

Are Potency and Actuality Compatible in Aristotle?

Abstract: The belief that Aristotle opposes potency (*dunamis*) to actuality (*energeia* or *entelecheia*) has gone untested. This essay defines and distinguishes forms of the Opposition Hypothesis—the Actualization, Privation, and Modal—examining the texts and arguments adduced to support them. Using Aristotle’s own account of opposition, the texts appear instead to show that potency and actuality are compatible, while arguments for their opposition produce intractable problems. Notably, Aristotle’s refutation of the Megarian Identity Hypothesis applies with equal or greater force to the Opposition Hypothesis. For Aristotle, then, potency and actuality are compatible.

Keywords: Aristotle; Potency; Actuality; Metaphysics; Physics; Ancient Philosophy

Aristotle’s contribution to ontology left at least two landmarks: the first, through working out the account of a categorical sense of being and its assertoric structure, and the second, through working out the philosophical import of potency (*dunamis*) and articulating its activity (*energeia*) and fulfillment (*entelecheia*) as a distinct, all-pervasive sense of being. The latter contribution will, however, remain unclear to us to the extent that the relationship between these terms is unclear or unthought.

Aristotle says explicitly that potency (*dunamis*) and being-at-work (*energeia*) are not simply the same: “it is clear that potency and being-at-work are different (for these assertions [of the Megarians] make potency and being-at-work the same [*tauto*], for which reason it is no small thing they are seeking to abolish)” (*Met.* IX.3 1047a20).¹ Yet this claim comes only three chapters after the claim that they are in fact one and the same: “the boundary [*eschatē*: limit, extremity, definition] of material and the form are the same and one [*tauto kai en*], one potentially, the other actively... and what is in potency and what is in activity are in a way one [*en pōs estin*]” (*Met.* VIII.6 1045b18, cf. 1045a21).² In both cases Aristotle uses the word *auto*, same. Potency and being-at-work are both the same and not the same. The question, of course, is this: how are they the same, and how are they different? At minimum, they will be either compatible – capable of being the case at the same time with respect to the same thing – or incompatible.

If we survey scholarly interpretations of the relationship between the Aristotelian concepts commonly translated as potency (*dunamis*) and actuality (*energeia*, and/or *entelecheia*), we find that, despite their variety, most share a common assumption, namely that the two are opposed to one another. In the first paragraph of his essay “On Potentiality,” Giorgio Agamben expresses an opinion common to analytic, continental, and historical interpretations of Aristotle: “In both his metaphysics and his physics, Aristotle opposed potentiality to actuality, *dunamis* to *energeia*, and bequeathed this opposition to Western philosophy and science.”³ Similarly, Jonathan Beere argues that “being-in-capacity and being-in-energeia are not only contrasting but also incompatible: if something is *F* in *energeia*, then it is not *F* in capacity, and conversely if something is in capacity *F*, then it is not *F* in *energeia*.”⁴ This position is that *dunamis* and/or a cognate term is the opposite of, or incompatible with *energeia*. It is held in different forms by Aquinas, Brentano,⁵ Ross,⁶ Akrill, Blair,⁷ Frede,⁸ Menn,⁹

Agamben,¹⁰ Heidegger,¹¹ Sachs,¹² Broadie,¹³ Coope,¹⁴ Kosman,¹⁵ and many others. Notwithstanding the importance of the terms, standing as they do at the height of Aristotle's thought, this assumption has gone more or less unchallenged.¹⁶

Aristotle uses 'opposite' (*enantion*) to describe things that cannot be present at the same time.¹⁷

Things said to be opposites are contradictories, contraries, relative terms, lacking and having, and the extremes from which things come into being and into which they pass away; and *whatever things do not admit of being present at the same time* [*mē endechetai hama pareinai*] *in something that is receptive of both of them* are said to be opposed... *Met.* V.10 1018a20-24.¹⁸

Opposed terms are, to use Beere's term, incompatible. Thankfully, unlike 'opposite,'¹⁹ the word 'incompatible' has an opposite, namely 'compatible.' Things that are compatible are usually different, they can be the same in many respects, and both can be present at the same time. They would be *symphoros*.²⁰ In this paper, the word incompatibility will be used to articulate the relevant conception of opposition, and compatibility to articulate its opposite.

Opposing potency and actuality or being-at-work, *energeia*, has the advantage of making the relationship between being-in-potency and being-at-work seem easy to grasp: if they are opposites then they are clearly different, and their relation is clear insofar as, through the kind of negation that opposition represents, potency can in some significant sense be derived from or even reduced to the concept of being-at-work. Or we can say that they are related to one another through a medium or intermediary between the two – temperature between hot and cold, presence between potency and being-at-work – even that this is in a sense more fundamental. But if they are not opposites, and are compatible instead: i) they will need to be described through a kind of difference other than negation, ii) there will be no intermediary medium to reduce them to. They will be distinct, robust, non-derivative primary terms, and iii) while Aristotle distinguishes four primary ways of saying being (incidental, categorical, energetic, alethic), the 'energetic' sense will itself be multiple, distinguished into *dunamis*, *energeia*, and *entelecheia*.

Texts Distinguishing *Dunamis* and *Energeia*

The two primary texts in which Aristotle directly describes the difference between potency and actuality do not use words of opposition. The two passages are nearly identical, except that *entelecheia* appears in *Met.* V.7 in the place of *energeia* in *Met.* IX.6.

Now being-at-work is something's being-present not [*mē*] in the way that we speak of as being in potency; and we speak of as being in potency, for example, Hermes in a block of wood or a half line in the whole, because they can be separated out, or someone who knows, even when he is not contemplating, if he is capable of contemplating. The other way these things are present is in activity.... let being-at-work be determined by one part of each distinction [*tēs diaphoras*], and what is potential by the other.... (*Metaphysics* IX.6 1048a31-b6).²¹

The text aims to say what being-at-work (*energeia*) means by distinguishing it from being-in-potency using examples. The two are complementary concepts. The distinction is clear without needing to resort to the concept of opposition to express it. The parallel text in *Met.* V. 7 1017a30-1017b9 even omits the “not” in the first line. Yet many of the most common translations insert words like ‘antithesis’ and ‘opposite’ into this passage.²² These translations have considerable virtues, but the infusion of the opposition hypothesis into passages like these leaves little doubt about its prevalence. Some argue that the examples imply opposition, but these claims are controversial.²³

Several texts present *dunamis* and its cognates as being the case at the same time as *energeia* and *entelecheia*. While Aristotle holds that while they can be *without* one another,²⁴ he appears to present them as compatible in the preamble to the definition of movement: “There is what-is-at-work alone, what-is-in-potency, and what-is-in-potency *and* -at-work” (*Physics* III.1 200b26).²⁵ He defines movement as “the *entelecheia* [or *energeia*] of the potential-being, as potent” (*Physics* III.1 201b3-4), being careful to remark that “it turns out that a thing is moved whenever this *entelecheia* [of the being-in-potency as potent] *is*, and neither before nor after” (*Physics*. III.1 201b7). Similarly, he defines the soul as “an *entelecheia* of the first kind of a natural body having life as a potency [*dunamei*]” (*On the Soul* II.1 412a27–8),²⁶ which indicates both that the *entelecheia* and the potency or being-in-potency are at the same time.²⁷ Furthermore, potency and being-in-potency are presented as *implying* actuality in the discussion of how the infinite *is only* in-potency (*Physics* III.6 206a19-22), and against the Megarians Aristotle argues: “what is capable [*dunaton*] is that which would be in no way incapable if it happened that the being-at-work of which it is said to have the potency was there” (*Met.* IX.3 1047a24-5). In the face of these texts, the Opposition Hypothesis would need a strong counter-argument.

A Remark on the Senses of *Dunamis*, *Energeia*, and *Entelecheia*

Since potency and being-at-work have several senses, which sense(s) are we examining? Their proper sense is movement-related, but extends to other things [*epi pleon*] (*Met.* IX.1 1045b33, IX.3 1047a30-33, IX.3 1048a27-32). Scholars argue that the further sense is ontological, distinguishing thereby between potency and movement on the one hand, and potentiality and actuality on the other. They differ about what potentiality and actuality mean, however, some arguing that they mean mere possibility and reality, others that they are modes or ways of being something. That the words are extended to other things seems to suggest continuity of meaning between them, rather than discontinuity. But the most obvious reading is that *dunamis* and *energeia* are extended to material and *ousia* (substance or thinghood) (*Met.* IX.6 1048b8-9), and few would say that the material is incompatible with or mutually exclusive of the being or form that it has. The distinction between actions and an ontological sense, then, is controversial, and since resolving it is beyond the scope of this essay, we shall aim to read the terms as neutrally as possible in each case.

This essay will not take a strong position on how to translate these terms,²⁸ nor will it attempt to settle completely their meaning, by deciding, for example, whether *energeia* means something closer to actuality or activity, or both at once, or neither.²⁹ For legibility we will use the typical translations of these words common to each of the primary opposition hypotheses, while for literalness I use

'being-at-work' for *energeia* and 'potency,' 'capacity,' 'being-in-potency,' 'potential being' and, in one case, 'possibility' for different forms of *dunamis*.

Instead of aiming to define the terms, then, our question is limited to whether *dunamis* and *energeia* or *entelecheia* are opposed to each other or not. Our goal is to outline the form of their relationship—whether they are opposed to or compatible with each other according to Aristotle's concept of opposition—in the hope that this will provide a hermeneutic framework to guide and support the subsequent interpretation of their meaning.

In what follows, then, there is first a typology of the Opposition Hypotheses. Along with an account of form, motives, and rationale for each type, there are objections peculiar to each, and textual evidence adduced in its support. We will turn then to passages that argue for compatibility, notably Aristotle's response to the Megarians in *Metaphysics* IX.

Types of Opposition Hypothesis

The Opposition Hypothesis has several types, which I call the Actualization, Privation, Modal States, Relation, and Manifestation Hypotheses of opposition. The theses are:

- i) that potency is converted, extinguished or exhausted in becoming actual (the actualization hypothesis).
- ii) that potency is privation or lack, is defined through privative negation, or cannot be potency without privation (the privation hypothesis).
- iii) that being-in-potency and being-in-actuality are different modal states which cannot exist at once (the modal states hypothesis).
- iv) that actuality happens to or acts upon potency conceived as a passive entity that undergoes actuality (relation hypothesis).
- v) that actuality and potency are opposed in the way they are present (the manifestation hypothesis).

