
Il libro Lambda della Metafisica di Aristotele by Silvia Fazzo

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Commento al libro Lambda della Metafisica di Aristotele by Silvia Fazzo

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Undoubtedly, *Metaphysics* Λ is among the most fascinating and influential treatises of Aristotelian writings. Because it contains Aristotle's theory of the prime mover, described as an intelligible substance and a divine intellect, it has been examined thoroughly and continually since antiquity in order to determine the very nature of Aristotle's theology and its relation to metaphysical science.

With these two books, grown from a doctoral thesis (Trento and Lille, 2009), Silvia Fazzo provides a new, innovative, and wide-ranging study of book Λ . The first volume, published in 2012, contains a new edition of the Greek text with an Italian translation. The second volume, which appeared in 2014, presents a detailed commentary. Both constitute a very rich, learned work that is based on a precise knowledge of the text and an extensive bibliography. Both volumes also form a strong unity which perfectly exemplifies Fazzo's aim to link the task of establishing what Aristotle really says with the understanding of why he says it [1.12]. In this regard, many of the most significant interpretations that she develops in the second volume stem directly from either the text or the translation that she adopts in the first; conversely, some aspects of her edition constitute in themselves a doctrinal interpretation. The major characteristic of these two works is their deep originality. Fazzo often states that she wishes to dispose of the previous editorial and exegetical tradition [e.g., 1.14, 28; 2.11, 25, 40–42] in order to study *Metaphysics* Λ in itself and not as it has been subsequently perceived, interpreted, or even reconstructed. This basic methodological principle, which runs across both volumes, leads Fazzo to elaborate some radical views, often in contradiction with the standard interpretation of the text.

The edition

Let us consider first Fazzo's critical edition of the text. In the extended introduction to the first volume [1.35–165], she discusses and justifies her editorial choices against the background of the history of the textual tradition. Her main goal is to build an edition on a new and complete stemmatic basis [1.19]. To begin, she dismisses both the use of conjectures and the indirect tradition, whose variant readings are inaccurate and, in some cases, impossible to reconstruct through the Arabic or Hebrew texts [1.134–136, 152–154]. In doing so, she signals a difference from the previous editions and particularly from [Jaeger 1957](#). As far as the manuscript tradition and the *stemma codicum* are concerned, Fazzo's edition also takes a very different approach. It is the first edition of book Λ that is based on a more complete textual ground in that it takes into account two manuscripts—Ambrosianus F 113 sup. (M) and Taurinensis VII B 23 (C)—which have not been collated by previous editors of book Λ . Furthermore, it tries to distinguish clearly the different hands at work in the MSS E (Parisinus gr. 1853) and J (Vindobonensis phil. gr. 100), and especially to establish the difference between the copyist of J and another scholar (named J²), who, says Fazzo, corrected the text of J and has remained unnoticed up to now [1.143–152]. Finally, Fazzo's edition rests on a new evaluation of a crucial MS, namely, Laurentianus 87, 12 (A^b). Indeed, all previous editors of the *Metaphysics* have relied heavily on A^b because:

- (1) it gives a smoother and grammatically correct text;
- (2) it has been suspected since [Christ 1885](#) that it derives from a more ancient source; and
- (3) it represents one of the two manuscript traditions of the *Metaphysics*, i.e., the β -family, whereas the α -family is essentially represented by E and J.¹

Fazzo strongly denies the importance that has been traditionally assigned to A^b. She refutes the evidence provided by Christ for an ancient origin of the text transmitted by A^b [1.55–56]. Like most contemporary editors of the *Metaphysics* [[Frede and Patzig 1988](#); [Primavesi 2012](#)], she underlines

¹ Even if [Harlfinger \[1979\]](#) showed that the MS A^b changes its affiliation in Λ 7.1073a1 and belongs from this point to the α -family (being a copy of a lost MS δ , which derives from the same source as J, namely, γ), A^b still remains in principle, together with M and C, a major witness to one of the two branches of the textual tradition of Λ 1–7.

the superiority of the MSS belonging to the α -family to the smooth text transmitted by the β -family [1.118–128]. Moreover, she holds that in Λ 7, A^b has already moved from the β to the α -family and proposes to locate this change in K 8.1065a26 [1.113–118].² As a consequence, A^b , for Fazzo, has no special value for establishing the text of *Metaphysics* Λ : its agreement with the readings transmitted by J and/or E does not express any concord between the two branches of the textual tradition; and its variants, given the standardizing nature of the MS, imply no stemmatic authority.

