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PRESUPPOSITIONS OF MORAL ACTION IN ARISTOTLE AND ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many accounts of ethics in the tradition of western philosophy take one or more of the following intuitions as their starting point.¹ A moral agent is supposed to have a sufficient level of awareness of her surroundings, and of her own position in it. She is also supposed to be able to assess her own activities and their consequences and, if necessary, to adjust her future behaviour to her findings. She can deliberate about possible courses of action and choose the one that best suits her aims. She can also deliberate about the aims she wants to achieve. Last but not least, it is reason that provides the explanation and justification for her actions, to herself and to others. Such intuitions constitute the foundations for being an *agent* at all, and, in addition, for being a *rational* agent who uses reason to define goals and means, and to discover and deploy rules of behaviour in interaction with her natural and social environment.

These intuitions about moral agency presuppose a rather sophisticated set of psychological capacities.² Sense perception must provide us with reliable information about the world we live in, including other human beings and their behaviour,

* It is with great pleasure that I dedicate this paper to my colleague Carlos Steel and our past and future cooperation. Given the close relations between Leiden and Leuven in the field of ancient philosophy we have met and exchanged views on many occasions. I have always profited from such encounters. According to the Platonic philosophical calendar Carlos is now at his peak, so I am sure that the mundane regulations of human society will lack the power to keep him away from philosophy.

¹ See e.g., B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006 [1985], ch. 3-4 on well-being and practical reason as the foundations of ethics; J. Kekes, *The Examined Life*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1988, ch. 2-3; and in most concise form J. Rawls, 'Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics', *The Philosophical Review* 60.2, 1951, 177-97, defining the characteristics of moral judges.

² Modern studies in moral philosophy and psychology confirm this, in that empirical research in psychology is more and more being discussed by ethicists; see e.g. C. Andreou, 'Morality and Psychology', *Philosophy Compass* 2.1, 2007, 46-55, and for a more critical stance S. Schleim, 'Moral Physiology, its Limitations and Philosophical Implications', *Jahrbuch für Wissenschaft und Ethik* 13, 2008, 51-80. In general, all styles of ethics with naturalist tendencies pay attention to human nature as a condition or limit of morality.

and the social structures of our society. Reason is needed for building the understanding that will guide our actions, and for proper deliberation and choice. A measure of self-awareness is necessary to assess one's own position in the world, one's success in achieving goals, and the reasons of failure. Since humans may decide to act rightly or wrongly, psychology must also be able to explain error. All in all, when external coercion and social pressure are bracketed, our set of psychological capacities should still warrant sufficient freedom to do justice to the intuition that our decisions and actions make a difference, and that we are rightly held responsible for them: in philosophy, as in society, we distribute praise and blame accordingly.

In an ideal world the senses are completely reliable, and reason infallibly intuits the true moral aims and finds the most efficient means to reach them. But we do not live in an ideal world. Both sense perception and deliberation can go astray; desires, emotions, and social pressure force us to act against our better knowledge. Sometimes we feel as if a higher power is in charge, and we find ourselves calling upon nature, gods, fate, or destiny to explain the course of our actions.³ These explanations may well be true, and our freedom an illusion. Perhaps our deliberations are pointless. There is probably no way of knowing in this life.

In the face of such questions philosophical ethics has developed a spectrum of rational theories about how people *can*, or rather *should*, operate in this difficult field. In addition, moral psychology has focused on emotional aspects of important moral practices. Thus moral psychology studies morally relevant emotions (guilt, shame, regret; satisfaction, pride), but also their background in ideas of freedom and intentionality, and the logic of deliberation and practical reasoning.⁴

The presuppositions of moral agency described above necessitate that philosophical ethics cannot operate in a theoretical vacuum. It must rest upon an explicit understanding of the world at large, of human capacities, and of the network of relations and influences that determine our lives. It must be able to explain actual human behaviour, and (hopefully) set out a course of action that allows us to progress successfully towards whatever moral goals are defined. Ideally, philosophical ethics itself should be rationally coherent and transparent. History has taught us that the results may range from radical determinism to radical libertarianism, and from naturalism to cognitivism, with many shades in between.

³ See S. Broadie, 'From Necessity to Fate: A Fallacy?', *The Journal of Ethics* 5, 2001, 26-30, for a vivid account of how the notion of fate might arise from the experience of life.