The first three forms of the Opposition Hypothesis take potency and being-at-work to be mutually exclusive or incompatible, that is, incapable of being at the same time with respect to the same thing. The last two take them to be opposed either in place or in direction. Aristotle dismisses the idea that they are opposed through relation by arguing that agent and patient both have the same potency to be affected, that the being-at-work is in what is moved, and the *entelecheia*, or being-complete is of both agent and patient (*Phys.* III.3 202a15-22, cf. *Met.* IX.1 1046a20-27).³⁰

The Privation Hypothesis

Aquinas, Broadie, Kosman, Agamben, Heidegger, and Sachs all hold versions of the Privation Hypothesis. Waterlow (Broadie) expresses the rationale for the position, saying: "unless [potency] retains something in common with not-being (so that 'potentially P' carries some of the same message as 'not-P') it will be of no use to explain change."³¹ The hypothesis seems to be based on an argument

like this: motion is always from something and to something. The ‘from’ and ‘to’ seem to indicate opposite ends of a continuum, the way hot is the contrary of cold—the pole ‘from which’ Aristotle calls deprivation, *sterēsis*, while the pole ‘to which’ he calls form.

In *Met.* IX.8 1050b form is called *energeia*, so if *energeia* is a synonym for form, activity must be ‘that to which’ a thing proceeds. It is a small step to saying that potency might be its opposite. Now, potency *is* in fact in some sense ‘that from which’ motion proceeds, because it is the source (*archē*) of movement (Cf. *Met.* V.1, 12). If potency as a source of movement were, in fact, a starting *point* in the sense of being one pole opposite form, then it would appear to be assimilated to the pole of deprivation.

This interpretation tries to bend a simple observation about motion—that it begins in one place and ends in another—into the definition of movement, and to make it an insight into the fundamental relationship between *dunamis* and *energeia*. This causes problems for the definition of movement, first of all because it defines movement using a movement from one pole (*dunamis*) to another (*energeia*).

The refinement of this position is that movement is the being of a contradiction. Aquinas’ argument is representative of this approach: movement, he says, occurs only when a thing “is midway between pure potency and act, which is partly in potency and partly in act,” so that it is both *able to be a man* and is *not-yet a man*.³² Potency and negation or absence, on this hypothesis, are inseparable, so that movement is the being-present of something that is still absent, and for *that* reason still potent. Put contrariwise, a house in potency is essentially *not* a house *because* it remains a house in potency.

It is possible to formulate the Privation Hypothesis more concisely: among others, Broadie suggests that that potentiality is an actuality that is not, but could be.³³ If potency is an actuality in a mode of negation or not-being that is different than simply not-being (e.g. not seeing vs. being without sight), it is still defined through negation. Now, if potency was an absence or defined by an absence, e.g. the way coldness is defined by the absence of heat, then movement would be accomplished by the presence of the absent thing. Sachs expresses this paradoxical idea succinctly: movement happens when “a potentiality, which must be, at a minimum, a privation of actuality, is at the same time that actuality of which it is the lack.”³⁴ On this account, movement is a mixing or coincidence, or even an identity of being and non-being, the being-present of something absent.

Thus, the Privation Hypothesis ends up holding that motion is a kind of synthesis of being and nothingness, spurred by the being present of that which is not (yet), by the presence of an absence. The claim that movement is self-contradictory is precisely what Aristotle was trying to dismantle in arguing against Parmenides that movement exists, and it conflicts directly with Aristotle’s agreement with Parmenides that everything must either be or not be (*Physics* I.8 191b26-7, VI.5 235b15). One solution is to hold that movement is a purgation, either of potency itself or of the non-being presumed to be implied in it.

This hypothesis also significantly compromises our conceptual resources: for example, there is a deprivation (*sterēsis*) of a form, e.g. uneducated or not-seeing, but there is also a deprivation of potency, e.g. uneducable or blind. Defining potency by privation leaves us unable to distinguish between the deprivation of ‘not-seeing’ from ‘able to see’ and either of these from ‘blind.’³⁵

Furthermore, it is unclear how the hypothesis could make sense of change that leads not to a reduction or disappearance of potency, but to its strengthening. A thing can move when its *dunamis* is *increasing* instead of being removed or left behind: learning, for example, is a movement in which the ability to think increases, not a movement in which this ability is destroyed.

Physics I.7-9

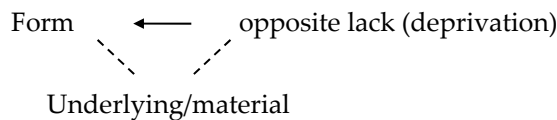
What textual support is usually offered for the Privation Hypothesis? The two most important passages for these positions are *Physics* I.7-9 and III.1 201b5-15 (discussed in the next section). But these either do not support this interpretation or actually support its opposite.

On the one hand, Aristotle argues that “every changing thing changes from something to something” (*Physics* VI.5 235b8). In his argument that movement is composite in *Physics* I.7-9, he describes the ‘to’ as form, *eidos*, and the ‘from’ as its opposite deprivation, *sterēsis* (*Physics* I.7 190b10). The deprivation is the starting point, and the form is the end point:

Form ← opposite lack (deprivation)

Now, if there were only those two terms, the Privation Hypothesis would have a foothold in the text: by associating form with *energeia* and deprivation with matter and *dunamis*, one could argue that movement is a change from one to the other, and in several places Aristotle comes close to saying that potency is incomplete.

But Aristotle distinguishes between *three* elements in any coming-to-be, and in so doing, undoes the hypothesis. A human being changes from unmusical to musical. There is (1) the ‘musical’ form, *eidos*, that comes to be, (2) its ‘unmusical’ opposite, deprivation, or lack, *sterēsis*, out of which the form comes to be, and which thereby ceases to be, and (3) the underlying thing, *hypokeimenon*, the ‘man’ staying itself through the change, *the coming-to-be thing*, which loses the deprivation and comes to have the form (*Physics* I.7 190b10). These can be schematized as follows:



Where might *dunamis* appear in the schema? If we attempt to assimilate the *energeia-dunamis* sense of being to these categorical/predicative terms, *dunamis* is associated with the underlying thing.

For, 1) Aristotle claims these distinctions allow him to agree completely with Parmenides that non-being is not, and that nothing comes to be from it (*Physics* I.8 191b12-20). He calls non-being deprivation or *sterēsis*, but non-being cannot make anything come to be. Meanwhile he defines *dunamis* as precisely the source of change (*Met.* V.12 1019a16, IX.1 1046a11-12). Therefore potency cannot be the deprivation. So, since, as the source of movement, *dunamis* cannot be the deprivation opposite a given form, it must either be the form, or be the underlying thing (*hypokeimenon*).

Now, 2) Aristotle clearly argues that potency is not an opposite: “being, potentially, opposite things belongs to something at one time, but the opposite things are incapable of belonging to it at the same time ...while the being-potential is equally both or neither” (*Met.* IX.9 1051a10-12, 15).³⁶ Thus, the potency will not belong to the form, but to the underlying thing, and the description of the underlying thing does resemble potency in this respect: the underlying thing is “not a contrary,” (*Physics* I.7 190b33, *Met.* IV.5 1009a33).

Finally, 3) the relation between potency and *energeia* anchors the relation between the underlying material and form: “material is in potency because it goes toward a form” (*Met.* IX.8 1050a14-15), “there is one thing that is material and one that is form, and the former has being as potency and the latter as being-at-work...” (*Met.* VIII.6 1045a23-26) so that “the highest level of material, *hyle*, and form, *eidos*, are one and the same thing, the former potentially, the latter actively” (*Met.* VIII.6 1045b18). Finally, “some of them [*energeiai*] are related in the manner of a motion to a potency, others in the manner of thinghood to some material,” with the underlying material clearly conceived as being-in-potency (*Met.* IX.6 1048b8). Aristotle describes the way material as potent in *Physics* I.9: the underlying material “inherently yearns for and stretches out toward [the form] by its own nature,” while “it is not possible... for [the form’s] contrary to long for it (since contraries are destructive of one another),” and “as what is by way of potency, it does not in its own right suffer destruction, but is itself necessarily indestructible and ungenerable,” unlike the *sterēsis* (I.9 192a18-31).³⁷

So potency *is* in a sense ‘that from which,’ (*from_a*) but this is a completely different sense than the starting point of deprivation is ‘that from which,’ (*from_b*) for while cold is a point on one side of a continuum, potency, which is the source of movement, is not a starting *point* at all (*Met.* V.1 1013a18-20). The error comes from missing a key distinction Aristotle is at pains to make in between different meanings of ‘from’: change does proceed *from_b* a starting point, i.e. it is characterized by lacking a form, but this starting characteristic is replaced by having a form. On the other hand, it is *from_a* being a certain kind of underlying thing, such as a woman, that a thing is capable of coming to have relevant characteristics, e.g. being an educated woman (*Physics* I.7-9 190a15-32). *From_b* is replaced, but *from_a* not only remains—its capacity determines what happens.³⁸ Potency is what makes it possible for the person to underlie the opposites “from which” and “to which.” Everything comes to be, Aristotle says, from the underlying thing and the form’s presence or absence, or, as he says, from potency and the presence or absence of being-at-work (*Physics* I.7 190b22, I.8 191b30).³⁹

In sum, at first it might seem possible to derive an opposition between *dunamis* and *energeia* by analogy with the opposition described in *Physics* I.7-9 between *eidos*, which simply is, and *sterēsis*, which simply is not, but the passage that was supposed to bolster the opposition hypothesis actually undermines it.

Nevertheless, someone might ask, is not potency inherently incomplete? For example, Aristotle says “motion seems to be, on the one hand, a certain being-at-work, and, on the other hand, <to be> incomplete. The cause is that the potent thing [*to dunaton*], of which it is <the being>-at-work, is incomplete” (*Physics* III.2 201b32-3). Similarly, he says what is moved (by an agent) “is a movable

thing in-potency, not in-completion, and the movable thing [or being-in-potency]⁴⁰ walks toward completion, and motion is the incomplete completion of the movable thing" (*Physics* VIII.5 257b6-10).⁴¹ This would seem to indicate that potency, or at least the kind proper to movement, is nevertheless defined by or inextricable from privation.

But incompleteness of potency could be interpreted in two other ways: (i) the potency itself is not yet complete, although it could be, e.g. the way one can have partly acquired the ability to speak a language, and (ii) the potency is incomplete because it lacks something necessary to exercising its potency by initiating a movement, e.g. house materials require a builder to make them into a house. The claim that deductions are not complete until they have all their assumptions (*Pr. Ana.* I.5 27a15) could support either, while the argument that eggs are complete if they have a yolk on which to feed, but incomplete if they are completed by something outside (*Gen. An.* III.2 754a1, III.1 749a) supports (ii). These passages, then, do not say that *potency* is intrinsically incomplete. They say instead that the *potent thing* (*to dunaton*), or the movable thing (*kinoumenon*) is incomplete.

