Aristotle’s Prime Mover

Characteristics of the Prime Mover

The prime mover:
1. exists by necessity – so the prime mover could not fail to exist.
2. is not capable of change
3. is pure actuality
4. has a nature which is good as a lack of goodness means that you can do better; meaning you can change.
5. is the Final Cause i.e. the ultimate explanation of why things exist is without parts and indivisible (without extension; divine simplicity).
6. ‘The final cause, then, produces motion as being loved’.
7. is the goal of all action: this is like attraction because the prime mover is the cause of all motion.

God in Aristotle

1. In his book Metaphysics Aristotle also links the Prime Mover with God and concludes that God is ‘a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God’.
2. God as Prime Mover is ‘complete reality’.
3. God in Aristotle’s thinking is a necessary being who is eternal, transcendent and impersonal.

How can God think if God is pure actuality?
He rejected the idea that God was like a person who is constantly asleep. Aristotle suggested that God’s activity was thinking and thought, but thinking about what? His conclusion is that ‘Therefore it must be of itself that the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things’.

Q. What do you think Aristotle meant?

How does the universe relate to God?
Aristotle suggests that it is in two ways (Metaphysics):
1. As a leader
2. In the order of the universe

Aristotle argues that the Prime Mover is more important as a Leader, as the universe depends for its existence on the Prime Mover, and he also points out that all things in the universe are ordered to some ‘final cause’ and ultimately to the Prime Mover. This fits in with the importance he places on the last of his four causes.