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Do Plato and Aristotle agree on self-motion in souls?

The attempt to establish some form of agreement or compatibility between Plato and Aristotle on a wide range of philosophical topics is a well-known characteristic of the Neoplatonic commentary tradition.¹ In the following, I wish to focus on one aspect of the rise of the harmonizing interpretation of Plato and Aristotle, namely the question how the two philosophers' positions on self-motion were first opposed, then reconciled by Neoplatonist commentators. Although the concept of self-motion is central to Neoplatonic psychology, there is so far no comprehensive treatment of its reception, transformation and use in philosophical debates in the later tradition. In the following, I hope to draw a broad outline sketch of the different ways in which the debate between Plato and Aristotle on the concept has been interpreted.

1 Plato and Aristotle on self-motion

In Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* (245c1-246e2), Socrates introduces a 'demonstration' (*apodeixis*; 245c1.4) concerning the 'nature of divine and human soul' as it is revealed in its affections (*pathē*) and actions (*erga*; c3-4). The central operative term in Socrates' demonstration is that of soul as a self-moving thing. If soul is self-moving, it is a principle of motion for other moved things, and *qua* principle of motion ungenerated, and hence imperishable. Accordingly, what is self-moving, being an imperishable principle of motion, never ceases its movement, and is hence immortal.² Since we can, moreover, observe that ensouled things have motion within themselves, while soulless things derive it from an outside source, the very essence of soul may be identified with self-moving motion.

¹See, for instance, Gerson (2005) for an assessment of Aristotle's Platonism through Neoplatonic spectacles. For the *de anima* commentaries in particular, Blumenthal (1976) remains the classic article. A review article by Cristina D'Ancona in *Oriens*, 36 (2001), 340-351 gives a good survey of the wider literature. For the early stages of the Neoplatonist harmonisation of Plato and Aristotle, see Karamanolis (2006a).

²The precise logical construction of the *Phaedrus* argument is a matter of controversy. Hermias of Alexandria divides it into two mutually supportive syllogisms (cf. *In Phdr.* 103.3-104.12 Couvreur). The two most thorough recent analyses read it as a single complex argument with constituent sub-arguments; see Bett (1986), 3; Blyth (1997), 196f.

In Book X of the *Laws*, Plato returns to the idea of soul as a principle of motion, and identifies the life-giving power of soul with its self-motion. Soul, when present in mixtures of elements, makes them ‘ensouled’ and thus alive. In *Laws X*, however, the Athenian Stranger adds to the life-giving power of soul a more detailed, and more curious, account of the way in which soul produces motion in the universe:

So soul drives all things in the heavens and on earth and in the sea through its own motions, the names of which are wishing, investigating, supervising, deliberating, [...]. (*Laws X* 896e-897a)

According to this passage, the cognitive and deliberative capacities of soul, rather than its life-giving power are primarily productive of motion in all things (they are the *prôtourgoi kinêseis*, primary-work motions).³ Soul with its primary-work motions takes over (*paralambanei*) natural changes and motions in the physical world, and thus manages the universe.⁴

The first philosopher to scrutinise the Platonic idea of soul as a principle of motion that is itself moving is Aristotle, whose stance on the issue is notoriously difficult to determine.⁵ While Aristotle does seem willing to allow that animals are self-movers., he critically analyses the concept in his *Physics* and *On the Soul*.⁶ At *Phys.* VIII.5.257b2-6 we find an argument that could seem to rule out self-movers *tout court*. A self-mover would have to both undergo motion and initiate it, thus combining actuality and potentiality with respect to the same thing within itself, which is impossible. It would be ‘transported as a whole, and transport itself with the same motion, being one and indivisible in form, and be altered and alter, so that it would teach and learn at the same time, and heal and be healed with the same health’. Aristotle’s alternative is to consider a self-moving thing as a composite of unmoved and moved parts, rather than a whole moving itself as a whole:

It is necessary, therefore, for that which moves itself to have a part that causes motion but is unmoved and a part that is moved but does not necessarily cause motion; with either both parts touching each other, or one part touching the other. (*Phys.* VIII.5.258a17-21)

³ On the question whether the *Phaedrus*’ account of soul as ‘principle of motion’ is compatible with the description of the tenth motion as we find in *Laws X*, cf. Skemp (1942), 112.

