

SESSION 6  
SIMPLICIUS COMMENTARY ON THE *PHYSICS*

*PHYSICS* VIII.5  
AN ARGUMENT FOR THE UNMOVED MOVER

Aristotle's text (VIII.5.256b13-27)

256b13-27 And this is the reasonable conclusion. [For there must be three things: (1) that which is moved; (2) that which causes motion; (3) that by means of which [a thing] causes motion. (1) That which is moved must be moved but does not necessarily cause motion. (3) That by means of which [a thing] causes motion [must] both cause motion and be moved, for it changes along with that which is moved, with which it coincides in time and space<sup>528</sup> (this is clear in the case of things that cause local motion [and the things they move], for they must be in contact with one another up to a certain point. (2) That which causes motion in such a way that it is not that by means of which [something else] is causing motion<sup>529</sup> is unmoved. Since we observe a last thing which can be moved but has no principal of motion, and [also] that which is moved but not by another thing but by itself, it is reasonable, though not necessary,<sup>530</sup> that there should also be a third thing which causes motion while being unmoved. And for this reason Anaxagoras speaks rightly when he says that mind is impassible and unmixed, since he makes it a principle of motion; for it would only cause motion in this way by being unmoved] and only rule by being unmixed.

Simplicius' commentary (1226,10-1227,33)

Having refuted the argument which states that everything that is moved also thereby accidentally causes motion itself, he must [now] turn to showing that nor is it the case that that which causes motion does so by being moved *per se*, but first he demolishes the entire hypothesis [that came] before the division into accidental and *per se*. 15 This hypothesis was the one that stated that everything that causes motion does so by also being moved itself by something else. And he demolishes it by showing that before the things that are moved and thereby cause motion there is something that is unmoved and thereby causes motion. And then he refutes the second section of the division, the one that states that it is by being moved *per se* that everything that causes motion also causes motion itself. 20

For the present, [then,] he shows, from a general perspective, that not everything that causes motion does so by being moved itself by showing that it is reasonable that the first mover should be unmoved and that there is something which causes motion while being unmoved. In showing this, he assumes that in motion there must be three things: that which is moved (which can be clearly observed); that which causes motion (for everything that is moved is moved by something that causes motion); and, intermediary to both [of these], that by means of which the thing that causes motion does so. For it is posited that everything that causes motion moves something, namely, that which is moved, and 25

[does so] by means of something, namely, the thing by means of which it causes motion. There being these three, then, that which is moved must be moved by that which causes motion but need not also cause motion; for if something is moved, there is no necessity that it should move another thing, since the last thing moved is moved but no longer moves anything else. On the other hand, that by means of which the mover causes motion must both be moved and cause motion. For that which moves some third thing through something [else] would not move that thing unless it first moved that through which it moves [it]. For example, someone moving a stone with a stick and by means of the stick<sup>531</sup> moves the stick first; for the things between the first movers and the last things moved must both cause motion and be moved. He himself shows the necessity [of this] when he says, 'for it changes along with that which is moved, with which it coincides in time and space'. For a thing that causes motion immediately by doing so through contact must change along with that which is moved by it, as he showed<sup>532</sup> in the previous book. And if it changes along with [it], it is clear that it too is moved. And that not only things which cause local motion immediately are in contact with the things moved by them, but that those [which cause motion] with regard to the other kinds of motion are too, he [also] showed<sup>533</sup> in the previous book; now, however, because they provide the clearer instances, he chooses to consider the matter only in relation to things that cause local motion.

5 He has added that things that cause motion or are moved locally [must] be in contact with one another 'up to a certain point' because of things that throw or are thrown. The thing that throws must necessarily be in contact with the thing that is thrown and be moved along with it, but it is not possible for it to always be next to [it] or to change along [with it]. For, after throwing and releasing it, it is no longer in contact with it, but [only] the air that carries it is.

