SESSION 7
PS.-ALEXANDER ON *METAPHYSICS* Λ.6-7

Introduction

Aristotle's proof of the existence of the prime mover culminates with two successive passages overlapping chapters 6 and 7. In the first passage Aristotle argues very abstractly that the everlasting cycle of coming-to-be and perishing on earth is ultimately caused by something which always acts in the same way. According to ps.-Alexander the causal chain terminating in the cycle of coming-to-be and perishing can be traced back to the everlasting motion of the heaven (i.e. the outermost sphere of the fixed stars). In the second passage Aristotle argues that this everlasting heavenly motion must itself have an everlasting cause which is unmoved. According to ps.-Alexander, this is because the heavenly sphere is a moved mover and thus serves as an 'intermediary' between what it moves (namely the system of planets) and what moves it (namely, the unmoved mover). How well does ps.-Alexander's interpretation explain Aristotle's text? How plausible is the argument which he attributes to Aristotle? Are there any parallels with Simplicius' interpretation of *Physics* VIII.5.256b13-27? (Caveat: the passages from Aristotle are translated as ps.-Alexander understands them. Scholars disagree over the final part of the second passage (in bold); see notes 8 and 12.)

WHY THERE IS ALWAYS COMING-TO-BE

Aristotle (6,1072a9-18)

Now if, then, [there is] always the same thing in a cycle, something must always remain, acting in the same way [or in another way]. And if there is going to be coming-to-be and perishing, there must be something else that is always acting in one way and then in another. It is necessary, therefore, that it act in one way in virtue of itself and in another way in virtue of something else; so [it must act] either in virtue of [yet] another thing or else in virtue of the first thing. It must then be in virtue of this [i.e. the first]. For [otherwise] that is again the cause of both it and that [i.e of the second and the third]. Therefore, it is better [to say that it is] the first. For that was the cause of its always occurring in the same way, and another thing was the cause of its occurring in different ways; but it is clear that of its always occurring in different ways both [are the causes]. This, therefore, is the way the movements are. Why, then, should one inquire after other principles?

Ps.-Alexander (692,1-35)

Following the clause 'now if [there is] always the same thing in a cycle ' he omits the phrase 'or in another way', so that the whole passage is: now if indeed this cosmos always exists, either 'in a cycle', as Empedocles says, or in another way, as *we* say,[1] 'something must always remain, acting in the same way' and its nature is actuality' (1072a9-10).

But if it is necessary that there is also always coming-to-be, there must be something acting in a different way (that is, being moved obliquely), so that it brings what is capable of making things come to be (namely, the sun) closer or takes it further away.[2] So, necessarily, the thing that is moved obliquely 'acts in virtue of itself in one way' (or it is moved obliquely and it brings the sun or takes it further away), and 'in another way in virtue of something else' (that is, the sun comes to be over the earth and under the earth every day in virtue of something else). '[E]ither in virtue of another thing' the sun is acted on in the latter way, for instance, say, by Saturn's sphere, or 'in virtue of the first', for instance, in virtue of the sphere of the fixed stars (1072a10-14).

And clarifying the argument, Aristotle says: so, necessarily, it is in virtue of the movement of the sphere of the fixed stars that the sun comes to be over the earth and under the earth, rather than in virtue of Saturn's sphere. And the reason why it is in virtue of the sphere of the fixed stars that the sun's motion necessarily occurs over the earth and under the earth every day, he has added with the statement: 'for that is again the cause of both it and that'.[3] (1072a14-15), that is to say: for the body of the sphere of the fixed stars will again be the cause of the star in Saturn's sphere coming to be over the earth under the earth each day, and also of 'that', which is the sun.[4] For the sphere of the fixed stars is the cause of both Saturn and the sun setting and rising again. Hence, it is more correct to state that the sphere of the fixed stars is the cause of the sun rising and setting than that it is Saturn's sphere. For 'that' (or the sphere of the fixed stars), is (as we said) the cause of the sun always being in motion in the same way (or being motion under the earth and over the earth), whereas the cause 'of [occurring] in different ways' (1072a15-16) (or occurring sometimes in Scorpio and sometimes in Capricorn) is the oblique alignment of the constellations of the zodiac through which it undergoes motion.[5] Further, the words 'but it is clear that of what [occurs] always in another way, both' (1072a17) (and a comma is needed after 'in another way') can be put more clearly: but of what occurs always—that is,

