

# Theophrastus on Intellect in Aristotle's *De Anima*

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## Abstract

Aristotle's cryptic *De Anima* III 5 has precipitated an enormous volume of commentary, especially about the identity of what has come to be known as active intellect and how it relates to potential intellect. Some take active intellect to be the prime mover of *Metaphysics* Λ, others a hypostatic or cosmic principle (for example, an ideal Intellect, intellect associated with the tenth celestial sphere, etc.), and others a faculty, potentiality, or power of the human soul that is distinct in function, office, or operation from potential intellect. But a very different, ontologically lightweight way of characterizing active and potential intellect can be reconstructed from fragments of a work by the only interpreter personally acquainted with Aristotle, his junior colleague, Theophrastus of Eresus. This reconstruction suggests various philosophically attractive solutions to notorious problems raised by Aristotle's text.

## Keywords

*nous* – mind – reason – active intellect – agent intellect

## I A Key Passage of Aristotle

Aristotle's *De Anima* III 5, in which he introduces a new way of talking about intellect as active or productive, has occasioned numerous interpretations.<sup>1</sup> Of particular urgency is the question of how this way of describing intellect relates to that in *De Anima* III 4, where Aristotle argues for various controversial theses, including that there is no bodily organ for thinking. Commentators have long thought that questions about the possibility of personal immortality and the extent of similarity between human and divine thinking are here at stake.

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<sup>1</sup> Cohoe (2014, 597–600; 2022, 240–246), Miller (2012, §5), and Shields (2016, 312–329; 2020) provide especially helpful overviews of the chapter that exhibit varying degrees of indecision between the interpretations that I enumerate.

My aim in this paper is to distinguish a promising strategy for interpreting the notoriously cryptic *De Anima* III 5 from other strategies to which it has typically been assimilated. This strategy can be reconstructed from the fragments of Theophrastus of Eresus, Aristotle's junior colleague in Plato's Academy and successor as head of the Lyceum. After quoting Aristotle's chapter, describing the three principal families of interpretations, and foregrounding some of the difficulties that these have, I will argue that Theophrastus's way of interpreting the passage should not be assimilated to any of those three families of interpretation and that it offers, at least in outline, elegant solutions to some of the most important problems that have troubled interpreters of Aristotle's chapter.

I translate *De Anima* III 5 in its entirety from the text of Ross (1961), eliminating Ross's brackets around a19–22 and his parentheses around a23–25 and inserting a full stop after 'ἀϊδιον' in a23. Nearly every line exhibits vexatious indeterminacy.

### *De Anima* III 5

Since in all nature there is something that is the matter for each kind of thing (this is what is all those things in potentiality), but something else the cause and agent, in making them all, as falls to a craft in relation to its matter, these differences must belong in the soul. And there is one sort of intellect in becoming all things, another in making all things, as a kind of state, like light. For in a way light makes colors in potentiality colors in actuality. And this intellect is separable, impassive, and unmixed, being in its essence an activity. For the active is always prior in worth to the passive and the principle to the matter. Active knowledge is the same as the thing—potential knowledge is temporally prior in the individual, though not in general—but it is not the case that it sometimes thinks and sometimes not. When it has been separated it is only that which it is, and this alone is immortal and everlasting. We do not remember because whereas this is unaffected, passive intellect is perishable. And without this nothing thinks (or: it thinks nothing).

Ἐπεὶ δ' [ὥσπερ] ἐν ἀπάσῃ τῇ φύσει 430<sup>a</sup>10  
 ἐστὶ [τι] τὸ μὲν ὕλη ἐκάστῳ γένει  
 (τοῦτο δὲ ὁ πάντα δυνάμει ἐκείνα),  
 ἕτερον δὲ τὸ αἴτιον καὶ ποιητικόν, τῷ  
 ποιεῖν πάντα, οἷον ἢ τέχνη πρὸς τὴν  
 ὕλην πέπονθεν, ἀνάγκη καὶ ἐν τῇ ψυ-  
 χῇ ὑπάρχειν ταύτας τὰς διαφοράς·  
 καὶ ἔστιν ὁ μὲν τοιοῦτος νοῦς τῷ πάντα  
 γίνεσθαι, ὁ δὲ τῷ πάντα ποιεῖν, ὡς 15  
 ἕξις τις, οἷον τὸ φῶς· τρόπον γὰρ τινα  
 καὶ τὸ φῶς ποιεῖ τὰ δυνάμει ὄντα  
 χρώματα ἐνεργεῖα χρώματα. καὶ ο-  
 ὔτος ὁ νοῦς χωριστὸς καὶ ἀπαθῆς καὶ  
 ἀμιγῆς, τῇ οὐσίᾳ ὦν ἐνεργεῖα· αἰεὶ γὰρ  
 τιμιώτερον τὸ ποιοῦν τοῦ πάσχοντος  
 καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς ὕλης. τὸ δ' αὐτὸ ἐστὶν 20  
 ἢ κατ' ἐνεργεῖαν ἐπιστήμη τῷ πράγ-  
 ματι· ἢ δὲ κατὰ δύναμιν χρόνον προ-  
 τέρα ἐν τῷ ἐνί, ὅλως δὲ οὐδὲ χρόνον,  
 ἀλλ' οὐχ ὅτε μὲν νοεῖ ὅτε δ' οὐ νο-  
 εῖ. χωρισθεὶς δ' ἐστὶ μόνον τοῦθ' ὅπερ  
 ἐστὶ, καὶ τοῦτο μόνον ἀθάνατον καὶ  
 ἀϊδιον. οὐ μνημονεύομεν δέ, ὅτι τοῦ-  
 το μὲν ἀπαθές, ὁ δὲ παθητικὸς νοῦς 25  
 φθαρτὸς· καὶ ἄνευ τούτου οὐθὲν νοεῖ.

## II Interpretations

Most interpretations of the intellect to which Aristotle here applies the labels “active,” “agent,” “cause,” “making,” and “principle” can be divided into three main groups, which I name after the most famous ancient proponents of each:<sup>2</sup>

**Alexandrian** The prime mover<sup>3</sup>

**Neoplatonist** One or more hypostatic or cosmic principles (for example, an ideal Intellect, intellect associated with the tenth celestial sphere, and so on) distinct from individual human intellects, but causally related to or accessed by the latter<sup>4</sup>

2 Thanks to Caleb Cohoe for helpful discussion about categorizing existing interpretations. My citations are far from comprehensive, especially for sources between the seventh and nineteenth centuries AD, during which numerous scholars offered interpretations of Aristotle's remarks on this point and even more took up the issues thus raised independently of exegetical interests. There are also some recent interpretations that do not fit neatly into this taxonomy, such as those of Andō (1971), whose interpretation is highly eclectic, and Wedin (1988), according to whom Aristotle's program in *De Anima* III is a version of naturalistic functionalism, not involving an appeal to any entity that is existentially separable from body.

3 This group of interpretations is originated by Alexander of Aphrodisias (*DA* 88.2–16 and ap. Philoponus (?) *In DA III*, 535.20). Roger Bacon (*Opus maius* II 5), Zabarella (*Liber de mente agente* 13), Leibniz (*Notizen zur Wissenschaft und Metaphysik*, 18 März 1676, 391.21–25)—thanks to Ed Minar for this reference—and Hegel (*LHP* ch. 3, B.3.a.γ) later adopted varieties of this interpretation. It has accumulated recent endorsements by Anscombe (1961, 58), Barnes (1972, 113), Burnyeat (2008), Caston (1999), Charles (2000, 130–135; 2021, 232n41), Clark (1975, 184–185), Frede (1992; 1996), Guthrie (1981, 322), Joachim (1951, 290), Johansen (2012, 237–244), Kelsey (2021, 136n28 and 155n19), Kosman (1992), Menn (1992, 562n21; 2020), and Rist (1989, 182).

4 I do not intend to suggest that all or only Neoplatonists interpret Aristotle in this way, but rather that various prominent Neoplatonists seem to have inaugurated a style of interpretation that is unsurprising in light of stereotypically Neoplatonist commitments and that has more or less directly influenced later adopters. Early attributions of this style are somewhat complicated: Alcinous (*Didaskalikos* 10.2.1–9) distinguishes between potential intellect, active intellect, and the prime mover, saying that active intellect is superior to soul and thinks all things at all times. Alcinous may mean this as a summary of Aristotle's view but does not say so explicitly. A similar view is attributed to Plotinus as an interpretation of Aristotle's *De Anima* III 5 by Philoponus (?) (*In DA III*, 535.8–15, 29–31, and 538.32–34): there is a single, perpetually thinking “active intellect” for all of humanity that somehow counts as human and “in us,” perhaps because the potential intellect in us accesses it. Hayduck (Philoponus (?) 1897, 538), the editor, regards this attribution to Plotinus as derivable from *Enneads* v.9.5. Even if it is not, such an interpretation can perhaps be reconstructed by combining Plotinus's comments on the end of *De Anima* III 4 with various remarks that do not explicitly mention Aristotle, such as *Enneads* v.1.3.12–25, v.9.5, vi.5.7.1–8, vi.6.6.20–42, and vi.6.15.13–23. A fragmentary text, reputed to be an Arabic translation of part of Porphyry's *De Anima*, takes a similar position. See Kutsch (1954). The text is apparently an exegesis of Aristotle's *De Anima* III 5, but sometimes it is unclear whether pronouns refer to Porphyry or to Aristotle.

