



THE INTUITION OF NOTHINGNESS IN ARISTOTELIAN THOUGHT

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 09th July, 2017
Received in revised form
24th August, 2017
Accepted 27th September, 2017
Published online 10th October, 2017

Key Words:

Aristotle,
Nothingness,
Movement,
Motor,
Deity.

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Citation: Héctor Sevilla Godínez. 2017. "The intuition of nothingness in aristotelian thought", *International Journal of Development Research*, 7, (10), 16162-16168.

ABSTRACT

This article inquires into the existing link between Aristotelian thought and Nothingness; for it, some pre-Aristotelian references are boarded, like Sophocles, Gorgias, or Plato. In the same manner, an analysis of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is carried out, centering the attention mainly on his concept of the Immobile Motor and what has been denominated as Aristotelian Theology. The intention is to demonstrate that, in spite of the originating denial that the Stagerian Philosopher undergoes about the not-being, nothingness is implicit in his concepts of movement, attraction, and divinity; in this sense, in spite of nothingness not being conceivable in the culture left behind by Aristotle, he intuited it in his philosophical proposal.

INTRODUCTION

The central intention that will occupy us during the following lines is to show that in Aristotle's metaphysical thoughts, an intuition of Nothingness is implicitly found as primal foundation of what exists. It is known that Aristotle explicitly denied the possibility of nothingness, but this is mainly due to the cultural influence of ancient Greece; in his main ideologies, a certain possibility of nothingness can be observed, distinguishing it from the simple not-being by which Aristotle had considered to have excluded it. The analysis I present begins by referring to some concepts preceding Aristotle and his considerations about nothingness; afterwards, the attention will be centered on the Stagerian philosopher and some topics from his works on metaphysics such as the Immobile Motor, divinity, movement, and the ultimate end. Of course, this study constitutes a first sketch with the objective of delimiting a greater purpose that can only be lightly satisfied for now, namely: the demonstration of a certain intuition of nothingness in Aristotelian thought.

Conceptions about Nothingness before Aristotle

Greek philosophy denied the concept of Nothingness since its commencement in the sixth century B.C. It was with Thales and his school in Miletus where the tradition of denying Nothingness originated, upon maintaining that never can something emanate from it nor disappear in it. Furthermore, Thales "utilized this idea to deny the possibility that the Universe could have come from Nothingness; a difficult idea to grasp, and to which we have become accustomed in the West due to two millenniums of religious tradition".¹ Most likely, one of the most ancient – though indirect – references about Nothingness is in the expression of the *not-being* that Gorgias (485-380 B.C.) proposes. This philosopher "could be considered the first nihilist of Western history",² and he affirms that "nothing is; but if it is, it's uncognoscible; and if it

¹ Barrow, *El libro de la Nada*, p. 68.

² Volpi, *El Nihilismo*, p.16.

is and is cognoscible, it is unable to be manifested to others”.³ Gorgias is located in the Eleatic tradition in which, since Parmenides, it is questioned whether thought is able to guarantee in itself the reality of that which is thought. Naturally, Gorgias’ conclusion is that it is not so and, furthermore, if something can be thought, then, beyond being, it is precisely a not-being, for the idea of what is thought is not that which is thought in itself. Afterwards, in Greek tragedy there are vast references to the issue of Nothingness. One example is in Sophocles’ play titled *Edipo en Colono* [Oedipus at Colon] –written between 406 and 405 B.C.– in which in the voice of the protagonist, weighed down by all the horrors and misadventures, Sophocles expresses the utter and inexorable human unhappiness, of himself and of all men, in the following manner: “To not have been born, is something overcome by every situation. But if one has been born, once having appeared into the light, it is the second good to return as quickly as possible to the place from which one came. When youth presents itself with its frivolous craziness, what overwhelming affliction remains outside it? Which shames are not?”⁴

