

The Meaning of "Energeia" and "Entelecheia" in Aristotle

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ONE WHO reads Aristotle in translation is not aware of certain peculiarities in his use of Greek. Perhaps one of the most glaring of these is the fact that he uses two words for *act* in the theory of act and potency: *ἐνέργεια* and *ἐντελέχεια*.

The problem, on the face of it rather simple, turns out to be extremely complex. Its solution has many times been attempted;¹ but a close examination of all the instances of use of the words reveals certain things that have not, it would seem, hitherto been noticed.

The task is to find out exactly what the words mean. But a roadblock appears at the very beginning: neither word is found in Greek before Aristotle.² This means that a dictionary is no help in finding a "basic" meaning from which to elaborate, and so one must rely wholly on the texts of Aristotle themselves. It also would seem probable that the two words were of Aristotle's coinage—a hypothesis which would find support if one could discover why he should want to do this.

¹ To mention two recent and extensive attempts, Josef Stallmach, *Dynamis and Energeia: Untersuchungen am Werk des Aristoteles zur Problemgeschichte von Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit* (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1959) and Chung-Hwan Chen, *Ὀυσία and Ἐνέργεια: Two Fundamental Concepts in the Philosophy of Aristotle* (Taipei: China Series Publishing Committee, 1958), summed up in part in "Different Meanings of the term *Energeia* in the Philosophy of Aristotle," *Phil. and Phenomenological Research*, 17 (1956-57), 56.

² At least the standard dictionaries mention no instance, and a search through concordances reveals that neither word is found in Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Demosthenes or Plato.

But coinage is in itself a peculiarity; Aristotle generally employs words in common use, altering their meanings to suit his technical needs.³ It is strange that for his central theory he should have used neologisms, and very strange that he should have used two of them.

1. DISTRIBUTION OF THE WORDS

The first step in the investigation would be to have absolutely every instance where the terms occur at hand. A table showing how the words are distributed follows.

A number of oddities emerge simply from an examination of the table. First, *ἐνέργεια* is used five times as often as *ἐντελέχεια*, and is fairly evenly distributed throughout the works, while the latter is clustered in a very few locations: in Books III and VIII of the *Physics* (but not V-VII), Book II and the first part of Book III of the *De Anima* (but not in the *Parva Naturalia*'s treatment of the same subjects), and Book Z and K of the *Metaphysics* (and K is a repetition of *Phys.* III). In Book Θ *ἐντελέχεια* appears twice in the first paragraph and only four more times in the whole book; and yet this book is the exposition of the theory of act and potency, and *ἐνέργεια* occurs sixty times. Further, *ἐντελέχεια* is used exclusively in Book Z and almost not at all in Book H, which deals with exactly the same subject. Yet in the places in the *Physics* and the *De Anima* where *ἐντελέχεια* occurs, *ἐνέργεια* appears generally in conjunction with it, in the same paragraph or even the same sentence.

Hence, the distribution seems to indicate that there is a clear distinction between the words; but this seems to be contradicted by the fact that for every use of *ἐντελέχεια* there is a use of *ἐνέργεια* somewhere in Aristotle in exactly the same sense.⁴

2. ENERGEIA

Thus there is a nest of problems even before one begins trying to discover the meaning of the terms. But fortunately, the distri-

³ For instance, *φύσις*, *εἶδος*, *μορφή*, *ὄλη*, *ψυχή*, *οὐσία*, and even *δύναμις* were all common words in current use.

⁴ It would take too long to verify this here. However, this has been done in my doctoral dissertation, *Ἐνέργεια and Ἐντελέχεια in Aristotle* (Fordham University, 1964), pp. 100 ff.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF THE TERMS

