

CAUSALITY, NATURE AND FATE IN ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS

ALBERTO ROSS*

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. 2. Fate and nature in *De fato*. 3. Providence and fate in the Aristotelianism of Alexander of Aphrodisias. 4. Conclusions.

1. INTRODUCTION

THE aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between “causality”, “nature”, and “fate” in the *De Fato* of Alexander of Aphrodisias. The Greek commentator follows the Aristotelian doctrine on this matter, but it is worth noting that Alexander diverges from the letter of the master on more than one occasion. It is well known that the most important Aristotelian commentators in late Antiquity offer us a detailed reconstruction of the Aristotelian arguments, but also the development of new positions in the framework of very different traditions. The works of Alexander of Aphrodisias in general and his book *De fato* (“On Fate”) in particular are one of the best examples of this practice.

De fato offers several arguments against determinism, but I will focus my attention on only one of them in order to achieve my purpose. The question to be dealt with could be framed in the field of metaphysics or natural philosophy. Alexander points out that everything that is “in accordance with nature” (*katà tèn phúsin*) in the sublunary world is also “in accordance with fate” (*kath’heimarménen*). This would be so because both notions would fall into the category of causality *kathautó* and within the field of nature.¹ However, this type of causality is not the only one that exists in the physical world according to Alexander’s account, which follows Aristotle. The author of *De fato* maintains that, besides the proper causes mentioned above, there are also certain accidental (*katà sumbebekós*) causes that account for a part of what happens in reality. Thus, not all of what occurs in the cosmos happens in accordance with fate and nature.² Behind this position, we find a deep assimilation of the Aristotelian theory of species and causal modes

* Universidad Panamericana. Calle Augusto Rodin 498, Benito Juárez, Insurgentes Mixcoac, 03920 Ciudad de México, D.F., Mexico. E-mail: jaross@up.edu.mx

¹ *De fato* 169, 19-23.

² *De fato* 170, 7-9.

presented by the philosopher in Book II of his *Physics*, but also an original development on that question.³

In order to understand Alexander's position, it is important to stress two aspects of his doctrine: (i) his use of Aristotle's causal theory to argue against a particular type of determinism, and (ii) the addition of some elements to the Aristotelian theory of chance that were not present in the original formulation. In particular, I refer to the identification mentioned between what is "in accordance with nature" and what is "in accordance with fate", and alongside that, the introduction of a certain kind of providence in the explicative framework of the physical world. In order to demonstrate the latter, I shall point to some connections between *De fato* and the treatises *De providentia* and *Quaestiones*.⁴

The position I shall be examining can be situated variously in relation to the different tendencies in ancient philosophy. Sharples and Thillet, for example, place Alexander's stance between Stoic determinism (according to which providence governs the world in all its details) and Epicurean materialism (according to which there is no need to appeal to metaphysical realities in order to explain what happens in nature).⁵ This would seem to be indisputable. It would, however, also be valid to situate it somewhere between Stoic determinism and the philosophy of Aristotle in its traditional version. There are good reasons to think that the notions of "fate" and "providence" do not figure in the framework of Aristotle's ontology as they do in that of stoicism. However, the Aristotelian inspiration of his doctrine is quite clear.

The Aristotelian Prime Mover, identified with god in *Met.* XII,⁶ is impassible and unmixed, in contrast with the god of the Stoics who is bound to the world and is provident. The Aristotelian god is separate from the world, and it is a very simple matter to demonstrate from the *corpus* that the Prime Mover is not, in the strict sense, provident.⁷ It is this that generates much of the interest of Alexander's position, since the latter seeks to joint some attributes of the Aristotelian Prime Mover and certain properties of the Stoic god, without incurring— at least at a thematic level – in pantheism. It has been pointed out that Alexander makes no explicit references to the Stoics in the whole of *De Fato*, but there is no serious reason to doubt the Stoic provenance of the arguments for determinism which he criticizes.

Alexander was aware of the originality of his position in the reconstruction of Aristotelianism. In his judgment, none of his predecessors had done

³ See *Phys.* 194b16 ff.

