

METAPHYSICS OF PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY. THE CONCEPT OF CAPACITY IN ARISTOTLE

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1. Introduction

The Aristotelian concept of capacity has been experiencing a renaissance since the beginning of the last century. The concept of *δύναμις* – discussed in this paper – is the object of investigation of historians, philologists and of philosophers or those who search for theoretical inspirations in Ancient thought. At beginning of the XXth century the Aristotelian capacity (or potentiality), being one of the basic concepts of *Metaphysics*, ‘returned’ to philosophy: Martin Heidegger and Nikolai Hartmann, among the first researchers in the twentieth century paid attention to this concept and its role in thought of Ancient philosopher.¹ Works devoted to *δύναμις* on the ground of philology and history of concepts appeared almost parallel.² Interests in this question have remained nearly constant among researchers up to now.

In this paper I will not consider all problems connected with the status and role of this concept. I will show, in a synthetic way, a brief characteristic of the capacity and will focus on the practical, usually overlooked, sense of it. It allows to sketch the connection between the practical and theoretical parts of Aristotelian philosophy. I will, therefore, consider two books of *Metaphysics* – *delta* and *theta* – in which the concept is put in a systematic way. Being aware of the complexity of the relation between of the theoretical and practical aspects of the system of The Stagirite, I will show the practical meaning of capacity only on the basis of definitional

¹ See N. Hartmann, *Der megarische und aristotelische Möglichkeitsbegriff*, Berlin 1937 (reprinted in his *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. II, Berlin 1957); M. Heidegger, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles*, Philipp Reclam, Stuttgart 2003. (These works have been included to G. Reale’s and R. Radice’s bibliographies. See: R. Radice (et. al.), *La «Metafisica» di Aristotele nel XX secolo*, Milano 1996; G. Reale, *Bibliografia sulla Metafisica*, In Aristotele, *La Metafisica*, traduzione, introduzione, commento G. Reale, Luigi Lofredo Editore, Napoli 1978, volume secondo, s. 449 sqq.) Cf. also M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Stambaugh, Albany, State University of New York Press 1996, passim.

² J. Stallmach, *Dynamis und Energeia. Untersuchungen an Werk des Aristoteles zur Problemgeschichte von Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit*, Meisenheim am Glan 1959.

determinations appearing between *δύναμις* and the most significant notion of the practical part of philosophy of Aristotle – the notion of virtue (*ἀρετή*).

After a short historical introduction, which shows the roots of the Aristotelian account of capacity, I will characterize the concept on the basis of the book Δ of *Metaphysics*. Association of capacity with the other concepts, especially the concept of act (actuality), is shown on the basis of interpretation of the most important drifts of the book Θ, in which Aristotle has introduced the concept in fullest mode. Reconstruction of the basic elements of the Aristotelian view of capacity in *Metaphysics* allows to characterize it in practical philosophy. Practical philosophy is mostly based on the concept of *aretê* – I will look at its two definitions. One rests on the concept of capacity (in *Rhetoric*), but the other, more commonly known, is formulated on the ground of another concept from *Metaphysics*, the concept of *ἕξις* – what is more, with proviso, that virtue cannot be defined as capacity. I will investigate this superficial inaccuracy, attempting to show dependencies of both concepts used in the definition of virtue. Conceptual correlation emerging from this superficial inaccuracy, briefly but not imperfectly, illustrates the role of *δύναμις* in Aristotle's thought.³

2. Metaphysical sense of capacity

In the fifth book of *Metaphysics* – Δ, Aristotle presents a kind of index, in which he characterizes the basic concepts of his philosophy: the first causes, 'being as being', substance, the 'First Mover'.⁴ The concept of capacity appears there as one of twenty nine separately presented entries, which appeared in philosophy long prior to Aristotle. Before I show how The Stagirite understood the concept of *δύναμις*, a short discussion of its context is needed.

³ I use the following sources: *Metaphysics* – in edition of W. Christ (Teubner first edition in 1885), Aristoteles' *Metaphysik*, In der Übersetzung von H. Bonitz, Einleitung, Kommentar hrsg. von H. Seidl, Griechischer Text in der Edition von W. Christ, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 1978 (1er Band), 1980 (2er Band), in the text signed as M (shortcuts borrowed from Bonitz's *Index Aristotelicus*); *Nicomachean Ethics* in Susemihl's edition, *Aristotelis «Ethica Nicomachea»*, recognovit F. Susemihl, Teubner, Lipsiae 1880, (in text as H); *Rhetoric* – editions of Ross and Kassel, *Aristotelis «Ars rhetorica»*, recognovit brevisque adnotatione critica instruxit W. D. Ross, Clarendon Press, Oxonii 1959; *Aristotelis «Ars rhetorica»*, edidit R. Kassel, apud W. De Gruyter et socios, Berolini et Novi Eboraci, 1976, in text as P.