⁴ See e.g. T. Honderich *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), s.v. 'Moral psychology'; F.C.T. Moore, *The Psychological Basis of Morality. An Essay on Value and Desire*, London – Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1978.

Here I shall focus on ancient philosophy, and Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias in particular. Aristotle's moral philosophy is closely tied to his psychology,⁵ and the same is true for Alexander, who held a chair for Peripatetic philosophy at Athens in the last quarter of the 2nd century AD. As is to be expected, he modelled both his moral philosophy and his psychology on Aristotle's example. Nevertheless, Alexander is well known for his innovations in the field of psychology, such as a distinct theory ofhylomorphism he applied to the (levels of) soul and body, the elaboration of the faculty of imagination, and an astonishing interpretation of the relation between divine and human intellect.⁶ If moral philosophy requires a moral psychology to match, we might well ask whether Alexander's ethics was as innovative as his psychology. Of course there is no need to reduce all of psychology to moral psychology. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that criticism and comments on Aristotle's psychological work by Platonists and Stoics, not to mention the difficulties in Aristotle's texts, would have prompted new answers and developments by Alexander. But if ethics and psychology are related as suggested above, at least one of the functions of philosophical psychology will be to provide for a moral psychology. If so, it may be profitable for the historian of philosophy to study the connection between the two for heuristic reasons: can Alexander's innovations in psychology be explained by reference to his position in ethics? It is this question, which inspires my current research, that I shall begin to explore in this paper.

⁵ See e.g. the contributions in M. Pakaluk – G. Pearson (eds.), *Moral Psychology and Human Action in Aristotle*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, for an overview of the current state of research. J.M. Moravcsik, 'The Nature of Ethical Theorizing in the *Eudemian Ethics*', in: G. Anagnostopoulos (ed.), *Topos: Aristotle on Philosophy of Mind, Ethics and Politics*, Dordrecht – Boston – London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996, 81-88, is explicit about the relation between the type of ethics that Aristotle proposes in *Eudemian Ethics* ('ideal ethics', according to Moravcsik), and its presuppositions in moral psychology. See also *Eth. Nic.* VI 2, 1139a1-6, where Aristotle states that he will proceed to the discussion of the intellectual virtues only after making a number of statements about the soul. These remarks summarize and develop the moral psychology of *De an.* III 7-9 and *De mot. an.* 6-11 we shall discuss below.

⁶ For a general assessment, see R.W. Sharples, 'Alexander of Aphrodisias. Scholasticism and Innovation', in: Wolfgang Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. II Principat.* 36.2, Berlin – New York: De Gruyter, 1987, 1176-243. For Alexander's *De anima* see A.P. Fotinis, *The De anima of Alexander of Aphrodisias: a Translation and Commentary*, Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979 and *Alexander Aphrodisiensis. De l'âme*, texte grec intr., trad. et annoté par M. Bergeron et R. Dufour, Paris: Vrin, 2008.

2. ARISTOTLE

Aristotle's background in Platonic philosophy gives us a head-start into our topic. As Carlos Steel has argued,⁷ the *Timaeus* does not show us Plato the cosmologist or physicist, but rather Plato the ethical and political theorist. The introductory paragraphs of the *Timaeus* make clear that Timaeus the Pythagorean is to provide his cosmological account as one of a series of contributions by philosophical specialists on the question: how can the political ideal of the *Republic* be shown to work in practice? The *Timaeus* gives an account of the universe as it should be envisaged in order to produce and sustain the kind of people that will be willing and able to live according to the *Republic's* ideal.⁸ The ethical goal of the *Timaeus* comes out in particular in the teleological treatment of the human body, and its amusing counterpart on the deterioration of body and soul and their diseases (*Tim.* 69-72). The teleology of the *Timaeus* is not primarily physical or biological in nature, but ethical. Although Plato shows some interest in cosmology and biology, physical and biological teleology is relegated to the realm of necessity. The moral purpose of the *Timaeus* gets pride of place.

