

Is There Divine Providence According To Aristotle?

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AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, Franz Brentano made use of passages such as *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN) 10.8.1179a22–32¹ and *Politics* (Pol.) 7.4.1326a31–32 in order to strengthen his interpretation of passages from more centrally theological works, according to which Aristotle held that God has effective providence over the world and things human.² However, the success of alternative readings of the theological and semi-theological works of Aristotle by scholars such as Eduard Zeller apparently settled the matter for a century: the scientific theology of Aristotle, as understood by most interpreters, had no place for God's providence and care for human affairs. Any passage in which Aristotle appears to endorse the doctrine of divine providence should rather be interpreted as a concession to popular religion.³

¹ Passages of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter, EN) are all taken from the Greek text of Ingram Bywater, *Aristotle's Ethica Nicomachea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959). In principle, unless otherwise indicated, I will follow the Revised Oxford Translation published in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), in translations of *De interpretatione* (1:25–38), *De anima* (1:641–692), *Metaphysics* (2:1552–1727), *Nicomachean Ethics* (2:1729–1867), and *Eudemian Ethics* (2:1922–1981).

² See Franz Brentano, *Aristotle and His World View* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 89n52.

³ Concerning at least the passage contained in EN, Kurt Pritzl has made the powerful observation: “It is barely possible . . . that a regard for popular sentiment is restraining him in a work not intended, so far as we know, for popular

In her essay “Aristotelian Piety,” Sarah Broadie has proposed to interpret *EN* 10.8.1179a22–32 as a passage that truly reflects Aristotle’s view on piety and the divine retribution of the wise, thereby distinguishing her reading from what had become the traditional interpretation of this and similar passages. I think her fresh look at this problem allows us to reconsider the question of whether God cares in general about human affairs, and in particular about the wise, or not. I will demonstrate in this essay that Aristotle thought that divine providence is real and effective. I will also address the kind of problems that have moved many to deny that Aristotle held the existence of divine care for human affairs, which cannot be done simply by re-interpreting the passages in which Aristotle clearly states that there is divine providence. This re-interpretation is necessary, but my task requires a broader scope. Thus, I will address these three groups of issues: (a) showing the consistency of divine providence with the formal theological studies contained mostly in *Metaphysics* (*Met.*); (b) showing how such providence could act and be effective, on the one hand; and (c) showing how to meet possible objections, such as the apparent incompatibility between divine providence and the possibility of the wise and virtuous man not being happy because of bad fortune, on the other.

Book XII of the *Metaphysics* and Divine Providence

Interestingly, Broadie holds that *Metaphysics* Λ does not exclude a personal relationship of human beings in general, and of Aristotle in particular, with God. However, she also argues that book Λ does not support, in any way, the view that God, according to Aristotle, takes care of the world and of things human.⁴ I am going to demonstrate that there are solid grounds in this book to hold to God’s care of the cosmos. This will be the exclusive purpose of this section. I will limit myself to a fresh reading of book Λ’s final chapters based on my previous investigations of Aristotelian divine causality. Usually I will leave to the notes the explicit mention of the convergences or divergences in interpretation with contemporary scholars.⁵

consumption,” in his “Aristotle and Happiness after Death: *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.10–11,” *Classical Philology* 78, no. 2 (Apr. 1983): 101–111, at 102. Eduard Zeller interprets the passage as a way to acquiesce to popular opinion in *Aristotle and the Earlier Peripatetics* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), 1:422n1.

⁴ Sarah Broadie, “Aristotelian Piety,” *Phronesis* 48.1 (2003): 54–70, 64.

⁵ I must clarify here that I am familiar with the interpretations of the *Metaphysics* (hereafter, *Met.*) Λ that Broadie, Lindsay Judson, David Bradshaw, Enrico Berti, Giovanni Reale, Tomás Calvo, Alberto Ross Hernández, and many others have

Some interpreters have claimed that chapters 6–7 and 9 of book *Λ* of the *Metaphysics* teach that God is the cause only of the movement of the cosmos (not of its being) and only as final cause (not as efficient cause).⁶ In order to defend the plausibility of my thesis, I must show, therefore, that God can be efficient cause because a merely final cause cannot be provident. In this task, it would be helpful to demonstrate that God is cause not just of movement, but also of being, for if this is so, he has to be an efficient cause. He cannot be simply a final cause because a final cause by itself cannot originate substantial being.

The purpose of book *Λ* is to investigate substances' causes, which are the causes of everything, since all other beings depend on substances in order to even exist. However, chapter 6 is taken by many to deal only with the cause of everlasting movement and time.⁷ This situation forces us to examine the context and content of this chapter. Chapters 4 and 5 have established that the causes of all things are the same in two senses: analogically, since form, privation, subject, and efficient cause are principles in all categories; and absolutely, since the causes of substances, univocal or equivocal (man generates man, but the sun intervenes in the generation of man, for example), are the causes of everything. The purpose of chapter 6 is not to switch the subject matter of book *Λ* in order to discuss the cause of everlasting movement and time. Rather, it discusses movement and time because to do so is useful in the study of the causes of being, especially of substances. And it is, for several reasons.

The first reason is that, (1) if movement and time are kinds of reality that presuppose substances, and if one can prove that movement is

made, and that I have dealt with them in an article dedicated to the issue of God's causality over the world and in my book *El ser, Dios y la ciencia, según Aristóteles* (Santiago: Ediciones UC, 2007). I am going to paraphrase some passages from my previous essay, "Dios como causa eficiente del cosmos, según Aristóteles (y desde Aristóteles)," *Acta Philosophica* 22.2 (2013): 279–301.

⁶ Alberto Ross Hernández brands this interpretation as the "traditional interpretation" of *Met. Λ* and defends it himself in his "La causalidad del Primer Motor en *Metafísica* XII," *Diánoia* 52.59 (2007): 3–26, at 4 and 13–25. Joseph G. Defilippo simply takes it for granted in "Aristotle's Identification of the Prime Mover as God," *The Classical Quarterly*, 44.2 (1994): 396–397 and 399–404. Myrna Gabbe also holds that, according to *Met.*, God is only final cause, not efficient, in her "Aristotle on the Starting-Point of Motion in the Soul," *Phronesis* 57 (2012): 358–379, at 375–379.

⁷ See, for example, Defilippo, "Prime Mover," 393–409, at 395–396. There Defilippo argues that eternal movement requires the existence of substances that are eternal and without matter, but he sees no connection between what is stated in *Met.* 12.6 and the origin of substances, eternal or passing.

everlasting, then one can prove that not all substances are perishable and that, among all the substances, the supreme one is an agent (and therefore not a Platonic Idea or Form) and Pure Act (and therefore not a Platonic divine soul). The latter proof, moreover, entails that the perennial substances, and especially the supreme one, are causes for the others. Indeed, chapter 6 starts with an argument that intends to prove that there is an everlasting substance which is pure act. Broadie perceives this well.⁸ The argument goes from the beginning of the chapter up until 12.6.1071b23. Aristotle states that “substances are the first among beings, and if all are perishable, then everything is perishable” (1071b5–7). But not everything is perishable, he argues, since movement and time can neither be generated nor corrupted. Aristotle gives an argument to prove that they are necessary beings (1071b7–11).

Now, this kind of necessary being is caused by an agent (κίνητικόν ἢ ποιητικόν) so that its necessity is received from another being. But the ultimate source of movement cannot be an agent that can act or not act. It cannot be an agent that is not pure act because “movement would not be everlasting, since that which is in potency may be not” (1071b19–20). That is to say, what has the possibility of not moving, in an infinite time would have ceased to move. Thus, the substance of this agent must be pure act and everlasting. Therefore, it must be immaterial (and not a soul, because souls are just *first act*, not pure act).⁹

This argument is followed by another through which Aristotle answers a possible objection and clearly extends the causality of the

⁸ My disagreement with her regarding the interpretation of book Λ consists in that she restricts the scope of the whole book to the scope of chapter 6. This is why she claims that the concern of *Met. Λ* “is not primarily to demonstrate god or the gods, but to prove the existence and nature of immutable substance by showing that, and why, the celestial motion is eternal.” However, this proof is given in such a way that the immutable substance is conceived as “infinitely desirable, perfectly actual, intelligence,” so that *Met. Λ* leaves the Aristotelian free to predicate “god” of something not cosmological (Broadie, “Aristotelian Piety,” 64).