⁴ See: e.g. G. Reale, *Storia della Filosofia Antica*, vol. II: *Platone e Aristotele* [I use Polish translation: G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytniej*, vol. II: *Platon i Arystoteles*, trans. E.I. Zieliński, RW KUL, Lublin 2002, to which I refer] p. 396.

Etymologically taken, capacity should be associated with power, strength and mastery.⁵ The analysis of the term and the basic forms connected with it (verb *δύνασθαι* and his *participium* *δυνάμενος*, *adjectivum verbale* *δυνατός*) refer to ‘ruling’, ‘strength’, ‘being able’ and ‘potency’. The Liddell-Scott-Jones dictionary gives seven different meanings of the term.⁶ The original use of capacity shows its magic meaning: as a mysterious power (of holy places, people or things). It appears in two semantic contexts: the first concerns nature and is tied, in a way, with theory and cognition; the second concerns human beings and has a *practical* dimension, since it covers human abilities and capacities, like agency, perceiving, speech or ruling.⁷ The beginnings of the philosophical career of *δύναμις* are connected with the context of nature. It is enough to say that the concept of capacity appeared in writings of pre-Platonist philosophers of nature (Anaximander, Anaximenes), and Plato (*Politeia*, *Timaios*), where we find characteristics of capacity in reference to certain abilities (‘powers’) of natural entities⁸. Aristotle was the next philosopher who discussed this symptomatic concept.

For Plato’s pupil capacity basically has the same context as for his antecedes: a domain of nature (*physis*) and substance. Matter (*ἡ ὕλη*) in the system of *Metaphysics* precisely comprises capacity⁹: it is a kind of ability to accept or receive form (*τὸ εἶδος*), that is, the essence, immanent shape. That immanent shape of things, the nature of things, can have its assembly with matter. When matter has form, it makes a *synolon*: a concrete connection of form and matter. All three – form, matter and *synolon* – constitute the overall concept of substance (*ἡ οὐσία*) in the so-called ‘metaphysics’ of The Stagirite. Thus, we can say capacity comprises an important element of the being.

⁵ See: P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots*, Éditions Klincksieck, Paris 1962, vol. I, p. 301 (entry: *δυναμαι*); H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, Bd. I, p. 423 sq.

⁶ *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Compiled H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, A New Ed. Revised Augmented throughout by H. S. Jones with assistance of R. MacKenzie, Vol. I, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1951 (2nd reprint of 9th ed.), p. 452.

⁷ The conclusion about existence of two contexts I draw on base of analysis of the meanings in The Liddell-Scott-Jones and the overview of distribution of *δύναμις* in Aristotle’s works (following *Index Aristotelicus* – see: H. Bonitz (ed.), *Index Aristotelicus*, In *Aristotelis Opera*, edidit Academia Regia Borussica, vol. V, typis et impensis G. Reimeri, Berolini 1870).

⁸ See: F.E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms. A Historical Lexicon*, New York University Press, University of London Press Ltd., New York-London 1967, (entry: ‘dynamis’) p. 42 sq. For Platonian context, see: *Republic* (507c, d – 508a, b) and *Timaios* (33a).

⁹ Reale even identifies these two concepts (*ὕλη=δύναμις*). See: G. Reale, *Introduzione alla lettura della «Metafisica»*, In *Aristotele, La Metafisica*, op. cit., p. 58.

“Capacity’ means a source of movement or change, which is in another thing than the thing moved or in the same thing *qua* other”¹⁰ (M 1019 a 15-16). Aristotle gives an example for this elliptic formula¹¹, clarifying the issue. The ability to build is an exemplification of capacity fixed not in what is built, but in the builder. While the ability to heal can be fixed in the man who is healed, but not in him *as* healed (physician heals himself, not as the physician, but as the sick). This tense formulation is to show two aspects of δύναμις: the capacity to act and the capacity to suffer (or to possess). The formula ἐν ἑτέρῳ ἢ ἢ ἕτερον (M 1019 a 16)¹², introduces, thus, two kinds of capacity – active and passive.

Active capacity relies on being able to act. Metaphysicians say this is *subjective* capacity (fixed in subject).¹³ Passive capacity means being able to suffer (πάσχειν) (or to have something). It is also subjective property. “For in virtue of that principle, in virtue of which a patient suffers anything, we call it ‘capable’ of suffering; and this we do sometimes if it suffers anything at all, sometimes not in respect of everything it suffers, but only if it suffers a change for the better.” (M 1019 a 21-23). Additionally, Aristotle considers capacity with regard to easiness or difficulty of change. Under that concept he also subsumes various damages and losses as properties which cannot be explained as simple negation.¹⁴

These two kinds of (subjective) capacities constitute one type of δύναμις, by Romans called *potentia*. But in the Aristotelian book Δ we can also find another type of δύναμις, meaning *possibility*, translated by the Romans as *possibilitas*. This is capacity in an objective (material) sense. In the following passage Aristotle writes about it in a negative way: “The impossible is that of which the contrary is of necessity true, e.g. that the diagonal of a square is commensurate with the side is impossible, because such a statement is a falsity of which the contrary is not only true but also necessary; that it is commensurate, then, is not only false but also of necessity false.”