**Themistian** A faculty/potentiality/power of the human soul that is distinct in function/office/operation from intellect described here as passive, potential, matter, and becoming<sup>5</sup>

### A *Disruption*

On most interpretations of *De Anima* III 5 the chapter turns out to be continuous with III 4 in certain important respects, but also to introduce severe disruptions. According to Alexandrians, Aristotle here transitions from psychology, the announced topic of the treatise, into theology, even if he does so in order to solve problems left over from the end of the preceding chapter. Some Alexandrians, for example, Caston (1999, 16), acknowledge that on their

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Philoponus (?) (*In DA III*, 535.32–536.2) cites Marinus, Proclus's successor, for a slightly different way of interpreting Aristotle as holding that active intellect is intermediate between the prime mover and individual human intellects and thinks all things at all times. At least some parts of the commentary of Simplicius (?) (*In DA* 240.1–248.17) echo the remarks of these Neoplatonic predecessors. While he thinks that *De Anima* III 5 must be in some sense about the souls of mortal beings, on pain of discontinuity with the rest of the treatise (172.4–11), he speaks as if it at least implicitly compares human intellect with a superior Intellect at various points. For example, a notorious absence of “not” in the text that he reads at 430a22 that I will later discuss facilitates his allegation that human intellect does not always think, whereas the superior Intellect does, and that it is insofar as the former is united with the latter that various properties that Aristotle mentions in *De Anima* III 5 can be predicated of it. al-Kindī (*On the Intellect*), who regards Aristotle's theory of intellect as the best available proxy for Plato's, says that the intellect that Aristotle describes as always active is different from the intellect associated with individual human souls, but these, when actively thinking, are assimilated to it. al-Fārābī (*The Letter Concerning the Intellect, On the Intellect*) credits Aristotle with the idea that active intellect is associated with a celestial sphere (other than the first) that activates individual human intellects. The Neoplatonist style of interpretation finds its most detailed and exegetically rigorous expression in Averroes (Ibn Rushd) (*Magnum in DA* 3.5 and 3.18–20), recently discussed in a systematic way by Ogden (2022). Averroes is followed by Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides) (*Milchamot Ha-Shem*, 93)—thanks to Max Wade for this reference—Siger of Brabant (*Quaestiones in tertium DA* 2, 8, 9), and numerous other medieval and Renaissance authors. Recent proponents include Gerson (2004), Hamlyn (2002, 142), Kahn (1981, 399–414), Lear (1988, 135–141), Nuyens (1948, 30n80, 296–309), Ross (1924, vol. 1, cxlvi), and Zeller (1879, vol. 2, p. 2, 572–576).

- 5 This group of interpretations is inspired by Themistius (*In DA* 98.12–109.3), but finds its paradigmatically influential expression in Aquinas (1a *ST* q. 79 a. 3 resp.; *SG* II 77; *In DA* III 4, 101–104, 147–166, 192–197). After Aquinas there were lively debates about whether the distinction at issue is real, formal, nominal, etc. Some subsequent Themistian interpreters are Brentano (1867), Buttaci (2019), De Corte (1934, 52–63), Nyvlt (2012, 105–108), Polansky (2007, 458–472), Rist (1966), Robinson (1983, 125–128), Ross (1961, 46–48), Sisko (2000), Siwek (1978), and Suárez (*In DA III* d. 9 q. 8). Schopenhauer, whose unpublished interpretation is discussed by Segev (2014), is unusual in taking Aristotle to think that this power is volitional rather than intellectual.

account the active intellect described in the chapter “simply plays no role in the details of Aristotle’s psychology.” But more relevance to the details of his psychology of this putative theological foray might be thought awkward in a different way if with such increasing relevance there comes an increasing dependence of Aristotle’s psychology on a principle from another science not superordinate to it, namely theology, which his scientific methodology apparently forbids (*APo.* I 7, 75b14–16, I 12, 77b6–9). (The nature of this prohibition is of course controversial.)

Themistian interpretations, though taking pains to preserve consistency with Aristotle’s focus on intellect as immanent in human subjects as displayed in III 4, render III 5 disruptive in a different way, namely by imputing to Aristotle a distinction between two intellects that he nowhere else attests. In addition to being unexpected, such a distinction introduces various problems about interaction (for example, between these two intellects, between each intellect and other psychic elements) and personal identity (for example, are we identical with one intellect or the other, or both, and might this vary at different stages of our career?) that have generated enormous masses of commentary. Neoplatonist interpretations inherit to some extent the dialectical advantages and disadvantages of both the Alexandrian and Themistian interpretations. *De Anima* III 5 will turn out to be disruptive to the extent that readers of *De Anima* have not been prepared for an ideal or cosmic intellect that is not in any straightforward sense a kind of soul or part of soul, but that is accessed by souls. Problems about interaction and personal identity arise in much the same way as they do for Themistians. Various Neoplatonist interpreters, most notably Ibn Rushd, infamously address such questions by endorsing the unity of intellect for all humanity.

## B *Apparent Contradictions*

Alexandrians, Neoplatonists, and Themistians are motivated to go to these interpretive lengths in part because they seek to absolve Aristotle of contradicting himself in various ways.

1. *In the Soul, but Characteristic of Divinity.* Aristotle introduces *De Anima* III 5 with the words “in the soul” (430a13). There are several indications, seized upon by Themistians, that this is meant as “immanent within the soul of human beings (or of other rational, ensouled beings with bodies if there are any).” First, as is noted, for example, by Shields (2016, 316), the preceding and succeeding chapters draw readily on the vocabulary of III 5 and they are clearly about human intellect. Second, *De Anima* II 1 raises, but does not answer, the question of whether there might be some part of the soul that is separable from body. Themistians are inclined to think that if this is not settled in III 5

then Aristotle leads us to expect an answer to a crucially important question and then changes the subject precisely at the obvious opportunity for addressing it. Third, Themistians have sometimes alleged that if active intellect, the subject of this chapter, is not in the soul, then humans have radically incomplete souls, for they cannot actively perform their distinctive activity, thinking, in their own right, for active thinking would not be a manifestation of one of their capacities, but rather an activity that takes place externally to them.

Though these are taken to be reasons for thinking that active intellect is in the human soul, *De Anima* III 5 also assigns attributes to active intellect that would seem to be peculiar to divine beings. “This intellect is separable, impassive, and unmixed, being in its essence an activity ... and this alone is immortal and everlasting.” This set of features fits so well with Aristotle’s description of the unmoved mover(s) of *Metaphysics* Λ that various Alexandrian and Neoplatonist commentators find it natural to identify the active intellect of *De Anima* III 5 with such a being. (It might be thought to remain puzzling, on such views, why Aristotle would say that this *alone* is immortal and everlasting, since he recognizes more beings that would meet such a description than the prime mover, the intellect of the tenth sphere, and so on.<sup>6</sup> Themistians are keen to point out that this problem is avoided by restricting the scope in accordance with the chapter’s opening: this alone *in the soul* is immortal and everlasting.)

2. *Perpetual and Non-Perpetual*. Aristotle cites at the end of III 4 (430a5–6) the empirically unimpeachable observation that human thinking is non-perpetual: we are not always thinking. If III 5 is about human intellect, as Themistians urge, then it might seem surprising to learn from III 5, 430a22 that human thinking is perpetual. Hicks (1907, 505), for example, claims that this is an outright contradiction. This is part of what motivates Alexandrians and Neoplatonists to allege that Aristotle is not talking about individual human intellect in III 5. Rather, he changes the subject to a superhuman intellect.<sup>7</sup>

Some others resort to reconsidering the transmitted text. Ross (1961), having adopted a broadly Themistian outlook on the chapter after his youthful flirtations with Neoplatonism (Ross 1924, vol. 1, cxlvi), avoids such complications by bracketing the entire sentence. Others eliminate “not” (οὐχ), yielding “It sometimes thinks and sometimes does not.”<sup>8</sup> The idea would then be that Aristotle

6 Philoponus (?) (*In DA III*, 536.20–537.1) presses this problem for Plotinus.

7 Those Neoplatonists who follow Ibn Rushd notoriously think that the intellect discussed in III 4 is also superhuman.

8 Two later manuscripts (Par. 2034 and Vat. 1026) lack “not,” as do Simplicius (?) and Sophonias. Siwek (1965) and Torstrick (1862) follow these, as do Modrak (1991) and Schopenhauer—Segev (2014, 546) says that he brackets it in his copy of Bekker’s text. Förster (1912), Hicks (1907), Miller (2018, 203), Ross (1961), Schorlemmer (2022, 106), Siwek (1965), and Torstrick (1862) allege that

is talking about a kind of intellect that is non-perpetually active, a description to which the human intellect indeed seems to answer.

These are *prima facie* difficulties to which various commentators have devised responses. I think that an interpretive strategy is available that more neatly avoids them. It fares better than others do in accounting for the unceremonious nature of *De Anima* III 5. Aristotle talks as if his points in that chapter are familiar and unsurprising. He does not indicate that his inquiry has shifted from psychology to theology, or that any new entity or subject matter beyond what *De Anima* III 4 discusses is being introduced. Alexandrians and Neoplatonists take Aristotle to be here venturing into what he would call theology, and Themistians to be introducing a distinction between (at least) two intellectual powers that Aristotle nowhere else attests and immediately drops. Those interpretations depict the chapter as exciting and disruptive. They are motivated not so much by the attitude with which Aristotle approaches the discussion as by the exigencies of rendering his specific claims compatible with others. I think that it is helpful to take an approach that lowers expectations for what the chapter is meant to accomplish. What we find is the same intellect that Aristotle has been discussing in *De Anima* III 4, described in terms of a distinction between active and potential that is ubiquitous in his works. This approach, I will argue, is the one taken by Aristotle's junior colleague, Theophrastus of Eresus, the only interpreter of this passage personally acquainted with its author.

### C *Theophrastus*

Theophrastus's understanding of the chapter must be reconstructed from fragments. Furthermore, these fragments are largely aporetic. However, various presuppositions are involved in setting up the questions that he raises. From these presuppositions we can derive important information about how he understands Aristotle's active and potential intellect.<sup>9</sup>

I will first summarize how Theophrastus's fragments have typically been interpreted. I will then offer evidence that they should be interpreted differently, highlighting a couple of ways in which Theophrastus's overall interpretive strategy can be applied to particular parts of Aristotle's chapter.

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Plutarch of Athens also eliminates "not" on the basis of a report by Philoponus (?). But this is not how Philoponus (?) intends the report. Rather, according to Philoponus (?), Plutarch thinks that this passage answers to 430a5–6 from the previous chapter. Intellect *qua* active always thinks, but intellect is not always qualified as active and therefore does not always think.

9 I agree with the assessment of Brentano (1867, 6), which has been the majority view, that Theophrastus raises puzzles not because he disagrees with Aristotle, but because he adopts Aristotle's own favored method of clarification of the issues at stake.

