficult to interpret. However, there is another passage where he repeats the point.

In Book II of the *Physics*,Aristotle gives us a very clear statement of what he means: “shape and nature are spoken of in two ways, for the privation too is in a way form” (193b19).[[18]](#footnote-10) Aristotle often gives answers of this sort; things are in one sense a certain way and are not that way in another sense. A door coming to be black is coming to be in a qualified sense, but not in an unqualified sense, as the birth of a human being is. However, Aristotle usually explains what he means when he gives these sorts of answers. Here, he does not, for he has given no indication of what sense privations are forms. To add to the problem, this quote from *Physics* II comes at the end of Chapter 1, and its content is not taken up in Chapter 2.

The reason that the tension between these passages needs to be resolved is because, right now, it seems as if we need to give up something to which Aristotle is deeply committed: the hylomorphic theory. On his account, matter is always enformed; we can only separate the two in thought (*On the Soul* I.1 403a12-13). However, many things lack forms. For example, menstrual fluid lacks the form of a human because generation has yet to occur, and a corpse lacks the form of a human because corruption has occurred. Either menstrual fluid, corpses, and a host of other things are solely matter, negating the hylomorphic theory, or privations are forms, negating the passages where Aristotle calls them the opposite of forms. My solution makes sense of these passages by arguing that privation is a form in a qualified sense, maintaining the hylomorphic theory, and that it is not a form in an unqualified sense, making sense of the claims that it is the opposite of form.

**2. The Solution: Privation Gives Shape and Explanatory Power**

Once I have established that privation occurs alongside a form, I will argue that privation is not a form in an unqualified sense. I will then conclude that privation is a form in an unqualified sense. My argument is as follows:

1. All perceptible matter is accompanied by a form.
2. Some perceptible matter is accompanied by privation.
3. Sometimes privation is accompanied by a form. [1,2]
4. If something is a form in an unqualified sense, then it actualizes a potentiality within the associated matter.
5. Privation does not actualize a potentiality within the associated matter.
6. Privation is not a form in an unqualified sense. [4,5]
7. Something is a form in a qualified sense if it provides a shape for the associated matter and explanatory power regarding the composite.
8. Privation provides a shape for the associated matter and explanatory power regarding the composite.
9. Privation is a form in a qualified sense. [7-8]

I will defend premises 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, and 8 each in their own subsection. In doing so, I will explain how privation and form are opposite in one sense and similar in another sense: they are contraries and exist on a spectrum. This argument is directly opposed to Aquinas’s reading of Aristotle’s *Physics*, which I will outline 2.5.

**2.1 Hylomorphism**

‘Hylomorphism’ comes from the Greek words *hulē* (matter) and *morphē* (form). It is Aristotle’s metaphysical thesis that every physical object is enformed matter. For example, a house is the form or layout of the matter, the bricks. A brick is the rectangular shape, the form, of the clay, the matter. For Aristotle, privation must be a form in some sense, because everything we perceive is a composite of form and matter. He tells us premise 1, all perceptible matter is accompanied by a form, in several places:

For no animal part exists without matter, nor is there matter alone. Nor can a body, independent of its constitution, make an animal or any part of an animal, as I have often said” (*Parts of Animals* I.3 643a25-27).[[19]](#footnote-11)

We say that although there is matter of the perceptible bodies, it is *not separable* but always bound up with a contrary, and it is from this that the so-called elements come in to being...For the hot is not matter for the cold nor the cold for the hot, but the subject for both” (*On Coming-to-be and Passing Away* II.1 329a25-33).[[20]](#footnote-12)

Perceptible matter is always bound up with a form.[[21]](#footnote-32536) We do not encounter the hot and the cold. Instead, we encounter hot and cold objects. Likewise, we do not encounter blackness, but black objects. This seems obvious. However, there is the question of prime matter.

If prime matter exists, scholars maintain that it is either the material from which substantial change proceeds, i.e., the material component of the menstrual fluid that becomes the body of a human being, or the matter out of which the four elements were formed.[[22]](#footnote-13) I hold that it is the latter.[[23]](#footnote-14) This is not to say that prime matter is merely pure potentiality, for it must have physical characteristics of its own in order to underlie change.[[24]](#footnote-15) Instead, it is something that is capable of combining with hot, cold, dry, and wet (HCDW) to form earth, air, fire, and water (EAFW). EAFW, which themselves are not perceptible, then go on to combine and make everything else in the sublunary sphere.

As matter for substantial generation, menstrual fluid is very basic, having to become each and every part of the organism. However, it is not what combines with HCDW to make EAFW. That is prime matter, and the menstrual fluid is merely the primary matter for substantial generation:

If, then*,* the male is the active, the one originating movement, and the female qua female is passive, it follows that what the female would contribute to the semen of the male would not be semen but matter. This is just what we find to be the case, for *the natural substance of the menstrual blood* *is the primary matter* (*Generation of Animals* I.21 729a29-34).[[25]](#footnote-16)

The menstrual fluid is not prime matter because, although ready to take on a form, it is a concrete thing with specific features of its own. For example, it is warm, wet, and usually red, pink, or brown in color.[[26]](#footnote-8107) More importantly, for Aristotle, it has to be from a creature of the same species as the sperm with which it combines. If it were just something generic, then it could not turn into a human being.[[27]](#footnote-21064) Primary matter is distinct from prime matter. For Aristotle, ‘form’ and ‘matter’ are relative terms. The matter of bricks is clay, but the matter of houses are bricks. Likewise, the matter of neighborhoods are houses. Primary matter merely refers to the most proximate material cause. Prime matter, on the other hand, would be rather amorphous, since it must be able to take on absolutely any form whatsoever.[[28]](#footnote-18) Instead, the matter we encounter, even the most basic, is not like that, for no matter how crude we think it is, it must have some form to it.

If prime matter indeed exists, it is not something that we can perceive. Just as the seed does not survive the change into a fetus, the prime matter does not survive the change into the four elements which combine to make everything else in the sublunary sphere.[[29]](#footnote-19) The simplest matter we encounter is neither prime matter nor the elements themselves. Earth is made up of mostly *earth*, the element. However, even a microscopic bit of dirt is not the element *earth* that Aristotle was talking about; it is still enformed matter. Likewise, with the other three elements. So, whether prime matter is something that Aristotle posited or not, it is still true that all perceptible matter is enformed.

**2.2 Before Generation & After Corruption[[30]](#footnote-23766)**

In support of premise 2, some perceptible matter is accompanied by privation, I will demonstrate that many objects that we encounter do not have positive characteristics like being black or square. Before generation has occurred, and after corruption has occurred, the subject is just matter and privation. E.g., a pile of sand, the rubble of a broken statue, menstrual fluid, and corpses are all examples of objects that are not yet or are no longer enformed.

