

## *Metaphysics*, 9.8, 1050a30—b4: The Identity of Soul and *Energeia*

David A. Shikiar

I argue that 1050a30—b3 contains an argument in which a series of analogies treating the ‘in’ relation are deployed to constrain how the relation between life and the soul is to be construed, such that, given other reasonable premises, it follows that the soul is identical with the activity life. The interpretation of the ‘in’ relation turns crucially upon the distinction between a subject and a site for an activity, which opens the way for understanding the relation designated as not being that of inherence, which would imply some form of ontological distinction. After establishing the conclusion concerning identity, I explain how the soul may be understood as possessing a modally graded internal structure, each higher-order modality corresponding to a higher level of completion, thinking being the highest grade in human beings. I then show how the identity of soul and living activities affirmed at b2—3 implies the substantial priority of *energeia* to potentiality affirmed at b3—4.

### I

In a neglected and even somewhat abused passage at *Metaphysics*, 9.8, 1050a30—b3, in which Aristotle is concerned with demonstrating that *energeia*<sup>1</sup> is prior

---

<sup>1</sup> I follow a practice adopted by Jonathan Beere in simply transliterating the term in both the Greek singular and the plural forms. But it should be noted that its literal meaning may be captured with ‘performance-of-function’ – a rather cumbersome expression. Jonathan Beere’s case, in *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle’s Metaphysics Theta*, (New York: Oxford University, 2009), against the translation ‘actuality’ is to my mind decisive: pp. 155—167 and esp. 211-219. When one pauses to consider to whom to give thanks for having contributed to, or otherwise shaped, the thinking that went into one’s work of scholarship, one may find oneself stopped short at the fact that the act has been rendered impossible due to the passing of a person to whom one would have joyously expressed one’s gratitude. I find myself in this position with respect to the once preternaturally energetic person of Stanley H. Rosen, a superlative teacher and a philosopher of genius. He has been an inspiration and a fixed model for me of how genuine love of truth can overthrow mere academic conformism and direct a person towards a philosophical thinking that is paradoxically both profound and brilliantly clear. As a small token of my gratitude, I wish to dedicate this article to the memory of Stanley Rosen. I wish to thank two other persons who introduced me to the study of Aristotle: Kenley R. Dove and Alfredo Ferrarin. Each philosopher has, in both the exhibition of intellectual virtues and the love of truth, and in specific theses concerning Aristotle that each has defended with great intellectual energy and wit, shaped my whole outlook and approach towards the Aristotelian texts. My thanks also to those who anonymously reviewed and commented on this text; the imperfect result is nonetheless much improved on account of their effort. Further thanks is due to Khalil Habib for having

in ‘substance’ to potentiality, he connects the soul with ‘energeia’ via the concepts of substance and form.<sup>2</sup> The passage itself, in which he is contrasting two types of energeia, is as follows:

For so many things for which there is something other coming to be apart from the activity [χρῆσις] – for *those* the energeia is in the thing being produced; for example, building is in the thing being built and weaving in the thing being woven, and similarly in the other cases, and generally the change is in the thing being moved [ἐν τῷ κινουμένῳ]. On the other hand, for so many things in which there is not something apart from the energeia, the energeia is present in those things; for example, seeing is in the thing that sees, contemplation in the one who contemplates, and life is in the soul, (whence also happiness is; for happiness is some kind of life). Hence it is clear that the substance [of a thing], that is, its form, is energeia.

In the context of the connection between energeia and soul, ‘energeia’ refers specifically to a core set of biological activities (seeing, thinking, living) treated as a complex unity. The thesis here to be defended consists of two parts: first, that this connection is best understood as an identity between soul (the form of living things) and the energeia of biological activity and, second, that the preceding context from 1050a30 is best understood as an argument for this conclusion. Call the interpretation of the conclusion concerning soul and energeia the *identity thesis* and that of its context the *argument thesis*.

The identity thesis is of special interest and deserves special emphasis as it concerns what Aristotle had in Book 7 called primary substance in living things, namely, soul and form.<sup>3</sup> Thus this passage may be read as containing an argument concerning the nature of the primary substance of living things, which constitute the primary class of

---

moved me to be clearer about how this paper relates to wider Aristotle scholarship and to Marco Zingano, the editor of this journal, for having saved me from at least one significant error. Perhaps it is too obvious to need stating that none of the persons referred to are to be held responsible for the defects that regrettably, but inevitably, do remain.

<sup>2</sup> In this and a few subsequent footnotes (6, 60), I will address the question of the larger textual context of *Metaph.* 9.8, 1050a30—b4. In this manner, this article may be taken to make a contribution to debates concerning the structure of *Meta.* 9.8. In this connection, I note that fn8 addresses editorial handlings of the specific passage under scrutiny. Chapter 8 may be divided into the following sections: 1049b12—17 treats priority in account; 1049b17—1050a3 treats priority in time; 1050a4—1050b5 treats priority in substance. 1050b6—1051a2 treats how eternal beings show the truth of the doctrine that energeia is prior to potentiality in substance. Thus, 1050a4—1051a2 form a continuous treatment of the priority in substance in energeia, but I can largely restrict my attention to the first half of that treatment concluding in 1050b5, as the identity thesis falls towards the end of it and is not repeated in the second half. See note 8 for a breakdown of 1050a4—1050b5.

<sup>3</sup> Form is called essence (τὸ τί ἐν εἶναι) and primary substance at *Meta.* 7.7, 1032b1—2; soul is called primary substance at 7.9, 1037a5.

sensible substance – otherwise put, concerning what in the realm of generation and destruction counts as primary substance as such.<sup>4</sup> Otherwise put, the passage containing the identity thesis provides and attempts to justify an essential conclusion concerning primary substance in the sub-lunar Aristotelian cosmos. More specifically, it is to my knowledge the only passage in the Aristotelian corpus that actually seeks to demonstrate that the form of living things is *energeia* – a most singular passage indeed. Thus it should come as something of a shock that the passage has received next to no detailed attention in the literature – a fact that is baffling given its singularity and the light it may shed on Aristotle’s doctrine of primary substance.

As for the reading of b2—3 as the identity thesis, this, I believe is forced upon one by the unqualified predicate nominative.<sup>5</sup> Aristotle asserts that substance, or form, is *energeia*, not that it is ‘energetic’ or ‘in accordance with *energeia*’, locutions that have no strict parallel in Aristotle’s writings. Nor does he assert that the soul is ‘a certain sort’ of *energeia*, but unqualifiedly that it *is* *energeia* (though the context indicates that in fact it is one specific type of *energeia*, that which contains, better, is an end). The question taken up here does not concern what Aristotle asserted, but what that assertion means, on what bases he thought he could have demonstrated it against alternative understandings of

---

<sup>4</sup> On the primacy of living things and the exclusion of artifacts from substantiality see *Metaph.*, 7.7, 1032a19; 7.8, 1034a4; 9.2, 1043a4; 8.3, 1043b22ff.

<sup>5</sup> One may object that the words at 1050b1—2, ‘whence also happiness is [in the soul]; for happiness is some kind of life’, weakens the interpretation of the conclusion at b2—3 as asserting identity. The words are clearly an aside, but that fact does not weaken the objection one bit. The reason is that if one takes the assertion that life is in the soul to imply that life and the soul are in fact identical, then one is bound to take the assertion that happiness is in the soul to imply that happiness and the soul are identical as well, which clearly has an absurd ring to it. But the absurdity is merely an appearance produced by the usual and simple manner of expression. If one takes into account Aristotle’s definition of happiness at *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*) 1.7, 1098a15—16, then we discover that happiness is a virtuous *energeia* of the *soul* – the *soul alone*, not the body, nor the composite of soul and body. How one reads the genitive here is clearly crucial, but one possibility is to take happiness as not belonging to the soul as an extrinsic property, but as the perfection of its own activity – the activity that it in fact *is* – just as the perfect act of thinking does not belong to the divine being as something extrinsic but *is* that being. On this reading, to affirm that happiness and soul are identical is simply to affirm that soul, which is a set of biological activities, is of course identical with those same activities whether performed virtuously or viciously. This thought simply cannot be conveyed with the simple, but absurd, construction, ‘Soul is happiness’; one is forced to have recourse, as is so often the case in philosophy, to a circumlocution that brings into appearance what the customary and simple mode of expression conceals: ‘soul is identical with a set of rational activities virtuously (or viciously) performed’ – that soul is identical with ‘a certain kind of life.’ It is enough to recognize this possibility, opened up by *NE* 1.7, to clear the way for the defense of the claim that identity thesis follows from the claim that life is in the soul.

soul, and on what its implications may be for the understanding of his doctrines of soul and primary substance. Hence, what I especially contend is that the identity thesis is implied by other Aristotelian premises, supplied in the preceding context and elsewhere, and that it constitutes a fascinating and profound contribution to our understanding of Aristotle's doctrine of primary substance in the central books of the *Metaphysics*.

As for the argument thesis, it can only be established in the course of the interpretation, so it need be only sparingly invoked. In fact, it is only necessary to articulate it as a thesis at all because Jaeger, Ross and Tredennick have taken pains to edit the text in a way that suggests that it does not contain a continuous and explicit argument at all – despite the presence of ὥστε θάνερον ὅτι, 'hence it is clear that', at 1050b2 preceding the assertion that substance and form are *energeia* and despite the fact that at 1050b3 Aristotle, with 'κατά τε δε τοῦτον τὸ λόγον θάνερον . . .' immediately refers to the preceding lines as being an argument – for surely λόγον can only refer to an argument here, not to a sentence, less to a word, and least of all to a mere concept.<sup>6</sup> The presence of

---

<sup>6</sup> The passage at *Meta.*, 9.8, 1050a25—b3 has been edited in a number of different ways: 1) In both Ross and Jaeger parentheses close off the examples at 1050a31-4 and a35-b1. W.D. Ross, *Aristotle: Metaphysics. 2 vols. A revised text with introduction and commentary* (New York: Oxford University, 1924); Werner Jaeger, *Aristotelis: Metaphysica*, OUP, 1957. This leaves two ways of reading the argument. a) The conclusion at 1050b2-3 concerning the identity of form and *energeia* follows from 1050a34-5, which may be paraphrased as follows: the *energeia* of a thing is *in* it when there is not something other than the *energeia* for the sake of which the latter exists. But it is difficult to see how the conclusion that the form and substance of a thing *is* its *energeia* is supported by the general observation that the *energeia* of a thing is *in* the thing. b) Ross (II, 264) suggests that 1050b2-3 refers back to the whole section from a4-b2. In particular, *within* this section it refers back to 1050a15-6, which states that matter is in *energeia* when it is in its form. From this it supposedly follows that form is *energeia*. However, it is obvious that a15-16 merely indicates that Aristotle *believed* form is either identical with *energeia* or that the latter is implied by form; it does not offer an argument for either possibility. In order to read an argument into these lines, as Ross seems to do, one would have to presuppose something like the following principle: 'x being in *energeia*' is equivalent to 'x being in its form', where equivalence is not semantic identity, but an identity that depends upon the adverb phrase of each expression referring to the same part or aspect of a thing.' Making this hidden premise explicit reveals an obvious case of circular reasoning. Thus, we have a reason to explore an alternative. 2) In his edited Greek text, Tredennick puts 1050b1-3 in parentheses: Hugh Tredennick, *Aristotle: The Metaphysics. Books I—IX*. (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1996). This choice simply expresses the opinion that b2-3 does not follow from what precedes it, thus reducing the lines to a dislocated fragment asserting a conclusion without prior premises. Discovering a good argument in the whole passage would render Tredennick's editorial choice superfluous. But, for whatever reason, the conclusion at b2—3 is *not* in parentheses in Tredennick's facing English translation; if this indeed was his considered view of how best to represent the text, it will find corroboration above. 3) Bonitz has no parentheses whatsoever. Hermann Bonitz, *Aristoteles: Metaphysik*. ed. Eduard Wellman (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1890). This way of handling the text yields a coherent argument, as will be argued above. J.P. Etzweiler, 'Being as Activity in Aristotle: A Change Interpretation', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 18, no. 3 (Sept. 1978), 311-334, also reads the passage as concluding at b2—3, though I cannot agree with

language unequivocally indicating both that a conclusion is being drawn and that it has just been drawn places the burden of proof on those who would deny that Aristotle intended this passage as a continuous argument. Further, such an extreme negative conclusion, boldly bodied forth by the insertion of parentheses indicating very clearly that one ‘need not bother’, lies well beyond ever being reasonably supported. For any small number of individual failures at making out a recognizable argument is not sufficient ground for denying that someone else might succeed in the endeavor. Accordingly, success in this venture – whether here or in another, better reasoned, attempt – would deprive editorial interventions of all point.

In sum, I believe that the natural way to take the text is as putting forward an argument for the identity of soul (form, primary substance) and *energeia*. But it is here again necessary to emphasize that the argument for the identity thesis is itself embedded in a slightly longer argument, ending at 1050b4, for the thesis that *energeia* is prior in substance to potentiality. Call this final thesis the *substantial priority thesis*. The substantial priority thesis is inferred from the identity thesis without further ado.<sup>7</sup> As

---

his interpretation of the whole passage. Alfredo Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, (Cambridge: 2000), and Edward Halper, *One and Many in Aristotle's 'Metaphysics': The Central Books*, (Parmenides, 2005), pp. 213-214 read the passage as one argument, but neither unpack its structure as will be done above. Three further recent commentaries require brief mention if only to highlight their dismissal of the passage. The first case in point is Beere on p. 313, where he simply skips the lines leading immediately to the conclusion at 1050b3. The second is Stephen Makin, *Aristotle: Metaphysics Theta: Translated with an Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Oxford), on p. 203, where he dismisses 1050a36—b2 as an ‘aside’ and refers to b2—4 as a mere ‘summary statement of his [Aristotle’s] conclusions so far.’ But the identity thesis is nowhere else put forward as a *conclusion* of an argument, so these lines cannot summarize prior conclusions. The third is Charlotte Witt, *Ways of Being: Potentiality and Actuality in Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Cornell UP, USA, 2003, who assigns no attention to the passage in pp. 79—94, which treat of substantial priority. One may make a reasonable guess that the editorial interventions referred to above have had something to do with the lack of attention paid to the passage by recent commentators.

