Mark Losoncz

THE ARISTOTELIAN ARCHE-DECISIONS AND THE CHALLENGE OF PERISHING

ABSTRACT
The paper deals with Aristotle's concept of corruption. First, it reconstructs Aristotle's debate with the pre-Socratics and then it focuses on the candidates for entity that can perish: form, matter, and substance. The text argues against the widely accepted thesis according to which substance is a *corruptio simpliciter* without further ado. The paper intensely relies upon ancient and medieval commentators of Aristotle. Finally, special attention is devoted to the dimension of time and the problem of actuality.

"…why some things are capable of passing away while others are incapable of passing away, no one says."[1]

(*Met*. 1075 b 13–14).

"…how could an eye that is corruptible see the incorruptible sun?"

(Duns Scotus 1997: 192)

One of the philosophers who made a series of arche-decisions[2] with regard to perishing was Aristotle. In that regard, he had at his disposal the thoughts of the philosophers before him, whom he could strictly criticize, and, on the other hand, a rich and diverse commentary literature appeared in the wake of his works. First of all, *On Generation and Corruption*, the *Metaphysics* and the

---

1   We will use the *Metaphysics* in the translation of C. D. C. Reeve (Aristotle 2016).
2   Every teaching, and every metaphysical teaching, is relying upon certain arche-decisions. Such decisions determine the framework of the investigations, the possibilities, the walkable roads. They are a beginning before the beginning, a choice before the choice, an "always already". They offer ready answers before anybody could have raised any questions. They trace out a field or a metaframe in which a problem can emerge as a problem at all. We can witness this kind of functioning in fact in the entire philosophy, even with regard to philosophy itself. It delineates what should be divided into to

Mark Losoncz: Research Fellow, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade; losoncz@instifdt.bg.ac.rs.

Physics deserve our attention, but we should also draw attention to some other works within the field of natural philosophy or logic. His most far-reaching decision is certainly the one that has to do with the simple insight that there is perishing. Even with this decision, he confronts his predecessors, those who denied or relativized the possibility of perishing. Thus, we can ascribe to Aristotle an ontological commitment that stands for the existence of perishing. However, on the other hand, we will see that he also had conceptual decisions

---

the pre-philosophical, everyday sphere, and what is unworthy of being the object of a philosophical investigation. It a priori eliminates something or qualifies it as relevant or irrelevant. It has blind spots, but also certain obsessions. We already tried to show, by focusing on Descartes' example, what kind of consequences can follow from certain arche-decisions with respect to the later evolution of a certain philosophy (Lošonc 2011). We could see that a certain philosophy can try to make a bridge over the gap or the demarcation line between pre-philosophy and philosophy, however, finally, it is condemned to exclude something. What will it banish, ignore or degrade as something unimportant? François Laruelle rightfully draws our attention to the "radical contingency" of the philosophical decision (Laruelle 2010: 196–224.). For instance, the way that the arche-decision divides the sphere of the empirical and the transcendental, is full of arbitrariness. Laruelle himself thinks that instead of this we should keep in mind what is not like a decision or what is not decidable – either because as an undecidable it slips out of the possibility of decision, or because its being is so robust and it offers itself as being ready, so that the choice with regard to it cannot even emerge. We can extend this perspective even to the critiques of philosophy. When Marx or Lacan conceptualize their critique with respect to the philosophical practice in general, they also must rely upon certain arche-decisions. The arche-decision can refer to pre-philosophy, just as to philosophy, or to post-philosophy that has – allegedly – a higher rank. However, one might ask if the authentic philosophical practice is not precisely rethinking the frames, the reframing of the frames, the care about hesitation? The arche-decisions can be reconsidered, we can take one step back. We can return to the beginning before the beginning and renew the coordinates. If it is true what Derrida suggests, that the moment of decision – by necessarily facing something undecidable – always have to be "mad" and beyond reasons, that is to say, it must emerge as a leap of faith (Derrida 1995: 65, 80), then one might also raise the question whether the leap could be different. Through a different leap we could open an entirely different horizon. This is how Bergson raises the question if humanity could take another path if it would, instead of the substantialist theories, focus on temporality, events, and action (Bergson 1919: 80–82). Let us add that Bergson himself sometimes spoke of substantiality affirmatively, for instance when he claimed that motion preserves itself by acummulating itself. (See: Lošonc 2018: 207–209). Thus, by starting from different arche-decisions, it could think of what is fluid and changeable easier. Bergsonian philosophy with great fondness demonstrates how the "Eleatic" presuppositions determined and limited thinking, from Plato to Einstein. The aim is to get rid of this attitude and choose another one, to commit oneself to a different way of seeing, to something that takes into consideration duration. If we can do away with the already given frames, a new creativity might start. However, we might ask even with regard to Bergson if the reframing of frames might be fruitful even in his case: while he was inclined to describe the durability of being as an avalanche that is gathering its past, sweeping up snow and not loosing a single snowflake, we might ask if, instead of this model of self-accumulation, we could take into consideration perishing as well. Hegel also starts from certain arche-decisions in *The Science of Logic*. The most general and most empty category of pure being is followed by the category of

that served the relativization or – according to some tense interpretations – denied perishing. Graham Harman claims that the pre-Socratic philosophers "all tend to think of their chosen ultimate thing as eternal or at least as indestructible, which remained a typical prejudice in Greek philosophy until Aristotle finally allowed for destructible substances" (Harman 2017: 46, cf. De Landa and Harman 2017: 16). Well, without any doubt, Aristotle took over his position as opposed to the majority of his predecessors when the perishing in general was at stake. Most of the pre-Socratic thinkers found their way to question the

_____

nothing, they become the same. Being becomes nothing, and vice versa, they disappear in each other as opposites ("being has passed over into nothing and nothing into being – 'has passed over', not passes over, ... *each* immediately vanishes in it opposite" [Hegel 2010: 59–60]). Their unity receives the name "becoming" *(Werden)* and thus we already have a frame, with its limits and barriers. It seems that this process contains perishing as well, not only creation (see: Carlson 2007: 21). Without the aspect of negation, the process could not be dynamic, in fact, it would stick in the mud already at the start. This arche-decision is the condition of fact that through the further evolution of categories the sublation *(Aufhebung)* can function. This example also shows how the initial choice with regard to perishing determines the further movement of thinking. But we could even leave behind the Western coordinates and question back differently. Tom J. F. Tillemans draws our attention to the fact that Indian and Tibetan philosophers gave an important role to negative philosophical argumentation, that is to say, they wanted to demonstrate that there are no entities of the sort *F*, or that things do not have *F*-properties (Tillemans 2018: 87). We can find in Buddhist philosophy many analyses that focus on the insight that entities do not have a substantial essence *(svabhāva)*, or as wholes, they do not have a holistic surplus with regard to the parts, or that the self as a substantial, separate and autonomous essence does not exist. Instead of being, the starting point is non-being or transience – the arche-decision with regard to this always already determines the framework of the possible investigations. Our aim is not to reconstruct a comprehensive Western metaphysical paradigm or discourse (patterned after Heidegger, Derrida, Agamben and others), which could have a certain unity, and from whose starting insights all the others might be deduced. There is no historical *Seinsschicksal* or signature that would have dominated or would still dominate the horizon. Certainly, one might not say that Western metaphysics in general ignored the question cessation and transience. However, we can reveal those arche-decisions because of which perishing has been in the background, arche-decisions that made the order of problems so that the whatness of perishing was hardly thought of. There is no single all-encompassing arche-decision, but there are arche-decisions that determined the standpoints with regard to perishing for centuries, by specifying the frames that enabled pro and contra opinions – without questioning the frame itself. Perishing was often analysed so that at the end of the investigation it was somehow eliminated: either so that they relativized perishing (that already has had a secondary role) by introducing entities that cannot perish, or, through mereological argumentation, they claimed that even though our everyday experience perceives certain objects as perishable, the elementary beings are in fact unperishable (and neither can they be generated), or so that they saved things from perishing by a temporal horizon that gathers the past, persists as presence without further ado or functions as eternal. As if those who reflected on perishing were regretting what they are doing, and they wanted to offer their condolences. But even if we accept Adorno's suggestions that the task of philosophy is to heal the wounds that thought causes to itself (Adorno 1995: 131), should not we come to the conclusion that transience and cessation are a wound that has to be ripped up without any mercy?

possibility of cessation. On the one hand, they – even independently from the concrete naturalistic analyses – presupposed that being has to be an eternal One that by itself makes perishing impossible, given that in case of perishing only the One could cease to exist, that is to say, the One would not be itself anymore. This insight might be joined by the – otherwise independent – thesis that everything that exists cannot perish, because this would lead to a contradiction, in the suspension of the tautology of "is": we cannot assume of what exists that it is not or that it becomes a non-being. Finally, it was widely accepted that cessation (or creation) in the absolute sense is not possible because the elements are eternal – we can only speak of their separation or aggregation. Parts can be transformed, but they cannot be generated or annihilated, and the whole remains simply self-identical. To sum it up, the denial of perishing has different ways: a monist one, one that is based on pure existence, and one that is inspired by mereological arguments. They can stand up by themselves, but they were even more convincing when they were somehow combined. While he was criticizing all of them, Aristotle himself also introduced certain arguments that might have raised some doubt with regard to perishing.