Thus, Fazzo's edition is based on simple and clear criteria [1.154–157]:

- (1) the text of Λ has to be established on the basis of the manuscript tradition only;
- (2) only E J (distinguished from the readings added by posterior hands E^2 , E^c and J^2) and M C have real stemmatic authority;
- (3) the reading transmitted by the α -MSS is always to be preferred as long as it is tenable and when it is not, the β -reading is to be followed;
- (4) in the case of a disagreement between M and C, the reading of M must prevail; and
- (5) if the β -reading is identical to the one transmitted by the α -family, then it is possible to venture a conjecture, generally attested in the secondhand variants and in the posterior tradition.

As a result, the text edited by Fazzo strongly differs from previous editions and especially from [Ross 1924](#) and [Jaeger 1957](#), which are in common use. Her edition certainly constitutes an improvement in some important aspects since it relies on M and C and gives an updated version of the text that is grounded on the priority of the testimony of the α -family. Her *apparatus* is also more complete and accurate, thanks, for example, to her revision of the indirect tradition. But, Fazzo's text also differs from the one which could emerge using other criteria adopted by contemporary editors. Indeed, Stefan Alexandru's own edition of *Metaphysics* Λ , which was published in [2014](#), shows how different are Fazzo's editorial choices. In particular, the most crucial point lies in Fazzo's depreciation of A^b .

² Silvia Fazzo already defended this hypothesis in [Fazzo 2010](#).

Pantelis Golitsis [2015]³ has recently argued in favor of Harlfinger's stemma, showing that A^b differs from MC in *Metaphysics* K not because it is a witness of the α -family but because M and C do not faithfully transmit the text of the archetype β ,⁴ due to the fact that they have been corrected on the basis of the text of the *Physics* and of a manuscript of the *Metaphysics* belonging to the α -family, namely, H^a. Golitsis' demonstration is convincing and provides an accurate picture of the *stemma codicum* of the *Metaphysics* in that it is based on a more comprehensive view of the Byzantine way of producing new manuscripts through the collation of several versions of the same text. If Golitsis is right, the value of A^b should be reasserted and we need to be cautious with Fazzo's edition.

However, since the above point does not suffice to give a clear view of Fazzo's innovative approach to the text, it will be useful to present and discuss certain readings that she adopts, to illustrate some of her original views and some of the major doctrinal orientations upon which she builds her commentary in the second volume.⁵

At Λ 1.1069a30–33, she proposes a text which perfectly exemplifies her fourth editorial criterion. The passage discusses the distinction between two kinds of sensible substances (corruptible and eternal) and the quest for the elements (στοιχεῖα) of sensible substances. The problem is that we do not really know what kind of sensible substances falls under this quest. E J read:

οὐσία δὲ τρεῖς, μία μὲν αἰσθητή, ἣς ἡ μὲν αἰδῖος ἡ δὲ φθαρτή, ἦν πάντες ὁμολογοῦσιν, οἷον τὰ φυτὰ καὶ τὰ ζῶα, ἡ δ' αἰδῖος, ἣς ἀνάγκη τὰ στοιχεῖα λαβεῖν, εἴτε ἐν εἴτε πολλά.

Traditionally, since Ross at least, editors consider « ἡ δ' αἰδῖος » in 1069a32 to be a corruption and suppress it. Thus, they edit the text with the following

³ On this point of criticism and on others (e.g., Fazzo's distinction between J and J²), see also Golitsis' review of Fazzo's edition in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* [2013a] with her response in [Fazzo 2013b](#) and Golitsis' further response in [2013b](#).

⁴ Cf. [Alexandru 2014](#), 46, which maintains that Fazzo has not proved her thesis about A^b sufficiently.

⁵ I leave aside the textual problem of Λ 7.1072b2–3 since Fazzo's edition of that passage (ἔστι γὰρ τινὲς τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα ὧν τὸ μὲν ἔστι τὸ δ' οὐκ ἔστι) is already well known [see [Fazzo 2002](#)] and often discussed in recent studies: see, e.g., [Rashed 2011](#), 128–130 or [Menn 2012](#), 422–464.

punctuation, implying that the quest for the elements concerns every sensible substance:⁶

οὐσίαι δὲ τρεῖς· μία μὲν αἰσθητή – ἧς ἡ μὲν ἀίδιος ἡ δὲ φθαρτή, ἦν πάντες ὁμολογοῦσιν, οἷον τὰ φυτὰ καὶ τὰ ζῶα [ἡ δ' ἀίδιος] – ἧς ἀνάγκη τὰ στοιχεῖα λαβεῖν, εἴτε ἔν εἴτε πολλά.⁷

