Aristotle against (unqualified) self-motion:  
*Physics* vii 1.α241b35-242a49 and β241b25-242a15

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It is well known that Aristotle tries to make room for self-motion—an idea he inherits to some extent from Plato—within his other commitments, such as the principle that every effect has a causal antecedent, while at the same time modifying the concept of a self-mover. However, one argument in *Physics* vii 1 seems to pose a problem for the bare possibility of self-motion; in it he seems to argue that everything in motion must be moved by something else. If this were true, then it would seem to pose a problem for the possibility of something self-moving at all. For what is self-motion but being in motion without being moved by anything else? The text in which this argument appears is itself vexed on a number of fronts, because it is not clear how *Physics* vii fits with the rest of the *Physics*, and also because there are two distinct manuscript traditions for *Physics* vii. For this reason, the argument in *Physics* vii 1 has not been adequately taken into account in discussions of self-motion.¹

A preliminary note about the text: there are two extant versions of *Physics* vii 1-3 (though not for chapters 4-5). This creates special interpretive difficulties for us, which I will briefly describe here. The two versions are referred to as α and β. These versions were known to Simplicius in late antiquity and left their traces in the MSS tradition of the *Physics*: some MSS have one version, others the other, and yet others have combined or contaminated versions. In Ross’s OCT, the two versions are kept apart and have been printed separately. The Greek I use here is from the OCT. Ross treats the α as the main text, relegating the β to an appendix. Most English translations of the *Physics* include a translation of only the α, entirely excluding the β. Like Lang, but contra Wardy and Olshewsky,² I think

¹ Bostock 1996, lxix-lxx writes: ‘I believe that, if Aristotle had himself prepared his *Physics* for publication, he would have omitted VII altogether. …Aristotle intended the whole of Book vii to be superseded by the whole of Book viii.’ Simplicius 1.1036.11-12 and his predecessors seem to concur *Phys*. vii’s five chapters just seem to be various points about motion and change: on self-motion and infinite chains of movers (vii 1); contiguity between mover and moved (vii 2); alteration takes place only in sensible qualities (vii 3); what makes changes incomparable (vii 4); and the exceptions to the principle that power acting is to weight moved as distance covered is to time taken (vii 5). Moreover, *Phys*. viii draws on many theses and theorems established in previous sections of the *Physics*. It refers back to *Phys*. ii at vii 1.251a1-3; to *Phys*. iii at vii 3.253b7-9 and at viii 5.257a34; to *Phys*. v at vii 8.262a1-2; and to *Phys*. vi at viii 8.263a11-12 and viii 10.267b21. But viii does not once refer to vii.

² Wardy 1990, 243: ‘α and β do not draw the same conclusion from VII’s unsatisfactory opening argument: according to α, ‘this moves itself’ entails ‘this is moved by something’ (e.g. 242a47); according to β, ‘this moves itself’ entails ‘this is moved by something else’ (e.g. 242a12-13).’
that there is no substantive difference between the two versions. But for the sake of transparency and thoroughness, I give the OCT Greek and my English translations of both versions below.

Aristotle begins *Physics* vii 1 with the claim that everything that is moved must be moved by something. By ‘something’ Aristotle means something non-identical to the thing in motion. Of course, things can be non-identical in different kinds of ways. I am non-identical to the laundry basket I was carrying earlier today. I am also non-identical to my legs. But unlike my legs, the basket is not one of my parts. Aristotle’s claim, as I read it, is that everything that is moved must be moved by something not the same as the very thing in motion, either by something external to the thing in motion or by a proper part (or both).

Aristotle’s discussion is divided into (a) a brief discussion of those cases in which the source of the motion is outside the moved thing, and (b) a more detailed discussion of those cases in which the source seems to be inside the moved thing. He begins with (a):

\[ \text{Ἅπαν τὸ κινούμενον ὑπὸ τινὸς ἀνάγκη κινεῖθαι· εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἐν ἑαυτῷ μὴ ἔχει τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς κινήσεως, φανερὸν ὅτι ψφ’ ἐτέρου κινεῖται; ἄλλο γὰρ ἔσται τὸ κινοῦν. (Physics vii 1.a241b35-37) }\]

Everything that is in motion must be moved by something. For if the thing in motion does not have the source of its motion within itself, it is clear that it is moved by something other than itself, for there must be something else that moves it.\(^3\)

\[ \text{Ὃπον τὸ κινούμενον ἀνάγκη ὑπὸ τινὸς κινεῖθαι· εἰ μὲν οὖν ἐν αὑτῷ μὴ ἔχει τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς κινήσεως, φανερὸν ὅτι ψφ’ ἐτέρου κινεῖται; ἄλλο γὰρ ἔσται τὸ κινοῦν. (Physics vii 1.b241b24-26) }\]

Everything that is in motion must be moved by something. Then if it does not have the source of its motion within itself, it is clear that it is moved by something other than itself, for there must be something else that moves it.

The text does not provide any examples. But consider my laundry basket when I carry it. It is obvious that the source of the laundry basket’s motion (τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς κινήσεως) is not the same as the basket: I am the source of its motion, and it is clear that (φανερὸν ὅτι) I am not the same thing as my laundry basket. The basket’s motion does not come about from the basket alone.

The harder cases are those in which the source of the motion is non-identical but internal to—that is, a proper part of—the thing in motion. What moves me when I carry my laundry basket? At the very least, all mobiles are moved in the following way:

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Olshewsky 1995 concurs with Wardy on this point. Lang 1992, 204 dismisses the argument in β, mentioning it only in a footnote: ‘There are two extant versions of *Physics* vii, one of which is generally accepted as primary. The language in them differs slightly, but the substance of the texts is the same. Hence, all references are to the primary text of *Physics* vii’. She follows Simplicius in this.