⁹ Enrico Berti argues in a similar way, along with Leo Elders. Berti points out some textual problems, and also that lines 21–22 speak of a plurality of immaterial substances, in his “Unmoved Mover(s) As Efficient Cause(s) in *Metaphysics Λ 6*,” in *Aristotle’s Metaphysics XII*, eds. Michael Frede and David Charles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 181–206, at 192. The efficient causality of God was dealt with again in *Nova et Vetera* (English) 10.3 (2012) by Berti himself (“The Finality of Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover in the *Metaphysics* Book Λ, Chs. 7 and 10” on 863–876), Kevin Flannery (“On Professor Berti’s Interpretation of the Causality of the First Unmoved Mover,” at 833–862), and Stephen Brock (“The Causality of the Unmoved Mover in Thomas Aquinas’s Commentary on *Metaphysics XII*,” at 805–832).

first agent not only to movement, but also to being (1071b23–30). The objection would be that, since potency is previous to act, the first existing reality cannot be Aristotle's pure act. To this he replies: "if things were so [if potency were previous to act] no one of the beings will be, since it has the possibility to be and yet not be" (1071b24–26). That is to say, since being cannot come from nothing, mortal and potential beings must have the origin of their being in perennial and actual beings, which means that these should be previous to the others. And the reason is this, I take it: if at a certain time there were only potential and perishable beings, since time is infinite, at that time those potential and perishable beings would have been for an infinite time. But in an infinite time, all potential and perishable beings would have been destroyed. Aristotle uses the future tense "no one of the beings will be" because he places himself hypothetically at a time where there was no necessary being and "predicts" the disappearance of all existing beings before his real time, which would be in the future of that hypothetical time.¹⁰

After giving this second argument, Aristotle applies his conclusions to criticize the "theologians," Plato, and Leucippo. After that, he confirms those conclusions by quoting Anaxagoras and Empedocles. Finally, he offers his explanation of the eternal cyclical being¹¹ and of generation and corruption. Thus, chapter 6 deals with the problem of the precedence of act over potency, which is a precedence of being and not just of movement, as is shown in 9.8.1050b6–19, in which context movement is clearly and explicitly considered as just a sub-case of the general precedence of act over potency (1050b20–30). But when chapter 6 considers this matter, it uses infinite time and movement in two ways, in my opinion: firstly as an example of beings that cannot not be, and secondly as a presupposition useful to show that perishable beings cannot be first, since in that case nothing would be now.¹²

¹⁰ See an interesting analysis of a similar argument in Christopher Martin, *Thomas Aquinas: God and Explanations* (Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press, 1997), 158–168.

¹¹ Of course, this expression (1072a10) does not imply that Aristotle held a view of *history* as an ever recurring story, but I cannot consider this problem here.

¹² In this paragraph I do not follow the Revised Oxford Translation of the *Metaphysics*. I translate from *Metaphysica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980; first published 1957). Berti interprets the passage in 12.6 as referring only to movement. He mentions 9.8, but he does not draw the proper consequences from that passage ("Unmoved Mover[s]," 193–194). The cause of his interpretation, I think, is that he equates "to be caused" with "to have beginning in time."

The second and third reasons why Aristotle investigates the origin of movement in chapter 6 are: (2) because the Academicians had established that precedence in causation of movement implies precedence in being (see *Laws* 10.896 b–d and 896e–897b). So that when Aristotle, himself an Academician, proves that God is the beginning of movement, he is proving, in his academic context, that God is also the beginning of being; and (3) because this way it is easy to prove that Plato's two hypotheses concerning the first principle of the cosmos and of movement (Ideas and soul) fail to explain the origin of movement (see 12.6.1071b12–20 and 1072a1–3.17–18).

One strong objection could be opposed to the thesis of the previous paragraphs: according to *Metaphysics* 12.7.1072a26–27, God's causality over the world is only final and not efficient. To such objection, I can answer that, if one examines the text closely, one discovers that it does not state that God originates movement as final cause. What it does state is that God originates movement in a way in which he is not moved. Thus, he moves in the way in which the objects of desire and of understanding move.¹³ God moves as Agent, End, and Intelligible all at once.¹⁴ To interpret this passage as stating that God moves only as final

¹³ Berti (persuaded by Broadie's argumentation) reads this passage as I do. See his *Estructura y significado de la Metafísica de Aristóteles* (Buenos Aires: Oinos–Unipe, 2011), which is a Spanish translation of *Struttura e significato della Metafisica di Aristotele* (Rome: Edusc, 2008), 150 and 152. See also "Unmoved Mover(s)," 203.

¹⁴ Something similar can be said of the intelligible and desirable in its connection to human intelligence and will: that the intelligible, like an agent, causes our intelligence to go from potency to act, at least in a sense, as is said in *De anima* 3.7.431a1–8 and in *De interpretatione* 1.16a–8; that the species of the intelligible in act is the species of the act of understanding, which means that the intelligible is a sort of formal cause for the intellect; and, finally, that intelligible reality might be a good that, once understood, is, without a doubt, an end of the appetite, according to *De anima* 3.7.431a8–431b9. Lindsay Judson uses considerations of this kind to solve the apparent conflict between chapters 6 and 7 of *Met.* A; see his "Heavenly Motion and the Unmoved Mover," 166–67, in *Self Motion from Aristotle to Newton*, ed. M. Gill and J. Lenox (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 155–171. It must be pointed out, however, that the way in which Judson understands God's efficient causality (as non-energetic and really identical in its essence to final causality—that is to say, as merely a principle of the movement of the appetite) is different from my view of God's efficient causality. I hold that God does transmit an act to the entities moved (moreover, he is the ultimate origin of their being), but in a way that is different from the transmission of an act by corporeal agents. Judson himself finds that Aristotle's statements concerning (a) the presence of God at the outermost circumference (*Met.* 12.7.1072b13–14) and (b) the

cause is to contradict something explicitly stated in 1071b12–13: God is ποιητικός (Agent).¹⁵ Moreover, there cannot be a final cause of entities if there is not an agent that directs such entities to that final cause. Thus, if God were only the final cause of the universe, there would have to be another, efficient cause directing the universe towards God.¹⁶ And finally, if Aristotle had held that God is cause only as intelligible and as desirable, then his god would be no different from Plato's Ideas, and all of Aristotle's efforts to supersede Plato in chapters 6 and 7 and in many other passages would be rendered vain, even nonsensical.

Having shown that book Λ deals with God as both the final and efficient origin of substances and of all beings,¹⁷ we can go further to establish that it gives grounds, along with the whole of the *Metaphysics*, to argue that Aristotle thought that God takes care of the cosmos and of things human, especially if one reads it in the light shed by both *Ethics*, as we will do in due course. In 12.10, Aristotle states that

need for the infinity of God's power because of the infinity of the movement of the outermost circumference (*Met.* 12.7.1073a5–11) are incompatible with his interpretation of God's efficient causality ("Heavenly Motion and the Unmoved Mover," 167–171). My interpretation does not encounter these obstacles. Both statements are perfectly compatible with my reading: (a) the incorporeal agent can touch without being touched and, for this reason, can in a sense be placed where its main effect is located; and (b) the incorporeal agent acts through its intellect. Thus, if such agent has infinite power, it can cause a movement infinite in duration but finite in speed, unlike corporeal agents that would cause a speed proportionate to their power (this is one reason to hold that a corporeal agent cannot have infinite power).

¹⁵ In *De generatione et corruptione* 324b13–15, Aristotle states that the agent moves as ποιητικός and that the end does not move as ποιητικός; see *On Coming to Be and Passing Away* (*De generatione et corruptione*), ed. Harold H. Joachim (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922). Berti corroborates this interpretation and, beyond that, shows that, when Aristotle states that the act of the mover is located in the subject of movement (*De anima* 3.2.426a4–5), he means that movement is in the subject of movement, not in the mover. With this he lays the cornerstone to be able to conceive God as unmoved mover ("Unmoved Mover(s)," 187–188).

¹⁶ I have dealt with the problem of the origin of the directedness of nature according to Aristotle in another essay. I cannot properly consider it here, because it would constitute an independent research by itself.

¹⁷ David Bradshaw would agree on this point. He, indeed, claims that God is the cause of all changes, even those that are not, properly speaking, "movements," since he contains the forms of all things ("A New Look at the Prime Mover," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 39.1 (2001): 1–22). For this reason he holds that there is an evolution in Aristotle's conception of the formal cause, from less to more Platonic. I can add that *Met.* XII, ch. 6 even asserts that God is the cause of the spheres (1072a9–17), but I cannot discuss this point here.

