

CALL FOR PAPERS

Workshop “Potentiality, Actuality, and Activity in Late Ancient Philosophy”

Munich School of Ancient Philosophy (MUSAΦ), LMU Munich, 16-17 July 2027

This workshop will explore the meaning, application and relations of potentiality (δύναμις), actuality (ἐντελέχεια), and activity (ἐνέργεια) in late ancient philosophy, particularly in accounts of change and causation, as well as to broader discussions of substance, nature, soul and human action.

In *Physics* III, Aristotle describes change both as ‘the actuality of that which is potential qua potential’ and as an ‘incomplete activity’. This suggests that change is a kind of activity whose relevant potentiality is already being exercised, although its end has not yet been attained. Elsewhere, especially in *Metaphysics* IX.6 and *Nicomachean Ethics* X.4, Aristotle contrasts changes – insofar as they remain incomplete for as long as they are taking place – with activities like seeing and thinking – which are complete at every moment of their exercise. In *De Anima* II.5, Aristotle distinguishes different levels of potentiality through the example of knowledge. A human being initially possesses the natural capacity to acquire knowledge; a grammarian possesses knowledge without necessarily exercising it; and someone actively considering a grammatical point is exercising the knowledge already acquired. The possession of knowledge is therefore actual relative to the natural capacity to learn, but potential relative to its active exercise. This makes Aristotle’s account still more complex, since actuality can itself function as potentiality in relation to a further exercise.

Late ancient philosophers, particularly Neoplatonists, interpreted these concepts in different ways and extended their application well beyond Aristotle’s definition of change. These readings were developed both in commentaries on Aristotle (*Categories*, *On the Heavens*, *Physics*) and in independent works on physics, cosmology, metaphysics, psychology, ethics and political philosophy. Across these different contexts, the concepts of potentiality, activity and actuality were used to interpret Aristotle, to incorporate his arguments into Platonist systems, to formulate positions that revised and challenged his account and to integrate these concepts into Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

Papers may address how late ancient thinkers answered questions including, but not limited to, the following: What distinguishes activity from actuality? In what sense is change an incomplete actuality? What is potentiality and how does it relate to each kind of actuality? Can an activity be complete while it is occurring? How can a cause act without itself undergoing change? How were Aristotelian concepts adapted within Platonist philosophical systems? Do these concepts retain the same meaning in commentaries and independent philosophical works?

We welcome papers on individual authors, texts or problems, as well as comparative contributions addressing broader exegetical and systematic developments across late ancient Pagan, Jewish, Christian and Islamic thought.

Workshop format and venue

The workshop will take place on **16–17 July 2027** at the Munich School of Ancient Philosophy (MUSAΦ), Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Leopoldstraße 11b, 80802 Munich, Germany.

The workshop will consist of two days of intensive discussion. Papers will be circulated in advance and expected to be read before the workshop to speed up constructive discussion of each contribution. Each speaker will be assigned a **90-minute** session freely allocable to summarizing the contents and leading the discussion of the paper.

Submissions

Applications should be submitted by **28 February 2027 at 11 pm CET** to paaworkshop@gmail.com and should consist of two separate Word files:

1. An anonymised document containing the title of the proposed paper and an abstract of no more than 300 words. The abstract should contain no references that could identify the author.
2. A separate document containing the applicant's name, academic title and institutional affiliation.

Proposals will be assessed on their philosophical and scholarly merit, their relevance to the theme of the workshop and their potential to contribute to a productive discussion. Doctoral students, early career researchers and senior investigators are invited to apply. Applications are welcomed from scholars of all backgrounds, in accordance with the organisers' commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Circulation of papers

Successful applicants will be asked to submit either a paper of no more than 8,000 words *or* an extended handout of roughly 3,000 words by **1 June 2027**. These materials will be circulated among the participants before the workshop. All speakers will be expected to read the materials submitted by the other participants in order to facilitate focused and constructive discussion.

Expenses

The organizers are currently applying to external agencies for funds to cover train or flight costs within Europe and accommodations for the duration of the workshop for all accepted participants. We will be grateful if participants can apply for funds to their home institutions to alleviate our expenses, but this will not play any role in the selection procedure.

With sincere regards,

Giuseppe Colonna (University of Oxford)

Alfonso Herreros (LMU Munich, MUSAΦ)

Xinkai Xu (LMU Munich, MUSAΦ)