10 There being, then, two things, [namely,] that which is only moved, and that by means of which a mover causes motion, which causes motion by being moved, there must also be something that causes motion not in the way that the thing by means of which a mover causes motion does (which causes motion by being moved), but which only causes motion, being unmoved [itself] – like that which was only moved and did not move anything else. For, given that there is [a share of] both that which is moved and that which causes motion<sup>534</sup> in the middle

15 [thing] which is both moved and causes motion,<sup>535</sup> if that which is moved also exists on its own, so that it no longer causes motion, it is reasonable that what remains, [namely,] that which only causes motion but is no longer also moved, should [also] exist on its own. And it is reasonable that if the middle partakes of both and is composed of both that which causes motion and that which is moved, and one of the simple entities of which it is composed exists on its own, it is reasonable that the other thing in the combination should be simple and exist on its own.<sup>536</sup> For it is reasonable that each of the extremities of which the middle is [composed] should have the same relation (*analogia*) to the middle. For just as, in the case of mead<sup>537</sup> mixed from wine and honey, when the honey is on its own, the wine must be on its own too, so too, in the case of that which causes motion and is moved, is it reasonable that if one [ingredient] is on its own so is the other.

20 He wrote 'reasonable, though not necessary'<sup>538</sup> because the statement seems to have been inferred from a kind of consequence and not

from demonstrative necessity.<sup>539</sup> But perhaps it is also necessary that if one of the ingredients of the mixture is on its own the other is surely (*pou*) also on its own. Unless, perhaps, one were to reflect that, amongst the elements of speech, the vowels are separately pronounced, but those referred to as consonants do not have any sort of pronunciation on their own but when combined with the vowels are pronounced along with them. So Aristotle was writing quite precisely when he said, 'reasonable, though one would not say necessary', because, although it is so in most cases, in a few it is otherwise. 30

#### Notes

528. More literally, 'being at the same time and together [with it]'.  
529. sc. in such a way that it is not merely an instrument.

530. This rendering is explained at 1227,27.

531. The phrase, which literally means something like 'through the stick in the middle', prepares the way for the reference to 'the things between the first movers and the last things moved' in the next clause.

532. 243a32-244b2 (Book 7, version 1); 243a2-244a24 (Book 7, version 2).

533. 244b3-245b2 (Book 7, version 1); 244a25-245b18 (Book 7, version 2).

534. Perhaps one should add *tou* before *kinountos* at 1227,14.

535. Changing *kinoun ti* at 1227,14-15 to *kinounti*.

536. The Greek contains a mild anacoluthon which I have preserved in the translation.

537. *oinomeli* was actually, as the name implies, a mixture of honey and wine rather than a true mead.

538. Modern scholars (e.g. Hardie and Gaye, Graham, Wickstead and Cornford, Ross in his 'Analysis') commonly, and correctly, translate *eulogon, hina mé anankaion eipômen* 'it is reasonable, not to say necessary', or the like, but Simplicius seems to understand it in some such way as I have rendered it.

539. sc. the argument was hypothetical rather than demonstrative. (On the meaning of the phrase 'from a consequence', see n. 520.)

SOURCE: Translated by Michael Chase in István Bodnár, Michael Chase & Michael Share, *Simplicius On Aristotle's Physics 8.1-5*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2012

SIMPLICIUS COMMENTARY ON THE *PHYSICS*

*PHYSICS* VIII.10

IS THE PRIME MOVER AN EFFICIENT CAUSE?

Simplicius' commentary (1360.24-1363.24)

Some think that Aristotle says the primary mover – which he  
hymns as mind,<sup>565</sup> eternity<sup>566</sup> and god<sup>567</sup> – is only a final cause and not 1360,25  
also an efficient cause of the world and in particular of the heaven,  
since it is eternal and consequently ungenerated. They think this  
because they hear him often saying that it causes motion as the object  
of love, and often celebrating it as a final cause.<sup>568</sup> It is a good idea,  
then, to prove that here too he is consistent with his teacher in calling  
god not only a final cause but also an efficient cause both of the entire 1360,30  
world and of the heaven. From what he says in the *Timaeus* ('Let us  
then state the cause by which the creator established coming to be  
and this universe: he was good.'<sup>569</sup>), Plato clearly calls god the final  
and efficient cause of the world. And when he says, 'He proceeded to  
construct the universe, establishing intelligence in the soul and soul 1360,35  
in the body, in order that the work he accomplished might by nature  
be as beautiful and good as possible',<sup>570</sup> throughout practically the  
entire dialogue he hymns the creator as looking to the good. And in  
the creator's speech to the heavenly beings he clearly shows that he  
himself proximately causes the existence of the things in the heavens, 1361,1  
while the sublunary things are <caused> by the heavenly beings. For  
the first creator says to the heavenly beings, 'O gods of gods, the works  
of which I am creator and father',<sup>571</sup> and further on he declares, 'Three  
mortal kinds are left. If these do not come to be, the heaven will be  
incomplete,<sup>572</sup> now calling the world heaven, like Aristotle. But, he 1361,5  
declares, these things too must come to be 'if it is going to be  
sufficiently complete. But if these things were to come to be and  
participate in life through my doing, they would be made equal to the  
gods; therefore, that they may be mortal and this universe may be  
truly all, turn yourselves naturally to the creation of living things.'<sup>573</sup>  
The expression, 'if these things were to come to be through my doing'  
reveals that things that arise from a cause that is in the same state

