

The Finality of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover in the *Metaphysics* Book 12, Chapters 7 and 10

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I. Book 12, Chapter 7

FOR roughly ten years I have been exploring the possibility of an interpretation of the causality of Aristotle's unmoved mover that differs from the traditional one. According to the traditional interpretation, this causality is exclusively final in the sense that the unmoved mover moves the heaven and, through it, the entire universe, as final cause, that is, as an object of

English translation by Laurie Malashanko. Quotations from Aristotle are often taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). Occasionally a translation from the latter work is adjusted in order to correspond more closely to Prof. Berti's argumentation and/or Italian translations; occasionally, for the same reason, a fresh English translation is provided.

Aristotle posits a number of celestial spheres (by one count, 55) each of which is called a "heaven" (in Greek, *ouranos*). The first heaven—or the farthest sphere—is sometimes understood as embracing the whole "sky" (as in "the night sky") and, in such cases, the term 'the heaven' (*ho ouranos*) is equivalent to our "the heavens." But to use the expression "the heavens" in such contexts would cause confusion, since the term could also refer to Aristotle's plural heavens (the celestial spheres), which present distinct philosophical issues having to do with their relationship with the first heaven and its unmoved mover. In order to avoid any confusion, we translate the singular term (whether Italian or Greek) as singular, the plural as plural, even though in standard English the heavens are not referred to as "the heaven." When the word "heavens" appears here, it refers to the various celestial spheres.

Another translation difficulty has to do with the Italian expression *stare bene*, which Berti (following Aristotle) uses with respect to God (the first unmoved mover). The expression is difficult to translate into English without resorting to expressions that are inappropriately used of God: the Italian *sto bene* means basically "I'm in good shape" or "I feel good." We have chosen to translate *stare bene* with

love.¹ The most important passage (or, rather, perhaps the only passage) on which the traditional interpretation is based is from Book 12, Chapter 7 of the *Metaphysics*, specifically the lines 1072a26–1072b4. Even though this is quite a famous passage, I include it in full for the reader's convenience:

The object of desire and the object of thought (*to orekton kai to noêton*) move in this way; they move without being moved. Of these, the first are identical. The object of sensible desire is the apparently beautiful, while the primary object of rational desire is the truly beautiful. But we desire (*oregometha*) it because it seems beautiful, rather than its seeming beautiful because we desire it, for the starting point is the intellection. The intellect is moved by the intelligible, but the in-itself-intelligible is one of the two series, and in this, substance is first, and of substance, that which is simple and in act (the one and the simple are not the same, for 'one' signifies a measure, but 'simple' signifies a way of being). But the beautiful and that which is in itself desirable are found in the same series, and the first is always best or analogous to the best. That the end is found among the immobile things is shown by the distinction, for the end is for someone, of which the one is immobile, the other not. It moves as loved, and by means of that which is moved it moves the other things.²

In my opinion this passage, traditionally interpreted as demonstrating that the unmoved mover of the heaven is a final cause, is not speaking about the unmoved mover of the heaven but rather about the object of human desire and human intelligence, as follows from the use of the first person plural (*oregometha*, "we desire"). This object, as also evident in *De anima*, moves while remaining unmoved, through the desiring faculty (*to orektikon*), which faculty (as opposed to the object) moves while being itself moved.³ The primary object of human desire and the primary

the expression "to be fine" (or the corresponding derivative expressions), as in the answer someone might make to the question, "How are you?" ("I am fine.") This translation has the disadvantage that people tend to use "I am fine" in a defensive manner ("You look terrible!" "I'm fine") which is not the connotation here; but it has the advantage of being close semantically to the Greek words *eu* and *kalos* frequently employed by Aristotle when speaking of God.

¹ My principal studies on this theme are found in the second volume of E. Berti, *Nuovi studi aristotelici* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005).

² Aristotle, *Metaph.* XII 7, 1072a26–b4. For the lines 1072b2–3, I accept the reading of all manuscripts as printed by Bekker, but not the emendations of Christ, Ross, and Jaeger. That reading is, in fact, sufficient to explain the distinction between the end, which is immobile, and that of which it is the end, which instead is moved by the end.

