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ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS, *DE INTELLECTU*
110.4: ‘I HEARD THIS FROM ARISTOTLE’.
A MODEST PROPOSAL

The treatise *De intellectu* attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias can be divided into four sections. The first (A, 106.19–110.3)¹ is an interpretation of the Aristotelian theory of intellect, and especially of the active intellect referred to in Aristotle, *De anima* 3.5, which differs from the interpretation in Alexander’s own *De anima*, and whose relation to Alexander’s *De anima*, attribution to Alexander, and date are all disputed. The second (B, 110.4–112.5) is an account of the intellect which is broadly similar to A though differing on certain points. The third (C1, 112.5–113.12) is an account of someone’s response to the problem of how intellect can enter the human being ‘from outside’² if it is incorporeal and hence cannot move at all; in the fourth (C2, 113.12–24) the writer who reported C1 criticizes that solution and gives his own alternative one.

Whether A, B, and C are parts of a single text or even by a single author is uncertain. C1 begins with the statement ‘wanting to show that the intellect is immortal and to escape the problems . . .’. As the text stands, this is naturally taken as referring to a further argument put forward by the person whose views have already been reported in B. However, in B (as indeed in A and in Alexander’s certainly authentic *De anima*) it is *our* intellect that, by developing from potentiality to actuality, becomes capable of abstracting intelligible forms from matter, and the role of ‘intellect from outside’ is to perfect our intellect by giving it this capability (110.22–4, 111.27–36). In C1, on the other hand, ‘intellect from outside’ extending throughout the universe, though always active (112.9–11, 27–8), functions in a particular way where there is a body with a capacity which forms a suitable instrument for it, i.e. our potential intellect (112.11–18), and ‘our intellect’ is described as a combination of potential intellect with the activity of the divine intellect (112.18–20). It follows that, for C1, when we are said to think, it is actually the divine intellect thinking through us (112.23–5, 30)—an idea that does not appear in B any more than in A or in Alexander’s *De anima*. And consequently it seems probable that something has dropped out of the text between B and C1, taking with it the name of the proponent of C1.³ It has indeed been suggested that B and C1 record the views of the same person, who followed an orthodox exposition of school-doctrine in B by a distinctive solution to a particular problem in C1.⁴ The doctrine of C1 is indeed explicitly

¹ All references to the text of the *De intellectu* (which forms part of the *De anima libri mantissa, Supplement to the book On the Soul*) are to the page and line numbers of the edition by I. Bruns in *Supplementum Aristotelicum* 2.2 (Berlin, 1892).

² *νοῦς θύραθεν*: Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* 2.3 736b28.

³ P. Moraux, *Alexandre d’Aphrodise: Exégète de la noétique d’Aristote* (Liège and Paris, 1942), 148; F. M. Schroeder and R. B. Todd, *Two Aristotelian Greek Commentators on the Intellect: The De Intellectu attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius’ Paraphrase of Aristotle De Anima 3.4–8* (Toronto, 1990), 23, 30–1.

⁴ Originally suggested by F. Trabucco, ‘Il problema del “De philosophia” di Aristocle di Messene e la sua dottrina’, *Acme* 11 (1958), 97–150, at 120–3, followed by P. Moraux, ‘Aristoteles, der Lehrer Alexanders von Aphrodisias’, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 49 (1967), 169–82 at 174–5, by R. W. Sharples, ‘Alexander of Aphrodisias: scholasticism and innovation’, *Aufstieg*

presented as an original proposal;⁵ but the difference between B and C1 concerning the relation of 'intellect from outside' to our functioning intellect is difficult to reconcile with the view that they both derive from the same person.⁶

Just because the solution advanced in C1 is so distinctive,⁷ one might naturally expect the author of C2, in reporting C1 before himself attacking it, to identify its proponent, to whom he does after all refer ('wanting to show . . .') in the first-person singular. And it is in this connection that the claim that there is a lacuna at 112.5 is particularly significant. For if the name of the proponent of C1 was not in fact given there, and if C1 and B were in fact reports of the views of the same person, one would naturally look for the required identification of that person at the start of B.⁸

