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ABOUT THE PASSAGE IN
METAPHYSICS Θ 6.1048B18-35: A RESPONSE

Abstract

This paper reconsiders *Metaphysics* Θ 6.1048b18-35 the controversial passage about *ἐνέργεια* vs. *κίνησις*, at the intersection of textual transmission, grammatical articulation, and ontological interpretation. Special attention is devoted to the program of Book Θ, which announces a reconsideration of *δύναμις* rather than a privileged treatment of *ἐνέργεια*, and to the specifically Aristotelian conception of actuality as a relational determination (*ἐνεργεία, κατ' ἐνέργειαν*). From this perspective, the passage introduces a mode of speaking about *ἐνέργεια* that sits uneasily with the relational ontology articulated in Θ 1-5. The paper further reassesses appeals to Plotinus and Theophrastus, arguing that conceptual continuity does not entail textual attestation, and examines the manuscript evidence and the status of the passage within Byzantine transmission. Taken together, these considerations suggest that Θ 6.1048b18-35 is best understood not as an original component of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but as a significant witness to an intermediate, neoplatonizing phase in the reception and transformation of Aristotelian ontology.

Keywords

Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Θ, *Energeia*, *Dynamis*,
Passage 1048b18-35, Textual Transmission

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The question of the authenticity of *Metaphysics* Θ 6.1048b18-35 is neither marginal nor merely technical. It concerns a critical juncture in the transmission and reception of Aristotelian ontology, where textual history, grammatical articulation, and doctrinal interpretation intersect. The passage occupies a particularly sensitive position, as it appears to reflect an intermediate stratum in which Aristotelian conceptual material is rearticulated within a Neoplatonic framework – the same one that would profoundly shape both Arabic philosophy and the Latin Middle Ages.

This helps to explain the persistent divergence of scholarly positions. The more Aristotelian ontology is read through a Neoplatonic lens – especially one that emphasizes *ἐνέργεια* as pure or self-subsistent actuality – the more natural it appears to regard Θ 6.1048b18-35 as genuinely Aristotelian. Conversely, the more one insists on the specifically Aristotelian distinction between being in potency (*δυνάμει, κατὰ δύναμιν*) and being in actuality (*ἐνέργεια, κατ' ἐνέργειαν*), as the main sense of *δύναμις* which is useful for the science of being qua being – the more the passage stands out as problematic. This is why Enrico Berti regards it as a gloss entered into the text during the Byzantine transmission. What is ontologically significant is not actuality as such, but *being* in actuality as correlative to *being* in a determinate *δύναμις*. The difference is not merely doctrinal; it is already visible at the level of syntax. Substance is not 'act' in an absolute sense, by Aristotle; it may be in potentiality or in actuality, depending on the correlativity that structures its being. This relational framework is precisely what Book Θ sets out to clarify.

1. The Program of Book Θ: δύναμις and Its Ontological Relevance

A central premise of Francisco Gonzalez's interpretation (see above in this issue of *Aristotelica*) is that Book Θ, chapter 1, announces from its outset a privileged treatment of *ἐνέργεια*, so that Θ 6.1048b18-35 would articulate explicitly what Aristotle is preparing from the beginning. This premise does not accord with the structure or wording of the opening chapters.

Aristotle does not announce a primary or 'more useful' treatment of *ἐνέργεια*. He announces a reconsideration of *δύναμις*. Book Θ opens by recalling that *δύναμις* is said in many ways and by distinguishing its senses, with explicit attention to the sense relevant for the inquiry at hand. When Aristotle states, at *Metaph.* Θ 1.1045b35, that the sense of *δύναμις* initially under

examination is “not useful” (οὐ χρησίμη), this qualification is strictly contextual. It does not rank senses of δύναμις according to intrinsic importance; it identifies which sense is useful for the science of being qua being.

The sense set aside is the physical one: δύναμις as the capacity to act or to be acted upon by another insofar as it is other. This sense is indispensable for physics and underlies the Aristotelian definition of motion as the actuality of what exists potentially, insofar as it exists potentially. It is excluded here not because it is defective, but because it belongs to a different scientific context.

What is useful for first philosophy is the ontological sense of δύναμις that grounds the distinction between being in potentiality and being in actuality. Only this contrast allows Aristotle to articulate being as internally structured and to account for invariance within variation. Accordingly, the opening chapters of Book Θ (1-5) do not prepare an autonomous concept of ἐνέργεια, but a relational ontology in which ἐνέργεια functions as the correlative determination of δύναμις.

From this perspective, Θ 6.1048b18-35 does not complete a trajectory already laid out in Θ 1-5. It introduces a mode of speaking about ἐνέργεια that sits uneasily with the program announced at the beginning of the book.

