

## THEMISTIUS

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## 1 LIFE

Themistius was born c. 317 in Paphlagonia, probably near the town of Abunoteich. He studied rhetoric and philosophy in Constantinople. His first teacher of philosophy was his father Eugenius, a Platonist, possibly of Iamblichaeian persuasion, but with a strong interest in Aristotle which he passed down to his son. At the beginning of his career, Themistius taught in the city of Nicomedia, and possibly elsewhere in Asia Minor, trying to establish his reputation as a philosopher. From the late 340s he taught in Constantinople, and around 347 entered the state service under Constantius II, who adlected him to the Senate in 355. After this, politics became Themistius' main career. He served as an advisor to Constantius II, who put him in charge of recruiting new members for the Senate and gave him a number of other key political and diplomatic functions. Themistius retained his influence during the reigns of Julian, Jovian, Valentinian and Valens, and Theodosius.<sup>1</sup> In both his political and private speeches, he emphasized that it was as a philosopher that he was in service of the political regimes of Constantinople (the denial of philosopher's title in *Or.* 21 is ironic). In his political speeches, he frequently appealed to ideas of enlightened government, and religious and political tolerance, informed by the legacy of classical political philosophy.

Themistius' school most likely offered training in both philosophy and rhetoric. His students would be young men of noble birth, normally preparing for some kind of a public career (of a state official or a teacher). Apparently, the breadth of his curriculum, which included 'astronomy, poetry and philosophy', made Themistius more attractive than other renowned teachers. Libanius, who taught rhetoric in Antioch, lost some of his students to Themistius. Themistius' school differed from the later Platonic schools in that its philosophical allegiance

<sup>1</sup> The question of Themistius' tenure of a public office under each of these regimes is still a matter of controversy, and the literature is growing. For recent surveys, see Vanderspoel 1995; Penella 2000.

(e.g., to Plato or Aristotle) was less important than its emphasis on the overall importance of philosophy (and, perhaps, the emphasis on the priority of practical over theoretical philosophy). It is not clear how long he continued in his role of the head of school, but it is clear that he did for some time combine this role with his service to the emperors.<sup>2</sup> Most likely, he composed his paraphrases of Aristotle's works in the earlier years of his teaching.<sup>3</sup> He died probably around 388.

## 2 WORKS

Five authentic Aristotelian paraphrases by Themistius have been preserved, three – *On the Soul*, *Posterior Analytics* and *Physics* – in the original Greek and two – *On the Heavens* and *Metaphysics Lambda* – in both Hebrew and Latin versions. Several paraphrases are extant in fragments and testimonia in Greek, Arabic and Hebrew translations. These include the paraphrases of *Categories*, *Topics* and *Prior Analytics*.<sup>4</sup> The Arabic tradition has preserved a logical treatise *Against Maximus concerning the Derivation of the Second and Third Figures of the Syllogism*.

The paraphrase of *Parva naturalia* attributed to Themistius is composed by a late Byzantine author, probably Sophonias.<sup>5</sup> The paraphrase of Aristotle's *History of Animals* in Arabic is attributed to Themistius in MS Tashkent 2385. This attribution has been doubted by several scholars, but the argument in its favour has recently been revived by M. Zonta in the light of new evidence from the Semitic tradition.

The Arabic sources mention paraphrases of *Poetics* and *Ethics*.<sup>6</sup> The treatise *On Virtue* preserved in Syriac offers an original standpoint with regard to the subject. The suggestion of Ritter and Walzer that Al-Kindi's treatise *On Dispelling Sadness* is based on Themistius' lost work *Peri alupias* has been rejected by scholars.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> From Libanius' correspondence, we know of a man called Celsus who returned to Antioch in 361 having just completed his studies with Themistius.

<sup>3</sup> Dates 347–57 were suggested by Blumenthal 1990.

<sup>4</sup> The text published in *CAG* 23.3 (1884) by M. Wallies as Themistius' paraphrase of *An. Pr.* 1 is a late Byzantine compilation based on the extant commentaries by Alexander of Aphrodisias and Philoponus. Rose argues for its attribution to Sophonias (Rose 1867).

<sup>5</sup> *CAG* 5.6 (ed. Wendland), see Wendland 1903: v–xiii, cf. Rose 1867, Freudenthal 1869.

