

Summary and Conclusion of Scott-Veloso Debate¹

with post-conference exchange

University of Lisbon
International Aristotelian Conference

June 2-4, 2025

Gregory L. Scott

17 September, 2025

Veloso indicates his goal in his Abstract:

...Scott argues that *Metaphysics* Theta 8 offers part of a more mature proof justifying eternal celestial motion. For him, this proof *supplements* the similarly more mature arguments of *De Caelo* I and II for the nature of the ether *qua* celestial eternal motion. Scott agrees with William Guthrie about the incompatibility between these conceptions and the theory of the first immobile motor...Now I show that Theta 8 and Lambda 6 are not at all incompatible, even if Theta 8 is no help to Lambda 6 for some flaws of the latter. Their disagreement concerns the direction of the change of conceptions: from the theory of the first unmoved mover to a more mature one (Scott) or from a less mature theory to that of the first unmoved mover (Guthrie). Now I show that Theta 8 and Lambda 6 are not at all incompatible, even if Theta 8 is no help to Lambda 6 for some flaws of the latter. *Similarly De Caelo I and II* [GS: my italics].

I do not doubt that some parts of Theta 8 are compatible with some parts of Lambda 6. For instance, substance is always primary for the Northern Greek throughout his professional life, and both texts posit, or at least imply, that an eternal substance or event has no potential. The devastating incompatibility is that in Lambda the ensouled outer spheres cause their own eternal celestial motion because they desire the (non-physical) Unmoved Mover while *De Caelo* ("DC"), which is also consistent with Theta 8, presents the aether (and its outer spheres) as having no soul whatsoever. Guthrie and I both agree that (any spherical body of) the aether cannot have a soul *and that the Northern Greek agreed with Plato in his early professional life that the outer spheres have souls*. However, my disagreement with Guthrie is that his three sets of arguments for Aristotle evolving to a third stage, of Lambda, are very flawed, for reasons amply given in Ottawa and Lisbon. Contrary to what Guthrie argues, (i) Aristotle never renounced self-motion; (ii) there is at least one reference in *DC* to the Unmoved Mover or at least "our" *Metaphysics*; and (iii) any proof of eternal motion in Lambda is hardly an important, unique proof (there are actually three in the corpus apart from Lambda, which I have argued is only a *logical* proof, not an ontological one, of which more below)

By the way, Guthrie never offers any resolution of the contradictions that now arise with Aristotle allegedly maintaining at the same time (in a third and final stage) both the fifth element *and* the ensouled outer spheres. At least Sarah Broadie tried resolve the two

¹ Published at <https://epspress.com/Lisbon2025/PostLisbonSummary.pdf>, Sept 2025. The first pdf of the series is at <https://epspress.com/Lisbon2025/Lisbon2025-ScottAndVelosoDebate.pdf>

incompatible doctrines, without appealing to the Scottish scholar, although she accepted his use of one “definition” of motion—actualizing a potential—that is really applicable only to finite things or events, when the issue at hand is eternal circular motion of the heavens. Moreover, Guthrie does not resolve how the ensouled outer spheres can self-move (eternally, out of desire for the Mover) *if self-motion has been renounced by the Northern Greek*.

Instead, as DC explains, the outer spheres move in virtue of their own nature as instances of an eternal element, which is weightless and simple, and which always follows the same exact circle, as they have for the infinite past, with no need for an Unmoved Mover, just as the other four elements move also in virtue of their own nature. However, instances of the four elements move rectilinearly, up or down, depending on whether they are light or heavy, always having weight to greater or lesser degree. Clearly, they do not need the Unmoved Mover and, indeed, because they have no souls, would not desire the Mover even if it existed.

Finally, because the aether has no soul, all of the interpretations of *De Anima* and other texts that Veloso offers—e.g., whether the soul only thinks without perceiving or desiring—are irrelevant in this context. Any suggestion in *On the Heavens* that the aether is ensouled, for instance, with immortality being attributed to the outer heavens *by the Greek forefathers*, which implies the heavens are alive, is refuted by both Guthrie and myself: This history and attribution of immortality, *seemingly* implying that, for the Stagirite himself, the heavens are literally alive, is just another example of Aristotle often showing how his own views are technical refinements of long held positions that are either commonsensical or championed by previous wise men.