¹⁰ All quotes from *Metaphysics* are in Ross’ translation – in each case I change ‘potency’ into ‘capacity’.

¹¹ See *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*. Books Γ, Δ, Ε, transl. with notes by C. Kirwan, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1971, p. 157.

¹² In book □ there is analogous formula, where ἄλλο appears instead ἕτερον. Cf. (Θ 1046 a 11).

¹³ See, for instance: M. Krapiec, *Struktura bytu. Charakterystyczne elementy systemu Arystotelesa i Tomasza z Akwinu [The Structure of Being. Characteristic Elements of System of Aristotle and Aquinas]*, In his *Dzieła [Works]*, Vol. V, RW KUL, Lublin 2000, p. 104.

¹⁴ See: R. Porawski & M. Wesoly, *Z Arystotelesowego słownika filozofii [From Aristotelian Vocabulary of Philosophy]*, Meander Vol. XXXIV No. 1 (1979), p. 47.

(M 1019 b 23-28)¹⁵ Let's put the logical (objective) sense of capacity aside, since its determinations do not appear in *Metaphysics*.¹⁶ Subjective capacity in *Metaphysics* has other characteristics – especially significant with respect to conclusions both in the theoretical and practical parts of Aristotelian philosophy. But before I come to the conclusions of the latter part, I will briefly show the capacity in book Θ.

Commentators acknowledge that the ninth book of *Metaphysics* has the best structure. It can be read as a monographic systematization of Aristotelian theory of actuality and capacity¹⁷ – one of the most influential theories in metaphysics. Aristotle summarizes here the results of the analysis of the fifth book: “Obviously, then, in a sense the capacity of acting and of being acted on is one (for a thing may be ‘capable’ either because it can itself be acted on or because something else can be acted on by it) (...).” (M 1045 b 19-21) Both forms of capacity are two aspects of one phenomenon – one integral capacity. This allows for various examples of both types of capacity. These examples in some part refer to human beings. Let us make a short digression: traditional understanding of metaphysics (inquiries into ‘being as being’ etc.) does not deplete Aristotelian metaphysics: The Stagirite takes into consideration capacity in context of rational beings, that is – human.¹⁸ This is the source of consecutive distinctions.

Plato's pupil says some capacities are fixed in living organisms, but others are fixed in non-living things. The capacity of a living being is for instance some ability of a rational part of the human soul.¹⁹ Clearly we can say that rational (*δύναμις μετὰ λόγου*) and non-rational capacities (*δύναμις ἄλογος*), are both connected with the soul (cf. M 1046 b 1-2). Aristotle claims rational capacity, counter to non-rational, is defined as being capable of contrary effects, while non-rational produces only one effect (the hot is capable only of heating; a physician can produce both disease and health). (cf. M 1046 b 23-26). This is a significant question. Capacity, as something that produces effects, that leads to some end, is half the action (or process). The second half, the

¹⁵ Add in that case of capacity Aristotle makes a little inaccuracy, because unifies possibility with contingency. For analysis of this mistake see: Kirwan's commentary: *Aristotle's Metaphysics ...*, op. cit., p. 159 sq.

¹⁶ We can find some amplification in *De interpretatione* and *Analytica Priora*.

¹⁷ See G. Reale, *Introduzione alla lettura della «Metafisica»*, In Aristotele, *La Metafisica...*, op. cit, p. 88.

¹⁸ Contemporary metaphysical considerations in context of practical philosophy use this Aristotelian idea in a huge part. See e.g.: J. McDowell, *Two Sorts of Naturalism*, In R. Hursthouse, G. Lawrence & W. Quinn (eds.), *Virtues and Vices. Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1998, p. 150-179.

