

Aristotle's Theory of *Nous*. A New Interpretation of Chapters 4 and 5 of the Third Book of *De Anima*

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In his book *De anima*, Aristotle speaks of the soul and its faculties, which are also called 'parts of the soul', or even simply 'souls' — 'the nutrient soul', 'the perceptive soul', and 'the thinking soul'. One must always bear in mind, however, that this soul is really a unity consisting of many strata, composed of a number of faculties, each with its corresponding function.¹ Each higher faculty requires, by its very nature, the existence of all the lower faculties as a necessary condition, and employs them in fulfilling its own functions.² This idea of unity is of even greater importance when one comes to deal with the individual functions of one and the same faculty.

The transition to the faculties of thinking, which are unique to man, is effected by the power of imagination, which is related both to perception³ and to thought.⁴ The thinking soul is never capable of thinking without the use of images.⁵

The purpose of the present paper is to make a contribution towards solving the problem of the number of layers, or strata, of the *nous* — that is, whether they are two or three. I shall attempt to demonstrate that Aristotle speaks only of two strata of *nous*:

- a. potential *nous* — in other words, *nous pathetikos* — which perceives all things conceptually and thus becomes all things.⁶ In other words, it

1 See Arist. *De An.* B3, 414a29–b19.

2 See Arist. *De An.* A5, 410b10–15; B2, 413a31–b9; B3, 415a 1–13.

Cf. Alex.Aphr. *De An.* 28,21–25; 30,1–6; *De An. Mant.* 99,12–14.

3 See Arist. *De An.* Γ3, 428a 6–11; 428b 9–16.

4 See Arist. *De An.* Γ3, 428a 1; 7,431a 15; 17; b2; 4; 7f.

5 Arist. *De An.* Γ7, 431a 16–17.

6 See Arist. *De An.* Γ5,430a 14–15.

coincides with its contents in actuality, thus passing from a state of pure potentiality to one of already actualized potentiality, in which it is already capable of initiating thought from within itself.⁷ Although even in this state of being it is still not in a position to exercise its fulfilled potentiality continually and without interruption, one must still distinguish even at this stage between two δυνάμει situations.

b. Aristotle also speaks of a *nous* which makes, or realizes, everything, as a kind of faculty similar to the brightness of light.⁸ Here we are concerned with the so-called *nous poietikos*, which moves the potential *nous* towards actuality.

How is one to understand this motion, and how to refute the view of the difference between νοῦς παθητικός and νοῦς δυνάμει, as well as the identification between νοῦς δυνάμει and νοῦς ποιητικός — these will be the main tasks of this paper.

Let us begin with potential *nous*. Aristotle says that it possesses no other nature apart from being a potentiality,⁹ and a pure potentiality at that. It is pure potentiality only in that, in its own essence, it does not merge with any of its concepts or objects.¹⁰ This does not imply that, in itself, it is ἀνείδεός,¹¹ but rather that it has no concept within itself before it becomes an acquired (ἐπίκτητος), thinking *nous*; that is, it is not identical, or mixed with any of its concepts, since it has only the potential to conceive them.¹² For, had this (potential) *nous* been identical or mixed, in actuality, with some of its objects, it would follow that it would not have been able to conceive *all* things. In relation to *some* things, it would have been not a pure potentiality, or power of perception, but rather a particular primary substance — τόδε τι — identical with the form of one of its concepts, and this would have prevented it from conceiving and recognizing some other conceptual forms.¹³ 'It is, therefore, necessary, that the (*nous*), since it thinks all things, should be unmixed (that is, with its objects of thought) ... so that it can conceive of its objects. For any foreign element which happens to come to its notice would hinder it and stand in its way. Therefore, it has no other nature except that of

7 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429b 9.

8 See Arist. *De An.* Γ5, 430a 15–16.

9 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 21–22.

10 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 23–29.

11 Phlp. *In De An.* 519,30.

12 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 18–21; 27–29; 429b 30–430a2.

13 Alex.Aphr. *De An. Mant.* 106,28–107,19.

beings potentiality'.¹⁴ Here, *nous* functions in a manner similar to sense-perception.¹⁵ For how could it conceive of some conceptual qualities, if it were identical with others?¹⁶ Once more, this in no way implies that this *nous*, the understanding part of the soul, 'is not really a being before it conceives.'¹⁷ It only means that this *nous*, before it thinks, is not in actuality any of those things which it does have the power of conceiving.¹⁸ That the *nous*, before it thinks, is related to its objects of thought as pure potentiality, does not in any way imply that it has no actual existence.

