



BRILL

PHRONESIS 69 (2024) 468–499

PHRONESIS

brill.com/phro

Naturalizing *Nous*? Theophrastus on *Nous*, Nature, and Motion

Andrea Falcon | ORCID: 0000-0002-9118-5068

Concordia University, Montreal, Canada, and University of Milan, Italy

andrea.falcon@concordia.ca, andrea.falcon@unimi.it

Robert Roreitner | ORCID: 0000-0002-6960-8079

Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

robert.roreitner@ff.cuni.cz

Received 10 January 2024 | Accepted 7 March 2024 |

Published online 2 July 2024

Abstract

There is *prima facie* evidence that Theophrastus naturalized *nous* to the extent that he spoke of it in naturalizing terms. But our evidence also suggests that Theophrastus accepted the reasons Aristotle had for excluding *nous* from the reach of natural philosophy. We show that, far from revealing an inconsistency on Theophrastus' part, this apparent tension results from a consciously adopted strategy. Theophrastus is developing one aspect of Aristotle's account of *nous* he found underdeveloped and feared might be misunderstood, namely the infrangible organic unity of the whole human being, including its *nous*. That is why he insists that *nous*, although 'from outside,' is 'grown together' with us, why he speaks of it as a nature (*phusis*), and why he insists that thought is a motion (*kinésis*). We show how these striking claims can be understood against the broader background of Theophrastus' natural philosophy.

Keywords

Theophrastus – Aristotle – *nous* – motion – nature

1 Introduction¹

There is *prima facie* evidence that Theophrastus was willing to naturalize the human capacity for thought (*nous*) to the extent that he spoke freely of it in naturalizing terms. But our evidence also suggests that Theophrastus accepted the reasons Aristotle had for excluding, in some texts at least, *nous* from the reach of natural philosophy. So, on the one hand, Theophrastus speaks of *nous* as a part of our nature (*phusis*), and of human thought as a motion or change (*kinêsis*); and yet, on the other hand, he emphatically endorses the idea that *nous* is something non-bodily and separate from the body (and so, apparently, not natural), and he insists that thought is a complete activity rather than motion. Thus, there seems to be a flagrant tension at the heart of Theophrastus' approach to *nous*.

Both tendencies come out as well-considered decisions, and Theophrastus could hardly have overlooked the tension between them. So, what at first appears to be a hopeless inconsistency is most likely a well-thought-out strategy. This essay aims at better understanding this strategy. Such an improved understanding is needed to fully appreciate Theophrastus' genuinely Aristotelian yet highly original account of human capacity for thought, which arguably played a crucial role in the later reception of Aristotle. But understanding Theophrastus' strategy is also needed to properly understand and appreciate central parts of his general 'physics' (his natural philosophy). We show that this field of Theophrastus' theorizing is permeated by questions about human thought in a way that has yet to be adequately acknowledged.

The paper proceeds in five main steps. In Section 2 we set out Theophrastus' project of natural philosophy and the place of his discussion of *nous* therein. Our focus is not just on Theophrastus' apparent incorporation of his study of *nous* within natural philosophy; we are primarily concerned with his striking willingness to speak of *nous* in naturalizing terms. Section 3 provides the *antithesis* by showing that Theophrastus in fact followed Aristotle on all the

1 Andrea Falcon produced initial drafts of Sections 2 and 4, while Robert Roreitner drafted Sections 3, 5, and 6. Each of the two co-authors revised, elaborated, and improved on what was written by the other. Section 4 is based on Roreitner (2024a). The initial input for this essay came from an invitation to present at the international conference devoted to the study of the extant evidence for Theophrastus' physics organized in Lyon, November 18–19, 2022. We are especially grateful to Gweltaz Guyomarc'h, who not only invited us to present at the conference but also commented on an earlier draft of this essay. A second, revised version was presented at a workshop dedicated to the essay at Tübingen University, June 30, 2023. We thank Klaus Corcilius and the TIDA research team for their feedback. This work was supported by the European Regional Development Fund project 'Beyond Security: Role of Conflict in Resilience-Building' (reg. no.: CZ.02.01.01/00/22_008/0004595).

key points that made the incorporation of *nous* within nature difficult, if not impossible. The subsequent three sections aim at providing a *synthesis*, capturing thereby the unique features in both Theophrastus' account of the human capacity for thought and the general part of his 'physics.'

Section 4 analyzes Theophrastus' view on the place of *nous* within human embryogenesis, especially his two key claims that *nous* comes 'from outside' at the very outset of embryogenesis and that it is 'grown together' with us. We show how these two claims articulate an intriguing conception of *nous* as a non-bodily and non-emergent capacity whose actualization is nevertheless wholly dependent upon a complex set of emergent hylomorphic capacities.

Section 5 sets Theophrastus' account of *nous* within a broader historical and philosophical context. We argue that his naturalizing approach to *nous* is motivated, first and foremost, by the need to bring out more clearly than Aristotle did the infrangible organic unity which binds the human capacity for thought—despite its non-hylomorphic character—to the rest of the human being as an inseparable part of its essence. We collect the evidence that Theophrastus defended what he saw to be the correct Aristotelian view of human *nous* against two extreme positions that emerged among his colleagues: while the first (strictly naturalist) approach reduced *nous* to a certain disposition of the perceptive capacity, and so deprived it of its *sui generis* status, the second (Platonizing) approach turned *nous* into an entity capable of existing apart from the body.

Can this insight into Theophrastus' naturalization of *nous* also help us understand his kinetization of human thought, that is, his recurrent classification of human thought as a kind of motion (*kinêsis*)? We tackle this question in Section 6 by revisiting the extant evidence pertaining to Theophrastus' account of motion. We argue that Theophrastus systematically extended Aristotle's concept of motion precisely in order to accommodate human thought, and we show how this strategy was part and parcel of his naturalization of *nous*. If we are right, the standard approach to the Theophrastean testimonies, treating his 'physics' and his 'psychology' separately, needs to be thoroughly reconsidered.

2 Theophrastus' Integration of *Nous* within the Study of Nature

From the extant evidence about Theophrastus' engagement with natural philosophy we learn that he wrote a *Physics* in eight books.² Two things stand out in what we know about its contents. First, this was a much more

² Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Philosophers* V 46: φυσικῶν ἁ'–η'.

comprehensive project than Aristotle's extant *Physics*. As well as inquiries into basic principles and concepts of natural philosophy (*Physics* I), it also contained a discussion of 'the divine body' and 'the things that are subject to becoming and their principles'³ (*Physics* III, also known as *On the Heaven*), topics pertaining to Aristotle's *De anima* (*Physics* IV–V, also known as *On the Soul*), and quite possibly an inquiry into perishable living beings, that is, animals and plants (*Physics* VI–VIII, whose contents are entirely unknown to us). Second, there was an extended discussion of nous, as a part of the inquiry into soul in two books, incorporated into Theophrastus' investigation of natural things (*ta phusika*).⁴

The latter is an arresting aspect of Theophrastus' *Physics* because this integration is not to be found in Aristotle. Indeed, Aristotle repeatedly expresses doubts about the possibility of incorporating the study of nous within natural philosophy. In *Metaphysics* (*Meta.*) VI 1, he limits the scope of natural philosophy, saying that

it is the task of the natural philosopher to study the soul to a certain extent, namely [to study] all the soul which is not [conceivable] without matter. (Aristotle, *Meta.* VI 1, 1026a5–6)

From elsewhere it becomes clear that the limitation outlined in this passage is intended to exclude nous.⁵ The same caveat about the purview of natural philosophy is made in the opening chapter of Aristotle's *De anima* (*An.*).⁶ In *Parts of Animals* (*Part. An.*) I 1, Aristotle provides an explicit argument for excluding the treatment of nous from natural philosophy:

3 Simplicius, *On Aristotle On the Heaven* 1.10–12.

4 This architectonic aspect of Theophrastus' *Physics* is lost in the collection prepared by W.W. Fortenbaugh, P. Huby, R.W. Sharples, and D. Gutas (1993) [FHS&G], where 'psychology' is separated from 'physics.' This leads the editors to print quotes from the very same works of Theophrastus—not only his *Physics* but also his *On Motion*—in two separate volumes. There are reasons to think, though, that these separated quotes were tightly connected in Theophrastus' mind and that his thoughts on nature and motion can shed light on his thoughts on nous, and, indeed, *vice versa*. We discuss a concrete example, pertaining to *On Motion* I, in Section 6.

5 Cf. Aristotle, *Meta.* XII 3, 1070a24–27.

6 Aristotle, *An.* I 1, 403a27–28.

if [natural philosophy is to treat] the soul as a whole, there will remain no philosophy beyond the scientific knowledge of nature. (Aristotle, *Part. An.* I 1, 641a34–36)⁷

His conclusion is that not the whole soul is a principle of motion:

not the whole soul is a nature, nor every part [of it], but only a certain part, either one or more. (Aristotle, *Part. An.* I 1, 641b9–10)

What Aristotle means is that the thinking part of the soul (*to noêtikon*) cannot as such be the principle of any motion, and so it cannot fall under the scope of nature. The incorporation of Aristotle's study of *nous* within a project of natural philosophy, suggested by the transmission of Theophrastus' *Physics*, appears in this context to have been a self-conscious philosophical move. To appreciate this move, we need not agree on how, ultimately, Aristotle would like to answer the large and difficult question of how (if at all) *nous* fits into nature. What matters here is only the following observation: at least *prima facie* Theophrastus goes beyond Aristotle in dropping his teacher's caution and incorporating the treatment of *nous* within natural philosophy.

At this point it ought to be acknowledged that we do not know whether Theophrastus himself intended to publish a *Physics* in eight books.⁸ It may well be that he did, and that some parts of his *Physics* also circulated in antiquity as more or less self-sufficient literary unities. But it may also be that several independent treatises written by Theophrastus were put together by a later editor and arranged into the eight books designated jointly as '*Physics*'. We need not take a definitive stance on this question. Even if the incorporation of the study of *nous* within *Physics* was not Theophrastus' own decision, the extant reports on and around *nous* provide enough evidence to suggest that this incorporation was congenial to Theophrastus' approach. What we have in mind is Theophrastus' readiness to speak of *nous* in terms of nature (*phusis*) and motion (*kinêsis*)—in stark contrast with the care Aristotle takes to *avoid* this language, at least in *De anima*.