In two ways this Platonic paradigm can be recognized in the Aristotelian corpus. The first way comes out especially when the Aristotelian corpus is read in the traditional order set by Andronicus of Rhodes, and reflected in the Bekker pagination by which we customarily refer to Aristotle. This order is more or less confirmed by internal references and programmatic passages in Aristotle as Aristotle's preferred reading order, or order of learning.⁹ The ethical and political works are near the end of the list, preceded by studies in logic, physics, psychology, biology and metaphysics. The ethical and political works take for granted much of what 'precedes' in this way.¹⁰ Thus psychology develops from general physics, as specific problems concerning what it means for beings in motion to be alive. At the same time the psychology provides insight in how the living being is able to interact with her environment, and how she can be right and wrong about her assessments. By consequence, the locomotion that follows from the internal pro-

⁷ See C. Steel, 'The Moral Purpose of the Human Body. A Reading of *Timaeus* 69-72', *Phronesis* 46.2, 2001, 105-28, inspired by e.g. F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1937, 20 and 282.

⁸ See *Tim.* 17a-20d, cf. 27a. Critias prefaces Timaeus' account by an 'historical' account of Atlantis as a previous realization of the ideal state (20d-27d), thereby once more affirming the social-political aims of the *Timaeus* as a whole; cf. Steel, *The Moral Purpose*, 106.

⁹ See M.F. Burnyeat, *A Map of Metaphysics Zeta*, Pittsburgh: Mathesis Publications, 2001, 111-124.

¹⁰ Of course this preferred order of learning as indicated by Aristotle has nothing to do with the order in which he wrote his works or developed his insights.

cessing of external and internal information is to be explained both from the condition of the living being, i.e., the healthy state of her body, and the degree of practical reason she has acquired. As David Charles has recently argued with new vigour,¹¹ Aristotle carefully discusses the living being and each of her activities as psycho-physical unities without a shimmer of dualism.¹² In the *Nicomachean Ethics* the successful activities of the rational soul reappear as virtuous dispositions that constitute so many conditions of the good life.¹³ A person is responsible for her deeds because she is responsible for her dispositions, which somehow condition the choices she makes.¹⁴ In sum, the preferred reading order displays the actual dependencies between the different areas of study that Aristotle delineated. We may surmise that Aristotle expanded the *Timaeus* perspective into a series of far more detailed studies. As Steel noted,¹⁵ within each of these studies the notion of teleology acquires a certain independence: in *De partibus animalium* biological finality instantiates the 'best', not the 'necessary', of the *Timaeus* account. Nevertheless, when we look at the Aristotelian corpus from a distance there is no denying that biological finality comes out as a species of cosmological finality, and is itself subservient to the explanation of human ethics and politics.

Second, the nesting of more specialized topics within embracing examinations is further enhanced by the fact that within each of his domains of study Aristotle employs an efficient method of exposition, which he explicitly sets out in the methodological introductions to e.g., *De anima* and *De partibus animalium*. First more general principles, definitions and theorems are worked out, while more complex applications in smaller areas of study have to wait until later.¹⁶ For the *De anima* and the *Parva naturalia* this general principle entails that the *De anima* provides

¹¹ See D.O.M. Charles, 'Aristotle's Psychological Theory', *Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 24, 2008, 1-29, and D.O.M. Charles, 'Desire in Action: Aristotle's Move', in: M. Pakaluk – G. Pearson (eds.), *Moral Psychology and Human Action in Aristotle*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 75-93, with critical remarks by V. Caston, 'Commentary on Charles', *Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 24, 2008, 30-47. I intend to return to the issue of hylomorphism on another occasion.

¹² Aristotle may well have believed that the thinking intellect opts out of this context under some descriptions, but this is not the place to address this vexed issue, for which see e.g., V. Caston, 'Aristotle's Argument for Why the Understanding is not Compounded with the Body', *Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 16, 2000, 135-75.

¹³ See e.g. *Eth. Nic.* II 5, III 8.

¹⁴ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* III 7-8. How precisely this is supposed to work is still a matter of scholarly dispute. For an attractive 'biological' account, see J.G. Lennox, 'Aristotle on the Biological Roots of Virtue', in: J. Maienschein – M. Ruse (eds.), *Biology and the Foundation of Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 10-31.

¹⁵ Steel, *The Moral Purpose*, 109.