<i>Treatise</i>	<i>ἐνέργεια</i>	<i>ἐντελέχεια</i>
Dialogues	8	0
Organon	18	0
Physics		
I	1	1
II	5	1
III	32	15
IV	9	2
V	3	0
VI	0	0
VII	4	0
VIII	12	7
Total	→ 66	→ 26
De Caelo	12	4
De Generatione et Corruptione	4	18
Meteorologica	0	1
De Anima		
I	0	1
II	27	22
III	31	6
Total	→ 58	→ 29
Parva Naturalia	24	0
Biological works	44	2
Metaphysics		
A, α	0	0
B	1	1
Γ	0	0
Δ	12	6
E	1	1
Z	0	8
H	18	2
Θ	60	6
I	0	0
K	23	10
Λ	32	2
M	2	2
N	5	0
Total	→ 154	→ 36
Nicomachean Ethics	113	0
Eudemian Ethics	21	0
Politics, Rhetoric, Poetics	5	0
Grand total	537	116

bution also provides a starting-point for investigation. It is only *ἐνέργεια* which appears in the dialogues, particularly in the *Protrepticus*, which is known to be early, written even before Aristotle left the Academy.⁵ And so Aristotle must have coined this word first.

From the makeup of the word, it would appear that it is a compound of *ἐν-* meaning "in" and *ἐργεια*, the noun from *ἐργεῖν*. Now *ἐργεῖν* is a rather rare active form of the common verb *ἐργάζεσθαι*, a middle deponent with the active meaning of "to do" or "to act." Judging from very rare analogous compounds, such as *συνεργεῖν* or *περιεργεῖν*, the active is used to strengthen the notion of intensity of activity: the first means "to cooperate," the latter "to be a busybody."⁶

Since the middle form would have occurred naturally to Aristotle, it may be assumed that in choosing the active form he intended to stress the notion of activity. And so etymologically the word would seem to mean "inward activity."

That he actually intended this at the beginning is shown from the following passage in the *Protrepticus*. It should be noted that the passage has Platonic overtones; in the fragment following the one to be cited, he speaks of "escaping back" to a previous life of pure thought, because this one is "unnatural." In this passage he is trying to prove that thinking about the best object is really living.

The fact, then, that pleasant living is most properly a characteristic of those who have chosen a life of reason will be clear from the following. It appears that "living" is used in two senses: one in reference to a power, the other in reference to *inner activity*. We call any animal that has sight and naturally can see a "seeing" animal, even if it happens to have its eyes shut; and we also use the term of what is using the power and looking. In the same way we say that "understanding" and "knowing" mean in one case the use and the thinking, and in the other having the ability and knowledge.

If, then, we distinguish living from not living by perceiving, and if "perceiving" has two senses—primarily that of using sensation and secondarily that of being able to (because of which, it seems, we call even the sleeping animal "sensitive"), then it is clear that "living" follows the double sense. The animal that is awake must be called "living"

⁵ Cf., e.g., Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development*, trans. Richard Robinson (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 54-60.

⁶ See Liddell and Scott's lexicon under the words *συνεργάζομαι* and *περιεργάζομαι*.

truly and chiefly, and the sleeping one must be called such because of its ability to change into the motion in reference to which we call it awake—and perceiving some given thing because of this.

And with this in mind, whenever the same thing is said of two beings, and one of the expressions refers to acting or being acted on, we will give the more proper meaning to this aspect. . . .

And "living" thus is said more of what is awake than of what is asleep, and more of what is *active* with its soul than of what only has one; we say that the latter is "alive" for the former reason, because it is such as to act or be acted on in the former way. . . .

"To use," then, applies more to one who uses properly, since the purpose and natural way belong to the one who uses well and accurately. And so the work of the soul either absolutely or in the most proper sense of all, is to think and reason. . . .

Now if living is (for an animal at least) exactly the same as being, it is clear that the wise man will *be* most and in the chiefest sense of all—and most properly at the time when he is *being active* and happens to be thinking about what is the most knowable of beings. But the ultimate unhindered *activity* has joy within it; and so the *activity* of thinking must be the most pleasant of all.⁷

Actually, what this amounts to is a definition of *ἐνέργεια*; which is not surprising if it were a freshly coined word.

Note first that the term has no reference to change; the question in his mind is not "How does A become B?" but "When is a non-A an A? When it has the power to do what A does." The reference is only to living beings, which is consistent with a young Aristotle discovering an argument from biology to confirm a Platonic thesis.