<sup>7</sup> I translate οὐσία with ‘substance’, even though the substantial priority thesis must apply to the relation between changes and their corresponding potentialities. Because changes are not substances, it can sound strained to state that they are ‘prior in substance’ to their potentialities. But preserving the standard translation seems preferable in the context of Books 7—9. And it further owns the virtue of maintaining in view a connection between the primacy of *energeia*, as identical with *form*, i.e., primary substance, and the primacy of change, as playing a typifying role analogous to form in characterizing certain beings as producers of a certain kind, and others as patients of a correlative kind. Just as substantial form determines type, so does change. Section VI spells out this view in greater detail. The conclusion concerning the priority of *energeia*, which follows from the identity thesis, refers back to 1049b11 where Aristotle asserts that *energeia* is prior to potentiality in account and in substance; and it is repeated at 1050b3—4. But it should be read as a summary conclusion for the whole preceding section, 1050a4—b3, treating the thesis

understanding the argument for the identity thesis requires somewhat lengthy commentary, sections II-IV of this article will be dedicated to it alone. Section V will be dedicated to articulating some of the implications of the identity thesis itself for Aristotle's doctrine of soul, while section VI will explain, rather briefly in comparison with the rest of the article, how the identity thesis implies the substantial priority thesis.

The argument from 1050a30—b4 is in fact just one of numerous arguments Aristotle brings forward to demonstrate the substantial priority thesis, but as it does not presuppose any premises established by those earlier arguments, and itself requires and repays careful interpretation, I will here isolate it for special treatment, with special consideration paid to how it sheds light on Aristotle's doctrine of primary substance.<sup>8</sup>

---

that *energeia* is prior to potentiality in substance. Identifying form and *energeia* is *one* way of proving its priority in substance (see note 8).

<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, some comments on how the argument fits into, indeed in a way consummates, the stream of arguments it concludes will be provided in this note. The section from 1050a4—b3, which forms the first part of the section on priority in substance, may be divided into the following sub-sections: i) 1050a4—10, where Aristotle argues that *energeia* is prior in substance because what is posterior in generation is prior in form and substance, and this is the end which is *energeia*; ii) a10—14, where he argues that capacity is acquired for the sake of *energeia* on the strength of the examples of sight being for the sake of seeing, the capacity to build being for the sake of building, and the capacity for theorizing being for the sake of theorizing; iii) a15—21, where he links *energeia* to form, which is implicitly assumed to be prior to matter, and then generalizes this relation to cases where the end is a motion; iv) a21—23, where he links 'ἐνέργεια' to 'ἐντελέχεια' via 'ἔργον' and 'τέλος', which terms are coextensive with their respective counterparts, in order to strengthen the credentials of *energeia* by lending it those of ἐντελέχεια, which as an end is straightaway prior to what exists for its sake. (v) The argument of a23—29 is difficult to make out, but clearly Aristotle is trying to justify the conclusion that instances of *energeia* that bring about products outside of themselves, such as the *energeia* of building in relation to a house, are prior to the potentialities for those *energeiai*. The reasons seem to be a) that the *energeia* of building is in what is being built, which is the ultimate end, so is itself more of an end than the potentiality to build, and b) that building comes to be and exists at the same time as the house. Presumably, in (b) Aristotle means the form of the house actively thought in the mind of the artisan, otherwise his claim makes no sense. It would seem that Aristotle's idea is that the co-realization of the noetic form and the *energeia* of building indicates that the latter is more of an end than its potentiality, as the form projects the end of the act of building and is identical with that end qua form. In any event, 1050a30—b3, the interpretive object of this paper, is the 'sixth argument' – not always recognized as such (see note 6) – for the priority of *energeia* in substance. One may assign the arguments from 1050a4—29 the following names: (i) the genesis argument; (ii) the acquisition of capacity argument; (iii) the form argument; (iv) the 'ἐντελέχεια' argument; (v) the copresence with the end [a coming-to-be and b) actively thought by the artisan] argument. (i-ii) belong together as emphasizing the instrumentality of both prior stages of genesis and of capacities to *energeia*. (iii-iv) belong together in virtue of connecting *energeia* with something else the priority of which is presumably unimpeachable or at least clearer than that of *energeia*: form being prior to matter, ἐντελέχεια being prior to that in which the end is not realized. (v) belongs by itself insofar as it seems to assert a necessary co-presence of productive *energeiai* with the ends of the production taken in two senses (a) and (b). The argument for the identity thesis thus resembles (iii-iv) in virtue of its connecting *energeia* with something, primary substance, which is clearly prior to whatever it can meaningfully be contrasted to, e.g., any posterior senses of substance

I commence with some comments on the general structure of the passage up to the point where the identity thesis is affirmed. It distinguishes between two types of *energeia*, elucidates the first type with two analogies, then elucidates the second type with three analogies that continue the series begun by the first two, and finally *concludes* that substance and form is *energeia*. It is clear from the context that in the conclusion substance and form are understood to be identical with soul, as the conclusion follows logically immediately from the assertion that life is in the soul.<sup>9</sup> Thus the argument possesses the peculiar structure of laying out a series of analogies and then drawing a conclusion. Clearly, to understand the argument, the meaning and function of the analogies, their interrelation, and the inference to the conclusion will have to be explained. It will be useful to have the specific analogues and the conclusion laid out in order:

- (1) Building is in what is being built. (*Energeia* type-1 = change)
  - (2) Weaving is in what is being woven. (*Energeia* type-1 = change)
  - (3) Seeing is in what sees. (*Energeia* type-2 = *energeia*)
  - (4) Thinking is in what thinks. (*Energeia* type-2 = *energeia*)
  - (5) Life is in the soul. (*Energeia* type-2 = *energeia*)
- Conclusion: Substance, that is, form is *energeia*.

Aristotle's generic use of *energeia* in this passage embraces a distinction found at 9.6, 1048b18—35, between a narrower concept of *energeia* (italicized: *energeia*) and the opposed concept of change (κίνησις).<sup>10</sup> That passage distinguishes between an action

---

(composite being, matter) and accidental being. Further, it is specifically reminiscent of (iii) in that it too invokes the concept of form. But it differs from and surpasses (iii) in two respects: first, it does not merely presuppose a necessary connection between form and *energeia*, but argues for their identity; second, it refers specifically to the form and substance of living things rather than to form generally, the latter of which is encountered even in artifacts and accidental compounds. Thus it serves as a fitting conclusive argument to the series, as it argues from the credentials of that which, in the sub-lunar realm, is prior to all else – in definition, knowledge, and time (*Meta.*, 7.1), but also most crucially in the etiological order of composite substance (7.17). The concept of etiological priority requires its own study and must here be presupposed, but I here merely assert that it amounts to form being the cause of both the species to which an individual belongs and of the individual *being* an individual.

<sup>9</sup> The reference to happiness being 'in' the soul is an aside and if properly understood does not block or weaken the inference to the identity thesis. See note 5.

<sup>10</sup> Myles Burnyeat, 'Kinēsis vs. Energeia: A Much-read Passage In (But Not Of) Aristotle's *Metaphysics*', in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. XXXIV, summer, 2008, 219—292, has shown that this passage does not belong to its original context. He also attempts to show that it is not at play in any other passage in the corpus. He establishes his point for the linguistic distinction, but not for the conceptual

(πράξις) that is an end and one that proceeds towards an end outside of itself; the first type of action is called *energeia* and the second change. Consequently, in the 1050a25—b3 passage, Aristotle is determining what I will call the ‘ontological site’ of *energeia* and change, respectively; it will be seen that it is crucial that one distinguish this concept of ontological site, which does not imply ontological distinction, from that of inherence, which does involve distinction of one kind of another (more on which below). Aristotle assumes the physical thesis, put forward in *Physics* 3.3, that change is ‘in’ the thing that is being produced; the unstated reason is that a change is defined by its end.<sup>11</sup> The criterion for determining the ontological site of change is that in which its end is coming-to-be; if the end is coming to be in some given materials, then the change itself is occurring in those materials. Aristotle subjects *energeia* to a slightly different, yet obviously connected criterion: if the end *is* (not ‘is coming to be’) in something definite, then the mode of *energeia* is in that thing. Aristotle determines the ontological site of both change and *energeia* with respect to their ends because each is *what* it is through its relation to an end (identity in the case of *energeia*). Thus each is *spatially* where that end is: in what is coming to be or what is performing a function. Hence, while building is spatially in what is being built (not the builder’s body or even the state-of-affairs composed of the builder working and the materials being worked upon), the activity of seeing is spatially in that which sees, the living thing (not in what is seen); the activity of

---

distinction, as the passage at 1050a30—b3 attests. This is an important observation, as it places the distinction in question back at the center of the interpretation of the Aristotle’s doctrine of substance; thus Burnyeat’s article, which is of great value philologically, amounts in my opinion, as a *philosophical* argument, to an energetic attempt to misdirect all future endeavors at interpreting Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. I here hope to make a modest contribution towards reestablishing and deepening a tradition of interpretation that has often been associated with L.A. Kosman. See his, ‘Substance, Being, and *Energeia*’, in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, New York: OUP, 1984, pp. 121—149.

<sup>11</sup> However, building remains *comparable* to a complete action, as Aristotle’s analogy at 1048a37—b4 indicates. Building is comparable to a complete action insofar as i) a *builder* has a capacity to build that is activated in building and ii) that this capacity can itself be perfected through practice, just as one’s capacities for sensory discrimination and thinking can be. But this activity is always subordinate to the product that is the end of building. Cf. Marc Pavlopoulos, ‘Aristotle’s Natural Teleology’, in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. XXIV, summer, 150n31, 151-2.



thinking is spatially in the individual thinking (not in the form being thought or, possibly, the active intellect); and life is spatially in the soul.<sup>12</sup>

## II

It is helpful to look briefly at analogues (3—5), which refer to *energeia*, before turning directly to an analysis of (1—2), which refer to change, as doing so will enable one to frame the opening moves of the analogical argument appropriately. With respect to (3—5) it is certainly curious that, while seeing and thinking are located in the individual, living as a whole is located in the soul – the kind of thread in a text, which, if pulled, more often than not reveals something unexpected and important about the author’s overall intention. In proceeding to understand the analogical exposition of the site of *energeia* – an exposition that somehow implies the identity of soul and *energeia* – the order of the analogies make it necessary to begin by clarifying what it means to be sited in the individual. This is true not merely relative to (3-4), but to (1-2) as well, the difference being that (3-4) refers to existing individuals, while (1-2) refers to individuals that are coming-to-be. Once the meaning of being sited in an individual is established section III will analyze what it is to be sited in the soul.

For the purpose of both clarifications, it will be useful to develop the distinction, to my knowledge unrecognized by Aristotle scholars, between a) an activity x being sited in y and b) y being the subject of x. This distinction will help reveal what is distinctive of the ‘in’ relation as employed in this passage, so that the conclusion concerning the identity between soul and *energeia* can be seen to follow from a reasonable interpretation of the analogies and the special kind of relation they represent. Further, making out this

---

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle locates the soul in the heart at *De Motu An.*, 9, 703a1—3, but this passage may refer back merely to ‘moving soul’ at 9, 702b16. In any event, for the purposes of this interpretation the location of the whole soul need not be precisely determined; it lacks extension (being at most at a point in the heart) and thus relates to a place only via the mediation of the body. The same holds of the activities of sensing generally and thinking. Also note that for any philosophy that defends the thesis that forms are immanent, it is necessary that forms be suitably connected with beings that have a place, else these forms themselves will not be genuinely immanent. For Aristotle specifically it may be said that forms require a material basis of realization.

generally unrecognized sense is especially important, as the most familiar ways of taking the ‘in’ relation would make the inference to the identity thesis invalid. These familiar ways seem to me to number three: i) one thing being ‘in’ another as belonging to the ‘what-it-is’ as a part of the latter, e.g., as line belongs to what a triangle is. But as a part is not identical with the whole, if Aristotle were asserting that life is a *part* of the ‘what-it-is’ of the soul, then the inference to the identity thesis would obviously be invalid.<sup>13</sup> Note that this consideration against what one may call the mereological thesis is not a *petitio*, for it has already been independently shown on grammatical grounds that the conclusion asserts identity. Hence, any reading of a prior premise that makes the inference to identity invalid is weakened by its producing that very result. Of course, any reading of (5) that makes the inference valid must not merely preserve said validity, but be compelling as a reading on its own account, *apart from* all reference to the following inference. Otherwise put, the identity thesis serves merely as a negative and no way a positive criterion for the interpretation of (5), not to mention (1—4). Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that reading the sentence asserting that life is in the soul as a part is in its whole is by itself entirely plausible. For, assuming that the soul contains life activities, can it not also be plausibly maintained that it contains the *capacities* for those activities as well? This mereological thesis will be ruled out on the basis of philosophical considerations towards the end of section III, after the interpretation of the preceding analogies prepares for a better understanding of what Aristotle meant by asserting that life is in the soul.

