

Alexander of Aphrodisias on Bodies and Explanation

Abstract

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In this paper I examine Alexander's account of the explanatory role of enmattered forms in view of his characterization of natural bodies as composites of form and matter. Focusing on Alexander's analysis of elemental motion, I consider the question whether the elements' forms, i.e. heaviness and lightness are active moving causes. An affirmative answer to this question is principally found in Alexander's reply to Galen's denial of Aristotle's principle *omne quod movetur est ab aliquo moveri*, where he states that the elements, like animate bodies, are moved by their forms. However, an examination of other evidence calls this interpretation into question, by implying that the forms of the elements are passive capacities (e.g. *In Met* 390.27-30). In attempt to reconcile this seemingly conflicting evidence, I interpret Alexander's account of elemental motion in light of a fragment found in Simplicius' commentary on the *Physics* VIII.10 (1346.37-1347.36), arguing that Alexander bases his account of elemental motion on his analysis of projectile motion. By this account, the elements as self-movers in a qualified sense; that is, they are primarily moved by an external cause but this cause endows them with the capacity of moving themselves.