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*Aristotle's Hylomorphism Reconceived*

MARY-LOUISE GILL

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

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*Metaphysics* Θ studies the topics of potentiality (δύναμις) and actuality (ἐνέργεια), and many scholars think that Aristotle broaches these topics once he has answered his main questions in Z and H. In Z he asked: what is primary being? After arguing in Z.1 that substance (οὐσία) is primary being, a being existentially, logically, and epistemological prior to quantities and qualities and other categorial beings, he devotes the rest of the book to οὐσία itself—what it is—so as to decide what entities count as primary substances. I differ from the leading interpretive consensus that ZH adequately answer the main questions about primary substance, and contend instead that *Metaphysics* Θ continues the same investigation as ZH and, using δύναμις and ἐνέργεια as tools, arrives at a striking new conception of hylomorphism, different from that in ZH and enabling Aristotle to defend the substantial primacy of living organisms consisting of matter and form.

## I.

*The Predicative and Genus-Differentia Versions of Hylomorphism.* According to the dominant scholarly view about substance in *Metaphysics* Z and H, of which there are many varieties, Aristotle revises his earlier position in the *Categories*, that living organisms, such as a particular man and a particular horse, are primary substances, though he keeps the predicative scheme articulated there. Once he has analyzed such entities into matter and form in the *Physics* to explain their generation, *Metaphysics* Z considers three candidates for primary substance—matter, form, and the hylomorphic complex of both—and awards primacy to substantial form, the item responsible for making a hylomorphic complex the distinctive thing that it is.<sup>1</sup> The hylomorphic complex is a derivative entity dependent on and defined in terms of two more basic entities, its form and its matter. The composite lacks the unity Aristotle requires of a primary substance.

I agree with the consensus that the hylomorphic complex is downgraded in *Metaphysics* Z, but in my view Z tells only part of the story and uses an aporetic strategy to set out the difficulties. As I understand *Metaphysics* Z, Aristotle shows that *nothing* succeeds as primary substance—not some property-less matter (Z.3), not the hylomorphic complex, including ordinary Aristotelian matter (Z.4–11), and—most provocatively—not

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1 Much scholarly debate has focused on whether substantial form is particular or universal, with a focus on Z.13, where Aristotle argues that no universal is a substance.

substantial form (Z.13–16).<sup>2</sup> If I am right, Aristotle has by no means answered his main questions, though he does reveal the source of the trouble: a conception of matter rooted in his theory of change in the *Physics* and recalled in *Metaphysics* Z.7–9.

According to *Physics* I and II (and *Metaphysics* A), a material object is generated from matter (call this the *preexisting* matter), which persists in the object as the subject for the form of the object (call this the *constituent* matter), and survives as the same stuff when the composite is destroyed. Given that conception of matter, the hylomorphic complex and its matter have different persistence conditions, and the relation between form and matter within a complex is *accidental*: form belongs to the matter, but the form is defined as what it is without reference to the matter, and the constituent matter is defined as what it is without reference to the form (*APo.* I.4, 73a34–b10). I call Aristotle’s hylomorphism in Z and H.1–5 the *predicative* version of hylomorphism. The conception of matter as persisting intact through substantial change is, I claim, the source of the problem of substance in *Metaphysics* Z and the main obstacle preventing Aristotle from adequately answering key questions about primary substance.

On my reading of ZH, Aristotle starts anew in Z.17 with a focus on form as the cause of being for a hylomorphic complex, and H maps potentiality and actuality onto the Z scheme of matter and form, but these developments do not solve the major problem, because matter, though *potentially* the product, is also *actually* something in its own right, something whose own essential properties ground the potentiality. To use one of Aristotle’s favorite examples, a bronze sphere consists of bronze, which is potentially a sphere but also *actually* bronze: because of its own essential features as a hard, resistant, meltable stuff, bronze is the sort of material suited to be made into and constitute a sphere.

This is not the occasion for me to defend my reading of *Metaphysics* Z.<sup>3</sup> I want instead to discuss what I regard as Aristotle’s second version of hylomorphism in *Metaphysics* Θ, a version which enables him to solve the problem of substance and award primacy to living organisms.