Let us look at the evidence for the integration of *nous* within the study of nature.⁹ To begin with, Theophrastus describes the *nous* present in human

7 Aristotle's argument at 641a34–b4 is highly controversial. For a reconstruction of it (and a discussion of alternative readings), see Corcilius et al. (2024), Chapter 6.

8 'Publication' is, of course, to be understood in the ancient sense of the word.

9 For ease of reference, we refer to the second book of Theophrastus' *On the Soul* as *Physics* V, without thereby prejudging the status of this incorporation.

beings as one kind of *phusis*: he not only asks about the *phusis* of *nous*,¹⁰ and ascribes to *nous* the *phusis* of matter,¹¹ but also characterizes *nous* as a *phusis*¹² and describes the activation of *nous* as a perfection of (its) *phusis*.¹³ And this is not merely a matter of terminology. One of Theophrastus' most distinctive claims in *Physics* V is that *nous* is *sumphuês* to us.¹⁴ The technical meaning of this adjective, as defined by Aristotle in *Meta.* V 4 and *Physics (Phys.)* V 3, is 'grown together,' referring to a higher form of non-homogenous unity than mere touching: an 'organic' or 'natural' unity. One outstanding feature of things 'grown together' (like, for instance, the embryo and the mother) is that one cannot move without the other.¹⁵ Occasionally, Aristotle also uses the adjective less literally, in the sense of belonging to one's nature.¹⁶ Aristotle never says that *nous* is *sumphuês*. Indeed, in Aristotle's *De anima*, *phusis* is mentioned only once in connection with *nous*—and only by way of a comparison.¹⁷

Theophrastus' reshaping of the language apt for *nous* does not stop with *phusis*. In fact, the way he applies the language of *kinêsis* to *nous* is even more striking. In lieu of Aristotle's *nous* which 'produces everything'—later traditionally labeled the 'productive' or 'agent' (*poiêtikos*) *nous*—Theophrastus repeatedly speaks of the 'moving' (*kinôn*) *nous*. His idea seems to be that it is fine to speak of human thinking as a kind of 'being moved,' or a kind of 'motion,' as long as we correctly identify the mover as the moving *nous*.¹⁸ Again, this is not just a matter of vocabulary, for we know (thanks to Simplicius) that, precisely in his treatise *On Motion*, Theophrastus went out of his way to insist that even theoretical thinking is a kind of motion.¹⁹ And this contrasts (if anything) even

10 Themistius, *On Aristotle On the Soul (In An.)* 107.32 (= 307A FHS&G): καὶ τίς ἡ φύσις αὐτοῦ <sc. νοῦ>.

11 Priscianus, *Metaphrasis (Metaphr.)* 26.2 (= 307B FHS&G); Themistius, *In An.* 108.7 (= 307A FHS&G): εἰ ὁ νοῦς ἔχει ἕλης φύσιν μῆδὲν ὦν ἅπαντα δὲ δυνατός. Theophrastus is probably drawing on *An.* III 5, 430a12–13, but his formulation is much stronger.

12 Themistius, *In An.* 108.22–23 (= 320A FHS&G), reflecting on *An.* III 5, 430a10–17: τίνε οὖν αὐται αἱ δύο φύσεις;

13 Priscianus, *Metaphr.* 31.13 (= 316 FHS&G): αὐτῆ δὲ οἷον τελεοῦν τὴν φύσιν <sc. τοῦ νοῦ>.

14 See Themistius, *In An.* 107.32 (= 307A FHS&G).

15 Aristotle, *Generation of Animals (Gener. An.)* II 4, 737b15–18; *Meta.* V 3, 1014b20–22.

16 See, e.g., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics (NE)* IV 1, 1121b12–16.

17 We have *An.* III 5, 430a10–17 in mind—a controversial text to which we return in Section 5.

18 Priscianus, *Metaphr.* 29.13–15 (= 311 FHS&G): τὸ ὑφ' ἑτέρου κινούντος τὴν ἐνέργειαν εἶναι τοῦ νοῦ ... ἄτοπον ..., εἰ μὴ τις ἄλλος ὁ κινῶν νοῦς. For this label, see also Themistius, *In An.* 108.22–28 (= 320A FHS&G): τίνε οὖν αὐται αἱ δύο φύσεις; ... εἰ μὲν οὖν σύμφυτος ὁ κινῶν.... We return to these testimonies in Section 4.

19 Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Physics (In Phys.)* 965.5–6 (= 271 FHS&G): καὶ τούτοις ἐπάγει [sc. Θεόφραστος ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ τῶν περὶ κινήσεως, from 964.31–32] 'ὑπὲρ μὲν οὖν τούτων [sc. κρίσεις

more sharply with Aristotle, who systematically avoids, at least in *De anima*, applying kinetic language to thinking (*noein*).²⁰

In sum, independently from the question whether Theophrastus incorporated his discussion of *nous* within his *Physics*, he clearly went a considerable way toward adopting a naturalizing language for *nous*: if thinking is a motion, then *nous* as the principle of thinking is a *phusis*, as Theophrastus, indeed, describes it; and if so, there seems to be no reason for excluding *nous* from the scope of natural philosophy.

The naturalizing tendency reviewed above is further underlined by the way Theophrastus frames his discussion of *nous* in *Physics* V. The order of his discussion seems to have closely followed the order of *An.* III 4–5, but his starting point is quite different. Aristotle begins his inquiry in *An.* III 4–5 from the *definitional* question of how the thinking capacity of the soul differs from other capacities (and from how thinking comes about).²¹ By contrast, Theophrastus takes his lead from a *genetic* question of how a soul comes to have *nous* as its capacity in the first place. More precisely, he asks how *nous*, which is ‘from outside’ (*exôthen*), can ever be connatural (*sumphuês*) to us.

The idea of *nous* being ‘from outside’ is referencing Aristotle’s response, in *Gener. An.* II 3, to the question of where *nous* comes from: ‘it remains that *nous* alone comes from without (*thurathen*) and is divine.’²² But this should not lead us to think that Theophrastus is simply engaged in the work of a commentator, trying to consolidate Aristotle’s scattered and enigmatic remarks on *nous*. In fact, Aristotle says a great deal more about *nous* beyond what appears in *An.* III 4–5. Theophrastus, as far as we know, did not care to recall any of those other remarks; for instance, he is conspicuously silent about the passages where Aristotle suggests that *nous* may need to be excluded from the

καὶ θεωρεῖται, from 965.2] σκεπτέον εἴ τινα χωρισμὸν ἔχει πρὸς τὸν ὄρον, ἐπεὶ τὸ γε κινήσεις εἶναι καὶ ταῦτα ὁμολογοῦμενον.’

20 Even in *An.* I 4 where Aristotle admits, at least for the sake of the argument, that *dianoesthai* is a kind of being moved (408a34–b18), he hastens to contrast *noein* with *dianoesthai* (408b18–30): the former is never described in kinetic language, not even for the sake of argument. The only relevant exceptions come at (a) *Meta.* XII 7, 1072a30 where Aristotle claims that ‘*nous* is moved by the object of thought (ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ κινεῖται),’ and (b) *Eudemian Ethics* VIII 2, 1248a24–28 where Aristotle asks about ‘the principle of motion within the soul’ (ἡ τῆς κινήσεως ἀρχὴ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ), and responds that ‘what is divine in us moves (κινεῖ) in a way everything’ as something ‘more powerful than λόγος’ and ἐπιστήμη. It is on these passages (or these kinds of assertions) that Theophrastus seems to rely in his *Metaphysics* (*Meta.*) when speaking about ‘the motion of thought,’ ἡ [κίνησις ἢ] τῆς διανοίας (*Meta.* II 9 (= 8.1 Gutas) 5b3–10).

21 Aristotle, *An.* III 4, 429a10–13.

22 Aristotle, *Gener. An.* II 3, 737b27–28.

reach of natural philosophy. Theophrastus seems to have consciously adopted the genetic perspective of *Gener. An.* II 3 as a way of reframing the agenda of *An.* III 4–5. One must, thus, consider his larger (philosophical rather than exegetical) motivation for this move. A connection with the naturalizing tendency we reviewed above suggests itself: unlike Aristotle, who sharply separates the definitional and the genetic inquiries, Theophrastus thinks that the question of how *nous* comes to be in us must be integrated within the inquiry into its essence, or, as Theophrastus symptomatically puts it, into its nature. The genetic perspective aligns Theophrastus' approach to *nous*, at least *prima facie*, with natural philosophy.

When we consider all the evidence reviewed above, we are tempted to conclude that Theophrastus bid farewell to Aristotle's caution and cheerfully integrated *nous* within the natural world like any other object of natural philosophy.

3 Theophrastus on the Non-bodily and Non-kinetic Character of Thought

A reader impressed by the evidence recalled so far may think that Theophrastus naturalized *nous*. And yet, there are good reasons to pause before we draw this momentous conclusion. On closer scrutiny, it turns out that not only is Theophrastus aware of the considerations that led Aristotle to doubt whether *nous* can be integrated within the study of nature; he also seems to unreservedly accept them.

In *Physics V* Theophrastus takes for granted that *nous* in human beings is, unlike their perceptive and nutritive capacities, something 'incorporeal' (*asômaton*). What he means is apparently not just that *nous* is itself not a body, but that it is not hylomorphic in the sense of being composed with a body as its form. Indeed, it is this assumption about *nous* which generates the key *aporia* that a considerable part of the extant fragments is concerned with.²³ In one of the fragments, Theophrastus repeats Aristotle's claim that while the perceptive capacity is not conceivable without a body, '*nous* is separable/separate (*chôristos*) [from the body].'²⁴ Moreover, in his treatise *On Motion*, Theophrastus insists that unlike, for instance, desire, which is a 'bodily motion' that has its starting

23 See Themistius, *In An.* 108.2–3 (= 307A FHS&G) and Priscianus, *Metaphr.* 27.9–10 (= 307C FHS&G), where an *aporia* is generated by the observation that unlike the senses, *nous*, as a subject of being affected, is 'incorporeal.'

