

The Object of Aristotle's God's Νόησις in *Metaphysics* Λ.9*

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Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Λ.9 deals with the controversial topic of the object of his God's νόησις. It is the purpose of this paper to discover exactly what this νοητόν is. In Section I, I catalogue existing interpretations and also state how the two key concepts for understanding the νοητόν are (i) God's *substancehood* and (ii) his metaphysical *simplicity*. In Section II, I work out the first two aporiae of Λ.9, namely (1) 'How must God be if he is to be most divine?' – laying out the three options presented, of God's οὐσία being (a) potentially, but not *actually* thinking, (b) actually thinking, but determined to do so by something else, and (c) actually thinking, and determined to do so by itself – and (2) 'What does God intelligize?' – again laying out the three options of God's νοητόν being (I) himself, or (II) something else, specifically, (II.i) always the same thing (but *not* God) or (II.ii) a (n unrestricted) number of *different* things (none of which are God), which God switches between intelligizing. In Section III, I show how Aristotle solves these aporiae by contending that God's οὐσία is (c) and the object of his νόησις is (I), such that he intelligizes his own οὐσία, and I explain what this means. In Section IV, I present the second pair of aporiae – namely, (3) 'Is it possible for God to intelligize himself directly?' and (4) 'Where does the good belong in this case?' – and show how, by solving these, Aristotle clarifies the position arrived at in Section III. In Section V, I present the final aporia – 'Can God himself be composite (as τὸ νοούμενον)?' – and its solution, and conclude

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Special thanks are due to Lindsay Judson for his detailed comments on an earlier draft of this paper – I am very grateful for his scholarly mentorship. I am also thankful for the suggestions made at University College London, where a condensed version of this paper was presented in November 2018, and for the helpful remarks made by the anonymous referees of this journal.

that Aristotle's God is a radically-unified Narcissus-God who intelligizes his own οὐσία and who has, above all, fulfilled the Delphic principle: Γνωθι Σεαυτόν.

1

Before working through the text of *Metaphysics* Λ.9, it is important to begin by cataloguing previous interpretations of the object of Aristotle's Prime-Mover God's¹ νόησις and pointing out two important concepts required for understanding just what this object is. Traditionally, the object of God's νόησις is just *himself*.² This 'Narcissus-God' interpretation³ is frequently characterized by a reliance on the following 'Syllogistic Proof': [1] God intelligizes⁴ (necessarily and exclusively)⁵ what is best; [2] God is best; therefore, [3] God intelligizes himself.⁶ Both Brunschwig⁷ – though *only* for Λ.9, and *not* Λ.7 – and Menn⁸ advance this view. Alternatively, Norman suggests that God's νόησις, being the same as our 'abstract thought,' takes an unspecified 'perfection [τὸ τιμιώτατον],' which does *not* result in 'self-contemplation,' as its object.⁹ De Filippo suggests that, because God is pure

¹ It is controversial to call Aristotle's Prime-Mover 'God.' Some deny Aristotle's God is the Unmoved Mover (e.g. Bordt (2011)). Others (e.g. Menn (2012), 423) deny that Aristotle has any concept of a 'capital-G' God. Bordt's point is well-taken – *essentially*, God is the pure actuality of νόησις, *not* the Prime Mover. Yet, the attribute 'Prime Mover' may still properly be predicated of him, so while it is 'misleading' to primarily characterize him thus, it is not incorrect. Against Menn, since the Prime Mover moves the Prime Heaven, it is the only *absolutely* unmoved celestial unmoved mover – the 'lower' unmoved movers being *per accidens* moved with their associated spheres within the Prime Heaven (*DC* I.9, 279^a11-28; cf. Menn himself (2012), 442). This seems to warrant applying the term 'God' to the Prime Mover as a way to set him apart.

² Ross (1995), 114.

³ So-called after Norman (1969), 63-64.

⁴ Following Brunschwig (2000), 275 n.6, I translate the word-family as νοῦς = intellect; νόησις = intellection; νοεῖν, νοεῖσθαι = intelligize, to be intelligized; νοούμενον = what is intelligized, the intelligized object.

⁵ Cf. Brunschwig (2000), 288, for these added constraints.

⁶ Ross (1995), 114; Norman (1969), 63; Brunschwig (2000), 288.

⁷ Brunschwig (2000), 288, 288 n.45, 299-301.

⁸ Menn (2012), 444-446.

