

ORIGIN OF THE METAPHYSICS OF THE LIVING: FROM PLATO TO *DE ANIMA* 2.5

JUAN ANDRÉS MERCADO*

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. 2. The Platonic texts. 2.1. Clitophon. 2.2. Euthydemus. 2.3. Theaetetus. 2.4. Philebus. 3. Aristotle's *Protrepticus*. 4. The distinctions in *De anima* 2.5. 4.1. The conditionings of contemporary readings: functionalism. 4.2. The course of Book II of *De Anima*. 4.3. *De Anima* 416b32-418 a6: sensation as alteration. 4.4. The types of potency and act. 4.5. The divisions of "undergoing": 417b3-16. 5. Concluding observations.

1. INTRODUCTION

THERE is an agreement and continuity in the ideas of Plato and Aristotle which normally go unnoticed. The common interests and thoughts regarding human perfection brought to development some fundamental notions of an original metaphysics of the living, connected to the formulation of the doctrine on act and potency. Such a metaphysics does not start with great principles, but with common life experience: we grow, we learn, things are used for better or worse, etc. The master and disciple show us a Metaphysics which starts from the bottom up in order to explain the appearances of undeniable realities.

Hidden in the almost picturesque images of Plato's passages is an effort to understand the activities which are at the basis of development of beings who can transform simple movement on their own, or better, of beings who can transform themselves in time. Plato opens up a channel, of which Aristotle avails himself, in order to make a complex proposal that responds to the *aporiae* of Eleatic heritage. It is more than likely that the distinction between act and potency which pervades all of Aristotle's work comes from the discussions in the Academy concerning the dead-ends of Pre-Socratic thought.¹ It is also probable that Aristotle had learned from them the basics to transfer physical notions to living realities, including human beings.

* Facoltà di Filosofia, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, Via dei Farnesi 82, 00186 Roma. E-mail: mercado@pusc.it

¹ Cfr. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, v. 6, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 1983, pp. 133; 137-138; 140-141, on the importance of the questions and on the roots of the *aporiae* of the Megarians and some problems of modern interpreters. Cfr. also R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto en Aristóteles*, Eunsa, Pamplona 1993, pp. 238-246.

In this work I will briefly present the four Platonic fragments which are the precursors to some of the distinctions that concern the faculties of living beings. In the second place, I will present the passages of *Protrepticus* in which Plato's core concepts are summarized along with the first attempt to assign them a precise terminology. The third part of the work is dedicated to the analysis of Chapter 5 from the second book of *De anima*, one of the texts in which the Philosopher applies some of the distinctions to the intimate activities of living beings.

The present article was inspired by the work of Ricardo Yepes, *La doctrina del acto en Aristóteles*,² one of the few systematic studies of the Stagirite's texts with an interpretation of great breadth. At the same time of this work, the debate about the *functionalistic* interpretation of the faculties of living beings was evolving, especially in the work of M. Nussbaum, H. Putnam and R. Sorabji, and the reactions of Myles Burnyeat. In fact, one of Burnyeat's latest studies is about bringing the debate back to a level of discussion which is diverse and much broader.³

The importance of these notions is not only valid as to the historiography or interpretation of the texts and to the genesis of a specific terminology. Rather, it concerns the development of a metaphysics, different from those in vogue, which reckons with a reality of dynamic beings who transform themselves. In this sense, the continuity and evolution of the arguments between master and disciple are as important as the discontinuity in the analysis of the Ideas and Forms, recollection and analogy.⁴

2. THE PLATONIC TEXTS

The Platonic texts start from very evident realities linked to human beings' capacity to learn or to make use of previously acquired knowledge.⁵

Even if *Clitophon* remains marked by the suspicion of not belonging to Plato's Corpus, by now the critic considers it authentic.⁶ To this we may

² Vid. Previous note.

³ M.F. BURNYEAT, *De Anima II 5*, «Phronesis» 47 (2002), pp. 28-90.

⁴ Also in recent works these important concepts can again be seen, without according importance to the evolution of notions which are taken on in this study. Cfr. Ch. SHIELDS, *Plato and Aristotle in the Academy*, in G. FINE (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford 2008, pp. 504-525. In this same work, V. HARTE, *Plato's Metaphysics*, pp. 191-216. From the same Ch. SHIELDS, *Learning about Plato from Aristotle*, in H. BENSON (ed.), *A Companion to Plato*, Blackwell, Oxford 2009, pp. 403-417.

⁵ Cfr. R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, cit., pp. 152-155. Cfr. M.F. BURNYEAT, *De Anima II 5*, cit., p. 40.

⁶ On the authenticity of *Clitophon*, cfr. S.R. SLINGS, *Plato's 'Clitophon'*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999, pp. x-xi. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, v. 4, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 1980, pp. 39-41 and v. 5, pp. 383-389 and T.H. IRWIN, *The Platonic Corpus*, in G. FINE (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 1979, p. 75.

add the texts of *Euthydemus*, *Theaetetus*, and *Philebus*,⁷ all cited by Aristotle. Among authors, the chronological arrangement of *Euthydemus* varies between Plato's youth (before his first journey to Sicily, i.e. between 393 and 389 B.C.) and his first period at the Academy (388-385 B.C.).⁸ In the entirety of the notions treated therein, these observations count very little, given the richness of connections with other works of Plato⁹ and above all, the progress in the discussion about the states of knowledge and their relation to happiness.¹⁰ It is rather unanimous that the composition of *Theaetetus* and *Philebus* should be assigned to the final years of Plato's productive life (369-347 B.C.).¹¹

2. 1. *Clitophon*

In this short writing we are presented with an inconclusive argument about the relationship between the knowledge of good and evil, and its consequences for the application of justice. The fundamental question is precisely the ability to teach and to learn virtue. However, the passage that interests us has to do with one of Clitophon's responses. Socrates' interlocutor focuses on the fittingness of *using* certain capacities in one sense or another: *to exercise* the body or soul, or rather the ability to play the lyre, and finally that "one who does not know how to *handle* his soul (φυλάττει μὴ ἐπίσταται χρῆσθαι) had better leave it alone and cease to live".¹²

2. 2. *Euthydemus*

Though the earliest of the works which are related to this study, *Euthydemus* contains different ideas for the plan of a metaphysics of human activities. It deals with a purely Socratic theme, included in the pursuit of knowledge and happiness: Socrates and Clinias discuss the importance of learning and knowledge, and then the influence of fortune in man's happiness. They finally arrive

⁷ E. LLEDÓ IÑIGO (ed.) *Platón. Diálogos*, Gredos, Madrid 1985, pp. 51-55 presents a table with the 9 best known chronologies of the last century. The general conclusions and small variants are confirmed by W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 4, cit., pp. 51-53; 67.

⁸ A detailed presentation of the proposals for the arrangement within Plato's *corpus* is found in W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 4, cit., pp. 50-51; 60. The contents are explained on pp. 266-283.

⁹ Cfr. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 4, cit., p. 266.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 277-281.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 51-53, evaluates both the concurrence of historical facts referred to in both dialogues, as well as their similarity to *Parmenides*, composed between 369 and 367 B.C. Cfr. also W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 5, cit., pp. 61-63. On the connections between Plato's later dialogues and the first Aristotelian works, cfr. E. BERTI, *La filosofia del 'primo' Aristotele*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1997², pp. 189-200.