Before I turn to my main topic, however, let me clarify why the conception of matter in ZH is more problematic than one might initially think. Matter preexists, constitutes, and survives the hylomorphic complex as some definite and actual stuff in its own right, definable without reference to the form of the complex whose matter it is. I am not here talking about the so-called ‘functional’ matter—arms and legs and other non-uniform parts—

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<sup>2</sup> In Gill (2001) I argue that Z.13–16 rule out form—whether universal or particular—as primary substance.

<sup>3</sup> I defend these claims in Gill (2014, and forthcoming).

matter whose identity is determined by the form of the complex. As Ackrill demonstrated in a seminal paper (1972–72), form *necessarily* belongs to the functional matter. In Z, as in the biological works, functional parts are destroyed together with the organism, and cease to be what they were when severed from it. Instead I am talking about matter at the next level down, stuff Aristotle calls the *proper* (οικεία/ἴδια) or *proximate* (ἐσχότη) matter, exemplified in Z by flesh and bones (Z.10, 1035a17–22, a31–34).<sup>4</sup> Scholars frequently identify the *proximate* matter as the functional matter in contrast to the *remote* matter.<sup>5</sup> This identification seems to me highly misleading. For things with functional matter, the proximate matter occupies the next lower rung of material analysis, described in the first half of Θ.7 as matter sufficiently worked up to be turned into the product without further transformations of it (1049a8–11). For example, bronze, but not earth, is the proximate matter of a sphere. Earth must first be transformed into matter of sufficient complexity to be the proper or proximate matter of a sphere. Since the proper matter can survive the destruction of an organism, the functional properties belong to this matter *accidentally*. So the functional matter is determined in two ways, as the organism itself is, with reference to the form and the proximate matter. Because of the proximate constituent matter, the unity of living organisms is as problematic as that of a bronze sphere. The proximate matter stands to an organism and its form as bronze stands to a bronze sphere and its spherical shape.

This conception of the proximate matter undermines the substantiality of both the hylomorphic complex and its form: the composite is *logically* posterior to both the form and matter, because it is defined with reference to both (human being is defined as a soul with various capacities in flesh and bones, Z.10, 1035b27–31; Z.11, 1036b21–32, 1037a5–10), and the form is *existentially* posterior to the matter because it depends on suitable matter for its realization.

In the final chapter of *Metaphysics* H—H.6—Aristotle proposes a new way to think of the proximate matter and its relation to form. After discussing a bronze sphere and chastising Platonists and others (including himself) for treating the relation between form and matter on the predicative model of Z (1045a25–b17), he sums up his new proposal

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4 In H.4 Aristotle distinguishes *proper* from *first* matter (the elements, 1044b1–3). Note that at GA II.1, 734b24–31 and *Meteor.* IV.12, 390a14–15, Aristotle treats flesh as a functional part which loses its identity when separated from the living body. Some scholars argue that matter at the next level down—blood—serves as the continuant (Freeland 1987, pp. 398–404, 406–407; Lewis, 1994, pp. 257–67, with objections in Gill 2020, pp. 26–28). In my view Aristotle’s claims about flesh in his biological works more likely reflect his second version of hylomorphism discussed in this paper.

5 For instance, Irwin (1988, ch. 11 § 131; ch. 12 §§ 135, 138–9).

in a famous sentence:

But, as we said, the proximate matter (ἡ ἐσχάτη ὕλη) and the form (ἡ μορφή) are the same and one, the one [matter] in potentiality (δυνάμει), the other [form] in actuality (ἐνεργεία). (H.6, 1045b17–19)

Thus he proclaims the unity of material composites by appeal to the proximate matter as potential, the form as actual.<sup>6</sup> As I understand Aristotle’s proposal in H.6 (Gill 2010), the proximate constituent matter of a hylomorphic complex is potential and indefinite, determinable like a genus, and substantial form differentiates the generic matter into some definite thing. I call this the *genus-differentia* version of hylomorphism as distinct from the *predicative* version operative in Z and H.1–5. The preexisting lump of bronze that can be made into a sphere is actually bronze and potentially a sphere, but on the new proposal the lump of bronze is *transformed* into a sphere. There are not two things in the same place at the same time with different persistence conditions, the bronze and the sphere, but just one thing, the brazen sphere, which shares properties with the material from which it was made (the sphere is hard, meltable, and so on), but those are merely accidental properties of the sphere, though some of them are hypothetically necessary for the realization of the spherical shape—that is, necessary *if* the form of the hylomorphic complex is to be realized (*Phys.* II.9199b34–b5; *PA* I.1, 369b21–306, 642a9–13). The resulting object is determined as what it is by its form alone, the spherical shape, since the requisite dispositional properties of the matter can be teleologically derived from it.