Now the synonyms confirm the etymological sense. In the first paragraph, it is "to live" that is related to the noun, not "life." And the example strengthens this; the new word refers rather to the looking and the use of the power—it means doing something as opposed to being a "seeing-thing." Note that Aristotle does not say that in one case one has knowledge and in the other "true" or "real" knowledge or sight, though he could have done this. He uses the verb.

⁷ W. D. Ross, *Aristotelis Fragmenta Selecta* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), Fragment 14. The translation of all Greek passages is mine. I have emphasized the translations of *ἐνέργεια* and *ἐντελέχεια* whenever they occur. I have also translated *οὐσία* as "reality," and *δύναμις* as "power" since for various reasons these translations seem to me to get across Aristotle's idea better than the usual ones. The Greek of all other passages is that of the Berlin edition.

In the second paragraph he uses "motion" (*κίνησις*) as the synonym for *ἐνέργεια*, and *not* for the change that precedes this motion (i.e. the transition from potency to activity). Later on Aristotle will use "motion" to refer to the transition, but then he expressly says that *ἐνέργεια* is not motion.⁸ But at present, the use of this word confirms the verbal force.

In the third paragraph the synonym is "acting or being acted on" (*ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν*); and when one thinks about it, to be acted on is also a kind of activity (a reaction)—so he could not simply have used *ποιεῖν* to express his meaning.

In a part of the passage omitted because it would inordinately have lengthened a long quotation, he says, "Use occurs . . . when one does (*πράττει*) [what the power directs one to do.]" This actually is used later when Aristotle speaks of motion as not an *ἐνέργεια*. But here he probably did not like *πράξις*, because the verb also connotes "to make" and in seeing or thinking nothing is made. This is probably also the reason for *ἐν-έργεια*, since the "doing" Aristotle is interested in is apparently that *actio immanens* that distinguishes living from nonliving beings.

The final synonym is in the fifth paragraph: the "work" of the soul (*ἔργον*). But this word also means "deed" in the sense of "thing done"; and so it would not exactly suit Aristotle's purpose.

Hence, it would indeed seem that *ἐνέργεια* in its origin means "inner activity."

But this does not show that Aristotle intended this throughout his career. However, we are again fortunate in the texts that have come down to us; there is only one place where Aristotle explicitly tries to define *ἐνέργεια*—in Book Θ of the *Metaphysics*—and it can be shown that the definition is late.

First, let us put the definition in context. Aristotle in the beginning of the book defines potency. Then in 1074a he says:

Now the noun "activity," which has been combined with *ἐντελέχεια*, has been extended from its chief sense of motion to other uses; *activity* in the chief sense is movement.

This is why "moving" is not applied to what does not exist, even though other predicates are. For example, one can say that what does not exist is thought of and desired, but not that it is moving. This is because if it moved what was not in *activity* would be in *activity*.

⁸ Cf. *Metaphysics*, Θ, 6, 1048b 28-35.

Aristotle says here that *ἐνέργεια*'s primary sense (not simply its original one—the Greek is clear) refers to movement. Prescinding from the problem of movement's not being exactly an *ἐνέργεια* one can see that he still wants to stress the "doing" idea in the word.

It has, he says "gone" (*ἐλήλυθε*) to other applications: (*ἐπὶ τὰ ἄλλα*). But this does not mean that its meaning has changed; it does not imply this at all. If the meaning had somehow doubled, one would expect Aristotle to have mentioned this here.

In any case, he does not seem to have lost sight of the original sense. And the definition will show this.

Now that a treatment has been given of the power connected with process, let us define what "*activity*" is, and how it is classified. . . .

Now then, "*activity*" is the way a thing is when it is not what we call "in power." For example, we say that Hermes' figure is in the wood in power; and the half is in power in the whole because it can be got out of it; and we call a "knower" even one who is not thinking if he is capable of thinking. The correlative is *activity*.

What we mean is clear in each case by the example. One must not try to find a definition of everything, but must grasp the analogy.

It is the same as the constructing person to the one that can build, what is awake to what is asleep, what is seeing to what has its eyes shut but has sight, what is made distinct out of the matter to the matter, and what is finished off to the unworked. Let "*activity*" be defined by one half of the dichotomy, and what is "in power" by the other.