24 See Themistius, *In An.* 108.17–18, drawing on Aristotle, *An.* III 4, 429b4–5.

point in the body, theoretical thinking ‘has its starting point, its activity, and its end in the soul itself.’²⁵ The very same point is echoed in *Physics* V, where Theophrastus rejects the idea that *nous*, being incorporeal, could be affected by a body: thinking cannot be produced by anything bodily, and so it cannot have its starting point in a body.²⁶

Interestingly for our question, in his treatise *On Motion*, Theophrastus finds support for the non-bodily character of thought in *Gener. An.* II 3: thinking, he says, cannot have its starting point in the body, for *nous* ‘comes from outside and is entirely complete (*panteleios*).’²⁷ He seems to have in mind Aristotle’s claim at *Gener. An.* II 3, 736b28–29 that ‘in its [i.e., *nous*] activity, the bodily activity takes no part.’ The completeness Theophrastus envisions seems to include the idea that thought is not a process like moving from *A* to *B*, which is only completed once *B* has been reached (and so the motion has stopped); rather, thought is an activity complete at every point of its duration. This is confirmed by Theophrastus’ comment (in *Physics* V) on Aristotle’s classification of the *nous* of the soul as a passive capacity. Theophrastus accepts this classification but reminds us that ‘being capable of being affected (*to pathêtikon*) must not be understood in this case [i.e., the case of *nous*] in terms of being movable (*to kinêtikon*)—for motion is incomplete—but in terms of activity.’²⁸ All this must be kept in mind when trying to evaluate Theophrastus’ account of *nous* as connatural and his insistence that thinking is a kind of motion.

Indeed, a closer look at the opening move in his discussion of *nous* in *Physics* V reveals that Theophrastus reads *Gener. An.* II 3 in a way which underscores (rather than eliminates) the contrast between *nous* and the other parts of the human soul. Unlike Alexander of Aphrodisias, who will later identify the *nous* coming from without with the divine *nous* becoming present in us to the extent we manage to think it,²⁹ Theophrastus clearly takes the characteristic of being ‘from without’ to concern the thinking capacity of the human soul, and he takes it to be a consequent of the exceptional (that is, incorporeal) character of this capacity. It turns out that Theophrastus’ prioritization of the genetic perspective does anything but serve the function of assimilating *nous* to other

25 See Simplicius, *In Phys.* 964.31–965.3 (= 271 FHS&G).

26 See, again, the *aporia* at Themistius *In An.* 108.1–6 (= 307A FHS&G) and Priscianus, *Metaphr.* 27.8–14 (= 307C FHS&G) together with the solution at Priscianus, *Metaphr.* 29.12–15 (= 311 FHS&G).

27 Simplicius, *In Phys.* 965.4–5 (= 271 FHS&G).

28 Priscianus, *Metaphr.* 28.21–22 (= 307D FHS&G). Cf. Themistius, *In An.* 108.15–17 (= 307A FHS&G).

29 For Alexander’s account of ‘*nous* from without,’ see his own treatise *On the Soul* 90.19–91.4; cf. *De Intellectu* 109.1–4.

capacities; on the contrary, the way *nous* comes to be present in us, according to Theophrastus, underscores the categorical difference between *nous* and the other capacities of the soul. We will need to see more closely (in Section 4) how Theophrastus envisions the way *nous* comes to be present in us and actualized. For the time being, we note that the genetic perspective employed in *Physics* V was apparently limited to *nous*, and so the intention can hardly have been to say that *nous* is a part of nature *in the way the other capacities of the soul are*.

If the above remarks are on the right track, how, then, should we understand what first appeared as a patent naturalizing tendency in Theophrastus' treatment of *nous*? It seems very unlikely that his descriptions of *nous* as a part of nature and of thinking as a motion could be mere slips with no philosophical relevance. What we witness is not just a random choice of vocabulary; rather, Theophrastus *self-consciously* insists that *nous* is connatural to us, or 'grown together' with us, and insists that thinking must be classified as a kind of motion. Moreover, he does so in contexts where such claims stand out very sharply as well-considered additions to, if not adjustments of, what Aristotle said on the topic of *nous*. The claim that *nous* is connatural or 'grown together' with us is introduced—at the very outset of Theophrastus' discussion—as a *complement* to Aristotle's claim that *nous* comes from without. The claim that thinking is a motion is, in turn, introduced as an *amendment* to the Aristotelian contrast between the activities of life which should be classified as bodily motions on the one hand, and theoretical thinking which does not take place in the body, and so cannot be a motion, on the other.³⁰ Theophrastus accepts the core of this contrast, and yet he insists that even theoretical thinking is to be understood as a kind of motion. The significance of this amendment is reinforced by the fact that it is introduced in the first book of Theophrastus' official discussion of motion.

So, when we look at the evidence pertaining to Theophrastus' treatment of *nous*, we are pulled in two opposite directions. *On the one hand*, Theophrastus seems to have followed Aristotle in sharply contrasting thought with other activities of life as something non-bodily, and, indeed, in claiming that thought must be understood as a complete activity rather than a motion. And he seems to have followed his senior colleague also in inferring that *nous* is not the principle of any bodily motion but something incorporeal and separable from the body, at least in account. This seems enough to conclude that *nous* cannot fall within the purview of natural philosophy. Indeed, Theophrastus has himself determined the subject matter of natural philosophy (at the outset of his *On Nature* as well as at the outset of his *Physics*) in a way that corroborates this

³⁰ Compare Aristotle, *An.* I 4, 408a34–b18 for the former and 408b18–30 for the latter.

finding: ‘natural objects’ are either bodies or ‘have their being in a body.’³¹ When Theophrastus claims that *nous* is incorporeal and is separable/separate from the body, he seems to be *eo ipso* denying that it can be an object of study for natural philosophy. And yet, *on the other hand*, Theophrastus goes conspicuously out of his way to insist that *nous* is connatural and to stress that thinking is a motion. How should we understand this flagrant tension at the heart of his approach to *nous*?

Our goal in the remainder of this paper is to better understand what Theophrastus was up to and to evaluate the philosophical significance of his approach to *nous*. We will attempt to determine in exactly what sense it is legitimate for us to speak of Theophrastus’ naturalization of *nous*—despite the broad agreement with Aristotle about the reasons why *nous* seems not to be a part of nature.

4 *Nous* Comes from Outside, but It Is Nonetheless ‘Grown Together’ with Us

At this point we want to return to Theophrastus’ opening move, namely his decision to deal with *nous* starting from what Aristotle tells us in *Gener. An.* II 3. We would like to have a closer look at what Theophrastus actually says. Hereafter is the relevant testimony preserved by Themistius, which is likely to be the starting point of Theophrastus’ treatment of *nous*:³²

(a) How in the world (*pôs pote*) can it be that *nous*, being from outside (*exôthen*) and as if superimposed (*hôsper epithetos*), is connatural [to us] (*sumphuês*)? (b) And what is its nature (*hê physis autou*)? (c) That [*nous*] is nothing in actuality but is potentially everything, just like *aisthêsis*, is well said. For this [claim] is not to be taken in the sense that *nous* is not even itself (this [interpretation] can [only] be motivated by a desire to dispute [the claim]); rather, [the claim should be taken] as [declaring *nous* to be] some underlying capacity (*hupokeimenên tina dunamin*), such as there is in the case of material objects, too. (d) But, then, ‘from outside’ (*to exôthen*) is to be taken not in the sense of ‘superimposed’

31 See Philoponus, *On Aristotle’s Physics (In Phys.)* 4.12–13 (= 144A FHS&G). Cf. Simplicius, *In Phys.* 9.10 (= 144B FHS&G) where instead of ‘having one’s being in a body’ we find ‘having a body.’ We return to these testimonies in Section 5.

32 Themistius is clearly reporting *verbatim* from Theophrastus’ *Physics* V even though we cannot rule out that he has left out some bits of the original text.

(*hōs epitheton*), but rather as being encompassed (*sumperilambanomenon*) in the first stage of generation (*en tēi prôtēi genesei*). (Themistius, *In An.* 107.31–108.1 = 307A FHS&G)³³

The passage opens with two related questions in (a) and (b). Theophrastus' answer to the second question (about the *phusis* of *nous*) in (c) provides the grounds for his answer to the first question (about *nous* being both from outside and connatural) in (d). This first question is prompted by a certain reading of the genetic account advanced in *Gener. An.* II 3, where we are famously told that '*nous* alone enters from without' (736b28–29). This reading makes Theophrastus wonder (rather emphatically) how *nous* can be connatural to us, or else how it can be 'grown together' with us as a part of our human nature, if *nous* comes from outside *as something that is superadded to our natural faculties*. The second part of the if-clause (highlighted in italics) is all-important. The thesis that *nous* comes from outside may be difficult to understand, but it does not *eo ipso* create any problem. The thesis creates a problem, and indeed a serious one, only when it is understood in the way suggested in (a). The idea that *nous* is superadded to our natural capacities is difficult, if not impossible, to square with the view that *nous* is a part of our human essence. Both Aristotle and Theophrastus believe that *nous* is a part of our human essence, for we cannot successfully define the human being without making a reference to *nous* understood as the principle responsible for our ability to engage in thinking.

In clause (d), Theophrastus endorses the genetic account advanced in *Gener. An.* II 3, but he rejects the view that *nous* is superadded to our natural capacities. His view is that *nous* is encompassed *in the first stage of <human> generation*. This claim contains a piece of technical terminology which becomes apparent as soon as it is read against the background of the Peripatetic study of perishable living beings. Both Aristotle and Theophrastus distinguish what they call the first generation from the later stages of the generative process, and they do so for both animals and plants.³⁴ In the first generation, the basic organs of nutrition and growth (the root and the buds, the heart and the blood vessels, or whatever is analogous to them) are generated one after the other. At the last stage of the generative process, the living being feeds itself and grows simultaneously everywhere. In the case of plants this last stage is the 'second

33 Cf. Priscianus, *Metaphr.* 25.28–29 (= 307B FHS&G). The word *συμπεριλαμβανόμενον* is Brandis' conjecture (supported by *Gener. An.* II 3, 737a7–12); the manuscripts have *συμπεριλαμβάνον*.