<sup>6</sup> No clear evidence that Themistius paraphrased any of Aristotle's ethical treatises has been found, but the question deserves further study. Themistius was certainly familiar with the main ethical and political ideas of Plato, Aristotle and Hellenistic philosophers.

<sup>7</sup> See Ritter and Walzer 1938, Pohlenz 1938; cf. most recently Adamson 2007: 150.

The suggestion made on the basis of Photius' report, that Themistius wrote commentaries apart from paraphrases as well as some exegetical works on Plato is most probably due to unfortunate wording.<sup>8</sup>

### 3 THEMISTIAN PARAPHRASE: GOALS, METHOD, AND SOURCES

Themistius revived and to a large extent reinvented the genre of Aristotelian paraphrase as an exegetical tool.<sup>9</sup> In the introduction to the paraphrase of *Posterior Analytics*, he distinguishes his method from that of major commentaries known in his time, and setting clear exposition rather than an independent investigation of controversial problems as its main goal:

That I should compose the commentaries on Aristotle's books after so many and so great commentators would seem to be close to a useless ambition. For there are not many things that our predecessors missed out, and demolishing the whole work for the sake of minor interferences is similar to wishing to recast Phidias' Athena in order to make better straps on her sandals. However, setting out and articulating the meanings of the texts written with fluency and supplementing as far as possible the concise style of the philosopher would seem to be both new and of some utility. For we have assumed that in this way the recollection will be made easy for those who have once learned the doctrine of Aristotle but cannot recover continuously because of the length of the commentaries. . . . For many of Aristotle's books seem to have been designed for concealment, not least the current one, firstly because of his customary brevity, and secondly because the order of the chapters is not marked. So we should be forgiven if we explain at greater length some parts of the text (for we could not make it clearer in as many words), and transpose and replace others in order to make each of the chapters clearly defined. And it is not worth complaining if we presented some parts more concisely: for someone who set out to contrive an easy way of cognizing the useful things should not be wasting time on things which although merit an expert consideration do not really contribute to the demonstrative argument. (I.1–2.4)

Unlike the 'hypomnematic' commentaries (such as those by Simplicius and Alexander), the paraphrases contain no lemmata. Unlike the Alexandrian commentaries based on lecture notes, they draw no clear division between *lexis*

<sup>8</sup> τούτου τοῦ Θεμιστίου εἰς πάντα τὰ Ἀριστοτελικά φέρονται ὑπομνήματα: οὐ μόνον δὲ ἀλλὰ καὶ μεταφράσεις αὐτοῦ εἶδομεν, εἰς τὸ χρήσιμον ἐπιτετημένους τῶν τε ἀναλυτικῶν καὶ τῶν περὶ ψυχῆς βιβλίων καὶ τῶν τῆς φυσικῆς ἀκροάσεως καὶ ἑτέρων τοιούτων. εἰσι δὲ καὶ εἰς τὰ Πλατωνικά αὐτοῦ ἐξηγητικοὶ πόννοι, καὶ ἀπλῶς ἑραστήης ἔστι καὶ σπουδαστῆς φιλοσοφίας (Cod. 74.52a15–21). The argument for Themistius' authorship of Aristotelian commentaries now lost was put forward by Carlos Steel (Steel 1973), who later withdrew his thesis. See also discussions in Rose 1867, Blumenthal 1979, Vanderspoel 1989, all arguing against the thesis.

<sup>9</sup> Prior to Themistius, Andronicus is said to have used the method of paraphrase for the exposition of Aristotle's *Categories*. Simplicius *In Cael.* 398.36, mentions the paraphrases by Nicolaus of Damascus.

and *theōria* and do not subdivide the text into separate lectures (*praxeis*).<sup>10</sup> The exposition is organized as a continuous narrative, with Aristotle's text not set out but embedded in the body of the paraphrase. Themistius is familiar with the earlier Aristotelian commentaries and with philosophical works of the Platonic tradition. Possibly he has access to the works of Stoic authors.<sup>11</sup> He certainly makes use of the commentaries by Alexander of Aphrodisias.

The paraphrases are normally longer than the paraphrased texts, but the added length is usually caused by the use of multiple expository devices; sometimes Themistius restructures Aristotle's text to make the argument clearer. Occasionally, Themistius makes an *excursus* from paraphrasing to state his position or discuss a more controversial question. These digressions are most important for reconstructing his philosophical views.

