

Aristotle and Human Movements

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ARISTOTLE thought and wrote a great deal about the structure of the human act. Many people with an interest in his philosophy do not realize this, however, since most of the pertinent remarks are contained not in his ethical works but in the *Physics*. He understands the human act to be bound up with movement, so most of what he says about the structure of movements applies also to human acts. Indeed, in discussing movement in *Physics* he is as likely as not to employ examples taken from the realm of human practice. He speaks, for instance, of an object's rolling (201a18) or of fire's being carried up (192b36), but it seems to come much more naturally to him to use examples such as a person's becoming musical (188b1–2) or a doctor's healing a patient (195b18–19). These latter, of course, are human acts.

Aristotle's remarks on the structure of the human act are especially useful for those trying to understand Thomas Aquinas's theory of human action since there are so many rival interpretations of this theory on offer today. Since in setting out this theory Aquinas often cites Aristotle (and, of course, cites none of the later interpreters), Aristotle serves as a control factor: If an interpretation conflicts with his theory, it is less likely to be a correct interpretation of Thomas.

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Action and Movement in *Metaphysics* ix, 6

Before offering an analysis of human actions as movements, we must first establish that it is permissible to speak of human actions—that is to say, all human actions—as movements. Once past that hurdle, we can enter into the details of Aristotle’s analysis of actions as movements.

The first passage that interests us is found in the last third of *Metaphysics* ix, 6, where Aristotle appears to make a sharp distinction between action (πράξις) properly speaking and movement (κίνησις):

Since of the actions which have a limit none is an end but all are relative to the end (e.g. of “to thin [it],” “making thin”),¹ and the things, when one is thinning in such a way that they are in movement, are not that at which the movement aims, *these* are not the action [πράξις] or at least not the complete one (for there is no end). But in *that* exists the end, i.e., in the action. E.g., at the same time one sees and has seen, one understands and has understood, thinks and has thought: but it is not true that at the same time one learns and has learnt, or is being cured and has been cured. And at the same time one lives well and has lived well, and thrives and has thrived. If not, the process would have had at some time to break off, as when someone thins; but, as it is, there is no such thing: one lives and has lived.

Of these actions, then, we must call the one set movements [κινήσεις], and the other actualities [ἐνεργείας]. For every movement is incomplete: making thin, learning, walking, building. These, therefore, are movements, and they are incomplete. For one journeys and has journeyed not at the same time; nor does one build and has built, nor does something come to be and has come to be, nor is moved and has moved at the same time—but each is different, i.e., “moves” and “has moved.” But it is the same thing and at the same time that one has seen and sees, or thinks and has thought. The latter such action, then, I call an actualization [ἐνέργειαν], the former a movement [κίνησιν]. (1048b18–35)

Part of what Aristotle is saying here is certainly linguistic. Consider the process of thinning something, that is, making something thin, such as a human body.² The thinning of that particular body is only accomplished

¹ Ἐπεὶ δὲ τῶν πράξεων ὧν ἔστι πέρας οὐδεμία τέλος ἀλλὰ τῶν περὶ τὸ τέλος, οἷον τοῦ ἰσχναινεῖν ἢ ἰσχνασία [αὐτό]. . . . This reading differs somewhat from the two standard critical editions: i.e., Ross (Wilfred D. Ross, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1953]) and Jaeger (Werner Jaeger, ed., *Aristotelis Metaphysica* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1957]). It is closer, however, to the original manuscripts.

² In a somewhat parallel passage in *Physics* ii, 3, in which Aristotle is discussing causality and, in particular, final causality, he speaks of curing or making healthy (ἵνα ὑγιαίνει—194b34) and of thinning (ἢ ἰσχνασία—194b36). Both concepts

once it is thinned to the desired dimensions. So, while engaged in the process one can say that one is thinning (the body) but not that the thinning has been accomplished. Moreover, once the body is thinned, it is no longer true that one *is* thinning it. On the other hand, with respect to activities such as understanding or thinking, one can look back on earlier stages in the process in which one is currently engaged and say truthfully that also during those stages one was doing what one is doing now; for instance, one is thinking now and has been thinking for ten minutes. But also before now (e.g., in the ten minutes between starting to think and now), thinking was entirely (completely) there. The reason for this, as Aristotle explains, is that understanding and thinking are wholly present whenever and for as long as one engages in them since the end of either activity need not be awaited but is present in every moment of the activity. One is reminded of the distinction made in *Nicomachean Ethics* i, 6, (1096b13–14) between things good in themselves and things good for the sake of other things: Thinking and understanding are good in themselves; thinning is for the sake of something else, health, for instance.

But, as John Ackrill famously pointed out some forty years ago, Aristotle's argument in *Metaphysics* ix, 6, is not without its problems.³ Most people would say that listening to a piece of music is an action (a *πρᾶξις*) and not a movement (a *κίνησις*), since presumably one enjoys the piece throughout its playing. One's satisfaction—and therefore one's end—is present in every moment and does not arrive only when the piece is finished. And yet the piece of music does have an end: A moment when it concludes, a point at which it hopes to arrive. Strictly speaking, one cannot claim truthfully to have heard Bach's first Brandenburg Concerto until the concerto is finished; thus, listening to a concerto is not unlike thinning something and yet it is a practice.⁴

appear in *Metaphysics* ix, 6, 1048b18–35 (although the latter employs the verb *ὀγιάζειν* instead of *ὀγιάειν*). It would seem, therefore, that in *Metaphysics* ix, 6, Aristotle has in mind regimes of weight loss, engaged in ultimately for the sake of health.

³ J. L. Ackrill, "Aristotle's Distinction between *Energeia* and *Kinēsis*," in *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, ed. R. Bambrough (New York: Humanities Press, 1965), 121–41.

⁴ The literature on the issues raised by Ackrill is huge. See, for instance, Terry Penner, "Verbs and the Identity of Actions: A Philosophical Exercise in the Interpretation of Aristotle," in *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. O. Wood and G. Pitcher (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 393–460; Daniel W. Graham, "States and Performances: Aristotle's Test," *Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1980): 117–30; Kathleen Gill, "On the Metaphysical Distinction between Processes and Events," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 23 (1993): 365–84; Alexander P. D. Mourelatos, "Aristotle's *Kinēsis*/*Energeia* Distinction: A Marginal Note on Kathleen Gill's Paper,"

Although there is no denying that Aristotle employs the present/imperfect tense distinction repeatedly in *Metaphysics* ix, 6, 1048b18–35 in order to establish his general point, there is more going on in the passage than that—and ultimately his point is not linguistic but metaphysical. This is especially apparent in the first sentence of the passage, which speaks of “the things,” referred back to in the subsequent line as “these” (ταῦτα). These things are apparently stages in the (so to speak) “life” of a movement or of a moved thing *qua* moved.⁵ These stages, Aristotle says, occur before the end (e.g., the thinned body) is actually present; they are present, that is, while the thing is still “in movement.” They are to be distinguished from the action properly speaking, referred to in the first sentence of the passage as “to thin [τοῦ ἰσχναίνειν],” which is itself distinct from “the making thin [ἡ ἰσχνασία].”

