

The road from Thebes to Athens

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ἡ δὲ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἐνέργεια καὶ τῆς αἰσθη-
σεως ἡ αὐτὴ μὲν ἐστὶ καὶ μία, τὸ δ' εἶναι
οὐ τὸ αὐτὸ αὐταῖς· λέγω δ' οἷον ὁ φῶφος
ὁ κατ'ἐνέργειαν καὶ ἡ ἀκοὴ ἡ κατ' ἐνέρ-
γειαν· ἔστι γὰρ ἀκοὴν ἔχοντα μὴ ἀκούειν,
καὶ τὸ ἔχον φῶφον οὐκ αἰεὶ ψοφεῖ, ὅταν δ'
ἐνεργῆ τὸ δυνάμενον ἀκούειν καὶ ψοφῆ τὸ
δυνάμενον ψοφεῖν, τότε ἡ κατ' ἐνέργειαν
ἀκοὴ ἅμα γίνεται καὶ ὁ κατ' ἐνέργειαν φῶ-
φος, ὡν εἴπειεν ἂν τις τὸ μὲν εἶναι ἀκουσιν
τὸ δὲ ψοφῆσιν.

εἰ δὲ ἔστιν ἡ κίνησις (καὶ ἡ ποίησις καὶ
τὸ πάθος) ἐν τῷ κινουμένῳ, ἀνάγκη καὶ
τὸν ψῶφον καὶ τὴν ἀκοὴν τὴν κατ' ἐνέρ-
γειαν ἐν τῷ κατὰ δυνάμιν εἶναι· ἡ γὰρ
τοῦ ποιητικοῦ καὶ κινητικοῦ ἐνέργεια ἐν
τῷ πάσχοντι ἐγγίνεται· διὸ οὐκ ἀνάγκη
τὸ κινῶν κινεῖσθαι· ἡ μὲν οὖν τοῦ ψοφη-
τικοῦ ἐνέργειά ἐστὶ φῶφος ἢ ψοφῆσις, ἡ
δὲ τοῦ ἀκουστικοῦ ἀκοὴ ἢ ἀκουσις· διττὸν
γὰρ ἡ ἀκοὴ, καὶ διττὸν ὁ φῶφος· ὁ δ' αὐ-
τὸς λόγος καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθήσεων
καὶ αἰσθητῶν. ὥσπερ γὰρ καὶ ἡ ποίησις
καὶ ἡ πάθησις ἐν τῷ πάσχοντι ἀλλ' οὐκ
ἐν τῷ ποιῶντι, οὕτω καὶ ἡ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ
ἐνέργεια καὶ ἡ τοῦ αἰσθητικοῦ ἐν τῷ αἰ-
σθητικῷ· ἀλλ' ἐπ' ἐνίων μὲν ὠνόμασται,
οἷον ἡ ψοφῆσις καὶ ἡ ἀκουσις, ἐπ' ἐνίων δ'
ἀνόνομον θάτερον· ὅρασις γὰρ λέγεται ἡ
τῆς ὀψεως ἐνέργεια, ἡ δὲ τοῦ χρώματος
ἀνόνομος, καὶ γεῦσις ἡ τοῦ γευστικοῦ, ἡ
δὲ τοῦ χυμοῦ ἀνόνομος, ἐπεὶ δὲ μία μὲν
ἐστὶν ἐνέργεια ἡ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἰ-
σθητικοῦ, τὸ δ' εἶναι ἕτερον, ἀνάγκη ἅμα
φθίρεισθαι καὶ σώζεσθαι τὴν οὕτω λε-
γομένην ἀκοὴν καὶ ψῶφον, καὶ χυμὸν δὴ
καὶ γεῦσιν, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὁμοίως· τὰ δὲ
κατὰ δυνάμιν λεγόμενα οὐκ ἀνάγκη· ἀλλ'
οἱ πρότερον φυσιολόγοι τοῦτο οὐ καλῶς
ἔλεγον, οὐθὲν οἰόμενοι οὔτε λευκὸν οὔτε
μέλαν εἶναι ἄνευ ὀψεως, οὐδὲ χυμὸν ἄνευ
γεύσεως, τῆ μὲν γὰρ ἔλεγον ὀρθῶς, τῆ δ'
οὐκ ὀρ- θῶς· διχῶς γὰρ λεγομένης τῆς αἰ-
σθησεως καὶ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ, τῶν μὲν κατὰ
δυνάμιν τῶν δὲ κατ' ἐνέργειαν, ἐπὶ τού-
των μὲν συμβαίνει τὸ λεχθῆναι, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν
ἐτέρων οὐ συμβαίνει· ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνοι ἀπλῶς
ἔλεγον περὶ τῶν λεγομένων οὐχ ἀπλῶς.
(DA III.2 425b25 – 426a26)