⁴ Hermias and Priscian try to explain the relationship between psychical and physical motion by way of elaborate analogies. Cf. Hermias *In Phdr.* 107.6-26 Couvreur and Priscian *sol. ad. Ch.* 49.19ff. Bywater.

⁵ For a fuller discussion of Aristotle’s attitude towards self-motion than I can provide here, see the papers collected in Gill and Lennox (1994).

⁶For instance at *Physics* VIII.6.259b1-3: ὁρῶμεν δὲ καὶ φανερώς ὄντα τοιαῦτα ἃ κινεῖ αὐτὰ ἑαυτὰ, οἷον τὸ τῶν ἐμψύχων καὶ τὸ τῶν ζώων γένος κτλ.

When Aristotle revisits the question of self-motion in his *On the Soul* I.3, he summarizes his earlier position in the *Physics* with the claim that it is not necessary to suppose that soul *qua* principle of motion is self-moving.⁷ Since Aristotle had argued in the *Physics* that a principle of motion does not itself have to be moved, and that even so-called self-movers are really composites of unmoved and moved parts, there is no necessity to attribute motion to soul. In *On the Soul*, however, Aristotle adds to this criticism a much stronger rejection of self-motion in souls, as being both false and impossible, as well as unnecessary.⁸

We must begin our examination with motion, for surely it is not only false that the essence of soul is correctly described by those who say that it is what moves (or is capable of moving) itself, but it is an impossibility that motion should be even an attribute of it. That there is no necessity that what originates motion should itself be moved has been said before. (*De an.* I.3.405b31-406a6)

Aristotle's attack in *De. an.* I.3 falls roughly into two parts, the first dealing with the conceptual impossibility of self-motion, the second with various absurdities involved Democritus' and Plato's views on how soul imparts its own motion onto bodies.⁹

Let us begin with part one. After distinguishing between two ways in which a thing can be moved, either by something else or by itself, Aristotle reasonably picks out the second sense as relevant to self-motion. All four kinds of motion (locomotion, alteration, diminution and growth) are in space. On the self-motion hypothesis, soul is not merely moved along with its body (like whiteness is by a man). Therefore, if soul is moved by nature, one of the four motions must belong to its nature, and so must space (406a12-22).

A second argument capitalizes on the notion that the opposite to being moved or being at rest by nature is being moved or being at rest by compulsion. In Aristotle's physical system, a rock thrown up into the sky, for example, is compelled to undergo an unnatural motion (406a22-30). But what would be the equivalent unnatural motion for souls?

It would, thirdly, be reasonable (*eulogon*) to infer that the soul has the same motions that it confers on the body. Since the body moves in space, the soul would also move in space. But in that case, there would be nothing preventing the soul from leaving and entering bodies at will (406a30-b5).

Finally, Aristotle can point out that any kind of motion is a departure (*ekstasis*) from an initial condition; so whichever kind of motion one attributes to

⁷ The reference at *De an.* I.3 406a3 to 'what has been said before' (*proteron eirêtai*) appears to recall the *Physics*, e.g. *Phys.* VIII.5.258b7ff. on the first unmoved mover.

⁸ Cf. *Met.* IX.1047b12; *De cael.* I.12.281b2ff. for 'false' and 'impossible'.

⁹ See Polansky (2007), 84-93, for a helpful overview of Aristotle's critique.

soul, it will lead to a departure from its own essence (which is *ex hypothesi* self-motion), and so to something other than self-motion (406b11-15).

Part two of Aristotle's attack begins by poking fun at Democritus' theory of spherical atoms that are supposed to impart motion on the body (406b17-20), and then moves on to a final onslaught on Plato's theory of soul in the *Timaeus* (406b26-407b11). Aristotle's criticisms are the result of a stubbornly literalist reading of passages such as *Tim.* 36b6-d; their target is the Platonic notion that the cyclical motion of the world soul causes the heavens to move in circles. Plato's revolving world soul is above all characterized by intelligence (cf. *Tim.* 36e3-4), so that Aristotle can focus his attack on absurdities that result from explaining thought or *nous* in terms of cyclical motion. *Nous* is unified by a temporal succession of thoughts, and so its continuity is more like the succession of numbers in a series than the continuity of an extended magnitude (*megethos*). If *nous* were an extended magnitude spinning in circles, furthermore, there would be no way to explain how it can connect, either as a whole or in parts, with its object of thought. Finally, various kinds of thinking like practical syllogisms and definitions entail limits and end-points; these cannot be explained by the eternal revolutions of *nous*.