⁴ Regarding the authorship of the *Quaestiones*, see SHARPLES (1982), p. 200.

⁵ See Sharples (1982), p. 199 and Thillet (2003), 16.

⁶ See *Met.* 1072b19-30.

⁷ See SORABJI (1990), p. 181; and BERTI (2002), pp. 648-651.

this in such terms,⁸ and the repercussion of this thesis for posterity is evident. Medieval philosophy, on assimilating Aristotelian philosophy, sought the same conjunction of variables as Alexander: providence and transcendence.

For ease of presentation, I shall first expound Alexander's position regarding what it is that is to be regarded as "in accordance with fate" in the context of nature; I will also make some observations on his critique of determinism. Secondly, I shall pause to consider the above mentioned novel aspects of Alexander's theory which emerge in the reconstruction of his assimilation of Aristotelianism. In this context, I shall mention some problems that arise from the originality of his thesis both for modern students of Aristotle and for ancient interpreters of Aristotle.⁹

2. FATE AND NATURE IN *DE FATO*

The principal concern of *De fato* is not to develop an argument accounting for the existence of fate. The main purpose of the text is, rather, to explain in what way fate is the cause of things that are attributed to it, and what is the domain of things that come to be in accordance with fate. As regards its existence, Alexander says: "That there is such a thing as fate, and that it is the cause of some things' coming to be in accordance with itself, is sufficiently established by men's conception (*prólepsis*)",¹⁰ although "as to *what* fate is and where it is located, the common conception of men is no longer sufficient to indicate this. For not only do they not all agree with each other, but even the same individual does not always hold the same opinions about it".¹¹ It is the diversity of opinions on this point that provides the starting point for discussion in *De fato*. The positions Alexander enumerates are: (i) that which supposes "that all things happen in accordance with fate" and understands "by fate some cause that is unalterable (*aparábaton*) and inescapable (*anapódrastron*)"; (ii) that which supposes that not all things occur according to fate, but that there are "certain other causes of things"; and finally (iii), the position that is perhaps most common but least interesting from a philosophical point of view, namely, that of individuals who assume that "all the things that come to be do so in accordance with fate", but when meeting with success in their enterprises they "suppose that they are themselves the causes of their successes".¹² Given this diversity of opinions, Alexander holds that "it is necessary for philosophers to inquire concerning fate, not whether it exists, but what it is and in which of the things that come to be, and are, a thing of such a nature is located".¹³

⁸ *Quaest.* 2.21, 70.24-71.2.

⁹ I discussed this question for the first time in Ross (2009).

¹⁰ *De fato* 165, 14-15.

¹¹ *De fato* 165, 25-27.

¹² See *De fato* 166, 1-13.

¹³ See *De fato* 166, 13-15.

This is how the first part of Alexander's agenda of inquiry in *De fato* takes shape. It does not set off to investigate whether fate exists or not, but to discover in what events or entities it is to be found. The itinerary is thus the following: as is well known "all those who speak about fate at all say that it is a cause for things that come to be"; furthermore, "it is the cause of the things that come to be coming to be in the way that they do". However, "since 'cause' is an expression used in many ways, it is necessary for those who deal with the problem in order first to apprehend under which types of cause fate should be placed".¹⁴ Alexander's thesis on fate that I have briefly sketched out in the opening section of this paper is determined precisely by the way in which he decided to approach the subject, that is, by the ascription of fate to the causal scheme outlined by Aristotle.

The predication of causes is multiple: for Alexander, who follows Aristotle to the letter, "some causes are efficient, some have the role of matter, and also among the causes is the formal cause; and besides these three causes the end, too, for the sake of which what comes to be does so".¹⁵ Hence, "there being, then, this number of causes and the distinction between them being clear, we would be right to count fate among efficient causes".¹⁶ Alexander has recourse to the frequently mentioned example of how a statue is made, in order to show that fate behaves as a productive or efficient cause and not as one of the other three candidates.¹⁷ The analogy of the work of art served as an appropriate means of demonstrating such an ascription, since it was an example familiar to his audience or his readers.