The activity of the sensible object and
that of the sense is one and the same ac-
tivity, and yet the distinction between
their being remains. Take as illustra-
tion actual sound and actual hearing: a
man may have hearing and yet not be
hearing, and that which has a sound is
not always sounding. But when that
which can hear is actively hearing and
that which can sound is sounding, then
the actual hearing and the actual sound
come about at the same time (these one
might call respectively harkening and
sounding).

If it is true that the movement, both the
acting and the being acted upon, is to be
found in that which is acted upon, both
the sound and the hearing so far as it
is actual must be found in that which
has the faculty of hearing; for it is in
the passive factor that the actuality of
the active or motive factor is realized;
that is why that which causes move-
ment may be at rest. Now the actuality
of that which can sound is just sound
or sounding, and the actuality of that
which can hear is hearing or hearken-
ing; 'sound' and 'hearing' are both am-
biguous. The same account applies to
the other senses and their objects. For
as the-acting-and-being-acted-upon is
to be found in the passive, not in the ac-
tive factor, so also the actuality of the
sensible object and that of the sensitive
subject are both realized in the latter.
But while in some cases each aspect of
the total actuality has a distinct name,
e.g. sounding and hearkening, in some
one or other is nameless, e.g. the actual-
ity of sight is called seeing, but the ac-
tuality of colour has no name: the ac-
tuality of the faculty of taste is called
tasting, but the actuality of flavour has
no name. Since the actualities of the
sensible object and of the sensitive faculty
are one actuality in spite of the differ-
ence between their modes of being, ac-
tual hearing and actual sounding appear
and disappear from existence at one and
the same moment, and so actual savour
and actual tasting, &c., while as poten-
tialities one of them may exist without
the other. The earlier students of nature
were mistaken in their view that with-
out sight there was no white or black,
without taste no savour. This state-
ment of theirs is partly true, partly false:
'sense' and 'the sensible object' are am-
biguous terms, i.e. may denote either
potentialities or actualities: the state-
ment is true of the latter, false of the for-
mer. This ambiguity they wholly failed
to notice. (transl. Smith)

The actuality of the object of perception
and of the senses are one and the same,
but their being is different. I mean, for
example, actual sound and actual hear-
ing. For it is possible for someone who
has hearing not to be hearing; and what
has sound is not always making a sound.
But whenever what is able to hear is in
actuality hearing and whatever is able
to sound is sounding, then actual hear-
ing and actual sounding come about si-
multaneously. One could say of these
that the one is hearing and the other
sounding.

If, then, the motion (both acting and
being acted upon) is in the thing which
is being acted upon, it is necessary that
both the sound and the actual hearing
be in something potential. For the ac-
tuality of what produces and causes
motion comes about in the thing which
is affected-for which reason it is not ne-
cessary that what initiates motion be in
motion. Hence, the actuality of what
is capable of making a sound is sound
or sounding, and the actuality of what
is capable of hearing is hearing or listen-
ing. For hearing is twofold; and sound
is twofold.

