


RESEARCH ARTICLE

## (Re)writing commentaries: Alexander on *Metaphysics* V 2 and Simplicius on *Physics* II 3

Mirjam E. Kotwick 

Princeton University

Email: [mkotwick@princeton.edu](mailto:mkotwick@princeton.edu)

### Abstract

This article presents and analyses new evidence for how Simplicius made use of Alexander of Aphrodisias for his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*. Alexander's commentary on the *Physics* is lost to us (except for scholia on *Physics* IV–VIII), but, as argued in section II of this article, we have a slightly abridged version of Alexander's commentary on *Physics* II 3 in the form of his commentary on *Metaphysics* V 2 (Aristotle's *Physics* II 3 and *Metaph.* V 2 are more or less identical). This allows a comparison of Alexander's and Simplicius' commentaries on the same Aristotelian text. In section III, it is shown that Simplicius relies much more extensively on Alexander than his explicit references indicate. In section IV, it is shown that (a) when Simplicius refers to Alexander disapprovingly, he reports reliably what Alexander said, but that (b) when Simplicius refers to Alexander approvingly and as an authority in support of his own view, he provides a tendentious interpretation of Alexander's argument. My results help to evaluate Simplicius' reliability as a witness to the many works of ancient philosophy for which he is our only source.

### I. Introduction

Simplicius (ca. 480–560 CE) is the most important Neoplatonic commentator on Aristotelian works. The history of philosophy relies on his testimony for Presocratic, Platonic and Peripatetic philosophy to a greater extent than on almost any other indirect source.<sup>1</sup> Looking, for instance, at Parmenides and Empedocles, two of the most important thinkers of the early phase of Greek philosophy, our knowledge of their work is in large part based on Simplicius' quotations from it. In the case of Parmenides, our knowledge of his philosophy and thought on being is virtually based on Simplicius' quotations (161 lines in total) from his poem;<sup>2</sup> in the case of Empedocles, we owe the most crucial parts of his *On Nature*<sup>3</sup> to Simplicius' extensive quotations.

In addition, Simplicius is often our only source for important figures of the later history of philosophy, such as his eminent commentator-predecessor Alexander of Aphrodisias (second to third century CE). Simplicius gives us indirect access to several of Alexander's commentaries which he used when writing his own, but which are lost to us today.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, we know well that Simplicius made ample use of Alexander's commentaries.

<sup>1</sup> See Helmig (2020); also Baltussen (2018) and Menn (2022).

<sup>2</sup> See Parmenides B 6–9, 11–13 DK = D7–8, 11, 13–14, 16 LM.

<sup>3</sup> See Empedocles B 17, 20–21, 23, 35, 71, 76 = D60–61, 73–75, 77 LM.

<sup>4</sup> See Rescigno (2004); (2008); Rashed (2011).

Numerous references to him in Simplicius' commentaries attest to that.<sup>5</sup> However, we do not *really* know in which ways and to what extent Simplicius relied on Alexander. Compared to the cases of Parmenides and Empedocles, where the hexametric form clearly marks beginning and end of a quotation, it is much harder to get a sense of how Simplicius excerpted from Alexander by relying solely on his explicit references to 'Alexander'. In this situation, it would help if we had a commentary by both commentators on the same Aristotelian work. Yet all of Alexander's commentaries on Aristotelian works on which we also have a commentary by Simplicius are lost.<sup>6</sup> There is thus no possibility of comparing Simplicius' comments with Alexander's. That we cannot assess Simplicius in this regard is troublesome, to say the least, because he is often our only source for Alexander's comments, and we cannot be sure how trustworthy a source he is for his predecessor's work.

That we do not have Simplicius *and* Alexander on the same Aristotelian work is unlikely to be coincidence. Rather, it is the result of a selection process during the transliteration period (from majuscule to minuscule) in the ninth century CE.<sup>7</sup> Given that Simplicius incorporates many of Alexander's comments, the copying and hence preservation of Simplicius' commentary likely seemed sufficient, even economical, for saving the ideas of both ancient commentators.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the idea that the existence of Simplicius' commentary appeared to make the preservation of Alexander's commentary on the same work unnecessary corroborates the claim (to be evaluated in this article) that Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* is the result of a process of rewriting and expanding of Alexander's commentary.<sup>9</sup> Yet we still do not really know what rewriting means in Simplicius' case.

The claim that Simplicius' commentary (like ancient commentaries more generally) is the result of his rewriting of earlier commentaries is not new.<sup>10</sup> In his 2008 book on Simplicius' and Philoponus' commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics*, Pantelis Golitsis points out that Simplicius constantly dwells on Alexander's commentary and suggests that *if we had Alexander's commentary in integral form*, we would be able to see many more loans in Simplicius.<sup>11</sup> But since we do not have an integral piece of Alexander's commentary (one might continue the argument), we cannot know just how much or, more precisely, what kinds of comments by Alexander Simplicius copied or reworked in his own commentary.

In 2011, Marwan Rashed published what he convincingly claims to be scholia that ultimately derive from Alexander's commentary on books 4–8 of Aristotle's *Physics*.<sup>12</sup> This

<sup>5</sup> Golitsis (2008) 58 counts Alexander's name more than 600 times in Simplicius' *Physics* commentary. Baltussen (2008) 121 speaks of 700 mentions: 'his [Alexander's] name appearing on practically every other page'. Menn (2022) 13 counts 'Alexander' 652 times and provides helpful comparative numbers of other names. See also Rescigno (2004) and (2008), who draws over 230 fragments of Alexander's lost commentary on Aristotle's *De caelo* from Simplicius' extensive commentary on the same work.

<sup>6</sup> Rashed (2011) 21–22. For an overview of Simplicius' commentary work see the supplement in Helmig (2020) and Menn (2022).

<sup>7</sup> During this period, ancient texts were copied from manuscripts written in the older majuscule script into manuscripts written in the new minuscule script. See Wilson (1983) 79–119; Reynolds and Wilson (2013) 58–66.

<sup>8</sup> See Rashed (2011) 21–22. Cf. Diels (1882) v n.1.

<sup>9</sup> On the Neoplatonic commentary tradition on Aristotle's *Physics* see Chiaradonna (2021).

<sup>10</sup> Golitsis (2008) 58–64 describes ancient commentaries in general, and the commentaries by Simplicius and Philoponus in particular, as based on a 'recomposition' of earlier commentaries. This claim seems intuitive, yet it is also vague. Golitsis offers a short synopsis of how Asclepius/Ammonius used Alexander (63–64). Does this allow conclusions about other commentators? See also Menn (2022) 9–32, who describes the Neoplatonic commentaries as 'meta-commentaries on [...] earlier commentaries'.

<sup>11</sup> Golitsis (2008) 58.

<sup>12</sup> Rashed (2011) 12–18. Cf. also the 18 fragments of Alexander's commentary preserved in Arabic and presented in Giannakis (1996).

is potentially a big step forward in our understanding of how Simplicius used Alexander. We can now compare the text of the scholia and Simplicius' corresponding comments to draw at least some conclusions about Simplicius' working method.<sup>13</sup> Yet, as Rashed makes clear, scholia are by nature reworked and impoverished bits and pieces of Alexander's original commentary.<sup>14</sup> And since their purpose is to give a short digest of Alexander's comments on a particular issue in Aristotle's text, they fail to provide a reliable picture of a continuous piece of commentary and the argument developed therein. But to understand better how Simplicius worked, we would need to see how, for at least the length of an entire lemma section or even for the length of a chapter, he adopts and/or changes Alexander's comments on that lemma or chapter. Thus, with the scholia, we are still a far cry from having a section of integral commentary.

As I will show, the situation is not so dire, as we do in fact have something that comes close to a piece of integral text from Alexander's *Physics* commentary, though none of the scholars mentioned so far have acknowledged this or made use of it. I will argue that we have a slightly abridged version of Alexander's commentary on *Physics II 3* in the form of his commentary on *Metaphysics V 2*.<sup>15</sup> Why did Alexander copy his own commentary? Because Aristotle, in the second chapter of his discussion of metaphysically relevant terms, *Metaphysics V*, copied his own exposition of the different meanings of 'cause' (*aition*) from *Physics II 3*.<sup>16</sup> And so Alexander did the same in his commentary on *Metaphysics V 2*, and took over his comments on *Physics II 3* with only a few and, as I will claim, clearly identifiable changes.

If this is true, then we can for the first time compare an integral piece of Alexander's commentary on an Aristotelian work, the *Physics*, with Simplicius' commentary on the same text. In what follows, I will first present the case and justify the claim that Alexander's commentary on *Metaphysics V 2* is in fact a slightly abridged version of his commentary on *Physics II 3* (section II). Then, by means of examples I will provide a comparison between Alexander's and Simplicius' comments. My aim is to determine how Simplicius used Alexander and to identify patterns of his behaviour as a commentator. I will distinguish two kinds of reference: undeclared adoptions from Alexander's commentary (section III) and declared adoptions or explicit references (section IV). Comparing both kinds of adoption with Alexander's original comments sheds new light on Simplicius' working method.

