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THEOPHRASTUS AND THE INTELLECT AS MIXTURE

By Myrna Gabbe, University of Dayton

De Anima III 5 introduces one of Aristotle's most perplexing doctrines. In this short and obscure chapter, Aristotle distinguishes between an intellect that *becomes* all things, the so-called potential intellect, and an intellect that *makes* all things, the so-called productive intellect (430a14-15). It is generally held that the intellect that becomes all things is described in *De Anima* III 4, since Aristotle there tells us that the intellect knows by becoming its objects (429a15-18). This intellect has acquired the title "potential intellect" since it must be potentially the objects of thought in order to become and think the objects of thought (429a18-24). But scholars do not agree on what these intellects are, what they do or how they relate to each other. The main point of contention arises with respect to the productive intellect's mode of existence – in particular, whether it is transcendent or immanent. This paper concerns Theophrastus' interpretation of *De Anima* III 4 and 5, because those familiar with his writings tend to agree that he holds the key to resolving this twenty-three hundred year old debate.¹

Why think that Theophrastus can help us to understand Aristotle's *De Anima*?

Theophrastus (ca. 371- ca. 287 B.C.E.) was Aristotle's pupil and named successor as head of the Lyceum. Remaining accounts indicate that he was Aristotle's close friend and

¹ For exceptions to this position, cfr. P. HUBY, *Stages in the Development of Language About Aristotle's Nous*, in H. BLUMENTHAL and H. ROBINSON (edd.), *Aristotle and the Later Tradition*, Oxford 1991, pp. 129-30 and H. BLUMENTHAL, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity*, Ithaca 1996, pp. 10-11. Huby is skeptical that Theophrastus had "privileged access" to the thoughts of Aristotle on matters of the intellect, while Blumenthal took Theophrastus' questions as an expression of genuine puzzlement.

associate.² We have reason, then, to suppose that he was privy to Aristotle's thoughts on the matter of the intellect. Furthermore, most scholars believe that Theophrastus' intention in writing his *On the Soul* was to elucidate Aristotle's views. Therefore, because Theophrastus places the productive intellect squarely in the human soul, it is held that Aristotle did too. This, in any case, is the position of Paul Moraux,³ Edmund Barbotin,⁴ Daniel Devereux⁵ and John Rist⁶. They take Theophrastus' writings on the intellect as sound evidence against the view that the productive intellect is purely transcendent and identical to a higher being. This view was first put forward by Alexander of Aphrodisias and is currently enjoying a revival.⁷

² For testimonies regarding the relationship of Aristotle and Theophrastus cfr. W.W. FORTENBAUGH, P. HUBY, R. SHARPLES, and D. GUTAS (edd.), *Theophrastus of Eresus: Sources for His Life, Writings, Thought and Influence*, I, Leiden 1992.

³ P. MORAUX, *Alexandre d'Aphrodise: Exégète de la noétique d'Aristote*, Liège and Paris 1942, p.5. Here Moraux remarks that Theophrastus is the most faithful of interpreters.

⁴ E. BARBOTIN, *La théorie aristotélicienne de l'intellect d'après Théophraste*, Louvain and Paris, 1954, p. 241: « Notre analyse des fragments a poursuivi un double effort de hardiesse et de fidélité : de hardiesse, pour rejoindre, au delà de textes laconiques et discontinus, la pensée vivante dont ils témoignent ; de fidélité aussi à respecter les intentions et les silences de l'auteur. Nous ne prétendons pas avoir toujours su résoudre l'antinomie d'une telle entreprise : il suffirait d'avoir attiré l'attention sur des documents de première main, qui apportent aux déclarations d'Aristote de substantiels compléments. »

⁵ D. DEVEREUX, *Theophrastus on the Intellect*, in W. W. FORTENBAUGH and D. GUTAS (edd.), *Theophrastus, His Psychological, Doxographical, and Scientific Writings*, New Brunswick 1992, pp. 32-43. Devereux remarks on pp. 32-3: "Theophrastus' aporiai are designed not so much to challenge as to clarify Aristotle's views. If clarification was indeed his aim, then we have all the more reason to look to these fragments for help in deciphering Aristotle's cryptic messages concerning the intellect."

⁶ J. RIST, *Notes on Aristotle De Anima* 3. 5, « *Classical Philology* » LXI (1966) pp. 8-20. On pp. 8-9, Rist appeals to Theophrastus as evidence for Aristotle's intent, taking for granted his authority.

⁷ Cfr., for instance, E. HARTMAN, *Substance, Body, and Soul*, Princeton 1977; C. KAHN, *The Role of Nous in the Cognition of First Principles in Posterior Analytics* II 19, in E. BERTI (ed.), *Aristotle on Science: The Posterior Analytics*, Padua 1981, pp. 385-414; J. HALDANE, *Aquinas and the Active Intellect*, « *Philosophy* » LXVII (1992) pp. 119-210; M. FREDE, *La théorie aristotélicienne de l'intellect agent*, in G. R. DHERBEY (ed.), *Corps et Âme*, Paris 1996, pp. 375-90; V. CASTON, *Aristotle's Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal*, « *Phronesis* » XLIV (1999) pp. 199-227; M. WHITE, *The Problem of Aristotle's Nous Poiêtikos*, « *Review of Metaphysics* » LVII (2004) pp. 725-40.

Theophrastus' writings on the intellect are now lost, but portions are preserved mainly by Priscian of Lydia (ca. 6th c. C.E.) in his metaphrase *On Theophrastus On Sense-Perception* [*Metaphr.*],⁸ and by Themistius (ca. 317- ca. 388 C.E.) in his paraphrase of Aristotle's *De Anima* [*In de an.*]. What remains is a fair bit, enough to say that his noetic theory is encapsulated by one fragment preserved by Themistius: "the intellect is in a way a mixture out of the productive and the potential" (108,22-23). Despite differences in the details of what is mixed and how, scholars generally take the descriptions 'mixed' (miktov") and 'mixture' (mixi") to reference duality, division and differentiation – to indicate either that Theophrastus recognized two types of intellects or that he distinguished between two kinds of noetic faculties. This treatment of Theophrastus corresponds with and lends support to a widely accepted reading of *De Anima*, whereby chapters four and five of book three are taken to describe either two kinds of intellects present in the human soul or two functionally discrete parts of a single intellect.

⁸ We do have references to Theophrastus in the works of Arabic and Latin medieval philosophers, but it is unlikely that the medieval philosophers had the texts of Theophrastus available to them in translation. The views of Theophrastus were usually yoked to those of Themistius, and since there was an Arabic and Latin translation of Themistius' paraphrase and since Priscian is not mentioned by the medieval philosophers, we can assume that their knowledge of Theophrastus comes from the quotes preserved by Themistius. See the following two articles by D. Gutas on the transmission of Greek texts into Arabic: D. GUTAS, *The Life, Works, and Sayings of Theophrastus in the Arabic Tradition*, in W.W. FORTENBAUGH, P. HUBY and A. LONG (edd.), *Theophrastus of Eresus: On His Life and Work*, New Brunswick and Oxford 1985, pp. 63-102; D. GUTAS, *The Starting Point of Philosophical Studies in Alexandrian and Arabic Aristotelianism*, in W.W. FORTENBAUGH, P. HUBY and A. LONG (edd.), *Theophrastus of Eresus: On His Life and Work*, New Brunswick and Oxford 1985, pp. 115-23. In the same volume, P. Huby argues that the medieval philosophers had a second text by Themistius, which also served as a source for Theophrastus. P. HUBY, *Medieval Evidence for Theophrastus' Discussion of the Intellect*, in W.W. FORTENBAUGH, P. HUBY and A. LONG (edd.), *Theophrastus of Eresus: On His Life and Work*, New Brunswick and Oxford 1985, pp. 165-81.