What kind of efficient cause is fate? In order to answer this question, Alexander takes up another of the classifications developed in the *Physics*: "Aristotle, distinguishing between all the things that come to be, says that some of them come to be for the sake of something [...], but others of nothing [...]" (such as clutching and twiddling toothpicks and touching and pulling one's hair").¹⁸ The same distinction appears in *Phys.* II, with the consequent subdivisions, namely, that among those that happen with an end, "some come to be in accordance with nature (*phúsin*), and others in accordance with reason (*lógos*)".¹⁹ The difference between these two is that those that are so by nature have within themselves the principle and cause of their generation, whereas those that occur in accordance with reason receive the principle of their movement from without.²⁰ Alexander, following Aristotle, situates in that same context those that take place spontaneously or by chance.²¹

Before explaining under which of these headings fate acts as a productive

¹⁴ *De fato* 166, 16-20.

¹⁵ See *De fato* 166, 23-26.

¹⁶ *De fato* 167, 12-14.

¹⁷ See *De fato* 167, 14-16.

¹⁸ See *De fato* 167, 19-26.

¹⁹ For ARISTOTLE see *Phys.* 196b17-25 and for ALEXANDER see *De fato* 168, 1-3.

²⁰ See *De fato* 168, 11-15.

²¹ See *De fato* 168, 18ff.

cause, Alexander explains the difference between things that come to be by chance and those that occur in accordance with nature or reason: the latter “come to be for the sake of something in a primary way”; in such cases “everything that comes before the end does so for the sake of the end”,²² whereas in the case of events attributed to chance “the things that come to be before the end do so for the sake of something else”,²³ since what they encounter as “their end” is “that which is said to come to be fortuitously and from luck”.²⁴ We find, then, that of the different ways in which an end can be articulated with the steps or phases that precede it, two causal lines result that are mutually irreducible. In some cases what happens before the end is for the sake of that end and in others for something different.

This asymmetry between causal lines, observed both by Aristotle and Alexander, is the basis upon which *De fato* sets out to show that while fate is a cause, not everything that happens in the world is in accordance with it. In the explication of the causal categories referred to above, there is no essential divergence from what Aristotle had said in *Phys.* II 46. What we do find, along general lines, is a faithful assimilation of Aristotelian thought, as Alexander seems to claim from the outset.²⁵

Having made these specifications for the sake of completeness, Alexander asks in which sort of efficient cause fate should be located. In *Phys.* II, there is nothing akin to this question, at least not in the terms proposed by Alexander, who goes on to provide the following answer: “we always use the term ‘fate’ of some end, saying that it came to be in accordance with fate”.²⁶ What kind of reference to ends does Alexander have in mind? From the outset, we must exclude whatever is attributed to reason, since in that case what produces them (the agent) has also the capacity to *not* produce them and this is solely dependent upon the agent.²⁷ On the other hand, it does include those things that happen in accordance with nature, since “...fate and nature are same thing. [...] for what is fated is in accordance with nature and what is in accordance with nature is fated. For it is not the case that man comes to be from man and horse from horse, in accordance with nature but not in accordance with fate; rather, these causes accompany each other as if differing only in name”.²⁸ What Aristotle regards as simply in accordance with nature, Alexander regards as also in accordance with fate. Thus, the Greek commentator takes a step beyond the letter of the Aristotelian doctrine.

There is thus an ontological reduction in *De fato* between what is “in accordance with nature” and what is “in accordance with fate”. The difference is only one of name, so that fate remains situated in the order of proper causes,

²² *De fato* 168, 20-21.

²⁵ See *De fato* 164, 13-15.

²⁷ See *De fato* 169, 6ss.

²³ *De fato* 168, 22.

²⁴ See *De fato* 168, 23-24.

²⁶ *De fato* 168, 27-169, 2.

