

WOULD ARISTOTLE AGREE WITH
ST. JOHN THAT "GOD IS LOVE"?

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My Aristotelian-Thomistic treatment here of whether Aristotle would agree with St. John¹ that God is love is necessarily very schematic. In order to determine whether this is the case one has to make determinations as to what constitutes a proper understanding of Aristotle on a number of questions concerning which there is considerable debate. As I cannot treat each of these questions in any depth here, I will do little more than indicate what they are. In approaching questions concerning God's will and his providence, I will take Aristotle's greatest commentator, Thomas Aquinas, as my guide, since Aristotle does not systematically address these topics. At certain points, I am also going to draw upon Plato's Socrates²

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¹ See 1 Jn. 8-10: "Anyone who fails to love can never have known God, because God is love. God's love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son so that we could have life through him; this is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away."

² The debate about exactly what Socrates thought and what Plato thought is not a topic for investigation here. I intend to do nothing

in order to bring out certain aspects of Aristotle's thought by way of contrast. First, I will consider some passages that might be mistakenly taken to indicate that Aristotle dismisses the notion that God is love. Next, I will consider whether Aristotle would agree that God is love insofar as this can be argued on the ground of God's immanent activities and then on the ground of God's transitive activities.

In Bk. XII of the *Metaphysics* (1075a12ff.) Aristotle takes up the question of how the good is a principle. He rejects the notion that the good is love at least in the manner that Empedocles proposed it. Does this mean that Aristotle would hold that the supreme good,³ God, cannot be love? It is plain from the text that Aristotle finds fault with specific aspects of Empedocles' view and not as such with the notion that love is a first principle. He argues:

Empedocles' theory is absurd, for he identifies the Good with Love. This is a principle both as causing motion (since it combines) and as matter (since it is part of the mixture). Now even if it so happens that the same thing is a principle both as matter and as causing motion, still the essence of the two principles is not the same. In which respect, then, is Love a principle? (*Meta.* 1074b3-7)

As Aquinas comments the same thing can be a material cause and an agent cause, but not in the same respect, as "the mover, as such, is in act, [while] matter, however, as such is in potency." Empedocles fails to identify "according to what love is matter, and according to what it is mover."⁴

other than quote Socrates' words as they are presented in the *Dialogues* of Plato.

³ Aristotle maintains that God is the ultimate end of the universe (see *Meta.* 1075a12-17), and identifies the end with the good (see *Phy.* 195a23).

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In Duodecim Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Ex-*

Aristotle has a second problem with Empedocles' position on love and strife, namely, that "it is also absurd that Strife should be imperishable; strife is the very essence of evil" (1075b7-8). As Aquinas comments: "evil, however, according to those opining rightly, is not posited to be a principle, but only the good, as was said earlier."⁵

Earlier in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle speaks favorably of the notion that love is a first principle insofar as at very least it offers a plausible response to the questions of what in things "is the cause of beauty, and the sort of cause by which motion is communicated to things" (*Meta.* 984b20). He mentions that "[i]t might be inferred that the first person to consider this question was Hesiod, or indeed anyone else who assumed Love or Desire as a first principle" (*Meta.* 984b23), and lists among the latter Parmenides and Empedocles, after which he briefly quotes Hesiod and Parmenides;⁶ however, he adds no further comment. The only view he takes up later is that of Empedocles, a view he rejects as we have seen.⁷ The others' views are never revisited.

Empedocles' notion of love and strife as first principles comes under repeated fire in other works of Aristotle as well. In the *Physics*, Aristotle levels a number of criticisms against

positio, ed. Raymundi M. Spiazzi, O.P. (Rome: Marietti, 1950), #2647. Herefter cited as *In Meta.*

⁵ *In Meta.* #2647.

⁶ Aristotle quotes Parmenides as saying, "Love she created first of all the gods" (*Meta.* 984b26), and Hesiod as saying, "First of all things was Chaos made, and then Broad-bosomed Earth. . . And Love, the foremost of immortal beings" (*Meta.* 984b27-28). All translations of Aristotle are taken from the McKeon edition of the *Basic Works of Aristotle* unless otherwise noted.

⁷ In addition to the criticisms Aristotle levels against love and strife in Bk. XII of the *Metaphysics* he also points out in Bk. III that it makes no sense to call "Love the cause of Being; for in combining things into one it destroys everything else" (*Meta.* 1000b12).

Empedocles' view that "Love and Strife alternately predominate and cause motion, while in the intermediate period there is a state of rest" (252a9); for example, he points out that love and strife do not explain why they themselves alternate in predominance, as they are simply causes of congregation and separation respectively.⁸ In the *De Generatione*, Aristotle points out yet other flaws in Empedocles' teachings regarding love and strife. For example, he points out that love and strife fail to explain natural generation; for in natural generation, things for the most part come to be in the same manner, and this requires that the elements be put together in some determinate proportion. Yet love and strife cannot account for this, as "the former is cause of association only, and the latter of dissociation only" (*De Gen.* 333b13).

To my knowledge, in every place where Aristotle considers whether the First Principle could be love he is considering views which contain additional suppositions which are objectionable. He never explicitly considers whether "God is love" could be taken to mean that there is an identity between God and his will and the primary act of his will (which is love), or whether it could mean that God loves us in a way he does not love non-rational beings and shows us special care. I will consider what Aristotle would be likely to maintain on each of these questions.

Would Aristotle agree that: 1) God possesses will; 2) has himself as the primary object of his will; 3) and that his loving himself is not other than what he is?

Aristotle thinks that God is intelligent.⁹ He also maintains

⁸ See *Phy.* 252a25-28: "The Love and Strife postulated by Empedocles are not in themselves causes of the fact in question [i.e., their alternating dominance], nor is it of the essence of either that it should be so, the essential function of the former being to unite, of the latter to separate."

⁹ See *Meta.* 1072b27: "For the actuality of mind is life, and God is that actuality." (My translation.)

that appetite follows upon cognition. Cognitive faculties allow the discrimination of things good and bad, from which springs certain tendencies towards or away from what is good or bad. Thus, in the *De Anima* Aristotle does not distinguish a grade of life based on appetite as if it could be found apart from cognition, and in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he attributes voluntary actions to non-human animals and chosen actions to humans, corresponding to the form of cognition each possesses.¹⁰ God then as an intelligent being must also possess will.

One can also see that Aristotle thinks that God possesses will insofar as Aristotle attributes pleasure to God,¹¹ as experiencing pleasure presupposes appetite. God as an intelligent being must possess the corresponding form of appetite which is will. He could not possess a sense appetite, as he is not a material being.¹²

Aristotle thinks that the primary object of the divine mind is God himself.¹³ God who perfectly knows himself necessarily knows himself to be supremely good, and thus necessarily loves himself.

Aristotle maintains that God's understanding is not other

¹⁰ See *NE* 1111b7-10, and 1113a10-14. See also *DA* 414b: "If any order of living things has the sensory, it must also have the appetitive; for appetite is the genus of which desire, passion, and wish are the species; now all animals have one sense at least, viz. touch, and whatever has a sense has the capacity for pleasure and pain and therefore has pleasant and painful objects present to it, and whenever these are present, there is desire, for desire is just appetition of what is pleasant."

¹¹ See *Meta.* 1072b15: "And its life [the life of first principle upon which depend the heavens and the world of nature] is like the best which we temporarily enjoy. It must be in that state always . . . since its actuality is also pleasure." (Translation of H. Tredennick in the Loeb edition.)

¹² See *Meta.* 1074a36-37: "The primary essence has no matter, because it is complete reality (*entelecheia*)."

¹³ See *Meta.* 1074b34: "Therefore Mind thinks itself. . . ."

than what he is.¹⁴ The same must be true for God's loving himself, since his loving himself goes hand-in-hand with his knowing himself. Indeed, if this was not the case, then the act of God's will would be something added to his substance, and so would stand to it as act to potency.¹⁵ But Aristotle holds that God is pure act.¹⁶ God's loving himself must then be his substance or in other words God is love.

In sum: God as an intelligent being possesses the intellectual appetite, i.e., will. The primary good known to God is not other than himself, and so the primary object of God's appetite is not other than himself. Consequently, since love is the primary act of appetite, God's love has himself as its primary object. Just as his knowing himself is not other than himself, for there is no passive potency in him, nor does he undergo change,¹⁷ so his loving himself is not other than him-

¹⁴ See *Meta.* 1072b27: "For the actuality of mind is life, and God is that actuality." (My translation.)

¹⁵ The same reasoning that Aristotle gives to show that God's intellect is his understanding applies equally to God's will and his willing himself the good that is himself. See *In Meta.* XII, lec. 7, #2544: "And he says that God is life itself; which he proves thus: 'the act of the intellect,' i.e., to understand, is a certain life, and is the most perfect thing in life. For act, according as was shown, is more perfect than potency. Whence the intellect in act lives more perfectly than the intellect in potency, as one awake compared to one sleeping. But that first, namely, God, is himself act. For his intellect is his understanding. Otherwise it would stand to him as potency to act. However, it was shown above that his substance is act. Whence it remains that the substance itself of God is life, and his act is his life, best and eternal, which subsists of itself."