Once, however, this *nous* has grasped its objects of thought, it coincides with them in actuality,¹⁹ since its thinking consists of nothing but the fact that the intelligible forms materialize within it.²⁰ This identification, however, only occurs in relation to immaterial objects of thought.²¹ For it is only in the case of immaterial objects of thought that being (substance, *eidos*) and existence are one and the same thing.²² Thus, in so far as potential *nous* can, by means of learning and exercise, conceive of its objects of thought in reality, it has reached its form and perfection — that is, it has overcome and surpassed its pure potentiality, which, in the process of perfecting itself, has been elevated into actuality, which is what we are to understand by 'second potentiality'. 'Thus', says Aristotle, 'it is even then in some manner still somehow in potentiality, but not in the same way as before it has learnt and found out; and then it can also think from within itself.'²³

Potential *nous* is thus to be differentiated into two forms:

- a. pure potentiality, which Alexander of Aphrodisias calls $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ φυσικός or ὑλικός²⁴; and
- b. actualized, or 'second', potentiality, called by Alexander $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ ἐπίκτητος, or ἐν ἔξει, or κατ'ἐνέργειαν $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$.²⁵

14 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 18–22; cf. Themistius, *De an.* 97,21f.

15 See Alex.Aphr. *De An. Mant.* 106,30f.

16 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 25–27.

17 W. Bröcker, *Aristoteles* (Frankfurt a.M. 1964) 154.

18 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 22–24.

19 See Alex.Aphr. *De An.* 84,22–23.

20 See Alex.Aphr. *De An.* 84,23–24.

21 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 430a 3–4.

22 See Alex.Aphr. *De An.* 86,23–25; 87,20–21.

23 Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429b 8–9.

24 See Alex.Aphr. *De An.* 81,26–27; *De An. Mant.* 106,25–28 and what follows.

25 See Alex.Aphr. *De An.* 82,1; 85,11; 86,4–5; *De An. Mant.* 107,29–30; 109,4f.

Aristotle, however, also speaks of *nous pathetikos*, that is, passive *nous* or mind. This ascription to *nous* of the epithet παθητικός can be found only once in Aristotle.²⁶ In one other place, this epithet is paraphrased with the words τῷ πάντα γίνεσθαι (in becoming all things).²⁷

The question now arises, whether *potential nous* is identical with *nous pathetikos*, or whether they are different from each other, as assumed, for example, by John Philoponus, by Themistius, and more recently by Franz Brentano.

Philoponus distinguishes between νοῦς παθητικός and νοῦς δυνάμει, identifying the first with φαντασία.²⁸ He also believes that the first is mortal and the second immortal.

The distinction between νοῦς παθητικός and νοῦς δυνάμει is also assumed by Themistius, who also takes the former to be mortal, but identifies it with the so-called νοῦς κοινός²⁹ — clearly the result of a misinterpretation of *De Anima* A4, 408b 28–29. The latter he takes to be immortal and separable in the same manner as the νοῦς ποιητικός.³⁰

Exactly for the same reasons, Franz Brentano also believed that potential *nous* was χωριστόν, implying not merely that it possesses its own spiritual being, but even more, that its substance is immortal. For Brantano, potential *nous* and active *nous* (νοῦς ποιητικός) belong to the same immortal part of the soul. Nonetheless, they are not identical, as H. Seidl³¹ has wrongly ascribed to Brentano.³²

Aristotle, however, never says, implicitly or explicitly, that potential *nous* is distinguished from passive *nous*. On the contrary, it seems quite clear from the context that they are one and the same thing. One can see this, for example, by comparing the passages 430a 14–15 and 25 of the famous fifth chapter of *De Anima* III with passages like 429a 10–11, 18, 23; 429b 3, 9 and 31, and 430a 5 of chapter 4 of the same book. According to all these passages,

26 See Arist. *De An.* Γ5, 430a 24.

27 Arist. *De An.* Γ5, 430a 14–15.

28 Phlp. *In De An.* 523,29–31; 541,18–542,18.

29 But see also R. D. Hicks, *Aristotle, De Anima* (Amsterdam 1965 [rep. of the first edition, London 1907]) 279.

30 See Them. *In De An.* 105,13–30; 108,12–34.

31 See H. Seidl, *Der Begriff des Intellekts [νοῦς] bei Aristoteles* (Meisenheim a.G. 1971) 124,133.

32 See Fr. Brentano, *Psychologie des Aristoteles* (Darmstadt 1967) (rep.; first ed. 1967) 143f.,167,179f,182f.

thinking, conceiving and 'being similar to all things' are ascribed to both potential and passive *nous*. Had they been distinct from each other, it is inconceivable that Aristotle would have ascribed to them one and the same activity.

