

Metaphysics Λ 7

Part II: Intellectual Life

Theses Presupposed I

- Going forward, we will accept as established, however precariously, the following:
 - ‘There is a mover which initiates motion without being in motion, being something eternal, and a substance, and an actuality. It initiates motion as do an object of desire and an object of thought: they initiate motion without being in motion’ (*Met.* Λ 7, 1072a25-27).
 - ἔστι τι ὃ οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ, αἰδιον καὶ οὐσία καὶ ἐνέργεια οὐσα. κινεῖ δὲ ὧδε τὸ ὀρεκτὸν καὶ τὸ νοητόν· κινεῖ οὐ κινούμενα.
 - ‘It initiates motion as something beloved, while the others initiate motion as things in motion.’ (*Met.* Λ 7, 1072b3-4).
 - κινεῖ δὴ ὡς ἐρώμενον, κινούμενα δὲ τᾶλλα κινεῖ.
 - It is thus a final cause—in one and only one of the ways α can be a final cause, namely, as benefit (*cuius*) and not as beneficiary (*cui*).

Theses Presupposed II

- Its being a final cause is consistent with its being an efficient cause.
 - More tendentially, the prime mover in fact causes motion both as final cause and an efficient cause.
- ‘Since there is something initiating motion while being itself immobile, existing in actuality, this cannot be in any way otherwise’ (*Met.* Λ 7, 1072b7-8).
- ἐπεὶ δὲ ἔστι τι κινουῦν αὐτὸ ἀκίνητον ὄν, ἐνεργεῖα ὄν, τοῦτο οὐκ ἐνδέχεται ἄλλως ἔχειν οὐδαμῶς.

Three New Theses to be Assayed

1. 'It exists, then, of necessity; and in as much as it exists necessarily, it exists finely, and in this way it is a principle' (*Met.* Λ 7, 1072b10-11).
 - ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἄρα ἐστὶν ὄν. καὶ ἡ ἀνάγκη, καλῶς, καὶ οὕτως ἀρχή.
2. If, therefore, the god is always in the good state that we are in sometimes, it is wonderful; and if it is more so, it is still more wonderful. But it is in this state (*Met.* Λ 7, 1072b24-26).
 - εἰ οὖν οὕτως εὖ ἔχει, ὡς ἡμεῖς ποτέ, ὁ θεὸς αἰεὶ, θαυμαστόν· εἰ δὲ μᾶλλον, ἔτι θαυμασιώτερον. ἔχει δὲ ᾧδε.
3. 'Life too surely belongs to <god>, for the actuality of reason is life, and that one is <this> actuality; and the actuality of that one [god] is in its own right the best and everlasting life. We say, then, the god is the best, everlasting living being, so that life, indeed a continuous and everlasting duration of life, belongs to god; for this is god' (*Met.* Λ 7, 1072b26-30).
 - καὶ ζωὴ δὲ γε ὑπάρχει· ἢ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωὴ, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἢ ἐνέργεια· ἐνέργεια δὲ ἢ καθ' αὐτὴν ἐκείνου ζωὴ ἀρίστη καὶ αἰδῖος. φημὲν δὴ τὸν θεὸν εἶναι ζῶντα αἰδῖον ἀριστον, ὥστε ζωὴ καὶ αἰὼν συνεχῆς καὶ αἰδῖος ὑπάρχει τῷ θεῷ· τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός.

FM: The burden of $\Lambda.7.1072b18-26$

- Having established that the prime mover is always in actuality or activity (*energeia*), Aristotle argues that this activity is the same as (or even exceeds) the highest activity of which human beings are capable: the act of thinking (*noêsis*).