¹⁶ See *Meta.* 1071b20: "Therefore there must be a principle of this kind whose essence is actuality." (Tredennick translation). See also *Meta.* 1074a36-37: "The primary essence has no matter, because it is complete reality (*entelecheia*)." Aquinas elaborates on Aristotle's statement thus: "But the first principle 'since it is *quod quid erat esse*' i.e., its essence and *ratio*, does not have matter, because its substance 'is *entelechia*,' i.e., act; matter, however, is in potency" (*In Meta* #2596).

¹⁷ See *NE* 1154b25-26: "Since if any man had a simple nature, the

self. In this sense then, Aristotle would agree, that God is love, granted he never says this.

Would Aristotle agree that God is loving in the sense of efficaciously wanting the good for beings in general and then us in particular? Would he agree with the deists that God is the cause of things, but does not provide for them, i.e., lead them to their perfection? There are a variety of objections that can be raised seeking to show that Aristotle does not think that God loves or cares for things. They include the claims that 1) God does not know things outside himself; 2) God cannot want any good outside of himself; 3) God does not care for anything because he is not an efficient cause; 4) God acts out of the necessity of his nature and not from will. I will take these up briefly one by one.

The objection that Aristotle thinks that God does not know anything other than himself is fairly readily dismissed. As Aquinas notes, when discussing whether God knows singulars: "For the Philosopher also holds as incongruous that something that is known by us is not known by God. Whence he argues against Empedocles in *I De Anima* [410b4] and in *III Meta.* [1000b3] that God would be most stupid of beings if he were ignorant of strife."¹⁸ It is true that in the *Eudemian Ethics* we read: "he [God] is too perfect to think of anything else beside himself" (1245b16).¹⁹ However, this has to be accorded with Aristotle's view that the ruler of the world is one.²⁰ This ruler is certainly God, and a blind, unknowing

same activity would afford him the greatest pleasure always. Hence God enjoys a single simple pleasure perpetually. For there is not only an activity of motion, but also an activity of immobility, and there is essentially a truer pleasure in rest than in motion."

¹⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Institutum Studiorum Medievalium Ottaviensis (Ottawa: Commissio Piana, 1953), I 14.11. (Hereafter cited as *ST*. All translations of Aquinas are my own.)

¹⁹ The translation of the *Eudemian Ethics* that I am using is that of H. Rackham, in the Loeb edition.

²⁰ See *Meta.* 1076a6.

ruler, cannot govern well, if he can govern at all. It is certainly not obvious how to accord God's knowledge of himself and his knowledge of other things with divine simplicity. To my knowledge Aristotle never attempts it.

Another objection to the view that Aristotle would affirm that God wills and loves things outside himself lies in ascribing to Aristotle the view that God as pure act could not want anything other than himself. However, Aristotle proposes this view only to reject it:

Anaxagoras makes the Good a principle as causing motion; for Mind moves things, but moves them for some end, and therefore there must be some other Good—unless it is as we say; for on our view the art of medicine is in a sense health. (*Meta.* 1075b8)

If Anaxagoras is right then it seems that God must have some good other than himself that he is aiming at, and thus that he is not the ultimate good. Aquinas' cryptic remark on Aristotle's rejoinder is: "For the art of medicine acts for the sake of health, and health is in a certain manner the art itself of medicine."²¹ It is not plain to me how this resolves the problem of how God can cause things without in some way being incomplete without them.²² Aquinas appears to offer an alternate way of understanding this passage in his commentary on Ephesians:

In order to understand in what manner God makes and wants all things for the sake of his goodness one must know that that something is done for the sake of end can be understood in two ways: either for the sake of an end to be attained, as a sick person takes medicine for the sake of health, or for the sake of the love of an end to be spread, as a doctor

²¹ In *Meta.* #2648. Aristotle also equates the medical art with health at *Meta.* 1070b33, and Aquinas again comments that "art itself is a certain likeness and ratio of the form that is in matter" (*In Meta.* #2473).

²² On this point, see Michael Augros' paper in this volume.

operates for the sake of health that is to be communicated to another. God, however, is in need of no good exterior to himself. . . . And therefore when it is said that God wants and makes all things for the sake of his goodness, it is not to be understood that he makes something for the sake of imparting goodness to himself, but for the sake of spreading it to others.²³

This fits with what Aristotle says in the *Eudemian Ethics*: "Nevertheless there is present here [in civic friendship] a ruling factor and a ruled—not a natural ruler or a royal one, but one that rules in his turn, and not for the purpose of conferring benefit [eu poie], as God rules, but in order that he may have an equal share of the benefit and of the burden" (*EE* 1242b30). Aristotle is saying here that God confers goodness on the things he rules, which is nothing other than loving them. Aristotle affirms here and elsewhere that the goodness God wants for things is not ordered to satisfying any need on God's part: "God is in need of nothing" (*EE* 1249b16). At the same time he also affirms that the goodness God wants for things is ordered to God himself as ultimate end and good:

We must also consider in which sense the nature of the universe contains the good or the supreme good; whether as something separate and independent, or as the orderly arrangement of its parts. In both senses, as an army does; for the good of an army consists in the order and in the general; but chiefly in the latter, because he is not for the sake of the order, but the order is for the sake of him. (*Meta.* 1075a12-17)²⁴

In sum: All things are ordered to God. God wants goodness

²³ *Commentary on Ephesians in Super Epistolas S. Pauli*, ed. P. Raphaelis Cai, O.P., vol. II, (Rome: Marietti, 1953), #13. See also *ST I* 19.2 and *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia* 3.15, ad 14. This way of thinking is explicitly enunciated by Socrates in the *Timaeus* 29e-30c.

²⁴ I have modified somewhat Tredennick's translation.

for these things, but does not need them for his happiness; his rule of these things benefits them.²⁵

Note that regardless of whether my understanding of Aristotle's solution to the objection that God cannot cause motion for then he would be moved by a good outside himself is correct or not, the fact remains that Aristotle offers this solution in defense of the position that it is possible for God to want a good other than himself.

We are all familiar with the debate about whether Aristotle's God is an efficient cause of anything in the world. If God does not act as an efficient cause in regard to things, he plainly does not take care of them.

Aquinas, commenting on the passage from Aristotle just quoted above that speaks of God as a leader to which an army is ordered to as an end, maintains that this means that God is also the efficient cause of the order of the army:

And because the rationale for those things which are to the end are taken from the end, therefore it is necessary not only that the order of the army be for the sake of the leader, but also that the order of the army be from the leader, since the order of the army is for the sake of the leader. Likewise, the separated good which is the prime mover is a better good than the good of the order which is in the universe. For the whole order of the universe is for the sake of the prime mover, namely, so that what is in the intellect and will of the first mover is deployed in the universe that is

²⁵ Aristotle's views accord with Aquinas' views that creatures witness to God's goodness and wisdom, but God is not in need of such witnesses. However, Aristotle never speaks of God producing creatures in order to represent his goodness, as Aquinas often does: "God produces things for the sake of communicating his goodness to creatures, and through them to represent his goodness" (*ST I* 47.1). See also *ST I* 65.2 ad 1: "By the very fact that some creature has being it represents divine being and its goodness. And therefore that God created all things so that they exist is not separate from the fact that he created all things for the sake of his goodness."

ruled. And thus it is necessary that the whole arrangement of the universe be from the prime mover.²⁶

Now we know that a lot of scholars would say that Aristotle would disagree with Aquinas here. There is no denying that there are passages where Aristotle speaks of the unmoved mover not as an efficient cause, but as a final cause, for example:

Therefore the first heaven must be eternal. There is therefore also something which moves it. And since that which is moved and moves is intermediate, there is something which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance and actuality. And the object of desire and thought move in this way; they move without being moved. (*Meta.* 1072a23)

While acknowledging that this issue deserves treatment in its own right, I will insist on a couple of points. First, if God is a final cause alone, the unmoved mover of Bk. VIII of the *Physics*, who is clearly an efficient cause of all motion, would not be God.²⁷

²⁶ *In Meta.* #2631. Note the similarity to what Aristotle says in *Phy.* 194a36-b9: "The arts, therefore which govern the matter and have knowledge are two, namely the art which uses the product and the art which directs the production of it. That is why the using art also is in a sense directive; but it differs in that it knows the form, whereas the art which is directive as being concerned with production knows the matter. For the helmsman knows and prescribes what sort of form a helm should have, the other from what wood it should be made and by means of what operations. In the products of art, however, we make the material with a view to the function, whereas in the products of nature the matter is there all along." In other words, God who uses the universe for his end is the one who is going to dictate the form of the universe. (God is unlike the user in Aristotle's example in that he is responsible for the matter as well).

²⁷ See among other places in the *Physics*: Bk. VIII, c. 6, Aristotle's conclusion at the end of VIII, c. 9, and his subsequent discussion in c. 10 about whether the first mover must be without parts and magnitude, a discussion which is plainly not about a final cause: "It has now to be shown that in no case is it possible for an infinite power to reside in a finite magnitude" (*Phy.* 266a25-26).