Objects that have undergone corruption are the more numerous examples of privation. So, let’s begin there. Animal corpses no longer have their form, according to Aristotle (*On the Soul* II.1 412b26-27). However, they do not immediately revert into piles of flesh. Instead, they resemble the creature they once were, for a time. After a time, decay sets in and flesh rots. This can only be explained by citing privation. Moreover, decay is not reversion to menstrual fluid, but bacteria consume the flesh and produce new gases and odors. Never mind if Aristotle was aware of this, because the corpse does not revert to menstrual fluid and sperm as they were consumed in the creation of the embryo.

While death is the only unqualified corruption, there are other qualified corruptions, for any destruction that takes away a form, even a non-substantial one, counts. For example, breaking a statue into pieces is a corruption, as is grinding up the pieces into dust. Aristotle calls bits, pieces, puddles, etc. of matter *sōroi* (heaps). *Sōroi* are not unities in the sense that an organism is unified, because there is no principle that explains the arrangement of the parts (*Metaphysics* Z.16 1041b11-12). A pile of sand or the rubble of a broken statue must be considered *sōroi* because they are not concrete enough to be things. Instead, a sandcastle or a statue would qualify as a thing. A thing has accidents, not the matter.[[31]](#footnote-17385) A sandcastle and a statue have a color and shape that the individual grains of sand and bits of bronze do not possess. This is because matter has neither positive nor negative qualities.[[32]](#footnote-6426) All of the qualities that come to be actualized when the matter is enformed were merely potentialities in the matter, not any actual qualities that the matter possesses.

Things that have not yet undergone a change also possess a privation. The human being who is not yet musical is unmusical. However, they still possess the form of human, and many others. Something prior to a change that does not possess a form is menstrual fluid. One could object by saying that positive qualities of menstrual fluid include its warmth, its color, and the fact that it flows (roughly) monthly.[[33]](#footnote-12053) These qualities, so the objection goes, come from its form and not privation. However, once expelled it is no longer capable of receiving the form. For Aristotle, menstrual fluid needs to be a residue, like semen is, only less concocted than semen (*Generation of Animals* I.19726b31-32). Being a residue (*perittōma*) means that it is a byproduct of some process, like fecal matter is the result of digestion. Of course, we now recognize that the ovum is the female equivalent of sperm, and that the menstrual fluid would become part of the temporary organ that supports the fetus: the placenta. However, the placenta needs to be attached to the uterine wall to serve its function. So, expelled menstrual fluid can no longer become a placenta. Failing to actualize its potentiality is what causes it to be expelled. We can explain why it is being expelled by citing the fact that, because the woman in question is not pregnant, the menstrual fluid is no longer needed to become the placenta.

Menstrual fluid is not the only thing prior to a change that possesses privation. Consider a rusted piece of metal. It is also corrupted such that it cannot receive a form. Rust is not a positive quality of metal, because it is not in the *telos* of the metal to be corrupted. Likewise, it is not the *telos* of the menstrual fluid to be expelled, although it is expelled more often than not. The purpose of the menstrual fluid is, for Aristotle, to combine with sperm. The purpose of the metal is to be softened and shaped by a craftsperson. Neither expelled menstrual fluid nor rusted metal can receive forms.

So far, I have been explaining privation in terms of lacking a feature or characteristic. However, many things lack the form of a human being, but do not possess the privation of being not yet or no longer human. In his commentary on the *Physics*, Simplicius interprets the potentially problematic quote from Book II of the *Physics* in a way that supports my view:

It is a sort of form, either because it is distinguished from the substrate as something opposed (since it too resides in the substrate as the form does, and it too becomes a sort of shape and form of the substrate, for the accidents are forms of a sort in their subjects), or because *privation is not absence pure and simple*, but is in something that is by nature <such as to admit the corresponding form> (280,13-16).[[34]](#footnote-5591)

An absence pure and simple would multiply the instances of privation to a ridiculously high number, as every inanimate object would not only possess the privation of the form of human but of everything that the form of human makes possible, e.g., musical, bilingual, moral, and so on. Instead, privation is not merely lacking a characteristic, but lacking a characteristic that something possesses the potential to become, or once possessed.

Menstrual fluid of humans is not a human being, but neither is it equine. However, not being human is a privation of the menstrual fluid and not being equine is not. Human menstrual fluid is not equine because it is not the sort of thing that can become a horse. The statue is not potentially a sword; rather, the bronze of the statue is. Aristotle does not equate potentiality to mere possibility. The statue is a possible murder weapon because it could be used as a blunt force object to take someone’s life. However, the deprivation of life is not within the matter of the statue like it is in poisonous venom. Venom is a potential means of murder and making an antidote requires returning to the matter where the potential to cure lies.

Let’s take stock. In the previous section I argued that all perceptible matter is enformed. I have just argued that matter that has undergone corruption or has yet to undergo generation possesses privation. Therefore, privation occurs alongside form. This is not the strong claim that I am looking to defend. I will explain why privation is a sort of form, but only after I have explained why it is not a form in an unqualified sense.

**2.3 Unqualified Forms**

In this section, I will defend premise 4: if something is a form in an unqualified sense, then it actualizes a potentiality within the associated matter. First, I will investigate what *haplōs*, often translated as ‘simpliciter’ or ‘unqualified,’ means in the rest of the corpus. While it is sometimes translated as ‘in every instance’, Aristotle has other phrases for ‘universal’ (*katholou*) and ‘predicated in all cases’ (*kata* *pantos*). More often than not, *haplōs* means ‘in the fullest sense of the word.’ Next, I will demonstrate that unqualified forms are forms in the fullest sense of the word because they actualize potentialities that the associated matter possesses.

**2.3.1 What does ‘Unqualified’ Mean?**

Aristotle uses *haplōs* in the *Topics*, *Posterior* *Analytics*, *On* *Coming-to-be and Passing Away*, *Metaphysics*, and *Nicomachean* *Ethics*. I will address each of these texts and how he uses *haplōs* in them to defend my claim that ‘unqualified’ means ‘in the fullest sense of the word.’

Aristotle sometimes uses *haplōs* to mean ‘in every instance’. In *Topics* III.2, he is discussing when things are better and more desirable. For example, justice is better and more desirable than courage because justice is always useful; courage is not (*Nicomachean Ethics* III.3 1117a35-37). He goes on to discuss when something is better than another thing without qualification:

Further, if this is better than that *haplōs*, then also the best of this is better than the best of that; for example, if human is better than horse, then also the best human is better than the best horse. Also, if the best <of this> is better than the best <of that>, then also this is better than that *haplōs*; for example, if the best human is better than the best horse, then also human is better than horse *haplōs* (*Topics* 117b34-39).[[35]](#footnote-23)

To say that human is better than horse could mean any human is better than any horse. So, we could say that human is better than horse *in* *every* *instance*. However, it could also mean that humans are better than horses in the fullest sense of ‘better’. Alone, this passage is inconclusive. Luckily, there are several more.