⁹ Norman (1969), 67-69, 71, 73.

actuality, we cannot know the content of his νόησις.¹⁰ Kosman takes the force of Λ.9 to be the *denial* that God thinks in a reflexively self-conscious way,¹¹ and, instead, suggests God's eternal, intentional subjectivity is what remains as ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις while he intellects first one, then another, unspecified essence.¹² Lear¹³ and Burnyeat¹⁴ believe that God is – and, thus, the object of his νόησις is – a unified system of all intelligible essences (Brunschwig¹⁵ also thinks this for Λ.7). Lastly, Beere, emphasizing the radical unity and simplicity of God, suggests that, while God intellects himself, this occurs in a *non-relational* way and, thus, resists further specification.¹⁶

With the current scholarly landscape enumerated, I wish to highlight the two key concepts of (i) divine substancehood and (ii) divine simplicity, both of which are posited in the chapters leading up to, and including, Λ.9. First, with respect to divine substancehood, *Metaphysics* Λ is introduced as an essay about the principles of 'substance [οὐσία]' (Λ.1, 1069^a18-19) and, throughout Λ.6-8, Aristotle frequently makes it clear – through the use of the singular or by directly mentioning the 'prime heaven' – that his God (and *not* just his many celestial unmoved movers) is a substance (Λ.6, 1071^b4; Λ.7, 1072^a24-5, 1072^a31-32, 1073^a3-6; Λ.8, 1073^a29-30, 1074^a34-35). Similarly – and again using the singular to specifically denote God – God's metaphysical simplicity is attested to in Λ.7, wherein he is first said to be a 'simple [ἡ ἀπλή]' substance (1072^a31-32) and, later, to be 'without parts and indivisible [ἀμερῆς καὶ ἀδιαίρετος]' (1073^a6-7).¹⁷ Further, these two characteristics are also present in Λ.9, with God's substancehood being thrice-affirmed at 1074^b20, 20, 22, and his metaphysical simplicity being suggested at 1075^a3-5. Possessing this understanding of both of these points, as we shall see, is crucial for our investigation of the object of Aristotle's God's νόησις.

2

Let us now begin with Λ.9's introduction (1074^b15) and the first pair of

¹⁰ Ross (1995), 545, 558-560.

¹¹ Kosman (2000), 323.

¹² Kosman (2000), 321, 323.

¹³ Lear (1988), 295.

¹⁴ Burnyeat (2008), 40-43, 40 n.53.

¹⁵ Brunschwig (2000), 303-304.

¹⁶ Beere (2010), 20, 26-27, 29-30.

aporiae. I think it is clear early on – though, *contra* Norman,¹⁷ not so early as ‘τῶν φαινομένων θεϊότατον’¹⁸ at 1074^b16 – that the chapter’s subject is God’s intellect (specifically its divinity and object), because of the use of the singular and the thrice-mentioned substancehood (οὐσία), of the intellect under discussion (1074^b20, 20, 22). Kosman, then, is incorrect to suggest that the topic of this chapter is merely the difficulty of the divinity of both man and God’s intellects – since man’s νοῦς is *not* itself a substance, but only a faculty.¹⁹

Now, onto the first aporia (1074^b15-21). The difficulty here is expressed through the question: ‘How must God be – what “condition” (1074^b16) must he be in – if he is to be most divine?’ The ‘condition’ here refers to whether God’s οὐσία is νόησις or νοῦς, where the two are contrasted – as throughout Λ.9²⁰ – as actuality (though the term ‘ἐνέργεια’ is absent from Λ.9)²¹ to δόναμις.²² While this aporia does not directly deal with the object of God’s νόησις, it is impossible to determine God’s νοητόν without first understanding what God *is*.²³ Evidently, there are three options for God’s οὐσία: (a) potentially, but not *actually* thinking, (b) actually thinking, but being determined to do so by something else, and (c) actually thinking, and determined to do so by itself. Option (a) is immediately rejected due to the lack of reverence in the ‘sleeper’ case (1074^b17-18), where intellection is not (*ever*) actualized, resulting in an Endymion-like state of perpetual potency (a

¹⁷ Norman (1969), 69.

¹⁸ Note that all Greek from *Met.* Λ in this article is borrowed from Alexandru’s (2014) critical edition of the book.

¹⁹ Kosman (2000), 307. Cf. Beere (2010), 5 n.7, who points out that the problems Λ.9 raises do *not* arise for human instances of νοῦς (e.g. being the best substance, not changing its object, etc.).

²⁰ That is, at 1074^b20, 21-22, 28 – after the forgivable exception of the introductory instance of ‘τὸν νοῦν’ at 1074^b15.

²¹ Dumoulin (1988), 30-31 and Brunschwig (2000), 301 employ this absence as an argument for Λ.9 being a (much) earlier composition than Λ.7 (in which the term ‘ἐνέργεια’ is present). However, Λ.9 draws unambiguous inferences from chapters Λ.1 and Λ.6 concerning God’s immutability and eternal intelligizing (see this Section and Section III (especially footnote 47), below) and both of these chapters *also* contain the term ‘ἐνέργεια,’ which appears to invalidate at least this portion of Dumoulin and Brunschwig’s larger arguments for the chronological relationship between Λ.7 and Λ.9.

²² For examples of other instances where this contrast is made, see *Met.* Θ.9, 1051^a30 or *DA* I.3, 407^a19-22.