Secondly, who else is going to be responsible for the intrinsic good of the universe which lies in the ordering of one thing to another? It would be absurd to think that Aristotle thought this was the product of blind causes rather than of mind. Indeed, the passage in the *Metaphysics* comparing God to the leader of an army indicates that he orders things as an efficient cause:

All things, both fishes and birds and plants, are ordered together in some way, but not in the same way; and things are not such that there is no relation between one thing and another; there is a definite connexion. Everything is ordered together to one end; but the arrangement is like that in a household, where the free persons are least allowed to act at random and have all or most of their actions preordained²⁸ for them, whereas the slaves and animals have little common responsibility and act for the most part at random. . . . (*Meta.* 1075a19-20).²⁹

Here, as Aquinas notes, God is compared to a paterfamilias who is "the principle of the disposition of everyone in the home, for the purpose of executing those things pertaining to the order of the home."³⁰

God's ordering of things as an efficient cause is also spoken of by Aristotle in *De Generatione*:

As has already been remarked, coming-to-be and passing-away will take place continuously, and will never fail owing

²⁸ Aristotle names advisors as causes responsible for the beginning of motion (see *Phy.* 195a23); similarly, rulers are also efficient causes.

²⁹ See also *Meta.* 1075b37-76a7: "As for those who maintain that mathematical number is the primary reality, and so go on generating one substance after another and finding different principles for each one, they make the substance of the universe incoherent (for one substance in no way affects another by its existence or non-existence) and give us a great many governing principles. But the world must not be governed badly: 'The rule of many is not good; let one be the rule.'" [Tredennick translation.]

³⁰ *In Meta.* #2634.

to the cause which we have given. This has come about with good reason. For nature, as we maintain, always and in all things strives after the better, and "being" (as we have stated elsewhere the different meanings of "being") is better than "not-being," but it is impossible that "being" can be present in all things, because they are too far away from the "original source." God, therefore, following the course which still remained open, perfected the universe by making coming-to-be a perpetual process; for in this way "being" would acquire the greatest possible coherence, because the continual coming-to-be of coming-to-be is the nearest approach to eternal being. The cause of this continuous process, as has been frequently remarked, is cyclical motion, the only motion which is continuous. (*De Gen.*, 336b25-37a2³¹)

God could not insure continual coming-to-be and passing-away if he was not responsible for the nature of the beings that are generable and corruptible.³²

Aristotle's understanding of God as unmoved mover in Bk. VIII of the *Physics* and as the one responsible for the order in natural things in the *Metaphysics*³³ and *De Generatione* are both

³¹ Translation of E. S. Forster in the Loeb edition.

³² God must be the one responsible for the natures of beings which result in their tending to the end of continuing the species: "The most natural act [of a living thing] is the production of another like itself, an animal producing an animal, a plant a plant, in order that as far as nature allows, it may partake in the eternal and the divine. That is the goal towards which all things strive, that for the sake of which they do whatever their nature renders possible. . . . Since then no living thing is able to partake in what is eternal and divine by uninterrupted continuance (for nothing perishable can for ever remain one and the same), it tries to achieve that end in the only way possible to it, and success is possible in varying degrees; so it remains not indeed as the self-same individual but continues its existence in something like itself—not numerically but specifically one" (*DA* 415b1-8).

³³ See *In Meta.* #2634 regarding the order in nature: "However, just as in the family order is imposed through the law and precept of the paterfamilias, who is the principle for each of the things ordered in the home,

reasons to maintain that God exercises efficient causality vis-à-vis natural things.³⁴ It is further clear from the general-army comparison that Aristotle thinks God moves these things to the intrinsic perfection of the universe which is further ordered to him as to an end. The latter shows that Aristotle, at least to some extent, rejects a deist god who does not care about the world.

Again, I do not mean to brush aside the passages which seem to indicate that God does not move as an efficient cause, e.g., the passage above identifying the eternal mover of the heavens with an object of desire, and other passages as well, such as: "For God is not a ruler in the sense of issuing commands, but is the end for the sake of which prudence gives commands . . . since clearly God is in need of nothing" (*EE* 1249b15).³⁵ The task of trying to accord the latter passages with Aristotle's affirmations concerning a first unmoved efficient cause and concerning God's rule of the world cannot be undertaken in this paper.

One could concede that Aristotle thinks that God is the efficient cause of things in the world, but then maintain that Aristotle thinks that God causes these things of necessity, rather than freely causing them. Here again we have a topic worthy of treatment in its own right. For example, in the *Physics*,

executing those things which pertain to the order of the home, so nature in natural things is the principle executing for each thing what belongs to it from the order of the universe. For just as the one who in the home is inclined to something through the precept of the paterfamilias, so too a natural thing [is inclined to something] through its own nature. And the nature itself for each thing is a certain inclination placed in it by the first mover, ordering it to a due end. And from this it is manifest that natural things act for an end, granted they do not know the end, because they obtain from the first intelligence an inclination to the end."

³⁴ An article worth reading regarding the question of whether Aristotle thought that God was an efficient cause is Mark F. Johnson's, "Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle?," *The New Scholasticism*, 63, 2, (Spring 1989), 129-55.

³⁵ I have modified Rackham's translation.

Aristotle says:

And further, if there is always something of this nature, a movent that is itself unmoved and eternal, then that which is first moved by it must be eternal. . . . The foregoing argument, then has served to clear up the point about which we raised a difficulty at the outset—why is it that instead of all things being either in motion or at rest, or some things being always in motion and the remainder always at rest, there are things that are sometimes in motion and sometimes not? The cause of this is now plain: it is because, while some things are moved by an eternal unmoved movent and are therefore always in motion, other things are moved by a movent that is in motion and changing, so that they too must change. But the unmoved movent, as has been said, since it remains permanently simple and unvarying and in the same state, will cause motion that is one and simple (*Phy.* 260a2 and 260a12-19).

Aquinas takes Aristotle to be saying here that the unmoved mover must always move. He goes on to comment that "the arguments that Aristotle relies on to prove that the first motion is perpetual do not conclude from necessity; for that the first mover not always cause motion is able to occur without any change on its part, as was shown in the beginning of book eight."³⁶ Ultimately Aquinas tries to save Aristotle by pointing out the consequences of a couple of his teachings.³⁷ It is somewhat strange that Aristotle himself never explicitly takes in account that God acts through will when speaking of God's causality vis-à-vis things. After all in the *Metaphysics* he reasons that "non-rational potencies are all productive of one effect each, but the rational are productive of contrary effects, so that if they produced their effects necessarily they would produce contrary effects at the same time; but that is

³⁶ *In Octo Libros de Physico Auditu Commentaria*, ed. Angeli M. Pirotta, O.P. (Naples: M. D'Auria Pontificius Editor, 1953), Bk. VIII, lec. 13, #2300. (Hereafter cited as *Phy. Comm.*)

³⁷ See *Phy. Comm.*, Bk. VIII, lec. 2, #2046-47.

impossible. There must, then, be something else that decides; I mean by this desire or will" (1048a811³⁸). Aristotle also explicitly argues that mind does not produce an effect without appetite in the *De Anima* (III 10).³⁹ Perhaps his concern is the determination of God's will seems to require that God be subject to potency and to imperfection, as God would then seem to go from not wanting something to wanting it.⁴⁰ To my knowledge, Aristotle never even raises the question of whether God's action in the world is free, rather than necessary.⁴¹ It does seem that Aristotle thought that some of what God does in the world is not done out of necessity, namely, the things that God does for us for which Aristotle says we should be grateful⁴²—for there is no reason to show gratitude

³⁸ I have modified Ross' translation in the McKeon edition.

³⁹ See *DA* 433a23: "Mind is never found producing movement without appetite."

⁴⁰ Aquinas provides an explanation of how God can will things to come about at a certain time without having to change from not willing that them to willing them: "[B]ecause he acts through will, it is possible through an eternal will to produce an effect that is not eternal, just as an eternal intellect can understand a thing that is not eternal: for the thing understood is in a certain manner the principle of action in agents acting through will, as the natural form is in agents acting through nature" (*Phy. Comm.*, Bk. VIII, lec. 2, #2047). Aristotle never even raises the question.

⁴¹ Aquinas on occasion responds to an argument based on a principle enunciated by Aristotle that concludes that whatever God wills, he wills of necessity. The argument runs: "whatever is natural to God is necessary; for God is the per se necessary being, and the principle of all necessity. . . . But it is natural to God to want whatever he wants; because in God there can be nothing 'outside nature' as is said in Bk. V of the *Metaphysics*. Therefore, whatever he wants, he wants of necessity" (*ST I* 19.3 obj. 3). Aquinas responds that "it is not natural for God to want certain other things that he does not want of necessity. Nevertheless nor is this unnatural or contrary to nature, but is voluntary" (*ST I* 19.3 ad 3).

⁴² See *NE* 1164b3: "This is the principle on which it would seem that payment ought to be made to those who have imparted instruction in philosophy; for the value of their service is not measurable in money,

to a being acting from compulsion. Whether or not Aristotle sees God's action in the world to follow from the necessity of his nature is not something that can be fully investigated here. Plainly, this would have to be determined in order to determine whether Aristotle thinks that God cared about things in the world.

Thus far I have argued that there are to be found in Aristotle explicit or implicit responses to the objections that would show that he thinks that God does not love or care for other things. In addition, we have seen that there are passages⁴³ in Aristotle that indicate that he thinks that God indeed loves things, i.e., wants goodness for them, namely, the goodness of being and also the goodness of sharing in the order of the universe, granted Aristotle never explicitly says that God brings about these things voluntarily. God provides for the non-rational beings, i.e., leads them to the perfection they are capable of by endowing them with their natures, which are a principle of motion to their perfection, and by ordering them one to the other,⁴⁴ as well as by being the ultimate efficient cause of all of their motions. I will turn now to the questions of whether God loves the rational being that is man in a way he does not love other non-rational beings and whether he show us special care.

