

The Energeia of Self-Thinking: A New Defense for The Classic Interpretation of the Prime Mover

Zahra Amini¹  | Mostafa Zali² 

1. PhD Candidate of Philosophy Department, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: zahra.amini9@ut.ac.ir

2. Corresponding Author, Associate Professor of Philosophy Department, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: m.zali@ut.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

This essay tends to defend the classical interpretation of Aristotle's God as the efficient cause of the universe mainly through textual evidences. The authors carry their point by emphasizing the concept of divine thinking activity in three main steps: explaining what Aristotle meant by self-thinking thought; arguing for the omniscience of the divine Intellect; and based on the previous two steps, arguing for the formal causation of the Prime Mover as an intellectual cause through whose single act of thinking plays the role of efficient, formal and final cause of the world, as many classical philosophers and commentators see it in the same way. The authors use a conceptual and argumentative method to approach their point. Results: The Aristotelian account of divine Intellect as an all-knowing cause by whose single and perpetual act of thinking performs the role of an efficient, as well as a formal and final cause of the world, bears conceptual as well as textual basis in Aristotelian corpus. The notion of Aristotelian philosophy as the opposing rival of other ancient schools, as a modern idea, remains challengeable.

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Introduction

Aristotle's description of the Prime Mover in *Metaphysics*.Λ is one of the most controversial and influential topics of his *Metaphysics*, played a highly crucial role in the subsequent traditions of Middle and New Academy and Christian and Islamic philosophy and theology. In discussions of subsequent philosophers (especially through commentaries of Platonics), the account of God as a being whose essence is activity (ἐνέργεια) and whose activity is thinking (νόησις) is related to the divine causation for the cosmos. The transformation of Platonic Ideas to intelligible objects of a divine Intellect (νοῦς) by whose single and constant act of thinking plays the role of an efficient cause, as well as a formal and final cause for the world, is quite a recurring theme thorough philosophical and theological traditions of later Greek, Medieval and Islamic philosophy. Many of the philosophers from as early as Xenocrates' age up to Brentano's, held the view that Aristotle's God, is an efficient cause by whose act of thinking of divine ideas, brings change and motion to the world and is at the same time the efficient, formal and final cause of the world. In the twentieth century, however, some new approaches took dominance over this view, declaring Aristotelian philosophy must be reexamined, this time genuinely and untouched by Platonism (or Neoplatonism to be precise). Consequently, the dominant traditional interpretation of the Self-Thinking Thought (νόησις νοήσεως) as efficient, formal and final cause of the world was disputed and regarded as eclectic not purely Aristotelian. Therefore, the role of the Prime Mover was confined to final causation and its formal causation was denied and its efficient causality -if accepted- believed to be secondarily and through final causation (See [Guthrie, 1981](#); [Modrak, 1987](#); [Wedin, 1988](#); [Gerson, 1990](#); [Graham, 1999](#); [Brunschwig, 2000](#)). According to these interpreters, the divine Intellect is considered as an eternal and unchangeable essence that constantly thinks of nothing but its own essence; However, it cannot be the noblest of all things, unless it is in actuality (ἐντελέχεια) and its actuality depends on the existence of its object because to think is always to thinking of something. Therefore, if actuality is the condition for nobility and the actuality of thinking depends on the object of thought, it is not the Intellect itself that is the noblest of things, but rather its object, because the object has the advantage of actualizing that Intellect. The only way to maintain this superiority is to say that the Divine Intellect thinks of itself. Since its object of thought is nothing but its own essence, it will not need of something outside itself to maintain its honor and superiority. But how does this isolated God cause motion in the universe? Through final causation; the first heaven is moved by observing this supreme being and imitating it in a circular and eternal movement which stimulates other heavens and all other things to move through it¹.

¹ There have been serious criticisms concerning this interpretation which can be classified into three groups: a. Some commentators believe such interpretation violates the efficient causality of the prime mover; b. Some commentators reject the modern interpretation by proving that the Aristotle's God should be of omniscience, see [George, 1989](#); [Koninck, 1994](#); c. Some commentators believe that commonly-held views, including the modern

In recent years, there has been an inclination for reconsidering this approach towards Metaphysics.Λ and many scholars, finding the idea of Unmoved Mover as an efficient cause more tenable, have tried to explain the efficient causation of divine Intellect in new interpretations which bears more correspondence to textual implications of the Aristotelian corpus.