I follow most interpreters in thinking that the fragments indicate that Theophrastus does not have what I am calling the Alexandrian or Neoplatonist understanding of active intellect in *De Anima* III 5, for as we will see, he thinks that active intellect is, at least from birth, immanent (ἐνυπάρχων) in individual humans. (He discusses the way in which it is connate (συμφυῆς). He takes actually thinking to be up to intellect, which suggests that intellect has to transition from potentiality to actuality. Furthermore, it can think about enmattered things. Finally, it is not always thinking. None of this applies to the prime mover, the intellect of the tenth celestial sphere, and so on.) With this fact in view, most have thought that he has instead what I am calling the Themistian interpretation.<sup>10</sup> But I will argue that the fragments give ample reason to doubt that for Theophrastus potential and active intellect are distinct powers with correspondingly distinct operations. Theophrastus assigns to intellect (undifferentiated) various attributes that Themistians would assign either to active or potential intellect, but not both. Furthermore, whereas at least some Themistians, for example Aquinas, insist that active intellect is not

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10 Andō (1971, 14, 18–19), Brentano (1867, 6, 24–26), Barbotin (1954, 164, 199–200), De Corte (1934, 57–58), Devereux (1992, 41–42), Jiménez (2017, 2, 69), Hicks (1907, 595), Kamp (2001, 146–147), Moraux (1942, 5), Movia (1968, 35–67, esp. 43, 63–67), Rist (1966, 9), and Siwek (1978, 375–376). But Gabbe (2008), Magrin (2011), and Roreitner (forthcoming[a], forthcoming[b]) demur. According to Magrin's interpretation of Theophrastus, which in some respects explicitly follows Menn's (2020) interpretation of Aristotle, active intellect is what Plato describes as knowledge, an intellectual substance separate from human intellect that acts upon it (59, 63). Roreitner likewise denies that for Theophrastus active intellect is immanent in individual humans, though he contests Magrin's attribution of the Platonic connection and offers a rich account of what Theophrastus might mean by "connate" that Roreitner says excludes the Platonic conception of human intellect as capable of existing independently of body. According to him, Theophrastus regards active intellect as transcendent, divine, and not associated with individual humans, but potential intellect as the connatural capacity of individual humans for thinking, which capacity is definable without reference to body but cannot exist separately from it. This does not mean, according to Roreitner, that potential intellect is nothing in its own right, but simply an aspect of perception, as some who endorse definitional but not existential separability allege. Roreitner (2021) offers a fuller explanation of the difference between definitional and existential separation, as well as of why potential intellect should not be assimilated to perception, as applied to *De Anima* III 4–5. Gabbe (2008) resists the typical way of interpreting Theophrastus as associating active and potential intellect with two faculties, potentialities, powers, or dispositions. Instead, she thinks that Theophrastus regards intellect as one disposition, "an acquired ability to render the world intelligible in active contemplation" (88). Her account puts Theophrastus "much more in line with Alexander than Aquinas and makes dubious the distinction between Theophrastus' immanent interpretation of *De Anima* Γ5 and Alexander's transcendent reading" (89–90). According to Gabbe, Theophrastus arrives at his account of intellect by rejecting various commitments of Aristotle's (90) and "we can learn little from Theophrastus about Aristotle's intentions" (65).

a substance, but rather an active *power*, Theophrastus wants to call it “a this” that is separable from body (fr. 312).<sup>11</sup> I suspect that in most cases interpreters have attributed a Themistian view to Theophrastus simply because he agrees with Themistians that active intellect is immanent in individual humans and the Themistian way of spelling out this immanence is the most fully developed alternative to Alexandrian and Neoplatonist readings and therefore the most dialectically salient. I submit, though, that by picking through Theophrastus’s fragments with only this level of granularity, we miss important resources that he offers us for addressing some of the most difficult problems of interpretation associated with this chapter.

### III Theophrastus’s Fragments

I want to offer a representative overview of the highest-quality evidence for Theophrastus’s views about *De Anima* III 5. His commentary, *De Anima*, which was part of his *Physics*, is now lost except for fragments. The fullest collection of fragments and testimonies is that edited by Fortenbaugh, Huby, Sharples, and Gutas (FHS&G), whose texts and translations I use in what follows (with permission kindly granted by Brill) when quoting Theophrastus unless otherwise noted.<sup>12</sup> The earliest and most valuable sources, especially for fragments, are Themistius and Priscian of Lydia. The value of testimonies from later sources, especially Ibn Rushd, Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas, is unclear, as is their degree of independence from Themistius. The extant fragments are largely aporetic: Theophrastus highlights questions that arise from Aristotle’s commitments. But even these give some indication of what he thinks those commitments are.

Fragment 307a makes clear that Theophrastus regards one and the same intellect (unqualified) as separable from body in a way that perception is not, as coming from outside (ἐξωθεν)—this presumably corresponds to *De Generatione Animalium* II 3, 736b28, where Aristotle calls the intellect that comes from outside (θύραθεν) divine—and yet connatural to humans,<sup>13</sup> as potentially becoming the intelligibles, as being active with respect to the intelligibles, and as being in a way affected/passive and in a way unaffected/impassible (ἀπαθής).

11 This fact also makes him different from, for example, Jiménez (2017) and Wedin (1988).

12 I make the following modifications throughout: I standardize the position of commas and periods relative to quotation marks. I standardize translations of νοῦς as *intellect*, νοητὸν as *intelligible*, νοεῖν as *to think*, νοούμενα as *things thought*, πράγμα as *thing*, and likewise *mutatis mutandis* for cognates.

13 This is the issue of principal interest to Magrin (2011) and Roreitner (forthcoming[a], forthcoming[b]).

307a (ap. Themistius *In DA* 107.30–108.18)

But it is better to give as well the (words) of Theophrastus about the potential and the actual intellect. About the potential he says this: “In what way is it that the intellect, while coming from outside and being as it were superposed, is yet connate? And what is its nature? For that it is nothing actually, but everything potentially, is well said, as is also the case with sense. For it must not be taken in this way, that it is not even itself—for that is captious—but as a certain underlying potentiality, as is also the case with material objects. But the ‘coming from outside’ must be interpreted not as being superposed, but as being included with it at its original generation.

“And in what way does it become the intelligibles, and what is its being affected by them? For it must be (affected), if it is going to come into activity, like sense. But what is the effect produced, or of what kind is the alteration, of an incorporeal thing by an incorporeal thing? And is the starting-point from that (intelligible) or from (intellect) itself? For by the fact that it is affected it would seem to be from that—for none of the things that are being affected (acts) from itself—but from the fact that it is the starting-point of everything and has thinking in its power, and not as with the senses, (it would seem to be) from itself. But perhaps this too would seem to be absurd, if the intellect has the nature of matter, being nothing, but potentially all things.”

It would take too long to add what follows, although it is not stated at length, but too concisely and shortly, in expression at least; for with regard to the facts, it is full of many problems, many careful enquiries, and many

ἄμεινον δὲ καὶ τὰ Θεοφράστου πα-  
ραθέσθαι περὶ τε τοῦ δυνάμει νοῦ  
καὶ τοῦ ἐνεργείᾳ. περὶ μὲν οὖν  
τοῦ δυνάμει τάδε φησὶν· “ὁ δὲ νοῦς  
πῶς ποτε ἔξωθεν ὦν καὶ ὡσπερ  
ἐπίθετος ὅμως συμφυῆς; καὶ τίς  
ἡ φύσις αὐτοῦ; τὸ μὲν γὰρ μηδὲν  
εἶναι κατ’ ἐνεργείαν, δυνάμει δὲ  
πάντα, καλῶς, ὡσπερ καὶ ἡ αἴ-  
σθησις. οὐ γὰρ οὕτως ληπτέον ὡς  
οὐδὲ αὐτός (ἐριστικὸν γάρ). ἀλλ’  
ὡς ὑποκειμένην τινὰ δύναμιν κα-  
θάπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ὑλικῶν. ἀλλὰ  
ὡς ἔξωθεν ἄρα οὐχ ὡς ἐπίθετον,  
ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ γενέσει συμ-  
περιλαμβανόμενον θετέον.

“πῶς δὲ ποτε γίνεται τὰ νοητὰ  
καὶ τί τὸ πάσχειν (ὑπ’) αὐτῶν; δεῖ  
γάρ, εἴπερ εἰς ἐνεργείαν ἦξει κα-  
θάπερ ἡ αἴσθησις. ἀσωμάτῳ δὲ  
ὑπ’ ἀσωμάτου τί τὸ πάθος ἢ ποία  
μεταβολή; καὶ πότερον ἀπ’ ἐκεί-  
νου ἢ ἀρχῆς ἢ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ; τῷ μὲν  
γὰρ πάσχειν ἀπ’ ἐκείνου δόξειεν  
ἂν (οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ τῶν ἐν  
πάθει) τῷ δὲ ἀρχὴν πάντων εἶναι  
καὶ ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τὸ νοεῖν, καὶ μὴ ὡσ-  
περ ταῖς αἰσθήσεσιν, ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ.  
τάχα δ’ ἂν φανείη καὶ τοῦτο ἄτο-  
πον, εἰ ὁ νοῦς ὕλης ἔχει φύσιν μη-  
δὲν ὦν ἅπαντα δὲ δυνατός.”

καὶ τὰ ἐφεξῆς μακρὸν ἂν εἴη  
παρατίθεσθαι καίτοι μὴ μακρῶς  
εἰρημένα, ἀλλὰ λίαν συντόμως τε  
καὶ βραχέως τῇ γε λέξει τοῖς γὰρ  
πράγμασι μεστὰ ἐστὶ πολλῶν μὲν  
ἀποριῶν, πολλῶν δὲ ἐπιστάσεων,

solutions. It is in the fifth (book) of the *Physics*, the second of *On the Soul*, and from all that it is clear that concerning the potential intellect as well they (Aristotle and Theophrastus) find almost the same difficulties, whether it is from outside or connate, and they try to define in what way on the one hand it is from the outside, and in what way, on the other, it is connate.

They say that it too is impassible and separate, like the productive and the actual: “For the intellect,” he (Theophrastus) says, “is impassible, unless indeed it is passive in a different sense,” and that “passive,” in this context, must be taken not as “moving”—for motion is something incomplete—but in terms of activity. And going on he says that the senses are not independent of body, but the intellect is separate.