Even before it is a question of whether God in some special way helps us achieve our perfection, as to our very being

and no honor paid them could be an equivalent, but no doubt all that can be expected is that to them, as to the gods and to our parents, we should make such return as is in our power."

⁴³ See *Meta.* 1075a19-20 and *De Gen.* 337a23-24, both quoted in the main text.

⁴⁴ See *Pol.* 1256b15-22: "In like manner we may infer that, after the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and that the other animals exist for the sake of man, the tame for use and food, the wild, if not all, at least the greater part of them, for food, and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. Now if nature makes nothing incomplete and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man."

Aristotle's God shows a particular love to us that he does not show other non-rational beings insofar as he is apparently directly responsible for each human individual's rational soul, in contrast to the souls of non-rational living beings whose progenitors are sufficient immediate causes thereof. According to Aristotle, the non-physical human soul must have a non-physical cause: "It remains, then, that Reason (*vow*) alone enters in, as an additional factor, from outside, and that it alone is divine, because physical activity has nothing whatever to do with the activity of Reason" (*Gen. An.* 736b28-30⁴⁵). And it is reasonable to suppose that Aristotle would identify God as the efficient cause of the rational soul.

The rational soul brings with it the capacity for moral action which allows humans to achieve a good higher than the good of nature. For this reason, humans are of greater concern to a wise governor of the universe than non-rational beings are.⁴⁶ In addition, since humans do not achieve this goodness in an automatic way, unlike plants and animals that succeed in continuing their species by performing their natural activities, humans need special help to achieve their end,⁴⁷ whence another reason to show them special care. Aristotle points

⁴⁵ Translation of A. L. Peck in the Loeb edition.

⁴⁶ Aristotle's contention that "we are not the best thing in the world" does not mean that we are not specially provided for. The things Aristotle has in mind as better than us are the heavenly bodies and the separated substances. The separated substances as intelligent beings would warrant special care as we do. The heavenly bodies' excellence lies in their being not subject to generation and corruption, which renders them eternal, and in the causality they exercise. However, while the heavenly bodies are superior to human bodies, they are inferior to the human soul which is both immune from corruption and "in a way all existing things" (*DA* 431b21).

⁴⁷ When speaking of moral virtue, Aristotle notes that error is multi-form, and that it is easy to miss the mark, the mean of virtue; see *NE* 1106b30. Animals arrive at their ends in much more predictable ways, as their ability to do so is determined by their nature ("non-rational potencies are all productive of one effect each" [*Meta.* 1048a811]). Thus I think Aristotle would be inclined to agree at least with the latter part of

out that within a household the more important members are the ones who rightly receive the most direction: "in a household . . . the free persons are least allowed to act at random and have all or most of their actions preordained for them, whereas the slaves and animals have little common responsibility and act for the most part at random" (*Meta.* 1075a19), and he voices a similar view in speaking of appropriate rule within a household in the *Politics*:

Thus it is clear that household management attends more to men than to the acquisition of inanimate things, and to human excellence more than to the excellence of property which we call wealth, and to the virtue of freemen more than to the virtue of slaves. (*Pol.* 1259b18-21)

God as ruler of the universe would undoubtedly be most concerned about the virtuous activities of the rational beings that form part of this universe, as opposed to the doings of animals, plants, and inanimate things. Indeed, in the *NE* Aristotle says: "the association of a father with his sons bears the form of monarchy, since the father cares for his children; and this why Homer calls Zeus 'father'; it is the ideal of monarchy to be paternal rule" (*NE* 1160b23-27). God as king of the universe exercises paternal rule over men.⁴⁸ In another passage as well,

what Aquinas says here: "Divine providence extends to every individual thing, even the least. Therefore, it is necessary for those beings which have some actions outside the inclination of the species that they are ruled by divine providence in their individual acts outside the direction which pertains to the species. But there appear in the rational creature many actions for which the inclination of the species does not suffice, a sign of which is that they are not similar in all, but vary in diverse individuals. It is therefore necessary that the rational creature be directed by God as to its acts, not only according to the species, but also according to the individual" (*Summa contra Gentiles* III 113).

⁴⁸ Aristotle compares the love we should have for our parents to that we should have for the gods: "The love of children for their parents, like that of men for the gods, is the love for what is good and superior to oneself; for their parents have bestowed on them the greatest bene-

Aristotle speaks of God's care for men:

And it seems likely that the man who pursues intellectual activity, and who cultivates his intellect and keeps that in the best condition, is also the man most beloved of the gods. For if, as is generally believed, the gods exercise some superintendence over human affairs, then it will be reasonable to suppose that they take pleasure in that part of man which is best and most akin to themselves, namely, the intellect, and that they recompense with their favours those men who esteem and honour this most, because these care for the things dear to themselves, and act rightly and nobly. Now it is clear that all these attributes belong most of all to the wise man. He therefore is most beloved by the gods. . . ." (NE 1179a23-31)

These passages suffice to show that Aristotle is not a deist. It is true though that Aristotle does not often speak about God's providence of men. And we can see from the two passages just quoted that when he does so he speaks in very general terms⁴⁹ and in the one passage he is tentative about whether God provides assistance to human individuals. He never offers specifics as to how God provides as parents do, be it as

fits in being the cause of their existence and rearing, and later of their education" (NE 1162a5).

⁴⁹ Aquinas reasons that since God moves the will, he is going to provide for the being whose will he moves: "But because the act itself of free choice is brought back to God as to its cause, it is necessary as well that those things which come to be from free choice are subject to divine providence; for the providence of man is contained under the providence of God, as particular cause under universal cause. . ." (ST I 22.2 ad 4). Aristotle sees God as responsible for the motions of our wills; see EE 1248a17-29, a text Aquinas often cites in support of God being the ultimate mover of the will (e.g., *Summa contra Gentiles* III 89 and ST I 82.4 ad 3). Aristotle, however, does not investigate the implication this divine motion has vis-à-vis God's providence other than proposing that divine motion explains why certain people consistently make decisions that have fortunate outcomes despite their lack of reasons for these decisions.

to physical nurture,⁵⁰ moral upbringing,⁵¹ or intellectual formation.⁵²

Aristotle's silence here is in contrast with Socrates who speaks in concrete terms of his personal experience of the moral guidance that God has provided him with throughout his life. In a well-known passage from the *Apology*, Socrates says:

What has happened to me, gentlemen of the jury . . . is a wonderful thing. My familiar prophetic voice of the spirit in all time past has always come to me frequently, opposing me even in very small things, if I was about to do something that was not right; but now there has happened to me what you see yourselves, what one might think and what is commonly held to be the extremest of evils, yet for me, as I left home this morning, there was no opposition from the signal of God, nor when I entered this place of the court, nor anywhere in my speech when I was about to say anything; although in other speeches of mine it has often checked me while I was still speaking, yet now in this action it has not opposed me anywhere, either in deed or in word. Then what am I to conceive to be the cause? I will tell you; really this that has happened to me is good, and it is impossible that

⁵⁰ One could argue that God's care at the level of physical nurture lies in his ordering plants and animals to human sustenance.

⁵¹ Parents are to train the appetitive part of the child's soul; see *Pol.* 1334b26; 1336b.

⁵² Aquinas, when commenting on Aristotle's affirmation that whether happiness is god-sent belongs to another inquiry (NE 1099b13-15), ventures to say: "However, that something is given to men by separated substances becomes evident from the very agreement of man with separated substances according to intellectual virtue. For just as lower bodies receive their perfection from higher bodies, so too the inferior intellects do from the superior ones" (*In Decem Libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum Expositio*, ed. Raymundi M. Spiazzi, O.P. [Turin: Marietti, 1964], #168). Aristotle never says this though. For him, the role of separated substances vis-à-vis material beings seems restricted to moving the heavens (see *Meta.* 1073a38-73b1).

any of us conceives it aright who thinks it is an evil thing to die. A strong proof of this has been given to me; for my usual signal would certainly have opposed me, unless I was about to do something good.⁵³

One might wonder whether the notion that God loves us with a special love and cares for us is compatible with what Aristotle says about our inability to be friends with God. The answer lies in the affirmation that friendship requires more than love on the part of both parties, rather than in the denial of God's special love for us:

Equality in friendship, however, does not seem to be like equality in matters of justice. In the sphere of justice, 'equal' (fair) means primarily proportionate to desert, and 'equal in quantity' is only a secondary sense; whereas in friendship 'equal in quantity' is the primary meaning, and 'proportionate to desert' only secondary. This is clearly seen when a wide disparity arises between two friends in point of virtue or vice, or of wealth, or anything else; they no longer remain nor indeed expect to remain friends. This is most manifest in the case of the gods, whose superiority in every good attribute is preeminent; but it is also seen with princes: in their case also men much below them in station do not expect to be their friends, nor do persons of no particular merit expect to be the friends of men of distinguished excellence or wisdom. It is true that we cannot fix a precise limit in such cases, up to which two men can still be friends . . . but when one becomes very remote from the other, as God is remote from man, it can continue no longer. (*NE* 1158b29-1159a4)

The reason given here as to why people cannot be friends with God is because the distance between man and God is

⁵³ *Apology* 40a-c. Unless otherwise noted the translation of the Platonic dialogues is that of W. H. D. Rouse as found in *Great Dialogues of Plato*, eds. Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse (New York: Mentor, 1956).

so great that the equality necessary for friendship is lacking. It is not because God does not love or care for us. Parents are unable to be friends with their very young children, as the latter are unable to return their love,⁵⁴ but they certainly are able to love and care for their children. God's providence over us is not dependent on our being able to enter into a friendship in him.