In *Posterior* *Analytics* I.2, Aristotle explains what it is to know in an unqualified sense.

We are thought to know each thing *haplōs*, but not accidentally in the sophistical way, whenever we think we know the cause of which the thing is is its cause and it is not possible for this to have been otherwise (*Posterior* *Analytics* 71b10-13).[[36]](#footnote-24)

So, I know in an unqualified sense not when I know every cause or everything about x, but when I have an account of the essential properties of x. Here is an instance where *haplōs* does not mean ‘in every instance’. Instead, it means that I know in the fullest sense of the word; no qualifications need to be added to explain how or under what circumstances I can be said to know.

In *On Coming-to-be and Passing Away* I.2, Aristotle is discussing what previous thinkers posited about unqualified coming to be. There, he pairs *haplōs* with *teleia* (complete) (317a18-19).[[37]](#footnote-25) Again, this points to the fact that *haplōs* can always be taken to mean ‘in the fullest sense of the word’ rather than ‘in every instance’, something it can be taken to mean only sometimes depending on the context. Moreover, in *On* *Coming-to-be and Passing Away* I.3 he states that *haplōs* means either the primary within each category or the universal (317b7-8).[[38]](#footnote-26) Here, we have evidence that *haplōs* does not always refer to something applying universally.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.4, Aristotle also uses *haplōs* to mean ‘primarily’ or ‘in the fullest sense of a word’. There, Aristotle discusses different kinds of friendship. Perfect or complete friendship is between two good people who are alike in virtue (*Nicomachean* *Ethics* 1156b8).[[39]](#footnote-29) Those who are friends without qualification are those who are friends not for utility or pleasure but for their own sake, because of their virtue (*Nicomachean* *Ethics* 1157b1-5). Being a friend without qualification does not mean being a friend to everyone. Indeed, Aristotle considers it impossible to have many friends (*Nicomachean* *Ethics* 1158a10-11). Instead, it means being a friend in the fullest sense of the word. Again, *haplōs* is paired with *teleia* to demonstrate that Aristotle is using it to mean ‘primarily’ rather than ‘universally’.

The fact that *haplōs* means ‘in the fullest sense of the word’ can best be understood in terms of homonymy. Friendships between virtuous people are friendships in the fullest sense of the word. Friendships between vicious people are not *really* friendships. They are only called so homonymously. Likewise, the unqualified forms are forms in the fullest sense of the word. Privation is not *really* a form. It is only called so homonymously.

In the *Categories*, Aristotle introduces the notion of homonymy. Two things are homonymous when the name is the same, but the account of the essence is different (1a1-2).[[40]](#footnote-30) For example, a human and a picture of a human are both called animals, but are only called such homonymously. They do not have the same account, for the picture is only a representation of an animal. In *Metaphysics* VII.10, Aristotle explains that a dead finger is only a finger homonymously (1035b25-26).[[41]](#footnote-31) Since it has lost its function, it cannot be a finger in the fullest sense of the word. Being a finger means that the object in question can “do finger things.” What does it mean to “do finger things”? This becomes clear in *On the Soul* II.1. There, Aristotle states that if an eye were an animal, then vision would be its soul. Removing vision would mean that the eye is no longer an eye, except homonymously, just like the eye of a painting or a statue (412b19-22).[[42]](#footnote-32) So, for a finger or eye to function properly, whatever makes it the sort of thing that it is must be present. A finger needs to move and feel. An eye needs to see. Likewise, friendships need to be maintained for the right reasons. If a finger does not move or feel, an eye does not see, or if a friendship is maintained for the wrong reasons, then those things are only called by their names in a weaker sense of those words. A finger that cannot feel or move is only a finger in the weakest sense of the word, because it merely resembles or once was a finger. Likewise, with eyes that cannot see, or friendships based on selfish reasons.

Of course, there are degrees of being between being the ideal friend, finger, eye and only being one of these things homonymously. One could be a less than perfect friend, but still be a friend. Maybe Jones forgets Smith’s birthday but is otherwise sensitive to his needs. Consider a chair that has only one arm rest. It is still a chair, even if it is incomplete. What about a chair with no back? It is still a fine surface for sitting. These chairs are better than a chair with no legs, which would only be a chair homonymously.

**2.3.2 What Is a Form in the Fullest Sense of the Word?**

Unqualified forms are forms in the fullest sense of the word. What this means is not yet clear. Because matter possesses potentialities that cannot be actualized without a form, unqualified forms must actualize some potentiality in the associated matter. Receiving a form is often a process, meaning that objects and subjects can possess forms to a different degree. Therefore, privation and unqualified forms exist as opposite ends of a spectrum.

At the beginning of Book II of *On the Soul*, Aristotle tells us that “matter is potentiality while form is actuality” (412a9-10).[[43]](#footnote-30427) A human’s form is their soul, which animates their flesh (the matter), forming a composite or a subject. Removing the form of a natural body, like ours, results in something only homonymously called a human: its corpse (412b13-16). It is only called a human homonymously because "it is not the body which has lost its soul that is potentially alive” (412b26-27).[[44]](#footnote-26993) Human menstrual fluid is potentially an adult human being. Moreso is an embryo. Still more is a fetus. Even more is an infant, a young child, and a teenager. So, possessing a form comes in stages.

There is not a bright line between privation and a form, because they are contraries, not contradictories. A person cannot be both pale and dark or both musical and unmusical.[[45]](#footnote-1426) However, skin comes in many intermediate stages between pale and dark and learners of music have neither the privation nor the form in a fully-fledged sense. Basically, form and privation exist on a sliding scale. Indeed, one way to be spoken of as one is to be a continuum (*Physics* I.2 185b6-8). A pristine statue is at one end, a pile of dust at the other, and a broken statue somewhere in between. Clearly, there are major differences between a statue and a pile of rubble. But when that switch from form to privation occurs is unclear. Imagine a bust that is missing a nose. Surely, it still has a form. A bust missing a face, however, seems to lack a form and have only privation. Destruction and creation work the same way. A pile of clay is definitely distinct from a finished vase. At what point does a body of clay come to have the form of a vase? (I take it that clearly the vase is "complete" only once it's fired, glazed, etc.) The ends of the spectrum are clear, but there is a gray area in the middle that is difficult to categorize.