²⁸ *De fato* 169, 19-23.

with their respective limitations. This implies, for example, that it may be the case that something contrary to fate takes place, that is, as long as what occurs could be described as “against nature”. Hence Alexander concludes that “if what is contrary to nature has a place and is not an empty expression, what is contrary to fate, too, will have a place in the things that come to be”.²⁹

Things that happen against the natural order, and thus against fate, receive the following description: “whenever there happens to something, that comes to be for the sake of something else, not that for the sake of which it came to be, but something else which was not even expected at the beginning, this is said to have come to be from luck; having *per se* come to be without a cause, but having as a cause *per accidens* that which came to be for the coming-to-be of something else”.³⁰ The examples of this kind of event are the traditional ones: who finds a treasure trove by chance while digging for something else, or who by chance recovers a debt on going to the market and finding himself unexpectedly face to face with the person who owed him the money, or the case of the stolen horse that escapes its captors in search of food and by chance finds itself with its owners.³¹ In all these cases the two conditions required by the definitions of what is “by chance” are satisfied, namely, (i) that action is undertaken for some purpose, and (ii) that what is attained is something other than what was aimed for in the first place.

In this context, Alexander is concerned to show that the subject of chance is not simply a matter of epistemological obscurity, but one of asymmetry in the causal lines, as has already been mentioned:

«The causes of the discovery of the treasure and of the collecting of the debt are not obscure to human reason, but clear and obvious; [the cause] of the finding is the digging, and of the collecting of the debt the going to the market place. For neither would the former person have found [the treasure] if he had not dug, nor would the latter have collected the debt if he had not gone [there]; but [...] the aforementioned things are not primary causes of these results, but came to be for the sake of something else [...]. For the things that are from luck are not said to come to be in this way [sc. from luck] because of the obscurity of their cause, but because of the absence of causation by the cause in the primary and proper sense». ³²

The asymmetric character of the causal lines on which the outcome coincides with what was initially sought for – as compared with those where a different outcome is met with – is sufficient for Alexander at the moment of examining determinism as an explanation of what happens in nature. In both cases, whether we look to *De fato* or to *Phys.* II, the position which would presumably be deactivated by the above argument is that of a determinism that is close to identifying temporal priority with causal priority: in effect, that is, a

²⁹ *De fato* 170, 7-9.

³⁰ *De fato* 172, 19-21.

³¹ See *De fato* 172, 25-173, 13.

³² *De fato* 174, 14-28.

determinism that does not concede the existence of final causes in nature, so that it has no manner of anchoring the asymmetry between the two types of causal lines mentioned above, which is of essential importance for delimiting the field of causal action of fate. The determinist opponent who does not introduce final causes into his description of nature will only be able to identify that there is a state prior to the present and that it is relevant for its explanation, but without further distinctions.

Aristotle refers to his determinist interlocutors in those passages as those who declare that “nothing happens casually, but that everything we speak of in that way has really a definite cause. For instance, if a man comes to market and there chances on someone he has been wishing to meet but was not expecting to meet there, [they will assert that] the reason of his meeting him was that he wanted to go marketing”.³³ The Aristotelian theory of chance is developed against this opponent who, while seeking in the past a cause of what happens in the present, neither qualifies this further nor distinguishes between the proper or accidental nature of the relations of priority or posterity that can be present in the course of an action. All this because of the lack of the notion of final cause.

On setting forth his reconstruction of the Aristotelian theory, Alexander seems to address the same kind of opponent as Aristotle, although this is not the only sort of determinism against which he argues in *De fato*. The emphasis on asymmetry between causal lines, proper or accidental, seems to suffice him for the purpose of deactivating determinism in the explanation of why things happen in nature. Obviously the success of the critique depends on his interlocutor’s conceding a theory of causes with all its above mentioned nuances. It is thus hard to see this critique as an objection that cancels definitively the possibility of other more sophisticated types of determinism than those that Aristotle and Alexander had in mind when formulating their theory of proper and accidental causality.