Aristotle’s proposal about the proximate matter in H.6 will prove to be the second prong of a two-pronged solution in *Metaphysics* Θ, and is developed in more detail in Θ.7. The first prong, also employing the notions of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, depends on the second, and is mainly developed in Θ.6 and Θ.8. I shall first argue that Θ continues the same project as ZH and aims to answer the original question: ‘What is primary substance?’ though from a distinctive perspective. Far from rejecting the conception of primary substance in the *Categories*, Aristotle will defend living organisms as primary substances by showing that they are hylomorphic unities after all.

II.

*The Project of Metaphysics* Θ. *Metaphysics* Θ.1 recalls in its first sentence the chief topic of ZH, the investigation of substance (οὐσία), the primary

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<sup>6</sup> Loux (1995, pp. 253–56, 261–65) rightly insists against Kosman (1984) and Halper (1989) (many other scholars could be cited) that the sentence refers back to Aristotle’s discussion of a bronze sphere (1045a25–33). Functional matter is not the issue in *Met.* H.6.

sort of being, and the relation of other categorial beings, such as quantities and qualities, to it. Aristotle says that he will now investigate being in terms of potentiality (δύναμις), actuality (ἐντελέχεια), and work (τὸ ἔργον) (1048b27–34); and that he will first discuss δύναμις in its chief sense, though it is not the most useful for his present purpose—for, he says, δύναμις and ἐνέργεια extend beyond the sphere of change (1045b35–1046a2).

As I said at the outset, scholars widely believe that Aristotle has completed his investigation of substance in ZH and takes up a new topic in Θ, potentiality and actuality. But in that case his claim that δύναμις in its main application, the context of change, is not the most useful for the present inquiry is odd. That application should be central to an investigation of potentiality and actuality as such. Whatever the current project is, the δύναμις associated with change, even if not the most useful, evidently has some significant use, because he devotes the first five chapters of Θ to it. Then at the start of Θ.6 he turns to ἐνέργεια and says that δύναμις, too, will become clear in the course of his distinctions, namely:

[T]hat we not only call δυνατόν (capable) that which naturally moves something else or is moved by something else, either simply or in a qualified manner, but also *in another way* (ἀλλὰ καὶ ἑτέρως), which is why (διὸ) in our search we went through those too. (Θ.6, 1048a28–30)

As Kosman (1984) convincingly showed, Aristotle asserts that he analyzed δύναμις in contexts of change because that analysis somehow bears on the more useful analysis of ἐνέργεια to which he is now turning.

Aristotle does not define ἐνέργεια in Θ.6 but instead lists examples to illustrate, by analogy, ἐνέργεια in relation to the capable (τὸ δυνατόν) (1048a30–b8), and the list culminates in two generalizations:

Some of the examples are related as *motion* to *potentiality* (ὡς κίνησις πρὸς δύναμιν), and some are related as *substance* to some sort of *matter* (ὡς οὐσία πρὸς τινα ὕλην). (Θ.6, 1048b8–9)

Later I shall argue that both characterizations pertain to the project at hand, but most important for my current purpose, the second generalization confirms the close link between *Metaphysics* Θ and the investigation of being in ZH, and especially the problematic relation of substance (οὐσία)—both the hylomorphic complex and the form—to some sort of matter (τινα ὕλην), a problem to which I called attention at the start.

### III.

*Aristotle's Two Potentiality-Actuality Models.* I mentioned two prongs of Aristotle's solution to the problem of substance in terms of δύναμις and ἐνέργεια. The main part of Aristotle's solution opens in Θ.6 and continues

in Θ.8, with a curious break in Θ.7, where he takes up the proposal in H.6 that proximate matter persists in the product potentially but not actually. In my view the discussion in Θ.7, whose location scholars have found confusing, fits exactly where it is: Θ.7 is needed to prepare for the opening of Θ.8. I will therefore follow Aristotle's lead and discuss the first prong of his solution in Θ.6 and Θ.8 in two separate sections, with Θ.7, the second prong, sandwiched in between.