¹⁶ See the methodological remarks and practice in e.g. *De part. an.* I 1-4; *De an.* I 1 and II 1; *De sensu* 1.

a definition of the soul and its capacities that covers as many different kinds of soul as possible, whereas topics like sleep, dreams, and memory and their more specific physiology are relayed to the *Parva Naturalia*.¹⁷ In principle the psychological works deal with all living beings, from plants to humans, and with humans in particular only in relation to the intellect which they alone possess. Also the general theory of locomotion described in *De anima* III 7-10 should apply to animals and humans alike. Thus Aristotle's notion of human rational desire (wish) and choice literally develop from a more general account in terms of physics, physiology and animal psychology. Locomotion is taken up once more in the *De motu animalium* that builds on cosmology, physics, psychology and biology together in order to provide a detailed account of the mechanism by which animals are the principle of their locomotion in any direction they choose.¹⁸

Although these texts are invariably adduced in the context of moral conduct, they all address in increasing detail a more general problem that was already posed in *Physics* VIII 2, 253a7-21 and VIII 6, 259b1-16.¹⁹ If animals can initiate motion by themselves without being moved by anything outside of themselves, perhaps this would be valid for the cosmos too. Aristotle opposes this line of argument by emphasizing that animals are always moved by their environment, and are subject to other natural motions than locomotion because of it.

The third objection may be thought to present more difficulty than the others, namely, that which alleges that motion arises in things in which it did not exist before, and adduces in proof the case of animate things: thus an animal is first

¹⁷ Of course the structure of the *De anima* and the relation between the *De anima*, *Parva naturalia* and the biological works are a matter of continuing debate. See e.g. G.E.R. Lloyd, 'Aspects of the Relationship between Aristotle's Psychology and Zoology', in: M. Nussbaum – A. Oksenberg Rorty (eds.), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, 147-82; S. Menn, 'Aristotle's Definition of Soul and the Programme of the *De Anima*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 22, 2002, 83-139; A. Falcon, 'The Scope and Unity of Aristotle's Investigation of the Soul', in: G. Van Riel and P. Destrée (eds.), *Ancient Perspectives on Aristotle's De Anima*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009, 167-81; C. Shields, 'Aristotle's Psychology', in: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-psychology/>), 2010.

¹⁸ See M.C. Nussbaum, *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978. For the interaction between the sciences in this context see J. Kung, 'Aristotle's *De Motu Animalium* and the Separability of the Sciences', *Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20, 1982, 65-76.

¹⁹ The classical treatment of these passages is D.J. Furley, 'Self Movers', in: G.E.R. Lloyd – G.E.L. Owen (eds.), *Aristotle on Mind and the Senses. Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium Aristotelicum*, Cambridge, 1978, 165-79, thoroughly discussed by various authors in M.L. Gill – J.G. Lennox (eds.), *Self-Motion from Aristotle to Newton*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

at rest and afterwards walks, not having been set in motion apparently by anything from without.

This, however, is false; for 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. Moreover, we say that the animal itself originates not all of its motions but its locomotion. So it may well be the case—or rather perhaps it must be the case—that many motions are produced in the body by its environment, and some of these set in motion the intellect or the appetite, and this again then set the whole animal in motion. This is what happens in sleep: though there is then no perceptive motion in them, there is some motion that causes them to wake up again.²⁰ But we will leave this point also to be elucidated at a later stage in our discussion. (*Phys.* VIII 2, 253a7-21; *Revised Oxford Translation*)

In *De motu animalium* 6-11 it turns out that also in the case of locomotion that is apparently initiated by the animal of its own accord, it is in fact objects of desire outside of the animal that cause motions that set the intellect or rather desire in motion, and this again the whole animal. Throughout in *De motu* 6-11 Aristotle focuses on the soul as principle of locomotion only, even though the examples include moral argument.²¹ This shows that moral action is not essentially different from other animal locomotion towards an (apparent) good.