One of Aristotle's basic moves is that he carefully separates generation/corruption from other phenomena. First of all, he makes a distinction between generation/corruption and motion (qualitative motion, quantitative motion, or growth and diminution, and the change of place). Even though both are changes, they differ essentially, because while generation and corruption result in being or non-being, motion presupposes the continuous persistence of something. The other distinction is almost just as important, namely, the one that he makes between generation/corruption and accidental change. While the former has to do with the very being of things, the latter has no effects on their (non)being – Socrates remains Socrates even if he is not handsome anymore, but his death would be a substantial change. Even though the polysemy of language enables to describe the change of place as generation from somewhere to somewhere else (or we could simply describe motion as creation), or to describe the loss of an accident as perishing, we should keep in mind what is at stake in the case of these conceptual distinctions. Thus, we can speak of what was named in the Middle Ages – of course, in the wake of Aristotle – as *generatio vero et corruptio simpliciter*.

We are already witnessing a debate with the monists, because the distinction between generation/corruption and motion serves for Aristotle precisely to separate his standpoint from those who claim that creation (and cessation) is the same as becoming-different. Given that the monists think that the bearing matter remains as an unchangeable element, they cannot accept the fact of creation (and cessation) in its true sense. It seems that the thought of perishing is always already a great challenge for monism. The monism that claims that there is exactly one concrete object (existence monism) can hardly explain how could this object perish. But the difficulty is not less serious for the monism that accepts the doctrine that there is a whole that is prior to all its proper parts (priority monism). If we look over the history of philosophy, we can see that

monists were struggling with the question of cessation, and, finally and most-ly, they gave a negative answer. If one would raise the question of perishing, Spinoza might answer in the following way: "What we are calling the annihi-lation of B is not, strictly and metaphysically speaking, a going out of existence of a thing. Rather, it is an alteration – a qualitative change in something that remains in existence throughout" (Bennett 1980: 395–396, cf. Bennett 1984: 102–103). It is no coincidence that one of the interpreters of the monistically committed F. H. Bradley came to the conclusion that "for Bradley, there is no becoming and perishing" (Leemon 1992: 57). It is almost needless to say that monists who are committed only to the monism of an underlying whole, can accept without further ado that the parts can change, however, they presuppose a whole that cannot itself perish. Aristotle who was debating with the monists, was first of all taking into consideration the "Eleatic paradigm". Parmenides' poem claims that being, that is to say, what is exists, is one and continuous, "wherefore looseth not her fetters to allow it to come into being or perish. ... How could what *is* thereafter perish? And how could it come into being? For if it came into being, it is not, nor if is going to be in the future. So coming into being is extinguished and perishing unimaginable." (Fr. 8, Simplicius *Phys*. 145, I., Kirk and Raven 1957: 273). As G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven remark, Parmenides could find it obvious that an argument against perishing might be elaborated without any problem, similarly to the argument against coming to being. The Parmenidian perspective excludes non-being and becoming non-existent in general, and finds them unthinkable. What is "motionless ... is without be-ginning or end" (Fr. 8, 1. 26–31, Simplicius *Phys*. 145, 27., Kirk and Raven 1957: 276). Sometimes it seems that with regard to cosmology or the analysis of ill-nesses Parmenides accepts the monism of an underlying whole, that is to say, he admits the destructing nature of certain forces, but this does not change his insight that what exist, simply *is*, and cannot come into existence or go out of existence – only mortals think otherwise. Melissus who continued the "Eleatic paradigm" argues similarly when suggesting that what exists, has always exist-ed and will always exist, "without either beginning or end, but infinite" (Fr. 2, Simplicius *Phys*. 29, 22, 109., Kirk and Raven 1957: 299). What is thus eternal cannot become bigger or lose anything. What does not exist cannot come into existence or perish. If it would be created, it would also perish, and this would be absurd. Melissus finds the transformation of the One impossible, given that it would involve generation or corruption. But it is even more interesting that he finds this valid even for the hypothetical multiplicity: if they would exist, they could not transform themselves either – they would also be unperishable (Fr. 8, Simplicius *de caelo*. 558, 21., Kirk and Raven 1957: 305).

Taken altogether, our impression is that Aristotle's criticism with regard to the "Eleatic paradigm" is double: he refuses that there is only one unchange-able being, and, differently from this position, he argues for the multiplicity of substances that persist in spite of changes, and, on the other hand, he claims that there are contingent beings (Hoffman 2012: 145). Even though we can take into consideration a possibility just as Thomas Aquinas' commentary does,

namely, that for Parmenides being is fire and non-being is earth (Thomas Aquinas 1: 59, 69) (and this could be understood in such a way that the creation of fire from earth is absolute creation, while the reverse process is absolute cessation), however, such speculation would not change the fact that, according to the "Eleatic paradigm", "does not exist" cannot be thought of, and, in general, it "either is or not". Aristotle accepts that we cannot say of the same thing that it exists and that it does not exist at the same time (contradictory propositions are not tenable[3]), but he does not think that becoming existent or non-existent would be impossible (cf. Algra 2004: 91–123). What is more, in the *Metaphysics* he suggests that "there is always an intermediate, so that as between being and not being there is coming to be, so too the thing that is coming to be is between the thing that is and the thing that is not" (*Met*. 994 a 25–30). When he states that being is said in many ways, he adds that the perishing of substance or privation also have to be understood in the spirit of polysemy (*Met*. 1003 b 5–10). In a certain sense, in the sign of the denial of substance, as a meaningful tautology, one could say that even a not being is not being (*Met*. 1003 b 10), and, furthermore, one could say what is not being in many ways (*Met*. 1089 a 15–20). Without any doubt, these insights could enable us the meaning of becoming non-existent. Aristotle tries to make the fixed categories more flexible, in order to make possible the thought of perishing as well. In a nutshell, his answer to monism is pluralism, persistence in spite of changes, and contingency.

The debate with the monists comes together with the criticism towards the pluralists. Aristotle's critical analysis is first of all focused on Empedocles (or at least on the Empedoclians), and on Leucippus and Democritus. Empedocles made a distinction between four elements: earth, water, air and fire (together with the movers six ones). He was convinced that they always remain existent and that they can only grow (by merging) or decrease (by being separated) (see *Met*. 983 a 5–10). That is to say, without any doubt, there is change and multiplicity, but without generation and corruption. As *On Nature* suggests, we can tell about the elements that "besides these nothing else comes into being nor ceases to be; of if they were actually destroyed, they would no longer be; and what could increase this whole, and whence could it come? And how could these things perish too, since nothing is empty of them? Nay, there are these things alone, and running through one another they become now this and now that and yet remains ever as they are" (Fr. 17., 1. 14., Simplicius *Phys*. 158, 13., Kirk and Raven 1957: 328). Similarly to Parmenides, Empedocles flogged the mortals who are – by misunderstanding mixture, separation and transformation – convinced that there is generation and corruption, "fools ... who fancy that that which formerly was not can come into being or that anything can perish and be utterly destroyed" (Fr. 11, Plutarch adv. Colot. 12: 1113., C., Kirk and Raven 1957: 323). As if Empedocles extended this insight to human death when he described as the lack of wisdom the thought that mortals can be annihilated by decomposition. By habit, they call it destiny, but they are wrong.