If we could be confident both that Theophrastus was privy to Aristotle's thoughts on the intellect and that his intention was to clarify his more obscure doctrines, we could rule out certain interpretations of the *De Anima* as implausible and focus our attention on Theophrastus' writings. However, these two assumptions are contentious. It is not obvious that Theophrastus had knowledge of Aristotle's doctrines on the intellect beyond the texts we share. Pamela Huby, who doubts that Theophrastus had privileged access to Aristotle's thoughts on this matter, observes that he "makes no claim to know what Aristotle thought independently of what he wrote down, and is as puzzled as we are about what his master meant."⁹ This latter point makes reference to the questions Theophrastus raises in the course of articulating an account of the intellect. The queries are generally thought to serve a pedagogical function – or, in the words of Devereux, "to anticipate the sorts of misunderstandings and questions a reader is likely to have."¹⁰ The fragments, however, do not conclusively show this to be the case. Because the text is fragmented, we do not have the full responses to his queries; hence, we cannot presume to know how or even that he had answered all of them. Furthermore, it is not evident that Theophrastus intended only to clarify Aristotle's theory of the intellect and not modify or reject certain aspects of it. It would not have been out of Theophrastus' character to modify and abandon certain doctrines that he believed did not advance the Aristotelian program. It has been argued, for instance, that Theophrastus rejected Aristotle's fifth element (aether), his theory of place, and the prime mover.¹¹ Moreover, Theophrastus'

⁹ P. HUBY, *Stages in the Development of Language About Aristotle's Nous*, cit., p.129.

¹⁰ D. DEVEREUX, *Theophrastus on the Intellect*, cit., p. 32.

¹¹ For an account of both ancient and contemporary assessments of Theophrastus see R. SHARPLES, *Theophrastus as Philosopher and Aristotelian*, in J. M. van OPHUIJSEN and M. van RAALTE (edd.), *Theophrastus: Reappraising the Sources*, New Brunswick 1998, pp. 267-80.

description of the intellect is in marked contrast with Aristotle's claim that the intellect is unmixed (ajmighv") (429a18, 24; 430a18).

Since we do not possess testimony from Theophrastus regarding his intentions or knowledge, to assess these interpretive assumptions we must investigate what is meant by the remark that the intellect is a mixture. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to unpack and clarify Theophrastus' noetic theory in the interest of assessing him as a commentator of Aristotle. Contrary to the received view, I shall argue that 'mixture' is applied to the intellect to emphasize its uniformity and lack of differentiation.¹² But it is my view that we can learn little from Theophrastus about Aristotle's intentions. Theophrastus, I contend, arrives at his conception of the intellect by modifying or, perhaps in his mind, rejecting certain of Aristotle's doctrines.

II

The description of the intellect as a mixture appears only in Themistius' paraphrase, but there is little reason to doubt that it comes from Theophrastus' treatise.¹³ Although Priscian's metaphrase omits the references to mixture, it ends abruptly before a treatment of *De Anima* III 5 with a note from the copyist that reads: "look out for the

¹² Cfr. P. HUBY, *Stages in the Development of Language About Aristotle's Nous*, cit. Huby arrives at a similar conclusion in this paper by analyzing the noetic language used by the Peripatetic commentators. According to Huby, noetic division and differentiation appear only after Theophrastus. Although 'mixture' would seem to denote plurality and differentiation, Huby does not address this description of Theophrastus.

¹³ Interestingly, the Stoics, who were corporealists, used the notion of a mixture to explain the relationship between the body and soul. This view is generally attributed to Chrysippus (ca. 280-207 B.C.E.), who was born after Theophrastus died, but Arcesilaus (ca. 315-240 B.C.E.) reportedly attacked the Stoic account of mixture, making it possible that the theory originated with Zeno, who was active during Theophrastus' life. Cfr. PLUTARCH, *comm. not.* 1078B-D. Hence, the Stoics may have already applied the word 'mixture' to the soul when Theophrastus wrote his treatise. It is unlikely that Theophrastus inspired the Stoic theory, since their corporeal conception of the soul demanded a physical account of how the soul relates to the body.

rest.” We can assume, then, that we do not have the complete text and that a discussion of the intellect as mixture is yet to come.

Themistius records two passages wherein the notion of the intellect as mixture appears. The first passage is introduced to show that Theophrastus had the same concerns as he regarding the final remark of *De Anima* III 5, which reads, “We do not remember because this is impassive, but the passive intellect (οἷ παθητικὸν; nou' ") is perishable and without this it thinks nothing” (430a23-25). Theophrastus reportedly wrote:

For if the potentiality is like a disposition, if it was connate with that, it must have been so both immediately and always: but if (it came) later, with what, and in what way, was its coming to be? Certainly it appears to be uncreated, if it is indestructible. But since it is immanent, why is it not always? Why are there forgetting and deception? Perhaps through the mixture (ἡ διάθεσις; mi'xin).¹⁴ (*In de an.* 102,26-29 = 320B FHS&G)

The second passage is part of a larger quote tacked on to the end of Themistius’ excursus of *De Anima* III 4 and 5. Themistius has just made reference to Plato and turns to Theophrastus for the final bit of support. The relevant portion runs as follows:

What are these two natures? And what again is what underlies or is united to the productive? For the intellect is in a way a mixture out of the productive and the potential (μικτόν γὰρ πῶς οἷ νοῦν ἐκ τοῦ ποιητικοῦ καὶ τοῦ δυναμειῖ). If then the motive (intellect) is connate, it must have been so both immediately and always; but if (it came) later, with what, and in what way, was its coming to be? Certainly it appears to be uncreated, if it is also indestructible. But since it is immanent, why is it not always? Why are there forgetting and deception and falsehood? Perhaps through the mixture (ἡ διάθεσις; mi'xin). (*In de an.* 108,22-8 = 320A FHS&G)

¹⁴ Without only minor modifications, translations of fragments are from W. FORTENBAUGH, P. HUBY, R. SHARPLES, D. GUTAS (edd.), *Theophrastus of Eresus. Sources for His Life, Writings, Thought and Influence, Part Two*, Leiden 1992. For ease of reference, I shall henceforth refer to the fragments by the numbers assigned to them in this sourcebook.

Notice that ‘mixture’ appears once in passage 320B and twice in 320A. The first use of the term in 320A describes the intellect’s character: The intellect, we are told, is a mixture of the potential and productive, where the potential underlies or is united to the productive.¹⁵ The context of the second appearance of ‘mixture’ in 320A is virtually identical with the context in which it appears in 320B – the two passages differ mostly in their opening lines.¹⁶ Having argued that the intellect is connate, invoking mixture answers the questions, “Why is it not always?” and “Why are there forgetting and deception and falsehood?” Scholars take the query “Why is it not always?” as a reference to the problem Aristotle mentions at the end of *De Anima* III 4 – namely, why we do not always think (430a5-6). That the intellect is a mixture of what is productive and potential explains the intermittence and fallibility of human intellection.¹⁷

The difficulty for interpreters of Theophrastus is to understand how the term ‘mixture’ applies to the intellect, when strictly speaking only corporeal bodies can be mixed. We can assume Theophrastus to use the word in an extended or analogical sense. Indeed, he indicates that the human intellect is not a genuine mixture by qualifying the description with the adverb *pw"*: The intellect, he says, is *somehow* a mixture. The task for scholars is to determine in what way the intellect is *like* a mixture of corporeal entities.

¹⁵ For an interesting discussion of *sunhrth' sqai* see P. HUBY and D. GUTAS, *Theophrastus of Eresus: Sources for His Life, Writings, Thought and Influence. Commentary Vol. 4, Psychology*, Leiden 1999, pp. 184-5.