The reason that the gray area in the middle is difficult to categorize is because we have concepts of generation and corruption, but not names for the various stages in the processes. In *Physics* I.5, Aristotle further explains why the principles are contraries. He writes:

And it is the same with everything else. For the same account holds for that which is not simple but composite; we fail to note it because we have not specific names for the several opposing dispositions (*Physics* 188b10-13).[[46]](#footnote-33)

Earlier, he tells us that pale cannot come from musical, except accidentally, because they are not opposites (*Physics* I.5 188a33-188b6). Now, he is stating that this is a general rule. Pale comes from dark and dark from pale. The only reason we have to doubt this is when we see the entire process and fail to conceptualize the various degrees to which something can gain or lose a privation.[[47]](#footnote-8327) However, people of various skin tones can become pale. So, pale can also come from something besides dark:

The pale does not come from the pale, i.e., not from just anything other than the pale, but from the dark or something in between (*Physics* I.5 188b1-2).[[48]](#footnote-1003)

As my mother’s tan goes away in the winter months, she becomes progressively paler. There is no right time to consider her pale. She will never be as pale as me, but that does not mean that she is not pale, for we are both Caucasian.

My interpretation is consistent with what Aristotle says about privation in *Metaphysics* Δ.22. There, he tells us that we consider something to have a privation because it lacks an attribute or does not *fully* possess it:

[A thing is called] invisible either because it has no color at all or because it has a *poor* color, and footless either because it has no feet at all or because it has *bad* feet…we call a thing indivisible not only if it cannot be divided but also if it cannot be *easily* or *well* divided (1022b35-1023a4).[[49]](#footnote-36)

So, when I say that form and privation are contraries, and can be said to hold to different degrees at different points on a spectrum, this is what Aristotle is saying here. An object that has most of its paint chipped off does not have a color like it did when it was freshly painted. If I lose a foot, then I am footless, but also if I lose nine of my toes or both of my legs. The privation is a qualified form because my foot ceases to be a good foot if I lose all my toes, but it does not revert into a pile of flesh or menstrual fluid.

My account is also consistent with other commentators, it is just more explicit about how to interpret what Aristotle wrote. For example, while Anton never comes out and says that privation and form exist on a scale, he consistently uses ‘extremity’ when he discusses privation. When Aristotle says that the principles involved are in one sense two and in another sense three, Anton interprets this as follows: “By two, he means matter and form; by three, he understands the subject-in-process plus the two polar extremities of the metaphysical contrariety.”[[50]](#footnote-10194) Strictly speaking, form and privation are contraries. However, generation and corruption are processes and not activities. I.e., they are not complete at each point in time. There is a clear beginning and ending, but there is also a large gray area in between drafting the blueprints for a house and it being move-in ready. Anton gives an example of a man who became bald as an example of privation. He states that “whereas there is *no third kind of statement* serving as an intermediate between affirmation and negation, the concept of privation can be stated in *three* ways.”[[51]](#footnote-18603) Being bald is a go-to example of vagueness. Is a man bald when his hairline recedes a noticeable amount? When his scalp is visible? When he has only a handful of hairs left? The extremities are clear, but the gray area in between is not.

My reading is also generally consistent with Morison’s: “The two simple items, the man and unmusicality, differ in form, even though the complex (συγκείμενον) item they come together to form is one in number.”[[52]](#footnote-15910) The composite of musical man has something which remains one, the man, while the form changes from unmusical to musical. Morison continues: “The privation component or aspect of the acorn does not persist; at the end of the process of maturation there is a (young) oak tree and hence no privation. Thus the acorn, since it is a complex of matter plus privation of form, also does not persist; it is no longer there at the end of the process.”[[53]](#footnote-21063) The material of the acorn persists as the material of the semen persists when a new life form comes into being. It changes insofar as it was previously acorn-arranged and is now young-oak-tree-arranged. Again, when this switch from privation to form occurs is unclear. Is it once it sprouts? Is it once it is several years old? Is it when it is mature enough and reproduces? I do not think that any one of these is the exact time that privation gives way to the form.

**2.4 Privations Often Negatively Affect Matter**

In this section, I will defend premise 5: privation does not actualize a potentiality within the associated matter. In fact, more often than not, privation negatively affects the associated matter, making it unsuitable to receive a new form. Even composites that can be reformed, such as a bronze statue becoming a bronze sword, require returning to the matter. I.e., such objects that need to undergo a completely new generation need to first undergo corruption.

While Aristotle is mainly discussing substantial forms in Chapter 5 of *Metaphysics H*, he gives an example of corruption for both qualified and unqualified forms which I find helpful for this discussion:

There is difficulty in the question how the matter of each thing is related to its contrary states. E.g., if the body is potentially healthy, and disease is contrary to health, is it potentially both? And is water potentially wine and vinegar? It is the matter of one in virtue of its positive state and its form, and of the other in virtue of the privation of its positive state and the destruction of it against its nature. It is also difficult to say why wine is not said to be the matter of vinegar nor why it is not potentially vinegar (though vinegar is produced from it), and why the living man is not potentially dead. In fact, they are not, but the destruction in question is accidental. The matter of the living body becomes via destruction the potentiality and matter of the corpse, and water the matter of vinegar. For the one becomes the other just as day becomes night. *And* *all* *things which change one thus into another must be returned to their matter*, e.g., if a living body comes from a corpse, it must first become the matter, then a living body. And vinegar must first become water then wine (1044b30-1045a7).[[54]](#footnote-37)

What Aristotle means here is that once wine has spoiled and become vinegar it cannot be made into wine again, because the matter suitable to receive the form of wine is water, not vinegar. When the form of wine is removed, it is not water which remains, ready to be made into wine again, but vinegar. The matter which constitutes our bodies is also like this. Upon death, the previously ensouled matter is no longer able to be ensouled, because, instead of changing into a neutral state, the privation of the previous form has negatively affected the matter. Recall that Simplicius said that privations are not just absences pure and simple; this is what he meant.

Of course, not all cases of corruption involve irreversible damage to the matter. A bronze statue can be melted down and cast into a different shape. But notice the italicized line of the passage from *Metaphysics H*. If losing a form and taking on a privation requires returning to the matter as an intermediary stage, then the potential to become vinegar was in the water, the matter of the wine, all along. Hence, privation did not add anything to the matter.[[55]](#footnote-39) In fact, in the case of vinegar and corpses, privation actually prevents the matter from taking on a new form. Having the (fully actualized) form of a man makes someone a potential professor, business partner, or husband. Lacking that form, either because it has not yet been actualized, in the case of a fetus or young boy, or in the case of having had and then subsequently losing it, in the case of a corpse, does not lead to any of those potentialities. One can neither learn from, start a business with, nor marry a corpse. The form of wine added structure to the water, not only making it wine, but giving it a further use and end. Water is fine on its own, but wine has effects that no amount of water alone has on the drinker.