πολλῶν δὲ λύσεων. ἔστι δὲ ἐν τῷ 20  
πέμπτῳ τῶν Φυσικῶν, δευτέρῳ  
δὲ τῶν Περὶ ψυχῆς, ἐξ ὧν ἀπάν-  
των δῆλόν ἐστιν, ὅτι καὶ περὶ τοῦ  
δυνάμει νοῦ σχεδὸν τὰ αὐτὰ δια-  
ποροῦσιν, εἴτε ἔξωθεν ἐστὶν εἴτε  
συμφυῆς, καὶ διορίζειν πειρῶνται,  
πῶς μὲν ἔξωθεν, πῶς δὲ συμφυῆς.  
λέγουσι δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν ἀπαθῆ  
καὶ χωριστόν, ὥσπερ τὸν ποιη-  
τικὸν καὶ τὸν ἐνεργεῖα: “ἀπαθῆς  
γάρ” φησὶν “ὁ νοῦς, εἰ μὴ ἄρα ἄλλ- 25  
λως παθητικός,” καὶ ὅτι τὸ παθη-  
τικὸν ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ οὐχ ὡς τὸ κινη-  
τὸν ληπτέον (ἀτελής γὰρ ἢ κίνη-  
σις) ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐνεργεῖαν. καὶ προ-  
ῶν φησὶ τὰς μὲν αἰσθήσεις οὐκ  
ἄνευ σώματος, τὸν δὲ νοῦν χωρι-  
στόν.

Several features of this fragment are worth noting. First, Theophrastus is comfortable speaking simply of intellect (unqualified, undifferentiated). The labels “potential” and “actual” are Themistius’s.<sup>14</sup> But Theophrastus is willing to say that one and the same intellect—even Themistius does not think that he changes the subject, as seen in the fourth paragraph—on the one hand potentially becomes the intelligibles and on the other is active with respect to the intelligibles, and on the one hand is in a way affected/passive and on the other is unaffected/impassible (*ἀπαθῆς*). (While Theophrastus does not fully spell out the relevant sense of being affected or unaffected, he may mean in the final paragraph of 307a, as well as in 307c–d—for example, “brings itself to perfection”—perhaps with Aristotle’s *De Anima* II 5 or *Metaphysics* Θ 6 in view, that intellect is not appropriately qualified as susceptible to motion in the standard sense, which, for Aristotle, is an *incomplete* actuality, but rather

14 Huby (1991, 134, 142–143), Kamp (2001, 133–137), Magrin (2011, 53), and Schorlemmer (2022, 92, 94–95), for example, mention the fact that although Themistius glosses the fragment as being concerned with potential intellect, Theophrastus speaks of intellect in an undifferentiated way.

as susceptible to activation that preserves or perfects something already present.) It is precisely because of the difficulty of seeing how all of these features could belong to a single thing that most interpreters prefer to read Aristotle as distinguishing between multiple intellects or noetic powers, one active and unaffected and another potential and affected. But if Theophrastus takes Aristotle to countenance one intellect that admits of qualification as active or as potential, then his way of speaking is reasonable: he can speak of one intellect unqualified, but apportion the incompatible properties between two different qualifications of it.

The second paragraph raises a puzzle. Seemingly incompatible features are envisioned as belonging to the same thing. On the one hand, intellect is the starting-point and has thinking in its power. (Aristotle says at *De Anima* III 4, 429b7–9 that it is able to actualize itself and to think because of itself and at II 5, 417b22–28 that we can think of non-perceptible things whenever we wish.) In this it differs from the senses. On the other, intellect is affected, coming into activity, and insofar as it is affected it does not act from itself. In this it is like the senses. Note that if two intellects, or even two faculties, are in view here, it becomes unclear why this would be regarded as even initially puzzling. However, if there is one intellect that admits of a merely aspectual distinction, the puzzle is an analogue of the problem of self-motion that exercises Aristotle and Theophrastus in other contexts (for example, *Physics* VIII and *Metaphysics*, respectively).<sup>15</sup> Theophrastus's view evidently is that intellect can self-actualize. This situation is coherently describable if intellect admits of qualification as active and as potential.<sup>16</sup>

The second paragraph also indicates that the same thing that is affected comes into actuality. The simplest explanation of this is that the actuality is intellect qualified as active. Intellect is here described as connatural to humans, incorporeal, and separate (presumably from body, as in fr. 312).

In 307c–d it is even clearer that Theophrastus thinks that “the intellect is the starting-point and from itself,” that it is in one way passive and in another way “impassible,” that it “bring[s] itself to perfection,” and that its thinking is intermittent (not perpetual). As at *De Anima* III 4, 430a5–6, the obvious fact that thinking is not perpetual requires explanation if, as Aristotle and Theophrastus suppose, intellect brings itself to perfection and its objects are perpetually abiding intelligibles.

15 I discuss self-motion in the context of Aristotle's hylomorphism generally in Reece (2019).

16 Roreitner (forthcoming[b], forthcoming[c]), looking to fr. 311, takes Theophrastus's response to the puzzle to be that thinking is not up to *us*, but rather governed by a separate, divine intellect. See also Falcon and Roreitner (forthcoming) for a detailed account of the role that the vocabulary of motion plays in Theophrastus's description of intellect.

307c (ap. Priscian *Metaphrasis* 2.4–5)

Rightly therefore Theophrastus declares that it is absurd to ascribe a material nature to intellect, and to do so saying that it is like matter in being nothing but potentially all things. And he recommends that we ought not to take it in this way, but should seek how it may be said to be potential in another way. ...

Next he raises the question in what way it becomes the intelligibles, and what is its being affected. For it must be (affected), if it is going to come into activity like the senses. But what is the effect produced on an incorporeal thing by an incorporeal thing, or of what kind is the alteration? And is the starting-point from that (intelligible) or from itself? For by the fact that it is affected it would seem to be from that; for none of the things that are being affected (acts) of itself; but from the fact that thinking is the starting point of everything and in its own power, and not as with the senses, (it would seem to be) from itself.

307d (ap. Priscian *Metaphrasis* 2.5–6)

And, simply, in incorporeal things which are separate from bodies, as he (Theophrastus) himself says, “what is the effect produced, or of what kind is the alteration? And effects are from outside, but the intellect is the starting-point and from itself. (It knows) then as being passive. For if it is wholly impassible,” he says, “it will grasp nothing intelligible. ... For intellect is an impassible thing,” says Theophrastus, “unless indeed ‘passive’ is taken in another sense, and not as ‘moving’—for motion is something incomplete—but in terms of activity. And these are different. But we must sometimes use the same names. ... And in what way is an intelligible thing affected by an intelligible thing? ... And how does it (the intellect) itself bring itself to perfection? ... And for what reason does it not always (think)?”

ὀρθῶς ἄρα καὶ ὁ Θεόφραστος ἀποποιῶν ἀποφαίνεται τὸ ὑλικὴν ἀποδιδόναι φύσιν τῷ νῷ, καὶ τὸ οὕτως ὡς ὕλη μηδὲν εἶναι ἀλλὰ πάντα δυνατὸν καὶ μὴ δεῖν οὕτω λαμβάνειν παρακελεύεται, ζητεῖν δὲ πῶς καθ' ἕτερον τρόπον δυνάμει λέγεται. ...

Ἄπορεῖ δὲ ἐξῆς ὅπως γίνονται τὰ νοητά, καὶ τί τὸ πάσχειν αὐτόν. δεῖ γάρ, εἴπερ εἰς ἐνεργεῖαν ἤξει καθάπερ αἱ αἰσθήσεις. ἀσωμάτῳ δὲ ὑπ' ἀσωμάτου τί πάθος ἢ ποία μεταβολή; καὶ πότερον ἀπ' ἐκείνου ἢ ἀρχῆς ἢ ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ; τῷ μὲν γὰρ πάσχειν ἀπ' ἐκείνου δόξειεν ἂν οὐδὲν γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ τῶν ἐν πάθει· τῷ δὲ ἀρχῆς πάντων εἶναι καὶ ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ τὸ νοεῖν, καὶ μὴ ὡσπερ ταῖς αἰσθήσεσιν, ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ.

καὶ ἀπλῶς δὴ ἐν τοῖς χωριστοῖς σωμάτων ἀσωμάτοις, ὅπερ καὶ αὐτὸς φησὶ, “τί τὸ πάθος ἢ ποία μεταβολή; καὶ τὰ μὲν πάθη ἔξωθεν, ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἀρχὴ καὶ ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ. ὡς οὖν παθητικός. εἰ γὰρ ὄλως ἀπαθής,” φησὶν, “οὐδὲν νοήσει. ... ἀπαθὲς γὰρ ὁ νοῦς,” φησὶν ὁ Θεόφραστος, “εἰ μὴ ἄρα ἄλλως ἢ τὸ παθητικόν, οὐχ ὡς τὸ κινητικόν (ἀτελὲς γὰρ ἢ κίνησις) ἀλλ' ὡς ἐνεργεῖα. ταῦτα δὲ διαφέρει. χρῆσθαι δὲ ἀναγκαῖον ἐνίοτε τοῖς αὐτοῖς ὀνόμασιν. ... καὶ πῶς νοητὸν ὑπὸ νοητοῦ πάσχει; ... καὶ πῶς αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν τελειοῖ; ... καὶ διὰ τί οὐκ αἰεῖ;”

Fragments 311–312 speak of intellect as (or: when it is) active and intellect as (or: when it is) potential, raising a question whether, since it is most itself when it is active, it is not itself when it is potential. It is easier to understand why Theophrastus would raise this question if he thinks that one and the same intellect can be qualified as active or as potential than it would be if he thought that there are two intellects, an active and a potential.