Insofar as a potency is a source of motion and rest in an *other*, it requires that other to be. From the point of view of an individual being, then, having a potency implies being incomplete in *that way*, but not in the sense of being deprived, or intrinsically related to what is not.

The Actualization Hypothesis

The next group of thinkers we shall address takes the relationship between potency and being-at-work to be one of actualization. Ross and the tradition following him argues that movement is the process of actualization understood as potency being turned into actuality.⁴² Kosman, for example, characterizes the sense of potency related to movement by saying " The potentiality that we now see a motion in some sense to *be*, is consumed in the course of the actualization to which the potentiality is ultimately directed..."⁴³

It is worth distinguishing the assertions implied in the hypothesis. When there is a transition, it holds, two things are true:

- 1) that this transition is between *dunamis* and *energeia*, e.g. the potential to stand moves toward the activity of standing (cf. *Physics* VIII.5 257b6-10)
- 2) that in this transition between them, potency is changed into the being-at-work opposite to it. e.g. the potential to stand becomes the actuality of standing

This position holds that when a thing actually is, its potential is reduced or gone because it has been used up or converted into actuality. (2) is a stronger form of (1).

Like the Privation Hypothesis, the Actualization Hypothesis tries to turn the fact that motion proceeds from something to something into the form of the relationship between potency and *energeia*. The definition reads:

Making sure to distinguish between each kind of being-complete [*entelecheiai*] and being-potent [*dynamei*], the being-complete of a being-capable [*tou dynamei ontos*], as such, is movement. *Physics* III.1 201a9-11

This hypothesis makes the definition of movement incoherent by positing *energeia* as the terminus or end-point of movement. In the definition actuality (*energeia* or *entelecheia*, interchanged in the parallel passage in *Met.* XI.1065b14-16) cannot be the *end-point* at which movement ceases, because *movement is itself energeia*, or a kind thereof: “movement is *energeia* most of all” (*Met.* IX.1047a33). If *energeia/entelecheia* was the end-point of movement, movement would, absurdly, occur only at the end of a movement.

To preserve the idea that *entelecheia* is static actuality, Ross, without argument, asserts that, unlike everywhere else in the corpus, “*entelecheia* must here mean ‘actualization,’ not ‘actuality’; it is the passage to actuality that is *kinēsis*.”⁴⁴ To distort the text like this, Sachs argues, is to despair of understanding what Aristotle means.⁴⁵ So if this is inadmissible, this ‘actuality,’ whether *energeia* or *entelecheia*, will not be the end point of movement, since it *is* movement.

But if *entelecheia/energeia* still mean actualization, the definition of movement will be circular, as Kosman observed⁴⁶: anyone who holds that movement is a passing over, a realization, a transformation, or an actualization is saying that movement is a motion of some kind. Movement, then, cannot be defined as a motion *from* potency *to* being-at-work. Aristotle argues that there is no change from being-in-potency to being-at-work: it would be “wrong to say that the thinker in thinking undergoes a change, just as it would be wrong to say this of the builder when he builds” (*On the Soul* II.5, 417b8–11). There is no movement, no change, no shift from being-able-to-work to being-at-work for the actor: the potent thing needs only to act for being-at-work to come to be.⁴⁷

Is there such a change for the patient? There is such a thing, after all, as the constitution of and destruction of a potency, e.g. the ability of wood to be built can be destroyed by fire, or generated through being cut and treated. But these are not movements from potency to being-at-work or conversions of one into the other, they are changes in potency accomplished through being-at-work. Therefore the relationship between potency and being-at-work is not one of actualization.

Physics III.1

The text to which proponents of the Actualization Hypotheses usually appeal⁴⁸ is actually a single word—*ouketi*, ‘no longer,’ ‘not now’—in a sub-clause of a complex passage at *Physics* III.1 201b5-15: “but when the house should be, the buildable is *no longer/not now* [*ouketi*]” (201b11).⁴⁹ This phrase is supposed by scholars to address a problem they call the Product Puzzle just mentioned, whereby they attempt to distinguish the actuality of motion from that of the completed house. They use the word *ouketi* to argue that the buildable, understood as the ability (*dunamis*) to be built into a house, must vanish the instant the house is complete (*entelecheia*).⁵⁰

Aristotle’s purpose in this passage is at odds to this reading. To show, as Aristotle claims he is doing, that movement admits of being (*Physics* III.2 202a1-3), the question he needs to answer in this final passage on the definition of movement is this: if the being-in-potency (the statue-able, the

buildable, the visible) is not in motion on its own, when and how is it in motion?⁵¹ His aim, then, is to show that movement occurs *only* while the fulfilment of the potent thing as potent is there (*entelecheia*).⁵² On its own this indicates that potency and actuality coincide.

In light of the purpose of the passage, the actualization reading makes a significant interpretive error: to explain when a thing is moving, it looks only at the *potent object*, which is acted upon, rather than looking at the *actuality* or *completion* that happens to it.

Brentano avoids this problem in advancing a different sort of Actualization Hypothesis. He takes the aim of the passage into account, but extends it to cover potency as well: the potency to move, he argues, is constituted by the actuality that a movement is, and persists only while it is moving.⁵³

But far from aiming to show that the potential being *ceases* to be when the movement has reached its end (*telos*), completion or actuality (*entelecheia*), the passage aims to say that that movement occurs when and *only* while the actuality or completion (*entelecheia*) is of the potent thing as potent, rather than it being of that thing as something else:

“That, then, [movement] is this, and that being moved happens whenever the being-complete should be this [i.e. what it is in the definition of movement], and neither before nor after, is clear.

(1a) For each [thing] admits of either being at work or not,

(1b) as the buildable thing [does], and

(1c) the being-at-work of the buildable thing, as buildable, is building.

(1a₁) For the being-at-work of the buildable thing is either building or the house,

(1b₁) but whenever the house should be, the buildable thing is no longer;

(1c₁) but [instead] the buildable thing gets built.

It is necessary, then, for the being-at-work [of the buildable thing] to be building.

(2) And building is some movement.” (*Physics* III.1 201b5–13)⁵⁴

The claim (1) is stated, and the argument is repeated twice, with increasing detail. The argument for (1) has three parts: (1a) each thing—e.g. what is built, the buildable (*oikodomēton*), or the house—has a proper activity (*energeia*), and this activity can either be happening or not. (1b) ‘The buildable,’ (*oikodomēton*), the underlying house-in-potency, has a kind of being-a-work or activity proper to it. But its activity is not being a completed house. When the house is complete and at-work, the buildable is no longer at-work as buildable. (1c) Its activity is something else, namely to get built. There is a being-at-work of the buildable as buildable, and it is the one we call building. Finally, (2) building is a movement.

Therefore, movement occurs only when *energeia/entelecheia* is underway (*huparchein*). This is a proof for the existence of movement, for there is an *entelecheia* that cannot be described as anything other than a movement:

(Thesis) Being moved happens only when the *entelecheia* is of the potential being as potent, here the buildable thing, *oikodomēton*.

(1a) things can be at work or not be at work. This means the buildable thing, the *oikodomēton*, can either be at work or not.

(1b) What is its being-at-work? When the house is, the buildable thing is no longer, i.e. not at work as buildable, but the same thing is at work *as something else*, namely a house.

So the being-at-work of the buildable thing is not the house: what is it?

(1c) It does have something proper to itself, namely to get built.

The being-at-work of the buildable thing, then, is building.

(2) But building is not a categorical being (*ousia*, quality, quantity, etc.), but a movement.

(Conclusion) Since a buildable thing is a definite existing thing, whose being is only *entelecheia* when it is the subject of a movement, movement must exist.

You would get strange looks if you asked why the materials of a house you are living in are no longer under construction. As any homeowner knows, the reason household materials are not under construction is not because they cannot be built any more, but because people are no longer at work building them. The movement of building stops not because the potency has run out, but because people have stopped working on it. There is no need to appeal to a metaphysical idea of kamikaze potencies, as Kosman suggests, to make sense of this passage.⁵⁵

For the argument of the passage to function at all, there must be an *entelecheia* proper to this way of being-potent [*dunamei on*], which must be different from the being-potent proper to the assembled house actively holding onto its structure.⁵⁶ To describe the situation as potency turning into actuality or being consumed by actuality undermines the very distinction between the two that makes it possible for movement to be at all.

Finally, if the potency and the actuality (*energeia/entelecheia*) could *not* be at the same time, Aristotle would have failed to prove the point he explicitly aims at in the passage, namely that movement happens only when *entelecheia* is of the potent being as potent, and neither before nor after. This failure would collapse the argument for the existence of movement (*Phys.* I.8, III.2 202a1-3).

The Modal States Hypothesis

The Modal States Hypothesis holds that *dunamis* and *energeia* are two modal states or ways of being something that cannot be the case at the same time: “a man must be a house builder in one of two mutually exclusive ways: in potentiality or in actuality.”⁵⁷ Proponents include Kosman,⁵⁸ Witt,⁵⁹ and Beere.⁶⁰

Let us examine the hypothesis: if being-potent and being-at-work were modal in the normal sense (i.e. possible or real), the possibility for thinking to occur and the actual occurrence of thinking would of necessity be compatible. So, to argue that the two modes cannot be present at the same time, this hypothesis must make being-potent and being-at-work into different states or phases, or, to use Witt and Beere’s term, *stages*.⁶¹ It is this commitment to the concept of states or stages that makes it plausible for the two to be mutually exclusive. A state or stage being what is actually the case at a certain time, this hypothesis makes being-potent into a kind of actuality—an actual state of being

which excludes a different actual state of being, namely being-at-work. Thus, with a slight hesitation, Beere argues “one might well say that what is in capacity *F* is *actually F*...”⁶² Actuality is, then, what the two have in common.

This means the Modal States position preserves the incompatibility hypothesis by undermining a meaningful and interesting distinction between potency and being-at-work, namely that they are fundamentally different senses of being.

Now, the switch from one state to another would normally be a change, which, we saw, would have to have something underlying it. But the Modal Hypothesis cannot allow this conclusion. Proponents must, then, defending a version of the Actualization Hypothesis in which the potency is replaced instantly by its contradictory activity, adding that, in this case alone, the transition from one state to another is not technically a change. This seems to be special pleading.