the regular and alternating occurrence of night and day as well as coming-to-be and perishing—the causes are 'both'—namely, both the sphere of the fixed stars and the solar sphere which undergoes oblique motion. Therefore, the sphere of the fixed stars is the cause of nights and days coming to be, and the solar sphere and the sun are the cause of coming-to-be and perishing.

After saying these things, Aristotle adds, 'This, therefore, is the way the movements are' (1072a17-18), which is equivalent to saying: not only do we say these things about the movements of the sphere of the fixed stars and the solar sphere but also this is the way they are. If, then, these movements are causes of things coming to be the way they come to be, why is there a need to inquire into other principles such as those spoken of by those who posit /35/ the Ideas?

NOTES

1. [692,4] Ps.-Alexander understands 'cycle' (*periodos*) in this passage as referring narrowly to the cycles in Empedocles' cosmology, so that the proposed 'or in some other way' would refer to Aristotle's own theory of eternal celestial motions. In contrast, Alexander in Averroes (*Tafsīr* 1578-9=fr. 27F) understands *periodos* here as referring to the eternally recurring cycle of the seasons which Aristotle himself acknowledges and explains in *GC* II.10,336a31-b15. On the latter interpretation ps.-Alexander's supplement would be unnecessary and indeed inappropriate.
2. [692,7] There are two observable facts about the sun: it appears to rise, pass overhead, and sink every day; and it comes closer and then moves away over the course of a year. These two facts have, according to Aristotle, two separate causes. The first is due to the diurnal revolution of the solar sphere around the stationary Earth, a motion which is ultimately caused by the motion of the outermost sphere of the so-called fixed stars. The second fact is due to the oblique orbit of the solar sphere. That is, because the solar sphere revolves at a slight angle to the equator, the earth's northern hemisphere is tilted closer to the sun for half the year so that the sun appears higher in the sky, the days are longer, and temperatures are warmer; and it is tilted away from the sun for the other half so that the sun appears lower in the sky, days are shorter, and temperatures are cooler. At the same time the southern hemisphere experiences the opposite of these effects. (Of course ps.-Alexander like Aristotle was unaware that the earth is actually closest to the sun in January (perihelion) and furthest from it in July (aphelion) due to its elliptical orbit around the sun.) The motion of the spheres is discussed in ch. 8, and the resulting process of generation and perishing is explained in *GC* 2.10.
3. [692,16] Translates *ekeino autôi te aition kakeinôi*, in the commentary manuscripts (although Sepúlveda translates 'ipsi'). However, some Aristotle manuscripts including EJ have *hautôi* instead of *autôi*, which would imply that the outermost sphere moves *itself* as well as the other sphere. Ps.-Alexander understands the clause to say that the outer sphere moves both the solar sphere and Saturn's sphere. Although earlier editors read *hautôi*, following Ross most later editors have read *autôi* with ps.-Alexander and Themistius (17,27).

4. [692,19] Saturn's sphere is adjacent to the outermost sphere. Hence, it is directly moved by the outermost sphere, and it transmits motion to the spheres within, including the solar sphere, as detailed in ch. 8. Thus, Saturn's sphere is, as it were, a mere cog in the cosmic machinery.
5. [692,25] During the course of the year the sun appears to pass through the zodiac (a belt of twelve constellations of stars in the outermost sphere) which is at an inclined angle of nine degrees to the equator. In antiquity the sun was in Scorpio in the autumn from October 24 till November 21 and in Capricorn in winter from December 22 until January 19. In the present day the sun passes through these constellations later in the year due to the precession of the zodiac.