The context for this question is Aristotle's remark at the end of *De Anima* III 4 that intellect is, in some way, the same as intelligibles. This remark comes *before* he has introduced the active intellect, which occurs in III 5, and is therefore taken by Themistian commentators to refer to the potential intellect. But it is this that Theophrastus says is active. Again, he is thinking of one intellect that is active or potential with respect to intelligibles. The claim that it is most itself and most the intelligibles when it is actively thinking is unsurprising if, as Theophrastus thinks, there is (extensionally) one intellect in view and this intellect perfects itself (this being possible because it admits of an aspectual distinction). The question raised in the last sentence of fr. 311 need not be answered in order to see what the presuppositions underlying the question are:

311 (ap. Priscian *Metaphrasis* 2.6–9)

“Since,” (as) he (Theophrastus) says, “the (suggestion that) the activity of the intellect is from something else moving it is absurd, both for other reasons and (because) it is to make something else prior to the intellect, and thinking to be not in its power, unless it is another intellect that starts the movement. ... But what is the implication? For if it is when it (the intellect) is active,” he (Theophrastus) says, “that it becomes things, and at that time it is most both (intellect and things), things and intellect would be one and the same.” For it is not only the things thought but also most fully intellect at the time when it is thinking. For that reason he said “both.” “If, then, when it is things, then it is also intellect, intellect and things would be one and the same. Is it the case, then, that when it is not thinking, not being things it is also not intellect?”

“ἐπει,” φησί, “τὸ ὑφ’ ἐτέρου κινούντος τὴν ἐνέργειαν εἶναι τοῦ νοῦ καὶ ἄλλως ἄτοπον, καὶ πρότερόν τι ποιεῖν ἐστὶν ἕτερον τοῦ νοῦ, καὶ οὐκ ἐφ’ ἑαυτῷ τὸ νοεῖν, εἰ μὴ τις ἄλλος ὁ κινῶν νοῦς. ... ἀλλὰ τί τὸ ἐπαγόμενον; εἰ γὰρ ἐνεργῶν,” φησί, “γίνεται τὰ πράγματα, τότε δὲ μάλιστα ἐκάτερόν ἐστι, τὰ πράγματα ἂν εἴη ὁ νοῦς.” οὐ μόνον γὰρ τὰ νοούμενα ἀλλὰ καὶ νοῦς τότε μάλιστα ἐστὶν ὅταν νοῆ· διὸ “ἐκάτερον” ἔφη. “εἰ οὖν ὅτε τὰ πράγματά ἐστι τότε καὶ νοῦς ἐστὶν, ὁ νοῦς ἂν εἴη τὰ πράγματα. ἄρα οὖν, ὅταν μὴ νοῆ, μὴ ὦν τὰ πράγματα οὐδὲ νοῦς ἐστὶν;”

Theophrastus's mention of "another intellect" in fr. 311 has provoked several kinds of interpretation.<sup>17</sup> Some see this as evidence that he countenances a superhuman active intellect.<sup>18</sup> Others think that this intellect, together with potential intellect, belongs to individual humans.<sup>19</sup> Granger (1893, 317–318) suggests that the other intellect is that of another human agent, namely a teacher, who leads our intellect to new insight.<sup>20</sup> However, it is far from obvious that Theophrastus *affirms* that "it is another intellect that starts the movement." Instead, he may mention this as merely a logical possibility. He clearly rejects the idea that the activity of intellect is initiated by something other than intellect. But it might be initiated by itself or by another intellect.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps he supposes that this last possibility threatens an explanatory regress: What initiates the activity of *that* intellect? A regress of that form is a standard Aristotelian motivation for exploring the possibility of self-motion.

Fr. 312 speaks of intellect as "a this something" (τόδε τι), indeed, as one that is separable from body, whether intellect is described (analogically) as active or as potential, since it would be strange (ἄτοπον) to say that intellect in potentiality is not intellect and that intellect in activity is something else.

### 312 (ap. Priscian *Metaphrasis* 2.8–9)

"For it is also absurd," he (Theophrastus) says, "if existing potentially it (the intellect) is nothing, but in activity it is something other (than itself), when it does not think itself, and through thinking one thing and another is never the same. For this is a kind of indiscriminating and disorderly nature"—extremely well refuting those who suppose that the intellect is potentially everything and nothing in itself. For first, when it does not think, it will be nothing; and then even when it is thinking, when it thinks other things and not itself, it will be another thing and not itself, and

"καὶ γὰρ ἄτοπον," φησὶν, "εἰ δυνάμει μὲν ὦν μηδὲν ἔστιν, ἐνεργείᾳ δὲ ἕτερος ὅταν μὴ ἑαυτὸν νοῆι, τῷ δὲ ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο νοεῖν οὐδέποτε ὁ αὐτός. ἀκριτος γάρ τις αὐτῆ γε καὶ ἄτακτος ἢ φύσις"—ἄριστα ἐλέγχων τοὺς δυνάμει πάντα καὶ μηδὲν εἶναι καθ' αὐτὸν (τὸν) νοῦν ὑποτιθεμένους. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ὅταν μὴ νοῆι οὐδὲν ἔσται· ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ νοῶν, ὅταν ἄλλα καὶ μὴ ἑαυτὸν νοῆι, ἕτερόν τι ἔσται καὶ οὐκ αὐτός, καὶ ἄλλοτε ἄλλος καὶ

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17 Thanks to Robert Roreitner for prompting me to discuss these.

18 Magrin (2011, 59) and Roreitner (forthcoming[a], forthcoming[b], forthcoming[c]).

19 Barbotin (1954, 121–122, 156, 165, 209, 212–213), De Corte (1934, 57n2), Hicks (1907, 595), and Movia (1968, 41–42).

20 Philoponus (*Comm. DA* 48.28–33) proposes this as an interpretation of Aristotle.

21 Schorlemmer (2022, 102) suggests viewing this as an aporetic enumeration of possibilities.

different at different times and continually changing. For this reason he says, “it is not to be taken like this,” but as was said earlier in the passage in which he thought it right to understand “potential” and “in activity” analogically, and not, as with matter, so with the intellect. For the intellect is a “this something.” Nor again as with sensation; “for this,” as he now also adds, “is not independent of body, but that is separate.”

ἀεὶ μεταβαλλόμενος. διό φησιν, “οὐχ οὕτω ληπτέον,” ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐλέχθη πρότερον ἐν οἷς ἠξίου κατὰ ἀναλογίαν ἀκούειν τὸ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ, καὶ μὴ ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς ὕλης οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ νοῦ· τότε γάρ τι εἶναι τὸν νοῦν· μὴδὲ μὴν ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς αἰσθήσεως· “αὕτη μὲν γάρ,” ὡς καὶ νῦν ἐπάγει, “οὐκ ἄνευ σώματος, ὁ δὲ χωριστός.”

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Fr. 316 says that the intellect that becomes each thing is the intellect which actually knows them and that this intellect is potentially such as to be active because of itself (δύνηται δι’ ἑαυτοῦ ἐνεργεῖν).

### 316 (ap. Priscian *Metaphrasis* 2.9–10)

“For when it (the intellect) has become each thing in the sense in which it is said actually to know them, and we say that this happens when it can be active through itself, then too it is potential in a way, but not in the same way as before having learned and found out. By what, then, is this becoming brought about, and how? Well, it is either by disposition and potentiality, or by substance. It seems to be more (a matter of) disposition, and this as it were perfects the nature (of the intellect). ... By what, then,” he (Theophrastus) asks, “is this becoming brought about, by disposition and potentiality, or by substance?”

“ὅταν γὰρ οὕτως ἕκαστα γένηται ὡς ἐπιστήμων κατ’ ἐνεργεῖαν λέγεται, τοῦτο δὲ συμβαίνειν φάμεν ὅταν δύνηται δι’ ἑαυτοῦ ἐνεργεῖν, ἔστι μὲν οὖν καὶ τότε δυνάμει πως, οὐ μὴν ὁμοίως καὶ πρὶν μαθεῖν καὶ εὐρεῖν. ὑπὸ τίνος οὖν ἢ γένεσις καὶ πῶς, εἴτ’ οὖν [ἦ] ἕξεως καὶ δυνάμεως εἴτε οὐσίας; ἔοικε δὲ μάλλον ἕξεως, αὕτη δὲ οἷον τελεοῦν τὴν φύσιν. ... ὑπὸ τίνος οὖν,” φησὶν, “ἢ γένεσις, εἴτε ἕξεως καὶ δυνάμεως εἴτε οὐσίας;”

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In fr. 317 we are told that “intellect is things both potentially and actually” (αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι τὰ πράγματα τὸν νοῦν καὶ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ).

### 317 (ap. Priscian *Metaphrasis* 2.17–18)

And again Theophrastus recalls in a most philosophical way that the statement that the intellect is things both potentially and actually must also be taken in the appropriate sense, in order that we should not understand “potentially” as with matter in the sense of

Πάλιν δὲ ὑπομνησκει φιλοσοφώτατα ὁ Θεόφραστος ὡς καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι τὰ πράγματα τὸν νοῦν καὶ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ ληπτέον οἰκείως, ἵνα μὴ ὡς ἐπὶ ὕλης κατὰ στέρησιν τὸ δυνάμει,

privation, nor “actually” in the sense of a perfecting from outside received passively, but neither should we understand them as in the case of sensation. ... And he (Theophrastus) seems to me here too to have indicated, with a glance at the tablet with no writing on it which is adduced somewhere here by Aristotle as a simile for the potential intellect, that we must take it in the appropriate sense, in order that we should also regard the “with no writing on it” as being in the intellect. ... “Potentially the potential intellect is the intelligibles, ... but it is actually nothing before it thinks.”

ἢ κατὰ τὴν ἔξωθεν καὶ παθητικὴν τελείωσιν τὸ ἐνεργεῖα ὑπονοήσωμεν, ἀλλὰ μηδὲ ὡς ἐπὶ αἰσθησεως. ... καὶ μοι δοκεῖ ἐπισημῆ-  
5 νασθαι κἀνταῦθα τὸ δεῖν οἰκείως λαμβάνειν ὑπιδόμενος τὸ ἄγραφον γραμματεῖον, ἐνταῦθ' αὖτε ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους ὡς παράδειγμα τοῦ δυνάμει νοῦ προφερόμενον, ἵνα καὶ τὸ ἄγραφον ὡς ἐν νῶ θεωρῶμεν. ... “δυνάμει μὲν τὰ νοητὰ ὁ δυνάμει νοῦς, ... ἐντελεχίαι δὲ οὐδὲν πρὶν νοεῖν.”

The claim that “intellect is things both potentially and actually” is further clarified in fr. 319, where we are also told that intellect’s matterless objects “are always present” to it.