To sum up, Alexander presents an initial argument against determinism which consists in showing the asymmetry between two types of causal line that are irreducible to each other: on the one hand, those along which everything that happens before obtaining the end is for the sake of that end; and on the other, those cases in which everything that happens before the end is for the sake of a different end. Having said this, the causal determinism that holds that every cause is a cause determined in the way I have already established is false, because if it is true that some causes are proper or determined like nature and fate – which are the same thing, only distinguished by name – there are still others that are undetermined (such as chance). On this point, the line of continuity between Aristotle and Alexander is clear;

³³ *Phys.* 196a1-196a5.

we find, nonetheless, a rupture – or innovation, if one prefers – at the moment of identifying what is “in accordance with nature” with what is “in accordance with fate”. In the following section, I shall examine this point in greater detail.

3. PROVIDENCE AND FATE IN THE ARISTOTELIANISM OF ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS

As we have seen, in his response to determinism, Alexander associates what is “in accordance with nature” with what is “in accordance with fate” within the framework of a reconstruction of what he calls the “peripatetic” theory touching on this matter. Irrespective of this attribution, it is clear to any reader familiar with Aristotle that the term and concept of *heimarméne* does not play an important role in his philosophy. That was no obstacle to its being introduced into the discussions of the philosopher were as many other concepts. The same can be said of the term *prónoia*, which is closely connected with the subject of fate in Alexander and that likewise is not easily attributed to Aristotle. About the distinction between “providence” and “fate” in Late Antiquity see Chase (2014).

It is important to say at this point that Alexander didn't think that the causal power of fate was universal. In Mantissa 25, for example, Alexander says that it is not acceptable to say that the eternal things are in accordance with fate, v.g. it is not reasonable to say that the triangle has its internal angles equal to two right angles “in accordance with fate”. In general, according to Alexander, it is not acceptable to say at all that those things which are always the same and in the same state are so “in accordance with fate”.

In this context, Alexander introduces other examples to illustrate the point. He says, for example, that it is not in accordance with fate that the sun come to be at the winter or the summer solstice, nor yet does each of the heavenly bodies have fate as the cause of its own proper motion. Therefore, the fate is not the cause of any of the things that are eternal or that come to be always the same and in the same way, but the activity of fate seems to be in the things that are subject to coming to be and passing away, i.e. in the sublunary world. This remark is crucial, because it entails that it is necessary to introduce more principles to explain the motion of cosmos and it implies a new difference with Aristotle.

If we hold by the traditional reading of *Met.* XII, the Aristotelian Prime Mover is exclusively the cause of the eternity of movement and moves the first heaven as a final cause to the degree that the latter imitates its activity. The way in which this *primum mobile* imitates the Prime Mover is through a circular and eternal movement, since this is the only way in which something corporeal can imitate a divinity whose sole activity is thinking itself. This reading

has been shared by commentators both ancient,³⁴ medieval³⁵ and contemporary.³⁶ It does not seem, in effect, to leave any room for the postulation of a provident god.³⁷

Now, if we return to Alexander, we find that the question of providence has complications of its own.³⁸ One – perhaps the most elemental, but not the least important – is that the passages in question are only conserved in two versions in Arabic, although several of the theses that are developed there were transmitted by other texts that were preserved in Greek. As for the principal theses regarding the matter that interests us, there seems to be an important parallelism with the treatise of the *Quaestiones*, although that in no way reduces the obstacles to interpretation that the doctrine itself presents.³⁹ Where the three texts undoubtedly coincide is in the concern to extend the scope of providence beyond the celestial sphere.

The position defended by Alexander in the texts where he discusses the matter is on general lines, that the action of god on the world is not limited to that of moving the heavens eternally, but that his causal action reaches the sublunary world, and not in an accidental manner.⁴⁰ Indeed, Alexander is anxious to rule out the possibility that anyone might think that the Prime Mover only relates accidentally with the sublunary world, as if one were to say that god is the cause of the eternity of the cycle of generation and corruption of that region, only to the extent that this is a non-intentional result of his principal activity: the movement of the heavens (which would be the direct object of providence). Simplicius confirms indirectly this point, through a critique to Alexander's position. He says that "Alexander and other Peripatetics hold that Aristotle believes in a final and motive cause (*kinetikós*) of the heaven, but not a productive (*poiētikós*) cause."⁴¹ Simplicius considered that this opinion coming from Alexander is a mistake, so he had to correct it. In his opinion, the Prime Mover is not just a final or motive cause, but also a productive cause for the entire cosmos and not just for the heavens. His remark against Alexander confirms the interpretation of Alexander according to which he extends the providence beyond the heavens.