³ Aristotle, *De anima* III 10, where he says that the object of human desire (*to orekton*) moves (while remaining unmoved) the faculty of appetite (*to orektikon*), which in turn moves (while being moved) man.

object of human intelligence—as Aristotle asserts in the passage given above—coincide, because the primary object of human desire, which is the supreme good (*ariston*), coincides with the primary object of thought, which is that substance that is simple and exists actually. Now, following from Chapter 7, as well as from other Aristotelian texts, it emerges that the supreme good of man is *theôria*.⁴ That which is a simple substance, as is evident in various passages of the *Metaphysics*, is form.⁵ In the case of man, the form is the intellective soul, that is, the intellect (*nous*), and *theôria* is the intellect's activity; therefore, Aristotle can say that that which is primarily intelligible, i.e., the form, and that which is primarily desirable, i.e., *theôria*, coincide.

This good cannot be the unmoved mover of the heaven because—as follows from *De anima* III 10, 433b15–16—that which moves desire is always a practicable good (*to prakton agathon*), i.e., contingent, whereas the unmoved mover of the heaven is in no way practicable, or achievable by means of an action. That which “moves as loved” (*kinei hós erômenon*) is therefore the primary object of human desire and human thought, i.e., *theôria*, which, “by means of that which is moved,” i.e., the faculty of appetite, “moves other things,” i.e., human beings. The unmoved mover of the heaven moves in the same way, not because it also is an object of desire, but because it moves while remaining unmoved, and by means of the first heaven, which is moved, other things are moved, i.e., the other heavens, the sun, and earthly things (“nature”). But this does not mean that it also [i.e., the unmoved mover] is the object of desire and thought: It moves as the moving cause of the heaven,⁶ not as final cause of the heaven or of any other thing. The entire passage is only a comparison that notes how both the heavenly mover and the object of human desire move while remaining unmoved and move by means of something that is moved.⁷

In the subsequent lines, Aristotle resumes speaking of the unmoved mover of the heaven and notes the difference between the unmoved mover

⁴ This follows from what he affirms further on in the same chapter, i.e., in 1072b24, and in *Nicomachean Ethics* X 6–7.

⁵ That that which is a simple substance is the form follows from *Metaph.* VII 17, 1041b9–11, and IX 10, 1051b26–28.

⁶ In *Metaph.* XII 6, 1071b12, Aristotle calls it *kinêtikon ê poiêtikon*, i.e., “motor or efficient.”

⁷ That the entire passage is referring to the object of human desire and not the unmoved mover of the heaven has also been pointed out by Annick Stevens in a paper presented at an Aristotelian seminar on causality, held in Brussels in September 2002; cf. A. Stevens, “La causalité de l'intellect dans la *Métaphysique* et le traité *De l'Âme*,” in *La causalité chez Aristote*, ed. L. Couloubaritis and S. Delcomminette (Paris: Vrin; Bruxelles: Ousia, 2011), 125–38.

of the heaven and the heaven itself: the heaven can be other than it is, i.e., it is contingent, because its movement is local, whereas the unmoved mover, inasmuch as it is unmoved, could not in any sense be other than it is; that is, it is a necessary being, and for this reason “is fine” (*kalôs*), and it is in this sense that it is a principle (*kai houtôs arkhê*).⁸ At this point, Aristotle recalls the various meanings of the term “necessary” distinguished in Book 5 of the *Metaphysics* (his dictionary of philosophical terms), that is: “that which is by compulsion (in the sense that it is contrary to desire), that without which something is not fine, and that which cannot be otherwise, but is in a single way (*haplôs*).”⁹ Right after this he adds, “on such a principle (*ek toiautês arkhês*) depend the heaven and nature.”¹⁰ Since the primary meaning of the term “necessary” mentioned is that which cannot be otherwise, there is no doubt that the unmoved mover is a necessary principle in this sense; however, it could also be a necessary principle in the sense of “necessary” that is mentioned just prior, as that which is a condition of being fine, that is to say of the realization, on the part of the heaven and of nature, of their good. In Book 5, it emerges that necessary principles in this sense are such things as breathing and food, which are necessary to live, or medicine, necessary in order to regain health, or travelling via ship, necessary to acquire goods. We are talking, therefore, not about final causes but rather conditions, i.e., efficient causes. That which is necessary is not the end in any of these cases because, if the necessary is understood as that which cannot be otherwise, it is not practicable, and if it is understood as that which is necessary for being fine, it is an efficient cause and does not coincide with the good for which it is necessary. The unmoved mover could be a necessary principle as a condition of the good of the heaven and other things since, in causing the movement of the heaven, it permits the heaven, along with all the other things that are moved by the heaven, to attain their good. In the case of heavenly bodies this good consists in their circular movements, and in the case of earthly bodies, particularly living things, in their eternal reproduction.¹¹