The idea is that with some actions we can consider their various stages—that is, “the things [αὐτὰ]” in the various states in which they find themselves along the way—and see that they are distinct from the “essence” of the action itself, which does not contain in itself stages along the way but is simply doing that thing. These stages (considered as parts of an action) are not yet the action properly speaking, which gets its intelligibility from the completed action. In other words, our idea of “to thin something” comes from our knowledge of things that have been thinned; and this idea is transferred also to the process of making thin, ἡ ἰσχνασία—even though, if we look at any stage in the process of making thin, we will not see the thinned thing. No stage in the process of getting to the end can, therefore, be called the action—nor can the whole process itself, *qua* process—since, while the action is being executed, the end is not yet present. The action itself, that is, “to thin” (τοῦ ἰσχναίνειν), is doing that thing—properly speaking, because it does have the end right in itself. Strangely, although we do do things like thinning bodies to a certain dimension, that action as such never appears among the phenomena presented to us since all we ever actually see are parts of the process. And yet, once the process is finished, we can and do call it “thinning (something).”

That *Metaphysics* ix, 6, 1048b18–35 is making such points is confirmed by looking a couple of chapters ahead to *Metaphysics* ix, 8, the main theme of which is that actualization (ἐνέργεια) (mentioned also at *Meta-*

Canadian Journal of Philosophy 23 (1993): 385–88. In my own interpretation of *Metaphysics* ix, 6, 1048b18–35, I am much indebted to chapters 2 to 7 of Carlo Natali, *L'action efficace: Études sur la philosophie de l'action d'Aristote* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

⁵ In this passage, Aristotle permits himself to move seamlessly from talk of movements to talk of things *qua* moved.

physics ix, 6, 1048b34) is prior to potentiality (δύναμις), which Aristotle closely associates with movement (see 1050a14; also *Metaphysics* v, 12, 1019a15–20). Actualization is prior, he says, “in substance” (οὐσίᾳ—1050a4), “because everything that comes to be moves towards a principle, that is, an end” (*Metaphysics* ix, 8, 1050a7–8). He goes on to use some of the very examples he uses in *Metaphysics* ix, 6 (1048b18–35):

And while in some cases the exercise is the ultimate thing (e.g., in sight the ultimate thing is seeing, and no other product besides this results from sight), but from some things a product follows (e.g., from the art of building there results a house, along with of the act of building [παρὰ τὴν οἰκοδόμησιν]), yet none the less the actualization is in the former case the end and in the latter more the end than the potentiality is. For the act of building [οἰκοδόμησις] is in the thing built, and it comes to be—and is—at the same time as the house. (1050a23–1050a29)

Ironically, the act of building, which is in some sense the action (or πρῶξις), arrives only when the process of building is past.

This approach helps us past some difficulties in Aristotle’s (in any case) belabored present/imperfect distinction: “at the same time one sees and has seen, one understands and has understood, thinks and has thought; but it is not true that at the same time one learns and has learnt, or is being cured and has been cured.” The examples in which both the present and imperfect tenses are possible are plausible enough: Looking back at the moment when a man saw (“has seen”), we recognize that at that moment he sees; looking back at the moment when he understood, we see that he understands (at that moment). But is it really true that, looking back at the moment when a man learned (the moment referred to when we say, he “has learnt”), he was not learning? Commentators have struggled to come up with meanings of the imperfect that make sense of this—that is, so that a man’s learning implies that he has not learnt. These meanings, however, although possible, are obviously imposed upon the imperfects as they appear in the passage—and *those* can be interpreted in various ways. Surely Aristotle’s Greek readers would have experienced the same troubles we do in assigning a meaning of the imperfect that makes sense of what he says—*supposing* that they thought Aristotle was making a linguistic point.

But if the linguistic distinction (such as it is) is imprecise, the metaphysical point is clear and cogent; so we should prefer *that* as Aristotle’s point in *Metaphysics* ix, 6, 1048b18–35. What is that point? It is twofold: (1) if the end is not present in the stages that lead up to an action, neither is that action’s full intelligibility—that is, its essence (or “substance”); and

(2) if, on the other hand, in some cases there are no “stages leading up to x” (i.e., in cases in which the end is never absent), all that there is to the action is present when it is engaged in: to use Aristotle’s examples, whenever one sees or understands or thinks, all there is to seeing and understanding and thinking is present at that moment. Or, as Aristotle puts it, using yet another example, at the moment when a man “has lived well,” it was (is?) true to say that he lives well. Were this not the case, “the process would have had at some time to break off, as when someone thins”—that is to say, there would have had to be a metaphysical break such as there is between thinning and its full intelligibility, which arrives only with the end; “but, as it is,” says Aristotle, “there is no such thing: one lives and has lived.”

When, therefore, Ackrill notes that we can posit an end in the various moments of listening (for instance) to a concerto, he misses the point. What he says is true, but still “listening to concertos” derives its intelligibility as a concept from concertos; and concertos are not finished until they are finished. Ackrill is confusing the end made present by the pleasure we take in listening with the completion (the end) of the concerto. It is interesting that Aristotle addressed this precise issue in the last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

We have discussed movement with precision in another work [i.e., the *Physics*], but it seems that it is not complete at any and every time, but that the many movements are incomplete and different in kind, since the whence and whither give them their form. But of pleasure the form is complete at any and every time. Plainly, then, pleasure and movement must be different from each other, and pleasure must be one of the things that are whole and complete. This would seem to be the case, too, from the fact that it is not possible to move otherwise than in time, but it is possible to be pleased; for that which takes place in a moment is a whole. (*Nicomachean Ethics* x, 4, 1174b2–9)

The point connected with the “whence and whither” is that the completed form arrives only at the point whither (ποῖ) the movement is headed; but all this is quite independent of one’s *enjoying* the movement while it is yet incomplete.

To return, though, to our main argument, a person might object that the use of the *Physics*, dedicated as it is to the analysis of movements, is largely irrelevant to the analysis of human action since Aristotle in *Metaphysics* ix, 6 sharply distinguishes movements from actions—regarding them, at best, as incomplete actions. But we can now see that Aristotle has no intention in *Metaphysics* ix, 6 of completely separating the analy-

sis of movements from the analysis of actions. Quite the contrary: He holds that a movement is only really intelligible in terms of the end to which it leads, which Aristotle associates with the action itself (or its intelligibility). If in some sense we want to distinguish certain human acts from movements strictly speaking, we must still say that they are dependent on movements—the process of going from one point to another, “the whence and whither” (*Nicomachean Ethics* x, 4, 1174b5; also *Physics* vi, 1, 231b29)—for their very essence or form. This is tied up with our natures as material substances.