The aether is divine (*theion*) even if it is not an (anthropomorphic) god (*theos*), and it is divine not because it thinks but because it is the primary element, always existing and moving in precisely the same way, forever. It is also the primary cause of all other movement and change in the whole universe, including the sublunary realm. As a specialist in Ottawa said during the Question & Answer period, thinking he would embarrass me (which he confessed afterwards): “you turn Aristotle into an Ionian.” The relevant doctrine, however, is found in Plato’s *Phaedrus* 245, as discussed in my “Plato Imitates Aristotle: Alcmaeon of Croton, *Phaedrus* 245c-e and *Laws* 10,” with the URL provided in the SecondaryComments. Thus, if Plato can be “Ionian,” clearly Aristotle can be, too.

Finally, Veloso, rather optimistically to say the least, attempted not only to address the issue of two-stage versus three stage theology but the worth of my whole book by focussing on the passage in Theta 8 with the conclusion of the “Not to Fear” Proof *per se* (and that Proof had been given in shortened form in the Handout in Ottawa). To set the broadest context, as will be explained in the forthcoming *Aristotle’s Apostasy: From the Thinking God (aka Unmoved Mover) of METAPHYSICS Lambda to the Divine Fifth Element of ON THE HEAVENS* (anticipated publication late 2026), it is impossible in a few pages to understand and critique fairly my different reading of the corpus and history, a reading that also includes grasping:

- How important the Principle of Plenitude is for the Stagirite’s thought in general and for the eternal motion of the universe in particular (in one proof);
- How the Principle must be construed following the *Physics* because wild or ambiguous formulations of it have been proffered throughout history, from Leibniz to Jonathan Barnes (both of whom interpret the Principle to be “any imagined possibility would occur in an infinity,” which is Parmenidean) to Jaakko Hintikka and Sarah Broadie, who provide the groundwork for my slightly modified view that possibility and necessity are not only logical, or logical based on reality, but are at times most crucially and emphatically ontological *per se*—the trick is to know or determine in any context which type or meaning of possibility (or the related modals) Aristotle is assuming;
- That is, this entails understanding most clearly the different meanings of possibility and necessity for the Northern Greek, and also understanding the ontological triangular modal

model, in which possibility is the finite intermediate between two eternal extremes: omnitemporal existence (necessity) and impossibility as *never* happening in an eternity;

- This also entails seeing how this triangular model is explicitly given in *DC* I 12 (which was not in my book from 2019 and which I only detected in 2023, with a bit of embarrassment), but it completely confirms my views that previously depended on Aristotle's two-sided possibility as articulated in *Prior Analytics*;
- The other Peripatetics after Aristotle did not consider the Unmoved Mover or narcissistic god important. Certainly none of them—including Theophrastus, Strato, Critolaus, Xenarchus of Seleucia and even the Platonizing anti-Aristotelian Atticus of the 2nd century CE—for 500 years embraced the doctrine. Only starting with Alexander of Alexandria or a follower was Lambda taken as the Stagirite's theology. Indeed, it was deemed so worthless until around the time of Alexander that only Theophrastus considered the Mover worth discussing, —and only while rejecting it!;
- What has almost always, if not always, also been ignored is how political considerations in a culture that had exiled Anaxagoras and put Socrates to death for not believing in the gods of Athens, and how Plato himself recommended death for atheists in *Laws* X, induced the Stagirite to keep references to a god, no matter how narcissistic and preposterous it was, in his manuscript of Lambda;
- Also ignored has been the importance of eternal accidents for Aristotle;
- The book also evaluates critiques (by, e.g., Richard Sorabji and Philoponus) of the infinite past, which is a core part of the “Not to Fear” Proof;
- It also offered doctrinal and historical reasons for previous scholars missing the importance of the “Not to Fear” Proof, etc.

Finally, I explicitly admitted in the book that I had not determined whether the outer spheres had souls or not for Aristotle, but the “Not to Fear” Proof showed the *necessary* eternality of the universe for Aristotle without needing to evoke the doctrine of Lambda or of *DC*.

Anyone supporting Veloso arguably needs to handle *DC* I 1-3, in which the fifth element is clearly posited and supported, although perhaps I should not say “clearly,” because of Lindsay Judson's completely absurd statement, as discussed in the SecondaryComments, that “the structure of the cosmos is explicable in terms of the operations of the natures of the four elements” (and Veloso cites Judson favorably on a number of occasions). Of course, if Judson merely skimmed or skipped I 1-3, similar to what I did in focussing on the passages that were relevant to Broadie's book, especially I 12, it is understandable how he could have made such an untenable claim.