I have not tried to be exhaustive in my summary of Aristotle's criticisms of Platonic self-motion, but hope that my selection is representative. In the following, I will be interested in two strategies of dealing with these criticisms, one of refutation, the other of conciliation. My main two texts are Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (II.15-16 Willis) and Hermias' *Commentary on Plato's Phaedrus* (102.1-120.16 Couvreur). As we will see, an early tradition of Platonism took a defensive stand against Aristotle, while later Platonists such as Syrianus (who is the source of Hermias' comments), made it their concern to explain away apparent discrepancies between Plato's and Aristotle's pronouncements on self-motion in souls.

2 Macrobius

Let us begin with a glance at Macrobius, who is commenting on Cicero's Latin translation of the *Phaedrus*' argument for immortality placed within the 'Dream of Scipio' (*De Re Pub.* VI.25 Ziegler). His stated intention is to gather the arguments from different followers of Plato (*diversi sectatores Platonis*) in defence of Aristotle's criticisms of self-motion. Macrobius therefore openly acknowledges his dependence on other Platonist sources. The argumentation of the section with which I am concerned here is structured in a highly scholastic fashion,

grouping Aristotelian ideas into syllogisms and refuting them one by one. Aristotle, according to Macrobius' presentation, makes two points against Plato:¹⁰

(I) Nothing is self-moved.

(II) If there were something self-moved, it could not be soul.

Point (I), that nothing is self-moved, is mainly developed with reference to Aristotle's *Physics* VIII.4, according to which either all things are immovable, or all things are in motion, or some are in motion and some are not. We know by observation and experience that not all things are immovable, and again, that not all things are in motion. Since however the heavenly bodies are always in motion, by symmetry it follows that there must also be something that is never in motion, and so immovable (*In somn. Scip.* II.14.1-5). Aristotle wishes to identify soul with what is immovable, and denies that anything can be self-moved, since everything is either moved or unmoved (*ibid.*, II.14.7-14).

Aristotle's second point (II) in Macrobius' presentation - that even if there were something self-moved, it could not be soul - rests on the following argument:

In contradiction to Plato, who says that the soul is the beginning of motion, he [Aristotle] forms a syllogism in this fashion: 'The soul is the beginning of motion: but the beginning of motion is not moved; therefore the soul is not moved.' (*In somn. Scip.* II.14.23 Willis)

If that which is the beginning of motion is not unmoved, but self-moved, there will be in one and the same thing a part that moves and a part that is moved. But if everything that moves is moved by something else, then the part of self-movers that moves will have to be moved by something else. So self-movers cannot be principles of motion, but another principle will have to be found (*ibid.*, II.14.16-21). Aristotle's inference then follows: everything in motion is moved by something else; that which is the first cause of motion is either stationary or else moved by something else; but if it is moved by something else then it cannot be called the first cause, and the search for the first cause will always continue; it follows that it must be stationary; therefore the original mover is stationary, and so unmoved (*ibid.* II.14.22-23).

Macrobius' Platonist reply to Aristotle's two-pronged attack (nothing is self-moved; if there is something self-moved, it cannot be soul) needs to demonstrate

¹⁰ Cf. *In somn. Scip.* II.14.4-14 Willis for Aristotle's first point (I), and 15.4-27 for Macrobius' refutation of it; and *In somn. Scip.* II.14.15-30 for the second (II), with Macrobius' refutation at 15.28-16.

two things: firstly, that the disjunction ‘everything is either moved or unmoved’ is not exhaustive in the sense required by Aristotle, so that there can be something that has self-motion; and secondly, that soul can be self-moving in the relevant sense. Thus, according to Macrobius, soul’s being self-moved does not imply a duality between a moved and a moving part, which in turn has to be explained with reference to an unmoved mover. Rather, being self-moved denotes motion in soul as its essential property, just like fire is essentially hot, without a duality of heating and heated parts within it (*ibid.*, II.15.11).¹¹ If then, the beginning of motion is self-moved, it is easy to explain that soul must be this self-moved thing, since no body taken by itself or in combination with other bodies can explain motion in natural things (*ibid.* II.15.28).