The genre of paraphrase is rarely used in the great Platonic schools of late antiquity. Themistian influence can be perceived in a revival of the method of paraphrase by Sophonias in the twelfth century, who attempted to combine this method with the method of hypomnematic commentaries.<sup>12</sup> Themistius' paraphrases, translated into Arabic, have influenced Ibn Rushd's Middle Commentaries on Aristotle.

#### (4) DOCTRINES

##### (a) Logic

Logic clearly occupies a central place both in the curriculum of Themistius' school and in his own interest in philosophy. One should not be misled by the fact that most of his logical paraphrases did not survive in Greek: this can be explained more by the nature of demand in late Greek and Byzantine schools. The character of Themistius' engagement with problems of logic and dialectic shows us that he was no mere disinterested expositor of the traditional doctrines.

Themistius' paraphrase of Aristotle's *Categories* was still known to Simplicius, who refers to it in the proem to his own commentary on the treatise (Simplic. *In Categ.* 1.9–10). Olympiodorus mentions Themistius' defence of Aristotle's

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the contrast between the two types of commentary drawn in the Proem to Sophonias' *De anima* paraphrase.

<sup>11</sup> In *Or.* 4 (357) to Constantius, Themistius puts forward a detailed proposal of an institution provided with a scriptorium whose goal would be the preservation of the 'minor' authors (i.e., those philosophers and poets who are not included in the school curriculum). The philosophers named are Chrysippus, Zeno and Cleanthes.

<sup>12</sup> Resulting in several Themistian pseudepigrapha (Sophonias' authorship of the paraphrase of *Parva Naturalia* has been argued by Freudenthal 1869; for Sophonias' relation to the Greek paraphrase of *Prior Analytics*, see Rose 1867).

definition of the accident as ‘that which is “in a subject”’ against the objection according to which this definition also applies to an individual substance, such as Socrates, because the latter is in a place as ‘in a subject’. The defence invokes the difference between the ways of being ‘in something’ (Olympiodorus, *In Cat.* 48.13–19). The Arabic version of the paraphrase was in circulation in the tenth century.

Themistius’ *Topics* paraphrase was used by Boethius, who reproduced Themistius’ division of topics in the second book of his treatise *De differentiis topicis*. About two dozen citations of Themistius in Averroes’ *Middle Commentary on Topics* are yet to be studied.

The paraphrase of *Prior Analytics* is lost, but its existence is attested in the Greek tradition.<sup>13</sup> A considerable amount of first-hand testimonia seems to have been preserved in the Arabic and Semitic traditions.<sup>14</sup> The published fragments of Hebrew translation contain Themistius’ critical discussion of Alexander’s modal interpretation of assertoric propositions (*de inesse*),<sup>15</sup> where he explains that these propositions do not correspond to any specific modality, but can exhibit any of the three ‘temporal’ modes that correspond to the three meanings of ‘the necessary’ (absolute, conditional for inseparable attributes, conditional for separable attributes).

Themistius also discussed the problem of modality of conclusion in the syllogism with mixed modal premisses (assertoric and apodeictic). He disagreed with Aristotle’s claim that a syllogism in the first figure with apodeictic major and assertoric minor premiss will conclude in the apodeictic mode (*Arist. An. Pr.* 1.15). Against Alexander and those Peripatetics who defended this claim, he concurred with Eudemus and Theophrastus who formulated the rule according to which in the mixed modal syllogism the conclusion will always be in the mode corresponding to the weaker of the two modes in the premisses.<sup>16</sup>

In the treatise *Against Maximus Concerning the Derivation of the Second and Third Figures of the Syllogism* preserved in Arabic, Themistius defends Aristotle’s theory of the perfect syllogism against the thesis that the categorical syllogisms in the

<sup>13</sup> Themistius himself refers to it in *Or.* 21.37.5. Philoponus mentions Themistius’ view stated apparently in the proem to the lost commentary, according to which the ‘Analytic Books’ is not an original work of Aristotle, but rather a result of his systematization of the rules and principles discovered by Plato ‘in *Phaedo* and all the other dialogues’ (Philoponus, *In An. Pr.* 6.14–18).

<sup>14</sup> In Arabic, by Averroes. Apparently, Themistius’ paraphrase was still in circulation in the late fifteenth century, when Laurentius Maiolus was able to cite it by chapter in his treatise *De conversione propositionum cuiuscumque generis secundum Peripateticos*, Venice, 1497.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander *In An. Pr.* 1.2 (25.25–26.23). Themistius in Rosenberg and Mannekin 1988: 94–7. For problems with Alexander’s modal interpretation, see Barnes *et al.* 1991: 79 n. 157.