## II. An abridged copy of Alexander's On *Physics II 3*

Alexander prefaces his comments on *Metaphysics V 2* by stating that what Aristotle says here is identical to what he says in *Physics II 3*.<sup>17</sup> He then states the consequence that follows for him as a commentator on both works:

<sup>13</sup> Rashed (2011) speaks to those in the introduction (23–26), and I will come back to them below.

<sup>14</sup> Rashed (2011) 17: 'Nous avons [...] un matériau retravaillé et appauvri, ce qui explique que dans certains cas, le texte originel puisse avoir proprement disparu. Dans ces situations extrêmes, il n'y a guère de sens à dire qu'Alexandre soit l'auteur du texte transmis. Il se tient seulement à l'extrémité historique d'un processus dont nous ne possédons plus que l'autre extrémité' (emphasis in original).

<sup>15</sup> Moraux (2001) 482, also 427, and Natali (2003) observe that Alexander likely reused his own commentary, but they do not draw any consequences for our understanding of Simplicius' working method from it.

<sup>16</sup> *Metaphysics V 2*, 1013a24–1014a25 is roughly identical with *Physics II 3*, 194b23–195b21.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Alex. in *Metaph.* 348.9–11.

Alex. Aphrod. in *Metaph.* 348.22–24 Hayduck

πάντα δὲ τὰ εἰρημμένα περὶ αὐτῶν νῦν αὐταῖς  
λέξεσι ταῦτά ἐστι τοῖς ἐν [23] τῷ Β τῆς  
Φυσικῆς ἀκροάσεως εἰρημμένοις, διὸ καὶ ἐξ  
ἐκείνων τὴν ἐξήγησιν μετενεκτέον.

However, everything that is said about these [i.e. the causes] now is the same and said with the same words as what is said in book II of the *Physics*. Therefore, we must also transfer our interpretation of these words.<sup>18</sup>

The meaning of the first sentence is straightforward: Aristotle's *Metaphysics* V 2 is identical to *Physics* II 3. The meaning of the second is less clear. As my translation shows, I take it to announce that Alexander transfers his own commentary on *Physics* II 3 into his *Metaphysics* commentary *ad loc.*<sup>19</sup> This understanding needs some justification and further clarification.

First the justification. The word διὸ marks the sentence as a consequence of the preceding statement. Aristotle copied his text from the *Physics* to the *Metaphysics*, and therefore Alexander needs to react in a certain way (μετενεκτέον, 'one must transfer').<sup>20</sup> The following καὶ (left untranslated by Dooley) is important. It means 'also' and highlights the action that must be taken as *similar* or at least related to the action that Aristotle took when he copied his own text. The prepositional phrase ἐξ ἐκείνων is the trickiest part of the sentence. Let us first look at the verb form at the end of the sentence: μετενεκτέον literally means 'one must transfer'. The thing transferred is expressed by the accusative τὴν ἐξήγησιν. Alexander typically uses ἐξήγησις to denote his own or someone else's explanation of an Aristotelian (or other philosophical) text or problem.<sup>21</sup> What remains then is the phrase ἐξ ἐκείνων. The demonstrative pronoun ἐκείνων ('these', in the genitive) most naturally takes up 'what is said in book II of the *Physics*' from the previous clause. But why ἐξ? One might want to take it as denoting the place from which (ἐκ-) the exegesis needs to be transferred.<sup>22</sup> This understanding, however, faces two obstacles. First, what would it mean to 'transfer the interpretation from (the things said in) *Physics* II'? This is odd, because the explication of *Physics* II is not exactly to be transferred from *Physics* II itself. To make this reading work, one would need to regard the phrase 'from *Physics* II' as shorthand for 'from our exegesis of *Physics* II'. And it is possible that this is what Alexander *meant* to say. Second, Alexander does not typically construe the verb μεταφέρειν with ἐκ, denoting the place from which something is transferred. He instead uses the prepositions ἀπὸ and ἐπὶ to indicate where something is transferred to and from, respectively.<sup>23</sup> To adhere to this reading,

<sup>18</sup> My translations of Alexander are generally based on Dooley (1993) but are revised and at times very different.

<sup>19</sup> Moraux (2001) 482 observes somewhat hesitantly: 'Alexanders Bemerkung διὸ καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνων τὴν ἐξήγησιν μετενεκτέον bedeutet höchstwahrscheinlich, dass *Metaph.* 348,27–354,25 weitgehend aus dem heute verschollenen Physikkommentar stammen'. Natali (2003) 159 states that Alexander's commentary on *Metaph.* V 2 is a shortened version of his commentary on *Ph.* II 3 ('il commento a *Metafisica* Delta 2 è una versione abbreviata e ridotta'). This is a correct assessment regarding the particular passage in which Natali is interested here, 349.2–27 ('Quanto meno per quanto riguarda i passi sulla causa formale'). Natali is not interested in the chapter as a whole, nor in the question of what we can learn here about Simplicius' method.

<sup>20</sup> Dooley's (1993) 17 translation is vague: 'hence it is to that source that we must look for our interpretation'. This suggests that Alexander consults the *Physics* to understand the present passage. This is not unreasonable, as Alexander could mean that we need the *Physics* as background to understand the account of αἴτιον. However, μεταφέρειν does not mean 'to look to' or 'to consult', but 'to transfer'. Natali (2003) 158 translates Alexander's words as 'perciò si deve riprendere la nostra esegesi da lì', and then adds 'da quei passi, da quelle fonti'. This, again, gives a rather general translation of the Greek which suggests that the place from which Alexander transposes is the *Physics* rather than his commentary on the *Physics*.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, in *Metaph.* 85.10 and 290.12.

<sup>22</sup> This is how Dooley (1993) and also Natali (2003) 158 take it. See n.20 above.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, Alex. in *Top.* 280.6, 15; 349.14; 588.12; in *Metaph.* 397.35, 411.2.

one would need to excuse his use of ἐκ here as an exception justified by the specific kind of transfer (namely, of words) ‘out of’ another commentary. As an alternative to the understanding of ἐκ- as denoting the origin of the transfer, one could take it as reinforcing and repeating the ἐξ- in ἐξ-ήγησιν. Then ἐξ ἐκείνων would simply denote the *subject of the explication*, that which is explicated.<sup>24</sup> The phrase ἐξ ἐκείνων τὴν ἐξήγησιν would then simply mean ‘the explication of *Physics II*’. That this is what needs to be transferred makes perfect sense. Since *Metaphysics V 2* is identical to *Physics II 3*, Alexander transfers his own exegesis of *Physics II 3* to the present point in his commentary on *Metaphysics V 2*.<sup>25</sup>

Now for the clarification. What does ‘transfer’ entail? Does it mean that Alexander, so to speak, copied and pasted his own comments? Or did he revise them in the process? Based on the remark just analysed, we may conclude the following: the fact that Alexander makes this remark suggests that he simply copied his comments without rephrasing them. He stresses that Aristotle uses *the same words* (αὐταῖς λέξεσι) in both chapters and then draws from that the consequence (διό) that he *too* (καί) will transfer his remarks, most likely also using the same words. In addition, and as we will see shortly, Simplicius’ quotations of Alexander’s *Physics* commentary coincide word for word in several passages with Alexander’s comments in his *Metaphysics* commentary. This indicates that Alexander overall did not rephrase or revise his comments in transferring them.

Still, there are a few points where Alexander must have made some adjustments when transferring his comments into the *Metaphysics* commentary. First, he made a few minor changes at the beginning of the section. In the early section of the comments on *Metaphysics V 2*, we find an embedding into both the *Physics* context and the *Metaphysics* context.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, there is one longer passage that Alexander must have left out when he transferred his comments from the *Physics* to the commentary on the *Metaphysics*. In *in Phys.* 310.31, Simplicius refers to Alexander as the source for the thought paraphrased in 310.31–311.37. This comes after a paraphrase of Alexander’s comments (310.23–31) that overlaps with the corresponding lines of *in Metaph.* 349.6–16 (see section IV.i.1 below). In this case, we might readily assume with Carlo Natali that Alexander, when copying, only kept the first part of his commentary on the formal cause and left out his extensive discussion of how nature produces irrationally, because that discussion makes perfect sense in a commentary on the *Physics*, but is less well-suited to comments on the ‘handbook of terms’ presented in *Metaphysics V*.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Another alternative would be to take the expression as an abbreviated or elliptical version of the formula ἐξήγησις (‘interpretation’) λέξεως (‘of the statement’) ἐκ X (‘from/in the work X’). This formula is used in the titles of the *Quaestiones (Problems and Solutions)*, a work attributed to Alexander, but whose compilation and titles are likely later (see Sharples (1992) 3). For instance, Λέξεως ἐξήγησις ἐκ τοῦ δευτέρου Περὶ ψυχῆς μετ’ ὀλίγον τῆς ἀρχῆς, Ἄλλης λέξεως ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐξήγησις (45.23–24 Bruns).