However, Fazzo notes [1.231–237] that the E J-reading, strictly speaking, links the research of elements with the eternal sensible substances. She also notes that the same occurs in the M C-reading, which additionally proposes a simpler text, one that she finally decides to adopt. She reconstructs the text as follows:

οὐσίαι δὲ τρεῖς· μία μὲν αἰσθητή, ἧς ἡ μὲν φθαρτή, ἦν πάντες ὁμολογοῦσιν, οἷον τὰ φυτὰ καὶ τὰ ζῶα, ἡ δ' ἀίδιος, ἧς ἀνάγκη τὰ στοιχεῖα λαβεῖν, εἴτε ἔν εἴτε πολλά.

The text implies that the research into the elements and the problem of their number concerns only the eternal sensible substances. Since these substances, i.e., the stars, are made of a special matter whose unique potentiality is to move between two points of a circle in directions that are not contrary to one another, Fazzo maintains [1.237; 2.127–129, 220–224, 243: cf. [Fazzo 2013a](#)] that Aristotle raises here an issue concerning the number of the elements of eternal sensible substances, which are probably composed of only one element (their matter) and not of three (matter and two contraries—form and privation) as corruptible substances are.⁸ On this basis, she proposes a new understanding of several passages of Λ ⁹ and rightly underlines both the difficulty of submitting every sensible substance to the same causal pattern and the need, in response to the 10th *aporia* in *Metaphysics* B [1000a5–1001a3], to distinguish clearly the principles of corruptible substances from those of eternal substances.

This being said, we can still have doubts about this reading on doctrinal and textual grounds. On the one hand, it is clear that research into the elements and the question of their number are repeatedly linked in book Λ with

⁶ Same interpretation but with a different text in [Alexandru 2014](#), *ad loc.* and [Frede 2000](#), 79, which places a full stop after « ἡ δ' ἀίδιος ».

⁷ See [Ross 1924](#), 1.350 and *ad loc.*; [Jaeger 1957](#), *ad loc.*

⁸ This implies that « εἴτε ἔν εἴτε πολλά » has an interrogative sense [1.237].

⁹ Λ 2.1069b24–26; 10.1075a28–32, 1075b13–14.

every sensible substance,¹⁰ so that it would seem strange that Aristotle limits the scope of these two studies in Λ 1. Now, nothing prevents us, even in the MC-reading, from understanding the distinction between two kinds of substances as a parenthesis. The research-program that Aristotle presents would then concern every sensible substance. And, even asserting Fazzo's view that the stars have only one element, the alternative « εἴτε ἓν εἴτε πολλά » would not express Aristotle's single concern (to determine whether the stars have one element or many), though it would be a reminder of the two cases (for the corruptible substances which have several elements, and for the stars which have just one) in which this research program has to be, and is effectively carried on, in the rest of the book. In other words, the text would express what Aristotle really does in book Λ .

On the other hand, Fazzo's philological grounds for accepting the MC-reading seem inadequately laid out: either the MC-reading, as she puts it, is authentic, which means that E J read a text whose corruption remains to be explained,¹¹ or MC give a correction, which means that then we cannot go back to the E J-reading as she proposes since it obviously gives an unsatisfactory and corrupted text that deserves to be emended.

Another example of Fazzo's innovative editing of the text comes at Λ 2.1069b20–23, where Aristotle refers to the conception of matter held by some Presocratics. The text raises several problems and Fazzo's reading, which follows Bekker's punctuation and David Charles' too—up to a certain point [Charles 2000, 106–110]—seems very convincing. However, one aspect of her reading is unsatisfactory:

καὶ τοῦτ' ἔστι τὸ Ἀναξαγόρου ἓν (βέλτιον γὰρ ἢ ὁμοῦ πάντα) καὶ Ἐμπεδοκλέους τὸ μίγμα, καὶ Ἀναξιμάνδρου, καὶ ὡς Δημόκριτός φησιν· ἦν ἡμῖν πάντα, δυνάμει, ἐνεργείᾳ δ' οὐ.

Unlike Jackson [1904], who is followed by Ross, Fazzo [1.239–45] thinks that the reference to Democritus has to introduce a real quotation. She suggests that we interpret « ἦν ἡμῖν πάντα » as a new fragment of Democritus in which he produces a new version of Anaxagoras' famous « ἦν ὁμοῦ πάντα » in order to underline the putative stability of the physical world, since atoms have

¹⁰ Λ 2.1069b32–34; 4.1070b18–19, b25–26, 1070b30–32; 5.1071b2.