The same account also applies to the
other senses and sensible objects. For
just as both acting and being affected
are in what is affected, but not in what
is acting, so also is the actuality of the
sensible object and of what is capable
of perceiving in what is capable of per-
ceiving. But while in some cases each
has a name, e.g. sounding and hearing,
in others one or the other is without a
name. For the actuality of sight is called
seeing, while the actuality of colour has
no name, and tasting is the actuality of
what is able to taste, while the actuality
of flavour has no name.

And since there is one actuality of the
sensible object and what is capable of
perceiving, though their being is differ-
ent, it is necessary that what is spoken
of in this way as hearing and sounding
perish or be preserved at the same time,
and so also for flavour and tasting, and
similarly for the other cases. But this is
not necessary for those things spoken
of as potential.

Still, the earlier natural philosophers
did not speak well on this point, be-
cause they supposed that nothing is
white or black without sight, nor is
there flavour without tasting. For
though they were in one way right,
in another way they were not right,
since both perception and perceptible
objects are spoken of in two ways, in
some cases as potential and in others
as actual. What was said by them ap-
plies to the latter, but does not apply
to the former. They, however, spoke
without qualification about matters which
are spoken of only with qualification.
(Shields, 2016, 52–53)

Aristotle introduces correlative potentialities in *Physics* III.3 in terms of having an identical actualization:

ἀλλ' ἄλογον δύο ἐτέρων τῷ εἶδει τὴν αὐτὴν καὶ μίαν εἶναι ἐνέργειαν· καὶ ἔσται, εἴπερ ἡ διδάξις καὶ ἡ μάθησις τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ ἡ ποίησις καὶ ἡ πάθησις, καὶ τὸ διδάσκειν τῷ μανθάνειν τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ ποιεῖν τῷ πάσχειν, ὥστε τὸν διδάσκοντα ἀνάγκη ἔσται πάντα μανθάνειν καὶ τὸν ποιῶντα πάσχειν.

ἢ οὐτε τὸ τὴν ἄλλου ἐνέργειαν ἐν ἐτέρῳ εἶναι ἄτοπον (ἔστι γὰρ ἡ διδάξις ἐνέργεια τοῦ διδασκαλικοῦ, ἐν τινι μέντοι, καὶ οὐκ ἀποτετμημένη, ἀλλὰ τοῦδε ἐν τῷδε), οὐτε μίαν δυοῖν κωλύει οὐθὲν τὴν αὐτὴν εἶναι (μὴ ὡς τῷ εἶναι τὸ αὐτό, ἀλλ' ὡς ὑπάρχει τὸ δυνάμει δὴ πρὸς τὸ ἐνεργεῖν), οὐτ' ἀνάγκη τὸν διδάσκοντα μανθάνειν, οὐδ' εἰ τὸ ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν τὸ αὐτό ἐστίν, μὴ μέντοι ὥστε τὸν λόγον εἶναι ἕνα τὸν <τὸ> τί ἦν εἶναι λέγοντα, οἷον ὡς λῶπιον καὶ ἱμάτιον, ἀλλ' ὡς ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ Θήβην ἂν Ἀθήνας καὶ ἡ Ἀθήνην εἰς Θήβας, ὡς περ εἴρηται καὶ πρότερον; οὐ γὰρ ταῦτα πάντα ὑπάρχει τοῖς ὁπωσοῦν τοῖς αὐτοῖς, ἀλλὰ μόνον οἷς τὸ εἶναι τὸ αὐτό.

But (someone will say) it is contrary to reason to suppose that there should be one identical actualization of two things which are different in kind. Yet there will be, if teaching and learning are the same, and agency and patiency. To teach will be the same as to learn, and to act the same as to be acted on – the teacher will necessarily be learning everything that he teaches, and the agent will be acted on.