¹² *Clitoph.* 408a, transl. by S.R. SLINGS, *Plato's 'Clitophon'*, p. 6. Italics added.

at the conclusion that the expert's knowledge (the artist, strategist) or the scientist's (the doctor) are more important than fortune as regards the preservation of human goods.¹³

Emerging from the debate, as Guthrie notes, is – among other things – an ideal of “philosophical” life, thus constituting the first model of *Protrepticus*, i.e. an exaltation of wise living.¹⁴

Simultaneous with the polemic against the Sophists' boasting of their ability to teach virtue, he outlines a hierarchy of internal goods – development of one's own capacities, especially the cognitive ones – toward external goods, the possession of which is useful only if man knows how to make use of them by ordering them to the good life: it is of no use to have the tools to work with wood if one does not know their *use*; it is not sufficient to have food and other goods if one does not know how to *take advantage* of them. Knowing is the only absolute and stable good and upon this depends the *use* that is made of external goods.¹⁵ In using external goods, however, other capacities are developed in a parallel way.¹⁶

Everything then is ordered to happiness. It seems that «it is necessary that the one who is to be happy must not only get possession of such good things, but also must *use* them, or else there is no benefit from *having* them».¹⁷ He concludes further on that «not only good fortune but good *doing*, as it seems, is provided by *knowledge* for mankind in every *getting* and *doing* (τὸ ὀρθῶς πᾶσι τοῖς τοιούτοις χρῆσθαι ἐπιστήμη ἣν ἡγουμένη καὶ κατορθοῦσα τὴν πρᾶξιν)».¹⁸ Thus, he goes back to the affirmation that «when wisdom is present, whoever *has* it (σοφίας παρουσίας, ᾧ ἂν παρῆ) needs no more good fortune than that».¹⁹

It is worth going over some of the terms here, which Guthrie considers «the most advanced piece of Platonic thinking in the dialogue»,²⁰ and which he introduces with examples that seem banal, i.e. the distinctions regarding the *acquisition* and *use* of abilities. To Clitophon's observation on the capacity to *use* the soul we may add the following:

– one may possess (κεκτηῖσθαι) a capacity, such as wisdom, and this makes

¹³ *Euthyd.* 279 b-280 a.

¹⁴ W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 5, cit., p. 274; cfr. also p. 281. Cfr. also v. 6, cit., p. 7 and R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, cit., pp. 163-164.

¹⁵ *Euthyd.* 280b-d.

¹⁶ On the “growth” of capacities see the commentaries on *Theaetetus*.

¹⁷ *Euthyd.* 280d. transl. by W.H.D. ROUSE in E. HAMILTON and H. CAIRNS (eds.), *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton 1989, p. 394. Italics added. Cfr. the commentary of W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 4, cit., p. 60 on the importance of the relationship between education and personal goodness.

¹⁸ *Euthyd.* 281b, p. 395. Italics added.

¹⁹ *Euthyd.* 280b, p. 394. Italics added.

²⁰ W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 5, cit., p. 281. The author marvels at this research which makes him think of two “hunters” searching for reality.

one capable of *acting in a certain way* and of *using* (κρῆσθαι) both things and other capabilities correctly;

– goods can be possessed, but what counts is the way they are used.²¹

2. 3. *Theaetetus*

Socrates is trying to correct the way that we term “knowledge” because, as he says to Theaetetus, people are wont to say “we know” or “we don’t know,” without much consideration as to what knowledge is or what is truly meant by “understanding” or “not understanding,” something which is similarly argued in *Euthydemus*. Theaetetus responds to this provocation by asking Socrates to propose a solution to the problem. Socrates proceeds from one of these manners of speaking, namely, that to know is the *possession* of knowledge. But perhaps it is more correct to say that it is the *acquisition* of knowledge. To help Theaetetus understand the difference between these two formulations, he presents the following image:

«*Having* (κεκτῆσθαι) seems to me different than *possessing* (ἔχειν). If a man has bought a coat and owns it, but is not wearing it, we should say he *possesses* it without *having it about him* [...]. Now consider whether *knowledge* (ἐπιστήμη) is a thing you can *possess* in that way without *having it about you*, like a man who has caught some wild birds—pigeons or what not—and keeps them in an aviary he has made for them at home. In a sense, of course, we might say he *has* them all the time inasmuch as he *possesses* them mightn’t we? [...]²²

He can take and have hold of them whenever he likes by catching any bird he chooses, and let them go again, and it is open to him to do that as often as he pleases [...]

Just as a while ago we imagined a sort of waxen block in our minds, so now let us suppose that every mind contains a kind of aviary stocked with birds of every sort [...] When we are babies we must suppose this receptacle empty, and take the birds to stand for pieces of knowledge. Whenever a person *acquires* (κτησάμενος) any piece of knowledge and shuts it up in his enclosure, we must say he has *learned* or *discovered* (μεμαθηκέναι ἢ ηῦρηκέναι) the thing of which this is the knowledge, and that is what *knowing* (ἐπίστασθαι) means [...]

Now think of him hunting once more for any piece of knowledge that he wants, catching and holding it, and letting it go again. In what terms are we to descri-

²¹ D. BRADSHAW, *Aristotle East and West. Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 2-3 refers to the same passage from *Euthydemus*. He does not cite, however, the text from *Philebus* mentioned below; Yepes does point this out.

²² W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 6, cit., p. 139: *Theaet.* 197c-d. Guthrie signals the parallelism ἔχειν-κρῆσθαι in *Top.* 129b33. One of the most important Aristotelian discussions on the distinctions between the states of knowledge starts with the identification, on the part of the Megarians, of activity with potentiality in carrying it out: *Met.* 9.3.

be that—the same that we used of the original process of acquisition, or different ones». ²³

We are faced with one of the familiar topics in the Academy during Plato's later years when Aristotle was one of the participants in the discussions. Guthrie links the argumentation of *Theaetetus* to *De anima* 417b21, which will be explained further on. ²⁴ Polo underlines the importance of this debate, referring to *Theaetetus* as Plato's first great "self-critique" of his own theories where he stresses that a sleeping man does not exercise knowledge, but we may not for this same reason conclude that he doesn't have νόυς. ²⁵

Therefore, the *uses* of one's own capacities, cited in *Euthydemus* and *Clitophon*, resurface with the image of the cage and the birds confined to it: *use* is necessary in order to *cultivate* the faculty, *acquiring* knowledge; this use creates a new situation, *having*, the *possessed* (the birds "possessed", stored knowledge), not an accumulation of "things". A different stage from this use is recalling to memory or exercising oneself anew in an activity. Everything obviously depends on having an initial capacity to learn and also on the will to activate this capacity at various levels. ²⁶

Thus we unveil an important development as regards the linguistic approach to the phenomena of knowledge and apprehension, that is, the appearance of the term ἔχειν, a kind of possession parallel to κερτῆσθαι. In the following lines of the dialogue the noun ἔξις appears so as to indicate a kind of permanent possession. ²⁷

On the other hand, verbs taken from common language (*to use, to take, to possess, to have, to acquire, to hold*) alternate with cognitive activities both as nouns and as verbs: knowledge-to know.

2. 4. *Philebus*

The last passage that deals with our subject is a three-way discussion between Philebus, Protarchus and Socrates. Socrates wants to distinguish and correct

²³ *Theaet.* 197c-198a, transl. by F.M. CORNFORD, in E. HAMILTON and H. CAIRNS (eds.), *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, cit., pp. 903-904. Italics added.

²⁴ Cfr. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 4, cit., p. 111. He also makes reference to *De Anima* 412a10 and *Physics* 255b2. See also the explicit connection of R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle's 'De Anima'*, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge 2007 p. 231n. In his volume on Aristotle, Guthrie remakes the connection: cfr. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 6, cit., pp. 126-127. Cfr. also R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, pp. 153-154; 163, in which the parallelisms between *Euthydemus* and *Theaetetus*, and again between these and Aristotle, are noted.

²⁵ L. POLO, *Prólogo*, in R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, cit., p. 19.