The differentiation, made by the commentators we have just discussed, between νοῦς δυνάμει and νοῦς παθητικός had originated, most probably, in their identification of νοῦς δυνάμει with the so-called νοῦς ποιητικός. Such an identification is based on the fact that the predicates χωριστός, ἀπαθής and ἀμιγής, so closely connected with νοῦς ποιητικός, are also ascribed by Aristotle to νοῦς δυνάμει.³³

One must, however, raise the question, in what sense can these predicates be ascribed to potential νοῦς? What can Aristotle mean by describing it as χωριστός (separable)? One thing must be clear: it is not χωριστός in the same sense in which νοῦς ποιητικός is, since it is clearly described as φθαρτός (perishable),³⁴ that is, inseparably attached to the body. For this reason, we cannot accept the view of Philoponus, that the epithets χωριστός, ἀπαθής and ἀμιγής imply the eternity of potential *nous*.³⁵

For the same reason, the view of R. D. Hicks, that the epithet χωριστός implies the separation between potential *nous* and the other parts or faculties of the soul³⁶ — a view which goes back to the ancient Greek commentators³⁷ — does not seem to me to be very fortunate in view of the Aristotelian passages I have just cited, which seem to me to be compelling.

From the clear contextual connection between the three epithets, there can be no doubt that χωριστός here means something similar to ἀμιγής — especially since Aristotle says in one passage that it is not mixed with the body,³⁸ and also, that it does not make use of any bodily organ.³⁹ A little later, he also says that, as distinct from sense-perception, it is separate from the body.⁴⁰

The epithet ἀμιγής means not only that potential *nous* is unmixed with the

33 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 15–b5.

34 See Arist. *De An.* A4, 408b 25–29; B1, 413a 5–7; 2,413b 24–28; Γ5, 430a 24–25.

35 See Philp. *In De An.* 523,29–31; 541,18–542,18.

36 See R. D. Hicks, *op.cit.* (n. 29 above) 475. Hicks believes that he can adduce here the famous passage of Aristotle's *De anima* in support of his thesis. He has forgotten that this passage does not refer to νοῦς δυνάμει, but only to νοῦς ποιητικός.

37 See Simp. *In De an.* 222,10–17; Them. *In De. an.* 94,3–4.

38 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 24–25.

39 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 26–27.

40 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429b 4–5.

body, but also, and beyond this, as Aristotle wishes to emphasize, that it is unmixed with the forms of the objects of thought which it is capable of grasping. Following Anaxagoras, Aristotle takes this to be an ontologically necessary condition for the activity of this *nous* in grasping its objects.⁴¹ If it included within itself, as part of its own nature, certain intelligible forms, then it would be unable to recognize any other intelligible forms apart from them.⁴²

As to the epithet ἀπαθής (incapable of passivity), one should note from the start that it is not only the thinking soul, but also the soul in general, which is incapable of passivity.⁴³ What is passive — or, to be more precise, capable of being passive — is always ‘the ensouled thing’ — that is, the body in its organic wholeness — and never the body merely as body, or the soul as its formal principle: only the soul in its function or functioning.

Aristotle ascribes to potential *nous* the inability to be passive;⁴⁴ but this is not irreconcilable with the capacity of *nous* to conceive its objects of thought, since the structure of *nous* as being δυνάμει remains unchanged by this capacity to conceive, even when, in the process of thinking, it merges in actuality with these objects of thought. For, what we have here is a process of actualization — that is, transition from the non-actual to the actual, which means simply its perfection or self-realization. One can speak here of an ascent into the same and the similar: ‘εἰς αὐτὸ...καὶ εἰς ἐντελέχειαν’⁴⁵, which, exactly for this reason, is not the same as a passivity, since it derives from its own potential nature. The final transition which occurs in this ascent towards the actuality of active reason changes nothing, since potential and active reason — despite all kinds of differentiation which are frequently made by Aristotle — constitute a substantial unity, the unity of the thinking soul. Thus, every interrelation between these two is merely an internal affair.