According to the above controversies, four groups of interpretation can be mentioned that attribute a kind of efficient causality to Aristotle's Prime Mover:

1. the first group¹ (Kahn, 1985; Furley, 1996) tries to prove that if we consider the broadened definition of efficient causation in Aristotle's philosophy, which somehow includes the notion of final causation, there can be proved a general kind of efficient causality to be true for Aristotle's God, which is at first place a telos (τέλος), and only secondarily and through its being a telos can play the role of an efficient cause. This interpretation is in the same side with the one mentioned above, with the slight difference that this group tries to advocate the account of the previous one through discussing the Aristotelian account of final causality as a remotely efficient one.
2. The second group (Kosman, 1994; Broadi, 2009) argues that the Prime Mover is the soul (ψυχή) of the universe, and the relationship between God and the world is like that of soul and body, a relation through which the Prime Mover is considered to be the efficient cause of the universe.
3. The third group (Caston, 1999; Tuozzo, 2011; Menn, 2012; Judson, 2019) tries to advocate for stronger notion of efficient causation of the Unmoved Mover in Aristotle's philosophy by expanding the argument of the first group and saying that the Prime Mover is not merely a static telos but through evoking thought and, consequently, igniting desire in beings, plays the role of an efficient cause.
4. But there is a fourth group of significance (Norman, 1969; George, 1989; Koninck, 1994; Bradshaw, (2004) which holds a closer approach to the classical interpretation of Aristotle's Self-Thinking Thought.³ Interpreters of this group tend to give an account of God's efficient causation by exploring the very nature of the Divine Intellect, i.e. its mode and its content. According to them, the self-thinking thought thinks itself in quite the same way which every intellect thinks itself through thinking its object i.e. by getting united with its objects. Therefore, Prime Mover's self-contemplation (αὐτὸν νοεῖν) is not a self-

interpretation, dismiss the special mode of God's act of thinking and see the whole issue in an anthropomorphic aim, see De Fillipo, 1994; Beere, 2010.

¹ Some advocates of the above-mentioned modern interpretation can be included in this group, eg Ross, 1924 and Guthrie, 1981.

² In his recent work, 'The Activity of Being' Aryeh Kosman seems to get close to the fourth group, but taking his insistence on the unity of De Caelo and Lambda into account, we think his interpretation remains close to the second group (See Kosman, 2013, 191-201).

³ The so-called classical interpretation is briefly outlined in the beginning of the Introduction.

reflexive process, but includes some other objects which explain its omniscience. The divine Intellect, in its single and constant act of thinking, contemplates the substance of all objects and, through its contemplation, unites with the objects of its contemplation. Due to the characteristics of its act of thinking, the Divine Intellect holds the role of an intellectual and consequently a formal cause through which, it can be considered as an efficient cause of the world too.

Each group faces some challenges¹; the first group is criticized for reducing the Prime Mover to an entirely metaphorical mover whose efficient causation can hardly be explained. The third group's interpretation, which seeks to moderate the first group's interpretation by discussing the mediation of desire and thought to emphasize the efficient causation of the Prime Mover, does not seem to be more tenable in the face of the same criticism. This interpretation can also be doubted because of dismissing divine agency, a factor through which Aristotle criticizes Platonic Forms and believes that they cannot make changes in the world. The second group, which tries to liken the relation of the Prime Mover and the world to that of soul and body, cannot maintain the immobility of the Unmoved Mover and is also vulnerable to Aristotle's criticism of the Platonic soul of the world. But the fourth group, encounters a serious challenge and that is to explain how exactly Aristotle's God can be the efficient cause of the universe through the intellectual causality. For at first glance, the efficient causality is ultimately a type of formal causality, if it is to be like Platonic Forms, that would be totally unacceptable and if it is to be like Aristotelian Forms, then how it can be separate from the matter?

In this article, the efficient causality of the Prime Mover is taken for granted, and an attempt is made by discussing textual evidences through the Aristotelian corpus to advocate for the interpretation of the fourth group, which tries to explain divine efficient causation through its formal causality and through its act of contemplation without reducing it to a metaphorical efficient causality. To achieve this aim, the authors draw on the Aristotelian concept of 'energeia'. First, the general features of divine activity will be discussed and as will be proved by the authors, the Prime Mover is always active because its substance is the activity, or 'energeia', of self-thinking, even though it remains unmoved. Then, God's single and main activity of thinking will be explored regarding its mode and content; first, the implication of the Prime Mover's self-thinking activity is seen through the lens of a dilemma raised by Aristotle in the ninth chapter of *Metaphysics* Lambda and it will be concluded that the substantial self-thinking of the Prime Mover implies the never-failing unity of divine substance with its objects of thought. Second, it will be shown that if we assume the substantiality of this activity excludes potentiality in divine thinking, as textual evidences support, then the omniscience of the Aristotelian God is proven; though, this idea is not explicitly stated by the philosopher himself, but is implied by his other assertions. The final section argues for the formal causation of the

¹ For criticisms concerning the first group, see [Broadie, 1993](#); [Berti, 2000](#); [Menn, 2012](#); and for further discussions rejecting second and third interpretations, respectively see [Judson, 1994](#) and [Miller, 2013](#).

Prime Mover, based on the specific mode and content of its activity. A concise survey of textual evidence will be provided to demonstrate the synonymy and resemblance between the Divine Intellect and the world, as implied by Aristotle but not explicitly stated; this survey can account for the formal causation of self-thinking and the role of efficient causation for the Prime Mover.