²³ Cf. De Filippo (1995), 555.

life Aristotle explicitly calls *not* divine at *EN* X.8, 1178^b20). Evidence is also given against (b) via the contention that, if something else *determines* God to intelligize, and is therefore ‘in charge of [κύριον]’ God (and his intelligizing) – so that he is not essentially intelligizing, but is brought to actuality by an external and distinct νοητόν or by some other faculty or substance (the phrasing is ambiguous)²⁴ – then he would ‘not be the best substance [οὐκ ἂν ἡ ἀρίστη οὐσία],’ contrary to what we believe about God (1074^b18-20).²⁵ We then learn – in what I take to be an unqualified sense, since the subject of ‘αὐτῷ’ that is being referred to here, and repeatedly from 1074^b15 to 1074^b21 (e.g. τούτου at 1074^b19),²⁶ seems to be the ‘τὸν νοῦν’ from the very first clause, namely the ‘intellect’ (God) which presents τινὰς ἀπορίας – that God has ‘honour [τὸ τίμιον]’ *because of* his (actual) ‘intelligizing [voeῖν]’ (1074^b20-21).²⁷ This suggests that (c) is the preferred case.

Two key things to notice from this first aporia are that (i) we are starting from the subject-object model also present in the *De Anima*, and, relatedly, (ii) we are, throughout, holding onto the *substancehood* of God. That the subject-object model is being employed is clear from the ‘determination’ language present in Λ.9. Thus, we should be reminded of *DA* III.4, where a passive faculty (νοῦς), which is a δύναμις capable of receiving a form, is acted upon by an external object of thought (the νοητόν), which causes the νοῦς to, in ‘in a way,’ become that νοητόν, even before actually intelligizing²⁸ (429^a10-18; 429^b5-9; 429^b22-430^a9). This subject-object model, involving a νοῦς receiving the νοητόν, is also present at Λ.7, 1072^b20-21.²⁹ The aporia, then, seems to arise from conceiving God’s substance as a νοῦς in a ‘naturalistic’ way³⁰ – i.e. as a *faculty* and a passive, receptive, capacity. It seems that this provides another piece of evidence for accepting (c) rather than (b), though –

²⁴ De Filippo (1995), 553.

²⁵ We should recognize the limitation here: the negative conclusion – that God would not be the best substance – only follows because this actual intelligizing is subject to something else which would be κύριον over it. Thus, Brunschwig (2000), 280-281 is correct: ‘τούτου δ’ ἄλλο κύριον’ belongs to the protasis beginning with ‘εἴτε νοεῖ.’

²⁶ With Beere (2010), 11 n.15 and *contra* Brunschwig (2000), 278 n.18.

²⁷ The colon setting this clause off by itself in Alexandru’s (2014), 107 critical edition of *Metaphysics* Λ should, therefore, be respected.

²⁸ Cf. Burnyeat (2008), 23-34.

²⁹ Cf. Beere (2010), 8.

³⁰ Cf. Beere (2010), 4-6, 10-13.

contra Norman³¹ – the aporia remains unsettled as of now – as evidenced by the ‘εἴτε . . . εἴτε’ construction at 1074^b21-22.³²

1)

We can now move onto the *second* aporia, which asks, ‘What does God intelligize?’ (1074^b21-27). Cautiously assuming, with Brunschwig³³ and Ross,³⁴ that Aristotle accepts this aporia’s premises, there appears to be an exclusive and exhaustive nature to the division presented, wherein the options for the object of God’s νόησις are: (I) himself *or* (II) something else (1074^b22-23). *Within* option (II)³⁵ are the further options of (II.i), where the object is always the same (but *not* God), or (II.ii), where the objects are a(n unrestricted) number of *different* things, which God intelligizes in the way of ‘first that, and then this’ (*none* of them being God).

This alternative is more significant than many commentators have realized. It is not just that Aristotle ‘does not conceive of any intellect able both to intelligize itself and something else,’³⁶ it is that God as his *own* object of thought, (I), is presented such that he *cannot* be understood as just one possible νοητόν among νοητά.³⁷ We know that, elsewhere, Aristotle states that the νοῦς and its object are the same, especially for νοητά without matter (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072^b20-21; *DA* III.4, 429^b30-430^a7), when the νοῦς reaches second potentiality / first actuality, or is at second actuality (as a purely actual νόησις-God would be).³⁸ Thus, in these cases, *anything* the νοῦς intelligizes would be able to be considered ‘itself.’ Yet, something *more* is clearly meant at Λ.9, 1074^b21-23. God thinking himself is set off from *all other* possible objects, so that there must be a special, close relationship intended that would *not* hold even in those cases where νοῦς thinks theoretical objects of knowledge.

Returning to the text, at 1074^b23-26 Aristotle immediately calls into doubt – and ultimately rejects – the idea that God’s νοητόν is not of ‘the fine [τὸ

³¹ Norman (1969), 69.

³² Cf. De Filippo (1995), 554 n.16; Brunschwig (2010), 287; Beere (2010), 18.

³³ Brunschwig (2000), 282-283.

³⁴ Ross (1995), 114.

³⁵ The ‘καὶ εἰ ἕτερόν τι’ construction clearly sets (II.i) and (II.ii) within (II), *contra* De Koninck (1994), 472-473.

³⁶ Brunschwig (2000), 282.

³⁷ Cf. Norman (1969), 70.

³⁸ The identity between νοῦς and νοητόν, of course, also holds during second actuality.