2. Peripatetic Ontology and Grammatical Determination: Alexander and the Iota Subscript

This tension becomes clearer when one considers the Peripatetic tradition and the grammatical articulation of actuality. In Aristotle’s core ontological texts – most notably *Metaphysics* Λ and *De anima* III 5 – actuality is characteristically expressed not as a nominal absolute (ἐνέργεια), but as a relational determination, through the dative construction ἐνεργείᾳ, corresponding to εἶναι ἐνεργείᾳ. This grammatical form encodes a fundamental ontological claim: actuality is always predicated relative to a determinate potentiality.

The importance of the iota subscript is therefore crucial. It marks the difference between an absolute predicate and a relational mode of being. When this distinction is taken seriously, the ontology that emerges is one of being in actuality, not of actuality as substance.

This grammatical and ontological framework is preserved in Alexander of Aphrodisias. By Alexander, being κατ’ ἐνέργειαν is articulated to being κατὰ δύναντον. Substance may be in potentiality or in actuality depending on

the relevant correlate. If Θ 6.1048b18-35 had belonged to the canonical Aristotelian text known to Alexander, it is difficult to explain his systematic avoidance of its distinctive syntactic and conceptual profile.

Here, grammatical and doctrinal evidence converge. The nominalized, quasi-absolute use of ἐνέργεια presupposed by 1048b18-35 is difficult to reconcile with the relational ontology articulated in Book Θ and preserved in the Peripatetic tradition.

3. Plotinus and the Neoplatonic Horizon

Gonzalez appeals to Plotinus and later ancient discussions to support the antiquity and centrality of the passage. Yet the presence of a doctrine in Neoplatonic debates does not establish its Aristotelian provenance. On the contrary, the concept of ἐνέργεια is precisely where the distance between Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ontology becomes most visible.

For Plotinus, ἐνέργεια denotes pure activity, a self-sufficient ontological principle no longer defined in relation to a determinate δύναμις. This conception entered the Arabic tradition under Aristotle's name through pseudo-epigraphic texts shaped by late Neoplatonic metaphysics, and was subsequently transmitted to the Latin Middle Ages. Coherence with this conception cannot by itself establish Aristotelian authenticity; it may instead indicate a stage in which Aristotelian terminology is reworked within a different ontological grammar.

4. Theophrastus and Conceptual Continuity

A similar caution applies to the appeal to Theophrastus. That Theophrastus knows that ἐνέργεια is conceptually broader than κίνησις is not in dispute. But this knowledge does not presuppose the specific formulation found in 1048b18-35, nor its placement in Book Θ. It follows naturally from Aristotle's definition of motion in the *Physics* and from the general structure of his ontology.

To infer from Theophrastus' conceptual usage, esp. *ap. Simpl. In Cat.* 304.32-33, that he knew the passage as an integral part of Book Θ is to conflate doctrinal familiarity with textual attestation. No direct citation, verbal echo, or structural dependence can be demonstrated. The continu-

ity of Peripatetic ontology as transmitted through Alexander strongly suggests that the passage did not belong to the core text as it was read and taught in the early imperial period.

5. *Manuscript Evidence*

The manuscript tradition reinforces this conclusion. Since Jaeger's OCT, the absence of Θ 6.1048b18-35 from the EJ tradition and its presence in Ab have been interpreted as evidence for an alternative Aristotelian redaction. More recent work in codicology, stemmatics, and the Arabic transmission, however, points toward the establishment of a canonical edition of Aristotle's works by the third century CE, and of an archetype by the fourth century CE.

If an independent pre-canonical tradition existed, one would have to expect clear separate errors (*Trennfehler*). None have been identified for Book Θ or elsewhere in the *Metaphysics*. The absence of the passage from EJ cannot therefore be classified as a technical omission. Conversely, the presence of the passage in Ab coincides with a phase of Byzantine editorial activity associated with the circle of Michael of Ephesus. The marking of the passage in Ab – necessary to keep text and commentary aligned – visually marks it as unstable rather than canonical.

Conclusion

Taken together, the stemmatic evidence, the Peripatetic reception, the grammatical articulation of *ἐνέργεια* and *δύναμις*, and the internal architecture of Book Θ converge on a consistent picture. Θ 6.1048b18-35 does not fit smoothly into the relational ontology articulated in Book Θ or preserved in the Peripatetic tradition. Its syntactic and conceptual profile is better explained as the product of an intermediate, neoplatonizing phase of reception.

This does not diminish the historical importance of the passage. On the contrary, it helps to make better sense of its striking affinities with late antique, Arabic, and medieval metaphysics. But influence should not be confused with authenticity. When the relational grammar of Aristotle's ontology is taken seriously, Θ 6.1048b18-35 appears not as a culmination of Book Θ, but as a doctrinal and textual anomaly – one that bears witness to the history of Aristotelian reception rather than to Aristotle's own metaphysical project.