\(^3\) All English translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
But if [the thing in motion has the source of its motion] in itself, then take AB to represent that which is in motion in itself and not by the motion of something belonging to it. First, then, to assume that AB is moved by itself because the whole is in motion without being moved by anything external to the whole is similar to the following: if KL is moving LM and KL is itself in motion, if we deny that KM is moved by something because it is not clear which is the mover and which is the moved. Second, something in motion without being moved by anything ought not to stop its motion just because something else is at rest; does not necessarily stop from being in motion because of the rest of something else; but if something comes to rest because something else ceases to be in motion, then [the thing that is brought to a rest because something else ceases to be in motion] must be moved by something. With this principle accepted, it follows that everything that is in motion is moved by something. For, since it has been assumed that AB is in motion, it must be divisible. For everything that is in motion is divisible. So let it be divided at C. If CB is not in motion, AB will no longer be in motion. For if [AB] were in motion, it is clear that AC would be in motion while CB rests, so that AB would not be in motion in itself and primarily. But AB was
assumed to be in motion in itself and primarily. Therefore with CB no longer in motion AB must rest. But if it rests because something is no longer in motion [the thing brought to rest because something else is no longer in motion] was agreed to be moved by something, so that everything that is in motion must be moved by something. For the thing in motion will always will be divisible, and with a [proper] part’s not being in motion the whole must also rest.

εἰ δ’ ἐν αὐτῷ, εἰλήφθω ἕρ’ οὗ τὸ ΑΒ, ὁ κινεῖται μὴ τῷ τόν τούτου τι κινεῖσθαι. πρῶτον μὲν οὖν τὸ ύπολαμβάνειν τὸ ΑΒ ύφ’ αὐτοῦ κινεῖσθαι διὰ τὸ ὅλον τε κινεῖσθαι καὶ ύπὸ μηθενός τῶν ἐξωθεν ὁμοίων ἐστὶν ὤσπερ ἀν εἰ τίς τοῦ ΔΕ κινοῦντος τὸ ΕΖ καὶ αὐτοῦ κινομένου ὑπολαμβάνοι τὸ ΔΕΖ ύφ’ αὐτοῦ κινεῖσθαι, διὰ τὸ μὴ συνορᾶν πότερον ὑπὸ πότερον κινεῖται, πότερον τὸ ΔΕ ύπὸ τοῦ ΕΖ ἢ τὸ ΕΖ ύπὸ τοῦ ΔΕ. ἔτι τὸ ύφ’ αὐτοῦ κινομένον οὐδέποτε παύσεται κινούμενον τῷ ἐτέρῳ τι στήναι κινούμενον. ἀνάγκη τοῖνυν, εἰ τι παύεται κινούμενον τῷ ἐτέρῳ τι στήναι, αὐτὸ ύφ’ ἐτέρου κινεῖσθαι. Τούτου δὲ φανεροῦ γενομένου ἀνάγκη πάν τὸ κινούμενον κινεῖσθαι ύπὸ τῖνος. ἐπεὶ γὰρ εἰληφται τὸ ΑΒ κινούμενον, διαρετῶν ἔσται πάν γὰρ τὸ κινούμενον διαρετῶν ἢν. διηρήσθω τοῖνυν ἢ τὸ Γ: ἀνάγκη δὴ τοῦ ΓΒ ἁρεμοῦντος ἁρεμῆσθαι καὶ τὸ ΑΒ. εἰ γὰρ μὴ, εἰλήφθω κινούμενον τοῦ τοῖνυν ΓΒ ἁρεμοῦντος κινοῦτο ἢν τὸ ΓΑ. οὐκ ἀρα καθ’ αὐτὸ κινεῖται τὸ ΑΒ: ἀλλ’ ὑπέκειτο καθ’ αὐτὸ κινεῖσθαι πρῶτον. δήλων τοῖνυν ὅτι τοῦ ΓΒ ἁρεμοῦντος ἁρεμήσει καὶ ΒΑ, καὶ τότε παύεται κινούμενον. ἀλλ’ εἰ τῷ ἄλλῳ ἁρεμῆσιν ἵσταται καὶ παύεται κινούμενον, τοῦθ’ ύφ’ ἐτέρου κινεῖται. φανερὸν δὴ ὅτι πάν τὸ κινούμενον ύπὸ τῖνος κινεῖται: διαρετῶν τε γὰρ ἐστὶν πάν τὸ κινούμενον, καὶ τοῦ μεροῦς ἁρεμοῦντος ἁρεμήσει καὶ τὸ ὅλον (β241b26-242a15).

But if the thing in motion has the source of its motion in itself, then take AB to represent that which is in motion not because something belonging to it is in motion. First, then, to assume that AB is moved by itself because AB as a whole is moved by nothing outside AB is similar to the following: if DE were moving EF and were itself in motion, and someone were to assume that DEF is moved by itself because he could not detect which is moved by which, whether DE is moved by EF or EF by DE. Second, something moved by itself will not cease from being in motion just because another thing stops being in motion. Therefore it is necessary that if something ceases from being in motion because of another thing’s having stopped, it is moved by something other than itself. With this made clear, it
follows that it is necessary that everything that is in motion is moved by something. For since it has been assumed that AB is in motion, AB will be divisible; for everything that is in motion is divisible. Therefore let AB be divided at C. Then it is necessary that, with CB being at rest, AB will be at rest too. For if this were not the case, let us assume that [AB] is in motion. Then, if this were the case, CB would at rest while CA would be in motion. So AB is not in motion in itself. But it was assumed that AB is in motion in itself and primarily. Therefore it is clear that if CB is at rest, BA will also be at rest, and will cease from being in motion. But if something ceases from being in motion because something else rests, then it is moved by something not the same as itself. So it is clear that everything that is in motion is moved by something. For everything that is in motion is divisible, and with a [proper] part’s being at rest the whole will also be at rest.