Not only is the self-realization of potential *nous* not to be identified with real passivity,⁴⁶ but it is also endowed with an incapacity to be passive, which is similar to that of sense-perception, albeit not in its objects⁴⁷, but rather in

41 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 18–20. Cf. Alex.aphr. *De An. Mant.* 106,25–28.

42 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 20–21. Cf. Alex.aphr. *De an. Mant.* 106,28–29.

43 See Arist. *De An.* A4, 408b 22–23.

44 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 13–b5. Cf. Brentano, *op.cit.* (n. 32 above) 176f.

45 See Arist. *De An.* B5, 417b 6–7.

46 Real passivity is, in some way, related also to destruction, φθείρεσθαι.

47 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 29–b5; Alex.Aphr. *De An.* 86,6f., where the difference is seen in the fact that sense-perception, in contrast with thought, makes use of bodily organs. On this point, cf. also Simp. *In De An.* 224,1–6; Them. *In De An.* 97,25–26; Philoponus, *De An.* 522,14.

its structure. *Nous* is related to its objects of thought in the same way as sense-perception is related to its objects of perception.⁴⁸

The fact that the same predicates are ascribed to active *nous* and to potential *nous* does not in any way imply that these two faculties of thought are identical. For, the same predicates express different things in accordance with the difference between their two subjects. Thus, when Aristotle ascribes the epithet χωριστός to active reason (νοῦς ποιητικός), he implies not merely the senses of this epithet which we have discussed in relation to potential reason, but, above and beyond them, the ability of active reason to exist in and for itself — that is, the eternal existence which is given to it alone,⁴⁹ since everything human, and therefore composite, is subject to the law of corruption. Active reason, however, is not subject to this law, since it seems to belong to another category of being.⁵⁰ It is really no perfection, ἐντελέχεια, of the body,⁵¹ but it only functions as such as long as it constitutes a phase of the human soul, or of man as a whole. But the χωριστόν of active reason is to be understood, not only in ontological terms, but also in epistemological terms, in so far as it separates itself from us — that is, form 'our' soul, as being not an object of thought *in actu*.⁵²

That potential reason is not identical with active reason is beyond doubt, since Aristotle himself distinguishes very clearly between potential and active reason. Add to this that potential reason *is* identical with passive reason, as we have already shown. For Aristotle, that is, there must be an active and a passive element, as two distinguishable things in the thinking soul — just as in the whole range of nature there is, on the one hand, matter for each kind of being (which is the potentiality of everything which belongs to that kind), and, on the other hand, the causal and active element, which generates all things, and relates to matter as art to its materials.⁵³

I find it very surprising that Horst Seidl,⁵⁴ in his zeal to convince us of the identity between potential and active reason, represents even Franz Brentano and Heinrich Cassirer as supporters of this view. This simply is not what they say.

48 Cf. Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 13–18.

49 See Arist. *De An.* Γ5, 430a 22–23. Cf. Alex.aphr. *De an.* 98,12–15.

50 See Arist. *De An.* B2, 413b 24–26.

51 See Arist. *De An.* B1, 413a 6–7.

52 See Alex.Aphr. *De An. Mant.* 113,21–24; cf. Alex.Aphr. *De An.* 91,1.

53 See Arist. *De An.* Γ5, 430a 10–14.

54 See H. Seidl, *op.cit.* (n. 31 above) 124,131,9.

It is also the opinion of Seidl — wrong, as I believe — that it is impossible to regard potential reason as distinct from active reason in the sense of two distinct functions, since both of them are designated as separable — and, he writes, ‘it would have been very remarkable if two quite distinct functions were to be described as separable from sense-perception (as well as from the human body after its death)’.⁵⁵ In fact, there is nothing extraordinary about it, since, as we have seen, potential and active reason are separable not in one and the same sense. It is also no argument against the difference between potential and active reason to say — as does Seidl —⁵⁶ that the same predicates (separable, incapable of passivity and unmixed) are ascribed to both of them, since these predicates have a different meaning in each case.

The final part of my paper will be concerned with the relation of active reason to potential reason, as well as to its intelligible objects.