<sup>25</sup> On Alexander’s method of ‘recycling’ his own work see Accattino and Donini (1996) vii–xi.

<sup>26</sup> At the beginning of the section (348.29), Alexander says ‘as he has demonstrated in *Physics* book A’. The reference to the *Physics* context, rather than *Metaphysics*, suggests that this was originally conceived within a commentary on the *Physics*. However, the phrasing ‘*Physics* book A’ instead of just ‘book A’ suggests that we are in a commentary on the *Metaphysics* or at least a work other than the *Physics*. Two lines later (348.31), he says εἶπε γὰρ πρὸ ὀλίγου (‘as he said just now’), referring to the preceding *Metaphysics* passage in 1013a7–8. This phrasing makes sense only in a *Metaphysics* commentary. Alexander may have inserted it when copying his comments or, more likely (based on Simplicius’ comments), revised a reference to *Metaphysics*.

<sup>27</sup> There is one more case (316.17–20) where Simplicius refers to a statement by Alexander that is not in our commentary on *Metaph.* V 2. Here Simplicius says that, according to Alexander, Aristotle shows the homonymy of the term ‘health’. This could be Simplicius’ interpretation of what Alexander says in 350.7–18. But it may also be that there was a more explicit statement in the version of Alexander’s commentary on the *Physics*. Still, in his commentary on *Metaph.* IV 2 (241.22–242.3 Hayduck, cf. however in *Top.* 1.15, 110.1–25), Alexander denies that

To conclude this section, Alexander's commentary on *Metaphysics* V 2 is a reliable but slightly shortened copy of his own commentary on *Physics* II 3. Alexander made changes to make the text fit by adjusting the references at the beginning of the commentary section and by cutting out one longer section that he deemed irrelevant for the *Metaphysics* context. He did not, however, change or rephrase his former comments in any extensive way. This conclusion underlies my following comparison of Simplicius' commentary on *Physics* II 3 and Alexander's commentary on *Metaphysics* V 2 (= Alexander's commentary on *Physics* II 3) and the results that I draw from this comparison.

### III. The unacknowledged Alexander in Simplicius

Before Rashed's edition of the scholia we could not know how much of Alexander was in Simplicius. We had numerous references by Simplicius that marked passages as containing Alexander's comments,<sup>28</sup> but we could not know how many *unacknowledged* passages there were. Rashed provides evidence that there is much more of Alexander in Simplicius than the acknowledged passages indicate.<sup>29</sup> Yet, since the scholia are often only brief extracts and do not represent entire commentary sections, we could not really know how much of Alexander's comments Simplicius incorporated. The situation is now significantly improved, given that we have both commentators' work on *Physics* II 3. The following examples can help us better understand how Simplicius worked with Alexander.

#### i. Unacknowledged Alexander as a starting point for Simplicius' exegesis

There is indeed *much* unacknowledged Alexander in Simplicius. Based on my comparison of the two commentary sections, Simplicius used Alexander's commentary as the basis for his own. In other words, it seems that Simplicius composed his commentary not by excerpting here and there from Alexander's, but instead by first *copying* and *slightly rephrasing* Alexander's comments, before adding his own exegesis in response to Alexander.<sup>30</sup>

#### 1. The beginning of the commentary on *Physics* II 3

Alexander and Simplicius start out with comments on the following Aristotelian text (*Ph.* II 3, 194b23–26): ἓνα μὲν οὖν τρόπον αἴτιον λέγεται τὸ ἐξ οὗ γίγνεται τι ἐνυπάρχοντος, οἷον ὁ χαλκὸς τοῦ ἀνδριάντος καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος τῆς φιάλης καὶ τὰ τούτων γένη ('In one way, then, that out of which a thing comes to be and which is inherent, is called a cause, for instance, the bronze of the statue, the silver of the bowl and the genera of these').<sup>31</sup>

Here are their comments:

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'health' is a homonymous term. This speaks to the assumption that we are dealing with one of Simplicius' tendentious interpretations of Alexander (on which see section IV.ii below).

<sup>28</sup> The studies by Baltussen (2008) and Golitsis (2008) are solely based on these explicit references.

<sup>29</sup> Rashed (2011) 24–25.

<sup>30</sup> Rashed (2011) 25 notes that Simplicius generally borrows the literal interpretations from Alexander. See also Menn (2022) 11–14. My analysis will support this assumption, and will furthermore allow us to see more precisely what this means.

<sup>31</sup> Tr. by Hardie and Gaye, modified.

Alex. Aphrod. in *Metaph.* 348.27–349.2

[27] Λέγει μὲν τὴν ὕλην, τὸ δὲ ἐνυπάρχοντος προσέθηκε χωρίζων δι' [28] αὐτοῦ τὴν τε στέρησιν τῆς ὕλης καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον· καὶ γὰρ ἐκ τῆς στερῆς-[29]σεως τὸ γιγνόμενον γίνεταί, ὡς ἔδειξεν ἐν τῷ Α τῆς Φυσικῆς ἀκροάσεως, [30] καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἐναντίου, ἃ οὐκ ἐνυπάρχει τῷ γιγνομένῳ.

καὶ τοῦ ποιητικοῦ [31] δὲ αἰτίου ἢ ὕλη ὡς ἐνυπάρχουσα χωρίζεται· εἶπε γὰρ πρὸ ὀλίγου περὶ τῆς [32] τοιαύτης ἀρχῆς “ὅθεν γίνεται πρῶτον μὴ ἐνυπάρχοντος.”

οὐ μόνον δὲ [33] τὴν προσεχῆ ὕλην ἐκάστου αἰτίαν ὑλικὴν λέγει, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ εἶδη αὐτῆς [349.1] καὶ γένη, οἷον ὅδε ὁ χαλκὸς τοῦδε τοῦ ἀνδριάντος, καὶ χαλκὸς ἀνδριάντος, [2] καὶ σῶμα εἰκόνας· τῷ γὰρ ἀνδριάντι ταῦτα ὑλικὰ αἴτια.

He means matter and adds ‘which is inherent’ in order to distinguish from it privation of matter and the contrary. For a thing comes to be from privation as well, as he has demonstrated in *Physics* I, and also from its contrary, which is not inherent in the thing that comes to be.

Matter, being inherent, is also distinguished from the productive cause. For he said shortly before about this beginning ‘that non-inherent thing out of which something first comes to be’.

But by material cause he does not only mean the proximate matter of each thing, but also the species and genera of matter, as for instance this bronze of this statue, and bronze of a statue and body of an image. For these are the material causes for the statue.

Simpl. in *Phys.* 309.35–310.17

[35] Τέτταρας τρόπους αἰτίων ἀποδόσεως τοὺς πάντας λέγων πρῶτον ἀπο-[310.1]δίδωσι τὸ ἐξ οὗ γίνεται τι ἐνυπάρχοντος, τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶ τὸ ὑλικὸν [2] καὶ ὑποκείμενον, ὅπερ κατὰ μὲν τὸ ἐξ αὐτοῦ γίνεσθαι τι τῆ στερῆσει ἐπι-[3]κοινωνεῖν δοκεῖ, κατὰ δὲ τὸ ἐνυπάρχοντος τούτου διαφέρει· ἐξ ἐκείνης μὲν [4] γὰρ ὡς μετ’ ἐκείνην καὶ ὡς ἐξισταμένης ἐκείνης γίνεται τὸ γινόμενον, ἐκ [5] δὲ τῆς ὕλης ὡς ἐνυπαρχούσης καὶ μεταβαλλούσης ἐξ ἄλλης διαθέσεως εἰς [6] ἄλλην· ὥστε ὁμῶνυμον εἶναι τὸ ἐξ οὗ τοῦ δὲ εἶδους ἢ ὕλη διαφέρει καὶ [7] αὐτοῦ ἐνυπάρχοντος, ὅτι οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ εἶδους γίνεται τὸ γινόμενον· οὔτε γὰρ [8] ἐξισταμένου οὔτε μεταβάλλοντος, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ εἶδος.  
... [lines 9–13]

οὐ μόνον δὲ ἢ [14] προσεχῆς ὕλη αἰτία τοῦ γινομένου ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ταύτης γένη. οὐ [15] γὰρ μόνον ὅδε ὁ χαλκὸς τοῦ ἀνδριάντος αἴτιος καὶ ὅδε ὁ ἄργυρος τῆς φιά-[16]λης, ἀλλὰ καὶ χαλκὸς ἀπλῶς καὶ ἄργυρος, καὶ εἰ ὕδωρ ταῦτά ἐστι, καὶ [17] τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ ἀνωτέρω τὸ σῶμα.

He says that there are four ways in all of defining the term ‘cause’ and he starts with ‘that out of which a thing comes to be and which is inherent’, that is the material and the substrate, which seems to share with privation the fact that something comes to be from it, but differs from it in that it is something inherent. For whatever comes to be does so from privation in the sense of following the privation, where the privation is lost, but from matter as something inherent which changes from one disposition to another. Therefore, the phrase ‘out of which’ is ambiguous.