Aristotle’s first point is that if we assume that AB is moved by itself, it does not follow that AB is not moved by anything (non-identical to AB). For compare AB to the case of KM, which can be divided into two parts: KL and LM. Suppose that KL is moving LM, and that KL is itself in motion. One could not ‘deny that KM is moved by anything on the ground that it is not evident which is the part that is moving it and which the part that is moved’; as long as we assume that some part is moving the other part, and the whole, it still follows that KM—and AB—are being moved by something.

Aristotle then argues for his thesis by assuming the opposite: that something can be in motion without being moved by anything. He tries to argue that, contrary to the assumption, it must be moved by something, if something else’s ceasing to be in motion causes it to be at rest. That fact shows that it is moved by something else. The argument goes as follows: Assume AB is in motion (without being moved by anything). It must be divisible (already established in *Phys.* vi 4 and vi 10). Let it be divided at C, so that we have two lengths: AC and CB. Take one of the two parts: CB. Suppose that CB is not in motion. Then it follows that AB will not be in motion. Why? Suppose the whole AB is in motion while CB is not in motion. Then AC (which is the other part of AB) would be in motion while CB is at rest. It would follow from this assumption that AB cannot be in motion in its own right and primarily—because its motion would be derived from AC’s motion. But this goes against the assumption that AB is itself in motion in its own right and primarily. Therefore, if CB is not in motion, then the whole AB will be at rest. But a thing that is at rest if something is not in motion must be moved by something.

In a more concise, skeletal form, here is how I see the argument Aristotle gives for his thesis as applied to the hard cases:

Premise 1 (P1): All things that are in motion must also be things that are
divisible; that is, all mobiles must have proper parts.\(^4\)

P2: All things that have proper parts must also be things that stop being in motion when one of their proper parts stops being in motion.

P3: All things that stop being in motion when something not the same as the thing in motion (such as a proper part) stops being in motion must also be things that are moved by something not the same as the very thing in motion.

Conclusion: All things that are in motion must also be things that are moved by something not the same as the very thing in motion.

The argument has puzzled commentators since antiquity, and has provoked criticism from Galen, Alexander, Simplicius, Avicenna, Averroes, Ross, Bostock, and Wardy. Wardy 1990, 114, for example, calls the argument a ‘fallacious if conveniently brisk and simple opening gambit’\(^5\). This is in large part because of P3, which appears to be false. And on the prevailing interpretation of the argument, Aristotle is here rejecting the possibility of self-motion. Yet throughout texts such as \textit{Physics} viii, \textit{De anima} iii 9-11, and \textit{De motu animalium} (not to mention the biological works), it is clear that Aristotle takes human and non-human animals to be self-movers. I will argue that Aristotle argues merely against unqualified self-motion, leaving open the possibility of self-motion in qualified senses (section 1). I shall defend P3, the argument’s most controversial premise (section 2). And I explore some useful implications of my reading, especially with respect to distinguishing Platonic self-motion from Aristotelian self-motion (section 3).

A note on how, precisely, my discussion is original: First, \textit{Physics} vii’s opening argument has escaped any serious attention in the literature on Aristotle’s account of self-motion—see Berryman 2002, Broadie 1982, 204-261, Coope 2015, 245-264, Corcilius and Gregoric 2013, Freeland 1994, Furley 1978, Gill 1994, Meyer 1994, and Morison 2004. The literature focuses on other highly relevant texts such as \textit{De anima} iii 9-11, \textit{De motu animalium}, and \textit{Physics} viii. In that sense, what I offer here is original. Second, the argument against unqualified self-motion in \textit{Physics} vii 1 differs in interesting ways from Aristotle’s other rel-

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\(^4\) By ‘proper part’ I mean ‘a part other than the whole’. One might think this usage is anachronistic, since it is not clear that Aristotle would have distinguished between ‘part’ and ‘proper part’. But, first, Aristotle was acutely aware that a whole is more than the mere sum of its parts (e.g., \textit{Topics} 13.150a15-21). Second, the point of my using the term ‘proper part’ is to make clear to a contemporary audience what Aristotle has in mind. Third, there are five senses of part (\textit{μέρος}) given in \textit{Meta. v} 25.1023b12-25. One of those senses is that into which a quantity can in any way be divided.

\(^5\) Lang 1992, 35-44, 204-208 gives a careful and charitable reading of \textit{α}’s version of vii’s opening argument. Lang emphasizes the historical and, in particular, the anti-Platonic context of the argument in \textit{α} (though she ignores \textit{β}). I analyze the argument through principally philosophical and exegetical means. Thus I show that there are good philosophical and text-based reasons to think that the argument does not swear off self-motion altogether. Also, Lang does not say much about how to incorporate her reading of the argument into Aristotle’s more general account of self-motion, whereas this is one of my aims. Coope 2015, 245-264 focuses on \textit{Phys. viii} 5, but also gives some brief (262-263) but insightful attention to viii 5’s connection with vii 1’s argument.
relevant arguments. In that sense, too, my discussion is original. But the broad philosophical problem I address here—that is, how Aristotle’s arguing that everything is moved by something (else) is compatible with his clear endorsements of self-motion—receives careful attention in much of the literature. And the main solution I offer—that is, Aristotle argues against unqualified self-motion, but does not rule out the possibility of self-motion in other senses—does find support in, for instance, Berryman 2002 and Morison 2004, in their readings of other relevant texts. Principally their interest is Physics viii. Berryman 2002, 85, 97 argues that by self-motion Aristotle means exclusively voluntary self-locomotion in animals, that a ‘causal “fresh start’’ is not required for animal motion to count as self-motion, that ‘Aristotle’s reason for calling animals self-movers is the simple fact that they, unlike inanimate things, are able to move locally in response to other kinds of change’ whereas other kinds of change are preceded by local changes, and that Aristotle’s account uses sumphuton pneuma as the stuff that can convert qualitative into local change so as to give animals their unique capacity for self-motion. Morison 2004, 75 also argues for a qualified reading of Aristotle’s account of self-motion, one on which, within a self-moving animal:

There is an unmoved part which moves the rest of the animal—this much we know from the fact that an animal does not move itself properly speaking, since one part moves another. But in that case, the unmoved part (which moves the other part) ends up moving accidentally (259b18) along with the organism as a whole. However, it is just this which is the crucial point for Aristotle’s argument, and which defuse the threat posed by animals to his argument of Physics vii 6. For Aristotle goes on to claim: ‘we may be sure that if a thing belong to the class of unmoved things which move themselves accidentally, it is impossible that it should cause continuous motion’ (259b20-22)

Yet, Physics vii 1 and its argument have not been taken seriously in the literature on Aristotle’s account of self-motion, and I think the argument in that text has useful implications and is interesting enough in its own right to merit careful study. In a broad, philosophical sense, the tension I address is well known, and the solution I offer enjoys support from other scholars’ readings of other texts.

1. Does the argument rule out the possibility of self-motion?

One might think that Physics vii’s opening argument establishes that nothing can move itself, that there are no self-movers.6 Though Wardy 1990, 114 has a

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6 There is a problem for translators in relation to the noun κίνησις and the verb κινέω throughout the Physics (and elsewhere), that is, whether to translate them as ‘change’ and ‘to change’ or as ‘motion’ and ‘to move’ (or whatever best fits the tense, number, voice, etc. of the particular Greek locution). Aristotle sometimes uses μεταβολή and κίνησις together and somewhat interchangeably to refer to change in a broad sense, under which change of place, change of quantity, and change of
slightly different reading of the argument in the $\alpha$ and a markedly different reading of the argument in the $\beta$, he concludes, ‘in the Physics vii 1 all apparent self-movers are treated as problematic’. And while she focuses on Physics viii rather than vii, Waterlow 1982, 204 argues that ‘if Aristotle is in general elusive on the subject of agency and its connection with change, nowhere is he more so than when treating of the mysterious concept of something’s “changing (transitive) itself”’, or “being changed by itself”’. For, Waterlow 1982, 209, worries, ‘if changer must differ from changed, how can “X changes itself” escape being nonsensical or self-contradictory?’ Guthrie 1939, xvii writes that for Aristotle ‘self-motion is impossible’. Aquinas also made such an assumption—see his Commentary on Aristotle’s ‘Physics’ viii 4, lectio 7; Commentary on the ‘Sentences’ I d.8 q.3 art.1; Summa contra gentiles 1.13; Summa theologiae 1a q.2 art.3; Quaestiones disputatae de veritate q.22 art 3; Compendium theologiae chap. 3. One might be tempted to agree with such readings: Aristotle is arguing that self-motion is altogether impossible.

The trouble with that interpretive option is that Physics vii 2, viii 2, viii 4, viii 5, viii 6, and viii 7 (not to mention passages throughout the biological works, in most of De motu animalium, and in sections of De anima such as iii 9-11) seem to endorse the claim that self-motion is possible, as well as the stronger claim that there are real things in the world (namely, plants and animals) which are self-movers. Consider, for example, the following:

> Everything in motion is moved either by itself ($\upsilon \rho$ ‘$\varepsilon$αυτο$\nu$) or by something else ($\upsilon \pi$ ‘$\alpha$λλον). Now, where self-movers ($\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$ ‘$\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$κινεται) are concerned it is obvious that the moved object ($\tau\omicron \kappaινομενον) and the agent of movement ($\tau\omicron \kappaινον) are contiguous; after all, the immediate agent is within the thing moved, so there is nothing in between. (Phys. vii 2.243a11-14)

If vii 1’s argument concerning self-motion is supposed to show that self-motion is altogether impossible, then Aristotle appears blatantly to contradict himself immediately afterwards: self-motion is endorsed in vii 2 for the same reason it was rejected in vii 1. Elsewhere Aristotle writes: ‘Now we determined before, in our discussion of eternal motion, that the origin of other movements is that which moves itself ($\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$ ‘$\varepsilon$αυτο$\nu$κινον)’ (De motu 1.698a8-9); ‘the living being, on the other hand, we say, moves itself’ ($\tau\omicron \delta \varepsilon \zeta\omicron\nu\pi\nu \alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha \phi\alpha\mu\varepsilon \varepsilon\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha \kappaινε\nu$, Phys. viii...
2.252b23); and ‘it is evident from actual observation that there are things that have the characteristic of moving themselves (κινεῖ ἑαυτὰ ἑαυτά), e.g., the animal kingdom and the whole class of living things’ (Phys. viii 6.254b2-4). Aristotle certainly seems committed to the claim that self-motion is possible and to the much stronger claim that there are many examples of self-movers (plants and animals). Yet vii 1’s discussion of self-motion seems to argue that self-motion is altogether impossible. One way to avoid the conflict would be to take a developmentalist line and say that this is a very different, perhaps a much younger Aristotle (so Olshewsky 1995), or we have effectively to ignore the argument since it apparently does not reflect any of Aristotle’s genuine views.

I do not use either of these options. Instead, the argument does not conflict with Aristotle’s frequent endorsements of self-motion. There is a non-trivial sense in which everything that is lifted must be lifted by something non-identical to the thing that is lifted. This coheres with saying that when people do chin-ups, push-ups, and so on, people lift themselves. This is compatible with holding that when we say that things lift themselves we acknowledge that their lifting themselves is qualified in at least one way: the thing’s lifting itself depends on its proper parts (and, in particular, on whether they are in motion).