Aristotle echoes the sentiment that change always requires returning to the matter in *On the Heavens* I.3: “Furthermore, everything that grows, and everything that decays, does so by the action of a related body being added to it and being broken up into its matter” (270a24-26).[[56]](#footnote-40) Nutrition works by breaking down food into the matter and then depositing it where our bodies need it. Steak is potential energy for my body because my body will break the steak down into its components and put those where I need them. The steak needs to be destroyed for this to happen. But the protein and the fat in the steak are not destroyed. They persist and have the chance to be stored and used within my body. Again, this shows that the potentiality is in the matter and is only actualized by an actual form, not a mere privation.

A vase has the potential to be a vessel for flowers. The rubble of a broken vase does not possess this potential. Some matter, e.g., bronze, can be reused after the original thing it was enformed as ceases to be. A little bit of bronze might be lost in the melting process, but a majority remains to become enformed again. However, not all matter is like bronze. Animal corpses, for example, cannot be given a new form. Even if most matter were like bronze, it would still be the matter that possesses the potentiality and the form in an unqualified sense that actualizes the potentiality. In *Meteorology* IV.12 Aristotle tells us that organic things, like plants and flesh, as well as inorganic things, like bronze and silver, are only properly called by their names when they are capable of receiving a form (390a15-21), whch is a feature of the matter and not some other form it possesses. So, in order to be reused, the matter needs to undergo corruption before it can undergo a new generation.

Corruption needs to occur so that the matter can be reformed but not because privation is the precursor to the new form. It might be prior in the process of change, but it is not out of which the new form comes. That is still the matter, which is why Aristotle says that the living body is not potentially dead. Although my body will one day be a corpse, being a corpse is not its *telos*. My continued existence, health, reproduction, and flourishing are all what my body is for.[[57]](#footnote-8097) So, my body has the potential to be healthy or pregnant because those are positive features that can be activated by my human form.

Taking on a form results in a positive outcome, actualizing something in the matter's nature. Taking on privation does not, except in realizing the potential to be a *sōros*. Since forms add something over and above the potentiality that matter already has, while privation takes away, privation cannot be a form in an unqualified sense.

Once again, let’s take stock. Privation is not a form in the fullest sense of the word because it often corrupts the associated matter and makes it unable to receive a new form. So, it is not a form in an unqualified sense. What remains to be argued is why privation is a form in any sense and not just the opposite of a form.

**2.5 Aquinas on Privation**

In Aquinas’s commentary on the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics*, he denies the view I endorse in premise 7: something is a form in a qualified sense if it provides a shape for the associated matter and explanatory power regarding the composite. I will outline his argument and explain why he is incorrect.

Aquinas agrees that form and matter are always found together and that privations are not mere negations, but negations of a definite subject at a definite time (*Metaphysics* V, Lesson 14, 967). However, he does not agree that privations are forms in any sense. In his commentary on *Physics* 190b16-191a22, he says the following:

Hence it must be said that matter is never without privation. For when matter has one form, it is in privation of some other form. And so while it is coming to be that which it becomes (e.g., musical man), there is in the subject, which does not yet have the form, the privation of the musical itself. And so the *per* *accidens* principle of a musical man, while he is coming to be musical, is the non-musical. For he is a non-musical man while he is coming to be musical. But when this latter form has already come to him, then there is joined to him the privation of the other form. And thus the privation of the opposite form is a *per* *accidens* principle of being. It is clear, therefore, according to the opinion of Aristotle that privation, which is posited as a *per accidens* principle of nature, is not a capacity for a form, nor an inchoate form, nor some imperfect active principle, as some say. Rather it is the very absence of form, or the contrary of form, which occurs in the subject (*Physics* I, Lecture 13, 113).

In no way is privation a form for Aquinas. Matter is always bound up with form, which means that it always lacks the opposite of that form, privation. However, it is not necessary that we possess privations such as blindness or immorality, for they are accidents.

While I dislike doing so, I must disagree with Aquinas here. First, recall from section 2.2 that what he is proposing multiplies privation too much. Not possessing a form is not equivalent to possessing privation of that form. Human menstrual fluid is not yet a human being. Therefore, it has a privation of human. However, it does not possess a privation of equine because it is not the sort of thing that can become a horse. Recall from 2.4 that we living human beings are not potentially dead, even though death is inevitable. Death is not our *telos*; living and flourishing is. So, it is incorrect to say that, while we are alive, we are potentially dead.

Second, Aquinas himself says that privation occurs in the subject—not the matter. The subject itself is a matter and form composite. Many subjects with privations possess other forms. For example, the unmusical person still possesses the form of human being. However, as I have argued, things that have yet to undergo generation or have undergone corruption are still composites, meaning that they have both matter and form. Piles of dirt and clay are not mere matter. They have color and shape. Since matter does not possess any positive properties, privation explains these positive qualities. Matter for non-substantial change is like the matter for substantial change in this sense. Menstrual fluid is not amorphous. Instead, it has temperature, texture, and color. Bodies do not revert into piles of mush upon death. Instead, the corruption of the matter takes time. The corpse resembles the person it once was and then slowly decomposes.

Before I defend the final premise, I would like to return to an objection from 2.2. One might wonder how my account can account for the fact that menstrual fluid is warm and wet. My response is that since hot, cold, dry, and wet (HCDW) combine with prime matter to produce earth, air, fire, and water (EAFW), temperature and moisture are basic features of matter. In Book IV of *Meteorology*, HCDW are *aitia* (causes) not properties (378b10). Instead, they give rise to *pathesin* (properties) like meltable, flexible, breakable, cuttable, combustible, and more (385a10-19). These properties, which emerge from the presence or absence of HCDW, are how we differentiate most bodies. Contrary to Aquinas, we do not need to invoke a form to explain why menstrual fluid is warm and wet. It is extended. So, it must have a temperature and texture. Further qualities can be explained by the fact that it was expelled. I will explain this further in the next section where I give a positive account as to why I give privation this elevated status.

**2.6 What Do Qualified Forms Do?**

The final premise to defend is 8: privation provides a shape for the associated matter and explanatory power regarding the composite. I will now argue that privation does two specific things that warrant ascribing the status of form. First, it provides the associated matter a shape. Second, it gives us explanatory power about the composite.

As I have argued throughout, privation gives matter a shape. Since perceptible matter is not the amorphous prime matter some ascribe to Aristotle’s metaphysics, it has a definite size and shape. Sand piles and the individual grains of sand themselves each possess a basic shape thanks to privation. The same goes for the rubble of a broken statue. The pieces have definite shapes and the reason why they have that shape has to do with corruption of the form, i.e., privation.