Literature Review

This article bears resemblances with the recent works of [David Bradshaw, 2004](#); [Ralph George, 1989](#) and [Thomas Koninck, 1994](#); nonetheless, it is original in some of its arguments, as well as the arrangement of arguments and synthesis of every section's conclusion. While this essay mainly makes use of the concept of *energeia* or divine activity in order to put more emphasis on the formal causation of the Prime Mover for the universe, Koninck and George do not bother to discuss the way of divine efficient causality and Bradshaw, while emphasizing on the role of the specific concept of divine activity, does not bear textual evidences to support his specific reading.

Methods

The authors try to reach their point through a conceptual and argumentative method. Through each part of this essay, the arguments are centered around the specific concept of activity or *energeia* of divine Intellect and overall direction of this inquiry is to conclude from Aristotle's account of divine νοησις, the specific efficient causality of God through its formal causation for the world, just as the classic interpreters did so.

Results

In an overall view, such inquiries, which do not seem as unacceptable as before, are crucial to our general approach to traditional interpretations of Aristotle's philosophy, which have been accused of being flawed and eclectic. If we can show that the interpretations of Christian and Islamic philosophy of God's efficient causation, as well as that of Middle Academy and Neo-Platonists, are not indefensible, we can reconsider our approach to Aristotle's philosophy as a system entirely contrary to what is called Platonic philosophy and find these two philosophical systems more congruent, as they were so before ([See Gerson, 2005](#); [Karamanolis, 2006](#)).

Discussion

1. The activity of Prime Mover

In this section the general features of the Prime Mover's activity are to be discussed and in the following section, the survey is to be completed by additional discussions concerning the special features of the Prime Mover's act of thinking.

1-1 Its activity does not entail motion

In metaphysics. A Aristotle claims for the immobility of the Prime Mover in two arguments:¹

1-1-1 The argument based on the eternity of time

According to Aristotle, substances (οὐσίαι) are the first of all things and it is not possible to think of all the substances as perishable (φθαρτός); because then, everything will be perishable, or in other words, everything should cease to be (because every perishable thing, or everything with an ending, should cease to be and have a beginning); but it can't be true because change doesn't cease to be, neither does time, which is the same or an attribute of change. Therefore, time is eternal, and eternal time requires the existence of eternal motion, and eternal motion needs an eternal mover. This eternal substance, which is the cause of eternal motion, has infinite power (1073a5-11) and infinite power cannot be placed in finite quantities and dimensions; therefore, it is not spatial and cannot have spatial motion³.

1-1-2 The argument based on the motion of the first heaven

According to Aristotle, the universe is spatially finite, surrounded by the first heaven, and the first heaven is the mediator between the Prime Mover and other moving substances, and it is through the motion of the first heaven that motion occurs in nature; But why does the first heaven need a mover? Why it cannot be moved by itself without depending on a Prime Mover? For answering this question, we have to consider an Aristotelian premise, namely the contingency of the movement in moveable objects. Aristotle believes that everything with the ability of motion could have been moved and changed in different ways because it entails potency; therefore, there has to be a specific cause making the moving object move in that particular shape (1072b4-7). Therefore, this cause of motion has to be unmoved (ἀκίνητος) itself; otherwise, it would entail potency (δύναμις) for being moved and require another cause to justify its way of motion. Consequently, the chain of moved movers needs to an unmoved cause specifying the way of their movement and, even if there exists a moved mover as the first principle of the universe's motion, by analyzing its components, we arrive at an unmoved part that is the mover of other parts (Phys 85258a18-25) namely the Unmoved Mover.

¹ It worth mentioning that some commentators (See [Bradshaw, 2007, 25](#); [Judson, 2019, 221](#)) do not separate the two following arguments and consider them as a single argument, mentioned once in A6 and repeated in A7. However, we agree with Eldres that Aristotle aimed to make different implications in the two arguments; because while the argument in A6 is a summary of Phys8 argument, the second one is basically an ontologic argument which through proving an intermediate being (the first heaven) aims to prove a divine, unchanging and fully actual being (See [Eldres, 1972, 164-165](#)).

² 1071b6-21; 1072a7-18 This argument closely resembles the argument of Phys81251b10-28. For a complete summary of the arguments presented at Phys8, see [Judson, 2019, 189-194](#).

³ This is the reason why God performs causation beyond time for we can speak of time when there is change and motion, but being unmoved, the divine activity stands beyond time.

⁴ 1072a21-5 (*all translations from *Metaphysics* A are included from [Judson 2019](#), other quotation from Aristotle's writings are from Barnes).

The fact that Aristotle does not consider being moveable and mover to converge in the final origin of motion can be regarded as a criticism of the second group's interpretation of the Prime Mover as the world soul. Although the separation of the Prime Mover from the moving substances which is emphasized in *Λ.1* (1069a33-4),⁷ (1073a4-5),¹⁰ (1075a12), does not seem congruent to that interpretation, for considering the inevitable relation of soul and body in Aristotle's philosophy, the Unmoved Mover will no longer be separate (*χωριστός*) if it is to be the soul of the universe.

The Prime Mover's substance, consequently, should be in complete actuality, its action should be in such a way that it would be perfect at any time and contain no change or motion (*κίνησις*), whether that change is from one act to another or the permanent act itself entails change and movement.

