

SESSION 8
COMMENTATORS ON *METAPHYSICS* Λ.7

After proving that the eternal movement of the heavens has a moving cause which is itself immovable, Aristotle proceeds to argue that this prime mover is a final cause, commencing with the following passage:

Aristotle's text (7.1072a26-b1)

[1] κινεῖ δὲ ὧδε τὸ ὀρεκτὸν καὶ τὸ νοητὸν· κινεῖ οὐ κινούμενον. τούτων τὰ πρῶτα τὰ αὐτά. ἐπιθυμητὸν μὲν γὰρ τὸ φαινόμεον καλόν, βουλευτὸν δὲ πρῶτον τὸ ὄν καλόν· ὀρεγόμεθα δὲ διότι δοκεῖ μᾶλλον ἢ δοκεῖ διότι ὀρεγόμεθα· ἀρχὴ γὰρ ἡ νοήσις. [2] νοῦς δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ νοήτου κινεῖται, νοητὴ δὲ ἡ ἑτέρα συστοιχία καθ' αὐτήν· καὶ ταύτης ἡ οὐσία πρώτη, καὶ ταύτης ἡ ἀπλή καὶ κατ' ἐνέργειαν . . . [3] ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ δι' αὐτὸ αἰρετὸν ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ συστοιχίᾳ· καὶ ἔσγτιν ἄριστον αἰεὶ ἢ ἀνάλογον τὸ πρῶτον.

Translation

[1] The object of desire and the intelligible object bring about movement in the following way: they bring about movement without being moved. And the first of these objects are the same. For the object of appetite is that which appears noble, but the first object of wish is that which is noble. And we desire things because they seem [noble] rather than believing they are [noble] because we desire them; for the act of thinking is a principle. [2] And the intellect is moved by the intelligible object, and one of the columns is in itself intelligible; and in this column substance is the first, and of substance that which is simple and actual [is first] . . . [3] But then both that which is noble and that which is in itself an object of choice are in the same column, and what is first is always best or analogous to it.

Assignment

Although somewhat obscure, this opening argument seems to involve three main steps:

1. The first intelligible object is the same as the first object of desire.
2. The simple and actual substance is the first intelligible object.
3. The simple actual and substance is the first object of desire.

In connection with each of these steps the major commentaries are quoted below. Compare the commentators in connection with questions raised by Aristotle's text. (You may well have other questions yourself.) Which commentator displays the firmest grasp of the overall argument?

STEP 1: THE FIRST OBJECT OF DESIRE IS THE SAME AS THE FIRST INTELLIGIBLE OBJECT

1072a26-30: “The object of desire and the intelligible object bring about movement in the following way: they bring about movement without being moved. And the first of these objects are the same. For the object of appetite is that which appears noble, but the first object of wish is that which is noble. And we desire things because we believe [they are noble] rather than believing they are [noble] because we desire them; for the act of thinking is a principle.”

Questions Raised by Step 1

Why are both the object of desire and the intelligible object unmoved movers? Why the qualification “the *first* of these objects”? Why is the first object of desire identical with the first intelligible object? How are the following related: desire, appetite, wish? Why does Aristotle assert that we desire things because we believe they are good but we don’t believe they are good because we desire them? The word “for” (*gar*) occurs twice, indicating that the clauses in which it occurs provide logical support for the preceding clauses. What sort of logical support do they provide? How is this all related to Aristotle’s theory of celestial objects?

Themistius (16,15; tr. Meyrav)

One should not be puzzled that an immovable mover exists, for anyone who is an object of desire moves [others] like this, and anything that is an intelligible object moves us to some action when we think of it; in this manner it is a mover. But since the objects of desire and the intelligible objects in us and in the rest of the animals are numerous, the object of desire and the intelligible object in us are not unified. For the object of desire immovably moves the desirer without its nature being of the nature of the intelligible object, whereas in the first principles, which are wholly without matter, the object of desire and the object of intellection are together one thing. It is desired because it is an intelligible object, not vice versa, i.e., it is not thought of because it is an object of desire. We find this to be the same with the desired things that are close to us, which we see, and they are the things which we fancy or choose. Those that we fancy are pleasant things, whereas those that we choose are the things that are truly good. For we fancy the things that we choose because we perceive them as good. We do not perceive them as such because we seek after them, but rather we seek after them because we perceive them as such. But in many such things, we happen to perceive them differently from how they really are.