The first mover, then, imparts movement without being moved, and desire and the faculty of desire impart movement while being themselves moved. But it is not necessary for the last of the things that are moved to move anything. And from this it is obvious, too, that it is reasonable that movement from place to place is the last of the movements in things subject to becoming. For the animal moves and progresses in virtue of desire or choice, when some alteration has taken place in accordance with sense-perception or *phantasia*. (*De mot. an.* 6, 700b35-701a6; trans. Nussbaum)

The first unmoved mover is the object of desire; desire is a moved mover, i.e., moved by sense perception or thought through the imagination that may arise from both quarters.²² Desire causes heatings and chillings which occur, sometimes imperceptibly small, in the region around the heart. These alterations cause

²⁰ I.e. the distribution of food that was digested during sleep, cf. *Phys.* VIII 6, 259b12-14.

²¹ This point is clearly argued by S. Berryman, 'Aristotle on *Pneuma* and Animal Self-Motion', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 23, 2002, 85-97.

²² See *De an.* III 10, 343b27-30 for the distinction between *φαντασία λογιστική* and *αίσθητική*.

the 'vital breath' (πνεῦμα) that is present there to expand or contract, and the 'vital breath' thereby moves the limbs that move the animal in the desired direction.²³ By this process the internal qualitative change (alteration) is transformed into a change of place (locomotion), first internal, then external.

We may surmise that Aristotle is prepared to assume that motions other than locomotion are readily explained by causes from the environment. After closer inspection locomotion turns out to be no exception to this rule. Hence Aristotle's account of human psychology consistently explains human locomotion in terms of processes they share with larger parts of the physical and animal world, with small (and thus characteristically human) differentiae added.²⁴ As the famous discussion of the practical syllogism in *De motu animalium* 7 shows, even moral deliberation is fully embedded in this process because it causes imagination and desire just like sense perception, as a response to the environment.

Despite the causal network in which moral psychology is positioned, Aristotle is not in the least worried about human responsibility.²⁵ Natural processes are not subject to absolute necessity but obey to general rules only 'for the most part'. Humans and other animals are significant links in causal chains. Aristotle finds the foundation for responsibility in voluntary acts whether they are brought about by perceptual stimuli or by moral deliberation.²⁶ He does not require that at any moment a moral agent could have refrained from doing what she did, or could have done the opposite. On the contrary, a virtuous person is such that her disposition will invariably lead her to the right conduct: that is what possessing a virtue consists in. The opposite applies to the vicious. Responsibility remains because we are responsible for our character formation, even though a developed character may not leave us any choice anymore.²⁷

²³ See *De mot. an.* 7 and 10; *De an.* III 9-10.

²⁴ In the secondary literature this theme of 'naturalization' is explored by e.g. R. Bolton, 'Perception Naturalized in Aristotle's *De anima*', in: R. Salles (ed.), *Metaphysics, Soul, and Ethics in Ancient Thought. Themes from the work of Richard Sorabji*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 209-44, and with respect to ethics by Lennox, *Aristotle on the Biological Roots of Virtue*. This reading of Aristotle also provides the starting-point for (in my view) less successful modern interpretations of Aristotle along the lines of functionalism and epiphenomenalism, as summarized in Caston, *Aristotle's Psychology*.

²⁵ For a helpful account of responsibility that focuses on causation, see S. Sauvé Meyer, *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility. Character and Cause* (Issues in Ancient Philosophy; 03), Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

²⁶ *Eth. Nic.* III 1-7 with C. Rapp, 'Freiwilligkeit, Entscheidung und Verantwortlichkeit (III 1-7)', in: O. Höffe (ed.), *Die Nikomachische Ethik*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995, 109-33; see also M. Frede – A.A. Long, *A Free Will. Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Sather Classical Lectures; 68), Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 2011, ch. 2, 'Aristotle on Choice without a Will'.

²⁷ See *Eth. Nic.* III 5, 1114a19-21, 1114a31-b25.

The analysis of the causal chain that leads to locomotion, and the necessity by which a person will choose the conduct that matches her disposition are two contexts that have been highlighted as problematic for a libertarian interpretation of Aristotle.²⁸ Sakezles has argued that because of a set of determinist texts in the corpus, Aristotle might be considered as a constitutive influence on Stoic determinism.²⁹ In *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 3, 1147a25-31, Aristotle suggests that the chain of motions from object of desire to action is called *necessary* unless a person is incapable of acting or restrained. In *De motu* 9, 702b21-25 the heatings and chillings *necessarily* lead to locomotion. A determinist interpretation of these and other texts receives some corroboration from the fact that in Antiquity, too, some authors regarded Aristotle as a determinist.³⁰ It is against this background that we can understand the concerns of Alexander of Aphrodisias.

3. ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS

Alexander of Aphrodisias, in his *De fato*, fiercely argues for a strong libertarian view as the only proper position for a Peripatetic, and he does so in a text that is full of quotations and reminiscences from the Aristotelian corpus.³¹ The attack on determinism had become necessary because the Stoics had become staunch defenders of the determinist view, embedded in a materialist cosmology governed by an all-pervading rational divine principle. A chain of antecedent causes determines everything, down to and including every individual decision. Still, we are responsible for our actions because they occur 'because of us' as links in the inevitable causal chain. Against this view Alexander upheld that fate is nature, which holds providence over species, not individuals. Actions are 'up to us' (ἐφ' ἡμῖν) in the strong sense that we could at any time have done the opposite. There is no need to elaborate on Alexander's well-known position here.

²⁸ See e.g., R. Sorabji, *Necessity, Cause, And Blame: Perspectives on Aristotle's Theory*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980; S. Everson, 'Aristotle's Compatibilism in the *Nicomachean Ethics*', *Ancient Philosophy* 10, 1990, 81-103. For a new evaluation of Aristotle's position on this score see the preceding paper by Jörn Müller in this volume.

²⁹ See P.K. Sakezles, 'The Aristotelian Origins of Stoic Determinism', *Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 24, 2008, 163-85, with comments by J.A. Martinez at 186-96. Although the interpretations she proposes are not equally convincing, she makes a plausible case that the Stoics *could* have taken (a selection of) Aristotle's texts as expressing the determinism they themselves developed.

³⁰ See R.W. Sharples, *Cicero On Fate and Boethius The Consolation of Philosophy* IV.5-7, V. Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1991, 186, with Cic., *De fato* 39, as prime example.

³¹ The classic treatment of this work is still R.W. Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Fate*, London: Duckworth, 1983.

However, given the fact that Aristotle's psychology of action is so intertwined with physical and physiological causation; given his alleged statements of determinism; and given the possibility that the Stoics employed some of Aristotle's ideas for the construction of their determinism, it will be obvious that Alexander would have to adjust Aristotle's moral psychology in line with his battle against determinism. If not, Aristotle might turn out to be a crypto-Stoic—and nothing could be worse for Alexander.

How does Alexander treat the causal chain from object of desire to locomotion we have examined above? As a dedicated Peripatetic he cannot simply reject Aristotle's *De anima* and *De motu animalium*, but Aristotle's explanation of locomotion cannot be left to stand either. Alexander's solution was to write his own *De anima*, comprising a summary and clear reminiscences of *De motu animalium*.³² In this work he carefully but crucially redefined the soul and its functions to suit his aims.

We should first note that Alexander presents the causal chain in such a way that we are left with the impression that it is not a chain at all, even though the qualifications he inserts are partly Aristotelian in nature.

So assent follows upon the imagination, but not every [imagination]. So too, impulse usually follows upon assent, but not every [assent]; and action follows upon impulse, but not necessarily. It is true that in an animal sensation, imagination, assent, impulse, and action follow each other in sequence according to a fixed order.

But it would seem that *imagination* does not follow upon every *sensation*, if we grant that there are animals which do not have a share in imagination.³³

Nor does *assent* follow upon every *imagination*—for we do not agree that the sun is a foot across even though this is the imagination we have of it;³⁴ similarly, assent does not follow upon anything else non-evident.³⁵

Nor does *impulse* follow upon every *assent*—for he who assents that something is white does not thereby also have an impulse towards it. Nor does [impulse supervene on] assents of mathematical truths. The assent to the fact that the diagonal is incommensurable with the side is not able to impart the motion of impulse. Or do such assents not supervene on imaginations? For instances of

³² A summary of *De mot. an.* is found at Alex., *De an.* 76.14–77.15, with reminiscences and a reference in 97.1–98.1. The latter passage testifies to Alexander's aim of establishing his view of cardiocentrism, also a theme in *De mot. an.*

³³ Cf. Arist., *De an.* III 3, 428a9–11, 21–24.

³⁴ Cf. Arist., *De an.* III 3, 428b2–8.