But if potency and actuality (whether *energeia* or *entelecheia*) are mutually exclusive stages or states of being *F*, their combination in the definition of change makes movement self-contradictory: for movement to be the actuality of the potent being as potent would be for an actuality that excludes the state of being potential to be *of* such a potential being, precisely as potent.

The argument that the potential neither is nor is not is not a tenable position: “we do not abolish everything’s either being or not being” (Physics I.8 191b26-7, cf. VI.5 235b15).⁶³ A thing is, then, either at work or not, either capable or not. If they argue that by being actually hot the potential to be hot is destroyed (a conclusion Frede and Beere want to avoid), then the thing becomes *incapable* of being hot, and the refutation Aristotle uses against the Megarians follows directly, as we shall see.

Thus, the Modal Hypothesis, while it does not mix being and non-being, it seems to make its proponents posit a third category other than being and non-being. If being potentially hot is incompatible with being actually hot, what happens to the potential to be hot? It must either be destroyed, or hover between being and non-being.⁶⁴

Why can this not be the case? It seems to me that proponents of the position are relying on a false symmetry between the terms. They are appealing to something like the following experience: when the activity of working ceases, it is not there, even though it does not ‘go anywhere else,’ and apparently it comes and goes instantly. Why would this *not also* apply to the *ability* to work, or being a builder or a thinker in-potency? If it did, then we could say that beings switch between being active and being passive or potential. But this is a false equivalence, because, as it turns out, Aristotle argues against the Megarians that potency is *not* like *energeia* in precisely this respect: it must remain both when a thing is actively being *F*, and when it is not. While *energeia* can come to be and pass away, to say that *dunamis* passes away is to say that it is destroyed: not being capable, Aristotle argues against the Megarians, means being incapable. Either the potency is present or it is absent: a thing is either *dunaton* or *adunaton* (*Met.* IX.3 1046b29-1047a29). We shall return to this argument, below.

Dative Ontological Modal States

There is, however, a refinement of this argument, too, that takes the form of a two-level hypothesis. This variation on the Modal Hypothesis allows the ordinary senses of potency and being-at-work to be compatible, but argues that the words have another level of meaning, on which they are

incompatible. Beere's is the most completely worked out position of this kind. Like Witt and Frede, he argues that there are two levels of meaning for *dunamis* and *energeia*:

- 1) In the sense concerning movement, *dunamis* and *energeia* are compatible.
- 2) In the dative case, that is, in the ontological usage of the terms, being-in-potency (*to dunamei on*) and being-in-work (*to energeiai on*) are incompatible states.⁶⁵

The second, higher, level of analysis is supposed to be the ontological level: when a thing is active, it is being-in-work. When it is not at work, the claim goes, its being shifts to being-in-potency – a shift that is, as noted, not a change. Let us call this the Dative-Ontological Hypothesis.

But in formulating the Megarian position, and throughout the refutation, Aristotle freely uses the dative case for both *energeia* and *dunamis* (e.g. *Met.* IX.3 1046b29-32).⁶⁶ So the argument for the persistence of potency is meant to reject precisely the idea that what is potent/in-potency can disappear without being destroyed, which the Dative-Ontological Hypothesis asserts.

Moreover, *to dunaton* and *to dunamei on* are freely exchangeable in the definition of movement (*tou dunamei ontos* at *Phys.* III.1 201b4-6, *Met.* XI.9 1065b34, and *tou dunatou* at *Phys.* III.1 201a10-11, *Met.* XI.9 1065b14-16) as are *energeia* and *entelecheia* and their respective dative formulations (*entelecheia* and *energeia* at *Phys.* 201a10-11, *Met.* XI.9 1065b14-16, being-in-*entelecheia* or in-*energeia* at *Physics* 201a25-29, *Met.* XI.9 1065b22-4). Thus, even with such a distinction, the hypothesis of mutual exclusion still makes the definition of movement self-contradictory.

Metaphysics IX.6-7

The basis for claiming that these are incompatible is i) the passage from *Physics* III.1 discussed above, and ii) that doing so makes *Met.* IX.6-9 do what Beere thinks it ought to do, namely to argue for a further sense or use of potency that corresponds to potentiality in an ontological sense.

Beere makes this claim, and it seems can only make it, based on *Met.* IX.6-7. IX.6 opens with Aristotle saying that we are seeking a further meaning “of the potential not only as that which is of such a nature as to move some other thing or be moved by something else... but also in another way” and his strategy is to make distinctions about being-at-work to do so (*Met.* IX.6 1048a25-31). Beere argues that Aristotle here makes the distinction between the sense of movement and the sense of potentiality.

If on one level the terms are supposed to be compatible, while on the other they are supposed to be incompatible, these chapters have to establish quite a strong distinction between these levels. However, if Aristotle in fact aims to distinguish between two levels of meaning of these words that correspond to their different cases, he makes a complete mess of it by both implicitly and explicitly equating this sense with others (much as Ross and Bonitz argue he does). He starts off the examples in *Met.* IX.6 by saying:

- 1) “*energeia* is the being there, though not the way (*mē houtōs hōsper*) we say [it is there] in capacity (*dunamei*),”

Beere, quite rightly, notes that Aristotle does not quite oppose being-in-potency to being-in-*energeia* here, or even to the nominative *energeia*. For the word ‘not’ does not obviously imply opposition or incompatibility (a strong ‘not’), it implies difference (a weak ‘not’), and opposition is only one kind of difference. That the word ‘not’ is absent from the parallel passage in *Met.* V. 7 1017a30-1017b9 implies a weak, non-exclusionary ‘not’.

Beere then quotes the passage from *Physics* III.1 as evidence for the claim that they are incompatible.⁶⁷ But as we have seen, it does not provide this evidence.

But the passage in IX.6 in which Beere says Aristotle distinguishes between different cases or levels of these terms in fact combines them indiscriminately. If we also look at the argument of the passage, it does not just fail to distinguish clearly between the dative and other cases, it implies rather strongly that the cases are identified. Contextually *dunamei* is equated with *to dunaton*, and *to energeiai* with *hē energeia*, while these are variously paired with each other, *dunamei* (dative) with both *energeia* and *energeiai* (nominative and dative), and *energeia* in addition with *to dunaton* (substantive).⁶⁸ Moreover, since the aim of the passage is to distinguish potency from being-at-work through analogous cases, the analogy actually would not work unless the dative and nominative were being used more or less interchangeably.

When Aristotle sets out in the next chapter to say exactly “when each thing is in-potency, and when not,” he again appears to identify the different cases, saying: “there is something that is potent (*dunaton*), and this is healthy in-potency (*dunamei*).” At minimum, to be potent is to be potent precisely when it is in-potency (dative). *Met.* IX.7 establishes that thing is in-potency only when it is already in the condition in which it is at-work on its own being that thing.⁶⁹

Aristotle expresses this clearly elsewhere as well, for example, in his description of how the infinite is in-potency and how it is not:

it is necessary to take the being-in-potency [of the infinite] not in the same way as if something were able to be a statue, since this would also be a statue, so that in this way there would also be an infinite which would be at-work [*energeia*]” (*Physics* III.6 206a19-22).

One example of taking a being-in-potency, *dunamei*, is taking something as able, *dunaton*, to be a statue. But a potential statue, i.e. a statue in-potency (cf. *Phys.* III.1 201a29-32), will be at-work as a statue. To argue that the infinite cannot, similarly, be at work, Aristotle does *not* argue for a distinction between being *dunamei* and being *dunaton*. Instead, he specifies the F that the thing able to be or is-in-potency. the distinction is instead that the being of the infinite is not a *this*, but a coming-to-be (*Phys.* III.6 206a31-35).⁷⁰ This problem only requires this solution if the dative sense of being-in-potency is compatible with being potential. Thus, the Dative-Ontological formulation of the Modal States Hypothesis is untenable.

If to preserve the position, someone argued that the ontological senses of the words are not isomorphic with the dative case, then the textual basis for the distinction seems to vanish. Aristotle would have to mount an explicit argument both for the distinction and for the mutually-exclusive character of its terms. But apart from the use of the dative, no such argument seems to be forthcoming.

The Manifestation Hypothesis

The Manifestation Hypothesis opposes potency to actuality through the way that they are present or manifest. For Heideggerian phenomenologists, phenomena are constituted by mutually dependent movements of presencing and absencing or withdrawal. Potency is an important concept for grasping this absencing: it is bound up with non-being. Brogan argues that “it is Aristotle’s discovery of an ontological sense of *dunamis* that allows [Heidegger] to think of finitude, privation, negation, and temporality as constitutive characteristics of beings as such.”⁷¹

Heidegger argues that “The actuality of the *δύναμις* as such remains completely independent of the actuality of that of which it is capable.”⁷² But to make this argument, he opposes the two: “Here we are dealing entirely with a being that is directly opposed to the *ἔργον* and its having been produced, namely *δύναμις*.”⁷³ He accomplishes this opposition, and defines the independent mode of presence that potency has through the structure of having, *echein*: having a potency means it holds itself back and does not enact.⁷⁴ Thus, Heidegger places an interpretation of the phenomenon of having or possessing beneath his account of potency as its foundation. But he distinguishes between different senses of the presence of potency: (i) the capability on its own, holding itself back in opposition, (ii) capability released into enactment, in which there is no opposition between them, and (iii) capability as expressed in its product.⁷⁵ Through this distinction he argues that potency *qua* potency is opposed to its enactment, *energeia*, while in its enactment the two are compatible.

Potency has no presence itself; it only appears indirectly through a particular kind of possessing, namely restraint. If potency itself is opposed to actuality, how can its opposition suddenly disappear so that it is entirely converted into enactment? This is made plausible by interpreting potency as force: restraint and release are what defines these two stages of potency.

This position runs into several problems: (i) is a Privation Hypothesis combined with (ii) which is an Actualization Hypothesis. There is little to no evidence that Aristotle understood potency as pressure or force; that interpretation of *dunamis* is accomplished by Philoponus. Further, if having and releasing define potency and actuality, the two have been reduced to a common dynamic of presence. This dilutes Heidegger’s claim that potency itself was completely independent of actuality. What if Heidegger was more right than he thought, and that potency was so independent that it had a fundamentally different way of being?

The opposition Heidegger articulated becomes the theme of Agamben’s interpretation. By reading Aristotle’s account of the ability to be at work or not (*Met.* IX.8 1050b10) together with the claim that nothing will be *adynaton* when a potency is at-work (*Met.* IX.3 1047a24-6),⁷⁶ and omitting an implied word, *enantia* at (*Met.* IX.1 1046a30), he translates “all potentiality is impotentiality of the same and with respect to the same,”⁷⁷ and concludes that potency is impotency, i.e. it is its own negation. This means, he argues, that it is negated in turning into actuality, and thereby it preserves itself.⁷⁸

Founded as it is upon a contradiction, Agamben's work to maintain this account is a speculative enterprise.⁷⁹ If it is possible to give a positive account of potency, as we aim to do, that does not depend on this self-contradiction, then the need for a dialectic of self-negation dissipates.