This is why God always enjoys a single and simple pleasure; for there is not only an activity of movement but an activity of immobility (*ἐνέργεια ἀκινήσιας*) (*EN. 1154b28*).

1-2. Its activity is a sort of agency as an efficient cause

Are we allowed then to conclude of what is stated, like the interpretation of the first and third group, that the Unmoved Mover's efficient causation is only in an indirect way? If heavens (and other substances) are moved by observing the constant motion of this eternal substance, and it moves things only by evoking thought and desire in them, in that case, the efficient causation of the Prime Mover will be reduced to a very weak notion which can hardly be separated from final causation.¹ In *Λ.6* Aristotle states:

If there is something which can cause change or act upon things, but is not active in some way, there will be no change; for that which has potentiality can fail to be active. Nor will it help, then, even if we posit substances which are eternal— as do those who posit the Forms— unless there is some principle in them which is able to cause change. Yet not even this will be sufficient, nor will another substance besides the Forms; for unless it is active, there will be no change (*εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἐνεργήσῃ, οὐκ ἔσται κίνησις*) (*Meta, 1071b 12-17*)

One might say that also Aristotle puts emphasis on the activity of the Prime Mover, this cannot lead to an agent efficiency, but its efficiency can still be regarded to be indirectly posed through evoking thought and desire. Although the text of *Metaphysics.Λ* does not seem to imply much beyond such causality, there is good evidence in Aristotelian corpus in defense of a stronger notion of efficiency.

The Aristotelian notion of efficient causation can best be understood through his criticism of Platonic Forms. For him, the Platonic Forms are not sufficient causes of motion because they

¹ For an explicit discussion of this criticism, see [Miller, 2013](#).

are not truly efficient causes. Aristotle thinks the mere existence of formal and final causes does not suffice for explaining the changes and movements of the cosmos. This is one of the main keys to understand the relation of two philosophers, implying that one core problem concerning the platonic theory of forms in Aristotle's view, is that they are not efficient causes, but merely formal and final causes of the world. In his well-known treatise 'On Generation and Corruption' Aristotle declares this idea clearly:

The active power is a cause in the sense of that from which the process originates; but the end, for the sake of which it takes place, is not active (That is why health is not active, except metaphorically). For when the agent is there, the patient becomes something; but when states are there, the patient no longer becomes but already is—and forms (εἶδη) (i.e. ends) are a kind of state ([GC. 1.7.324b13-18](#)).

He implies that the mere existence of the Forms is not sufficient to bring movement in the world if there would be no efficient cause,

For if the Forms are causes, why is their generating activity intermittent instead of perpetual and continuous—since there always are participants as well as Forms? Besides, in some instances we see that the cause is other than the Form. For it is the doctor who implants health and the man of science who implants science, although Health itself and Science itself are as well as the participants; and the same principle applies to everything else that is produced in accordance with a capacity ([GC. 2.9.335b17-26](#)).

Therefore, should the Prime Mover be a mover in an indirect way through its being formal and final cause, it will no longer be an efficient cause, but only a metaphorical one, insufficient to cause movements and changes; and this point can be regarded as a flaw in the third group's interpretation¹, which tries to provide an account of efficient causation for the Prime Mover congruent with his impassivity only by emphasizing on the role of thought and desire evoked by him, dismissing the importance of his agency, while Aristotle seems to imply more than final causation for him, namely a strong conception of efficient causation tied with agency (See [Brentano 1978, 75-77](#)), because the efficient cause is

¹ Judson, mentioning the quoted fragments of GC, claims that there, Aristotle has unactive causes in mind while the unmoved mover, being an active cause, is not included in what Aristotle mentions (See [Judson, 2019, 185](#)) We would say, however, the activity of the Divine Intellect is due to its constant act of self-thinking and if we do not take this special activity to play any particular role in the efficient causation of the divine, our account would be no better than the modern interpretation in including unnecessary arbitrariness, nor would it be any different than what Aristotle ascribes to the Platonic Forms.

the primary source of the change or rest; e.g. the man who deliberated is a cause, the father is cause of the child, and generally what makes of what is made and what changes of what is changed (*Phys.* 2.3.194b29-32).

Otherwise, in case of reducing the principle of change, i.e. the efficient cause, to a final one, there would be no change.

Now we should investigate the very action through which the Prime Mover plays the role of an efficient cause while remaining Unmoved. In $\Lambda.9$ Aristotle speaks of the Prime Mover as a self-thinking thought and describes his action as a constant act of thinking which always thinks of himself and entails no potency. Because the only act of the Prime Mover is thinking, to investigate its efficient causation, we have to explore his single act of contemplation through which his efficient causation is applied to the world.

2. Investigating God's act of Thinking

In this section, the Prime Mover's act of thinking is to be discussed in terms of its mode and content of thinking and as we will see, divine *energeia* plays a crucial role in this part as well.

2-1 The mode of God's act of thinking

Aristotle ascribes some special features to the Self-Thinking Thought's mode of contemplation in light of which many ambiguities, including some misjudgments concerning the classical interpretation, could be clarified.