Section B opens with the following notorious words:

(1) Ἦκουσα δὲ περὶ νοῦ τοῦ θύραθεν παρὰ Ἀριστοτέλους, ἃ διεσωσάμην.	110.4
(2) τὰ γὰρ κινήσαντα Ἀριστοτέλη εἰσαγαγεῖν τὸν θύραθεν νοῦν ταῦτα ἐλέγετο	5
εἶναι· ἣ τε ἀπὸ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀναλογία καὶ ἣ ἐπὶ τῶν γινομένων ἀπάντων.	
ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐπὶ πάντων τῶν γινομένων ἐστὶ τι τὸ πάσχον, ἐστὶ τι καὶ τὸ	
ποιοῦν καὶ τρίτον ἐκ τούτων τὸ γινόμενον . . .	8

(1) I also heard about the intellect from without, from Aristotle, (things) which I preserved. (2) For the things that prompted Aristotle to introduce the intellect from without were said to be these: the analogy from perceptible things and that applying to all things that come to be. For in all things that come to be there is something that is acted upon, something that acts, and thirdly what is produced from these . . .

Zeller emended 'Aristotle' here to 'Aristocles', on the grounds that no one could have supposed that what follows was Aristotle's own view.⁹ However, later Peripatetics,

und Niedergang der römischen Welt, vol. 2.36.1 (Berlin, 1987), 1176–1243 at 1212, and by P. Accattino and P. L. Donini, *Alessandro di Afrodisia: L'anima* (Rome and Bari, 1996), xxvii and n. 78.

⁵ 112.8, 'following his own idea' (κατ' ἰδίαν ἐπινοίαν). 113.2–4, 'he said that, if one is to suppose that intellect is divine and imperishable according to Aristotle at all, one must think [that it is so] in this way, and not otherwise', shows that the proposer of the doctrine was presenting his interpretation in a speculative way, and 112.19–20 refers to Aristotle for one particular terminological point in a way that may suggest the rest of the doctrine presented is less strictly Aristotelian.

⁶ The unusual use of the first-person singular both in B (at 110.4–5) and in C2 (at 113.12), noted by M. Rashed, 'A "new" text of Alexander on the soul's motion', in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle and After. Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, Suppl. Vol. 68 (London, 1997), 181–95 at 192, n. 28, is an argument for the reporter of B and the reporter of C1 (and author of the criticism in C2) being the same person, not for the proponents of the doctrines reported in B and in C1 being the same.

⁷ Cf. Schroeder and Todd (n. 3), 73, and the discussions cited there. There are similarities between C1 and the discussion in Alexander, *Quaestio* 2.3 of the influence of the heavens (cf. 113.6–12 here); there is also a possible reference back from the latter (at 48.19–22) to the former (cf. P. Moraux, 'Alexander von Aphrodisias *Quaest.* 2.3', *Hermes* 95 [1967], 159–69, at 160, n. 2, 163–4, n. 2). But the *Quaestio* speaks only of the effect of the motion of the heavens in making human beings rational, not of a supra-personal intellect which is active in our thinking.

⁸ We are grateful to an anonymous referee of the first version of this paper for emphasizing this point. One might indeed argue, against the interpretation of the beginning of B that we will be advocating, that, regardless of any question concerning C1, the source of B itself needs to be indicated. But just because B is broadly similar to A, this requirement seems much less pressing than does the identification of the proponent of C1. There is indeed a question why it was thought worthwhile to add B to A at all; but that is another issue.