It is not absurd that the actualization of one thing should be in another. Teaching is the activity of a person who can teach, yet the operation is performed in something – it is not cut adrift from a subject, but is of one thing in another. There is nothing to prevent two things having one and the same actualization (not the same in being, but related as the potential is to the actual). Nor is it necessary that the teacher should learn, even if to act and to be acted on are one and the same, provided they are not the same in respect of the account which states their essence (as raiment and dress), but are the same in the sense in which the road from Thebes to Athens and the road from Athens to Thebes are the same, as has been explained above. For it is not things which are in any way the same that have all their attributes the same, but only those to be which is the same.

But it is unreasonable that there should be one and the same operation of two things different in form. And if teaching and learning are the same thing, and acting-upon and being-acted-upon, then to teach will be the same thing as to learn, and to act upon as to be acted upon, so that it will be necessary that every teacher learns and everyone that acts upon is acted upon.

Or can it be that: (a) it is *not* absurd that the operation of one thing should be in another (for teaching is the operation of that which is disposed to teach, but it is *on* something, and not cut off, but is of this on this); and (b) there is, also, nothing to prevent the operation of two things being one and the same, not as the same in being, but in the way that what potentially is is related to what is operating, and (c) it is also not necessary that the teacher learns, even if to act upon and to be acted upon are the same thing, provided they are not the same in the sense that the definition that gives the 'what it was to be' is one (as with 'raiment' and 'clothing'), but in the sense in which the road from Thebes to Athens is the same as the road from Athens to Thebes, as was said earlier? For it is not the case that all the same things are present in things that are the same in any sense whatever, but only of those of which the being is the same.

The difference in definition of two reciprocal potentialities is then in turn explained by their direction, their unity by their being aspects of the same *kinēsis*:

οὐ μὴν ἀλλ' οὐδ' εἰ ἡ διδάξις τῇ μαθήσει τὸ αὐτό, καὶ τὸ μανθάνειν τῷ διδάσκειν, ὡς περ οὐδ' εἰ ἡ διάστασις μία τῶν διεστηκῶτων, καὶ τὸ διεσταθῆαι ἐνθένθε ἐκεῖσε κάκειθεν δεῦρο ἐν καὶ τὸ αὐτό. ὅλως δ' εἰπεῖν οὐδ' ἡ διδάξις τῇ μαθήσει οὐδ' ἡ ποίησις τῇ παθήσει τὸ αὐτὸ κυρίως, ἀλλ' ὃ ὑπάρχει ταῦτα, ἡ κίνησις· τὸ γὰρ τοῦδε ἐν τῷδε καὶ τὸ τοῦδε ὑπὸ τοῦδε ἐνέργειαν εἶναι ἕτερον τῷ λόγῳ. (202a36-b22)

But indeed it by no means follows from the fact that teaching is the same as learning, that to learn is the same as to teach, any more than it follows from the fact that there is one distance between two things which are at a distance from each other, that being here at a distance from there and being there at a distance from here are one and the same. To generalize, teaching is not the same as learning, or agency as patiency, in the full sense, though they belong to the same subject, the motion; for the actualization of this in that and the actualization of that through the action of this differ in definition. (Aristotle, 2014, 763)

And, in any case, even if teaching is the same thing as learning, to learn is not [therefore] the same thing as to teach, just as, even if two things separated by an interval have one interval between them, to be distant in the direction from *A* to *B* is not one and the same things as to be distant in the direction from *B* to *A*. But speaking generally, the teaching is not the same, in the primary sense, as the learning, nor the acting-upon as the being-acted-upon, but that in which these things are present, namely the change, [is the same as being acted upon]; for to be the operation of *A* in *B*, and to be the operation of *B* by the agency of *A*, are different in definition. (Aristotle, 1993, 5-6)

We also find this sameness-in-number/difference-in-account account of correlative powers in the *Metaphysics*. In *Met. Θ.1*, Aristotle asserts that the active capacity to ϕ and the passive capacity to be ϕ -ed are in a way a single capacity (1046a19-20) and in a way distinct capacities (1046a22). They are the same because (i) their exercise is the same and (ii) they produce the same change, i.e. produce the same change (ii) in the same way (i). The change is in the patient; both the active and the passive powers are powers for that change. They are also different, and thus distinct capacities, for they are in different locations: this in turn is itself explained in terms of what the powers can explain: the passive power is in the thing that undergoes the change and can help explain why it undergoes the change, but cannot explain why the active thing also undergoes a change (though it does, to some extent, explain what change it undergoes).

