CHAPTER 3

# *Complete Passive Activity*

## 3.1 Why Distinctions Are Needed

The first few lines of *An.* 2.5 outline several key conditions with which any successful account of perception must comply. First, it must account for the fact that a perceiver can be activated only by an external perceptual object, and, indeed, that she needs to be affected by the object for as long as she is perceiving it. Furthermore, it must accommodate the salient differences that distinguish perception from processes such as burning, as the capacity for perceiving is clearly not exhausted in the way that the capacity for burning is and the activity of perceiving is essentially object-directed. These criteria cannot be satisfied, I argued, without new conceptual distinctions pertaining, first of all, to the notions of being affected and likeness. Most of *An.* 2.5 is, indeed, engaged in drawing such distinctions. In the present chapter, we shall concentrate on how the distinctions Aristotle draws at 417a21–418a3 accumulate to form his first general account of perception as a complete passive activity, which lays the groundwork for the rest of his inquiry into perception.

Let us begin, though, with the preliminary distinctions, drawn immediately after the puzzle at 417a2–9, and with briefly reflecting on how these may already be preparing Aristotle's account:

> But since **(i)** we talk about perceiving (τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι) in two senses (διχῶς) – in one sense we say that what is capable of hearing and seeing (τό δυνάμει ἀκοῦον καὶ ὁρῶν) hears and sees (ἀκούειν καὶ ὁρᾶν), even when it happens to be sleeping, whereas in another sense [we apply these terms to] that which is active (τὸ ἐνεργοῦν) – **(ii)** we can also talk in two senses about perception (ἡ αἴσθησις): perception in the sense of capacity (ὡς δυνάμει) [i.e. the sense or perceptivity], and perception in the sense of activity (ὡς ἐνεργείᾳ); and similarly **(iii)** [we can talk in two senses]



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> about perceptual object (τὸ αἰσθητόν), too:[1] perceptual object in capacity (τό δυνάμει ὄν) [i.e. perceptible] and perceptual object in activity (τὸ ἐνεργείᾳ) [i.e. perceived]. (*An.* 2.5, 417a9–14)

Aristotle's observation about the two senses of 'perceiving' in (i) may sound trivial, but the wider context shows it need not be. He has, just previously, claimed that that which can perceive 'does not perceive (οὐκ αἰσθάνεται) [on its own], just as (καθάπερ) the combustible [material] does not burn on its own' (417a7–8). Now, he seems to be qualifying that claim by saying that, while combustible material does, indeed, in no true sense 'burn' on its own (in the absence of fire), we standardly say that a perceiver does 'perceive' on her own (e.g. a sleeping person still 'sees' and 'hears' in the sense of being neither blind nor deaf).

Similarly, we might say, with (ii), that perceivers are endowed with αἴσθησις even when they are not actively engaged in perceiving, whereas the combustible material is hardly endowed with burning until something sets it aflame.[2] This suggests that perceivers relate to perceiving in a very different way than combustible materials relate to burning: there is a much more stable and advanced kind of capacity involved in the former case, which is significantly closer to the exercising of the activity. Such a difference seems directly relevant for the observed contrast between combustible materials, on the one hand, which are progressively consumed by burning, and perceivers, on the other, which are not exhausted by perceiving over time. Although our passage stops short of spelling out this connection, the conceptual distinctions drawn here help a perceptive reader to see where the preceding analogy with burning falls flat. However, further distinctions will be required to articulate the difference between the two kinds of capacities.

More speculatively, one can read Aristotle's point about the perceptual object in (iii) as preparing the grounds for understanding how the object-directedness of perception distinguishes it from processes such as burning.

[1] τὸ αἰσθητόν is clearly attested by Alexander's *Quaest.* 3.2, 83.6, which outweighs (as first observed by Torstrik) the authority of extant manuscripts reading τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι. The manuscript reading (followed e.g. by Hicks 1907, Jannone and Barbotin 1966, and more recently Miller 2018) turns the final sentence into a redundant repetition. With τὸ αἰσθητόν the sentence makes an important point (recalled in *An.* 2.7 and 3.2, on which see Sections 4.2 and 4.3) and so should not be excised as a gloss (as was suggested by Rodier 1900, followed by Burnyeat 2002: 48 n. 54).

[2] Cf. *An.* 2.5, 417a32–b2 and *Metaph.* Θ.3, esp. 1047a7–10 (see also *Protr.* 79 and 81). See also the formulation of the puzzle at 417a2–6 as to 'why there is not perception (αἴσθησις) of the senses (αἰσθήσεων) themselves and why these do not produce perception (αἴσθησις)'. The noun αἴσθησις is used here in two different meanings. By distinguishing them in (ii) Aristotle is gaining a control over the ambiguity which the adherents of *LKL* lacked.

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Aristotle has compared the need, on the side of perceivers, for the presence of external perceptual objects (417a3–4) with the need, on the side of the combustible material, for the presence of a fire in fulfilment (417a9). Now, once the combustible material is set on fire by the activity of a fire in fulfilment – that is, once it starts burning – it does not depend for its burning on the activity of the original fire anymore; indeed, its burning no longer has any occurrent (non-historical) relation to that fire other than being another instantiation of fire in the universe. This is significantly different from the case of perceiving, which is essentially object-directed. In perception, the perceptual object serves not only as the efficient cause of perceiving in the sense of bringing about the episode of perception, but also as the formal cause of perception in the sense that the perceiver's activity is essentially *of* that object. My suggestion about the relevance of (iii) is that distinguishing between the fulfilment (ἐντελεχείᾳ) of a perceptual object (e.g. being red) and the activity (ἐνέργεια) of that object (e.g. making itself seen) can help us understand that the latter is intrinsically intertwined with the activity of the perceiver in a way that is absent in the case of fire and burning. Whereas the activity of the agent there (i.e. setting on fire) is over once the respective activity of the patient (i.e. burning) begins, the relevant activity of perceivers (i.e. perceiving) is not only initiated by, but also coincides throughout with, the respective activity of the perceptual objects (i.e. making themselves perceived). Again, when read in this way, the distinction in (iii) provides resources for seeing the limits of the preceding analogy between perceiving and burning; but further distinctions will be required to understand properly how the two kinds of relations to the agent differ.

I argued (in Sections 1.3 and 2.5) that Aristotle's identification of being affected with being active in the following passage (417a14–17) is intended to prepare us for the idea that, in perceiving, the perceiver is affected by an object to which she has already been assimilated (the element of truth within *LAL*). However, Aristotle also acknowledges that this provides us with only a provisional understanding of how the assimilation model (spelled out at 417a17–21) can apply to perception. This raises a concern about whether the alleged truth of *LAL* can be coherently captured at all. What makes it the case that, for perception, being affected passes the tense test together with being active? And how exactly can the two notions be combined in a general account of perception? Only if we can answer these questions will we be in a position to understand properly the disanalogies between perception and processes such as burning that have been sketched out above. Furthermore, only if we can answer these questions will we (as

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argued in Sections 1.4 and 2.7) be in a position to see how Aristotle can resolve the conflict between *LKL* and Anaxagoras.

## 3.2 The Perceptive Capacity as a Fulfilment

In the first set of his distinctions at 417a21–b2, Aristotle lays down what has come to be known as his 'triple scheme', or *Dreistufenlehre*. Here, I limit myself to outlining how these distinctions help to ground the key disanalogies between perception and processes such as burning. We should not be misled by the fact that, at 417a21, all of a sudden, Aristotle turns from considering 'that which can perceive' to considering 'that which knows' (ἐπιστῆμον). This does not mark a change of topic or a digression; rather, Aristotle seems to think that the case of a knower provides a useful model for understanding other phenomena – in this case, perception. In contrast to approaches that analyse the *Dreistufenlehre* as a general ontological scheme, I shall emphasize how much the passage is targeted specifically on capturing the essential features of perception.[3]

My first observation is that, when Aristotle announces (right after introducing the assimilation model at 417a17–21), that 'distinctions need to be drawn about capacity and fulfilment, for we have been speaking simply (ἁπλῶς) about them' (417a21–2), his primary focus seems *not* to be on the plurality of ways in which each of the two terms can be used. After all, Aristotle has already distinguished between two kinds of fulfilment at *An.* 2.1, 412a22–8, and so has *not* been talking 'simply' about fulfilment in the sense of having only a single meaning of the term available. Rather, what simplicity seems to mean is a way of speaking about capacity and fulfilment *as mutually exclusive notions*.[4] Such an exclusivity may seem to have been implied by the analogy with burning at 417a6–9.[5] One could also understand the preliminary distinctions at

[3] The parallel passage at *Phys.* 8.4, 255a30–b12 (where a similar analysis of the knower serves as a model for clarifying the changes of the four elements) may lead one to think that *An.* 2.5, 417a21–b2 is intended as an all-embracing classification, applying equally well to living and non-living phenomena, such as heating and the locomotion of elements. However (as has also been noted by Polansky 2007: 231; cf. Menn forthcoming a: IIIα2), the latter cases are only claimed to be 'similar' in *Phys.* 8.4. An obvious dissimilarity consists in the fact that what corresponds to the transition from the first to the second capacity here involves a substantial change (cf. the echo at *GA* 2.1, 735a9–11, in the context of whether embryos have souls). Contrast e.g. Kosman 1969: 50–6 (cf. Kosman 2013: 62–7) treating *An.* 2.5, 417a21–b2 as a universal scheme.