But in the first desire and the first among the objects of desire, the manner we perceive it is not different from how it truly is. Whatever is thought of from its [real] state and is thought of from its [real] state to be good is therefore good in truth. This affection starts from the act of thinking of the first cause, just as our appetite starts from the act of thinking and imagination. The movement of every intellect is [caused] from the thing that is thought of, just as the movement of the act of thought is [caused] by the thing that is thought about and the movement of the imagination is [caused] by that which is imagined.

Averroes (*Tafsīr* 1592-3; tr. Genequand)

[Aristotle] says: if the first mover imparts motion without being moved either essentially or accidentally (like the soul in the body) then this mover must impart motion only in the same way as desirable and pleasant things move us, and particularly intelligible things whose actuality we see to be good. The different kinds of desirably moving things are not, according to us, the same as the different kinds of intelligible things which move us, to the extent that these two motions are often contraries, I mean the motion (caused by) the desirable is opposed to the motion (caused by) the intelligible. With regard to these principles in the celestial bodies, it appears that the desirable in them is the same as the intelligible because the distinction which we establish between the desirable and the intelligible exists only on account of the separation of the powers whereby we perceive the desirable and the intelligible . . . since the celestial bodies do not have sense-perception . . ., the desirable is not distinct in them from the intelligible . . . From that, it appears in all clarity that these celestial bodies have souls and that of the powers of the soul, they have only the intellect and the faculty of desire, I mean (the faculty) that imparts to them local motion . . .

Aquinas (Lesson 7, 2519-22; tr. Blackwell)

[Note: *orexis* is translated here as “appetite” rather than “desire”, *orekton* is translated as “appetible” rather than “object of desire”, *epithumia* is translated “concupiscence” rather than “appetite”, and *ephithumêton* is translated “concupiscible” rather than “appetitive”.]

2519. After having shown that there is an eternal, immaterial, immovable substance whose essence is actuality, the Philosopher now proceeds to investigate the attributes of this substance. . . First (2519), he considers the perfection of this substance. . . . In regard to the first he does two things. First, he explains how the unmoved mover causes motion; and second (2523), he infers from this what is comprised in its perfection. He accordingly says, first, that, since it has been shown that the first mover is unmoved, it must cause motion in the way in which the desirable and the intelligible do; for only these, the desirable and the intelligible, are found to cause motion without being moved.

2520. He proves this as follows. Motion is twofold: natural and voluntary, or according to appetite. Now that which causes motion by means of natural motion necessarily undergoes motion, since a natural mover is one that begets and alters things. For both heavy and light bodies are moved locally directly by their begetter. But that which begets and alters things directly must exist in different states. Hence it has also been pointed out above (2510) that the cause of generation and destruction acts in different ways. Now in the case of voluntary and appetitive motion, will and appetite have the character of moved movers, as is evident in Book III of *The Soul*. Hence it remains that only that which causes motion as something appetible is an unmoved mover.

2521. Now it is said that the first mover causes motion as something appetible because the motion of the heavens has this mover as its end or goal, for this motion is caused by some proximate mover which moves on account of the first unmoved mover in order that it may be

assimilated in its causality to the first mover and bring to actuality whatever is virtually contained in it. For the motion of the heavens does not have the generation and destruction of lower bodies as its end, since an end or goal is nobler than the things ordained to it. Therefore the first mover causes motion as something appetible.