2-1-1 It is a self-thinking thought

At the beginning of $\Lambda.9$ Aristotle outlines two problems concerning the Divine Intellect:

For while it seems to be the most divine ($\theta\epsilon\iota\acute{o}\tau\alpha\tau\omicron\nu$) of the phenomenon, the question in what condition it would be to be such a thing presents certain problems. For if it thinks nothing, why would it be the object of reverence? Its condition would be like that of one who sleeps. Or if it thinks, but something else is what determines this, then (since it is not this which is its substance, namely thinking, but rather potentiality) it would not be the best substance; for it is because of its thinking that honour belongs to it (*Meta*, 1074b16-22).

Here, he describes two ways through which the Divine Intellect can be thought of as the most divine of the phenomenon: A) In potency or B) In actuality.

But A cannot be true because in potency the Intellect does not think and therefore, *"its condition would be like that of one who sleeps."* But if B is true, but it is through an object other than the Divine Intellect itself that it becomes actualized, then not the Intellect, but its object will be the most divine of the phenomenon because it is through its object that the Divine Intellect is actualized. In other words, the condition through which the Divine Intellect becomes the object of reverence is dependent on something else; therefore, if the Divine Intellect is to think of something other than itself, that object is the most divine of the phenomenon, not the

Intellect. Then, Aristotle raises another question concerning the object of the Divine Intellect and states that its object should be the worthiest of things, and it should not change for the change would be for the worse, and such a thing is already a motion (*Meta*, 1074b27)

Many (including Guthrie, 1981; Modrak, 1987; Brunschwig, 2000) have concluded of what is stated that the Divine Intellect contemplates a single object which is the most divine of the phenomenon and does not entail change and motion:

Itself, therefore, is what it thinks, seeing that it is the greatest thing, and its thinking is a thinking of thinking (ἑστίν ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις). (*Meta*, 1074b33)

Although Aristotle's statement at (1074b33) seems confining for such interpretation, it does not seem congruent with the rest of his implications (See Eldres, 1972; Kahn, 1985; Norman, 1969; Lear, 1988; George, 1989; Lang, 1993; De Filippo, 1994; Kosman, 1994; Koninck, 1994; Bradshaw, 2004; Burnyeat, 2008; Judson, 2019). Right after that statement, he states:

But knowledge, perception, opinion, and reflection always appear to be of something else, and to be of themselves only by the way. Further, if thinking and being thought are different, in respect of which of them does the good belong to it? for neither is what it is to be the same for thinking and for being thought (*Meta*, 1074b35-39)

Here, Aristotle raises two problems concerning the self-reflexive understanding of the Divine Intellect: first, if all forms of thinking seem to be of themselves by the way, then what should be considered of Divine Intellect's content in order to exclude other objects? Because according to Aristotle, in the process of cognition, we receive the form of the object, and the faculty involved in this process becomes (like) that form (De An4429b5-9). If the Divine Intellect is to be considered a self-thinking thought, then in what notion does its self-thinking differ from other forms of cognition? Second, he raises the question of whether the Divine Intellect's being the most divine of the phenomenon is due to the goodness of its object or its activity of thinking? Due to which is the Self-Thinking Thought the worthiest of all phenomenon? For understanding Aristotle's answer to all these problems, we should take a look at another aspect of his theory about the Divine Intellect which for Aristotle:

2-1-2 It is a purely actual substance¹

Aristotle's discussion of the object of the Divine Intellect will remain incomplete, and its arguments will be flawed if it is not considered a substance purely in actuality². What he

¹ This section is well discussed in Beere, 2010 and Judson, 2019.

² In this article, the Prime Mover is mostly described to be in activity rather than actuality, and the word *entelekheia* is used where there is an emphasis on Divine Perfection and its being in the state of fulfilment and completion. Aristotle himself prefers *energeia* over *entelekheia* when speaking of God, except once in 1071a35-6 (See Judson, 2019, 172-3). But what is the reason for such preference? While there is a difference between the two word's implication, and one invokes a sense of completion and realization while the other one is bounded to

contends in 1074b17-27 seems more reasonable if we consider the pure actuality of the Divine substance. Where he raises a dilemma at the beginning of the chapter, he is not merely struggling with the object of the Divine Intellect, but the implication of what he says is that if we consider the substance of the Prime Mover as something which is not purely actual, rather is completely potential or is to become actual only through contemplating an object, its being the most divine of the phenomenon will not be justified, for in the first case, it will not be the object of reverence at all and in the second case, its goodness will be dependent on something else, and for preserving its goodness, we are obliged to contend that it thinks of itself, but there will be other problems which arise in that case. Therefore, our only way for getting out of this dilemma is to consider God as a purely actual substance, and in that case, the whole discussion of $\Lambda.9$ will be more coherent. There are also some textual implications in favor of this case (1071b20; 1072a25-6; 1074b27-33). Considering the actuality of God's substance, what is Aristotle's answer to problems mentioned in 1074b35-39? The answer to the first problem would be that because the divine Intellect is an ever-active and actual substance or in another words, its substance is activity of thinking and always contemplates the same unchangeable objects, so the objects of its thinking are no different than its activity and the objects of its thought are its substance. With this account in mind, we are no longer allowed to consider it as perceiving itself only secondarily, as the other forms of cognition are in Aristotle's account. The answer to second problem seems obvious accordingly: it owes its goodness to its objects without owing it to something distinct from itself because its substance (activity of thinking) is one with its objects of thinking (See [Judson, 2019](#); [Beere, 2010](#); [De Philipo, 1994](#)).