As pointed out already, there are good reasons for thinking that Macrobius’ arrangement of Aristotle’s arguments, and his refutation of them, are not original to Macrobius. The source question with Macrobius is intricate, but arguably, the Platonist with the best claim to be Macrobius’ source on the question of self-motion is Porphyry.¹² There are two pieces of evidence which lend some support to the view that Porphyry took a critical and hostile stance towards Aristotle on the subject of self-motion. Firstly, a fragment from Porphyry’s *Against Boethus on the soul* preserved by Eusebius attacks the Aristotelian notion of *entelecheia* by arguing that an unmoved soul cannot explain how deliberations, inquiries and volitions arise in the soul.¹³ Since elsewhere, however, Porphyry seems to think that Aristotle’s theory of soul as the *entelecheia* of a living body is in fact compatible with Plato’s theory of the separable immortal rational soul, one may suspect that the fragment from Eusebius is based on a misattribution.¹⁴

There remains, however, Themistius’ paraphrase of *On the Soul* I.3, which contains a polemical passage directed against an anonymous critic of Aristotle.¹⁵ The unnamed critic is referred to as having composed a ‘summary of what

¹¹ Cf. Plotinus *Enn.* II.6.1.33.

¹² See Armisen-Marchetti (2003), 182ff., for an excellent survey of the different scholarly proposals regarding Macrobius’ sources in his discussion of self-motion.

¹³ Porphyry *Against Boethus on the Soul*, fr. 247F Smith: Πρὸς δὲ τὸν ἐντελέχειαν τὴν ψυχὴν εἰπόντα καὶ ἀκίνητον παντελῶς οὐσαν κινεῖν ὑπειληφότα ρητέον, πόθεν οἱ ἐνθουσιασμοὶ τοῦ ζώου μηδὲν μὲν ξυνέντος ὧν ὄρα τε καὶ λέγει, τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς καὶ τὸ μέλλον καὶ μὴ ἐνεστῶς βλεπούσης καὶ κατὰ ταύτῃ κινουμένης κτλ. (Eusebius, *PE* XV.11.1-11.4).

¹⁴ Note Karamanolis (2006a), 296-298, who argues that the fragment should be attributed to Atticus. His main reasons are (i) the incompatibility of the fragment with what Porphyry says about the relation between the transcendent soul and the *empsychia*, discussed in more detail in Karamanolis (2006b). The two passages that could suggest Porphyry saw Plato’s and Aristotle’s psychology as compatible are Simplicius *In de An.* 247.23-26 and Porphyry *Sent.* 18. (ii) The relative proximity of the fragment to Atticus, who also makes heavy use of *Laws* X in his anti-Aristotelian polemics.

¹⁵ Cf. Themistius *In de An.* 16.15ff. Heinze. See also Moraux (1978), 305ff. on Porphyry’s critique of Aristotle in Themistius, expanded in points of detail by Ballériaux (1995).

Aristotle said about movement'.¹⁶ A marginal note in one manuscript of Themistius' *Paraphrase on the Soul* identifies the critic with Porphyry, a suggestion which is strengthened by the fact that Simplicius cites a 'summary' of books V-VIII of Aristotle's *Physics* by Porphyry with the title 'on motion'.¹⁷ One of the main objections raised by the critic is that 'the soul does not also cause the body to be moved with the same motions with which it itself is moved' (Themistius, *In de An.* 16.19f.). The motions of soul consist in 'judgments and giving assent'; those of the body are in place.¹⁸ Furthermore, just as soul does not move the body with its own proper motions, so, inversely, the motion with which the body is moved is not necessarily the same as that with which the soul is moved. Against Aristotle's complaint that if soul is essentially self-moved, and motion a departure from an initial condition, soul will move away from its own essence, Porphyry maintains that soul's own motion is life, and that living is the same for it as being moved (*ibid.*, 18.16ff.).