2522. But in our own case that which causes motion as a desirable good differs from that which causes motion as an intelligible good, though each causes motion as an unmoved mover. This is particularly evident in the case of an incontinent person; for according to his reason he is moved by an intelligible good, but according to his concupiscible power he is moved by something pleasant to the senses, which, while it seems to be good, is not good absolutely but only with some qualification.—However, this kind of difference cannot be found in the first intelligible and the first desirable good. But the first intelligible and the first desirable good must be the same. The reason is that a concupiscible good, which is not an intelligible good, is merely an apparent good; but the first good “must be an object of will,” i.e., an object desired by intellectual appetite. For will belongs to the intellectual order and not merely to that of concupiscible appetite. And this is so because what is desired by the concupiscible power seems to be good because it is desired; for concupiscence perverts the judgment of reason insofar as something pleasant to sense seems to be good to reason. But what is desired by intellectual appetite is desired because it seems to be good in itself. For “understanding” as such, i.e., the act of intellection, which is moved in a way by an intelligible object, “is the principle of desire.” Therefore it is evident that the object of concupiscible appetite is good only when it is desired through a dictate of reason. Hence it cannot be the first good, but only that which, because it is good, moves desire and is at once both appetible and intelligible.

Ps.-Alexander (693,32-694,15; tr. Miller)

Having said that the object of desire and the intelligible object bring about movement in this way, Aristotle briefly adds how they bring about movement by saying that it is without being moved [themselves] (cf. 1072a26-7). In this way, he says, everything desirable and everything intelligible bring about movement in such a way that they are not moved but while remaining immovable they move other things, as the hay moves the ass and the picture moves the lover. But since everything desirable and everything intelligible are so called from that which is intelligible and desirable first and in itself, and some objects are desirable but not intelligible, such as bread, and conversely some are intelligible but not desirable, such as bad things, he proves that that which is intelligible in the first and chief sense and that which desirable in the chief sense are the same (cf. 1072a27).

First of all, however, he teaches us the difference between the object of appetite and the object of wish, stating that “the object of appetite is that which /694/ appears noble” (1072a27-8) For that which is noble in the chief sense is an object not of appetite but of yearning and desire; for appetite is different from yearning, since appetite resides in the appetitive and non-rational part of the soul, whereas yearning is in the rational part; and the first and chief object of wish is

not that which is apparently noble but that which is noble in its own nature. And we desire [something] because it seemed so, rather than, conversely, it seems so because we desire it (cf. 1072a28).

After speaking, then, in this way about these things, Aristotle concludes that the first intelligible object and the first object of desire are the same, stating, “for the act of thinking is a principle” (1072a30), that is, the object of desire is a principle of movement (for the object of desire must be understood in addition to the principle of thinking); for this moves the intellect, and the movement is the intellect’s act of thinking; for the object of desire moves the intellect into actively thinking, whether the object of desire exists or not. And yet the intellect is moved by the intelligible object. If, then, the intelligible object moves the intellect and makes it actual, and the object of desire moves it too, the intelligible object and the object of desire turn out to be the same. But the first cause is intelligible in the chief sense and is intellect in its own nature. So it [i.e. the first cause] is intelligible in the chief sense and intellect in the chief sense and desirable in the chief sense.

STEP 2: THE SIMPLE AND ACTUAL SUBSTANCE IS THE FIRST INTELLIGIBLE OBJECT

1072a30-32: “And the intellect is moved by the intelligible object, and one of the columns is in itself intelligible; and in this column substance is the first, and of substance that which is simple and actual [is first] . . .”

Questions Raised by Step 2

How is the claim that the intellect is moved by the intelligible object related to what went before? The concept of columns (*sustoikhai*) has Pythagorean roots. Why does Aristotle invoke it here? What does Aristotle mean by “one of the columns” and what column is opposed to it? Why does he say one of the columns is “intelligible in itself”? What is “the substance that is simple and actual” and how does it differ from other substances? Why does the simple and actual substance occupy the highest rank in the column? How is this related to Aristotle’s theory of celestial objects? (See also the Appendix for background on the columns.)

Themistius (17,2; tr. Meyrav)

There many kinds of intelligible objects, but the first among all intelligible objects is substance, and among substance the most simple one, that is in actuality. It is without potentiality, and nothing is predicated of it, nor does anything underlie it, for it is truly a nature that is one and simple. Nothing which has matter is either simple or one in its own right, but anything in which we find potentiality has in it plurality and composition. If you say about it that it is one, this is [actually] not so, according to the true reference of “one”.