---

3   Similarly, there is no intermediary between generation and corruption (*Met*. 1012 a 7–8).

He says that it is always where it has always been. According to Plutarch, this means that our existence extends beyond our "death". As for Aristotle's critique of Empedocles, it is elaborated on more levels: it contains the critique of the doctrine that action takes place through pores, but he also discusses the theory according to which the elements cannot be transformed into each other, and he thinks that Empedocles misunderstands the nature of growth and change. In principle, those who claim that matter consist of more elements should make a distinction between qualitative change and generation, however, their propositions contradict to this. *On Generation and Corruption* states the following: "it is not clear, for instance, how, on the theory of Empedocles, there is to be 'passing-away' as well as 'alteration'. In the philosophy of Empedocles ... it is not clear how the 'elements' themselves, severally in their aggregated masses, come-to-be and pass-away"[4] (*De Gen. et Corr*. 325 b 15–25). It seems that when, for instance, the elements meet each other in the right proportion, generation is possible. Aristotle is also uncertain whether Empedocles thinks that the one is the underlying one or the multiple. The debate with Empedocles reaches its peak in the following sentence: "the cause in question is the essential nature of each thing – not merely to quote his [Empedocles'] words: 'a mingling and a divorce of what has been mingled'" (*De Gen. et Corr*. 333 b 10–15). Here it is clear that the doctrine of generation (and corruption) has to be in a different way, namely, it does not have to be imagined as the proportional mixture of elements (in fact, as their juxtaposition). Empedocles is unable to grasp what Aristotle himself describes as formal cause and final cause (Williams 1982: 171). To sum it up, Aristotle thinks that the Empedoclian idea of action and transformation is not inappropriate in order to understand perishing. As we can read in the comment made by C. F. J. Williams: "Empedocles could account for the corruption and alteration of composite bodies in terms of the dispersal or replacement of the elementary particles which compose them. But the elementary bodies themselves, fire and all the others (325b23-4), are not decomposable into more elementary components, nor can they lose the properties that are their permanent characterizing features: fire, for example, can never lose its heat. Empedocles in this way fails to account for phenomena that Aristotle regards as evident to perception: water can be 'corrupted' by turning into air, and can 'alter' by becoming hot instead of cold" (Williams 1982: 131). That is to say, in the final instance, Empedocles is not only unable to grasp generation and corruption, but he is even unable to conceptualize qualitative change (cf. *Met*. 988 a 25–30). Empedocles has a further teaching which can be connected to the doctrine of mixture and separation, namely, the theory of love/friendship and strife. This distinction is not at all evident, since sometimes – even according to Empedocles himself – love / friendship separates and strife unites (*Met*. 985 a 25–30, 1000 a 25–29, *De Gen. et Corr*. 333 b 20). When love/friendship connects things, it destroys them. Alexander of Aphrodisias states in his commentary on Aristotle that for Empedocles this is one of the ways to

---

4   We are using the translation by Joachim 1970.

conceive corruption (and generation) – however, Empedocles still thinks that love / friendship and strife themselves are unperishable (and the same goes for the elements) (Alexander of Aphrodisias 1992: 68. [219, 25–30]). Taken altogether, we can say that monism is not the only way to deny or relativize perishing. A mereologically supported pluralism can contest the possibility of corruption without further ado: either by insisting on the idea of the unperishable whole (while accepting the plurality of changing parts), or without presupposing a totalizable whole, thus, by describing the remaining elements as being unable of being transformed, and by denying that they can ever perish.

The view that appears in Leucippus' and Democritus' philosophy is very similar to that of Empedocles. They all start from multiplicity and want to explain the way that action and influence functions. However, On *Generation and Corruption* emphasizes that "Democritus dissented from all the other thinkers and maintained a theory peculiar to himself. Not one of them penetrated below the surface or made a thorough examination of a single one of the problems. Democritus, however, does seem not only to have thought carefully about all the problems, but also to be distinguished from the outset by his method" (315 b 1), and that "the most systematic and consistent theory, however, and one that applied to all bodies, was advanced by Leucippus and Democritus: and, in maintaining it, they took as their starting-point what naturally comes first" (325 a 1). It seems that for the atomists the question whether motion is eternal was extremely important. However, this insight was joined by the idea that uncountable worlds are created and cease to exist, simultaneously or successively, in the infinite space. According to Leucippus and Democritus these uncountable worlds are "...supposed to be coming-to-be and passing away for an infinite time, with some of them always coming-to-be and other passing away; and they said that motion was eternal" (Simplicius *Phys*. 1121, 5., Kirk and Raven 1957: 124). Hence, corruption (and generation) had an important role in the worldview of the atomists, but one might raise the question what kind of role could it have within the world. We can conclude that they interpreted the meaning of this process in a peculiar and narrow way, that is to say, as the decomposition (and composition) of atoms, as breaking-up by means of the void. This is not an essential motion, but much more a restructuring that can be defined in a mereological manner. For Aristotle it was not acceptable that the atomists wanted to describe the bodies by referring to the void and indivisibility. He thought that there are no ultimate atoms that cannot be divided, however, ha was convinced that the bodies cannot by divided everywhere, because "the body could be divided at all these points and dissolved away into nothing; whereas it has potentially an infinite number of points, none next to another" (Ross 1995: 101). In principle, according to Democritus and Leucippus plurality is infinite, that is to say, the worlds consist of the infinite multiplicities of the bodies – the composite things come into existence from them, and the various atoms with different shapes join together in differently structured compositions. In that respect, one can describe the difference between qualitative change and generation/corruption: "they explain coming-to-be

and passing-away by their 'dissociation' and 'association', but 'alteration' by their 'grouping' and 'position'" (*De Gen. et Corr*. 315 b 5–10). According to this, the entry of a single thing in the mixture or the change of a single component can result in the restructuring of the whole. The parts are self-identical even if the composition is still different – just as tragedy and comedy are different, although they consist of the same letter. While according to this standpoint the atomic division, composition, mutual contact and the following structure determines the state of things, Aristotle thinks that the body "is liquid – and again, solid and congealed – uniformly all through" (*De Gen. et Corr*. 327 a 20–25), that is to say, change goes on in the entire body, and not – only gradually and by the change of shapes – in the parts. What is at stake is "the change of a thing 'from this to that, as a whole,' change affecting not only a thing's qualities but the formal and the material factor which together make it what it is" (Ross 1995: 101). In general, Aristotle extends these mereological insights to mixture as well. While some philosophers denied the possibility of combination (because they either thought that the constituents are annihilated or that they survive – thus, taken altogether, they are not combined), Aristotle was convinced that the chemical combination which results in homogenity is possible, a combination in which the constituents remain what they are potentially. This is also about the generation of a whole that cannot be reduced to the transformation of the parts. Aristotle agrees with the atomists that generation and corruption are not qualitative change, but he refuses to understand them as a mere restructuring of atoms: instead of this, he focuces on the whole body, and on the mutual influence of formal and material causes, on the generation and corruption (or some other change) of substances that can persist in spite of intrinsic change, even if certain parts are being separated. Furthermore, while Democritus (and perhaps Leucippus) held the view that only those bodies can effect each other that are similar, Aristotle argued for the transformations into contrary states. Finally, we can add that while the atomists – in that respect, staying close to the path of Parmenides according to which what exists cannot perish (or come into existence) – put emphasis on the difference between being and non-being, that is to say, between the atoms and the void, Aristotle prioritized the polysemy of being and non-being, and thus, he admitted that the becoming non-existent of being (and the becoming existent of non-being) is also possible. To sum it up, in the case of Democritus and Leucippus it is hard to find a text in which they would openly define atoms as being without generation and corruption, however, this is implicated by the description of atoms and voids as elements and principles. In short, they can speak of corruption (and generation) only in a relative manner. Let us remark that the insights of the atomists reappeared in a new form in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, and we can see them once again in the contemporary debates, namely, in the theories of those who claim that reality is nothing more than the composition of elementary parts in a mosaic.

Taken altogether, pre-Socratic philosophers are usually presupposing a basic entity (water, air or something else) that remains unchanged, and cannot

come into existence or cease to exist. Even if they find the corruption of any entity possible, they think that it can take place only on a derived level. For instance, we can discover such insights in the case of Anaximander. "And the source of coming-to-be for existing things is that into which destruction, too, happens" (Simplicius *Phys*. p. 24, 13 Diels [DK 12 A 9]., Kirk – Raven 1957: 107). So it may be that uncountable worlds are created and annihilated (in that regard the interpreters of Anaximander are uncertain), however, matter does certainly not perish, and the underlying Indefinite remains existent – while things can be destroyed into it. Furthermore, it is possible that generation and corruption will be infinite, given that infinite is that from which they are "separated" – however, the infinite itself remains unmolested. "Did motion come into being at some time... or did it neither come-to-be nor is it destroyed, but did it always exist and will go on forever, and it is immortal and unceasing for existing thing, being like a kind of life for all natural objects?" (*Phys*. VIII 1: 250 b 11., Kirk and Raven 1957: 127) – as Aristotle reminds us once again of the doctrine of Anaximander. We can find similar argumentation in the case of Anaximenes who stated "that air is the principle of existing things; for from it all things come-to-be and into it they are again dissolved" (Aetius I 3, 4., Kirk and Raven 1957: 158). Xenophanes found it possible that all people will perish when the earth sinks into the sea, and this way, a new creation will start (Kirk and Raven 1957: 177). Even for Heraclitus, whose views are described with the image of a relentlessly changing river, according to whom "nothing remains the same", "the unity of the river as whole is dependent upon the regularity ... of the balance of constituents in the world" (Kirk and Raven 1957: 198). Let us continue the analysis: even though Anaxagoras confronts his predecessors in many ways, with regard to the remaining and underlying thing, he follows them: "The Greek are wrong to recognize coming into being and perishing; for nothing comes into being nor perishes, but is rather compounded or dissolved from things that are. So they would be right to call coming into being composition and perishing dissolution" (Fr. 17, Simplicius Phys. 163, 20., Kirk and Raven 1957: 369). In the original mixture everything is ready, thus, perishing (and creation) can be eliminated without further ado or at least they can be reduced to mereological relations. The number of similar things remain the same, given that there is no numerical change and thing do not become existent or non-existent. Diogenes of Apollonia followed the same path when he thought that by perishing things return to the same thing from which they were created. This unchangeable underlying "thing is both eternal and immortal body, but of the rest some come into being, some pass away" (Fr. 7, Simplicius *Phys*. 153, 19., Kirk and Raven 1957: 436). It is no coincidence that Aristotle describes his predecessors as concordant – for them, with regard to the elements, there is no coming into being or going out of existence, only in a derived, limited way (*Met*. 984 a 1–16). Let us remark that not even Plato is an exception in that respect. At least the Platonicians wrongly presuppose "that there are certain natures beyond those in the heaven as a whole, and that these are the same as perceptibles, except that they are eternal whereas the