Matter differs from form, which is also inherent, because that which comes to be does not do so from the form (for the form is neither lost nor altered) but according to the form.

...

But the material cause is not only the proximate matter of the thing, but also the genera of matter. For not only this bronze of the statue is the cause and this silver of the bowl, but bronze and silver simply. And if the cause is water, also water and, at a higher level, body.<sup>32</sup>

Alexander starts off by condensing Aristotle’s phrase τὸ ἐξ οὗ γίνεται τι ἐνυπάρχοντος (‘that out of which a thing comes to be and which is inherent’) into the term *hulē*. Simplicius

<sup>32</sup> Translations of Simplicius are based on Fleet (1997), but have been modified.

adopts this, using a slightly different formulation (τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶ τὸ ὑλικὸν καὶ ὑποκείμενον). Next, Alexander explains the term ἐνυπάρχοντος as distinguishing the material cause from other things ‘out of which’ something comes to be, like privation (στέρησις) and its contrary (τὸ ἐναντίον), but which are not inherent (ἐνυπάρχον). Simplicius makes exactly the same comparison with privation (leaving aside the contrary) but presents it somewhat differently.

Alexander further compares the material cause with the efficient cause, the former being inherent in the thing caused, the latter not. He refers to what Aristotle said elsewhere (namely in *Metaph.* V 1, 1013a7–8, as quoted by Alexander in 348.32). Simplicius takes over from Alexander the comparison of the material cause with another cause, but chooses the formal instead of the efficient cause.<sup>33</sup> Then Simplicius, deviating from Alexander, adds that Aristotle discusses the material cause first, because earlier thinkers mostly referred to this cause. Finally, Alexander comments on καὶ τὰ τούτων γένη (‘and the genera of these’) by spelling out what it means in the case of matter. Simplicius follows closely, but expands on the examples offered.

Comparison of the two entries shows that Simplicius adopts the structure of Alexander’s commentary and his basic explanation of Aristotle’s text. Generally speaking, Simplicius adopts what Alexander says. But he does not just copy it. He reformulates and varies examples. He takes Alexander as his starting point and basis but reworks it by rethinking what Alexander says and *reacting* to it. One might say his comments are in close conversation with Alexander. All this happens without ever acknowledging Alexander.

## 2. Another beginning of a commentary section

The Aristotelian text commented on here is *Ph.* II 3, 195a3–4 τὰ μὲν οὖν αἴτια σχεδὸν τοσαυταχῶς λέγεται ... (‘As there are then roughly speaking this many causes, ...’).

Alex. *Aphrod. in Metaph.* 350.20–21

Τὸ σχεδὸν προσέθηκεν, ἐπεὶ ἔστι τινὰ γε οὐ κυρίως ἀλλὰ κατὰ συμ-[21]βεβηκόσ, ὧν καὶ αὐτῶν μνημονεύσει.

He added the phrase ‘roughly speaking’ because there are certain causes not in the primary sense but only accidentally. These he will also mention.

Simpl. *in Phys.* 316.22–26

Τὸ σχεδὸν πρόσκειται ἢ ὅτι τὰ κυρίως αἴτια τοσαυταχῶς πολλῶν [23] ὄντων καὶ κατὰ συμβεβηκός αἰτίων, ὡς ἐρεῖ, ἢ δι’ εὐλάβειαν εἴρηται, τοῦ [24] Πλάτωνος τὸ μὲν παραδειγματικὸν αἴτιον τοῖς κυρίως αἰτίοις συναριθμήσαν-[25]τος τῶ τε ποιητικῶ καὶ τῶ τελικῶ, τὸ δ’ ὀργανικὸν τοῖς συναίτιοις τῶ [26] τε ὑλικῶ καὶ τῶ εἰδικῶ.

The phrase ‘roughly speaking’ is added either because, although there are this many causes in the primary sense, there are many accidental causes, as he will say. Or, it is spoken with caution, because Plato numbered the paradigmatic cause along with the causes in the strict sense, the efficient and the final, and the instrumental along with the auxiliary causes, the material and the formal.

Alexander starts off by specifying the meaning of the word *σχεδὸν* (‘roughly speaking’). He states that Aristotle uses the word to signal that there are also (in addition to those just mentioned) causes that are so only accidentally. Simplicius adopts a slightly reformulated version of Alexander’s statement (without indicating his source), but introduces it as one of two options (ἢ, ‘either’). He then adds a second (ἢ, ‘or’) understanding of *σχεδὸν*. That brings Plato into the picture and the Neoplatonist reading of Platonic causes (316.24–29). Simplicius’ attempt to show Plato’s presence in Aristotle’s words is part of the harmonizing impetus that

<sup>33</sup> The formal cause is also inherent in the thing it causes, yet the thing does not come out of it (ἐκ, which answers to Aristotle’s phrase τὸ ἐξ οὗ γίγνεται τι).



runs through his work.<sup>34</sup> Alexander's linguistic explanation is the starting point for Simplicius: he copies it (without acknowledgement) and then adds an alternative view which then turns into a detailed exploration of causation and the interrelation of causes from a Neoplatonic perspective (see 316.23–318.25).

## ii. Direct quotations without indication of Alexander as the source

So far we have looked at examples from the beginning of a commentary section, yet Simplicius may silently adopt Alexander's comments at any point of his commentary.

### I. Copying and pasting Alexander on the basics I

Arist. *Ph.* II 3, 195b6–10

ὁμοίως δὲ λεχθήσεται καὶ [7] ἐφ' ὧν αἷτια τὰ αἷτια τοῖς εἰρημένους, οἷον τουδὶ τοῦ ἀνδριάν- [8]τος ἢ ἀνδριάντος ἢ ὄλως εἰκόνας, καὶ χαλκοῦ τοῦδε ἢ [9] χαλκοῦ ἢ ὄλως ὕλης· καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν συμβεβηκότων ὡσάυ-[10]τως.

Similar distinctions [i.e. between being remote or proximate; actual or potential] can be made in the things of which the causes are causes, for instance, of this statue or of a statue or of an image generally, of this bronze or of bronze or of material generally. So too with the accidental attributes.

Alex. *Aphrod. in Metaph.* 353.23–29

ὁμοίως δὲ φησὶν ἔξειν καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν συμβεβηκότων τοῖς αἰτιατοῖς· τὰ γὰρ [24] τοῖς αἰτιατοῖς συμβεβηκότα καὶ αὐτὰ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς αἰτιατά τε καὶ γινόμενα· καὶ γὰρ τούτων τὰ μὲν ἐγγυτέρω τὰ δὲ πορρωτέρω ἔσται, ἐγγυτέρω [26] μὲν τὰ τοῖς αἰτιατοῖς τοῖς πρώτοις συμβεβηκότα, οἷον τὰ τῷδε τῷ ἀνδριάντι [27] ἢ τῷδε τῷ χαλκῷ, πορρωτέρω δὲ τὰ εἶδη καὶ τὰ τούτων γένη·

Simpl. *in Phys.* 324.31–325.6

ὁμοίως δὲ φησὶν ἔχει καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν [32] συμβεβηκότων τοῖς αἰτιατοῖς· τὰ γὰρ τοῖς αἰτιατοῖς συμβεβηκότα καὶ [33] αὐτὰ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς αἰτιατά ἐστὶ καὶ ὁμοίως καὶ ἐπὶ τούτων τὰ μὲν [1] ἐγγυτέρω ἐστὶν αἰτιατά, τὰ δὲ πορρωτέρω· ἐγγυτέρω μὲν αἰτιατά κατὰ [2] συμβεβηκὸς ἐστὶ τὰ τοῖς ἐγγυτέρω καθ' αὐτὰ αἰτιατοῖς συμβεβηκότα, του-[3]τέστι τοῖς καθ' ἕκαστα, πορρωτέρω δὲ τὰ τούτων εἶδη ἢ γένη.

τόδε μὲν [28] γὰρ τὸ ἐρυθρὸν ἐγγυτέρω κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς αἰτιατόν, εἰ εἶη τοῦτο ἀνδριάντι, [29] πορρωτέρω δὲ ἀπλῶς τὸ ἐρυθρὸν, καὶ ἔτι μᾶλλον τὸ χρῶμα.

τόδε μὲν [4] γὰρ τὸ ἐρυθρὸν, εἴπερ ὁ χαλκὸς ὁ γινόμενος τοιοῦτον ἔχει χρῶμα, ἐγγυ-[5]τέρω αἰτιατόν κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς ἐστὶ, πορρωτέρω δὲ τὸ ἐρυθρὸν καὶ ὄλως [6] τὸ χρῶμα.

He says it will be similar to the accidental attributes of the effects. For the accidents of the effects become themselves accidental effects. And of these, some will be more proximate, some more remote. The accidents of primary effects are more proximate, such as those of this particular statue or this particular bronze, while the species and genera of these are more remote. For this red, if it is the colour of this statue, is a more proximate accidental effect, while red without qualification is a more remote accidental effect, and colour even more remote.