3 Hermias

The evidence from Themistius, then, provides a good reason for seeing the influence of Porphyry, and to a lesser extent Plotinus (who nowhere in the *Enneads* refutes Aristotle's criticism of self-motion with as much detail), behind Macrobius' discussion of self-motion. With Macrobius, the opposition between Plato and Aristotle is absolute, and unsurprisingly resolved in favour of Plato. Subsequently, the antagonism between Aristotle and Plato on the question of soul's essential self-motion seems to vanish in favour of the well-known Neoplatonic move to harmonize the two philosophers. Hermias, when commenting on the *Phaedrus*' argument for the soul's immortality, duly notices that 'no insignificant man' has raised doubts on the existence of the self-moved. Instead of dwelling on the difficulties, however, Hermias quickly goes on to lay out the common ground between Plato and Aristotle (*In Phdr.* 104.18f.).

There are two strategies Hermias uses to reconcile the two philosophers. Firstly, he maintains that Aristotle's criticisms in *On the Soul* I.3 merely show that soul is not moved by physical motions, which is in agreement with Platonic doctrine. Secondly, and perhaps more surprisingly, Hermias claims that both philosophers agree that soul is a self-moved principle of motion. The only difference between Plato and Aristotle is that they use different names for the same

¹⁶ Cf. Themistius *In de An.* 16.30f.: σύνοψιν ἐκδεδοκῶς τῶν περὶ κινήσεως εἰρημένων Ἀριστοτέλει.

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. Simplicius *In Phys.* 802.7ff. Diels and Ballériaux (1995), 222.

¹⁸ Themistius *In de An.* 16.20-21: κρίσεις μὲν γὰρ καὶ συγκρατήσεις αἱ κινήσεις αἱ τῆς ψυχῆς, τοπικαὶ δὲ αἱ τοῦ σώματος.

thing. If Aristotle calls the soul, or at least part of the soul, 'unmoved', this merely indicates that he thinks only bodily motions are motions strictly speaking.

The first strategy, that tries to argue away Aristotle's criticisms in *On the Soul*, is expressed very clearly by Hermias in the following passage:

Aristotle took away all bodily movements from the soul, which is very true as we also say, and Plato declares clearly that the movements of the soul are other ones, besides all bodily movements (*In Phdr.* 104.19-22).

The formula 'Aristotle took away all bodily movements from the soul' is the critical get-out-clause needed to square Plato and Aristotle on the subject of self-motion. For on this reading, even Aristotle's apparently anti-Platonic argument at *On the Soul* 406b11ff. (if soul is self-moved, its essential motion must either be locomotion, alteration, diminution or growth, with all the absurd consequences that follow, e.g. that soul must be in a place) is not a final objection to the idea of a self-moving soul, but part of a negative process of eliminating all kinds of bodily changes for the soul. The result of this process is then compatible with the Platonic view that soul is self-moved in terms of non-bodily motions.

The second point on which Plato and Aristotle are in agreement, according to Hermias, is on the very nature of the principle of motion, which for both philosophers is soul, although it is called 'self-moved' by Plato and 'unmoved' by Aristotle (*In Phdr.* 105.6f.). Importantly, Hermias adds that he is not talking about the living animal, which according to Aristotle, as we have seen, can be called 'self-moved' in the sense of a composite of moved and unmoved parts. Instead, the subject of the investigation is to be the self-moved defined as the medium between what is other-moved and what is wholly unmoved, in line with the central Neoplatonic tenet that different levels of being need to be bridged by intermediate entities.¹⁹

Aristotle, Hermias tells us, himself agrees that there are Intellect, Life and Being (note the Neoplatonic triad here), and that with each of these there is an intermediate entity above that which receives something. Above the kind of being which is brought about by something else stand the heavens or intellects on Aristotle's terms, which are not caused by anything else; above the kind of life that receives its life from something else, there is that which has its life by itself, as again the heavens and intellects according to Aristotle.²⁰ Finally, above the intellect that receives thinking, i.e. the potential intellect, stands the active intellect, which derives its thinking from itself and thinks itself. Hence, on good

¹⁹ Cf. Proclus *In Tim.* II.313.19ff. Diehl (reporting Iamblichus' doctrine) for the necessity of mediating entities. For Proclus' division of motion into unmoved, self-moved and other-moved, cf. *El. Th.* prop. 14.

²⁰ Cf. *De cael.* I.10; *Phys.* VIII.5.256b25ff.