<sup>16</sup> *peiores semper conclusio sequitur partem*. This fragment shows that Themistius was familiar with Alexander’s treatise *On Mixed Premises* (‘Alexander the commentator has already collected all of their arguments, and the possible refutations of these [arguments], in one book’).

second and third figures do not need any demonstration, nor reduction to the first figure. The treatise shows his good knowledge of earlier discussions of this subject.<sup>17</sup>

In the paraphrase of *Posterior Analytics*, Themistius explains the rationale for his method of exposition. This is also the paraphrase where this method is perhaps most strictly observed, including the final chapter. In his account of the cognitive states which contribute to our knowledge of the first immediate principles (sense-perception, memory, experience and the knowledge of the universal), Themistius closely follows the text of Aristotle (*An. post.* 2.19, 99b35–100a15). If there is any additional influence in the account of the intellect, it is the influence of Alexander of Aphrodisias in the account of the evolution of the intellect (*In An. Post.* 65.12–66.6). Themistius' awareness of Aristotle's debt to Plato in the logical corpus does not prevent him from criticizing Plato's theory of recollection as an account of the acquisition of the knowledge of principles (*In An. Post.* 4.17–5.4).

(b) *Physics*

Themistius' *Physics* paraphrase contains few original discussions, being designed as an advanced introductory text to the problems of Aristotle's *Physics*,<sup>18</sup> but some of the occurring digressions shed additional light on Themistius' overall philosophical position.

PRIVATION, FORM AND MATTER IN COSMIC PROVIDENCE In the course of his exposition of Aristotle's analysis of change according to the principles of form, privation and the underlying subject, Themistius claims that privation – rather than matter as such – is the source and cause of evil.

The evils, then, originate from [privation] and by means of it. For it is because matter is disposed to receive privation and because it has the potentiality that it is weaker than needed to be able to retain continually the forms of which it partakes. (33.6–8)

Themistius uses this argument to explain his view of the relation between the first principle of the cosmos and matter. The first principle is described as

<sup>17</sup> Possibly through lost works of Alexander. Themistius quotes Boethus and refers to Eubulides and 'Menelaus': 'Menedemus' suggested by Barnes 1999: 27 n. 9.

<sup>18</sup> The paraphrase of books 1–4 is more detailed than that of books 5–8. Todd gives the ratio by word count of Themistius to Aristotle in the books of *Physics* 1–8 as follows: 2.18, 1.84, 2.27, 1.99, 1.10, 1.12, 0.38 and 0.88, Todd 2003b: 4 n. 4. The paraphrase is well known to later Greek authors (Simplicius cites him by name thirty-six times, Philoponus in the extant Greek books seventeen), and circulated in the Arabic world (cf. Peters 1968 ad loc.).

‘the first cause’, and more specifically as ‘the first form’ of which the matter partakes by desiring the good and the divine.

Why (*pothen*), then, does it partake of them? Because it desires the divine and longs for the good: and by ‘the good’ and ‘the divine’ I mean the first form, the first cause, towards which everything is inclined, with which everything seeks to be similar to the extent to which each thing is able to. And each thing has this ability in accordance with its nature. (33.8–11)

This mechanism of participation is explained as an effect of the ‘true providence’, whereby the desire for the beautiful is inherent in the ugly, and the desire for self-sufficiency in what is deficient.

But how is this desire (*epheisis*) present in the matter? Or is this a true providence: that in what is ugly there should be present a desire (*orexis*) of the beautiful and in what is deficient, a desire of what is self-sufficient, and this form which is the first and incorporeal and separate and the enmattered forms which are led by it have as their contrary the privation, whereas the matter is inclined to [this form] and [thus] has a desire? (33.12–16)

Themistius criticizes the view of privation as identical with matter:

If indeed privation is nothing else, but exactly identical with matter, then how would it be preserved in the [process] of partaking of some form? Because, he says, even then the privation is present within matter: for matter is always lacking the other [term], even if it partakes of ‘this particular’ [item], because the privation mentioned in the account of matter covers not just ‘this particular’ [feature], but all [features] in a similar way. For [otherwise] it would perish even if it had some of the forms and not others. If, then, neither the form has a yearning for itself (for it is not deficient with respect to itself), nor its contrary [namely privation] (for the contraries are mutually destructive), it remains that matter is desiring the form, the way female desires the male and the ugly the beautiful; ‘the ugly’ not in the sense of ‘ugliness’, but accidentally, to the extent to which it partakes of privation. (33.18–27)