²⁶ The Platonic origin of the distinction between act and potency is noted by W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 6, cit., p. 126; E. BERTI, *Genesi e sviluppo della dottrina della potenza e dell'atto in Aristotele*, «Studia Patavina», 5, 1958, pp. 477-505. Cfr. R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, cit., p. 72.

²⁷ Cfr. R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle's 'De Anima'*, cit., p. 233.

the way of referring to the movements of the soul, combining two criteria: the distinction between activities and the passions, and the order in the pursuit of states in which the soul finds itself in seeking them. Socrates proposes to his interlocutors:

«What you and I are now to attempt is to put forward a certain *state* or *condition* of the soul (ἔξις ψυχῆς καὶ διάθεσις) which can render the life of every man a happy life [...] Then you people put forward the state of enjoyment, whereas we put forward that of intelligence (φρονήσεως)?».²⁸

The verb ἔχειν, as in *Theaetetus*, is presented also as a noun, ἔξις, giving a different weight to the dispositions or stable situations of the soul.

Philebus introduces a discussion that does not stop at a distinction to clarify the terms of the debate, but takes up elements about the acts of a living rational being that impress upon his fundamental choices. Guthrie wants to emphasize the importance of the notion of stable dispositions or *habitus* in understanding the Socratico-Platonic proposition in the sense of life as a series of harmonious activities, and how the Aristotelian notion of *excellence* or *virtue* depends upon this.²⁹ Yepes reveals the importance of the active sense of these situations or states of soul, which is not a container of objects, but a living principle that performs different activities.³⁰

3. ARISTOTLE'S *PROTREPTICUS*

It is well-known that Aristotle began his philosophical formation at the Academy and that he participated in its activities for almost twenty years, from 367 to 347 B.C. Despite the impossibility of determining with precision the dates of composition of his works, it is important that we avoid using the term “early writings” in the sense of “prematurity,” nor should we be led to believe that they were simply notes or drafts. As Berti holds, it is important to underline that that twenty year period entails almost half of Aristotle’s intellectual course, and important parts of the works of the *Corpus* were composed in the same period.³¹ If to this may be added the aforementioned observations on the fluidity of Platonic argumentation in that span of time (i.e. the coexistence of “consecrated” arguments with a certain self-critique or re-evaluation as that of *Theaetetus* relating to the origin of knowledge) it is plausible to think

²⁸ *Philebus* 11d, transl. by R. HACKFORTH, in E. HAMILTON and H. CAIRNS (eds.), *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, cit., p. 1087. Italics added.

²⁹ Cfr. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 5, cit., p. 201. Quotes *Nic. Ethics* 1106b36, 1098a16. Cfr. also pp. 239-240 and M.F. BURNYEAT, *De Anima* II 5, p. 55, which connects the *hexeis* of DA 2.5 to *Theaetetus* 153b and the *Symposium* 208a.

³⁰ R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, cit., p. 153.

³¹ E. BERTI, *La filosofia del 'primo' Aristotele*, cit., p. 9.

of a strong continuity in the interests of both authors and an important evolution of “collegial” discoveries within the Academy, used in an original way by Aristotle in other writings.

The most important early writing for the purposes of this article is *Protrepticus*.³² Even if there is no lack of recent work on this topic – especially the annotated translations³³ – the legacy of Rabinowitz and Düring³⁴ in ordering the fragments and accounts, and in editing the sources, was definitive for perfecting Ross’ and Jaeger’s work, and to move beyond the previous cataloging which was developed more on assumption than on the real value of the documents.

It is generally accepted that *Protrepticus* was composed between 353 and 350 B.C.³⁵ The long surviving fragments bring forth precious observations on the internal movements of human beings that are exercised in the pursuit of the good life. This already leads us into the background of the great Platonic discourses just mentioned.

Here I will transcribe Fragment 14 almost in its entirety from Düring’s text. It is important to note how certain common vocabulary which Plato uses is repeated and how it is grouped together in such a way as to establish a general philosophical language:

«B79. The word ‘live’ seems to be used in two senses, one implying a *potentiality*, the other an *actuality* (κατὰ δύναμιν τὸ δὲ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν); for we describe as ‘seeing’ both those animals which have sight and are *born capable* of seeing, even if they happen to have their eyes shut, and those which *are using this faculty* (καὶ τὰ χρώμενα τῇ δυνάμει) and looking at something. Similarly with *knowing* and *cognition*; we sometimes mean by it the *use of the faculty* and *actual thinking* (χρηῖσθαι καὶ θεωρεῖν λέγομεν), sometimes the *possession of the faculty* and *having knowledge* (κεκτηῖσθαι τὴν δύναμιν καὶ τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχειν).

B80. If, then, we distinguish life from non-life by the *possession of perception* (αἰσθάν-

³² I will omit the more important connections with other fragments from Aristotle’s lost works so as not to excessively lengthen this study. Yepes reports all of the terminological concurrences in those writings: *La doctrina del acto*, cit., pp. 155-171.

³³ The annotated translation by Berti, published in 1967 as *Aristotele ‘Protreptico’* (repr. 2000) takes advantage of the work of Rabinowitz and Düring and he enriches it with observations that go beyond mere textual or historiographical clarifications, as will be seen further on. A compilation of the studies on this Aristotelian work is in progress on the website www.protrepticus.info, operated by D.S. Hutchinson and M.R. Johnson.

³⁴ W.G. RABINOWITZ, *Aristotle’s Protrepticus and the Sources of its Reconstruction*, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley 1957. I. DÜRING, *Aristotle’s Protrepticus. An Attempt at Reconstruction*, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteborg 1961. Cfr. E. BERTI *La filosofia del ‘primo’ Aristotele*, cit., p. 34.

³⁵ The details can be found in E. BERTI, *La filosofia del ‘primo’ Aristotele*, cit., pp. 32-35 on the reconstruction of the text; p. 404 on the dating; W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 6, cit., pp. 86-95.

νεσθαι), and ‘perception’ has two meanings, meaning properly ‘to use one’s senses’ but in another significance ‘to be able to use them’ (κυρίως μὲν τὸ χρῆσθαι ταῖς αἰσθησεσιν ἄλλως δὲ τὸ δύνασθαι) (it is for this reason, it seems, that we say even a sleeping man perceives), it is clear that ‘live’ will correspondingly have two meanings; a waking man must be said to live in the *true and proper sense* (ἀληθῶς καὶ κυρίως), a sleeping man must be said to live because he is *capable of passing into the activity* (κίνησιν) in virtue of which we say that a man is waking and perceiving something; it is for this reason and with reference to this that we describe him as living.

B 81. When, therefore, we use the same word in two different meanings, the one implying *action*, the other *passivity* (ποιεῖν / πάσχειν), we shall define the former as expressing *the stricter sense* of the word; e. g. we shall use the word ‘know’ rather of him who is *using* than of him who merely *possesses* knowledge, and ‘see’ rather of him who is looking at something than of him who merely can do so.

B 83. Thus we say that a waking man ‘lives more’ than a sleeping man, and that a man who is exercising his mental capacity ‘lives more’ than a man who merely *possesses* it, (applying logical priority); for it is because of the former that we say that the latter ‘lives’, because he is *such as to be active or passive in this manner* (πάσχειν / ποιεῖν) (i. e. such as to live actively or passively).

B 84. The *exercising* (χρῆσθαι) of anything, then, is this: if something can be done only in one way (it is exercised) when one does just that thing; if it can be done in more than one way, (it is exercised) when one does it in the best possible way, as for instance when somebody uses a doublepipe: he either just *plays* when he uses it, or *plays excellently*; we reason along the same line in other contexts where the words ‘use’ or ‘exercise’ occur. Thus we must say that he who uses a thing aright ‘uses more’ (χρηταί τις ἢ μάλιστα), (i. e. in a stricter sense of the word); for he who uses something well and accurately has a purpose in view and does in a natural manner what he does [*or: acts with the final end* (i. e. the good) in view and according to nature].