Finally, if he is to be reasonably rigorous, Veloso or any supporter should explain the following points:

1. Why the Unmoved Mover of Lambda should be identified with the blessed god (*ho theos*) that thinks of itself thinking forever, given the bizarre implications that result by accepting that they are identical (with Michael Bordt being one of the few to take the opposite and, in my view, correct position in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 2011, although he does not leverage his insights²);
2. Why the profession keeps ignoring the ontological triangular modal model, given my publications and especially *Guthrie recognizing as far back as 1939* Aristotle's explicit citation of it twice in *On the Heavens* I 12 (282a8-9 and 282b10-11) as the two extremes (always happening or never happening) and any intermediate, *finite potentiality*, only one side of which can, or will, be true at any given moment;

² I discuss this at <https://www.epspress.com/NTF/AlcmaeonOfCroton.pdf>, p. 10, ftnote 22.

3. Aristotle throughout his corpus sometimes provides multiple arguments or “proofs” for a particular conclusion. What benefit does Lambda provide (apart from political cover so that the Athenians will not prosecute him for being an atheist, as explored in *Aristotle’s “Not to Fear” Proof*, pp. 304-311, with a letter to Alexander the Great, and in my digital extension “Plato Imitates Aristotle,” given the *Laws* X recommendation to kill atheists), considering that the Northern Greek provides at least three other proofs for the eternity of the universe without appeal to the Unmoved Mover or god of Lambda?:
 - A. the one referred to at *Physics* VIII 5 (256b11-13), a proof that stems from the analysis of time and motion in *Physics* VIII 1, as defended in *Physics* I 2 and following. That the Stagirite believes he is showing motion is eternal, without any appeal to the Unmoved Mover, is revealed at the end of I 3, 254b3-6, when he writes “It remains, then, to consider whether all things are so constituted as to be capable both of being in motion and of being rest [GS: which Aristotle rejects], or whether, while some things are so constituted, some are always at rest and some are always in motion; *for it is this last view that we have to show to be true*” (tr. Hardie & Gaye). For the mature Northern Greek, the earth is eternally at rest, according to *On the Heavens* II 14, and naturally the aether is always in circular motion, with other, sublunary bodies being capable of both motion and rest.
 - B. proofs in *On the Heavens*, especially I 10-12, focus on the indestructibility and ungenerability of The All (*to pan*), that is, the universe in its broadest of the three senses that Aristotle differentiates; and
 - C. the “Not to Fear” Proof with the conclusion in Theta 8 that presupposes:
 - the Principle of Plenitude, “for eternal things, what may be, is” (*Physics* III 4, 203b30), which is not one of the questionable variations that have been claimed throughout history (e.g., “whatever is *thought* possible will be actualized [in infinity]”);
 - the doctrine that nothing eternal is potential;
 - the infinite past; and
 - the triangular modal model, the logical version of which is described at *Prior Analytics* 1.13, 32a18-20, and the ontological version of which is stated twice in *On the Heavens*, as noted.

In brief, I have argued that the Unmoved Mover and the ensouled outer spheres were the Stagirite’s youthful attempt to advance Platonic-Parmenidean metaphysics, and was the third “unmoved mover” in philosophical history, after those of Xenophanes and Anaxagoras. This is completely consistent with what Guthrie rightly says, namely, that in *On Philosophy* Aristotle accepted the Platonic position that the outer spheres are ensouled. However, as Guthrie and I both also assert, Aristotle then evolved to the position of *DC*, with the aether being divine and elemental, and thus not having a soul which would cause its movement but having its motion occur simply because of its nature. Nothing else is needed to explain why it goes in a circle eternally in exactly the same path. Of course, Guthrie unnecessarily and wrongly posits a third stage, which I deny, but *much* credit goes to him for having caught at least part of the theological evolution that even that renowned pioneer of Aristotelian evolution, Werner Jaeger, missed.