Not everything, however, is said to be in *activity* in the same way; it is only what has the relation of *this* in *this* or to *this* and *that* in *that* or to *that*: some things are active as motion is to power, others as reality to some matter.⁹

The definition is peculiar in that, contrary to Aristotle's usual practice, it is not a definition¹⁰—in fact, he says that the word can only be defined by examples.

But it turns out that the examples are particularly instructive; they are a sort of summary of all the different applications of *ἐνέργεια* except those referring to biological processes, the first mover, and to ethics. The Hermes as an example is found in the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, the parts and whole appear in the *Physics*, *De Anima*, *De Sensu et Sensibili* and the *Metaphysics*. The knower and thinking are in the *Protrepticus*, the *Physics* and the *De Anima*. Building and the buildable is the chief example of motion in the *Physics*

⁹ *Metaphysics*, Θ, 6, 1048a 25-b 17.

¹⁰ As is abundantly clear from Book Δ.

and appears in the summary of this in the *Metaphysics*. Being awake or asleep comes from the *Protrepticus* and the *De Anima*. The *Protrepticus* also contains the seeing-sighted example, and, significantly, is the only place outside the definition where it occurs. The correlative of matter to matter is in the *Metaphysics*; and the finished to the unworked is from the *Physics* and the *Parts of Animals*.¹¹

It cannot be sheer coincidence that these particular examples were used, especially in view of Aristotle's statement that only examples reveal the meaning of the word. And it would be much too far-fetched to say that Aristotle first defined *ἐνέργεια* in this way *before* he had written the treatises referred to and then wrote the treatises using these examples.

Therefore the definition must have occurred after Aristotle had the whole of his doctrine of act and potency thought out. It is therefore late.

If this is true, then we know that the word still primarily means "activity," because the quotation just preceding the definition said that its primary sense was movement. And if one observes the number of times the *Protrepticus* is referred to above, including one example that appears nowhere else, it would seem that Aristotle has not repudiated his original meaning, which clearly¹² was "doing."

But the examples are arranged very instructively also. The passage is split in the middle by the statement that one must not look for a definition. Before that the potential comes first, then its correlative; after it, the correlative comes first and then the potential. Further, in the first section the examples run matter-form, power-act; and in the second act-power, form-matter. There is an exact chiasmus between the two sections—too neat and complex to be accidental.

But the effect of so complicated a construction is to mix up the examples so as to destroy the primacy of force. It may be assumed that Aristotle, a teacher of rhetoric, knew this. Hence, he seems by his arrangement to be trying to give the impression that there is but one meaning to the word.

But this seems contradicted by the "analogy" in the last paragraph. In the *Poetics* he explains that "this in this or to this, etc." is a verbal proportion;¹³ if evening is to day as old age is to life, then old age is the evening of life (or evening is the old age of the day).¹² Hence,

¹¹ For the actual locations of these passages, see my dissertation, pp. 44 ff.

¹² *Poetics*, 21, 1457b 16-19.

either operation is a form of the subject, or form is an activity of matter. It would seem that he is trying to say that form is what matter, in a sense, does, since motion is the primary sense of *ἐνέργεια*. But this is more than mere metaphor, since the meaning of the word must come from grasping the analogy.

But this means that matter is "power" not in the passive sense of ability to receive a form, but rather in the sense of the ability to "do" form. And, in fact, *δύναμις* as receptivity does not appear in the definition at the beginning of Book *Θ*.¹³ And that form is a "doing" is perfectly consistent with what was seen in the *Protrepticus* where "to live" and "to be" are equated—provided that there is no distinction between essence and existence in Aristotle.¹⁴

Psychologically speaking, if Aristotle were interested in getting across the notion of form as a "doing" of matter to students acquainted with the Platonic static sense of form, he would have had to employ something like the definition as it appears. Obviously the "doing" which is form is not activity in *exactly* the same sense as seeing or thinking, and so he would have to point this out. But he would have spoken carefully so that the Platonizing mind would not be led into thinking that what he was really saying was that motion is really a kind of form (and hence, static). If this is true, it would seem that the Platonizing mind was historically too much for Aristotle to overcome.