Later on, Aristotle explains that the unmoved mover of the heaven undertakes an activity that is pleasure (*hêdonê*), and is therefore thought (*noêsis*), because even for man thought is the most pleasing activity there is, except that man enjoys it only in certain moments, whereas the unmoved mover always enjoys it. For this reason, i.e., because it thinks, it is a living being—thought is in fact a form of life—and, in being a living

⁸ *Metaph.* XII 7, 1072b4–13.

⁹ *Metaph.* XII 7, 1072b12–13; cf. *Metaph.* V 5, 1015a20–26.

¹⁰ *Metaph.* XII 7, 1072b13–14.

¹¹ Aristotle, *De anima* II 4, 415a35–b3.

being that is supremely good and eternal, because it eternally undertakes the most pleasing of all activities, it corresponds to the definition that the Greeks gave the gods (i.e., “immortal and supremely good living beings”) and it is therefore a god. For the same reason the supreme principle, notwithstanding Speusippus, is also supreme beauty and supreme goodness (*to kalliston kai ariston*).¹²

But for Aristotle, pleasure indicates that somebody is carrying out an activity that is an end in itself; thus the unmoved mover of the heaven, inasmuch as it takes delight, carries out an activity that is an end in itself. In the first treatise on pleasure in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle in fact affirms that pleasures are not forms of generation, i.e., they are not processes, but “activities and end” (*energeiai kai telos*)¹³ and that “God always enjoys a single and simple pleasure; for there is not only an activity of movement but an activity of immobility, and pleasure is found more in rest than in movement.”¹⁴ And in the second treatise on the same argument, contained in the same work, he affirms that “pleasure accompanies activity,” in which by activity he means precisely not a movement but an activity that is an end for itself.¹⁵

In addition, in a famous passage from *De caelo*, in order to explain why the heaven moves in a single movement whereas the planets move in many movements, Aristotle affirms: “For it is plausible that the best-conditioned of all things should have its good without action, that that which is nearest to it should achieve it by little and simple action, and that which is farther removed by a complexity of actions.”¹⁶ This signifies that the unmoved mover eternally attains its own good, i.e., its own end, while remaining immobile, while the first heaven, which is nearest to it, attains its good through a single action, i.e., circular movement, and the planets, which are further away, attain their good through the means of many actions, i.e., many movements. The unmoved mover, therefore, is an end in itself, whereas the heaven has circular movement as its end and the planets have as their end the many movements to which they are subject. In *De caelo*, Aristotle also affirms, “while the perfectly conditioned has no need of action, since it is itself the end (*esti gar auto to hou heneka*), and action always requires two terms, that is, both the end and that which is for the end.”¹⁷ Therefore, the unmoved mover, which exists in the

¹² *Metaph.* XII 7, 1072b14–34.

¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII 13, 1153a10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15, 1154b26–28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, X 4, 1175a5.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *De caelo* II 12, 292a22–24.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 292b4–7.

highest state possible, is itself the end. But of whom is it the end? Of itself, because the affirmation that it is the end justifies the fact that there is no need for any action in order to bring it about.

II. Book 12, Chapter 10

Chapter 10 is a little-studied chapter, as evidenced by the scarcity of commentary dedicated to it, and the most recent study of it, David Sedley's, is influenced by the traditional interpretation of the unmoved mover as final cause.¹⁸ The entire chapter deals with the problem of how the universe (*hê tou holou phusis*) possesses the good or the highest good, whether as something separate (*kekhôrismenon ti*), or as an order (*taxis*), or in both ways. Aristotle's response encompasses this last option: The supreme good is like an army general, i.e., it is separate, and it is the unmoved mover of the heaven; however, order is also a good—the immanent order of the universe—which is nonetheless subordinate to the unmoved mover, because the unmoved mover is the cause.¹⁹ The good in which the unmoved mover consists is evidently an efficient cause, in the way a general is the efficient cause of an army's order. The unmoved mover is the supreme good first of all because it is prime, eternal, and maximally self-sufficient, i.e., "because it is fine" (*dioti eu echei*).²⁰ It is the supreme good, then, because it is the cause of that good which is order, the highest of which is the order of the universe; or better put, it [i.e., order] is a realizable good (*prakton*) thanks to the action of the unmoved mover, and in this sense it can be considered a final cause.