A Preview of Aristotle’s Apostasy

What will *Aristotle’s Apostasy* offer that is new, beyond a consolidation and re-ordering of the earlier work? I have hinted at some of it above, but to summarize the presentation and later exchanges from Lisbon: In retrospect, the book from 2019 on the “Not to Fear” Proof primarily offered an unseen proof for the necessary and not just logical eternity of the universe without

either the Unmoved Mover or God of Lambda. Yet, as we just saw, it is clearly not the only proof without God for eternal motion (which requires physical bodies for Aristotle). Also, an unmoved mover is ambiguous because there are unmoved movers like the rock-hitting man of *Physics* VIII 5, which obviously have matter, and if my view is incorrect, how will one explain the 47+ unmoved movers of Lambda 8?

Moreover, my book also explains other poorly understood or unrecognized themes and sub-themes in the corpus, and how important they are for comprehending Aristotle's philosophy, with respect to both subtle points and fundamental constructs, for example, those just listed above along with, e.g., how my findings impact our knowledge of Theophrastus, solving at least one known dilemma and showing that he and the Stagirite probably wrote some of their treatises earlier than usually thought.

As indicated, one unanswered question in the book that did not impact the soundness of the "Not to Fear" Proof was whether the outer spheres had souls or not, and it was only while writing the subsequent digital extensions that I realized to some extent the *fullest* import of *DC*. As also indicated, I focussed on *DC* I 10-12, but only a few other passages from other chapters because of Broadie's restricted use of it and because I was evaluating her seemingly powerful and novel theories.

I also wanted to show that the "Not to Fear" Proof was seemingly stronger than the proof in I 12 for the indestructibility and ungenerability of the infinite universe, which seems to rely on human records in part for the never-changing rotation of the outer spheres (whereas the "Not to Fear" Proof does not depend on those records). I used Guthrie's translation but, to reiterate, am a bit embarrassed to admit that out of a blinkered focus on one issue, I did not read the Introduction until 2023. Rather, in the meantime, I concentrated on other issues with my digital extensions, including the history of Peripatetic scholarship for 500 years after its founder and demonstrating that Plato in his final ten years borrowed from Aristotle's mature metaphysics. Alternatively, they developed many insights together even if Plato always kept god, or actually gods, as he develops his final cosmology and theology in *Laws* X, in which Forms have disappeared and in which the *always-moving* god-souls are the primary ontological entities.

Most of the final pieces to the (main) theological puzzle resulted from my finally reading Guthrie's Introduction, as I mentioned. This remarkable work provided the final confirmation for me that, indeed, Aristotle had moved away from the Platonic position of the outer spheres having souls. The suggestion of the spheres having souls is a doctrine of Lambda 7-8, although too many readers and commentators of Aristotle's philosophy seem to assume that the Unmoved Mover arises in Chapter 6, whereas it only enters after the introduction of the perennially puzzling doctrines of Ch 7, including the suggestion that the motion of the universe must be caused by desire (and many of these passages work equally well with the position that the internal principle *qua* source of nature, which is "unmoved," is responsible for the eternal motion). Strangely, the Stagirite had suggested at the end of Ch 6 that he is finished with his theory: "Now this is just what actually characterizes motions; therefore why need we seek any further principles?" (tr. Tredennick), all of which suggests that Ch 7 was a different Aristotelian text that was interpolated into its current position.

Aristotle's Apostasy will add the few final pieces to a consolidation of my previous work on the Stagirite's theology,—work which is virtually unknown. As just suggested, Lambda is frequently, but not always, consistent with *DC*, and in my view, only if one takes some of the metaphysical positions in *DC* will certain paradoxes in Lambda be finally and sensibly resolved: e.g., how there can be multiple "unmoved movers," like the plural ones in Ch 6 and the 47+ unmoved movers in Ch 8, especially considering that the Northern Greek explicitly writes there that the principle of individuation is matter. By pinpointing the doctrines of Lambda which are utterly consistent with *DC* and the others which are Platonic or transitional, we can establish

which parts of Lambda were early and which parts later. After Jaeger, I think there can be no doubt that certain sections of Lambda were written at different times by Aristotle, even though, as alluded to, the renowned pioneer ironically missed the evolution of theology to *DC* in developing his interpretation of the Northern Greek's full thought. My analysis, with great admiration for the spirit of Jaeger, will, I trust, put to rest at least most of the major questions regarding which sections or doctrines of Lambda were early and which were later. At the minimum, this will be my goal.