

Chapter 8

Looking for an Authority: The Failed Revival of Anaxagoras's Fiery Aether in the Early Modern Period



Eva Del Soldato

Abstract A few lines in *On the Heavens* I.3 reference Anaxagoras's belief that celestial aether was actually fire, based on an etymology opposed to the one adopted by Aristotle. Although Aristotle quickly dismissed Anaxagoras's position, he later mentioned it again in *Meteorology* I.1. How was the text read in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the Aristotelian fifth essence ended up in the firing line amid a season of new observations and theological concerns? This article examines the early modern reception of Anaxagoras's doctrine of the fiery aether, considering Aristotelian commentaries as well as works by authors who sought to challenge Peripatetic cosmology for philosophical, scientific, and religious reasons. It particularly focuses on Matthias Frkić's *De caelesti substantia*, a 1646 treatise that aimed to promote Anaxagoras as an anti-Aristotelian authority aligned with Christian needs. By evaluating the limited impact of Frkić's work, this contribution seeks to explain why Anaxagoras never experienced a significant revival in early modern cosmological debates despite certain advantages of his tenets.

Keywords Anaxagoras · Aristotle · Early modern cosmology · Aether · Fire