[4] Cf. Bonitz 1870: 77 for a distinction between two meanings of ἁπλῶς λέγεσθαι: (1) *X* is said in a single way rather than many ways; (2) *X* and *Y* are each spoken about separately and on their own rather than in their interrelation or combination (cf. e.g. *Phys.* 2.3, 195b15–16).

[5] Cf. also the contrast at 417a17–18.

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417a9–14 as if the perceiving and perception 'in capacity' were capturing a *pure* capacity simply opposed to fulfilment. If that is correct, then the point of the so-called triple scheme is not so much about there being different kinds of fulfilment and different kinds of capacities; rather, the key point is about recognizing that there is a kind of capacity *that is already a fulfilment*. This matters not just because it is an interesting ontological category, but because Aristotle's inquiry cannot move forward until we understand that the perceptive capacity is itself already a fulfilment of that which can perceive.[6]

This will be crucial for overcoming the way in which being affected and being active were identified at 417a14–17. This identification could only be provisional because the activity of perceiving is *not* incomplete, and so is not a change in terms of *Phys.* 3.1–2: it is complete in the sense of passing (at least a weakened form of) the tense test.[7] In the relevant passage from *Phys.* 3.2 (quoted almost *verbatim* at 417a16–17), Aristotle goes on to specify *the reason* why change is only an incomplete activity:

> change is an activity (ἐνέργεια), but an incomplete (ἀτελής) one; and the reason (αἴτιον) is that that which is in capacity (τὸ δυνατόν), and whose activity the change is, is incomplete (ἀτελές). (*Phys.* 3.2, 201b31–3)

If the perceptive capacity is to be classed with capacities that are fulfilments – that is, *complete capacities* – then the provisional identification of perception with a change will be undermined.[8]

When introducing the notion of a capacity that is already a fulfilment, Aristotle captures a feature that has been, since Plato, taken to characterize a certain class of human capacities. These capacities are usually those acquired by learning and typically arts, such as medicine, housebuilding, or carpentry. Aristotle's primary intention is, apparently, to extend this class of capacities to include perception (as suggested most clearly at 417b16–18 and b29–32). The art itself lacks nothing, and its exercise does not aim at its own (or the artisan's own) improvement or good;

[6] Cf. 417b29–32, discussed in Section 3.4. [7] See Sections 2.5 and 2.6.

[8] Cf. *An.* 3.7, 431a4–7. Contrast Kosman 1969: 56–7 (cf. Kosman 2013: 66), who analyses the incompleteness at *Phys.* 3.2, 201b31–3 as a characteristic of *all* beings in capacity. In making this connection between 417a21–b2 and *Phys.* 3.2, 201b31–3, I follow Anagnostopoulos 2017: 181–4 (cf. n. 10). For Aristotle's definition of change, see Kosman 1969, cf. e.g. Waterlow 1982: 93–131, Hussey 1983: 58–62, Coope 2009. Anagnostopoulos 2010 (cf. Anagnostopoulos 2017: 177–82) offers an attractive alternative to the standard reading, one of the virtues of which is the avoidance of rendering ἐνέργεια as 'actuality' (cf. Section 2.1, n. 3, and Section 2.4, n. 46). The present discussion of *An.* 2.5, however, does not depend on which interpretation of Aristotle's definition of change we adopt.

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rather, it aims at the improvement or good of its object.[9] It is, in other words, complete, and its exercise is not a change in the artisan (rather, it is usually productive of a change in the object). Such a capacity, which is already a sort of fulfilment, must surely be first acquired, and the acquisition undoubtedly *is* a change in the learner; but once the capacity has been acquired, its employment is no longer a change.[10] As Aristotle puts it at *An.* 2.4, 416a34–b3: a carpenter is not affected qua carpenter in any way; what he undergoes is only a transition from inactivity to activity.[11] This also implies that the exercise of such a capacity cannot exhaust it – unlike other capacities, such as the capacity to heat something. The exercise of the heating capacity effectively exhausts it because (1) what heats can, owing to generic likeness, be itself cooled by what it acts on, and because (2) it standardly *is* cooled, owing to the fact that the conditions of *A* heating *B* coincide with the conditions of *B* cooling *A*.[12]

At 417a21–b2, Aristotle further develops this point from *An.* 2.4, particularly in the last sentence where the capacity that is a fulfilment, on the one hand, and the capacity that is not, on the other hand, are contrasted with respect to how each is brought to fulfilment:

[9] See Socrates' description of the art of medicine, which is extended to other arts, at an important juncture of his discussion with Thrasymachus at *Resp.* 342a–e.

[10] I am *not* saying that the activity of a doctor, carpenter, or housebuilder passes the tense test (for such a reading, see e.g. Waterlow 1982: 183–6 or Kosman 1969: 56; for a criticism of it, see Heinaman 1985: 149–54). Anagnostopoulos 2017: 173–6 and 204–8 argues convincingly that two distinct criteria are in play: (i) a 'subject criterion' at *Phys.* 3.2, 201b31–3 and *An.* 2.5, 417a21–b2 and (ii) a 'telic structure criterion' in *Metaph.* Θ.6 and *EN* 10.4. For further discussion of the relation of the two criteria, see Section 3.5.

[11] Cf. *Phys.* 7.3, 247b7–9 (cf. 248a3–6): 'there is no coming to be of the use [of an acquired knowledge] – that is, the activity – at least if one does not assume that there is also coming to be of looking and touching'. Acquired knowledge is characterized in *Phys.* 7.3 as a 'perfection/completion' (τελείωσις), see 246a13–b3. Cf. *Metaph.* Θ.8, 1050a23–b1.

[12] Aristotle's thought at *An.* 2.4, 416a34–b3 is thus akin to the one at *GC* 1.7, 324a24–b13 (cf. 1.10, 328a18–22): it is not just that producing a table does not mean undergoing a change for the carpenter; the point is that he undergoes no change qua carpenter at all when producing a table because the primary agent is not a form in matter. In this, a carpenter sharply differs from fire. Anagnostopoulos 2017: 185–204 argues convincingly that in *Phys.* 3.1–3 Aristotle intends to exempt agency in general, including the activity of non-living agents such as fire or a warming pan, from being a change. However, this generalization threatens to blur something that Aristotle takes to hold essentially of knowledge and arts, namely that their exercise in no way *exhausts* them. A warming pan, in contrast, exhausts its heat in warming the bed, for – owing to (1) and (2) – it cannot warm the bed without, effectively, being cooled by it. In *Phys.* 3.1–3 Aristotle seems fine with ignoring this specific feature of arts, for he is interested in a more general characteristic that holds of agents in general; in *An.* 2.5, in contrast, he seems willing to emphasize exactly this feature when taking complete capacities such as arts to be a model for understanding the perceptive capacity (cf. Section 2.1).

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> So, both the former are in capacity [i.e. can be] knowers, but one [can be a knower only] after having been altered by learning and having made the transition often from the opposite state, whereas the other [can be a knower (or a perceiver) after having made the transition] in another way from having perception or knowledge of letters, but not being active, to being active.[13]
>
> ἀμφότεροι μὲν οὖν οἱ πρῶτοι κατὰ δύναμιν ἐπιστήμονες, ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν διὰ μαθήσεως ἀλλοιωθεὶς καὶ πολλάκις ἐξ ἐναντίας μεταβαλὼν ἕξεως, ὁ δ' ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν τὴν αἴσθησιν[14] ἢ τὴν γραμματικήν, μὴ ἐνεργεῖν δέ, εἰς τὸ ἐνεργεῖν, ἄλλον τρόπον.
>
> (*An.* 2.5, 417a30–b2)

The transition to fulfilment, characteristic of artisans, and of knowledgeable persons in general, is here contrasted with another kind of transition to fulfilment characteristic of those who have not yet acquired the knowledge in question, but who are able do so. Clearly, neither of the two fulfilments considered at 417a21–b2 is itself a change; if there is a candidate for being a change, it is the first kind of transition to fulfilment (i.e. learning). However, the present passage also already suggests a contrast between learning and processes like burning. What makes learning special is exactly that it is the transition to a fulfilment that *is* a capacity. Learning can, accordingly, be described as a change consisting exactly in overcoming the definitional incompleteness of changes; it is a change through which the subject (τὸ δυνάμει ὄν or τὸ δυνατόν) is fulfilled or completed so as to become capable of being active in a non-kinetic, complete way. It is thus no surprise that Aristotle returns to learning at 417b12–16 and suggests that it is a case of 'being affected' and 'being altered' only in a very special sense. In addition, it is no surprise that, at 417b16–18 (and b29–32), he goes on to claim that this kind of transition has already taken place for the

[13] For syntactic difficulties in this passage, see Burnyeat 2002: 83–7. I believe that Aristotle's thought becomes fairly transparent once 'κατὰ δύναμιν [εἰσι]' is rendered as 'can be'. This provides an alternative to both Burnyeat's construal and the one suggested by Emily Kress (adopted by Anagnostopoulos 2023: 90). While both these ways of construing the text assume that κατὰ δύναμιν qualifies ἐπιστήμονες, I take it to qualify, effectively, the (tacit) copula: Aristotle's point is not about what kind of (potential) knowers the first two are, but about how (i.e. under what conditions) they can be knowers (in fulfilment). Nothing in the following discussion, though, depends on this syntactic issue.