καλόν,]’ but rather just ‘anything [τὸ τυχόν] (1074^b24),’ suggesting that this would be absurd.³⁹ Instead, Aristotle affirms that God must clearly intelligize ‘the most divine and most worthy of honour [τὸ θειώτατον καὶ τιμιώτατον] (1074^b26).’

While this portion of text does not *per se* eliminate any of our options, it plays an important role in restricting what we can include within (II) and, also, provides some evidence against (II) as a whole. The options available, given the ‘τὸ θειώτατον καὶ τιμιώτατον’ requirement, are that either God intelligizes (I) God himself, or (II) something other than God, like the Good,⁴⁰ or even the Good *and* some other thing(s), which are better than God and equally as divine and honourable as the Good. What it *cannot* mean, *contra* Beere,⁴¹ is that the object of God’s νόησις is (III) God *and* all of the other unmoved movers, who are all equally honourable and divine, because, the way the dichotomy is set up, God cannot think both himself *and* other things that are ‘co-honourable’ and ‘co-divine.’

I did not here differentiate the case of ‘God intellects the Good, which is more divine than God’ into (II.i), and the case of ‘God intellects the Good *and* other things, none of which are God, but all of which are equally more honourable and divine than God’ into (II.ii) because I think that 1074^b26-27, which definitively precludes (II.ii), still preserves the possibility of a multiplicity of objects if they are intelligized *simultaneously*, as a set. What we see in this passage are two arguments against the (II.ii) idea that God intelligizes ‘first this and then that.’⁴² First, Aristotle puts pressure on the possibility that there could be multiple things which are all ‘co-divine’ and ‘co-honourable’ by suggesting that God cannot change his νοητόν because change is for the worse. The second argument (1074^b27), definitively eliminates (II.ii) by claiming that *any* change amongst the objects of God’s thought would unacceptably be a ‘motion [κίνησις].’ This imports the ‘immutability’ idea from the earlier chapters of *Metaphysics* Λ (Λ.1,

³⁹ Perhaps suspiciously, Aristotle uses the term ‘διανοεῖσθαι’ here – a term which Burnyeat (2008), 29, argues against ‘collapsing up’ into νοῦς, and contends to belong only to the hylomorphic man and *not* to God (cf. Brunschwig (2000), 283 n.32). I, however, think that it is likely that this is just a slippage point here, as the context (i.e. the repeated mentions of substancehood) still suggests God as the subject and neither Burnyeat nor Brunschwig gives a satisfying account of why man would appear at this particular point.

⁴⁰ Brunschwig (2000), 284.

⁴¹ Beere (2010), 14 n.25.

⁴² Cf. Brunschwig (2000), 285.

1069^a33-1069^b2; Λ.6, 1071^b3-5; Λ.7, 1072^a25, 26-7, 1072^b7, 1073^a4)⁴³ and suggests that God's perfection is such that he cannot be subject to κίνησις as in (II.ii).

Further, if we admit God cannot change, we can seriously damage the possibility of (II) as a whole. In *DC* II.12, 292^a22-292^b15, Aristotle suggests that what is in the *best condition* does not move, while those things which most closely approximate it – like the Primary Heaven – move with few movements to attain the Good, and so on, until we get to those things that are *incapable* of attaining the Good, and instead strive for its *imitation*, and, finally, arrive at the Earth which, being *so* far away, no longer even attempts to move to attain *this*.⁴⁴ On this view, we would have to believe that God was as far away removed from the Good as the Earth if he does not move but the object of his νόησις is some unchanging object (or simultaneous set of objects) other than itself (as in II.i). This unacceptable conclusion heavily supports accepting (I). Still, Aristotle does *not* here explicitly state that God is the object of his own νόησις, indicating that the aporia still remains open.

3

Now we can approach the interrelated solution passage (1074^b28-35) for the first pair of aporiae.⁴⁵ Let us start with the solution to the first aporia. Recall that the two remaining viable solutions are: (b) God actually thinks,

⁴³ Both Dumoulin (1998), 30-31, 338-339 and Brunschwig (2000), 301-304, 306 contend that Λ.9 is an 'archaic' draft of Λ.7 and that it is supplanted by Aristotle's 'philosophically mature' view given in Λ.7. However, I – along with the majority of scholars – remain sceptical of this interpretation. It seems to me, rather, that there is a strong philosophical link between Λ.7 and Λ.9, as evidenced, for example, by the clear importation of philosophical concepts here. Brunschwig (2000), 285 admits that this importation occurs but thinks that, since the imported concept is also espoused in Λ.1 and Λ.6, the link is not sufficiently strong to suggest that Λ.9 is contemporaneous with Λ.7. However, if Λ.9 *is* linked to Λ.1 and Λ.6, as Brunschwig allows and, indeed, argues for, then – since both of these chapters seem to be from a similar period of philosophical development as Λ.7 (e.g. all of Λ.1, 6, and 7, unlike Λ.9, make use of the term 'ἐνέργεια' (cf. footnote 22)) – there seems to be *prima facie* evidence that Λ.9 and Λ.7 are similarly linked and, thus, products of the same period of Aristotle's thought. The burden of proof, then, seems to shift more heavily towards Dumoulin and Brunschwig's interpretation.