I'd like to further investigate here the matter of Aristotle's rejection of the possibility that people can be friends of God, as a Christian would maintain that this is necessary for our happiness both in this life and in the next. In the passage quoted above Aristotle explicitly denies this possibility on the grounds of the inequality between the two. However, elsewhere in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle explicitly says that there can be friendships among unequals: "[E]quals must effect the required equalization on the basis of equality in love and in all other respects, while unequals must render what is in proportion to their superiority or inferiority" (*NE* 1162b2-4).⁵⁵ In this passage Aristotle specifically names as a friendship involving inequality, the "friendship of . . . men to gods" (*NE* 1162a5). H. Rackham translates "philia" here as "affection" rather than "friendship," seemingly to avoid having Aristotle contradict himself. However, in the *Eudemian Ethics* we find Aristotle again acknowledging that there can be friendships where strict equality is lacking, and again he specifically names friendship between God and man as being such: "But another variety of these kinds is friendship on a basis of superiority, as in that of a god for man, for that is a different kind of friendship, and generally of a ruler and subject" (*EE* 1238b18-20).⁵⁶ Here, as in the *NE*, he teaches that inequality between two parties can be bridged by good intention, and

⁵⁴ See *NE* 1161b25 and 1111b10 regarding the absence of choice in very young children.

⁵⁵ See also *NE* 1161a10-29 and 1162a34-b4.

⁵⁶ In the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle points out that we cannot expect a

thus "even God is content with getting sacrifices in accordance with our ability" (*EE* 1243b13).

The issue of affection comes up in the *Magna Moralia*, a work of Aristotelian inspiration, which maintains that friendship with God is impossible because this requires a return of friendly affection, and it is "an absurdity for a man to profess a friend's affection for Zeus" (1208b30-31). Here, as in Rackham's translation of *NE* 1162a5, "philein" is translated as affection. Whether or not this translation is accurate, it is typically thought that Aristotle's God was distant from human affairs, and hardly to be regarded as an object of human affection. Still, this view is questionable since Aristotle maintains that we should make what return we can to the gods for the benefits they have bestowed upon us;⁵⁷ for this indicates that the gods are not aloof from our affairs and that we have reason to hope for good things from them. One must also take in account Aristotle's own statement regarding Zeus:

The rule of a father over his children is royal, for he rules by virtue both of love and the respect due to age, exercising a kind of royal power. And therefore Homer has appropriately called Zeus 'father of Gods and men', because he is the king of them all. For a king is the natural superior of his subjects, but he should be of the same kin or kind with them, and such is the relation of elder and younger, of father and son.⁵⁸ (*Pol.* 1259b10)⁵⁹

Kinship, of course, naturally elicits affection and implies a certain sharing of life.

return of love from God as if we were worthy of it (see *EE* 1238b28-30 and 1239a18-19); but that does not mean that God cannot love us.

⁵⁷ See *NE* 1164b3 (quoted earlier in footnote 42).

⁵⁸ Aquinas' commentary on this passage in the *Politics* reads: "love separates royal rule from tyrannical rule which is not for the sake of love which is had towards the subject, but for the sake of his own advantage" (#154).

⁵⁹ Aristotle makes a similar remark in the *NE* 1160b23-27 (quoted earlier in the main text).

Arguably it is our inability to share in God's life that is in Aristotle's eyes the greater obstacle to friendship than our seeming inability to achieve a proportional equality as to love, for the primary mark of friendship is sharing life together,⁶⁰ and God's life of thought is not one we can share in due to the limitations of intellects that depend on sense experience.⁶¹ Aristotle notes that childhood friends can no longer share their lives when one has "remained a boy in mind, while the other is a man of the highest ability" (*NE* 1165b27), and consequently the two can no longer be friends. *A fortiori*, man and God cannot share their lives, and thus cannot be friends.

On the other hand, when arguing that human happiness lies principally in contemplation, Aristotle says: "It follows that the activity of god, which is transcendent in blessedness, is the activity of contemplation; and therefore among human activities that which is most akin to the divine activity of contemplation will be the greatest source of happiness" (*NE* 1178b20-24). And he continues: "A further confirmation is that the lower animals cannot partake of happiness, because they are completely devoid of the contemplative activity. The whole of the life of the gods is blessed, and that of man is so in so far as it contains some likeness to the divine activity; but none of the other animals possess happiness, because they are entirely incapable of contemplation" (*NE* 1178b25-28).⁶²

⁶⁰ See *NE* 1157b19: "Nothing is more characteristic of friends than that they share life together."

⁶¹ Aquinas explains clearly wherein lies the difficulty as to reason's inability to arrive at knowledge of the divine essence by means of its native ability: "that which is most manifest in nature is hidden to us because it exceeds the proportion of our intellect, and not only because our intellect receives from images" (*ST* I 64.1 ad 2), for if "the mode of being of something exceeds the mode of the nature of the knower, it is necessary that the knowledge of that thing be above the nature of that knower" (*ST* I 12.4).

⁶² See also, *EE* 1217a22-28: "Now it is agreed that happiness is the greatest and best of human goods (and we say 'human' because there

Still for Aristotle, at least according to what he says in *NE* 1159a4, this kinship and likeness between us and the gods is insufficient for friendship. (Aquinas, reasoning along similar lines, maintains that while rational beings, unlike merely sensitive beings, have an openness to being elevated to a vision of the divine essence, they cannot arrive at this knowledge through their natural powers alone, but can do so only through God's grace.⁶³ The imperfect sharing in God's life which is the foundation for friendship with God during man's earthly life also requires grace.⁶⁴)

Socrates, on the other hand, thinks that certain people after death will spend their lives with the gods: "But into the family of the gods, unless one is a philosopher and departs wholly pure, it is not permitted for any to enter, except the lover of learning."⁶⁵ I will return to this point later on.

We have yet to address the question of whether Aristotle thinks that God's providence of the just differs from his providence of the unjust.⁶⁶ A passage quoted above indicates that

might very likely also be a happiness belonging to some higher being, for instance a god); since none of the other animals, which are inferior in nature to men, share in the designation 'happy,' for a horse is not happy, nor is a bird nor a fish nor any other existing thing whose designation does not indicate that it possesses in its nature a share of something divine. . . ."

⁶³ See *ST* I 12.4: "Whether some created intellect through its natural principles can see the divine essence."

⁶⁴ See *ST* II-II 23.1 and ad 1, and also *ST* II-II 24.2.

⁶⁵ *Phaedo* 82 c.

⁶⁶ Two things conducive to happiness that Aristotle seems to regard as god-sent, though not sent as a reward of virtue, are dispositions conducive to the acquisition of moral virtue and dispositions conducive to the acquisition of intellectual virtue. Aristotle sees natural virtue to facilitate the acquisition of true virtue (see *NE* 1179b10). As for intellectual virtue, Aristotle maintains that "among the human race men are well or poorly endowed with intelligence in proportion to their sense of touch, and no other sense; for men of hard skin and flesh are poorly, and men of soft flesh well endowed with intelligence" (*DA* 421a23-28; translation

Aristotle thinks this likely on the grounds of fittingness: "then it will be reasonable to suppose that they [the gods] take pleasure in that part of man which is best and most akin to themselves, namely, the intellect, and that they recompense with their favours those men who esteem and honour this most, because these care for the things dear to themselves, and act rightly and nobly" (1179a26-29). Is it expecting too much from Aristotle some articulation of the Christian notions that "hardships are medicines,"⁶⁷ and "all works for the good of those who love God,"⁶⁸ or are such notions only arrived at through one's personal experience of grace? Socrates seems to hold such views:

[N]o evil can happen to a good man either living or dead, and his business is not neglected by the gods; nor has my business now come about of itself, but it is plain to me that

of W. S. Hett in the Loeb edition). Aristotle speaks of natural gifts as god-given: "Now some think that we are made good by nature, others by habituation, others by teaching. Nature's part evidently does not depend on us, but as a result of some divine causes is present in those who are truly fortunate" (*NE* 1179b20-23). What is not clear is whether the natural gifts he has in mind are natural virtue or softness of flesh or both or something in addition as well.

⁶⁷ See *ST* I-II 87.7 on how temporal misfortunes serve as medicines for the just. Aristotle does speak of punishments as medicines, though without ever asking if God punishes: "[B]oth goodness and badness have to do with things pleasant and painful; for punishments, which are medicines, and which as is the case with other cures operate by means of opposites, operate by means of pleasures and pains" (1220a34-38). Aquinas sometimes refers to this passage when discussing God's treatment of people, e.g., *Scriptum super Sententiis*, Bk. 3, d. 19, q. 1, a. 3, q¹a 2.