"And all things," Aristotle continues, "are ordered together somehow (*suntetaktai pôs*)"—fish, birds, and plants—"but not all alike (*oukh homoiôs*)," i.e., not in the sense that they all have the same end.²¹ In fact, in the *Eudemian Ethics* I 8, 1218a30–33 Aristotle affirms: "And to say that all existing things desire some one good (*henos tinos agathou*) is not true; for each seeks its own special good (*idiou agathou*), the eye vision, the body health, and so on." Yet, things do not lack relations with each other; something is held in common, "for all are coordinated in relation to one (*pros men gar hen hapanta suntetaktai*)."²² This "one," in relation to which all things are coordinated, i.e., are in order, is not an end but is rather the cause of the order; namely, it is the unmoved mover of the heaven, which

¹⁸ D. Sedley, "Lambda 10," in *Aristotle's Metaphysics Lambda: Symposium Aristotelicum*, ed. M. Frede and D. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 327–50.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Metaph.* XII 10, 1075a11–15.

²⁰ Cf. *Metaph.* XIV 4, 1091b14–20.

²¹ *Metaph.* XII 10, 1075a16–17.

²² *Ibid.*, 1075a16–19.

is an efficient cause. Likewise in a house, Aristotle continues, the freemen act in an ordered way, while the servants and animals at times act randomly, contributing little to the common good (*to koinon*), i.e., to the order. The same thing occurs in the universe, “for this is the sort of principle that constitutes the nature of each. I mean, for instance, that all must at least come to be dissolved into their elements, and there are other functions similarly in which all share for the good of the whole.”²³ In short, because all things can participate in the whole (i.e., take part in the universe, in coming to be), it is necessary that some of them cease to be in order to give way to others, and this is the order, i.e., the common good, the good of nature. The direct cause of this generation and corruption, as Aristotle explains in Book 12, Chapter 6, is the annual motion of the sun along the ecliptic, which determines the changing seasons, and the primary cause of the sun’s annual motion is the unmoved mover of the heaven.²⁴

At this point, after having thoroughly expounded a proper understanding of the good, Aristotle, as is his custom, compares it with the thought of preceding and contemporary philosophers. Those who posit contraries as principles err, first of all, because they do not realize contraries require a third principle, i.e., a substratum, and, secondly, because they identify the good with one of the two principles (Plato), with the result that all things, besides participating in the good, also participate in evil. If, on the other hand, they do not identify the good with either of the two principles (Speusippus), then they do not realize that “in all things the good is in the highest degree a principle (*en hapasi malista to agathon arkhê*).” The first thinkers are right, but they do not explain how the good is a principle, “whether as final cause or as moving cause or as form (*poteron hôs telos ê hôs kinêsan ê hôs eidos*).”²⁵ Thus, for Aristotle the good is a principle, but it needs to be specified in what way: The alternatives he proposes, as final cause, as moving cause, or as form, are evidently diverse, so the different types of causes cannot be identified with each other. Furthermore, in the whole *Metaphysics* he says that the moving cause can be identical with the form and end only in species, in the case of animals, not in number.²⁶

Empedocles, Aristotle continues, identifies the good with friendship, but he errs because he conceives friendship as a moving cause and he conceives it together with the material cause, whereas these two causes

²³ Ibid., 1075a19–25.

²⁴ *Metaph.* XII 6, 1072a9–17.

²⁵ *Metaph.* XII 10, 1075a25–b1.

²⁶ Cf. *Metaph.* VII 8, 1033b30–1034a9; VIII 4, 1044a32–b1.

are in essence diverse. In addition, he errs because he identifies evil with strife, considering it imperishable.²⁷ Yet again, therefore, Aristotle desires that the types of causes be kept well distinguished from each other.