¹⁹ Aristotle inherits Platonian idea of division soul into three parts.

result of an action, the end of an action is constituted by the realization of *δύναμις* – by Aristotle called actuality, *ἐνέργεια*.²⁰

„Actuality, then, is the existence of a thing not in the way which we express by ‘potentially’; we say that potentially, for instance, a statue of Hermes is in the block of wood and the half-line is in the whole, because it might be separated out, and we call even the man who is not studying a man of science (*ἐπιστήμονα*), if he is capable of studying; the thing that stands in contrast to each of these exists actually.” (M 1048 a 33-35) Actuality, then, is the complement of capacity. Like capacity, actuality belongs to properties of being: it is the realization of power and finalizes its immanent abilities.²¹ Aristotle stresses that actuality cannot be defined *sensu stricto*, but can only be illustrated with examples:²² the ability to build is, for instance, capacity concerning actuality of the building. *Δύναμις* is always the capacity of something – it does not exist separately, since its existence can be known only in relation to *ἐνέργεια*.²³

The example of Hermes places actuality in the context of matter. There is a very important issue connected with this: the form (*εἶδος*) which is realization or actuality (*ἐνέργεια*) of matter. Here Aristotle formulates his weighty doctrine of *priority* of actuality with respect to capacity: *ἐνέργεια* is prior to *δύναμις* regarding cognition, existence²⁴ and time (but not always).²⁵ The presentation of this doctrine with its

²⁰ *Ἐνέργεια* etymologically comes from the term with multiplicity of meaning of *τὸ ἔργον*. Researchers say a function, role of given thing or thing as a product here is concerned. See F.E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms...*, op. cit., p. 56 and H. Seidl’s commentary – Aristoteles’ *Metaphysik*, In der Übersetzung von H. Bonitz, Einleitung, Kommentar hrsg. von H. Seidl, Griechischer Text in der Edition von W. Christ, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 1980, 2er Band, p. 483. (Cf. also the connection of German *Wirklichkeit*–*Werk*.)

²¹ See F. Filippi, «*Dynamis*», *Causality and Chance in Aristotle*, In Académie d’Athènes (ed.), *Hasard et Nécessité dans la philosophie grecque* (ΤΥΧΗ ΚΑΙ ΑΝΑΓΚΗ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ), Centre de Recherche sur la Philosophie Grecque, Athènes 2005, p. 115.

²² Reale and Peters point this question concerns both actuality and capacity. See F.E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms...*, op. cit., p. 43 (‘potentiality cannot be defined, but only illustrated’); Aristotele: *La Metafisica...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 76 (‘Atto e potenza sono concetti che noi conosciamo con predicamento intuitivo-induttivo’).

²³ Reale comments : „(...) *ἐνέργεια* e *δύναμις* non si possono caratterizzare singolarmente prese, ma solo nel loro reciproco rapporto; non possibile cogliere il significato del primo concetto se non cogliendo, insieme, anche il significato del secondo (...).” Aristotele, *La Metafisica...*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 76.

²⁴ Philosophically we might say Aristotelian *ἐνέργεια* is *ratio essendi et cognoscendi* of *δύναμις*.

²⁵ Krapiec considers in details the idea of priority of actuality. See M. Krapiec, *Struktura bytu...* [*The Structure of Being...*], op. cit., pp. 125-170 (esp. pp. 126-134).

refinements apparently does not need to be included in our considerations here. It is enough to say that this doctrine has practical consequences.²⁶

Metaphysical considerations of Aristotle show capacity as a key concept in his *philosophia prima*. G. Reale points out that thanks to *δύναμις* Aristotle found a solution for worries concerning the becoming and move, the issue of matter and form comes clear, as well as the existence of God (as First Mover). Multiple interpretations of capacity and actuality make them apt to be applied to various questions. These interpretations are: physical, methodological, and ontological – each of them appears in Aristotle's first philosophy.²⁷ When we will look into Aristotle's practical works, we will see that capacity is not less important.

Yet, before I do this, let me make a short interpretative commentary to the 'metaphysics' of capacity described above. Current discussions concerning metaphysics and epistemology are often focused on the question of naturalism. Someone might ask: is the Aristotelian concept of capacity naturalistic or supernaturalistic?

On one hand, we can say it is naturalistic, since viewed in the way described above capacity is a part of the natural world (capacity and actuality belong to properties of the natural being: the former constitutes its immanent abilities, the latter makes the realization of power fixed in the being). On the other hand, it may seem supernatural, since it presupposes meta-physical (in a classic way) characteristics: exceeds beyond the natural world, as it is commonly understood. Thus, there is no simple answer. What is more, the terms 'naturalism' and 'supernaturalism' are notoriously blurred and vague. Let us look at contemporary understanding of naturalism. This account has many embodiments: it can be identified with methodologically restricted scientism²⁸ or it can be widened to the fully empirical account²⁹, it can be reductive or non-reductive and, finally, can be identified with the 'old' Aristotelian account (as neo-Aristotelians tend to propose³⁰). If definitions of naturalism differ – definitions of the supernatural differ too. Thus,

²⁶ Cf. (M 1050 b 5-15). It is worthy to note that Hans Krämer in his own theory of ethics gives an attempt at contrary doctrine, which gives priority to capacity (possibilities) before actuality (reality). See H. Krämer, *Integrative Ethik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1992.