Since Aristotle indicates at the beginning of Θ.6 that the δύναμις associated with change somehow relates to the upcoming investigation, let us briefly consider the first model. Change for Aristotle involves an agent that brings about a change and a patient that undergoes it. In Θ.1 he defines the core notion of δύναμις as 'the principle (ἀρχή) of change in another thing or qua other', an *active* δύναμις for change (1046a9–11; cf. *Met.* Δ.12, 1019a15–16, 1019b35–1020a2), and then defines other notions with reference to that core notion; in particular a *passive* δύναμις for change as 'the principle of passive change in the thing itself that suffers [change] by another or qua other' (1046a11–13). When something undergoes a change, it acquires a property it previously lacked. The agent either has that property as its active δύναμις or, in an artificial change, has it in mind. For instance, fire is hot and makes other things hot (*Phys.* III.2, 202a912; VIII.5, 257b6–10); a doctor, in virtue of her knowledge of health, imposes health on someone sick. In the course of a change, the agent assimilates the patient to herself (*GC* I.7, 324a11–12) by transmitting to the patient the form she possesses. According to the so-called 'transmission' theory of causation, the agent of change has the property it transmits to the patient, and has it more eminently (Lloyd 1976). In some cases the agent transforms the patient into a new agent, with its own active δύναμις (human generates human), but in many cases, as when a doctor cures someone sick, the healthy state acquired by the patient is a passive state, a disposition to respond appropriately to the environment (*GC* I.7, 324b13–18). In *Physics* III.1–3 Aristotle defines change—the patient's transition from the privative to positive state—as an actuality (ἐνετελέχεια) of both the agent and the patient, though located in the patient. The actuality is incomplete, because its completion (the product) lies beyond the process and terminates it (*Phys.* II.2, 201b31–33; VIII.5, 257b6–10).

Aristotle devotes time in *Metaphysics* Θ to the first potentiality-actuality model because the second model involves the same basic elements—an active δύναμις in the agent, a passive δύναμις in the patient, and two main actualities: a κίνησις and a product. But Aristotle modifies the core meaning of δύναμις in one decisive respect at the start of Θ.8 (1049b4–10) and the resulting scenario is entirely different from the earlier one. Whereas on the first model the κίνησις is a *change* in the patient from one state or location

to another, on the second model the κίνησις is an *activity* (a complete actuality), a motion that expresses what the agent is.

Now consider again the end of the analogy passage in Θ.6. After giving a series of examples—something building to something able to build, something awake to something asleep, something seeing to something sighted with eyes shut, something separated out of the matter to the matter, and the wrought to the unwrought—in which one item in each pair is the ἐνέργεια and the other the capable (τὸ δυνατόν) (1048a35–b8), Aristotle announces in the key sentence I quoted before: ‘some of the examples are related as κίνησις to δύναμις, and some are related as substance (οὐσία) to some sort of matter (τινα ὕλην)’ (Θ.6, 1048b8–9). Some of the examples (such as building) belong to the first model, others (being awake, seeing) to the second, but both generalizations apply to both models.<sup>7</sup>

On the first model, someone building stands to someone able to build as motion (κίνησις) to potentiality (δύναμις), and a brazen sphere stands to a lump of bronze as substance (οὐσία) to some sort of matter (τινα ὕλην) (the *preexisting* matter). On the second model, someone seeing stands to someone sighted with eyes shut as motion (κίνησις) to potentiality (δύναμις), and a brazen sphere stands to its constituent bronze (the proximate *constituent* matter) as substance (οὐσία) to some sort of matter (τινα ὕλην). κίνησις in the summary is an instance of one of two sorts of ἐνέργεια (the other being οὐσία). At the same time, the term κίνησις here specifies a genus covering two sorts of motions, one proper to the first model, the other proper to the second.<sup>8</sup> The generic use of κίνησις motivates Aristotle’s famous distinction later in the chapter between κίνησις in the strict sense (change) and ἐνέργεια (activity) (Θ.6, 1048b18–35).<sup>9</sup> As for ἐνέργεια as substance (οὐσία): On the first δύναμις-ἐνέργεια model a substance is the product of change and differs in form from the matter from which it emerged. By contrast, on the second model the substance will prove to be

<sup>7</sup> Beere 2009, p. 198 n.58, rightly takes me to task (Gill 1989, pp. 214–18) for trying to interpret all five examples as exemplifying the second potentiality-actuality model.