This [the general, God] is not because of the order, but this [the order] is because of that [God, the general].¹⁸ All things, fishes and birds and plants, are somehow ordered together, but not in the same way nor in a manner in which none has anything to do with the other. On the contrary, they have to do with each other because all things are ordered towards one.

However, in the same way as in a household, the free ones are allowed to act very little at random because all their business, or most of it, is subject to order, but very little of the slaves' and the animals' business is directed towards what is common, and the greater part is left to chance; because such principle for each is their nature (1075a15–23).¹⁹

Clearly the νοητική ψυχή²⁰ and those beings whose nature includes νοῦς are more subject to God's order, since they are more similar to him than those deprived of νοῦς. Thus, animals do not have ethics. But those beings that are immortal are more subject to God's order and could be above some of the ethical virtues (celestial souls and secondary separate substances).²¹ This means that everything is under

¹⁸ Many authors today take this passage to imply that God is efficient cause, and not only final—for example, Berti (*Estructura y significado*, 160; “Unmoved Mover[s],” 200 and 205) and Bradshaw (“A New Look,” 8). Ross Hernández points out that Broadie also invokes this passage in favor of God's efficient causality, even if he opposes this interpretation (“La causalidad del Primer Motor,” 6n21). More recently Ross Hernández has cast some doubts on the negation of God's efficient causality based on the fact that Alexander of Aphrodisias seems to have been the origin of such interpretation, but Alexander himself held a very different view about God in his *De fato* (Ross Hernández, “La recepción de la teoría aristotélica del azar en el *De Fato* de Alejandro de Afrodisia,” *Estudios de filosofía* 40 (2009): 183–198, at 194–195). Ross Hernández also cites several authors who have recently held God's efficient causality, such as Aryeh Kosman (“Aristotle's Prime Mover,” in *Self Motion from Aristotle to Newton*, eds. M. Gill and J. Lenox [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994], 135–153) and Lindsay Judson (“Heavenly Motion and the Unmoved Mover”).

¹⁹ I strive to achieve a literal translation.

²⁰ The expression is used in Aristotle's *De generatione animalium* 2.3.

²¹ Of course, these claims would need a thorough discussion of universal teleology in the light of other works, a discussion that lies outside the scope of the present essay. Alejandro Vigo seems to agree that this passage implies universal teleology with diverse kinds of mutual relations between the parts of the whole, in his *Aristóteles: Una introducción* (Santiago de Chile: Instituto de Estudios para la Sociedad, 2007), 182–183, and Gabbe seems to agree (“Aristotle on the Starting-Point,” 375 and 378).

God's care, and human beings more than animals, celestial souls more than human beings, and secondary separate substances more than celestial souls.

Now, God's care could be provided directly or indirectly. In chapter 6 it is stated that the celestial movement that causes the eternity of corporeal beings and the celestial movement that causes the cycles of birth and death act in God's virtue (see 1072a9–17). Thus, God's care is real and does not entail a denial of the natural order but, on the contrary, the efficiency of natural order comes from such care.

That according to Aristotle God cares about everything is not very surprising if one recalls Aristotle's praise of and disappointment with Anaxagoras contained in *Metaphysics A*:

For surely it is not likely either that fire or earth or any such element should be the reason why things manifest goodness and beauty both in their being and in their coming to be, or that those thinkers should have supposed it was; nor again could it be right to ascribe so great a matter to spontaneity and luck. When one man said, then, that intellect was present—as in animals, so throughout nature—as the cause of the world and of all its order, he seemed like a sober man in contrast with the random talk of his predecessors (1.3.984b8–22).

For, Anaxagoras uses intellect as a *deus ex machina* for the making of the world, and when he is at a loss to tell for what cause something necessarily is, then he drags intellect in, but in all other cases ascribes events to anything rather than to intellect (1.4.985a18–22).²²

Both Aristotle's praise and criticism of Anaxagoras are quite similar to Socrates's as they are portrayed in the *Phaedo* (97–99).²³ The problem with Anaxagoras' brilliant insight is that he does not use it systematically to explain the cosmos. He sticks to the mechanistic explanations of pre-Socratic philosophers. Aristotle, instead, as we have shown already and shall revisit below in this article, understands that God is at the same time final and efficient cause of the cosmos and that one cannot corner him and use him just to explain only what cannot be

²² I follow the Revised Oxford translation of Aristotle with one slight change: I translate νοῦς as “intellect,” rather than “reason.”

²³ The *Phaedo*'s texts I take from *Platonis Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 1:57–118.

explained mechanically, which would amount to using him as a *deus ex machina*.

One serious objection could still be used to oppose the idea of God's providence in Aristotle's works, the one proposed by Zeller and summarized by Broadie: since Aristotle holds, in 12.9.1074b15–35, that God does not intellectually grasp (νοεῖ) anything other than himself, he cannot be understood to care for anything else.²⁴ In order to respond to this objection, one could argue thus: It is true that God does not intellectually grasp (νοεῖ) things other than himself because, if he did, (a) he would depend on them, and (b) he would not be the highest being because the intelligible (τὸ νοούμενον) is nobler than the intellect (νοῦς), unless they are the same. Despite this, since he is the ultimate cause of being of everything, he knows everything, while intellectually grasping nothing other than himself. In fact, in *Metaphysics* 1.2.983a6–10, Aristotle holds that God's science is perfect and comprehends everything, precisely because he is some kind of principle of the causes ("since God seems to be for all things certain principle of the causes" [ὁ τε γὰρ θεὸς δοκεῖ τῶν αἰτίων πᾶσιν εἶναι . . . ἀρχὴ τις]). Thus, one can know something without intellectually grasping it, without *taking it* from outside, just as one can know the conclusions of science without grasping or perceiving anything else than the principles and their connections (without grasping, for example, a particular instance of the conclusion).

In order to strengthen the textual foundation of this aspect of Aristotle's theology, I will here briefly explain first his criticism of Empedocles in *Metaphysics* 1.4 and *De anima* 1.5, and then a pair of passages from the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) quoted by Verdenius.

Hence it also follows on his theory that God most blessed is less wise than all others; for he does not know all elements; for he has in him no strife, and knowledge is of the like by the like (*Met.* 3.4.1000b3–6).²⁵

[According to Empedocles' view,] each of the principles will have far more ignorance than knowledge; for though each of them will know one thing, there will be many of which it will

²⁴ Jonathan Barnes perhaps has in mind this very reason when he claims that Aristotle denies the gods' providence over the world in his *Conversaciones con Aristóteles* [*Coffee with Aristotle*] (Barcelona: Ediciones Oniro, 2008), 142–145.

²⁵ I include this passage thanks to an observation by an anonymous referee and the reference in Leo Elders, *Aristotle's Theology: A Commentary on Book Λ of the Metaphysics* (Assen: Royal VanGorcum Ltd., 1972), 257.

be ignorant—viz. all the others. Empedocles at any rate must conclude that his god is the least intelligent of all beings; for of him alone is it true that there is one element, Strife, which he does not know, while there is nothing which mortal beings do not know; for there is nothing which does not enter into their composition. (*De anima* 1.5.410b3–8)

Aristotle's criticism of Empedocles clearly commits him to hold a view of God that is very different from Zeller's. A god who does not know anything but himself would be ignorant. God not only is not ignorant, but his science comprehends everything, as Aristotle has pointed out in *Metaphysics* 1.2.983a6–10.

Let us now turn to the two *EE* texts quoted by Verdenius:

(a) But another variety of these kinds [of friendship] is friendship on a basis of superiority, as the excellence of a god is superior to that of a man (for that is another kind of friendship)—and in general that of ruler to subject; . . . In these varieties there is not at all, or at least not in a similar way, the return of love for love. For it would be ridiculous to accuse God because He does not return love in the same way as He is loved, or for a subject to make the same complaint against the ruler. For the part of a ruler is to receive not to give love, or else to give love in a different way. (*EE* 7.3.1238b18–30)²⁶

Here God has a kind of friendship with men and loves them and returns love, but in a way different than that in which men love him.

(b) . . . That God is not such as to need a friend makes us assume that a man who is similar to Him also does not need one. Yet according to this argument the virtuous man [σπουδαῖος] will neither grasp intellectually anything; for God is not well in this way, because He is in a better state than needing to intellectually grasp something different from Himself. The cause is that for us to be well depends on another, but for Him He Himself is His being well. (*EE* 7.12.1245b14–19)²⁷

²⁶ *Ethica Eudemia*, ed. F. Susemihl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1884). Here I follow the Revised Oxford Translation, with slight changes that strive for rendering a more literal translation.