Besides shape, privations can give some explanatory power. Aristotle gives the example of a person becoming musical in *Physics* I.7. When the person is only potentially musical, i.e., is the right sort of being who can learn musical things, they possess only privation, and not yet the form of being musical. However, some things can be explained by citing privation. If someone asks why they are shredding sheet music, holding that harp sideways, or singing so far off key, then a proper response is that they do those things because they are unmusical. They have not learned what playing music is or entails and are, therefore, behaving in these strange ways.

Becoming musical is non-substantial generation, but what about substantial generation? The same holds true. Human menstrual fluid is not *yet* a human being because it has not yet received the form from the sperm (according to Aristotle). If acted upon properly, it will become a human being because it is the only thing from which a human being can be made. So, how is it that the privation gives some weak explanatory power when discussing menstrual fluid? The menstrual fluid gets expelled from the uterus because (according to Aristotle) it has not been acted on by a sperm. We now recognize that sexual reproduction is more complicated. For example, a fertilized egg can fail to implant and be expelled along with the menstrual fluid. However, we can still appeal to the privation to explain why the menstrual fluid is flowing. In both Aristotle’s and our contemporary understanding something has not happened, which is why the menstrual fluid is expelled.

**3. Conclusion**

In analyzing Aristotle’s account of change, some inconsistencies arose in how he treats privation. On the one hand, he defines privation as the opposite or lack of a form. On the other hand, he later states that privation is, in a sense, a form. Given his commitment to hylomorphism, he believes that we never encounter just matter in the world. While unqualified forms actualize potentialities that the associated matter possesses, privation does not. As such, it is only a form in a qualified sense. We call it a form in the weakest sense of the word because it gives the associated matter a basic shape and allows us to explain features of the composite. Therefore, Aristotle’s claim that privation is, in some sense, a form is not only understandable in its own right, but can be made to fit with other things he says about privation in the rest of the corpus.