⁹ E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* 3.1⁴ (Leipzig, 1909), 815, n. 3.

and especially Alexander, are very ready to present their own interpretations as Aristotle's views,¹⁰ and there is no doctrinal reason to suppose any reference to Aristocles here. Moraux in 1942 supposed that the doctrine was being attributed to Aristotle and that the reference to 'hearing' was to be taken not in the literal sense of 'hearing from Aristotle's own mouth' but in that of 'through a tradition which refers to Aristotle'.¹¹ In 1967, however, he identified 'Aristotle' in (1) not with Aristotle of Stagira but with the second-century A.D. Peripatetic Aristoteles of Mytilene, and argued that this Aristoteles had been Alexander's teacher.¹² This, however, means that the name 'Aristotle' has to refer to two different people in the space of two lines.¹³

It has been argued that 'hear', ἀκούειν, can in ancient Greek usage regularly be used in the context of acquaintance with the views of people long since dead, and that this usage reflects an ancient practice of reading aloud, or of being read to by a slave.¹⁴ How widespread such a practice actually was has been questioned;¹⁵ so too has whether ἀκούειν can actually mean 'read'.¹⁶ But these may not be the central issues for our passage anyway. For, given that philosophical theories and positions must have been discussed orally, as well as in writing, in antiquity at least as much as now, the question is rather whether one could say that one had 'heard' a view of a thinker long since dead, whether or not it is a matter of referring to any written text.¹⁷

However, we are concerned not just with ἀκούειν but with ἀκούειν παρά. Moraux in 1967 pointed out that ἀκούειν παρά with the genitive seems to be used only of literal hearing from a living person.¹⁸ But παρά with the genitive, and specifically with the genitive Ἀριστοτέλους, is used elsewhere in the *mantissa*—in titles, admittedly—to indicate the derivation of a doctrine from Aristotle.¹⁹ Schroeder and Todd therefore suggested that we should read in 110.4 rather Ἦκουσα δὲ <τὰ> περὶ νοῦ τοῦ

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. Alexander, *De fato* 164.13, 212.5, 17 (though at 171.17 the reference is rather to the opinion of the *Peripatetics*); *De providentia* 31.20 Ruland. See also R. W. Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias: Quaestiones 1.1–2.15* (London, 1992), 86, n. 266.

¹¹ 'par une tradition qui se réclamait d'Aristote': Moraux (n. 3), 148.

¹² Moraux (n. 4), esp. 176–82.

¹³ As is pointed out by P. Thillet, *Alexandre d'Aphrodise: Traité du Destin* (Paris, 1984), xvii.

¹⁴ Cf. D. Schenkeveld, 'Prose usages of ἀκούειν "to read"', *CQ* 42 (1992), 129–41. A clear example is the emperor Julian's statement in *Oratio* 8(5).3 162C that he remembered hearing Xenarchus 'saying certain things' (τοιαῦτα γὰρ ἐγὼ μέμνημαι τοῦ Ξενάρχου λέγοντος ἀκηκῶς); Julian lived in the fourth century A.D., Xenarchus in the first century B.C.

¹⁵ By A. K. Gavrilov, 'Techniques of reading in classical antiquity', *CQ* 47 (1997), 56–73, and M. F. Burnyeat, 'Postscript on silent reading', *CQ* 47 (1997), 74–6; we are grateful to Pamela Huby for drawing our attention to these discussions and to that in the following note. Schenkeveld (n. 14), 130 already recognizes that reading aloud was not the *most common* practice.

¹⁶ By S. Usener, *Isokrates, Platon und ihr Publikum* (Tübingen, 1994: *ScriptOralia*, 63), 164, n. 39. What concerns us is however rather whether ἀκούειν can refer to the acquisition of information by reading or hearing about an author no longer alive.

¹⁷ Schenkeveld's examples of ἀκούειν λέγοντος applying to Aristotle do involve reports of the content of Aristotelian *texts*, extant now or lost: Schenkeveld (n. 14), 133. Cf. Schroeder and Todd (n. 3), 24, n. 79.

¹⁸ Moraux (n. 4), 175; cf. Schroeder and Todd (n. 3), 24. Thillet (n. 13), xvi–xvii, citing Plutarch, *De audiendis poetis* 37a3–4, notes that ἀκούειν παρά with the *dative* is used to refer to a doctrine one has heard of in a certain context, with no implication that one has heard it directly from the original source; indeed the context explicitly refers both to hearing and to reading (προακηκῶτες . . . καὶ προανεγκῶτες, 36e13–f1), and when Plutarch refers to what is heard παρά τοῖς φιλοσόφοις what follows is, as Thillet notes, verbatim quotation of Epicurus.