B87. Again, *perfect and unimpeded activity* (τελεία ἐνέργεια καὶ ἀκώλυτος) certainly contains in itself delight, so that the activity of thinking must be the most pleasant of all.³⁶

An initial observation which goes beyond the earlier Platonic ones concerns the first few lines above: “to live” or “living” is said to be in potency or in act; life can be predicated of a subject in two different ways.³⁷ The two meanings corresponding to one word are explained with the capacity-activity of seeing.

The transition from having a capacity (δύναμις) is no longer expressed in images – the birds, the cage and the owner – but in terms of “activation” and “deactivation” of something that is there already *κατὰ δύναμιν*. To be in act (*κατ’ ἐνέργειαν*) is different, but not isolated from being in potency. Within

³⁶ I. DÜRING, *Aristotle’s Protrepticus*, cit., pp. 79-83. Quotation marks (“) in the original, italics added.

³⁷ Cfr. E. BERTI, *Aristotele ‘Protreptico’*, cit., p. 96.

his proposal, Yepes rightly insists that the formulation of potency or faculty as δύνάμις was in use within the Academy as well as outside, but that ἐνέργεια is of purely Aristotelian coinage, starting from common vocabulary, all regarding the exercise of activities.³⁸ The distinction between ἐπιστήμη and θεωρεῖν offers two ways of speaking of act at the beginning of Book II of *De anima* (412a10-11).³⁹

Therefore, ordinary language – to possess, to have, to exercise, to use – and the variety of actions – to see, to play, to know, to live – are given a codification or universal terminology: the pair κτήσις / χρεῖσις becomes *potency* and *act*.⁴⁰ Berti affirms that with this distinction we find ourselves faced with the «most famous and important of the doctrines formulated by Aristotle»,⁴¹ the «all-pervasive distinction of potentiality and actuality». ⁴² In the words of Yepes, we pass from Platonic intuition to an Aristotelian generalization of terminology.⁴³

The Spanish scholar also notes the Platonic and *functionalistic*⁴⁴ character of the discussion – which will no longer appear in the texts which present the more developed ideas on act and capacities – which is evident from the frequency of the use of verbal forms. Berti notes that the abundance of examples in the face of a distinction explained in a few lines shows the radicalness of the Aristotelian discovery, which can only be shown through experience and the analysis of language since proofs cannot be adduced.⁴⁵

Then the correction to the order of the presentation of phenomena is explained: it goes from potency to act, but potency is said (and understood) only in order to act; it goes before it. Life, like knowledge and sight, can be understood in this way, and moreover, it may be said that those who exercise more activities *live longer* or *more intensely* than he or she who is less active (or sleeping).

Immediately then we are given another criterion of distinction, i.e. excellence in exercising certain activities, such as flute playing, pointed out by Plato in attempting to highlight the means/end relationships between external goods and the use we make of them, and applied especially to the virtuous life.

³⁸ R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, cit., pp. 157-162. D. BRADSHAW, *Aristotle East and West*, cit., pp. 1; 3-5. To understand the depth and scope of Yepes' effort, it suffices to look at the observations on the difficulties of separating this terminology in *De anima* with the observations of R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle's 'De Anima'*, cit., p. 150.

³⁹ The connection of these notions in the work's entirety can be followed in R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle's 'De Anima'*, pp. 149-151; 232.

⁴⁰ R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, cit., p. 167.

⁴¹ E. BERTI, *Aristotele 'Protrepitico'*, cit., p. 97.

⁴² M.F. BURNYEAT, *De Anima II 5*, cit., p. 41.

⁴³ R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, cit., p. 168.

⁴⁵ E. BERTI, *Aristotele 'Protrepitico'*, cit., p. 98.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

Before closing the discussion he affirms the order to the good: health is not simply something *healthier* than other *healthy things*, it is not a difference of degree, but of reason (ἡ λόγος). Health, as other things worthy of being chosen for themselves, is superior to things that are chosen to procure or conserve it.⁴⁶

There is also the possibility of doing or *doing better using* things in view of the end and in an excellent manner. And this because the aim of the argumentation is to establish what the best and most perfect activity is, as we see in *Euthydemus*. Berti gathers these observations to draw an implicit premise: the identification of the living being with its living, in order to then link it to the present reasoning on the superiority of activity exercised in the right way. The *use* of one's own life is not insignificant, just as it is not insignificant that a faculty be used in one way instead of another: the best activity is always the point of reference of action.⁴⁷

Even at the risk of devaluing the scope of the text's final assertion by emphasizing only its terminological significance, I consider the expression *τελεία ἐνέργεια* to be important: an activity "having in itself its own end" and "unimpeded" calls to mind the connection and continuity between activity and its perfection: the attainment of an external end is not treated here, but rather the *living* of a situation or a more perfect state. Both Yepes and Berti demonstrate that the discourse aims at establishing the structure of the good life, containing within it *capacities*, *activities* (both external and internal), *the best possible activity*, and *pleasure* as well.

The various references to the *good use* of things and the gradation of activities make a timely connection to an important notion such as debated that would deserve a separate study. It deals with the idea of the *proper* and *most perfect* activity of each type of being. Plato examines them at different times, but it is Aristotle who takes up the question head-on and in absolute terms: is it possible to determine the best action for each type of being, that is, its *ἔργον*?⁴⁸ In the final part of this study we will analyze some of the texts which address the issue from another point of view.

Yepes thus summarizes the generalization of the technical language employed by Aristotle:

⁴⁶ Cfr. E. BERTI, *Aristotele 'Protreptico'*, cit., pp. 98-100 and *La filosofia del 'primo' Aristotele*, pp. 34-35: connects the observations on possession and the priority of act over potency as well as the subordination of predication in the case of health to the mature thought of the Philosopher.

⁴⁷ Cfr. E. BERTI, *Aristotele 'Protreptico'*, cit., pp. 101-102. On how Plato structured the discourse about living well (*Rep.*), cfr. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 4, cit., p. 442. For the development of the question in Aristotle, cfr. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 6, cit., pp. 340-345.

⁴⁸ R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, cit., pp. 159-169; 347-354. The classic texts of the *Nicomachean Ethics* are 1094a-b; 1097b - 1098 a; 1144 a6. Cfr. note 86 *infra*.

– the Stagirite prefers ἔχειν in the place of *possession* in ordinary language (κατῆσις), and gives a technical weight to the *permanent states* of the soul; it deals with developed capacities which make their possessors *more capable*, not with physical phenomena;

– in order to express “use” he prefers ἐνεργεῖν to χρῆσις;

– and he condenses χρῆσις, ἔχισ, προῶχισ into ἐνέργεια;

– ἐνέργεια is a term derived from ordinary roots but which acquired a technical character unlike the term δύνάμις, which was commonly used in the Academy.⁴⁹

4. THE DISTINCTIONS IN *DE ANIMA* 2.5

Aristotle then takes up the distinctions between the different types of movement in order to explain various activities. In systematic presentations Aristotle usually begins with what is more evident, that is, with physical movement. Then he proceeds to explain other types of movement which can be understood due to this physical discourse, but to which it cannot be reduced.⁵⁰

De anima is a kind of crossroads; on the one hand, there are arguments about alterations in the natural world,⁵¹ and on the other, you have the activities of the soul, ignoring, however, the “moral” environment into which these distinctions were born. This will be of great importance in interpreting the different groups of texts.⁵²

The study of such distinctions as presented in the second book of *De anima* – which takes the fifth chapter as its point of reference – serves to frame the germinal notions of Plato in a general scheme on the internal activities of living beings.