³⁵ Cf. Arist., *De an.* III 3, 428a12–15.

knowledge are not imaginations.³⁶ But when we assent to the statement that the man coming towards me is Socrates we certainly do not have an impulse to anything at all. For impulse is assent to certain things which are not present but considered worthy of choice, and desire is the same thing.

There are things we have an *impulse* towards that we do not *act* upon: when, that is, our wish no more goes along [with the impulse].³⁷ (Alex., *De an.* 72.13-73.2; trans. after Fotinis, modified)

The first thing to note is that Alexander inserts 'assent' (συγκατάθεσις) and 'impulse' (ὁρμή) in Aristotle's chain without any hesitation. Apparently, these terms, so important in Stoic thought, had been adopted in the philosophical discourse of the time. In this context the meaning of 'assent' seems to come close to 'conviction' (πίστις) and its cognates which are used by Aristotle when he is differentiating imagination from opinion by means of the sun example.³⁸ The notion of 'impulse' here is equivalent, as Alexander notes, to 'desire' (ὀρεξις) which is the more familiar term in similar Aristotelian contexts.

From my footnotes it will be clear that in most cases Alexander can point to Aristotelian texts for the thoughts he conveys, although he no longer pays attention to the precise context of any of them. As a whole, this passage effectively breaks up the causal chain that Aristotle so carefully constructed in the texts we examined above. This presentation of moral psychology is quite in line with a libertarian view in which no link in the chain *necessarily* follows upon his predecessor, in spite of Aristotelian statements to the contrary. It is clear that Alexander wishes to distance his account from the more or less automatic physical or physiological processes in which Aristotle had embedded his moral psychology.

There are further indications that Alexander transformed Aristotle's psychology with this aim in mind. Aristotle famously defines the soul as the first actuality (ἐντελέχεια) of the body that potentially possesses life. From this definition Alexander drew the more general conclusion that this relation between soul and body also applies to the series of nutritive, sensitive, imaginative, and rational powers of the soul. Each higher power is the crowning actuality of the compound

³⁶ Aristotle states that theoretical reason, as opposed to practical reason, is not concerned with flight or pursuit, *De an.* III 9, 432b25-31. Of course it is true that ἐπιστήμαι are not identical with φαντασίαι, but even the activity of theoretical knowledge requires φαντάσματα, cf. Arist., *De an.* III 7, 431b2; III 8, 432a8-9.

³⁷ Here a desire from sense perception gives way to a change of insight in reason that first supported it. This case derives from inserting rational assent (= rational support) before the occurrence of desire. In Aristotle sense perception may give rise to desire independently from reason, with the ensuing problem of *akrasia* when it overpowers, or causes to neglect, a rational desire (wish).

³⁸ Cf. Arist., *De an.* III 3, 428a20-23, 428b4.

of body *plus* lower powers.³⁹ In this way the imaginative power of the soul is called the actuality or perfection of the animal soul (body + nutrition + sensation). Alexander stipulates that an actuality as such is not itself a motion, or caused by a motion.

Anything that is detached and separate of what is moved by it in a material way, through contact, necessarily imparts motion while being moved. Thus when motion is generated in the subject body by pushing or pulling or turning or carrying, the causes of such movement become 'causes of motion' only inasmuch as they too are moved. When capacities or dispositions cause movement of a specific kind to things moved that possess them, there is no necessity, indeed no possibility, that these powers should themselves be moved in the act of imparting motion; since they do not exist apart from their subjects, neither can they be moved independently of them.⁴⁰

Now it is not only active powers and their *habitus* that exist thus in union with their subjects, but all corporeal forms in general; and we have already proved that soul is a form of this kind.⁴¹ (...) So too the soul of living beings contains the cause of all their movements as a living being, since an animal possesses the power [ἐξουσία] of self-movement precisely in virtue of its soul; but soul imparts such movement to its body without itself being moved. (Alex., *De an.* 21.26-22.6; 22.10-12; trans. after Fotinis, modified)

Strictly speaking, it would seem that Aristotle would agree with these statements. An activity is not a motion, and does not impart locomotion by moving itself in the same way. However, for Alexander this entails that each power and disposition of the soul imparts motion in this way, remaining itself unmoved in any sense of the term 'motion'. This leads him to straightforwardly deny that the desiderative faculty of the soul functions as a moved mover, against Aristotle's clear statements to that effect.⁴²

The impulsive and desiderative soul moves the living being without moving itself, as was said before. For in itself every actuality is unmoved. And the soul was shown to be an actuality. Therefore the body is not said to be 'moved' by the soul in the strict sense of the term. (Alex., *De an.* 78.24-27)

³⁹ Alex., *De an.* 8.1-13; 21.22-25. As a consequence, the order of topics in Alexander's *De an.* is adjusted: the discussion of intellect now follows the discussion of desire, which Aristotle dealt with only at the end of *De an.* III, after intellect.