¹¹ On the contrary, as Golitsis shows [2015, 6n23], the opposite hypothesis of a correction of E J by MC is easier to explain.

always existed even if they can move, combine, or dissociate from one another. Fazzo's hypothesis is interesting and may be right but it remains highly conjectural since it lacks positive evidence and requires a real theory to be built on the basis of a very few words that seem over-interpreted.

Another aspect of Fazzo's innovations which has some significant consequences relates to the problem of subscript iotas. In her introduction [1.58], she observes that they are not systematically written down in ancient MSS, or, to be more precise, that they are either adscript or omitted. She concludes that their omission is not necessarily significant. This leads her to re-examine every occurrence of «ἐνέργεια» when the word qualifies a substance in order to determine whether it is used in the nominative or in the dative case. As a result, she judges that there is only one case in Λ (i.e., 1072a25) where none of the MSS explicitly confirms the dative.¹² She decides then to print «ἐνεργεία» systematically not only in these latter cases but in the former too, since the reading «ἐνέργεια» in 1072a25 would constitute otherwise a strange *unicum* [see also 2.55–59]. This editorial choice, she says, prevents us from interpreting Aristotle's prime mover in a wrong, though traditional, way, since nothing proves that the prime mover is a pure act. Indeed, this famous interpretation would only rely on the absence of a subscript iota (in Λ 6.1071b22), which turns out to be an incorrect reading of the text [Fazzo 2016].

Fazzo offers an interesting, new perspective which undoubtedly invites us to reconsider some passages that we may be used to reading in haste. But, even if her paleographical observations are accurate and useful, the methodology that she develops on this basis, as well as the interpretation that she gives of the theory of the prime mover as a pure act, can appear somewhat unbalanced. It amounts to printing a subscript iota in every case: if some MSS have it, then it must be accepted; and even if no MS does, it must nevertheless be accepted. In other words, it is impossible to find any counterexample.

According to Fazzo, this impossibility relies doctrinally on the Aristotelian *corpus* as a whole and on the *Metaphysics* in particular, where actuality and potentiality are always employed as correlative concepts, which apparently means two things:

- (1) that they are always relative to each other, and

¹² See 1071a8, 1071b22, 1072a5, 1072b5, and 1072b8.

- (2) that each of them is always relative to a substance, so that « ἐνέργεια » cannot be a substance but must be a way of being for a substance.

However, these two remarks are perhaps compatible with the exegetical description of the prime mover as a pure act. If we admit that the prime mover is different and superior to every other substance, even to the stars, why then should the regular correlation between δύναμις and ἐνέργεια have any value in the case of the prime mover, whose ontological status is different, since it is an absolutely first principle?¹³ Furthermore, the standard theory which describes the prime mover as a pure act does not mean anything more than this: actuality is the only mode of being of the prime mover's substance. It does not deny the essential relationship between ἐνέργεια and the prime mover's substance but only suggests that this ἐνέργεια cannot be the actualization of a previous potentiality. In addition, is it true to say that this theory only relies on the absence of a subscript iota? In fact, this theory derives from Aristotle's argument as a whole, which defends the priority of actuality to potentiality and, therefore, points to the prime mover's being a substance deprived of any potentiality. In these conditions, this interpretation does not collapse, even if it is not expressed through a nominative.

Apart from the criticisms stated above, some of Fazzo's editing choices illuminate Aristotle's text. For instance, in Λ 7.1072a24–25, Aristotle announces a very short proof of the prime mover's immobility:

ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ κινούμενον καὶ κινῶν καὶ μέγρον, τοίνυν ἔστι τι ὃ οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ....

The text raises several issues, as for example the repetition of « καὶ » and the motivation of this proof. Traditionally, it has been interpreted as relying on an argument developed in *Physics* 8.5, which focuses on the notion of symmetry. This argument opposes a mobile which does not move anything to a mover which is unmoved, whereas the mover and the mobile are linked with each other by something which is both a mobile and a mover. But even with this argumentative structure in mind, it remains quite difficult to understand how it could apply in Λ 7, where the symmetry seems to be truncated, which led Ross and Jaeger to suspect a lacuna.

¹³ Of course, this criticism only concerns the occurrences where Fazzo admits that the prime mover is at stake. It leaves intact her reading « ἐνεργεία » in Λ 6.1071b22 since she thinks that Aristotle is there speaking of the *primum mobile*. On this point, see below.