²⁷ I have departed from the Revised Oxford Translation, which in my opinion does not render well the original meaning, and I have attempted a literal translation from the Oxford *Metaphysics* Greek text. I have connected these two

Verdenius interprets the latter two passages from the *Eudemian Ethics* as contradicting each other.²⁸ In Verdenius' opinion, the second passage would be in accordance with the Stagirite's philosophic view of God (he does not grasp anything other than himself and does not care about anything other than himself because he needs nothing beyond himself), while the first one would be in accordance with the popular view adopted by Aristotle as his without realizing the incompatibility with the philosophic one. The root of the problem with Verdenius' interpretation is that he suppresses an essential trace of Aristotle's metaphysics when he states that the Stagirite excluded any hierarchy of being and of imitation of God.²⁹ In many passages, Aristotle clearly speaks of a hierarchy of being and of a growing proximity to God. One of them is *Metaphysics* 12.10.1075a15–23, already quoted. This hierarchy is central to his metaphysics, as Michael Frede has taught.³⁰ It would be enough to remember such passages as *Metaphysics* 2.1.993b19–31³¹ and 12.7.1072a27–1072b2,³² or *De generatione et corruptione* 2.10.336b31–35. Thus, Verdenius interprets in a univocal manner non-univocal Aristotelian terms, such as “to intellectually grasp” (νοεῖν), which clearly means something different, even though not equivocally different, when applied to an intellect that needs to grasp an intelligible reality different from itself (the human intellect, for example), rather than to another that does not (God's intellect).

We should keep in mind Franz Brentano's principle of interpretation, according to which the reader must try to conciliate Aristotle's apparently conflicting statements and take occasion from them in order to gain a deeper understanding of the Stagirite's mind and philosophy. In this task, Brentano advises, one should strive to dissolve any appearance of contradiction, instead of adopting one of the statements and

passages thanks to Willen J. Verdenius's “Traditional and Personal Elements in Aristotle's Religion,” *Phronesis* 5.1 (1960): 56–70, at 67.

²⁸ Ibid., 60–61 and 67.

²⁹ Ibid., 63–64 and 70n62.

³⁰ Michael Frede, “The Unity of General and Special Metaphysics: Aristotle's Conception of Metaphysics,” in *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 81–95, at 90–91.

³¹ Please note lines 26–27: “In such way, what is truer also is the cause of their being true for those which are posterior” (my translation, as literal as possible).

³² Tomás Calvo, in the introduction to his Spanish edition of the *Metaphysics*, rightly interprets this passage when he states, “the priority of the supreme entity [or substance] seems to be *the priority that corresponds to the first term of a series* with respect to the remaining members which constitute such series”; see *Aristóteles Metafísica*, trans. and intro. Tomás Calvo (Madrid: Biblioteca Clásica Gredos, 1994), 46 (my translation and emphasis).

rejecting others in the name of the strangest hypotheses.³³ Thus, in the case at hand, since Aristotle has said in *De Anima* 1.5 and in *Metaphysics* 1.2 that God knows everything, we have to conclude that in *EE* 7.12.1245b14–19 what is meant is precisely that God's intellect knows things in a manner different from our intellect's manner: he does not depend on them because, in that case, his intellect would be inferior to the Intelligible, as is said in *Metaphysics* 12.9. So interpreted, this passage does not contradict the other (*EE* 7.3.1238b18–30).³⁴

How Can an Unmoved Mover Intervene in the Course of Contingent Affairs? The Ways in Which Divine Providence Actually Intervenes in Things Human

Aristotle was aware of a deep metaphysical problem and attempted to cope with it: God must be pure Act, simple and immutable, but at the same time must be the source of order of the whole world at all (successive) times. This problem is so difficult that, apart from Aristotle, it was a source of controversy in the time of Francisco Suárez, who branded the problem of conciliating divine immutability and simplic-

³³ See Brentano, *Aristotle and His World View*, 10. Thomas de Koninck has a similar opinion in "La Pensée de la Pensée chez Aristote," in *La question de Dieu selon Aristote et Hegel* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991), 69–151, at 79). I do not deny that there were changes of position in Aristotle's whole lifetime. But I must observe that the extant systematic works by Aristotle were written after he reached a mature understanding of the main metaphysical problems. First of all, we lost the dialogues, of which Cicero said that they were a river of flowing gold—see Plutarch, "Life of Cicero," in *Plutarch's Lives*, ed. John Dryden and Arthur Hugh Clough, Modern Library Classics (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 1041–1107, at 1054. We know that Aristotle held Plato's theory of ideas for some years. We know, as well, that, when he abandoned the theory, this probably produced an intellectual crisis in Aristotle's life. We find fragments of this crisis in several passages of Aristotle's extant works, as when he speaks in the *Posterior Analytics* about the hypothesis of a science of the common principles (see, e.g., 1.11.77a25 and ff.), or in *Met.* of the "sought for science" (1.2.982a4–5, e.g.). But I hold that, since the time he found a way out of that crisis, his metaphysical conception of the world did not change much. The two *Ethics* belong to this period of his life, and the *Metaphysics* does as well. I do not deny that, in some issues, Aristotle changed his mind. It is clear, for example, that in some passages of the extant works he considers himself a member of Plato's school, while in others he does not. Moreover, it seems clear to me that his way of regarding the fortunate man changes and that it is more precise in the *EN* than in the *EE*, for example. However, I do not see changes that affect the main thesis of this essay.

³⁴ We should add, incidentally, that God's not needing friends does not imply that he has no friends. It only means that his love for those whom he loves is not love of concupiscence or desire, but exclusively love of friendship.

ity with free decisions of his will regarding creatures as “one of the most obscure difficulties which theologians consider.”³⁵ Because he was aware of the difficulty of this problem, Aristotle used a tentative language when he spoke of divine providence in *EN* 10.8.1179a24–29. Thus, he states the following: “for if the gods have any sort of care for things human, as it seems [ὥσπερ δοκεῖ], it would be reasonable to suppose that they delight in what both is best and has the greatest affinity to themselves.”³⁶

On the other hand, because Aristotle denied neither of the problem’s terms, despite its difficulty, he conceived at least two ways in which divine providence can intervene in human affairs without denying God’s immutability: (a) through the natural order of the cosmos; and (b) through divine intervention in human deliberation.

³⁵ Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, ed. Salvador Castellote, Jean-Paul Coujou, John P. Doyle, and Michael Renemann, *Disputatio* 30, *Sectio* 9, 4 (<http://salvadorcastellote.com/investigacion.htm>). The whole of section 9 is dedicated to this problem. There one can see the names of some of the authors who took part in this controversy: Aquinas, Caietan, Sylvester Ferrariense, Capreolus, Scotus, Ockham, Lychetus, Gregorius, etc. Even today, it is the source of much controversy, for example, between Eleonore Stump, on the one hand, and David Ray Griffin and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, on the other. Stump has dealt with the problem of demonstrating the compatibility between God’s immutability and simplicity in chapter 3 of her book *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 100–101 and 108–127. There she explicitly debates with David Griffin’s *God, Power and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976) and Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange’s *God: His Existence and Nature* (Saint Louis, MO: Herder, 1995). She debates a very similar issue with Alvin Plantinga in her “Divine Simplicity and Aquinas’ Quantum Metaphysics” (paper presented at the First International Conference on Thomistic Philosophy, Universidad Santo Tomás, Santiago de Chile, July 4–6, 2012), which she has generously provided to me. Using Thomistic language, she formulates the difficulty of the issue thus: “That these apparently contradictory claims all have to be affirmed shows that there is a deficiency in our mode of speaking, because, of course, strictly speaking these claims cannot all be true. The problem is that we do not know how to formulate them in an accurate mode of speaking. If we could do so, then we would know the true nature of God. We would know the *quid est* of God. But this is precisely what we do not know.” Of course, her thesis has been, in turn, the subject of much controversy among Thomists.

³⁶ The full passage reads literally: “For if the gods have any sort of care for things human, as it seems [ὥσπερ δοκεῖ], it would be reasonable to suppose that they delight in what both is best and has the greatest affinity to themselves (and this would be intelligence [νοῦς]) and that those who cherish this most, and honor it, are the ones they benefit in return [ἀντενποιεῖν] for taking care of what they themselves love, and acting correctly and finely.”