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1. I owe my gratitude to Ryan Ross, Austin Heath, and Richard Bett for reading drafts of this article as it changed and expanded over the years. I am also thankful for the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their very helpful comments that clarified my point of view. [↑](#footnote-ref-25525)
2. Ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ αὐτοί φαμεν γίγνεσθαι μὲν οὐδὲν ἁπλῶς ἐκ μὴ ὄντος, πὼς μέντοι γίγνεσθαι ἐκ μὴ ὄντος, οἷον κατὰ συμβεβηκός· ἐκ γὰρ τῆς στερήσεως—ὅ ἐστι καθ᾿ αὑτὸ μὴ ὄν—οὐκ ἐνυπάρχοντος γίγνεταί τι· (θαυμάζεται δὲ τοῦτο καὶ ἀδύνατον οὕτω δοκεῖ γίγνεσθαί τι ἐκ μὴ ὄντος). All translations are my own and the Greek text is from the Loeb editions. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Aristotle notes several senses of coming from in Metaphysics Δ.24-27. Something can come from part of the whole, come from something in that it follows in time from the first thing, and come from the material cause. The child comes from part of the parent. Night comes from day because it is subsequent in time. The statue comes to be from bronze. All of these are changes for Aristotle. [↑](#footnote-ref-27504)
4. Στέρησις λέγεται ἕνα μὲν τρόπον ἂν μὴ ἔχῃ τι τῶν πεφυκότων ἔχεσθαι, κἂν μὴ αὐτὸ ᾖ πεφυκὸς ἔχειν, οἷον φυτὸν ὀμμάτων ἐστερῆσθαι λέγεται· ἕνα δὲ ἂν πεφυκὸς ἔχειν, ἢ αὐτὸ ἢ τὸ γένος, μὴ ἔχῃ, οἷον ἄλλως ἄνθρωπος ὁ τυφλὸς ὄψεως ἐστέ- ρηται καὶ ἀσπάλαξ…ἔτι ἂν πεφυκὸς καὶ ὅτε πέφυκεν ἔχειν μὴ ἔχῃ…ἔτι ἡ βιαία ἑκάστου ἀφ- αίρεσις στέρησις λέγεται. [↑](#footnote-ref-1317)
5. Furthermore, when Aristotle defines ‘to have’ in the next chapter, the second usage mentions forms: “e.g., the bronze has the form of the statue, and the body has the disease” (1023a13). [↑](#footnote-ref-8420)
6. See Devin Henry for the view that being the underlying subject and being that which persists throughout the change are separable conditions (2019, 41-2). Non-substantial change is not an issue, but substantial change is for Henry. Since contraries cannot come to be, there must be a subject that comes to be (2019, 44). The change I am concerned with at present is non-substantial, because it is about a subject losing/gaining a privation. Substantial change proceeds from a privation in the sense that the primary matter for generation, the menstrual fluid, is not yet a human being. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
7. My rendition could be particularly dark or depressing. However, calling it black in the sense that a comedy is black is different from calling a thing black in color. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
8. See also Morison: “The acorn is some matter which is capable of receiving the form of an oak, but is currently deprived of that form. The matter will take on that form when the acorn sprouts into a sapling” (2019, 256). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
9. See Ebrey (2020, 79). [↑](#footnote-ref-21871)
10. See Kelsey (2006, 353-355) for why many interpreters of this passage have misinterpreted coming to be from what is. [↑](#footnote-ref-15838)
11. See Kelsey (2006) for why the principle is not that an individual cannot come to be what it already is but that nothing can come to be the kind of thing it already is. [↑](#footnote-ref-23462)
12. See Ebrey (2020, 88). Of course, it could be expelled and become nothing, which would mean taking on a privation. I will discuss this more in 2.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-32007)
13. See Ebrey (2020, 93). Also, there is no Frankenstein’s monster for Aristotelian metaphysics, because once our form has been separated from our matter there is no introduction of a new soul (*On the Soul* II.1 412b26-27). [↑](#footnote-ref-25699)
14. What “it” refers to is unclear. I am inclined to take the referent to be the form or the matter/form composite because those are determinate enough to be considered a *tode ti*. In section 2 I will present evidence from the rest of the corpus to defend my reading of this passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-15897)
15. Ἔστι δὲ τὸ μὲν ὑποκείμενον ἀριθμῷ μὲν ἕν, εἴδει δὲ δύο—ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὁ χρυσὸς καὶ ὅλως ἡ ὕλη ἀριθμητή· τόδε γάρ τι μᾶλλον, καὶ οὐ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς ἐξ αὐτοῦ γίνεται τὸ γιγνόμενον, ἡ δὲ στέρησις καὶ ἡ ἐναντίωσις συμβεβηκός. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
16. I translate *hupokeimenon* as ‘subject’, because the subject persists throughout the change, unlike the matter, which does not. Liddell, Scott, and Jones have ‘substance’ as a possible translation, referring to the form and matter composite which underlies the accidents (A.II.8.2). [↑](#footnote-ref-3664)
17. μία δὲ ἡ ὁ λόγος, ἔτι δὲ τὸ ἐναντίον τούτῳ ἡ στέρησις. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
18. ἡ δέ γε μορφὴ καὶ ἡ φύσις διχῶς λέγεται· καὶ γὰρ ἡ στέρησις εἶδός πώς ἐστιν.  [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
19. οὔτε γὰρ ἄνευ ὕλης οὐδὲν ζῴου μόριον, οὔτε μόνη ἡ ὕλη· οὐ γὰρ πάντως ἔχον σῶμα ἔσται ζῷον, οὐδὲ τῶν μορίων οὐδέν, ὥσπερ πολλάκις εἴρηται. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
20. ἡμεῖς δὲ φαμὲν μὲν εἶναί τινα ὕλην τῶν σωμάτων τῶν αἰσθητῶν, ἀλλὰ ταύτην οὐ χωριστὴν ἀλλ᾿ ἀεὶ μετ᾿ ἐναντιώσεως, ἐξ ἧς γίνεται τὰ καλούμενα στοιχεῖα...οὔτε γὰρ τὸ θερμὸν ὕλη τῷ ψυχρῷ οὔτε τοῦτο τῷ θερμῷ, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον ἀμφοῖν. Emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
21. Ransome agrees when he states that Aristotle’s use of matter “never refers to a free-standing and independent substance” (2020, 60). [↑](#footnote-ref-32536)
22. William Charlton does not think that Aristotle actually believes in a substratum that underlies the change from element to element. However, Charlton’s evidence falls short of proving his conclusion. Among other things, he cites *On the Heavens* 298b29-32: there is no this that underlies change. This quote should not be interpreted as meaning that nothing underlies change. Instead, it means that there is no this (*tode ti*) that underlies change. Prime matter is not a this. It is too amorphous to be a concrete thing. He also cites *On the Heavens* 312b20-313a1: There isn’t one matter for elements. This quote should not be interpreted as meaning that there is not one matter that underlies the elements. Instead, it means that there is no one thing, e.g., water for Thales, that each element can be reduced to or born from. I maintain that Aristotle very much believed in prime matter. For more evidence that Aristotle believes in prime matter, see *On the Heavens* 312a30-33, where Aristotle says that there is one matter out of which the four elements come to be, but it is *logically* separable into four. Cf. *Meteorology* 339a36-b2. Finally, see also Byrne (2018, 53) and Dancy (1978, 389). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
23. For an explanation of why the four sublunary elements share a common substratum, see Christopher Byrne (2018, 51-52) and Michael J. Loux (2008, 241). I side with Clarke (2022) that Aristotle accepted the existence of prime matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
24. See Bostock (2006, 19), Byrne (2018, 56), Ebrey (2020, 84), and Loux (2008, 242) for explanations as to why. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
25. εἰ οὖν τὸ ἄρρεν ἐστὶν ὡς κινοῦν καὶ ποιοῦν, τὸ δὲ θῆλυ, ᾗ θῆλυ, ὡς παθητικόν, εἰς τὴν τοῦ ἄρρενος γονὴν τὸ θῆλυ ἂν συμβάλλοιτο οὐ γονὴν ἀλλ᾿ ὕλην. ὅπερ καὶ φαίνεται συμβαῖνον· κατὰ γὰρ τὴν πρώτην ὕλην ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν καταμηνίων φύσις. Emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
26. See Coates for more evidence that the menstrual fluid is not indeterminate (2020, 39-40). [↑](#footnote-ref-8107)
27. See Ebrey (2020, 84). [↑](#footnote-ref-21064)
