Alexander of Aphrodisias [addendum] Encyclopedia Article

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Alexander of Aphrodisias's influence on Islamic philosophy was far reaching. In fact, it could appear to be somewhat out of proportion with his real importance as a thinker. The reason for this is partly fortuitous in that a large number of his works were preserved long enough for them to reach Baghdad in the ninth century CE and be translated into Arabic. Among the most significant of these are the following:

1. The fragments of the Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics, book lambda (*lam* in Arabic) preserved by Ibn Rushd in his own Great Commentary on the same work. The original text is lost in Greek.
2. The short treatise *On the Principles of the Universe* describing the mechanics of the heavenly motions and the mode of their influence on the sublunary world. It could be defined as a free synthesis of the main themes of Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, with some borrowings from the *De Anima* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*.
3. A treatise, *On Providence*, preserved in two fairly different translations. This last work was of particular importance to the Muslims in that it provides an Aristotelian answer to a question that is crucial in the context of a monotheistic religion, but was never treated as such by Aristotle himself.

The main features of the philosophical system set forth in these works can be summarized as follows. The heavenly motions are caused by the souls of the spheres (which carry the stars) in their desire to imitate the First Mover of the universe. The counterpart of this upward motion is the influence that the contrasting motions of the stars exert on the world of nature. This influence is as a matter of fact identified by Alexander with nature and providence. But this providence, although emanating from the heavens, is not willed by them, because Alexander postulates that the superior cannot care for the inferior without debasing itself.

Another Alexandrian tenet that exerted a profound influence on the Arab philosophers is his identification of the Active Intellect of Aristotle's *De Anima* with the Unmoved Mover of the *Metaphysics*. The intellectual processes of the human mind were thus directly connected with the divine.

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