²⁷ Typology of these interpretations is presented here using subsections in the index of Radice's bibliography. Cf. R. Radice (et. al.), *La «Metafisica» di Aristotele...*, op. cit.

²⁸ E.g. views of David Papineau, Richard Carrier, James Rachels.

²⁹ See, for instance, papers on naturalism by Jaegwon Kim, David Copp, Charles Pigden, James Griffin.

³⁰ Contemporary theories of neo-Aristotelians (e.g. of Rosalind Hursthouse, Philippa Foot) their roots have in writings of G.E.M. Anscombe and Peter Geach.

before we can ascribe the Aristotelian concept of capacity to naturalism, as neo-Aristotelians would, we must decide which option is our. Of course, I shall not present even the sketch of account of naturalism here.³¹ Instead, I would like to point out two issues, which can serve as an answer to the question. First, I think there is a chance to give a naturalistic, critical interpretation of Stagirite's concept of *δύναμις* (and of the whole 'metaphysics') being sound as a *historical* interpretation of Aristotelian naturalism (it would be naturalism in terms of Aristotle). But this interpretation would not, at least to some extent, be compatible with the *adaptational* interpretation of Aristotle's thought, using the background of naturalism plausible today.³² The reason is as follows: when we grasp the concept of capacity in its stringent relation to the concept of *energeia*, the teleological view of nature in Aristotle is evident. And teleological interpretation of the being (or nature) prompts us to say that the main ideas of The Stagirite's metaphysics have a more or less *supernaturalistic* character.³³ It seems the answer depends on the option of what type of interpretation (and *a fortiori* – what way of understanding of the natural) we choose. Both interpretations may be sound and useful.

3. The practical meaning and role of *δύναμις* (ethics and rhetoric)

The concepts of capacity and actuality appear in the practical part of Stagirite's philosophy. The key notion of *πρᾶξις* (*practice*), *ἀρετή* – usually translated as *virtue* – actually plays a basic role in politics, rhetoric and ethics which constitute practical dimensions of Aristotelian philosophy. Here we will consider the most important questions connected with virtue, which allow a clarification of the role of capacity in practical philosophy.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle aims at explaining what the essence of human goodness is. In the first sentence of the work the philosopher stresses: "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things

³¹ I consider the issue of naturalistic metaphysics in more details in *The Question Concerning Metaphysics in Ethical Naturalism* (forthcoming).

³² In terms of liberal naturalism by David Macarthur, for instance. See D. Macarthur, *Naturalizing the Human or Humanizing Nature: Science, Nature and the Supernatural*, Erkenntnis Vol. 61 (2004), pp. 29-51. I point the main ideas of the plausible naturalism in *The Question Concerning Metaphysics in Ethical Naturalism*.

³³ Mysterious, warranted only by speculation and/or intuition, thus – not empirically or intersubjectively corroborated.

aim.” (H 1094 1-4) Aristotle radicalizes this ‘aiming at some good’ concerning ethics. His main idea is ‘the highest good’, τὸ ἄριστον ἀγαθόν (*summum bonum*): “(...) it is the thing which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this (...).” (H 1094 a 18) Following Socrates and Plato The Stagirite claims that only human *reason* is able to guarantee manifestation of this goodness. Acting according to reason is the only gauge of *acting rightly*. “(...) human good turns out to be *activity of soul* in accordance with virtue (...).” (H 1098 a 17-21) Before we characterize how Aristotle understands virtue, we must have a look at the ‘activity of soul’.

Activity of soul aims at three types of good.³⁴ These are physical, external, and spiritual – the latter ones are the highest. In *Eudemian Ethics* these are specified: “(...) some of them are dispositions [ἕξεις] or capacities [δύναμεις], and others are activities [ἐνέργειαι] or movements [κινήσεις]”³⁵ Thus, Aristotelian definition ought to be formulated by use of one (or more) of these goods. The idea of priority of ἐνέργεια before δύναμις mentioned in the previous paragraph suggests the definition is based on the concept of actuality, that is – ‘activities’ specified above in third place. But this is not the Aristotelian solution.

Rhetoric belongs to the practical part of the Aristotelian system on a pair of his three *Ethics*. We may, then, reasonably suspect that the notion of virtue in this work should have the same meaning as in *Nicomachean Ethics*, for instance. But here we meet an inconsistency. The Stagirite in *Nicomachean Ethics* defines ἀρετή in a different way than in *Rhetoric*: in the first case he associates virtue with disposition (ἕξις) – in the second he uses the concept I am analyzing in this paper. Before I consider this question in detail, let’s look at this ‘inconsistency.’ Does Aristotle make inaccuracy? Investigators commonly used to confine a statement of inaccuracy – without analyzing relations which between capacity and disposition do constitute or without hearing the context in which their definitions appear. Primordial but cautious reflection and analysis points out that this inconsistency is not grave and does not require revision (or even refutation) of either one of the two definitions nor the acknowledgement of Aristotle’s real inaccuracy.