¹⁶ It is questionable whether fragments 320A and B are quotations of two separate passages, since there is significant overlap between the two. Huby thinks it unlikely that Theophrastus repeated his words twice. She speculates that “Themistius paraphrased a single passage of Theophrastus twice, adapting the opening to suit his context.” P. HUBY, *Commentary, cit.* pp. 185-6.

¹⁷ I will question the notion that the mixture accounts for the intermittence of human intellect in section IV.

III

Ideally, an interpretation of fragments 320A and 320B should address why Theophrastus describes the intellect as a mixture. It should explain what ‘mixture’ is meant to underline. Moraux, for instance, thinks that the intellect is mixed insofar as it has two functionally discrete parts – one that produces the intelligible forms, the other that passively receives them.¹⁸ He does not explain, however, why this conception of the intellect is aptly described by the term ‘mixture’ and for this reason his account is unsatisfactory.¹⁹ (I will, nonetheless, address Moraux’s account in greater detail in Section V.) By contrast, both Barbotin and Devereux aim to give an interpretation that reflects Aristotle’s account of mixture, which is why I focus on their interpretations. On the face of it, Devereux offers the more natural reading of the fragments. Not only is his interpretation simpler than Barbotin’s, but Devereux also makes Theophrastus’ treatment of the intellect conform more closely than Barbotin’s to Aristotle’s account of mixture. But even if Barbotin’s interpretation is strained, it is revealing. It shows us what is wrong with Devereux’s theory and hints at the problem besetting both accounts: the shared assumption that the human intellect is somehow a compound of two kinds of intellects,

¹⁸ Moraux’s interpretation of Theophrastus looks a lot like Aquinas’ interpretation of the *De Anima* in that he takes passages 320A and 320B to describe an intellect with two faculties: one productive, which produces the intelligible objects by dematerializing the intelligible form from its material condition, the other potential and passive, which receives the forms. Not surprisingly, Moraux commends the Thomist interpretation for respecting both the text and the Aristotelian spirit more than any other. Cfr. P. MORAUX, *Alexandre d'Aphrodise, cit.*, p. 5. R. D. Hicks seems to read the fragments more or less in line with Moraux in that he takes the ‘mixture’ to describe an intellect comprised of active and potential elements. Cfr. R. D. HICKS, *Aristotle: De Anima*, Cambridge 1907, p. 595.

¹⁹ Moraux also fails to explain how this account of the mixture explains deception, falsehood and forgetting.

one whose nature is active, the other whose nature is potential and passive. The place to begin is with Aristotle's theory of mixture.

Aristotle's account of mixture is detailed in book one, chapter ten of *On Generation and Corruption*. He explains there that a mixture is a compound formed out of two or more constituents that originally existed in separation (327b21-22). The compound is not identical to any of the constituents, but rather is a unique third entity different in actuality from its constituents (327b24-25). According to Aristotle, the compound is formed when the combined constituents reciprocally alter such that each lose their essential character and become something intermediate (328a28-31). The constituents, however, are not destroyed in the process of being mixed, because the destruction of either of one of them will not produce a compound that is some third thing. Rather, the constituents persist within the compound potentially, so that should the compound separate out, the constituents would regain their original form (327b25-26).

Because the constituents alter reciprocally, mixing produces a compound that is uniform in quality – each portion has the same character as the next (327b4; 328a10-11; 328b21-22). Mixtures thus stand in contrast to combinations that result only in the juxtaposition of their elements. The latter type of combination is produced because the constituents are not altered by the presence of the other, like barley and wheat when combined. Hence, while a group of juxtaposed entities exhibits division and differentiation – not all parts are alike – a genuine mixture manifests uniformity (328a8-15).

Devereux's interpretation of the intellect as mixture makes great use of the notion that a mixture is a compound resulting from the reciprocal alteration of its constituents.

According to Devereux, the human intellect is a mixture of what I call the potential and the productive intellects: it is a unique third intellect resulting from the combination of two kinds of intellects. Because Devereux identifies the potential intellect with the intellect Theophrastus describes as “belonging to the soul” (yuciko; " nou' ", *Metaphr.* 26,6 = 307B) and assumes it to stand in contrast with the intellect Theophrastus describes as entering from without (*In de an.* 107,36 = 307A), he takes the potential intellect to be inseparable from and perishable with the body. (Theophrastus, we might note, makes no explicit connection between the potential intellect and the intellect belonging to the soul.) Conversely, he presumes that the intellect entering from without is the productive intellect and takes it to be capable of independent and separate existence.²⁰ This intellect, in his view, is characterized by its actuality. As he conceives it, it is actual in its being, ceaseless in its activity, immortal and eternal. But the nature of these two intellects changes when the productive intellect becomes a part of the human soul.

Appealing to the reciprocal alteration that occurs with a genuine mixture, Devereux argues that the productive and potential intellects are reciprocally changed “out of their nature” when they meet: the potential intellect acquires actuality, the productive intellect potentiality.²¹ Like a genuine mixture, the constituents preserve their original character in potentiality, though only the productive intellect survives the dissolution of the individual. The alteration, however, does not result in uniformity. As Devereux understands it, the mixing of the two intellects produces a single intellect composed of

²⁰ According to Theophrastus, the intellect that enters from without joins the human soul at the first generation of the embryo, for otherwise it would be “as if added” (*In de an.* 107,31-37 = 307A).

²¹ DEVEREUX, *Theophrastus on the Intellect*, cit., p. 42.

distinct functional parts that each play a role in the acquisition and contemplation of the intelligible forms or objects. Thus although the productive intellect acquires some potentiality, it remains principally active, operating as a disposition (WJ" e{vxî", *In de an.* 102,26 = 320B) whose activity is intermittent. Likewise, after the mixing the potential intellect retains its potential and passive nature insofar as its role is to receive and be affected by intelligible forms. As Devereux explains, thinking, for Theophrastus, takes place when the potential intellect receives or becomes the intelligible objects thanks to the agency of the intelligible objects, which were actualized by the productive intellect. (I will say more about this in section V.)

Devereux's account has a seductive simplicity that belies a serious problem. It is clear that Devereux takes the mixture to account for human intellection on the assumption that an intellect whose nature is either purely potential or purely actual cannot. An intellect whose nature is potential cannot produce intelligible objects for lack of agency and, hence, cannot think by itself. Conversely, an intellect that is thoroughly actual will always think, though human intellection is clearly intermittent. This interpretation of the intellect as mixture assumes that Theophrastus read *De Anima* III 4 and 5 as describing two different kinds of noetic entities. However, the intellects, as Devereux conceives them, cannot mix. As a mere potentiality, the potential intellect lacks the actuality necessary for it to be a constituent of a mixture. A constituent of a mixture must have separate and independent existence: it must be something actual. Likewise, an intellect whose very being is actuality cannot alter and acquire potentiality because suffering change, under Aristotle's account, requires potentiality. This means

that neither of the two intellects, as Devereux understands them, can be mixed in any way that resembles the physical process described in *On Generation and Corruption*.

Barbotin is careful to avoid the problems that beset Devereux's interpretation by denying (a) that the potential intellect can mix with the productive intellect as a pure potentiality and (b) that the productive intellect is altered in its encounter with the human soul.²² Doing so, however, makes for an exceedingly awkward account of the intellect as mixture. Barbotin explains that prior to the productive intellect's presence in the human soul, the potential intellect is merely one potentiality among the ensemble of potentialities belonging to the embryo.²³ Therefore, it does not yet have the actuality to be a constituent of a mixture. The productive intellect, he explains, "penetrates" the vegetative and sensible soul – it does not mix with the human soul, because "mixture," we recall, is reserved for the relationship of the productive and potential intellects.²⁴ The mixing of these two intellects thus proceeds from the initial encounter of the productive intellect and the vegetative and sensitive soul, an encounter which serves to create the faculty for human intellection. "Its presence," Barbotin writes, "awakens in the growing

²² Devereux criticizes Barbotin for maintaining that the productive intellect retains its essence while in the human soul. However, he seems to have missed Barbotin's reason for this insistence. DEVEREUX, *Theophrastus on the Intellect*, cit., pp. 40-43.