Now it turns out that all of the uses of *ἐνέργεια* in Aristotle are consistent with the meaning "activity" and only some with the meaning "actuality."¹⁵ And, in fact, if one reads Aristotle substituting "activity" for the usual translation of *ἐνέργεια*—provided one takes account of the insight that the form of a thing is really a special kind of activity of its matter—then one finds that the mystery in many of his mysterious passages disappears.¹⁶

¹³ That is, unless the power to be acted on is called the potency to receive a form; but actually what Aristotle had in mind is more complicated.

¹⁴ Actually, once one realizes that *οὐσία* is reality and means what the Scholastics call the individual essence rather than the substance, one discovers that *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* is existence; and Chapter 6 of Book *Z* of the *Metaphysics* is a discussion of the real distinction between the two. Read in this light, it sounds like Suarez' comments on St. Thomas.

¹⁵ All of them have been examined in my dissertation, pp. 50, ff.

¹⁶ It is particularly instructive to read Book *H* of the *Metaphysics* with this in mind.

3. ENTELECHEIA

Many interesting, but for purposes of this discussion irrelevant, things could be said at this point; so it would be better to pass on to *ἐντελέχεια*.

Liddell and Scott give the etymology of the word as from *ἐν τέλει ἔχειν*, analogous to *νουνέχεια* from *νοῦν ἔχειν* (to have a mind); hence it would mean "to be at an end" or be complete.

However, the *ἐν*- more probably parallels that of *ἐνέργεια*, and the analogy indicates that *τέλος* would be better off in the accusative case. Hence, the more probable etymology is "having an end within." Admittedly, the difference between possessing one's end inside oneself and being *at* one's end is slight, but as it happens it is significant.

Aristotle nowhere explicitly defines *ἐντελέχεια* (something in itself peculiar if it is another word for act); but luckily in Book *Δ* of the *Metaphysics* there is a covert definition somewhat like that in the *Protrepticus* for *ἐνέργεια*:

Again, "to be" and "being" signify that some of what were mentioned¹⁷ are spoken of in power, others as *having their ends in themselves*. We say a thing is "seeing" both when it is seeing in power and when it is doing so *with its end in itself*; and in the same way "knowing" applies to the one who can use knowledge and to the user; and "resting" refers to what is now at rest and to what can rest. The same is true of realities; we say that the Hermes "is" in the stone, and that there "is" a half of a line, and that what is not yet ripe "is" grain. But when a thing is in power and when it is *not* will be explained elsewhere.¹⁸

One is immediately struck by the fact that the examples here, with the exception of rest and the grain (which are found only in this passage) are exactly the same as those used to define *ἐνέργεια*; and yet the latter word can be defined only by means of the examples.

Therefore, *ἐντελέχεια* and *ἐνέργεια* must mean exactly the same thing; and so Aristotle coined two words and then defined them in such a way as to show that he should have coined only one. Nor do the words have different applications; as was pointed out earlier, every single instance of *ἐντελέχεια* has a use of *ἐνέργεια* that exactly parallels it.

¹⁷ I.e., some of the things that are said "to be."

¹⁸ *Metaphysics*, *Δ*, 7, 1017a 35-b 9.

One runs into the further peculiarity that the definition of *ἐντελέχεια* is found in Book *Δ* and not in Book *Θ*, where it belongs; while that of *ἐνέργεια* appears in Book *Θ* and not in Book *Δ*. Yet the latter is the "philosophical dictionary," and one would expect so important a word as *ἐνέργεια* to be in it. And in Book *Θ*, Aristotle has not simply forgotten about *ἐντελέχεια*; when he introduces the definition of activity he explicitly mentions the word—as "combined" with activity, thus implying some difference between the two.

It would seem that the only possible way out of the two-definition dilemma would be that Aristotle never intended them to stand side by side; they must have been written at different times, and one superseded the other. That would at least neatly account for their being "combined."

However, the mention that the two are "combined" would lead one to assert that the definition of *ἐνέργεια* is later, since there Aristotle is aware of the relation of the two words, and yet chooses to define *ἐνέργεια*.