⁴⁴ Cf. Menn (2012), 449-450.

⁴⁵ Cf. Beere (2010), 8-9.

but is determined to do so by something else – i.e. is a νοῦς unified with a νοητόν and caused to actually intelligize either by that νοητόν or something else other than itself – and (c) God actually thinks and is determined to do so by himself – i.e. God's οὐσία is, itself, νόησις. The first argument here, from weariness (1074^b28-29), is designed to attack (b). If the οὐσία of God is not νόησις, but δύναμις (νοῦς), Aristotle says that the continuity of its νοήσεως would be *burdensome*. This is an unacceptable consequence for God, who is supposed to intelligize *eternally*,⁴⁶ because if an eternal actuality were burdensome, its capacity for action would 'wear out' and the actuality would cease (*Met.* Θ.8, 1050^b26-7).⁴⁷

A *further* argument (1074^b29-33) is also produced against (b)⁴⁸ (*contra* Kosman, who thinks this argument is against (c)).⁴⁹ The conclusion of this argument is that, if God is essentially a δύναμις, a νοῦς, then something would be 'more honourable [τὸ τιμιώτερον]' than it, namely its νοητόν. This argument is explained by the fact that, for a God that is essentially (b) – a faculty – its actualization will belong to it even if it intelligizes 'the worst [τὸ χείριστον]' things. Thus, because this is clearly to be avoided, the actual intelligizing will not be the best. Therefore, if God is essentially a faculty – even if it is currently intelligizing the most divine and honourable thing(s) – it would only be doing so *contingently*,⁵⁰ which would preclude it from being intrinsically honourable for intelligizing, as God is explicitly required to be at 1074^b20-21.⁵¹

Therefore, God's οὐσία must essentially be (c) – pure νόησις. God's substancehood must *not* be forgotten here, for it is the key to properly

⁴⁶ *Met.* Λ.6, 1071^b20-21; Λ.7, 1072^a25, 1072^b24-30, 1075^a4. Brunschwig and Dumoulin are both silent on the fact that this argument in Λ.9 is dependent on God's eternal intelligizing – a point raised *only* in Λ.6 and 7 and not explicitly states in Λ.9 – which, again, suggests philosophical continuity between the chapters and tells against their idea that Λ.9 is an early, obsolete draft of Λ.7.

⁴⁷ Cf. Beere (2010), 19; Reeve (2016), 535 n.1384.

⁴⁸ Cf. Norman (1969), 70; De Filippo (1995), 556-557; Brunschwig (2000), 286; Beare (2010), 19.

⁴⁹ Kosman (200), 316.

⁵⁰ Cf. Norman (1969), 70.

⁵¹ Brunschwig (2000), 286 does not draw a difference between the cases of 1074^b20-21 and 1074^b29-33 but, rather, suggests that the 1074^b20-21 case is *also* limited to the (b)-God conception. Yet, this would mean that there would be no explicit reason why an essentially potential God who *did* always intelligize the most divine thing would not have a νόησις that was the best thing. Insofar as our account is able to explain this, then, it has an advantage over that given by Brunschwig.

understanding the second part (1074^b34-35) of Aristotle's two-part claim at 1074^b33-35. Aristotle says here that God 'is the most-powerful thing [ἐστὶ τὸ κρᾶτιστον]' and, famously, that God ἔστιν ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις. I want to make two points here. Firstly, with the claim of ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις, Aristotle explicitly adopts (c) as his solution to the first aporia: God must essentially – substantially – be νόησις. I am, therefore, reading, with Beere⁵² and De Filippo,⁵³ the genitive νοήσεως as *subjective* rather than *objective*. Aristotle affirms that the νόησις is the νόησις of something that is *essentially* νόησις as opposed to the νόησις of a mere νοῦς. If we, instead, took νοήσεως to be an *objective* genitive, so that God's νόησις was just being said to be *of* some unspecified νόησις, we would not only be repeating – in a weaker way – the first part of the two-part claim, namely, that God 'intelligizes himself [αὐτὸν ἄρα νοεῖ],'⁵⁴ but we would also never explicitly solve the first aporia by affirming that God's οὐσία was νόησις. Secondly, the 'τὸ κρᾶτιστον' wording is not, *contra* Brunschwig,⁵⁴ merely a Syllogistic-Proof-style argument for God intelligizing himself, but, rather, it also affirms the ontological independence of God, because God – understood as (c) – is not dependent on either an external object or an internal capacity to be fully actualized.⁵⁵

1)

Let us now work through and solve the *second* aporia. Recall that the two still-viable options for the object of God's νόησις are either (I) God himself, *or* (II.i) some unchanging object (or simultaneous set of objects) other than God which is (are) nevertheless (co-)divine and (co-)honourable to some degree higher than God.