⁶⁸ Rom. 8:28. See *ST* I 22.2 ad 4: "God, however, has providence of just men in a certain more excellent mode than of the impious, insofar as he does not permit something contrary to happen to them that may ultimately impede their salvation, for 'all things work together to the good for those loving God,' as is said in Rom. 8:28."

to die now and be free from trouble was better for me. That is why my signal did not warn me. . . .⁶⁹

This is very close to what Aquinas says in discussing merit which is the effect of cooperating with grace:

The good for man simply speaking is his ultimate end, according to Ps. 72:28: "It is good for me to cling to God," and consequently good are all those things which are ordered as leading to this end. And such things simply speaking fall under merit. . . . Accordingly, it ought to be said that if temporal goods are considered insofar as they are useful for the works of virtue by which we are led to eternal life, in this manner they directly and simply speaking fall under merit; as also does an increase in grace and all those things after the first grace by which man is helped so that he may arrive at beatitude. For God gives to the just as much of temporal goods and also of evils as is helpful for arriving at eternal life. And to this extent these sorts of temporal things are simply speaking good. Whence it is said in Ps. 33:11: "Those fearing the Lord are not diminished in any good;" and in another place, "I never saw a just man abandoned" (Ps. 36:25), etc.⁷⁰

I do not know anywhere in Aristotle where he voices a view similar to Socrates' view that the gods see to it that no evil ultimately befalls the just. Aristotle seems to see non-moral evils at least in some cases as arbitrarily blighting the happiness of the just:

[G]reat and frequent reverses can crush and mar our bliss both by the pain they cause and by the hindrance they offer to

⁶⁹ *Apology* 41d. See also, *Republic* 613a: "Then this is what we must believe about the just man: if he is born in poverty, if disease be his portion, or any other evils as men regard them, all these will work together for his good in the end, while he lives or even when he is dead. For the gods of a surety never neglect one who earnestly desires to be just, and by practicing virtue to become as like to God as it is possible for man to be."

⁷⁰ *ST I-II* 114.10.

many activities. Yet nevertheless even in adversity nobility shines through, when a man endures repeated and severe misfortune with patience, not owing to insensibility but from generosity and greatness of soul. And if, as we said, a man's life is determined by his activities, no supremely happy man can ever become miserable . . . though it is true he will not be supremely blessed if he encounters the misfortunes of Priam.⁷¹ (*NE* 1100b30-1101a8)

What does the providence of the gods for the just concretely consist in for Aristotle? What sort of favors do they bestow on those who esteem intellectual matters and act nobly? It has been suggested that perhaps the superhuman virtue Aristotle speaks of in the *NE* is the result of a divine gift to the just which renders them capable of superhuman acts of virtue.⁷²

⁷¹ In the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle does make some comments regarding God and the goods of fortune, goods that can be instrumental to virtue, but the question of the just being privileged recipients does not enter into the discussion; Aristotle simply concludes that the best explanation for why certain individuals seem to consistently make decisions that have lucky outcomes is that they are aided by the gods (see *EE* 1248b3-8). The author of the *Magna Moralia* reasons that the goods of fortune cannot be the work of divine providence, as good fortune befalls those who do not merit it as well as those who do, and bad fortune befalls those who do not merit it as well as those who do; see *MM* 1207a8-18. A similar line of reasoning is used by Aristotle to conclude that prophetic dreams are not sent by God, i.e., "quite common men have prescience and vivid dreams" (464b22, 463b15 and 464a22). Whence, it is reasonable to conclude that he would agree with the aforesaid argument against the goods of fortune being sent by God to reward the just, granted he never actually says this.

⁷² See *NE* 1145a19-27: "[T]o brutishness it would be most fitting to oppose superhuman virtue, a heroic and divine kind of nature, as Homer has represented Priam saying of Hector that he was very good, 'For he seemed, not, he the child of a mortal man, but as one that of God's seed came.' Therefore if, as they say, men become gods by surpassing virtue, of this kind must evidently be the state opposed to the brutish state; for as a brute has no vice or virtue, so neither has a god; his state is higher than virtue, and that of a brute is a different kind of state from vice."

I think it plausible that Aristotle thought this. He does not, however, explicitly identify these godlike men as individuals who have been favored by God.⁷³ When all is said and done, Aristotle never fleshes out in what manner God provides for the just (or for humans in general for that matter), but leaves us with the general notion that God provides for us with fatherly care.⁷⁴

Again, Socrates had a strong conviction that God gave him guidance so that he would make good choices,⁷⁵ a conviction which seems to be due to grace. We do not see Aristotle articulating the same sort of conviction, but this does not necessarily mean that he did not have such. If he did, we would not expect him to speak about it, given that it would be based on his own very personal experience of God's love for him, rather than on the commonly shared experiences which for Aristotle are the foundation of philosophy. Certainly, it is not common experience to have a prophetic voice alerting us when we are about to say or do something wrong—unless, that prophetic voice was nothing other than Socrates' conscience. Be that as it may, while some people profess awareness of God working in their lives leading them to their spiritual perfection, others deny that God even exists, much less works in their lives. Someone might maintain that the latter persons must be in denial of God's working in their lives, basing this view on the belief that God wants the salvation of all.

⁷³ Aquinas in his commentary does not refer to superhuman virtue as having a divine source; see *In Decem Libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum Expositio*, ed. Raymundi M. Spiazzi, O.P. (Turin: Marietti, 1964), #1299-1302.

⁷⁴ See *Summa contra Gentiles* III 147 regarding the many impediments humans face in arriving at their end—God in principle could be of help in regard to them. See also *Summa contra Gentiles* III 92: "How someone is said to be fortunate, and in what manner man is helped by higher causes."

⁷⁵ See *Apology* 40a-c, quoted in main text earlier, regarding Socrates' prophetic voice.

It is possible to deny out of obstinacy things that are evident from common experience. Still, it is one thing for God to be working in one's life (and even continually doing so) and another to experience it. To experience God working in one's life requires faith. What a believer perceives as an answer to his prayers, a non-believer will see as simply a coincidence.⁷⁶ A believer will claim that a given suffering is meant to purify him from worldly attachments, whereas the non-believer will regard it as meaningless. God does not send faith to people according to some predictable time-table. This is implicit in what Aquinas says about the salvation of individuals raised by brute animals, namely, that if such an individual "follows the lead of natural reason in desiring good and fleeing evil, it is to be held with the greatest of certainty that God either would reveal to him those things which are necessary for believing through internal inspiration or would direction some preacher to him, as he sent Peter to Cornelius. . . ."⁷⁷ The experience of God's providence then is not a common experience. God's providence is known by natural reason with certainty through arguments that are based on common experience (e.g., the harmony of beings of diverse natures in the universe), and the knowledge arrived at is very general.

What then about the afterlife: does Aristotle think that God's providential care results in the just being rewarded and the unjust punished? Aristotle does broach the issue of what happens in the afterlife in the *NE*:

⁷⁶ The purported results of a scientific attempt to verify whether sick people who were prayed for fared better health-wise than those who were not prayed for was that they did not. This attempt overlooked the fact that God as a free being may not have wanted to participate in the study. It does bring out, however, that the experience of God's working in one's life lacks the uniformity requisite to serve as a basis for science or philosophy.

⁷⁷ *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. I, ed. Raymundi M. Spiazzi, O.P. (Turin: Marietti, 1964), 14.11 ad 1.

That the happiness of the dead is not influenced at all by the fortunes of their descendants and their friends in general seems too heartless a doctrine, and contrary to accepted beliefs. . . . We ought [to take into account] . . . still more perhaps the doubt that exists whether the dead participate in good or evil at all. For the above considerations seem to show that even if any good or evil does penetrate to them, the effect is only small and trifling . . . or if not trifling, at all events not of such magnitude and kind as to make the unhappy happy or to rob the happy of their blessedness. (1101a25-b5)

However, as Aquinas comments:

To seek, however, whether men after death in some manner live according to the soul and whether they know those things which go on here or if they are in some way affected by them is not to the purpose, since here the Philosopher is treating happiness in the present life. And therefore questions of this sort, which are in need of long discussion, are to be set aside here, lest in this science which is practical, many words are produced outside of works, something that the Philosopher condemns above. But elsewhere we will open these matters up more fully.⁷⁸

This promise is not fulfilled in the part of the Aristotelian corpus that has come down to us, to my best knowledge.

In order to consider whether Aristotle in principle would accept that God rewards and punishes people in the afterlife, one must consider his views on: 1) why in general people merit reward or punishment; 2) whether there is an afterlife, and whether one's existence there is such that one can be rewarded or punished; 3) how we stand to the putative rewarder, God; 4) and lastly, what an appropriate reward would consist in.

Aristotle sees the person who acts virtuously to merit a reward: "honor is the prize or reward of virtue" (1123b35).

⁷⁸ *Comm. on NE*, #203.