⁴⁹ R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, cit., pp. 158-162; 355-357; cfr. D. BRADSHAW, *Aristotle East and West*, cit., p. 1.

⁵⁰ Cfr. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 6, cit., pp. 119-129, R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto*, cit., pp. 265-280 and R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle's 'De Anima'*, cit., pp. 223-224.

⁵¹ W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 6, cit., pp. 304-321 continues to be one of the best presentations of the Aristotelian theories regarding sensation. R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle's 'De Anima'*, cit., pp. xii; 15; 223-229 has the particularity of considering movement in the psychological works of Aristotle.

⁵² On the unity of composition, despite the difficulties in fixing the details of the text and at times also the argumentation, see the observations in the French version *Aristote. De l'ame*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1995 (2nd rev. edition) on the part of E. Barbotin (pp. ix-xii) and A. Jannone (pp. xxiv-xxvi), and the recent complex reading of R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle's 'De Anima'*, cit., p. xi. Cfr. also M.F. BURNYEAT, *De Anima II 5*, cit., p. 31. On the structure of Aristotelian psychology in contrast with the previous proposals, cfr. G. MOVIA, *Aristotele. L'anima*, Bompiani, Milano 2001, p. 17 or the long treatment in Polansky's work, pp. 62-143.

4. 1. *The conditionings of contemporary readings: functionalism*

In 1974, Sorabji commented on several aspects of Aristotle's proposal on the physical phenomena of sensitivity in relation to the Cartesian reading by different authors of the last century. He attempted, therefore, to understand the extent to which the Aristotelian theories on sensation, sensibility, and the sense organs coincided or not with Cartesian "perception".⁵³ Already at odds with Burnyeat, Sorabji synthesizes his explanations in a well-known writing from 1992.⁵⁴

Among the topics discussed was the interpretation of a physical phenomenon as knowledge in itself, i.e. as if alteration of the sense organ were already knowledge. Of purely Cartesian mold was the assimilation of the physical phenomenon – the transparent part of the eye becoming red when presented with an object of that color – to consciousness (awareness).⁵⁵

On the other hand, Sorabji's interlocutors are *functionalist* interpreters of the conception of the soul – as already stated beforehand by Yepes – i.e. they describe the vital principle as a «set of capacities».⁵⁶

In his effort to clarify the purely Aristotelian position, Sorabji highlights the notions of ἔργον, ἐνέργεια, ἐντελέχεια and ποιεῖν as something different from the modern notions of *activity* and *function*, that is, unrelated to a materialistic reading and normally with an active sense.⁵⁷ However, when he takes up this topic again in *Intentionality and Physiological Processes*, he discusses Burnyeat's thesis regarding the "Christian" reading of Aristotelian theories

⁵³ R. SORABJI, *Body and Soul in Aristotle*, in J. BARNES, M. SCHOFIELD, R. SORABJI (eds.), *Articles on Aristotle*, Duckworth, London 1979, v. 4. pp. 42-64. Originally pub. in «Philosophy», 49 (1974), pp. 63-89.

⁵⁴ R. SORABJI, *Intentionality and Physiological Processes: Aristotle's Theory of Sense-Perception*, in M. NUSSBAUM, A. RORTY, (eds.) *Essays on Aristotle's 'De Anima'* (First paperback edition, with an additional essay by M.F. Burnyeat), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995, pp. 195-225 (originally pub. 1992).

⁵⁵ Cfr. J. BARNES, *Aristotle's Concept of Mind*, in *Articles on Aristotle*, v. 4, pp. 32-41 (orig. in «Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society», 72 (1971-2), pp. 101-114), p. 38. R. SORABJI, *Intentionality and Physiological Processes*, pp. 209 ss.; W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 6, cit., p. 319. The passage from 438a12-25 on the composition of the eye, preceded by the position of Democritus which identifies vision with reflex.

⁵⁶ R. SORABJI, *Body and Soul in Aristotle*, cit., p. 43. A fuller vision than the *functionalistic* one is found in D. BRADSHAW, *Aristotle East and West*, cit., p. 17. The *functionalist* reading crossed the boundaries of interpretations of specialists in order to pass, in part through the fame of M. Nussbaum, into the field of social philosophy and ethics. The *activities* or *functions* (or also *capacities*, in the case of Amartya Sen) of the individual become the criteria of human individuation. For a critical evaluation of Nussbaum's position, cfr. P. BERNARDINI – J.M. RIST, *Uomo naturale o uomo politico? Il fondamento dei diritti in M.C. Nussbaum*, Rubbettino, Soveria Manelli 2009.

⁵⁷ R. SORABJI, *Body and Soul in Aristotle*, cit., pp. 43-53.

on the intentionality of knowledge, according to which the development of these interpretations would be in line with Aristotelian thought.⁵⁸ For Sorabji, the Greek and medieval interpretations (Arabic and Latin), upon which Brentano is based, are not faithful to Aristotle when speaking of intentionality – they would have lost the meaning of the phrase “to acquire the form without matter”⁵⁹ – because they arbitrarily “spiritualize” it beyond the Stagirite’s horizon. Sorabji admits that this lack of “faithfulness” to Aristotle, however, has proved fruitful for reflection on intentionality,⁶⁰ and argues that not a materialistic, but a *physiological* reading, is truer to genuine Aristotelianism.⁶¹

For his part, Burnyeat resumed the discussion to argue that the interpretation criticized by Sorabji is a coherent development of the problematic Aristotelian texts.⁶² The problem, says Burnyeat, is that Aristotle’s effort aimed at a harmonization between his *Physics* – especially the definitions of movement and change in Book 3 – and *De Generatione et corruptione* Book 1.7.⁶³ Psychological principles associated with a physics that was made obsolete by the Cartesian proposal. In the 21st century, these notions would no longer make sense.⁶⁴ The British scholar resumes his criticism of both Sorabji and Nussbaum-Putnam, and again emphasizes his disapproval of their reading of Ari-

⁵⁸ IDEM, *Intentionality and Physiological Processes*, cit., pp. 208-210. He refers to M.F. BURNYEAT, *How much Happens when Aristotle Sees Red and Hears Middle C*, in M. NUSSBAUM, A. RORTY (eds.) *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*, cit., pp. 422-443 (orig. in «Revue Phil. de la France et de l’Étranger», 118 (1993), pp. 262-280, pub. with corrections in *Corps et Âme: Sur le De Anima de Aristote*, Vrin, Paris 1996, pp. 149-167).

⁵⁹ R. SORABJI, *Intentionality and Physiological Processes*, cit., p. 10 cites *De anima* 2.12, 424a17ss and the parallel 3.2, 425b23-4, followed by the affirmation of the sense-act identity of the sensible in 3.12, 434a30.

⁶⁰ R. SORABJI, *Intentionality and Physiological Processes*, cit., pp. 220-223.

⁶¹ Cfr. *ibidem*, pp. 209; 222. Sorabji seems to mean that a conscious act is something substantial. In Plato’s texts and in the “early” Aristotle, it is clear that a “proprietary” subject is presupposed in activity but also in undergoing. N. STEIN, *After Literalism and Spiritualism: The Plasticity of Aristotelian Perception*, in G. VAN RIEL, P. DESTREE (eds.), *Ancient Perspectives on Aristotle’s ‘De Anima’*, Leuven Univ. Press, Leuven 2009, pp. viii-ix; pp. 17-33: takes up the discussion again and offers an alternative explanation.