1361,10 and condition (or, as Aristotle would say, by the agency of what is unmoved) must be eternal.

No one disputes that Aristotle calls god or the primary mover a final cause; but <to show> that it is also an efficient cause I think it is sufficient that in his distinction <of the kinds> of causes in the second book of the *Physics*, he calls the efficient cause the source from which motion has its origin: 'Also, the source from which the change or rest has its first origin, as the person who deliberated is a cause, and the father <is the cause> of the child, and in general the maker <is the cause> of what is made.'<sup>574</sup> What could be clearer than this to say with a view towards showing that the primary mover is an efficient cause? Also in the first book of *De Caelo* he clearly says that neither god nor nature does anything in vain,<sup>575</sup> after saying in the same book that eternity 'has taken its name from always being, and is immortal and divine, and from it depend existence and life for the others – in some cases more exactly, in others more obscurely.'<sup>576</sup> And it is clear that just as all things are made good through the final cause, so they exist and live through the creative <cause>. Also in the first book of *De Generatione*, while investigating the causes of perpetual generation he shows that the primary mover is an efficient cause too, writing as follows. 'One cause being the source from which, we say, the motion has its origin' (clearly speaking in this way of the efficient cause), 'and another cause being the matter, this latter is the kind of cause to be discussed. Regarding the other, we stated earlier, in the account *On Motion*, that there is something unmoved for all time and something always being moved.'<sup>577</sup> Therefore, he too declares that there are two efficient causes: the unmoved one is the cause of all things, and the heavenly bodies are the cause of the sublunary ones. In expounding these words Alexander says 'At any rate the first mover is the efficient cause of the motion of the divine body, which is ungenerated.' Further, in the first book<sup>578</sup> of the treatise *Metaphysics*, praising Anaxagoras and Hermotimus before him for not only assigning material causes of the universe but also recognizing mind as an efficient and final cause, he writes as follows: 'Someone, declaring that in nature as in animals mind is the cause both of the world and of all its order, appeared like a sober person in comparison with those who had earlier spoken at random.'<sup>579</sup> Now after saying that Anaxagoras and before him Hermotimus touched on these discussions,<sup>580</sup> he continues, 'Now those who thought like this posited the cause as both the principle of well being for things that are and as the source from which their motion arises.'<sup>581</sup> Therefore he praises the men who posit mind as both a final and an efficient cause, as shortly above he was praising Anaxagoras for calling mind a principle of motion and so preserving it impassive and uncontaminated.<sup>582</sup>