¹⁹ *Mantissa* 150.19, τῶν παρά Ἀριστοτέλους περὶ τοῦ πρώτου οἰκείου; 169.33, τῶν παρά Ἀριστοτέλους περὶ τοῦ ἐφ' ἡμῖν; 172.16, as 169.33 (but with totally different doctrine!).

θύραθεν παρὰ Ἀριστοτέλους, ἃ διεσωσάμην, 'I also heard the doctrine from Aristotle about the intellect from without, which I preserved.'²⁰ Accattino and Donini reject this, partly because of the emendation it involves.²¹

It may, however, be possible to achieve essentially the same result from the transmitted text, by construing παρὰ Ἀριστοτέλους with νοῦ τοῦ θύραθεν rather than with ἤκουσα—as the word-order might in any case imply: 'I also heard, about the intellect from without from Aristotle, [things] which I preserved.'²² True, here too one might expect the dative, but the titles cited in note 14 suggest that the genitive could be used. The difference is presumably that the dative implies an opinion *in* Aristotle, the genitive one 'from' him, i.e. deriving from him; and though we might find it more natural to talk about the active intellect *in* Aristotle, to speak of that *deriving from* him, i.e. from what he says, does not seem impossible.²³

Moreover, this interpretation removes another slight awkwardness. It is one thing to say that what one is going to say is Aristotelian even though it is in fact an interpretation; another to attribute, as construing παρὰ Ἀριστοτέλους with ἤκουσα would imply, an explanation in the third person of Aristotle's own motives to Aristotle himself. This might indeed be acceptable, if we suppose that (1) is, as it were, a heading tacked on to the beginning of an already existing discussion referring to Aristotle in the third person. That 110.4—but omitting Ἡκουσα δὲ and ἃ διεσωσάμην—might be 'a kind of title' is indeed suggested by Schroeder and Todd,²⁴ but retracted because here the reference to Aristotle comes after that to the subject matter, whereas in the titles cited in note 18 it comes before. The cases are not in fact similar. In the case of τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν it is appropriate to specify that the doctrine is (or at least is claimed to be) Aristotle's rather than someone else's, because others besides Peripatetics discussed τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν. On the other hand 'intellect from outside' (νοῦς θύραθεν) is distinctively Aristotelian; so rather than distinguishing Aristotle's doctrine from someone else's, it is a matter of adding a reference to Aristotle simply in order to fill out the description of the doctrine in question.

Nevertheless, that Ἡκουσα δὲ and ἃ διεσωσάμην should be retained, and that 110.4 is not a title in the strict sense, is suggested by γάρ in 110.5. The great majority of the texts in the *mantissa* and *quaestiones* attributed to Alexander begin, after their titles,²⁵ with no connecting particle at all; a few which are presented as parts of a sequence begin with δέ.²⁶ The only ones to begin with γάρ are *Quaestio* 2.12 and

²⁰ Schroeder and Todd (n. 3), 28–30.

²¹ Accattino and Donini (n. 4), xxvii, n. 77. See also below, n. 29.

²² The text, it may be noted, has νοῦ τοῦ θύραθεν, not τοῦ θύραθεν νοῦ. Why? Perhaps because the sense is 'intellect—more specifically, the intellect from without' (cf. H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA, 1920 [1980¹], §1159); and in that case the reference to Aristotle, 'intellect—more specifically the intellect from without in, or which derives from, Aristotle', may seem a natural and indeed necessary completion. The implicit reference to Aristotle at 110.25 confirms that 110.6–25 is considered as truly from Aristotle and suggests that the rest of the discussion (from 110.25 onwards) is conducted in an equally Aristotelian vein; in this respect B is to be contrasted with C1 (above, n. 5).