The Aristotelian position holds that the Prime Mover cannot be the direct cause of what happens in the sublunary world. The unmoved, says Aristotle,

³⁴ See THEMISTIUS *In Met.* XII, 19-20 and 31-55.

³⁵ See AQUINAS, *In Met.* XII, l. 7, n. 2521-2535.

³⁶ See See ROSS (1924), CXXX; REALE (1968), p. 588; Elders (1972), 35-43; NATALI (1997), pp. 105-123; GÓMEZ LOBO (1998), 65; BOERI (1999), pp. 71-77; SEDLEY (2000), pp. 327-336; LAKS, (2000), 242; SHARPLES (2002), pp. 1-40; BOTTER (2005), pp. 191-195; and and GOURINAT (2012), pp. 201-2014.

³⁷ I attempt a defense of this interpretation in ROSS (2016).

³⁸ For a complete explanation of this notion in Alexander, see FAZZO (2002), pp. 147-174.

³⁹ See SHARPLES (1982), 199.

⁴⁰ See *Quaest.* 2.21, 65.17ss.

⁴¹ *In Phys.* 1362, 11-13.

will always impart movement in the same way and with a single movement, because it suffers no change at all in relation with what is moved by it.⁴² On the other hand, that which is set in motion by the Prime Mover is capable, in turn, of causing another type of effect: “on finding itself in contrary places or <adopting> <contrary> forms, it will produce contrary movements in each of the other things that are set in movement by it, and will make them to be at times in repose and at times in movement”.⁴³ Hence this is the reason why in the cosmos there are some things that are always in movement and others that undergo contrary movements. This is so because “some things are moved by <a Mover> that is eternally immobile (and are thus always moved), others <on the other hand, are moved by a mover> moved and changing, so that they too must change”.⁴⁴ Alexander, however, places particular emphasis on pointing out that providence extends to the sublunary world making use precisely of the movement of the celestial bodies to maintain the infinite cycle of generation and corruption and hence the conservation of the species, although one might say that its dominion does not extend properly speaking as far as individuals.⁴⁵ In *De fato*, Alexander holds that the specific configuration of the divine entities according to their movement in relation to the things of this world is the principle of each generation.⁴⁶ This relation, however, is not merely accidental, but proper. Fate and providence are not the same, and their introduction is crucial in order to give a complete explanation of the cosmos. In these terms, we find *grosso modo* Alexander’s reaction against those reinterpretations of Aristotle that restrict the sphere of providence to the heavens.

This clarification, however, entails a difficulty for the interpreter of Aristotle: the fact that the traditional interpretation of *Lambda*, which seems to be at the antipodes of the position defended in *De fato*, derives precisely from certain texts of Alexander himself, as Enrico Berti has reminded us.⁴⁷ As I have already remarked, to the question of how the Prime Mover moves the world (considering that the two are of different natures), the traditional reading of *Met. XII* replies that this is so, because the Prime Mover presents itself as something desirable and intelligible to the first heaven, which moves in a circular manner so as to imitate the activity of that which presents itself as desirable. In this way, the Aristotelian god is conceived as the thinking of thought. Nonetheless, one of the main problems presented by this reconstruction of *Met. XII* is that, in effect, Aristotle’s text says nothing explicitly about any kind of “imitation”. In Sarah Broadie’s opinion, this is simply an exegetic construc-

⁴² See *Phys.* 260a.3-5.

⁴³ *Phys.* 260a 8-10.

⁴⁴ *Phys.* 260a 14-17.

⁴⁵ See *De prov.* 33.1ff. and 87.1ff; *Quaest.* 1.25, 41.8-19.

⁴⁶ *De fato* 169, 25-26.