The standard reading—on which Physics vii’s opening argument swears off self-motion altogether—is further undermined in the context of ordinary generalizations that we take to be true. We generally say, for instance, that people are capable of motivating themselves. But we also acknowledge that even cases of self-motivation often involve or even require an external object of motivation that plays some role in the motivation. We also generally say that some animals are capable of feeding themselves. That is compatible with saying that animals require food itself together with a properly functioning digestive system and mouth in order to feed themselves. If the animal’s mouth stops working, then the animal cannot feed itself. Similarly, the animal requires an external source of food in order to feed itself. Those are reasonable qualifications on the generalization that some animals are capable of feeding themselves. But the generalization still seems accurate.

In this context, then, it is the standard reading rather than Aristotle’s qualifications that look suspect. Arguing that there is at least one qualification on self-motion does not entail that self-motion is impossible. This would be like arguing that since picking oneself up off the floor and jumping onto a chin up bar requires earth’s gravitational constant not to start to behave erratically, it follows that no one can pick themselves up or lift themselves. To insist that self-motion can only be properly called ‘self-motion’ and only strictly be ‘self-motion’ if the motion therein is utterly free of all non-self-related qualifications is by reasonable contemporary standards needlessly unequivocal thinking. It is also profoundly anti-Aristotelian thinking: he is notoriously careful in delineating the different senses in which claims can be true and properties can hold.

Moreover, consider his discussion in De anima iii 9-11 of the moving factor in the soul responsible for animals’ unique ability to start local movement (κινεῖν
τὴν κατὰ τόπον κίνησιν, De an. iii 9.432a16-19). He argues that an animal is self-moving insofar as it is appetitive (ὢ ὀρεκτικὸν τὸ ζῷον, ταύτη αὐτοῦ κινητικὸν) (10.433b27-28). In particular, an animal is able to start its own locomotion because the animal’s soul has two moving factors (ταῦτα κινοῦντα), namely, desire (ὁρεξίς) and thought (νοῦς). Thought refers to imagination (φαντασία), which is present in all human and non-human animals capable of starting their own locomotion—calculation or intellectual knowledge is present only in human beings (ἐν τοῖς Ἀλλοῖς ζῴοις οὐ νόησις οὐδὲ λογισμὸς ἔστιν, 433a9-12). Nowhere does Aristotle suggest that since an animal’s capacity for self-motion is dependent on its soul’s capacity for desire (τὸ ὀρεκτικόν) and ultimately on an external object of desire (τὸ ὀρεκτόν), it follows that the animal is not really a self-mover. On the contrary, Aristotle argues that it is precisely because the souls of (most) animals have this part and power capable of responding to and moving the rest of the animal toward an external stimulus that they are capable of self-motion and rightly called self-movers.

My reading entails that the conclusion of Physics vii’s opening argument is not necessarily in tension with Aristotle’s other discussions of self-motion. When Aristotle endorses self-motion, from the endorsement immediately following vii 1 (early on in vii 2) to the various endorsements in Physics viii, in De anima, and in De motu animalium, he is taking it for granted that self-motion in its unqualified sense is impossible:

Unqualified Self-Motion = df a thing is moved by itself (ὑφ’ ἑαυτοῦ) in the sense that everything required for its motion is identical to it. In short: something X is self-moving if and only if X is moved only by X.

On my reading, then, Physics vii’s opening argument attacks Unqualified Self-Motion. That Unqualified Self-Motion is impossible does not entail that self-motion in any number of its qualified senses is impossible. So, returning to the purported contradiction between vii 1 and vii 2 on self-motion, vii 2 can now be read as endorsing self-motion in a weaker sense, Qualified Self-Motion:

Qualified Self-Motion = df a thing is moved by itself (ὑφ’ ἑαυτοῦ) even though there is at least one sense in which its motion must depend on something not identical to it: the continued motion of each of its proper parts.

So, vii 2 merely follows vii 1’s conclusion concerning self-movers. It infers that

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8 Aristotle distinguishes ‘the faculty of desire’ (τὸ ὀρεκτικόν) from ‘the object of desire’ (τὸ ὀρεκτόν) by the suffix ικον. As Shields 2006, xxix notes, this is common practice in Aristotle’s Greek, though there are sometimes contradictions in the manuscripts as to (a) whether the ‘ικον-version’ of the word ought to be in the Greek (as a glance at the apparatus criticus in the OCT for this very text will help to show) and (b) how best to understand the distinction.

9 One might think that Aristotelian self-motion is not restricted to voluntary self-locomotion in animals. For on Aristotle’s account, plants have souls that give them nutritive, growing, and reproductive functions. Also, plants bloom and change color, and those changes seem like self-changes. In addition, one might argue, immobile animals (e.g., a species of sea anemone, described in Aristotle’s biological works) lack the capacity for voluntary self-locomotion and yet seem capable of self-changes. The reading I offer here is compatible with those suggestions, though I worry that they conflate natural change with self-change—Aristotle clearly wants to separate them (see Phys. viii 4).
in self-movers there is contiguity between the active mover and the passive mover owing to the fact the active mover is part of the thing that is moved, namely, the whole. I am contiguous with my legs, and with each of my other parts. So if I, an animal, engage in self-motion as Aristotle describes in *Physics* viii, *De motu animalium* and elsewhere, then my self-motion is qualified in at least one way: my motion is dependent on something not the same as me, namely, the motion of each of my proper parts.