²³ Cfr. E. BARBOTIN, *La théorie aristotélicienne de l'intellect d'après Théophraste*, cit., p. 199.

²⁴ P. Merlan also takes there to be one intellect whose encounter with the vegetative and sensitive soul explains the fallibility and intermittence of human cognition. As opposed to Barbotin, however, who maintains that the 'mixture' applies to the relationship between the potential and productive intellects, Merlan takes the 'mixture' to describe the relationship between the intellect from without (the productive intellect?) and the vegetative and sensitive soul. It is not clear how Merlan conceives the mixture of the productive intellect with the sensitive soul when the productive intellect enters at the first generation of the embryo, prior to the formation of the sensitive soul. Cfr. P. MERLAN, *Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus*, in A. H. ARMSTRONG (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge 1967, p. 109.

being a new faculty: the potential intellect”.²⁵ The potential intellect obtains actuality – i.e., the power to actualize spontaneously intelligibles in an act of thought – thanks to the presence of the productive intellect in the human soul. Thus pace Devereux, it is not, for Barbotin, the productive intellect that actualizes intelligible forms. The productive intellect remains a pure actuality, despite the mixing. Its activity does not become intermittent, or liable to error and fatigue, because these traits belong to the human intellect insofar as it admits potentiality.

Barbotin cleverly anticipates the problems with Devereux’s account, but try as he might, he cannot explain how the relationship between the potential and productive intellects is anything like a mixture. Barbotin maintains that the union of the two intellects produces something analogous to an alteration of mixed bodies.²⁶ Still, if the potential intellect is not combined with the productive intellect and if the productive intellect remains unaffected, it is hard to see how this union is in anyway analogous to a mixing.²⁷ It seems rather that the mixture, on Barbotin’s view, is constituted by the productive intellect and the hylomorphic soul, since this union produces a third distinct entity. But as Barbotin rightly notes, this is not how Theophrastus describes the mixture. Regardless, how the embryo can be the source of the potential intellect is perplexing, given (a) that the embryo is hardly in possession of a vegetative soul, let alone a sensitive

²⁵ E. BARBOTIN, *La théorie aristotélicienne de l'intellect d'après Théophraste*, cit., p. 199 writes: « En pénétrant dans l’embryon à l’origine de la vie, il y rencontre des énergies physiologiques et psychiques – végétative et sensibles – issue du déterminisme biologique ; mais sa présence éveille dans l’être en croissance une faculté toute nouvelle : l’intellect potentiel ; celui-ci se trouve enveloppé, inclus dans l’ensemble de virtualités dont l’embryon est porteur. »

²⁶ ID., p. 164.

²⁷ I think because of this difficulty, Barbotin often writes as if the term ‘mixture’ is meant simply to emphasize the productive and potential intellects’ intimate union. ID., pp. 155, 163 and 164.

soul, and (b) Aristotle's insistence that the intellect is not the product of biological changes.²⁸

It is doubtful that the problems illuminated by Barbotin's interpretation can be resolved as he imagined, by extending or manipulating the meaning of mixture. Rather, the difficulties suggest that the problems facing Devereux's and Barbotin's account of the intellect lies with their interpretive assumption that the human intellect is composed of two distinct kinds of noetic entities. Still this is not yet to show that Theophrastus had no such concept, for we cannot assume that he was aware of the difficulties just described. So let us turn now to consider the fragments.

IV

Reading *De Anima* III 4 and 5 as distinguishing between two kinds of noetic entities has long been a part of our interpretative tradition, so it is not surprising that Devereux and Barbotin would find this distinction in Theophrastus. The evidence for this interpretation comes principally from fragment 320A discussed in section II above. Because this passage is so central to our discussion, it is useful to quote it again.

What are these two natures? And what again is what underlies (to; uJpokeivmenon) or is united to (sunhrthmevnon) the productive? For the intellect is in a way a mixture out of the productive and the potential (mikto;n gavr pw" oJ nou'" e[k te tou' poihtikou' kai; tou' dunavmei). If then the motive intellect (oJ kinw'n) is connate, it must have been so both immediately and always ; but if (it came) later, with what, and in what way, was its coming to be? Certainly it appears to be uncreated, if it is also indestructible. But since it is immanent, why is it not always? Why are there forgetting and deception and falsehood? Perhaps through the mixture (h] dia; th;n mi'xin). (THEM. *In de an.* 108,22-8 = 320A FHS&G)

²⁸ ARISTOT. *GA* II 3, 736b8-29.

The passage opens with the question “What are these two natures?” which is reformulated in the next sentence, before Theophrastus makes a shift to a different, presumably related, question regarding the immanency of the motive intellect. Reformulated, the question is: “What underlies (to; uJpokeivmenon) or is united to (sunhrthmevnon) the productive?” Theophrastus justifies this reformulation with the notion of the intellect as mixture: “For the intellect is in a way a mixture out the productive and the potential” (mikto;n gavr pw" oJ nou'" e[k te tou' poihtikou' kai; tou' dunavmei).

Barbotin and Devereux assume Theophrastus here to distinguish between different kinds of intellects for two reasons. First, the participles uJpokeivmenon and sunhrthmevnon imply a relationship between two things: between (a) what underlies or is united with the productive and (b) the productive. The subsequent reformulation in terms of mixture makes clear that what underlies or is united with the productive is the potential. Second, the reference to a motive intellect (oJ kinw'n) suggests that the discussion in the second half of the passage addresses the productive active intellect, since the agent of change cannot be potential. However, the assumption that the human intellect is constituted by two opposing kinds of noetic entities is challenged by Theophrastus’ rejection of the potential intellect – i.e., an intellect whose nature is passive and potential.

Theophrastus’ critique of the potential intellect is a response to two remarks of *De Anima* III 4: (i) the intellect has no nature of its own other than that of potentiality (mhd j aujtou' ei\nai fuvsin mhdemivan ajll j h] tauvthn, o{ti dunatov", 429a21-2) and (ii) the intellect is nothing before it thinks (oujqevn

ejstin ejnergeiva/ tw'n o[ntwn pri;n noei'n, 429a24). On the face of it, these remarks suggest that the intellect is a mere potentiality before it acquires knowledge and thinks. Theophrastus, however, provides two arguments against this view. Consider the following fragment preserved by Priscian. He writes:

Perhaps this too would be absurd, if the intellect has the nature of matter, being nothing, but potentially all things. But it must not be taken in this way, nor of all intellect, but it is necessary to make distinctions. Of what nature, then, <is it>, and what is <the basis> of the distinction? For matter is not a 'this something' (ouj tovde ti), but intellect, if it is not like this, what else <would it be>? In the case of the intellect belonging to the soul (ejpi tou' yusikou' nou'), we must therefore also take "potentially" analogically (kata; ajnalogivan); for it must be interpreted in relation to the intellect in actuality, that is, that which is separate (wJ" ga;r pro;" to;n ejnergeiva/ nou'n, touthvsti to;n cwristovn). (*Metaphr.* 26,1-7 = 307B FHS&G)

In the first part of the passage, Theophrastus argues that the intellect cannot have the nature of matter or potentiality. From here he concludes that a distinction must be drawn between an intellect that belongs to the soul (yusiko;" nou'") and an intellect in actuality (ejnergeiva/ nou'"). Devereux and Barbotin take the distinction to demarcate the productive and potential intellects. But Theophrastus' remarks here do not support this reading.