It is clear that Sophocles doesn’t mention Nothingness, but at the same time, it is clear that this idea is present in his writing. In ancient Greece, the conception of Nothingness was not precisely considered something worthy of the most studied or recognized minds. Nothingness, however, in spite of the utter idolatry of the Being, was metaphorically present, since Sophocles’ reference to that from which one comes from and to which one goes upon dying, would not have been understood in any other way. Such as Givone affirms,⁵ in Plato (427-347 B.C.), and mainly in his work *El Sofista* [*The Sophist*], the issue about the Being or the not-being is observed. There, Plato recognizes that the existence of the not-being as an irreplaceable shadow of the Being, with which he breaks with Sophisticism and proposes the dialectic. The central point of discussion in the Platonic play consists in the contrary affirmation to the one that everything is which Parmenides had so defended. Since we name things and the things themselves are different than the name, it can be affirmed that the name is not the thing; therefore, the frame of thought that it only is what it is, is broken to affirm that what is-not also *is*, in a way, though always in relation with what is and that, by being, it is referred to the not-being. In fact, it is from this frame that Plato develops more profoundly the idea of the representations and the notion that the world is mainly of shadows, hence any aspect that we perceive is perceived imperfectly.

A second Platonic argument to destroy Parmenides’ affirmation that “everything is” was without a doubt the conscience of movement and change; for if everything is the same, then there would not be such movement or such change. In the same manner, that which is false also is, since “the false *is* in as much as not-being that participates in the Being. It’s not true that the false cannot be thought nor said since it is, in thought, the other of that which thought thinks according to truth”.⁶ The aforesaid supposes that in everything that is, Nothingness also is, even as a condition of the Being itself. It may seem to us as more radical in the comprehension of the denial of Nothingness that which Plato taught, clearly: that all we see in this world are imperfect manifestations of a set of

ideal perfect forms out of this world, and which are indestructible and eternal. So, even by eliminating all of existence, such ideal forms would still exist. In such a way that if we had to suppose that Nothingness is one of these perfect forms, it would not have, then, an imperfect manifestation on earth; for, if it was imperfect, Nothingness would not be Nothingness since it would contain something. Hence, for Plato and many others, the idea itself of Nothingness was inconceivable. In part, as well, this explains that: “Greek tradition was maintained on the belief that there was always originally something from which the world had been molded. In this manner was it prevented having to deal with the concept of nothing[ness] and with all the philosophical problems that it contemplated”.⁷ Leucippus, like the rest of the Atomists, considered that all matter is composed of atoms: indivisible particles that didn’t change any more than their position, but not in themselves. In the middle of the fifth century B.C., Leucippus instructed his student Democritus about the possibility of the existence of an empty space in which the atoms could move; because, if everything is composed of atoms and atoms move, wasn’t it logical to think that the only place where these atoms were not would be a hollow space which, in the end, would allow their movement? Leucippus himself affirms that “unless there exists an emptiness with an independent own being, ‘what is’ cannot be moved; nor can it be ‘many’, since there is nothing to keep the things apart”.⁸

Not only the Atomists had this consideration of Nothingness, but also the Stoics in the northern area of Athens, two centuries later, considered that the entire Universe was found over an infinite empty space; the emptiness was the great beyond. Therefore, the world was finite and less, inferior to the Nothingness that contained it. What should surprise us was that neither the ideas of the Atomists nor the Stoics produced a healthy impact in the West. The aforesaid was due to Scholastic tradition having inherited from Aristotle the primary ideas to articulate a whole religious creed centered on the Being, leaving Nothingness in a supposed forgottenness. This is why “the Aristotelian image of Nature was extraordinarily influencing and its ideas about emptiness modeled the opinion of consensus about the topic, until the Renaissance”.⁹ Precisely due to the aforesaid, we are to dedicate an extensive section to the Aristotelian ideas about Nothingness and Nature, for it is imperative that these are comprehended before continuing on the path about the history of the conceptions of Nothingness. The intention will be to outline and demonstrate in small lines, the manner in which even Aristotle himself, who centers his entire philosophy on the Being, had an intuition about Nothingness; that I later discard in order to reconstruct it in such a manner that the Scholastics complemented with traces of divinity. It is improbable that he had supposed that, even 2 400 years later, the same frames of comprehension of that which is omnipotent beyond our being, would still be reproduced based on his speculations.

Nothingness in Aristotle

I have considered it timely to emphasize the Aristotelian postulates since we primarily owe the Stagirian Philosopher to a great extent for the heredity that we have in the West about

³Gorgiasapud Calvo, *Pensar desde la nada*, p. 189

⁴Sófocles, *Edipo en Colono*, v. 1224-1226.

⁵Cfr. Givone, *Historia de la Nada*, pp.60-63.