That Aristotle does not intend with *Metaphysics* ix, 6, 1048b18–35 to keep actions out of physics (as he understood that science) is indicated by his calling movements actions throughout that passage. It is true, he does suggest at one point that there is something lacking in them *qua* actions, but in the rest of the passage they are described as actions without qualification: from the opening phrase (“Since of the actions [πράξεων] which have a limit none is an end but all are relative to the end . . .”) to the concluding one (“The latter action [τὴν τοιαύτην], then, I call an actualization, the former [ἐκείνην] a movement”). (The feminine forms here show that Aristotle still understands that he is speaking about types of action.) If a movement is an “imperfect action” in any way, that is only because that which it makes possible has not arrived at its completion.

Nor does Aristotle ever deny in *Metaphysics* ix, 6, 1048b18–35 that actions such as seeing, understanding, and thinking have the sort of structure that would allow them to be analyzed alongside movements, properly speaking. That is, they still have objects or ends, even though these are in some sense within the actions themselves. Consider once again the first phrase of the passage: “Since of the actions which have a limit none is an end but all are relative to the end. . . .” Aristotle is implicitly acknowledging here that an *action* could serve as an end, although *these* actions—since they *have* ends—are not ends. There is no reason to believe that Aristotle thinks that the actions that do serve as ends must be *just* that, that is, that they are only understandable as the indivisible endpoints of movements, with no internal structure of their own. After all, in this very passage he speaks of one’s thriving [εὐδαιμονεῖ: 1048b26] as an end, and he insists that thriving [εὐδαιμονία] is an activity; and seeing and understanding and thinking, even if they are, in a sense, ends in themselves, still have objects: One sees, understands, and thinks something.⁶

This desire to analyze all actions as one does movements is much in evidence in *Physics* v, 2, where Aristotle sets out what he means by the

⁶ See, for instance, *De anima* ii, 11 (424a10–12); iii, 10 (433a15–17); and *Physics* v, 1 (225a1).

various terms he will be employing in that book. He divides change (μεταβολή) into three: generation (γένεσις), corruption (φθορά), and movement (κίνησις). Movement itself is split into four: alteration (ἀλλοίωσις), increase (αύξησις), decrease (φθίσις), and locomotion (φορά).⁷ As Sarah Waterlow (Broadie) has pointed out, calling some alterations movements is a bit of a stretch.⁸ When thought of a friend comes into my mind, does anything go from here to there; is there really here a whence and a whither? But whatever its linguistic plausibility, it is clear that Aristotle holds that even such alterations are to be analyzed as events that aim at some object, which gives them their sense.

So, Aristotle is not separating movements and actions but just saying that nothing in a movement corresponds to the essence of the action. This entails the at-first-glance odd conclusion that much of the analysis in *Physics* is about things that are not wholly intelligible in themselves. But this sounds more likely and Aristotelian once one sees that it corresponds to the progress of the general argument in both *Physics* and *Metaphysics*: from phenomena and entities that demand an explanation in terms of act, to entities that are pure act. Aristotle says in chapter 8 of *Metaphysics* ix, that is, not long after his discussion of thinning and seeing, and so on, that obviously “actualization is prior in substance to potentiality; and as we have said, one actualization always precedes another in time right back to the actualization of the eternal prime mover” (*Metaphysics* ix, 8, 1050b3–6). The lower things, that is, the things bound up with the elements, “imitate [μιμείται]” the imperishable things, says Aristotle (“For these also are ever active; for they have their movement of themselves and in themselves”; *Metaphysics*, ix, 8, 1050b29–30). Before long, that is, in book xii, one finds Aristotle’s treatise on unmoved movers (especially the first unmoved mover), a treatise inserted either by Aristotle or by an early editor who realized that the trajectory of the argument demands it. In *Physics* the movement of the argument is similar: from a consideration of general principles (books i and ii), to the analysis of movement and its various accompaniments (books iii to vi, and parts of

⁷ Aristotle offers a somewhat different division in *Physics* iii, 1. There κίνησις and μεταβολή are equivalent concepts, and κίνησις is divided into γένεσις, φθορά, ἀλλοίωσις, αύξησις, φθίσις, φορά. I take Aristotle’s shunting γένεσις and φθορά off to one side in *Physics* v, 2, to be connected with the coming discussion of the first unmoved mover in books vii and viii (however they ended up at the end of *Physics*). Implicit here would be the idea that the realm of generation and corruption belongs properly to the first unmoved mover (and perhaps certain other subsidiary unmoved movers).

⁸ Sarah Waterlow, *Nature, Change and Agency in Aristotle’s Physics: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 199–203.

vii), finally (in books vii and viii) to the consideration of unmoved movers.⁹

Human Acts and single movements: *Physics* iii, 3

It is time now to move into *Physics* and, in particular, into Aristotle's analysis of particular actions. The most salient characteristic of this analysis is the way Aristotle identifies in any act levels or lines of intelligibility. First of all, there is intelligibility in a movement itself—and independently of whether it has any connection with a human act. There is an intelligible structure to a stone's rolling down a hill, even if no one notices its rolling: It is a rolling, with points on top moving below, then to the top, then below, and so on. This is a different species of physical movement from sliding (for example), where points down below stay below. Part of the intelligibility of a rolling is also the fact that it has a beginning and an end, both in time and in space. It may not reach that end, but, as we shall see more clearly below, the end that it would have reached, were it not impeded, fixes its species.

Such basic, physical intelligibility is present in human acts. A useful example is one Aristotle discusses in some detail in *Physics* iii, 3: that of teaching (τὸ διδάσκειν) and learning (τὸ μανθάνειν).¹⁰ He insists that an instance of teaching and the corresponding learning pertain to the same movement (202b19–21). The “account” (202a20) of each is different—that is, “the account which states their essence [τὸν λόγον . . . <τὸ> τί ἦν εἶναι λέγοντα: 202b12]”¹¹ (the essence of teaching and the essence of learning)—but below this level, and presupposed by the two accounts, is the movement described truly and in such a way that it belongs both to the teacher's teaching and the learner's learning.

Aristotle compares this latter movement to the road between Thebes and Athens.¹² When Cebes considers traveling from Thebes to Athens and

⁹ Strikingly similarly to *Metaphysics* xii, *Physics* viii, is not fully integrated into the work as a whole. For evidence of this, see, e.g., *Physics* viii, 1 (251a8–9 and 257a34–b1). There are problems also with the integration of book vii into the whole: See Wilfred D. Ross, *Aristotle's Physics: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936), 11–19.

¹⁰ The example is discussed also in *Physics* viii, 5; obviously, it refers to human acts. Learning is mentioned also in *Metaphysics* ix, 6, i.e., at 1048b24–25, as an example of a complete practice.

¹¹ The word “account” translates λόγος, a notoriously difficult word to translate. In Latin—and in a context such as this—it comes out *ratio*; in English we could use the translation “intelligibility.”

¹² The example occurs at 202b13–14 and (partially) at *Physics* vi, 1 (231b30–232a1); at *Physics* iii, 3 (202a19–20), he speaks of the ascent being identical to the descent, which is essentially the same example.