Given Fazzo's criterion of the agreement between the β -family (MC), which reads «ἐπεὶ δὲ κινούμενον» without «τὸ», and E, which originally had the same reading (the article is added above the line), she proposes to read «ἐπεὶ δὲ κινούμενον καὶ κινῶν καὶ μέγρον...» and interprets the text in a more economical and a more convincing way. She refers «κινούμενον» not to a mobile in general but to the first heaven, mentioned three lines before (1072a21), and she hypothesizes that this argument relies not on the notion of symmetry but on the impossibility of a *regressus ad infinitum*. Aristotle would be saying that, since the heaven is both a mobile and a mover, it is only an intermediary term and has to be moved by something which is unmoved [1.275–280; 2.89–90, 310–316]. The suppression of the article might be unnecessary and can certainly be discussed but it gives rise to a new interpretation which succeeds in giving a clear and satisfactory meaning to a text that was particularly enigmatic.

The commentary

Fazzo's commentary on book Λ follows the same methodological orientations. The volume includes an extensive introduction in which she develops her main interpretation of the book [2.11–110], and a running commentary in which she presents, chapter by chapter [2.110–189], and then lemma by lemma [2.203–415], a more accurate reading of the structure and the argumentative motivations of the text.¹⁴ Fazzo alerts us [2.13] to the selective character of her lemmatic commentary: not every aspect of the text is commented on. Indeed, such an approach seems impossible and perhaps even undesirable. However, the selection that she makes is sometimes harsh: she is silent on quite extensive or significant portions of the text. If her concern was the length of the book, she could have cut down the repetitions that occur in her abstract and outline for each chapter, replacing it with more commentary. For instance, in Λ 3, nothing is said on the quite surprising possibility that the form of natural substances exists separately [1070a17–18]. The lemmatic commentary on Λ 4 or of Λ 9 is rather empty, whereas these two chapters develop some conceptually important or difficult arguments. Aristotle's analysis of the *aporia* concerning the priority of actuality to potentiality in Λ 6 [1071a22ff.] is only clarified in the outline of the chapter,

¹⁴ This second volume also contains an *addendum* [2.191–202] to the critical edition presented in the first volume.

and no further details are given in the lemmatic commentary. Of course, for some of these points, important interpretive elements are developed in the introduction. Unfortunately, there is no *index locorum* to indicate where in the volume the reader might find supplementary information.¹⁵

As for its methodology, the second volume aims at considering Aristotle's book itself, making a clean break with the exegetical tradition which might blur or modify its real meaning [2.25]. In particular, two standard views of Λ are rejected by Fazzo. The first consists in interpreting Λ as a theological book in which Aristotle's main concern is to develop a fully elaborate conception of the divine. On the basis of a close examination of the text and, especially of Λ 7.1072b7–30 where theological motives are evoked for the first time [2.45–54], Fazzo concludes that Λ constitutes not a theological but a philosophical treatise, whose theological meaning or value is only incidental [2.31–44; 59–61]. As a consequence, book Λ , according to Fazzo, is essentially directed towards research regarding the principles of every substance and aims to provide an understanding of the intelligible and immutable principle from which the order of all things derives that is different from that achieved by the Presocratics or the Academics [2.33, 40, 44]. In other words, Λ is a treatise, Fazzo says, of first philosophy. All this appears to be true and relevant but it does not suffice to give a clear view of Fazzo's rejection of the exegetical tradition: scholars for a long time, as she tells us, have questioned the theological appreciation of book Λ to which Ross and Jaeger still adhered.

Fazzo's metaphysical but non-theological evaluation of book Λ also leads her to deny a second standard interpretation, i.e., the supposed chronological and/or conceptual isolation of book Λ from the rest of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Modern scholars tend to see in Λ not the fulfillment of Aristotle's metaphysical project but a peculiar and maybe early work, grounded on a different basis and making no use of Aristotle's argument elsewhere in the *Metaphysics*, especially in books ZH Θ . On the contrary, Fazzo provides an extensive list of parallel texts between Λ and other physical and metaphysical treatises, and concludes that book Λ is like a synthesis of the entire *corpus* and that Aristotle probably wrote it at the end of his philosophical career [2.28–31, 82–87]. Aristotle in Λ so read re-uses his physical and metaphysical philosophy in a meta-reflexive way ('in modo meta-riflessivo' [2.63]) in order to produce on the

¹⁵ It is also unfortunate that neither of these volumes contains a final bibliography.

basis of a new theory of principles a coherent and hierarchical vision of reality as a whole [2.44, 63]. According to the categorial analysis developed in the previous books of the *Metaphysics*, book Λ would thus constitute a full ontological research that provides auto-reflexive knowledge (*scienza autoriflessiva* [2.60]) which would constitute the fulfillment of Aristotle's metaphysics.