Averroes including Alexander fr. 29F (Tafsīr 1600-2; tr. Genequand)

[Note: *sustoikhia* is translated here as “series” instead of “column”.]

[Averroes:] Since many things have intelligible objects, he sets out to explain which intelligible object this first intelligible object is which imparts to the whole heaven the immense motion that is called daily motion, the greatest and fastest of the motions; he says: “the intelligible is the other series in itself and on its own”. Alexander says: this passage can be understood in different ways:

1. [Aristotle] means that the one series itself is thought of from the kind of series which the Pythagoreans posited and which they mentioned in their search for principles. When they posited the opposites as principles of all existents, they arranged the ten opposites which they considered as principles in two classes: the ones in the class of the good or under the genus of the good, and the others in the class of the evil; among these things, those which are intelligible in themselves constitute the series of the good; those which belong to the evil are accidental because they are conceived by negation of the good. . . .

2. [Alexander] says: he may be referring now to the series he mentioned concerning the division of the elements of which he discusses the opposites in every genus, which are the principles of motion for all changing things, I mean change in substance and in the other categories. The two opposites are analogous to form and privation; and the series which is analogous to form is intelligible in itself; that which is analogous to privation is intelligible, but not primarily and by itself because privation is perceived only in relation to the property which is form. . . .

3. There is a third interpretation according to which [Aristotle] means by “latter series” [i.e. one of the series] the perfect form without any privation, because one of the two opposites does contain privation. [Averroes:] According to this interpretation, [Aristotle] meant as it were that this intelligible belongs to the class of the intelligibles with which no privation is mingled, not to the opposite, with which privation is mingled.

4. The fourth interpretation is that [Aristotle] means by “the latter series” [i.e. one of the series] form and not matter, because this principle [i.e. matter] is not intelligible by itself but in relation, whereas form is intelligible by itself. [Averroes:] According to this interpretation, [Aristotle] meant as it were that this intelligible belongs to the class of the intelligibles of the forms and falls under them, not to the intelligibles of matter, because the series which is the form is the intelligible in itself and on its own, that is to say absolutely intelligible. The intelligibles of matter which are ten exist by relation. That is why [Aristotle] concluded this argument by the words: “of this series substance is first”. This is the interpretation which is closest to [Aristotle’s] words.

[Averroes:] It is as if [Aristotle] had said: this intelligible falls under the intelligibles of the forms which are understood by themselves, not by relation (these are intelligible of matter); it belongs, in this genus, to the species of the forms which are something substantial and among these to those which are simple. For some forms are substantial and some are not; among those which are substantial, some are material and some are not. This first intelligible falls under this

genus. This is what he indicates by the words: “the simple in actuality”. He means by “simple” the form without admixture of matter, because everything in which there is admixture of potentiality is composite, and since potentiality is perceived through something else and actuality in itself, that in which there is not admixture of potentiality is fittest to be intelligible.

Aquinas (2523-4; tr. Blackwell)

[Note: *orekton* is translated “appetible” rather than “object of desire”.]

2523. Since he has proved that the first mover is both intelligible and appetible, it now remains to show from this how perfection is found in the first mover. . . . First (1253), he shows the perfection of the first mover in itself by considering the formal character of the intelligible and the appetible . . . In treating the first part he does two things. First, he proves that the first mover is perfect on the ground that it is intelligible; and second (2526), on the ground that it is appetible.

He says, first (1068), that, just as movers and things moved are related to one another, so also are intelligible things. He calls this latter relationship an intelligible column of opposites because one intelligible is the first principle for understanding another, just as one mover is also the cause of the motion of another.

2524. Therefore, just as it has been shown (298) from the series of movers and things moved that the first mover is a simple substance and an actuality, in a similar fashion the same thing is found to be true from the series of intelligible things. For it is evident that substance is the first of intelligible things, because we understand accidents only by means of substance, through which they are defined; and among substances a simple intelligible substance is prior to a composite one; for simple things are included in the concept of composite things. And of the simple entities contained in the class of substance the actually intelligible are prior to the potentially intelligible; for potentiality is defined by means of actuality. It follows, then, that the first intelligible entity is a simple substance which is an actuality.