⁶*Ibid.*, p.64.

⁷Barrow, *op.cit.*, p. 67.

⁸Sambursky, *The Physical World of the Greek*, p. 108.

⁹Barrow, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

the predominance of the Being. Already in *Física*[Physics], Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), had clearly set forth the conceptual and theoretical guidelines to be followed in metaphysical issues. The Stagirite wanted to demonstrate in the first and second books of *Física*, that the Universe is a functional unit. I share Düring's observation in which he mentions that "the not-being was reduced to a gnoseological concept and identified with the non-perceptible";¹⁰ this is to say, that the not-being was not contemplated in all that it could signify in itself in Aristotelian issues. Afterwards, in his books of *Metafísica* [*Metaphysics*], Aristotle delved deeper into issues about movement, time, and space; in other words, the implications of physical issues from a perspective of first philosophy. It is known that *Metafísica* is not properly ordered into chapters by Aristotle, but rather his books are independent teachings,¹¹ and were compiled by Andronicus¹² into a complete work without a chronological order.

About the Aristotelian divinity

According to Beuchot¹³, Aristotle proposes Theology as the culmination of science; but a theology un-impregnated from the basic mythologists' interests. Precisely, a first step to un-impregnate mythology from the conception of the Aristotelian god, consists in ceasing to call it "God" and not assuming that Aristotle's metaphysical explanations are properly theology in its traditional sense. Even though Aristotle clearly refers that "the divine is the end of all things and that is its manner of moving them",¹⁴ he also assumes that "man does not reach such liberty in his life or such theoretical capacity in his mind to comprehend it";¹⁵ which is why it is understood that he recurs to myths or manners of understanding the Absolute that work in his own time. I know that I, upon speaking of this, do not escape it; but even so, it could be speculated that it is Nothingness which allows all movement. Likewise, since man cannot be Nothingness without ceasing to be man, it is understood that he cannot profoundly understand that which is in Nothingness itself. That which until now has been called God, is Nothingness; and, certainly, one does not entirely possess God (Nothingness), but rather only by being one with Him (It), will man (ceasing to be so), be included in It. When it is affirmed that God is and that there is no matter or potentiality in him, we can also be referring to Nothingness, which in turn persists by its own self, even being in relation with that foreign to it.

With regard to this, Aristotle tells us: "God seems, to all thinkers, to be the first cause, the divine science, and therefore should be the most venerable".¹⁶ I coincide, then, with Düring when he categorically declares that: By reason of systematical beauty, it occurred to him to call this first science theological; a term which only occurs a few times in his writings [...] I am convinced that Aristotle never seriously employed this term of theology afterwards. The name was a casual occurrence, motivated parenthetically, and did not leave any trace whatsoever in his writings or in those of his immediate successors.¹⁷

However, Aristotle's supposed theology has played an enormous role, consciously or unconsciously interpreted as "real theology"; and Jaeger, who Düring labels "excessive" when he supposes that in "Aristotelian theology" there are signs of an Aristotelian *creed*, has had much to do with it.¹⁸ Due to all of this, and as I have argued, "the time has come to renounce to the expression of *Aristotle's theology*, or at least to assign it the position without its corresponding pretensions".¹⁹ The issue is not dealt with, naturally, only by Aristotle but was rather a common topic in his day, in such a manner that if for the Stagirite there existed the Being in act and the Being in potentiality, for the Eleatics, it was the Being in act and the not-being with potentiality of the Being; and for Parmenides (since he denies the not-being and does not assume potentialities), the correct structure would be a Being-Being. The not-being is contingent to the Being; it is not a substance. Hence, the not-being is the contingent manifestation of Nothingness; though Nothingness is not only the not-being, the not-being is, in fact, contained by Nothingness.

It has already been previously warned that "reality is intelligible by causality"²⁰ in such a way that Nothingness allows the comprehension of the Being whose movement it causes, indirectly, not as a subject that moves but rather as a conditioning of mobility. Nothingness is always in act, and thus enables the potencies of everything else. Due to Nothingness is that the matter of the un-existent is in potentiality and the intangible in act. If the Aristotelian method is the causative perspective of the universe, Nothingness is the first cause. All of this coincides with the Aristotelian ideas that "what is first for the senses is last for the plenitude of the being",²¹ as with the immutability and eternity of the divine which, furthermore, is one and multiple, being able to be in many places at once. In fact, as Düring affirms: "according to Aristotle, God and the ideas are in nature".²² Nothingness remains imperceptible to the senses but it is present in nature, allowing in it the changes that we can perceive.