This, I think, may also explain why natural things both have an inner principle of change but are not self-changing in the sense in which *Phys. VIII* says that nothing changes itself. In *De An. II 417b1-16*, Aristotle makes the claim that a man who passes from (i) having knowledge (of what a dog is) but not exercising it to (ii) exercising this knowledge (encountering a dog, she knows that this is a dog) does not *thereby* undergo change. The lack of opportunity for the exercise of the knowledge, i.e. the fact that the perceptual situation of the knower does not present her with a dog, is an impediment, and the impediment is an impediment for the *manifestation* of the change, not for the change itself.

That the change is already ongoing when the reciprocal power is activated is built into its very definition. Why is change the actuality of a potentiality *as* potentiality and why is it not the actuality of a potentiality *as* actuality? Aristotle illustrates the importance of the qualification with an example:

ὅτι δὲ τοῦτο ἔστιν ἡ κίνησις, ἐντεῦθεν δὴ-
λον. ὅταν γὰρ τὸ οἰκοδομητόν, ἢ τοιοῦτον
αὐτὸ λέγομεν εἶναι, ἐντελεχεία ἤ, οἰκο-
δομεῖται, καὶ ἔστιν τοῦτο οἰκοδόμησις.
(201a15-18)

That this is what motion is, is clear from what follows: when what is buildable, in so far as we call it such, is in fulfilment, it is being built, and that is building. (Aristotle, 2014, 758)

That this is change is clear from the following: when that which is buildable is in actuality, in the respect in which we call it such, it is being built, and this is the process of building..(Aristotle, 1993, 2)

The buildable is the house we plan to build today on this site here out of these bricks. Its becoming actual is the process of its being built; but it is only the buildable as such which already *is* actual in this process; the bricks lying around on the construction site were actual even before the process started and the house – the buildable as actual – will be actual only when the process is finished. During the process, however, we have something in between: not only is the buildable in potentiality (that was before the process), but it is now in actuality as well; it is in actuality as potentiality, as the buildable, and not yet as actuality, as the house, because we have not yet finished building it.

With respect to the metaphysics of powers, we thus have a very interesting three-fold distinction: **potentiality only** The house is buildable (the materials are there, the plan has been made), but we have not yet started.

potentiality and actuality The house is buildable and is being built; its potentiality is activated but the actualisation of the house is still *qua* buildable, not yet *qua* built.

actuality only The house is built, the potentiality realised: while it was buildable, it is no longer buildable; rather it is built.

As I understand Aristotle, he identifies change with the process, the actuality of the potentiality as potentiality, the being activated but not yet having been realised of the potentiality. He gives another example:

...ἡ δὲ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος <ἐντελέχεια>, ὅταν ἐντελεχεία ὄν ἐνεργῆ οὐχ ἢ αὐτὸ ἀλλ' ἢ κινήτόν, κινήσις ἔστιν. λέγω δὲ τὸ ἢ ὡδί. ἔστι γὰρ ὁ χαλκὸς δυνάμει ἀνδριάς, ἀλλ' ἔμως οὐχ ἢ τοῦ χαλκοῦ ἐντελέχεια, ἢ χαλκός, κινήσις ἔστιν. οὐ γὰρ τὸ αὐτὸ τὸ χαλκῷ εἶναι καὶ δυνάμει τινί [κινήτῳ], ἐπεὶ εἰ ταῦτόν ἦν ἀπλῶς καὶ κατὰ τὸν λόγον, ἦν ἂν ἡ τοῦ χαλκοῦ, ἢ χαλκός, ἐντε-
λέχεια κινήσις. οὐκ ἔστιν δὲ ταῦτόν, ὡς εἶρηται. (201a27-34)