⁴⁷ See BERTI (2000b), pp. 229-236.48 See BERTI (2000b), pp. 229-236.

tion of Platonic character.⁴⁸ Following Broadie, a long list of commentators agree on this critique of the traditional interpretation of Lambda.⁴⁹

The obscurity of the text, however, leaves the door open to future discussions of the matter, but what does remain quite clear is that the idea of “imitation” used to explain the relation of the first heaven with the Prime Mover and which is the basis for some anti-providentialist readings of Aristotle, is owing to Alexander.⁵⁰ This does not imply that a reading of Aristotle in those terms is impossible. One might say, in effect, that the concept of imitation does not imply analytically the postulation of fate nor that of a provident god, which may lead one to think that whatever consequences Alexander may have drawn from that reconstruction of Aristotle’s text is of little importance. That is true, but the tension between the Alexandrine reading of Aristotle manifested in the texts I have presented here and the traditional reading of *Met. XII* inspired by it—which denies, precisely, the existence of any kind of providence in the Aristotelian god—is no less interesting on that account. Whatever the case, it seems to me that this point must be borne in mind when one rereads the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle and the work of Alexander.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the history of the reception of the Aristotelian physics and metaphysics, it is important to underline the continuity between certain theses of Aristotle and the *De fato* of Alexander of Aphrodisias, as well as the discontinuity of others. In this case, we have seen that Alexander refers to the Aristotelian critique of determinism and the defense of the existence of chance in nature as a real phenomenon, irrespective of our cognitive limitations. Setting out from the reconstruction of asymmetrical causal lines, both Alexander and Aristotle aim to deactivate the determinist position according to which every cause is a determined cause. While they share with their opponents the thesis that everything that happens has a cause, they do not share the thesis that this has to be determined, since undetermined causes also explain the reason for being of many of the things that occur in nature.

In the second place, I have tried to show some of the innovatory aspects of the Alexandrine exposition as regards the subject of fate and providence, which were taken up again systematically by posterity. Alexander adopts the basic categories of Aristotle’s ontology and offers an audacious rereading of them. Providence and fate, notions alien to Aristotelian thought, find a place in the Alexandrine philosophy of peripatetic inspiration, which is none the less interesting for that. As I have already observed, the reading that tradition-

⁴⁸ See BROADIE (1993), p. 379.

⁴⁹ See KOSMAN (1994), JUDSON (1994); BERTI (2000a); BRADSHAW (2001).

⁵⁰ *Quaest.* 2.18, 62, 6-34; γ 2.19, 63.18-26.

ally ruled out the possibility of speaking of a provident god in Aristotle is inspired by or follows a line of interpretation inaugurated by Alexander, and this, beyond doubt, ought to stimulate us to seek a deeper understanding of this tradition of commentators on the *corpus aristotelicum*.

REFERENCES

- APHRODISIAS, ALEXANDER OF, *Supplement to On the Soul*, trad. by R. Sharples, Bloomsbury, London 2004.
- APHRODISIAS, ALEXANDER OF, *On fate*, trad. by R. Sharples, Duckworth Publishers, London 2007.
- AQUINAS, S. T. DE, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, edition and study by R.M. Spiazzi, Marietti, Turin-Rome 1964.
- BARNES, J. (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (vol. I y II), Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995.
- BERTI, E. (2000a), *Metaphysics L 6*, in FREDE-CHARLES (2000), pp. 181-206.
- IDEM (2000b), *Il movimento del cielo in Alessandro di Afrodisia*, in A. BRANCACCI (ed.) (2000), pp. 225-243.
- IDEM (2002), *La Causalità del Motore Immobile secondo Aristotele*, «Gregorianum», 83/4, pp. 637-654.
- BOERI, M., *Aristóteles. Física I-II*, Biblos, Buenos Aires 1993.
- IDEM, *Aristóteles. Física VII-VIII*, Biblos, Buenos Aires 2003.
- BOTTER, B., *Dio e Divino in Aristotele*, Academia Verlag, Bonn 2005.
- BRADSHAW, D., *A new look at the Prime Mover*, «Journal of History of Philosophy», xxx-ix/1 (2001), pp. 1-22.
- BRANCACCI, A. (ed.), *La filosofia in età imperiale. Le scuole e le tradizioni filosofiche*, Bibliopolis, Naples 2000.
- BROADIE, S., *Que fait le premier moteur d'Aristote?*, «Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger», 183 (1993), pp. 375-411.
- CHASE, M., *Time and eternity from Plotinus and Boethius to Einstein*, «Scholae», 8.1 (2014), pp. 67-110.
- ELDERS, L., *Aristotle's Theology. A Commentary on Book Λ [Lambda] of the Metaphysics*, Van Gorcum, Assen 1972.
- FAZZO, S., *Aporia e sistema. La materia, la forma, il divino nelle Quaestiones di Alessandro di Afrodisia*, ETS, Pisa, 2002.
- GILL, M.L., LENNOX, J.G. (eds), *Self Motion: From Aristotle to Newton*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1994.
- GOURINAT, J.B., *Le premier moteur selon Physique VIII et Métaphysique Λ: physique et philosophie première*, in M. BONELLI (éd.), *Physique et métaphysique chez Aristote*, Vrin, Paris 2012, pp. 175-206.
- HORN, C., *Aristotle's "Metaphysics" Lambda – New Essays*, De Gruyter, Boston/Berlin, 2016.
- JAEGER, W., *Aristotelis Metaphysica*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1973.
- JUDSON, L., *Heavenly motion and the Unmoved Mover*, in GILL-LENNOX (1994), pp. 155-171.