34 A full discussion with references from the zoological and botanical *corpora* of writings is offered in Roreitner (2024a).

generation,' whereas in the case of animals there seem to be other intermediate stages of generation at which further organs, especially organs of perception, are produced in a definite sequence.

By relying on this technical distinction, Theophrastus can square the claim that *nous* comes from outside with the thesis that it is part of our human nature. *Nous* is part of our human nature in the sense that it is present in us from the very beginning of our human development. More to the point, it is present in us as a capacity 'grown together' with us not only in the sense that everything in us is there to enable the actualization of this capacity, but also because this capacity cannot be actualized before the entire process of human ontogeny is completed. *Nous* is both existentially and functionally dependent on the human body, for it can neither exist apart from the body, nor be actualized without a complex set of bodily preconditions having occurred in the past (diachronic dependence) and occurring at the very moment of any episode of thinking (synchronic dependence). It is this set of dependences that we jointly refer to in terms of infrangible organic unity binding *nous* to the rest of the human being.

Note, however, the following, crucial point: *nous* comes from outside in the sense that it is *itself not the outcome of a generative process*. The contrast with the perceptive capacity is salient. According to both Aristotle and Theophrastus, the perceptive capacity cannot come from outside; rather, as a hylomorphic capacity, it emerges at a later stage of animal ontogeny as a result of the embryogenetic process. *Nous*, by contrast, must be present in us from the very beginning, not only in the teleological sense that the whole process is directed ultimately at providing the enabling conditions for the exercise of *nous*, but also in the sense that no natural process whatsoever could bring about such a capacity. It is an incorporeal or non-hylomorphic capacity, and so if it were not present at the very outset of embryogenesis, there would be no way for it to ever become present in us.

Another important point to stress is that while Theophrastus envisions the presence of *nous* right from the start of our generative process, he need not be committed to the view that *nous* is a fully integrated part of the soul at the outset of human development. Quite the opposite. What we know about the Peripatetic theory of animal generation suggests that such an integration requires the presence of a fully developed capacity for perception. But the latter requires, in turn, the presence not just of a heart as the central organ of perception but also of fully developed peripheral organs. As a result, the integration of *nous* as a part of the soul can only happen at a relatively late stage of embryogenesis, or even after birth. To appreciate this point, we should recall that Aristotle is quite explicit in *Gener. An.* that the human eyes are fully formed

only sometime after birth.³⁵ While eyes may be the exception to the rule, they are quite important for humans since we rely on them heavily to experience the world around us. When we take this point seriously, and when we realize that *nous* understood as the human capacity for thought requires not only the presence but also the full exercise of our capacity for perception, we begin to see that as the *nous* enters from outside, it cannot yet be what Aristotle refers to in *An. III 4* as the so-called *nous* of the soul, namely the thinking part of the human soul. The *nous* that enters from outside can only become this part at a much later stage of human ontogeny.

In connection with this last point, it is worth noting that Theophrastus, just like Aristotle, would like to distinguish the capacity for thought from the ability to engage in thinking. The latter is only present when all the enabling conditions for the exercise of the capacity for thought are in place. It is only at this point that *nous*, as a part of the human soul, can be activated. In other words, it is only at this moment that an episode of human thinking becomes possible. But what is needed for an episode of human thinking to take place? In addition to a fully developed perceptual body, knowledge of a language as well as a great deal of education (*paideia*) and a fair amount of *empeiria* are required, plus an appropriate constellation of *phantasmata*. *Nous* can remain active in the human being only for as long as all the enabling conditions are in place. When we take this into account, we can better see why *nous* is regarded by Theophrastus as an *inseparable* part of our *nature*: it is both existentially and functionally dependent on a well-functioning human body.

We have argued that, according to Theophrastus, *nous* becomes a fully integrated part of the human soul only at a much later stage. Still, it is significant that this 'becoming' involves no intrinsic change to *nous* itself. *Nous* does not itself 'grow.' On the contrary, the intrinsic nature of the *nous* that enters from outside is the very same as the essence of the so-called *nous* of the soul, as analyzed by Aristotle in *An. III 4*. For Theophrastus, *nous* is what it is from the very beginning of the embryogenetic process—that is, right from the moment *nous* comes to be present in us at the earliest stage of human development. In our passage, *nous*, entering from outside at the very beginning of embryogenesis, is compared to the full-fledged capacity for perception as the latter emerges at an advanced stage of animal ontogeny. The fully constituted capacity for perception only needs to be activated by the relevant external objects (colors, sounds, and the like). Likewise, the capacity for thought that is present in the human embryo is a *full-fledged capacity* which only needs to be activated by the appropriate agent.

35 Aristotle, *Gener. An.* V 1, 779a26–b12.

Nous understood as the full-fledged capacity for thought must not be confused with any of its enabling conditions, nor with all of them jointly considered, nor again with our ability to engage in thinking. This means that for Theophrastus the generative process that begins in the womb and continues after birth adds nothing to (and takes nothing away from) the intrinsic nature of *nous*. But this also means that *nous*, while being connatural to us or 'grown together' with us, is not really on a par with other natural capacities. Think, again, of the capacity for perception. This capacity is not present in the animal embryo right from the start. What is present at the outset of the generative process is the mere capacity for producing and developing the capacity for perception. We can restate this point by saying that the capacity for perception is present in the animal embryo as a mere capacity—or set of capacities—for developing a capacity. The reason is that, since perceiving is an activity that is common to the soul and the body, it makes no sense to speak of a perceptive capacity apart from the perceptive organs. However, the relevant bodily organs are obviously not yet present in the animal embryo. What is present in the animal embryo is only a capacity, or rather a set of capacities, for developing the full-fledged perceptive capacity along with the relevant bodily organs. The situation is significantly different in the case of *nous*. To begin with, *nous* comes to be present only in the *human* embryo. Moreover, *nous* comes to be present in the human embryo *from outside as a full-fledged capacity* rather than as a mere capacity (or a set of capacities) for developing a capacity.³⁶ It is a full-fledged capacity which can neither come about nor 'grow' as a result of natural processes. This is, indeed, unavoidable given that thinking is a non-bodily activity with both its origin and its end in the *nous* of the soul itself, and that the thinking capacity is thus something incorporeal and separate from the body.³⁷

36 How is this claim to be fleshed out in terms of Aristotle's so-called triple scheme (*Dreistufenlehre*) of first/second potentiality and first/second actuality? (A question helpfully raised by Gweltaz Guyomarc'h and Katerina Ierodiakonou at the conference held in Lyon.) It is true that the *nous* with which we are born is, unlike the perceptive capacity, only a first potentiality which can be developed into various second potentialities (that is, dispositional grasps of interrelated, domain-specific essences). But this should not lead us to assimilate the *nous* that comes from outside to the capacity for developing the perceptive capacity with which, arguably, any animal embryo is endowed from the very beginning. Unlike that capacity, the *nous* that comes from outside already *is nous*. Moreover, its actualization will consist in thinking (the only way of learning how to think is by thinking; cf. *Meta*. IX 5, 1047b31–35). This, again, sharply contrasts with the embryogenetic process bringing out the perceptive capacity, which obviously does not consist in perceiving anything.

37 See again the references assembled in Section 3.

This leads us to a final element of the conception of *nous* offered in the passage quoted above, which can be extracted from clause (c). The *nous* that comes from outside is an ‘underlying capacity, such as there is in the case of material objects, too.’ This is how Theophrastus thinks we should understand the characterization of the nature of *nous* taken from *An.* III 4, 429a24. The idea of *nous* as an underlying capacity, we submit, helps Theophrastus to spell out the sense in which *nous* enters from outside—unlike all the other capacities of the soul. Saying that *nous* is an underlying capacity means, effectively, comparing it to the capacities provided by the female matter (i.e., the *katamênia*) which enable the embryo to have various soul-capacities developed in it. The point seems to be that the underlying capacity for *nous* cannot be provided by any physical matter because *nous* is not part of the form of a body. Either this capacity is already present in the embryo or it will never belong to the animal in question. More to the point: this underlying capacity just *is nous*, for there is nothing that could underlie *nous* and because the only possible actualization of this capacity is thought.

As such, *nous* is radically different from all the hylomorphic capacities of the human being. What the natural development of the human being is expected to accomplish is (i) the integration of this unique capacity—that is, the capacity for thought—into the human soul, and (ii) the provision of all the enabling conditions for thought without which no one is able to engage in thinking. This is, to a certain extent, the regular outcome of human ontogeny. If everything goes well, we naturally develop into living beings that can engage in thinking and can communicate successfully using a language. And yet, unlike in the case of natural capacities, this goal, which is *regularly* achieved, does not coincide with a *full* actualization of *nous*. We have no reason to believe that Theophrastus departed from Aristotle’s view according to which the proper actualization of *nous* in human beings consists in our grasping the relevant essences, which is a very high and quite rare cognitive achievement. According to both Theophrastus and Aristotle, in most of us *nous* ever remains at a quasi-embryonic stage.

Theophrastus’ characterization of *nous* as an underlying capacity points, at any rate, to his conviction that while natural human development is needed to provide enabling conditions for thought, the actualization of thought itself cannot be a natural event. Unlike the other underlying capacities in the embryo, which are paired with the respective productive capacities allowing the embryo to develop those capacities, step by step, via natural processes, into full-fledged capacities of the soul, the productive correlate of *nous* is emphatically not present in the embryo, or indeed anywhere else in the realm of bodily natures. That is why thinking cannot have its origin in the body, and why *nous*

cannot be affected and actualized by bodily processes. Bodily processes are just not the kind of items that could have a direct impact on *nous*. The latter is beyond their reach. By Theophrastus' lights, there is only one thing that can act on *nous* and bring it into actuality once the latter has become an integrated part of a human soul and all the enabling conditions are in place, namely another *nous*, described by Theophrastus—in contrast to the 'underlying' *nous*—as the 'moving' (*kinôn*) *nous*.