He says it is similar to the accidental attributes of the effects. For the accidents of the effects are themselves accidental effects and, similarly, of these some are more proximate effects and some more remote. The more proximate accidents of the per se effects, that is particulars, are more proximate accidental effects, while the species and genera of these are more remote. For this red, if the bronze produced has this colour, is a more proximate accidental effect, while red and in general colour are more remote.

<sup>34</sup> On Simplicius' harmonizing strategies see Barney (2009) and section IV.ii below.

In his discussion of Aristotle's remark καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν συμβεβηκότων ὠσαύτως ('so too with the accidental attributes', 195b9–10), Alexander spells out that it concerns the accidental attributes of *effects*, and then provides examples. These illustrate how accidental attributes of effects can, similarly to the accidental attributes of causes, be either more proximate or more remote: the accidents of this particular statue, for instance this particular red, are more proximate than the accidents of the species 'statue', for instance, colour.

Simplicius reproduces this passage very closely, with only minor differences in phrasing. Still, he nowhere indicates that he is copying from Alexander. The reason for this silence is evident. Alexander spells out the basics of Aristotle's theory of causation. He adheres closely to the Aristotelian text and operates with basic Aristotelian terminology. This is an uncontroversial explication of what Aristotle means, and Simplicius wholeheartedly agrees with it. He therefore copies it, and he sees no need to acknowledge Alexander.<sup>35</sup>

To derive a rule from this case would be to suggest that any exposition in Simplicius' commentary that reads like a close exegesis of Aristotle's text, perhaps enriched with a few examples, may well be a verbatim or near-verbatim copy of Alexander's commentary.

## 2. Copying and pasting Alexander on the basics II

On Aristotle's words about the final cause διαφερέτω δὲ μηδὲν εἶπεῖν αὐτὸ ἀγαθὸν ἢ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν ('it should make no difference whether we call it good or apparently good', 195a25–26), Alexander comments with a citation from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. So does Simplicius:

Alex. Aphrod. in *Metaph.* 352.3–8

δια-[4]φερέτω δὲ μηδὲν αὐτὸ εἶπεῖν ἀγαθὸν ἢ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν. [5] ἐκάστω γὰρ τὸ τέλος ἢ ὄντως ἀγαθὸν ἢ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν· καὶ γὰρ εἰ [6] μὴ ἀληθῶς ἀγαθόν, ἀλλ' ὡς περὶ ἀγαθὸν αὐτὸ ἡ σπουδὴ· "πᾶσα γὰρ [7] τέχνη καὶ πᾶσα μέθοδος, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ πρᾶξις τε καὶ προαίρεσις ἀγαθοῦ [8] τινος ἐφίεσθαι δοκεῖ" ὡς εἶπεν ἀρχόμενος τῶν Νικομαχείων.

'It should make no difference whether we call it good or apparent good'. For the end of each thing is either its real good or its apparent good. And if it is not truly good, our effort is as if it were about something good. 'For every craft and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice seem to aim at something good', as he says at the beginning of the Nicomachean Ethics.

Simpl. in *Phys.* 321.29–322.3

εἰπὼν δὲ τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα ἀγαθὸν εἶναι, ἐπειδὴ ὡς ἀρχόμενος [30] εἶπε τῶν Νικομαχείων ἠθικῶν "πᾶσα τέχνη καὶ πᾶσα μέθοδος, ὁμοίως δὲ [31] πρᾶξις τε καὶ προαίρεσις, ἀγαθοῦ τινος ἐφίεσθαι δοκεῖ", οὐ πάντως δὲ καὶ [32] ἀληθῶς ἀγαθόν ἐστι τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα τὰ πραττόμενα πράττομεν, φαινόμενον δὲ [322.1] πάντως ἐστὶν ἀγαθόν (φαινόμενον δὲ λέγω τὸ δοκοῦν εἶτε ἔστιν εἴτε μὴ), [2] διὰ τοῦτο προσέθηκε διαφερέτω δὲ μηδὲν ἀγαθὸν αὐτὸ εἶπεῖν ἢ [3] φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν.

He said that the end and the goal are something good, after he said at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 'every craft and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice seem to aim at something good'. For the goal for which we do what we do is not in every respect and truly good, but in every respect apparent good (by 'apparent' I mean what seems to be good, whether it is or not). Therefore, he added, 'It should make no difference whether we call it good or apparent good'.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Rashed (2011) 25.

Alexander quotes the opening lines of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to illustrate the idea that the goal of our actions is always something good, whether real or apparent. Simplicius follows Alexander and quotes the same phrases, and for the same reason. He only changes the order in which the line of thought is presented.

We may then conclude from section III that Simplicius relies on Alexander much more often and to a much wider extent than his references to Alexander by name would suggest. As the examples in section III.i demonstrate, Simplicius begins his commentary by adopting from Alexander what he finds useful: he regularly adopts Alexander's first comments and either takes over the structure of the entire section or takes it as the starting point for his own interpretation. As the examples in section III.ii show, it is not just at the beginning of a commentary section that Simplicius adopts what Alexander says, it can happen anywhere. In any case, the direct adoptions mostly concern the *basics* of Aristotelian philosophy, spelling out the meaning of the text. However, it would be wrong to claim that Simplicius just copies what Alexander says in this regard. As section III shows, Simplicius is careful in his reliance on Alexander, he rephrases and reshapes the presentation of the argument. Simplicius' commentary is written *in reaction* to Alexander. He relies on Alexander to explain the Aristotelian text *without acknowledging* Alexander as his source. I stress this point not to accuse Simplicius of plagiarism anachronistically, but to demonstrate that Alexander's commentary, though often hidden, is ubiquitous in Simplicius'.

#### IV. Alexander as a named authority in Simplicius

Let us then turn to those places where Simplicius makes a point of his reliance on Alexander. Here, it is not about discovering how much hidden Alexander there is in Simplicius. Instead, comparing Simplicius' acknowledged borrowings with Alexander's text will help us to understand how trustworthy Simplicius is in his references. This means on a basic level whether Simplicius' acknowledged quotations are accurate, and on a higher level whether his representation of Alexander's arguments and views is faithful and fair.<sup>36</sup>

##### i. Explicit quotations

###### 1. Alexander as a sparring partner

Let us look at the first instance where Simplicius refers to Alexander by name in his commentary on *Physics* II 3. In 194b26, Aristotle introduces the formal cause as τὸ εἶδος καὶ τὸ παράδειγμα ('the form or the model'). This is what we find in the commentaries *ad loc.*:

Alex. Aphrod. *in Metaph.* 349.6–16

παράδειγμα δὲ τὸ εἶδος εἶπεν οὐχ ὡς οἱ τὰς ἰδέας λέγοντες· οὔτε γὰρ δοκεῖ τὴν ἀρχὴν [8] αὐτῶ τῶν φύσει τι γιγνομένων γίνεσθαι πρὸς τι ὃν ἕξω παράδειγμα (οὐδὲ [9] γὰρ τὰ ποιοῦντα φύσει νοήσαντα πρῶτον ὃ ποιεῖ οὕτω ποιεῖ, ὡς γίνεται [10])

Simpl. *in Phys.* 310.23–31

καλεῖ δὲ παράδειγμα τὸ εἶδος οὐχ ὡς οἱ τὰς ἰδέας λέγοντες αὐτὴν καθ' [24] αὐτὴν εἰδικὴν οὐσίαν ὑποτιθέμενος, πρὸς ἣν τὰ ἐνθάδε ἀφομοιοῦται. [25] οὐδὲ γὰρ τὰ φύσει ποιοῦντα, φησὶν Ἀλέξανδρος, πρῶτον νοήσαντα ἃ ποιεῖ [26]

(Continued)

<sup>36</sup> Rashed (1997) suggests that Simplicius (see *in Phys.* 964.9–23 and 965.21–30) may suppress information from Alexander's commentary to make it fit his own argument; however, Menn (in an article in progress on 'Atticus, Alexander, Porphyry: εἰσκρισις and the neo-Platonic interpretation of the Third Hypothesis of the Parmenides, with some implications for instantaneous creation') shows that Simplicius' presentation of Alexander here is faithful and justified.