The first argument (1074^b28-29) of this Section implicitly suggests that the burdensomeness would only occur if the νόητον was something *distinct* from God, such that it would be unacceptably laborious to continually actualize an object that was *not* essentially identical to God.⁵⁶ This occurs because, if God, understood as a νοῦς, were actually identical with, and actually intelligizing, a νοητόν, this νοητόν could *not* be essentially the same as God because, if it *were*, it, too, would be essentially a δύναμις and, there would be

⁵² Beere (2010), 18-19.

⁵³ De Filippo (1995), 556-557.

⁵⁴ Brunschwig (2000), 288.

⁵⁵ De Filippo (1995), 558-559 and Menn (2012), 447, both recognize the significance of God's ontological priority.

⁵⁶ Brunschwig (2000), 286 briefly suggests this reading but does not fully develop it.

no actual νόησις, but only the already-rejected case of potential νόησις.

A further argument is also advanced against (II.i): If God is conceived of as a faculty – as in (b) – then the value of his νόησις is determined by his νοητόν (as explained above). And, if his νοητόν is such that it permits him (at least logically) to intelligize worse things, i.e. if there is no essential unity *necessitating* that he intelligizes the most divine and honourable thing(s), then the νοητόν seems to lose some of its value. In other words, the *best* νοητόν is that which does *not* permit God to intelligize anything else worse than himself (1074^b31-33). However, this requisite necessity condition only comes with (I). Thus, Aristotle definitively rejects (II.i) as a possibility for the νοητόν of God's νόησις.

It is important here to note how Kosman's confusion with respect to the limit of the second argument at 1074^b29-33⁵⁷ leads to the illicit non-restriction of νοητά such that, as Kosman concludes, God can think *all* things.⁵⁸ Kosman, not restricting this argument to (b), thinks that the upshot is that, if the divinity of the νοητά were to be considered, then, in *any* case, the divinity of νόησις would be unacceptably jeopardized. He therefore concludes that God's νόησις must be best *independent* of whatever it intelligizes. In fact, however, the force of the argument goes the other way:⁵⁹ *because* God's νόησις is best, it must think what both is best absolutely and what *allows* God to be best, in the way explained above. Thus, God *must* have *only* himself as his νοητόν.

We can now mention two things about 1074^b33-34. First, this passage can – though it need not – be seen as an expression of the Syllogistic Proof.⁶⁰ Secondly, we can take this 'self-intelligizing' to be a clear expression of Aristotle's solution to the second aporia, by settling on (I), i.e. that the νοητόν of God's νόησις is God himself.

2)

Now that we have reached the conclusion of our first pair of aporiae and have determined that God's οὐσία is νόησις (c), and that he is also the νοητόν of his νόησις (I), it is important to explain exactly what this does not, and what it does, entail. Most significantly, it *does not* entail 'the self-thinking of νοῦς *qua* νοῦς,' i.e. an intelligizing of the act of (reflexive self-) intelligizing

⁵⁷ Kosman (2000), 317.

⁵⁸ Kosman (2000), 321, 323.

⁵⁹ As Beere (2010), 16-17, 17 n.29 notices.

⁶⁰ Cf. Brunschwig (2000), 288; Menn (2012), 442-444; Ross (1995), 114.

– in the way that De Filippo⁶¹ and Norman⁶² caricature the ‘Narcissus-God’ position – because we have determined that God is *not* a νοῦς but is, essentially, a *pure* νόησις.

We must, however, be careful here. It is imperative that νόησις is not de-substantialized to a mere ‘act’ – God’s substancehood, as enumerated in Section I, *must* be preserved. This, however, is made complicated by the fact that, in addition to being *essentially* νόησις, God is also *simple*. The solution, I believe, is to bear down on Aristotle’s claim that there cannot be floating properties ungrounded by a substance (*GC* I.3, 317^b5-12; II.10, 337^a29; *Phys.* I.2, 185^a31-32; I.4, 188^a5-8). Aristotle nowhere makes an exception to this rule and, further, it does not seem that doing so – by claiming that something whose οὐσία is an actuality does not require its activity to be grounded, because its essence just *is* the activity – is coherent. Aristotle, as is clear from the early chapters of the *Categories* (especially 2, 1^a29-1^b2; 4; 5, 2^a11-17), believes that substances and activities operate on different ontological levels: activities are said *in* and *of* a subject, and substances *are* subjects. Thus, even if the οὐσία *is* an activity, there *must* be a logical distinction permitting the substance and the activity to be – while actually and essentially unified – logically different *in being*. Therefore, God remains simple and his οὐσία is still able to logically ground his essential activity of νόησις – he is, thus, a self-contemplating Narcissus-God.

This view of God also helps answer Beere’s question of how God’s νόησις can have a ‘cognitive content’ if it is no longer understood in the ‘naturalistic’ way of a capacity (νοῦς) being actualized by a νοητόν, but, rather, as the νόησις of essential νόησις.⁶³ By appealing to the logical distinction that we have advanced here between the οὐσία and the act, we can say that God’s intellection avoids vacuity by being the intellection of his *own* essence. Kahn is, then, correct to note that an individual act of νόησις is *not* itself a νοητόν, so it *cannot* be the object of God’s intelligizing.⁶⁴ Rather, God’s own οὐσία is what serves as the νοητόν of his νόησις, such that it is of the concept of eternal, simple, purely actual, and absolutely unmoved νόησις.