Theophrastus introduces this second *nous* at another important juncture of his discussion in *Physics* V. After letting *nous* enter from outside as an underlying capacity, he starts questioning the way in which this *nous* is brought into actuality. The trouble, as he sees it, is, roughly, the following: on the one hand, there seems to be nothing beyond *nous* itself which can act on it; on the other, *nous* cannot be brought into actuality without being acted upon.³⁸ With Theophrastus' treatment of *nous* from outside in mind, this trouble is easily understood: as an *underlying* capacity, *nous* requires, by definition, something else that brings it into actuality by acting upon it; but as an *incorporeal* underlying capacity, it is beyond the reach of bodies and natural processes. Theophrastus' solution is straightforward:

[to claim] that the activity of *nous* is caused by something else moving [it], is absurd for other reasons too, but [above all] it means to make something else prior to *nous* and thinking not to be up to it, unless it is some other *nous* that moves [it] (*ei mê tis allos ho kinôn nous*). (Priscianus, *Metaphr.* 29.13–15 = 311 FHS&G)

The so-called *nous* of the soul, then, can neither be generated by embryogenesis nor be actualized by any natural process. And yet, Theophrastus insists that it is 'grown together' with us as an inseparable part of our human nature. We can finally begin to see how these two commitments are compatible and why Theophrastus brought out the latter in strikingly naturalizing language.

5 *Nous* and Nature

Later in *Physics* V, Theophrastus returns to the 'moving' *nous* and makes it clear that he means by it nothing other than the *nous* which 'produces

38 See Themistius, *In An.* 108.1–6 (= 307A FHS&G) ~ Priscianus, *Metaphr.* 27.8–14 (= 307C FHS&G). For an analysis of this puzzle and the role it played in later Peripatetic discussion of *nous*, we refer the reader to Roreitner (2024b).

everything' (*An.* III 5, 430a12), which has traditionally been labeled the 'agent' or 'productive' *nous*.³⁹ What is particularly interesting for our purposes is how Theophrastus grounds his naturalizing language in Aristotle.

Let us recall how Aristotle's *An.* III 5 opens:

Since (*epei*), just as in the whole nature (*hōsper en hapasêi têi phusei*), for every *genos* there is something which is matter (namely, what is potentially all those things) and something else which is the cause and producer because it makes them all, as for example art stands in relation to its materials, it follows that there must be these [two] different [factors] in the soul as well. (Aristotle, *An.* III 5, 430a10–14)

Theophrastus assumes that 'nature' (*phusis*) is the category under which soul, and hence *nous*, is to be subsumed:

What needs to be further explored is our saying that in all nature (*en pasêi phusei*) there is, on the one hand, something like matter and in potentiality (*dunamei*) and, on the other hand, the cause and that which can act. ... What kind of pair then are these two natures (*tine oun hautai hai duo phuseis*)? (Themistius, *In An.* 108.20–21, 22–23 = 320A FHS&G)

What Themistius reports in this passage may not surprise contemporary readers because they are used to a text from which *hōsper* has been dropped.⁴⁰ But this editorial choice is far from obvious, let alone uncontroversial. For one thing, *hōsper* is found in all manuscripts. For another, at least in the received text, Aristotle is emphatically not subsuming *nous* under nature. Rather, he considers *nous* to be a *genos* sharing with all natures on the one hand and all artifacts on the other a distinction into the following two factors: the material and the productive. If we understand *genos* in the first of the senses distinguished in *Meta.* V 28,⁴¹ then Aristotle's idea must be that *nous* is subject to generation in which like produces like, just like all natural beings; as a result, it

39 See Themistius, *In An.* 108.18–28 (= 320A FHS&G).

40 So Ross (1956) [*editio minor*] and Ross (1961) [*editio maior*]. See also Hamlyn (1993²) and Shields (2016).

41 See *Meta.* V 28, 1024a29–31, b6–7. According to both passages, γένος is used in the ancient Greek language, in line with the derivational relation to γίγνομαι and γεννάω (IE *ǵenh₁-), when there is a continuous generation of things of the same kind.

must be possible to distinguish between a productive and a material factor of *nous*, just as is the case with artifacts, too.⁴²

Like many modern readers, Theophrastus reads the above passage in a creative way as if nature were the name for the domain under which *nous* is supposed to fall. But unlike many modern readers, Theophrastus is entirely clear about the fact that this domain is considerably larger than what Aristotle standardly calls nature. It must be so because both the ‘underlying’ and the ‘moving’ *nous* that fall under this domain are, by Theophrastus’ lights, incorporeal beings, separate from the body (*asômaton, khôrîston* [*sômatos*]): not only are they not bodies; they also cannot be analyzed as forms of hylomorphic compounds.⁴³ This is in stark contrast with Aristotle’s account of natural beings in *Phys.* II 1–2 as essentially hylomorphic, as well as with Theophrastus’ own determination of the subject matter of natural philosophy. At the beginning of his *Physics* and of his *On Nature*, respectively, Theophrastus claims that natural philosophy is concerned either with bodies or with ‘that which has a body’ (*ekhei sôma*) / ‘that which has its being in a body’ (*en sômati to einai ekhei*).⁴⁴

What can it mean, then, to subsume *nous* under nature, and, indeed, to call each of the two kinds of *nous* a ‘nature’? The core of the answer is contained in Theophrastus’ opening move, as analyzed in Section 4. The underlying *nous* falls within the extended realm of nature because it is ‘grown together’ with us, and so can only be actualized when the natural process of human ontogeny has been completed and all the natural enabling conditions of thought are in place. While this *nous* is incorporeal and is not—as itself an underlying capacity—underlaid by a body, its existence and functioning are *inseparably* bound with the existence of a well-functioning human body.⁴⁵ The moving *nous* turns out to be a nature by the same token: *qua* moving it is entirely dependent for its activity (that is, *moving* an underlying *nous*) on natural processes. To be

42 Theophrastus singled this out as the first of three kinds of generation in *Physics* III (= *On the Heaven*); see Simplicius, *In Phys.* 1236.1–9. It should be noted that this concept of generation does not imply any *coming-to-be*, which, we will argue in Section 6, is crucial to Theophrastus’ distinction between two kinds of motion. For a discussion of the opening passage of *An.* III 5, we refer the reader to Corcilius et al. (2024), Chapter 6.

43 The moving *nous*, moreover, is ungenerated and incorruptible. See Themistius, *In An.* 102.28 (= 320B FHS&G), 108.26–27 (= 320A FHS&G).

44 See Simplicius, *In Phys.* 9.10 (= 144B FHS&G) and Philoponus, *In Phys.* 4.12–14 (= 144A FHS&G), respectively. The contrast with Theophrastus’ account of *nous* stands out even more sharply when the latter category is spelled out in terms of capacities that have their being in the bodies which *underlie* them (Philoponus, *In Phys.* 4.16).

45 So there is a sense, albeit an etiolated one, in which the underlying *nous* always ‘has its being in a body’ and always needs to ‘have a body,’ that is, a human body.

sure, the two kinds of *nous* sharply differ from one another in that the moving *nous* alone is (eternally) active independently from any underlying *nous*, and indeed from nature;⁴⁶ by contrast, the underlying *nous* can only be active when being moved by the moving *nous*. But if this is right, then Theophrastus' naturalizing language, grounded in the genetic perspective on *nous*, is intended to underscore one point in Aristotle's account that the definitional perspective adopted in *An.* III 4–5 can easily conceal, namely the *infrangible* organic unity which binds the 'underlying' *nous* (despite its incorporeality) to the rest of the human being as an *inseparable* part of its essence, depending on the body both existentially and functionally.

Theophrastus' opening text, as reported above from Themistius, contains at least a few hints at what Theophrastus takes to be at stake here. He rejects two unacceptable interpretations of Aristotle—the first pertaining to his characterization of the so-called *nous* of the soul in *An.* III 4, the second to his claim that *nous* enters from without in *Gener. An.* II 3. Moreover, he sketches out an approach which, in his mind, avoids both kinds of misunderstandings. The first misunderstanding consists in inferring that since *nous* is nothing in actuality, it is not even itself, and so, apparently, is nothing at all.⁴⁷ This is presented by Theophrastus as an eristic interpretation—that is, an interpretation motivated by the desire to dispute Aristotle's claim that *nous* is nothing in actuality before it is activated. In fact, the interpretation in question may not be prompted by a mere desire to dispute Aristotle's claim as Theophrastus alleges—that may already be a part of Theophrastus' attempt to disqualify an interpretation he did not like. A more charitable reading is possible. The constructive idea behind this interpretation may be that for Aristotle *nous* is nothing over and above the senses: it is not a self-standing capacity and can be explained (away) as a certain determination or (excellent) condition of *the perceptive capacity*.⁴⁸ Such a tendency is attested for Strato of Lampsacus, who famously identified reason (*dianoia*) with the senses 'peeping out through the

46 See Aristotle, *An.* III 5, 430a18: τῆ οὐσίᾳ ὧν ἐνέργεια. Cf. Theophrastus in Themistius, *In An.* 108.26–27 (= 320A FHS&G), on the imperishable and ungenerated character of the moving *nous*.

47 That this is what Theophrastus means is confirmed by a sequence of questions he raised later, as reported by Priscianus, *Metaphr.* 29.18–27 (= 311 FHS&G): he asked rhetorically whether it follows from Aristotle's account that when *nous* does not think 'it is not even *nous*' (οὐδὲ νοῦς ἐστίν), and then whether it follows from this that *nous* is simply nothing (οὐδὲν ἐστίν).

48 This idea can, in fact, be suggested by a certain reading of Aristotle, *An.* III 4, 429b10–22. A few modern scholars have read the simile of a bent and a straight line at 429b16–18 as suggesting that *nous* can be conceived as the perceptive capacity (τὸ αἰσθητικόν) in the state of being 'straightened out' (or in a 'bent' state if the simile is read the other way round).

sense-organs,⁴⁹ and who took thought to be a motion derived from perceptual motions.⁵⁰ Theophrastus is clearly determined to resist any such reductive and straightforwardly naturalist account of human rationality. He thinks that *nous* is a self-standing capacity, irreducible to any other capacity, and, indeed, a basic capacity, which cannot emerge from any natural process and is identifiable with no part of the form of the human body.