28. David Ebrey disagrees (2020, 89-90). He claims that prime matter must be able to take on only HCDW. However, since matter is a relative term for Aristotle, sometimes referring to a simple and sometimes referring to a compound, prime matter does become everything extended. It has to first take on HCDW, but then it takes on other forms to become everything else. See also Devin Henry for the difference between prime matter and the matter that substantial generation precedes from: “Thus, while prime matter counts as ‘a certain substance in potentiality but not in actuality’, it cannot be the sort of non-being that is required to serve as the *terminus a quo* of substantial generation” (2019, 34). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
29. Of course, we now know that the DNA encoded in the seed does survive the change. However, Aristotle did not know this. This is not an issue, because, according to Stephen Makin, “there will have to be some degree of material continuity between the seed and the living thing which develops from it. For if there were no material continuity between seed and organism there would be no reason to think of what occurs as a seed giving rise to an organism rather than a seed vanishing and an organism appearing in the same place out of nowhere” (2009, 34). Recall what I said in 1.1 about complete obliteration being destruction and replacement rather than a change occurring. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
30. I will return to the discussion of corruption in 2.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-23766)
31. Chappell, “Matter”, 686. [↑](#footnote-ref-17385)
32. Chen, “Aristotle’s Concept of Primary Substance”, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-6426)
33. I will discuss this objection more in 2.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-12053)
34. Emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-5591)
35. Ἔτι εἰ ἁπλῶς τοῦτο τούτου βέλτιον, καὶ τὸ βέλτιστον τῶν ἐν τούτῳ βέλτιον τοῦ ἐν τῷ ἑτέρῳ βελτίστου, οἷον εἰ βέλτιον ἄνθρωπος ἵππου, καὶ ὁ βέλτιστος ἄνθρωπος τοῦ βελτίστου ἵππου βελτίων. καὶ εἰ τὸ βέλτιστον τοῦ βελτίστου βέλτιον, καὶ ἁπλῶς τοῦτο τούτου βέλτιον, οἷον εἰ ὁ βέλτιστος ἄνθρωπος τοῦ βελτίστου ἵππου βελτίων, καὶ ἁπλῶς ἄνθρωπος ἵππου βελτίων. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
36. Ἐπίστασθαι δὲ οἰόμεθ᾿ ἕκαστον ἁπλῶς, ἀλλὰ μὴ τὸν σοφιστικὸν τρόπον τὸν κατὰ συμβεβηκός, ὅταν τήν τ᾿ αἰτίαν οἰώμεθα γιγνώσκειν δι᾿ ἣν τὸ πρᾶγμά ἐστιν, ὅτι ἐκείνου αἰτία ἐστί, καὶ μὴ ἐνδέχεσθαι τοῦτ᾿ ἄλλως ἔχειν. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
37. ἀλλ᾿ οὐχ ἡ ἀπλῆ καὶ τελεία γένεσις συγκρίσει καὶ διακρίσει ὥρισται, ὥς τινές φασιν, τὴν δ᾿ ἐν τῷ συνεχεῖ μεταβολὴν ἀλλοίωσιν. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
38. Τὸ δ᾿ ἁπλῶς ἤτοι τὸ πρῶτον σημαίνει καθ᾿ ἑκάστην κατηγορίαν τοῦ ὄντος, ἢ τὸ καθόλου καὶ τὸ πάντα περιέχον. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
39. Τελεία δ᾿ ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν φιλία καὶ κατ᾿ ἀρετὴν ὁμοίων.  [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
40. Ὁμώνυμα λέγεται ὧν ὄνομα μόνον κοινόν, ὁ δὲ κατὰ τοὔνομα λόγος τῆς οὐσίας ἕτερος. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
41. οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁ πάντως ἔχων δάκτυλος ζῴου, ἀλλ᾿ὁμώνυμος ὁ τεθνεώς. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
42. εἰ γὰρ ἦν ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς ζῷον, ψυχὴ ἂν ἦν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὄψις· αὕτη γὰρ οὐσία ὀφθαλμοῦ ἡ κατὰ τὸν λόγον. ὁ δ᾿ ὀφθαλμὸς ὕλη ὄψεως, ἧς ἀπολειπούσης οὐκ ἔστιν ὀφθαλμός, πλὴν ὁμωνύμως, καθάπερ ὁ λίθινος καὶ ὁ γεγραμμένος. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
43. ἔστι δ᾿ ἡ μὲν ὕλη δύναμις, τὸ δ᾿ εἶδος ἐντελέχεια. [↑](#footnote-ref-30427)
44. ἔστι δὲ οὐ τὸ ἀποβεβληκὸς τὴν ψυχὴν τὸ δυνάμει ὂν ὥστε ζῆν. [↑](#footnote-ref-26993)
45. Of course, one could have a tan/burn/pigment in one area of their body and not another. However, the same part of their body cannot be both pale and dark. It can be neither pale nor dark. [↑](#footnote-ref-1426)
46. Ὁμοίως δὲ τοῦτο καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων· ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰ μὴ ἁπλᾶ τῶν ὄντων ἀλλὰ σύνθετα κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν ἔχει λόγον, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ μὴ τὰς ἀντικειμένας διαθέσεις ὠνομάσθαι λανθάνειν τοῦτο συμβαίνει. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
47. My account accords with Delcomminette: “This does not mean that the change itself is necessarily a continuous and unified *process*—on the contrary, it can involve many different intermediate processes, as is the case of the building of a house (see *EN* X 4, 1174a19–b5)—but only that its termini can be described in a homogeneous way, and thus that it is no exception to the general rule which Aristotle is trying to establish” (2019, 177). [↑](#footnote-ref-8327)
48. ἀλλὰ λευκὸν μὲν γίνεται ἐξ οὐ λευκοῦ, καὶ τούτου οὐκ ἐκ παντὸς ἀλλ᾿ ἐκ μέλανος ἢ τῶν μεταξύ. [↑](#footnote-ref-1003)
49. ἀόρατον δὲ καὶ τῷ ὅλως μὴ ἔχειν χρῶμα καὶ τῷ φαύλως, καὶ ἄπουν καὶ τῷ μὴ ἔχειν ὅλως πόδας καὶ τῷ φαύλους…τὸ ἄτμητον οὐ μόνον τῷ μὴ τέμνεσθαι ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ μὴ ῥᾳδίως ἢ μὴ καλῶς. Emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
50. Anton, *Aristotle’s Theory of Contrariety*, 75-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-10194)
51. Anton, *Aristotle’s Theory of Contrariety*, 88. Emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-18603)
52. Morison, “The Complexity of the Subject in a Change: *Physics* I 7, Part 1”, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-15910)
53. Morison, “The Complexity of the Subject in a Change: *Physics* I 7, Part 1”, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-21063)
54. χει δ᾿ ἀπορίαν πῶς πρὸς τἀναντία ἡ ὕλη ἡ ἑκάστου ἔχει. οἷον εἰ τὸ σῶμα δυνάμει ὑγιεινόν, ἐναντίον δὲ νόσος ὑγιείᾳ, ἆρα ἄμφω δυνάμει; καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ δυνάμει οἶνος καὶ ὄξος; ἢ τοῦ μὲν καθ᾿ ἕξιν καὶ κατὰ τὸ εἶδος ὕλη, τοῦ δὲ κατὰ στέρησιν καὶ φθορὰν τὴν παρὰ φύσιν; Ἀπορία δέ τις ἔστι καὶ διὰ τί ὁ οἶνος οὐχ ὕλη τοῦ ὄξους οὐδὲ δυνάμει ὄξος (καίτοι γίγνεται ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὄξος) καὶ ὁ ζῶν δυνάμει νεκρός. ἢ οὔ, ἀλλὰ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς αἱ φθοραί, ἡ δὲ τοῦ ζῴου ὕλη αὐτὴ κατὰ φθορὰν νεκροῦ δύναμις καὶ ὕλη, καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ ὄξους· γίγνεται γὰρ ἐκ τούτων ὥσπερ ἐξ ἡμέρας νύξ. καὶ ὅσα δὴ οὕτω μεταβάλλει εἰς ἄλληλα, εἰς τὴν ὕλην δεὶ ἐπανελθεῖν, οἷον εἰ ἐκ νεκροῦ ζῷον, εἰς τὴν ὕλην πρῶτον, εἶθ᾿ οὕτω ζῷον· καὶ τὸ ὄξος εἰς ὕδωρ, εἶθ᾿ οὕτως οἶνος. Emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
55. Here, I deviate from Morison. He states: “Or when we call bronze unshaped (cf. 190b15), we are saying what it isn’t, rather than what it is. So in a way we add nothing to our description of the matter when we say which privation it has. In another way, of course, we do add something to our description when we attribute this privation to the matter: we describe it in such a way that we manifest clearly the role it is going to play in a change, namely the change where the matter takes on the form of which the privation is a lack” (2019, 260). The issue here is that Morison is thinking of change in one direction only: privation to form. However, change also occurs as corruption or passing away, i.e., from form to privation. In such cases, the privation does not add anything to the description of the matter. Instead, it takes something, a potentiality, away. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
56. ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ τὸ αὐξανόμενον ἅπαν αὐ- ξάνεται [καὶ τὸ φθῖνον φθίνει] ὑπὸ συγγενοῦς προσιόντος καὶ ἀναλυομένου εἰς τὴν ὕλην· [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
57. See Coates for why the form preserves the ensouled body (2020, 22-23, 31). [↑](#footnote-ref-8097)