Theophrastus' argument against the potential intellect takes for granted that matter corresponds to potentiality, form to actuality and being. It assumes that while the form of an entity accounts for its being a tovde ti – a "this something" or a certain kind of thing – its matter is only potentially a tovde ti – potentially a certain kind of thing. The argument, then, is that if the intellect has the nature of matter – if it is no actual being, but is all things potentially – then the intellect is a tovde ti only potentially. However, Theophrastus insists that the intellect must be an actual tovde

ti: “What else would it be?” Thus, he concludes that the intellect with potentiality is something and, therefore, that it has a nature and actuality.²⁹

According to Barbotin and Devereux, the critique of the potential intellect in the first half of the passage and the distinction in the second anticipates the account of the intellect in terms of mixture. It is for this reason that they take the distinction between “the intellect belonging to the soul” and “the intellect in actuality” to be the distinction between the potential and productive intellects respectively. Yet Theophrastus’ critique of the potential intellect rules out the possibility that “the intellect belonging to the soul” and “the intellect in actuality” refer to the potential and productive intellects respectively. Simply put, Theophrastus does not recognize an intellect whose nature is potential.

The argument of 307B demonstrates that the potential intellect violates the principle of non-contradiction. It shows that an intellect whose nature is potential is an actual *to vde ti* insofar as it is an intellect, but not an actual *to vde ti* insofar as it has a potential nature. Hence, the argument precludes its postulation, even as a theoretical notion, and that is why subsequent to this argument Theophrastus provides us with a different way of conceiving the intellect possessed of potentiality. “It is necessary,” he writes, “to make distinctions” in order to articulate the nature and character of the intellect manifesting potentiality. We must distinguish between an intellect belonging to the soul and an intellect in actuality, because “we must take ‘potentially’ <said of the intellect belonging to the soul> analogically” – i.e., in relation or in contrast to the intellect in actuality and not as matter. Given, then, the argument

²⁹ This is how Priscian interprets Theophrastus. Regarding the intellect described in III 4, the intellect that is connected to the soul, Priscian reports that it manifests both potentiality and actuality. According to Priscian, this intellect has a form and is active by itself (*Metaphr.* 26,12-14)

against the potential intellect in the first part of the passage, we can assume that the intellect belonging to the soul is already, in Theophrastus' mind, mixed: it has actuality. Therefore, the intellect belonging to the soul is neither an intellect whose nature is potential, as Devereux imagines, nor a potentiality of an embryo, as Barbotin envisions. The distinction between "the intellect belonging to the soul" and "the intellect in actuality" is better understood as the distinction between the human and the divine.

In case the argument of 307B did not convince his readers that there cannot be an intellect whose nature is potential, Theophrastus provided a second argument. This argument, also recorded by Priscian, runs as follows:

For if it is when it is active that it becomes things, and at that time it is most both <intellect and things>, things and intellect would be one and the same...If, then, when it is things, then it is also intellect, intellect and things would be one and the same. Is it the case, then, that when it is not thinking, not being things it is also not intellect (οἷταν μὴ νοήν, μὴ ὡν τὰ πράγματα οὐδε νοῦν ἐστίν)? (*Metaphr.* 29,18-23 = 311 FHS&G)

For it is absurd...if existing potentially it (the intellect) is nothing, but in activity it is something other (than itself), when it does not think itself, and through thinking one thing and another is never the same (οὐδεὶς ποτε οἷ αὐτόν). For this is a kind of indiscriminating and disorderly nature (ἀκρίτος γὰρ τί αὐτὸ γε καὶ ἀτακτος ἡ φύσις). (*Metaphr.* 30,22-25 = 312 FHS&G)

The above argument takes as its premise Aristotle's thesis that, when active, the intellect is identical to its objects or identical to what it thinks (430a3-4). In a nutshell, the argument is that if the intellect is like matter, then its nature will be potentially whatever it comes to be actually, i.e., whatever it thinks. Theophrastus here points out that this thesis of Aristotle's has two problematic entailments so long as the intellect is like matter: (a) since it is not always thinking, it will not always be an intellect and (b) since the content of one's intellect is continually changing, the intellect will have a different nature

from one moment to the next. The problem with conclusion (b) is that the potential intellect is made to have a nature that is “undiscriminating and disorderly,” though disorder cannot arise from a nature: it occurs in absence of natures. Natures account for being and unity, meaning that whatever has a nature has an identity or a being in virtue of its nature. Thus if, on the one hand, the intellect has a potential nature and a being due to something other than itself, i.e., its objects, it will not be an intellect when it is not its objects – when it is not actively thinking. On the other hand, when the intellect is active, when it is both intellect and things, its nature will be disorderly, changing from one moment to the next. Both entailments are impossible. Hence, we may conclude that Theophrastus does not raise these arguments to show that the potential intellect is in need of the productive intellect. He raises these arguments to show that the mere notion of a potential intellect is, to use his description at the begin of fragment 312, “absurd.”

To sum: Fragments 307B, 311 and 312 reveal the problem with Barbotin’s and Devereux’s first assumption, that Theophrastus recognizes a potential intellect. Theophrastus is at pains to show that there cannot be an intellect whose nature is potential. Yet without the potential intellect, the theory that the human intellect is a mixture of two kinds of intellects loses its plausibility, since the mixture is meant to explain how a potential intellect acquires the agency to think. Nonetheless, let us turn to consider briefly their second assumption – that “the productive” of 320A and 320B corresponds to an intellect that lacks all potentiality.

The issue is whether the intellect that enters the human soul from without is the actual intellect (*ejnergeiva/ nou'*) that stands in contrast to the intellect belonging to the soul (*yusiko; nou'*). For we might think, contrariwise, that the

intellect from without belongs to the human soul, and stands in contrast to a purely transcendent intellect in actuality. The two fragments drawn upon are ambiguous on this matter. Consider the following passage recorded by Themistius, as quoted previously.

For if the potentiality is like a disposition (eij me;n ga;r wJ" e{x i" hJ duvnam i"), if it was connate (suvmfuto") with that, it must have been so both immediately and always: but if (it came) later, with what, and in what way, was its coming to be? Certainly it appears to be uncreated, if it is indestructible. But since it is immanent, why is it not always (ejnupavrcwn, d j ou\n dia; tiv oujk ajeiv)? Why are there forgetting and deception? Perhaps through the mixture (h] dia; th;n mi'xin).³⁰ (*In de an.* 102,26-29 = 320B FHS&G)

Theophrastus here affirms that the intellect is uncreated and indestructible, and hence that it is not generated by biological causes. Thus, following Aristotle, Theophrastus describes this intellect as e[xwqen (*In de an.* 107,32 = 307A). Furthermore, Theophrastus assumes this intellect to belong to the individual immediately and always. Two puzzles subsequently arise. “Why is it not always?” and “Why are there forgetting and deception.” These puzzles are answered by the mixture.

The question “Why is it not always?” (dia; tiv oujk ajeiv) is thought to allude to the puzzle Aristotle leaves unanswered at the end of *De Anima* III 4: “the cause for why thinking is not always” (430a5-6). Hence the question is typically glossed as “Why does it not always think?” and is taken to imply a time when the productive intellect thinks continuously and lacks potentiality. Yet there is a way of understanding this question that neither supplies missing words nor reaches outside the passage.

³⁰ Translations of fragments are from W. FORTENBAUGH, P. HUBY, R. SHARPLES, D. GUTAS (edd.), *Theophrastus of Eresus. Sources for His Life, Writings, Thought and Influence, Part Two*, Leiden 1992. For ease of reference, I shall henceforth refer to the fragments by the numbers assigned to them in this sourcebook.