[14] In his paraphrasis of this passage Themistius says τὴν ἀριθμητικήν instead of τὴν αἴσθησιν (*In An.* 55.28). But given that this is just a paraphrasis, not a quotation, and that this reading is not attested anywhere else, the manuscript reading seems preferable. The switch to 'having perception' (cf. 417a12–13) is, admittedly, awkward, but it is understandable, given that the case of 'knowers' has served as a model for understanding the perceptive capacity, which is what Aristotle has really been up to.

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perceptive capacity of a new-born animal: the perceptive capacity is, already upon birth, a fulfilment of its subject (i.e. a complete capacity). This, I argue, is the key claim for which the distinctions at 417a21–b2 serve to prepare us.[15]

Now, if Aristotle's aim was simply to *confront* the assimilation model of perceiving as a kind of being affected by and assimilated to perceptual objects with the perspective on perception as an activity of something complete, in a sort of antinomy, he could stop here. But this is not what he does. Rather, in what follows, he turns to the notion of being affected and draws an additional set of distinctions pertaining to it (as well as to the related notion of being altered). His aim, I shall argue, is to show what the latter perspective (i.e. perceiving as a complete activity) tells us about the former (i.e. perceiving as being affected and assimilated), and how the former needs to be transformed, if it is to be reconciled with the latter.[16]

## 3.3 Kinds of Passivity

Aristotle's distinction between two kinds of being affected at 417b2–5 has often been understood as further developing the preceding contrast between two kinds of transition (417a30–b2).[17] The idea has been that preservative πάσχειν simply overlaps with the transition from not being active to being active. However, there are at least two reasons for resisting this reading. First, the notion of preservative πάσχειν seems to be reapplied at 417b12–16 to the first kind of transition (such as learning).[18] Second, at 417b2–12, the notion of preservative πάσχειν does *not* seem to overlap with the idea of transition from not being active to being active. Rather, it contains the idea that something else is the agent (so it cannot apply to productive activities, such as building a house); moreover, it appears to be intended to capture the way in which something is affected

[15] One might object to the proposed reading by observing that, at 417a21–b2, Aristotle does not *explicitly* apply the notion of ἐντελέχεια to the 'second capacity' (he uses it only once at 417a29 in the sense of the 'second fulfilment'). However, if he did not intend to classify the 'second capacity' as a fulfilment as well, his call for distinctions concerning capacities *and fulfilments* at 417a21–2 would be idle. The use of ἐντελέχεια in the sense of 'first fulfilment' has, after all, already been established at *An.* 2.1, 412a22–8. Moreover, it is hard to understand what Aristotle could be talking about at 417a31–2 (on any construal) if not a transition to fulfilment, i.e. to a 'first fulfilment'.

[16] Cf. Section 2.5.

[17] At *In An.* 55.29–56.1, Themistius identifies preservative πάσχειν with the second case and destructive πάσχειν with the first case. Cf. Gill 1989: 222, Sisko 1996: 143, Everson 1997: 91, Sisko 1998: 335, Burnyeat 2002: 54–5, Makin 2006: 152–3, Lorenz 2007: 181–8, Polansky 2007: 235, Anagnostopoulos 2017: 184, Anagnostopoulos 2023: 91.

[18] For further discussion, see Section 3.6.

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*throughout the entire time* of being active, or so I shall argue. This last point will become important: if it is correct, then the passage turns out to bear directly on the phenomenon of continued perceiving (as introduced in Section 1.3) and the object-directedness of perception (emphasized in Sections 2.4, 2.5, and 3.1), on the question of how the truth of *LAL* (as interpreted in Section 2.5) can be distilled from traditional errors, and so, finally, on how Aristotle can solve the key puzzle about knowing (as analysed in Sections 1.4 and 2.7).

Here is the relevant passage again, this time supplied with (admittedly excessive) clarifications indicating how I think the text is best construed and understood:

> Now, being affected is also not simple. But one kind of it is a destruction by what is contrary, whereas another kind of it is rather a preservation **(i)** of that which is in capacity **(ii)** by that which is in fulfilment and **(iii)** [a preservation of it] as [being made] like [that which acts on it], **(iv)** [it is a preservation of it] in the way in which capacity relates to fulfilment.
>
> οὐκ ἔστι δ' ἁπλοῦν οὐδὲ τὸ πάσχειν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν φθορά τις ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐναντίου, τὸ δὲ σωτηρία μᾶλλον **(i)** τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος **(ii)** ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄντος, **(iii)** καὶ ὁμοίου, **(iv)** οὕτως ὡς δύναμις ἔχει πρὸς ἐντελέχειαν.
>
> (*An.* 2.5, 417b2–5)

In Section 1.3, I suggested, against the deflationary reading, that we should understand the preposition ὑπό as introducing the efficient cause rather than the *terminus ad quem*. Moreover, against both the existing non-deflationary readings, I suggested that we should take the likeness in question to be a full-fledged likeness (rather than a potential or generic likeness) *resulting* from being affected. The upshot is that τὸ δυνάμει ὄν is preserved by the agent precisely in its being assimilated to it. That is: being assimilated to the agent is, for τὸ δυνάμει ὄν, a way of being preserved as what it is. In what follows, I fill in the details of this account, particularly concerning the construal of (iii) and (iv).

Let us begin with a question about (iii) – that is, καί ὁμοίου. Is Aristotle adding a piece of information here about τὸ δυνάμει ὄν, about τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν, or about σωτηρία?[19] Perhaps it is best to say that the new feature is

[19] Given the symmetrical nature of likeness, we can leave aside the question of whether τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν is said to be like τὸ δυνάμει ὄν, or the other way round. The text can be construed as comparing τὸ δυνάμει ὄν with τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν even without the bold transposition into ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄντος τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος proposed by Ross 1961. It is sufficient to put a comma after ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄντος, as is done by Ross 1956. Moreover, there is no principled reason for not following Alexander

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meant to concern all three of the terms: it is a likeness between the first two that tells us *what kind of* σωτηρία defines the non-destructive πάσχειν. The mention of likeness thus fits well into what we can call the full grammar of preservation: *something* is preserved *by* the agency of something else having *a certain effect* on the former. Not all cases of preservation, to be sure, need to involve all three of these aspects. In many cases, *X* will simply be preserved untouched by *Y* (as when *Y* wards off some influence on *X*) and this seems to be the most usual sense of preservation. It is in this sense, for instance, that the inert atmosphere will 'preserve' what is in it, or my head will be preserved from the sword's blow by my shield.[20] But, in some cases, *Y* preserves *X* while having a certain effect on *X* that needs to be further specified. In this way, for instance, Aristotle says that the tyranny is preserved when being made more like the rule of a king.[21] Similarly, I suggest that καὶ ὁμοίου in our passage adds a third characteristic of the preservation with which the second kind of πάσχειν is identified: τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν preserves τὸ δυνάμει ὄν exactly when making it like itself.

It is not difficult to see why the third characteristic needs to be spelled out. If ὑπό introduces the efficient cause, Aristotle is clearly saying that the second meaning of πάσχειν is a σωτηρία (rather than a destruction) of *X* by *Y*. But this, on its own, could well mean that *X* is preserved by *Y* entirely untouched, just as *X* would be preserved without encountering anything at all (as my shield preserves my head from the sword's blow). This clearly cannot be the meaning of σωτηρία in our passage if it is true that the πάσχειν qua σωτηρία is intended to capture how an activity (such as the activity of perceiving) is produced by an agent (such as the perceptual object) in something (such as the perceiver) *in which it was not before*. Accordingly, saying that τὸ δυνάμει ὄν is preserved in the sense of remaining entirely untouched (in line with Anaxagoras' ἀπάθεια) and just as it was before would be to no avail, because this would not be an instance of πάσχειν whatsoever.

As a result, rather than being preserved entirely untouched, we can see that τὸ δυνάμει ὄν is preserved in receiving the fulfilment that existed

of Aphrodisias, who takes Aristotle the other way round: as comparing τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν with τὸ δυνάμει ὄν (see *Quaest.* 3.3, 84.1 and 86.19–23).

[20] Moreover, the subject and the object of preservation in many cases coincides, so the difference between the first and the second aspect will also disappear: animals often do something simply as a way of preserving themselves. See e.g. *An.* 2.4, 416b16–17; 3.12, 434b11–18; *Sens.* 1, 436b19–437a1.

[21] τῆς τυραννίδος σωτηρία τὸ ποιεῖν αὐτὴν βασιλικωτέραν (*Pol.* 5.11, 1314a35). Cf. the less-explicit example at *Rhet.* 1.4, 1360a18–23.