Socrates considers traveling from Athens to Thebes, they think about same thing: that is, the same road. The parallel with the teaching-learning example is not exact: Cebes's going to Athens is quite a different action from Socrates's going to Thebes. But the point is clear enough: Even though teaching and learning are in essence quite different, they refer to a common event or movement. This movement (*qua* movement) does not necessarily enter into either the teacher's or the student's thinking. When a teacher says to himself in the morning, "I must teach today between 9 and 10," and his student says to himself the same morning, "I am sure to learn something today between 9 and 10," the one thinks of teaching, the other of learning: But both make reference to—or, perhaps better, their thoughts presuppose—the same movement (or series of movements).

Aristotle alludes to such levels of intelligibility also a chapter earlier, in *Physics* ii, 2, where he discusses the knowledge of "matter" (ὕλη) required by an artist or technician. A doctor, he says, needs to know about health but also something about bile and phlegm, in which health is realized; a builder knows not only the form of houses but also something about "bricks and beams" (*Physics* ii, 2, 23–6). The matter in this second example is clearly already "building material" and not just trees or unhewn wood; similarly, bile and phlegm are already bodily matter, not matter that might be found (as its proper matter) in something else, such as a house. A bit later, Aristotle says that a doctor must know sinews and a blacksmith bronze "up to a point" (194b9–13): that is, up to the point at which such knowledge no longer serves their purposes. *Beyond* that point is found the matter that might be involved in a mere movement, *qua* mere movement.

Aristotle also speaks in *Physics* ii, 2, about two types of art (or craft): the "using art" (ἡ χρῶμένη) and the "making art" (ἡ ποιητική) (194a36–7).¹³ An example of the former would be helmsmanship; of the latter, the art of making helms. "For the helmsman knows and prescribes what sort of form [εἶδος] a helm should have, the other from what wood it should be made and by means of what operations [κινήσεων]" (194b5–7). But both the helmsman and the helmsmaker must simply *have wood*, otherwise their craftsmanship will never get going. Similarly, the teacher and the student (in most circumstances) need not know anything at all about how the sound of the teacher's voice affects the student's auditory nerve, but such material factors—which belong to the movement common to the teaching and the learning—must be in order, otherwise the teaching/learning will not occur.

¹³ In Thomas Aquinas these become the *ars usualis* and the *ars factiva*.

The reason that Aristotle insists upon this point—that is, that teaching and learning share a lower intelligible order (or level)—is that the intelligibility of either teaching or learning depends on it: that is, not just the existence of the events but their very intelligibility and general structure. He explains why this is so in a fairly complicated passage in *Physics* iii, 3, in which, as he tells us, he is confronting a dialectical—or logical—difficulty. It runs as follows:

This view has a dialectical difficulty. Perhaps (I) it is necessary that there should be an actualization [ἐνέργειαν] of the agent and [an actualization] of the patient. The one is agency and the other “patency”; and the outcome and end of the one is an action, that of the other a passion. Since then they are both movements, if they are different movements, *in* what are they? Either (A) both are in what is acted on and moved, or (B)¹ the agency is in the agent and (B)² the patency in the patient. (If we have to call also the latter an “agency,” the word would be used in two senses.)

Now, in the latter case (B), the movement will be in the mover, for the same account will hold of mover and moved. Hence either every mover will be moved, or, having movement, it will not be moved.

If, on the other hand (A), both are in what is moved and acted on—i.e., both the agency and the patency (both teaching and learning, being two, are in the learner)—, then, first, the actualization of each will not be present in each and, second, there is the absurdity of two movements’ being moved together. For what will these two alterations [ἀλλοιώσεις] of one thing towards one form [εἶδος] be? But this is impossible.

But (II) will there be one actualization? But it is contrary to reason to suppose that of two [movements] different in kind [εἶδει] there should be one and the same actualization—and this will be the case if teaching and learning are the same, and agency and patency, i.e., if to teach is the same as to learn and to act is the same as to be acted upon—so that the teacher will necessarily be learning everything that he teaches, and the agent will be acted upon. (*Physics* iii, 3, 202a21–b5)

A lot of the initial obscurity of this passage is cleared up once one understands that Aristotle has tacitly eliminated two of the four possibilities presented to him by the dialectical question posed. That question is (initially) whether one might not be able to say that in an action such as teaching/learning there are two movements (and not—as Aristotle holds—one), corresponding to two actualizations, the two being distributed between the agent and the patient in various ways. The first possibility (A) would have agency (ποίησις) and patency (πάθησις) *both* in the patient;¹⁴

¹⁴ I use here “patient” in the philosophical sense of one who undergoes a change; of course, it has nothing directly to do with doctors or medicine.

the second (B) would have agency in the agent and patiency in the patient. The two possibilities tacitly eliminated are (C) agency and patiency both in the agent, and (D) agency in the patient and patiency in the agent. Aristotle sees some plausibility in possibility (A), probably for reasons connected with the theory we have seen set out in *Metaphysics* ix, 6: The essence of a movement is in the thing worked upon. He accepts the plausibility of (B) without difficulty. Aristotle apparently regards possibility (C) as obviously implausible. This will seem strange to many modern philosophers, used to locating human acts within the agent himself; but, again, it is connected with Aristotle's understanding of potency and act, which he regarded as more plausible than do many philosophers after Descartes. Possibility (D) so reverses one's intuitions that Aristotle quite reasonably decides not to mention it.

It is worth noting too that, although Aristotle denies that teaching and its corresponding learning involve two movements, he does hold that each is a movement. At 202a25 he asks, "Since then they are both movements, if they are different movement, *in* what are they?" Clearly, the claim that each is a movement is different from the claim that they are different movements. The implication, of course, is that he believes that they are the same movement. We shall see below that this idea is important for establishing the objectivity of the structure of the human act for Aristotle.

So then, in *Physics* iii, 3, 202a21–b5, Aristotle takes up possibility (B) before taking up possibility (A). He suggests at first (B)¹ that the movement corresponding to the agency might be in the agent and (B)² that the movement corresponding to the patiency might be in the patient. Or, actually, he considers only (B)¹. The reason for this has, in effect, been given just earlier, in the parenthesis at 202a27–28: "If we have to call also the latter [i.e. patiency] an 'agency,' the word would be used in two senses." If patiency, *qua* patiency, corresponds to a movement (and the movement to the patiency), then patiency must *be* (anomalously) agency, that is, an act in itself. So, Aristotle need only consider (B¹), that a whole movement is in the agent; to consider (B²) would be to consider the same thing. And his argument is that if a whole movement is in the agent, "either every mover will be moved, or, having movement, it will not be moved" (202a30–31).

Why do these two latter alternatives present themselves? Aristotle anticipates the explanation in the first paragraph of *Physics* iii, 3, that is, just before our passage. "Movement," he says, "is in the movable" (202a13–14). (Here again we see the *Metaphysics* ix, 6 idea that a movement's essence is found rather at its end than at its beginning or in the process of getting to the end.)