Against Identifying or Opposing Potency and Actuality

In addition to the texts that show potency and being-at-work to be compatible, above, Aristotle's refutation of the Megarians in *Met.* IX.3-4 applies to the incompatibility hypothesis, including the Dative-Ontological formulation. This is the case even though the Megarians hold a position that is its contradiction. They do not argue that potency and being-at-work are incompatible or mutually opposed. Put otherwise, far from being obviously opposed principles, potency and *energeia* are so similar that the Megarians conflate them, and Aristotle sets out to distinguish them in *Met.* IX.3-4.

What is the problem their position poses? Aristotle argues that the Megarians go too far, *not* because they say that a thing is potent and active at once in the same respect—he says nothing to disabuse us of this notion—but because they argue that a thing can *only* be potent when it is active. As Aristotle presents them, they argue that potency and being-at-work coincide utterly, so that someone is able to sit or build *only when* she is actively sitting or building, and when she is not, she does not have the potency. This seems to leave them with no way to *distinguish* potency and *energeia*, and, Aristotle argues, this forces them to deny the existence of movement (*Metaphysics* IX.3 1047a12).

What does Aristotle argue in response? That potency can exist without *energeia*. As Witt argues in *Ways of Being*, Aristotle's refutation of the Megarians works by linking two senses of potency together necessarily, namely capacity and possibility. This argument bears on their argument because it shows that lacking the ability to build means being unable to build, and that this inability, *to adynaton*, necessarily implies impossibility.⁸⁰ Thus, Aristotle argues, if someone lacks the ability to sit, this incapacity to sit implies that sitting is impossible for him, so that if he is now standing he will never sit.

[a] if what is lacking a potency is incapable, what is not happening will be incapable of happening; [b] but of what is incapable of happening, it is false for anyone to say either that it is so or that it will be so (since that is what incapable means). (*Met.* IX.3 1047a12-13)

What lacks a potency is incapable of happening and therefore cannot be. By arguing that potency coincides with actuality, Aristotle argues that the Megarians are describing a world in which movement is impossible.⁸¹

Now, the same argument applies to the opposition hypothesis. If the lack of a potency is inability or impotence and this implies or is the same as impossibility, as Aristotle has just argued, then the refutation of the opposition hypothesis arrives immediately: if potency and *energeia* are

incompatible or opposed, it follows that when one is sitting his ability to sit will be eliminated, so that sitting would be impossible for someone precisely when *and because* he is actually sitting.

Let us put this in a more detailed way. Like the Megarians, Aristotle accepts Parmenides' argument that a thing must either be or not be (*Physics* I.8 191b28, VI.5 235b15). Nothing is partly being and partly not-being. Thus, Aristotle presents us with two choices: either 1) a thing actually sitting lacks the potency to sit (incompatibility), or 2) a thing actually sitting has the potency to sit (compatibility).

Now, the proponents of the opposition hypothesis cannot coherently argue 2) that someone actually sitting has the potency to sit at the same time as they are actually sitting, for this would be to assert what their hypothesis denies, namely that potency and actuality or activity are compatible. But if they argue 1) that someone actually sitting has no potency to sit, then it follows that sitting is impossible for her precisely at the same time as she is actually sitting. Both alternatives are incoherent. Therefore the premise must be rejected.

Unlike the refutation of the Megarians, the self-contradiction of the incompatibility hypothesis does not depend on the existence of movement for its force, but it happens that the hypothesis also makes movement impossible. Thus, it follows immediately from Aristotle's argument against the Megarians that potency and being-at-work cannot be opposed or incompatible, just as they cannot be the same.

This suggestion, that Aristotle's argument against the Megarians refutes both the identity and opposition hypotheses, is not just a tangential reading. Aristotle's conclusion from this passage is an explicit denial that potency and being-at-work are either identical or incompatible. He argues that if something is capable of sitting, and admits of sitting, if it so happens that sitting is there in it, it will in no way be incapable of it. Thus

what is potent is that which would be in no way incapable if it happened that the being-at-work of which it is said to have the potency was there (*Met.* IX.3 1047a25-7).

Put otherwise, things *must* be potent for something when they are at-work-doing that thing: that is, as Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* XII, "it appears that everything at work is capable, while not everything capable is at work" (*Met.* XII.6 1071b24, cf. *Physics* III.1 201b5-15).⁸² The *dunamis* and *energeia* for the same thing are both present at the same time.

It is clear, then, not only that Aristotle does not oppose potency and being-at-work or *entelecheia*, but also that, on his argument, they *cannot* be opposed or incompatible.

Potency, Beginning with *Metaphysics* IX.3-4

The contrary hypothesis, that *dunamis* and *energeia/entelecheia* are compatible, would hold that *dunamis* is neither an extreme opposite *energeia*, nor defined by such a logical opposite (as *sterēsis* is by form). The argument against the Megarians (*Met.* IX.3-4) points out a complex and irreducible asymmetry between *energeia* and *dunamis*:

- a) *energeia* necessarily implies potency, but the lack of *energeia* has no necessary implication for potency.
- b) However, the deprivation of potency is impossibility,
- c) This means the deprivation of potency necessarily implies a deprivation of actuality, a limitation of the actual.
- d) Thus, potency is required for actuality. It is something different than actuality that lets actuality be or not be, and on which actuality depends if it is to be.

Both actuality and capacity exert necessary claims on one another, the first by being, the other by being removed. Potency adds to what is actually the case the meaning that it *need not be* the case, that it may not necessarily or simply or always be the case. It adds that actuality does not determine a thing absolutely, that actuality is neither the only sense of being nor the entirety of being. That the removal of potency makes something *necessarily* impossible suggests that necessity also depends upon potency, in a way quite unlike our concepts of causal determinism.⁸³ Thus, a positive meaning potency has, both for actuality and in its own right, comes into view: it opens a place between the necessity implied by actuality and the necessity implied by impossibility.

On this view, potency is not the opposite of or derived from *energeia*; Witt is right to resist reducing potency to actuality.⁸⁴ Potency is something positive and distinct in character. Nevertheless, potency is not indifferent to *energeia*, but the being of the two is related: potency is the source of being-at-work, and it is completed by being at work. Thus being is *oriented*, not aimed accidentally by or at something external or externally organized, but itself containing or being a direction or sense.

Potency is neither derivative, nor an abstract concept,⁸⁵ nor a 'bare' term in Aristotle: it has a rich multiplicity of meanings.⁸⁶ For example, it is an ability to be affected and receptive of action (*Met.* IX.1 1046a10-29), but it is in another sense also the ability to be unaffected.⁸⁷ The same thing has the ability to be opposite things, e.g. healthy or sick. Both agent and patient have the same potency, and different beings are unified in a complex of potencies and their operation (*Met.* IX.1 1046a21).⁸⁸ And all of these can be said to be done well or badly (*Met.* IX.1 1046a13-19).

As "a source of change in another or in itself as other" (*Met.* IX.1 1046a11, cf. V.12 1019a16), potency lays out the criteria for the conditions in which it originates movement, since "it has the potency in the sense that it is a potency of acting... when things are in certain conditions" and these are contained in the potency (*Met.* IX.5 1048a16-21). It is most of all when it is acting: potencies are spontaneous sources of action that "will be on their own if nothing outside blocks their way," (*Met.* IX.7 1049a15).⁸⁹ Finally, potency is a sense of being: for, to be an opera singer is to have the ability to sing entire operas well, and when this capacity is at work, to be singing an opera.

Conclusions and Stakes

I have tried to test the Opposition Hypothesis by distinguishing its types and examining the texts adduced in their support. I have also argued that Aristotle's case against the identity hypothesis of the Megarians tells with equal or greater force upon the incompatibility hypothesis. The result

appears to be that the incompatibilist interpretation is false. Potency and being-at-work, then, are compatible in Aristotle.

It is, of course, possible to evade the arguments against incompatibilism by using further distinctions like epicycles. But this argument, hopefully, showed that on their own the principal incompatibilist positions are untenable, and that combining them does not help. The hypothesis that they are compatible is more difficult to grasp at first, but simpler, more powerful, and in the end more subtle.

The motivation for arguing that potency and being-at-work are opposed or incompatible seemed to be the fear that if they were not, then nothing would prevent them from being identical. They seem to have been opposed for the sake of securing this difference. If they are compatible, working out what they are will require us to use *a kind of difference that is not opposition* (cf. *Phys.* III.2 201b20-202a3). Potency and being-at-work are the same, but not identical, and they are different, but not opposed.

The purpose of doing this work is to clarify a tremendous and provocative contribution Aristotle made and can make again to the philosophical understanding of potency and actuality, and to ontology more generally, namely that “being and one start out already having kinds (*genē*)” (*Met.* IV.2 1004a4). If this argument has been successful, of the four great kinds of being—incidental, categorical, potent and at-work, and true—it has shown that the members of the third are irreducible to one another. In this they resemble categorical being, for

“different in kind means things which have different things primarily underlying them, which cannot be reduced one to the other or both to the same thing; for example, form and material are different in kind,” as are the categories (*Met.* V.28 1024b10-17).

Being, for Aristotle, is many *in many ways*. To this extent, being is irreducibly complicated, multiple, and not simply identical with itself. The manyness of being is not a *consequence* of the fact that being is all there is, as Plato had argued; multiplicity is not, as it were, *contained within* being. Multiplicity is, as it were, the ground on which ‘one’ and ‘being’ grow up.

¹ Joe Sachs, trans., *Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 1999).

² Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

³ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 177.

⁴ Jonathan Beere, *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle’s Metaphysics Theta*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 173.

⁵ For example, “Whatever is potentially, insofar as it is potentially, is actually a non-being; only the actual has being in the proper sense.” Brentano, Franz, *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*, trans. Rolf George (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 92, cf. 43.

⁶ For example, Ross, W.D., ed., *Aristotle’s Physics: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 359.

⁷ He says, with approval, “When all is said and done, he [Couloubaritsis, in “La notion de *entelekheia* dans la *Metaphysique*.”] leaves us with the conundrum of Aristotle’s needing something precise to express two senses of the opposite of *dunamis*, coining two different words—and then giving each of the words both meanings.” Blair, Reply, 97.