Alexander and some other Peripatetics hold that Aristotle believes

in a final and motive cause of the heaven, but not an efficient cause  
 – as indeed the passage of Alexander cited shortly above revealed,  
 which says, ‘The primary mover is the efficient <cause> of the motion 1362,15  
 of the divine body, which is ungenerated.’ Come, then, let us prove  
 that he considers mind to be also the efficient cause of the heaven. It  
 is sufficient that he defines this particular efficient cause as the  
 source from which motion has its origin, and that he calls mind, or  
 the unmoved cause, that from which the heavenly motion proxi-  
 mately has its origin. For it is through the motion of the heaven that  
 the unmoved is the origin of the motion of sublunary things too. 1362,20  
 However, in the second book of the *Physics* he calls luck and chance  
 incidental causes that supervene upon things that are efficient  
 <causes> per se, viz., mind and nature (‘For’, he says, speaking of luck  
 and chance, ‘as to the type of the cause, both of them are among the  
 sources from which motion has its origin.’<sup>588</sup>), and he adds this: 1362,25  
 ‘Since chance and luck are causes of whatever things might have mind or  
 nature as causes, when something comes to be the cause of those  
 things incidentally; and since nothing incidental is prior to what is  
 per se, <it is clear that the incidental cause is not prior to what is the  
 cause per se either>;<sup>584</sup> therefore, chance and luck are posterior to  
 mind and nature, so that no matter how true it is to say that chance  
 is the cause of this heaven, mind and nature must be a prior cause of 1362,30  
 many other things and of this universe in particular.’<sup>585</sup> An argumen-  
 tative person might perhaps find an escape from this by saying that  
 Aristotle does not prove in these words that mind and nature are  
 causes of the heaven, but only that anyone who says that chance and 1363,1  
 luck are efficient causes of the heaven will be forced to admit mind  
 and nature as prior causes. But he should pay attention to the fact  
 that what is moved by something else must also get its subsistence  
 from something else, if in fact existence is superior to movement. But  
 since according to Aristotle the power that every finite body has is 1363,5  
 finite – that is to say, the power that causes motion and is constitutive  
 of existence – it is necessary, then, that just as it has its eternal  
 motion from the unmoved cause, so also it receives its eternal corpo-  
 real existence from the incorporeal <cause>. My teacher Ammonius  
 has written an entire book<sup>586</sup> that provides many proofs of the fact  
 that Aristotle considers god to be also the efficient cause of the entire 1363,10  
 world, and I have here taken over some points sufficiently for my  
 present purposes. His more complete instruction on this topic can be  
 found in that book.

If someone inquires why in the world Aristotle does not say that  
 god is an efficient as evidently as <he said that he is> a final cause,  
 I will now again state the account I gave earlier about what is subject  
 to generation.<sup>587</sup> For since what works as an efficient cause produces 1363,15  
 something that is generated, and what is generated seems to bring

1363,20 with it a temporal origin of its generation, this is why he refuses to speak of eternal bodies as coming to be and to identify their cause frequently and evidently as efficient. And perhaps if someone were to say that the expressions 'what is generated' and 'what works as an efficient cause' apply strictly to things that are subject to generation and perishing, bringing with them a particular <reference to> time he will use other terms in discussing eternal things. Notice that Aristotle does not refuse to call motion eternal even though motion has its existence in coming to be. But he does not choose to call generation eternal as applying to the same thing, because what is generated seems to be generated not having existed previously, and tends to perish afterwards.

#### Notes

- 565. *Metaph.* 12.9.
- 566. *Metaph.* 12.7, 1072b29.
- 567. *Metaph.* 12.7, 12.9
- 568. *Metaph.* 12.7.
- 569. Plato, *Tim.* 29d7-e1 (approximate quotation).
- 570. Plato, *Tim.* 30b4-6 (approximate quotation).
- 571. Plato, *Tim.* 41a7.
- 572. Plato, *Tim.* 41b7-8 (approximate quotation).
- 573. Plato, *Tim.* 47c1-4 (approximate quotation).
- 574. *Phys.* 2.3, 194b29-31.
- 575. *Cael.* 1.4, 271a33.
- 576. *Cael.* 1.9, 279a27-30 (approximate quotation).
- 577. *GC* 1.3, 318a1-5 (approximate quotation). 'The account *On Motion*' refers to *Phys.* 8.6.
- 578. Simplicius refers to this book as 'big alpha'.
- 579. *Metaph.* 1.3, 984b15-18 (approximate quotation).
- 580. *Metaph.* 1.3, 984b18-20.
- 581. *Metaph.* 1.3, 984b20-2.
- 582. Simplicius incorrectly says 'shortly above'; the reference is *Metaph.* 1.8, 989b15.
- 583. *Phys.* 2.2, 198a2-3 (approximate quotation).
- 584. The manuscripts of Simplicius here omit some words from the text of Aristotle's *Physics*.
- 585. *Phys.* 2.2, 198a5-13 (approximate quotation).
- 586. This work of Ammonius has not survived.
- 587. Above, 1359,30.

SOURCE: Richard McKirhan (trans.), *Simplicius On Aristotle's Physics 8.6-10*

Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2001