FM: Translation

- [1] And the act of thinking in its own right is of that which is best in itself, and the [act of thinking] most of all is of that which is [best] most of all. [2] And the intellect thinks of itself by participation in the intelligible object; for it becomes an intelligible object by touching and thinking of it, so that the intellect and intelligible object are the same. For that which is receptive of the intelligible object and the substance, is the intellect, and it is acting when it possesses it. [3] Hence, it is the latter rather than the former* which is the divine [state] that the intellect seems to possess, and contemplation is pleasantest and best. [4] If, therefore, the god is always in the good state that we are in sometimes, it is wonderful; and if it is more so, it is still more wonderful. But it is in this state.
 - * 'the former rather than the latter' in the manuscripts and ps.-Alexander's lemma
- [1] ἡ δὲ νόησις ἢ καθ' αὐτὴν τοῦ καθ' αὐτὸ ἀρίστου, καὶ ἡ μάλιστα τοῦ μάλιστα. [2] αὐτὸν δὲ νοεῖ ὁ νοῦς κατὰ μετάληψιν τοῦ νοητοῦ· νοητὸς γὰρ γίνεταί τιγγάνων καὶ νοῶν, ὥστε ταῦτὸν νοῦς καὶ νοητόν. τὸ γὰρ δεκτικὸν τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ τῆς οὐσίας νοῦς, ἐνεργεῖ δὲ ἔχων, [3] ὥστ ἐκείνου μᾶλλον τοῦτο* ὃ δοκεῖ ὁ νοῦς θεῖον ἔχειν, καὶ ἡ θεωρία τὸ ἥδιστον καὶ ἄριστον. [4] εἰ οὖν οὕτως εὔ ἔχει, ὡς ἡμεῖς ποτέ, ὁ θεὸς αἰεὶ, θαυμαστόν· εἰ δὲ μᾶλλον, ἔτι θαυμασιώτερον. ἔχει δὲ ὧδε.
 - *ἐκεῖνο μᾶλλον τούτου codd. A1¹

FM: Structure of the Argument I

- [1] 'And the act of thinking in its own right is of that which is best in itself, and the [act of thinking] most of all is of that which is [best] most of all.'
- Questions:
 - What is the basis for the first claim?
 - How is the second claim inferred from the first?

FM: Structure of the Argument II

- [2] 'And the intellect thinks of itself by participation in the intelligible object; for it becomes an intelligible object by touching and thinking of it, so that the intellect and intelligible object are the same. For that which is receptive of the intelligible object and the substance, is the intellect, and it is acting when it possesses it.'
- Questions:
 - Most commentators think that Aristotle is talking about human thinking as described in *De Anima* III.4-8. See especially ps.-Alexander. Is this the right approach?
 - The term 'participation' has a Platonic connotation. How does Aristotle's account of thinking differ from Plato's?
 - How does the human intellect become its object by thinking of it so that the intellect and intelligible object are the same?
 - When Aristotle says that the intellect 'is acting (*energein*) when it possesses (*ekhein*)' its object, what kind of acting is this? (cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 198a)

FM: Structure of the Argument III

- [3] 'Hence, it is the latter rather than the former* which is the divine [state] that the intellect seems to possess, and contemplation is pleasantest and best.' (*Or "the former rather than the latter" as in the manuscripts.)
- Questions:
 - Traditional interpretations of "the latter versus the former": divine self-thinking rather than human self-thinking (ps.-Alexander), actual thinking versus potential thinking (Averroes), the object of divine thinking versus the object of human thinking (Aquinas). Contrast Judson who follows the manuscripts: the activity of thinking rather than the object of thinking.
 - Which interpretation makes the best sense of the argument?

FM: Structure of the Argument IV

- [4] 'If, therefore, the god is always in the good state that we are in sometimes, it is wonderful; and if it is more so, it is still more wonderful. But it is in this state.'
- Questions:
 - What is so good about this good state?
 - Why is the divine intellect in a better state than the human intellect?

Fine (or Noble or . . .) Existence

- 'It exists, then, of necessity; and in so far as it exists necessarily, it exists nobly / finely / beautifully, and in this way it is a principle' (*Met.* Λ 7, 1072b10-11).
 - ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἄρα ἐστὶν ὄν. καὶ ἡ ἀνάγκη, καλῶς, καὶ οὕτως ἀρχή.
- This difficult sentence represents a bridge from necessity to normativity.
 - How should *kalon* (καλόν) be translated?
 - Traditional, aristocratic: 'noble'
 - Modern, egalitarian: 'fine'
 - Modern, aesthetic: 'beautiful'
 - Why does Aristotle use *kalon* instead of simply 'good' (ἀγαθόν)?
- There seems to be a suppressed argument from the manner of necessity to the manner of life, where the manner of its life involves its having achieved some normative standard.
 - What is that argument?