Now, referred to the causes proposed by Aristotle, we could say that the material cause of man is the flesh, the formal cause is the spirit, the efficient cause is chaos, and the final cause is Nothingness. Chaos is a function of the Being; Nothingness is with the Being or without it. Nothingness also has a substance and that substance is the insubstantiality. On the other hand, when it is affirmed that "God thinks about himself since it is the most perfect thought that can be thought",²³ we are to recognize that Aristotle assumes God as an intelligence centered on itself, which assumes itself, without withdrawing from itself. We are to suppose that he doesn't refer to the act itself of thinking, since this would imply attributing an image of man to God, which we assume that the Stagirite has overcome; which is why this is rather about the Nothingness which assumes itself, for it can only be entered by being *already* it. The absolute is not thought, it simply is. And, in that sense, man cannot think about the absolute (at least not adequately or without distortions) other than being the absolute (or integrating himself to it).

¹⁰Düring, *Aristóteles: exposición e interpretación de su pensamiento*, p. 321.

¹¹In regard to Aristotle's *Metafísica*, each time I cite it I will mention the specific books more than the title of the compendium.

¹²Düring, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

¹³Beuchot, *Ensayos marginales sobre Aristóteles*, pp.108-110.

¹⁴Aristóteles, *Alpha 2*, 982b 6.

¹⁵Aristóteles, *Alpha 2*, 982b 28.

¹⁶*Vid.* Aristóteles, *Alpha 2*.

¹⁷Düring, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

¹⁸*Vid.* Jaeger, *Aristóteles*, 1984.

¹⁹Düring, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

²⁰Beuchot, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

²¹Reale, *Introducción a Aristóteles*, p. 22

²²Düring, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

²³Aristóteles, *Alpha 7*, 1072b, 18-24

Nothingness opens its invisible arms for the final embrace, consisting in the inalterable fusion of all men in death. Precisely in the intention of eliminating an apparently volitive intention of the deity imagined by Aristotle, the latter impregnates in God an utter disinterest for the imperfect (among which is the materialistic and, in it, man himself). In this way, the Deity is an object of love which does not love, since “to love men would be a diminishment of God”.²⁴ Therefore, God does not love; he is merely an object of love. Christianity believes to correct Aristotle by affirming that God loves his creations, but our philosopher never affirmed this; he – I maintain – thought about Nothingness. Since we come from Nothingness, humans begin, as well, as infinite potentiality. Based on what we know, we are mentally conformed. We are nothing, which is to be filled in order to be Nothingness. We are nothing and will turn into Nothingness.

Due to all of the aforesaid, the implication of God in what has been considered Aristotelian theology is nothing more than a way to escape the possibility of Nothingness. Hence, Aubenque recognizes that if the Stagirite affirms that all causes are eternal, and that the first causes are to be unbegotten, it is because if it were not in this manner, “all things would dissolve in nothing”.²⁵ Aubenque warns that, “We cannot speak of transcendence with our physical categories, because the divine is beyond those categories; or, better said, because those categories, instrument of human discourse about the world, contain only a mundane sense and are lacking a sense with regard to God”.²⁶ Likewise, I am to say that Nothingness, the same as the concept of God stated, is only partially interpretable based on our existent, and human, arguments. To speak of Nothingness is to distort it.

Aristotle has hinted that to share the science of the divine with God is a challenge.²⁷ This is because intending to know what He knows is nothing else than nullifying oneself; becoming Nothingness to be with Him. That is the challenge. It is true that “by speaking of transcendence we humanize it”,²⁸ such as in speaking of Nothingness we make it be and, therefore, we only know a partial and simple portion; that which humanly, as beings that we are, we can know. To completely comprehend Nothingness would imply being Nothingness with it. In a certain way, recognizing oneself as unable of all equity before the Absolute is man’s homage to that which is above (and below) him. Just as we “reduce God to not be more than the limit of our world, or the condition of the possibility of intermundane phenomenon”²⁹ we also can naively reduce Nothingness to that same state. But Nothingness is not only the limit, but rather is all possibility, culmination; certainly the alpha and omega of all existence. The immanence is the mirage of transcendence in the human discourse, such as phenomenon are the mirages of Nothingness in material reality. Hence, the only thing to which every being tends is precisely the not-being. Beyond being in a different manner, the truly substantial change is to cease to be.