(a) The first way is referred to in the above commented passage from *Metaphysics* 12.10. One reason that makes many contemporaries think that Aristotle's philosophical understanding of God is incompatible with care for the world and for human beings is that providence, according to the Stagirite, does not exclude the natural order. God takes care of the world through secondary causes (as they became later known), which in turn act by his virtue in a way similar to that in which the movements of the celestial spheres cause the permanence of sub-lunar being and its cycles: such movements act in God's virtue.³⁷ In ethical matters, divine action through the natural order means, as well, that the activity of contemplating God is in itself the happiest and the greatest gift that God can bestow on a human being. The ultimate source of such activity in both series of efficient and final causes is God. He acts through secondary causes, but acting through secondary causes does not equate to not acting. God really acts, even though within a framework that safeguards his immutability and his reasonableness.

This intelligible structure that accepts a real divine providence over the world and things human and connects it to a natural order is found already in Plato's *Laws* and is presupposed in many of his other dialogues. I am copying here the entire relevant section because it is the best illustration of the way in which divine providence acts through secondary causes. Note well the phrases I have highlighted in italics, which show the concern of God acting through the order which he has established:

Since our King saw that all actions involve soul, and contain much good and much evil, . . . and since He perceived that all soul that is good naturally tends always to benefit, but the bad to injure,—observing all this, He designed a location for each of the parts, wherein it might secure the victory of goodness in the Whole and the defeat of evil most completely, easily, and well. For this purpose He has designed the rule which prescribes what kind of character should be set to dwell in what kind of position and in what regions; but the causes of the generation of any special kind he left to the wills of each one of us men. For according to the trend of our desires and the nature of our souls, each one of

³⁷ See *Met.* 12.6.1072a9–17. This same way of divine action is found in *EN* 10.9.1179b21–22, connected to *EE* 7.14.1247a27–1248b6. Ross Hernández has recently shown that Alexander of Aphrodisias held a similar view in order to explain God's providence over the sublunar realities (“La recepción de la teoría aristotélica,” 193–194).

us generally becomes of a corresponding character. . . . All things that share in soul change, since they possess within themselves the cause of change, and in changing they move according to the law and order of destiny; the smaller the change of character, the less is the movement over surface in space, but when the change is great and towards great iniquity, then they move towards the deep and the so-called lower regions, regarding which—under the names of Hades and the like—men are haunted by most fearful imaginings, both when alive and when departed from their bodies. And whenever the soul gets a specially large share of either virtue or vice, owing to the force of its own will and the influence of its intercourse growing strong, then, if it is in union with divine virtue, it becomes thereby eminently virtuous, and moves to an eminent region, being transported by a holy road to another and a better region; whereas, if the opposite is the case, it changes to the opposite the location of its life's abode. . . . *O thou child and stripling who thinkest thou art neglected by the gods*,—the decree that as thou becomest worse, thou goest to the company of the worse souls, and as thou becomest better, to the better souls; and that, alike in life and in every shape of death, thou both doest and sufferest what it is befitting that like should do towards like. From this decree of Heaven neither wilt thou nor any other luckless wight ever boast that he has escaped; *for this decree is one which the gods who have enjoined it have enjoined above all others, and meet it is that it should be most strictly observed*. For by it thou wilt not ever be neglected, neither if thou shouldest dive, in thy very littleness, into the depths of the earth below, nor if thou shouldest soar up to the height of Heaven above; but thou shalt pay to the gods thy due penalty, whether thou remainest here on earth, or hast passed away to Hades, or art transported to a region yet more fearsome. And the same rule, let me tell thee, will apply also to those whom thou sawest growing to great estate from small after doing acts of impiety or other such evil,—concerning whom thou didst deem that they had risen from misery to happiness, and didst imagine, therefore, that in their actions, as in mirrors, thou didst behold the entire neglect of the gods, not knowing of their joint contribution and how it contributes to the All. (10.904a–905c)³⁸

³⁸ I use the English translation contained in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. R. G. Bury, vol. 10, [*Laws*] *Books 1–6* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

How a similar structure appears in Aristotle can be hinted at here. God introduced order into the universe, as *Politics* 7.4.1326a31–32 states clearly.³⁹ An important aspect of the order of the universe due to God's influence is that the man who shares most in the excellent (virtuous) activity of the intellect shares most as well in God's order and least in chance's lack of order (*Met.* 12.10.1075a15–23). These metaphysical statements match the ethical one according to which the man who shares most in the excellent (virtuous) activity of the intellect shares most as well in happiness, as we will have occasion to see in the third section of this essay.

(b) But, fortunately, Aristotle explicitly establishes that God can act directly over the mind of the *fortunate man* in a more direct way by initiating his deliberation. This initiation, I think, would be a kind of illumination, analogous to that which the teacher exerts over the mind of the disciple. Aristotle explicitly states that, in God's causality, Intelligence [efficient cause] and the Good [final cause] are one, as medicine is in some sense health.⁴⁰ This is realized much more clearly in teaching and learning, so that there you can have an unmoved mover.

Let us see the relevant passage of *EE* 7.14.1247a27–1248b6.⁴¹ This passage is concerned exactly with the problem of who among human beings is the most god-beloved, and the imperfect answer it gives is corrected and completed in *EN* 10.8.1179a22–32. The older work,⁴² indeed, holds that the best (βέλτιστον) and most judicious

1967), and vol. 11, [*Laws*] *Books 7–12* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). I contrasted it with the following Greek edition: *Les Lois*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 12 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956). This doctrine (or another with similar consequences) is presupposed, for example, in *Apology* 30c–d, 40a–42a and *Republic* 10.617d–621d.

³⁹ Stephen Salkever holds that, in chapters 4–12 of *Politics* 7, Aristotle is not talking in his own name but is simply presenting what a contemporary Greek male [ἀνὴρ] “fully committed to the political life” would wish as the best political regime; see his “Whose Prayer? The Best Regime of Book 7 and the Lessons of Aristotle’s *Politics*,” *Political Theory* 35, no. 1 (2007): 29–46, at 32. If this were so, the lines I am quoting (7.4.1326a31–32) would have low value in elucidating Aristotle’s philosophical conception of God. I disagree with this interpretation, however, and argue that the reasons that bring Salkever to believe that Aristotle is not talking in his own name can be strongly responded against. But it would take me far from the line of this essay.

⁴⁰ See *Met.* 12.10.1075b8–10 and 12.4.1070b28–34.

⁴¹ I follow the division of the text by the Revised Oxford Translation, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁴² Of course, Anthony Kenny (among other scholars) holds that *EE* is posterior to *EN* in his *Aristotle on the Perfect Life* (New York: Oxford University Press,

(φρονιμώτατον) is the most god-beloved, without deciding the issue between who is such, whether the prudent or the wise. Moreover, that same older passage adds that there is a “fortunate man” (εὐτυχής) who has a “divine good fortune,” since he acts inspired by a divinity in a way that is better than any that can be determined through deliberation. (Aristotle probably had in mind politicians and/or warriors such as Timoleon.)⁴³ This divinely fortunate man is also god-beloved, and again Aristotle does not distinguish whether he is less or more so than the other two.

It seems to me that, if one does not take into account this precedent, then one has little possibility of finding the real meaning of *EN* 10.8.1179a22–32, where Aristotle is solving the old problem about who is the most god-beloved. Regarding the central point of the present essay, moreover, the earlier text allows us to assess the meaning that Aristotle intends when he holds that God takes care of human affairs and benefits the wise in 1179a24–29.

For, in *EE*, Aristotle first considers whether it is chance that brings about the right deliberation and understanding. Rejecting this, he describes it as “manifest” that the principle of deliberation and intellect, or understanding (and therefore, of desiring rightly)⁴⁴ in general, is divine. Anyone who changes from not deliberating to deliberating and/or from not understanding to understanding is moved so by a divine principle:

Fortune [or chance] is the cause of this, of desiring what is proper and when it is proper. Or will it [fortune] be in this way the cause of all things? Because it would be the cause of understanding [νοῦσαι] and of deliberating: because one did not

1992), 479–480. I am inclined to think otherwise because the analysis of particular discussions that are different in both *Ethics* seems to show that *EN* is more recent. A good example is given by Daniel T. Devereux in his review of Kenny’s book in *The Philosophical Review* 106.3 (July 1997): 475–482: the treatment of habituation in the acquisition of virtue seems to be more perfect in *EN* than in *EE*. Another example could be, perhaps, the treatment of the fortunate man, as I suggest in this essay. It is true that *EN* is very brief on the matter, but it seems to be answering to the old problem as it was posed at *EE*.