⁴⁰ Cf. Arist., *De an.* I 3, 405b31-406b25.

⁴¹ Cf. Arist., *De an.* II 1, 412a1-b9.

⁴² Arist., *De an.* III 10, 433a13-22.

The same applies to the imagination: *qua* actuality it is unmoved, and no longer a motion as Aristotle (*De an.* III 3, 429a1-2) defined it. As an actuality the imagination acquires a more and more independent position. Alexander (*De an.* 68.21-25) provides an analogy with sense perception and thought to reach the following description of the imagination:

One must assume the same situation in the case of the imagination, too:

1. that there is a certain object of imagination (φανταστόν)—this will be the trace (ἐγκατάλειμμα) that comes to be from sensation in actuality, which is analogous to the object of sensation (αἰσθητόν) and the object of thought (νοητόν);
2. the power of imagination (φανταστικόν), which is analogous, too, to the power of sensation (αἰσθητικόν) and the intellect (νοῦς);
3. the imagination (φαντασία), which is analogous, too, to sensation (αἴσθησις) and thinking (νόησις), being the actuality of the imaginative power with respect to the objects of imagination.

For the traces that come to be from sensation in actuality lie present [ὑπόκειται] for the imaginative power as if they are certain internal objects of sensation, as the objects of sensation for sense perception are outside. Such traces are called sensation in actuality, because they are the products [ἔργα] of the actuality of the power of sensation. (Alex., *De an.* 68.25-69.3; trans. Fotinis, modified)

The last sentence entirely transforms Aristotle's definition of the imagination as "a movement resulting from sensation in actuality". This phrase no longer refers to the imagination itself, but 'sensation in actuality' is interpreted as shorthand for the trace, or 'representation', of an act of sense perception, which comes to be *without any interference by the imagination*. It is only after the traces have arrived in the central sense organ in the heart that the imagination can actualize its specific capacity with those traces as its objects. The concept of motion is thus effectively removed from the picture. The imagination in actuality, *qua* actuality, is exempt from motion, and somehow operates on finished products that have come to reside in the soul.⁴³ Here the inner spectator is born that was to have a great career in later philosophy. In Alexander, however, this definition of the imagination as a full-fledged independent power of the soul, and thus an actuality and perfec-

⁴³ It remains unclear in the context of Alexander's *De anima* how this imagination can be distinguished from practical or even theoretical reason that deliberates by means of φαντάσματα in the soul (at least according to Aristotle). Thus Alexander prepares for later developments in the reception of Aristotle's *De anima* that gradually assimilate the imagination to a lower intellect or opinion (δόξα). Cf. H.J. Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity. Interpretations of the De anima*, London: Duckworth, 1996, ch. 10.

tion, lifts the imagination from any physical or physiological chain of causation that may have contributed to its generation.

4. CONCLUSION

Although the list of modifications undertaken by Alexander is much longer, we are now in a position to give an affirmative answer to the question whether the changes in the interpretation of Aristotle's *De anima* that Alexander is famous for were spawned by ethical concerns (among others). Alexander works hard to create the largest possible distance between the chains of antecedent causes that define Stoic determinism on the one hand, and Aristotle's causal chain of animal locomotion in *De anima* and *De motu animalium* on the other—despite (or because of?) the possible historical relations between Aristotle and Stoic determinism. Alexander denies Aristotle's chain every necessity, and tries to remove any impression that each of the links is itself a motion or a moved mover. As perfections or activities (*ἐντελέχειαι*) they are exempt from motion. Only in this way, Alexander must have thought, could Aristotle's moral psychology be a worthy adversary of 2nd century Stoicism.