

Summary

The author takes up one of the key philosophical questions, namely the problem of the Absolute. He does this based on the example of system of the "philosopher of all times," Aristotle. In the work, he presents the original thesis that the conception of the first cause (God) that Aristotle held was not something accidental in his philosophy but followed in a necessary way from his entire thought, and is the crowning point of his thought. It is primarily a consequence of how knowledge is understood (knowledge as including science), how the world was understood (i.e., the accepted image of the cosmos), and how being was understood (along with motion).

With the desire to justify this, the author next indicated the following theories of Aristotle and reconstructed them (with an appeal to the present state of research): 1. The theory of knowledge—where the world (things) is the object of human knowledge, and abstraction is the way it is apprehended, which had a determining influence on Aristotle's entire thought. First, the author indicated the theory of science and its object, then the image of the world and the understanding of being, and at the end (indirectly, through the previous theories, and directly, the type of life), the author indicated the conception of the first mover. 2. The theory of knowledge: (a) in which the understanding of epistemic knowledge as perfect knowledge of the world demarcates in it the perfect

object (form—essence), determining thereby the metaphysical concept of being; (b) and the accepted and applied model for the explanation of the world (things)—that is, causal knowledge up to the final cause in a particular series—this leads to the discovery of the first mover. 3. The theory of the construction of the cosmos—where the accepted (and rationally justified) image of the world as eternal reality, which is in eternal motion and has within it the efficient cause of its motion, i.e., the “first heaven”—interpreted metaphysically—postulated only the existence of an external cause of motion, which is the final cause, for the motion of its first mover; 4. The theory of motion—in which motion is understood ultimately in the metaphysical categories of act and potency, and turns out to be precisely the actualization of potency, which cannot occur with the participation of being in act. Such an understanding of motion leads to the acceptance of the theory that motion necessarily must be imparted from the outside for every being in motion. Aristotle’s proof for the existence of the first mover is also based on this. 5. The theory of being—according to which substances composed of matter (potency) and form (act) are fundamentally beings, yet on account of the role of form in being (the cause of being and of knowledge), and the necessity of knowing being in a scientific (valuable) way, there is a special reduction of being to form as such. Thereby the “being-ness” of the first mover is also enclosed in the concept of pure form.

The theories presented above are logically prior to the Aristotelian conception of the first mover, which in a mature form and entirely enough is presented by book VIII of the *Physics* and book XII of the *Metaphysics*.

In the final (third) chapter of the work, the author called attention to their influence on the acceptance of such a concept of the mover—in three aspects: (1) the proof of the mover’s existence; (2) the nature of the mover, and (3) the relation of the mover to the world—performing a reconstruction of this conception. It turns out, in the first aspect, that the proof for the existence of the first source of motion in both books appeals primarily to the metaphysical conception of motion, but also to the image of the world and (primarily in the *Metaphysics*) to how being

is understood. Aristotle concludes that a being who ultimately renders the existence of motion free of contradiction must exist.

In the second aspect, the aspect of nature, Aristotle is “metaphysically” forced to accept that the mover must be a being and substance, and as completely immobile must also be a pure act, and thereby is a pure form. In turn, epistemology demarcates for him the “nature” of the pure form—the form is the thinking of thought (the intellect that thinks itself).

In the third aspect, that of the mover’s relation to the world, the first mover as pure act and as the supreme being, and thereby as the supreme good, can only constitute the final cause of motion of the first heaven, which in harmony with the accepted image of the world is the efficient cause of the motion of the entire cosmos.

The lines of thought performed and the results achieved allow the rejection of all these interpretations (or fragments of them), which either (or together) do not agree with content of the texts directly connected with the question of the first mover (i.e., book VIII of the *Physics* and book XII of the *Metaphysics*), or do not agree with the Aristotelian system (or his entire thought). These include first of all the interpretations that isolate (more or less) the theory (or theories, as some would hold) of the first mover present in the above mentioned books, on the one hand, from Aristotle’s other (philosophical) conceptions, and on the other hand, it would include the interpretations opposed to the conceptions contained in them. In the first case are the interpretations of authors including the following: Jaeger, Aubenque, Weil, Oggioni, Nolte, and Mansion. In the second case are authors including Düring, Theiler, Kramer, Rose, Goblke, Elders, Paulus, de Corte, and Dirlmeier. They also include interpretations that refuse to give to the first mover the status of the absolute immobile cause of motion or the state of being a being (a pure form), and these include the interpretation of Paulus (with respect to the conception from *Physics* VIII), Mugnier, and Ryan, or the interpretations that deny that it is possible to establish this, e.g., Verbeke. Finally, they include interpretations that give to the first mover the status of an efficient cause, and these include Mugnier and Paulus mentioned above, and in part de Corte and Elders, or interpretations that

give to the first mover the status of the being that knows the world, e.g., Elders, in part de Corte, and a being that is providence for the world, e.g., Maritain and Brentano.

In turn, from the positive side, studies that are presented in large measure confirmed some of the existing interpretations, especially those of Ross, Solmsen, and Krapiec.