<sup>8</sup> For the generic construal of κίνησις at 1049b8, cf. Menn (1994, pp. 106–7) and Burnyeat (2008, p. 222). Aristotle’s language is flexible and therefore confusing. He defines change as a sort of ἐντελέχεια (an incomplete one) (*Physics* III.1–3 and VIII.5, 257b6–10) and as an ἐνέργεια in the doublet of the *Physics* at *Met.* K.9, 1065b16. Cf. *DA* III.7, 431a6–7. At *Met.* Θ.3, 1047a30–32, he says that the name ἐνέργεια, which is associated with ἐντελέχεια, extends to other things especially from motions, ‘for ἡ ἐνέργεια seems especially to be ἡ κίνησις’. There is much controversy about the translation of ἐνέργεια and ἐντελέχεια, especially among those who advocate a single translation for ἐνέργεια, including Kosman (1984 and 2013), Makin (2006), and Beere (2009).

<sup>9</sup> I am not persuaded by Burnyeat (2008) that the passage distinguishing κίνησις and ἐνέργεια at the end of Θ.6 (1048b18–35) is misplaced. See Gonzalez (2019) for reasons to reject Burnyeat’s thesis.

both the agent and product of its motion, maintained and enhanced by its activity as the very thing that it is.

The key revision at the start of Θ.8—a passage we shall examine in due course—concerns an active δύναμις, designated by Aristotle as ‘nature’ (φύσις), and it differs from the active δύναμις on the first model in one vital respect: Nature is a source of causing motion (ἀρχὴ κινητική), though not in another thing (as on the first model), but *in the thing itself qua itself* (1049b4–10).

How can a thing act on itself *qua itself*? This is not like a doctor curing herself (*Phys.* II.1, 192b23–27), a situation explained by the first model. Θ.7 deals with the relation of substance to matter and directly precedes the striking announcement at the start of Θ.8, because Aristotle’s grand proposal depends on having already solved the problem of how substance relates to its proximate matter. That solution justifies him in saying that an agent, in virtue of its formal nature, acts on itself as patient and in so doing acts on itself *qua itself*. It can act on itself *qua itself* only if the proximate matter of the entity does not compromise the unity of the hylomorphic complex. If it does, then the thing acts on itself *qua other*, like a doctor curing herself.

We now turn to the second prong of Aristotle’s solution, the relation of substance (οὐσία) to some sort of matter (τινα ὕλην).

#### IV.

*Matter and Potentiality in Θ.7.* *Metaphysics* Θ.7 on matter as potential develops the proposal in H.6, and seems to interrupt the discussion of ἐνέργεια in Θ.6–8.<sup>10</sup> Aristotle’s organization makes sense once we realize that Θ.6 introduces the second δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction and announces in its twofold generalization (1048b8–9) two strands of his solution: first the relation of κίνησις to δύναμις exemplified on the second model by activity (κίνησις) to something that is or has a δύναμις for that activity (for instance, seeing to sight or something able to see), and second the relation of οὐσία to τινα ὕλην exemplified by the hylomorphic complex or its form as οὐσία and the *proximate* (ἐσχάτη) *matter* as τὸ δυνατόν (for instance, something that has been worked up out of the matter to the matter). Θ.6 and 8 focus on the first relation, Θ.7 on the second.

The first part of Θ.7 (1048b37–1049a18) asks when an entity is properly called potential (δυνάμει), and argues that something is potentially in some end-state when it is sufficiently worked up that it can be in the end-state

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<sup>10</sup> This apparent interruption may be part of the reason why scholars, such as Ross (1924: II, pp. 240–41), regard Aristotle’s discussion of δύναμις in Θ as muddled. The confusion of Bonitz and Ross about Aristotle’s notion of δύναμις is helpfully sorted out by Frede (1994, pp. 176–79).

without further changes of it (Θ.7, 1049a5–12). Earth is not yet potentially a sphere, because it must first be combined with water and worked up into copper or comparable stuff, and then copper combined with tin to yield bronze, but once the ingredients have been transformed into appropriate matter, there is stuff of a suitable kind to be a sphere and retain that shape. The potentiality to be in the end-state is grounded in what the material is, its own *actual* identity. This is what Aristotle calls the proximate matter, as opposed to some more ultimate stuff that can be worked up into that matter.<sup>11</sup>