It [movement] is the fulfillment of this potentiality by the action of that which has the power of causing movement; and the actualization of that which has the power of causing movement is not other than the actualization of the movable; for it must be the fulfillment of *both*. A thing is capable of causing movement because it *can* do this, it is a mover because it actually *does* it. But it is on the movable that it is capable of acting. (*Physics* iii, 3, 202a14–17)

The emphases in this passage—especially those in the second last sentence: the potential mover is thus since “it *can* do this,” the mover is a mover because “it actually *does* it”—are taken over from the Revised Oxford Translation and bring out Aristotle’s meaning effectively.¹⁵ A movable thing is always waiting for the action of its mover; a mover is always leaning toward its movable: that leaning forward is in its very definition. So, when Aristotle says at 202a30–31 that, if all of a movement is in the mover, “either every mover will be moved, or, having movement, it will not be moved,” he is alluding to what he has already explained. If any movement is *just* in the mover, it either possesses all its intelligibility necessarily and cannot not succeed as a mover or, not needing to get anywhere, it never (so to speak) leaves the station.

Or, to put things somewhat differently, any movement has to have a receptacle: It has to work upon a (true) patient. If one says that the whole of a movement is in the agent, one says in effect either that the agent is the patient (i.e., “every mover will be *moved*” [202a30]) or that the movement is not a movement (“having movement, it will *not* be moved” [202a30–31])—both of which are impossible: Agency is not patiency, and having movement (at least, of this type) implies being moved.¹⁶ Since actions such as teaching and learning are movements, they must share the same general structure. If all of teaching was in the teacher, it would either be impossible for an attempt to teach to fail or (alternatively) such an attempt could never take off, since there could be no “leaning forward” to teaching’s own fulfillment (someone taught): Teaching (or whatever this would be) would be sufficient unto itself. Moreover, if every teacher

¹⁵ Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 344.

¹⁶ When Aristotle suggests at 202a30 that it is clearly incorrect to say that “every mover will be moved,” it seems unlikely that he has in mind his position that in tracing back a line of movers we must eventually get to one that is unmoved (*Physics* vii, 1, 242b71–72). That position requires considerable argumentation (such as he performs over the course of *Physics* vii, 1); here in *Physics* iii, 3, he seems to be referring to something obviously false. The only candidate would seem to be the idea that any mover is (*qua* mover) moved. I discuss below the sense in which it is contradictory to say that a mover is moved.

is necessarily the person taught (since teaching is necessarily in the teacher) and that is what teaching is, we can no longer make sense of the difference between teaching and being taught. Indeed, there will be no such thing as being taught since that implies passivity and teaching has no connection with that.

Moving on (or back) to alternative (A), if we says that both agency and patiency are in the patient, “then, first, the actualization of each will not be present in each and, second, there is the absurdity of two movements’ being moved together” (202a34–35). This initial expression of the difficulties connected with alternative (A) is likely to strike one as question-begging and unconvincing. Of *course* the actualization will not be present in each: That is what makes (A) the alternative that it is; and what is wrong with saying that two movements occur together? But the two points are interrelated and why together they constitute a problem is explained—very cryptically—in the subsequent sentence: “For [γὰρ] what will these two alterations of one thing towards one form *be*?” (Aristotle is using the term “form” [εἶδος] here in its non-Platonic sense, according to which any power or potency impresses a form upon that which it affects.)

The problem inherent in proposal (A) is that, given that both actualities are placed in the patient (not one actualization in each: agent and patient), the whole usually complementary relation “teaching-learning” occurs in the one thing (the patient), which has a single structure: that of receiving a form. But that structure must now accommodate *two* forms: that which teaching impresses (which pertains no longer to an agent but—absurdly—to a patient) and that which learning impresses. And both these forms finish at the same logical spot: that is, with the patient being impressed with those two forms.¹⁷ But two forms cannot get into the same spot like this. It only adds to the absurdity that the two forms are complementary (and therefore contraries): teaching and learning.

Why can two forms not get into the same logical spot? Let us say we have a lamp and a punch-press: the first impressing light upon a metal object, the second *literally* impressing an image upon the same object. The lamp does what it does (sheds light), thereby impressing its proper form (the object was dark, now it is bright); the punch-press does what it does (punches), thereby impressing its form (the object has now a different shape). But it is nonsense to suppose that the lamp and the punch-press could enact their respective alterations and finish up with the same form.

¹⁷ I use the peculiar expression “logical spot” here instead of “logical space” since the word “spot” seems to suggest (more than does the word “place”) the idea that the logical area referred to belongs *just* to the object: It fills it up and there is nothing there other than the object (so conceived).

What would this one form *be*? (Recall that Aristotle asks about teaching and learning: “[W]hat will these two alterations of one thing towards one form *be*?” [202a35–36].) They will be, presumably, some combination of visual appearance and shape. But that is absurd: Those two things cannot *fit in* there, that is, into the one form. Aristotle waves the notion away saying, “But this is impossible” (202a36).

That brings us finally to section (II) of the above quotation (which can be dealt with very briefly). Here Aristotle changes the assumptions of the “dialectical difficulty,” continuing to presuppose that there are two movements (which is the heart of the problem), but saying now that there is just one *actualization* (ἐνέργεια).¹⁸ But saying that there is just one actualization is ridiculous, says Aristotle: Teaching and learning, agency and patiency end up being the same thing. And if this is so, “the teacher will necessarily be learning everything that he teaches, and the agent will be acted upon” (202b4–5). As we shall see shortly, this is something that Aristotle very much wants to avoid: that is, that (for example) “the teacher will necessarily be learning everything that he teaches.”

What, then, is the upshot of this refutation of the dialectical proposal that in cases of complementary action such as teaching and learning there are two movements involved? We can identify at least two consequences. First, Aristotle has demonstrated that the idea that (e.g.) teaching and learning do not share a common movement but are two movements is to be utterly rejected: It leads to absurdities in each of its possibilities. So, we have no choice except to return to his thesis that (e.g.) teaching and learning are one movement.¹⁹ But this means that the structure of such actions is objective, in the sense that it does not belong just to the teacher or just to the learner. Of course, teaching and learning are “subjective” in another sense: One cannot do either without intending to do so; nonetheless, the action that a teacher intends to perform when intending to teach has a structure that depends not just on that intention.

Second, this objective structure has an object: that is, something standing over and against the agent. As one sees in analyzing the argument of *Physics* iii, 3, 202a21–b5, if one posits two movements, one in effect takes away the object. We saw this under possibility (B). If the agency is in the agent and the patiency in the patient, in fact the patient becomes agent.

¹⁸ This possibility represents perhaps an objector’s feeble attempt to solve the problem of getting two forms into one logical spot, or perhaps Aristotle considers it simply in order to set aside another set of possibilities.

¹⁹ Aristotle would consider the proposal that there are *more* than two movements involved as patently absurd; and he presumes that any action—or, at least, any human action—is a movement.