319 (ap. Priscian *Metaphrasis* 2.19–20)<sup>22</sup>

After this, (Theophrastus) sets out the views of Aristotle in which that writer brings the separate and matterless into sameness with

Ἐπὶ δὲ τούτοις ἐκθέμενος τὰ Ἀριστοτέλους, ἐν οἷς ἐκεῖνος τὰ χωριστὰ καὶ ἄλλα εἰς ταῦτ' ἄγει

22 This translation modifies FHS&G in substituting “sameness” for “identity” and “the same as” for “identical with,” as well as “is joined with them in essence” for “coexists with them essentially.” Lewis (1996, 41) argues that Theophrastus, following Aristotle, consciously rejects the idea that intellect is strictly identical with intelligibles when thinking them and offers reasons why anyone should reject it: otherwise, all intelligibles are the same and no distinct individuals can think of the same intelligibles. Shields (1995, 326), too, urges the denial of strict identity between intellect and intelligibles for similar reasons. Lewis contends (1996, esp. 44–49) that Aristotle takes “the actualization of the passive power in *nous* for being brought to think, and the actualization in the object of thought of its corresponding active power for bringing *nous* to think” to stand not in a relation of strict identity, but rather of accidental sameness, understood in accordance with the model that Aristotle employs in *Physics* III 3 for explaining moving and being moved in general: these actualizations of these powers both are realized in intellect and are the same in number, but not in being, failing to share all of their attributes. Lewis (1982) provides even more discussion of accidental sameness. Gregoric and Pfeiffer (2015, 27), by contrast, endorse strict identity between intellect and intelligible. On their view, if these are strictly identical then intellect “ceases to be something private,” a result that they welcome. Kelsey (2021, §7.5), too, opts for strict identity, which facilitates his interesting broader argument that intellect is in a way the “measure” of intelligibles since it turns out, on his view (130), that “everything intelligible is also intelligent.” Compare Plotinus’s engagement with this passage in *Enneads* VI.6.6.20–42 and V.9.5.

intellect, but (says that) in the enmattered each of the intelligibles exists (only) potentially, and in these the intellect is not actually present. (Then Theophrastus) makes further distinctions and adds some further difficulties. ... Intellect, therefore, is not present in the enmattered, but the intelligible will be present in it. Theophrastus, having set this out, adds: “But evidently when these have come to be and have been thought, it (the intellect) will possess them, but the intelligibles always, if indeed speculative knowledge is the same as the things,” that is, knowledge in actuality, obviously, for that is its most proper state. “To the intellect,” he says, “the intelligibles,” that is, the matterless, “are always present,” since it is joined with them in essence, and is what they are, “but the enmattered, when they have been thought, themselves too will be present in the intellect.”

τῷ νῷ, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἐνούλοις δυνά-  
 μει ἕκαστον εἶναι τῶν νοητῶν καὶ  
 τούτοις μὴ ἐνυπάρχειν τὸν νοῦν,  
 ἐπιδιαρθροῖ τε τὰ εἰρημμένα καὶ  
 ἐπαπορεῖ τινα. ... τοῖς μὲν οὖν  
 ἐνούλοις οὐχ ὑπάρχει ὁ νοῦς, ἐκεί-  
 νῳ δὲ τὸ νοητὸν ὑπάρξει. τοῦτο  
 δὲ διαρθρῶν ὁ Θεόφραστος ἐπά-  
 γει· “ἀλλ’ ὅταν γένηται καὶ νο-  
 ηθῆ ἡ δλονότης ταῦτα ἔξει, τὰ δὲ  
 νοητὰ αἰεὶ, εἴπερ ἡ ἐπιστήμη ἡ  
 θεωρητικὴ ταυτὸ τοῖς πράγμα-  
 σιν,” αὕτη δὲ ἡ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν δη-  
 λονότης κυριωτάτη γάρ. “τῷ νῷ,”  
 φησί, “τὰ μὲν νοητὰ,” τουτέστι  
 τὰ ἄυλα, “αἰεὶ ὑπάρχει,” ἐπειδὴ  
 κατ’ οὐσίαν αὐτοῖς σύνεστι καὶ  
 ἔστιν ὅπερ τὰ νοητὰ· “τὰ δὲ ἔν-  
 υλα, ὅταν νοηθῆ, καὶ αὐτὰ τῷ νῷ  
 ὑπάρξει.”

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Theophrastus’s claim that intelligibles (νοητά), are always present to intellect is glossed by Priscian as “it [intellect] is joined with them [intelligibles] in essence.” I suspect that here Priscian’s “joined with them in essence” offers a promising starting-point for grasping Theophrastus’s meaning. Theophrastus clearly does not intend to suggest that intellect is always actively engaged with some intelligible or other, for he has repeatedly denied that the intellect under discussion is always thinking. Neither has he abruptly shifted the topic to the prime mover, whose essence is not joined with that of other things (on pain of failing to be prior in being to them), or to the intellect of a celestial sphere, which would not have *multiple* intelligibles always present to it.<sup>23</sup> He also does not mean that the human intellect thinks *all* intelligibles at all times. Rather, he seems to have in mind a symmetrical dependence of essence that holds between intellect and intelligible. Essential codependence is a sort of sameness. But it holds only for certain qualifications of intellect and intelligible: intellect *qua* actively cognizing some intelligible and intelligible *qua* actively cognized by intellect. These qualifications (*vel sim.*) yield per se correlatives, which have symmetrically dependent essences.

23 For more on divine beings’ cognition in Aristotle’s system, see Reece (2020; 2023, ch. 4).

Some explanation of per se correlatives may perhaps be helpful here.<sup>24</sup> In the Aristotelian system there are different possible qualifications of entities, under some of which the entities are genuine correlatives and under others of which they are not. For example, while two individuals qualified as members of the human species, or as bipeds or as musical, are not per se correlatives, they are when qualified as master and slave (*Cat.* 7, 7a28–30). The subjects qualified in the latter way, that is to say, properly specified, are “per se correlatives,” and the subjects qualified in some other way, or considered simply as subjects of qualification, are “accidental correlatives” (*Cat.* 7, 7a25–28, *Top.* VI 4, 142a26–31, VI 8, 146a36–b6, *Metaph.* Δ 15, 1021b3–11).

Importantly for our current purpose, Aristotle stresses that qualifying something as active or as potential can make the difference for whether per se correlativity obtains. In the following passage he does not speak explicitly in terms of correlativity, but the fact that perception and perceptible are standard examples of correlatives, together with his language of oneness of actuality and being “destroyed or preserved together,” which language Aristotle uses to describe correlatives in *Categories* 7, indicates that he is making a familiar point about how per se correlatives must be qualified.

*De Anima* III 2, 426a15–26

Since the actuality of the perceptible and of what is capable of perceiving are one, though their being is different, it is necessary that what are spoken of as “hearing” and “sounding” in this way (*viz.*, as active) are destroyed or preserved together, and likewise for flavor and tasting and the other cases. But it is not necessary for those spoken of as potential. The earlier natural philosophers did not speak well about this, since they thought that neither white nor black is apart from sight, nor flavor apart from taste. In one way they spoke correctly, in another incorrectly. That is because “perception” and “perceptible” are said in two ways, namely, as potential and as active, and what was said by them applies in the latter case but not in the former. They spoke unqualifiedly about things that are not said unqualifiedly.

ἐπεὶ δὲ μία μὲν ἐστὶν ἐνέργεια ἢ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἰσθητικοῦ, τὸ δ' εἶναι ἕτερον, ἀνάγκη ἅμα φθεῖρεσθαι καὶ σώζεσθαι τὴν οὕτω λεγομένην ἀκοὴν καὶ ψόφον, καὶ χυμὸν δὴ καὶ γεῦσιν, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὁμοίως· τὰ δὲ κατὰ δύναμιν λεγόμενα οὐκ ἀνάγκη· ἀλλ' οἱ πρότερον φυσιολόγοι τοῦτο οὐ καλῶς ἔλεγον, οὐθὲν οἰόμενοι οὔτε λευκὸν οὔτε μέλαν εἶναι ἄνευ ὄψεως, οὐδὲ χυμὸν ἄνευ γεύσεως. τῇ μὲν γὰρ ἔλεγον ὀρθῶς, τῇ δ' οὐκ ὀρθῶς· διχῶς γὰρ λεγομένης τῆς αἰσθήσεως καὶ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ, τῶν μὲν κατὰ δύναμιν τῶν δὲ κατ' ἐνέργειαν, ἐπὶ τούτων μὲν συμβαίνει τὸ λεχθέν, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἐτέρων οὐ συμβαίνει. ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνοι ἀπλῶς ἔλεγον περὶ τῶν λεγομένων οὐχ ἀπλῶς.

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24 Reece (ms) discusses these in more detail.

Only the perceptible qualified as active and perception qualified as active are per se correlatives. This does not hold of the perceptible qualified as potential and perception qualified as potential. Democritus, Protagoras, and other conventionalist antirealists failed to give a proper account precisely because they spoke about the perceptible and perception without qualification instead of isolating, as Aristotle does, the qualification under which each count as relative to the other. Their accounts failed in denying without qualification that the perceptible can be without perception but not vice-versa, or in other words, in denying without qualification that the perceptible (the underlying subject bearing a certain form that happens to be perceived) is ontologically prior to perception. Aristotle, by distinguishing between underlying subjects and qualifications of them, is able to give an account according to which perceptible and perception under some qualifications are correlatives even though the underlying subject bearing a certain form that happens to be perceived is ontologically prior to perception.

This distinction between underlying subjects and qualifications of them, only some of which are per se correlatives, is in play both in Theophrastus's fr. 319 and in Aristotle's text (the latter part of *De Anima* III 4) on which he comments. Intellect as potential and intelligibles as potential are not per se correlatives, but intellect as active and intelligibles as actively thought are per se correlatives. Actively thought intelligibles are what are "joined in essence" with intellect as active and in this sense "always present" to it. My claim is not only that since enmattered forms, insofar as they are enmattered, are only potentially intelligible (as fr. 319 reminds us), intellect is not always thinking them; it is also that, though our intellect is not always (at all times) active and we are therefore not always actively thinking any thing, whether enmattered or unenmattered, intellect *qua* active and things *qua* actively intelligible are always (in every case) joined in essence as per se correlatives. (Note that this does not require that for any given thing there is something, whether the prime mover, as for Alexandrians, an ideal Intellect or intellect associated with a celestial sphere, as for Neoplatonists, or one peculiar to individual humans, as for, for example, Philoponus (*Comm. DA* 52.21–29) and Philoponus (?) (*In DA* III, 539.1–7), that thinks it at any given time.) It is therefore appropriate for Aristotle to say in *De Anima* III 4 that we are not always thinking and in *De Anima* III 5 that active intellect, that is, our intellect *qua* active, is always thinking intelligibles.<sup>25</sup>

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25 Thanks to Caleb Cohoe for encouraging clarification about the scope of my claim.