latter pass away" (*Met*. 997 b 5–10). So the conceptual framework is the same as in the case of the Presocratics: they assume an eternal, underlying thing (or, more precisely, things), and differently from it, the derived beings can perish, for instance through separation (at least this is what Plato suggests according to Aristotle: *De Gen. et Corr*. 325 b 25–28) or through the loss of forms (*De Gen. et Corr*. 335 b 10–15). What makes a difference between Plato's teaching and that of Leucippus, is that while Leucippus defines the indivisible things as spatial and describes them by referring to infinitely many shapes, Plato thinks that things are countable, finite planes – however, they both speak of indivisible entities and they both define them as shapes. Therefore, they both explain generation and corruption by referring to these things – according to Leucippus, the changes can happen in two ways, partly by means of the void, partly through contact (because everything is divisible at the contact points), while Plato is convinced that motion is possible only through contact, because he thinks that there is no void. Even though *ousia* comes from Plato, Aristotle modified it in an essential way, and this has serious consequences with regard to perishing as well. To put it simply, Aristotle held a quite different position from that of Plato, namely, that *ousia* itself can also perish. As Syrianus claims in his commentary on the Metaphysics: maybe things "are constantly coming to be and passing away, but enjoy permanence as a whole by virtue of their formal cause, as Plato would have it" (Syrianus 2006: 63 [104, 20]). It seems that Plato thinks that motion is possible only with the help of eternal and unperishable motion (*Phaedr*. 245 C5–E [cf. Beere 2009: 323]). While Plato makes a distinction between essence or forms and changing things, for Aristotle the challenge consists precisely of grasping essence within the changing things (Politis 2004: 314–315). Taken altogether, our impression is that Aristotle elaborated a position that was unprecedented.

⋆ ⋆ ⋆

Aristotle starts from the claim which is not at all evident, namely, that there is corruption, and that there are things that perish (and come into existence) by nature. However, his standpoint would not be original if it would consist of only of this statement. We could see that his predecessors accepted the possibility of perishing, at least on a derived level. Aristotle's aim is to describe perishing possible not only with regard to a limited layer of being (which is finite, mixed, which consists of parts, etc.), but even with respect to the fundamental entity that serves as an underlying basis for all the other categories. For Aristotle, the question of corruption (and generation) is so important that it seems as if he wanted to classify all the entities on this basis. At certain points of his lifework, for instance at the beginning of Λ book of his *Metaphysics*, he defines one type of substances as changeable and perceivable, and the other type as unchangeable and unperceivable (obviously, theology focuses on such immaterial and autonomous beings). With regard to the first type, he makes a distinction between those which are perceivable and changeable,

but still eternal and cyclically moving (and which always realize their aims), such as the stars, and those which can perish, that is to say, those which are parts of the sublunary world. The latter are mostly the object of natural investigations, but this does not mean that we cannot have metaphysical propositions about them. Corruption belongs to the "bad things" (*Met.* 1051 a 19–21). To put it simply, what has the possibility of becoming non-existent, cannot be considered to be eternal – that would be contradictory (as if this was a debate with Plato's *Timaeus* according to which the celestial beings do not perish, however, they have the possibility of being destroyed (Beere 2009: 323); similar insight apperead in Avicenna's philosophy [Giovanni 2014: 68]). The division can be made even more subtle, for instance by stating that the mathematical things cannot be separated from matter, more precisely, they are not independent from it, however, they are not changeable. Furthermore, it is also important that – differently from what the predecessors presupposed – the elements are not eternal, that is to say, they can be created from each other or destroyed into each other (see for instance *De Caelo*, 305 a 14-32). We can classify things based on their distance from eternal things. For instance, the perishable things are imitating the moved movers, and thus even corruption (and generation) is an imitative "heliolatry" that is adapted to the cyclical motion of the sun (Broadie 2009: 240). For instance, in his commentary *On Generation and Corruption*, John Philoponus suggests that the entities that are far away from the eternal beings cannot remain numerically identical, because they only desire to be eternal, but they are not able to realize it and, thus, they try to "cheat their perishing" by trying to acquire eternity in species and by imitating the celestial bodies (Philoponus 2005: 90 [296, 30]). In fact, the eternal (which does not involve potentiality) is the condition of every generation and perishing, it is far ahead of perishing entities. Perishable entities would not be possible without the eternal ones (if they would perish, everything else would also cease to exist), however, the contrary is not true. Given that in the Aristotelian worldview there is no space for infinite regress, perishable things cannot be reduced *ad infinitum* to other perishable entities, namely, they have to have eternal beings that serve as causes and underlying principles. Aristotle also mentions the aporia whether the principles of perishable and eternal things are the same, and whether the principles of perishable things are themselves perishable (*Met.* 1000 a 5–10, 1060 a 20–35).

Hermann Bonitz rightfully raises the question that Aristotle's argumentation might be circular: as if he stated that the eternal causes cannot perish because the impossibility of perishing implies eternity (we modified Bonitz's remark, that is to say, we adapted in to the commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias: Alexander of Aphrodisias 1992: 44). At this point, it is more important that the possibility and impossibility of corruption itself (and generation) serves as a basis for classifying the whole reality, according to which the entities can be divided into a hierarchy (and those who followed Aristotle, gladly classified the predicates on this basis: *necese est, corruptibile alique corruptibilitate relative, simpliciter incorruptibile...* [Duba 2014: 479]). This is a method that is practiced

even today. In his book which serves as an introduction to metaphysics, when he is defining concrete particulars, Michael Loux claims that they have a temporally limited being, that is to say, they come into existence at a certain time and their being is extended to a certain time, and after that "they pass out of existence at a time" (Loux 2002: 85). Accordingly, as Loux adds, concrete particulars are contingent being: things that exist, but whose non-being is also possible – that is to say, things that can perish. Here, the metaphysics of the layers of being is at stake: obviously concrete particulars can be defined with regard to the possibility of perishing because the same is not true for other beings, such as abstract entities or universals. So the perishable/unperishable binarity can serve as the most general basis of classifying the entities. Let us also remark that certain contemporary metaphysicians (for instance Daniel Deasy and Timothy Williamson) recommend us to ask which entities can go out of existence (or come into existence), instead of asking which entities do exist or not. This approach enables us to separate the eternal entities, but also to introduce a fruitful distinction, for instance between permanentism (according to which nothing ever comes into existence or goes out of existence) and transientism (according to which sometimes something begins to exist and sometimes something ceases to exist). Taken altogether, the fact that Aristotle is classifying the entities according to perishing and eternity is not an outdated approach, but serve as an inspiration even today.

In general, we can say that Aristotle's works mention corruption mostly in the shadow of generation. He mostly analyzes it when generation is also conceptualized, and sometimes we can come to conclusion regarding corruption only in a mediated way, by relying upon what is said about generation. As we suggested, Aristotle is trying to clearly separate corruption (and generation) from qualitative change, that is to say, from becoming-other. He does not accept that only the becoming something from something is possible, he explicitly claims that becoming non-existent (or becoming-existent) can also happen: "a thing changes, from this to that, as a whole" (*De Gen. et Corr*. 317 a 20–25). He does not contest the idea that the dissociation or the association of things can contribute to their corruption, however, he does not think that corruption is simply the – mereologically describable – restructuring of the entities. If "passing-away and coming-to-be never fail to occur in Nature" (*De Gen. et Corr*. 318 a 10), we have to raise the question what is exactly perishing, and what kind of novelty is offered by Aristotle's philosophy in that respect. Given that in the sublunary sphere, namely, in the world of perishable things everything is material, of course, matter itself is one of the candidates when we search for the perishable entity. Even if the immaterial entity cannot perish but the material can, then this seems to be a logical conclusion. We could see that Aristotle's predecessors were convinced that matter is what the things are made of, and "into which they pass away in the end" (*Met*. 983 b 6–10). Therefore, this is the final nature from which things are created and in which they perish, while this entity itself persist. Is the novelty of Aristotle's philosophy in claiming that matter itself is also perishable? Not at all. In fact, in this