The second part of the chapter (1049a18–b3) focuses on the product, with the driving question: Does the entity designated as potential in the first part of the chapter persist in the product as something *actual* as well as *potential*? As I understand the passage, Aristotle answers that it depends on what sort of continuant and what sort of change we are talking about. If we are talking about a man who comes to be healthy, musical, or pale, then the persisting subject, the man, remains actually a man when his potentiality to be healthy or musical or pale is realized. The complex—for instance, a pale man—is an actual man characterized by an accidental property (1049a29). The subject is a τὸδε τι, a definite thing of a particular sort (1049a27–30). Aristotle retains the predicative model from Z for the relation between a hylomorphic complex and its properties, both accidental and essential. But the situation is different for the form-matter relation:

In cases not like that [i.e., not like a physical object and its properties], but the item predicated (τὸ κατηγορούμενον) is some form (εἶδος τι) and definite thing (τὸδε τι), the proximate [subject] (τὸ ἔσχατον) is matter (ὑλη) and material substance (οὐσία ὑλική). And calling [a product] ‘that-en’ (ἐκείνινον) [that is, specifying it adjectivally] with reference to its matter and its properties (κατὰ τὴν ὑλὴν καὶ τὰ πάθη) turns out to be quite correct, since both are indefinite (ἄορίστα). (1049a34–b2)

As I construe this important passage, form-matter predication differs from ordinary predication. The item predicated is said to be some form and definite thing (τὸδε τι), and the matter of which it is predicated is variously characterized as *indefinite* (1049b2), *potential* (1049a18–24), and *not* a τὸδε τι (1049a24–29).<sup>12</sup> We specify the product adjectivally (as

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11 For this reason Aristotle says in Θ.7 that we can specify a product adjectivally only with reference to matter at the next level down, but not further (1049b18–27)—a box is properly called ‘wooden’ but not ‘earth-en’ (1049a18–24).

12 I would argue that Aristotle also characterizes matter as a universal (καθόλου) at 1049a28, but I cannot defend that claim here. I attempt to do so in response to Code’s (1996, pp. 227–29 and n. 7) objections to Gill (1989, pp. 158–60) in Gill (2008, pp. 393–96, esp. n. 5, and 418–24).

‘that-en’) with reference to it, for instance, as ‘a brazen statue’ or ‘a wooden box’, much as we specify an object with reference to its non-substantial properties as, for instance, ‘a brave man’ or ‘a red box’. I earlier labeled this view the *genus-differentia* version of hylomorphism.

According to the genus-differentia version of hylomorphism, the matter is present in the product only potentially and not actually, and I call it ‘generic matter’.<sup>13</sup> In his discussion of mixture in *GC* I.10 (327b19–31), Aristotle declares that the ingredients of a mixture exist actually before they are combined but are only potentially present in the compound. Ingredients of the original sort can be extracted by destroying the mixture, and in that sense they are potentially present, but they are not actually there in the compound.<sup>14</sup> The matter is *transformed* into something of greater complexity at the next level up. At the same time, the presence of those constituent materials is felt in the mixture, because the compound has certain properties owing to its ingredients. Bronze, a compound of copper and tin, has the color, the strength and rigidity, the malleability, and other dispositional properties it has because of the metals used in its composition. It shares some properties with its ingredients, but its own essential features, which differentiate it from them, are not the same as theirs.

VI.

Δύναμις, Ἐνέργεια, and Οὐσία in Θ.8. Immediately following Θ.7, Aristotle opens Θ.8 with the following statement:

Since we have distinguished in how many ways ‘prior’ is defined, it is evident that ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις. I mean not only prior to the δύναμις that has been defined, which is said to be a principle of causing change (ἀρχὴ μεταβλητικῆ) in another thing or qua other, but generally every principle of causing motion or rest (ἀρχῆς κινητικῆς ἢ στατικῆς). For nature (φύσις) too is in the same genus as δύναμις, since it is a principle of causing motion (ἀρχὴ κινητικῆ), though not in another thing but in the thing itself qua itself.<sup>15</sup> (Θ.8, 1049b4–10)

This passage should remind us of Aristotle’s statement introducing the

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13 In *De Caelo* III.3, Aristotle defines a corporeal element as that into which other bodies are divided, which is present in the complex either potentially or actually, and he adds that it remains disputable in which of the two ways this occurs (*Cael.* III.3, 302a15–18). These two alternatives—matter as actual and matter as potential—reflect the distinctive treatments of matter in *Metaphysics* ZH and in H.6 and Θ.