It is worth noticing that the machinery needed to clarify and address the puzzles that Aristotle and Theophrastus raise about intellect's relation to the intelligibles is of no heavier variety than I have indicated. In particular, no distinction between multiple intellectual entities is required, *pace* Alexandrians, Neoplatonists, and Themistians. Aristotle and Theophrastus do not need to say, for purposes of explaining human cognition, that there is a kind of intellect that thinks at least something at all times. Rather, their remarks suggest that a standard Aristotelian distinction between qualifications of intellect and intelligibles as active and as potential is sufficient for their purpose.

According to fr. 320a, "the intellect is in a way a mixture out of the productive and potential." Active intellect, which he here variously calls "productive" and "motive," is immanent (ἐνυπάρχων).<sup>26</sup> Theophrastus here sticks closely to the vocabulary of *De Anima* III 5, particularly that involved in drawing its signature distinction between two ways of characterizing intellect and in claiming that the productive is prior in worth to the passive.

**320a part** (ap. Themistius *In DA* 108.18–28)

And tackling the distinctions made by Aristotle about the productive intellect, "It is necessary," he (Theophrastus) says, "to look into that statement of ours that in every nature there is something like matter and potential, and something like a cause and productive, and that in every case the productive element is more valuable than the passive and the origin than the

ἀψάμενος δὲ καὶ τῶν περὶ τοῦ ποιητικοῦ νοῦ διωρισμένων Ἀριστοτέλει, "ἐκεῖνο," φησὶν "ἐπισκεπτέον, ὃ δὴ φαμεν ἐν πάσῃ φύσει τὸ μὲν ὡς ὕλην καὶ δύναμει, τὸ δὲ αἴτιον καὶ ποιητικόν, καὶ ὅτι αἰεὶ τιμιώτερον τὸ ποιοῦν τοῦ πάσχοντος, καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς

26 I find it most plausible that Theophrastus does not here introduce distinct entities, that is, a productive intellect and a motive intellect, each differing from active intellect and all of these from potential intellect, but rather either uses the qualifications "productive," "motive," and "active" interchangeably, thinks that some of these qualifications of the same intellect depend on other qualifications (for example, that intellect can be qualified as productive and motive insofar as it admits of qualification as active because of itself), or adopts each qualification of the same intellect independently based on the relevant explanatory purpose, dialectical context, or consistency of metaphor. Fragments 307a, c, d, 311, and 316–317 indicate that he thinks of intellect as active because of itself and associates this with how we should characterize its way of affecting and being affected. But since the details of this association are not fully articulated, we are left without a complete account of how these qualifications are related to each other. I think that, since multiple qualifications of a single thing come cheaply, this is less worrying than it would be if we were left with an incomplete story of how multiple productive, motive, and active *entities* are related to each other. Thanks to Daniel Maher and Robert Roreitner for encouraging clarification about this.

matter.” He accepts these points, but develops some difficulties: “What are these two natures? And what again is what is subjected to or united with the productive? For the intellect is in a way a mixture out of the productive and the potential. If then the motive (intellect) is connate, it must have been so both at once and for ever: but if (it came) later, with what, and in what way, was its coming to be? Certainly it appears to be uncreated, if it is also indestructible. But since it is immanent, why does it not always (think)? Why are there forgetting and deception and falsehood? Perhaps through the mixture.”

ἕλης.” ταῦτα μὲν ἀποδέχεται, δι- 5  
 απορεῖ δέ· “τίνε οὖν αὐταί αἱ δύο  
 φύσεις; καὶ τί πάλιν τὸ ὑποκεί-  
 μενον ἢ συνηρημένον τῷ ποιη-  
 τικῷ; μικτὸν γάρ πως ὁ νοῦς ἔκ-  
 τε τοῦ ποιητικοῦ καὶ τοῦ δυναμει.  
 εἰ μὲν οὖν σύμφυτος ὁ κινῶν, καὶ  
 εὐθὺς ἐχρῆν καὶ αἰεὶ· εἰ δὲ ὕστε-  
 ρον, μετὰ τίνος καὶ πῶς ἢ γένε-  
 σις; ἔοικε δ’ οὖν ὡς ἀγένητος, εἴ-  
 περ καὶ ἄφθαρτος. ἐνυπάρχων δ’  
 οὖν διὰ τί οὐκ αἰεὶ; ἢ διὰ τί λήθη 10  
 καὶ ἀπάτη καὶ ψεῦδος; ἢ διὰ τὴν  
 μίξιν”

Theophrastus’s two allusions to mixture in this fragment, which I take to be connected, have attracted attention. Barbotin (1954, 163–164) associates these uses of “mixture” with those in Aristotle’s *De Generatione et Corruptione* I 10, according to which corporeal components admit of reciprocal alteration. The emphasis, for Barbotin, is on *distinct* components standing in this relationship. (The upshot for intellect, according to Barbotin, is that there are two intellects thus related.) Barbotin requires that Theophrastus transpose the technical, corporeal notion of mixture from the physical to the metaphysical order. “In a way” (πῶς) simply signals the boldness of this transposition.

Devereux (1992, 42), like Barbotin, thinks that the notion of mixture from Aristotle’s *De Generatione et Corruptione* is at issue, but draws a more radical conclusion from its application to intellect: “Theophrastus meant to suggest that productive and passive intellect do not retain their nature or essence when they are combined and interact with each other.”

Gabbe (2008, 71) raises a problem for Devereux: If we understand, as Devereux does, active intellect as purely actual and potential intellect as purely potential, neither can possess the requisite actuality and potentiality to be a constituent of a mixture in the technical sense explained in *De Generatione et Corruptione*. She argues that while Barbotin avoids this problem, he also cannot explain how the relationship that he sees between the two intellects is even remotely analogous to a corporeal mixture. She agrees with both that the notion of mixture as described in *De Generatione et Corruptione* is the relevant one, but thinks that the feature of such mixtures that Theophrastus is emphasizing is their uniformity, all parts of the mixture being alike (88–89). It turns out, she says, that this Theophrastean application of the Aristotelian notion of intellect is tantamount to a rejection of various commitments of Aristotle’s in

*De Anima* III 4–5. For example, “Theophrastus’ description of the intellect is in marked contrast with Aristotle’s claim that the intellect is unmixed” (64).

Kamp (2001, 148–150), agreeing that the notion of mixture from *De Generatione et Corruptione* is at issue here, thinks that Theophrastus’s appeal to this notion involves him in a problematic corporealization of intellect. For this reason he, like Gabbe, alleges that Theophrastus has here sharply deviated from Aristotle.<sup>27</sup>

I suspect that we need not go to such lengths to explain Theophrastus’s use of “mixture.” One possibility, perhaps suggested by his “*in a way* a mixture,” is that it is simply a non-technical expression on which he does not intend to put much weight.<sup>28</sup> He may mean merely that human intellect exhibits some kind of complexity, for example, aspectual complexity.<sup>29</sup>

Another possibility is that the language of mixture is peculiarly appropriate in the relevant context and that Theophrastus does not diverge from Aristotle in his way of applying it. Indeed, we need look no further afield than the passage that Theophrastus has been discussing, *De Anima* III 4, where Anaxagoras’s theory of an unmixed, superhuman intellect sets Aristotle’s explanatory agenda to a large extent. The chapter’s two parts argue that intellect is somehow unmixed (429a13–b22) and somehow mixed (429b23–430a9)—it is controversial whether this is because intellect is somehow mixed into every intelligible or because something intelligible is somehow mixed into intellect—with Anaxagoras explicitly named at the beginning of each part. Theophrastus’s comments in fr. 320a about mixture would concern the part of Aristotle’s chapter in which intellect is somehow mixed, rather than the part in which it is somehow unmixed, and thus, *pace* Gabbe (2008, 64), would not be contradicting Aristotle on the point of intellect’s status with regard to mixture any more than Aristotle contradicts himself. Various features of intellect discussed in *De Anima* III 4–5 and in Theophrastus’s comments, such as its self-determination, completely general applicability, separability, and being just what it is, echo to some degree those that Anaxagoras ascribes to the intellect that he depicts in the following fragment, the text and translation of which are those of Laks and Most.

27 Schorlemmer (2022, 109, 120) agrees that Theophrastus’s comments on mixture represent a departure from Aristotle, criticizes the proposals of Barbotin, Devereux, Gabbe, and Kamp, and stresses the difficulty of accounting for Theophrastus’s employment of “mixture,” saying that instead of being a technical term it is meant only to indicate that there are two natures influencing each other.

28 De Corte (1934, 57n5) goes further, saying that “in a way” indicates Theophrastus’s awareness that the proposal is somehow distanced from Aristotle.