Of the immobility and attraction of the Immobile Motor

Such as he warns in his book of *Física* [*Physics*], for Aristotle time is eternal since movement is eternal. However, movement is neither independent nor has substance, but is

rather an adjective, needing of something to move it, as well as that which is moved. In other words, movement must be caused. Hence, if movement is eternal, then “the cause had to be, also, eternal and immobile; in other words, pure act and without potentiality”.³⁰ Here we can observe how Aristotle himself withdraws conclusions from the assumptions he has.

Surely considering the problems implicated in the reflection of the volition of the motor on which it moves, Aristotle proposes that the Immobile Motor moves by *attracting*. We are to say, then, that the attraction proposed by the Stagirite as the motor’s own is not volitive but is produced in itself; in other words, there would be an attraction without the will of that which attracts (the attracting Being), but rather only in the being which is attracted. It is clearly observed that the Aristotelian motor is not a substantial one with volition, but rather only has repercussions on the rest of what it is. So then, the ineludible question remains about the origin or motive for such attraction. Aristotle found himself obligated to recur to an analogy to explain this, which he does in the following manner: “The immobile motor moves *like* the object of love attracts the lover”.³¹ The issue that follows, is that we are to recognize that what it does is make a comparison by using *like* within his expression. The problem would be to take this literally, such as occurred in scholastics, assuming that the Motor is worthy of love which is why it attracts. It seems that the condition of attraction, as the Stagirite explains it, is that of necessity.

The lover is in need of love in order to be, and that which is moved tends towards that which moves it due to the same necessity. Analogically, once again remitting myself to Nothingness, we would have to assume that Nothingness attracts the Being, due to its necessity of adjudicating itself to fullness. I coincide with Reale when he affirms that: “The cause of the immobile motor is a cause of the final type”,³² though by it he is not referring to Nothingness but to God. I had forewarned previously that Nothingness is the final cause of movement and change. Hence, we are beings for Nothingness (analogical to Heidegger’s «being for death») and all of our lives we are attracted to it, accidentally ceding to each second until, finally, being substantially attracted upon dying. But dying is not the passing into the not-being (which remains in reference to the being) but rather the passing into Nothingness (which is not in reference to something) which is also the ultimate end. Upon dying, that which we were is no longer and Nothingness is that which we are. With death, both issues are clarified. Hence, to want to live is merely a consequence of the impossibility of avoiding death. The issue of the Immobile Motor has been skillfully made relative also by Düring who concludes that “it is about an abstract principle, of the absolute point zero of movement and change, and at the same time the beginning of all movement [...] what Aristotle wants to say is that the beginning of movement is eternally immutable and immobile, and it really exists”.³³ Such attributes can be given to Nothingness, understood as an infinite potentiality in its most literal sense. Not as empty space or deprivation but as unending possibilities. This does not only apply to the relationship of Nothingness with man, but also with regard to all material beings.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Aubenque, *El problema de ser en Aristóteles*, p.326.

²⁶*Ibid.*, pp.349-350.

²⁷*Id.* Aristóteles, *Metafísica* I.

²⁸Aubenque, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 61.

³¹Aristóteles, *Alpha* 7, 1072b 3.

³²Reale, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

³³Düring, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

Relating the Motor with the world, there are also various controversies. To begin with, we cannot be in agreement with Reale when he affirms that:

The world that is constantly attracted by God as the supreme end has not had a beginning. There has not been any moment in which chaos or the absence of the cosmos has existed; precisely because, had it been this way, there would have been a contradiction with the theorem of the priority of the act over potentiality; firstly, there would have been chaos, which is potentiality, and then the world would have emanated, which is act; which would be absurd in itself, since God, upon being eternal, had to necessarily attract from eternity, the universe as an object of love which, therefore, has always had to be as it is.³⁴