respect, he follows the path marked by his predecessors: "there must be a matter that underlies what comes to be and changes" (*Met*. 1068 b 9–10, *Phys*. 192 a 25–34). Almost needless to say, this insight was especially important in the commentary literature. As William E. Dooley and Arthur Madigan claim by completing Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary, "matter itself, as the ultimate substrate, persists throughout all changes" (Alexander of Aphrodisias 1992: 44). Of course, this framework does not imply that every kind of matter is unperishable. So does Thomas Aquinas claim that the concept of underlying matter from which things are made of should be separated from "that kind of matter which is totally corrupted in generation. For example, bread is the matter of blood, but blood is not generated, unless the bread from which it is generated passes away" (Thomas Aquinas 2: 3).[5] Thus, matter basically cannot perish, only in a derived sense (for instance, in the case when it is not anymore what contained some kind of privation). As for Aristotle himself, we know it very well that his theory on substance went through a certain evolution. In the *Metaphysics* it is not merely a primary substance, an individual entity, but an entity composed of form and matter. Our problem has to do with the question whether the material aspect of substance is perishable. Our answer is no. To quote the formulation of Frank A. Lewis: "prime matter by definition itself has no matter – as prime matter, it is not itself a compound of form and matter – so it cannot be subject to generation or destruction" (Lewis 2009: 179). Or as Pierre Aubenque puts it, "matter is what persists when thinking wipes out every possible predicate, both the essential ones and the accidental ones, it is what remains as the *sine qua non* of every predication" (Aubenque 2009: 202–203, cf. Bostock 2006: 19, 23, 27, 34). Aristotle wonders whether matter can be identified with substance, but at the end he comes to the conclusion that it would be impossible because matter is not independent or separable, it is undetermined and lacks essence (it needs form). In itself, matter cannot be known and it is amorphous. The *hypokeimenon* is "the subject that ensures permanence throughout change" (Aubenque 2009: 215)[6]. Aubenque emphasizes that we have to be careful because if we absolutize the permanent and persistent character of matter, we can easily make the mistake that we turn it into an absolutely autonomous and fully valid entity, that is to say, into a substance. However, we would also make a mistake if we would overemphasize its indeterminacy and formlessness because that way we would consider it as a non-being, we would annihilate it – we would miss its positivity, the fact that matter is "stability and continuity which is analogous with the permanence of home *(hestia)* whose keeper is the woman. It is the present, that is to say, presence itself" (Aubenque 2009: 217). Therefore matter the *materia prima* is what ensures an underlying and persisting basis in spite of the changes, including corruption (and generation). It is the primary substrate that can persist without

---

5   We are using the translation made by Gyula Klima.
6   On Aristotelian corruption in the context of feminity: Milutinović-Bojanić 2013: 35–49.

any qualification and which persists in every final result. Matter itself does not perish, but the perishable things perish owing to it. It receives the forms, things are made of it, it is a passive principle of being, a possibility. So we have to be careful when we read in Ross' interpretation that "the material cause – that which makes generation possible – is 'that which can be and not be,' i.e. transient mutable substance" (Ross 1995: 107). Without any doubt, it is true that matter is the condition of the possibility of corruption (and generation), however, it is only a condition which itself cannot perish, only in a derived way. Matter is *ex hypothesi* infinite, and not finite (Alexander of Aphrodisias 1992: 2–3, 46). Basically, "new matter is never created, or old matter destroyed, either 'out of or into nothing' or by 'increasing or decreasing' the quantity of matter already there" (Bostock 2006: 44). Matter is for Aristotle first of all a *materia permanens*, and not a *materia transiens* (cf. Libera 2010: 77, with regard to the difference between *transiens* and *permanens* see: Thomas Aquinas 2: 2). Given that it seems that matter is not perishable, we might raise the question whether form is the entity that can cease to exist. However, our hypothesis cannot be verified. Without any doubt, the Aristotelian form is not the same as that of Plato (or at least as that in Platonism) which is opposed to corrupted (and generated) things as an eternal entity. The Aristotelian form is not an arche-paradigm, although it is what matter as a substrate "needs". Let us be clear that "form – or whatever we ought to call the shape that is in the perceptible thing – come to be, and the essence does not come to be either" (*Met.* 1033 b 5–6), and, what is more, we can say that "some things are and are not without coming to be or passing away – for example, points, if indeed they are, and in general the forms" (*Met.* 1044 b 21–23). The form can manifest itself in any matter, but its contribution to matter or its dissociation from it does not seem to be generation or corruption. Form is, first of all, a guarantee for permanence, for instance by keeping the body united (as *De Anima* suggests). Even if it contributes to matter or becomes separated from it, thus, contributing to its individuality as well, it undoubtedly causes change, but form itself does not have to change in order to realize its effects. As a formal cause, it is responsible for change, but itself persists as unchanged. By its nature, it has a persistence-grounding function. It is the integrative entity that we can say about matter in terms of predicates. Taken altogether, it seems that in the case of substance, whose basic property is persistence, "form and properties [are] remaining constant while matter and accidents are subject to change" (Lowe 2012: 233). But this is more than a contribution to mere persistence: form cannot be generated or corrupted. As Vasilis Politis puts it, according to Aristotle "the process of generation of a particular material thing (e.g. Socrates, when Socrates is generated in his mother's womb) does not involve a process of generation of the form of that thing. He concludes that the form of a changing, material thing is not subject to generation and destruction, and in general it is changeless" (Politis 2004: 222–223). Or, in the words of Walter E. Wehrle: „form *per se* does not contain matter, and so it cannot be either created or destroyed" (Wehrle 2000: 118). The latter remark is especially important because

there is a subtle distinction in its background: even though matter itself is also unperishable, there has to be something material in order to realize a kind of perishing – and this is not true for the form. The integrity of forms is a guarantee for the consistency and persistence of the world and of the things. Form cannot come into existence, "the form must always be preexistent" (*Met.* 1034 b 12), furthermore, a house is ready in the head of the builder before the very process of building (*Met.* 1034 a 23–24), and during the birth of a living being the form is already present in the parent (*Met.* 1033 b 30–32). Therefore, "what is said to be the substance as form does not come to be" (*Met.* 1033 b 18), and there is no reason to presuppose that the going out of existence of the form could be possible. Forms can appear and disappear, however, "the *eidos* cannot be created and cannot perish" (Aubenque 2009: 217). In the commentary literature, for instance, in Avicenna's works, it was mentioned that maybe being and non-being contribute to the eternal essence only in an accidental way (through generation and corruption), and some were even convinced that the mixture of being (or non-being) with essence is simply impossible (Kok 2014: 523). Of course, the more a commentary on Aristotle was Neoplatonic, the more it claimed that form is unperishable.

At this point, it is worth taking into consideration a further aspect. Since the time that Aristotle's works are available, it is much debated how the forms can be exactly defined. Either way, it is undoubtedly true for the forms as universal natures that they cannot perish. That is to say, as the medieval commentary literature suggested, "if all the individuals belonging to a certain substantial species were annihilated, the species would keep on being as a mere metaphysical possibility *(esse indeterminatum et in potentia)*" (Conti 2014: 574, cf. Philoponus 2005: 2.5–11, 91 [297, 10]); in this regard, see Buridan's arguments against this position: Kok 2014: 524). However, it was widely debated whether forms in general are universals, and whether in a concrete case the form of a given substance is a universal or a particular version of a universal. Many interpreters thought that forms are particular forms or essences (Wilfrid Sellars, Edwin Hartman, T. H. Irwin or Charlotta Witt), but others (Michael Woods, G. E. L. Owen, Alan Code, Michael Loux, Frank A. Lewis, and others) were convinced that forms are universals (with regard to the summary of the relevant literature see: Cohen, internet). Both positions have good arguments. From our perspective, only the question of perishing is important. In this regard there is no doubt: the more we consider form to be a universal or a sortal essence, the more we strengthen the idea of what we suggested earlier, namely, that forms cannot perish. To put it briefly, our impression is that the cessation of individually instantiated variations does not affect the universal form. Of course, it is not impossible to imagine an approach according to which form is still perishable in a certain sense. In his commentary *On Generation and Corruption*, Thomas Aquinas sketches the possibility according to which certain intermediate corruptions can take place: such as the form of a dead body, then the form of a putrefied body, and so on (Thomas Aquinas 1: 60). However, there is no reason to understand this possibility as the possibility of the corruption

of form in general. Taken altogether, the distinction between perishable and unperishable forms is very rare among the interpreters of Aristotle (one of the examples: Wehrle 2000: 159). Almost needless to say, beyond them it is even more widely accepted that form cannot perish. As Manuel DeLanda formulates it after having praised the realist Aristotle: "Aristotelian essences are, by definition, ahistorical, untouched by corruption and decay, as he would say" (De Landa and Harman 2017: 16).