(Continued)

Alex. Aphrod. in <i>Metaph.</i> 349.6–16	Simpl. in <i>Phys.</i> 310.23–31
<p>τὰ κατὰ τὰς τέχνας, ἵνα<sup>37</sup> τις εἴπῃ τὸ νόημα παράδειγμα τῶν γινομένων [11] κατ' αὐτό), ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τὸ γιγνόμενον ἐν τῇ ὕλῃ εἶδος παράδειγμα λέγει τῷ [12] τὴν φύσιν τούτου ἐφίεσθαι. πᾶν γὰρ τὸ ἕνεκά τινος ποιοῦν ἃ ποιεῖ ἐφέ-[13]σει τῇ ἐκείνου ποιεῖ. διὸ καὶ παύεται τοῦ ποιεῖν ἔτι ὡς πεποηκὸς τοῦτο [14] οὐ χάριν ἐποίει. καὶ τὰ φύσει δὲ γινόμενα πάντα ἕνεκά του γίνονται καὶ [15] ὠρισμένον τινὸς εἶδους καὶ τελειότητος, ἐν ᾗ γενόμενον αὐτῶν ἕκαστον τοῦ [16] γίνεσθαι παύεται. τοῦτο ἄρα ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς τὸ παράδειγμα.</p>	<p>οὕτως ποιεῖ, ἵνα τις εἴπῃ τὸ νόημα παράδειγμα τῶν γινομένων κατ' αὐτό,<sup>38</sup> [27] ὡς ἐπὶ τῶν τεχνῶν ἔχει, ἀλλὰ τὸ γινόμενον περὶ τῇ ὕλῃ εἶδος τοῦτο καλεῖ [28] παράδειγμα διὰ τὸ τὴν φύσιν τούτου ἐφιειμένην ποιεῖν ἃ ποιεῖ πάντα. δῆ-[29]λον δὲ ἐκ τοῦ γενομένου τούτου παύεσθαι τῆς ποιήσεως, ὡς ὠρισμένου [30] τινὸς ὄντος τοῦ εἶδους καὶ οἷον σκοποῦ προκειμένου, εἰς ὃν τέταται ἡ φύ-[31]σις, καὶ παράδειγμα διὰ τοῦτο λεγομένου.</p>

10 ἵνα scripsi ex Simpl. 310.26 ('fort. ἵνα' Hayduck) : εἰ μὴ codd.

26 κατ' αὐτό scripsi ex Alex. Aphrod. 349.11 : κατ' αὐτόν DEF : αὐτὴν a

He calls the form 'model' not like those who posit the Forms. For he does not think that things that come about by nature do so by reference to an outside model.

He calls the form 'model' not like those who posit the Forms, positing a form-like self-subsisting substance to which the things here bear a likeness.

For also things that produce by nature do not think first what they produce and then produce, as production occurs in the crafts, so that one can say the thought is a model for the things that come to be according to it. But he calls the form that comes to be in matter 'model', because nature aims for it. For everything that produces for the sake of something does so by aiming at that. And so it stops producing once it completed that for whose sake it was acting. And everything that comes to be by nature comes to be for the sake of something, that is some determining form and completion, and when each of the things came to this form and completion it stops coming about. This then is their model.

For also things that produce by nature, says Alexander, do not think first what they produce and then produce, so that one could say that the thought is a model of the things that come to be according to it, as is the case in the crafts. But he calls the form that comes to be in matter 'model', because nature produces everything she produces by aiming for it.

And it is clear that once it came to be, production stops, because the form is something determining and like a target set up at which nature aims and therefore it is called a 'model'.

Simplicius adopts Alexander's comments on παράδειγμα as a term for the formal cause. He copies Alexander's explication that Aristotle does not use the word in the Platonic sense, and then adds what that sense is. Simplicius then adopts Alexander's explanation of παράδειγμα as the form towards which nature aims, which is the completion of a natural process rather than a model as it would be in the crafts. Simplicius ascribes this section to Alexander explicitly (φησὶν Ἀλέξανδρος).

<sup>37</sup> The transmitted εἰ μὴ makes no sense. Alexander wants to say that the thought is indeed a model in the crafts. Simplicius' copy of the passage preserves the original ἵνα. Hayduck prints εἰ μὴ in the text but writes in the apparatus: 'fort. ἵνα'. Natali (2003) does not comment on the text, but his translation reveals that he retained εἰ μὴ. I suggest that the text be corrected (see my apparatus).

<sup>38</sup> I correct the transmitted but faulty reading (κατ' αὐτόν) following Alexander's text (κατ' αὐτό), which Simplicius is quoting here.

After the passage quoted here, Simplicius quotes Alexander again (φησὶν Ἀλέξανδρος, 310.31) and seems to copy a longer stretch on how nature works irrationally (310.31–311.37). For this text, however, there is no equivalent in Alexander’s commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Presumably, Alexander did not transfer this section of his *Physics* commentary (see my discussion above, section II). In the remainder of the section (312.1–314.24), Simplicius gives an extensive discussion of, and Neoplatonic answer to, Alexander’s understanding of the formal cause, paying attention to the irrationality that the latter ascribes to nature.<sup>39</sup>

For my purposes, this example indicates that Simplicius is generally reliable in his quotations (introduced by φησὶν). Furthermore, the passage offers an answer to the question of why Simplicius refers to Alexander by name in some cases. We might say that Alexander makes a distinctive point in his interpretation of Aristotle and introduces the notion that nature, though working with a ‘model’, works irrationally. Simplicius found this position worth presenting at length and takes it as a springboard to argue extensively for his own, *differing* position. In a way, then, Alexander serves as a sparring partner for Simplicius.<sup>40</sup>

## 2. Different viewpoints on Aristotle’s phrasing

In the following example, Alexander criticizes a phrase in Aristotle’s text, and offers a subtle reformulation to improve the text or clarify its meaning. The phrase in question is *Physics* II 3, 195a23–24 τὰ δ’ ὡς τὸ τέλος καὶ τάγαθὸν τῶν ἄλλων (‘But the rest [are causes] in the sense of the end or the good of the other things’). Here is what Alexander and Simplicius have to say on it:

Alex. Aphrod. in *Metaph.* 351.38–352.2

Τὰ δὲ ὡς τὸ τέλος καὶ τάγαθὸν τῶν ἄλλων. τὸ ἀκόλουθὸν [352.1] ἐστὶν τὰ δὲ ὡς τὸ τέλος τῶν ἄλλων καὶ τάγαθόν· τῶν ἄλλων δὲ δηλονότι [2] ὧν ἐστὶ τέλος.

Simpl. in *Phys.* 321.16–23

Τέταρτον καὶ τελευταῖον τοῖς ἄλλοις τὸ τελικὸν αἴτιον ἐπάγει λέγων [17] τὸ δὲ ὡς τέλος καὶ ἀγαθὸν τῶν ἄλλων. καὶ φησὶν ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος τὸ [18] ἀκόλουθον εἶναι κατὰ τὴν λέξιν τὸ δὲ ὡς τέλος τῶν ἄλλων καὶ τάγα-[19]θὸν, τῶν ἄλλων, δηλονότι ὧν ἐστὶ τέλος. μήποτε δὲ καλῶς κατὰ κοινού [20] καὶ τῷ τέλει καὶ τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἐπῆκται τὸ τῶν ἄλλων. τὸ γὰρ τελικὸν [21] αἴτιον οἶον ἡ ὑγεία ὡς ἐστὶ τέλος τῶν ἄλλων τῶν ἔνεκα αὐτοῦ λαμβανο-[22]μένων οἶον περιπάτου καὶ φαρμακοποισίας καὶ τῶν τοιούτων, οὕτως καὶ [23] ἀγαθὸν ἐκείνων ἐστὶ.

The words ‘but the rest is in the sense of the end or the good of the other things’. What is meant here is this: ‘but the rest are causes in the sense of the end of the other things or the good’. ‘The other things’ clearly means those things which have an end.

The fourth and last cause that he adds to the others is the final cause, saying ‘but the rest is in the sense of the end or the good of the other things’.

And Alexander says that the meaning of the phrase is, in his own words, ‘but the rest are causes in the sense of the end of the other things’  
(Continued)

<sup>39</sup> On Alexander’s interpretation of the formal cause as motive, and Simplicius’ reaction to it, see Natali (2003) and Genequand (1984) 112–20.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Menn (2022) 11–14.

(Continued)

Alex. Aphrod. in *Metaph.* 351.38–352.2Simpl. in *Phys.* 321.16–23

or the good'. 'The other things' clearly means those things which have an end.

But perhaps the expression 'the other things' belongs correctly to both in common, the end and the good. For just as the final cause, for instance, health, is the end of the other things that are taken up for its sake, for instance, walking, the intake of medicine, and such actions, so is also the good of these things.

Alexander finds fault with the position of the genitive τῶν ἄλλων ('of the other things') and suggests a reformulation in which the genitive follows directly upon the term τὸ τέλος. This reformulation does indeed improve the text. The reading 'the good of the other things' is somewhat odd, simply because 'the good' is not a term that naturally takes a genitive.<sup>41</sup> Alexander's subsequent explanation that τὸ τέλος τῶν ἄλλων is to be taken as 'the end of the other things', where 'the other things' are the things of which the end is the end, makes perfect sense.

Simplicius regards Alexander's reformulation and explanation worthy of inclusion in his commentary, and credits them to Alexander; however, he also defends Aristotle's text.<sup>42</sup> Simplicius does not claim that Alexander's reading is wrong, but prefers the reading of the transmitted text, where 'the other things' is taken as referring to both the end and the good. Since he disagrees with Alexander on what is the best reading of the Aristotelian phrase, he needs to put a name to the differing view he reports.