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previously only in τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν that now acts upon it. Thus, it is preserved *by* τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν *in* being made like it.[22] Through this third characteristic, the σωτηρία already acquires the specific meaning requisite for capturing the receptive nature of perception: τὸ δυνάμει ὄν is preserved by τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν in the very act of being assimilated to it.

But what does Aristotle mean then when he adds (iv) οὕτως ὡς δύναμις ἔχει πρὸς ἐντελέχειαν? It could be explaining the sense in which τὸ δυνάμει ὄν is made like τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν: the former is assimilated to the latter in the sense in which a δύναμις is turned into the corresponding ἐντελέχεια. The idea here would apparently be that the result of the acting of τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν on τὸ δυνάμει ὄν – characterized in terms of the latter being like the former, that is, being like *something else* – is in fact the latter's *proper* fulfilment (ἐντελέχεια).[23] Alternatively, one could take (iv) to depend on σωτηρία. On this reading, Aristotle would be further specifying the notion of preservation. Not only is it a preservation of τὸ δυνάμει ὄν in the very act of its being assimilated to τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν; rather than just being preserved as it was, τὸ δυνάμει ὄν is fulfilled as what it *ought to be*: in being assimilated to something else it reaches its intrinsic goal.

Be that as it may, the contrast with the 'destructive' πάσχειν should by now be sufficiently clear. What undergoes this πάσχειν is not preserved, and a fortiori not fulfilled, as what it was; rather, it becomes something different, contrary to what it was before, and this modifies how it can now be affected. Although Aristotle does not explicitly mention perception at 417b2–5, his primary aim in the wider context of *An.* 2.5 is, apparently, to stress precisely the fact that perception cannot consist in a destructive πάσχειν – not least because if that which can perceive was affected in this way it would become like the perceptual object in a sense that would diminish (or destroy) its ability to engage in perception. It would be brought 'closer' to some objects of the given range and 'distanced' from other ones. Moreover, it would be prevented from being further affected by the object to which it has been assimilated: in this way, like could *not* be affected by like, and so no continued perceiving, and indeed no perception at all, could take place. In this respect, that which can perceive must be *impassive*: resistant to 'destructive' πάσχειν.

[22] καί need not be understood copulatively; it can also be read adverbially as 'even', or 'also'. On such a reading, the second kind of being affected is a preservation of τὸ δυνάμει ὄν not just as being untouched but a preservation of it 'even in its being made like τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν'.

[23] This is close to how Philoponus (*In An.* 302.28–32) understands the final phrase, except that he takes 417b2–5 to talk about a likeness that *precedes* preservative πάσχειν.

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The hope seems to be that by classifying perception as a case of 'preservative' πάσχειν we can escape – provided that the notion can successfully be fleshed out – both kinds of difficulties raised by Aristotle against his predecessors. The proposed solution appears to be that (a) that which can perceive is not absolutely impassive, as Anaxagoras' νοῦς, but rather can be affected by and assimilated to the perceptual object acting on it; however, (b) it is assimilated to the object in such a way that its perceptivity is preserved untouched (unbiased), so that it is capable of being further affected by the same external object and thus of continued perceiving. Perceiving is brought about by way of assimilation, but in such a way that it in no way diminishes the perceptivity of the subject.[24]

## 3.4 Kinds of Alteration

At 417b5–9, further developing the notion of preservative πάσχειν,[25] Aristotle returns to the model of the knower and explains exactly in what sense the notion of alteration does, and in what sense it does not, apply to the 'second fulfilment' of the knower (i.e. the activity of 'thinking' or 'understanding') and the transition to it. Although Aristotle does not say it in so many words, he seems to be taking for granted here what he will explicitly assert in *An.* 3.4 (429a13–18, 429b22–6) – namely, that thinking (νοεῖν, or here θεωρεῖν) is, like perceiving, a case of πάσχειν (to wit, preservative πάσχειν).[26] Aristotle begins from the 'coming to be' involved in the transition from having knowledge to thinking (and *mutatis mutandis* from having perception to perceiving):

> For that which has scientific knowledge comes to be theorizing, and this [coming to be] is either not a case of being altered (for the advance is into itself – that is, into fulfilment), or it is a different genus of alteration.
>
> θεωροῦν γὰρ γίνεται τὸ ἔχον τὴν ἐπιστήμην, ὅπερ ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλλοιοῦσθαι (εἰς αὑτὸ γὰρ ἡ ἐπίδοσις καὶ εἰς ἐντελέχειαν) ἢ ἕτερον γένος ἀλλοιώσεως.
>
> (*An.* 2.5, 417b5–7)

[24] If the likeness acquired in a preservative πάσχειν is qualified in this way, one might ask what it implies for the unlikeness as a condition of this πάσχειν and for the capacity to undergo this πάσχειν. We shall return to this question in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.

[25] See γάρ at 417b5.

[26] Although a set of disanalogies applies, as *An.* 2.5, 417b16–29 and then 3.4, 429a18–b22 make clear.

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The move from preservative πάσχειν to alteration should not surprise us, as we have seen that the notion of preservative πάσχειν essentially involves a notion of assimilation (wherein τὸ δυνάμει ὄν is made *like* τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν), and Aristotle is now bringing this aspect into focus. He does so by formulating a disjunction: when that which has knowledge comes to be actively theorizing, this coming to be (picked up by ὅπερ) is either not a case of being altered, or, if it is to be understood as being altered, the sort of alteration at issue here is of an entirely different kind.[27]

Aristotle's two disjuncts are unlikely to represent two different options between which we are supposed to decide. Rather, they seem to articulate two different ways of using the word 'alteration'. We already know that the assimilation involved in preservative πάσχειν cannot be a change between contrary states. Instead, in being assimilated to τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν – that is, to something else – τὸ δυνάμει ὄν is fulfilled as what it itself is, without becoming different (i.e. without becoming, for instance, more 'distant' from some objects and 'closer' to others). The first disjunct is further reinforcing this point by developing the notion that the 'advance is into itself' – that is, being assimilated to something else (i.e. τὸ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄν) is for τὸ δυνάμει ὄν (exemplified now by that which has knowledge) an advance into itself;[28] and this cannot be an alteration in the standard sense of becoming different. It is, however, essential for the preservative πάσχειν that, in contrast to the case of productive arts, the advance into itself consists here exactly in being assimilated to something else. Hence the need for the second disjunct. We can either say that there is no alteration at all (if we retain the standard notion of alteration), or we can claim that

[27] Despite my sympathies for Heinaman's heterodox insistence that 417b2–12 cannot be *simply* about transitions (see Heinaman 2007: 167–81), I do not think that Aristotle can be understood as talking about activity *rather than* transition at 417b5–7 (for such a claim, see also Gill 1989: 222–6). This presupposes that ὅπερ picks up θεωροῦν rather than γίνεται, but that would imply a distasteful categorial incongruence: Aristotle would be, literally, asking whether the thinking subject is an alteration or not. The standard reading of these lines thus needs to be retained. Heinaman and Gill, however, have a point when it comes to 417b8–9, as we shall see in Section 3.5.

[28] This expression seems to be modelled to contrast with the way in which being affected was characterized (namely as γένεσις εἰς τοὐναντίον) in the passage from *GC* 1.7 (324a9–14), which, I suggested in Section 2.2, Aristotle is most likely referring to at 416b35–417a2. It may also remind an attentive reader of Aristotle's argument in *An.* 1.3 to the effect that, if the soul were to undergo a change in its own right, it would have to 'step out of (its) substance' (ἐξίσταιτ' ἂν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας, 406b13–14). Now, Aristotle has introduced a different notion of being affected and being altered that is rather the opposite of ἐξίστασθαι ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας, namely ἐπίδοσις εἰς αὑτὸ καὶ εἰς ἐντελέχειαν. The question thus arises whether this newly introduced affection and alteration can belong to the soul or not. In *An.* 2.5, however, Aristotle does not tell us. The question will become central in Chapter 5.

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there is a different genus of alteration. The former option would be insufficient for Aristotle's purposes, but the latter is yet to be developed.[29]

Aristotle's present aim seems limited to making conceptual room for a kind of assimilation to something else that is an advance into itself and thus needs to be contrasted with the standard notion of alteration as becoming different. That this is, in fact, the case is supported by the reoccurrence of a very similar disjunction at 417b12–16 (further discussed in Section 3.6), and again at the outset of *An.* 3.4: at 429a14–15, thinking (νοεῖν) is said to be, like perceiving, 'either a kind of being affected or something else like that'. The fact that, later in *An.* 3.4, Aristotle characterizes thinking simply as 'a kind of being affected' strongly suggests that he does *not* intend to exclude the first disjunct from consideration.[30] Rather, the disjunction is aimed at contrasting the intended notion of being affected with 'destructive' πάσχειν: were we to stick to this standard notion of being affected, we would have to say that perception and thinking are 'something else' and that this is only 'like' being affected. However, building on the distinction between different kinds of πάσχειν at 417b2–5, Aristotle can take the bolder line and maintain that thinking *is*, after all, a kind of being affected. The disjunction at 417b5–7 seems to be making the very same point with respect to 'being altered'.[31]

Accordingly, what is progressively being shown in *An.* 2.5 is why the meanings of the two key notions must be extended beyond the ways in which we typically understand them as well as how this can be achieved. This task turns out to be essential for capturing the receptive nature of perception (and thinking) as a way of taking things in.[32] Towards the end

[29] We shall see in Chapters 4–7 how the latter is developed by a set of key notions introduced in *An.* 2.6–12: mediation, discrimination, and the reception of forms without the matter.