It is the fulfilment of what is potential when it is already fulfilled and operates not as itself but as movable, that is motion. What I mean by 'as' is this: bronze is potentially a statue. But it is not the fulfilment of bronze as bronze which is motion. For to be bronze and to be a certain potentiality are not the same. If they were identical without qualification, i.e. in definition, the fulfilment of bronze as bronze would be motion. But they are not the same, as has been said. (Aristotle, 2014)

The actuality, then, of what is potentially – when being in actuality it is operating, not *qua* itself but *qua* changeable – is change. I mean 'qua' thus: the bronze is potentially a statue, but yet it is not the actuality of bronze *qua* bronze that is change. For it is not the same thing to be bronze and to be potentially something: if indeed it were, without qualification and by definition, the same thing, then the actuality of the bronze, *qua* bronze, would be change, but, as has been said, it is not the same thing. (Aristotle, 1993, 2-3)

We are, I believe, given the following picture: when the sculptor buys the bronze, there is, in front of him, a statue-in-potentiality in the following sense: there is something, i.e. a bronze, that is potentially a statue. The bronze-in-actuality and the statue-in-potentiality are 'one in number' and 'one in reality', but they are 'two in account': for being actually a bronze and being potentially a statue are two things. When the change, the sculpting, occurs, it is the statue-in-potentiality that undergoes it, not the bronze-in-actuality; for the change is nothing but what undergoes it and it cannot be the bronze-in-actuality, because what the bronze is in actuality is independent of what it will become: what it is to be this bronze includes having been bought by the sculptor, having put here in his workplace, but – because the sculptor could change his mind, or accidents could happen – does not yet include its being sculpted into a statue.

Aristotle even gives two other examples:

(δῆλον δ' ἐπὶ τῶν ἐναντίων. τὸ μὲν γὰρ δύνασθαι ὑγιαίνειν καὶ δύνασθαι κάμνειν ἕτερον — καὶ γὰρ ἂν τὸ κάμνειν καὶ τὸ ὑγιαίνειν ταῦτόν ἦν — τὸ δὲ ὑποκειμενον καὶ τὸ ὑγιαίνειν καὶ τὸ νοσοῦν, εἴθ' ὑγρότης εἴθ' αἷμα, ταῦτόν καὶ ἔν). ἐπεὶ δ' οὐ ταῦτόν, ὡς περ οὐδὲ χροῖμα ταῦτόν καὶ ὄρατόν, ἢ τοῦ δυνατοῦ, ἢ δυνατόν, ἐντελέχεια φανερόν ὅτι κινήσις ἔστιν. (201a34-201b5)

(This is obvious in contraries. To be capable of health and to be capable of illness are not the same; for if they were there would be no difference between being ill and being well. Yet the subject both of health and of sickness – whether it is humour or blood – is one and the same.) We can distinguish, then, between the two – just as colour and visible are different – and clearly it is the fulfilment of what is potential as potential that is motion. (Aristotle, 2014, 759)

The case is clear with opposites: to be capable of being healthy and to be capable of being sick are different – otherwise being sick and being healthy would be the same thing – but the underlying subject, that which is healthy and that which is diseased, be it moisture or blood, is one and the same. Since then it is not the same thing, just as colour is not the same as visible thing, it is manifest that the actuality of the potential, *qua* potential, is change. (Aristotle, 1993, 3)

Blood is both potentially healthy and potentially sick, but it cannot be both actually healthy and actually sick. When it is actually sick and becomes healthy, what undergoes (and hence *is*) the change

is the blood-as-potentially-healthy, not the blood-as-actually-sick, even though these two are the same in number.

Motion, the actuality of the mover as mover, is in what is moved, but its being moved is in the moved only potentially – even while it is moved!

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