This brings us to the second sense of three senses of ‘in,’ (ii): this sense takes it to be an incidental property, that is, a property that can either belong to or not belong to a subject in which it inheres, e.g, pale in relation to Socrates; but it is inconceivable that life would relate to the soul in this contingent way.<sup>14</sup> iii) A third sense takes it to be what one might call a type-2 *per se* attribute, such as color in relation to surface or odd in relation to number, cases where the attribute presupposes a definite kind of subject, which subject therefore enters into its full account. But this would make the relation

---

<sup>13</sup> See *Po. An.*, 1.4, 73a35.

<sup>14</sup> *Po. An.*, 1.22, 83b17—22.

between soul and life extrinsic in a manner such that, while life would have to include soul in its account, soul would not have to include life in its.<sup>15</sup> This would saddle one with a strange account of the soul. For how is one to account for it if not necessarily with reference to life? Further, it too would make the inference to the identity thesis invalid, whereas the identity thesis is really the only plausible interpretation of b2—3 and is clearly presented as the conclusion of an argument. Again, it is necessary but not sufficient for the present interpretive task to reject three senses of the ‘in’ relation that make the inference invalid. This much progress points to the necessity of a clarification of the positive nature of the relation that the ‘in’ indicates – the site relation – and then to explain how it implies identity in the case of life and the soul.<sup>16</sup>

I submit that an adequate understanding of the argument requires that one carefully distinguish the concept of a site from that of a subject. Though the concept of a site has no nominal counterpart in the Greek text being interpreted, it is justified insofar as it gives a name to what is common to various objects of the preposition ‘in’ in various relations that determine the spatial location of an *energeia* in one or another individual, as, e.g., building is in *what is being built*, sight is in *what sees*, thinking is in *what thinks*,

---

<sup>15</sup> *Po. An.*, 1.4, 73a35—6. What I have called a type-2 per se attribute is the same as what Aristotle calls per se incidentals, a conception analyzed thoroughly by Richard Tierney in ‘On the Senses of ‘*Sumbebēkos*’ in Aristotle’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (New York: OUP, 2001), pp. 61—82. Both types of incidental are defined against essential properties that do not inhere in, but are part of the identity of their subjects. See *Po. An.*, 1.22, 83a24.

<sup>16</sup> A variety of Aristotelian texts treat the preposition ‘in’ in a correspondingly diverse number of ways, the very diversity of which lends support to the view that one should not presume that the ‘in’ indicates either an inherence or a mereological relation. It is not necessary to list the senses of ‘in’ enumerated at *Physics* 4.1, 210a15—24, as they are of no assistance in understanding the passage under analysis. What could appear to be an exception is the whole being ‘in’ its parts, as this relation does involve a kind of identity. But it cannot refer to the relation between life and soul as the soul is not a mere aggregate of parts relative to life taken as their encompassing whole (cf. *Meta.* 7.13, 1039a3—4, where he asserts that no substance is ever composed of substances). One should also mention *Meta.*, 9.8, 1050a16, which refers to matter being ‘in’ its form; but Aristotle nowhere describes life as *matter* in relation to the soul as its form. Finally, the various senses of ‘in’ at play in *Meta.*, 7.10-11, boil down to two: i) parts of a thing being in an account of that thing as at 1035a20—25; ii) form being in matter as at 1036b23—24. (i) has already been called into question and will receive further treatment in Section IV. (ii) remains inapplicable because Aristotle nowhere describes life as the form of the soul taken as matter. (Perhaps one could take *DA* 2.1, 412a20—b1, in which soul is called a first *ἐντελέχεια* in contrast with the waking state, which is second *ἐντελέχεια*, as implying that soul is in fact a kind of matter. But this is ruled out by 2.5, where Aristotle argues that the passage to *ἐντελέχεια* is not the acquisition of a formal property; also see note 46 for some remarks on 412a20—b1 that render it compatible with the identity thesis). Finally, the references to grammar and knowledge being in the soul at *Cat.*, 2, are clearly instances of type-2 per se attributes (see note 15); that life is a type-2 per se predication has been ruled out above.

etc. Being a site of an *energeia* is common to the italicized objects. The question, ‘where is an *energeia* located?’ is interesting if one’s concern is with solving a dialectical puzzle concerning what exactly is moving in an instance of change. Again, take the case of building. Here there is a question concerning whether building is primarily a builder moving his body in various ways or the material patient undergoing various transformations.<sup>17</sup> The question is effectively one of spatial location: where is a change ontologically embedded, in this individual here or the materials he is forming into an artifact? The question of location is also interesting if one’s concern is with determining the relation between the soul and the living activities that in some sense define what it is to be alive. Are they where the soul is? Or are they elsewhere in the living body – most naturally, in the organs that respectively serve them? A subject (τό ὑποκείμενον) is, by contrast, a familiar Aristotelian concept, which answers generally to the question, ‘what in a complex thing, if anything, owns that thing’s properties without itself being owned?’<sup>18</sup> What owns properties without being owned is clearly different in meaning from what determines the spatial location of an *energeia*.

Nonetheless, the distinction is still not sufficiently sharp. The reason is that the concept of a site could yet seem to involve property ownership, the distinguishing mark of subjecthood. For one could claim that asserting that change is located in the thing moved implies that what moves is simultaneously the subject of change. One could lend support this claim by citing Aristotle’s assertion that it is necessary that a place (ποῦ) be in a subject. This support for the claim that sitedness implies subjecthood itself comes from the *Categories*, a text the theses of which one may assume are subject to

---

<sup>17</sup> That there was such a puzzle is, again, indicated at *Phys.*, 3.3, 202a13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Every mention of the concept of a subject in books 7–9 conforms to this sense: *Meta.* 7.1, 1028a25–7; 7.3, 1028b36–7 (Here being a subject is glossed as being that of which all other things are predicated, while being predicated of nothing.); 7.11, 1037b3–4 (Here being a subject seems to be identified with being ‘matter’ underlying something else that is predicated of it); 7.12, 1037b13–18 (Here he refers to a) the unity of the subject with its incidental attribute when the latter has come to be in the former and b) to their plurality when it has not); 7.13, 1038b15–16 (Here he contrasts substance, which is not predicated of a subject, and the universal, which is); 8.1, 1042a12–13; 8.1, 1042a26; 8.2, 1042b9–10, b12–13; 8.2, 1043a25; 9.7, 1049a27–29, 29–30. A second conception of the subject, introduced in *Phys.*, 1.7, is that of what underlies a change from one contrary to another. But there is no question of this conception of a subject being at play in the analogies. The reason is that an *energeia* is not itself a change involving an underlying subject – as is implied by its end not being apart, i.e., by its being itself an end. Hence, I will disregard this second conception of being a subject.

qualification in the more detailed and specific theoretical treatises. I submit that such qualification is necessary to understand the passage under scrutiny and will endeavor to demonstrate this in the following pages.

The specific problem for this interpretation is that if being a site implies being a subject, then if the soul is the site of life, it is likewise its subject – precisely the relation that would both make it impossible to define the soul at all and undermine the inference exhibited in the text. But it will be shown that being ‘in’ y as x’s site does *not* imply that y is x’s subject, at least not without additional premises, which are not always supported by certain species of site relation. Otherwise put, the being marking the spatial location of an *energeia* does not straightaway own that *energeia* without being owned, that is, it cannot without further ado be conceived as that *energeia*’s subject. The particular case of change bears this out, as will be now shown.

To say that change is in the thing moved is ambiguous between two distinct Aristotelian conceptualizations of change, a fact that will complicate the argument somewhat. The first is introduced in *Physics* 1.7, where Aristotle argues that any change corresponds to a subject acquiring a form from a state of privation that is the contrary of that form. Call this the formal conception of change.<sup>19</sup> The second is presented in *Physics* 3.1—3, where Aristotle defines change as an *ἐντελέχεια*, a ‘having-its-end-within-itself’, of a being in the mode of potentiality qua in potentiality.<sup>20</sup> Call this the teleological conception of change. According to the formal conception, a change is in a substrate that is the matter for the form being acquired.<sup>21</sup> This conception of matter is broad enough to embrace both unshaped clumps and well-defined individuals, such as living things.<sup>22</sup> My

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Physics*, 1.7, 190a14—17 and b24 on the difference between the physical subject and its acquired property as a formal difference. Also see 190b28—9.

<sup>20</sup> *Phys.*, 3.1, 201a10—11. The translation ‘having-its-end-within-itself’ is supported by *Meta.* 5.16, 1021b23-30 and is ably defended by George A. Blair, (1992), *Energeia and Entelecheia: Act” in Aristotle* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1992), pp. 79—82; and the same author, ‘Unfortunately, It is a Bit More Complex: Reflections on Ἐνέργεια,’ *Ancient Philosophy* 15 (1995), 565—579. For a challenge to this view, see Daniel W. Graham, ‘The etymology of *Entelecheia*’, in *American Journal of Philology*, 110 (1989), 73—80.

<sup>21</sup> That the physical subject is matter is stated at 190b25, but could have been inferred prior to that passage, especially from *Phys.* 1.7, 190b13—17. Compare Aristotle’s comment at 190b6—12.

<sup>22</sup> *Phys.* 1.7, 190b24—25.

thesis is that on the teleological conception of change that ‘in’ which the change occurs cannot, on that conception, be conceived as subject of change, but merely as its spatial site. But the site and subject of change *do* converge on the formal conception. I will analyze the instance of convergence before turning to that of divergence.

The relevant question is not one directly posed in *Physics*, 1.7: according to the formal conception of change, does a change inhere in a physical subject as a property of that subject, analogously to how that subject owns incidental properties such as a concrete weight or specific color? One may infer that this is the case from the following line of reasoning. Form and its contrary privation are, uncontroversially, both properties of the physical subject at the corresponding times at which each is stably present. When the passage from the privation to the form is undergone, the physical subject loses one negative property before acquiring the contrary positive property. But during the period between owning first one and then the other property, it is the subject of a continuous change of *passing through* the potential properties situated between the extremes without any one of them ever coming to be owned as something stable comparable to the privation or, in retrospect, the contrary form. If it is the case that any potential property passed through could have become an actual property (by the change having ceased at the appropriate time), then the very *passing through* of those properties – the change itself – should be conceived as a property of the physical subject. At least the burden of proof now lies with those who would deny that it should be so conceived. Hence, if a change is understood formally, then that in which a change is located is nothing other than the subject of change.

Things assume a profoundly different appearance when one turns to the teleological conception of change. Here what is moved is not to be understood merely as a physical subject acquiring a new property, but as an instance of coming-to-be *oriented towards* an end. The site of the change is thus conceived, not as a material *subject*, but *as the end* existing merely *in potentiality*. The teleological conception substitutes the concept of a *potential* individual for the formal conception’s concept of an actually existing subject. A brief comment is necessary to clarify this concept. The structure of potential being may be represented schematically as follows: this quantum of matter (or individual) *is* potentially such-and-such (or so qualified). A statement about potentiality characterizes

the subject as existing in the mode of potentiality insofar as it stands in relation to what is indicated in the predicate.<sup>23</sup> Hence, according to the teleological conception, the site of change is a being in the mode of potentiality. Of course, this being is also an actual thing with a definite character, presently real; but *insofar* as it constitutes a suitable starting point for the coming-to-be, through one change, of a being not yet in existence, it *is* that being in a certain mode, that of potentiality. I will now show that so conceived the site of change cannot straightaway be understood as a subject of that change. The general reason, in need of clarification, is that a potential being cannot be an actual subject.

Consider the following objection. On the surface, existing in the mode of potentiality does not preclude being a subject, as in the *De Anima* Aristotle also asserts the following: i) the living body of a composite has life in *the mode of potentiality*<sup>24</sup> and ii) the living body is the *subject* of the soul.<sup>25</sup> He asserts (ii) in an introductory context where absolute precision is not to be expected. But assume for argument's sake that this passage expresses a considered position. Such a relation between subject and form would be marked by the peculiarity of something existing in the mode of potentiality owning something else conceived as an instance of ἐντελέχεια ('having-its-end-within-itself'). Thus, on the strength of analogy one could maintain that there is no reason to exclude the possibility that Aristotle could have understood a being in the mode of potentiality to be a subject of change, the latter possessed as an incidental property of its subject. The true burden for the interpreter would then become that of explaining how potential being could simultaneously be a subject of incidental properties.

There are a number of considerations to be brought against this analogical defense of the subjecthood of a potential being conceived as the site of a change. To begin with, closer inspection reveals that Aristotle allows that the living body is the subject of the soul only in a very circumscribed sense that does nothing to support the suggestion that potential being generally, and conceived precisely as potential being, must always be

---

<sup>23</sup> *Meta.* 9.7, 1049a11—12, defines being in potentiality as x being in such a condition as to allow for it to assume some form through a single change without addition, subtraction, or modification.

<sup>24</sup> 2.1, 412a27—28.

<sup>25</sup> Most clearly at *DA*, 2.1, 412a12—17.

conceived as a subject. Towards weakening the claim of the living body to being a subject, one should consider the important way in which the soul is in fact more basic than, and so a subject of, the body. The key is Aristotle's characterization of the soul as the 'having-its-end-in-itself' of the body. This teleological term indicates that the body is defined relative to an end that is not extrinsic to it, but which it in fact presupposes in being an organic body. This idea seems to be reformulated and expanded upon at *Metaphysics* 7.10, 1035b14-16, where Aristotle asserts that the soul is the substance in accordance with the λόγος, form, and essence of such-and-such a body. He explains this assertion in the next lines by referring to the doctrine that a living part is defined with respect to the function that it performs. His meaning, I submit, is that each living part performs or can perform its function only insofar as it is related to the soul as its 'substance', namely that which it essentially serves in performing its function. Thus the relation to the soul is presupposed by and integral to the λόγος of the part. But this makes it impossible that the organic body as a whole own the soul as an incidental property, even a necessary incidental. For then the soul, which the organic body presupposes and integrates into its own intelligible structure, would be simultaneously extrinsic and intrinsic to the account of the body. So the analogy that has emerged as genuine is the reverse of what the objection suggested: neither the living body, which exists in the mode of potentiality, nor what is coming-to-be, which is the end of change in the mode of potentiality, are subjects of inherence in relation to their respective ἐντελέχειαι. In a word, when x is conceived as in the mode of potentiality, it is not conceived as a subject of inherence.