The first motive power for the emergence of potential, or passive, reason is, according to Aristotle, undoubtedly active reason. Yet Aristotle does not explain to us how we are to understand that influence of active reason on potential, or passive, reason. As far as I know, we have no clear evidence for this in his text. Nor can I find a convincing interpretation of this matter in the writings of later commentators and philosophers. The whole of Aristotle’s doctrine regarding this complicated epistemological issue, the influence of active reason on passive reason, in the sense of a first cause which moves potential reason into thinking and makes it capable of thinking, is epitomized in one single passage. I refer to that well-known passage in *De Anima* III, 5, in which active reason is compared to light and potential reason to possible colours:

καὶ ἔστιν ὁ μὲν τοιοῦτος νοῦς τῷ πάντα γίνεσθαι, ὁ δὲ τῷ πάντα ποιεῖν, ὡς ἕξις τις, οἷον τὸ φῶς · τρόπον γάρ τινα καὶ τὸ φῶς ποιεῖ τὰ δυνάμει ὄντα χρώματα ἐνεργεῖα χρώματα.⁵⁷

Just as potential colours require light in order to become actual, so does the matter-like reason require active reason in order to acquire its ability to think in actuality, thus becoming a potential reason — in other words, to make the transit from a first and pure potentiality (‘potential potentiality’), to the state of a second and achieved potentiality (‘actual potentiality’). Aristotle’s

55 See H. Seidl, *ibid.* 124.

56 See H. Seidl, *ibid.* 120. The same wrong opinion is shared by P. Moraux, *Alexandre d’Aphrodise Exegète de la Poétique d’Aristote* (Paris 1942) 125.

57 See Arist. *De An.* Γ5, 430a 14–17.

comparison is clearly not meant in the sense of activating what is potentially capable of being thought by active reason. This invalidates the view that active reason works on potential reason only in an indirect way — a view held, among others, by Thomas Aquinas and Franz Brentano — on the ground that it turns what is δυνάμει intelligible into ἐνεργείῃ intelligible, and that it is thus that active reason endows potential reason with the *habitus* of thinking, as Paul Moreaux believes. But before I deal briefly with this view, I would like to point out that, through this Aristotelian simile, the ontological difference between active and potential reason finds its clearest and most significant expression. These faculties are related to each other as light to colours. Now, light does not actually create colours: it merely makes them perceptible.

Let us now return to the position of Thomas Aquinas and Franz Brentano. Thomas believes that the intelligible forms are derived from the objects of the imagination by potential reason through the direct activity of active reason, by abstracting the intelligible forms from the images of phantasy.⁵⁸ This theory of Thomas is accepted by Franz Brentano, when he writes ‘that the νοῦς ποιητικός activates first the sensual part of the soul, in whose images the intelligible forms are encapsuled, and thus it makes perceptive reason into actually thinking reason only in an indirect manner.’⁵⁹ That is, the νοῦς ποιητικός works directly on the so-called *phantasmata*, in which, according to Aristotle, the intelligible forms are encapsuled: ‘ἐν τοῖς εἶδεσι τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς τὰ νοητά ἐστὶ.’⁶⁰ Precisely for this reason, these *phantasmata* constitute — as we have already said — a *conditio sine qua non* for thinking altogether.

Brentano’s theory of the emergence of thought is criticized as untenable by Heinrich Cassirer, since it is nowhere attested in the text of Aristotle. This goes also for the theory of Thomas Aquinas. Another difficulty which Cassirer finds in Brentano’s theory is its identification between imagination and passive reason.⁶¹ But Cassirer himself is also incapable of bringing any compelling textual evidence for the counter-theory which he opposes to that of Brentano.⁶² Besides, his view is also untenable in that it implies a possible influence of the images of φαντασία on potential reason. But thinking cannot

58 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 85,1 ad 4.

59 Fr. Brentano, *op.cit.* (n. 32 above), p. 167.

60 Arist. *De An.* Γ8, 432a 4–5.

61 Cf. H. Cassirer, *Aristoteles’ Schrift von der Seele* (Tübingen 1932) 170.

62 Cf. H. Cassirer, *ibid.* 170–73.

be affected by its objects of thought. Thus, the relation between perception and the perceived is not transferable to the relation between thought and the objects of thought.