14 For interpretations of mixture different from my own, see Lewis (1994: 272–75) and Fine (1994). Loux (1995, pp. 260–61) raised objections to the original version of my proposal in Gill (1989: 168–70). I give a brief response in Gill (2010, p. 118 n. 61).

15 With Bonitz, Ross, and Jaeger I delete 8 γίγνεται...9 γὰρ, following MS A<sup>b</sup> and Alexander.

notion of ἐνέργεια and the second potentiality-actuality model at the start of Θ.6, the last part of which I quoted before:

Since we have talked about the δύναμις spoken of in connection with change, let us distinguish what ἐνέργεια is and what sort of thing it is. And indeed the capable (τὸ δυνατόν) will be clear at the same time in our analysis, that we not only call that thing capable which naturally moves something else or is moved by something else either simply or in a qualified manner, but also in another way, which is why in our search we went through those too. (1048a25–30)

At the beginning of Θ.8 Aristotle tells us what that other notion of δύναμις is: it is a principle of causing motion, not *in another thing* or in the thing itself *qua other* as on the first model, but a principle of causing motion in the thing itself *qua itself*. And this, he announces, is a thing's nature (φύσις). Both passages invite us to think about the second δύναμις-ἐνέργεια distinction in light of the first, and as I interpret the passage in Θ.6, Aristotle went through the first distinction (in Θ.1–5) for the sake of the second. We can flesh out the second model by appeal to the first.

While the passage in Θ.8 mentions only an active δύναμις, the one in Θ.6 recalls that the first δύναμις-ἐνέργεια model involves a passive, as well as an active, δύναμις, defined in Θ.1 as a principle of being changed *by another thing* or *qua other*, a principle located in the patient (Θ.1, 1046a11–13). On the second model, the same individual is both agent and patient of its activities, and we could characterize the passive δύναμις as a principle of motion and rest *by the thing itself qua itself*. The patient does not come to be *other* than it was, as on the first model, but simply performs its own function. For an animal that actively sees, its soul is a collection of active capacities including the active capacity to see, and its eye has a corresponding passive capacity, sight, equipping the animal actually to see; and similarly with other psychic capacities. Recall that in *Physics* III.1–3 Aristotle defines change as the joint actuality (ἐντελέχεια) of the agent and patient and located in the patient. He repeats that idea in *Met.* Θ.8 (1050a23–29). Then he contrasts the new situation: When there is no other product (ἔργον) apart from the activity, the activity is *in the agent*, for example, seeing is in the one that sees (1050a34–b2). The second model resembles the first in that activities are the joint actuality of active psychic capacities and passive functional capacities realized in the organism's body.

On the second δύναμις-ἐνέργεια model the living body is *entirely* determined as what it is by the form of the organism: The proximate matter is not some definite stuff to which the functional capacities belong as properties (as in *Metaphysics* Z and H.1–5). Instead, the proximate matter, once form differentiates it into the functional parts, is itself a collection of

properties of those bodily parts. On the new picture, when an organism dies, its matter is totally destroyed, because the nature of the functional matter is fully determined by the form alone. To be sure, the corpse looks for a while like the organism it was, but the parts of the corpse are what they were in name only and share only certain dispositional properties with the functional matter—for example, both live and dead flesh are soft and squeezable, and both live and dead bone are hard and brittle.

Θ.8 aims to show that ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις in various respects, and most importantly in substance (οὐσία). At the start of the section arguing for this claim, Aristotle says that things posterior in generation are prior in form and substance, for instance, a man is prior to a boy and a human being to a seed (σπέρματος), because one has the form, whereas the other does not (1050a4–7, a15–19). The transformation of something lacking the relevant form into something possessing it is a change explained by the first δύναμις-ἐνέργεια model.