The inexistence of chaos is then affirmed, but this is improbable. The error is precisely in the premise from which chaos is observed as potentiality. Why would it have to be like that? Chaos is not a being but rather a quality of what is. If we speak of the Universe, this is the being that can be in chaos or in order, but chaos is not a being in itself; it is neither potentiality nor act in itself, but rather in reference to that which in some way contains it. Chaos is a quality of something; it is not a being in itself. Neither can the idea that the Universe has always been as it is be sustained, beginning with the theories about its origin, continuing on through its expansion, and finalizing with the possible collapse in which it will be destroyed. As we can see, fully assuming Aristotle leads, sooner or later, to fall into issues as yet unresolved. Chaos, furthermore, is nothing more than the human denomination to that which escapes the cosmos; and naturally, the limited perception of the cosmos that we possess, has to do with it. I understand the cosmos here as the order of the existent.

On a different note, Pierre Aubenque is clear about the ambiguity of the First Motor: "As is known, the First Motor comes to be conceived by a process of regressive investigation, not so much as a condition of movement as much as a condition of the eternity of movement; of a movement which, being eternal in its entirety is nevertheless fragmented in a multiplicity of movements, apparently discontinuous".³⁵ Furthermore, the French philosopher asks, "How can an un-corporal being imprint a movement, seeing as how the only two manners of imprinting a movement, recognized by Aristotle, are to push or pull?"³⁶ Considering it, can we now work out that Aristotle is referring to Nothingness? Yes, definitely: a Nothingness that facilitates mobility without moving itself. It could be that what we now lucubrate, twenty-four centuries later, fills in some way that paradoxical emptiness of the Aristotelian metaphysics. Aubenque continues: "Everything occurs as if, Aristotle, worried at the same time about the transcendence of the divine and about reaching it by human means, had sometimes described such transcendence as a denial of the physical and, at others, striven to reach it through a step toward the limit, based on physical realities".³⁷ As the reader observes, these affirmations are not far from the conception of Nothingness provided here. That which is beyond the physical is not any different issue than Nothingness itself; it is outside of the

world and within the world; outside of us and within us; all around, and as a possibility. Furthermore, the notion of the First Motor is conceived from our experience of the natural movements, which usually demonstrate an interaction between motor and mobile. In the same way, even affirming that the First Motor is bodiless – which excludes all possibility of contact – it is assumed (according to Aristotle) that it is also «there» in the circumference of the world; and yet, it is not in a place. All of this leads to surmise the possible idea behind the word Immobile Motor that the Stagirite sustains. The divine ends up being what Aristotle imagined as being above that which is highest, and its mention is due to the impossibility to name Nothingness as enveloping of the world; the universal enabler of movement and the final cause, in addition to all things. By it, it is understood how complicated it can be in a mentality – ancient or contemporary – centered on the Being, all of which the acceptance of Nothingness implies.

Nothingness, the ultimate end, and movement in Aristotle

It has been warned that everything has a cause and that the processes of nature are directed to an end as an act of experience. Aristotle supposes, in his works, that this end is always good, such as occurs with a horse or a plant that beautify upon growing. But, as a counterpart to this supposed natural bounty of change, we would have to continue observing the horse and the plant, and we would see that the ultimate end is not necessarily good: its death. However, this finality isn't negative either; rather, only necessarily natural and finalist.

The end is that which during the course of the process of generation, according to a natural law and within a continuous development, appears each time as a final result. There is necessarily a connection between the principles of movement and the moved. Düring expresses it in the following manner. "The principles of movement are things which precede the moved; those, the principles that explain the structure of a thing, exist at the same time as the singular thing".³⁸ Aristotle argued the same upon affirming that, "movement and time are continuous and only aspects of the same reality; without movement there is no time".³⁹ It is understood, then, that an interdependent relation exists between the moved and that which moves it. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that the Immobile Motor be absolute and incontinent, since it establishes relationships of dependence with the moved. On the contrary, to assume Nothingness not as that which moves but rather as that which allows and empowers movement, frees it from the characterization of necessity that corresponds to the Immobile Motor. That which directly moves is that which is associated to the materialistic within a specific context; chaos or a multifactor causality can be that which directly generates the movement, but it is Nothingness which allows it by being, in itself, the final cause. Nothingness as a supreme principle can only be the pure act of updating because if it were only potentially, it would also be in a situation of not-being, and it cannot be that Nothingness not be. If the latter were exact, there would absolutely not be any being. In other words, the supreme beginning cannot be to not-be, because upon being a not-being, Nothingness would be everything. Neither can Nothingness be a potential not-being since, in the lapses that such potentiality would be updated, the world and sensible

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Aubenque, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

³⁶Ibid., p. 347.