³⁴ According to division of soul into three parts. In *Eudemian Ethics* (in the text below signed as ηε) Aristotle says these three types of good can be reduced to two. Cf. (ηε 1218 b 32-34).

³⁵ (ηε 1218 b 35-36). In my translation.

Let us first look in *Rhetoric*. “Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.”³⁶ (P 1355 b 25) The aim of Aristotelian rhetoric is a persuasion: persuasion concerning some matter. Each of the three types of speech (deliberative, forensic, of display), being the most refined examples of rhetorical faculty, are connected with the concept of good and bad. This is why the concept of virtue plays an important role in the art of speech. The Stagirite in *Rhetoric* defines virtue as follows: virtue is “(...) a capacity [δύναμις] of providing and preserving good things; or a capacity of conferring many great benefits, and benefits of all kinds on all occasions.” (□ 1366 a 36-b 1) Recalling the distinctions I have made of capacity (active and passive capacities, *potentia* and *possibilitas*), we can say δύναμις here is taken as active capacity (δύναμις ποριστική/εὐεργετική). Onward, if we recall the division of spiritual goods in *Eudemian Ethics*, we must admit that it is *rational* capacity. This is consistent with the Aristotelian account described in ‘metaphysics’; virtue means ‘being capable’ of doing well. In *Rhetoric* the philosopher stresses the ethical aspect of capacity specifying various virtues: justice, valor, moderation, prudence etc. Thus, ἀρετή defined as δύναμις is active, subjective and rational condition of well-doing.

Meanwhile, *Nicomachean Ethics* discloses that virtue is a disposition (H 1106 a 5-20). What is more, Aristotle gives a passage, in which he shows that virtue cannot be concerned with the notion of capacity (!). Both other *Ethics* agree that virtue is a disposition, that is – ἔξις.³⁷ Disposition has, of course, its characteristic in the book Δ of *Metaphysics*³⁸, nonetheless, in this paper it is enough to stress that Aristotle kept its meaning in his ethics. In *Nicomachean Ethics* he writes: “(...) by dispositions of character [I mean] the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions (...)” (H 1105 b 25-26)³⁹ A durable disposition of character gives a guarantee of a stable good attitude in situations requiring virtue. Virtue interpreted as ἔξις means a skill of preserving a durable habit to act well. “(...) the virtue of man also will be the disposition of character which makes a man good and which makes

³⁶ Here and in other cases I use R. Roberts’ translation, changing ‘faculty’ (δύναμις) into ‘capacity’ when needed.

³⁷ Cf. *Magna Moralia* (ημ): (ημ 1184 b 33, 1185 a 37-38) and *Eudemian Ethics*: (ηε 1222 a 6-8, 1227 b 8-9).

³⁸ See commentaries: R. Porawski & M. Wesoły, *Z Arystotelesowego słownika filozofii (pojęcia kategorialne w Met. V)* [From Aristotelian Vocabulary of Philosophy (Categorical Notions in Met. V)], Meander Vol. XXXIV, No. 4 (1979), p. 215 sq; Kirwan’s: *Aristotle’s Metaphysics...*, op. cit, p. 170 sq and Reale’s: *Aristotele, La Metafisica...*, op. cit, vol. I, p. 470.

³⁹ Translation here and in next quotes changed (Ross translates ἔξις as ‘state of character’ and δύναμις as ‘faculty’).

him do his own work well.” (H 1106 a 23-25) Why, then, can virtue not be defined as *δύναμις*?

In the passage in which Aristotle refutes capacity as *definiens* of *aretê*, capacity is considered to be passive: “by capacities [I mean] the things, in virtue of which we are said to be capable of feeling these, e.g. of becoming angry or being pained or feeling pity (...).” (H 1105 b 23-25) Additionally, he claims that the question concerns *innate* capacities (H 1106 a 10). But the Aristotelian virtue is not understood as innate. In fact, Aristotle claims it can be learned (H 1103 a 19-26). We can see that the definition of capacity in *Ethics* is different from that in *Rhetoric*.

While in work devoted to the art of speech *δύναμις* is defined as active and learnable capacity⁴⁰, in the main ethical work capacity is defined as passive and innate.⁴¹ Thus, distinctions made in *Metaphysics* can be useful pointing out that the meaning of both concepts in these practical works is obviously different.