What we get, then, is a radically-unified, self-contemplating Narcissus-God, where his νόησις is of *himself* as a substantial, purely actual, self, and his eternally-actual νόησις is essentially unified metaphysically with his οὐσία, only differing from it logically, thereby preserving his simplicity.

⁶¹ De Filippo (1995), 557-558, cf. 544.

⁶² Norman (1969), 71-72.

⁶³ Beere (2010), 10.

⁶⁴ Kahn (1992), 375.

Thus, as we have explained above, God is related to himself in an extremely close way – so close that this relationship cannot be duplicated by *any* other νοητά, for no other νοητά will be *essentially* identical with his actuality.

4

With the object of God's νόησις posited as his own οὐσία, we now are faced with several aporiae concerning how to work this out. The next pair of aporiae also have an intertwined solution (overlapping at 1075^a3-5), and help express just what we mean when we say that God intelligizes himself.

Let us start with the third aporia, which asks 'Is it possible for God to be his own νοητόν directly?' (1074^b35-36) and is concerned with the 'πάρεργον' problem.⁶⁵ This problem begins with an inference from how, for several (human) cognitive activities, it seems that they are always *of* something else and only 'by-the-way [ἐν παρέργῳ]' of themselves – i.e. perception is not *of* perception principally, though we *do* 'perceive that we perceive' (*DA* III.2, 425^b12) – in an attempt to motivate a similar worry for the νόησις of God. However, we should notice that νόησις is *not* included in this list,⁶⁶ foreshadowing a dis-analogy in the cases.

And this is exactly what we find. From 1074^b38-1075^a3, Aristotle presents the cases of identity between 'the thing [τὸ πρᾶγμα]' 'without matter [ἀνευ ὕλης]' and the 'substance and the essence [οὐσία καὶ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι]' for the productive sciences, and between τὸ πρᾶγμα and the λόγος and νόησις for the theoretical sciences. Thus, in these cases, there is clearly a path to some-level of identity: while a productive science is not *fully* identical to the intelligizing human νοῦς because of its hylomorphic nature (clearly 'carpentry' cannot be identical to my νοῦς because my νοῦς cannot physically become a hammer or other such tools), if we abstract the matter away, there *is* identity. Similarly, for (non-hylomorphic) theoretical sciences, there is actual identity between the science and my νόησις, but not substance-to-substance identity (I, as a substance, do not become identical to this science, only one of my faculties, νοῦς, does) because man is limited by being, himself, a hylomorph.⁶⁷ However, for God – as explained in 1075^a3-5 – it seems that there is, finally, full substantial identity: Aristotle asserts there, for matterless things,

⁶⁵ Brunschwig (2000), 291-292.

⁶⁶ Cf. De Filippo (1995), 561.

⁶⁷ Cf. De Filippo (1995), 548.

‘intelligizing will be one with what is intelligized [ἡ νόησις τῷ νοουμένῳ μία].’ As Kosman suggests, for God there is an erasure between remote and immediate object: God’s οὐσία, being νόησις, is *fully* identical to his νοητόν.⁶⁸

Further, God’s οὐσία is identical to his νοητόν in a special sense – more closely than if he were just intelligizing some non-hylomorphic theoretical science – because, instead of just intelligizing one among many νοητά, God *essentially* intelligizes his own οὐσία. He is a radically-unified Narcissus-God, metaphysically simple with only a logical distinction between his eternal activity of νόησις and his οὐσία.

1)

The fourth aporia, significantly, explicitly introduces the *simplicity* requirement to Λ.9. The question is, ‘In respect of τὸ νοεῖν or τὸ νοεῖσθαι does the good belong to God?’ (1074^b36-38). The non-identity of ‘the being [τὸ εἶναι]’ of the νοήσει and the νοουμένῳ is emphasized here, and this seems to be the key for understanding the aporetic solution. This solution, given at 1075^a3-5,⁶⁹ is just that, for things without matter, what is intelligized and the intellect will be the same thing, and ‘intelligizing will be one with what is intelligized [ἡ νόησις τῷ νοουμένῳ μία].’ Beere rightly takes this to be a claim about God’s simplicity. However, he goes too far by suggesting that this text lays down the framework to deny that intelligizing is ‘a subject-object relation between a thing and itself,’ to affirm that God’s νόησις is *not* ‘self-reflection or a reflexive relation’ and to claim that there is ‘no basis for distinguishing between the νοῦς and its activity (ἐνέργεια), νόησις.’⁷⁰

This position threatens to entirely de-substantialize God. As explained above, one can distinguish the substance and its activity, even if the substance *is* that activity, by logically distinguishing the *ground* from the action. Rather than viewing the solution to the aporia, as Beere does, in such a way that denies that the substance and the act are different even in *being*, I think that Aristotle’s response shows that, while they *are* different in being, they are unified, and, thus, essentially *simple* in actuality. So, while God’s substance *is* to act, the ‘good’ belongs to it, as the act does, *due to* its grounding substancehood.