The two examples discussed in section IV.i show that when quoting Alexander explicitly (φησὶν 'he says'), Simplicius is a reliable source. In both cases, he disagrees with Alexander, and uses that disagreement to sharpen his own position. Should we then conclude that Simplicius refers to Alexander mostly when he disagrees with him?<sup>43</sup> As I will show in the remainder of this article, this conclusion is too hasty.

## ii. Simplicius' 'harmonized' Alexander

In his comments on the efficient cause (ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς μεταβολῆς ἢ πρώτη ἢ τῆς ἡρεμῆσεως, 'the primary source of change or rest', 194b29–30), Simplicius argues for a Neoplatonic understanding of causation. Two aspects are important here. First, Simplicius works with Proclus' scheme (*Elements of Theology*, prop. 75),<sup>44</sup> according to which proper causes cannot be immanent in the things they cause.<sup>45</sup> Second, the

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle does not say anywhere else that the good is 'the good of something'. But he often says 'the end of', both in the immediate context (τὸ γὰρ οὐ ἔνεκα βέλτιστον καὶ τέλος τῶν ἄλλων ἐθέλει εἶναι, 195a24–25) and in other passages (for instance, *Eth. Nic.* 1094b6–7 τὸ ταύτης τέλος περιέχει ἂν τὰ τῶν ἄλλων, ὥστε τοῦτ' ἂν εἴη τάνθρώπινον ἀγαθόν).

<sup>42</sup> On Simplicius' use of μήποτε, 'perhaps' (used in 321.19), to introduce original material see Menn (2022) 26–32.

<sup>43</sup> Previous scholars suggest as much: Diels (1882) v n.1; Golitsis (2008) 58; Barney (2009) 110 ('markedly agonistic relationship'); Menn (2022) 11, 13–14 with n.36. Cf. also Fazzo (2004) 8. Baltussen (2008) 121 takes the opposite stance, that most of Simplicius' references to Alexander show agreement (cf. also n.57 below).

<sup>44</sup> *Elements of Theology*, prop. 75 Πᾶν τὸ κυρίως αἴτιον λεγόμενον ἐξήρηται τοῦ ἀποτελέσματος ('Every cause in the strict sense transcends its effect'). Cf. also Proclus, *In Ti.* 1.3.1.

<sup>45</sup> See also Hankinson (2001) 444; Steel (2003) 177–83; Baltussen (2015) 124.

Neoplatonic theory of causation adds two causes to Aristotle's four-cause scheme, the paradigmatic and the instrumental causes.<sup>46</sup>

Simplicius claims Alexander's authority as support for his reading of Aristotle in which he argues for the non-immanent position of the true efficient cause and for the existence of the instrumental cause. Now that we can compare Alexander's actual comments with Simplicius' report, we see that Simplicius gives a tendentious interpretation of Alexander rather than a simple report. Additionally, Simplicius repeatedly invokes Alexander's authority in several subsequent sections, each time providing as evidence a reading of Alexander that bends what he actually says towards how Simplicius wants to understand him.

Alex. Aphrod. in *Metaph.* 349.28–37

Ἔτι αἴτιον λέγεται ὅθεν ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς μεταβολῆς ἢ πρώτη. περὶ [29] τοῦ ποιητικοῦ αἰτίου<sup>47</sup> λέγει. γίνεται δέ τινα οὐ μόνον κινούμενα ἀλλὰ καὶ [30] ἡρεμοῦντα· καὶ γὰρ ἴσταται τινα ὑπ' ἄλλων ὡσπερ καὶ κινεῖται· τὸ δὲ [31] ἴσταν αὐτὰ εἶη ἂν τῆς στάσεως αὐτῶν ποιητικὸν αἴτιον, διὸ καὶ ἡρεμῆ-[32]σεως πρόσκειται. μεταβολῆς δὲ εἶπεν, οὐ κινήσεως, ἵνα καὶ τὴν γένεσιν [33] καὶ τὴν φθορὰν περιλάβῃ. τὸ δὲ πρῶτον πρόσκειται, ὅτι τοῦτο μάλιστα [34] ποιητικὸν αἴτιον· τὸ γὰρ ἐνυπάρχον τῷ γινομένῳ καὶ οὕτως ποιοῦν τὰ [35] ἐφεξῆς παρὰ τοῦ ποιήσαντος αὐτὸ τὴν αἰτίαν ἔχει· καὶ τὰ ὄργανα δὲ οὐκ [36] ἐξ αὐτῶν τὸ κινεῖν ἔχει· τὸ δὲ πρῶτον καὶ τούτοις αἴτιον καὶ ἐκτὸς τοῦ [37] γινομένου.

Simpl. in *Phys.* 315.9–22

καλεῖ δὲ τὸ ποιοῦν ὅθεν ἡ πρώτη τῆς μετα-[10]βολῆς ἀρχὴ ἢ τῆς ἡρεμῆσεως βουλόμενος τὸ κυρίως ποιητικὸν αἴτιον [11] κεχωρισμένον εἶναι καὶ ἐξηρημένον τοῦ γινομένου. τὸ γὰρ ἐνυπάρχον αἴτιον [12] ὡσπερ τὸ εἶδος καὶ ἡ φύσις τῆς κατὰ τὸ εἶδος ἀρχῆς ἔχεται. καὶ δεῖ [13] μεινῆσθαι, ὅτι ἐνταῦθα ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ὁμολογεῖ μὴ εἶναι κυρίως ποιητικὸν [14] αἴτιον τὴν φύσιν, ἀλλ' εἰδικὸν μᾶλλον διὰ τὸ μὴ εἶναι πρῶτον ἐν τοῖς [15] ποιητικοῖς.

καὶ τὰ ὄργανα δὲ δοκεῖ κινήσεως αἴτια γίνεσθαι, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ [16] ταῦτα κυρίως ποιητικά ἐστίν, ὅτι μὴ πρῶτως ἀλλὰ κινούμενα κινεῖ. καὶ [17] τούτου δὲ χρὴ μεινῆσθαι, ὅτι συγχωρεῖ ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος καὶ τὸ ὄργανον [18] αἰτίον πως εἶναι· εἰ καὶ μὴ κυρίως ποιητικόν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο ὀργανικόν. [19] ἐπειδὴ δὲ τῶν γινομένων τὰ μὲν κινούμενα γίνεται τὰ δὲ ἰστάμενα καὶ τὸ [20] κινοῦν τὰ κινούμενα καὶ τὸ ἰστῶν τὰ ἰστάμενα, ποιητικὸν ἂν εἶη αἴτιον τὸ [21] μὲν κινήσεως, τὸ δὲ στάσεως. διὸ εἰπὼν ὅθεν ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς μετα-[22]βολῆς προσέθηκεν ἢ τῆς ἡρεμῆσεως ἢ πρώτη.

Furthermore, cause means 'the primary source of change'.

Aristotle is speaking about the productive cause. Some things not only come to be moved but also come to be at rest. For some things are halted by others

He calls the producer 'the primary source of change or rest' because he wants the productive cause in the strict sense to be separate and transcendent from the thing coming to be. For the inherent cause, such as the form and the nature, comes close to the formal principle.<sup>48</sup> And

(Continued)

<sup>46</sup> Simplicius lays out the scheme in *in Phys.* 316.23–26 (quoted above in section III.i.2). For Simplicius, the material and formal causes are not causes in the proper sense; they are συναίτια, auxiliary causes. Cf. *in Phys.* 3.13–19. See Sorabji (2005) 138–40; Hankinson (1994).

<sup>47</sup> The expression τὸ ποιητικὸν αἴτιον is rarely used by Aristotle (a TLG search brings up two passages: *Gen. corr.* 324b13 and *De. an.* 430a12; in addition, cf. the pairing with ἀρχή, which occurs once in *Gen. an.* 729b13–14 ποιητικὸν καὶ ὅθεν ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κινήσεως), but it is a standard term for the efficient cause among the commentators. I translate it here as 'productive cause'.

<sup>48</sup> Fleet's translation 'the nature consisting in the formal principle, is contained <in the product>' is unhelpful.

(Continued)

Alex. Aphrod. in <i>Metaph.</i> 349.28–37	Simpl. in <i>Phys.</i> 315.9–22
<p>just as they are moved by them. What brings them to rest would be the productive cause of their being at rest. That is why he has added ‘of rest’.</p> <p>But he said ‘of change’, not ‘of movement’, so that it also includes becoming and perishing.</p> <p>He adds ‘primary’ because this is the productive cause to the greatest degree. For what is inherent in the thing coming to be and in this way produces what is subsequent has its causality from the thing that has produced it.</p> <p>And instruments have the capacity to move not out of their own. But the primary cause is their cause as well and it is outside of the thing coming to be.</p>	<p>we should remember that <b>Alexander</b> at this point <b>agrees</b> that nature is not a productive cause in the strict sense, but that it is rather a formal cause since it is not the first among the producers.</p> <p>And instruments seem to be the cause of movement, but they are also not productive in the strict sense, because they move not in a primary sense but because they are moved. And we should remember this, that <b>Alexander concedes</b> that the instrument is also a cause in some sense. Even if it is not truly productive, it is just that: instrumental.</p> <p>Since of the things coming to be some are moved and others are stopped and what moves the things being moved and what stops the things being stopped would be the productive causes, one of movement and one of rest. That is why he said, ‘the primary source of change’ and added ‘or of rest’.</p>

Before looking at how Simplicius makes use of Alexander’s authority for his own reading of the text, we should take a bird’s-eye view of the corresponding passages. As we saw in section III, Simplicius relies on Alexander, unacknowledged, for the basic work of his commentary. For instance, Alexander’s exemplification of Aristotle’s addition ‘of rest’ (τῆς ἡρεμῆσεως) in 349.28–32 can be found slightly reformulated in Simplicius 315.19–22. Simplicius places the comment not at the beginning of the commentary section as Alexander did, but after a point that is more important to him.