⁴³ About Timoleon, see Nicholas G. L. Hammond, *A History of Greece (to 322 BC)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 577–581, and Plutarch, “Life of Timoleon,” in *Plutarch’s Lives*, 293–320.

⁴⁴ The right desires are the fruit of grasping the proper desirable things and of deliberating well, since election is a “deliberative desire” and the principle of practical reasoning is intellection or understanding of the good in the concrete surroundings (see *EN* 3.3.1113a10–12 and 6.11.1143a33–b14).

deliberate having already deliberated, and having [previously] already deliberated this. But there is some beginning [ἀρχή]. And one did not understand [ἐνόησε] having understood previously to understanding and so indefinitely. Therefore, understanding is not the beginning [ἀρχή] of having understood, nor deliberation of having deliberated. What else, then, except fortune? In this way everything will come from fortune [or chance]. Or is there some beginning out of which there is no other and which is such in being that in some way it could do this [or bring this about]? What is sought is this: what the principle of movement in the soul is. It is manifest that in the same way God is in the whole, so equally it is in that case. Because somehow what is divine in us moves everything. But the principle [ἀρχή] of reason is not reason, but something better. What then would be better than both science and intellect except God? (EE 7.14.1248a16–29)⁴⁵

The conclusion of this section, considered in conjunction with another section of the same passage (EE 7.14.1247a27–1248b6) a little afterwards, where it is stated that the divinely fortunate man's judgment is divinely corrected ("because it seems as well that the fortunate one succeeds because of a god";⁴⁶ 1248b4: διὸ καὶ δοκεῖ ὁ εὐτυχῆς διὰ θεὸν κατορθοῦν), leads one to the conclusion that there is clear intervention by God and the gods in things human. This was not denied by Aristotle in EN 10.8.1179a22–32, even if the passage of this latter work is much more sober. It is even indirectly confirmed by the work *On Divination in Sleep* (1.462b21–26) because there Aristotle not only does not *prima facie* exclude that God could be the cause of divinations in sleep, but he states that God's causality is the only plausible explanation, in case there is real divination in sleep.

My interpretation of the *Eudemian Ethics* is approximately in line with Anthony Kenny's interpretation, which holds that there are three kinds of fortunate men: the man who occasionally has good fortune, the man who consistently has good fortune due to nature (which Kenny divides in two and considers as non-genuine cases of good fortune), and the man who has good fortune because he acts inspired by God.⁴⁷ Julie Ponesse, instead, assumes that there is only one kind of fortunate

⁴⁵ Here I offer a literal translation, the meaning of which is the same as the Revised Oxford Translation.

⁴⁶ Again, here I offer a literal translation, with the same meaning as the Revised Oxford.

⁴⁷ Kenny, *Perfect Life*, 73–75.

man, the one due to nature, and holds therefore that always the immediate cause of good fortune is nature and the ultimate cause chance.⁴⁸ Against her, Myrna Gabbe argues that there are two kinds of fortunate man, the occasionally and the naturally fortunate. But Gabbe holds that God, as a transcendent cause, originates the latter. Inasmuch as it accepts an intervention of God as a transcendent cause, her interpretation is similar to mine. However, she denies the difference between the divinely fortunate man and the naturally fortunate man for reasons similar to Julie Ponesse's.⁴⁹ Let us examine briefly this aspect of Ponesse's interpretation.

Ponesse excludes the possibility of the existence of the kind of good fortune due to God based on two arguments.⁵⁰ Both arguments are rather weak. The first one claims that the gods cannot favor the foolish with inspiration as they do not favor those who are asleep with divination, according to Aristotle. The second one claims that the grammatical constructions of the sentences used in *EE* 7.14.1248a38 and b4 exclude divine agency because it seems that the agent is simply a man who acts through God.⁵¹ Regarding the first argument, I agree that the gods do not favor the foolish. However, I shall reply that the

⁴⁸ Ponesse's interpretation of *EE* 7.14 holds that, in it, Aristotle strives to distinguish the prudent or wise man's way of acting from the fortunate man's way of acting; see her "Enthousiasmós and Moral Monsters in *Eudemian Ethics* VIII 2," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50.3 (2007): 315–337, at 329–330. She assumes that there is only one kind of fortunate man, the one due to nature, and holds, therefore, that always the immediate cause of good fortune is nature and the ultimate cause chance. It seems clear to me that Aristotle holds, in *EE* 7.14.1246b37–1248b7, that there are three kinds of good fortune: (1) that which is occasional and due to mere chance (1247b32–33: the agent chooses to do X and by chance does Y, which turns out to be good. Here I follow the Revised Oxford translation's text); (2) that which is consistent and due to nature (see 1247b20–28, 1247b 33–37, and 1248b4–5—EN speaks of them also, in a passage not considered by Ponesse: 10.9.1179b20–23); and, finally, (3) good fortune that is consistent and due to experience, habituation, and the intervention of God (see 1248a37–40 and 1248b3–4). In the main text, I place consistent good fortune due to experience, sharp eye, and/or habituation within natural good fortune. (See *EN* 6.11.1143a33–b14.)

⁴⁹ See Gabbe "Aristotle on the Starting-Point," 362, 364 and 375. She asserts, in fact, that to accept the existence of three kinds of fortunate men would amount to making God the steersman of those who do not use reason and quotes, in her support, *EE* 7.14.1247a29. But this passage refers to the naturally fortunate. Unfortunately, Gabbe does not sufficiently consider 1248b4–5, which explicitly distinguishes the naturally from the divinely fortunate man.

⁵⁰ There is a third one, but it simply intends to rule out that the word *enthousiasmós* used in 1248a34 must be interpreted as "divinely inspired."

⁵¹ See Ponesse, "Enthousiasmós and Moral Monsters," 324 and 328–329.

divinely fortunate man is not foolish at all. I suspect that Aristotle has in mind men such as Timoleon (unlike Ponesse, who expresses puzzlement about who could be the referent for the word “εὐτυχής” in these texts⁵²). This remarkable politician was certainly a fortunate man, but he was with equal certainty a prudent and wise man. His crossing the strait from Italy to Sicily and his strategic campaign for the defense of Syracuse against the Carthaginese forces were deeds in which, after doing all that prudence required, he also leapt into the unknown, with surprising success. It is no accident that Aristotle mentions navigation and strategy as examples of the presence of chance in human affairs (1247a5–6).⁵³

Regarding the second argument, I shall reply that Ponesse’s rendering of 1248b4 as “the fortunate man acts through God”⁵⁴ is not the best reading. My reading is more accurate: “the fortunate man succeeds because of God” (ὁ εὐτυχής διὰ θεὸν κατορθοῦν).⁵⁵ The correction of the reading already dissolves the difficulty supposedly posed to God’s causality by the grammatical construction.

I think we can safely add that there are two kinds of fortunate man owing to nature: the one who has good desires that lead him to a good outcome (*EE* 7.14.1247b33–39) and the one who cannot deliberate correctly or explain or teach why he acted as he did but nevertheless acted well, not only because he had a good desire but also because he had a sharp eye that allowed him to judge well the situation with reasoning (*EE* 7.14.1247b22 and 1248a36–38; *EN* 6.11.1143b7–14).⁵⁶

⁵² Ibid., 317.

⁵³ Moreover, I think it necessary to connect *EE* 7.14.1248a34–b5 to *EN* 6.11.1143a33–b14. These passages connected refer one, I think, to an important experience: human action takes place in concrete circumstances where the possible paths are infinite, so that to discern the right path is very hard and sometimes impossible. When it is impossible, then only the divinely fortunate ones can hit the right path. This kind of divine fortune does not contradict 1247a29 in the *EE* passage. The mention of the art of divination is connected to a common practice among the Greeks, down to Aristotle’s times: they did not venture an important battle without the good omens of the seers and/or the encouragement of god-sent dreams. See, for example, Plutarch, “Life of Pelopidas” (347–367, at 358–359) and “Life of Aristides” (391–411, at 399–401 and 403–404) in *Plutarch’s Lives*.

⁵⁴ See Ponesse, “Enthousiasmós and Moral Monsters,” 329.

⁵⁵ The Revised Oxford Translation reads “*owing to god*,” which is closer to my reading, I think, than to Ponesse’s.

⁵⁶ Kenny conflates this kind of naturally fortunate man with the divinely fortunate man, perhaps because he did not consider the relevant passage of *EN* 6 (*Perfect Life*, 73).