However, one can still view the body as the subject of the soul in a sense that in its conception is distinct from the concept of the subject of inherence. The body is that in which the soul is ontologically realized. Call this the 'subject of realization.' Though the body bears a necessary relation to the soul, such that soul is prior to the body<sup>26</sup>, the soul is necessarily realized in a body<sup>27</sup>, so presupposes the body as this vehicle of realization.

---

<sup>26</sup> This discussion implies that the soul is prior etiologically (it is the cause of the body being what it is in one crucial respect, its being instrumental for the soul), and in account.

<sup>27</sup> This is affirmed in Aristotle's doctrine of hypothetical necessity. See *Phys.*, 2.7, 198a7; 2.9; *Parts of Animals*, 1.1, 639b24ff.; 640a34—35; 642a9—13; *Gen. and Cor.*, 2.11, 337b26—27.



However, the body's being a subject of realization does not imply that a potential being could be a subject of realization for a change. The two cases (body to soul, potential being to change) are simply disanalogous. Two considerations show this: i) Aristotle asserts that the organic body is an instrument of the soul (*DA*, 2.4, 415b18—19). More precisely, it is integrated into a functional whole in a manner that presupposes its instrumental relation to the soul, but goes beyond that mere instrumental relation to distinguish it from artifacts that may *also* be instruments of the soul, yet are never parts of a living individual. Thus the body is part of a whole that actually<sup>28</sup> exists and participates in that actual existence; it participates in the functioning of the living thing by itself actually functioning. The potential being that is the site of change cannot enjoy this status so cannot be conceived as a subject in the sense of a basis of realization. ii) The living body has life in the mode of potentiality, in significant part at least, because it is structurally suited to perform various life functions, but is not identical with that performance; its structure is as presently real as an existing stone or river. But the potential whole that is the site of a change is not the instrument of that change, so there is no reason to infer that it exists in the manner that a stone or river does. True, it converges with a set of presently real attributes that as a set *enable* it to be a potential individual, but at least some of these attributes will ultimately be excluded from the individual once it has come to be; for example a piece of lumber prior to being milled will lose some of its mass in the jointer and planer before it is considered a finished board. Thus these same attributes are excluded from the conception of the potential individual as well. These presently real properties do not constitute the potential being, so do nothing to establish the credentials of the potential individual for being a subject of realization; these presently real properties do, however, constitute the substrate of change under the formal conception, so one should conceive that substrate, numerically coincident with the potential being, as the subject of realization in addition to being the subject of inherence. One may summarize the conclusions drawn concerning subjecthood so far by noting that

---

<sup>28</sup> Note that I am not here using 'actually' as a translation of ἐνέργεια, but am only relying on its familiar meaning referring to what is a present fact. Similar points hold for 'actual' and 'actuality.'

every subject of inherence is a subject of realization, but that not every subject of realization is a subject of inherence.

In conclusion, a potential being, conceived precisely, is neither a subject of inherence, nor a subject of realization for a change. That means that the conception of a change that construes it teleologically, and not formally, necessarily excludes from the family of concepts constituted by that mode of conception the concept of a subject, whether of inherence or of realization. As analogues (1—2) take *Physics* 3.3 as their point of departure, which assumes the teleological conception of change, one is compelled to conclude that (1—2) do not refer directly to a substrate of change, but rather to a potential being that is necessarily not conceived as a subject, whether of inherence or realization, but rather conceived as the site of change. But one must likewise conclude that this site is numerically identical with a subject of change that is conceived as such relative to the formal, rather than the teleological, conceptualization of change, as the two modes of conceptualization imply one another.

That which is potentially x must be conceived as the *site* of change, but cannot under that description be conceived as the subject of change. The site of change, then, is a potential being in the place in which it is coming-to-be. However, one might suggest that the material patient acquiring a form must clearly be thought as both subject *and* site, the spatial location, of a change, even though Aristotle presupposes the teleological conception of change and not the formal in determining the site; for just as a change occurs where the end is coming-to-be, so does it occur where form is coming-to-be *in* matter. The reason is simply that under the formal conception the change unequivocally belongs to a definite subject, which thus immediately determines the spatial location of that change. And all sub-lunar changes that fall under the teleological characterization of change also fall under the formal characterization.<sup>29</sup> The difference between the site and subject of a change is based on different simultaneous relations that the change bears to its present material substrate and its potential end, respectively; there is a difference in

---

<sup>29</sup> The converse apparently does not hold, as *Generation of Animals*, V, attests. The entire book is dedicated to a study of the role of necessity in change, yet Aristotle studiously avoids any use of either ἐντελέχεια or ἐνέργεια, both teleological terms. Both terms are common in *GA*, I-IV.

conception based upon the difference in relation, while the referents of the concepts are spatially coextensive. But under one description, the teleological, what is changing can only be conceived as the site of change; under the other, the formal, what is changing must be conceived as both the site and subject of change. The lesson of the distinction may be summarized as follows: *x qua coming-to-be-y-for-the-sake-of-being-y* is the site for *energeia* (type-1) *z*, but cannot, under that same description, be conceived as a subject for *energeia z*; but *x qua coming-to-be-y-for-the-sake-of-being-y* is numerically identical with *x qua acquiring-form-y*, which, under the formal description, is both the subject and site of *energeia z*. Sitehood and subjecthood are biconditionally related for changes towards an end, but subjecthood correlates *conceptually* merely with the formal conception of change, which is not at play in 1050a30—b3.

Even further precision is needed. The formal site of change is numerically identical with the teleological site of change, but the two have different properties. The formal site is constituted by a set of presently real properties, say those of the pre-milled board. The teleological site is constituted by a set of properties, some of which at least exist only in the mode of potentiality. These potential properties will replace some of the presently real properties of the site of change conceived formally. As the distinction between the formal and teleological sites of change plays no role in Aristotle's argument in 1050a30—b3, it will be ignored and every subsequent reference to the site of change will be to the teleological site.

These conceptual distinctions enable one to draw a conclusion concerning the argumentative function of analogues (1—2). *As they concern a teleologically conceived 'in' relation between changes and their respective sites, they in effect constrain the reader to take the subsequent analogies as narrowly concerned with site relations answering the location question and not with subject relations answering the ownership question.* It is already clear that this will prove important for the interpretation of the claim that life is in the soul; I here merely assert that it provides the key to understanding the inference to the identity thesis, which inference will be analyzed in IV below.

Some further comments on how analogues (1—2) set up the remainder of the argument. Though sitehood in the case of change (*energeia* type-1) is biconditionally related to subjecthood, one cannot assume that this is the case for *energeia* (*energeia*

type-2).<sup>30</sup> In fact, as Aristotle indicates that the soul is the site of biological activities, and the soul cannot be a subject of inherence for those activities, whether taken as simple or per se incidentals, nor a subject of realization, it would seem that the biconditional relation between sitehood and subjecthood does not hold for all *energeiai* – for then the soul would be the subject of activities in relation to which it cannot be conceived as a subject. But, to repeat, no philosophical consideration as yet rules out the mereological thesis, i.e., the soul's being conceived as a whole that contains certain activities as parts and so serves as that 'in' which those activities occur. The breakdown of this biconditionality relationship in the case of life and soul preserves the possibility that the inference to the identity thesis is to be accredited, provided that the mereological thesis itself be disqualified. This noted, I now turn to analogues (3—4), those which relate seeing and thinking, two *energeiai*, to the living individual as their site. Now that analogues (1—2) have been shown to constrain one's conception of the 'in' relation as one concerning the concept of site and not that of subject, the next step in the interpretation defines itself, namely to show how analogues (3—4) shed further light on the site relation, specifically, concerning how it is to be understood in cases where the *energeia* is itself an end, not something that points towards an end outside itself. And we may assume that what we are to glean from (3—4) will prove important for setting up a valid inference to the identity thesis.

---

<sup>30</sup> It is worth restating why this biconditionality relation holds. If a change admits of a teleological description, then that in which the change is occurring is to be conceived as the site of that change *and* that same change simultaneously admits of a formal description that implies that that in which it occurs is likewise the subject of change. By contrast, if a change admits of a formal description, it follows that the subject referred to in that very description must likewise be the formal site of that change, but it does not follow that what admits of a formal description of change simultaneously admits of a teleological description, as there are changes in accordance with mere necessity (see note 29). Hence, even though description-types (formal and teleological) for changes are not biconditionally related, sitehood and subjecthood are.

### III

Consider the first example of *energeia*, that of seeing. Seeing is an *energeia* that, like change, relates to a subject. But the sense of subject needs to be clarified, as seeing for Aristotle is not an incidental, whether simple or per se, of its subject. The reason is made apparent in a passage from *De Somno*, where Aristotle states that sensing and thinking are the ends of all sentient life.<sup>31</sup> If seeing is not merely a property of its subject, but an end of that subject, then it follows that it belongs to the what-it-is of that subject; the alternative is to countenance that the very end of a thing is extrinsic to what-it-is. But the subject is not contained in the what-it-is of its end. It is therefore necessary to recognize a third mode of subjecthood, alongside those of the subject of inherence and the subject of realization. This may be termed the ‘axiological subject.’ I choose the term ‘axiological’ because the end of a thing is its good, so that the subject in question is understood as the subject of its own good. It will prove useful to define the axiological subject schematically for any subject, x, and its (at least partially) constitutive end, y: x is the axiological subject for y iff a) y is the good of x; b) x is not part of what-y-is; c) y is part of what-x-is. Understand, then, seeing as the end of its subject taken axiologically, not as a subject of inherence. It follows trivially that the axiological subject of an *energeia* is likewise the subject of realization for that *energeia*. In what follows, I will make exclusive use of the concept of an axiological subject.

The relation that seeing bears to its subject is complicated, as one could suggest that seeing has as its primary subject the eyes (or the heart, but for simplicity I will refer only to the former) and as its secondary subject the individual. The following argument, which will support the conclusion that an individual is the primary subject of its *energeiai*, will make two assumptions: a) that if x is the subject of *energeia* z, where z is a performance-of-function that is the end of x, then x is the site of *energeia* z; and b) that the ordinality of the subject and the site are always identical, so that a primary subject is a

---

<sup>31</sup> *De Somno*, 455b20—25. Cf. *NE*, 9.9, 1170a16—17, where Aristotle asserts that life is defined by sensation in animals and by sensation and thought in human beings.

primary site, a secondary subject is a secondary site, etc.<sup>32</sup> Again, recognizing these links between being a subject and being a site will open up a line of reasoning that will point to a conclusion concerning Aristotle's treatment of the whole individual as the primary site of *specific* types of *energeia* (seeing, thinking, etc.), thus explaining the motivation behind Aristotle's formulation of analogues (3) and (4). The next section turns to the crucial fifth analogue and examine grounds for Aristotle's locating the *comprehensive energeia* of living neither in the whole, nor in the material part, but in the soul.

It can be shown that the eyes are not the primary subject of seeing. Marc Pavlopoulos helps clarify matters by drawing a distinction between an organic part serving an activity and the primary subject of that activity. For example, the eyes serve the activity of sight by receiving form apart from matter, while the individual as a whole is the subject of that activity.<sup>33</sup> Two lines of argument may now be brought forward. First, I have noted that in *De Somno* Aristotle asserts that sensing and thinking are the ends of all sentient life. As an end is a good, this implies that the individual achieves its good through engaging in typical sensory and noetic activities. Consider the following principle:

(P) The intrinsic good of a thing belongs to it primarily.

---

<sup>32</sup> It has already been shown that the first part of the assumption applies to changes, *mutatis mutandis*: if x is the subject of change z, then x is also the site of change z. (Of course the connection holds in a second way as well, namely if one, for certain changes, infers from 'x is acquiring form y' to 'x is coming-to-be-y-for-the-sake-of-being-y' and then to 'x is the site of change z.' This latter inference does not apply to changes that are merely from necessity.)

<sup>33</sup> Marc Pavlopoulos, 'Aristotle's Natural Teleology', in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. XXIV, summer, 157. (I have introduced the concept of a 'primary' subject). He makes two other points on 154-5 and these figure importantly in his argument that living activities belong to the whole rather than to the part: i) the eyes are also part of the nutritive system insofar as they transform blood into tissue; ii) the whole body is involved in the activity of seeing because it is necessary for the possibility of that activity. Note that in (ii) Pavlopoulos glides from taking pervasive nutritive activity as a *necessary condition* for seeing to this activity being a *part* of the system of sight – a doubtful inference. Considering (i) and (ii) together, he then poses the following exclusive disjunction: 'either we say that a living body's organs both see and feed themselves (or contribute to feeding other organs); or we say that only the whole animal both sees and feeds itself.' (155) His point surely is that *any* living activity – nutritive, sensory, and even noetic – must be realized *either* in every organ, i.e. the organic body, *or* in the composite whole. Pavlopoulos then points out that Aristotle opts for the second alternative. But his underlying premise that being necessary for an activity implies being part of its system is hardly obvious; rather, it is probably false. Thus he does not prove that the individual is the sole subject of life activities. A different argument for a similar conclusion is offered above, but one that allows that the organic body as a whole and organic parts are also subjects of life activities, but in secondary and tertiary senses respectively.