This problem of the the effect of active reason on potential reason would acquire a wholly different dimension, if we were to follow Horst Seidl and — despite the clear statements in *De Anima* 3.5 — identify, to a greater or lesser degree, these two faculties of the mind. Seidl writes: The ‘active reason’ of 3.5 is clearly a phase of development common to ‘the actual’ and ‘the potential’ (the intelligible) conceiving intellect of 3.4.⁶³ Yet despite all his efforts, Seidl has not succeeded in citing one compelling passage of Aristotle in support of his thesis — which in itself is extremely interesting — of the identity between active and potential reason. All his assumptions miss the mark, once we pay our attention to the Aristotelian texts and doctrines. Seidl assumes, for example, that ‘when the soul (that is, the reasoning soul — D.P.) unites the two intellectual faculties into a unity, it must relate to the same intelligible objects, at the same time, both in a passive (‘becoming’) and in an active (‘effecting’) manner — but this is impossible.’⁶⁴ This way of putting the problem is not merely derived from ‘a similar problem’ which ‘has already been noticed by Thomas’⁶⁵: it is, in fact, taken lock, stock and barrel out of Thomas’ way of posing the problem:

Non videtur autem possibile, idem respectu eiusdem posse esse in potentia et in actu: unde non videtur possibile, quod intellectus agens et possibilis convenient in una substantia animae.⁶⁶

This two-sidedness of the active and the passive faculties of the reasoning soul in relation to one and the same intelligible object *seems* to Thomas to preclude the possibility that these two constitute one and the same substance. This, however — as Thomas continues — is only an apparent contradiction; for potential reason and active reason do not relate to the same object of thought, at the same time, one as potentiality and the other as actuality.⁶⁷ *For if* — he carries on to say — *active reason contains within itself in reality the essences of all objects of thought, then potential reason would need no pictures of the imagination, for it would perform the act of conceiving its objects of*

63 H. Seidl, *op.cit.* (n. 31 above) 113.

64 H. Seidl, *op.cit.* 120.

65 H. Seidl, *op.cit.* 130.

66 Thomas Aquinas, *In Arist. De An.* 3.10, 737.

67 See Thomas Aquinas, *op.cit.* 738.

thought on the basis of active reason.⁶⁸ This, however, would imply that both potential and active reason stand, in their relation to the objects of thought, in the position of potentiality, as long as these objects of thought have not been conceived *in actu* — in other words, as long as they have not become the actual contents of thought.

To this problem, Seidl gives an answer which is totally different from that of Thomas, although both started with the same problem, posed in the same manner. Whereas for Thomas, the two-sidedness within the reasoning soul constitutes only an apparent problem, Seidl is of the opinion that it cannot be reconciled with the substantial unity of the reasoning soul. He therefore settles for the identification of active reason with potential reason. Here is Seidl's answer to the problem — in his view — of the irreconcilability of the unity of the soul on the one hand with its two-sided relation (passive and active) to one and the same intelligible object on the other hand:

The difficulty is removed if one looks more closely at the meaning of these intelligible objects. The 'becoming' aspect of the passive principle leads it indeed to a perception of the intelligible objects, but only to that state of perception in which the intelligible object is only perceived 'potentially', and thus is still only 'potential'; whereas, on the other hand, the active principle 'effects' it so that the intelligible object becomes actualized. This is therefore the sense of our passage of Aristotle! (He means *De An.* 3.5, 430a 14–15 — D.P.) The passive intellect is 'of such a nature, that it becomes identified with its intelligible objects always potentially', whereas active intellect, on the other hand, is 'of such a nature, that it makes its intelligible objects actual.'⁶⁹

Let us make two remarks in relation to this solution offered by Horst Seidl. First, he himself speaks here of two intellectual principles, although he has put himself firmly in opposition to the distinction of the intellect into two principles.⁷⁰ Second, Aristotle nowhere says that the active principle 'effects the actualization of the intelligible objects.'