29 This is a lighter-weight complexity than is Schorlemmer’s (2022, 120) tentative proposal of mutual influence.

**Anaxagoras d27** (= DK 59 b12, ap. Simplicius *In Phys.* 164.24–25, 156.13–157.4)

The other things possess a portion of every thing, but mind is unlimited and master of itself, it has not been mixed with any thing, but is the only one to be itself by itself. For if it were not by itself, but had been mixed with some other thing, it would participate in all things, if it had been mixed with any; for in every thing is present a part of every thing, as I said earlier. And the things that would be mixed with it would prevent it from having control over any thing in the same way as it does being alone by itself. For it is at the same time both the thinnest of all things and the purest, and in particular it retains the full decision concerning every thing and possesses the greatest power; and of the things that have life, whether they are larger or smaller, of these mind is master; and mind has been master of the whole rotation, so that there would be rotation at the beginning. And the rotation began at first from the small, then it rotates more broadly, and it will continue to become even broader. And the things that mix as well as those that are detached and separate out—all these mind decided. And as things were going to be and as all things were that now are not, and as all things are now and as they will be, mind separated and ordered them all, as well as this rotation, which is being performed now by the heavenly bodies, the sun, the moon, the air, and the aether, which are separating out. And the rotation itself caused the detachment. And from the rarefied the dense separates out, from the cold the warm, from the dark the bright, and from the moist the dry. Numerous are the parts of numerous things; yet nothing is completely detached

τὰ μὲν ἄλλα παντὸς μοῖραν μετέχει, νοῦς δὲ ἐστὶν ἄπειρον καὶ αὐτοκρατὲς καὶ μέμεικται οὐδενὶ χρήματι, ἀλλὰ μόνος αὐτὸς ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἐστίν. εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἦν, ἀλλὰ τεφ ἐμέμεικτο ἄλλω, μετεῖχεν ἂν πάντων χρημάτων, εἰ ἐμέμεικτό τεφ. ἐν παντὶ γὰρ παντὸς μοῖρα ἔνεστιν, ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν μοι λέλεκται. καὶ ἂν ἐκώλυεν αὐτὸν τὰ συμμεμειγμένα, ὥστε μηδενὸς χρήματος κρατεῖν ὁμοίως ὡς καὶ μόνον ἐόντα ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ. ἔστι γὰρ λεπτότατόν τε πάντων χρημάτων καὶ καθαρώτατον, καὶ γνώμην γε περὶ παντὸς πάσαν ἴσχει καὶ ἰσχύει μέγιστον· καὶ ὅσα γε ψυχὴν ἔχει καὶ μείζω καὶ ἐλάσσω, πάντων νοῦς κρατεῖ· καὶ τῆς περιχωρήσιος τῆς συμπάσης νοῦς ἐκράτησεν, ὥστε περιχωρῆσαι τὴν ἀρχήν. καὶ πρῶτον ἀπὸ τοῦ σμικροῦ ἤρξατο περιχωρεῖν, ἔπειτα πλείον περιχωρεῖ, καὶ περιχωρήσει ἐπὶ πλέον. καὶ τὰ συμμισγόμενά τε καὶ ἀποκρινόμενα καὶ διακρινόμενα πάντα ἔγνω νοῦς. καὶ ὅποια ἐμέλλεν ἔσεσθαι καὶ ὅποια ἦν ἄσσα νῦν μὴ ἐστὶ, καὶ ὅσα νῦν ἔστι καὶ ὅποια ἔσται, πάντα διεκόσμησε νοῦς, καὶ τὴν περιχώρησιν ταύτην, ἣν νῦν περιχωρεῖ τὰ τε ἄστρα καὶ ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη καὶ ὁ ἀήρ καὶ ὁ αἰθήρ οἱ ἀποκρινόμενοι. ἡ δὲ περιχωρήσιος αὕτη ἐποίησεν ἀποκρίνεσθαι. καὶ ἀποκρίνεται ἀπὸ τε τοῦ ἀραιοῦ τὸ πυκνόν καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ψυχροῦ τὸ θερμόν καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ζοφεροῦ τὸ λαμπρόν καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ διεροῦ τὸ ξηρόν. μοῖραι δὲ πολλαὶ πολλῶν εἰσι. παντάπασι δὲ οὐδὲν ἀποκρίνεται οὐδὲ

or separates out from one another, except mind. But all mind is similar, the larger and the smaller, and nothing else is similar to anything else, but that of which each thing contains the most, this is what each thing is and was most manifestly.

διακρίνεται ἕτερον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐτέρου πλὴν νοῦ. νοῦς δὲ πᾶς ὁμοίος ἐστί καὶ ὁ μείζων καὶ ὁ ἐλάττων. ἕτερον δὲ οὐδέν ἐστιν ὅμοιον οὐδενί, ἀλλ' ὅτῳ πλείστα ἔνι, ταῦτα ἐνδηλότατα ἐν ἕκαστόν ἐστι καὶ ἦν.

If Theophrastus is following Aristotle in engaging with an Anaxagorean ἐνδοξον about intellect's status with regard to mixture, the force of his points made in terms of mixture may be something like this: Human intellect is, in some relevant way, different from the unmixed, superhuman intellect envisioned by Anaxagoras, and perhaps with reference to this difference we can locate why we, unlike that intellect, are susceptible to forgetting, deception, and falsehood, though our intellect shares some other properties with that intellect. This of course does not go very far in specifying exactly how forgetting comes about, but this is in keeping with Theophrastus's brief and inconclusive way of raising the question.

The two questions with which fr. 320a concludes—Why does it not always think? Why are there forgetting and deception and falsehood?—are two of the most vexing for interpreters of *DA* III 5. They are usually considered separately, but Theophrastus invites us to treat them together. It is clear from his *Metaphysics* that Theophrastus regards thinking as factive. If intellect is *always* thinking, then it is never erring. But forgetting, deception, and falsehood are ways of erring. We can look to potentiality for an explanation of why we are not always thinking and of why we err. The upshot of this for explaining Aristotle's claim near the end of *De Anima* III 5 that “we do not remember” is that *in cases in which* we do not remember, it is because of facts about potentiality. Theophrastus does not take Aristotle to be making an implausible general claim that we never remember, or saying, as do various interpreters, beginning with Themistius (*Paraph. in DA* 100.37–102.23) and especially after Aquinas (*In DA* III 4, 221–249), that he means that we do not remember after death. (Since this passage and its context offer little reason for supposing that this is something that Aristotle is interested in explaining, the Themistian construal may be, as Menn (2020) thinks, anachronistic.)<sup>30</sup>

Theophrastus's way of interpreting Aristotle better explains the apparent contradictions that I enumerated in section II B above than Alexandrian,

30 Themistius adverts to *De Anima* I 4, as does Aquinas, but it is not obvious whether or how this chapter is relevant to Aristotle's explanatory project in *De Anima* III, or whether or how Themistius's notion of a “common intellect” might be grounded in these chapters.

Neoplatonist, or Themistian interpretations do. If Theophrastus is correct, then intellect is immanent in the human soul, but divine attributes are ascribed to it *qua* active. There is no need to suppose that Aristotle changes the subject to a superhuman intellect. Likewise, Theophrastus affirms with Aristotle that we do not perpetually think, but in his fr. 319 he accounts for Aristotle's claim that "it is not the case that it sometimes thinks and sometimes not" by asserting that intelligibles are always present to intellect, by which he evidently intends the familiarly Aristotelian point that intellect *qua* actively thinking and intelligible *qua* actively thought are always, that is to say, in every case, the same in a way, being per se correlatives with mutually dependent essences. Intellect (unqualified) and the thing (not qualified as intelligible) do not have mutually dependent essences. Neither do intellect *qua* potential and intelligible *qua* potentially thought. Again, Theophrastus offers us a way of avoiding attributing a contradiction to Aristotle without alleging that his discussion has ventured beyond the precincts of human psychology. Unlike Alexandrians, Neoplatonists, and Themistians, Theophrastus indexes features that Aristotle predicates of intellect to human intellect *qua* active and human intellect *qua* potential. This lightweight distinction between qualifications or modes of intellect involves fewer problematic complications than do the more robust distinctions drawn by Alexandrians (between a human intellect and the prime mover), by Neoplatonists (between an individual human intellect and a hypostatic or cosmic intellect), and by Themistians (between human intellects distinct in power, function, operation, and so on).

#### IV Conclusion

Theophrastus's fragments offer a picture of a set of questions raised by Aristotle's *De Anima* III 4, overlapping substantially with those that Aristotle there explicitly raises, that are answered, clarified, or sharpened by a distinction between activity and potentiality, drawn by Aristotle in *De Anima* III 5, that applies to one and the same human intellect.<sup>31</sup> Theophrastus's comments on Aristotle's *De Anima* III 4–5 reveal that Theophrastus interprets Aristotle as having the following commitments: One and the same intellect (unqualified)

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31 I agree with Devereux (1992, 33–34) that Theophrastus, like Aristotle, spends the first part of the discussion of intellect assigning various attributes to intellect (undifferentiated, unqualified), then raises puzzles about how all of these attributes could belong to the same thing, and finally (as Aristotle does in *De Anima* III 5) distinguishes between active and potential intellect and assigns some of the attributes to one, others to the other.

is connatural to humans, yet separable from their bodies. On the one hand it potentially becomes the intelligibles and on the other is active with respect to them. In one respect it is unaffected/impassible, in another affected/passive. Unlike the senses, intellect is the starting-point, has thinking in its power, and brings itself to perfection. Like the senses, intellect is affected, coming into activity, and insofar as it is affected it does not act from itself. Intellect is qualifiable as active and as potential and is most itself when qualified as active. One and the same intellect is active or potential with respect to intelligibles. Intellect is "a this something" that is separable from body, whether it is described (analogically) as active or as potential. The intellect that becomes each thing is the intellect which actually knows them and this intellect is potentially such as to be active because of itself. Intellect is the same as intelligibles both potentially and actually. This is why on the one hand its thinking is intermittent (not perpetual) and on the other intelligibles are always present to it (in the sense that intellect is joined with intelligibles in essence). By this he means that intellect *qua* actively cognizing intelligibles and intelligibles *qua* actively cognized by intellect, as per se correlatives, have mutually dependent essences. Intellect is immanent and is somehow a mixture, being variously characterizable as active/productive/motive on the one hand and potential/passive on the other. Because of this, it is, unlike the unmixed, divine intellect described by Anaxagoras, intermittently active, and therefore susceptible to forgetting, deception, and falsehood.

These facts indicate that Theophrastus's interpretation of Aristotle does not belong to the Alexandrian, Neoplatonist, or Themistian families. According to him, individual human intellect admits of a distinction between active and potential qualifications or aspects that are separable from each other not in power, operation, or function (as Themistians suppose), but merely in the way in which an actuality and its corresponding potentiality are separable. In other words, it is not as if active intellect is the part of human intellect responsible for one sort of intellectual activity and passive intellect another. Rather, individual human intellect, like so many other things that Aristotle theorizes, can be discussed *qua* active/actual or *qua* passive/potential with respect to whatever power(s), operation(s), or function(s) it has.<sup>32</sup>

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