This is in sum a strong thesis held by Fazzo on the scope and status of Λ , and it appears to be true in some important aspects. Fazzo is surely right to reject the theological scheme and she correctly insists on the metaphysical value of Λ . However, as any strong thesis, it requires, in order to be fully convincing, a detailed and accurate demonstration. Yet, Fazzo's commentary remains rather vague or silent on some points. In fact, part of her demonstration often relies on such adjectives as 'meta-reflexive', 'auto-reflexive', and 'meta-linguistic' ('metalinguistico' [e.g., 2.120]), which are not, unless I am mistaken, precisely defined in the volume, though they seem to play an important role in her description of book Λ . Another vague, though crucial, element of this demonstration concerns the very nature of Aristotle's metaphysical project, which book Λ is supposed to fulfill but which is neither systematically analyzed nor defined. Fazzo strongly asserts, and often repeats, that book Λ is comprehensible only against the background of the entire *Metaphysics*. But we do not really know how its purpose is supposed to fit into the project of the science of being *qua* being that is defined in *Metaphysics* Γ and E. Some allusions are made to these passages but no detailed analysis is given. The same occurs with books $ZH\Theta$ which are repeatedly presented as a preliminary step toward Λ -research but without any clear analysis either of their aim or of the way in which they could play some role in the argument of Λ .

This is probably what the adjectives, mentioned above, are intended to express; but, as far as I can understand them, they only insist on the fact that Λ reworks in a new direction an already extant philosophical material. They do not show straightforwardly which epistemic and philosophical structures Aristotle re-uses in book Λ .

Moreover, one would have expected a more detailed analysis of the evidence on which she draws her statement regarding the chronology of Λ . She is

fully right to deny the standard approach of Λ as an isolated treatise¹⁶ but her view that book Λ comes later than every treatise of the *Metaphysics* or to any echoes of it found in other parallel texts seems to require additional proof. It obeys a rule of ‘all-or-nothing’ which is unnecessary. Every parallel between Λ and other Aristotelian texts does not necessarily imply that Λ has been written afterwards. To say so, one still has to demonstrate that Λ not only echoes some problematic or doctrinal aspects developed elsewhere but that it requires these other developments and the results to which they led.

Unfortunately, Fazzo’s commentary does not provide such analysis and only mentions the textual parallels that she is fully right to notice but whose content and context are not examined. Fazzo explains instead that so many parallels would imply that Aristotle already had in mind every important aspect he was supposed to develop later on in his other treatises, which appears to be an unreasonable hypothesis. Is that really necessary?

Most of the elements that Λ has in common with the central books of the *Metaphysics* concern basic conceptual tools (e.g., the description of οὐσία as ὑποκείμενον and χωριστόν, the notion of τόδε τι, the three meanings of οὐσία as matter, form, and composite) or introductory considerations¹⁷ or concern for important ontological problems (such as the priority of actuality, the separate existence of form or the principles of substance), which are specific not to these central books but to a metaphysical research as such. In other words, maybe Fazzo is right. But her demonstration, as it stands, seems to have proven clearly only that Λ is a metaphysical treatise in its own right, not that it represents the final synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy.

So far as Aristotle’s theory of the unmovable substance is concerned, Fazzo offers an interesting and useful study. She shows, for instance, how Aristotle progressively defines the nature of intelligible substance in Λ 7 by establishing one-by-one each of its predicates. She also highlights the conceptual tension which structures Aristotle’s conception of the principle in Λ 7 either (in an

¹⁶ In this regard, we could add, as Fazzo sometimes suggests, that Λ is closely linked to *Metaphysics* B and many *aporiae* developed in the latter are partially or fully answered in Λ .

¹⁷ See, e.g., the extensive list of parallels between Λ 1 and Z 1–2 that Fazzo gives in 2.114–115.

Academic way) as an intelligible being or (from an Ionian perspective) as an intellect.

Needless to say, it is impossible to give here an exhaustive picture of Fazzo's interpretive frame. I will conclude by presenting and discussing only some noteworthy exegetical aspects of the second volume.