The question at the end of 320B, “Why is it not always?” mirrors an implication of the intellect’s immanency articulated earlier in the passage. “If it was connate with that,” he writes, “it must have been so both immediately and always.” It is likely, then, that the query harkens back, not to Aristotle’s question of why thinking for us is intermittent, but to the supposition that the intellect is present always. The worry is that if the intellect is connate, and, hence, present immediately, then the embryo at first generation will be possessed of an intellect. Indeed, this is a worry that really must be addressed.

It is important to note that this rendering of the question does not imply that the intellect from without lacks potentiality.³¹ And this is a good thing, since it preserves the consistency of the passage. The fragment, after all, affirms that the intellect from without manifests potentiality: Its “potentiality,” we are told, “is like a disposition” (εἰς μένην γὰρ ὡς ἐξ ἡ δυνάμει", *In de an.* 102,26 = 320B). Still, this is not the only place where Theophrastus attributes potentiality to this intellect. In the following fragment preserved by Themistius, Theophrastus assumes the intellect from without to manifest potentiality. He writes:

In what way is it that the intellect, while coming from outside and being as it were superposed, is yet connate? And what is its nature? For that it is nothing actually, but everything potentially, is well said, as is also the case with sense. For it must not be taken in this way, that it is not even itself – for that is captious – but as a certain underlying potentiality, as is also the case with material objects. But the ‘coming from outside’ must be interpreted not as being superposed, but as being included with it at its original generation. (*In de an.* 107,32-37 = 307A FHS&G)

³¹ Even if the suggested reading is not accepted, there is another reason for denying that the query “Why does it not always think?” is directed towards an intellect that is pure actuality. Aristotle raised this question at the end of book three chapter four, i.e., before the introduction of the productive intellect. His worry, then, was not directed towards an intellect that lacks all potentiality.

The issue here regards the nature of the intellect from without. Theophrastus suggests that this intellect has potentiality as a material object. Therefore, the intellect from without cannot be the ever active, purely actual productive intellect, as conceived by both Barbotin and Devereux. We may conclude, then, that Theophrastus does not recognize two kinds of intellects that mix or co-mingle within the human soul. Indeed, the fragments suggest the opposite – namely, that the intellect, for Theophrastus, is a single entity. Notice that the question is always, “What is *its* nature?” From the discussion so far, it is clear that his answer will aim to account for its potentiality and actuality. I will attempt at a fuller explanation of Theophrastus’ noetic theory in the final section of this essay, but let us now turn to the notion, so far addressed just briefly, that the intellect manifests mixture insofar as it possesses two functionally discrete powers.

V

According to both Devereux and Moraux, Theophrastus’ mixed intellect is comprised of discrete functional parts: a productive part, which actualizes intelligible forms (or produces universal concepts) as a kind of pre-rational power, and a potential part, which receives and thinks them. This understanding of Theophrastus reflects a fairly common interpretation of *De Anima* III 4 and 5 born out of Aristotle’s claim that thinking is analogous to sensing insofar as the intellect is related to its objects just as the sense faculties are related to theirs (429a17-18). On the face of it, this analogy is quite peculiar since the sensible and intelligible objects are, prior to being cognized, disanalogous. While sensible forms are actual prior to being sensed, the intelligible forms are potential prior to being thought.

Sensible forms of material objects are the so-called proper objects: colors, tastes, sounds, smells and the tactile qualities. Aristotle is a realist about the sensibles; in his view, they exist in the world as we experience them. For instance, Aristotle would explain that an apple is red and sweet independent of our perception of it and, therefore, the cause of our sensual experiences. As Aristotle explains it, sensing occurs when the sense-faculty is moved by sensible forms to become like them (418a3-6). Intelligible forms, by contrast, are potential prior to being thought because they do not have existence separate from and independent of material objects (432a3-6). Therefore, because these forms are entrenched in material conditions and because matter is not intelligible in and of itself, the forms must somehow be rendered intelligible by the intellect in order to be thought as a universal concept. The intellect must, then, produce or actualize intelligible forms, which makes thinking active: we can think what we want, when we want because thinking is up to us (417b21-27).

Some scholars, following Aquinas, want to reconcile the disanalogy between the objects of the senses and intellect by postulating two discrete faculties: one that produces the intelligible objects, the other that receives them. On the suppositions that (a) thinking takes place when the intellect is affected by its objects and (b) the intellect cannot be affected by what is potential and material, it is held that the intelligible must be made actual and immaterial in order to precipitate thinking. Accordingly, because the potential intellect is thought to lack the agency to render our sense-experiences intelligible, the productive intellect is given the role of producing intelligible objects as a pre-rational power capable of abstraction or dematerialization, while the potential intellect is given the role of receiving them. Hence, on such a view the analogy between thinking and

sensing holds – at least between the sense faculty and the potential intellect – yet thinking nevertheless remains active.

However, this interpretation is deeply problematic. Not only does this theory makes the acquisition of form by the cognizer a mysterious and immediate process – a process that cannot account very well for error or the realities of learning – its causal account of intellection does not stand up to scrutiny. What is problematic is the underlying assumption that the intelligible object must be made actual in order to bring about intellection because the potentially intelligible is a material particular incapable of affecting the intellect. The trouble is that an immaterial intelligible is an actual thought; in the case of things without matter, what is thought and what thinks are the same (430a3-4). If, then, the intelligible needs to be immaterial in order to affect the potential intellect, it will be an actual thought prior to the intellect thinking it. Surely this cannot be.³²

Given both the difficulties of this view and its frequent attribution to the Peripatetic philosophers, it is all the more important to determine whether or not Theophrastus espoused it.³³ The place to begin is with Theophrastus' response to the analogy, for he was evidently puzzled by it. Priscian records his concern as follows:

For it <the intellect> must be <affected> if it is going to come into activity like the senses. But what is the effect produced on an incorporeal thing by an incorporeal thing, or of what kind is the alteration? And is the starting-point from that <the object> or from itself? For by being affected it would seem to be from

³² There is reason to believe that Theophrastus took note of this problem. After critiquing the analogy and denying that the intellect is passive, Theophrastus asks: “in what way is an intelligible thing affected by an intelligible thing?” (PRISC. *Metaphr.* 28,29 = 307D). Given the preceding discussion, we can assume that this question is a response the suggestion that the intellect is passively affected. Thus, the question suggests that Theophrastus takes this conception of the intellect to be problematic, presumably because objects are intelligible only when thought.

³³ The theory of abstraction or dematerialization has been attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius as well. I very much doubt that either of these philosophers held such a view.

that <the object> (tw/' me;n ga;r pavscein ajp j ejkeivnou dovxeien a[n]); for none of the things that are being affected <acts> of itself; but by being the starting-point of everything and thinking in its power, and not as with the senses, <it would seem to be> from itself (tw/' de; ajrch; pavntwn ei\nai kai; ejf j eJautw/' to; noei'n, kai; mh; w{sper tai'" aijsqhvsessin, ajf j eJautou'). (*Metaphr.* 27, 9-14 = 307C FHS&G)

Theophrastus appears to deny that thinking conforms to the causal structure of sensing for two reasons: (a) only sensible objects can cause or be the subject of alteration (an allusion to *Physics* VII 3) and (b) the intelligible objects cannot be the starting point of thinking. This latter objection has two components. The first pertains to the ontological priority of the intellect. The intellect, the argument goes, cannot be brought to activity by the intelligible objects without subordinating it to the intelligibles, as Plato does. The second objection pertains to the active nature of thinking. Thinking, we are told, cannot be brought to activity by something other than itself, for the reason that if the objects were the cause of the intellect's activity, then thinking would cease to be ejf j eJautw'/. Yet thinking is ejf j eJautw/'.