This more important point for Simplicius is to defend, with Alexander’s help, his own view on what counts as an efficient or ‘productive’ cause in the strict sense (τὸ κυρίως ποιητικὸν αἴτιον). Here the first of the two Neoplatonic tenets that I mentioned above comes into play, namely that the true (κυρίως) productive cause is not immanent and transcends the thing it produces.<sup>49</sup> But let us first look at what Alexander says. He explains that Aristotle added πρώτη (‘primary’) to ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς μεταβολῆς to mark it as the productive cause that is μάλιστα (‘to the greatest degree’). Other productive causes are immanent and have another productive cause as their cause (249.33–35). It is important to state that Alexander does not deny those inherent causes the status of productive cause (τὸ ... ἐνυπάρχον ... ποιῶν). They are just not productive in the *primary* sense and to the greatest degree.<sup>50</sup> This is what Simplicius makes of the thought: the productive cause must be separate and transcendent (κεχωρισμένον εἶναι καὶ ἐξηρημένον) from its product and if it is inherent, it is rather a formal cause. He brings in Alexander’s authority (13), by

<sup>49</sup> See Helmig (2020).

<sup>50</sup> Interestingly in the *Mantissa*, Alexander even says that nature (an *inherent* efficient cause) is ‘productive in the strict sense’ (177.23–24 Bruns): τὰ κυρίως αἴτια ποιητικὰ φύσις τε καὶ τέχνη καὶ προαίρεσις. This stands in clear opposition to what Simplicius will claim that Alexander thinks. Also, in *De fato* IV, 167.17–168.18 Alexander distinguishes the efficient causes into those that have a goal and those that do not; those that have a goal he further divides into those that act according to nature and those that act according to reason; the origin of movement of those that act according to nature is in them, that of those that act according to reason is outside of them. Very clearly, however, those causes with internal origins are still efficient causes.



saying that he ‘agrees’ (ὁμολογεῖ) that nature, *qua* being inherent, is not a productive cause strictly speaking but rather a formal cause.<sup>51</sup> This is not, however, what Alexander says here.<sup>52</sup> He does not describe the inherent productive cause as formal in nature. All he says is that apart from inherent productive causes there are primary productive causes that are external.

Next, the instruments. In the final sentence, Alexander mentions instruments as an *example* to illustrate the primary productive cause that is external (349.35–37). Instruments do not move themselves but have a primary cause of movement outside themselves. Simplicius takes Alexander’s brief illustrative remark about instruments as welcome support for the existence of an *instrumental cause*. For Simplicius, instruments are instrumental causes. To support his statements, he refers once more to Alexander (17), stating that Alexander concedes (συγχωρεῖ) that instruments are causes in some way and that they are instrumental (ὀργανικόν). With this Simplicius puts a Neoplatonic concept into Alexander’s mouth that is not supported by the latter’s words. Alexander mentions instruments as an example, but he does not make them instrumental causes.<sup>53</sup> Simplicius *interprets* Alexander rather than reporting what he said. And he uses Alexander’s authority to back up his own interpretation of Aristotle’s efficient cause.

This has important implications for my purposes. Simplicius might not always be as trustworthy as we tend to think. At least sometimes, he gives a tendentious version of what Alexander says in his commentary. This receives confirmation in the remainder of Simplicius’ commentary on *Physics* II 3. Four times in subsequent sections (see A–D in the Appendix, supplementary material), Simplicius comes back to the two interpretations that he ascribes to Alexander, namely, that the efficient cause in the strict sense must be outside and that there exists an instrumental cause. To strengthen his own interpretation, he refers repeatedly to Alexander’s approval of these two points. Alexander, on the other hand, does *not even mention* them in the corresponding parts of his commentary. Still, Simplicius creates the impression that Alexander discussed them extensively, and thus presents a distorted picture of Alexander’s comments and interests.

We may then say that Simplicius’ presentation of Alexander’s comments on the productive and instrumental causes ends up being misleading with regard to the content, the frequency and the importance of the topic for Alexander. The verbs that Simplicius uses to refer to Alexander’s authority (ὁμολογεῖ, συγχωρεῖ) are indicative in two respects. First, they signal that Simplicius does not so much quote from Alexander’s commentary as give his own interpretation of it. It becomes clear then that Simplicius is more trustworthy as a source when he uses the verbs φησί (or even γράφει).<sup>54</sup> However, as passage A in the Appendix shows, Simplicius may use the verb φησί to express that Alexander said something, but this does not mean that Alexander really said it *ad loc.* or in the sense that Simplicius claims. Second, the verbs that Simplicius uses here (especially the expression

<sup>51</sup> This relates to the earlier discussion of the formal cause as a paradigm, where Alexander does speak of the form as if it were productive in some sense. On this reading of the formal cause see Natali (2003). See also in *Metaph.* 360.9–14, where Alexander calls the ‘enmattered form’ the ‘origin of the movement in all natural things’ (though the text is problematic, see Dooley (1993) 137 n.80), which he identified with ‘nature’ understood as ‘the origin of movement’ (ἡ τῆς κινήσεως ἀρχή) (on which see also my previous footnote).

<sup>52</sup> Pace Steel (2003) 180, who, fully trusting Simplicius’ testimony, writes: ‘As Simplicius says, even Alexander had to admit that nature, which is an intrinsic principle in things, is not really an efficient cause ..., since this cause must be separate from the thing produced’. Steel rightly adds, however, that ‘Alexander, of course, did not anticipate the Neoplatonic view’ and argues overall that the concepts of causality of the Neoplatonic and Peripatetic philosophers are ‘quite different’ (p. 180 n.16).

<sup>53</sup> Alexander does not work with the concept of instrumental causes, neither here nor elsewhere, as a TLG search demonstrates (a search for ὀργανικός in the context of αἰτ- yields no results). Again, pace Steel (2003) 181 n.20, who states, admittedly with hesitation, and solely relying on Simplicius: ‘It seems that Alexander ... was the first to have conceived of instrumental causality. See Simplicius *In Phys.* 315.17–18’.

<sup>54</sup> See Rashed (2011) 26.

ὁμολογεῖ) may offer an explanation for how we should think about his distortions of what Alexander says. They are born out of a harmonizing impetus which shapes Simplicius' approach to Plato and Aristotle,<sup>55</sup> and may at times also extend to Alexander's exegesis of Aristotle. In other words, Simplicius himself clearly wants to get the causes right and hence tends to read his Platonic view into Aristotle as well as into Alexander's explanation of Aristotle.<sup>56</sup> From his perspective, he only brings out what Alexander really wanted to say but did not say clearly enough.

## V. Conclusion

My comparative analysis of Alexander's commentary on *Metaphysics* V 2, which, I have argued, is a slightly abbreviated version of his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* II 3, and Simplicius' commentary on the same text yields the following results. There is much more of Alexander in Simplicius than we may infer from the latter's explicit references. In fact, Alexander's commentary was the starting point for Simplicius' writing. He generally adopts and adapts Alexander's explications of the Aristotelian text and then may add his own considerations, often in direct response to Alexander. Furthermore, we can now better understand Simplicius' working method and can better estimate how trustworthy a source he is for Alexander's lost works. When Simplicius names Alexander, he often disagrees with him while being accurate in his reporting of what Alexander says. When he refers to Alexander approvingly, however, we should be cautious.<sup>57</sup> There is clear evidence that Simplicius amplifies and even distorts Alexander as needed for his own exegesis and argumentation.

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**Supplementary material.** To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426924000089>

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<sup>55</sup> For a helpful analysis of Simplicius' harmonizing strategies see Barney (2009).

<sup>56</sup> If we regard it as Simplicius' aim to make Aristotle 'an orthodox Neoplatonist' (to borrow a phrase from Hankinson (2001) 445), we might say that Simplicius' use of Alexander's authority as commentator *par excellence* is powerful evidence in support of that view.

<sup>57</sup> Baltussen (2008) 121 claims, based on the explicit references, that 'the majority of his references to Alexander concern points where Simplicius shows agreement with him'. Based on my analysis, we should be cautious about Simplicius' reliability as a source for Alexander in those passages that seemingly agree.

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