Anaxagoras, treated next by Aristotle, posits the good as a moving principle; in fact, he identifies it with *Nous*, which moves: "But it moves for the sake of something, which must be other than it (*host'heteron*), unless it is as we say (*plên hōs hēmeis legomen*), for medicine is in a certain sense health."²⁸ In Book 3, 984b15–22, Aristotle notes that Anaxagoras posits *Nous* as "the cause of the world and of all its order (*aition tou kosmou kai tēs taxēōs pasēs*)," that is, as the "cause of its being fine (*tou kalōs tēn aitian*)"; however, he conceives of it as a cause from which movement derives, i.e., as an efficient cause, and for this reason Anaxagoras's view seems sensible with respect to all of his predecessors, who spoke at random. Aristotle, therefore, does not disapprove of Anaxagoras's conception of the good as an efficient cause, but he objects that *Nous* of which Anaxagoras speaks acts in view of an end—and this means that the good, inasmuch as it is an end, is different from *Nous* (*host'heteron* can refer both to the good and the end). This seems to be a difficulty, because he puts forth two diverse goods without explaining what relation there is between them. Nonetheless, Aristotle suggests remedying this difficulty through recourse to his doctrine according to which "medicine is in a certain sense health." This doctrine, as noted, considers medicine as the art that permits the physician to procure health, because it contains ideally the form of health, and this therefore ensures that the physician, inasmuch as he realizes a form he possesses in his mind precisely because he is a physician, in a certain sense realizes himself, i.e., is an end in himself, and does not have an end other than himself.²⁹

If this doctrine is applied to that *Nous* which for Aristotle is the unmoved mover of the heaven, one must admit that the unmoved mover of the heaven possesses in its own mind the form of the order of which it is the efficient cause in the universe, whereupon, bringing about the cosmic order, it does not act in view of an end different from itself, but acts having, in a certain sense, itself as the end. Aristotle's unmoved mover emerges in this way as similar to the demiurge of the *Timaeus*, which brings order out of disorder, so that a beautiful world is brought about, because the demiurge itself is good and gazes upon a beautiful model (the world of Ideas). Yet, the difference remains, for which Aristotle reproaches the *Timaeus*, that the organizing action of the demiurge presupposes an exter-

²⁷ *Metaph.* XII 10, 1075b1–7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1075b8–11.

²⁹ Cf. *Metaph.* VII 7, 1032a3–b6.

nal model (of which Aristotle denies the existence) and brings the world from a preexisting disorder to order, establishing an order that at first did not exist, and is therefore generated; whereas the moving action of the unmoved mover is exerted all along and forever, for which reason it causes order, but rather than a generated order it is an eternal one. Yet, perhaps it is not necessary to overemphasize this allusion of Aristotle to his doctrine of medicine and health, which only serves to critique Anaxagoras.

Philosophers, Aristotle continues, who posit contraries as principles (i.e., the Platonists) do not explain how some things are corruptible and others incorruptible, since all of them derive from the same principles, whereas it is necessary to admit diverse principles (the four earthly elements for corruptible things, ether for those incorruptible).³⁰ They do not explain, moreover, how there is constant generation and what the cause of generation is (which for Aristotle is the sun, moved in its turn by the prime mover).³¹ Lastly, they do not explain how sensible things participate in the Ideas, whereas for Aristotle, in addition to the two contrary principles (form and matter) a superior principle (*arkhê kuriôtera*) is needed that explains such a participation, i.e., an efficient cause, the unmoved mover.³²

These same philosophers, Aristotle observes, admit a principle contrary “to wisdom, i.e., to the highest knowledge (*têi sophiai kai têi timiôtatêi epistêmêi*),” whereas they do not need to admit it, because there is nothing contrary to that which is primary and because the opposite of knowledge would be ignorance.³³ Here Aristotle is clearly thinking of the unmoved mover posited by himself, which possesses wisdom and the highest knowledge, as evident in *Metaphysics* Book 1, Chapter 2, 983a9–10, i.e., it knows the first causes and cosmic order of which it is the efficient cause. The ideas and numbers set forth by Plato, on the other hand, do not cause movement, i.e., they are not efficient causes but only formal causes and as such do not explain that which has size and is extended. Additionally, neither of Plato’s two contrary principles (the one and the indefinite dyad) are “that which is in itself both efficient and moving (*hoper kai poiêtikon kai kinêtikon*),” which instead for Plato is the world’s soul. But this, inasmuch as it moves itself, is in potency, and therefore it could also have the possibility of not moving, or at least its doing is posterior to its potency (*husteron ge to poiein dunameôs*), for which reason this does not explain the existence of an eternal movement, which is that of the heaven.³⁴

³⁰ *Metaph.* XII 10, 1075b11–14.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 16–18.