Aristotelian principles, in the case of motion too there must also be an entity immediately above what is other-moved, which is self-moved soul (*In Phdr.* 105.6-106.6). Thus, the other-moved at the level of generation, and the wholly unmoved at the level of intellect, require mediation through the agency of self-moving souls. The same point can be established through a *reductio* argument: it would be illogical (*alogos*) to move from the other-moved to the unmoved without intermediary, since we could not tell whether the unmoved was below the other-moved (in the realm of pure matter) or above it (i.e. with intellect) (*ibid.*, 106.6-16).

Hermias' two strategies for reconciling Plato and Aristotle appear to presuppose some more detailed engagement with Aristotle's positions in his *On the Soul*, the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics*, presumably by Syrianus.²¹ Thus, we are clearly meant to infer that Plato and Aristotle agree on the nature of the self-moved, even though Aristotle, because he only acknowledges physical motions to be proper motions, prefers to talk about the 'unmoved'. Simplicius, who argues for much the same conclusion as Hermias, refers to *Physics* VIII.5.257a29ff. ('if it should be necessary to examine whether the self-moved or the thing moved by another were the cause and principle of motion, everyone would say the former') as evidence that Aristotle held the same view as Plato in the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*. Only out of respect for the common use of names does Aristotle habitually call the living animal 'self-moved', and the principle of motion 'unmoved'.²²

4 A concluding perspective

Attempts at harmonizing Plato and Aristotle that are in substance very similar to what we find expressed in condensed form in Hermias recur in a number of ancient commentators on Aristotle's *On the Soul* and his *Physics*, for instance in Simplicius' *On the Physics*, and Simplicius' and Philoponus' *On the Soul*.²³ A full survey of the relevant texts and their relationships would go beyond the limits of this paper, however, and I shall therefore conclude with some final reflections on the importance of the concepts of 'motion' (*kinêsis*) and 'activity' (*energeia*) in discussions of Plato's and Aristotle's (dis)agreement over self-motion. From Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Laws*, it is clear that soul's activities of bestowing life and moving the world by thinking and desiring are described as 'motions'. Aristotle, on the other hand, maintains a distinction between 'motion' and 'activity'. At *On*

²¹ For Syrianus' complex attitude towards the relation between Plato's and Aristotle's teachings, see Praechter's *RE* article 'Syrianos', cols. 1771-3.

²² Simplicius *In Phys.* 1249.13-17.

²³ Cf. Simplicius *In Phys.* 1247.10-1250.30; "Simplicius" *In de An.* 34.2ff. Hayduck; Philoponus *In de An.* 92.12ff. Hayduck. See also Blumenthal (1996), 81-3 for a helpful summary of Philoponus' discussion of Aristotle's *On the Soul* I.3.

the Soul 417a17, he argues that motion is some kind of activity (*energeia tis*), but ‘incomplete’ (*atelês*). The thought is illustrated with the examples of walking, which as a motion towards something is always incomplete, and thinking or seeing, which are complete at every instant (*Met.* 1048b28).

For a number of Platonists, Aristotle could not consistently attribute activities to the soul while at the same time denying that it is moved. Porphyry, or Atticus, in the fragment from *Against Boethus On the Soul* I referred to already (247F Smith), clearly considers that a denial of motion is tantamount to a denial of what in Aristotle’s own terminology would be called ‘activities’, like thinking or deliberating. With Iamblichus, in fragment 16 Dillon-Finamore of his own *On the Soul* in Stobaeus, this reading of Aristotle’s *On the Soul* I.3, that Aristotle wants the soul to be the unmoved cause of all activities, is firmly relegated to the Peripatetics, rather than to Aristotle himself, which may well indicate a shift away from Porphyry’s polemics.²⁴

If we turn once more to Themistius, finally, we find further traces of a harmonising approach, which sets out to equate Platonic ‘motion’ with Aristotelian ‘activity’. Having accused Porphyry of not distinguishing properly between ‘motion’ and ‘activity’ when he talks about soul’s life-giving motion, Themistius considers a possible defensive move for the Platonists:

If they dispute that what we name ‘activity’ they call ‘motion’, then we shall not dissent over the name. For one is permitted to use names as one wishes, and particularly species in place of genera. For motion is a kind of activity, and so if something is an activity, it is not always a motion, a [distinction] which it is clear that Plato in many places actually adopts in the same form. That is why there is no need to have a dispute over a name, but it must be realized that the matters [being referred to] are vastly different – an imperfect versus a perfected entelechy. (*Paraphrase on the Soul*, 18.30-37, tr. Todd, slightly modified.)