Let us look at the definitions of virtue formulated by the use of (active) capacity and disposition. Are they really inaccurate? We can find various strategies in literature. Consider these exemplary four:

/1/. Determination of virtue as *δύναμις* is intentional and is used to „(...) stress active aspect of virtue as a product of ability of soul to have durable disposition” (H. Podbielski).⁴²

/2/. The difference of both definitions is evident, but in some contexts both terms are almost interchangeable, thus, the difference is not essential. (Ch. Rapp).⁴³

/3/. Defining virtue by capacity is only partial; only *ἕξις* explains what *ἀρετή* is: capacity is a condition of virtue understood as a disposition, which constitutes capacities realizing a *habitus*: virtue. (G. Reale).⁴⁴

⁴⁰ It is active since is ability to make and to act, learnable – since is virtue.

⁴¹ It is passive since is ability to suffer: passions, for instance, innate – since suffering passions is not learnable, not achieved by exercises.

⁴² In commentary to his translation: Arystoteles, *Retoryka*, In Arystoteles, *Retoryka. Poetyka*, trans. H. Podbielski, PWN, Warszawa 1988, p. 382.

⁴³ “(...) virtue is a *hexis* and not a *dynamis*. This is a real difference, but in this case I would side with those who try to diminish its relevance: in some other contexts *dynamis* and *hexis* are almost interchangeable, so that it seems due to the particular context of the *Ethics* that Aristotle insists on the difference between the two concepts.” Ch. Rapp, *Persuasion and Moral Psychology in Aristotle's Rhetoric*, Berlin 2005, part 3.4., p. 31:

[http://web.princeton.edu/sites/philosph/Persuasion%20and%20Moral%20Psychology%20\(Ch.%20Rapp\).pdf](http://web.princeton.edu/sites/philosph/Persuasion%20and%20Moral%20Psychology%20(Ch.%20Rapp).pdf), [access: 05.06.2006].

⁴⁴ G. Reale, *Storia della Filosofia Antica*, vol. II: *Platone e Aristotele*, op. cit, p. 485 [pagination of Polish translation]. (This view is not *explicitly* expressed in the text, but such conclusion I draw on the base of thorough reading of relevant passage.)

/4/. The definition of *aretê* as capacity is intentional and is connected with rhetoric tasks: a speaker (much like a physician) possesses an active, rational capacity to produce the opposite (persuasion to the good and to the bad as well – alike producing health and disease); understanding virtue as *hexis prohairetike* needs a disposition for rational choices, meanwhile *average citizens* lack this kind of a disposition. Nevertheless, they can be persuaded to choose what is good, since they have the capacity for virtuous acts (S.K. Allard-Nelson).⁴⁵

This short presentation allows the formulation of preliminary adjudication of the problem considered here. Views presented in /1/ and /2/ do not seem to be satisfying. Nonetheless, Podbielski's opinion agrees with Reale's and the latter – with Allard-Nelson's. Views /3/ and /4/ can be accommodated and it shows that we do not find contradiction in Aristotle's definitions of virtue – but only superficial inaccuracy. Accommodation offers a good solution to the question, since Allard-Nelson focuses her acute inquiry on virtue regarding rhetoric aims (and treats ethics only marginally) and Reale, contrary, bases his opinion only on ethics (and does not consider rhetoric).

Thus, a very and full virtue is a *disposition* to choose a good way of conduct and appropriate behavior, only supposes *capacity*. This capacity is *active* ability to act and to behave *owing to* disposition to virtue. But virtue is learnable, that is – not always belongs to one's stable dispositions and, therefore, sometimes is only fixed as one's potential skill, which can lead to virtue *by other* people skilled in virtue. Not everyone is able to autonomously gain, by exercising, a disposition to virtue. Only (rhetorical) persuasion of a speaker, who has *active δύνάμις*, is able to lead such people to the state of ethically relevant disposition.⁴⁶ *Aretê* is capacity both when it cannot be a disposition and when it is a disposition, but only in the first case has full virtuous sense. The Stagirite does not use a different meaning of *dynamis*. In *Ethics* the definition of virtue cannot be tied to capacity, since Aristotle focuses on a strictly ethical dimension of virtue. Passive capacity in *Nicomachean Ethics* means an ability to suffer, which obviously cannot be a principle of virtue. We can *additionally* state that virtue defined as a stable disposition causes the existence of active capacities: a person who has a stable disposition to virtue, also has an active capacity to realize that virtue (cf. H 1143 a 28).

⁴⁵ See S.K. Allard-Nelson, *Virtue in Aristotle's Rhetoric: A Metaphysical and Ethical Capacity*, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2001), pp. 253-256.

⁴⁶ Indecisive and hesitant listener or listener who acts in a wrong way can be persuaded to the good, that is, one can produce in him or her *hexis* to good decisions and actions.