[30] See 429b24–5 with 429b29–430a2 (cf. Section 1.1).

[31] At 417b12–16, introducing a similar disjunction for learning, Aristotle even switches between being affected and alteration across the two disjuncts. Burnyeat's idea that preservative πάσχειν is a more general notion, allowing for cases that are alterations, as well as those that are not, is, then, unlikely (cf. Section 1.2).

[32] One could compare this extension with the move undertaken in the first half of *Metaph.* Θ.6 (cf. Δ.7, 1017a35–b9 and Θ.8, 1050a3–b2), where the notion of ἐνέργεια is extended from its original meaning of 'activity' (or more narrowly 'change') to a broader meaning in which it can apply, for example, to a finished house (existing 'in actuality') in contrast to the material from which it is built (and which is a house only 'in capacity'). For Aristotle's move here, see Frede 1994: 179–85, Menn 1994: esp. 105–13, Menn forthcoming a: IIIα2, Makin 2006: 128–50, Charles 2010, Beere 2009: 178–208, and Johansen 2012a. As noted in Section 2.5 (nn. 56 and 59), the way Aristotle proceeds in *Metaph.* Θ.6 (assuming that the second half of the chapter was incorporated by Aristotle himself) leaves unresolved the question of the compatibility of the two different descriptions of phenomena like seeing offered in the two halves of Θ.6, respectively (cf. Anagnostopoulos 2011: 408–10): it is first introduced as an example of change in the first half (presumably a passive change of the perceiver) and then it is contrasted with changes as a complete activity in the second half.

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of *An.* 2.5, Aristotle seems to announce that this extension has successfully been performed. He first reminds us that perceivers are endowed with a complete capacity (417b29–32, cf. 417b16–18) and then he adds an explicit reflection on the usage of the two key notions:

> **(i)** Since the distinguishing feature of each of these [i.e. the two kinds of capacity] is nameless, but it was determined that they differ and how they differ, **(ii)** it is necessary to use the notions of 'being affected' and 'being altered' as proper terms.
>
> **(i)** ἐπεὶ δ' ἀνώνυμος αὐτῶν ἡ διαφορά, διώρισται δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν ὅτι ἕτερα καὶ πῶς ἕτερα, **(ii)** χρῆσθαι ἀναγκαῖον τῷ πάσχειν καὶ ἀλλοιοῦσθαι ὡς κυρίοις ὀνόμασιν.
>
> (*An.* 2.5, 417b32–418a3)

By saying that it was determined how the two kinds of capacity differ, Aristotle is apparently referring to 417a21–b12 as a whole, as is suggested by the consequent (ii). Aristotle can legitimately be taking 417b2–12 as a part of determining how the two kinds of *capacity* differ, because that which can perceive is characterized by a complete *passive* capacity and, from 417a21–b2, it is still far from obvious that a complete capacity can be passive. This crucial finding is only established at 417b2–12. Accordingly, when Aristotle says that the distinguishing feature of each kind of capacity is nameless, this also involves the recognition that there is a lack of specific terms for 'preservative' πάσχειν (as contrasted with 'destructive' πάσχειν) and for alteration as an advance into itself (rather than as a way of becoming different).

With this reading of the antecedent (i), it becomes much clearer how the consequent (ii) is meant to follow. The consequent contends that, since there are, regrettably, no specific terms, but it is impossible to define perception without the notions of being affected and being altered, it is necessary that we use the only available terms – namely, the generic ones. Moreover, as long as we keep in mind the fact that their meaning has been extended at 417b2–12 beyond the ways in which they are typically understood, we shall be using these terms as proper terms rather than,

My suggestion is that Aristotle takes up this task in *An.* 2.5 and argues that, to reconcile the two perspectives on perception, we must undertake another extension, this time concerning the notions of being affected and being altered. The extension here starts from an analogy between perceiving and processes like burning. But something more than mere analogy seems to be at issue: in contrast to the case of ἐνέργεια in the first half of *Metaph.* Θ.6, the notion of πάσχειν is not extended in *An.* 2.5 *across different categories*; so nothing prevents there being a common genus of πάσχειν under which both perceiving and processes like burning fall as different kinds of it.

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say, mere metaphors.[33] Armed with these distinctions (that is, effectively, with the διορισμός for which Theophrastus calls in *Sens.* 19),[34] we shall finally be in a position to understand how 'perception comes about in being changed and being affected' and in what sense it can (and cannot) be analysed as 'an alteration' (416b32–4). The closing lines (418a3–6) can therefore, finally, fulfil the promise made at the beginning of the chapter.

## 3.5 Non-Altering Passive Activity

With the aforementioned disjunction in hand, Aristotle proceeds to say more about alteration at 417b8–9. These lines have often been read as supporting the idea that he intended to reject the second disjunct at 417b5–7, and indirectly also as supporting the deflationary reading of preservative πάσχειν:

> Thus, it is not right to say about that which is thinking, when it is thinking, that it is undergoing alteration, any more than [this is right about] the housebuilder when he is housebuilding.
>
> διὸ οὐ καλῶς ἔχει λέγειν τὸ φρονοῦν, ὅταν φρονῇ, ἀλλοιοῦσθαι, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ τὸν οἰκοδόμον ὅταν οἰκοδομῇ.
>
> (*An.* 2.5, 417b8–9)

If a thinker is no more altered when thinking than a housebuilder is when building a house, then it may seem that the notion of alteration is not applicable to thinking at all (for, as we know, in Aristotle's view a housebuilder undergoes no alteration whatsoever, not even in any refined sense). Moreover, if Aristotle's mention of housebuilding here is understood as somehow falling under the notion of preservative πάσχειν, then this notion can, apparently, have no other meaning than the deflationary one of a transition from a complete capacity to its fulfilment – for it is only in this way that it can be applied to a productive activity such as

[33] For the meaning of κύριον ὄνομα, see *Poet.* 21–2 (especially 1457b1–3, 1458a18–23, and 1458b17–19). The contrary of κύριον ὄνομα is ξενικὸν ὄνομα, including foreign words (γλῶτται) and metaphors. Cf. *Rhet.* 3.2, 1404b5–8; *Soph. Ref.* 17, 176a38–b7; *Meteor.* 4.2, 379b14–17. The language of a distinguishing feature (διαφορά) that has no established name but has been successfully explained suggests that Aristotle takes preservative πάσχειν and alteration as an advance into itself to be genuine kinds of the higher genera of being affected and being altered, respectively. Contrast e.g. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Quaest.* 3.3, 85.34–86.2, 86.28 (cf. Anagnostopoulos 2023: 89–90, 95). It is difficult to see why Aristotle would say that it is necessary to use these notions 'as if they were' proper terms, if they were in fact entirely unfitting. Why use them at all, then, rather than sticking, for example, to the innocuous notion of transition (μεταβάλλειν) and saying that it is in *no* sense an affection or an alteration whatsoever?

[34] Cf. Section 2.7.

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housebuilding. I shall argue that the quoted passage does not support either of these interpretative moves. In order to understand it correctly, we need, first of all, to appreciate the perspective from which housebuilding and thinking are being compared here.

This perspective, I contend, is determined by the specific temporal aspect of thinking under consideration in these lines. Aristotle does not seem to be talking about the transition from not thinking to thinking but, rather, about the continued activity of thinking, as is strongly suggested by the repetition of ὅταν with the subjunctive.[35] If this is correct, then we can understand why it proved so difficult to decide whether the distinctions at 417b2–9 concern transitions or activities.[36] The reason is that Aristotle speaks of both. Although the point of 417b5–7 apparently concerns the transition to theorizing, the point of 417b8–9 turns out to be rather about the continued activity of thinking. Understanding the reasoning behind this change of perspective seems crucial for successfully coming to grips with Aristotle's argument at 417b2–9 as a whole.

Let me begin by adding a caveat concerning the standard view that, at 417b5–7, Aristotle talks about the transition to theorizing rather than theorizing itself.[37] If the proposed interpretation of 417b2–7 is correct and Aristotle defines preservative πάσχειν here as a way of being preserved as what one is in the very act of being assimilated to something else, then this puts the notion of transition being described here in a novel perspective. We should not expect that Aristotle's account at 417b2–7 is limited to the first moment of the activity in question (say, the opening of one's eyes); rather, what he describes seems to be taking place throughout the duration of the subject's being involved in the perceptual activity. This would confirm that being affected and being active cannot be dissociated in any temporal way (as flagged in Section 1.3); but it does not imply that the one cannot be *conceptually* distinguished from the other, and it provides even less reason to think that Aristotle 'merges' 'the (instantaneous) transition to perceiving and perceiving [itself]', as Burnyeat would have it.[38]

It thus seems fair to say that, throughout 417b2–7, Aristotle focuses on the transition to activity – so long as we remain open to the idea that τὸ δυνάμει ὄν is making this transition *incessantly* as long as the activity is going on. At 417b8–9, however, Aristotle switches to a different

[35] As stressed by Heinaman 2007: 178–80 against most interpreters who take for granted that throughout 417b2–12 Aristotle talks simply about transitions.
[36] Cf. Section 1.3. [37] Cf. n. 27. [38] Burnyeat 2002: 72–3.