³⁷Ibid., p. 348.

³⁸Düring, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

³⁹Aristóteles, *Física IV*, 10-14

things would stop moving, which has never occurred since we prove the present movement. If Nothingness were not, there would not be a motor that would move Nothingness towards its Being, after being in the not-being. And if there were, this other motor would be the Motor of which we speak: Nothingness. Therefore, there is no way for Nothingness to be nothing. Aristotle, for example, objects to Plato having stated Goodness to be a principle without explaining that Goodness is in the same way finality, motor, and form. And yet, the Stagirite, “Dotes his principle of movement with all the properties of the Platonic idea of Goodness”⁴⁰ anyway. It is not enough, then, like Plato, to make of the soul the principle of movement; but neither to the Aristotelian Motor should clairvoyant senses be connoted, bountiful in their finality.

Such bountiful senses of the ultimate End are observed in the relation that Aristotle makes of the Supreme End with Ethics. For the Stagirite, the principle of movement moves as Supreme End, to which the Universe tends; the first sky moves the rest, in as much as it is moved by this principle. As is seen, all natural processes, therefore, are governed by the *proton kinoun* and the “love of Goodness is on last term the dynamo of the Universe and all human works”.⁴¹ Comprehending these implications, “it is understood then, how easy it was to interpret this in a Christian manner and substitute the abstract principle for a personified motor”.⁴²

However, Aristotle warns: “If we do not approve my solution, we will once again be before Parmenides’ problem. The Being would proceed from the not-being, and we know that this is impossible. There is, therefore, a first-moved, a knowledge, the first sky, and a beginning of movement; both eternal”.⁴³ But it is also true – for me – that Parmenides is not entirely mistaken since, if Nothingness attracts the Being, due to it is the principle of movement that exists. The millenary-supposed issue is that Nothingness is the not-being, and in it lays the distortion. The Aristotelian impossibility to clearly define the First Motor allowed, in turn, the unfortunate interpretations of Christian scholastics and of all the others who assume a theological issue in their proposal. It is to be understood that in ancient Greece, “everything that was elevated over the human sphere was *Theion*, or was attributed to an intervention from the gods”.⁴⁴ It is understood that Aristotelian philosophy follows an irrefutable logic upon coinciding with such canons and premises proper of his time. However, such irrefutability only results as a possibility upon undergoing dialectic with its specific context, since the conclusion becomes unsustainable outside of those enabling and at the same time conditioning premises.

It was also believed in ancient Greece that the celestial bodies were living beings, since everything that moved without violence had to be alive. But the issue about the polytheistic or monotheistic sense of the Aristotelian god is, according to Düring, insignificant.⁴⁵ He later affirms, in a categorical tone: The medieval *Interpretatio Christiana*, that explained the Aristotelian theory of movement like its theology, has been sustained with astounding tenacity.

Hence, I consider it important to underline: firstly, that in the complexity of his ideas God is exclusively indispensable as proton kinoun (immobile motor); secondly, that absolutely without distinction he speaks of “God”, “the god”, or “the divine”.⁴⁶ These common forms of speaking of divinity are found in the text of *Ética a Nicómaquea* [*Nicomachean Ethics*]⁴⁷ and it needs to be assumed, in addition, that due to this book having been one of the last of the Stagirite, he had likely then realized the necessity to make his ideas more flexible about that which is higher than man himself. In the same passages of the cited book it is warned, additionally, that Aristotle recognizes that God has to be higher than the philosopher. In fact, if we conceive God as Nothingness, this is above the philosopher. There is room for the possibility that Aristotle, despite conceiving the reality of Nothingness, could do little more than sense it due to the impossibility of calling it by its name and assuming it as real in the Greek culture. In his words, Rotman expresses that:

For Aristotle, occupied in the classification, ordering, and analysis of the world into its irreducible and final categories, objects, causes, and attributes, the perspective of an unclassifiable emptiness, a hole without attributes in the natural weave of the being, isolated from cause and effect, and unrelated to that which was palpable for the senses, must have presented itself as a dangerous evil, a denying-of-God craziness which left him with a horror vacui, impossible of eradicating.⁴⁸