Given that we came to the conclusion that neither form, nor matter can perish (or come into existence), that is to say, they can be transformed only with regard to their potentiality, *in virtute*, only one possibility is left: that matter and form are perishable only together, namely, as substance, so "what is capable of not being can pass away ... – 'unconditionally' is 'with respect to substance'" (*Met*. 1050 b 16–17). The composition is singular and perishable, or, according to a different formulation, the form individualized in the matter. We are right away facing the following difficulty: if neither matter nor form is perishable, how can the entity composed of them still cease to exist? In fact, the answer is very simple: if matter is associated with a new form, a new substance is created, and if this composition goes out of existence by the dissociation of the form and privation is generated, the substance itself also ceases to exist. It is especially important that substance is even nowadays defined as opposed to transitoriness: substance is a guarantee of diachronic persistence in spite of becoming-different and intrinsic changes (this is what separates it, among others, from Democritean-Leucippean atoms which do not undergo intrinsic changes). They can persist for a long time, they are stable and they can receive even contrary properties (for instance, they can be either hot, or cold), and during the passing of time we can have different predications about them. Thus, Aristotelian hylomorphism reaches its peak in the "transtemporal unity" (Marmodoro and Mayr 2019: 39, cf. 17–18) of substances. Even though it is suggested that substance can perish, one of the basic properties of substance is "resistance" to cessation. Paradoxes such as the ship of Theseus can be raised precisely because substance is in general defined on the basis of its stability and its temporally extended persistence. We know it very well, that the concept of substance has a lot of followers even today, within the field of metaphysics. Similarly to the substrate theories, the substance theory holds that there has to be a raw particular which is both basic and primary, and which cannot be further reduced, however – as opposed to the former position – this particular is not an unknowable underlying principle, but a well-structured entity which instantiates natural kinds and which clearly has certain properties. Differently from the bundle theory, the substance theory suggests that substance can persist in spite of changes. While the follower of bundle theory thinks as an ultraessentialist, namely, he is convinced that every property is essential, and thus is inclined to presuppose that the change of any accident results in a new entity, the follower of substance theory as an essentialist can come to the conclusion that if the essential properties persist, the perishing of accidental properties do not cause the cessation of the substance, on the contrary, it remains numerically

the same – that is to say, change *secundum quid* or *per alium* is not change *simpliciter*. For instance, Guillaume de Champeaux was inclined to say in the 11–12th century that we are speaking of different versions of Socrates according to the variations of the accidents: different is the Socrates who is swimming in the sea from the one who is running in the forest (Libera 2010: 37). Or, to use the example from the *Atlas of Reality*: if Jumbo the elephant suddenly becomes angry, that is to say, it becomes different from the placid Jumbo, we can come to the conclusion that the angry Jumbo is annihilated (Koons and Pickavance 2017: 184). Bundle theories have certain strategies in order to avoid this counter-intuitive conclusion: such is the nuclear, the four-dimensional and the evolving bundle theory (ibid: 184–187, cf. Van Cleve 1985). What interests us is the fact that the advantage of the substance theory is precisely that it speaks of an entity that persists in spite of the change of the properties, that is to say, it argues for substantial stability as opposed to accidental perishing from the beginning. This is the reason why nothing can be substantial what is instantaneous and transient, for instance an event or a fleeting impression. This model itself can be specified in different way. For instance, it seems that Thomas Aquinas comes to the conclusion that within substance it is prime matter that particularizes and grounds existence and in other cases it is the individual essence that unifies and serves as a basis for persistence (Koons and Pickavance 2017: 197). Or as Jean-François Courtine puts it by referring to the Stoics, *substantiam habere* is nothing else then "having a solid substrate that is precisely the guarantee for consistency and permanence" (Courtine 1980: 58). The permanence of substance can be thought of in many ways.

The original meaning of substance is "that which lies under". Its aforementioned properties completely meet this criterion. "For something to change, it must exist before, during, and after the change, and so must survive it. Only so can we say it changes, rather than that it was created, replaced by something else, or destroyed. The subjects of change thus 'outlive' whatever ceased to be at the change (the state or accident of the substance)" (Simons 2009: 588). Thus, it is no coincidence that the followers of substance theory are inclined to endurantism, that is to say, to the thesis that substance is entirely present in every moment of its being (Macdonald 2005: 80, cf. 102–106). Without any doubt, the secondary substances or the universal aspects of the entities can contribute to the stability of primary substances. What is important, is the "substantial permanence" in spite of the changes, or as Aubenque claims, "the priority of the Aristotelian substance makes it possible to recognize the core of permanence in experience, and compared to it the other transient properties can only reach the status of contingent accidence" (Aubenque 2009: 395., cf. 214). Such a worldview, says Aubenque, makes it difficult to think of what is fluxlike and mobile. The eternity of substance does not follow from the permanence of substances, however, it is not difficult to extrapolate to extrapolate to the thesis – as Leibniz does, partly following the path of Aristotle –, that every property of the entity is essential and part of its nature, and that the monad itself is eternal (Harman 2014: 237). Even Whitehead, who is quite

critical of the Aristotelian doctrine of substance, can accept the concept of the stable, robust and enduring substance. Whitehead introduces "a reformed version of the doctrine of substance" (Zycinski 1989: 765). That is to say, despite his insights concerning events and processes, he insists on the persistence of substance (therefore, we do not think that Whitehead simply eliminated the substance: Hoffman 2012: 144).

The original meaning of the Aristotelian *ousia* is property and wealth that remains in the hand of the owner, and it consists of storing of goods. It was needed, among others, because old Greek did not have a word that would have fitted the meaning of "thing". Property began to refer to the attribute of something, and finally, it meant essence, namely, "essence that has a true being (as opposed to the phenomenal forms that come into existence and go out of existence)" (Steiger 1993: 601). The Latin *substantia* is a loan translation of hypostasis (while *ousia* itself was also translated as *essentia*). In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle developed his substance theory elaborated in the *Categories*, by offering different candidates for the role of substance: the essence, the universal, the genus and the one that lies under. Although there is a lot of debate with regard to his decision, taken altogether, we can say that while in the *Categories* substance referred to the individual substance that persists in spite of changes (namely, the variations of the accidents), in the *Metaphysics* the analysis also contains the hylomorphic character of the underlying singular substance, that is to say, its substance consisting of matter and form (it seems that Aristotle thinks that form is much closer to substance than matter). The perceivable substance is also "separated", it is self-preserving in its permanence, even though it is not is own cause (it that case it could not perish). However, as we stated, Aristotle does think that substance can come into existence (or go out of existence). The kind of perishing that is at stake is not merely the corruption of accidents[7] but the change of a whole, for instance, when water comes fire or earth becomes air (in this case both the cold and the wet, and both the cold and the dry perish), and not as in the situation in which the musical man becomes tone-deaf. As Thomas Aquinas formulates it, following Aristotelian lines: there is "corruption in an absolute sense, and corruption with qualification. Generation and corruption absolutely speaking are only in the category of substance, while those with qualification are in the other categories" (Thomas Aquinas 2: 1, cf. *Phys*. V. 2–3, *Met*. 1026 b 22–25, 1059 a 1–3). Absolute corruption *(phthora, corruptio)* is therefore change with regard to substance, a transformation into non-being, and even accidental change is possible only with respect to substance. Given that there are no accidents without substance, what remains after perishing cannot be a quality, a quantity or a "where" (*De Gen. et Corr*. 318 a 15–16), or any other accident – or at least it cannot persist as the accident of the perished substance (cf. Thomas Aquinas 1: 54). Aristotle states that perishing is possible, and maybe he even thinks what is called gappy existence – even though he is

---

7   Augustine raises the question whether the disappearance of accidents is annihilation, and not merely perishing. Duns Scotus 1997: 521.

convinced that a living being cannot return as self-identical and alive after the event of perishing (Kirby 2008: 57–60). We do not see why could not he find possible the reversibility in other kinds of substances. Almost needless to say, according to Aristotle, certain kinds of perishing are possible, but other kinds are not. A boy can become a man, but not vice versa. Similarly, the corruption of relative beings is impossible, given that they are the least real beings (*Met*. 1088 a 28–30, cf. Duns Scotus 1997: 532, regarding the possibility that certain beings are annihilated without perishing: Alexander of Aphrodisias 1992: 188). The perishing of the cause in itself also does not involve the perishing of the effect, and if knowledge perishes, what can be known does not necessarily perish. Even if a bird can build a nest, it does not follow that it is capable of destroying it (ibid: 2009: 77). Neither is it easy to the tell if a bridle is still usable or it has been destroyed regarding its functional being (Beere 2009: 86). We have to be careful if we would like to map what is perishable and what is not. In general, Aristotle is so much committed to the possibility of perishing that he mentions even the question why not the whole world disappeared given that corruption is continuous: "if, then, some one of the things 'which are' is constantly disappearing, why has not the whole of 'what is' been used up long ago and vanished away – assuming of course that the material of all the several comings-to-be was finite?" (*De Gen. et Corr*. 318 a 16–19, cf. *Phys*. 318 a 1–18)? Well, the answer is very simple: it is so because change is continuous, because "every coming-to-be is a passing-away of something else and every passing-away some other thing's coming-to-be" (*De Gen. et Corr*. 319 a 5–7). Among others, Aristotle mentions the example in which the generation of fire is also the corruption of earth. However, substance does not come into existence *ex nihilo*, neither does it go out of existence *ad nihilum* (see Brentano's analysis: Brentano 1978: 49–50). A substance is always generated from another substance, that is to say, "the destruction of one substance is the generation of another. Generation and destruction are the two sides of a single transformation of substance into substance" (Ross 1995: 102). The generation of perceivable substances is always already corruption as well, and vice versa, therefore, this is not a cyclical process, but much more a simultaneous event that is continuous and necessary, which never fails. What comes into existence has to persist at least for a while in order to perish, "and the natural processes of passing-away and coming-to-be occupy equal periods of time" (*De Gen. et Corr*. 336 b 8–10). However, in a certain sense we can still speak of the "circular structure of the chain" (Bognár 1988: 295)[8] of generation and corruption, given that they are adapted to the elliptical motion the Sun: when the Sun comes closer to some point of the Earth, it provokes generation, and when it distantiates then it causes corruption. This also affects the evolution and perishing of plants and animals, just as the change of seasons. Thus, it is no coincidence that *On Generation and Corruption* describes these two processes, or, more precisely, the sides of the same coin as having to do with the hot and cold, wet

