The Unmoved Mover in early Aristotle

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It is still worth discussing whether the Unmoved Mover is present in the early stages of the development of Aristotle's thought. Jaeger thought that the doctrine of the Unmoved Mover was formulated by Aristotle at the beginning of his independent career and that it was to be seen as the successor to the Theory of Forms. Perhaps few scholars would subscribe to this extreme version of the thesis today, but there is currently considerable support for the belief that the doctrine was an early one and that it appeared in *De Philosophia*.

There has been a good deal of interest in the subject recently, but no account has been taken in recent discussions of the references to the Unmoved Mover (or to an unmoved mover) in the earlier books of the *Physics*, which I wish to consider here. To anticipate my conclusions, I intend to argue that the passages containing these references, which occur in *Physics* B and I, are later additions and that the doctrine of the Unmoved Mover did not figure in the original version of these books.

As there can be no doubt about the presence of the Unmoved Mover as a central topic in *Physics* Θ, the intention to treat the early books separately may need some justification. Though it is hard to be dogmatic about the structure of the *Physics*, it is perhaps safe to say that the proof of the Unmoved Mover’s existence, which occupies Θ, forms the culmination of the discussion of change that begins in E and

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continues in Z4. Leaving out of account the puzzling book H, one can say that EZO, whether or not they were originally written as a single unit, certainly form one now, with H awkwardly intervening, and that they are so regarded by Aristotle, who refers to them as τὰ περὶ κινήσεως⁴. Similarly ABΓΔ form a loose unit, also recognised as such by Aristotle under the title τὰ περὶ φύσεως or τὰ φυσικά⁶; this unit is clearly earlier in date than EZO⁷. Thus it seems a justifiable procedure to examine ABΓΔ as an independent unit early in date.

The proof of the Unmoved Mover’s existence appears in Θ, and it is natural to ask whether this was the place where Aristotle first announced it as a new doctrine, or whether he is here setting out a proof to support a doctrine already formulated and enunciated elsewhere. At first sight the latter explanation might appear correct, for there are several references to an unmoved mover in the earlier part of the Physics. I now wish to examine the passages in which these occur. There are five in all:

For convenience I will take first the three passages from the discussion of κίνησις in Γ 1-3, which hang together.

1. δοκεῖ μὲν οὖν τίσιν ἀπαν κινεῖσθαι τὸ κινοῦν, οὐ μὴν ἄλλα περὶ τοῦτο μὲν ἔξ ἀλλων ἐστιν δὴ λοι δῶρον ὅπως ἕχει (ἐστι γὰρ τι κινοῦν καὶ ἄκινητον).

201 a 25-27

After some preliminaries, Γ 1 begins by defining change as the actualisation of the potential (a 11), giving examples (a 16). Aristotle then makes the point that some things can be both actually and potentially, and thus can stand both as agent and as patient. This applies to τὸ κινοῦν φυσικὸς, which is κινητόν as well as κινητικόν (a 24), because it produces change while being changed itself. A digression (a 25-27) then remarks that there is another kind of mover (viz. unmoved), though some thinkers fail to realise this.

2. κινεῖσθαι δὲ καὶ τὸ κινοῦν ὀσπερ ἐφηται πάν, τὸ δυνάμει ὃν κινητόν, καί οὐ ἡ ἄκινησι ἰσμιὰ ἐστὶν (ὁ γὰρ ἡ κίνησις ὑπάρχει, τοῦτο ἡ ἄκινησι ἰσμιᾷ).

202 a 3-5

This is merely the same point as that made at 201 a 25-27, appearing again in the summary at the end of the chapter. Every mover, says

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⁴ This view of Θ is perhaps an over-simplification; cf. G. A. Seeck, Nachträge im achten Buch der Physik des Aristoteles (Abh. Mainz, 1965. 3).
⁵ e.g. de Caelo 272 a 30, 275 b 22.
⁶ e.g. Physics 251 a 8.
⁷ For a fuller discussion of these references and of the relative dating, see W. D. Ross, Aristotle’s Physics (Oxford, 1936), pp. 1-19.