Since the object of agency is in a patient, under this supposition there is lacking an object. Indeed, as we have seen, there is lacking the very sense of agency, that sense including the idea of leaning forward toward something different from the agent: that is, toward an object. And, under (A), if both agency and patiency are in the patient, the object becomes obscure and (finally) incoherent: One cannot get two forms into the same logical spot. So, positing two movements results in impossibilities all around. According to the rules of *reductio ad absurdum*, we must therefore conclude that there is just one movement and that it has an object. As Aristotle says at the beginning of *Physics* iii, 3, “movement is in the movable” (ἡ κίνησις ἐν τῷ κινητῷ: 202a13–14).

Another Example in *Physics* viii, 5

We find a similar conclusion in the very rich chapter *Physics* viii, 5, at 256b27–254a24. This is a useful passage to consider—and to understand—since it helps us to see how Aristotle’s analysis of human action is of a piece with his understanding of the structure of the universe more generally. Although often and correctly considered part of Aristotle’s proof of the existence of a first unmoved mover (God), the chapter is, in fact, replete with examples of human acts (agents wielding sticks, teachers teaching, etc.). Playing a key part in this account is an idea we have just seen: the—in fact, absurd—idea of a movement in which agency and patiency are the same thing, that is, a movement without a whence and a whither.

The position that Aristotle sets out to refute maintains that everything that is moved is moved by something that is moved. For Aristotle, on the contrary, although he acknowledges that some things are both moved and mover (but not in the same sense), eventually we must arrive at something that is *just* mover, without being moved. Such a thing stops the regress: If an unmoved mover is in the particular system under consideration, an infinite regress cannot be generated. So, if someone wants to argue for an infinite regress (i.e., that there is lack of intelligibility built right into the system), he has two options: Either he can say that all movement is accidental and lacking in intelligibility, that is, things do move “but not *because* of the being moved itself” (i.e., not because they are on the passive end of movements intelligible as movements of that particular type) (*Physics* viii, 5, 256b5–7); or he can say that there are things that are *both* moving and moved because of the being moved itself: that is, because moving is being moved (*Physics* viii, 5, 256b7). In either situation there would be no ultimate thing that was just mover; an infinite regress would be possible.

Aristotle's refutation of the first horn of the dilemma does not interest us a great deal. It will surprise no one to learn that he denies that the movements we encounter in the world are ultimately haphazard and without intelligibility. But his refutation of the second horn contains a proof that any full explanation of a movement must come down eventually to a movement-type structure. He argues as follows:

Now, if the mover is not accidentally but necessarily moved and, if it were not moved, it would not move, then the mover in so far as it is moved must necessarily be moved either (a) with the same kind of motion, or (b) with a different kind. I mean [regarding (a)], the heating thing would *itself* be heated and the thing making healthy made healthy and the transporting thing transported. (*Physics* viii, 5, 256b27–34)

In this first possibility (a) within the second horn, Aristotle is supposing that, whatever (for example) heating is, its analysis never goes beyond concepts that somehow involve heat: that is to say, the concepts “heating thing” and “heated thing” (although in the end this possibility also undermines any actual attempt to distinguish “heating thing” and “heated thing”). So, according to this conception, “the heating thing would *itself* be heated”; but, says Aristotle, “it is obvious that this is impossible”:

For one must break things down to the smallest components: for instance, if something teaches some geometry, this must be taught the same thing; and, if one throws, one must be thrown in the same way as the throwing. (*Physics* viii, 5, 256b34–257a3)

In other words, it is somewhat plausible to say that the heating thing is the heated thing since we can in effect posit some aspect of the thing (some “smallest component”) by which it heats, another in which it is heated. But then the question becomes whether such components—literally, “atoms”—can themselves be split into aspects in order to make sense of heating. Aristotle's implicit answer is that no: They are atoms and therefore unsplitable.²⁰

So, the two consequences in the above passage are obviously absurd: that is, for that which teaches *x*, *it itself* to be learning precisely *x*; or for someone who throws to be thrown in that very act of throwing. So, even if in some sense we can say (for example) that the teacher learns while

²⁰ In the passage, Aristotle speaks of *something* teaching since he has in mind a teacher who does in some sense teach himself. Rejecting the notion that a teacher *qua* teacher might learn, he holds that such talk makes sense only if we posit some part—or aspect—of the teacher that teaches, another in which he learns.

he teaches, if we are looking to analyze that act of teaching—if we are pressing on to the basic “atoms” of intelligibility—we are going to have to identify someone or something taught: a patient. In this case, the patient would be another aspect of the teacher’s own soul, the point being that, if we are not to violate the principle of non-contradiction and forfeit all intelligibility, we cannot *include* this being taught (this patiency) in the teaching (the agency) itself.

The other possibility (b) within the second horn—that is, the other way of saying that we do not ever have to arrive at an unmoved mover standing opposite its object (and that causality is not haphazard)—is to say, not that the lines of intelligibility are compressed in the way we have just seen (i.e., so compressed that there is no difference between agent and patient), but that they are more extended: They go on and on, one line of intelligibility actually being *part* of another, that one (of which the first is part) part of another, and so on. In introducing his refutation, Aristotle first restates the position he opposes:

Or [regarding (b)] if things are not thus [as in (a)], one kind [of change] comes from another distinct kind: e.g. the transporting thing is augmented, the thing augmenting this is altered by something else, the thing altering this is moved with respect to some other movement.²¹

According to this scenario, the process of augmenting something’s size results not in a bigger thing (which would be for the augmentation to have a true—and its proper—patient) but in something that (actively) transports: τὸ φέρον; also, according to this scenario, that from which the augmenting thing issues, itself has no conceptual connection with augmentation. It is important to note that in the passage just given there appears no passive participle: In the translation, the transporting thing is said to be “augmented.” There is no other way to render the idea into understandable English. But the word “augmented” corresponds to the Greek passive infinitive ἀυξάνεσθαι. So, Aristotle never speaks even remotely of an augmented *thing*. His imaginary interlocutor (under this possibility) is allergic to passive objects of agency: For him, there are just agents and verbs.²²

²¹ *Physics* viii, 5 (257a3–6). Just previously (256b33–34) he has represented the position more succinctly: “or (b) the healing thing is transported, the transporting thing augmented.”

²² Toward the end of this more general passage (*Physics* viii, 5, 256b27–257a14), Aristotle does speak of a κινούμενον (257a11), but there he is speaking in his own voice, saying that in a rightly conceived theory the moving thing comes before the thing moved.

Aristotle's stated objection to all this is not what someone might at first think: that is, it is not to the permutation and fusion of types of change (which is certainly objectionable in its own right and which Aristotle certainly does not accept),²³ but to the fact that even such an analysis generates eventually two agents—*sans* patients—of the same type. The reason these must be generated, says Aristotle, is that the types of change are limited in number (257a7). To use his own example, in working back from "transporting thing" to augmentation (which involves an "augmenting thing"), to alteration (and an "altering thing"), and so on, since there are a limited number of types of change, eventually the analysis must arrive at another "transporting thing." And to have such a pair in the system, says Aristotle, is no better than to say that the teacher learns *qua* teaching (257a12–14).