If seeing and thinking are ends of an individual, then by P that individual is the primary subject of seeing and thinking.<sup>34</sup> But in fact this principle goes too far. For the activity of seeing is likewise the intrinsic good of the organic parts in which it is potentially realized because those parts achieve their good when they perform their function. If P is correct, then seeing has two, mutually exclusive, primary subjects.

This brings me to the second line of argument, which is independently effective, and also helps explain what is wrong with the first, inconclusive, argument. The first premise is that organic parts are dependent upon the wholes of which they are parts, as when removed from those wholes they cease to perform the functions that define them.<sup>35</sup> Implicit in this claim is the further claim that the functional performances that define the parts are likewise dependent upon a whole within which they are performed. But if the activity cannot belong to the part taken independently of the whole, then it cannot belong to that part primarily and to the whole secondarily. Rather it must belong to the whole primarily and to the part only insofar as it belongs to the whole. By analogy, it is not as if the activities of the police officer, the fireman, and the mayor belong first to each as private individuals and secondarily to the political communities in which they perform those activities. Rather they belong to the individuals only insofar as they perform assigned functions relative to the whole (this is why no one is free today to become a Samurai warrior). The activities are for this reason primarily activities of the whole and secondarily those of the individuals that are its parts. The same holds for seeing, as this activity does not belong to the whole because it belongs to the eyes which are parts of that whole, but belongs to the eyes, if at all, because seeing belongs to the whole, while being *served* primarily by the eyes. The homonymy premise of this argument explains the fault of the simple appeal to an activity's being the end and good of the thing: that appeal by itself fails to take into account the relation between organic parts and their typical activities, on the one hand, and organic parts and their living wholes, on the other. Because the second type of relation is marked by homonymy, the first type characterizes

---

<sup>34</sup> This assumes that for x to be the primary subject of y simply *is* for y to belong primarily to x.

<sup>35</sup> This is Aristotle's familiar homonymy thesis. *Meta.*, 7.10, 1035b24-5; 7.11, 1036b31-2. See Christopher Shields, 'The Homonymy of the Body' in *Archiv für die Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1993, 1-30.

a relation between an *energeia* and its secondary subject – secondary because dependent upon the whole of which it is a part. It is therefore not a subject that clashes with the primary status possessed by the living whole.

Thus, Pavlopoulos' distinction between the subject of an activity and what serves an activity is a distinction between an activity's primary and secondary subjects, as organic activities are the ends of a least two related things: the living whole and the living part or living parts that serve the activity. Joining the argument that links an activity *y* being the good of *x* with *x* being a subject of *y* and the argument concerning the distinction between primary and secondary subjects of a life activity, one may conclude that seeing belongs primarily to the whole as its end and good and secondarily to the eyes as their end and good. But it belongs necessarily to both, as the whole requires its parts to exist, while the parts are defined by the function they perform for the whole. These points can be generalized for all forms of sensing. Again, the claim that the intrinsic good of a thing belongs to it primarily has been shown to be false, for it can belong to a thing either primarily or secondarily depending on whether that thing is a whole or a part. But the argument has not shown that for every specific type of *energeia*, that it will have both a primary and a secondary subject. For thinking for Aristotle does not have an organ that serves it directly, so is an activity of the whole alone.<sup>36</sup> This in effect means that the transition from analogue (3) to analogue (4) marks a reduction in the number of subjects and sites involved in the relation between an *energeia* and that which it is in. As the series of analogues really has to do with sites, one is to take that reduction as referring to the number of sites.<sup>37</sup>

A further point of clarification is required. Whereas the eyes are the axiological secondary subjects and (secondary subjects of realization) for the activity of seeing, the composite individual is a primary axiological subject in a distinct way. First of all, it is not a subject of realization; its body is the basis for the realization of biological activities. Second, biological activities are included in the composite individual in a way that is

---

<sup>36</sup> *DA*, 3.4, 429a24—27.

<sup>37</sup> What it could mean to say that an activity has a number of different locations will be addressed below, note 51, after the argument of Section III is complete.



stricter than how they are included in the parts that respectively serve them. This is obvious from the very fact that the individual is a composite that includes its activities, whereas the organic parts that serve its activities are straightaway not composites that include their activities, but parts that necessarily refer beyond themselves to those activities as their constitutive goods. But the activities remain intelligible apart from both the composite individual and the parts that serve them. This is why it is correct to describe both subjects as axiological subjects.

The analogies treat what I have called the site of *energeia* in answer to the ‘where?’ question as opposed to ‘what underlies a thing’s properties?’ question. Analogues (1—2) function restrictively to determine the interpretation of (3—4) as involving site relations. The concept of a subject, which answers to the question ‘what underlies a thing’s properties?’, admits a distinction between primary and secondary subject. I have assumed that if there is an ordinally defined subject, then it is identical with a site of the same ordinal degree. If this assumption is correct, then one may conclude that Aristotle is committed to recognizing a distinction between a primary and a secondary site; and one may explain his locating seeing in the organic whole, rather than the eyes, by appealing to his recognizing that the whole is the primary site of any *energeia*. (Thinking would only have a primary, and not a secondary, site on this interpretation.) But one should keep in mind the different criteria invoked to identify the subject and site of an *energeia*, respectively. In accordance with the passage from *De Somno*, primary subjecthood belongs to a living whole for which an *energeia* is its good and secondary subjecthood belongs to a living part for which an *energeia* is its good.<sup>38</sup> In accordance with 1050a30—b3, primary sitehood belongs to a living whole when it performs a function that does not produce something apart from that performance – which implies that the performance is an end and a good – and secondary sitehood belongs to a living part under the same condition. But one is able to draw the distinction between primary and secondary sitehood *because* one can justify this distinction for

---

<sup>38</sup> Thus three conceptions of subjecthood have so far emerged in the course of the argument: x is the subject of y if i) x owns y as an inhering property or ii) x is the necessary vehicle for the realization of y or iii) y is *the* good of x (where x cannot be its own good, at least in the same sense of ‘being the good of x’, y is part of what-x-is, and x is not part of what-y-is).

subjects of an *energeia*. This much partially explains the motivation behind analogues (3) and (4), which state that seeing and thinking are ‘in’ the being that sees and the being that thinks respectively. What is needed is a clearer understanding of their argumentative function. This, I submit, will emerge through an analysis of analogue (5), which states that life is in the soul – not the living whole, but its form and essence. The suggestion is that at this stage we are to think of the argument as turning upon the contrast between specific *energeiai* being in the living whole and the comprehensive *energeia* of life being in the soul.

#### IV

The conclusions concerning primary and secondary subjects and sites makes the fact that Aristotle relates the activity of life immediately to the *soul*, and not the individual, both more perplexing and more interesting. It is the thread in the text which, if pulled, may reveal the plan after which it was woven. The difficulty is that Aristotle’s argument to this point makes it seem that the individual should be the primary subject and site of all *energeiai*, and consequently of the sum of *energeiai* that is identical with life.<sup>39</sup> Because life includes self-maintenance, sensing, and thinking, to locate life in the soul as its (primary) site would seem to imply that each specific *energeia* is also located in the soul as its primary site. But this implication added to (3—4) produces the result that each specific *energeia* has *two*, mutually exclusive, primary sites, the individual and the soul. Clearly, what is needed is a justification and explanation of the shift in reference from the individual to the soul that avoids this seeming inconsistency. Let it be noted that the general problem is not an artifact of the present interpretation, but a result of Aristotle having placed seeing and thinking ‘in’ two distinct sites: the individual and the soul. The

---

<sup>39</sup> I by no means wish to suggest that life is a merely summative, or aggregate, unity of *energeiai*. Only for the purpose of this interpretation one need not specify the relation between specific *energeiai* beyond the numerical one.

question becomes, how are these *energeiai* related to both? In what senses of ‘in’ does each relation, to the individual and the soul, respectively, hold?

Towards explaining why Aristotle’s analogical exposition of *energeia* contains the referential shift, one may first note and emphasize the clear difference between specific *energeiai*, such as seeing and thinking, and the comprehensive *energeia* of life, which embraces every specific *energeia*, seeing and thinking included. Otherwise put, life is not simply some other specific instance of *energeia*, as it embraces what has already been identified and any other conceivable *energeiai*. This shift in reference from the specific to the comprehensive allows one to hypothesize that something peculiar about the soul makes it most qualified to comprehend or at least stand in a privileged relation to *all energeiai*. This interpretive clue opens up at least three possibilities to explore. The first is that it may be correct to locate each specific *energeia*, taken absolutely (self-maintenance *or* sensing *or* thinking), in the living whole as the primary site of each, while it may at once be correct to locate in the soul each specific *energeia* *considered as part of a cohesive set of energeiai* (self-maintenance-sensing-desiring-thinking- ...), which cohesive set is equivalent to the comprehensive *energeia* of life. Accordingly, the assignation of life as such to the soul would be understood as a function of the assignation of each of its parts understood as cohering with each other. This possibility calls for clear reasons justifying the distribution of assignations in accordance with the two different modes of conception; such reasons are, it seems to me, difficult to find. Further, there is an objection to this possibility that seems decisive. If an abstracted *energeia* has its site in the individual and the same *energeia* when hyphenated with every other has its site in the soul, then one and the same *energeia* is primarily – that is, unqualifiedly and without further precision with respect to locating the activity being possible – in the whole individual and in whatever part of the individual Aristotle would ultimately locate the soul (as he locates at least moving soul in the heart). If Aristotle did not understand the soul as spatially dispersed throughout the individual – and he produced no statement to this effect – then one and the same activity would be located in some unqualified way in the living body, while likewise being unqualifiedly located in the soul. The difference in respects in which the activity is taken does not help against this objection, but merely sets it up. Hence, this interpretation should be rejected.

So I turn to the second possibility. This involves simply identifying individual and soul. This identification confronts the obvious difficulty that the individual is a composite of body and soul. In the central books of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle does entertain the possibility that the individual in some sense *is* his soul, but he nowhere asserts it.<sup>40</sup> He does indeed assert an identity between individual and *intellect* at *Nichomachean Ethics* (*NE*), 10.7, 1178a2—3. One could recognize a qualified identity between individual and soul on the grounds that the latter may be taken as the etiological and axiological center of the living thing. It is that which is the cause of being a living thing and that ultimately which is benefited and harmed as the good for the sake of which every organ does its work.<sup>41</sup> On the basis of this qualified identity one could infer that the activities that have their primary site (and subject) in the individual simultaneously have their primary site (and subject) in the soul *as* that which is the cause of the individual and its typical activities.<sup>42</sup> The movement of the analogy would be from the composite mode of individuality to the mode identifying the individual with the cause of its being, in its composite mode, the kind of thing that it is and of its axiological properties.<sup>43</sup> This indeed would make some sense of the argument up to the point from which the inference to the identity thesis commences. But it is not the only successful reading available and it rests upon a conception of individuality that receives little support in the Aristotelian texts. I proceed then to the third interpretive possibility.

---

<sup>40</sup> 7.10, 1037a6—10.

<sup>41</sup> *DA*, 2.4, 415b18—21.

<sup>42</sup> That the soul is the cause of living things is asserted at *DA*, 2.4, 415b8; that it is the cause of the *essence* of living things is asserted at b11—12; that it is the cause of the *being* of living things is asserted at b12—14. This last assertion forms part of argument to the effect that soul is a cause as the essence of living things. The argument is simple: essence (*οὐσία*) is the cause of being (*εἶναι*) for all things; for all living things, to be (*εἶναι*) is to live; soul is the cause and principle of this [i.e., life (*ζῆν*)]; therefore, soul is cause in the sense of essence (*οὐσία*). That *οὐσία* must be translated with essence here is almost too obvious to merit specific comment.

<sup>43</sup> If one accepts the identity thesis, then one can conclude that the soul is the cause of the numerical unity of a thing as well. For as identical with life activity the soul would have a kind of particularity that would stand as an end for the various life changes that inhere in a living thing's bodily parts. Thus it would unify the set of life activities and organs into a cohesive set oriented towards one end. This explanation of the individuality of the living thing requires a separate discussion.

The third possibility is that there may be a distinction between the soul and the living whole that is analogous to that between the living whole and the living part with respect to ordinal gradations of being a site. Such a distinction would ultimately force an adjustment to the conclusion drawn in Section III: that the living whole is the primary site of an *energeia*. Instead the soul would take the place of the individual, demoting the living whole to the status of secondary site and the living part to the status of tertiary site. The projected gradation of (soul)-(living-whole)-(living-part) assumes that the primacy of the soul with respect to the activity of life implies the primacy of soul with respect to every specific *energeia*, even when each is taken absolutely. Relative to this third possibility, to demonstrate that the soul is the primary site of the comprehensive *energeia* of life, some reason analogous to that discovered on behalf of the living whole must be found. In the latter case, the homonymy thesis concerning living parts and living wholes was extended to the activities of parts in relation to the activity of life characteristic of the whole. But this consideration cannot be invoked to establish the priority of the soul with respect to the body, as the homonymy thesis concerns only relations between composite wholes and material parts, not the relation between the composite whole and the soul. Some other criterion of primacy must be found for the soul.

The solution consists in following Aristotle's conception of the soul as the cause of life in the living whole. This criterion straightaway establishes the primacy-relation sought.<sup>44</sup> The form that analogue (5) assumes rests upon the doctrine that seeing and thinking are in the individual engaged in those activities *because* living has its site in the soul. The converse is not the case: living is not 'in' the soul because seeing and thinking are in the individual. On this second proposal, then, the motion of the analogies expounding *energeia* is from site relations that presuppose a determining ground to a site relation that is their determining ground. Seeing and thinking are occurring in this individual because the comprehensive set of biological *energeiai*, life as such, is situated in the soul and not elsewhere. The order from (3—5) corresponds to a movement from

---

<sup>44</sup> See note 42. One should also note that taking the soul as cause of the individual being a living thing is in fact simpler than taking it as identical with the individual. The obvious reason is that any form of identity between soul and individual must be mediated by a characterization of the soul: as cause of being or as cause of goodness.

explananda to explanans. This reading thus far makes the best sense of the text and has strong textual support in *De Anima*. It also cashes in on the suggestion that Aristotle invokes the soul in connection with life because the latter is a comprehensive set of specific *energeiai* each of which is exhibited by the individual because the whole set of activities is ‘in’ the soul that is the cause of the body having life.