WHY THERE MUST BE AN UNMOVED MOVER

Aristotle (7,1072a19-26)

[Ch. 7] Since it is possible [that things are] this way (and if they are not this way, they will be from Night and 'all things together' and from not-being), these [difficulties] may be resolved. And there is something that is always moved with an unceasing movement, namely, circular movement, and this is clear not only by reason but by fact, so that the first heaven must be everlasting. **There is, therefore, also that which it moves. And since what is moved and what brings about movement [is] also an intermediary, therefore there is something which brings about movement without being moved, which is everlasting and a substance that is also an actuality.**

Ps.-Alexander (692,36-693,30)

After saying these things, Aristotle states, 'since it is possible that [things are] this way', these issues would be resolved; 'and if they are not this way' (and a comma must be inserted after 'in this way'), 'they will be from Night and "all things together" and from not-being'[6] (1072a19-21). For in this what continues in the text. But what it means is: since, as has been proven, actuality is prior to potentiality, and because the movement of the sphere of the fixed stars and of the solar sphere (and these spheres are also themselves actualities, even if not [actualities] in the chief sense), are causes of days and nights and of coming-to-be and perishing, every puzzle would be solved: namely, the one puzzling over whether potentiality is prior to actuality, the one asking why the sphere of the fixed stars is moved in one way and the sun's sphere in another, and the one inquiring what sort of movement is primary. For concerning all these things it has been stated that the movement that moves the others together with itself, which is the movement of the

sphere of the fixed stars, is the first of the movements, and is moved the way it is moved because nights and days come to be, but the solar sphere [is moved] in the reverse direction, because there must be coming-to-be and perishing; and there is always coming-to-be and perishing always because there must always be something. If, then, it is possible that [things] are this way, as we say, all these issues would be resolved; 'and if they are not this way' (that is, if one were to say that they are not this way), 'they will be from Night and "all things together" and from not-being' (1072a19-20), that is, potentiality will be prior to actuality, and everything will be from potentiality, which has been proven to be impossible.

After saying these things, he again uses the method of analysis to discuss the first principle. For, 'there is,' he says, something that is always moved with an unceasing movement', and this is circular movement (1072a21-2). And the fact that /circular movement is everlasting is clear not only by reason and demonstration but also by fact[7] and by the tradition from our forebears. There is, then, 'the first heaven', [that is], the sphere of the fixed stars, which is moved everlastingly, and there is also 'that which it moves'[8] (1072a23-4), [namely,] the entire planetary body.[9] For the planetary body is moved by the first and fixed body. There must, therefore, be that which[10] only brings about movement. For since there is that which is moved only (namely, the planetary body), and there is also intermediary that which at the same time both is moved and brings about movement, such as the sphere of the fixed stars, there must be also a third thing, that which brings about movement only. And it is that everlasting thing which that brings about movement without being moved, being a substance and actuality (cf. 1072a24-6). Therefore, the thought expressed in all his statements has been stated.

In the passage, however, 'since [there is] what is moved and what brings about movement [is] also an intermediary, therefore there is [something][11] which brings about movement without being moved'[12] (1072a24-5), first of all a comma must be inserted after 'intermediary'; then one must understand 'and there exists also that which is moved only'[13]; and then one must attach 'therefore there exists something which brings about movement without being moved', and so on, so that the whole passage will read as follows: since that which both brings about movement and is moved at the same time is an intermediary between that which is moved only and that which brings about movement only, and two of these exist—that which is moved only and that which both brings about movement /30/ and is moved at the same time— there must also exist that which is immovable.[14]