The problem conclusion is generated, of course, by excluding from the outset true patients; and the reason for doing that was to avoid ever saying that there is something that is *just* mover and not moved. So, we see, Aristotle's doctrine of an unmoved mover is not unconnected with his doctrine that any action has an object distinct from the action itself. Not only must an unmoved mover have an object, but its unidirectional character (always *toward* something else) allows there to be an end to a regress. Were this unidirectional character not found in every change, that is, were everything in the universe just agents and act (there being no distinction between agency and patiency), an unmoved mover would be impossible.

Aristotle's argument in *Physics* viii, 5 also gives us an anticipatory glimpse into the philosophical satisfactoriness to be expected from his analysis of movements (and therefore of human acts). Since each bipolar unit of intelligibility is self-contained and can be understood fully as what it is (this action going toward that object), once one understands that unit, one can rest assured that at least some genuine knowledge has been gained. One can then ratchet up to yet more extensive knowledge. One need not worry that, for instance, since the intelligibility of transportation itself is embedded in the intelligibility augmentation, the latter in the intelligibility of alteration (and so on), that one can never *really* understand any change. Even if it is true that we can frequently add to what we know of a particular change, either by investigating a level of a particular change not yet considered or by fitting a change more adequately into the larger picture, we are adding to what we already really know. What knowledge we have, therefore, can be solid—and incrementally increased.

²³ This fusion (and confusion) of types of change would fall under the haphazard or accidental change excluded at *Physics* viii, 5 (256b7–27).

Non-Contradictory Action

As mentioned above, Sarah Waterlow calls attention to the fact that Aristotle utilizes his analysis of movement—as always involving going *to* an object that completes it as movement—much more widely than would seem to be warranted. Even a thought, which does not have an endpoint in the way thinning does, still has for Aristotle something toward which it goes. Waterlow is not worried about this, maintaining that Aristotle simply extends the analysis to changes in which there are not literally present agent and patient—and we need not be worried either. But it will be useful to consider how this analysis (as applied more widely) fits into his philosophy as a whole—for, indeed, it is not an isolated doctrine but one demanded by what Aristotle calls “the most certain principle of all” (*Metaphysics* iv, 3, 1000b17–18): the principle of non-contradiction.

The fourth book of the *Metaphysics* is largely devoted to the investigation of this principle. Its earliest formulation there is found toward the end of the third chapter: “the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect.” He immediately adds a word of explanation of the qualifying phrase “in the same respect”: “and let us presuppose, in the face of dialectical objections, any further qualifications that might be added” (*Metaphysics* iv, 3, 1005b19–22). If an Aristotelian says, for instance, that it is impossible for a person to be knowledgeable and not knowledgeable at the same time and another objects that Theaetetus knows what a polyhedron is but does not know how to fight, the Aristotelian can reply that the principle of non-contradiction allows one to add whatever qualification (or specification) needed in order to deal with such an objection. Thus, he can always say something like, “To be more precise, it is impossible for a person to be knowledgeable regarding polyhedrons and, at the same time, to be not knowledgeable regarding polyhedrons.” If the objector is persistent and says, “Well, he can be knowledgeable regarding some polyhedrons and not knowledgeable regarding the others,” the Aristotelian can reply: “It all depends on what I meant: I meant that Theaetetus is knowledgeable regarding all; therefore, I cannot claim—without violating the principle of non-contradiction—that he is not knowledgeable regarding all.”

There are a number of possible objections that might be addressed in order to bring out what Aristotle understands by the principle of non-contradiction, but we are interested here not in defending the principle but in understanding how it bears upon human acts. And, in this connection, of primary importance is the fact that the principle of non-contradiction, as Aristotle understands it, is not primarily about propositions. Later in book

iv, he does say that “the most indisputable of all beliefs is that contradictory statements are not at the same time true” (*Metaphysics* iv, 6, 1011b13–14), but that comes quite a bit later (ch. 6) and is best understood as a consequence of the principle of non-contradiction as enunciated earlier. So Aristotle’s most basic principle is not the modern $\neg(p \ \& \ \neg p)$ but has to do rather with what attributes can be found simultaneously *in* the same thing.

This wider conception of the principle of non-contradiction is ideally suited to the sort of analysis we have already encountered, for it allows us to understand as falling under the principle the fact that a particular individual cannot at the same time both want and not want *x* in the same respect. At one place in *Metaphysics* iv, Aristotle actually applies the principle of non-contradiction within the field of human acts, using an example of a type frequently found in the *Physics*. As he does throughout *Metaphysics* iv, Aristotle is arguing here against the notion that something and its contradictory might be simultaneously true. “Why,” he asks, “does a man, who thinks he ought to, walk to Megara and not remain inactive?” (*Metaphysics* iv, 4, 1008b14–15). That this man intends to head toward Megara excludes his intending to remain where he is. We saw similarly in *Physics* iii, 3 that Aristotle rejects the notion that a mover *qua* mover might be a patient or that something having movement might not be moved (202a30–31). The attributes under consideration here are again agency and “patiency,” being in motion and not being in motion; and as always, there is something that is one or the other.

This brings us into a position to answer the main question in this section: How can Aristotle attribute movement-like structure to non-movements? What authorizes him to attribute to *any* action an internal structure in which something goes toward an object that completes that action? The answer is that the structure of movement can be reduced to the principle of non-contradiction—which in turn becomes the definitive factor. That a movement has the structure it has is part and parcel of its being impossible for an agent’s heading toward one object to be reconciled with his not doing that—for a man’s heading to Megara (for example) to be reconciled with his remaining where he is. What is important is not so much there being literal distance between the *terminus ab quo* and the *terminus ad quem* as the fact that going to Megara and not cannot get into the same logical spot together, that is, at the same time and in the same respect—which latter (i.e., the “respect in which”) can be specified as much as needed.

The soundness of this claim depends on showing that even non-movements have something that completes them; but all that this requires is showing that any such activity involves a state different from—but

related to—that which comes from it. We find such relationships throughout Aristotle's philosophy, in particular when he talks about things (physical objects, events, concepts, etc.) *qua* this or that, for he typically uses this locution to set up a unity of intelligibility together with a difference (a distinct something). An animal, Aristotle acknowledges, is in a sense generated from an animal; but it comes, he says, from an animal “not *qua* animal, for that is already there” (*Physics* i, 8, 191b22). What then does it come from? From its progenitor: not *qua* animal, however, but *qua* progenitor. And a progenitor is distinct—even conceptually—from its offspring. Similarly, a patient is cured by a doctor not *qua* healthy but *qua* sick. Not only does a person have no need of curing *qua* healthy but even to speak of curing someone *qua* healthy makes no sense.