⁸ Michael Frede, “Aristotle’s Notion of Potentiality in *Metaphysics* Θ”, in Scaltsas, T, and D. Charles, M.L. Gill eds., *Unity, Identity, and Explanation in Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 173-193.

⁹ Cf. Menn, *Origins*, 77, 91, 92.

¹⁰ Cf. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 177.

¹¹ “Here we are dealing entirely with a being that is directly opposed to the ἔργον and its having been produced, namely δύναμις.” In the passage that follows, he goes on to say that the presence of ἔργον is producing, that is, ἐνέργεια. Martin Heidegger, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics* Θ 1-3: *The Essence and Actuality of Force*, Trans. Walter Brogan, Peter Warnek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 156-7. See also his *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 145.

¹² Sachs argues that “Aristotle’s definition of motion was made by putting together two terms, actuality and potentiality, which normally contradict each other.” Joe Sachs, “Motion and its Place in Nature” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/aris-mot.htm>, §6. See also §3.

¹³ Broadie argues for both actualization (“change is from potential to actual in some definite respect,”) and privation hypotheses (“unless it retains something in common with not-being (so that ‘potentially P’ carries some of the same message as ‘not-P’) it will be of no use to explain change.”) in Sarah Waterlow, *Nature, Change and Agency in Aristotle’s Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 109-10.

¹⁴ Coope argues that potentiality is defined by incompleteness or lack of actuality, so “bronze’s potential to be a statue is actual-*qua*-potential when it is *not yet* a statue.” Coope, *Time for Aristotle: Physics IV.10-14* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 7. Cf. also her use of “incomplete actualities” at 201b31 on p.9.

¹⁵ “The potentiality that we now see a motion in some sense to be, is consumed in the course of the actualization to which the potentiality is ultimately directed... the potentiality that is manifested in a motion gets used up in the course of that motion...” Kosman, L.A., “Substance, Being, and *Energeia*” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2 (1984), 131. In *The Activity of Being*, 61 and “Kosman, L.A. “Aristotle’s Definition of Motion,” Kosman distinguishes between a sense of potency that is opposed (deprivative potency) and a different sense (constitutive potency) that is not.

¹⁶ Frede’s compatibilism, e.g. that the materials of a house do have the capacity to be a house, but a *different house* than they actually are, is based on an incompatibilist position, namely that a thing cannot be capable of being what it actually is. Frede, 192.

¹⁷ Aristotle uses several terms to describe difference. In the book of definitions, *Met. V*, he distinguishes two: different (*heteron*) and opposite (*enantion*), but his usage implies one or two more: other (*allos* or *alloios*), and the kind of difference implied by the adverb ‘many ways,’ or ‘diverse ways’ (*pollakhōs*) that he uses to distinguish ways of being (*Met. V.10 1018a37*). He elsewhere uses different, distinct (*diaphora*), as we shall see.

¹⁸ Sachs, trans., my emphasis.

¹⁹ Since the opposite of an opposite is an opposite, there is no opposite of opposite. The word ‘agreement’ as an opposite of opposition does not quite work, since it suggests an agreement between two entities meeting on some common ground, or even between equals operating on the same terms, which means it is not neutral enough for our purposes.

²⁰ The word *symphoros*—accompanying, being a companion, carrying together—is perhaps the best fit for the sense required here, as it is not opposed to *diaphora*—difference, distinction, carrying through. The word *symbatikos*, which means tending toward agreement, comes from *sumbainō*: standing with feet together, joining together with, having to do with. This could work, except that Aristotle uses *symbebēkos*, another

cognate of *symbainō*, as the word for an inessential and incidental attribute, which tags along with a being. Other similar words in Greek express harmony (*synōdos*, singing together, echoing or being responsive to, cognate; *symphōnia*—musical concord, harmony or union of voices, concord), or suitability (*epitēdeotēs*—fitness, convenience, tendency, requirement; *prosporos*—serviceable, useful, suitable, fitting, agreeing with), but none of these express quite the sense needed here.

²¹ Sachs, trans.

²² Tredennick translates: “That which is present in the *opposite* [*to de*] sense to this is present actually... Let actuality be defined by one member of this *antithesis* [*tēs diaphoras*], and the potential by the other.” (Hugh Tredennick, trans. *Aristotle in 23 Volumes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933). My emphasis.) There is no justification here for interpreting *to de*—‘on the other hand’—as ‘opposite,’ or *diaphora*—‘distinction, difference’—as ‘antithesis.’ Ross translates: “the thing that stands in contrast [*to de*] to each of these exists actually... Let actuality be defined by one member of this antithesis [again, *tēs diaphoras*], and the potential by the other.” (W.D. Ross, trans. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (NY: Random House, 1941).) Makin’s critical translation uses ‘contrast’ for both the *to de* construction and *diaphora* in the last line, but to the extent that the prefix ‘contra-’ means ‘against or opposite,’ it risks implying the same. (Stephen Makin, trans. Aristotle, *Metaphysics Book θ* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).) Putting an argument forward in support of using words like ‘antithesis,’ ‘opposition,’ and ‘contrast,’ would be to make a substantial claim, while translations should tend toward neutrality where possible.

²³ To argue that half a line is the opposite of and mutually exclusive of the whole line strains the text, since the half is *in* the line (*en tē holē tēn hēmiseian*). One might argue that half a line can *only be* while it is *within* a whole line, i.e. that once the line is actually divided, it is no longer a *half*, but itself a *whole* line. But it does not seem possible to conclude from this that being in potency and being in *energeia* are incompatible. For 1) if the being-in-potency is for i) being-half-a-line, there will be no actuality of a half line at all, and thereby no switch from one mode to another, but if the being-in-potency is for ii) being-a-line, e.g. half the length of the other, then once it is separated out, the being-actual and being-potent would be at and the same time. Furthermore, to establish the incompatibility, 2) this exclusionary sense would need to be the same for the other examples, e.g. Hermes (a finished statue? While being carved? Before carving starts?), and contemplation (in which example there is no change from contemplating to being able to contemplate, cf. *On the Soul* II.5 417b5-10).

²⁴ Cf. *Met.* IX.3-4, *Physics* III.1 201b5-15, and *Met.* XII.6 1071b24.

²⁵ ἔστι δὲ τὸ μὲν ἐνεργεῖα μόνον τὸ δὲ δυνάμει τὸ δὲ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνεργεῖα. Cf. *Met.* XI.9 1065b5. Proponents of the Opposition Hypothesis interpret the *kai* in a very elaborate way, namely that Aristotle is asserting that there are beings whose being is exclusively *energeia*, such as the prime mover, while other beings are only in-potency (perhaps the elements, or prime matter?), while still others are sometimes one and sometimes the other, such as natural beings. Not only does Aristotle not mention such an interpretation or the worries that might motivate it, it is also a tremendous amount to import into the word ‘and,’ in a passage whose purpose (indicated in *Physics* III.2) is to articulate basics, such as how being-potent and being-at-work are related to individual categories, and then to establish that there is in fact such thing as movement after all.

²⁶ Sachs, trans., modified.

²⁷ Sachs, trans., modified. Cf. the parallel text a *Met.* XI.9 1065b34.

²⁸ For notable positions in this debate, see Blair, “Aristotle on ‘Ἐντέλεχεια: A Reply to Daniel Graham,” *American Journal of Philology*, 114 (1993), 91-97. See also Blair, “Unfortunately, It Is a Bit More Complex: Reflections on ‘Ἐνέργεια” *Ancient Philosophy* 15 (1995), 565-580. See also Stephen Menn’s argument that *energeia* originally meant ‘use’ in “The Origins of Aristotle’s Concept of ‘Ἐνέργεια: Ἐνέργεια and Δύναμις” *Ancient Philosophy* 14 (1994), 73-114. Andreas Anagnostopoulos argues that it must mean activity, in “Change in Aristotle’s *Physics* 3” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 39:4 (2010), 33-79. Jonathan Beere

argues that it means both activity and actuality in *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), especially §2 and §8. Graham, "The Etymology of Entelecheia." *American Journal of Philology* 110 (1989) 73-80. Joe Sachs, trans. *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 1999), li.

²⁹ G.A. Blair argues persuasively that *energeia* and *entelekheia* should not both be translated as 'actuality' (Blair, 1993, 1995). Beere argues against translating *energeia* at all. The English word actuality is usually used merely for emphasis, for example 'in all actuality' and 'actually.' This might incline us to think twice about using the word to translate Aristotle's richly complex and fundamentally important words for being. More literal, phrasal translations can be helpful, for example, 'being-at-work' for *energeia* is both more intuitive and richer, and challenges us to think the identity of being and working, which is true to the concept. A simple and versatile translation of *entelekheia* is much more difficult: 'being-complete,' (Graham and others) 'having its end within it' (Blair), 'being-at-work-staying-itself' (Sachs, li, cf. the pun on *endelekheia*). Unlike *energeia* and *entelekheia*, Aristotle appears in *Met.* V.12 to give a definition of *dunamis*, so we are on firmer ground translating it: 'Potency' seems best, while 'capacity' is questionable because of its relation to containment, 'dynamic' has been assimilated to a modern concept of movement, and 'power' has been distorted through its use in natural and social sciences.

³⁰ The hypothesis of opposition through Relation differs from the others in setting up a causal opposition. It is unlike the others insofar as it posits the potency and actuality as different beings that act upon one another, while the others presume the two to be in some way in the same being, thereby allowing for the possibility that they do not act upon one another. The relation hypothesis is that activity acts on potency the one might naively think form is a second thing applied to material. Aristotle rejects this position in *Met.* VIII.6 1045b15-24 (cf. VII.17 1041b11-33). But potency and being-at-work are not 'related' to one another in any of the senses Aristotle lists, for potency is not one object that is related to another, separate, and non-coincident active being. Potency is not that which is acted upon, but that *by which* something is referred to or related to another (*Met.* V.15 1021a15-26). For 1) *potency* is the source (*archē*) of movement, so far from potency being the opposite of *energeia*, it must be the *source* of *energeia*, and since it is an ability to act it cannot be identified only with the affected object, but must be identified with the agent as well, and in general, 2) potency is for both acting and for being acted upon: both agent and patient have appropriate potencies and activities (*Met.* V.12 1019a17-22, IX.1 1046a10-19, *Phys.* III.3 202a13-20, b18-23). The potent thing is the very thing that acts, and potency and actuality are certainly not in virtue of themselves individual or separate beings, nor do they act upon one another.

³¹ Waterlow, *Nature, Change and Agency in Aristotle's Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 109-10.

³² Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, books 3-8, trans. Pierre Conway (Columbus: College of St. Mary of the Springs, 1958-62), available online at: www.dhspriory.org/thomas/Physics.htm. III.2.1.285, p. 136-137. See also Sachs's analysis in "Motion and its Place in Nature" in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, §4.

³³ "Potential is potentially just what it would be if actual" (Waterlow, 110).

³⁴ Sachs, *Ibid.*, §3.

³⁵ If *dunamis* was already defined by or as lack, its negation or *sterēsis* would lead to two untenable positions: either 1) the negation of 'not-seeing' would be its opposite, namely 'seeing,' instead of 'blind,' which was demanded, or 2) the negation of 'not-seeing' would still be 'not-seeing,' making it impossible to distinguish 'able to see' from 'blind.' The privationist could appeal to time here, saying that potency is a privation, not in the simple sense, but temporally: something able to see is something that is not yet seeing. This reverses the dependence of time on movement that Aristotle argues for in *Physics* IV.

³⁶ Sachs, trans.

³⁷ Joe Sachs, trans. *Aristotle's Physics: A Guided Study* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

³⁸ Cf. Waterlow (Broadie), *Nature*, 10-12.

³⁹ Thus, the argument against Parmenides allows Aristotle to argue that movement has no essential reference to what is not (here, *sterēsis*): everything either is or is not, so deprivation does not even have a partial existence (*Physics* I.8 191b28, cf. VI.5 235b15). When considered *simply*, Aristotle says, what is not simply is not, and nothing comes to be from it. Yet nothing prevents us from considering what is not in another way, namely as part of a composite. In this way it *is* incidentally because it is the non-being of a form that is, in an underlying thing that is (*Physics* I.8 191b7). Thus, education does not spring out of nothingness, nor does the lack of education produce it: it arises from the human being who gets educated.

⁴⁰ EKP has τὸ δὲ κινούμενον instead of τὸ δὲ δυνάμει, in which case the passage does not appear to conflict with *On the Soul* II.5. But the appearance of a conflict turns out not to be a reality. *Soul* II.5 argues that it is *not* correct to say that *dunamis* goes toward (βαδίζει εἰς) *entelekheia*. When a thing begins to think or act, it is not correct to say that a thing is changing between being capable and being actively thinking or acting, but that nevertheless, because we have no words to express this event, “it is still necessary to use such words as ‘be acted upon’ and ‘be altered’ as though they were appropriate” (*Soul* II.5 418a3-4, cf. 417b1, 6-8, 13-15). He says that in a sense, learning is not an alteration, since something does change—a person loses his ignorance—but in another sense the person ‘comes to be’ precisely what it is, that is, able to know, and this does not seem to be a change (*Soul* II.5 417b14-17). Having defined movement by *energeia* / *entelekheia* and *dunamis*, we cannot turn around and explain the difference or relation between them by saying one moves toward the other.

⁴¹ The whole sentence is: Ἐτι διώρισται ὅτι κινεῖται τὸ κινητόν· τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν δυνάμει κινούμενον, οὐκ ἐντελεχεία, τὸ δὲ δυνάμει εἰς ἐντελέχειαν βαδίζει, ἔστιν δ' ἡ κίνησις ἐντελέχεια κινήτου ἀτελής.

⁴² Thus David Ross: “*entelekheia* must here mean ‘actualization,’ not ‘actuality’; it is the passage to actuality that is *kinēsis*,” Ross, *Physics*, *Ibid.*, 359. Frede usefully characterizes Ross’s position this way: “For Ross potentiality is primarily the ability of an object to pass into a new state of or by itself.” Frede, “Aristotle’s Notion of Potentiality in *Metaphysics* Θ”, in Scaltsas, T, and D. Charles, M.L. Gill eds., *Unity, Identity, and Explanation in Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 177. Brentano, similarly, says “[the state of potentiality] can obviously not exist *after* the activity, for if the activity has passed nothing remains that can be realized through this activity,” Brentano, *Ibid.*, 43. Christopher Shields uses the same gloss: “a change is a continuous actualization of a subject’s potentiality for being F insofar as it has that potentiality: indeed the process of change *is* that potentiality’s being made actual” *Aristotle* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 202.

⁴³ The passage continues: “the potentiality that is manifested in a motion gets used up in the course of that motion; thus ‘it is no longer buildable’. This is only to say again that a motion is the *transformation* of an entity by the exchange of one characteristic for another; and since the first characteristic is the occasion of the very potentiality in question, that potentiality is lost in the transformation” Aryeh Kosman, “Substance, Being, and Energeia” in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (2) 1984, 131.

⁴⁴ Ross, *Physics, text with commentary*, London, 1936, p. 359

⁴⁵ Sachs observes: “Ross’ decision that ‘*entelekheia* must here mean “actualization”’ is a desperate one, indicating a despair of understanding Aristotle out of his own mouth.” Sachs, *Ibid.*, §3.

⁴⁶ Kosman, L. A. “Aristotle’s Definition of Motion,” *Phronesis*, 14 (1969), 40-63.

⁴⁷ Cf. “Once an ability has been acquired, only the act of exercising a power is needed for motion to begin,” says Kosman, in *The Activity of Being*, 65. He is here rejecting the actualization hypothesis, however, in favor of the Privation hypothesis, but preserves the former elsewhere.

⁴⁸ For example, Kosman, *Substance, Being, and Energeia*, 131, and Beere, 173. Frede holds a nuanced version of the same position, describing the case in the following way: “Even when turned into a house, it is crucial for the continued existence of the house that the material retain its ability to be a house,” but includes a crucial qualification: “the matter, of course, can no longer be turned into *this* house, but it retains the ability to be turned into *a* house, another house.”⁴⁸ With respect to this qualification, is the relevant potency the ability to be *changed into* a house, or to *be* a house? That is, is the potency the ability to be moved, and motion

being complete of this ability to be moved? If so, the definition of motion has become circular. If Aristotle did *not* argue that the material loses its potency upon completion, this part of the case seems much easier. The challenge, then, is to account for movement without this caveat, in which case, the cessation of motion would be either a) due to the absence of the *energeia*, rather than of the *dunamis*, or b) that the activity of the potency that motion is remains once it is complete, but in a different form, i.e. the thing with a capacity to be in the corner moves when active, and while it is there is actively there in a different sense.

⁴⁹ ἀλλ' ὅταν οἰκία ᾗ, οὐκέτ' οἰκοδομητὸν ἔστιν. Hardie and Gaye translate: "But when there is a house, the buildable is no longer there." Hussey translates: "but when the house is, the buildable no longer is."

⁵⁰ A relatively complete account is given by Andreas Anagnostopoulos in "Change in Aristotle's *Physics* 3" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 39:4 (2010), 33-79. Kosman summarizes the point in *Substance, Being, and Energeia*, 127.

⁵¹ Just previous to this passage, in *Physics* III.1 201a27-b4, Aristotle argued that the underlying thing is different in being from the being-that-is-in-potency. The underlying thing is the *hupokeimenon* e.g. the bronze, the color, while the being-in-potency or potential being is *to dunamei on*, the being insofar as it is able to be something, e.g. the being just insofar as it is able-to-be-a-statue, 'the statue-able being', or the visible being. These aspects of the being are one in number, but two in being. The bronze or the color is at work being what it is, while for the statue-able or visible being to be at work as statue-able or visible requires someone to be at work building or seeing it. The being-in-potency on its own does not amount to movement, but is there even when there is no movement.

⁵² The standard reading has four main problems: 1) it adduces no evidence to support the hypothesis that the purpose of the passage is to solve the product problem, 2) it ignores the argument's broader context and purpose, which Aristotle states in introducing it, 3) as a result it makes parts of the passage pointless, and 4) as a result it misreads the words themselves, taking what is normally translated as a parenthetical remark and making it the core of the passage.

⁵³ "While the builder builds, that with which he builds is in a state of potentiality which is constituted by actuality, but the building material as such was only a potentiality with respect to house construction and the edifice. Either the actuality of constructing or the actuality of the edifice must therefore be that which constitutes that higher state of potentiality. But not that of the edifice, for the edifice as such is no longer a potentiality with respect to the builder and this building activity of his; hence, the actuality in question must be the building activity (*oikodomesis*), and this is indeed a movement (*kinesis*)... If that which is potentially a building is constituted as such through an actuality, then it is presently in the process of being erected, and just this is house construction, hence movement." Brentano, 44. One can accept this argument without also believing that i) the *capacity* is intermediate between a privation and a form or that ii) the capacity is a capacity *for moving*. For (#i) if a thing is capable of opposites, the capacity is not an *intermediate stage*, but the condition that makes both possible, which is present in both. Then, (#ii) for a thing to be in movement, it is not necessary for there to be a capacity *for moving*, only that the capacity to be a house, i.e. the house-in-potency is constituted by a *builder*, i.e. by a source of change in an other, by *dunamis*. Once the builder has stopped building, then the capacity to be a house is 'in' the materials without outside help or hindrance, i.e. they have the form of house, which means the source of change and resting (the *dunamis*) is at work in them.

⁵⁴ The only substantial difference between this and *Met.* XI.9 1065b33-1066a8 is that the latter has "(1b) such as the buildable thing *as buildable*," and "for the being-at-work is either *this, the [activity of] building, or a house*."

⁵⁵ L.A. Kosman, "Substance, Being, and *Energeia*" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2 (1984), 127.

⁵⁶ Put otherwise, the materials of a house *work* to hold together as a house (*Met.* VI.17 1041b4-8), but the materials as potent in such a way that they are buildable have a different kind of being at work proper to them.

⁵⁷ Christopher Frey, "From Blood to Flesh: Homonymy, Unity, and Ways of Being in Aristotle" *Ancient Philosophy* 35 (2015), 375-394.

⁵⁸ L.A. Kosman, "Substance, Being, and *Energeia*" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2 (1984).

⁵⁹ Charlotte Witt, *Ways of Being: Potentiality and Actuality in Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁶⁰ Jonathan Beere, *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), cf. especially 173-4.

⁶¹ Beere, 250. Charlotte Witt, "Hylomorphism in Aristotle" *Apeiron* (1989) 22:4, 149.

⁶² The qualification is that this is fine, "so long as that is taken to mean that what is in capacity *F* is already *F*, and is not merely such that it could become *F*" Beere, 217.

⁶³ *Dunamis* and *energeia* are not exceptions to this rule: Aristotle brings them up in the sentence immediately following this. Moreover, he says that "neither is it possible that there be anything between contradictories, but about any one thing whatever, it is necessary either to affirm or deny one of them" (*Met. IV.7* 1011b23). Sachs, trans.