2-2. The content of God's act of Thinking¹

Having considered the mode of God's act of thinking as a pure activity or a perpetual act of self-thinking, in this section, we will examine divine actuality from a different angle: the perfection of divine Intellect. We also attempt to support this idea with textual evidence. If the self-thinking thought is to be proved perfect in terms of its content, or if Aristotle's statements imply God's omniscience, then the Prime Mover would be a substance that is perpetually active and united with its objects, which are all the substances. While we do not claim that Aristotle himself held such a view of God (never declaring anything about this matter) but we argue that the implications of his other claims, both conceptually and textually, paved the way for his successors to interpret his account of divine Intellect in this manner.

activity (See [Kosman, 2013, 47](#)), Aristotle regards *energeia* as inclusive of *entelekheia* He declares this twice in *Metaphysics*Θ (for an explicit discussion of the following fragments, see [Beere, 2009, 218-9](#)) Once in 1047a30-2 Aristotle declares that *energeia* is 'extended from movements to other things' and can be extended to cases that are not of change Once again in 1050a21-3 Aristotle tries to clarify the point of this inclusion and suggests that 'function' is the link between *energeia* and *entelekheia* and 'The function is the end and the function is the activity, which is why the very word, '*energeia*,' is said in accordance with the function and extends to *entelekheia*' (translation is included from [Beere, 2009](#)) For further reading, see [Menn, 1994](#).

¹ For an informative classification of contemporary interpretations concerning divine omniscience, see [Judson, 2019, p312-313](#).

In Λ.7, Aristotle tends to prove how the best thing, which is the first object of desire, is the same as the first object of thought. For this end, he refers to the Pythagorean columns of the opposites:

One of the two columns of opposites (συστοιχία) is in itself an object of thought; and in this column substance is first, and of substance that which is simple and exists in activity is first

(ἡ οὐσία πρώτη, καὶ ταύτης ἡ ἀπλῆ καὶ κατ' ἐνέργειαν).

But both the good (καλός) and that which is itself an object of choice (δι' αὐτὸ αἰρετὸν) are in the same column; and the first thing is always best (ἄριστον ἀεὶ) or analogous to the best ([Meta.12.1072a31-1072b1](#)).

According to this passage, if the members of the first column are the direct objects of thought and members of the second are privations of the first, then among the objects of the first column, the substance stands first and among substances, the divine substance, which is simple and in activity, comes first. So, at top of this column, there is God which is the first object of thought and desire; and the principle of goodness (for being the first object of desire), and intelligibility. But where lies Aristotle's argument for taking the best object of thought and desire as the same with the first substance? In 1072b18-31:

Thinking in itself is of what is best in itself, and the highest kind of thinking is of the highest kind of what is best.

God is a thinking substance and its thinking is the best kind of thinking and the best thinking, is of the best, but why is it of the best and why we claimed that he is the best and highest in the column but now saying that he is only of the best? How are they the same? Aristotle continues his argument to solve the ambiguity:

And it is itself which the intellect thinks, by sharing in the object of thought; for <intellect> comes to be an object of thought in touching and thinking <it>, so that the intellect and the object of thought are the same. For that which is receptive of the object of thought, i.e. of the substance, is intellect, and it is active when it possesses <the object of thought>; consequently, it is the former rather than the latter which seems to be what is divine about the intellect, and contemplation is the most pleasant and best thing.

So Intellect is the best and is of the best because it is the nature of its activity to be united with its objects, and this is why this specific act is considered the best in Aristotle's point of view:

If, then, God is always, as we are sometimes, in this good state, that is wondrous; and if its state is better, that is still more wondrous. And God is in this state. Life too belongs <to it>; for the activity of the intellect is life, and <its> activity is that. Its activity, which is activity in itself, is a life best and

eternal; hence we say that God is a living being eternal and best, so that life and lifetime, continuous and eternal, belong to God; for this is God.

Therefore, not only is God's activity the best, it is also the best because, as the act of thinking, God is always united with his objects of thought. This conclusion bears much resemblance to that of the previous section concerning the ninth chapter of Lambda. The new aspect is that divine Intellect is the first among objects of thought. The first explanation that comes to mind is that it is due to its perpetual activity that is always united with its objects of thinking. While this is true, we can further justify this by saying that the most thinking substance is also the most thinkable substance, which is why Aristotle considers it the first object of thought. If God is the perpetual *energeia* of thinking and being thought, the most thinking substance, as well as the most thinkable one, is it irrelevant to assume that it encompasses all thinkable forms? Although Aristotle never declared God as an all-knowing substance but sometimes there seems to be textual evidences implying that he was not so far from the concept of omniscience. For example, in the sixth book of '*De Anima*', he claims that, when two opposite things are the object of our cognition,

one element in each pair of contraries will suffice to enable it to discern both that element itself and its contrary"; (De.An.1.411a3) because "contraries have in a sense the same form; for the substance of a privation is the opposite substance, e.g. health is the substance of disease; for it is by its absence that disease exists; and health is the formula and the knowledge in the soul ([Meta.7.1032b1-2](#)).