Of course, this does not entail that Aristotle is free to add any number of qualifications on self-motion and still consider it self-motion. I can add many qualifications to the motion of my kettle when I pick it up, without justifying calling the kettle’s motion ‘self-motion’. And there might be a point at which adding other-related qualifications to animal self-motion overwhelms the autonomous qualities that normally make us consider animals capable of moving themselves (that animals have complex physical parts, means of voluntary self-locomotion, imagination, desire, sensation, and so on). But, as it stands, Aristotle has introduced merely one basic qualification on self-motion, and I see good reasons for rejecting the reading that says that the argument swears off self-motion altogether.

II. A defense of Premise 3, the vital principle

P3 in α: Second, something in motion without being moved by anything does not necessarily stop from being in motion just because of the rest of something else; but if something rests because something else stops being in motion, then [the thing that is brought to a rest when something else ceases to be in motion] must be moved by something (α242a1-3).

P3 in β: Second, something moved by itself will not cease from being in motion just because another thing stops being in motion. Therefore it is necessary that if something ceases from being in motion because of another thing’s having stopped, it is moved by something other than itself (β241b33-242a3).

Commentators seem to think that P3 is by far the most controversial premise in *Physics* vii’s opening argument. Consider, for example, Bostock 1996, 281:

The principle is: if it is true that when \( x \) stops changing so does \( y \), then \( y \)’s change is caused by something (else). This sounds plausible, because the thought seems to be that \( y \)’s change is caused by \( x \)’s change, or perhaps by some larger change of which \( x \)’s change is a part. But Aristotle will apply the principle to the case when \( x \) is itself a part of \( y \), and in this application the principle is clearly quite unreasonable.

Ross 1979, 669 is very critical as well, and spells out his concerns in more detail:

It is true that the movement of a whole \( AB \) involves the movement of a part \( CB \), since if \( CB \) were at rest not \( AB \) but at most only the remaining part \( AC \) would be in motion. But Aristotle makes the mistake of supposing that this implies the causal dependence of the movement of \( AB \) on the movement of a part of itself \( CB \). That this is false is shown by the fact that it is
equally true that if AC were at rest AB could not be in motion, so that AB’s motion, if it were causally dependent on that of CB, would be equally dependent on that of AC. The fact is that the general principle laid down in 241b44-242a37 is valid if ἄλλο means something outside the thing in question, but not valid if ἄλλο is taken to refer to a part of the thing in question; then the motion of the whole logically implies the motion of the part, but is not necessarily causally dependent on it.

Wardy 1990, 97, 112 worries that ‘Aristotle has simply muddled up necessary conditions with agents’ and that ‘the argument seems to play on a gross equivocation, slipping from the innocuous claim that the whole’s motion depends on that of its part (AB stops along with BC) to the unwarranted assertion that the whole is moved by something other than itself’. These and other commentators worry that it is fallacious to infer that since the whole is in some sense moved by its (proper) part it follows that the whole is moved by something other than itself. Just because the part’s motion is a necessary condition for the whole’s motion it does not follow that the whole’s motion is causally dependent on an agent other than the whole.

It seems to me that the objections described above are confused on two main fronts. First, the objections presuppose that Aristotle requires a separately existing agent to be the (transitive) mover of the moved thing. But the text does not warrant that presupposition. Some commentators are impressed by the fact that ἔτερον (‘different’ or ‘another’) appears twice in β’s version in the passage above, used to describe the agent of the motion, whereas α seems to use a far weaker and more general descriptor for the agent: in α’s genitive of agent, ὑπὸ τινὸς κινεῖσθαι, an unqualified indefinite (τι, ‘something’), is the agent. There is a third instance of ἔτερον later on in β, and again it is absent from the corresponding section of α: δὲ ἠρεμεῖ μὴ κινουμένῳ τινῷ, ὡμολόγηται ὑπὸ τινὸς κινεῖσθαι. (‘But if it rests by something no longer in motion, it was agreed to be moved by something’, α242a45-46). The β version: ἄλλ᾽ εἰ τῷ ἄλλῳ ἠρεμεῖν ἠστάται καὶ παύεται κινούμενον, τοῦθ᾽ ὡφ᾽ ἐτέρον κινεῖται. (‘But if something ceases from moving by something else’s resting, then it is moved by something else’ β242a12-13). Since there thus appear to be three instances in which α has ‘something’ (τι) as its agent, whereas β has ‘something else’ (ἕτερον) as its agent, commentators such as Olshewsky and Wardy infer that β intends to prove that all mobiles are moved by something else, whereas α intends to prove that all mobiles are moved by something.

Yet, in the first of the three instances where β has ἔτερον, α has ἄλλο (‘another’) as the agent of motion (α241b44, quoted above). So, Aristotle might very well take this connotation to be implicit each time he uses an indefinite to express the agent of motion. Further, following both of the passages quoted above, and each time we find ἔτερον (‘something else’) present in β but absent from α, Aristotle states the same consequence in both versions. After the statement of the general principle, that is, P3, Aristotle states what he takes to follow
P3 (together with P1 and P2): τούτου δ’ εἰλημμένου πᾶν τὸ κινούμενον κινήσε- 
tai υπό τινος. (‘With this principle accepted, it follows that everything that is in 
motion is moved by something’, a242a37-38). τούτου δὲ φανεροῦ γενομένου 
άνάγκη πᾶν τὸ κινούμενον κινεῖθαι υπό τινος. (‘With this made clear, it follows 
that it is necessary that everything that is in motion is moved by something’ 
β242a3-4). Notice that there is no mention of έτερον in β. Rather, β has an indef- 
inite (τι) as the agent of motion, just as in the case of α. The same can be found in 
the text immediately following the third instance where έτερον is present in β but 
absent from α: ὡστε πᾶν ἀνάγκη τὸ κινούμενον υπό τινος κινεῖται (‘So that 
everything in motion must be moved by something’, α242a45-46). φανερὸν δὴ 
ὅτι πᾶν τὸ κινούμενον υπό τινος κινεῖται (‘So it is clear that everything that is in 
motion is moved by something’, β242a13-14). Both versions once again use an 
unqualified indefinite to express the agent of motion, rather than something as 
strong and specific as ‘something else’, that is, a distinct agent.