²³ In the case of the titles later in the *Mantissa* (above n. 18), to speak of what *derives from* Aristotle, rather than what is *in* him, concerning responsibility (τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν) is entirely suitable; Aristotle uses the expression, but the argument of these sections is hardly '*in* Aristotle', verbatim or otherwise. Similarly, Aristotle says that intellect comes 'from outside', but could hardly be said to develop the idea in detail.

²⁴ Schroeder and Todd (n. 12), 30.

²⁵ Which were probably added later; cf. Bruns (n. 1), xi.

²⁶ For example *Mantissa* 130.14, 134.30, 136.30, from a sequence on vision; cf. R. W. Sharples,

Ethical Problem 7, but here there is a logical connection between the sentence following the title and a controversy already indicated in the title. Unless γάρ in 110.5 refers to what preceded in an original, and now unrecoverable, context from which B has been extracted,²⁷ it should be taken as referring back not to a putative title consisting only of the words *περὶ νοῦ τοῦ θύραθεν παρὰ Ἀριστοτέλους*, but to the decision, indicated by *διεσωσάμην*, to record the doctrine ('I preserved this and set it out here. That was because it seemed worth recording. For he said that . . .').²⁸

It seems, then, that the difficulty of referring to Aristotle as the source of an interpretation of his own doctrines is not to be avoided by treating 110.4 as a title. If on the other hand, as here suggested, we interpret it as '(1) I also heard, about the intellect from without (which comes) from Aristotle, (things) which I preserved. (2) For the things that prompted Aristotle to introduce the intellect from without were said to be these . . .' the difficulty simply disappears.²⁹

It therefore seems to us that Schroeder and Todd are essentially right. The reporter of B is simply referring to an interpretation that he has heard of the Aristotelian 'intellect from outside'; we do not know whose interpretation this was, and there is no reason to connect it with Aristoteles of Mytilene.³⁰

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'Alexander and pseudo-Alexanders of Aphrodisias: scripta minima. *Questions and Problems, makeweights and prospects*', in Wolfgang Kullmann, Jochen Althoff, and Markus Asper (edd.), *Gattungen wissenschaftlicher Literatur in der Antike* (Tübingen, 1998: *Scripta Oralia*, 95), 383–408 at 395–6. Cf. also *τοῦνον* at *Mantissa* 141.30; *καί* at *Mantissa* 169.34 and *Ethical Problem 24*.

²⁷ γάρ certainly cannot be taken as linking 110.5 directly to the end of A in 110.3.

²⁸ J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (Oxford, 1954²), 59 refers to γάρ 'after an expression denoting the giving or receiving of information, or conveying a summons to attention'.

²⁹ Accattino and Donini (n. 4), xxvii, n.77 argue that the name 'Aristoteles' would not need to be repeated if it refers to the same person both in (1) and in (2). But in (1) Aristotle is referred to as the authority from whom the theory derives; in (2) the reference is to a discussion of his motives. And that difference is sufficient to justify the repetition.

³⁰ On the other evidence for Aristoteles of Mytilene as Alexander's teacher cited by Moraux in 1967, cf. Thillet (n. 13), xix–xxxii; R. Goulet, 'Aristote de Mytilène', in id. (ed.) *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1989), 411–12; Schroeder and Todd (n. 3), 25. There remains the reference to 'our Aristotle' at Alexander, *In metaph.* 166.19–20, noted by P. Moraux, 'Ein neues Zeugnis über Aristoteles, den Lehrer Alexanders von Aphrodisias', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 67 (1985), 266–9 and by P. Accattino, 'Alessandro di Afrodisia e Aristotele di Mitilene', *Elenchos* 6 (1985), 67–74. But, as Schroeder and Todd (n. 3), 27–8 note, this can only establish that Aristoteles of Mytilene was Alexander's teacher if one combines it with the *De intellectu* passage, interprets the *De intellectu* passage in the manner in which Moraux did in 1967, and accepts that the *De intellectu* is an authentic work of Alexander's.