Both naturally fortunate men are different from the divinely fortunate because this one acts thanks to inspiration (ἐνθουσιασμός). Both the naturally and the divinely fortunate ones act in accordance with their impulse, and in this they are different from the occasionally fortunate (*EE* 7.14.1248b6 and 1247b30–33). In this context, it seems expedient to clarify one further point: the naturally and the divinely fortunate ones are not *foolish* and do not act *irrationally* or *against reason* or *knowledge*. Instead, they are *unreflective* (ἄφρονες) and act *without reasoning* (ἄνευ λόγου, ἄλογοι), *at the margin of right reasonings* (παρὰ τοὺς λογισμοὺς τοὺς ὀρθοὺς) and *at the margin of all sciences* (παρὰ πάσας τὰς ἐπιστήμας). Indeed, they see the right action or are propelled towards it without deliberation and therefore without being able to explain or to teach why it is good to act as they are acting.⁵⁷

Besides the kinds of fortunate men, another point in dispute is what is meant by the need of an initiating cause of deliberation and understanding in *EE* 7.14.1248a23–29. Gabbe brings two possibilities. I agree with the second one she considers, when quoting and criticizing C. Shield:⁵⁸ “individual instances of thought are not intentionally caused. We do not know what thought we are going to think next, until we actually think it. So from our perspective, they simply occur to us.”⁵⁹ In my opinion, what Aristotle has in mind is the flow of our consciousness and its being pointed towards a certain direction, towards deliberating, for example. What leads our consciousness from not deliberating to deliberating? Whence arises the desire to deliberate? Is it the mere happening of a physical stimulus and/or the contingent presence of a sensible reality as for desires in general it is said in *De motu animalium* chapter 6, lines 700b25–701a6, for example? Would not chance, in this case, rule our life? Aristotle establishes in 1248a18–29 of the *EE* passage that God is the initiator of all good deliberations that are not due to chance.⁶⁰ This allows him to state at 1248a29–b3 that God is

⁵⁷ In these points, I think, the Revised Oxford Translation is not accurate (see 1247b25–26, 1248a2–4, and 1248b5–7).

⁵⁸ The first one is that God as cause is needed to explain the rightly disposed nature of the naturally fortunate man (see Gabbe, “Aristotle on the Starting–Point,” 372). I think this possibility can be ruled out by one of Gabbe’s own statements. Indeed, according to her, 1248a23–29, which is the answer to the question posed in 1248a18–22, refers to “something [an *arché*] possessed by all” (ibid., 367). Thus, 1248a18–22 cannot refer only to the naturally fortunate ones, but to all.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 373.

⁶⁰ Anthony Kenny seems at first to hold that God, in this passage, is the cause of the right desire, not of the impulse to deliberate (*Perfect Life*, 72–73). But later

the initiator of the divinely fortunate man's decision without upsetting his conception of the general order of the cosmos: God's special intervention in the case of the divinely fortunate ones does not run against the natural order.

I cannot enter here into the discussion in which I think Gabbe settles another problematic aspect of the text: whether the initiator of deliberation is God metaphorically understood or literally God, an entity outside of our soul. She concludes that it is an entity outside of the soul and especially rules out that the initiator could be our will or a *noetic* principle acting beneath the conscious *noetic* activity.⁶¹

The last disputed point is that Gabbe asserts that God's causality in initiating good deliberations or the good decisions of the divinely fortunate ones is only final, whereas I, along with Kenny, hold that it is also efficient⁶²—initiating the activity of deliberation. But the only reasons Gabbe gives are (a) that if God were efficient cause here, then he would benefit the unreasoning and (b) that to have God as a proximate cause of deliberation would abolish the distinction between the deliberation of adults and children. Now, reason (a) we already considered in answering Ponesse. Regarding (b), we must argue that to have God as first cause does not imply the abolishment of secondary causes. If he starts the deliberation of a grown general, the general then will deliberate by using all of his knowledge of strategy and all of his experience, unlike a child.

Since the passage just elucidated from *EE* is very much connected to *EN* 10.8.1179a22–32, it seems that now we are in a good position to briefly examine Broadie's interpretation of the second one. She, unlike Zeller or Verdenius, does not describe Aristotle as incoherent or as "talking popular." She establishes well, arguing from the position of the text and the contents of the immediately precedent passages, that Aristotle means seriously what he states there.⁶³ She adds, however, that the passage is a serious philosophical reply to probable popular puzzlement caused by Aristotle's statement according to which the wise would be the happiest even if only "moderately equipped with external things"

(*ibid.*, 80–81) he clearly states that God is the starting point of the desire to deliberate and to understand (he speaks of *thinking* instead of *understanding*) at the right time.

⁶¹ Gabbe "Aristotle on the Starting-Point," 373–374.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 364 and 375. Actually, Kenny holds that God's causality in this context is efficient (*Perfect Life*, 79–82), but he does this in a timid way through a rhetorical question.

⁶³ Broadie, "Aristotelian Piety," 65–67.

and deprived from political power. In this context, she claims that Aristotle does not think that God or the gods can affect the course of human life⁶⁴ because, according to her, “traditional belief that the gods reward those who love them” is indeed popular⁶⁵ and childish. She adds that one needs not interpret Aristotle’s use of this *ἐνδοξον* “in terms of flocks and herds multiplying and ships coming home.”⁶⁶ Instead, “what Aristotle has in mind as vindicating the *éndoxon* is a familiar fact of intellectual experience: devoted thinking results, often enough, in bursts of understanding. This is the reward to the human thinker for intellection engaged in just for its own sake, . . . which Aristotle equates with service to the god that is *nous* or ‘something beyond *nous*.’”⁶⁷

Broadie’s interpretation has various problems, some of which I will leave aside for the present. However, it partially corresponds with what has been argued above: God’s care for the wise manifests itself in the order of the cosmos, where human life in accordance to what is highest in our nature (in accordance to intelligence) would produce in human beings the highest kind of happiness.

However, there is another aspect of Broadie’s interpretation that is ambiguous and that I must clarify now. She is correct when she asserts that God’s care of the wise must not be understood “in terms of flocks and herds multiplying and ships coming home.” To think that God’s reward of virtue (ethical or theoretical) could consist in wealth or in other external goods would be quite inadequate and even vulgar, as Plato establishes in the *Republic*, beginning in 2.358–367. But from what has been stated follows that God can affect human lives in a different way: by initiating people’s deliberations. Moreover, it is clear that both Plato and Aristotle held: (a) that there is a connection between being “loved by the gods” and being “favored by them;”⁶⁸ (b) that the essence

⁶⁴ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁵ Verdenius claims that this passage is serious, that the belief in providence is popular, and that Aristotle, nevertheless, seriously shares in it (“Traditional and Personal Elements,” 60–61). Broadie notes that Richard Bodéüs holds that there is providence according to Aristotle, but that such would be the care that the gods that are honored in the city have for human affairs (“Aristotelian Piety,” 62n24). It is clear to me that Aristotle’s conception of God is far purer than the popular one, although he interprets the latter allegorically and saves it. But it is also clear, as I will contend in the text, that the purest and truest conception of God includes His care for things human.

⁶⁶ Broadie, “Aristotelian Piety,” 64.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 64–65.

⁶⁸ This is explicitly held, for example, in *EN* 10.8.1179a22–32 and in *EE* 7.14.1247a27–1248b6.

of happiness or beatitude is not accidentally connected to virtue;⁶⁹ (c) that the highest beatitude is found in the practice of the highest of virtues, wisdom, which does not need many external goods, an opinion on which the wise agree (*EN* 10.8.1179a17: συμφωνεῖν δὴ τοῖς λόγοις εὐοικασιν αἱ τῶν σοφῶν δόξαι);⁷⁰ and (d) that the god-beloved is happy and vice versa (see *Apology* 30d–31a, 40a–42a;⁷¹ *Republic* 10.621c–d;⁷² *Laws* 10.904a–905c; and *EE* 7.14, for example 1247a26–28: “so, the fortunate man has a good pilot, namely, the divinity. But it is absurd that a god or divinity should love such a man and not the best and most prudent one”;⁷³ ἀλλ’ οὗτος εὐτυχῆς τὸν δαίμον’ ἔχει κυβερνήτην ἀγαθόν. ἀλλ’ ἄτοπον θεὸν ἢ δαίμονα φιλεῖν τὸν τοιοῦτον, ἀλλὰ μὴ τὸν βέλτιστον καὶ τὸν φρονιμώτατον). Thus, both philosophers held that there is divine retribution, even if certainly not in the way criticized by Adeimantus in *Republic* 2.362–367. True happiness, by divine disposition, belongs to the best man. Moreover, the gods truly take care of him precisely because that man acknowledges that every choice is good if and only if it brings one to the contemplation and the service of God, as Aristotle taught in *EE* 7.15.1249b19–21. There is, then, according to both Plato and Aristotle, a conception of divine providence over the good and the wise that is very different from their contemporary popular belief.⁷⁴ In this line, Dominique Scott points out that Aristotle truly means what he states in *EN* 10.8.1179a27–28, that contemplation brings honor from the gods.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ See, for example, *EN* 1.7.1198a16–18 and *Republic* 9.580b.