³² *Ibid.*, 18–20.

³³ *Ibid.*, 20–22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1075b22–34. Cf. XII 6, 1071b19–22.

The Platonists, moreover, do not explain how numbers form a unity, or how the soul and body form a unity, or in general the unity of form and the thing, “unless one speaks as do we (Aristotle), saying that the mover produces this unity (*hôs to kinoun poiei*).”³⁵ As is evident, the entire critique of the Platonists revolves around the absence, in their doctrine, of an efficient cause (*kinêtikon, poiêtikon, kinoun, poiein*), which is present in Aristotle’s doctrine, and is the unmoved mover of the heaven.

Whoever admits, Aristotle lastly concludes, mathematical number as a principle (i.e., Speusippus), and thereby always admits another reality that comes next and diverse principles for diverse realities (i.e., a series of successive levels of reality, each with its own principles), renders the reality of the universe episodic, since each reality in no way contributes to the others, either by its existence or by its non-existence, and admits of many principles. Things, however, must not be governed (*politeuesthai*) badly, “The rule of many is not good; let there be one ruler.”³⁶ In citing this Homeric verse, recalling the supreme command of the Greek army entrusted to Agamemnon,³⁷ Aristotle again takes up the metaphor of the army general, with which he began the chapter, and he yet again identifies the supreme good with the general, as the cause of good rule, that is, of order.

On the whole, therefore, Book 12, Chapter 10 reinforces the Aristotelian conception of the good of the universe as the unmoved mover of the heaven, the efficient cause of that subordinate good that is the cosmic order, consisting of the fact that each thing tends toward its own good, but in a way that is coordinated with all the others. The only novelty introduced by Aristotle’s discussion of other philosophers seems to be the critique of Anaxagoras’s *Nous*, which acts in view of another, unless conceived according to the Aristotelian doctrine in which the artist who produces an object succeeds in realizing the form constituted by his own art, i.e., by himself. If one is obligated to apply this observation to the unmoved mover, one would have to admit that the unmoved mover is an Intellect, which, however, as opposed to that posited by Anaxagoras, contains in itself the idea of the cosmic order, and thus, in causing the order, has itself as an end. This conception finds little textual verification in Aristotle, if one sets aside the passage already cited from the *Metaphysics* Book 1, Chapter 2, where it is stated that the science of first causes is divine because, in addition to having God as its object, who is one of the first causes, God alone or God above all others can have it.³⁸ If in fact

³⁵ Ibid., 1075b34–37.

³⁶ Ibid., 1075b37–1076a4.

³⁷ Homer, *Iliad* II, 204.

³⁸ *Metaph.* I 2, 983a5–10.

God, i.e., the unmoved mover, possesses the knowledge of first causes, because he knows himself, one must admit that in knowing himself as the cause of the cosmic order he possess the knowledge of the same cosmic order. In any case, the unmoved mover of whom Aristotle speaks cannot be conceived of as an artist, who first conceives of a project and then carries it out, because he moves the heaven eternally. The reason, in fact, why Aristotle refused to accept a demiurge such as that described in the *Timaeus* is that he judges this conception to be too anthropomorphic and incompatible with his doctrine of the eternity of the world.

III. Appendix

In order to elucidate and support the interpretation proposed of Book 12, Chapters 7 and 10, it is useful to cite other passages, set forth in various works of Aristotle, that regard single points treated in Book 12. One of these is in the *Eudemian Ethics* I 7, where Aristotle distinguishes practicable (*prakta*) and non-practicable goods (*ou prakta*). The latter he identifies with beings that do not participate in movement (i.e., with the unmoved movers of the heaven) and are by nature best (*arista*). The practicable goods are divided in turn into those that are practicable for human beings and those that are “practicable for beings superior to us (*prakta kreittosin hêmôn*),” that is, presumably the heavens and stars. Even the latter, therefore, tend toward practicable goods, which are not their unmoved movers (which are not practicable). Finally, practicable goods are divided into goods practicable in view of other goods, for example health and riches, and goods practicable as ends in themselves, i.e., happiness. Happiness is the best (*ariston*) of the goods practicable for human beings.³⁹ The result of all of this is that the supreme good, i.e., the unmoved mover, is not the end either of man or of the heaven because it is practicable by no one; or, better, it is the end only of itself, an end that is had without the need of any action.

