

A Theologian's Response to the "5th Element"¹

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At the end of the 19th century, in reply to Darwin's evolutionary theory, a religious member of the Royal Society tried to reconcile Darwin with Christianity, *saying that God planted the fossils in order to test the credulity of believers*. The member's name is not important; rather what is important is the idea and the recognition that even scientists can function like theologians and defend a deity at all costs. In this case, the cost is making the ostensibly "all-good" God into a clever deceiver.

Philosophers, on the other hand, are supposed to be objective and only accept a god if the evidence or arguments justify it; otherwise, they would follow one of the three ethical theories based on reason and empirical evidence, such as the biological nature of human beings (Epicureanism, Aristotle's system of the "virtues" or "excellences," or Kantian deontology), or they should devise a better ethical system.

At the online session of Chuyu Tian's presentation on the Unmoved Mover *qua* God, Fifteenth Annual Marquette Seminar on Aristotle and Aristotelianism (June 20-23, 2021)—"Causes and Causation in Aristotle and the Aristotelian Tradition"—I noted in the Q&A period that M. Bordt, who is a Jesuit, writes that the Unmoved Mover (UM) of Lambda 6 is not the same as the God (*ho theos*) of Lambda 7, one reason being, in my own words, that the UM has no potentiality of any kind whatsoever (whether active or passive). See:

<https://www.epspress.com/NotToFearUpdates.html#Bordt>

That is, the UM has no matter, no energy,—nothing. Indeed, it is hard to see from the Stagirite's description how it differs from pure nothingness, despite him *calling* it "Pure Actuality." As I explain my book, it was a brilliant attempt by the youthful Northern Greek from Stagira to guarantee the eternal existence of such a being, *if* it exists, because in that case there is no potential to ever go out of existence. The question, though, is: Does it *really* and not just *logically or fictionally* exist? Leaving aside that little issue, God for the Stagirite has a blissful life and thinks (of itself thinking), which indubitably requires matter and potentiality unless, as Franz Brentano once said, Aristotle prattles without any sense or reason.

I also reported that Sarah Broadie's "On Heavenly Bodies and First Causes" (2009) discusses two views for Aristotle, namely, (i) the well-known view of Lambda and (ii) the not-so-well-known view of the eternally "running" *aether*, the so-called 5th element. Unlike the other (four) elements air and fire, which always move straight up according to their nature, unless interfered with, and earth and water, which move straight down, the *aether*/outer spheres always move in a circle, unimpeded for eternity, simply in virtue of the nature of the whole outer heaven. No other cause is needed. As Broadie notes (and correctly in my opinion), in at least some ways the 5th element is theoretically stronger than the ensouled outer spheres that move because they love the UM, the position given at the beginning of Lambda 7 to explain how the Unmoved Mover causes the eternal motion of the outer (physical) spheres. Broadie does not try to determine how Aristotle could hold both views, but there is clearly a tension, because the 5th element, like fire or air, does not have a soul. As explained in the 6th digital extension of my *Aristotle's "Not to Fear" Proof for the Necessary Eternality [without the Unmoved Mover]* (2019) (see the link above for the additional, relevant link), I reconcile the discrepancy by providing the textual evidence (including *De Caelo* II 1 stating that the outer, eternal spheres have no souls) and the historical grounds why the Stagirite dropped his youthful UM, which in my mind was his initial attempt to advance beyond Plato's theology. He then progressed to the

¹ Created at www.epspress.com/NTF/Theology5thElement.pdf on June 26, 2021.

fifth element for the rest of his life, inspiring all Peripatetics after him through at least Xenarchus of Seleucia in the 1st century BCE. The trail vanishes for 200+ years until Alexander of Aphrodisias positively and Plotinus negatively treat Lambda as the Stagirite's mature theology, or at least as the one and only theology, all of which sets subsequent philosophers on a chase for, as it were, the Holy Grail, trying to make sense of the doctrine of the UM and how one of the greatest empiricists in history could hold it.

A priest on the Marquette session, whose name I need not publicize because, again, it is the idea that is important (and others on the session will know who he is, which suffices), retorted, if politely, that *God could have created the 5th element!* Yet, we were speaking of Lambda, not a Christian deity starting with Christ about 300 years later. If the God of Lambda only thinks of itself thinking, it is not even aware of the physical universe (as at least one other participant gently reminded the group) and is incapable of caring for us, as Cicero long ago complained in his own words (cf. my book, pp. 280, 307-308 and 312-313). *A fortiori*, the God of Lambda could not have even known about a fifth element or how to create it, much less even have gone through the mental effort of creating it. If this is not enough, we are therefore smarter than Lambda's God, because we know that each other and the universe (and God supposedly) exists; yet God has no clue about your existence or my existence or the universe itself.

In short, if you wish to believe in a supernatural deity, whether Christian or not, which concerns itself with humanity and can hear prayers, explore one of the other reasons for believing in God but have the sense not to appeal to *Lambda*. The god described there simply does not care about you.