From this perspective, it is easy to understand that for the Greeks, even for the philosophers, it was complex to assume something out of form in their own culture. This is because: Greek philosophy and psychology could not find any place in their Universe that was indivisible from the Being for the type of gap that the reality of Nothingness would require. That is why, it simply couldn’t be. Something could not be made from Nothingness. Aristotle defined emptiness as a space in which there could not be any body. This step would have allowed him to undergo many different philosophical explorations, transposing himself to the East in order to contemplate the notions of the not-being and Nothingness, so loved of the Indian thinkers. In place of this, he concluded that emptiness could not exist. Every place was occupied by external things. There cannot be a state of perfect emptiness, deprived of the Being.⁴⁹

Logically, returning to the central idea, what is shown to us is that the Immobile Motor is the number one in the absolute sense of the series of beings. Gnoseologically, it demonstrates that it is the updated form, without matter and, therefore, without potentiality or contingencies. Axiologically, with regard to the goal of all tendencies in the universe, it is the Supreme Goodness. But in each one of these three demonstrations, the conception of Nothingness proposed here can be adapted without much difficulty. Nothingness has not matter, neither is it potentiality, nor does it have contingency; instead it is the ultimate end, since everything that exists, at some time ends up being part of Nothingness, whether it be to favour change or by destruction. Nothingness is the Motor, since this enables movement by attraction and not by push or by violence; in this sense, living things are directed without

⁴⁰Düring, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

⁴¹Aristóteles, *Ética Nicómaquea* I, 1, 1094a 1.

⁴²Düring, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

⁴³Cfr. Aristóteles, *Lambda* 7.

⁴⁴Düring, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Aristóteles, *Ética Nicómaquea*, X, 8, 1178b, 7-27.

⁴⁸Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero*, p. 63.

⁴⁹Barrow, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

violence to Nothingness, by way of death. There remains only the issue of necessity and contingency that the Aristotelian Motor shows with regard to the moved; but if such contingency is not compulsory, then Nothingness can symbolize the Motor, partially. In my opinion, I conceive Nothingness as something more than even the Motor itself, since the concept of Motor shows, as a substantial characteristic, the fact of moving something. It does not seem to me that Nothingness has such an aspect exclusively. However, it seems clear to me that when Aristotle expresses his conception about the Immobile Motor, he does in part refer to one of Nothingness' faculties. I am to say, in addition, that Nothingness is not contingent to the moved, but rather that the moved is contingent to Nothingness in order to be and, furthermore, to *be* moved. Nothingness is needed since "the necessary is: something compulsory; the sense of something without the existence of which, the end cannot exist, upon not being able to be any other way",⁵⁰ and Nothingness complies by all of the requirements. This is congruent with the fact that "the end is also a beginning".⁵¹ Finally, when the Stagirite affirms that: "that which changes is matter, and that in which it changes, is the form"⁵², it is assumed that movement is a predicate; and that in turn, the principle of movement cannot be a predicate but is instead something of which something cannot be predicated; in other words, Nothingness.

Conclusion

Only Nothingness is un-attachment; to bind oneself to Nothingness is the goal; utter un-attachment, and in that sense, the partial coexistence with Nothingness is the supreme enjoyment. It does not suppose the imperturbable apathy of the Stoics, but rather the wisdom of the forthcoming in the dumbfounding chaos. If we follow the postulate that theories must be accepted in which a smaller number of problems remain unsolved⁵³ in a topic of which no certainties are had, then, to think that Nothingness is the Immobile Motor leaves less unresolved points than if the Immobile Motor is God, from the common perspective.

God is not a good start. Both Plato and Aristotle looked for a static beginning: Plato sees it outside of the sensible world and Aristotle sees it implied in the sensible world. Though, if the sensible world is not only this one, by all means the originating principle must also be in another. The intuitive binding of Aristotelian thought with this conception of Nothingness is in itself a topic worthy of a complete study, which would deserve a specific space.

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⁵⁰ Aristóteles, *Lambda* 7, 1072b, 12.

⁵¹ Aristóteles, *Física* II, 9 200a, 23.

⁵² Aristóteles, *Lambda* 3, 1069b, 36.

⁵³ Düring, *op. cit.*, p. 349.