This is why *nous* cannot but come to be present in us from outside. The problem is that this key genetic idea of *nous* coming from outside could easily be misunderstood as taking *nous* to only be something superadded, and so perhaps capable of leaving again, so that its relation to our natural selves would only be loose and precarious. In other words, someone could press the following dilemma on Aristotle and Theophrastus: either you reduce *nous* to a certain condition of the perceptive capacity, or *nous* becomes foreign to us, natural human beings, as something which can at most be superimposed on our bodies but that can never be fully integrated so as to become an inseparable part of what we are. Interestingly, we know that an understanding of ‘*nous* from without’ along these lines was alive among the Peripatetics of the first century BC. Cratippus of Pergamon is reported to have explained prophetic dreams by referring to *nous*, or the noetic part of the soul ‘drawn from without,’ which can leave the body during sleep and come back again.⁵¹ This extravagant (Platonizing) doctrine seems not to have been isolated in the early history of the Peripatetic school (although it seems to have never belonged to the mainstream). Closer in time to Theophrastus, such an idea was most emphatically embraced and defended—as Aristotle’s own insight—by Clearchus of Soli.⁵²

We insist on this Peripatetic background because we believe that it can shed some light on what may have motivated Theophrastus in his treatment of *nous*. It is also worth stressing that while Cratippus is removed in time from Theophrastus, Clearchus and Strato are his contemporaries and are also likely to be his interlocutors within the Peripatos. By insisting that *nous* comes from outside but is ‘grown together’ with us as a part of our ‘nature,’ we submit, Theophrastus wants to block both these alternative approaches. He is likely to perceive them as a threat to the *sui generis* status of *nous* on the one hand, and the infrangible organic unity of the human being on the

49 See Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* VII 349–350 (= 61 Sharples) and Tertullian, *On the Soul* 14.5 (= 59 Sharples).

50 Simplicius, *In Phys.* 965.7–18 (= 41 Sharples).

51 Cicero, *On Divination I* 32.70.

52 See Proclus, *On Plato’s Republic* II 114 and 122.22–123.6 (= 8A and 7 Dorandi). For Clearchus as a possible source of inspiration for Cratippus, cf. Verde (2022), 155–72. For a fuller exploration of the position Theophrastus wants to exclude, see Roreitner (2024a).

other. Theophrastus wants to insist that—its status of a self-standing, basic, and incorporeal capacity notwithstanding—the ‘underlying’ *nous* is inseparably bound to our natural selves in the sense of both existential and functional dependence. Theophrastus’ qualifiedly naturalizing reading of Aristotle on *nous* is, thus, a balanced way of resisting both the strictly naturalist conception of *nous* (*à la* Strato) and the super-naturalizing and quasi-dualistic tendencies (*à la* Clearchus). By his lights, both options are pitfalls to be avoided.

6 Thought and Motion

If this is the ultimate philosophical point of Theophrastus’ naturalizing language, one key question remains to be discussed: Does this philosophical motivation also help us understand Theophrastus’ kinetization of *nous*—that is, his recurrent description of thinking as a kind of motion or change (*kinêsis*)?⁵³

We have seen that these descriptions, just like the naturalizing language adopted for *nous*, cannot be mere slips on Theophrastus’ part, since it is in his very treatise *On Motion* that he insists that thinking belongs to the category of motion. What makes Theophrastus’ insistence particularly puzzling is that it occurs right after he has brought out the reasons that led Aristotle to *avoid* kinetic language when speaking of thinking. Indeed, Theophrastus elsewhere uses Aristotle’s key idea for ruling out kinetic language—namely that thought is *complete*—to insist that the passivity of thinking should not be understood in terms of motion (*kinêsis*) but rather in terms of passive activity (*energeia*). Is this a sheer contradiction? Or is Theophrastus following a well-thought-out strategy when he speaks of the relation between thought and motion in these two, *prima facie* conflicting, ways? To answer these questions, we need to revisit the extant testimonies pertaining to Theophrastus’ account of motion. It will turn out that treating them separately from the testimonies pertaining to *nous* is most unfortunate.

A good starting point is a remark on Aristotle’s definition of motion in *Phys.* III 1–2 that Theophrastus made repeatedly (at least in *Physics* I, *On Motion* II, and *On Motion* III). Theophrastus reportedly highlighted the generality of Aristotle’s definition in *Phys.* III 1–2 (against what may look like Aristotle’s attempts at limiting the purview of the concept of motion elsewhere).

53 For the close connection between the notions of nature and motion, see the report on Theophrastus’ *Physics* I in Simplicius, *In Phys.* 20.20–26 (... πάντα ἐν κινήσει τὰ τῆς φύσεως ..., 143 FHS&G) and his *Metaphysics* VIII 27 (= 21 Gutas) 10a9–10.

One conspicuous common element here is the claim that Aristotle's definition of motion applies to all categories of being.⁵⁴ This is striking because the claim *prima facie* sharply contrasts with Aristotle's endeavor in *Physics* V 1–2 to limit motion to the categories of quality, quantity, and place, on which Aristotle builds in his argument against motions of soul in *An.* I 3 (see 406a12–13). Indeed, Theophrastus' comment on the *pros ti* category from *On Motion* III suggests that he was aware of the contrast. He acknowledges that there is no motion in *pros ti* when understood as *pros ti kata logon*, which is, apparently, what he takes Aristotle's argument at *Phys.* V 2, 225b11–13 to show. However, Theophrastus insists that there is a motion in *pros ti kata dunamin*.⁵⁵ It is likely that Theophrastus spelled out how the definition of motion does (and does not) apply to other controversial categories too (especially substance and acting and being affected), but that Simplicius, who is our sole source of information for this, did not find this interesting enough for his purposes.⁵⁶ That is regrettable because Theophrastus' comments on acting and being affected

-
- 54 See Simplicius, *In Phys.* 860.19–23 with 861.23–26 (= 153C FHS&G) and *On Aristotle's Categories* (*In Cat.*) 435.24–31 (= 153A FHS&G) from *Physics* I; *In Phys.* 413.1–4 (= 153B FHS&G) from *On Motion* II; *In Phys.* 413.4–9 (= 153B FHS&G) from *On Motion* III. Cf. Aristotle, *Phys.* III 1, 201a8–9: there are as many kinds of motion as there are of being—but the claim comes after enumerating just four kinds of being: substance, quality, quantity, and place. Sharples (1998), 70–1, points out that, even in Theophrastus, 'all' need not necessarily mean 'all ten.' If *Phys.* V 1–2 is the relevant context, then substance, relation, and acting/being affected will be the key targets.
- 55 Simplicius' report at *In Phys.* 413.8–9 (= 153B FHS&G) gives us no clue as to what Theophrastus may have meant by this distinction. But, as noted by Robert Sharples (in Sharples 1998, 74–75), Theophrastus is likely to have been inspired by the kind of distinction Aristotle draws in *Meta.* V 15 between (i) πρὸς τι κατ' ἀριθμὸν and (ii) πρὸς τι κατὰ δύναμιν (cf. *Phys.* III 1, 200b27–30). Aristotle's example of (ii) is the pair of what can heat and what can be heated, and he points out that there are ἐνέργειαι of these, unlike for (i), e.g., the activity of heating and being heated. The same point could be extended to (iii) the third class of πρὸς τι distinguished in *Meta.* V 15, namely the measurable, the knowable, the perceptible, and the like: there, surely, are ἐνέργειαι also of these, namely being measured (and measuring), being known (knowing), being perceived (perceiving). It is difficult to see why Theophrastus would bother to make his point if he only had (ii) in mind (for a surmise, see Sharples 1998, 75). But if he also—or even primarily—had (iii) in mind (which comfortably fits under the κατὰ δύναμιν label), his intention would be more easily understandable. One option at least is that he wanted to make room for cognitive acts like perception being conceived as ἐνέργειαι, and so motions in the category of relatives: as relations to the respective objects established for a certain period of time. Cf. Priscianus, *Metaphr.* 21.4–8 (= 282 FHS&G).
- 56 Substance (οὐσία) is at least explicitly mentioned in one list of examples of relevant categories (see Simplicius, *In Phys.*, 413.1–4 = 153B FHS&G). Here Theophrastus clearly has a point. In *Phys.* V 2 Aristotle excludes motion in the category of οὐσία on the basis that there are no contraries in the category of οὐσία; but no mention of contraries figured in

could have shed light on the apparent contradiction between his account of the passivity of thought in terms of activity rather than motion and his insistence that thought is a motion.

Fortunately, the bits and pieces that Simplicius does quote contain at least clues as to what Theophrastus might have said about acting and being affected and how it could underlie his kinetization of human thought. We learn, first of all, that his *generalization* of the definition of motion went hand in glove with a certain *distinction* drawn within this generalized category of motion. In *Physics* I, Theophrastus wrote: ‘we ought to inquire about motions, some of which are comings-to-be, while others are like (*hōsper*) a sort of *energeiai*.’⁵⁷ The first kind of motion here goes some way toward justifying Aristotle’s limitation of motion to quality, quantity, and place, but stops short of providing a full justification since substantial change (excluded by Aristotle right at *Phys.* V 2, 225b10–11) would apparently be included, too. What, however, could the second kind of motion possibly be? The contrast with coming-to-be suggests that Theophrastus has in mind what Aristotle occasionally calls *complete activities*, such as perception or thought.⁵⁸ Unlike motion from one place to another or qualitative change, which consist in coming-to-be in a certain location or state and which are over once they attain their goal, perception and thought are complete activities in the sense of not being directed at anything beyond themselves (that is, not coming to be anything), but already containing their goal within themselves.⁵⁹

If this is (at least a part of) what Theophrastus means, another question arises: Why does he insist that these *energeiai* represent one kind of motions?⁶⁰ A part of the answer may be contained in another report from Simplicius where Theophrastus is said to have drawn an even more general contrast between

the definition of *Phys.* III 1–2. Indeed, at *Cat.* 14, 15b1–16, substantial generation is counted as a fourth kind of motion.