Therefore, we do not think of the privative objects directly; rather, we recognize them through the contrary object; for example, we realize what health is and recognize disease as the absence of health. When recognizing the substance of a privation, the other side, which is the informative side, is actually in our mind while the other side is potentially there, so

that which recognizes must be its object potentially, and one of the contraries must be in it (De.An.3.430b23-4).

Then, as some scholars¹ believe so, Aristotle speaks of the Divine Intellect, which has no need for contraries in order to recognize things, because if he is to think through contraries, it will contain potency, for to think through contrary, implies lack and exclusion of some other part:²

¹ See Hamlyn, 1968, 507; Koninck, 1994, 480; Shields, 2016, 334; and for a different interpretation, see Polansky, 2007, 477.

² Putting the above-mentioned argument into a syllogism, we can say: a. We can think of privative objects only through their contraries; therefore, our intellect contains potency; b. God knows everything through itself; c. To think something is to have it in one's intellect/: The Divine Intellect is the most perfect substance which having no potency, excludes nothing.

"But if there is anything that has no contrary (ἐναντίον), then it knows itself and is actual and possesses independent existence (χωριστός)." (De.An.3.430b23-4)

The statement above, besides calling this specific thinking substance as separate (Χριστός) or independent, which is the exact title we find Aristotle attributing to the Prime Mover in 1073a5, also echoes another assertion of him in Λ.10:

There is nothing opposite (ἐναντίον) to the first thing (πρῶτος), since all the opposites have matter, and these things are in potentiality ([Meta.12.1075b22-3](#)).

So there are two common attributes between the thinking substance referred in De Anima's account and the Self-Thinking Intellect of Metaphysics.Λ, i.e. independence (self-adequacy) and not having opposites. These two attributes can be understood as implying the same quality, which is perfection or being all-encompassing. This specific quality in Aristotle's language, implies something complete and whole (τέλειον καὶ ὅλον)", which "has nothing outside it (οὐ μὴδεν ἔξω)" and, "from which nothing is wanting", for "that from which something is absent and outside, however small that may be, is not 'all'. Whole and complete are either quite identical or closely akin. (Phys.3.207a8-14) One again we find classical interpretation's account of God as acceptable; for as stated before, the thinking activity of the Prime Mover makes it perpetually united with its objects and if divine substance is perfect as discussed above, it contains every substance within itself, not excluding any thinkable/existent form at all.

Two stages of our argument discussed so far; the immobile activity of divine substance through which he is the agent mover of the world, and its special activity, thinking, in terms of its specific mode and content. Up to this point, we can conclude of what is discussed, that the Prime Mover is a perpetually active substance which its activity is thinking and through its act of thinking, gets united to its objects, which are all thinkable substances, for it cannot exclude anything due to its perfect nature. Therefore, its being perpetually united with substances, and its thinking of them is equal to its thinking of itself, for it is always united with them in its constant act of thinking. But there remains a question unanswered: how does this Intellect play the role of an efficient cause in the world? The answer to this question will be illustrated in the next step. The last step in our argument is to prove the similarity and synonymy of God with the world and we believe that it's the only way through which, we can claim for the formal causation of divine Intellect for the cosmos and fulfill our account of this God as an efficient cause, just like the fourth group of interpretation.

3. An account for divine formal causation

Is there any resemblance between God and the world? among Peripatetics and commentators of Aristotle's philosophy, there has been a long quarrel over this question; for example, while Themistius and Alexander Aphrodisias believed that there is no similarity -or as was later called

synonymy- between Aristotle's God and the world, many others, including Averroes¹ and Simplicius² believed otherwise.³ Through our final survey, we will attempt to demonstrate that Aristotle was not far from this attitude, although he never openly contended it. Without referring to the arguments of the second group (i.e. those who believe in similarity)⁴, we will reason based on the concept of divine *energeia* of self-thinking at first, and secondly, we will demonstrate how our argument is supported in the *Metaphysics*.Λ.

3-1 Argument based on the mode and content of divine activity

We already know that the Divine Intellect is a substance that is always active and, through this activity of thinking, is united with its objects, which include every substance. One clear outcome of this account is the resemblance and synonymy between the divine mind and the cosmos. If, as stated previously, no thinkable object is lacking from it, and if it is the most thinkable substance because it is the most thinking substance, then its unity with all other thinkable forms counts as a kind of synonymy and resemblance. If there is to be a resemblance between God and the world, then formal causation is the most adequate explanation through which the efficient causality of the divine mind can be understood. This account renders the Aristotelian Prime Mover as moving and affecting the world through its thinking and getting united with its objects. As we shall see, there is also some textual basis for this claim in *Metaphysics*.Λ, which we will discuss below.