Before turning to the inference to the identity thesis, I wish to take a summary look at how the argument thus far constrains one to interpret analogue (5). The special difficulty in connecting it with the conclusion drawn from it has been that Aristotle chooses to use the ‘in’ relation to express the relation between the soul and life. To repeat, on the face of it the ‘in’ relation immediately suggests that one of two relations obtains: i) the inherence relation, in accordance with which the soul would be the subject and life the property; (ii) the mereological relation, in accordance with which one thing (life) would be one part of the essence of soul alongside other parts. Two considerations together rule out (i): first, Aristotle prepares the reader’s understanding of (3—5) with analogues (1—2), in which the ‘in’ relation denotes the site of a change, not what owns that change; the text is simply not about the inherence relation. But this contextual consideration is not decisive on its own, as it is possible that sitehood implies subjecthood, so that any reference to a site implies that the subject identical with that site be referred to as well even though not intended as such. But the second consideration, already twice met, does rule out the inference from being a site to being a subject of inherence: Life cannot be a mere incidental of the soul. In sum, the context dictates that ‘life is in the soul’ indicates a site relation, and the reference to soul blocks any inference to the soul being the subject of inherence of life as well. This inference is indeed necessary to draw for changes (*energeia* type-1), but not for *energeiai* (*energeia* type-2). This should not be at all surprising, as changes are accidents of subjects of inherence, while *energeiai* are the constitutive good of axiological subjects. In the case of change, there is a kind of ontological fissure separating a subject of inherence from the change inhering in it, while in the case of living activities there is what one may call a constitutive ontological relation whereby one thing, an axiological subject, is most fully realized as what it is through a living activity.

While these considerations rule out the possibility that life is in the soul as an incidental property,<sup>45</sup> they do not, by themselves, exclude (ii), that life is *part* of the essence of the soul. This possibility is intrinsically plausible, as it is certainly intelligible that the essence of soul contain capacities for life activities in addition to the exercise of those capacities.<sup>46</sup> But (ii) would make the inference to the identity thesis invalid and

---

<sup>45</sup> Relations between material parts and *energeia* have no bearing on how one is to take the relation between life and the soul, which is not itself a material part. But closer inspection reveals that indeed there is a question concerning whether the soul, despite not being matter, is in fact what above was called an ‘axiological subject.’ The subject for this kind of relation is i) realized, perfected, through an end and good distinct from itself, ii) not contained in the essence of this end and iii) contains a reference to the end in its own account. For example, seeing is the good of the eyes; may be analyzed without invoking the material properties of the eyes (even though it requires eyes as a [secondary] subject of realization); and eyes – even when blind – are what they are and are intelligible only with reference to seeing. What if one had written ‘soul’ in the place of ‘eyes’? In that case the soul would be realized through an *energeia* that contained no reference to it, though it contained a reference to that *energeia*. This would have the awkward consequence that the soul be intelligible apart from the biological activities constitutive of life, emptying the soul of specific content. In fact, the axiological subject relation is only possible between material parts and their *energeiai* because the material parts possess properties distinct from those of the *energeia*; this qualifies those parts as a ‘material cause’ contributing properties to the material part-*energeia* complex not contributed by the *energeia*. But soul cannot contain any real properties *apart from* its relation to activities and capacities for those activities (and being ‘unmoved’, ‘immaterial’, etc. are not of the right order of properties to make the soul a possible axiological subject, as these are *explained* by its being identical with its *energeiai*); remove these *energeiai* and the soul has no content at all. Whereas it makes sense to say that part x has properties y, z, ... and exists for the sake of *energeia* A, it makes no sense to say that soul x has no identifiable properties except to exist for the sake of *energeia* A. If one counters that the content of the soul is precisely its being identical with a set of capacities for certain *energeiai*, then the response is that a capacity is not distinct from its corresponding *energeia* in the way necessary for the soul to be an axiological subject; rather, an *energeia* is simply the *exercise* of its capacity – with the result that if the soul is identical with its capacities, then it is identical with its *energeiai*, capacity and *energeia* being simply different modes of soul. This thought, which rules out what may here be called the ‘axiological subject thesis’ in relation to the soul, also rules out the mereological thesis, as will be shown above. Thoroughness requires consideration of *DA* 2.1, 412a20—b1. There Aristotle famously argues that the soul is a ‘having-its-end-within-itself’ of the body, but merely in a manner analogous to the possession of knowledge rather than its exercise. Accordingly, soul would be the first, and the waking state of the soul, the second, ‘having-its-end-within-itself.’ Understanding the relation between soul and life activities this way, one could be led to conclude, despite the remarks above, that indeed the soul is an axiological subject. But one must consider the context, in which Aristotle is specifically concerned to give an account of the soul that distinguishes it from the *body*. *This contrastive perspective determines the meaning of his subsequent remarks*. Accordingly, when Aristotle distinguishes between two grades of ‘having-its-end-within-itself’ in *DA*, 2.1, he should be taken to distinguish between two grades of realization *relative to* the living body – simply *having* a soul, even when the body is slumbering, is already a kind of realization for it, but the soul’s being active is a second and higher realization of the body. One should take his point to be that soul is *already* a ‘having-its-end’ insofar as it *capacitates* the body in certain ways, not that the exercise of these capacities is somehow intelligible apart from soul.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Parts of Animals*, 1.1, 641a18—20 where Aristotle considers the possibilities that form is soul, or is merely a part of soul, or else is something that does not exist without soul. If by ‘form’ we take him to mean life activities, then here he is in effect considering both the identity thesis and what might be called the ‘mereological thesis.’

make it extremely difficult to interpret the conclusion ‘substance, i.e. form, is *energeia* [qua *energeia*].’ The reason, again, is that the copula in this sentence cannot be taken to predicate a quality, and it is not clear what else besides the copula of identity it could conceivably be. If Aristotle indeed meant a mereological relation by analogue (5), then the conclusion should have read ‘substance, i.e. form, is *energeia* *and* its other parts, particularly capacities.’ But these remarks merely point to the fact that what is needed to gain a genuine understanding of the passage is an argument showing why life activities are not parts of the soul alongside other parts, namely capacities for those activities. Apart from such an explanation, Aristotle’s argument must either remain baffling or even possibly be written off as a bad argument – but at the price of making Aristotle look stupid.

The whole question now is on what additional premise Aristotle inferred the identity thesis, while apparently excluding the mereological understanding of (5). The following considerations are meant to supply the missing premise.

Note the following concerning the structure that the interpretation assigns to the relation between (5) and the conclusion. The claim being argued for is that (5) has a simple and not a compound meaning. (5) means that life has its site in the soul *and nothing more* – not that a) life has its site in the soul *and* that the soul is its subject, nor that b) it has its site in the soul *and* it is part of the soul alongside some other part(s). If either of these were correct interpretations of (5), then no inference to any conclusion would even be necessary, and the factual inference to the identity thesis would be invalid. (a) has been ruled out; it is now only necessary to rule out (b) while supplying the premise that licenses the inference being examined.

Again, one may plausibly hold that the soul contains not only certain *energeiai*, but also the capacities to perform the intermittent life *energeiai* of seeing and thinking (at least). Now, the strongest independent consideration against this possibility seems to me to be the following. For Aristotle a capacity is not something ontologically distinct from its exercise. Rather the exercise is *of* the corresponding capacity that remains, in its exercise, a dispositional property of what has had it all along; the exercise is the dispositional property doing its work, existing in the active modality. Charlotte Witt has shown that the dispositional concept of capacity should be distinguished from, yet



correlated to, the modal concept of potentiality.<sup>47</sup> When an individual (dispositionally) possesses a capacity for sight that he is not exercising, he is (modally) potentially seeing, whereas when he exercises that capacity for sight he is (modally) ‘at work’, ‘performing a function’, seeing.<sup>48</sup> The transition from not exercising a capacity to exercising it is not the acquisition of a new property<sup>49</sup>, but the activation of what remains the same in its being exercised; it is simply *a different mode of the same thing*. The unexercised capacity is not some further element of the soul alongside its activities, but the soul, and consequently the individual, being in the mode of potentiality with respect to the exercise of those capacities; and in those capacities being exercised the soul, and the individual, engages in the corresponding activity.<sup>50</sup> This accounts for the presence of capacities in the soul in a way that supports the identity thesis. In the absence of any other plausible proposal for an essential property of the soul apart from its activities, one should infer

---

<sup>47</sup> She prefers the term ‘power’ over capacity. See her *Ways of Being*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP), 2003. She finds the distinction between capacity/power and potentiality worked out in 9.1—5. There is no particular difficulty in assuming that Aristotle kept track of his own argument and was presupposing this distinction in 9.8. and particularly at 1050b1—3, as holding that capacities are not independent parts of the soul contributes not a little towards making sense of the passage. For a contrasting argument that Aristotle is reasoning about powers throughout Book 9, see Michael Frede, ‘Aristotle’s Notion of Potentiality in *Metaphysics*’, in *Unity, Identity, and Explanation in Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (T. Scaltsas, D. Charles, and M. L. Gill, eds.), New York: OUP, 1994. The problem with Frede’s reading is that, as Witt notes, it forces one to understand a boy as a capacity, which is obviously strained. On the reading adopted here a boy should be understood as an incomplete substance, the incompleteness of which is captured conceptually by saying that he is potentially a mature adult.

<sup>48</sup> The important point here seems to be that he is characterized as a thing that sees even when he is not actively seeing anything; his seeing in potentiality is enough to qualify him as a seeing thing (and thus as an animal). When he actively sees, he does acquire some new incidental property, but realizes, internally, his own end. Cf. Stephen Menn, ‘The Origin of Aristotle’s Concept of *Energeia*: *Energeia* and *Dunamis*’, *Ancient Philosophy*, XIV, Spring, 1994, 73—114. Also note the distinctively Aristotelian linkage of grades of realization, or perfection, with what we feel compelled to call *modal* distinctions.

<sup>49</sup> I take this formulation from Pavlopoulos, 151—2.

<sup>50</sup> It is worth emphasizing that the individual exercises those capacities, not the soul. The soul by contrast contains the exercise of each capacity as part of its essence, with which it is identical according to the arguments of *Meta.* 7.6. The soul is identical with *energeia* when the latter term is taken as shorthand for the complete set of *energeiai* that make up soul; when those *energeiai* are not exercised the essential properties of the soul remain the same, albeit the soul and its essential properties exist in a different mode of being. Why did Aristotle not then say that the soul is identical with specific biological activities, whether actively or merely potentially exercised? The answer is that the soul is completely itself when an individual is exercising all of the capacities that are possessed in virtue of the soul; soul is *unqualifiedly* identical with those exercises. When those activities lie dormant, the soul merely awaits their somatic impediments being removed, so that it may return to its state of completion. When in potentiality, the soul is as it were merely qualifiedly identical with certain capacities, as these unexercised capacities qua unexercised place the soul in the mode of potentiality.

from (5) that the soul is identical with life. That is, ‘life has its site in the soul’ and ‘life activities are identical with the exercise of their corresponding capacities’ imply ‘the soul is identical with the exercise of its capacities, i.e., is *energeia*.’ This establishes the identity thesis.

But it likewise establishes the connected conclusion that the soul is identical with its unexercised capacities (= dispositions) in which circumstance it is soul ‘in a certain mode’, namely that of potentiality. But as the capacities are intelligible only with reference to the corresponding activities, while the converse does not hold, it follows that the soul is unqualifiedly identical with its *energeiai*, all of which are comprehended in the *energeia* of life, and identical with its potential modality in a qualified way, i.e., insofar as some of its defining activities lie dormant. In sum, the soul is identical with a definite dispositional content that is subject to a binary modal distinction, which distinction evinces the peculiarity of being understood teleologically, i.e., to be in *energeia* is for the thing in *energeia* to have realized an intrinsic end – recall the passage referring to sensing and thinking from *De Somno*. Finally, while the modality of soul is binary one of those poles, that of *energeia*, is clearly primary, as both the mode of potentiality and the capacity it corresponds to are only intelligible – for Aristotle, this means are only something definite at all – with reference to the exercise of that capacity, its *energeia*. Accordingly, the *energeia* is not defined as the exercise of a capacity, but simply as an activity that is an end; it is only its intermittence that enables one to understand that it is incidentally, albeit necessarily, an exercise of a capacity. Thus, understanding *energeia* and *energeia* in accordance with two distinct but necessarily connected senses, the dispositional and the modal, opens the way towards supplying a premise that licenses the inference to the identity thesis.