Confirmation that the passage in Book *Θ* must be the later one comes from two sources: first, the definition of *δύναμις* in Book *Δ* is not so neatly arranged, so confident in tone, nor so free of irrelevancies as the corresponding one in Book *Θ*.¹⁹ It is incredible that Aristotle should have revised in the direction of sloppiness, and so Book *Θ* must contain the revised version. Secondly, there is the introduction to Book *Θ* itself:

Now since "being" is used in the sense of "what," quality, or quantity, and also with reference to power and the *possession of the end* and to action, let us also find the meaning of power and the *possession of the end*, and we will discuss first the most common and proper use of "power," though it is not, as it happens, the most useful for what we want now, since power and *activity* have more uses than mere references to processes.²⁰

In the first paragraph of Book *Θ*, Aristotle says, "Let us now discuss power and *ἐντελέχεια*"—and then proceeds to say nothing about it. He uses the word a total of four more times in the book (three of which indicate its "combination" with *ἐνέργεια*) as opposed to sixty for the latter. In fact, in the very same sentence of this introduction the change to *ἐνέργεια* has begun.

There is a hypothesis which can make sense out of all of this. It will be remembered that *ἐνέργεια* was a very early word, which

¹⁹ Cf. *Δ*, 12, 1019a 15-1020a 6 and *Θ*, 1, 1046a 4-36.

²⁰ *Metaphysics*, *Θ*, 1, 1045b 29-1046a 2.

originally meant simply operation and not form. Suppose that Aristotle wanted to speak of form as the correlative of *δύναμις* in the sense of "possibility"—i.e. as the reality which corresponds to a possibility (which matter would be). *Ἐνέργεια*'s original meaning without the analogy would not fit, since it is not immediately apparent (to say the least) that what makes a stone a stone is some activity. Hence, he would want another word as the correlative of "possibility"—a static word, indicating an embodied Platonic Form. Let us assume that this word was *ἐντελέχεια*, and that he wrote a book on act and potency using this word. Then let us assume that later, as the theory developed in its applications, he found that he was using *ἐντελέχεια* where he has originally used *ἐνέργεια*—in reference to operations. It might then have occurred to him that, since some forms are evidently activities, perhaps all forms really are activities; and so he really did not need to have coined the word *ἐντελέχεια* at all. He would then have rewritten the treatise on act and potency, this time using *ἐνέργεια* and inserting the analogy.

This rather complicated theory can explain the anomalous introduction to Book *Θ* in the following way. If it is true that Aristotle completely rewrote an earlier treatise on act and potency, he might well have looked for some way to make sure that it was the revised version that was preserved for posterity and not the earlier one. One way to do this would be simply to tack the old introduction onto the new book in such a way that it would be clear that the new one was a revision. It will be noted that the sentence quoted has a rather abrupt transition in the middle—bringing the two words into the same sentence. Further, this sentence follows one that more or less already says what the first clause says. It does, then, give the impression of merely being attached. It is not possible that an editor did this, since without the parts dealing with *ἐντελέχεια* there would be no indication of what the book in general is about. But Aristotle would not have introduced the book with a word that he was not going to use unless he had a special reason.

Add to this the indications already noted that there was both an earlier definition of "act" in terms of *ἐντελέχεια* and also one of potency, and it would seem to be a reasonable conclusion that the investigation has uncovered traces of an earlier, lost version of Book *Θ* with *ἐντελέχεια* as the word for "act."

Further, it would be quite sensible for an Aristotle who, at the time of writing *On Philosophy* and *On Ideas* broke with the Platonic theory of "separate" Forms²¹ to have needed something to take

the place of what he felt was true in the Form theory. And since his distinctive insight already concerned *δύναμις*, with its double sense of "power" and "possibility," it is consistent with what we know that he should have coined a word whose etymology meant "possession of its end within." In that way the form would be intimately related to the matter. Further, *δύναμις* would then mean "having its end outside itself," which, after all, is what possibility does mean.

It remains to be seen whether there is textual confirmation of this meaning. The remaining passages in Book *Θ* where *ἐντελέχεια* is used (except for one rather irrelevant occurrence) are as follows:

For the work is the end, and the *activity* is the work. This is why the noun "*activity*" is used in reference to work, and has the same force as "*the internal possession of the end.*"²¹

Now the noun "*activity*," which has been combined with the *possession of the end*, has been extended from its chief sense of motion to other uses; *activity* in the chief sense is movement.

