

Aristotle's Conception of God: Some Notes

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Some background ideas

1. Metaphysics is the study of being, which is also the study of God.
 - a. Something can either exist as a substance or as a property; the second is dependent on the first. So to be as a substance is the primary way of being.
 - b. Substances can be either form, matter, or a combination.
 - c. Formless matter can't exist: matter can't exist independently of form.
 - d. Form independent of matter is prior to form that exists in matter, because it is independent.
 - e. Not all forms are substances – only those things that are their essences.
 - f. God is form existing independently of matter. God is the primary type of being.

2. The four causes
 - a. Material: “that out of which a thing comes to be, and which persists; e.g., bronze, silver, and the genus of these are causes of a statue or a bowl” (*Physics* 194b24).
 - b. Formal: “the form . . . the account of the essence” (194b27)
 - c. Efficient: “the primary source of change or rest” (194b30), e.g. an adviser is the cause of an action, a father is the cause of his child, and in general the producer is the cause of the product.
 - d. Final: “the end (*telos*), that for which a thing is done” (194b33). “form, mover, and *telos* often coincide” (198a25)

Metaphysics XII

1. So what does God turn out to be? Metaphysics XII connects change to the most fundamental type of being:
 - a. you can't have change or time without substance, because change require substance, and time is either change or an attribute of change
 - b. time cannot have come into being. The alternative is that the world came out of non-being and non-time – but then there would be a 'before' and an 'after' time came into being – but this could only occur in time.
 - c. If time, and so change, did not come into being, then there has always been time and change.
 - d. If there has been change, something has caused that change. It is not enough that the unmoved mover *can* cause things to change; it must be actually doing so, if there has always been time. So the essence of this eternal substance is actuality, not potentiality.
 - e. In its essence – eternal, substance, actual – this substance does not change. It is 'unchanged'. It is an activity – a changing that doesn't lead to change of itself. A change involves losing one property and gaining another; the subject of an activity does not.
 - f. If change aims at something else, the end is of greater good than the change. To see change as the primary way of being, we need the kind of change that aims at nothing outside itself – activity.
2. The unmoved mover must be without matter; since matter changes and is not eternal.
3. A final cause causes change without changing; the object of thought and desire, the 'good'. But God does not exist only as an occasional object of thought.
4. So God must also be able to think – but not just be the capacity (since again, 'thought' doesn't exist unless there is actual thinking going on); it must be actual thought, constant thinking. Here is an activity that does not aim outside itself.
5. Divine thinking must contemplate what is best – itself; if it thought about other things, this would be a change, and one for the worse: "its thinking is a thinking on thinking".
6. God as unchanging source of all change and all final ends, necessary, eternal, immaterial, thinking.