⁶² M.F. BURNYEAT, *How much Happens*, cit., p. 421. He cites, as does Sorabji, *Timaeus* and *De anima* 2.12. Cfr. The analysis of the texts brought ahead by J. SISCO: *Material Alteration and Cognitive Activity in Aristotle’s ‘De Anima’*, «Phronesis», 41 (1996), pp. 138-157. With explicit reference to the polemics of past years, he outlines an interpretation extending the study to the imaginative faculty. See also the following study of Burnyeat, *Aquinas on ‘Spiritual Change’ in Perception*, in D. PERLER (ed.) *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality*, Brill, Leiden 2001, pp. 129-153, and the explanation of R. Polansky, *Aristotle’s ‘De Anima’*, p. 233n and 236n: he criticizes Burnyeat’s affirmation according to which the identity of the knower and the known derives from the missing distinction between perception and thought.

⁶³ A link also unveiled by R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle’s ‘De Anima’*, cit., p. 227.

⁶⁴ M.F. BURNYEAT, *Is an Aristotelian Philosophy of Mind Still Credible? A Draft*, in M. NUSSBAUM and A. RORTY (eds.), *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*, cit., pp. 15-26. *De Anima* II 5, p. 78.

stotle: according to him, the functionalistic reading of Aristotle is due to the Cartesian physics on which we depend today,⁶⁵ and that it is in sharp contrast with the Stagirite's thought.⁶⁶ Guthrie joins him in judging as unsuitable the modern proposal for interpreting these Aristotelian notions. However, unlike Burnyeat and more in line with Yepes, he does not consider it obsolete for the purposes of a deep understanding of the development of living beings.⁶⁷

Despite his lack of sympathy for the Aristotelian position, in his review of *De anima* 2.5, Burnyeat takes on a reading of the texts that has to deal not only with parallels in other works, but with the structure of the treatise in question, and of the other works associated with it.⁶⁸ On another level, one must take into consideration the type of discussion initiated by Aristotle, which in this case refers to the common opinions about sensation (understood as physical movement).⁶⁹ From such a context we can reread the "ranking" of alterations listed in this famous Aristotelian work.

These references to contemporary criticism served to emphasize the importance of the distinction between act and potency, of *πρᾶξις* and *ποίησις*, the different types of *ἐνέργεια* and *ἐντελέχεια*. In the following treatment of *De anima*, I will limit myself to presenting the connections of the second pair (act/potency).

4. 2. *The course of Book II of De Anima*

The second book of *De anima* opens after the evaluation of the previous treatments on the nature of the soul. This treatment aimed at finding a more correct definition of the soul, which is achieved by the classical formula as the first act of the body (natural, organic) that has life in potency.

The path which leads to the definition of the soul starts from the distinction between the pairs matter/form (*ύλη / μορφή*) and act/potency (*ἐντελέχεια*

⁶⁵ Burnyeat's observations and his analysis of the texts make evident that Sorabji's proposal is dualistically Cartesian. Cfr. how he poses the problems of the body-soul "connection" in *Body and Soul in Aristotle*, p. 60.

⁶⁶ M.F. BURNYEAT, *De Anima II 5*, cit., pp. 78-80. The author shows how the functionalists ignore *De anima* 2.1 and have a partial reading of the different types of alteration (*ἀλλοιώσεις*).

⁶⁷ Cfr. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History*, v. 6, cit., p. 320. R. YEPES, *La doctrina del acto, passim*; Th. BUCHEIM outlined the applications of Aristotelian notions both to the "mind-body problem" and to the understanding of freedom in his studies *Die Grundlagen der Freiheit. Eine Einführung in das 'Leib-Seele-Problem'*, «Philosophisches Jahrbuch», 111 (2004), pp. 1-16, and *Sômatikê energeia – ein aktualisierter Vorschlag des Aristoteles zur Lösung des Leib-Seele-Problems*, in Th. BUCHHEIM and F. HERMANNI (eds.), *Das Leib-Seele-Problem. Antwortversuche aus medizinisch-naturwissenschaftlicher, philosophischer und theologischer Sicht*, W. Fink, München 2006, pp. 85-106.

⁶⁸ M.F. BURNYEAT, *De anima II 5*, p. 31.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 33-36. R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle's 'De Anima'*, cit., p. 62-81.

/ δύνᾱμις). Matter is in potency to the form, which is act (whether it is act or activity will be seen on a case by case basis).

As has already been noted,⁷⁰ in the early stages of Book 2 (412a10-11; 22-23) it is recalled that act (ἐντελέχεια) is said in two ways: either as knowledge or the use of it (ὡς ἐπιστήμη, τὸ δ' ὡς τὸ θεωρεῖν): almost an update of the above-mentioned passage from *Theaetetus*, without using *χρησις*, however.

The dense argumentation leads to the famous formulation of the soul as the substance or form (οὐσία / εἶδος) of a natural body, and this substance is act. Therefore, the soul is the (first) act of this body.⁷¹

Once this definition has been reached, we go on to the explanation of the soul's functions, starting with nutrition and growth, in order to then move to superior activities. Among these, sensibility stands out. It is here where the conceptual tools enter, as well as the nuances which lead to the different explanations of Chapter 5.

In this first approximation of the notion of the soul we arrive at the characterization that the principle of the activities of living beings is something stable. In the argumentation he did not go on to a description of the activities starting from the soul, he simply made use of the evidence – as in the Platonic and his own early texts – of certain operations that depend on *having the ability to exercise them*, and *to exercise them effectively*. Thus, the principle of all these activities is described as “stable capacities,” like an ἐντελέχεια, without further determination.⁷² It seems that in the scheme the priority is retained in describing the stable principle, which is the root of all operations. Thus, it goes beyond the Platonic position and anchors the operations to something fundamental. This strong sense of actuality as supporting being is confirmed in 2.4 (415b11-16), where the different elements discussed so far are taken up in order to affirm that the soul is the cause of movement as a principle, as an end, and as the essence (ἡ κίνησις καὶ οὗ ἕνεκα καὶ ὡς ἡ οὐσία) of animate bodies.

The discourse on faculties in Chapter 4 (415a14-23) opens with a study proposal in order to determine:

- what the objects of these faculties are;
- what the activity of each one of them is;
- what each of these faculties is; and then their properties and characteristics.

As mentioned previously, after redefining the soul in 415b11 and further on, distinctions begin to appear with regard to activities and movements. The dis-

⁷⁰ Cfr. note 39.

⁷¹ 412a20-22.

⁷² The insertion of the term ἐντελέχεια is very important, but to comment on it would excessively broaden the scope of this study. It is one of the central arguments in Yepes' work. It suffices to point out the connection with the τελεία ἐνέργεια of Fr. 14 of *Protrepticus* cited previously.

tion is necessary not as a definition of movement, but as a list of changes of which the soul is the cause: the soul is the cause of local motion (*κίνησις*), but also of alteration (*ἀλλοίωσις*) and growth (*αὔξεισις*). It is worth noting that this is a non-physical causality – unlike that of Empedocles, which attributes these movements to fire. He argues this by saying that the physical cause is undetermined and that instead, the movement caused by the soul is given with limit and order (*καὶ πέρας καὶ λόγος*): there is a *ratio* dependent upon an order different from that of fire, which grows until there is fuel to burn (415b29-416a19).

In that discussion he, for the first time, compares sensation with “a certain alteration” (*ἀλλοίωσις τις*: 415 b25), such as growth and decay.

To be clear in distinguishing nutrition from nourishment, Aristotle states that it is the food which changes through the power of the eater’s faculty, and not vice versa. The faculty, as the builder, changes only from the state of inactivity to that of activity (*εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἔξ ἀργίας*: 416b2). These observations, always in line with the Platonic texts, foreshadow the discussion in Chapter 5.