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perspective, concentrating on thinking (and *mutatis mutandis* perceiving) as an activity exercised continuously over a certain period of time. One could say that, while at 417b2–7 Aristotle is developing the notion of preservative πάσχειν, 417b8–9 is, strictly speaking, no longer about being affected but, rather, about being active: the preservative πάσχειν and the respective ἐνεργεῖν are numerically the same but differ in being and, at 417b2–9, Aristotle effectively captures their difference in being. At 417b5–7, he focuses on coming to be actively theorizing, whereas at 417b8–9 he discusses the activity of thinking as such – and these are clearly not the same thing. As soon as we realize that there is this switch of perspective, we cease to be confronted with the problem that most interpreters have found here – namely, that Aristotle seems to be first admitting (in the second disjunct of 417b5–7) that *X* is a kind of alteration and then plainly denying (at 417b8–9) that *X* can be any alteration whatsoever, while, moreover, suggesting that the latter can be somehow inferred from the former.[39] The inference starts to make much better sense once we take the switch of perspective into account.

In comparison with the content of 417b2–7, Aristotle's claim at 417b8–9 is, in fact, not that striking. In a way, he is simply spelling out what we already know from 417a21–b2: the fulfilment of a second capacity is not a change. The art of housebuilding is a case in point: it produces changes in the material, but the housebuilder qua housebuilder does not undergo any change; housebuilding does not mean for her becoming different. I argued (in Section 3.2) that Aristotle's primary aim at 417a21–b2 is to classify the perceptive capacity as being *complete*. But this seems prima facie difficult given that the perceptive capacity is *passive* rather than productive. What happens at 417b2–9, as I see it, is roughly this: (a) Aristotle explains at 417b2–7 what kind of passivity is involved; and (b) he insists at 417b8–9 that this kind of passivity is compatible with the capacity in question being complete like the art of housebuilding.

How exactly does it *follow*, then, from the notion of preservative πάσχειν developed at 417b2–7 that the activity in question is not itself an alteration? Let us recall that what is affected in the preservative way is, in its very assimilation to the agent, preserved and, indeed, fulfilled as what it itself already is; and that this involves no change to a contrary state. While, say, the perceiver perceiving a certain object is incessantly being affected by and assimilated to this object, there is no progressive changing, no acquiring of the quality as a quality of its own. If the patient were to acquire the quality of

[39] See διό at 417b8.

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the agent as a quality of its own (so that it could retain the quality even when the acting is over), it would thereby lose its ability to be further affected by that agent. It can, therefore, have the quality in itself only dynamically, so to speak, and only for as long as the acting – and the activity – is going on. Once the acting (and so the activity) is over, there is no lasting result.[40] Accordingly, it is legitimate to infer that engaging in the activity of perceiving does *not* mean that the perceiver becomes different – any more than building a house means becoming different for a housebuilder.

Let me conclude this section by commenting on two different ways of contrasting changes with 'complete' activities.[41] If the proposed reading of 417b2–9 is on the right track, then at 417b8–9 thinking (and *mutatis mutandis* perceiving) is concluded to be a complete activity in a somewhat different sense than it is claimed to be a complete activity in *Metaph.* Θ.6 and *EN* 10.4. Thinking and perceiving are complete activities because their subjects are complete just as the subject of housebuilding is complete – that is: they are understood as being complete activities by the *subject criterion*, rather than the *telic structure criterion*, as Andreas Anagnostopoulos calls them.[42] As shown by the example of housebuilding, something can well qualify as a complete activity by the subject criterion, while failing by the telic structure criterion (i.e. by not passing the tense test). At the same time, it has now been confirmed that nothing can pass the tense test without satisfying the subject criterion. On similar grounds, Anagnostopoulos calls the subject criterion 'more precise' and 'more fundamental'.[43]

I agree that this is the case as far as we are concerned with drawing the general line between changes and non-kinetic activities.[44] However, I am less sure that the same assessment also holds when we are concerned with the specific nature of perception (and thinking), as Aristotle is in *An.* 2.5. Here, the subject criterion is – in an important sense – not sufficiently precise, for it does not allow us to distinguish *passive* non-kinetic activities from other non-kinetic activities. Furthermore, it is also questionable whether the subject criterion is more fundamental in this context. When

[40] Perception often results in a *phantasma*, of course (as explained at *An.* 3.3, 428b10–429a8). However, this is a different phenomenon. Acquiring a *phantasma* cannot mean being altered qua perceiver (as e.g. having my eye turned blue, or my ear sounding would).

[41] As introduced in Section 3.2. [42] See Anagnostopoulos 2017: 173–6 and 204–8.

[43] Anagnostopoulos 2017: 172, 205, 208.

[44] In classifying housebuilding as a change, for instance, the telic structure criterion is not wrong but is, rather, imprecise because what it rightly detects is the numerical identity of housebuilding with a change (while overlooking their difference in being).

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the perceptive capacity is simply claimed to be a complete capacity, it is far from obvious how this is compatible with perception being essentially passive. Without the distinctions provided by 417b2–9, it would seem that we are only confronted with an antinomy between perception's completeness (on the basis of the subject criterion) and its passivity.[45] However, as I have argued, Aristotle does not simply want to confront us with this kind of antinomy. He also wants to indicate how the passivity of perception needs to be conceived if the antinomy is to be overcome. He does so by introducing the notion of preservative πάσχειν (implying alteration qua advance into itself) and by showing how this kind of passivity is compatible with completeness in the sense of the subject criterion. Now, the notion of preservative πάσχειν has appeared to be essentially informed by the telic structure criterion: it is exactly such a kind of being affected that can pass the tense test (and thereby incorporate the truth of *LAL*). If this is correct, it means that the idea of perception as an activity that is complete according to the subject criterion can certainly be *conceived* independently from the telic structure criterion. If this is done, though, it can figure only as one horn of an antinomy, for this obviates the question of perception's passivity. It is only with the aid of the telic structure criterion, extended from 'being active' to 'being affected', I submit, that activities like perception can be shown to be complete while being passive – that is, to be *complete passive* activities.

Be that as it may, the crucial point can be made independently from whether the subject criterion is more precise and more fundamental in the case of activities such as perception: the two criteria point jointly, from two complementary perspectives, to what seems to be Aristotle's main claim in *An.* 2.5 – namely that there are complete passive activities, distinct from both passive changes and non-passive complete activities, and that perception is one of them.

## 3.6 Activity and Acquisition

At 417b9–16, Aristotle steps back from complete passive capacities to provide a comparison with another kind of passive capacities that are not complete, although the way they are fulfilled can be contrasted with destructive πάσχειν, too. In the first sentence, Aristotle contrasts activities such as thinking or perceiving with the process of being taught:

[45] Which is exactly what Anagnostopoulos 2023 argues.

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> So, on the one hand, that which leads [what is in capacity] from being in capacity into fulfilment in the sense of knowledgeable thinking should not be called (after)[46] teaching but something different.
>
> τὸ μὲν οὖν εἰς ἐντελέχειαν ἄγον ἐκ δυνάμει ὄντος κατὰ τὸ νοοῦν καὶ φρονοῦν οὐ διδασκαλίαν ἀλλ' ἑτέραν ἐπωνυμίαν ἔχειν δίκαιον.
>
> (*An.* 2.5, 417b9–12)

Aristotle turns our attention to what he calls 'that which leads into fulfilment' (τὸ εἰς ἐντελέχειαν ἄγον). The referent of this phrase can be understood in two ways: either as picking up on 'that which is in fulfilment' from 417b4 (i.e. as *the agent* of the activities in question that leads τὸ δυνάμει ὄν to fulfilment by assimilating it to itself and so producing this fulfilment in it)[47] or as referring to *the acting* of this agent on the patient.[48] However we understand τὸ ἄγον, what Aristotle is saying must be that the name of the agent should not be derived from 'teaching' or that its agency must not be called 'teaching' – apparently because what it does is essentially different from teaching.[49] The problem seems to be that, in contrast to the case of teaching, as the ποίησις corresponding to learning, there is no proper name for the ποίησις that corresponds to 'knowledgeable thinking' (νοεῖν καὶ φρονεῖν) or to 'perceiving' (αἰσθάνεσθαι).[50] It must be emphasized, nonetheless, that this is an essentially different kind of ποίησις.

Aristotle presents this point as something following on from, or summarizing, what has been said so far,[51] and we are now in a position to understand what he means. He has already distinguished at 417a30–b2 between learning and the transition to thinking, stressing that the former

[46] See n. 49 for an explanation of how to understand the text both with and without the supplemented word.