57 Simplicius, *In Phys.* 860.27–28 (= 153C FHS&G): ζῆτεῖν δεῖ, φησί, περὶ τῶν κινήσεων, εἰ αἱ μὲν γενέσεις εἰσὶν, αἱ δὲ ὡσπερ ἐνέργειαι τινες.

58 See *Meta.* IX 6, 1048b18–35, *NE* X 4, cf. *An.* III 7, 431a4–7.

59 Simplicius uses the quote as support for his observation that Theophrastus understands generation and corruption as also being motions; he thus ascribes a much narrower meaning to γενέσεις than we did. We cannot exclude this reading, but it is not able to account equally well for the details of the text: (i) γενέσεις in plural, (ii) no mention of corruption, and, above all, (iii) the cautious formulation ‘like a sort of ἐνέργειαι’—more on which below. We will also see that the proposed reading fits better with Theophrastus’ concerns in other relevant fragments.

60 Cf. Theophrastus, *Metaphysics* VIII 27 (21 Gutas) 10a9–16, where the category of ‘motion’ and ‘moving’ seems to cover all activities of life.

motions and *energeiai*.⁶¹ While all motions are *energeiai*, not all *energeiai* are motions; yet by non-kinetic *energeiai* here Theophrastus does not mean complete activities: he means ‘the substance and the proper form’ as ‘the *energeia* of each thing, which is not a motion.’⁶² This kind of *energeia* is not a motion but rather a non-kinetic perfection (*teleiôtês*). One example is the perfection ‘with respect to the shape of a statue.’ This is a non-kinetic *energeia*, because ‘the shape remains at rest with respect to one and the same perfection.’⁶³ Again, the way Theophrastus distinguishes between the two suggests that ‘complete activities,’ like perception or thought, are supposed to fall on the side of motions. But the passage may also shed some light upon Theophrastus’ cautious formulation in the preceding quote, where he says that the second kind of motions are ‘like a sort of *energeiai*.’ The idea seems to be that they resemble non-kinetic, resting perfections, like the shape of a statue—but not quite. They are neither comings-to-be nor resting perfections.⁶⁴ What we still need to understand is why Theophrastus classifies them as *motions*.

It is important to notice that Theophrastus’ distinction between two kinds of motion was drawn in direct connection with his comments on Aristotle’s definition of motion from *Phys.* III 1–2, and apparently in direct connection with Theophrastus’ insistence that this definition applies to all categories of being.⁶⁵ This sheds some light on how he could have construed Aristotle’s definition of motion. It strongly suggests that Theophrastus did not understand the key phrase ‘of what is potential *qua* potential’ (which seems explicative of ‘incomplete’) in the way it is often understood—namely as implying that the subject of motion is such as to not yet have reached its goal. If motions which are not comings-to-be (but rather complete activities) are supposed to fall under the definition, too, then the phrase ‘*qua* potential’ must be less restrictive than that. More to the point, Theophrastus does not seem to think the phrase implies that motion cannot co-exist with its goal (as no physical object can be both, say, still moving to a certain position and already located in that position). The idea of motion as the actuality of the potential *qua* potential

61 We do not know where it comes from, but most likely it comes from *On Motion* or *Physics* I.

62 Simplicius, *In Cat.* 304.35–305.1 (= 152 FHS&G): τὴν γὰρ ἐκάστου οὐσίαν καὶ τὸ οἰκτεῖον εἶδος ἐνέργειαν εἶναι ἐκάστου, μὴ οὖσαν ταύτην κίνησιν. Cf. Sharples 1998, 69 for the probable authenticity of this report.

63 Simplicius, *In Cat.* 305.3–4 (= 152 FHS&G): ἔστηκεν γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν τελειότητα. There is nothing suggesting that this characterization does not derive from Theophrastus; but even if it is Iamblichus’ addition, that is not crucial for our argument.

64 Theophrastus’ use of ἐνέργεια rather than ἐντελέχεια in his rendering of Aristotle’s definition of motion can thus hardly be a ‘way of emphasizing the notion of process,’ as suggested by Sharples 1998, 67.

65 This connection is suggested by Simplicius, *In Phys.* 860.23–27 (= 153C FHS&G).

only seems to imply, by Theophrastus' lights, that motion is *dynamic* in the sense of existing just for as long as a *dunamis* is being actualized, no matter whether this actualization consists in approaching a goal or already contains it. In this sense alone the subject of motion would be necessarily incomplete.⁶⁶ To illustrate the proposed contrast between static and dynamic actualities, compare a statue, which remains an actual statue when the sculptor is done and leaves, with a human thought, which only exists for as long as it is being brought into actuality by a mover—namely (on Theophrastus' account) by the moving *nous*. This shows how complete motions, like perception or human thought, differ both from substantial forms, i.e., stable or static *energeiai* of the corresponding potentiality, and from *energeiai* which do not depend on potentialities at all (think of the Prime Mover).⁶⁷

If this (admittedly speculative) reconstruction is on the right track, we can begin to see how Theophrastus' kinetization of human thought fits within his larger strategy of naturalizing *nous*. Saying that human thought is a motion (albeit not a coming-to-be) means emphasizing that it is an activity which is at every single moment existentially and functionally dependent not just on the underlying capacity, but also, by implication, on all the enabling conditions that can be provided by nothing other than a well-functioning human body.

But it is not just that Theophrastus' kinetization of human thought sheds additional light on his naturalization of *nous*. It also works the other way round: if our suggestions are on the right track, then Theophrastus' general discussion of motion cannot be properly understood and appreciated if it is separated, as a part of his 'physics,' from his account of *nous*, as a part of his alleged 'psychology.' We can illustrate this point with the help of the group of testimonies concerning Theophrastus' use of the idea that things can change 'all at once' (*athroa/athroôs*). The idea derives from the passages where Aristotle briefly mentions the possibility that large objects, such as a pond, can undergo a change (*kinêsis*), such as freezing, all at once rather than part by part.⁶⁸ That, to be sure, does not imply that changes of this sort are instantaneous.⁶⁹ The

66 Cf. Simplicius, *In Cat.* 435,28–31 (= 153A FHS&G) and *In Phys.* 860,21–23 (= 153C FHS&G).

67 Cf. Theophrastus' *Meta.* V 16 (= 16 Gutas) 7b9–15 and Simplicius, *In Cat.* 305,1–2 (= 152 FHS&G); beside the perfection 'with respect to the shape of a statue,' Simplicius reports, as an example of non-kinetic *ἐνέργειαι*, the perfection *ἐν τοῖς νοητοῖς καὶ φύσει ἀκινήτοις*. It is controversial whether Theophrastus recognized such activities, but there is at least no clear evidence that he did not.

68 See *On Perception and Perceptible Objects (Sens.)* 6, 447a1–3; *Phys.* VIII 3, 253b25–26; cf. *Phys.* I 3, 186a15–16.

69 Although Aristotle is sometimes paraphrased in that way by scholars (see, e.g., Sharples 1998, 77).

pond does not freeze in an instant. Alexander of Aphrodisias, for one, is very clear on this front: the only instantaneous changes are relational changes (e.g., illumination), and yet these are not genuine changes at all (as Aristotle shows in *Phys. V 1–2*).⁷⁰ But other thinkers, such as Porphyry, tried to explain these passages as if Aristotle had genuine instantaneous changes in mind.⁷¹ If we are on the right track, Theophrastus may have played an important role in the development of this idea (which later inspired speculations about the creation of the world).

Interestingly, two reports in Themistius suggest that Theophrastus was at the very least more ambiguous than Alexander in treating the possibility of instantaneous change. Theophrastus is reported to have raised a puzzle as to whether the phenomenon of changing *athroôs* does not call into question Aristotle's claim (in *Phys. VI 4*) that only things which have parts can change.⁷² And his approach is contrasted by Themistius with Alexander's straightforward denial that there could be any instantaneous changes.⁷³ Theophrastus struck Themistius more like someone in doubt about the question. Themistius gives a possible reason for this doubt in the phenomenon of change from darkness to light: the entire room, apparently, changes from darkness to light all at once and in no time at all.⁷⁴

There is one understudied testimony which can help us understand what Theophrastus was up to in his reflections on the phenomenon of changing *athroôs*:

And Theophrastus in his *On Motion*, Book I, appears to agree on this very point [i.e., the meaning of changing *athroôs*]. He says as follows: Concerning [the idea that] what is moved ought to be moved (*dein kinêisthai to kinoumenon*) and what has been moved ought to have been moved (*dein kekinêsthai to kekinêmenon*) it is then very well possible to say what applies to bodies, too (*ho kai epi tôn sômatôn*), with respect to alteration, namely that the half does not always come before [the whole]

70 See *On Aristotle On Perception and Perceptible Objects* 133.1–27 (cf. *Sens.* 6, 446b27–28 for an explicit rejection of the idea that illumination could be a motion).

71 See the report on Porphyry in Simplicius, *In Phys.* 106.30–107.6 (Simplicius rejects the idea).

72 Themistius, *On Aristotle's Physics (In Phys.)* 191.29–192.2 (= 155A FHS&G).

73 Themistius, *In Phys.* 197.4–8 (= 155B FHS&G).

74 Given Theophrastus' view that there is a motion in the category of *πρός τι*, he could not simply say, as Alexander did later, that illumination is no genuine motion/change. For the instantaneity of the light's propagation, see Aristotle, *An.* II 7, 418b20–26.

but sometimes [the thing moves] all at once (*athroon*). (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 107.12–16 = 155C FHS&G)

Without the original context, it is hard to see what Theophrastus is talking about here.⁷⁵ The reference to ‘what *also* applies to bodies’ is particularly opaque. But perhaps the quote will start to make sense when we recall that it was also in *On Motion* I that Theophrastus—after spelling out the peculiarities of thought, connected to the fact that *nous* comes from outside—insisted on thought being nonetheless a kind of motion and invited us to search for conceptual distinctions that would allow us to understand how this can be so and how the kind of motion thought is differs from ‘bodily motions.’⁷⁶ What we have reviewed above (deriving largely from *On Motion*, too) at least comes close to providing such a conceptual apparatus: thought is a motion which is not a coming-to-be but is rather ‘like a sort of *energeia*.’