3-2 Some textual-based arguments

There are two positions in book lambda where Aristotle seems to ascribe formal causality to divine Intellect; one in chapter four and another in chapter ten. Chapter four ends with a discussion on causes or principles of things which Aristotle counts them as: form, matter, privation, and moving cause. Then he mentions synonymy of moving cause with the thing moved:

Since the mover is, in natural things, human being for human beings, while in the things which result from thought it is the form or the opposite, in a way there are three causes, though in this way, there are four: for medical art is in a way health, and the art of building is the form of a house, and human being begets human being (*Meta*, 1070b35)

¹ Averroes reports Themistius and Alexander's opinion as opposed to his own See [Genequand, 1986](#)

² See *On Aristotle Physics*2, 31728-33; 31822-34.

³ This approach was first widely held by the Middle-Platonists who transferred the Platonic Ideas to the Divine Intellect (See Dillon, 1977), and became a dominant theme through the history of classical philosophy.

⁴ Simplicius, for instance, speaks of separate forms (probably having [MetaZ1037a21-b8](#) in mind) which reside in the Divine Intellect and due to the Aristotelian doctrine of the unity of the efficient and formal cause, bear resemblance to the down-here forms; "if the forms 'down here' are generated, and if everything that is generated must of necessity be generated by some cause which has previously acquired the definition of what is generated (so that it should not be an irrational or indefinite generation), and if what is generated bears a resemblance to the definition, this cause would be the model of whatever is generated" See *On Aristotle Physics*2, 297-299.

To sum up, because the efficient and the formal cause coincide, the causes can be regarded as three. Then comes the concluding sentence of this chapter:

Again, in addition to these, there is that which as first of all things moves all things (ἐτι παρὰ ταῦτα ὡς τὸ πρῶτον πάντων κινεῖν πάντα) (*Meta*, 1070b35)

While some commentators (See [Eldres, 1972, 121](#)) believe that in this sentence, Aristotle wants to introduce a new cause (the first moving cause), it seems possible to understand it differently, which would be more coherent to the rest of metaphysics.Λ. As George points out in his essay, even if, unlike Brentano, we do not change the wording of this sentence, we still can understand it differently if we legitimately consider the pronoun "*these (ταῦτα)*" as referring not to causes but to "*medical art, building art and man*" or "*medical art being health, building art being the house and man begetting man*" and so in this way, the first mover moves all things because "*in analogy to the first three cases it is all things*" ([George, 2019, 157](#)) for it contains their substances as the objects of his thinking, a picture congruent with our account of Prime Mover. This is not the only textual evidence supporting our point, there is a way more straightforward statement in chapter ten, where Aristotle compares his account of first mover with that of Anaxagoras:

Anaxagoras makes the good (ἀγαθός) a principle (ἀρχή) as mover (κινεῖν): for Intellect (νοῦς) causes motion; but it causes motion for the sake of something, so that something else is the principle, except on our account, since medicine is, in a way, health. (*Meta*, 1075b8)

In the above sentence, we see Aristotle criticizing Anaxagoras for separating the first mover and efficient cause from the final cause or the Good and making the first mover to cause motion for the sake of something distinct from itself (i.e. the final cause). Doing so, Anaxagoras has distorted the position of the first mover as the first principle of the world's movement, for the mover no longer would be the first principle, but the final principle will come first. Then, in a very clarifying statement, Aristotle puts his opinion as contrary to Anaxagoras by emphasizing that in his account of the Prime Mover, final and efficient cause coincide, and it is only possible through the mediation of the formal causation "since medicine is, in a way, health". Once again, as in Λ.4 we find him describing the efficient causality of God over world, through similar example of medicine or medical art with health. In Λ.4 he was discussing the relation of formal and efficient cause but here, in Λ.10, he is insisting on the oneness of final and efficient cause, but since he is doing so through attributing formal causation to the first mover, the implication of both texts are corresponding in one same point, i.e. that the divine Intellect plays his role of efficient causality through formal causation, and this would contribute to our account massively, for if there is a formal, efficient and final cause of the world whose single perpetual activity is thinking, is it not clear that he is playing his role through this single act of contemplating the thinkable cosmos "by its perpetual *energeia* it constitutes the forms, both in

the sense of causing them to be (though without any temporal priority) and in that of making up the content of their being" (Bradshaw, 2004, 43)? This account of the Prime Mover's causality, which is in line with the classical philosopher's reading of Aristotelian theology, apart from having strong textual basis, puts great emphasis on the role of God's act of thinking, as a keystone which through formal causation, completes our account of God as both efficient and final cause of the universe.

Conclusion

Proving three steps of our argument, we have reached a new conception of Aristotle's God, closely resembling traditional interpretations. Such resemblance makes us doubtful about the very common belief which considers Aristotelian philosophy as sharply different from the so-called Platonic tradition. If Aristotle's thought, at least in some issues, is not far distinct from his Platonic rivals, is it not better to reconsider our approach to it and, as traditional philosophers and commentators did, try to see Aristotle and Plato, at least partly, in agreement?

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