[47] Just as it is picked up again at 417b13. For this understanding of that which ἄγει τὸ αἰσθητικὸν εἰς ἐνέργειαν, cf. *Sens.* 4, 441b19–23 (referring probably to our section of *An.* 2.5).

[48] In the second case, the neutral ἄγον seems parallel to the neuter ὅπερ at 417b6 referring to γίγνεσθαι. So, either way, Torstrik's emendation – changing ἄγον into ἄγειν – seems unnecessary.

[49] Taking τὸ ἄγον as referring to the agent seems, in itself, the more natural choice. However, this produces some difficulties with understanding the rest of the sentence, particularly the claim that this agent does not have the notion of διδασκαλία, but something else, as its ἐπωνυμία. Clearly, 'teaching' is not a potential *name* of an agent, which seems to support the alternative construal of τὸ ἄγον. But perhaps the expression ἐπωνυμίαν ἔχειν is used in a more relaxed way, meaning that the name of the agent in question is not *derived from* διδασκαλία – that is, it is not διδασκαλικόν. Cf. *Phaed.* 102b and 103b, where other things (e.g. something large) take the ἐπωνυμία of the Forms (e.g. largeness) themselves (see further *Crat.* 409c, 398b–c, or *GA* 5.3, 783b12–17; cf. *Soph.* 229a–b defining the διδασκαλική).

[50] Accordingly, the situation is analogical to the one described at *An.* 3.2, 426a12–15 with respect to the agency of colours and flavours (in contrast with the agency of sounding things that does have a proper name). At *An.* 3.2, 426a9–11 perceiving is explicitly described as a πάθησις.

[51] Cf. μὲν οὖν at 417b9.

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involves an alteration in the sense of being brought into a different lasting state. This contrasts sharply with what we have just learnt about passive activities like thinking (or perceiving), which have no such lasting result. Accordingly, although we have no name for the respective ποίησις, we must insist that it is something essentially different from teaching.

However, this leaves the status of learning somewhat unclear. On the one hand, it can be sharply contrasted with the case of perceiving and thinking. But, on the other hand, it is hard to resist the impression that learning cannot be simply identified as a case of destructive πάσχειν.[52] The following sentence seems to be focused on addressing exactly this concern, and it can be understood as subsuming learning under an expanded category of preservative πάσχειν (despite its difference from complete passive activities, which has just been stressed):

> On the other hand, that which, starting from being in capacity, learns and acquires scientific knowledge by the agency of that which is in fulfilment and capable of teaching is either not to be described as being affected, or there are two ways of being altered, one which is a transition to privative states and the other which is a transition to [positive] dispositions and to nature.
>
> τὸ δ' ἐκ δυνάμει ὄντος μανθάνον καὶ λαμβάνον ἐπιστήμην ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐντελεχείᾳ ὄντος καὶ διδασκαλικοῦ ἤτοι οὐδὲ πάσχειν φατέον [[ὥσπερ εἴρηται]][53] ἢ δύο τρόπους εἶναι ἀλλοιώσεως, τήν τε ἐπὶ τὰς στερητικὰς διαθέσεις μεταβολὴν καὶ τὴν ἐπὶ τὰς ἕξεις καὶ τὴν φύσιν.
>
> (*An.* 2.5, 417b12–16)

Aristotle's aim seems to be twofold: he is, on the one hand, resisting the identification of learning with destructive πάσχειν, while, on the other hand, emphasizing its difference from the preservative πάσχειν as it was introduced at 417b2–9. Learning does not mean transitioning to a privative state: it is *not* a case of 'destruction'. Rather, Aristotle says something very similar about learning to what he has said about preservative πάσχειν at 417b5–7 – namely, that it leads to a positive disposition (ἕξις) in which,

[52] See e.g. Johansen 2012b: 159: at 417b14–16 'Aristotle is reapplying the notion of an advance to the thing itself to the alteration from first-level to second-level capacity in learning.' Cf. Heinaman 2007: 174: 'As it will turn out, 417b2–16 will explain that both contemplation and the learning referred to previously at 417a31–32 . . . are refined forms of alteration.' See also Charles 2009: 23; cf. Burnyeat 1984: 136 and Bowin 2012a: 262–5.

[53] With Förster 1912 and Ross 1961 (cf. already Rodier 1900), I believe the words ὥσπερ εἴρηται (contained in most manuscripts, but omitted by SUX, and not attested before Sophonias) should probably be excised.

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apparently, the very nature of the subject finds its fulfilment.[54] However, this very characterization also contrasts with how preservative πάσχειν was analysed at 417b2–9: learning involves acquiring a new quality of one's own as a lasting result, whereas perceiving and thinking emphatically do not involve the perceiver or thinker acquiring any quality of their own as a lasting result.[55]

In other words, learning is not quite as preservative as perceiving and thinking (I can indefinitely and repeatedly perceive the same thing, but once I have learnt something, I cannot learn it again, unless I have forgotten it). However, learning still possesses a preservative feature in the sense that τὸ δυνάμει ὄν is in no way harmed (or 'destroyed') by it – rather, its very nature is fulfilled through being affected. Indeed, this is exactly how a complete capacity is acquired: the result of learning is a completion or perfection (τελείωσις) that enables the subject to engage in a complete activity (whether this activity is passive or not).[56] This explains what Aristotle means when, in the immediately following lines (417b16–18), he compares the acquisition of the perceptive capacity in embryogenesis with learning.

## 3.7 A Programmatic Definition of Perception

The notion of preservative πάσχειν can, accordingly, be conveniently expanded to capture also what happens in learning. However, the comparison with embryogenesis turns our attention back to what has been the main goal behind introducing preservative πάσχειν, and behind *An.* 2.5 as a whole – namely, capturing, on the most general level, the receptive nature of perception as a way of taking things in. We have seen that the notion of preservative πάσχειν can serve this purpose only once it has been successfully distinguished from both passive changes and non-passive

[54] Aristotle seems to be drawing on his distinction between state (διάθεσις) and disposition (ἕξις) as two kinds of qualities from *Cat.* 8, 8b26–9a13. However, he here sharpens the contrast by characterizing state as privative and connecting disposition with nature. Both characterizations seem jointly intended to contrast learning with destructive πάσχειν.

[55] Unless, again, we count *phantasmata* (cf. n. 40). The contrast would be further reinforced if we take the distinction between two τρόποι of alteration at 417b14–16 *not* to overlap with the two γένη of alteration implied by the second disjunct of 417b5–7, but as a further subdivision within the ordinary kind of alteration in the sense of becoming different.

[56] Cf. *Phys.* 7.3, 246a13–15 (with 247b4–7, 10–12): 'Whenever something acquires its virtue (ἀρετή), then it is called perfect/complete (τέλειον); for then it is in the highest degree (μάλιστα) in accordance with [its] nature (κατὰ φύσιν).'

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complete activities. Perception itself is a complete passive activity. Establishing this claim is the key result of *An.* 2.5.[57]

We have also seen what role this notion plays in Aristotle's engagement with his predecessors. Introducing the notion of preservative πάσχειν would be to no avail if Aristotle characterized it in terms of a generic likeness presupposed by any πάσχειν whatsoever or if he deflated it of any genuine passivity. The notion of complete passive activities, in contrast, does exactly what is needed to resolve the main dilemma about knowing raised in *An.* 1.2.

By introducing this concept, Aristotle is able to capture the sense in which like perceives like, as well as the way in which like is affected by like in perception, while overcoming the difficulties of the traditional *LKL* position (as exposed, once more, in the puzzle at 417a2–9). Furthermore, this allows him to incorporate the truthful aspects of *LKL* without having to rely on the provisional identification of 'being affected' and 'being active' from 417a14–17 – rather, it frees him to show how an activity can be passive without being incomplete. Finally, it prepares us for the closing passage of the chapter (418a3–6), which applies the assimilation model explicitly to perception. The notion of complete passive activities provides the ground for understanding the present and the perfect aspect of being affected in a temporally non-exclusive way. This is possible only as a result of the fact that, for the entire duration in which the subject is being affected by and assimilated to the relevant object, the subject is preserved. In other words, the subject is *impassive* in the sense of never being turned into a contrary state by the object, and thereby never acquiring a new quality of its own. If the subject is a perceiver, this is how she succeeds in retaining her untainted ability to perceive. By developing the notion of preservative πάσχειν, Aristotle thus allows two seemingly incompatible intuitions about knowing (i.e. the *Acquaintance/Contact Requirement* and the *Unbiasedness/Externality Requirement*) to be successfully incorporated into his first general account of perception. On this basis, Aristotle's

[57] Is this also true of perception in non-human animals? One reason to doubt this is the essentially practical use non-human animals make of perception according to Aristotle (see e.g. the two kinds of odours in *Sens.* 5, 443b17–445a16 and *EN* 3.10, 1118a18–23). I would respond that the way perception is *used* has no bearing on how it is *defined*. That is, admittedly, a claim that would demand larger discussion, which cannot be provided here. I only point out that there is no conflict in assuming that a complete activity provokes, or becomes the basis of, an incomplete one (when, say, I react to my seeing of a bear by running away). That said, I do not wish to underplay the way in which perception is embedded, according to Aristotle, in the self-preservative activity of animals. This embeddedness will be emphasized in Chapter 7. Besides this, human beings, of course, also use perception for the sake of νοῦς. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this issue.)