Another passage useful in clarifying the Aristotelian conception of the good is in *Eudemian Ethics* I 8. This passage explains well the difference between the two goods; namely, that which is separate, i.e., transcendent, which is the unmoved mover of the heaven, and that which is immanent to nature, which is order.

‘Good’ is said in many ways and something of it is beautiful (*kai esti ti autou kalon*), and the one is practicable (*prakton*) and the other is not practicable. And the good of this type is practicable, that is, the end, but it is not in immobile things. It is clear, then, that neither the Idea of

³⁹ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* I 7, 1217a30–40.

good is the good itself that we are seeking, nor is the common predicate (for the one is immobile and not practical, the other mobile but not practical), while that for the sake of which [we act] as end is the best, and it is the cause of those things under it, and it is the first of them all. This then will be the good itself, the end of actions practicable by man (*to telos tôn anthrôpôi praktôn*). This is the object of the knowledge which has authority over all, which is politics, economics and *phronêsis*.⁴⁰

The non-practicable good is evidently the unmoved mover of the heaven, while the supreme practicable good is the ultimate end of man, i.e., happiness, which renders good everything that helps bring it about, and it is the object, not of first philosophy, but of practical philosophy (politics, economics, and ethics). The unmoved and non-practicable good is an efficient cause; the supreme practicable good is a final cause.

Regarding Aristotle's conception of the good, other clarifications are found in the *Movement of Animals* 6. This passage also explains the difference between the two goods:

From these considerations it is clear that in one regard that which is eternally moved by the eternal mover is moved in the same way (*homoiôs*) as every living creature, in another regard differently (*allôs*), and so while it is moved eternally, the movement of living creatures has a limit. Now the eternally beautiful (*to de aidion kalon*), and the truly and primarily good (*alêthôs kai prôtôs*) (which is not at one time good, at another time not good), is too divine and precious to be anterior (*theioteron kai timiôteron hôst'einai proteron*). The prime mover then moves, itself being unmoved, whereas desire and its faculty are moved and so move. But it is not necessary for the last in the chain of things moved to move something else.⁴¹

The similarity between the way in which the unmoved mover of the heaven moves the heaven and the unmoved mover of the animals, i.e., the object of desire, moves each animal consists in the fact that both move while remaining unmoved and they move through the means of that which is moved; the difference consists above all in the fact that the unmoved mover of the heaven moves eternally, whereas the unmoved mover of the animals moves until it is realized, and also in the fact that the unmoved mover of the heaven, here referred to also as "eternally

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8, 1218b4–14.

⁴¹ Aristotle, *De motu animalium* 6, 700b29–701a2. I follow the text handed down by all of the manuscripts, setting aside the corrections introduced by the modern editors (W. Jaeger and M. C. Nussbaum), which seem to me unnecessary.

beautiful” and “truly and primarily good,” is far too divine to be anterior, i.e., to be the end that precedes all the actions that are aimed toward it.⁴² In sum, the unmoved mover of the heaven is the “first” (*prôton*) good, i.e., supreme, and not simply “anterior” (*proteron*), as, on the other hand, is the object of desire, i.e., the end that moves the animals.⁴³

The only passage, other than that from Book 12, Chapter 7 which we cited in the beginning, in which Aristotle could seem to be oriented toward conceiving of the unmoved mover as a final cause is in *Physics* II 7, where he says:

Now the principles which cause motion in a natural way (*phusikôs*) are two, of which one does not belong to nature (*ou phusikê*), as it does not possess the principle of movement in itself. Of this kind is whatever causes movement, not being itself moved, such as that which is completely immobile, the primary reality (*to pantelôs akinêton kai pantôn prôton*), and the essence and the form; for it is the end and that for the sake of which (*telos gar kai hou heneka*).⁴⁴