Two Conjectures

- A Platonizing Thought
 - To exist of necessity is to exist purely, completely, and as a context invariant paradigm, and thus as a normative standard for all.
 - To illustrate: Nothing other than Justice Itself is perfectly just; all other things called just are just eponymously, striving, vainly, to be like Justice Itself, forever mired in the contingent vagaries of the life of becoming.
 - In this sense, everything existing necessarily exists nobly / finely / beautifully.
- A More Local Thought:
 - The unmoved mover has been shown to be a final cause as an object of love, the kind of final cause which is a benefit without being a beneficiary (cf. *Met.* Λ 10, 1075a11-25; cf. Plato, *Symp.* 210-212)
 - What is loved is loved because it is noble / fine / beautiful; it is not noble / fine / beautiful because it is loved.
 - This would lay stress on ‘in so far as it exists necessarily’ (possibly: in the way in which it exists necessarily; ἢ ἀνάγκη), taken to mean, roughly, ‘in the manner of its necessary existence’.
 - In this approach, not everything existing necessarily exists nobly / finely / beautifully.
 - This approach also helps explain to next extension of the bridge: ‘and in this way it is a principle’ (καὶ οὕτως ἀρχή): its manner of necessity renders it worthy of being deemed noble / fine / beautiful—and so worthy of its being an object of love, and so of its being a principle as a source of motion.

A Conjectural Argument

- We have, then, a conjectural argument based on the second conjecture:
 1. The unmoved mover exists necessarily as a final cause—as a benefit to be attained (*cuius*).
 2. If τ exists necessarily as a benefit to be attained, τ is necessary being worthy of desire and/or love.
 3. If τ is necessary being worthy of desire and/or love, τ exists as something noble/fine/beautiful (*καλός*).
 4. So, the unmoved mover exists as something noble/fine/beautiful (*καλός*).
- ‘. . .and in so far as it exists necessarily, it exists nobly/finely/beautifully; *καὶ ἡ ἀνάγκη, καλῶς*).

The Actuality of Reason

- ‘Life too surely belongs <to god>, for the actuality of reason is life, and that one is <this> actuality; and the actuality of that one [god] is in its own right the best and everlasting life. We say, then, the god is the best, everlasting living being, so that life, indeed a continuous and everlasting duration of life, belongs to god; for this is god’ (*Met.* Λ 7, 1072b26-30).
- καὶ ζωὴ δὲ γε ὑπάρχει· ἢ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωὴ, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἢ ἐνέργεια· ἐνέργεια δὲ ἢ καθ’ αὐτὴν ἐκείνου ζωὴ ἀρίστη καὶ ἀίδιος. φημὲν δὴ τὸν θεὸν εἶναι ζῶον ἀίδιον ἀριστον, ὥστε ζωὴ καὶ αἰὼν συνεχῆς καὶ ἀίδιος ὑπάρχει τῷ θεῷ· τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός.

Some Striking Identifications

- The actuality of reason is life.
- The actuality of god is in its own right the best and everlasting life.
- This, evidently, an everlasting duration of life, is god

The Progression of *Met. Λ 7, 1072b26-30*

- Aporia: How does Aristotle get from (3) to (8)? We seem to move somehow from 'ϕ is an activity / actuality of α' to 'α is identical with ϕ'.
1. The actuality of reason is life.
 2. God's actuality is the actuality of reason.
 3. So, god's actuality is life.
 4. In fact, in god the actuality of reasoning is actuality in its own right, which is to say intrinsically or indeed essentially actuality.
 5. If an (or the) activity of reasoning is in essence the actuality of reasoning, then (that) activity is reasoning optimally.
 6. If god's reasoning is life and god's reasoning is reasoning optimally, then god's life is an optimal life, a way of living optimally.
 7. If so, then 'god is the best, everlasting living being.'
 - Indeed, as a corollary, 'a continuous and everlasting duration of life, belongs to god.'
 8. So, finally, 'this is god.' [Caveat: 'this' (τοῦτο) is neuter, whereas life is feminine.]