The last quoted report from Simplicius may well be even more directly related to the extant discussion of *nous*. This context would at least perfectly explain Theophrastus’ reference to ‘what applies to bodies, *too*.’ It would also explain his concern with the present and the perfect tense of ‘moving.’ The question raised by Theophrastus was exactly how the relevant kind of motion, the motion that consists in an act of theoretical discrimination, differs from bodily motions, and the key distinguishing feature of the former was precisely its completeness which is most straightforwardly manifested in the coincidence of the present and the perfect tense.⁷⁷ In the last quoted passage, Theophrastus is, presumably, concerned with the apparent incompleteness of motions manifested in the mutual exclusiveness of the two tenses,⁷⁸ and he is concerned with it as an apparent objection to the idea that theoretical discriminations can be motions (for theoretical discriminations are, of course, complete). Presumably, he is answering this worry by saying that the mutual exclusiveness of the two tenses should not be taken for granted as a necessary characteristic of all motions, and he supports this answer by pointing out that *even* in the case of bodies (the realm of bodily motions) the exclusiveness is not so obvious in certain cases, or, at least, that the phenomena of changing *athroôs* have a *structural similarity* with complete activities, in that one cannot say what comes first and what second. This may shed light on Theophrastus’

75 Sharples (1998), 77–9, has virtually nothing to say about this testimony. We are not aware of any in-depth discussion of its contents.

76 See Simplicius, *In Phys.* 964.29–965.6 (= 271 FHS&G).

77 Cf. Simplicius, *In Phys.* 965.2–4 (= 271 FHS&G).

78 We take the idea behind τὸ κινεῖσθαι τὸ κινούμενον καὶ κεινῆσθαι τὸ κεινημένον δεῖν to be the rule of mutual exclusiveness of the two tenses, as established by Aristotle for κινήσεις.

concern with changing *athroôs* also in the previously mentioned reports. If, in particular, Theophrastus treated illumination as an instantaneous change, as suggested by Themistius, we see already here a transition from changing *athroôs* to instantaneous changing and we can understand how this transition could have been motivated by Theophrastus' concern to accommodate the activity of human *nous* as a specific kind of motion.

In any case, if the proposed interpretation of the quoted passage is plausible, it shows even better than the preceding material that dividing testimonies coming from a single book such as *On Motion* I into testimonies that pertain to 'physics' and testimonies that pertain to 'psychology' is unfortunate: not only do we miss an important background on the side of 'psychology'; we can easily become clueless, and unnecessarily so, on the side of 'physics.'⁷⁹ And what holds for single books also holds for entire treatises, such as Theophrastus' *Physics*. With the 'physical' material in hand we can readily understand that there is no real conflict between Theophrastus' classification of thought as a kind of motion and the explanation of thought's passivity in terms of activity rather than motion. Or so we want to argue as a way of testing our hypothesis about Theophrastus' kinetization.

The easiest way to make the two claims compatible is to say that Theophrastus is using the notion of motion in different ways in two different contexts. When classifying thought as a motion, on the one hand, he is explicitly extending the notion of motion beyond its standard meaning. When spelling out the passivity of thought, on the other hand, he is using the familiar Aristotelian contrast between complete activity and *motion in the usual narrow sense*—that is, roughly, in the sense of coming-to-be. This would mean that Theophrastus is using the word 'motion' in a narrow and a broad meaning depending on the context. While this might be mildly annoying, it does not affect the consistency of Theophrastus' thought.

It is worth stressing, though, that our annoyance may only result from the lack of direct evidence. We cannot rule out that if we knew how Theophrastus defended motion in the category of *paskhein*, we could better see his point in spelling out the passivity of human thought in *Physics* V. Here is at least one possible consideration. Aristotle's point against motion in the category of *paskhein* is that this would commit us to there being 'a motion of a motion,'

79 Yet another example may be Simplicius' quote from *On Motion* I at *In Phys.* 986.3–7 (= 156B FHS&G) with Themistius, *In Phys.* 195.8–13 (= 156A FHS&G). Theophrastus may have been calling into question Aristotle's exclusive association of the perfect tense with the final moment of motion.

which is impossible.⁸⁰ If Theophrastus' strategy with respect to *paskhein* is similar to that in the case of *pros ti*, he is likely to have acknowledged that there is, indeed, no motion in the category of *paskhein of one kind*. This could be described, we submit, as *paskhein* that results in the acquisition of a new quality (e.g., being heated). In this case there is, indeed, no genuine motion in the category of *paskhein*: either *paskhein* refers just to the mere transition to motion, that is, transition to the respective qualitative change, and so, as Aristotle shows, it cannot itself be a motion; or it refers to the respective change in quality, and so it is idle to speak of it as being a change in a different category besides quality. This is likely to be the kind of *paskhein* Theophrastus wants to exclude when discussing the passivity of thought and claiming that it is not to be understood in terms of being movable: it is neither to be understood as a *paskhein resulting in motion* (i.e., as a transition) nor to be reduced to a different kind of motion.

If this suggestion is correct, we can also see what kind of motion in the category of *paskhein* Theophrastus is likely to have defended in his *Physics* and in *On Motion*. When he says that the passivity of thought is to be understood in terms of *energeia*, what he may mean is that the *paskhein* in question results in and, indeed, is 'like a sort of *energeia*.' Thought is not reducible to a qualitative change, or a motion in any other category, exactly because it neither is nor results in any coming-to-be. And yet, by Theophrastus' lights, one must insist that human thought is a kind of motion, that it is not a static but a dynamic *energeia*, because it exists only for as long as an underlying *dunamis* is being brought into actuality, which, as we know, cannot happen without a complex set of bodily enabling conditions. And since there is no other category under which this motion could fall, there must be motion in the category of *paskhein*: a complete, and yet passive, and thus dynamic, activity.⁸¹

7 Conclusion

Many questions of detail remain open, but we hope to have made a compelling case for understanding Theophrastus' kinetization of human thought as an integral and well-considered part of his qualifiedly naturalizing interpretation of human *nous*. This mild naturalization, we argued, results from a

80 See *Phys.* V 2, 225b13–226a23.

81 Another candidate would be the category of *πρός τι*. But these two options need not be mutually exclusive; they may well be just two ways of articulating the very same point, or ways of articulating two distinct sides of the same event.

philosophically well-motivated re-thinking of Aristotle's account of the human capacity for thought. Theophrastus is neither attacking Aristotle, nor slavishly following him, nor merely 'commenting' on his canonized work. We rather tend to see Theophrastus as a philosopher freely developing what he understood as a shared project of penetrating the essence of human thought and understanding its place within the world of nature. In doing so, Theophrastus is already reacting to what he perceived as dangerous distortions and deadlocks of that shared project. This wider context of an early Peripatetic debate appears to be an important factor motivating Theophrastus' emphasis on the infrangible organic unity of the human being, including the non-hylomorphic and non-emergent capacity for thought.

Would Aristotle be happy with Theophrastus' way of reframing and reorganizing his account of *nous*? This is a difficult question to answer. On the one hand, we emphasized the extent to which Theophrastus remains committed to the central non-negotiable points of the Aristotelian doctrine of *nous*. But his reshuffling of emphases and his transformation of several key concepts, including central concepts of natural philosophy, are far from being innocent or inconsequential. Aristotle could easily worry that, as mild and cautious as Theophrastus' naturalization of *nous* was, it pushed him onto a slippery slope, where key distinctions risked becoming blurred. Against his own will, perhaps, Theophrastus might have come too close to the naturalist side of the false dilemma that, we argued, he was eager to overcome.

Be that as it may, the very fact that Theophrastus' treatment of *nous* raises these kinds of questions speaks in favor of recognizing him as a significant philosopher.⁸² We hope to have helped persuade the reader that Theophrastus was one, and that even the scanty fragments of his philosophizing are worthy of close and attentive reading.

Bibliography

- Caston, V. (2019). Theophrastus on Perceiving. *Rhizômata* 7, pp. 188–225.
- Connell, S. (2021). 'Nous Alone Enters from Outside.' Aristotelian Embryology and Christian Philosophy. *Journal of Ancient Philosophy* 15, pp. 109–139.
- Corcilius, K., Falcon, A. and Roreitner, R. (2024). *Aristotle on the Essence of Human Thought*. Oxford.
- Dorandi T., Mayhew, R. and White, S. (2022). *Clearchus of Soli: Text, Translation, and Discussion*. London.

82 Cf. Sorabji (1998).

- Fortenbaugh, W.W., Huby, P., Sharples, R.W. and Gutas, D. (1993). [FHS&G]. *Theophrastus of Eresus: Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought, and Influence*. Leiden.
- Hamlyn, D.W. (1993²). *Aristotle: De Anima*, Books II and III (with passages from Book I). Oxford.
- Roreitner R. (2024a). Ontogeny of Human Thought in Aristotle and Theophrastus. *Apeiron* 57.
- Roreitner R. (2024b). Thought 'from Without': The Role of the Agent Intellect in Alexander's *De Intellectu*. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 64.
- Ross, W.D. (1956). *Aristotelis De anima recognovit brevique adnotatione instruxit*. Oxford.
- Ross, W.D. (1961). *Aristotle's De anima*. Oxford.
- Sharples, R.W. (2012). *Strato of Lampsacus: Text, Translation, and Discussion*. New Brunswick.
- Sharples, R.W. (1998). *Theophrastus of Eresus: Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought, and Influence*. Commentary. Volume 3.1: *Sources on Physics*. Leiden.
- Shields, C. (2016). *Aristotle, De anima*. Oxford.
- Sorabji, R. (1998). Is Theophrastus a Significant Philosopher? In: Van Ophuijssen, J.M. and Van Raalte, M., eds., *Theophrastus: Reappraising the Sources*, New Brunswick, pp. 203–221.
- Verde, F. (2022). *Peripatetic Philosophy in Context: Knowledge, Time, and Soul from Theophrastus to Cratippus*. Berlin.