More generally, understanding the assertion that life is in the soul as resting on the conception of soul as cause of life in the body and adding the additional premise that capacities are *energeiai* in the mode of potentiality constrains one to understand the

conclusion as stating that substance, or form, is *energeia*, which simply is the identity thesis.<sup>51</sup>

This interpretation has one describe the motion from (3—4) to (5) as that from the analogues referring to the composite whole engaging in certain biological activities to that referring to the cause of that whole’s engaging in those specific activities. It explains why Aristotle locates the site of specific life activities both in the individual and in the soul; but, unlike the rejected alternatives, it compels one to recognize *three* grades of sitedness. The following table exhibits these grades and integrates the conclusions thus far drawn into a format allowing for easy overview:

<b><i>Energeia</i></b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Gradations</b>
Seeing.	The individual seeing.	<i>Primary Site</i> : The Soul. <i>Secondary Site (= Primary Subject)</i> : The Individual. <i>Tertiary Site (= Secondary Subject)</i> : The organs that serve sight.
Thinking.	The individual thinking.	<i>Primary Site</i> : The Soul. <i>Secondary Site (= Primary Subject)</i> : The Individual. <i>Tertiary Site (= Secondary Subject)</i> : None.
Living (in Human Beings)	Soul	<i>Primary Site</i> : The Soul <i>Secondary Site (= Primary Subject)</i> : The Individual. <i>Tertiary Site (= Secondary Subject)</i> : None, as thinking has no organ and is partially constitutive of the activity of life for human beings. However the tertiary site of sensing + self-maintaining is the whole organic body.

This table organizes the relation between the soul as the cause of life in the living thing and the individual as that which is alive because it has a soul. In the lesson column, I have added statements on the position of the organic body and individual parts in the ordinal scheme of site and subject relations. But despite the difference in the criteria invoked to justify the distinctions between, on the one hand, primary and secondary site, and, on the other, secondary and tertiary site, a certain common thread runs throughout.

---

<sup>51</sup> The conclusion refers to generic *energeia*, but clearly soul is identical only with one of its species, *energeia*. I will explain how the conclusion applies to changes in Section VI.

For seeing has its primary site in the soul, and not the living whole, because the soul is the cause of the living thing's seeing; and seeing has its secondary site in the living whole, and not the eyes, because the activity of the part belongs primarily to that of the whole. In each relation (primary to secondary site and secondary to tertiary site) a different species of *dependence* is exhibited: the whole upon the cause of its being the kind of thing it is and the part upon the whole to which it essentially belongs.<sup>52</sup>

One may justifiably entertain suspicion concerning any interpretation that creates such an array of distinctions as those exhibited in the table above. But the distinctions follow deductively from two other distinctions that any reader of Aristotle must acknowledge: i) that between organic parts and organic wholes (a distinction that all human beings must recognize) and ii) that between the body and the soul (a central distinction for Aristotle). It was necessary to analyze (i) in order to understand why Aristotle chose to locate *energeiai* in the whole rather than the part. Analyzing (ii) was necessary because of Aristotle's sudden shift in reference from organic wholes to the soul in (5). If the goal is to understand the concept of sitehood in Aristotle's text, and it is necessary as a matter of course to analyze the relation between sitehood and what can appear at first blush to be closely related to it, subjecthood, then it becomes necessary to do so in relation to distinctions (i) and (ii). The inevitable consequence is that further distinctions between gradations of sitehood and subjecthood must be acknowledged. So justifiable suspicion should upon reflection be replaced with the confidence that the argument has been conducted with a view towards spelling out those consequences of Aristotle's

---

<sup>52</sup> For an *energeia* to have three different sites is not for it to occupy three different places. The individual as a whole has a definite place in virtue of its having limits and one can state truly, with a permissible degree of indeterminacy, that Socrates' activity of seeing is occurring in him – and not anywhere outside himself. Because the material body is coextensive with the composite individual, one can likewise state truly that Socrates' activity of seeing is occurring in his *body* and not anywhere outside *it*. By contrast, the soul is extensionless, but incidentally located in a body, so one can state truly that, however the spatial relation between the soul and Socrates is to be more precisely understood, his sensing is primarily in his soul and not primarily in his body as a whole. But as has been noted Aristotle may have located the soul at a point in the heart; if he did, then one can likewise truly state that Socrates' activity of seeing is occurring in his heart and not in some other organ – say, the other major contender, the eyes. The concept of site is relative to the set of alternatives being entertained and what kind of exclusions are built into the answer to the question 'where is the *energeia*/change occurring?' And once various answers are given, one can then set about establishing an order of priority and posteriority invoking part/whole and ground/grounded relations.

assumptions that must be understood for an understanding of the argument for the identity thesis.

There is another objection that requires addressing. One may claim that it gets things backwards to affirm that the individual is the secondary site of a sense activity, while simultaneously holding that the organic part that serves that activity is its tertiary site. For this seems to imply that it can be more precise to locate an activity in a thing with greater volume than in one with less – in a whole individual than in a part that serves the sense activity. But it is clearly more precise to locate Socrates in Athens than in Greece, in the Athenian agora than in Athens, in the northwest corner, etc. One may respond to this concern in the following way. The objection presupposes the view that space is homogenous, such that the only relevant criterion for locating a thing or activity with greater or lesser precision is that of a particular spatial volume, lesser volumes always correlating with greater precision up to the point where the particular volume in question is identical with that of what is being located (if it has a volume). But Aristotelian space is neither homogenous nor a self-subsistent individual with extended parts that it as a whole contains or of which it is composed. Aristotelian space is qualitatively articulated, not merely by the elements and the heavenly spheres, but by the particular, morphologically well-defined beings that exist within it; and it is dependent upon and in some sense an accident of these beings. The regions of space being ontologically articulated and dependent, one cannot say that an activity is first and foremost in some precise *region* of space. Rather, it is *in* the independent, separate, being relative to which it either is an end, if it is the activity of thinking or sensing, or else points towards an end, if it is a generation. This justifies holding that sensing is in the living whole, which is ontologically separate, rather than in its parts, which are dependent and ‘inseparate.’ These considerations help one identify a remarkable symmetry in Aristotle’s assertions in (1—4): changes (*energeia* type-1) have their site in potential wholes, while *energeiai* (*energeia* type-2) have their site in wholes that presently exist. With respect to changes, teleologically conceived, it is more precise to locate them in a secondary and dependent mode of existence, that of potentiality, than in what is presently real, as the change points towards that potential being as its end; with respect to *energeiai* it is more precise to locate them in the whole than in the part. But as *energeiai* are in the

whole on account of the soul, it likewise follows that they are in the latter in a sense prior to that qualifying their sitedness in the whole; as changes are in a potential whole on account of some external agency serving the realization of an end, they are simply in the potential wholes corresponding to those ends and not primarily in something else, say, the intellect of the artisan who conceives of the form that he gradually realizes in matter. Some final words on the structure of the argument itself. It deploys a five-part analogy that explicates the key relation between life and the soul and then draws an inference from the latter to the identity thesis, an inference that depends upon the unstated premise that capacities are not independent parts, but rather modes, of soul. Upon very close inspection, analogues (1) and (2), expounding change, are shown to have not one, but two argumentative functions: first, they perform the function of constraining how one is to take the subsequent analogies, namely as involving what I have called the concept of a site, a spatial location, for *energeiai*; second, they identify this site with the individual, here specified as being in the mode of potentiality. Analogues (3—4) inherit both features of (1—2): they are concerned with sitedness and they identify that site with an individual, albeit one that is at work. But in (3—4) the relation is not between potential individuals and changes, but between living wholes and their particular biological activities. Thus, the argumentative function of (3—4) is to set up the transition to an explanation of the very fact that there are life activities in individuals. (5) inherits the reference to sitedness from (1—4), but surpasses the identification of site and individual (potential or fully at work) in favor of an identification of site with the cause of the living individual being alive, the soul. But (5), incidentally, does not explain the very fact that changes are in potential individuals, a fact which could easily be explained by appeal to the existence of rational animals with needs and desires for various artifacts. Without (1—2) it would not be clear that the concern is with sitedness, while without (3—4) the transition to (5) would remain unmotivated. (5) names the cause of living activities being in an individual and characterizes it positively by referring to the fact that life occurs in it; (5) is then taken as the key premise for a deductive inference relying upon the suppressed premise

that capacities are modes of soul.<sup>53</sup> When examined closely and patiently the entire argument, its precise sequence of assertions, and Aristotle's precise choice of wording makes very good sense. But now more needs to be said about the identity thesis that follows once one accepts (5) along with the suppressed premise.

## V

Granted that Aristotle identifies the soul with the *energeia* of life, questions remain concerning how one is to understand this identification. Two observations will clarify matters: first, the most rudimentary form of the activity of life, nutritive self-maintenance, never ceases so long as a thing is alive. Second, various life activities are not species of life, as species exclude one another; life activities cohere as a conjunctive set.<sup>54</sup> Hence, the soul is not what exercises the capacity for life, but is simply the various *energeiai* inherent in an organic body, only one of which is continuous, namely the activity of nutrition. If one grants that nutritive, sensate, and intellective soul are not merely co-possible, but form a unity, then one may hold that whenever a living thing senses or thinks, it is the soul itself that encompasses the activities of sensing or thinking. The soul is *energeia* in the sense of the comprehensive set of *energeiai*, a conclusion that in a way serves as a kind of culmination of the whole study of sensible substance.<sup>55</sup>

Another problem remains: how are we to understand the intermittence of the activities of sensing and thinking in relation to the continuous existence of the soul? This

---

<sup>53</sup> Of course, I am assuming that life comprehends all *energeiai* of sensible, perishable, living substances – a further suppressed premise that is perhaps obviously true in Aristotle's system.

<sup>54</sup> I take this point from Pavlopoulos, 156. But I would add that they do not merely conjoin, but intertwine in various ways: we see thoughtfully and think in a manner that makes free use of analogies provided by sight. Mark Shiffman originally made this or a similar point to me in conversation.

<sup>55</sup> Three other passages from 9.8 correlate well with this doctrine. 1049b17–8 simply identifies what is prior in time as what is active; 1050a16–19 states that just as the teacher believes to exhibit his complete product when the student is shown engaging in the activity he was learning, so too does nature achieve its end when the natural being performs its typical activities; 1050a21–23 supports the previous observation by arguing that whatever 'energeia' refers to is covered by 'having-its-end' as well (cf. note 8, point (iii), which describes a second function for this passage.)

problem is comparable to the problem of the coming-to-be of form. Aristotle claims that form, and hence the soul, *comes* to be without ever *coming* to be; i.e., the soul first does not exist and then exists, but does not become a complete soul over a continuous stretch of time.<sup>56</sup> A similar conception can be applied to, say, an individual's beginning to think: the commencement of thinking is instantaneous, as when a binary light-switch is used to fill a space instantaneously with light, the preceding darkness departing in what seems like an instant. Of course, this is an approximate analogy, as light travels at a finite velocity of which we can have no sense experience; but it nonetheless provides us with what we cannot help but take as the conscious experience of instantaneity. By analogy, the soul does not suffer change when certain capacities come to be exercised, but activates. The same point applies to each *energeia*.<sup>57</sup> When the individual begins to sense or think, it activates an aspect of the soul that had to that moment remained dormant because something had impeded that activity – just as in the case of artificial light something had impeded the flow of electrons.

One can ground this point concerning the uninterrupted identity of the soul in a text that also provides some support for the interpretation of capacities offered above – the interpretation that was used to defeat the proposal that capacities are somehow parts of the soul distinct from their exercise. Otherwise put, this one text both underwrites a premise leading to the identity thesis and sheds light on how that thesis is to be understood in relation to the phenomenon of intermittent life activities. In *DA*, 2.5, where Aristotle is discussing senses of *energeia*, he writes:

For the one having knowledge comes to think theoretically, which is either not alteration [at all] (but a progress into itself and into its having-its-end-within-itself) or else another kind of alteration [altogether]. [417b5—7]

---

<sup>56</sup> See *Meta.*, 8.3, 1043b15, where Aristotle states that ‘substance (= form) is either eternal or perishable without ever being in process of perishing, and generated without ever being in process of generation.’ (This is Tredennick’s translation.) But ‘the eternality of form’ is a Platonic notion that Aristotle rejects, so only the second possibility remains. Also cf. 8.5, 1044b21—22 and 6.3, 1027a29—30.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher Shields advances the same solution, which he finds throughout *DA*: “Soul and Subject in Aristotle’s *De Anima*” In *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy V: Aristotle’s Ontology*, eds., Antony Preus and John P. Anton (Albany: SUNY UP, 1992), 229—243; cf. 241fn25.



Aristotle is arguing that the passage from potentiality to *energeia* does not involve acquiring a property that it previously lacked, but rather involves a modulation of the being of thing which passes from potentiality to *energeia*.<sup>58</sup> The modulation involves its achieving its end *internally* without the generation of a new individual or the realization of a new composite of matter and form. What is distinctively Aristotelian here is, I submit, the conception of what we would call ‘modality’ that involves degrees or levels of completeness or perfection. When each of the capacities of the soul is activated, the soul is in a mode of being that corresponds to its inner perfection; when only some are activated, then it is incomplete in the relevant respects. But it is the same soul that is first incomplete and then complete, first in potentiality, then ‘at work.’

Finally, this analysis shows why two alternative views of the soul correspond to part of the truth. The view that the soul is a potentiality for life corresponds roughly with the fact that sensing and thinking are exercised intermittently. In no instance does the soul ever become nothing more than something in potentiality (or a mere capacity), as the activity of self-maintenance occurs continuously and the potentiality for sensing and thinking exist within the unity of the soul. The activation of sensing and thinking corresponds to two grades of completion internal to the soul and, consequently, the living individual. Thus the soul is most fully itself when all of its modes have been activated. A second view that the soul is the cause of the body possessing the capacity for life activities (or being potentially at work performing its typical functions) is correct insofar as it rightly traces the possession of every functional capacity back to their common ground.<sup>59</sup> It is in virtue of having a soul that a body is alive. But one should not make the mistake of reducing the soul to a mere capacitating element in the structure of the living thing, as if the soul played no internal role in the concrete, particular, unfolding life of the living thing. Rather one should understand the soul as capacitating the body insofar as it is the subject for a certain set of functional activities that have their primary site in the

---

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Pavlopoulos, 151-2. In accordance with the interpretation above, one may understand this modulation of being in passing from potentiality to *energeia* as coextensive with the transition from an unexercised capacity to the exercise of that capacity.