4. 3. De Anima 416b32-418a6: *sensation as alteration*

For Burnyeat, as for St. Thomas Aquinas, «the positive aim of II 5 is to introduce the distinction between first and second potentiality, each with their own type of actuality. In both cases the actuality is an alteration different from ordinary alteration. Perception exemplifies one of these new types of alteration, another is found in the acquisition of knowledge and in an embryo’s first acquisition of the power of perception.» He also points out that the absence of comparisons with physical alterations supports his “consolidated” interpretation of perception according to Aristotle as excluding any type of material process.⁷³

The explanation of what sensation is (*αἴσθησις*) calls to mind the text at 415b24 as a starting point: sensation consists in *being moved* or in *undergoing an action* (*ἐν τῷ κινεῖσθαι τε καὶ πάσχειν συμβαίνει*),⁷⁴ since it seems that it is a kind of alteration (and again, *ἀλλοίωσις τις*: 416b33-35). However, in recalling the text – which resolves the question of the relationship between the similar and dissimilar in the previous chapter – Aristotle does not refer to a basic step,

⁷³ M.F. BURNYEAT, *De Anima II 5*, cit., p. 28. Cfr. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sententia Libri ‘De Anima’ 2*, lectio 11, nn. 80641-80645, in E. ALARCÓN (ed.) <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/can2.html> (24.08.2012).

⁷⁴ J. BARNES, *Aristotle’s Concept of Mind*, cit., pp. 38-39. He links the distinctions in this chapter to the various others in *De anima*, trying to maintain the balance between the acquisition of forms without matter and the different affirmations about the communion of body and soul in knowledge and everything understood as “alterations”. He makes no reference to act or to active capacities.

namely, to the assertion that the soul transforms what is dissimilar and assimilates it: i.e. activity originates from the capacity of a living being, neither from the ingested material, nor from fire or other external elements. The active principle and “orderer” is always internal to the living being.⁷⁵ Keeping this in mind can also help to avoid losing the meaning of sensation as an activity.

The text points out that there is no sensation of the sense organs, and that their activation depends on the presence of sensible objects: they need them to pass into act (τὸ αἰσθητικὸν οὐκ ἔστιν ἐνεργεία ἀλλὰ δυνάμει μόνον: 417a7-8).⁷⁶

Thus, to perceive (αἰσθάνεσθαι) is said in two ways, i.e. as one who listens and sees *in potency* or one who is *presently* listening (417a10-11): insofar as he is in potency and insofar as he is in act (τό τε δυνάμει ὄν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεία), and thus also for the sensible object (τὸ αἰσθητόν).

This reduction of the two characterizations of faculties – in potency and act – allows us to accept as a starting point that undergoing (πάσχειν), the moved being (κινεῖσθαι), and acting (ἐνεργεῖν) are all the same thing. Then we are able to insert them into a discussion in broad terms, calling to mind the consideration of movement (κίνησις) as a species of act (ἐνεργεία τις),⁷⁷ albeit imperfect or ἀτελής – *inachevé*, as Barbotin translates it (417a15-17). When one undergoes something or is moved, this happens through an agent.⁷⁸

4. 4. The types of potency and act

However, the starting point does not suffice. Aristotle maintains that the moment has arrived to apply the potency/act (δύναμις/ἐντελέχεια) distinction to the different movements of the soul which explain the passages regarding knowledge (417a23-b1):

«we must distinguish different senses in which things can be said to be potential or actual; at the moment we are speaking as if each of these phrases had only one sense. We can speak of something as a knower

[a] either as when we say that man is a knower, meaning that man falls within the class of beings that know or have knowledge (τῶν ἐπιστεμόνων καὶ ἐχόντων ἐπιστήμην),

⁷⁵ Cfr. *De anima* 1.1 404a1-b18.

⁷⁶ M.F. BURNYEAT, *De Anima* II 5, cit., pp. 39-40. He links these observations to *De Generatione* and to the opinions discussed in preparation of the physical argumentation.

⁷⁷ G. MOVIA, *Aristotele. 'L'anima'*, in *loc. refer to Fis. 3.1, 201a10ss; Met 9.6, 1048b18ss*. Barbotin refers to *Fis. 3.2, 201b31-33* and *Met 9.6, 1048b28-36*. M.F. BURNYEAT, *De Anima* II 5, cit., p. 40 quotes *Phys. 3.1-3*.

⁷⁸ On the peculiar and irreducible character of the movements of the senses to physical movements, i.e. understood always as a type of activity, cfr. J.M. MAGEE, *Sense Organs and the Activity of Sensation in Aristotle*, «Phronesis», 45 (2000), pp. 306-330.

[b] or as when we are speaking of a man who possesses a knowledge of grammar (τὸν ἔχοντα τὴν γραμματικὴν);

each of these is a knower in potency (κατὰ δυναμιν), but not in the same way: the one [a] because his kind or matter is such and such, the other [b] because he can exercise his thinking when he wants to (ὅτι βουλευθεὶς δυνατὸς θεωρεῖν), if nothing external prevents him.

And there is [c] the man who is already thinking – he is a knower in actuality and in the most proper sense is knowing, e.g. this A (ὁ δ' ἤδη θεωρῶν ἐντελεχεία ὧν καὶ κυρίως τόδε τὸ A). Both the former [a,b] are potential knowers, who realize their respective potentialities, the one [a] by change of quality, i.e. repeated transitions from one state to its opposite under instruction, the other [b] in another way by the transition from the inactive possession of sense or grammar to their active exercise (ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν τὴν αἴσθησιν ἢ τὴν γραμματικὴν, μὴ ἐνεργεῖν δ' εἰς τὸ ἐνεργεῖν).⁷⁹

It is impossible in just a few lines to establish the connections between the texts previously cited and the current discussions concerning the details of this passage. However, its parallel reading with the Platonic fragments and *Protrepticus* mentioned in the preceding paragraphs will suffice in order to understand their common purpose.

4. 5. The divisions of “undergoing”: 417b3-16

But the division of activities also implies some clarification of the terms “to suffer” and “to undergo” since Aristotle added to the discussion the role of the teacher and his activity on the student:

«Also the expression ‘to be acted upon’ (πάσχειν) has more than one meaning; it may mean either (a) a certain kind of extinction (φθορά) of one of two contraries by the other, or (b) the maintenance of what is potential by the agency of what is actual (τὸ δὲ σωτηρία⁸⁰ μᾶλλον τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐντελεχειᾶ ὄντος) and already like what is acted upon, with such likeness as is compatible with one’s being actual and the other potential. For what possesses knowledge becomes an actual knower by a transition which is either not an alteration of it at all (being in reality a development into its true self or actuality) (εἰς αὐτὸ γὰρ ἢ ἐπίδοσις καὶ εἰς

⁷⁹ 417a23-b1, from the translation of J.A. SMITH, in J. BARNES (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton 1991. The division of the text makes another explanation of the argument’s structure unnecessary. A detailed presentation of the texts is found in M.F. BURNYEAT, *De Anima II 5*, cit., pp. 46-57.

⁸⁰ σωτηρία is translated by Smith as *maintenance*. Barbotin: *conservation*, Movia: *conservazione*; St. Thomas Aquinas: *quaedam salus et perfectio* (*Sententia*, lib. II, sec. 11, n. 9). Sorabji, *Intentionality and Physiological Processes*, p. 221: *is preserved*. Polansky, *Aristotle’s ‘De Anima’*, p. 235: *preservation or salvation*: enriched by the parallel passages in other works.

ἐντελέχειαν) or at least an alteration in a quite different sense from the usual meaning». ⁸¹

Critique of the text can open up different fields of discussion. The continuation of the thread of the original discourse serves to clarify one point in the preceding paragraph: after having affirmed that there are at least two ways of understanding the verb “to suffer,” we see that he goes back to the argumentation on the transition from *inactivity* to *activity* once he is in *possession* of knowledge (a new state through which he is capable of reacting). It is not an alteration, or if it is, it is treated as a particular kind of alteration. Even if Aristotle fails to highlight this, he is treating two principles which are internal to the subject, not transitive activities.