In connection with what is said above, one may ask whether this work with its conclusions brings anything new in the present state of research apart from a certain summary. It seems that it does bring something new. The way the question of the first mover is approached, which, among other things, turns the order of thoughts in a different direction, is certainly new. Previously (in general), the problem was studied by starting from the theory of the first mover (God) and all (or almost all) of Aristotle's statements on God were considered, while an author would try to reconcile them, evidently without positive results. The procedure adopted in this work allows one in a systematic way to demarcate the Aristotelian understanding (that is, the understanding proper to Aristotle), and the Aristotelian resolution of the question of the first mover (God). Thereby this allows one to eliminate also various (germinal) statements that appear in the *Corpus Aristotelicum* as contrary to his fundamental thought, and allows one to negate interpretations that are in disagreement with his thought, either as the result of having considered other statements of Aristotle, or as the result of having accepted arbitrary (*a priori*) visions of his God that follow from the inspiration of other systems. The following (and main) thesis of this work to a certain degree is new: the first mover (God) of Aristotle as read in the context of his system (his entire philosophy) appears as the most perfect being—the pure form (and the thought of thought) that is the final cause of the motion of the first heaven, while the very fact that such a problem appears (the problem of the first mover) and is resolved in just such a way is a question that is immanent and necessary to his system.

Before Aristotle entered the discussion, the controversy between Plato and the materialists (atheists) led to the clear presentation of the question of the source of all motion. Plato defended the existence of an immanent principle of motion, the “soul of the world,” which was the

first mover of the motion of the cosmos and the principle that directs the cosmos. Mainly as the result of an analysis of the nature of motion, Aristotle came to the conclusion that the first mover must be absolutely unmoved and at the same time transcendent, and must impart motion by being the object of the desire of the first sphere (or more precisely, the desire of the soul of that sphere). In this way, Aristotle definitively went beyond the views of Plato. The Aristotelian first mover acts upon the world without being a part of the world—this is the conclusion presented already in book VIII of the *Physics*. Book XII of the *Metaphysics* allows one to describe in greater detail the nature of this first principle of motion as a being, as a pure form. This view fully corresponds to the new (i.e., Aristotelian) conception of being and is based on that new conception. The supreme form can only exist as one (individual) form, and as a form completely free of physical or material components. It is a pure form, a pure thought, and pure actuality at the same time. In this way, the hierarchy of beings culminates in the hierarchy of motions and in the hierarchy of goods. The supreme good, the first cause of the world, the supreme (most perfect) being, the supreme mind and act of knowledge, and the fulness of life are called God by Aristotle. However, this is not a result of his philosophy, but rather the result of his personal belief that a philosopher could understand God only in that way. In this, Aristotle is only in part a continuator of the tradition that preceded him, namely when he attributes to God an intellectual type of life and action (Xenophanes, Anaxagoras, Diogenes of Apollonia, and in part Plato did likewise). Aristotle's own discovery, which at the same time was an epochal discovery, was the idea that God stands at the head of a "chain of beings" (God is the crowning point of all forms), and that God is the first cause (imparting motion) on account of his perfection.

According to Aristotle, God is the cause of the world, though obviously in the Aristotelian meaning of the concepts of cause and world. By imparting motion (or better, by arousing the desire that causes motion) at the same time in this way God causes everything that is connected with motion. Thereby not only motion, but also life, existence, and knowledge depend on God, although they do not depend on God's will and knowledge. Thus Aristotle is the author of the classical concept of

God as the supreme being, and of the fact that the religious concept of being is identified (and united) at the same time with the philosophical concept of the supreme being (reality). Solmsen writes: "We cannot imagine what later theology would have done without this doctrine of the hierarchy of beings, and among them, of God."¹ Of course, if we consider the matter historically, when Christian thought started it did not encounter Aristotle's philosophy right way, but first encountered neo-Platonic ontology, and only beginning in the eighth century would Aristotle's philosophy become proper material for Christian thought. For the neo-Platonists (Plotinus, Origen, and St. Augustine), God as the source of being is found beyond being. Although this conception has its source in the writings of Plato (*Republic*, VI 509 b), Plato for his own part situated God below being (Ideas) and gave to God the function of mediation between the world of being and the world of becoming (the cosmos). Aristotle's God, as he understood him, is a being and the cause of being, although at the same time the very concept of God here was adapted to the accepted concept of being, that is, the concept was trimmed to the measure of how he understood reality. However, that conception of God had a profound influence on later philosophical thought in medieval Arab and European culture and elsewhere. It seems that that conception of God, like any conception of the absolute, reflected the value of a system (or philosophy) in which it arose and it inherited the good and bad aspects of that system. However, certainly such a concept of God cannot fully satisfy the human reason today. When Thomas Aquinas looked to Aristotle, he produced a completely new theory of the absolute (God) thanks to a new (existential) conception of being; God is the efficient cause (the creator) of the existence of the world (of being) and is the providence of the world. As the highest good, God is the end to which all beings, consciously or otherwise, move; God is also a personal being who freely (out of love) calls the world into existence.

Thomas' philosophical thought concerning the absolute being (God) thus stands in full harmony with the religious concept of God that is fundamentally present in Christianity.

¹ Cf. F. Solmsen, *Plato's Theology*, New York 1942, p. 181.

Nevertheless, Aristotle is the father of the rational (natural) way of presenting the question of God, through an analysis of the facts that are accessible to ordinary subjects who know (human beings). By his realism (despite the essentialism that is present), this way of thought is open to enrichment and corrections (which occurred in later times), including the (fully) realistic conception of being, and thereby, a new (correct) conception of God. When Thomas Aquinas looked to Aristotle's thought, he turned to it not as to fragmentary statements that had no connection with each other concerning being or concerning God, but as to a certain entire metaphysical vision of reality. And this is fitting.

Besides the natural (rational or irrational) sources from which the problem of God continuously occurs in culture, one accepts the existence of supernatural sources (Revelation). Aristotle with his conception of God underlies the the way of presenting the question of God that is natural and rational. Among other things, by such a point of view the problem of God does not vanish from human life because it is ultimately a problem of how reality is understood.