<sup>59</sup> See *Meta.* 7.10, 1035b14—20.

soul, their secondary site in the individual that is ensouled, and tertiary sites in the relevant organic parts.

In sum, the individual is at work maintaining itself, is potentially sensing, and is potentially thinking because its soul contains the continuous activity of self-maintenance as a coherent part of its essence and intermittently enjoys two further grades of completion through an instantaneous modulation of its being through the activation of sensing and thinking. This activation corresponds to the realization of the end corresponding to a potentiality and, in the same moment, to the exercise of a capacity previously dormant. The organic body maintains itself and senses *in the mode of potentiality* because it is an organic structure brought to a higher completion by being ensouled, i.e., being a subject for psychic activities. But it is impossible to say that the body thinks for Aristotle, even in potentiality, as thinking has no organ. Only the composite whole can think.

## VI

So much for understanding some aspects of the identity thesis itself. But Aristotle argues for the thesis in order to use it in turn as a premise in an argument for the substantial priority thesis, namely that *energeia* is prior in substantiality to potentiality. He writes from 1050b2—4:

. . . It is clear that substance, i.e. form, is *energeia*. And according to this argument it is clear that *energeia* is prior in substance to potentiality.

Thus, it is necessary to consider how the identity thesis supports this general conclusion.

The main difficulty to confront is that the support that the identity thesis lends to the substantial priority thesis may seem to be only partial – a fact that is not really a problem in and of itself, as Aristotle adduces numerous arguments for the substantial priority thesis, and these may cooperate in some way to imply it. Nevertheless, I submit that the argument for the identity thesis should be understood as leading to the substantial

priority thesis on its own, so I will add some words towards establishing its independence.

The appearance of partiality derives from the fact that the argument for the identity thesis ultimately draws a conclusion that involves merely one sub-type of generic *energeia*, the type equivalent to activities that are ends. Thus the identity thesis seems to say that generic *energeia* is identical with (primary) substance and form *insofar* as it is the type that is an end – that is, *insofar* as it is *energeia* in the sense familiar from 1048b18—35. This would seemingly only warrant the limited and basically uninteresting conclusion that generic *energeia* is prior to potentiality *only insofar* as it is taken as referring to an *energeia*, which is prior to potentiality because it is identical with primary substance (while change obviously is not). By analogy, animal is rational *insofar* as the kind of animal in question is human being. Just as in this latter case one cannot validly infer that *another* kind of animal is rational, so in the former it would seem that one could not infer that *another* kind of *energeia*, say, change, is prior in substance to potentiality. Again, one could rest content with this conclusion, as other arguments in the section from 1050a4—b3 support the substantial priority thesis for change.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> See note 8, (2), (3), and (5). There has been an effort in recent scholarship to show that substantial priority in 1050a4—b3 is understood in terms of ontological priority, as defined in *Meta.*, 5.11: x is ontologically prior to y iff x can exist without y, but y cannot exist without x. This strategy for reading the passage has the one advantage of being able to rely upon a text, 5.11, where substantial priority is explained in terms of ontological priority. But it has several disadvantages: first, ontological priority is nowhere invoked in 1050a4—b3; second, ontological priority *is* invoked in the *subsequent* passage where Aristotle asserts that *energeia* is prior in substance to potentiality *in a more authoritative sense* (1050b6—9) – one that apparently stands in contrast to that operative in 1050a4—b3; third, at *Physics*, 8.7, 260b15—19 Aristotle *distinguishes* substantial priority from ontological priority and at 261a13—20 Aristotle links substantial priority with *being complete*. The arguments reviewed in note 6 fit better with the thesis that the complete is substantially prior to the incomplete where ‘complete’ refers to having or being an end: a mature specimen is more complete than an immature specimen (1), the exercise of a capacity is more complete than the dormant capacity on account of the latter existing for the sake of being exercised (the burden of proof falls upon whoever would deny this) (2), informed matter is more complete than matter that is uninformed (3), and a having-its-end-within-itself is more complete than what exists for its sake (4). Further, the activity of building is more complete than the mere capacity to build and the finished product is more complete than activity of building (5). As for argument (6), to demonstrate that *energeia* is prior to potentiality by identifying it with primary substance is to show that what is in potentiality is what it is at all because an *energeia* (form, primary substance) causes it to be such. Now, if one objects that this conflates etiological and ontological relations, I reply that a sharp distinction between the two is based on no Aristotelian text. On the contrary, Aristotle’s investigation is into the principles and causes of being qua being; so it should come as no surprise if substantial priority is explained in terms of causal priority, where such causality is understood as determining the being of what is caused. In understanding the importance of completeness for an understanding of this passage, I have benefited a great deal from Christos Y.

But there is an analogy between *energeia* and change that works against this seeming partiality: whereas the comprehensive *energeia* of life as identical to the soul is the cause of a thing's *being alive*, a change is the cause of an agent carrying out a change *being qualified in the fashion corresponding to that change*: as an active builder, an active doctor ("healer"), or an active orator ("persuader"). But whereas *energeia* typifies one being, change always typifies two, as in addition to an agent, it typifies a patient that is characterized as coming-to-be such-and-such: a house, healthy, or persuaded. Thus, the *energeia* of life is prior in substance to having life in the mode of potentiality, which is characteristic of the body, because it is the cause of a thing being alive, and change is prior in 'substance' to the potentiality to carry out that change because it is the cause of the agent being the kind of producer it is, and the patient coming-to-be the kind of thing it is coming to be. In each case being a formal cause establishes priority.

---

Panayides' article, 'Aristotle on the Priority of Actuality in Substance' in *Ancient Philosophy* 19 (1999), pp. 327—344. For an attempt at reading 1050a4—b3 as involving ontological priority, see Stephen Makin, 'What does Aristotle Mean by Priority in Substance?', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 24, 2003; and Makin, 2006, 192—207. Makin's reading suffers from the defect of making substantial priority turn on the mere logical possibility that the adult members of an entire species exist without the existence of any immature specimens. But it seems to me very doubtful that Aristotle would base a major conclusion concerning substance a) on a mere logical possibility that Aristotle would not regard as a real possibility (as the concept of species extinction plays no role in his biology), so one which has nothing to do with the cosmos as Aristotle conceives it to be and which he is trying to comprehend and b) with reference to a logical possibility concerning an indefinite multitude of entities rather a single individual. The criterion that Makin relies upon would be acceptable to many modern and contemporary philosophers, but it becomes anachronistic when applied to Aristotle. Cf. Witt, pp. 79—94, who likewise defends the substantial priority = ontological priority reading. Complete satisfaction on the question of Aristotle's various criteria of substantial priority requires that two questions be answered: why does 1050b6—1051a2 suddenly invoke ontological priority as a criterion of substantial priority? Why does he say that ontological priority establishes substantial priority in a more authoritative way? The *recourse to completeness in 1050a4—b3 helps to answer both questions*, as one may view ontological priority in the case of the celestial spheres as a *consequence* of their peculiar kind of completeness. Celestial spheres are complete in a way that distinguishes them from mature products of generation: the former are simply in their end (moving in a circular path), so cannot have come into being or perish; the latter are in their end for a limited time on account of their dependence on changeable matter. Consequently, the former can exist without necessarily being accompanied by any specific perishable individual, while no perishable individual can exist without the celestial spheres existing. Their *energeia* is substantially prior to potentiality in a more 'authoritative' sense because, as Aristotle states 'no eternal thing is in potentiality' (1050b8) – except with respect to place (1050b17). In this case potentiality (for circular motion) is not merely superceded by *energeia* as the incomplete is superceded by the complete because the latter is the end of the former, but entirely excludes potentiality (for being a thing engaged in circular motion) as superfluous on account of the end in question always obtaining. In sum, the uninterrupted completeness of celestial motion implies the ontological priority of *energeia* to the potentialities found in perishable beings and a more *authoritative* mode of priority because *within* itself it is free of the potentiality to exist. These considerations put to rest the concerns with so-called 'explanatory' priority articulated by Witt, p. 87.

There is one minor complication. A builder with the capacity to build, but who never exercises that capacity, is potentially building, but is already a genuine builder. Even if he never builds again, so long as he preserves his building capacity he remains a builder and the *energeia* of building would not in his case be the cause of being a builder. But this consideration is not decisive. A capacity to build is not intelligible independently of its connection with actual cases of building; it is from the latter that the capacity derives its content, while an account of the *energeia* of building need not make any reference to the capacity to build.<sup>61</sup> This is not a point about dictionary definitions, but about what capacities and their corresponding activities are, as the account of each discloses the essence of each in the sense of intelligible structure. Thus, one should infer that the *energeia* of building is indeed the ultimate cause of being a builder because it is what lends the capacity, and corresponding potentiality, to build its intelligibility and, at bottom, is the cause of its being.<sup>62</sup>

This pattern of reasoning is not foreign to Aristotle. At *NE* 9.9, 1170a16—19 Aristotle reasons in an analogous manner concerning the implications of the fact that capacities are defined with reference to what they are capacities *for*. After first asserting that animal and human life are defined by their capacities, he then notes that capacities are defined with reference to their corresponding activities and concludes that ‘[human] life is in essence the *activity* of perceiving or thinking.’ One must then understand the concept of the activity of building, with reference to which the capacity to build is defined, as entering into the account of the related concepts of building, a builder, and the buildable. The analogy stands up between the cause of being alive and the cause of being a certain kind of agent. And it necessarily stands up between the cause of being alive and coming-to-be a certain kind of thing, as a mere potentiality or capacity cannot cause the latter. Hence, the conclusion that the substance and form of living things is *energeia* (and *energeia*) should be taken to imply that the typical changes of producers function as

---

<sup>61</sup> Compare Beere, p. 303.

<sup>62</sup> To be precise, a capacity, as a dispositional property of a substance, is a being, the cause or ground of which is its exercise; without the exercise in some being or other it would not and could not be what it is. The corresponding modal concept of potentiality has no direct cause, as it merely captures a mode of being of that which has the capacity.

energeiai in an analogously typifying way that justifies that inference to the general conclusion that *energeia* is prior to potentiality in substance.<sup>63</sup>

David A. Shikar  
Rhode Island College

### *Bibliography*

Beere, Jonathan. *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta*, (New York: Oxford University, 2009)

Blair, George A., *Energeia and Entelecheia: Act" in Aristotle* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa) 1992.

—, 'Unfortunately, It is a Bit More Complex: Reflections on `Ενέργεια," *Ancient Philosophy* 15, 1995, 565—579.

Bonitz, Hermann. *Aristoteles: Metaphysik*. ed. Eduard Wellman (Berlin: Georg Reimer), 1890.

Burnyeat, Myles. 'Kinēsis vs. Energeia: A Much-read Passage In (But Not Of) Aristotle's *Metaphysics*', in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. XXXIV, summer, 2008, 219—292.

Etzwiler, J.P., 'Being as Activity in Aristotle: A Change Interpretation', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 18, no. 3 (Sept. 1978), 311-334.

Ferrarin, Alfredo. *Hegel and Aristotle*, (New York: Cambridge UP), 2000.

Frede, Michael. 'Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality in *Metaphysics*', in *Unity, Identity, and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics* (T. Scaltsas, D. Charles, and M. L. Gill, eds.) [New York: OUP], 1994

Graham, Daniel W., 'The etymology of *Entelecheia*', in *American Journal of Philology*, 110 (1989), 73—80.

---

<sup>63</sup> Of course builders qua builders are not substances, while builders qua human beings are. Nonetheless, there is an analogy between *energeia* and change with respect to their determining types of beings – a bona fide substance, on the one hand, and an incidental compound of man and the capacity to build/activity of building on the other. Thus, we may speak of priority of substance with respect to such incidental compounds in a manner that depends for its sense upon the primary case of living things.

Halper, Edward. *One and Many in Aristotle's 'Metaphysics': The Central Books*, (Parmenides, 2005).

Jaeger, Werner, *Aristotelis: Metaphysica*, (New York: OUP), 1957

Kosman, L.A. 'Substance, Being, and *Energeia*', in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, New York: OUP, 1984, pp. 121—149.

Makin, Stephen. *Aristotle: Metaphysics Theta: Translated with an Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Oxford)

—, 'What does Aristotle Mean by Priority in Substance?', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 24, 2003, 192—207.

Menn, Stephen. 'The Origin of Aristotle's Concept of *Energeia: Energeia and Dunamis*', *Ancient Philosophy*, XIV, Spring, 1994, 73—114.

Panayides, Christos Y., 'Aristotle on the Priority of Actuality in Substance' in *Ancient Philosophy* 19 (1999), pp. 327—344.

Pavlopoulos, Marc, 'Aristotle's Natural Teleology', in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. XXIV, summer, 133-181.

Ross, W.D., *Aristotle: Metaphysics. 2 vols. A revised text with introduction and commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1924.

Shields, Christopher. 'The Homonymy of the Body' in *Archiv für die Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1993, 1-30.

—, "Soul and Subject in Aristotle's *De Anima*" In *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy V: Aristotle's Ontology*, eds., Antony Preus and John P. Anton (Albany: SUNY UP), 1992, 229—243.

Tierney, Richard, 'On the Senses of '*Sumbebēkos*' in Aristotle', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (New York: OUP), 2001.

Tredennick, Hugh, *Aristotle: The Metaphysics. Books I—IX*. (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library), 1996.

Witt, Charlott. *Ways of Being: Potentiality and Actuality in Aristotle's Metaphysics*, (Cornell UP), 2003.