Theophrastus' objections to the analogy can certainly be answered by a theory of abstraction or dematerialization. Still, there is no indication that he held such a view – quite the opposite. Not only does Theophrastus typically avoid the verb pavscein (to be affected) and its cognates when discussing the intellect, but he is clearly uncomfortable with the description paqhtikov".³⁴ Theophrastus addresses the intellect's passivity in a discussion that follows immediately upon his critique of the analogy between thinking and sense-perceiving. Admitting that the intellect cannot be

³⁴ Theophrastus prefers to characterize the intellect as becoming its objects (givnetai). See, for instance, *Metaphr.* 29,18 = 311 FHS&G; 31,8 = 316 FHS&G; and 37,24-5 = 319 FHS&G. He only uses the adjective paqhtikov" when challenging the intellect's passivity. See, for instance, fragments 307A, 307D and 317 FHS&G.

wholly impassive (ajpaqh^v) – presumably for the reason that only the divine is impervious to all kinds of change – Theophrastus cautions us not thereby to affirm its passivity. The intellect is not appropriately described as passive, “unless,” he writes, “‘capable of being affected’ (to; pahtikovn) is not taken as ‘capable of being moved’ (to; kinhtikovn)...but as activity (ejnevrgeia)” (*Metaphr.* 28, 21-22 = 307D).

Indeed, the evidence for the view that the intellect is comprised of functional parts is weak. Moraux, in fact, does not appeal to any passages beyond those that challenge the analogy of thinking to sense-perceiving and admits that one must conjecture as to Theophrastus’ response to his challenges. Devereux’s main piece of evidence comes from a passage recorded by Priscian. It reads as follows:

For when it <the intellect> has become each thing in the sense in which one is said actually to know them and we say that this happens when it is able to actualize through itself (di j eJautou'), then too it is potential in a way, but not in the same way as before having learned and found out. By what, then, is this becoming brought about, and how? Well, it is either by disposition and potentiality, or by substance (ei[t jou'n e{xew" kai; dunavmew" ei[te oujsiva"). It seems to be more by disposition, and this as it were perfects the nature <of the intellect> (e[oike de; ma'llon e{xew", au{th de; oi|on teleou'n th;n fuvsin). (*Metaphr.* 31,8-13 = 316 FHS&G)

The question raised here is: What accounts for the intellect’s becoming the intelligible objects as it does when it actually knows them? Theophrastus explains that one is actually a knower when one’s intellect is able to actualize through itself. At this point, the intellect is still potential, but not in the same way as before learning and discovering. Theophrastus offers two possible answers before presenting his conclusion: “it is either by disposition and potentiality or by substance” that the intellect is brought to actuality.

The answer he gives in the subsequent line is that the intellect perfects itself by a $\epsilon\chi\iota$, a disposition.

Devereux takes Theophrastus' claim that the intellect is perfected by a $\epsilon\chi\iota$ to reference the productive intellect because Aristotle, in *De Anima* III 5, describes the productive intellect as a $\epsilon\chi\iota$ like light (430a15). Devereux assumes that our $\epsilon\chi\iota$ is responsible for the intellect's ability to think $\delta\iota\ \eta\ \epsilon\lambda\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ on the assumption that $\delta\iota\ \eta\ \epsilon\lambda\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ characterizes its ability to acquire knowledge of the forms. This is not, however, what the passage says. $\delta\iota\ \eta\ \epsilon\lambda\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ describes the condition under which we say that someone is an actual knower. A person, we are told, knows when his intellect is able to actualize its knowledge by itself –i.e., without the aid of external recourses. Hence, the question Theophrastus asks is: What accounts for the intellect becoming its objects *after* it has acquired knowledge? How do we characterize the intellect when it is capable of thinking $\delta\iota\ \eta\ \epsilon\lambda\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$? And his answer is that an intellect possessed of knowledge has a $\epsilon\chi\iota$, a disposition for thinking. Given, then, the paucity of evidence for the theory that the potential and productive were perceived as discrete functional parts of the intellect, there is no compelling reason to saddle Theophrastus with such a difficult view.

VI

I have so far argued that the duality and division attributed to Theophrastus is not supported by the fragments. Yet our main question remains unanswered. We still want to know what Theophrastus means by describing the intellect as a mixture of the potential and productive – i.e., what he takes these two descriptions “the potential” and “the

productive” to denote. We may reasonably suppose that the description of the intellect as a mixture is given as the final answer to Theophrastus’ progressive queries, so long as we assume Priscian’s meta-commentary to reflect the order of his treatise. Therefore, I propose to unpack this description of the intellect by considering the questions that lead him to this conclusion.

The first five fragments on the intellect preserved by Priscian (307B, 307C, 307D, 311 and 312) all concern its nature. 307B, 307C and 307D considers the intellect, should it have the nature of matter – a nature that is both potential and passive. The fragments highlight five descriptions given in *De Anima* III 4 and 5 that would lead one to this conclusion. In III 4, Aristotle tells us that (i) the intellect has no nature of itself other than that of potential (mhd j aujtou' ei\nai fuvsin mhdemivan ajll j h] tauvthn, o{ti dunatov", 429a21-2); (ii) the intellect is nothing in actuality before it thinks (oujqevn ejstin ejnergeiva/ tw'n o[ntwn pri;n noei'n, 429a24); and (iii) thinking is analogous to sensing because the intellect relates to its objects just as the senses to theirs (to; noei'n w{sper to; aijsqavnesqai...w{sper to; aijsqhtiko;n pro;" ta; aijsqhtav, ou{tw to;n nou'n pro;" ta; nohtav, 429a13-18). The implications of these remarks appear to be affirmed in III 5, wherein (iv) Aristotle compares an intellect to matter (ejsti; to; me;n u{lh...tou'to de; o} pavnta dunavmei ejkei'na, 430a10-11) and (v) describes it as paqhtikov" (430a24).

Theophrastus challenges remarks (i), (ii) and (iv) in fragment 307B.³⁵ Here he insists that the intellect is a *to vde ti*, “what else would it be?” and therefore denies (i) – that the intellect has a potential nature like matter. Furthermore, in denying (i) and (iv), he rejects (ii) – the idea that the intellect is nothing before it thinks. If the intellect were nothing before it thinks, then before it thinks it would be characterized only in virtue of its potentiality.

In the subsequent fragment, 307C, Theophrastus disputes the idea that the intellect is, like the senses, passively affected by its objects (iii). The analogy is problematic, as we saw, because it gives ontological priority to the objects of thought and precludes the intellect’s ability to think *ejf j eJautw/* (from itself). Theophrastus turns in the next recorded fragment (307D) to respond to the anticipated objection that the intellect must be *paqhtikov* on the grounds that if it is wholly impassive it would think nothing. He answers by explaining that if we must use the adjective *paqhtikov* to describe the human intellect (since it is evidently not wholly impassive), then it is important to understand that it is not *paqhtikov* in the sense of being moved (*kinhtikov*) by the objects of thought. For how, he goes on to say, is an intelligible thing affected by an intelligible (*pw' " nohto;n uJpo; nohtou' pavscei*, *Metaphr.* 28,29 = 307D)?

The difficulty is that if the intellect’s nature is not tied to its potentiality, neither is it tied to what it is in actuality. This is made clear in fragments 311 and 312. The argument articulated between these two fragments takes as its premises that, when active, the intellect is identical to its objects (430a3-4). The problem is that if the intellect is an

³⁵ Perhaps “challenge” is too leading of a verb. But we can say, at the very least, that he challenges a literally reading of these descriptions.

intellect most of all when it is active, and intellect, when it is active, is identical to what it thinks, then when thinking intellect's nature will be "undiscriminating and disorderly," and when not, it will not have a nature and so not even be itself. Both conclusions are evidently absurd. Therefore, what the intellect is cannot be explained on appeal to its activity.