Themistius’ point here is that the Platonist is right to reply that Platonic motion and Aristotelian activity can be related, but that Aristotle’s description is on the whole more accurate. According to Themistius, the (complete) intellectual activity of the soul would not be motion in the strict sense (which is incomplete), so that Plato’s account of soul’s intellectual motions in *Laws* X would rest on a misuse of names.²⁵ Are the Platonist originators of this proposal (‘they’) merely ‘notional’, though, or can the equation of ‘motion’ and ‘activity’ be traced to a specific Platonist exegesis known to Themistius? Nothing in the text helps us to

²⁴Stobaeus *Anth.* 1.49.36.3-1.49.36.6 Wachsmuth: Τίς οὖν ἀνήκοός ἐστι τῆς Περιπατητικῆς δόξης, ἢ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀκίνητον μὲν εἶναι φησιν, αἰτίαν δὲ κινήσεων; Εἰ δὴ καὶ ἀνεέργητόν ἐστι τὸ ἀκίνητον, ἔσται καὶ χορηγὸν τῶν ἐνεργειῶν τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀνεέργητον.

²⁵Despite his preference for Aristotle’s vocabulary, Themistius later allows without further comment that Plato, just like Aristotle, has proven the immortality of *nous* (here the rational part of the soul), if one but thinks of ‘motion’ in place of ‘activity’. Cf. *In de An.* 106.29-107.7.

settle this question, unfortunately. Yet the strategy which Themistius presents here remains, in any case, fundamental to the harmonists' case.²⁶

Do Plato and Aristotle, then, agree on self-motion in souls? And what can the Neoplatonic evidence add to our understanding of the similarity and differences between Plato's and Aristotle's positions? Does the shift towards harmonization present a closer, more nuanced reading of Aristotle's criticisms, or is the opposition between the two philosophers an inescapable consequence of detailed engagement with their texts?

On one level, it would be futile to deny that there are significant disagreements between Plato and Aristotle, and the harmonizing interpretation will have much work left to do in determining precisely how Aristotle can combine his account of the unmoved mover with a self-moved principle of motion such as one finds in Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Laws*.²⁷ Moreover, the analyses of *Physics* VIII.5 certainly suggest that, for the Stagirite, unqualified talk of self-movers is misleading, if not completely misguided, in so far as apparent self-movers are really composites of unmoved and moved parts. The long string of attacks on self-motion in *On the Soul* I.3, finally, could suggest that Aristotle was quite unwilling to allow any exceptional or 'spiritual' motion for Platonic souls.

And yet, the harmonists' case is a strong one. There is nothing in *On the Soul* I.3 that could cause real embarrassment to an interpreter committed to the view that Aristotle focuses on crude, physical conceptions merely to show the absurdity of attributing bodily motions to soul. On this line of interpretation, even in places where Aristotle would seem to disallow that the motion of souls could be different from that imparted to bodies, e.g. at *De an.* 406a30-1, further thought shows that his aim is merely to dispell a particular misconception of how soul moves a body. It is only if one conceives of soul moving bodies in the manner of 'leverage and pushing', as Philoponus puts it, that one can validly infer from the body's motion to that of the soul.²⁸ In the case of the heavenly bodies, and even more so with souls, it is of course untrue that the movement that is produced is the result of a change or affection of the same form in the mover.

Similarly, Aristotle's interpretation of the *Timaeus* is too literalist to impress any sympathetic reader of Plato. Neoplatonic commentators such as "Simplicius" and Philoponus could shrug off Aristotle's worries by pointing to the Pythagorean customs of expressing supernatural reality in symbols and riddles.²⁹ This approach will certainly require some rather forcible interpretations of the relevant sections in

²⁶ Cf. the concise formula of this strategy at Philoponus *In de An.* 95.22-26: τοῦ οὖν Πλάτωνος πᾶσαν ἀπλῶς ἐνέργειαν κίνησιν εἶναι λέγοντος, τοῦ δὲ Ἀριστοτέλους μόνας τὰς φυσικὰς κινήσεις εἶναι λέγοντος, ἀληθῆς καὶ ὁ λόγος ὁ κινεῖσθαι λέγων τὴν ψυχὴν κατὰ Πλάτωνα καὶ ὁ μὴ κινεῖσθαι κατὰ Ἀριστοτέλην, καὶ ἐν μόνοις ῥήμασιν ἢ διαφωνία εὐρίσκεται.