According to some interpretations (H. Carteron, O. Hamelin, L. Couloubaritis), the last phrase “for this is the end or that for the sake of which” refers both to the unmoved mover and to the form; others do not clarify to which of the two principles it is referring (A. Russo, L. Ruggiu, G. R. de Echandia, P. Pellegrin); still others maintain it refers only to the form (P. H. Wicksteed–F. M. Cornford, R. P. Hardie–R. K. Gaye, H. Wagner, W. Charlton, F. Franco Repellini, G. R. Giardina). As Rita Salis has convincingly demonstrated, that phrase refers only to the form, because the principles that move in a natural way (i.e., not violently like man) are two, the unmoved mover and form, both of which are capable of moving while remaining unmoved. Yet, whereas the unmoved mover has no need to be explained as a mover, since it is introduced precisely with this qualification, the form, on the other hand, does require this explanation, since in itself it seems to be only a formal principle and not a mover as well. So the explanation according to which such a principle moves as an end and final cause regards only the form, the only principle for which it is necessary to explain how it could also be a moving

⁴² That the end precedes the actions that tend toward realizing it also follows from *Eudemian Ethics* II, 1227a7–9.

⁴³ On these passages see my works *Le rapport entre cause motrice et cause finale dans la “Métaphysique”* and *La cause du mouvement dans les êtres vivants*, published in the collection E. Berti, *Dialectique, physique, métaphysique: Études sur Aristote* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters, 2008).

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Physics* II 7, 198a35–b4.

principle.⁴⁵ Therefore, the unmoved mover is not being characterized as a final cause. Both the unmoved mover and the form move in a natural way, i.e., non-violently, but the unmoved mover does not belong to nature, that is, it is not a “physical” principle (today we would say, “meta-physical”), whereas the form is a physical principle, because it is the form of natural bodies and is the principle of movement within them, although not as a moving cause but rather as final cause.

In conclusion, all of Aristotle’s passages that address the unmoved mover speak of it as an efficient cause and none of them, it seems to me, speak of it as the final cause of the heaven or of the universe. The interpretation of it as a final cause already existed at the time of Aristotle, as Theophrastus attests, in the works of several Platonists who posit that between the heaven and the unmoved mover there is a relationship of “imitation,” which is coherent with the logic of Platonism.⁴⁶ This interpretation was consolidated with Alexander of Aphrodisias,⁴⁷ influencing the entire tradition, not only in commentaries, but also philosophically in the most general sense. It acquired a justification above all in the creation philosophies, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim, because in the creationist visions God, being the total and sole cause of the universe, and having only himself as the end of his own actions, is himself also proposed as the end of the entire universe.⁴⁸ N V

⁴⁵ Rita Salis, “La causalità naturale in Aristotele, *Fisica* II 7,” a paper presented at the conference *Fine del Dio di Aristotele*, organized by the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Sardinia, held May 5, 2009 in Cagliari, now published in *Studi su Aristotele e la tradizione aristotelica*, ed. C. Rossitto (Lecce: Edizioni di Storia della tradizione Aristotelica, 2011), 81–102.

⁴⁶ Theophrastus, *Metaph.* 5a25–29. Regarding this passage, see my work “Teofrasto e gli Accademici sul moto dei cieli,” in *Gigantomachia: Convergenze e divergenze fra Platone e Aristotele*, ed. M. Migliori (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2002), 339–58.

⁴⁷ Cf. E. Berti, “Il movimento del cielo in Alessandro di Afrodisia,” in *La filosofia in età imperiale: Atti del Colloquio, Roma, 17–19 giugno 1999*, ed. A. Brancacci (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2000), 225–43.

⁴⁸ In the conference at Cagliari mentioned above, Fr. Kevin Flannery presented a paper on my interpretation of the unmoved mover in which he pointed to a passage in which (according to his interpretation) Aristotle would be making an allusion to an imitation of the unmoved mover on the part of the heaven. The passage is found at *Physics* VIII 10, 267b5–9, where Aristotle affirms that “that which is moved need not undergo any change with respect to it (that is, with respect to the unmoved mover) in order that its movement might be similar (*homoia*).” Flannery interprets this “similar” as “similar to the activity of the first mover,” whereas to me it seems clear, and all interpreters agree on this point, that the movement of the heaven, as Aristotle has just said, must be similar to itself, i.e., continuous, as in fact circular movement is. Here “similar” means “identical” (see also L. Ruggiu, in Aristotle, *Fisica* [Milan: Rusconi, 1995], which gives the translation, “*affinché il movimento si mantenga identico*” [“so that the movement remains identical”].)