Second, the objections to P3 seem to gloss over the fact that it is not at all clear 
that the condition in P3 is necessary and not sufficient. If none of my proper parts 
stops being in motion then it seems as though my motion as a whole is guaran- 
teed. This hinges on a difference in the type of selection in P3. Take my right arm 
alone. Call that CB. The rest of me is AC. As a whole I am AB. Suppose that CB 
stops moving. But AC continues being in motion. Then AB is no longer in 
motion in the first instance (primarily) and in its own right. So we can say that the 
motion of CB, and in particular the non-stopping of CB, is in a sense a necessary 
but not sufficient condition for my continued motion. Had CB continued being in 
motion with the rest of me, another one of my parts, such as AC, might have 
stopped being in motion. But if CB is arbitrarily selected from the domain of all 
proper parts of the whole in question, which certainly seems to be the case in the 
context of the Physics vii’s opening argument, then what is true of CB is true of 
all proper parts. And it is true that if all of the proper parts of a whole do not stop 
being in motion, then the whole must also continue being in motion. In that 
sense, then, the continued motion of every proper part is sufficient for the 
whole’s motion. Even if the necessary condition fails to be sufficient, since Aris- 
totle does not require a distinct agent for the whole’s motion, it follows that the 
argument shows that the whole’s motion is in a sense moved by something non-
identical to the whole.

III. Implications for Aristotelian self-motion

There are two useful implications of my reading of Physics vii’s opening argu- 
ment for Aristotelian self-motion. First, if in Physics vii 1 Aristotle is arguing 
only against unqualified self-motion rather than self-motion of any kind at all 
(such as self-motion in a more qualified, plausible sense), we can more incisively 
draw a distinction between Aristotelian self-motion and Platonic self-motion. In 
Plato’s Phaedrus 245c-246e, Socrates describes the soul as a self-moving thing 
and an imperishable, ungenerated source of motion for all other moved things. 
Socrates argues that since it is clear that things with souls have internal sources
of motion, whereas things without souls are moved by something outside them, what it is to be a soul is at least in part to be something capable of self-motion.\textsuperscript{10} In Plato’s \textit{Laws} 896a-897d, the Athenian Stranger reaffirms that the soul is a source of motion, connects life with the capacity for self-motion, and argues that self-motion must be the first kind of motion.\textsuperscript{11} On Plato’s account, everything that is in motion ultimately owes its motion to a self-mover, and self-movers necessarily do not owe their motion to anything else. There is widespread agreement in the literature that Aristotle rejects Plato’s account. But there is much less agreement as to how, precisely, Aristotle aims to do so, and whether he does so through sound arguments.

On my reading of \textit{Physics} vii 1.a241b35-242a49 / β241b25-242a15, in order clearly to distinguish Aristotelian self-motion from Platonic self-motion, it is not necessary to turn to familiar but controversially established claims such as: (1) those in \textit{De anima} concerning the soul-body relation, such as (a) the claim that the soul moves the body, (b) the soul is never moved in itself but only accidentally, (c) the soul’s faculty of desire and faculty of imagination initiate self-motion, though (d) those soul-faculties always require a perceived external object of desire in order to initiate motion in the animal; or (2) Aristotle’s arguing in \textit{Physics} viii 2.253a11-21 and viii 6.259b1-16 that (a) animals can change themselves only with respect to locomotion and not any other kind of motion or change, and (b) self-motion is always dependent on and affected by changes going on inside and outside the animal (growth, decay, digestion, respiration, environmental conditions) that are not in the animal’s control. Aristotle’s argumentation in \textit{Physics} vii is compatible with any of those claims. But \textit{Physics} vii 1’s way of qualifying self-motion is also much simpler and more general. It hinges merely on the divisibility of any mover (self-mover or not), resulting in the dependence of that divisible whole’s motion on the kinetic state and, in particular, the non-rest of each of its proper parts.\textsuperscript{12}

While comparatively straightforward, the distinction between Platonic self-motion and Aristotelian self-motion that my reading of \textit{Physics} vii 1 makes clear is an emphatic way in which Aristotle chooses to contradict Plato. As Coope 2015, 248 observes, as a response to Plato’s arguing that the ultimate cause of motion is an unqualified self-motion, Aristotle could have simply claimed ‘that such a cause would not be able to produce eternal continuous motion’. Instead, Aristotle has a more radical objection: ‘no origin of movement could be a self-causing movement, and hence Plato’s account is mistaken even as an account of self-motion’. Aristotle supports not just the weaker claim that Platonic self-motion, embodied in an unqualifiedly self-moving soul, is unnecessary as an

\textsuperscript{10} For more careful analyses of this passage, see Bett 1986, 3 and Blyth 1997, 196-197.

\textsuperscript{11} For detailed discussion of the relation between these two passages, see Skemp 1942, 112. Kelsey 2004 argues that both passages push not for the immortality of individual souls but, rather, for the immortality of ‘a kind of “world soul”—some kind of universal source of all the world’s motion’.