NOTES

6. [692,37] Ps.-Alexander takes the clause 'and if they are not . . . from not-being' to be parenthetical; cf. lemma 1072a4. The three theories of how the world came to be have been mentioned before: from Night (1071b27; 690,9-13), from a primordial mixture (1069b21-7; 1071b28; 673,4-22; 690,13-14), and from not-being (1069b18-20; 672,37-673,4).
7. [693,16] On the contrast between observable fact (*ergon*) and argument or theory (*logos*) see *EN* 9.8,1168a35; 10.9,1179a21.
8. [693,17] 'That which it moves' translates *ho kinei*, on the assumption that *ho* is in apposition with *to planômenon pan sôma*, 'the entire planetary body' (on which see following note). This assumes a comma following *kinei* (the comma is in Hayduck's text but missing in Bonitz's). However, *ho kinei* is ambiguous, since *ho* can refer to the subject of *kinei* rather than the object, i.e. 'that which moves it' rather than 'that which it moves'. (Incidentally, *ti*, 'something', preceding *ho kinei* in the Aristotle manuscripts but omitted by ps.-Alexander, is consistent with either reading.) Ps.-Alexander thus takes *ho* to refer to the object moved by the outer sphere, perhaps understanding this to be implied by the argument at 1072a12-19. Ross, however, takes it to refer to the mover of the outer sphere on the grounds that 'from the existence of a *kinoumenon* [thing moved] there cannot be inferred the existence of something which it moves, but only the existence of something that moves it' (endorsed by Sharples 2003,201). However, ps.-Alexander's reading (assuming the aforementioned comma) has the advantage that the existence of two of the three terms will be established before Aristotle infers the existence of the third term, the unmoved mover.
9. [693,18] Translates *to planômenon pan sôma*, namely, the totality of celestial bodies that 'wander' over time relative to the 'fixed' stars. These planets are imbedded in internal spheres which are surrounded by the outermost sphere, which Aristotle here calls 'the primary heaven'. See note [689,10].
10. [693,19] Or 'something which' (cf.'aliquid' in Sepúlveda).
11. [693,24] Ps.-Alexander omits *ti* here but includes it in line 27.
12. This passage has been the subject of many other interpretations: see Alexandru 2014, 113-15, Elders 1972, 162-4, Salis 2005, 203-6, Fazzo 2012, 275-80. Regarding the text itself ps.-Alexander's reading is close to that of mss E_1C: *epei de kinoumenon kai kinoun kai meson toinun esti ti ho ou kinoumenon kinei* (cf. note [693,24]). The manuscripts vary on two main points: a definite article *to* is read before the first *kinoumenon* by J and A_b (and added by the second hand of E); and the second *kai* is expunged by the original scribe of A_b and omitted in V_k. These variants are followed by Ross who translates 'since that which is moved and moves is a middle term . . .' Another difficulty concerns *toinun esti* (found in $EJCA_b$ thought there is a lacuna in MV_k.) is that if (as proposed by ps.-Alexander) a comma is inserted after *meson*, the apodosis begins with *toinun*, which according Denniston 'is never, in classical Greek (though occasionally in later writers), placed at the opening of a sentence' (1950, 568). Many accordingly regard the passage as corrupt, and offer various repairs, including the substitution of *kinoun* for *toinun* (e.g. Judson 2019, 374-5).
13. [693,26] Ross objects that this cannot be understood. However, ps.-Alexander takes this as a premiss in Aristotle's argument which is supported by his construal of *ho kinei* at 1072a22-4; see note [693,17].
14. [693,30] The following is ps.-Alexander's interpretation of the crucial but very difficult passage at 1072a24-5. It rests on the assumption that if Y is intermediate between X and Z, and both X and Y exist, then Z must also exist. In this case X=that which is moved only,

Y=that which both is moved and brings about movement, Z=that which brings about movement only. For a similar triad of mover, moved, and moved mover, see *Phys.* 8.5,256b13-27. Themistius offers a very similar interpretation: 'If a thing that both moves and is moved exists, and a thing that is only moved, without moving, exists, it necessarily follows that there exists an immovable mover' (*In Metaph.* 16,20ff, tr. Meyrav). Alexander in Averroes (*Tafsīr* 1588-9=fr. 28F) offers an interpretation more or less along these lines. An obvious problem with this line of interpretation is that the term 'intermediate' (*meson*) is ambiguous. If the intermediate Y is a compound of X and Z, the assumption will be true in some cases and false in others: see Simplicius *in Phys.* 1227,20-33.