This is why "moving" is not applied to what does not exist, even though other predicates are. For example, one can say that what does not exist is thought of and desired, but not that it is moving. This is because if it moved what was not in *activity* would be in *activity*.

And some things that do not exist exist in power; they do not exist because they *do not have their ends within them*.²²

It can be seen how neatly the etymological meaning fits the passages; if activity is an end, then what is active has the end within it; and things in power do not have their ends within them. Note in the latter passage how "they do not exist because they are not actual" would destroy the sentence's significance; what it would then mean is that they don't exist because they don't exist.

It is reasonable that the etymological significance should be the true one in view of the fact that the actual meaning of *ἐνέργεια* turned out so close to the etymology of the term. This meaning for *ἐντελέχεια* also clears up the relation of the two words, and explains why Aristotle stopped using *ἐντελέχεια* without absolutely repudiating it—if he made the discovery that when a thing had its end in itself, and only then, was it active, and that every possession of the end is in fact an activity of some sort.

²¹ Jaeger, *Aristotle*, pp. 124 ff.

²² 8, 1050a 21-23.

²³ 3, 1047a 30-b 2.

In other words, the so-called "first act" is *ἐντελέχεια*, and the "second act" *ἐνέργεια*.

Then in 414a the "first act" is called an activity, though the soul is still called the possession of an end. The distinction begins to blur. In 417a the words are thoroughly confused. Both acts are first called activities, and then the second act is called both the possession of the end and an activity. There are several passages like this, where no distinction at all can be found in the use of the words.

Finally, in Book III, both acts are called *ἐνέργειαι*:

When it [the mind] has in this way [by learning] become each thing, it is spoken of as knowing *in activity* (this happens when it *can be active* by itself). But even then it is somehow like a potential thing, though not like what it was before learning or discovering. . . .²⁶

From then on *ἐντελέχεια* occurs but once more (in 431a), and in an insignificant use, throughout the rest of the *De Anima* and the *Parva Naturalia*, some sections of which cover the same ground as the second book of the *De Anima*. It could probably be argued that the *De Sensu et Sensibili*, for instance, is another instance of updating, analogous to Book H of the *Metaphysics*.

So it would indeed seem that there was a progression in Aristotle's thought from the exclusive use of *ἐντελέχεια* in the sense of form to the mixing of the two words, to the final exclusive use (except for backward references) of *ἐνέργεια*.

4. CONCLUSION

What has resulted, then, from an innocent-seeming investigation into words that are very common throughout Aristotle's works are (1) that the traditional meaning "actuality" is wrong no matter which word it applies to: *ἐνέργεια* means "activity" and *ἐντελέχεια* "the internal possession of the end." (2) *Ἐνέργεια* was first coined by Aristotle as a biologically-oriented Platonist; then when he broke with the theory of Forms, he invented *ἐντελέχεια* to be the (static, eternal, unchanging) correlative of matter as *δύναμις*. (3) In investigating motion and the soul he discovered that the reality of the possession of an end is that it is an activity, and so in his later writings he

²⁶ 4, 429b 5-10.

used only *ἐνέργεια*. (4) There is apparently a lost version of Book *Θ*, parts of which appear in *Δ*. (5) Finally, the theory forms a relatively sound basis for dating those works of Aristotle that mention the theory of act and potency—and that is practically all of them—at least into general periods.

It would be interesting to pursue this last point, but there is not space here for the complex discussion that it would involve.

Let it suffice for the present that the meaning of the two terms has been cleared up. It may be that someone will disagree with my interpretation of them—since, after all, I have only offered what I consider to be a reasonably verified hypothesis.

But whether or not my interpretation is right, and I am sensible that it disagrees with long, long years of tradition, it would at least seem that it is now not possible simply to disagree on what the meaning of the words is. One who offers a different interpretation must make his theory of the words' meanings consistent with the rather formidable array of textual peculiarities that have been uncovered.