The definition of virtue in *Rhetoric* can be based on active capacity, since an ethical dimension of virtue is *secondary*. There is obvious reason for the indirect relation of capacity to virtue. A speaker is able to persuade others both to good and bad: the capacity of a speaker occurs to be virtuous not with respect to his action as such, but with respect to the effect. This secondary connection of virtue with capacity causes the definition of virtue in *Rhetoric* to seem more political than ethical: rhetoric is closer to politics than to ethics.⁴⁷

3. Conclusion. Capacity as a link between metaphysics and practical philosophy

It is not a big exaggeration to say that the Aristotelian *δύναμις* plays a role in the link between the theoretical, cognition-oriented part of his philosophy (metaphysics and physics) and the practical, action-oriented part (ethics, rhetoric, and politics). In both dimensions capacity occurs to be a basis of key philosophical conclusions. While using this concept in *philosophia prima* The Stagirite solved the main problems of *Metaphysics* and *Physics* (the latter yet belongs to the ‘second philosophy’), like the above mentioned idea of the ‘First Mover’ or problem of the matter, in practical wisdom his conclusions based on *δύναμις* are no less significant. Even if the central notion of the practical section of Aristotelian philosophy is *ἀρετή*, it does not influence the fact that *δύναμις* is stringently connected with virtue, since it conditions the sphere of action. The concept of capacity applied to a practical domain, points that *πραξις* is generally possible owing to the human activity founded by it.

A short analysis of uses of capacity in the basic works of The Stagirite shows that it constitutes in fact a concept being *the link and the joint between the practical and theoretical domain of philosophical cognition*. Capacity reveals their unity: is a kind of bridge between the sphere of being, reality, and sphere of actions.

The considerations proposed here begin with the theoretical part and proceed over to the practical. Although Aristotle gave priority to *the first philosophy* before practical cognition and wisdom,⁴⁸ this account of the question of capacity has its philosophical reasons. The Aristotelian philosophical ‘vocabulary’, where *dynamis*

⁴⁷ The Stagirite apparently was aware of this fact. See (P 1356 a 25-28).

⁴⁸ Because knowledge in the latter is not implicit (like in *philosophia prima*), but is secondary goal, used to practical activity. Cf. G. Reale, *Storia della Filosofia Antica*, vol. II: *Platone e Aristotele*, op. cit, p. 475 [pagination of Polish translation].

holds an important place, can be read at an angle of *praxis*. Book Θ also contains many drifts, which in the case of practically-oriented reading refer to the sphere of *πραξις*. What is more, reconstructed distinctions of capacity made in *Metaphysics* seem to be useful in understanding various questions of practical philosophy: Aristotle not only brought these distinctions onto the ground of ethics and rhetoric, but used them in prompting us to treat *dynamis* as one of basic concepts of practical philosophy. The later history of *δύναμις* shows that the connection of practical and theoretical philosophy is unusually stringent and the Aristotelian thought is one of the first examples which show unity of our cognition. It is significant especially in the light of naturalistic tendencies in contemporary epistemology.⁴⁹

The value of philosophical intuitions present in the concept of capacity is brought home to us when we look at current theories in social sciences. They are various conceptions regarding human abilities, dispositions, skills, and competences that we meet in the fields of biology, psychology, and sociology. Basically and reasonably speaking, in these theories we can discover the same cognitive intuitions as Aristotelian – frozen in the concept of *δύναμις*⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ Therefore, it seems that historical naturalistic interpretation of the concept of capacity, pointed in second part of the paper, has its points also in the view of contemporary naturalism (although may appear to be supernaturalistic on its ground).

⁵⁰ This paper is modified and shortened version of my article *Δύναμις. Metafizyczne pojęcie możliwości i jego rola w filozofii praktycznej Arystotelesa* [*Δύναμις. Metaphysical Concept of Capacity and Its Role in Practical Philosophy of Aristotle*] (forthcoming).

METAPHYSICS OF PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY. THE CONCEPT OF CAPACITY IN ARISTOTLE

S U M M A R Y

The author presents the Aristotelian conception of capacity/potentiality (*dynamis*), which is part of Aristotle's basic philosophical vocabulary. The concept of capacity is one of the most important in Aristotle's metaphysics. Its significance can be seen in the link between metaphysics and practical wisdom (ethics, rhetoric, politics): the author analyzes this link in Aristotle on the base of the concept of capacity.

Demonstrating the connection between theory and practice is based on the most important parts of *Metaphysics* (books Δ and Θ) and relates metaphysical definitions to an essential element of Aristotelian practical philosophy – the concept of virtue (*aretê*). In the practical works of Aristotle (three ethics and rhetoric) it is possible to find definitions of *aretê* which differ: in *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle defines *aretê* using the notion of disposition (*hexis*), but in *Rhetoric* he formulates the definition based on the concept of capacity. Distinctive analysis of this inconsistency shows the significance of capacity in The Stagirite's philosophy.