The section culminates with a passage differentiating situations dealt with by the second model from situations dealt with by the first:

But in those cases in which there is no other ἔργον [product] apart from the activity (ἐνέργεια), the activity is present in them [the agents] (for example, seeing in the one that sees, theorizing in the one that theorizes, and life (ἡ ζωὴ) in the soul, hence also happiness (εὐδαιμονία), since it is a certain kind of life. So it is evident that *substance* (ἡ οὐσία) and *form* (τὸ εἶδος) are ἐνέργεια. And according to this argument it is evident that ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις in substance. (Θ.8, 1050a34–b4)

Notice that Aristotle concludes from his series of examples that substance and form are ἐνέργεια. This claim is startling in light of the passage opening the chapter (1049b4–10), in which he said that nature (the form of an organism) is an active δύναμις with some ἐνέργεια prior to it. Now form is itself an ἐνέργεια and prior to δύναμις in substance. What is he saying?

Consider the examples Aristotle lists to demonstrate his point that activity takes place in the agent: seeing in the one that sees, theorizing in the one that theorizes, life in the soul, and also happiness. These examples feature a living organism or its soul as the *subject* of the relevant activity, something that already *has* or *is* the form. The activity takes place in the agent and thereby constitutes, enhances, and maintains that subject as what it is. Thus the subject is both the agent and the *product* of its activity. Whereas change, caused by an external agent, brings something new into the world that was not there before, activity caused by an organism's own psychic nature *preserves* the agent as the very thing it already is.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. DA II.4, 416b11–17 on the role of nutritive soul in self-maintenance. I discuss DA II.4 in detail in Gill 2020.

## VI.

*Proximate Matter and Perishability.* Why the need for self-maintenance? The last main section of Θ.8 answers the question and also responds to an issue I glossed over in quoting the tantalizing lines toward the end of H.6, where Aristotle says that the proximate matter and form are one and the same, the one in potentiality, the other in actuality. In the full passage Aristotle contrasts things like brazen spheres that are merely *somehow* one (ἐν πως) with things that have no matter and are *simply* just some one thing (ἀπλῶς ὅπερ ἐν τι) (H.6, 1045b17–23). Aristotle has demonstrated the unity of hylomorphic complexes, but the problem of proximate matter has not entirely vanished.

In the last main section of Θ.8, Aristotle says that ἐνέργεια is prior to δύναμις in substance in an even stricter sense than the one just discussed, because eternal things are prior to perishable things (Θ.8, 1050b6–8). Eternal things, such as the sun and stars, are prior to perishable things because their matter is not the sort that makes their activity tiring, and so they are always active. We living organisms, alas, grow weary of our proper activity, wind down, and finally collapse, and Aristotle says that our matter, being a δύναμις and not an ἐνέργεια, is the *cause* of that (Θ.8, 1050b8–28). Aristotle is here talking about the *proximate* matter, understood as generic matter. Because organisms are generated out of simpler matter and perish into simpler matter, they possess various dispositional properties inherited from the preexisting proximate matter, and those properties, though they are either hypothetically necessary for the functional parts or mere accidents of those parts, are *essential* properties of simpler stuffs, such as the material flesh and bones left behind when an animal dies. Unlike ordinary categorial properties, such as qualities and quantities, these material properties drag us down, and explain why complex organisms flag and easily degenerate into simpler stuff. Because the residual material properties tend to subvert the unity of the whole, the unity of a living hylomorphic complex is unstable and must be vigorously maintained. Because staying the same is considerable work, an organism's characteristic activity is much more than an expression of what it is. Such activity also enhances, maintains, and renews it. This dynamic preservation is the joint manifestation of an organism's active and passive δυνάμεις, and that activity preserves the organism as the actual thing that it is.

A living organism falls short of imperishable hylomorphic complexes, such as the sun and the stars, and of immaterial substances, such as the prime mover, because an organism's proximate matter ultimately undermines it. But for as long as it lives and actively pursues its proper activity, an organism is a primary substance, with a nature responsible

for its distinctive behavior, a substance whose formal nature wholly determines what it is and what it characteristically does.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The roots of this paper go back to the core thesis of my book on Aristotle in 1989, and I have been revising and refining those ideas in response to criticisms and questions ever since. I gave versions of the paper at Yale, University of South Carolina, NYU, Providence College, Duquesne University, and at a conference on matter at Wadham College, Oxford, and another on Aristotle's Hylomorphism in Porto Alegre, Brazil. I thank all those audiences for their constructive comments.

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