We can now understand why Seidl criticizes as incorrect the thesis of Heinrich Cassirer, which is correct on other points,⁷¹ as to the significance of

68 See Thomas Aquinas, *loc.cit.*: *Si autem intellectus agens ... intelligibilium.*

69 H. Seidl, *op. cit.* 118–9.

70 See H. Seidl, *op. cit.* 113.

71 See H. Cassirer, *op.cit.* (n. 61 above) 176–7.

the uninterrupted activity of active reason,⁷² and why he is of the opinion that intellect itself actualizes the intelligible objects — whereas Cassirer⁷³ has expressed the opinion that active reason works directly on potential reason and sets it in motion. The interpretation offered by Cassirer does not leave the epistemological problem of *De Anima* 3.5 unsolved, as Seidl believes.⁷⁴ On the contrary, it is the best possible interpretation of this Aristotelian text.⁷⁵

Let us now sum up. It seems to me to be in no way impossible that the reasoning soul, which is a unity, can relate to the same intelligible object, at the same time, both in a passive ('becoming') and an active ('effecting') manner. For the reasoning soul is in no way a simple substance, but rather a unity composed of a 'passive' and of an 'active' faculty. Thus it is, in relation to one and the same intelligible object, both passive, that is perceptive — in one of these faculties — and active, that is 'effective' — with regard to the other faculty — a faculty which, in any case, is always, and in its very nature, active: οὐχ ὅτε μὲν νοεῖ, ὅτε δ' οὐ νοεῖ.⁷⁶ Furthermore, potential and active reason do not relate to the same object of thought, at the same time, one as potentiality and the other as actuality — as Thomas Aquinas has already shown.

The activity of active reason is, of course, not identical with thinking itself, since thinking is the effect of this activity. It is thus impossible that active reason should be conceived as pure *energeia* of the thinking faculty.⁷⁷ Thinking in its aspect of perceiving the objects of thought requires as a necessary condition⁷⁸ a passive — that is, a percipient — faculty of thought. Such a faculty is, for Aristotle, potential reason, which, for this very reason, is regarded as the 'place of intelligible forms', τόπος εἰδῶν.⁷⁹ In its relation to its intelligible forms, potential reason first appears as pure potentiality, that is, as a pure capability of grasping these forms.⁸⁰ Then it becomes that power which has already perceived these forms, and acquired the *habitus* of

72 See H. Seidl, *op.cit.* 131.

73 See H. Cassirer, *op.cit.* 172–3.

74 See H. Seidl, *op.cit.* 131.

75 See especially Arist. *De An.* Γ5, 430a, 10–15.

76 Arist. *De An.* Γ5, 430a 22.

77 See Arist. *De An.* Γ5, 430a 18.

78 On this, cf. Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 14–15; a29–b5; Alex.Aphr. *De an.* 86,6f.

79 Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429a 27–28.

80 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429b 15–16; 28–29.

thinking, but has not yet manifested itself in actuality.⁸¹ Finally, it becomes the thinking faculty which manifests its intelligible forms *in actu*, and coincides with them as actuality (that is, with those objects of thought which are not composite).⁸² These are the three phases which all belong to potential reason and are discussed exclusively in 3.4 — and this is what Horst Seidl does not seem to have grasped rightly. Of active reason, which sets potential reason in motion, there is not a single word in this chapter. This is first discussed in the well-known chapter 5, so often discussed by commentators, which gives an answer precisely to the question, how potential reason makes the transition from its first potentiality to its second potentiality, how it comes to be a νοῦς ἐκτετατός (acquired reason) — but it does it in a rather general and vague manner.

Aristotle's general presentation is made more precise by the great commentator on Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias. Alexander maintains that active reason endows potential reason with its *habitus* of thinking. He believes that active reason is not an indirect mover of potential reason, but rather the first, and direct, cause of movement, which moves it to activity. As a result, potential reason, in its constructive confrontation with the so-called *phantasmata*, slowly and continually creates its own abstractive power corresponding with its own concepts.⁸³

Finally, let me emphasize that, in answering the question whether active reason works on potential reason in a direct, or in an indirect manner, we should bear in mind that active and potential reason do not constitute separable powers or faculties — not to speak of substances which exist separately — but rather two states of one and the same intellectual faculty of the human soul. This scheme of an active and a passive phase, as it were, of the intellectual soul, should be understood within the larger framework of Aristotle's model of form and matter, and of his cosmic model with its first unmoved mover.⁸⁴

Athens.

81 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 429b 5–9.

82 See Arist. *De An.* Γ4, 430a 3–4.

83 See Alex.Aphr. *De an.* 82,19–87,23; *De an. Mant.* 108,19–22.

84 I am grateful to Prof. John Glucker, of Tel-Aviv University, for translating this article into English from my German manuscript.