---

8   Thomas Aquinas also spoke of circularity: Thomas Aquinas 1: 57.

and dry properties (according to the status of positivity and privation), and also with the doctrine of the transformation of elements. What perishes does not fall into nothingness, it just becomes different. It becomes non-being, owing to the fact that it can be non-existent by its nature, but what happens to it, even if it is a violent, unnatural perishing (in this regard the following commentary could be revealing: Philoponus 2005: 2.5–11, 87 [292, 18–20]). cannot be described as annihilation. Ultimately, there is no *tendere ad nihilum*. Even if we "say that a thing has been completely ruined and completely destroyed" (*Met*. 1021 b 26–28), this is certainly not annihilation. Without any doubt, "a thing does not persist in the processes of unqualified coming-to-be or passing-away" (*De Gen. et Corr*. 321 a 22–23). Nonetheless, only substance ceases to exist. Matter merely gets rid of a form and receives another, and it can even instantiate contrary essences. Even though there are philosophers who think that becoming non-existent is simply becoming unperceivable and invisible – they are wrong. Because in many cases the substance coming into existence during perishing is very visible, and what we might describe as mere air or wind is in fact – precisely as air and wind – an entity with a form. And in general, "if something is passing away, there will be something that is" (*Met*. 1010 a 19–21, cf. 1068 b 9–10) – this is obviously a *crux commentatorum*.

It is time to summarize our conclusions. Without any doubt, Aristotle confronts his predecessors with regard to perishing, as far as he does not start from the underlying matter or the element which cannot go out of existence (and, in that case, all the other perishing things are only derived as compared to it). As opposed to this approach, Aristotle raises precisely the question whether the being that has a certain metaphysical priority can also cease to exist. Taken altogether, we can say that in his works corruption appears almost exclusively in the shadow of generation or together with it. We showed that it is not simple to tell what is exactly perishing according to the Aristotelian framework. With respect to form and matter, we can explicitly come to the conclusion that they cannot perish. However, there are many difficulties even regarding their combination, namely, substance, given that Aristotle from the start defines it as opposed to transitoriness, as something that persists in spite of changes. The possibility of defining substance as unperishable is a possibility within the Aristotelian framework. Even if substance ceases to exist, it necessarily implies the creation of another substance. Even though "there is understanding of a thing that has passed away" (*Met*. 990 b 15–17), it is hard to find a place for non-being and cessation. It is worth taking into consideration some other aspects. As László Tengelyi says, "even though being carries within itself the possibility of its own non-existence, this never happens 'when it exists (because in that case, it is actually a being)'. What follows is that the reality of being excludes the non-existence of this being. ... Aristotle ... attributes necessity to the general, that is to say, to the contingent being, as far as it is not only possible but real as well" (Tengelyi 2017: 22). Thus, what persists has a hypothetical (and not logical) necessity – what exist, necessarily exits. As Tengelyi demonstrates, Thomas Aquinas makes similar arguments (following

the path of Aristotle), namely, that the existence of the world is contingent, however, it is still true that it could have always existed. The necessity of being real, the internal teleology overwrites contingency. A further aspect has to do with the question of the dimension of time. "The now" as a limit "does not admit of coming to be or passing away either, yet it seems to be always something distinct nevertheless, because it is not a sort of substance" (*Met*. 1002 b 7–10). Even though we use to say that things perish within time, in fact, time cannot be responsible for this: it is merely accidental that perishing happens within time (*Phys*. 221 a 30–b 3, 222 b 24–7). Time can be connected to extinction and decay at most as far as it has to do with motion (Roark 2011: 210), or as far as there has to be a wider plane of time in which things do not exist yet or do not exist anymore (*Phys*. 221 b 23–229 a 9). In fact, "if they [substances] are all capable of passing away, everything is capable of passing away. But it is impossible that movement either came into being or passed away (for at every point it was), or that time did" (*Met*. 1071 b 5–9, cf. *Phys*. 250 b 13–15) (cf. Philoponus 2005: 2.5–11, 143). As we can see, it is hard to find any useful reference with regard to perishing in the Aristotelian works. In fact, only substance can cease to exist, but even this is true only in a limited sense. As it is well-known the Aristotelian substance was intensively criticized and relativized during the history of philosophy (with the help of Locke, Hume, Kant, Quine and others), and it got back its dignity only a few decades ago. However, we can see that in the 20th-century history of philosophy the Aristotelian doctrine of substance persisted as a ghost, either as a paradigm that has to be followed or as a debate partner.[9] Thus, Aristotle is still present spectrally, and he will probably stay with us for a long time.

---

9   As an example, let us mention Bertrand Russell's *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* where he states the following in the context of acquaintance: "I compared particulars with the old conception of substance, that is to say, they have the quality of self-subsistence that used to belong to substance, but not the quality of persistence through time. A particular, as a rule, is apt to last for a very short time indeed, not an instant but a very short time. In that respect particulars differ from the old substances but in their logical position they do not" (Russell 2010: 32.). For Russell the problem of the perishing of a particular is both an epistemological and a metaphysical problem – and he approaches this question partly by relying upon the Aristotelian doctrine of substance and partly by having a debate with it. Our other example is Niklas Luhmann who noticed that during the Middle Ages many thinkers paid a lot of attention to the problem of *annihilatio*, and some of them came to the conclusion that only complex entities can cease to exist. Within his own theoretical framework, Luhmann emphasizes that it is impossible for the complex system to be autopoetic only a little bit: man either lives or not. Luhmann himself offers a radical conclusion with regard to perishing: he claims that "there is the destruction of the system by the environment, but the environment does not actively contribute to the maintenance of the system. This is precisely the point of the concept "autopoiesis. ... What is excluded may very well affect the system causally, but only negatively" (Luhmann 2013: 85). That is to say, what is irritation and perturbation, namely, what the system cannot integrate as intrasystemic through its structural couplings or, in other words, what the system cannot interpret as being within the system, is ultimately embodying the potential perishing of the system. However, this means that

References

Adorno, Theodor W. (1995), *Kants "Kritik der reinen Vernunft"*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Alexander of Aphrodisias (1992), *On Aristotle's Metaphysics 3*, in *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Aristotle's* Metaphysics *2–3*, transl. by W. E. Dooley, S.J. and A. Madigan, S.J., London: Bloomsbury, pp. 77–232.

Algra, Keimpe (2004), "On Generation and Corruption I. 3: Substantial Change and the Problem of Not-Being", in F. De Haas and J. Mansfeld (eds.), *Aristotle's On Generation and Corruption I*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 91–123.

Aristotle (2016), *Metaphysics*, transl. by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Aubenque, Pierre (2009), "La matière chez Aristote", in: *Problèmes aristotéliciens*, Paris: Vrin, 211–221.

—. (2009), "Relativité ou aporéticité de l'ontologie?" in *Problèmes aristotéliciens*, pp. 387–399.

—. (2009), "Sur l'ambivalence du concept aristotélicien de substance", in *Problèmes aristotéliciens*, pp. 197–211.

Beere, Jonathan (2009), *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta*. New York: Oxford University Press.