This clarification provides a new way of understanding the movements of the soul: we cannot speak of alteration in a proper sense when dealing with the growth of living beings: the subject’s development of itself and toward its own realization, “an advance into itself,” as Burnyeat refers to it, ⁸² or “a fulfillment of what is already there. There is no replacement or destruction by something different,” according to Polansky’s gloss. ⁸³

Aristotle pursues his argumentation, making clear what it means to teach and to learn (417b8-12), and concluding that whoever learns from another,

«either [a] ought not to be said ‘to be acted upon’ at all or [b] we must recognize two senses of alteration, viz. [i] the change towards negative [temporary] conditions (ἐπὶ τὰς στερητικὰς διαθέσεις), or [ii] the development of an existent quality from potentiality in the direction of fixity or nature (ἐπὶ τὰς ἕξεις καὶ τὴν φύσιν)» (417b13-16).

Burnyeat offers a brilliant exegesis of the final sentence, drawing from the complementary texts of the *Physics*. His translation of ἕξεις is «firmly fixed dispositional states» ⁸⁴ in the direction of “a change towards nature”: the attainment of these “settled states,” as Sisko calls them, ⁸⁵ is growth toward one’s own identity because it is to pass into act, and to the act which most corresponds to one’s own nature (ἔργον). ⁸⁶ This perfection, Burnyeat contin-

⁸¹ 417b3-16. Cfr. the accurate analysis of J. ARAOS, *Pasión y conocimiento. Lectura del “De anima” de Aristóteles*, «Revista Philosophica», 16 (1993), pp. 106-123.

⁸² M.F. BURNYEAT, *De Anima II 5*, pp. 55 and 63. His reference to this “lyrical phrase” does not seem ironic. St. Thomas follows the translation «in ipsum enim additio est et in actum». Barbotin translates: “car c’est un progrès de l’être en lui-même et vers son entéléchie”. Sorabji (*Intentionality and Physiological Processes*, cit., p. 221): «developing more into himself and finding fulfillment».

⁸³ R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle’s ‘De Anima’*, cit., p. 235.

⁸⁴ M.F. BURNYEAT, *De anima II 5*, cit., pp. 62 and 77.

⁸⁵ J. SISCO, *Material Alteration and Cognitive Activity in Aristotle’s ‘De Anima’*, cit., pp. 143-144. R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle’s ‘De Anima’*, cit., p. 233: «ἕξεις (...) which we must translate as ‘habit’, ‘state’, ‘condition’, or ‘disposition’». Cfr. the observations on the origin of the term in the texts of *Theaetetus* and *Philebus*, *supra*.

⁸⁶ M.F. BURNYEAT, *De anima II*, 5 p. 63. Cfr. note 48 *supra*.

ues, can really be seen as a kind of “resting” because it implies a result greater than a mere additive effect of the effort to learn: it is thus a matter of acquired development.⁸⁷ Sorabji, too, underscores this sense by adding «to his real nature» to the text.⁸⁸ Polansky marks out a parable in the ἐξελίξ of this passage, which are the active state, and their assimilation to the light in 430 a14-17.⁸⁹

The conclusion of the chapter (417 b29-418 a6) turns to these observations in order to affirm that for the moment it is sufficient to have understood that “to be in potency” is not said *simpliciter*. The child and the adult can become strategists, but in different ways: the child must still develop as he is in potency, but he is not yet ready. Perception is in potency as the *adult-not-yet-strategist*. But since there are no terms to distinguish the two situations, πᾶσχεῖν and ἀλλοιοῦσθαι are used as the appropriate terms.⁹⁰

5. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Due to the diversity of approaches and the complexity of specialized studies on Plato and Aristotle, it is always a challenge to harmonize the level of textual criticism with their fundamental philosophical ideas.

Despite their celebrity and richness of content, the Platonic texts and the long passage from *Protrepticus* are not usually linked to the most famous works of Aristotle as a continuous and coherent proposal in their broad outline. I believe that the ideas mentioned here which lean in that direction are useful for taking up again and developing classical psychology as a metaphysics of the living and above all, as a philosophy of the person (philosophical anthropology) with a broader foundation than the modern one.⁹¹ As can be seen in the brief outlines of the works of more recent authors, the limits of post-Cartesian Physics significantly affect the scope of the great theories of the Greek authors.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 63-65.

⁸⁸ R. SORABJI, *Intentionality and Physiological Processes*, cit., p. 221. Nevertheless, his reading looks to bring back the development of *De anima* to the physical sphere: «the point could even be extended to a purely physical switch, such as a rock’s switching from its perch on a ledge to falling in the direction of its natural position, just so long as that could be viewed as a switch towards its true nature».

⁸⁹ R. POLANSKY, *Aristotle’s ‘De Anima’*, cit., pp. 462-463. The difficulty of understanding its analogies does not take away from the importance of the text: light is considered something superior to movement. Cfr. the brief commentary of St. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sententia Libri ‘De Anima’* 3, lectio 6, n. 80951.

⁹⁰ It is beyond the scope of this study to include the details of other recent proposals. Cfr. R. HEINAMAN, *Actuality, Potentiality and De Anima* II.5, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 13 (1995), pp. 187-216, and N. STEIN, *After Literalism and Spiritualism*, cit., p. 22; J. BOWIN, *Aristotle on Various Types of Alteration in ‘De Anima’* II.5, «Phronesis», 56 (2011), pp. 38-61.

⁹¹ The last chapter of Guthrie’s volume dedicated to Aristotle, and from which I treated various ideas, contains 70 pages on *The Philosophy of Human Life*.

I also maintain that a reading of *De anima* which is attentive to the continuity of certain fundamental ideas of the Stagirite on development and human perfection would result in more productive exchanges in morals, as can be seen in some recent works.⁹²

ABSTRACT: *This study is developed in three stages beyond the introduction and concluding observations: the first stage is a collection of passages from Clitophon, Philebus, Euthydemus, and Theaetetus, in which the attempt is made to explain the diversity of acts in the exercise of human faculties in view of the "good life." In the second stage, we will analyze fr. 14 of Protrepticus and will discover both the parallelisms with Platonic works and the Stagirite's original developments. The most important novelties concern the creation of a general language, with which to refer to the activities of the soul, based on act and potency, and the analogical application of terms to describe the very different realities among them. In the third part, the fundamental passages from Book II from De anima are studied in order to arrive at Chapter 5's distinctions on alteration and passion in light of the discoveries concerning the different states of activities in living beings. Given the richness and complexity of the texts in the third part, a way of exposition was chosen so as to compare the principal ideas. We wanted, however, to make reference to the recent debates regarding the questions at hand (the functionalism of Nussbaum-Putnam; the debate between Sorabji and Burnyeat; Heinaman) to underline the importance of a more open interpretation of the foundations of a metaphysics of the living, which is capable of understanding their development as growth towards one's perfection.*

KEYWORDS: *Plato, Aristotle, act, potency, psychology, personal development, actualization, emergence.*

⁹² R. HEINAMAN, *Activity and Change in Aristotle*, cit.; *Actuality, Potentiality and De Anima II.5*, «Phronesis» 52-2 (2007), pp. 139-187, in response to Burnyeat. *Eudaimonia as an activity in NE 1. 8-12*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 33 (2007), pp. 221-253. His works start with the critiques of Kosman at the end of the 1980s and again reflect on the last writings of Burnyeat. The progress made in textual criticism could serve to update Yepes' work, which from the point of view of the exhaustiveness of Aristotelian sources, remains unmatched.

NOTE E COMMENTI