Central to virtue is that one must "choose the acts, and choose them for their own sake" (1105a33). A person who begrudgingly does what is right out of fear of punishment plainly is not virtuous, and he is not worthy of a reward. Now if we put together Aristotle's view that the virtuous merit reward with his views that the ultimate ruler or commander of the universe is one, and we fall under his rule, it seems that Aristotle would conclude that God would reward us for freely obeying his commands. On this point, Aquinas reasons:

For certain things are thus produced by God so that having intellect they bear his likeness and represent his image; whence these are not only directed, but are directing themselves to a due end through actions that are properly theirs; which, if in their direction they are subject to divine rule, from divine rule they are admitted to the ultimate end to be achieved; if they proceed otherwise, however, they are banished.⁷⁹

The closest Aristotle ever gets to this line of thought is at the end of the *Eudemian Ethics* where he says:

Therefore whatever mode of choosing and of acquiring things good by nature—whether goods of body or wealth or friends or the other goods—will best promote the contemplation of God, that is the best mode, and that standard is the finest; and any mode of choice and acquisition that either through deficiency or excess hinders us from *serving* and from contemplating God—that is a bad one. This is how it is for the soul, and this is the best standard for the soul—to be as far as possible unconscious of the irrational part of the spirit, as such. (*EE* 1249b17-23) [Emphasis added]

Here Aristotle is talking about this life. It is not obvious what Aristotle means by serving God, though again the notion is plausibly tied to Aristotle's army comparison in which the soldiers serve under the general by working to the general's

⁷⁹ *Summa contra Gentiles* III 1.

end, victory. In this light, Aristotle might have seen good moral behavior on the part of humans as contributing to the perfection of the universe's ordering to God. Those people who did their part or failed to do it would be judged, and rewarded or punished accordingly. At any rate, whatever he means by serving God in the passage above, he makes no mention of what bearing this might have on being rewarded in the next life. Similarly, Aristotle's teachings in the *NE* are about achieving happiness in this life, and not about living the sort of life that will gain one a reward from God in the next. Aquinas never faults Aristotle for this. Aquinas tacitly agrees that overall Aristotle has done a good job of investigating by use of natural reason how we ought to live. Again, Aquinas thinks that those who follow the dictates of natural reason thereby dispose themselves for accepting grace when God freely offers it. He does not expect from human nature unaided by grace more than it is capable of.

Socrates on the other hand is quite explicit about seeing his life as service of God,⁸⁰ and he regards this service as something that will gain him recompense from God in the after-life: "I shall pass over to gods who are very good masters."⁸¹ While one might debate whether Socrates suffered from undue self-sufficiency and lack of awareness that he is in need of

⁸⁰ Socrates speaks repeatedly of his need to obey God's command and to serve him. For example, at the end of the *Apology* he says: "Perhaps someone might say, Can't you go away from us, Socrates, and keep silent and lead a quiet life? Now here is the most difficult thing of all to make some of you believe. For if I say that this is to disobey the god, and therefore I cannot keep quiet, you will not believe me but think I am a humbug" (*Apology* 37e). Earlier on he says: "And I maintain that I have been commanded by the god to do this [namely, cross examine those who think they are wise], through oracles and dreams and in every way in which some divine influence or other has ever commanded a man to do anything" (*Apology* 33c). See also *Phaedo* 62b, c.

⁸¹ *Phaedo* 63c.

salvation from sin,⁸² still there is no doubt that he is grateful for the guidance God provided him and that he does trust in God. In the *Phaedo* Socrates says: "I do think, Cebes, it is right to say the gods are those who take care of us."⁸³ At the end of the *Apology*, he affirms: "[N]o evil can happen to a good man either living or dead, and his business is not neglected by the gods."⁸⁴ And in the *Crito*, his closing words are: "Then let it be Crito, and let us do in this way, since in this way God is leading us."⁸⁵

While Socrates plainly did not have explicit faith in the Redeemer, the minimal measures of supernatural faith and hope that Aquinas speaks of seem borne out in Socrates' speech and behavior:

[A]ll articles [of faith] are implicitly contained in certain first believables, namely that it is believed that God exists and that he has providence concerning human salvation, as is said in Hebrews, "It is necessary for those approaching God to believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him." For the truth that God exists includes all the things we believe to exist eternally in God, things in which our beatitude consists. In faith in God's providence are included all those things that are dispensed by God throughout time for human salvation, things which are ways to beatitude.⁸⁶

⁸² Socrates speaks of the need for purification; however, he seems to regard this as something that is fully in our power: "And is not the purification . . . to separate as far as possible the soul from the body, and to accustom it to collect itself together out of the body in every part, and to dwell alone by itself as far as it can, both at this present and in the future, being freed from the body as if from a prison? . . . But to set it free, as we say, is the chief endeavour of those who rightly love wisdom, nay of those alone, and the very care and practice of the philosophers is nothing but the freeing and separation of the soul from the body. . . ." (*Phaedo*, 67c, d and 85b).

⁸³ *Phaedo* 62b.

⁸⁴ *Apology* 41d.

⁸⁵ *Crito* 54e.

⁸⁶ *ST* II-II 1.7.

The object of hope is the future difficult good possible to be had. Therefore, for someone to hope requires that the object of hope be proposed to him as possible. The object of hope in one manner is eternal beatitude, and in another manner is divine aid. . . . And both of these is proposed to us through faith through which it is known to us that we are able to arrive at eternal life, and that to this end divine aid has been prepared for us; according to Heb. 11:6: "It is necessary for those approaching God to believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him."⁸⁷

From a philosophical perspective Socrates has a much easier time seeing the afterlife as bringing benefit to the just than Aristotle does. While both maintain that the rational soul is immortal,⁸⁸ there are two reasons why Aristotle does not espouse Socrates' rosy views on the afterlife. First, for Socrates the body is an obstacle to thought,⁸⁹ whereas Aristotle maintains that thinking depends on imagining,⁹⁰ and the latter requires the brain. One might argue, as Aquinas does, that:

The Philosopher says in I *De Anima* [403a11] that 'if there is not any operation proper to the soul, it is not the case that it exists separated [from the body].' However, it does exist separated. Therefore, it has some proper operation; and principally that which is to understand. Therefore, it, existing without the body, understands.⁹¹

Still it would be strange if Aristotle was to regard the rational soul's separation from the body to improve rather than to diminish or extinguish its capacity for understanding, given that he thinks that soul and body are naturally united to each

⁸⁷ ST II-II 17.7.

⁸⁸ See DA 430a23 and *Meta.* 1070a28.

⁸⁹ See *Phaedo* 66b-67b.

⁹⁰ See *De Anima*, 431a14-17.

⁹¹ ST I 89.1 sed contra.

other as parts forming a single substance.⁹² Aquinas acknowledges this doubt, and offers a solution that we do not find in Aristotle,⁹³ as the latter never explicitly addresses the matter. Socrates, on the other hand, has no qualms about the separated soul's ability to understand as he regards the body as an obstacle to thought⁹⁴ and indeed he regards as blessed "those who hav[ing] purified themselves enough by philosophy live without bodies altogether forever after" (*Phaedo* 114c).⁹⁵ The Christian belief of the resurrection of the body occurs to neither of the two.

The second reason why Aristotle could not agree with Socrates' views about the afterlife lies in their difference of view on whether humans can share in God's life. Socrates' view on inferiority of human knowledge compared to God's knowledge⁹⁶ does not prevent him from envisaging, and even expecting that some people will spend their afterlife with the gods. Again in the *Phaedo* he says: "But into the family of the gods, unless one is a philosopher and departs wholly pure, it is not permitted for any to enter, except the lover of learning."⁹⁷ And earlier in the *Phaedo* he says: "that I shall pass over to gods who are very good masters, be assured that if I would maintain for certain anything else of the kind, I would with certainty maintain this."⁹⁸ Socrates is able to envisage another earth where the people living there have: "Groves of the gods . . . and sanctuaries, and the gods really dwell in them, and there are between them and the gods voices and prophecies and perceptions and other such communions (*sunousías*). . . ."

⁹² See DA 407b15-25 and 412b5-9.

⁹³ See, among other places, ST I 89.1-3 and *De Veritate* 19.1.

⁹⁴ See *Phaedo* 107c-108c.

⁹⁵ Socrates sees the body as an impediment to knowledge; see *Phaedo* 66b-67b.

⁹⁶ See *Apology* 23a, b.

⁹⁷ *Phaedo* 82c.

⁹⁸ *Phaedo* 63c.

(*Phaedo* 111b, c). This fits both with his view of human beings as essentially spirits, and thus closer to the gods in nature than Aristotle thought we were, and with his more sanguine view of the knowledge humans can attain,⁹⁹ views that go hand-in-hand.

One might wonder whether Aristotle could accept the notion of an ultimate reward or punishment given his views on the eternity of the world for they seem to imply eternal cycles of reincarnation. Although Socrates does sometimes speak of continual reincarnation of souls, he also presents scenarios where the just escape from the cycles of reincarnation.¹⁰⁰ Aristotle, in keeping with his view on the eternity of the world, thinks that "every art and philosophy has probably been repeatedly developed to the utmost and has perished again"¹⁰¹ (1074b10), but he never intimates that the same human soul would be caught up in these cycles, and his views on the fitness between the soul and body arguably exclude reincarnation of a rational soul in a body foreign to it.¹⁰² It seems

⁹⁹ In the allegory of the cave Socrates speaks of the ascent to the contemplation of the supreme good, as if this might really be possible to man (see *Republic*, 517b, c) and later he speaks as if by following a course of studies culminating in dialectic one could realize this ascent: "[W]hen anyone by dialectic attempts through discourse of reason and apart from all perceptions of sense to find his way to the very essence of each thing and does not desist till he apprehends by thought itself the nature of the good itself, he arrives at the limit of the intelligible, as the other in our parable came to the goal of the visible" (*Republic* 532a). (Jowett translation.)