\textsuperscript{12} Aristotle argues in \textit{Phys.} vi 10.240b8-241a27 that something without parts (ἰμμέρες) cannot be in motion on its own account but only accidentally (κατὰ συμβεβηκός); cf. \textit{Phys.} vi 4.
explanation of the beginning of motion, but, also, the much stronger claim that Platonic self-motion cannot explain the beginning of motion. For, as Aristotle shows in *Physics* vii 1, everything that moves must be moved by something else. At the very least, every moving thing must be moved by something else inside it, namely, a proper part (τι). A fortiori, every self-moving thing must be moved by something inside it, namely, a proper part (τι). So, by reading *Physics* vii 1 in the way I suggest, we find Aristotle arguing not merely that Platonic souls are redundant as origins of causal chains of movers, but, in addition, that Platonic souls are conceptually incoherent. This helps to explain why there are no concrete examples given in *Physics* vii 1’s discussion of self-motion, nor even any concrete restrictions on the types of things under consideration (unless divisibility is considered a concrete restriction). For Aristotle intends to attack not just the application of Platonic self-motion, but also its basic, underlying assumption: that unqualified self-motion is possible.

Second, my reading of *Physics* vii’s opening argument can shed light on how to resolve tension between many of Aristotle claims concerning self-movers, especially in *Physics* viii. One of the main problems in understanding Aristotle’s account of self-motion is how to reconcile passages in which he seems to endorse the claim that there are genuine self-movers having progressive motion, namely, most animals—other than immobile exceptions such as sea squirts (τήθυα, ascidians) and a species of sea anemone; see, for example, *Historia Animalium* iv 6.531a8-35—with passages in which he seems to deny that there are self-movers or, more radically, that genuine self-motion is possible. As Furley 1978 puts it:

Aristotle sometimes calls animals self-movers. We must try to determine what exactly he means by this. In particular, we must look at this thesis in the light of certain passages in the *Physics* that appear to deny that there can be self-movers. Is this apparent anomaly to be explained genetically? Are we to believe that Aristotle criticized and rejected his earlier thesis that animals are self-movers? Or is his position as a whole consistent? How then are we to explain away the apparent anomaly?

Besides the countless passages throughout Aristotle’s vast biological works where we find descriptions of animals running, flying, slithering, swimming, and crawling without external impetus, we find, for example, passages conceding, ‘it sometimes happens that we produce a beginning of motion in ourselves from within ourselves, without anything having set us in motion from without’ (*Physics* viii 2.252b19-21). Nothing like this is seen in anything other than animals; ‘the animal, on the other hand, we say, moves itself’ (viii 2.252b23). Aristotle claims that animals are ‘things that derive their motion from themselves’ (viii 4.254b11-12). He does not merely endorse self-motion; rather, he gives great importance to it: ‘it is the self-mover that we declare to be the principle of things that are moved and impart motion and the primary source for things that are in motion’ (viii 7.261a24-26); and, in the opening clauses of *De motu animal-
ium: ‘the origin of other movements is that which moves itself’ (1.698a9-10).

Yet Aristotle also writes that in self-movers, ‘we observe that there is always some part of the animal’s organism in motion, and the cause of the motion of this part is not the animal itself, but, it may be, its environment’ (Physics viii 2.253a11-13). Further, he argues in both Physics viii 2 and viii 6 that animals move themselves only with respect to locomotion and, even with respect to self-locomotion, ‘this is not strictly originated by them’ (6.259b7). For the causes and necessary conditions come—at least in large part—from things outside the animal’s control, including processes of respiration, digestion, and various external, environmental factors (2.253a13-18, 6.259b8-14). So even in the senses in, and at the times when animals do engage in what is accurately called self-locomotion, they do not do so continuously or with total autonomy. Rather, ‘it is something else that moves them, itself being in motion and changing as it comes into relation with each several thing that moves itself’ (6.259b15-17). Moreover, the real self-mover in the animal—remaining unidentified in Physics viii, but it must be the soul, as most commentators assume, due to overwhelming evidence from De Anima—is self-moving only accidentally, by moving the body and then being moved as a result of the body’s motion (6.259b17-20).

So, despite the passages in which he seems to say that animals are not really self-movers, are animals genuinely capable of self-motion, on Aristotle’s account? By looking at a small sample of this tension in Physics vii 1-2 wherein Aristotle seems to reject self-motion in vii 1 and then endorse it in vii 2, and by reading vii 1’s argument the way I suggest, it is easier to see why Aristotle does not think he is being evasive or contradicting himself on self-motion in Physics viii. He certainly could have made his thinking on this subject more systematic and explicit, but it seems to me neither philosophically implausible nor a departure from the texts to understand Aristotle as appropriately qualifying self-motion where we might otherwise be tempted to read him as rejecting it. Aiming to hold onto the ordinary appearance and common view that animals do in fact move themselves, Aristotle also aims to add the qualifications to self-motion that reflect the incoherence of motion beginning from absolutely nothing except the moving object itself (and the philosophical reasons for that incoherence), along with the empirical evidence that seems to show that even the self-locomotion of animals is dependent on various internal and external factors.

Conclusion

I have argued that in Physics vii 1.a241b35-242a49 / β241b25-242a15, Aristotle does not argue against self-motion altogether. He argues against unqualified self-motion. He does so by arguing for what he takes to be a necessarily universal qualification on all cases of motion, including all cases of self-motion. I understand the temptation of many commentators to worry that Aristotle contradicts himself in no uncertain terms by going on to endorse self-motion in many clear cases throughout the Physics viii (as well as Physics vii 2), De anima, De motu animalium, not to mention frequently throughout the biological works. But it
seems to me that other commentators might well have lost sight of just how unreasonable it would be for any competent thinker, let alone one as empirically grounded and common sense-driven as Aristotle, to pretend as though actions, including self-affecting and self-caused actions, can be done without any mitigating qualifications. It seems to me that the argument does not deserve its unfortunate reputation, and reading the argument in the more charitable way I suggest has some useful implications for understanding Aristotelian self-motion.  

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