The focused objections of the first five fragments indicate that Theophrastus' interest is to explain the intellect's nature. This is evidenced further by the fact that when he does give his description of the intellect as mixture, it is prefaced by the question: "What are these two natures?" (*in de an.* 108, 22-3 = 320 A). Theophrastus' challenge is to give an account of the intellect's nature in light of the fact that it must be all of its objects potentially, and actually the very object it thinks. The problem is that if the intellect is all things potentially but nothing actually, then it lacks form and being. Thus, his challenge is to explain what accounts for and persists through the intellect's activities: i.e., to explain an infant's ability to learn or what allows us to say that she has an intellect prior to acquiring forms and to explain how the intellect that has learned does not change its nature from one thought to the next.

Theophrastus is left with little option. He has shown that the intellect's nature is tied neither to its potentiality nor to its actuality. Presumably, then, it must be tied to its *e{xi}*, disposition. Indeed, the intellect's disposition is the focus of the very next fragment preserved by Priscian. Here in fragment 316, Theophrastus explains that the intellect becomes its objects thanks to a disposition, not a substance (such as a Platonic form). This proposal solves the above-described problems. It is easy to see how tying the intellect's nature to its disposition will solve the second problem: namely, how the

intellect can remain one and the same through its various activities. For the disposition of the intellect to think does not change with the changes in its activity and it is not lost when the intellect ceases to think. What is harder to explain is how this proposal solves the problem of the infant's intellect, but recall that the problem arises on the assumptions that the intellect is nothing before it thinks and that it thinks by becoming its objects. These two theses suggest that the intellect's nature is tied to what it thinks. However, if the intellect is defined by its objects, then it will not be an intellect prior to acquiring a relationship to them. That is why on such a view an infant will not have an intellect prior to thinking the objects. By contrast, if the intellect is defined by a disposition intrinsic and natural to it, then it can be an intellect even before its disposition is fully developed. Indeed, an infant has a capacity to think from birth: a capacity that develops both naturally from experience and also through rigorous training. Thus I contend that for Theophrastus the intellect's nature corresponds, not to *what* it thinks, but to its *ability* to think: its ability to render the world intelligible in active contemplation.

We can now return to the description of the intellect as a mixture of the potential and productive. My suggestion is that this description refers to the intellect's nature insofar as a disposition reflects both potentiality and productivity. Hence, my claim is that "the productive and the potential" refers, neither to distinct intellects nor to opposing noetic powers, but to the very same thing: an acquired ability to render the world intelligible in active contemplation. Indeed, Theophrastus' use of the participle *sunhr thmevnon* ("what is united to") to describe the relationship between the potential and the productive (*In de an.* 108,23 = 320A) speaks to this suggestion. Huby, in her commentary on the fragments, notes that Galen contrasts *sunhr th'sqai* with

sumfuvesqhai.³⁶ She reports that sumfuvesqhai is used to describe the growing together of distinct things, while sunhrth'sqai is used to describe things that are intimately united. The use of sunhrthmevnon thereby points to the unity of the productive and potential just as Theophrastus' insistence that the intellect's potentiality is comparable to that of a material object (*Metaphr.* 25,28 = 307B). A material object manifests both potentiality (matter) and actuality (form) because it can be described from different perspectives. Considered from one aspect, a house is materially bricks and mortar; considered from another, it is form and arrangement. Yet the house's shape does not stand apart from its bricks and mortar. "Mortar and brick" and "shape and arrangement" offer two different descriptions of the same thing.³⁷ Likewise, the disposition that the intellect has to actualize its objects in active contemplation is none other than the ability it has to become its objects.

If this understanding of the fragments is correct, we have an interpretation of why Theophrastus uses the term 'mixture' to describe the relationship between "the productive" and "the potential." On the interpretation here offered, the application of the description 'mixture' to the intellect is not meant to emphasize the intellect's duality. But let us recall that a genuine mixture does not result in duality, but uniformity: all parts of a mixture are alike. This, then, is what I take Theophrastus to emphasize with the notion of the intellect as a mixture: not differentiation and division, but uniformity, singularity and

³⁶ P. HUBY, *Commentary, cit.*, pp. 184-85.

³⁷ We might note how ill suited Devereux's and Moraux's conception of the intellect is to make sense of Theophrastus' comparison of the potentiality of the intellect to the potentiality of material objects. On their view, the potential intellect has an actuality apart from the activity of the productive intellect. The potential intellect actualizes when it becomes an actual thought. Hence, on their view the intellect has two actualities: the actuality of the potential intellect and the actuality of the productive intellect.

wholeness. The intellect may admit of different descriptions, but ultimately they are of the same thing.

To some, this interpretation of Theophrastus must sound deeply problematic. On the interpretation just now given, the potential intellect (the intellect that is none of its objects in actuality) has by its very nature the ability to acquire (and not simply to receive) the intelligible objects. This is a treatment of III 4 that is believed to be first proposed by Alexander of Aphrodisias in his own *De Anima*, the subject of Moraux's doctoral thesis. At that time, Moraux thought ludicrous Alexander's theory that the potential intellect perfects itself. It is for this reason that Moraux writes that we must look towards Theophrastus and Aquinas for a more faithful and coherent treatment of Aristotle.³⁸ This study of Theophrastus places him much more in line with Alexander than Aquinas and makes dubious the distinction between Theophrastus' immanent interpretation of *De Anima* III 5 and Alexander's transcendent reading. Theophrastus certainly takes "the productive" to describe an aspect of the human intellect, but their conception of the human intellect is not far apart. Furthermore, Theophrastus insists that we need to understand the human intellect in reference to the divine (Metaphr. 26,5-6 = 307B), leaving room for us to speculate on the precise relationship of the two.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that Theophrastus and Alexander offer the more faithful approach to the *De Anima*. It is very hard to determine Theophrastus' motives, but on my reading, Theophrastus arrived at his interpretation by rejecting the following of Aristotle's doctrines or descriptions (at least when taken at face value): (i)

³⁸ About Alexander's conception of the intellect, Moraux writes: « La contradiction interne du système est flagrant: à cette faculté qui « n'a d'autre essence que d'être en puissance »... on attribue des *opérations*, telles que l'abstraction et la connaissance ; on lui accorde la possibilité de se meubler de formes, comme si, dans le cas de la tablette, c'était le non écrit lui-même, qui se couvrirait d'écriture ! ». P. MORAUX, *Alexandre d'Aphrodise, cit.*, p. 75.

the intellect has no nature of itself other than that of potential (429a21-2); (ii) the intellect is nothing in actuality before it thinks (429a24); (iii) thinking is analogous to sensing because the intellect relates to its objects just as the senses to theirs (429a13-18); (iv) the intellect is comparable to matter (430a10-11); and (v) it is aptly described by the adjective *paqhtikov*" (430a24). We need not think that Theophrastus takes all these remarks literally. He gives a feeble explanation of why we might be forced to describe the intellect as *paqhtikov*" in 307D and he could have easily read (ii) as the claim that the intellect is *none of its objects* before it thinks. However, (i), (iii) and (iv) are a different story, since he does not provide us with a satisfactory way of understanding these odd remarks. Thus, there is reason to believe that Theophrastus went beyond clarifying Aristotle's *De Anima* III 4 and 5 – that in his mind he transformed it.³⁹

³⁹ I would like to thank Jeff Dean, Andrea Falcon and Susan Sauvé Meyer for their comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.