⁷⁰ Points b and c will be briefly shown in the third section of this essay.

⁷¹ The *Apology*’s texts I take from R. G. Bury in *Plato*, vol. 1 (1971), 61–145.

⁷² The *Republic*’s texts I take from R. G. Bury in *Plato*, vol. 4 (1972), 327–621.

⁷³ I follow the Revised Oxford Translation, except that I replace “the most wise of men” with “the most prudent one.” The best and most prudent one, or the wisest according to *EN*, is the most God-beloved. And they are the happiest, as argued in chapter 10, for example.

⁷⁴ Many have denied divine providence because they identify it with popular belief, including Berti (in *Estructura y significado*, 159). He attempts to ground his opinion in the final passage of *EN* 10.8.1074b4–8, a passage that clearly gives no ground to Berti’s claim: “The rest of the tradition has been added later in mythical form with a view to the persuasion of the multitude and to its legal and utilitarian expediency; they say these gods are in the form of men or like some of the other animals, and they say other things consequent on and similar to these which we have mentioned.” It is one thing to denounce anthropomorphism in Greek popular religion (which truly was anthropomorphic), but a very different thing to deny divine providence.

⁷⁵ Dominic Scott, “Aristotle on Well-Being and Intellectual Contemplation,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes 73 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1999), 225–242, at 239.

Does the Bad Fortune of the Virtuous and Wise Exclude Divine Providence?

The previous section must face a hard problem. According to Aristotle, chance or fortune has or may have a heavy influence on the happiness of life. How could we assert that God cares for things human, then, if the wise and virtuous could be unhappy? We must turn our sight briefly to the Aristotelian conception of happiness, its relationship to fortune, and the implications of this relationship on the theological conception of divine providence.

The first and most obvious answer to this question is that, according to Aristotle, not everything lies under God's providence. Aristotle does not consider God as the Creator of the world. For this reason, when he enumerates the most universal efficient causes, nature, intelligence and chance,⁷⁶ he, unlike Aquinas, does not feel any necessity to explain how chance also comes under the rule of intelligence, of divine Providence.⁷⁷ This is the reason why the existence of the wise and virtuous man's bad fortune cannot be laid at the feet of God. The cosmos is a bipolar reality (between God and matter—or *matters*: celestial and terrestrial). Matter as a co-principle of the cosmos is the ultimate cause of chance and fortune (see *Met.* 6.2.1027a8–14).

However, the wise and virtuous man is not at the mercy of fortune. The essence of happiness is activity in accordance to virtue and to highest virtue, as has been articulated by many competent scholars.⁷⁸ This virtue is, above all, virtue of the highest part of human nature, intelligence. Some have shown as well that a minimum of good fortune plays a role, not as an integral part of happiness but as “merely necessary

⁷⁶ *Physics* 2.6.198a1ff.

⁷⁷ Aquinas, in his commentary to *Physics* 2.6.198a1ff, after showing its meaning, adds an observation that goes beyond the text introduced with the typical clause (*considerandum est autem*), according to which chance is under a higher cause (divine providence) in comparison with which it is not chance (but it is real chance in comparison to its effects). See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaria in Octos Libros Physicorum* at www.corpusthomicum.org/cpy012.html.

⁷⁸ I will mention just three: Pritzl, “Aristotle and Happiness”; David Charles, “Aristotle on Well-Being and Intellectual Contemplation,” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes 73 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1999), 205–223, at 212 and 220–222 (but Charles tends to use “virtue” only for moral virtue, and not for *dianoetic* virtues); and Scott, “Aristotle on Well-Being and Intellectual Contemplation,” 231 and 237–240 (who shows well that *eudaimonia* is not a combination of many goods but is virtuous activity, which entails pleasure and honor, etc.).

conditions of happiness.”⁷⁹ This is how Aristotle answers to the challenge posed by Priam’s example and Solon’s warning, “look at the end” of life before you judge whether a man has been happy or not: “virtuous activity of the soul is decisive (*kýriai*; *EN* 1.10.1100b9–11 and b33–34) for establishing the happiness of the individual. Although not decisive, good and bad fortune do play a role in a person’s happiness. Good fortune enhances the happiness achieved by virtuous activity (1100b25–28), and bad fortune tests the mettle of the virtuous individual (1100b28–33), but neither can reverse the condition made stable by virtue.”⁸⁰ In truth, the virtuous man cannot be made unhappy by bad fortune, because “no blessed man could ever become miserable; for he will never do the acts that are hateful and mean. For the man who is truly good and wise, we think, bears all the chances of life becomingly and always makes the best of circumstances, as a good general makes the best military use of the army at his command. . . . And if this is the case, the happy man can never become miserable—though he will not reach blessedness, if he meets with fortunes like those of Priam”

⁷⁹ Pritzl, “Aristotle and Happiness,” 102. In line with this interpretation, I think, is Devereux, when he asserts that happiness as *the* good cannot be made more choice-worthy by the addition of any other goods (Review of A. Kenny’s *Aristotle on the Perfect Life*, 481–482).

⁸⁰ Pritzl, “Aristotle and Happiness,” 101–111, at 108. Terence Irwin is in complete agreement with the general lines of Pritzl’s interpretation in *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and intro. Terence Irwin, with notes and glossary (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 188–190 (notes to chs. 10–11 of *NE* 1). Kenny is also in agreement (*Aristotle on the Perfect Life*, 79). Robert C. Bartlett disagrees with this interpretation in his “Aristotle’s Introduction to the Problem of Happiness: On Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,” *American Journal of Political Science* 52.3 (July 2008): 677–687, at 684. I, of course, agree with Pritzl, Irwin, and Kenny, on the one hand, and disagree with Bartlett, on the other, but I cannot here enter into a detailed analysis of Bartlett’s sophisticated reading. His interpretation conceives of Aristotle as something like an ancient Straussian who has several audiences in mind when he writes, and therefore several levels of writing. I have dealt with this kind of readings of Plato and Aristotle in general on other occasions, and it has taken the form of a separate investigation. I can point out, however, that Bartlett’s interpretation clearly rings as anachronistic, at least in some passages. It rings so, for example, when it states that “the teaching of Book I of the *Ethics* that is at once most fundamental and least obvious is that ‘the human good’ is not indeed happiness” (684), or that “insincere as they may be, Aristotle’s remarks about the divine in Book I nonetheless serve altogether serious purposes. And if prudential calculation no longer demands that we today pay careful attention to ‘the divine,’ self-knowledge does demand it” (686).

(1100b33–1101a8).⁸¹ If this is so, then the ways in which divine providence acts over the world and cares for things human are effective also when a virtuous man suffers bad fortune.

Conclusions

According to Aristotle, God cares about the world and especially about virtuous and wise persons. This care is exercised in ways that are compatible with God's immutability. The problem that divine immutability poses to God's care for the world is one of the hardest in philosophy. Probably for this reason, Aristotle expressed himself about this in a tentative way. Thus, in *EN* 10.8.1179a22–32, he writes that God cares about the wise "as it seems." But explicitly, Aristotle states that God cares about the world and about persons who make the right deliberations and elections in two ways: (a) through the order of the cosmos and (b) as the starting point of their deliberation and understanding. Since Aristotle does not hold the creation of the world, however, according to him, divine providence is not responsible for the unreasonable effects of chance (e.g., large misfortunes of the wise and virtuous), but rather, allows the victim of chance, if virtuous and prudent, to endure those effects without unhappiness. N-V

⁸¹ Werner Jaeger points out that, according to Aristotle, there is an exception: Plato. To Plato Aristotle dedicated the altar of friendship, through this inscription: "to the only man or the first man who clearly revealed, with his own life and with the methods of his words, how a man comes to be good and happy at the same time. Now it is impossible that anybody else could reach both things again," as quoted in Jaeger, *Aristóteles, bases para la historia de su desarrollo intelectual* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984): 125–131.