¹⁰⁰ See *Phaedo* 114b, c.

¹⁰¹ Aristotle in *Meteorology* Bk. I, c. 14 speaks of unending geological cycles on earth as a consequence of the eternity of the world, but makes no mention of anything like human reincarnation.

¹⁰² See *DA* 407b13-25, especially 19-25: "All, however, that these thinkers do is to describe the specific characteristics of the soul; they do not try to determine anything about the body which is to contain it, as if it were possible, as in the Pythagorean myths, that any soul could be clothed upon with any body—an absurd view, for each body seems to

improbable that he would endorse the notion that the same person came back over and over, as it is inherently futile to live the same life over and over again, and Aristotle explicitly maintains that mind does not aim at the infinite;¹⁰³ whence such an occurrence could not be part of God's providential plan for humans. So far as I can see, Aristotle would not deny on the grounds of the eternity of the world the possibility that there is an ultimate end that rational souls arrive at and rest in.

Socrates explicitly acknowledges that no one knows for sure what happens after death.¹⁰⁴ When he goes on to speculate about it using reason, it is in the context of his philosophical convictions concerning the immortality of the soul and the fundamental rationality of the world which renders it unfitting, and thus, unthinkable that when all was said and done harm would come to the just person. However, he also has personal experience of God guiding him in this life. As I said above, Socrates appears to be animated by the supernatural virtues that come with the gift of grace. I think that if a philosophical difficulty was raised concerning the meaning of life that he could not answer, as Aristotle could certainly put to him, he would not lose his convictions about this life or the next.

Aristotle pushes certain philosophical questions relevant to the afterlife further than Socrates did, namely, those concerning the nature of the human intellect and the limits of our

have a form and shape of its own. It is absurd as to say that the art of carpentry could embody itself in flutes; each art must use its tools, each soul its body." See also *DA* 432b18-22.

¹⁰³ See *Meta.* 994b12-13: "Those who introduce infinity do not realize that they are abolishing the nature of the Good although no one would attempt to do anything if he were not likely to reach some limit; nor would there be intelligence in the world, because the man who has intelligence always acts for the sake of something and this is a limit, because the end is a limit."

¹⁰⁴ See *Apology* 29a, b.

knowledge, and ironically ends up unable to whole-heartedly adopt Socrates' views about the afterlife, views which are closer to the truth as known through faith. Aristotle agrees with Socrates on the immortality of the soul and the fundamental rationality of the world which renders it fitting that the just be rewarded. Socrates, reasoning from the starting point of common experience, cannot defeat the argument that our natural faculty of reason is such that we of ourselves cannot share in God's life of wisdom and thus we cannot be friends with him. Aristotle, on the other hand, cannot show using natural reason that there is no supernatural remedy for this. And Aristotle does point out that human beings have an appetite for the divine that other animals lack.

As to what the reward consists in: I do not know what to do with Aquinas' philosophical argument that concludes that some of us must attain to an intellectual knowledge of the essence of the first cause. This argument is based on two principles that Aristotle enunciates, the first being that upon seeing an effect, we naturally desire to know its cause, and once we know it, we naturally desire to understand it in itself; the second being that natural desires are not instilled in us in vain. Aristotle seems quite resigned to human limitations, and does not speculate whether they can be surpassed.¹⁰⁵ Our minds to the most intelligible things are like "the eyes of the bats to the blaze of day" (993b10), and that's the way life is. We should seek to be happy as "humans are happy" (1101a20). Aristotle does not conclude on the basis of natural reason that

¹⁰⁵ See *Summa contra Gentiles* IV 54: "The Incarnation of God was the most efficacious aid to man striving after beatitude. For it was shown that the perfect beatitude of man consists in the immediate vision of God. It could, however, seem to someone that man can never arrive at the state where the human intellect would be immediately united to the divine essence, as intellect to intelligible object, on account of the immense distance between the natures; and thus man would become lukewarm about seeking beatitude, held back by the very despair of it."

we must enjoy the beatific vision, that humans must know the ultimate cause of things in itself.¹⁰⁶ I am unable to do more than pose the problem which numerous authors have treated at length.¹⁰⁷

Did Socrates know that the afterlife would consist in union with God through the vision of the divine essence? Again, Socrates is convinced that he would spend the afterlife with the gods: "I shall pass over to gods who are very good masters, be assured that if I would maintain for certain anything else of the kind, I would with certainty maintain this."¹⁰⁸ He

¹⁰⁶ See *ST I* 12.1: "Certain reckoned that no created intellect can see the essence of God. But this is unsuitably said . . . for in man is a natural desire to know the cause when it sees an effect; from this wonder arises in men. Therefore, if the intellect of the rational creature is not able to arrive at the first cause of things, a natural desire will remain vain." See also *ST I-II* 114.2: "Eternal life is a certain good exceeding the proportion of the nature of the creature, because it also exceeds its knowledge and desire, according to 1 Cor. 2:9: 'Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it risen in the heart of man.'"

¹⁰⁷ One might also think that Aristotle would find the failure of most humans to achieve their end problematic given that nature does nothing in vain and that he would see in this something like original sin which calls for some sort of remedy. However, both he and Aquinas seem to find adequate natural explanations for this. Aquinas maintains: "It happens in man that the good is in the fewer number of cases, and the bad in the greater number, because to deviate from the mean, in contrast to hitting the mean, occurs in many ways, as is said in Bk. II of the *Ethics*, and because sensible goods are more known to the many than are the goods of reason" (*Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo* in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. 2, ed. P. Bazzi et al. [Turin: Marietti, 1965], 1.3 ad 17). In this he concurs with Aristotle who notes the multiple ways of going wrong when aiming for the mean of virtue ("For men are good in but one way, but bad in many" [*NE* 1106b30]) and who makes the following observations regarding pleasure: "The bodily pleasures have appropriated the name both because we oftenest steer our course for them and because all men share in them; thus because they alone are familiar, men think there are not others" (*NE* 1153b34-35).

¹⁰⁸ *Phaedo* 63c. See also *Phaedo* 81a, 82 c and 111b, c.

also maintains that the ultimate good for man is what he describes alternately as "apprehending by thought itself the nature of the good,"¹⁰⁹ beholding true being,¹¹⁰ or beholding self-subsisting beauty.¹¹¹ While it does not appear that this vision of the good for him is the same thing as being with God, for he seems to make the gods participants of such knowledge,¹¹² (unlike Aristotle who sees God and God's knowledge as identical), he certainly comes close to the Christian notion of the beatitude.¹¹³

Comparing Aristotle's knowledge to Socrates' one might be tempted to conclude that sound philosophy is an obstacle to faith. Again, there is nothing in Aristotle's reasoning that excludes the possibility of revelation or personal inspiration by God. It seems fairer to see Aristotle's philosophy, not as an impediment to faith, but as simply posing puzzles that only faith can answer: the unnatural and diminished state of human soul after death in its perpetual existence as separated from the body, along with the apparently unsatisfiable natural desire we have to know the ultimate cause of things. Socrates' philosophy was deficient on a number of counts in ways that made it easier for him to believe that both friendship with God and a meaningful afterlife were possible. Still, what carried the day as far as his convictions about these things was

¹⁰⁹ Republic 532a. (Jowett translation).

¹¹⁰ See *Phaedrus*, 247c, d.

¹¹¹ See *Symposium* 211a, b.

¹¹² See *Phaedrus* 247c-248a.

¹¹³ See *Symposium* 211e-212a: "'What indeed,' she said, 'should we think, if it were given to one of us to see beauty . . . in pure simplicity?' 'Do you think it a mean life for a man,' she said, 'to be looking thither and contemplating that and abiding with it? Do you not reflect,' said she, 'that there only it will be possible for him, when he sees the beautiful with the mind, which alone can see it, to give birth not to likenesses of virtue . . . but to realities . . . and when he has given birth to real virtue and brought it up, will it not be granted him to be the friend of God, and immortal if any man ever is?'"

not primarily philosophy, but his personal experience of God working in his life in a supernatural way. There is nothing irrational about thinking that God can do so. Indeed, Aristotle acknowledges on the basis of natural reason that God watches over us with fatherly care on a purely natural plane. He never denies that God could do so on a supernatural plane. Aquinas, as we have seen, affirms that if one follows what is right as known by natural reason, God will most certainly bestow his grace on him. Again, that Aristotle does not speak of any such experience in his philosophical works is in keeping with his method which is to reason starting from what is known from common experience.

Is God love according to Aristotle? God is love insofar as the act of his will which has himself as object is not other than himself.¹¹⁴ God is also love insofar as he provides help in the natural order to human beings so that they achieve their end of happiness, help he does not bestow on other material living things.¹¹⁵ God is not love as a being who condescends to share his own life with man or who raises man to knowledge of his essence or who brings about man's ultimate salvation. Aristotle, however, neither implicitly nor explicitly denies that God could be love in these ways.

¹¹⁴ Socrates shows no indication of having made the investigations necessary to understand that God is love in this sense.

¹¹⁵ The question of whether God's love of himself is the same as his love for us never arises in Aristotle since he never speaks in these terms. Aquinas addresses this question in a number of places, e.g., *ST I* 19.3 and *De Veritate* 23.4.