Ps.-Alexander (694,15-695,8; tr. Miller)

And after saying, “the intellect is moved by the intelligible object” , Aristotle adds “and one of the columns” is intelligible—intelligible “in itself” (1072a30-1). But some things are intelligible in themselves and some are not in themselves, as we shall see in a little while. By “one of the columns” Aristotle means that of the noble, under which are, according to the Pythagoreans, substance, light, triangle, odd, and such things that they reckoned there. Therefore, the things under the column of the good are all intelligible, but substance is the most intelligible of these things, and of substance, again, the most intelligible is “that which is simple and actual” (1072a32), which is both intelligible in the chief sense and desirable in the chief sense.

Since Aristotle has said that substance is intelligible in itself and actual in total distinction from certain intelligible objects which are intelligible neither in themselves nor in actuality, it is appropriate—or, even more, necessary—to say which things are intelligible in themselves and in

actuality and which are not of this sort. All things, <then>, that are enmattered forms and possess their being in matter come to be intelligible by the intellect's agency, though they are intelligible [only] in potentiality and neither in themselves nor in actuality. For by separating these things from the matter together with which they have their being, the intellect itself makes them actually intelligible; and at that time each of them, when it is thought of, is actually intelligible and becomes intellect, not beforehand when they were not like this in their own nature. For the actual intellect is nothing other than the form which is thought of, so that also each of the objects, though not intelligible without qualification, becomes intellect whenever it is thought of. For just as actual perception is the same as the actual perceptible object and the actual perceptible object is the same as actual perception, so also the actual intellect is the same as the actual intelligible object and the actual intelligible object is the same as the actual intellect. For by grasping the form of the object of thought and having separated it from the matter, the intellect both makes it actually intelligible and it becomes itself an actual intellect.

And if any of the things that exist, as has been proven, is in itself incorporeal and immaterial, it is intelligible actually and in virtue of its own nature, and it possesses actual intelligibility from itself, and not from the intellect that separates it from its matter (for it is an intellect [that is] is both immaterial and intelligible), but it is actually an intellect and actually an intelligible object, as Aristotle will say shortly after. Hence, whichever forms that the intellect separates from their matter and makes intelligible are not intelligible in the chief sense and in themselves (an indication of this is that if they have been separated from the intellect that thinks of them and has separated them from their matter and has made universal from particular objects, they perish and do not exist). But whichever things possess being in themselves from themselves are intellects in the chief sense and intelligible objects in the chief sense.

STEP 3: THE SIMPLE AND ACTUAL SUBSTANCE IS THE FIRST OBJECT OF DESIRE

1072a34-b1: "But then both that which is noble and that which is in itself an object of choice are in the same column, and what is first is always best or analogous to it."

Questions Raised by Step 3

To what do "that which is noble" and "that which is in itself an object of choice" refer? Why does Aristotle say they are in the same column? How does the claim that "what is first is always best or analogous to it" advance Aristotle's argument?

Averroes (Tafsīr 1604-5; tr. Genequand)

What [Aristotle] has in mind in this sentence is to distinguish between the first principle and all the other separate principles; for all the other separate principles appear to choose it and desire it for the sake of something distinct from themselves, I mean the principles of the celestial motions except the daily motion; but the mover which produces this motion appears to be chosen for its

own sake, for the universe moves according to it of a motion faster and greater than the motions proper to each of them (i.e. the movers). It is that which is chosen for its own sake and the object of the desire of the universe; that which possesses this property possesses the supreme perfection.

Aquinas (2526-7; tr. Blackwell)

[Note: *orekton* is translated “appetible” rather than “object of desire”.]

2526. Then he proves the same point from the formal character of the appetible. He says that that which is good and that which is desirable in itself belong to the same class. For that which is prior in the class of intelligible things is also a greater good in the class of appetible things, or is something analogous to it. He says this because intelligible things are actual insofar as they exist in the intellect, whereas appetible things are actual insofar as they exist in reality; for good and evil are in things, as has been pointed out in Book VI (1240).