---

the external influence of the system, the external danger of perishing can contribute to the system's self-affirmation: "evolution can survive such destruction because there are always other possibilities to develop the autopoiesis of life via structures in the direction of higher complexity" (ibid: 94). In fact, we can say that the complex system can cope with mediums that are more stable than the ephemeral generation of forms: noise disappears, but we can hear something else instead of it. One of the Luhmannian *opus magnum*s, namely, *Social Systems* focuses on the problem of perishing even more. He claims that the non-structured complexity would be mere entropic complexity, that is to say, it would be destroyed into chaos. At this point, he adds a crucial remark: "the formation of structure uses this disintegration and constructs order out of it. Out of the disintegration of elements (i. e., the necessary cessation of every action), it draws the energy and information to reproduce elements that therefore always appear within existing structural categories yet still always appear as new" (Luhmann 1995: 282). Furthermore, he says that "not even the interchangeability of elements .... grasps the temporal reference radically enough. ... Because a social system (like all other temporalized systems, including life) exists as elements that are events, it is confronted at every moment with the alternative of ceasing or continuing. Its 'substance' continually vanishes, so to speak, and must be reproduced with the help of structural models" (ibid: 290, 347). In order to grasp the continuous persistence and the gradual disappearance of the complex system, Luhmann carefully uses the expression "substance", namely, under quotation marks. In the case of complex systems, the environmental influence that is not processed intrasystemically, is always destructive, however, this kind of danger can inspire the system to become even more self-affirmative. On the other hand, the condition of the possibility of complex systems is the continuous perishing of the intrasystemic elements – otherwise, the redefinition of the systemic structures, the persistence of complexity would not be possible. The persistence of the systems is not possible in spite of the danger of cessation, but precisely owing to it. Thus, Luhmann comes to the conclusion that we do not have to operate with the binarity of persisting and perishable, but, as he puts it, with the "mixed relations of flexible couplings". "Substance" is appropriate to fill in this double role because, as we could see, it is both transient and persistent.

Bennett, Jonathan (1984), *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—. (1980), "Spinoza's Vacuum Argument", in P. A. French et al (eds.), *Studies in Epistemology*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 391–399.

Bognár László (1988), "Előzetes megjegyzés Arisztotelész *A keletkezésről és a pusztulásról* című művéhez", *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle* 1–2: 291–367.

Bergson, Henri (1919), *L'*énergie spirituelle. Paris: PUF.

Bostock, David (2006), *Space, Time, Matter, and Form*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Brentano, Franz (1978), "No Coming to Be from Nothing, and no Passing Away into Nothing", in *Aristotle and his World View*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 49–50.

Broadie, Sarah (2009): "Heavenly Bodies and First Causes", in Georgios Anagnostopoulos (ed.), *A Companion to Aristotle*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 230–241.

Carlson, David Gray (2007), *A Commentary to Hegel's Science of Logic.* London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cohen, Marc S. (internet), Aristotle's Metaphysics, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition), E. N. Zalta (ed.), URL: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/ (downloaded: 01-04-2020).

Conti, Alessandro D. (2014), "Giles of Rome's Questions on the Metaphysics", in F. Amerini and G. Galluzzo (eds.), *A Companion to the Latin Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, pp. 551–575.

Courtine, Jean-François (1980), "Les traductions latines d'οὐσία et la compréhension romano-stoïcienne de l'être", in *Concepts et Catégories dans la pensée antique*, Paris: Vrin, pp. 33–87.

De Landa, Manuel and Graham Harman (2017), *The Rise of Realism*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.

Derrida, Jacques (1995), *Gift of Death*, transl. by D. Wills. Chicago and London: University of Chicago.

Duba, William O. (2014), "Three Fransiscan Metaphysicians after Scotus: Antonius Andreae, Francis of Marchia, and Nicholas Bonet", in F. Amerini and G. Galluzzo (eds.), *A Companion to the Latin Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle's* Metaphysics, pp. 413–495.

Duns Scotus (1997), *Questions on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*. New York: St. Bonaventure University.

Giovanni, Matteo di (2014), "The Commentator: Averroes' Reading of Metaphysics", in F. Amerini and G. Galluzzo (eds.), *A Companion to the Latin Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle's* Metaphysics, pp. 59–95.

Harman, Graham (2017), *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*. London: Penguin Random House.

—. (2014), "Whitehead and Schools X, Y, Z", in N. Gaskill and A. J. Nocek (eds.), *The Lure of Whitehead*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 231–249.

Hegel, Georg W. F. (2010), *The Science of Logic*, transl. by G. di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hoffman, Joshua (2012), "Neo-Aristotelianism and Substance", in T. E. Tahko (ed.), *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 140–156.

Joachim, Harold H. (1970), *Aristotelous peri geneseōs kai phthoras = Aristotle On Coming-to-be and Passing-away. (De generatione et corruptione)*. Hildesheim: G. Olms.

Kirby, Jeremy (2008), *Aristotle's Metaphysics. Form, Matter, and Identity*. London and New York: Continuum.

Kirk, Geoffrey S., and John E. Raven, J. E. (1957), *Presocratic Philosophers*. London and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kok, Femke J. (2014), *John Buridan's Commentary on the Metaphysics*, in F. Amerini and G. Galluzzo (eds.), *A Companion to the Latin Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle's* Metaphysics, pp. 495–551.

Koons, Robert C., and Timothy H. Pickavance (2017), *The Atlas of Reality: A Comprehensive Guide to Metaphysics*. Chichester: Wiley.

Laruelle, François (2010), *Philosophy of Difference*. London and New York: Continuum.

Lewis, Frank A. (2009), "Form and Matter", in G. Anagnostopoulos (ed.), *A Companion to Aristotle*, pp. 162–185.

Libera, Alain de (2010), *Archéologie du sujet: la quête de l'identité*. Paris: Vrin.

Lošonc Mark (2018), *Vreme, svest i kompleksnost: temporalnost u Bergsonovoj i Huserlovoj filozofiji*. Beograd – Novi Sad: IFDT – IKZS.

—. (2011), "Svakidašnje ja u Dekartovoj filozofiji", *Treći program* 42(1): 152–173

Lowe, Edward J. (2012), "A neo-Aristotelian substance-ontology", in T. E. Tahko (ed.), *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 229–248.

Luhmann, Niklas (2013), *Introduction to Systems Theory*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.

—. (1995), *Social Systems*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Macdonald, Cynthia (2005), *Varieties of Things: Foundations of Contemporary Metaphysics*. Malden – Oxford: Blackwell.

Marmodoro, Anna and Erasmus Mayr (2019), *Metaphysics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McHenry, Leemon B. (1992), *Whitehead and Bradley: A Comparative Analysis*. Albany, NY: SUNY.

Loux, Michael (2002), *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.

Milutinović-Bojanić, Sanja (2013), "Corruption and Female Body", in A. Birešev et al. (eds.), *Corruption and Social Development*, Belgrade: IFDT, pp. 35–49.

Philoponus (2005), *On Aristotle – On Coming-to-Be and Perishing 2.5–11*, transl. by I. Kupreeva. London: Bloomsbury.

Politis, Vasilis (2010), *Routledge Guidebook to Aristotle and the* Metaphysics. London and New York, Routledge.

Roark, Tony (2011), *Aristotle on Time: A Study of the Physics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ross, David (1995): *Aristotle*. London and New York: Routledge.

Russell, Bertrand (2010), *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Simons, Peter (2009), "Substance", in K. Jaegwon et al. (eds.), *A Companion to Metaphysics*. Malden and Oxford: Wiley and Blackwell, pp. 585–589.

Steiger, Kornél (1993), "Aristotelés: ˈMetaphysica', görögül és magyarul", *Holmi* 5(4): 599–603.

Syrianus (2006), *On Aristotle Metaphysics 13–14*, transl. by J. Dillon and D. O'Meara. London: Bloomsbury.

Tengelyi László (2017), *Őstények és világvázlatok*. Budapest: Atlantisz Kiadó.

Thomas Aquinas, *De principiis Naturae*, 3 Translation made by G. Klima. URL: https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/Aquinas-principlesofnature-klima.htm (downloaded: 17.01.2020).

—., *Super Libros De Generatione et Corruptione*, transl. by P. Conway and R. F. Larcher. URL: (https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/GenCorrup.htm) (downloaded: 17.01.2020).

Tillemans, Tom J. F. (2018), "Metaphysics and Metametaphysics with Buddhism: The Lay of the Land", in S. M. Emmanuel (ed.), *Buddhist Philosophy: A Comparative Approach*, New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 87–107.

Van Cleve, James (1985), "Three Versions of the Bundle Theory", *Philosophical Studies* 47: 95–107.

Wehrle, Walter E. (2000), *The Myth of Aristotle's Development and the Betrayal of Metaphysics*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Williams, Christopher F. J. (1982): "Notes", in *Aristotle's De generatione et corruptione*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Zycinski, Joseph M. (1989), "The Doctrine of Substance in Whitehead's Metaphysics", *The Review of Metaphysics* 42(4): 765–781.

Mark Lošonc

Aristotelove praodluke i izazov nestajanja

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad tematizuje Aristotelov pojam nestajanja. Prvo, rekonstruiše Aristotelovu raspravu da predsokratcima, zatim se fokusira na pojedine kandidate za entitete koji mogu da nestanu: formu, materiju i supstanciju. Tekst pruža argumente protiv široko prihaćene teze da je supstancija *corruptio simpliciter* bez ikakvih rezervi. Rad se o velikoj meri oslanja i na antičke i srednjovekovne komentatore Aristotela. Na kraju, uzima se u obzir i dimenzija vremena, odnosno aktualnosti.

Ključne reči: Aristotel, nestajajnje, predsokratovci, materija, forma, supstancija, vreme