Conclusion

The first concerns Fazzo's reading of the enigmatic epistemic program that Aristotle exposes at the end of Λ 1 [1069a36–b2], when he says that the study of the immovable substance will have to be produced by a non-physical science—probably first philosophy—if this substance does not have any principle in common with the two kinds of sensible (corruptible and eternal) substances. This passage has been thoroughly commented on by many scholars seeking to understand how Aristotle could manage to build a universal science of every substance [e.g., [Frede 2000](#), 73–77; [Berti 2008](#), 413–421; [Donini 2011](#), 32–34]. Fazzo takes an illuminating approach [2.228–229]. She proposes to give to the conjunction « $\epsilon\iota$ » a causal meaning and, above all, she reads the text in continuity with the first lines of the analysis of sensible substances [1069b2ff.], where Aristotle depicts them as essentially subject to physical change and, therefore, to the principles of change (matter and contraries). Thus, she states that Aristotle here, rather than asking for a universal principle of every substance, probably takes for granted that such a principle does not exist: the sensible substances are mutable; the unmovable substance is not.

She interestingly assumes that intelligible substance cannot share any common principle with sensible beings. Furthermore, she proposes an original reading of the context of this passage in underlining its continuity with the following lines, which are commonly considered as extraneous to this passage. One regrets, however, that she does not give more information about the epistemic architecture that she assumes Aristotle to evoke here. In fact, it would be important to know how these two sciences are supposed to be coordinated in Λ and how, more generally, they might fit within the project of a universal ontological science.

A second important element of Fazzo's interpretation of Aristotle's theory of intelligible substance indirectly concerns her reading of Λ 6. This chapter has been interpreted almost unanimously as providing for the first time in

Λ an important doctrinal clarification with respect to the prime mover: the demonstration of its existence and its substantial identification with ἐνέργεια. Fazzo proposes instead, however, a new interpretation, according to which Λ 6 exclusively concerns the *primum mobile* [see also Fazzo 2009].

This approach relies on some precise textual or linguistic observations [1.267–270; 2.100–101, 141–143, 290–295]:

- (1) in the Aristotelian corpus and in Λ in particular, the verb « μεταβάλλειν » regularly has an intransitive meaning, which suggests that the principle of change mentioned in 1071b15–16 concerns something capable of being changed;
- (2) there is a parallelism between the phrase « τις δυναμένη ἀρχὴ μεταβάλλειν » in Λ 6 and the description of matter in Λ 2 « μεταβάλλειν τὴν ὕλην δυναμένην » [1069b14–15];
- (3) the verb « ἐνέεται » [Λ 6.1071b15] usually indicates a material substrate; and
- (4) there is a close parallelism between this section in Λ 6 and the description of the actuality and potentiality of the stars in Θ 8.1050b6–30.

On the basis of these propositions, Fazzo assumes that the whole chapter constitutes a description of the first heaven. Having established the existence of an eternal movement, which necessarily belongs to an eternal substance, Aristotle then turns to the description of the moving element of this substance, showing that it has to be effectively and eternally moving, both conditions that would be satisfied by Aristotle's conception of ὕλη τοπικὴ (topical matter). Because such matter has potentiality, it would permit the moving element of the heaven to be active, since there would be something in it on which its power could be exerted. Yet, because the only potentiality of this matter concerns local change, it would also prevent this moving cause from ceasing to move. As far as the immateriality of the mover is concerned, which is stated at the end of this section, it would not contradict this analysis—Fazzo adds—given that this topical matter has a very special nature (it is not submitted to substantial change) and then is sometimes considered by Aristotle as not really being a matter [see, e.g., H 5.1044b27].

Fazzo's argumentation is original, interesting, and based on textual evidence. Be that as it may, however, one may well wonder whether it gives more importance to single words and phrases than to the argumentative and conceptual motives of Aristotle's text. For Fazzo, the most crucial evidence

concerns the phrase « τις δυναμένη ἀρχὴ μεταβάλλειν », which she supposes to indicate matter. However, this phrase occurs in a short criticism of Platonic Forms, the meaning and objective of which seem impossible to understand if we accept this new reading. Why would Aristotle think it necessary or even useful to mention the Forms here? Obviously, because they are presented as Plato's misguided attempt to define them as a cause of physical change. But, in the context of Λ, they also stand for an alternative conception of the immutable substance which Aristotle's prime mover is intended to replace. How then can we not conclude from these two observations that Aristotle mentions Platonic Ideas here in order to make room for his own conception of the unmovable and non-sensible substance? In these circumstances, the principle of change that these Platonic Forms lack probably has an active rather than a passive meaning. Furthermore, the mention of an active principle (κινητικόν or ποιητικόν) a few lines before helps us to interpret the verb « μεταβάλλειν » in a transitive sense.