2527. Hence, just as the concept of intelligible substance is prior to that of intelligible accidents, the same relationship holds for the goods which correspond proportionally to these concepts. Therefore the greatest good will be a simple substance, which is an actuality, because it is the first of intelligible things. It is evident, then, that the first mover is identical with the first intelligible and the first appetible good, which is the greatest good.

Ps.-Alexander (695,17-23; tr. Miller)

“And yet both that which is noble and that which is an object of choice are in the same column” (1072a34-5), namely, [in the column] containing that which is intelligible in its own right, so that the first cause which is intelligible and noble in itself is an object of choice and best both in itself and because of itself. And by analogy, too, that which is first will be called best (cf. 1072a35-b1). Thus we could say that in so far as it is prior in worth and nobility the actual intellect is best in comparison with the dispositional [intellect], and we would say, in turn, that circular movement is best in comparison with straight movement.

APPENDIX: SOME PASSAGES FROM ARISTOTLE ON THE COLUMNS

Note: the term “column” (*sustoikhia*) commonly refers to a line of soldiers, and it is applied by extension to other things including abstract items. The term can also be translated “series” or “chain”. Some Pythagoreans used the term to refer to two series of corresponding opposed items, the one positive and the other negative (e.g. definite and indefinite). Aristotle occasionally avails himself of columnar analysis (e.g. at *Metaphysics* XII.7.1072a31) though commentators generally disagree over how he applies it. Aristotle describes the positive column as “the column of the noble” (*kalon*, or beautiful), and he associates the negative column with his own concept of privation. In some cases he uses *sustoikhia* to refer to a series of predicates (e.g. human, quadruped, animal, etc.), but in the following passages it is associated with his theory of

the categories. The expression *hê hetera sustoikhia*, translated “one of the columns” (literally “the other column”), can refer to either column depending on context.

Metaphysics I.5.986a22-6 Other [Pythagoreans] say there are ten principles, which are said to be in columns: limit and unlimited, odd and even, one and plurality, right and left, male and female, resting and moving, straight and curved, light and darkness, good and bad, square and oblong.

Metaphysics XIV.6.1093b11-14 For those who assume [that numbers are causes of nature], evidently the good belongs in the column of the noble, as well as the odd, the straight, the equal, and the powers of certain numbers.

Physics III.2.201b24-6 (= *Metaphysics* XI.9.1066a13-17) The reason why they put motion into these kinds [i.e. difference or inequality or not-being] is that it is thought to be something indefinite [or unlimited], and the principles of one of the columns are indefinite because they are privative; for none of them is either a “this” [i.e. substance] or “such” [i.e. quality] or [falls in] any of the other categories.

Metaphysics IV.2.1004b27-30 In the list of contraries one of the columns is privative, and all contraries are referred to being and nonbeing, and to the one and plurality, as for instance rest belongs to the one and movement to plurality.

Generation and Corruption I.3.319a14-17 [Aristotle is distinguishing between coming-to-be without qualification and coming-to-be in a qualified sense.] These differ in terms of the categories; for some things signify a this-something, others a such, and others a so-much. Those things, then, which do not signify substance, are not said to come to be without qualification but only to come to be something. Nevertheless, in all things alike, we speak of coming-to-be when the thing comes to be something in the other column—e.g. in substance, if it comes to be fire but not if it comes to be earth; and in quality, if it comes to be learned but not when it comes to be ignorant.

Nicomachean Ethics I.6.1096a1096a23-9, b5-7 [Aristotle is criticizing Plato’s theory that all good things are good because they partake of one common Form of the Good.] Since the good is spoken of in as many ways as that-which-is (for things are called good both in the what [i.e. the category of substance], e.g. the god and the intellect, and in quality, e.g. the virtues, and in quantity, e.g. that which is moderate, and in relation, e.g. the useful, and in time, e.g. the right opportunity, and in place, e.g. the right locality and the like), clearly the good cannot be something universally common and one; for then it would not have been predicated in all of the categories but in one only. . . The Pythagoreans seem to give a more plausible account of the

good [than Plato] when they place the one in the column of goods; and it is they that Speusippus seems to have followed.