²⁷ Cf. Solmsen (1971) for a nuanced approach to this question.

²⁸ Philoponus *In de An.* 106.8ff.

²⁹ "Simplicius" *In de An.* 40.3ff.; Philoponus *In de An.* 116.21ff.

the *Timaeus*, as a glance at Proclus' *Timaeus Commentary* will confirm.³⁰ Yet for those convinced that Aristotle shared their higher notions of soul channeling the indivisible kinetic *energeia* of Intellect into the divisible activity of the heavens, *On the Soul* I.3.406b26-407b11 would be targeted at novice students, who might stand in danger of getting caught up in the customary meaning of words, rather than piercing through to the metaphysical realities behind them.

Still, one may wonder how the Platonist can defend himself against the charge that the idea of soul moving and being moved as a single whole appears to be absurd. One strategy, taken by Simplicius, is to admit the main thrust of Aristotle's argument, that no single whole can be in actuality and potentiality at the same time, while denying that this admission proves fatal to self-moving souls properly conceived.³¹ Soul, after all, is not a single whole; it can be divided into a potential and an actual intellect. When soul becomes alienated from itself on account of its descent, it is unaware of the reason-principles that are part of its own essence and possesses them merely potentially.³² But it can activate them again by reverting upon itself, thereby acting upon itself as something that is other than its descended nature, as the active intellect. Because there is a duality between actual and potential intellect within the soul, there is no absurdity in saying that the soul teaches itself and learns from itself at the same time. If, then, a soul that is becoming aware of its own reason-principles undergoes a change from potentiality to actuality, it can be said to be moved according to the definition of motion Aristotle himself gives in the *Physics*.³³

It is now time to draw some conclusions. Firstly, we have seen that Porphyry takes a remarkably defensive stand against Aristotle, and, as has been pointed out before, is thus closer to Plotinus than to the subsequent tradition.³⁴ In fact, it remains unclear whether Porphyry's criticisms of Aristotle's arguments in *On the Soul* I.3 can be reconciled with his alleged attempt to harmonize Platonic and Aristotelian psychology by distinguishing the rational soul from the *empsychia*. If Porphyry understood Aristotle to deny not the soul's bodily but intellective

³⁰ Cf. Proclus *In Tim.* III.330.9-331.1; 341.4-342.2.

³¹ Simplicius *In Phys.* 1250.14-16: αὐτενέργητος οὖν καὶ αὐτόγνωστος καὶ αὐθεύρετός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ κατὰ τὸν Ἀριστοτέλην, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡς μία καὶ ἀπλή, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐκ τοῦ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ συγκεκμημένη.

³² Simplicius *In Phys.* 1249.32-35: καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πάντας ἔχουσα τοὺς λόγους τοὺς μὲν προχείρους ἔχει καὶ ἐνεργητικούς, τοὺς δὲ ἡρεμοῦντας καὶ δυνάμει τέως ὄντας ἐν αὐτῇ, καὶ τοῖς ἐνεργείᾳ οὖσι κινεῖ τοὺς τέως δυνάμει, κινῶνται δὲ ἐκεῖνοι, καὶ οὕτως ἡ πᾶσα αὐτοκίνητος λέγεται.

³³ Cf. *Phys.* 201a10-11; Simplicius *In Phys.* 1249.27ff. A rather different way of establishing some form of duality in self-moved souls can be found in "Simplicius" *In de An.* 30.4-10. See the discussion in Steel (1978), 67-68.

³⁴ See Ballériaux (1995), 224f. for evidence that Plotinus defended Platonic self-motion against Aristotle.

motions, would he not also have read Aristotle as denying that the rational soul has an activity separate from the soul-body compound?

Secondly, Hermias' discussion of the *Phaedrus* argument already presupposes two major strategies of interpretation which later Neoplatonists such as "Simplicius" and (to a lesser extent) Philoponus employ systematically in their commentaries on Aristotle's *On the Soul*, namely that Aristotle is trying to cleanse our conception of soul's self-motion from physicalist notions, and that his disagreement with Plato is merely verbal, motivated by respect for the common usage of names. Whether this is true to Aristotle's intentions or not is, of course, quite another matter.

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