The situation is the same with actions properly speaking (i.e., non-movements). Even if, as Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* ix, 6, the end of thinking is always present while one is thinking, still the object of thinking is different from that which thinks (the intellect). A thinking thing is different from a thought thing, even if a thinking thing—but not *qua* thinking—can become an object of thought.

Aristotle discusses these matters in a passage in *De anima* iii, 4. In the passage he asks two questions: First (A), how can intellect think, given that thinking is to suffer something (429b25) but intellect is simple and impassible, having nothing in common with anything else. (To do and to suffer [429b25–26], he interjects, appear to be possible only insofar as there is something common to both, that is, linking the doing and the suffering.) Second, (B) is intellect itself knowable? The difficulty connected with (B), Aristotle explains, is that, if intellect is knowable, it would seem to entail that:

either (B.1) intellect will hold of the *other* things (if it is not knowable as other and the object of knowledge is something one in species) or (B.2) it will be possessed of some mixture, which makes it knowable like the others. (*De anima* iii, 4, 429b27–29)

In other words, if intellect itself is knowable, it must either (B.1) “hold”—be predicable of—all other things, so that *they* would be intellect too, or (B.2) intellect itself must possess some mixture of that which it is not (i.e., other) and in this way become knowable like other things. Both of these apparent consequences (B.1 and B.2) Aristotle regards as false, but B.2 he regards as obviously so: Intellect cannot be an amalgam of activity and passivity, for the very notion is without intelligibility. He will not come back to B.2.

One notes that both of the questions—(A) and (B)—assume that what intellect knows is other. This is precisely the issue we have been addressing: that is, whether even non-movements can be understood as “heading toward” something, that is, as internally articulated. Aristotle assumes—at least with respect to thinking—not only that they can be so regarded, but that they must be. Understanding how they head toward something is to solve the problems that provoke the questions. He takes up question (A) first: How can the impassible suffer? His response is that we must simply recognize that there are two ways of suffering (being passive): one in which the suffering thing changes character (and this would not be acceptable for intellect, which is always the same); another in which both things—the agent and the patient—remain throughout, without changing character (see *De anima* ii, 5, 417b2–7). Intellect is a patient in this second sense. Intellect *is* all things, says Aristotle (*De anima* iii, 4, 429a18; iii, 8, 431b21; also iii, 5, 430a14–16); that is to say, all things enter into the intellect without their matter (if they have any). But they do so only potentially and not before they are thought of. Thus, intellect’s having an object (i.e., a passive aspect) is a function of its being what it is: that which *can* think. It can sometimes think this, sometimes think that. So, intellect goes toward something even though it is never (literally and per se) in movement.

Regarding question (B), whether intellect is itself knowable, Aristotle replies that it is known as are any knowables (430a1). The knowables are divided into two classes: those, in knowing which, the intellect must leave behind their matter; those which the intellect need only *think* of and thus know. But in both cases a potency gets put into act in a specific way. In order to know things connected with matter, this is fairly obvious: A rock or a flower are only potentially known (430a6–7). When there is no matter involved, things are not quite as obvious. That which thinks and the known thing, says Aristotle, are the same. This is not to say that intellect is identical with absolutely *everything* (that, of course, is the position he is refuting) but that that which knows is limited by that which it knows. Intellect will not (as in B.1) be predicated of all things so that they all become intellect; on the contrary, *it* is limited by what particular thing it knows at whatever particular moment. As Aristotle says here at 429b30, intellect is nothing actually *until* it knows, that is, knows something; knowing of whatever type is, therefore, a matter of being brought into act “in the direction of” something else.

We might add (as a corollary to Aristotle’s argument here in *De anima* iii, 4) that the knowable is also distinct from the *thinking* (i.e., not just from the intellect), even if it is always present with it. If it were not, any

thinking would be either thinking of everything (since there would be nothing to delimit what the thinking was about) or thinking of nothing (which is similarly without specification of what is thought). One recalls Aristotle's statement at *Physics* iii, 3, 202a30 that, if all that there is to movement is in the agent, then "either every mover will be moved or, having movement, it will not be moved."

The thing toward which any activity moves must not only be distinct from it but also something intelligible: a *logical* spot and not, for instance, some merely physical object. As we have seen, the coherence of even movement (the most intuitively accessible type of action) depends on the idea that diverse forms cannot fit into the same logical spot. But it is very clear that the present analysis of action reveals an *intelligible* object since the object is just the other end of an intelligible construct. The concept "thought" has no sense independently of the concept "thinking": There is a path of intelligibility, from one to the other, that holds these two together; and, without this intelligibility, they would not be.²⁴ In this sense, then, even a complete action in the sense discussed in *Metaphysics* ix, 6, is like a movement:²⁵ Even if its end is always present along with it, it does have to have an end. At the other end of the stick, so to speak, there is a logical spot; and there is room at that spot for nothing except that which corresponds to the action *per se*.

The present argument has to do, however, not simply with logic but with the logical structure of reality. If something (for instance, doing something) is something (i.e., doing that), it is not not that something (i.e., it is not *not* doing that). As Aristotle remarks in *Metaphysics* iv, "not to have one meaning is to have no meaning at all . . . , for it is impossible to think of anything if we do not think of one thing" (*Metaphysics* iv, 4, 1006b7–10). If *per impossibile* we could get doing something and not into the same logical spot, it would have no shape, no form. This applies not only to movements, such as going to Megara, but also to things like seeing and thinking. If someone sees Socrates coming toward him, he does not not see him—unless senses in which he both sees and does not see are specified. ("I see the front of Socrates but not his back.") Thus even actions that are not movements in the sense identified in *Metaphysics* ix, 6—that is to say, complete actions—have objects.

Conclusion

We now have a fairly comprehensive understanding of how Aristotle views the structure of the human act. The modern temptation is to view

²⁴ See again *De anima* iii, 4 (429b25–26).

²⁵ That is, at *Metaphysics* ix, 6 (1048b21–22, 29–30).

the human act as without structure—or, at least, not to attend too closely to what structure might have to be acknowledged. Is the doctor to be blamed for killing the fetus when he removes the cancerous uterus containing it; is that death to be attributed to his will? We cannot give a precise answer to such questions (it is argued or tacitly assumed) since choices, wants, and so on, are sloppy things: A person sort of wants this, even while he sort of wants that; what matters, though, is where the person's heart is, not any objective—or quasi-physical—analysis of what he does. Or someone might argue in a more sophisticated manner that all that matters morally is the state of the agent's soul (or mind): An analysis of the external act contributes nothing to our understanding of the human act's moral character.

Such approaches or attitudes are hard to argue against. If an interlocutor is disinclined to regard even acknowledged structure in what someone does as relevant ethically, the best we can do is simply to depict the structure in as perspicuous a manner as possible and hope that this will lead him to acknowledge that that *does* correspond to what the agent does. Aristotle was faced with similar interlocutors in his own day: those who expended every effort to discover infinity—the unknowable—in movement (see, for instance, *Physics* vi, 7). His response was always patiently to break into intelligible bits and to order that which they claimed was not orderable. **N-V**