- KOSMAN, A., *Aristotle's Prime Mover*, in GILL-LENNOX (1994), pp. 135-153.
- LAKS, A., *Metaphysics L 7*, en FREDE-CHARLES (eds.) (2000), pp. 207-243.
- NATALI, C., *Causa motrice e causa finale nel libro Lambda della Metafisica di Aristotele*, «Méthexis», x (1999), pp. 105-123.
- PHILOPONUS, *On Aristotle's Physics 2*, Translation and notes by A. Lacey, Duckworth Publishers, London 1993.
- REALE, G., *La metafisica di Aristotele*, Luigi Loffredo, Naples 1968.
- ROSS, A., *La recepción de la teoría aristotélica del azar en el De Fato de Alejandro de Afrodisia*, «Estudios de Filosofía», 40 (2009), pp. 183-198.
- ROSS, A., *The Causality of the Prime Mover in Metaphysics Λ*, in Horn (2016), pp. 207-228.
- ROSS, D., *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1924.
- (1936), *Aristotle's Physics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- SEDLEY, D., *Metaphysics L 10*, in M. FREDE and D. CHARLES, (eds.) (2000), pp. 327-350.
- SHARPLES, R., *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Divine Providence: Two Problems*, «The Classical Quarterly» (New Series), 32/1 (1982), pp. 198-211.
- IDEM, *Alexander of Aphrodisias, Quaestiones 1.1-2.15*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1992.
- IDEM, *Alexander of Aphrodisias, Quaestiones 2.16-3.15*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1994.
- IDEM, *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Fate*, Duckworth Publisher, London 2003.
- SIMPLICIUS, *On Aristotle's Physics 2*, translation and notes by D.B. Fleet, Duckworth Publishers, London 1997.
- SORABJI, R., *Aristotle transformed: the ancient commentators and their influence*, Duckworth Publishers, London 1990.
- THEMISTIUS, *In Aristotelis Metaphysicorum librum XII paraphrasis hebraice et latine*, Reimer, Berlin 1903.
- THILLET, P., *Alexandre d'Aphrodisias. Traité de la providence*, Verdier, Lagrasse 2003.

ABSTRACT: *The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between “causality”, “nature”, and “fate” in the De Fato of Alexander of Aphrodisias. The Greek commentator offers several arguments against determinism in the mentioned book, but I will focus my attention on only one of them in order to achieve my purpose. Alexander points out that everything that is “in accordance with nature” (katà tèn phúsin) is also “in accordance with fate” (kath’heimarméne). I will try to clarify this point and I will consider some novel aspects of Alexander’s theory which emerge in the reconstruction of his assimilation of Aristotelianism*

KEYWORDS: *Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Nature, Fate, Providence, Causality, God.*