Fazzo's interpretation of Λ 10 applies the same careful and original reading of a phrase or a sentence, from which stems a new understanding of its context. In the first demonstrative step of this chapter [1075a11–15], Aristotle builds an alternative between two modes of existence of the good in the universe [1075a11 ἢ τοῦ ὅλου φύσις]. This alternative is traditionally understood as opposing an immanent good existing inside the universe such as its order (τάξις) and a transcendent good corresponding to the prime mover. Aristotle shows that both members of this alternative are true, as they are for an army whose good is both its commander and its order. Scholars usually interpret this solution to mean that the transcendent good, namely, the prime mover, is a primary good for the universe and the cause of its immanent good, i.e., its order. But according to Fazzo, this interpretation is wrong and impossible since Aristotle does not say in 1075a14 that the good is both in the order and in the commander but that both the good (understood as immanent) and the commander are in the order: « καὶ γὰρ ἐν τῇ τάξει τὸ εὖ καὶ ὁ στρατηγός ». The alternative that Aristotle develops would not concern the immanence or the transcendence of the good but its mode of being: does it exist in the order of the universe as a quality, i.e., as a non-substantial being, or as a separate being, that is, as a substance? In showing that both solutions are correct as in the case of an army, Aristotle would then mean that a non-substantial good as well as a substantial good both exist inside the order of the universe. And this latter good would belong even more deeply to the order of the universe

in that it is the cause of its well-ordered parts [see 2.173–180, 387–395]. As a result, Aristotle's point is that, contrary to Academic positions, the good and the principle of the good do not belong to another realm of being.

Strictly speaking, this new interpretation, which has been recently developed in [Fazzo 2017/2018](#), does not invalidate the standard one: it does not amount to saying that the prime mover is not separate from the sensible beings; it only claims that its transcendence is not at stake in this text. Accordingly, it assumes that this passage has to be read in continuity with the priority of substance to every other being, so that the separate existence mentioned by Aristotle at the beginning of the passage is to be understood as the separate existence of a substance, not as the separate existence of an immaterial being. Fazzo thus proposes an interesting reading: undoubtedly, the prime mover is a substance and it cannot belong to another realm of being. However, two interpretive elements might prevent us from immediately adhering to it.

The first one concerns the meaning of the phrase « ἡ τοῦ ὅλου φύσις » at the beginning of the text [1075a11], which is usually interpreted as referring to the physical universe but which has to indicate, according to Fazzo, reality as a whole—the entire realm of being and not only its physical part. This may be true but it remains to be proved convincingly and made compliant with other textual evidence that suggests that Aristotle here considers the physical world. For it is to some kinds of sublunary living beings (πλωτὰ καὶ πτηνὰ καὶ φυτὰ at 1075a16–17) that he alludes to later on in this argumentative section. And, if we admit that the second part of Λ 10 is not totally unrelated to this first one, then we should remark that the existence of a transcendent, non-sensible, principle of the order (τάξις) of the universe is obviously a major concern for him [1075b24–27]. Of course, this does not prove that this problem is the one raised in the first part of Λ 10 but only that it would not be surprising if it were so.

Above all, it would seem that this new reading conceals the purpose of this passage, which is probably to determine the relationship between the good and the principle in light of Aristotle's criticism of the Academics as developed in *Metaphysics* Λ 7 [1072b30–1073a3] and N 4–5 [1091a29–1092a17]. In these two texts, Aristotle insists on the necessary identification of the good with the principle itself: the good is much more in the principle than in its effects since the principle of the good is necessarily better than the good things it produces. This is precisely what Aristotle apparently intends to

underline in Λ 10 by saying that the general is the cause of the universal order and that a particular attribute or quality (the good in this perspective) belongs to him more deeply than to the universal order itself. Of course, Fazzo's interpretation does not preclude this reading but makes it more implicit and secondary. Again, this remark does not prove definitively that the standard interpretation of this section is the right one. But it does show which converging set of texts supports it since it could more properly answer to the problem of the relationship between the good and its principle, which seems to be at stake here.

This critical remark, like others that I have made here, is not meant to deny that Fazzo's interpretation merits our attention. On the contrary, its purpose is to highlight how Fazzo can renew our vision of *Metaphysics* Λ . All in all, every study of this fascinating book of the *Metaphysics* will now have to take into account these two major contributions to Aristotelian studies that Fazzo offers.¹⁸

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