⁶⁴ Beere resists this idea for the potency for movement, saying: "this is not to say that, in the production of an *F* from something that has the power to be made into an *F*, the thing's power to be made into an *F* is thereby destroyed." Beere, *Ibid.*, 173. It is notable that he conceives a power as a property or distinct item in or belonging to a being. This eliminates the distinction between the categorical sense of being and the 'energetic' (i.e. the sense of potency and *energeia*) by making potencies indistinguishable from categorical attributes.

⁶⁵ Beere, 173.

⁶⁶ εἰσὶ δὲ τινες οἳ φασιν, οἷον οἱ Μεγαρικοί, ὅταν ἐνεργῆ μόνον δύνασθαι, ὅταν δὲ μὴ ἐνεργῆ οὐ δύνασθαι, οἷον τὸν μὴ οἰκοδομοῦντα οὐ δύνασθαι οἰκοδομεῖν, ἀλλὰ τὸν οἰκοδομοῦντα ὅταν οἰκοδομῆ: ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων.

⁶⁷ Beere, 173.

⁶⁸ The only dative pair in the passage asserts that (1) X and Y are there in capacity (*dunamei*), and "[all these things are around] *in energeia* too." Far from establishing Beere's hypothesis, it merely says that things are around in both ways, and since there is no explicit claim to incompatibility, the sentence indicates an easy compatibility of the terms. Aristotle concludes the examples by saying (2) "within this distinction [of pairs], let the *energeia* be marked off as one part, what is able (*to dunaton*) as the other." Here *hē energeia* (nominative) is paired with *to dunaton* (substantive), instead of the dative *dunamei* or the compound phrase *to dunamei on*.

⁶⁹ Something is *dunamei* when there is nothing obstructing it, that is, when it is ready and able to be (and be at work) on its own (*Met. IX.7* 1049b13-18). In other words, while a thing still needs an external origin, that being is not self-sufficient or complete. Something is (properly) *dunamei* only when its potency is complete. This is when the potency decides what sort of being it is, i.e. the ontological sense of the word.

⁷⁰ "So being is meant in many ways, and the infinite must not be taken as a *this*, such as a man or a house, but in the way that day or the games are meant, to which being belongs not as to a thing, but in a constant coming into being and passing away..."

⁷¹ Walter Brogan, *Heidegger and Aristotle* (Albany: SUNY, 2005), 112.

⁷² Martin Heidegger, *Aristotle's Metaphysics Θ 1-3: The Essence and Actuality of Force*, Trans. Walter Brogan, Peter Warnek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 161.

⁷³ Heidegger, *Metaphysics*, 156. The presence of *ergon* is the activity of *producing*, that is, *energeia*. Brogan observes that for Heidegger "*dunamis* as affirming is always also denying, *adunaton*, so that this sense of *dunamis* involves an *enantion*, a contrariness or opposition" (Brogan 2005, 121). See also his *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 145.

⁷⁴ "Aristotle sees the presence of δύναμις as such in ἔχειν... Δύναμις ἔχειν means that something which is capable is capable in that it "has" a capability; it holds itself in this capability and holds itself back with this

capability—and thereby precisely does not enact. This holding itself back now shows itself to us already more clearly as a way of being... Here we have to gather all this from the Greek word ἔχειν.” Heidegger, *Metaphysics*, 156-7.

⁷⁵ Heidegger, *Metaphysics*, 162

⁷⁶ ἔστι δὲ δυνατόν τοῦτο ᾧ ἐὰν ὑπάρξῃ ἡ ἐνέργεια οὗ λέγεται ἔχειν τὴν δύναμιν, οὐθὲν ἔσται ἀδύνατον (*Met.* IX.3 1047a24-5). It seems tautological to say that what is potent is what is not impotent. Agamben, however, interprets potency as inseparable from, and therefore essentially the ability not to act, that is, potency is impotency. Only for this reason, he argues, does potency remain when it is active, for potency must hold itself back from full activity, if it is to act again in the future. Therefore his account is that potency (which is impotency) negates itself in becoming active, and thereby becomes potent precisely in ceasing to be what it is.

⁷⁷ In its originary structure, *dynamis*, potentiality, maintains itself in relation to its own privation, its own *sterēsis*, its own non-Being. This relation constitutes the essence of potentiality. To be potential means: to be one’s own lack, *to be in relation to one’s own incapacity*. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality *are capable of their own impotentiality*; and only in this way do they become potential. They *can be* because they are in relation to their own non-Being...” Agamben, 182.

⁷⁸ “What Aristotle then says is: *if a potentiality to not-be originally belongs to all potentiality, then there is truly potentiality only where the potentiality to not-be does not lag behind actuality but passes fully into it as such*. This does not mean that it disappears in actuality; on the contrary, it *preserves itself* as such in actuality. What is truly potential is thus what has exhausted all its impotentiality in bringing it wholly into the act as such... [this is] contrary to the traditional idea of potentiality that is annulled in actuality...” Agamben, 182-4.

⁷⁹ Agamben calls the account of self-negation the “mystical Aristotle” Agamben, 184.

⁸⁰ Though in what follows I shall use these words to translate *dunamis*, it is important to remember that the argument gains considerable intuitive force from these being the same word. Witt defends the viability of the distinction by appealing to Aristotle’s own distinction in *Metaphysics* V.12 between what is not necessarily true, what is true, and what admits of being true (1019b34). She also points out that Aristotle links potency with possibility in *On Interpretation* 12, and *On the Heavens* I.12. See Witt, *Ways*, 125 n.3. See also Cynthia Freeland’s “Aristotle on Possibilities and Capacities,” *Ancient Philosophy* 6 (1986), Simo Knuutila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1993), chapter 1.

⁸¹ On the level of an intuitive claim, compatibility has much more force, for it seems that a person who is pushing a bucket is most obviously capable of pushing when he is actually doing so, and that it is not clear that someone is capable of pushing when he is not. It is precisely this that lends plausibility to the Megarian position. Yet, if this is the case, then the objection is all the more implausible. For an account of the plausibility of their position, see Stephen Makin, “Megarian Possibilities” *Philosophical Studies* 83 (1996): 253-276. Charlotte Witt defends their position up to a point as well, and has reservations about whether Aristotle would agree that they hold the preposterous conclusions Makin ascribes to them, in Witt, *Ibid.*, 125 n.2. Much like the two-level hypothesis discussed above, someone wishing to argue that potency and actuality are opposite or incompatible might try to parry by distinguishing a ‘metaphysical’ sense of potency (translated either ‘potentiality’ or ‘possibility’) from the ‘physical’ sense of potency (translated by ‘power’ or ‘force’), that sense in the definition of movement is the latter, and that it is opposed to activity.

⁸² Dialogically this is a difficult passage, and one might try to object that Aristotle withdraws or controverts just what I quote here, on the basis that Aristotle presents the position as leading to an impasse. But the passage that follows does not controvert the idea that potency and being-at-work are at the same time—in fact, it dramatically affirms that *both* must necessarily be-at-work *always*. What Aristotle corrects is precisely *not* that what is at work is also always potent—this remains affirmed—but instead the false conclusion that this implies that potency is prior. Again, the statement that what is at work is also capable remains, and only the question of priority is corrected. The concern is articulated very clearly, as follows: “And yet there is an impasse: for it seems that, while everything that is at work is capable of it, not everything that is

capable of it is at work, so that the potency would take precedence. But surely if this were so there would be no beings at all, since it is possible to be capable of being and not yet be." He continues, accepting the priority argument, and also the coexistence of potency and being-at-work: "now to suppose that potency takes precedence over being-at-work is in a sense right but in a sense not right (and in what sense has been said [in *Met.* IX.8-9])..." Thus, he argues, something other than activity, i.e. potency, the potent thing, must also exist and *always be at work in varying ways* "so... it is necessary for something to persist always at work in the same way. But if there is going to be generation and destruction, there must be something else [i.e. which has potency] that is always at work in different ways. Therefore it must necessarily be at work in a certain way in virtue of itself, and in another way in virtue of something else, in virtue, that is, of... the first [mover]... and obviously both together are responsible for what happens in different ways always. And without a doubt motions are this way.... And if it is *not* this way things will come from night and from "all things together" and from not-being..." *Met.* XII.6 1071b24-1072a21. Sachs, trans.

⁸³ Cf. Waterlow (Broadie), *Nature*.

⁸⁴ Witt, *Ways of Being*, 61.

⁸⁵ *Potency is not a thing apart from the person who is healthy*, or, which is the same thing, from her actively being healthy. Potency is not something other than the person at-work: 1) that very thing which is able to be healthy is also at the same time and *for that very reason* able to be sick, 2) that thing with this ability can only be one of these at any one time, either healthy or sick, or something in-between, 3) the thing with this ability *must* be one of these. *Met.* IX.9 1051a4-16.

⁸⁶ Cf. Mark Sentesey, *Motion and Being in Aristotle*. Forthcoming from Northwestern University Press, ch. 6, and "On the Many Senses of Potency According to Aristotle" in *Sources of Desire: Essays on Aristotle's Theoretical Works*, ed. James Oldfield, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2012, 63-93. Charlton, "Aristotelian Powers," *Phronesis* 32 (1987), 277-289. Frede, Michael, "Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality in *Metaphysics* Θ", in Scaltsas, T, and D. Charles, M.L. Gill eds., *Unity, Identity, and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 173-193. Freeland, Cynthia, "Aristotle on Possibilities and Capacities," *Ancient Philosophy* 6 (1986). Code, Alan, "Changes, Powers and Potentialities in Aristotle" in *Desire, Identity, and Existence: Essays in Honor of T.M. Penner*, ed. Naomi Reshotko (Kelowna: Academic Printing & Publishing, 2003), 253-271.

⁸⁷ "an active condition of being *unaffected* for the worse or for destruction by the action of a source of change, either some other thing or itself as other" (*Met.* IX.1 1046a13-14), and "things are broken and crushed and bent and in general destroyed not by being potent but by being impotent and falling short of something" (*Met.* V.12 1019a28-31). Sachs, trans.

⁸⁸ "something is potential both by having the same potency to be acted upon, and by another <having the potency to be acted upon> by it" (*Met.* IX.1 1046a21).

⁸⁹ In *Physics* VIII.4 Aristotle uses fire and lightness as examples: "by the time [a thing] is light, it will immediately be at work, unless something prevents it." καὶ ἤδη κοῦφον, καὶ ἐνεργήσῃ γ' εὐθύς. Here "being light" is the being-in-potency. (*Physics* VIII.4 255b6-9). Cf. *Met.* VII.7 1048b35-1049a18.