⁶⁸ Kosman (2000), 321.

⁶⁹ *Contra* Brunschwig (2000), 276, 292, who thinks that this aporia is never answered.

⁷⁰ Beere (2010), 28-30.

5

The final aporia asks ‘Can God himself be composite (as τὸ νοούμενον)?’ (1075^a5-6). If – with Beere⁷¹, Brunschwig,⁷² De Filippo,⁷³ and Kosman⁷⁴ – we, again, cautiously assume that Aristotle accepts the premises of this aporia, there appear to be three things to say about Aristotle’s solution (1075^a6-10). First, it seems clear that *any* sort of composite νοούμενον – which appears to be an attempt to import, from (II.i) into (I), the possibility of simultaneously intelligizing of a complex object – is prohibited. There may not be a simultaneous intelligizing of actually separable objects *even if they all* (somehow) were God. As Menn notes,⁷⁵ any such complexity would illicitly result in *potentiality*, because what is complex is *potentially* divisible (*Met.* N.2, 1088^b14-28; Z.13, 1039^a3-14). Thus, God cannot, *contra* Lear⁷⁶ and Burnyeat,⁷⁷ be – or have, as the object of his νόησις – a unified system of all intelligible essences.

Secondly, while there is no complex whole that is potentially divisible in the case of God, this does *not* mean that there are no logical *aspects* whatsoever (*contra* Beere).⁷⁸ God's simplicity, as explained above, still involves the logical aspects of *substance* and *act*, as is required to avoid collapsing down to a de-substantiated floating activity.

Lastly, *contra* Brunschwig,⁷⁹ it is *not* the case that a human intellect intelligizing indivisibles and the divine intellection would ‘bring out a complete similarity.’ God should *not* be understood as a perfected version of us, intelligizing more perfectly and for a longer period of time.⁸⁰ Aristotle is extremely critical of the poets for making the gods eternal men, and of Plato for making the Forms eternal sensibles (*Met.* B.2, 997^b5-12). It seems that he would be equally critical of himself if he made God an eternally intelligizing human. Instead, God stands to his νοητόν, i.e. himself, in a way that is unlike how he could stand to any other νοητά, because his *essential* unity with

⁷¹ Beere (2010), 30.

⁷² Brunschwig (2000), 298-301.

⁷³ De Filippo (1995), 562.

⁷⁴ Kosman (2000), 322.

⁷⁵ Menn (2012), 446-447, 447 n.35.

⁷⁶ Lear (1988), 295.

⁷⁷ Burnyeat (2008), 40-43, 40 n.53.

⁷⁸ Beere (2010), 30.

⁷⁹ Brunschwig (2000), 299-301.

⁸⁰ *Contra* Norman (1969), 67-8.

himself eliminates the need for a remote object, and this produces the *objective* self-consciousness of his essence.⁸¹ We, thus, know exactly what the content of his νοητόν is, *contra* De Filippo.⁸² Further, *contra* Burnyeat,⁸³ we *can* express God's essence in a single sentence, namely: the νοητόν of God's νόησις is his own, purely actual οὐσία, the concept of an eternal, simple, purely actual, and absolutely unmoved νόησις.

It should be clear now where my theory stands. God *is* a self-contemplator, in the style of the traditional Narcissus-argument, but he is radically-unified and *not* just empty thought. Further, he is a *substance*, and (metaphysically) *simple*, such that, being the best thing, he eternally intelligizes himself *alone*, thereby achieving the highest metaphysical good.

⁸¹ Kosman (2000), 321, 323.

⁸² De Filippo (1995), 545, 558-560.

⁸³ Burnyeat (2008), 25-26.

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[Abstract]

The Object of Aristotle's God's Νόησις in *Metaphysics* Λ.9

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In this paper I attempt to discover the object of Aristotle's God's νόησις in *Metaphysics* Λ.9. In Section I, I catalogue existing interpretations and mention the two key concepts of (i) God's substancehood and (ii) his metaphysical simplicity. In Section II, I explore the first two aporiae of Λ.9 – namely (1) what God's οὐσία is and (2) what God intelligizes. In Section III, I show how Aristotle solves these aporiae by contending that God's οὐσία is actually intelligizing, and being determined to do so by himself, and that the object of his νόησις is *himself*, such that he intelligizes his own οὐσία, and I explain what this means. In Section IV, I present the second pair of aporiae in Λ.9 and show how, by solving these, Aristotle clarifies the position arrived at in Section III. Lastly, in Section V, I present the final aporia and its solution, and conclude that Aristotle's God is a radically-unified Narcissus-God who intelligizes his own οὐσία and who has, above all, fulfilled the Delphic principle: Γνῶθι Σεαυτόν.

[Key words]: Aristotelian theology, pure intellect, self-intelligizing, divine simplicity, divine substancehood, *Metaphysics* Λ.9.

Received: October 16, 2018
Reviewed: December 20, 2018
Accepted: December 20, 2018