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account finally shows how we might arrive at grasping the whole that his predecessors managed to glimpse only in isolated parts.

We still require, however, a better understanding of the notion of impassivity (ἀπάθεια) at stake here. It clearly cannot be the absolute impassivity claimed by Anaxagoras for νοῦς as excluding any πάσχειν whatsoever. Such an impassivity would make any account of how thinking, and a fortiori perceiving, comes about impossible (as Aristotle points out at *An.* 1.2, 405b21–3 and again at 3.4, 429b22–6). However, it does not seem to be the abstract kind of impassivity that Aristotle refers to in *An.* 1.4 (408b18–30), either. Here, he makes a point, akin to the argument of *Metaph.* Z.8 (1033b3–1034a8), that the soul itself (whether it is the perceptive or the rational soul) cannot qua form be what, properly speaking, 'suffers' when we become incapacitated owing to malady or old age. While the former (Anaxagorean) impassivity seems too strong, the latter seems too weak, because it considers *any* form whatsoever (including forms of things undergoing destructive πάσχειν and including productive arts) to be impassive.[58]

To appreciate more fully just how the notion of preservative πάσχειν can be spelled out in terms of impassivity and thus be presented as overcoming the conflict between *LKL* and Anaxagoras' view, it is helpful to recall the way in which Aristotle defines impassivity in *Metaph.* Δ.12 and Θ.1.[59] Impassivity is not simply a privation or the incapability of being affected; it is rather a *power for resisting* a certain kind or range of acting, particularly if such an acting would mean for the patient changing towards something worse. This kind of resistance can be a necessary condition for acting in some way, but apparently – and here we return to the main point of *An.* 2.5 – it can also be a necessary condition for being affected in some way, particularly if the kind of being affected in question is such as to become the patient's own fulfilment.[60]

[58] For Aristotle's commitment to the impassivity of the perceptive soul, and its role within his account of perception, see Chapter 5.

[59] See *Metaph.* Δ.12, 1019a26–32 (cf. 1019b10–11) and Θ.1, 1045b13–14, and also *Phys.* 7.3, 246b19–20 (cf. 247a3–4) where both impassivity and passivity are treated as two possible manifestations of an excellence. For further discussion of impassivity, see Section 6.5.

[60] See *Metaph.* Δ.12, 1019a20–6, which introduces a more demanding concept of a passive capacity as a capacity for being affected 'towards the better' and as a capacity for being affected 'excellently': these two classes could be compared with *An.* 2.5, 417b12–16 and b2–9, respectively. The more demanding kinds of passive capacities seem directly connected with impassivity as the power to resist being affected towards the worse (1019a26–32): such a power seems to be a prerequisite for the demanding kinds of passive capacities.

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This, I submit, is exactly how perception is to be understood according to Aristotle and Theophrastus. It presupposes an ἀπάθεια that is the 'preservative' aspect of the perceptive πάσχειν seen, as it were, from the other side. That which can perceive is able to resist any change towards a contrary state (i.e. to resist acquiring a colour or an odour as a quality *of its own*) that would diminish or destroy its perceptivity. This impassivity is what allows the perceiver to be affected by, and assimilated to, the perceptual object in the way that for her means her own fulfilment qua perceiver while preserving her ability to perceive in an untainted manner. The quality received by the perceiver must remain, as we shall see, a quality *of* the external perceptual object. This, I suggest, is the kind of impassivity that Aristotle feels entitled to infer from the notion of preservative πάσχειν at *An.* 3.4, 429a14–15.[61] Moreover, this aspect of preservative πάσχειν provides a key to understanding why Aristotle appears to oscillate between classifying perception as a case of being affected, as a quality, and as a relatum: perception is exactly such a kind of *being affected* that the perceiver is, throughout the entire time, *like* the perceptual object – in a way that makes perception a *relatum* of it.

If this proposed reconstruction of Aristotle's first general account of perception is on the right track, it ought to be stressed that *An.* 2.5 itself leaves many questions open, despite the fact that it has often been taken to be the ultimate source for their answers.[62]

First, it does not contain any definitive statement on whether perception involves a literal assimilation of the sensory organs, and 'ordinary' changes in general, or not. The straightforward literalist reading of *An.* 2.5, which would identify preservative πάσχειν and ἀλλοίωσις at 417b2–9 with physiological processes involved in perception, seems misguided, as Aristotle's aim here is to capture the very essence of perception, making the stakes much higher. However, it also seems mistaken to take this fact as implying that, according to Aristotle, perception involves no 'ordinary' changes whatsoever. There is nothing in *An.* 2.5 to exclude literal assimilation from being somehow involved in perception – and, indeed, it is hard to resist the impression that at least perceiving temperatures does, according to Aristotle, *somehow* involve an instance of literal cooling or heating of the perceiver's body. Yet, *An.* 2.5 also seems to imply important constraints on how exactly this might be the case.

It is, first of all, hardly possible for such a literal, and hence 'destructive', heating or cooling to constitute the essence of perception. Moreover, such

[61] Cf. Section 1.1. [62] See Section 1.1.

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a literal cooling or heating can be, at most, local: if I were *in toto* assimilated to the object cooling or heating my body, then I would obviously lose my ability to be affected by, and so perceive, it.[63] Moreover, even on a local level, additional work must be done to explain just how a literal assimilation is compatible with the requisite unlikeness that allows the perceiver to continue being affected by the perceptual object in question and, thereby, to perceive it. This, to be sure, raises a difficulty not only for literalism, but also, as we shall see, for the idea that, for the duration of perceiving, the sense organ is like the perceptual object in the sense of embodying the same ratio in a different pair of contraries.[64] What needs to be explained is how the perceiver can be assimilated to the perceptual object while retaining the unlikeness requisite for being further affected by the same or any other object of the given range. This question is yet to be explored. For now, it is sufficient to stress that spiritualism does not provide a viable alternative: if the only thing that counts in perception is a spiritual change, then it is equally unclear how something that has already been 'spiritually' assimilated to the perceptual object can continue being 'spiritually' affected by it.

A related point concerns the 'Democritean' generic likeness. If the proposed reconstruction points in the right direction, then *An.* 2.5 says nothing about this sort of likeness. That does not mean, however, that generic likeness plays no role in Aristotle's account of perception. Rather, in *An.* 2.7–11, Aristotle clearly takes it on board. Each perceptive organ needs to be a specific instantiation of the genus under which the perceptual objects accessible through it fall: it needs to be exactly in the middle between the two extremes. This notion of the mean (μεσότης, introduced in *An.* 2.11), which has directly to do with the 'Democritean' generic likeness, will be crucial for how the notion of preservative πάσχειν should be fleshed out.[65]

All of this, finally, relates to the question of how exactly *the perceptive soul*, as the primary cause of perception, is involved in this activity – a question that has received much less attention than the one concerning the role the body plays in perception, despite the fact that it is no less tricky and no less central for understanding Aristotle's account. *An.* 2.5 does not contain any clear statement on this point (any more than

[63] Cf. Freeland 1992: 232.
[64] See Caston 2005: 303–7. For further discussion of this reading, and of the literalism-spiritualism debate in general, see Chapter 4.
[65] For more on this question, see Chapter 6.

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*An.* 2.4, 416a21–b11 contains any clear statement about the role of the nutritive soul).[66] But we shall see that this question becomes crucial for the task of fleshing out the notion of complete passive activities in *An.* 2.6–3.2.[67] It contains a dilemma that comes to the fore as soon as the result of *An.* 2.5 is confronted with Aristotle's argument in *An.* 1.3–4 against the idea that the soul could itself be undergoing a change. This dilemma will be worked out in Chapters 4 and 5 and addressed in Chapters 6 and 7.

If the proposed reconstruction is on the right track, then *An.* 2.5 does not provide answers to any of these pressing questions. Aristotle's first general account of perception is too preliminary to do that. It is pre-causal in the sense of leaving it open exactly how the respective roles of the soul and the body in perception are to be laid out. It captures, in most general terms, the nature of perception, but without saying anything about its causes. The chapter's relation to the further discussion in *An.* 2.6–3.2 is rather like the relation of *An.* 2.1 to *An.* 2.2–3.11: in a sense, the most general account describes only what the inquiry proper should accomplish.[68] However, it would be a misunderstanding if this led us to disparage the achievement of *An.* 2.5 (or, for that matter, *An.* 2.1). The range of open questions may appear daunting, but we have been left with a well-argued, novel, and attractive notion of what exactly we should be looking for in any satisfactory answers to these questions. And this is no small accomplishment.

[66] Cf. Sections 1.1 and 2.4, and – more fully – Section 5.4.
[67] Just as it becomes crucial at *An.* 2.4, 416b20–3.
[68] For *An.* 2.1, see Corcilius 2025 (the chapter formulates 'a job description of the soul within a hylomorphic science of living things', p. 40); cf. Johansen 2012b, 9–46 (the chapter provides 'a check that the essential definition of the soul is of the right general kind', p. 40).

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