Chapter 6 in Book I of the De Generatione et Corruptione is one of the most intricate and syntactically complex in the whole treatise. Thus it is clearly a pivotal point for this investigation: it separates the treatment of the main theme of the work from the required preliminary section, which has already been completed at this point. As the first sentence of the work states, the main theme of the whole work is to analyse “coming to be and passing away […] as they apply uniformly to all the things that come-to-be and pass-away by nature” and to give both an analysis of the various “definitions” of these and of related events, as well as an analysis of “causes”. The definitions of coming to be and passing away, and their demarcation and distinction from other related events in nature—for example, change and growth—have been presented and explained in chapters 1–5. In chapter 6 Aristotle turns his attention to a more thorough analysis of the causes of coming to be and of passing away. As the first sentence of chapter 6 repeats, this analysis is aimed primarily at causes in their material aspect, namely:

the matter and the so-called elements. We must ask whether they really are elements or not, i.e. whether each of them is eternal or whether
there is a sense in which they come-to-be; and if they do come-to-be, whether all of them come-to-be in the same manner, reciprocally out of one another, or whether one amongst them is something primary.\(^5\)

And it is only afterwards (from the beginning of II.9 onwards) that we get a treatment, though much briefer, of causes in the sense of the efficient cause of coming to be and of passing away. Certainly the two causes mentioned, “matter” and “the so-called elements”, are to be understood as two distinct principles in the class of the material causes of coming to be.\(^6\) As Aristotle himself explains (see DGC II 1 329a29–35), these two are not to be identified with each other. The concept of matter gets its first comprehensive treatment in DGC II 1, and then in the conclusion to this, the so-called elements are discussed (II 1–8). So it is not at first completely clear what chapters I 6–10 actually contribute under the aspect of material causes. But Aristotle explains in the next sentence that, for the functioning of the causal relationship in general and especially for the exchange of matter between bodies, certain important presuppositions must be explained. Clearly, these are the subject of Aristotle’s considerations up to the end of book I. There must now be a more precise investigation of what these presuppositions are, and of how Aristotle approaches the topic.

1. **Diogenes and the “single nature” of agent and patient**

Superficially stated, Aristotle believes that his predecessors have not developed a clear understanding of certain concepts. But, on looking more closely, one can hardly avoid the impression that, even after Aristotle’s efforts, this lack of clarity persists:

For all those who generate the elements as well as those who generate the bodies that are compounded of the elements—make use of dissociation and association, and of action and passion. Now association is combination; but the meaning of combining has not been clearly explained. Again, without an agent and a patient, there cannot be altering any more than there can be dissociating and associating. For not only those who postulate

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\(^5\) I 6 322b1–5.

\(^6\) For a different view, see Natali 2004, pp. 195–197, where he appeals to Zabarella, but without considering the explanation of this point which Aristotle gives and which is quoted in the main text.