This argument probably draws on Alexander’s commentary, where it is argued that privation inheres in matter as an accident (*kata sumbebēkos*) rather than *per se* (see Simplic. *In Phys.* 211, 3–23, discussed in Rashed 2007: 199–214). The argument may or may not have Plotinus’ view of matter in *Enn.* 1.8 as its immediate target, but its force is certainly anti-Plotinian. The description of relation between the first cause and the enmattered beings in terms of desire is elaborated and clarified in the paraphrase of *Metaphysics Lambda*.

THE PLACE OF THE COSMOS AS A WHOLE In the cluster of problems which have to do with the application of the principles of Aristotle’s physics to Aristotle’s cosmology, the problem of the place of the first body is particularly important.

Aristotle defines place as ‘the limit of containing body at which it is in contact with the contained, i.e., that which is locally movable’ (*In Phys.* 4.4, 212a2–7, trans. Ross). The problem arises because the first body, or the outer heaven, while being ‘locally movable’, does not have any containing body (*In Phys.* 4.5, 212b7–9). Aristotle’s proposed solution, that the first body is not in a place as a whole except *per accidens*, but its parts are in a place, leaves undefined a number of terms and positions.

First, there is a question of the meaning of *per accidens*. Ancient tradition took ‘being in a place accidentally’ to mean that while the first body itself is not in a place, its parts are in a place, ‘*per accidens*’ thus being synonymous with ‘*per partes*’. Themistius also adopts this interpretation.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, there is a question of the meaning of parts (related to a more general question of the meaning of *ouranos*, which can refer either to the outer heaven or to the whole body of the cosmos). Here there are the following historical options: ‘parts’ could be either (a) continuous sections of the outer sphere, or (b) all the concentric spheres inside the outer heaven, or (c) all the concentric spheres and the sublunary cosmos. Themistius interprets ‘parts’ as concentric planetary spheres which form a sequence of containers (*In Phys.* 119.17–25). The outermost sphere does not have any external container, but Themistius says that it is ‘in a place in respect of what is on its inner side (i.e., it is in contact with the sphere of Saturn, and that is to say, “in a way” contained [by it]), whereas in respect of its outer side, it entirely lacks any share in place’ (*In Phys.* 121.2–4). Thus, the outermost heaven has no place in the conventional sense of outer place, but does have the ‘inner’ place which is the convex surface of the last planetary sphere. This position is criticized by both Simplicius and Philoponus in their respective revisions of the Aristotelian concept of place.<sup>20</sup>

*DE CAELO* Themistius’ paraphrase of *De caelo*, extant in Hebrew and Latin translations, is the earliest complete exegetical work on Aristotle’s treatise that has reached us. Themistius’ paraphrase, along with Simplicius’ commentary, is an important source for the reconstruction of the lost commentary by Alexander of Aphrodisias.<sup>21</sup> But in this paraphrase, Themistius adopts a more critical stance towards Aristotelian doctrines. He criticizes the thesis that the elements have

<sup>19</sup> Although he shows some misgivings about the inconsistency this causes with the discussion of being ‘in itself in *Phys.* 4.3, 210a33–b8 where the characteristic of being ‘incidentally’ is not supplied as synonymous with ‘in parts’. Most medieval commentators treat ‘incidentally’ and ‘in parts’ as two different meanings.

<sup>20</sup> Simplicius, *In Phys.* 590.27–32; 592.25–593.6; Philoponus, *In Phys.* 565.21–566.7.

<sup>21</sup> On Themistius’ use of Alexander’s commentary, see Rescigno 2004: 85–98. Zonta 1994 indicates the need for a new edition of the Hebrew version (warranted by both new manuscript evidence and eclectic considerations).



weight and lightness when at their natural places, arguing that although the elements do develop natural propensities to move upwards or downwards, once they have reached their natural places, they do not keep these tendencies *qua* natural propensities (*In Cael.* 232.17–235.21). Against Alexander, Themistius rejects the notion of ‘heavenly matter’.<sup>22</sup> From Simplicius’ commentary we know that Themistius’ arguments were used by Philoponus in his arguments against the Aristotelian theory of the aether (cf. *Simplic. In Cael.* 70.2–9; 71.20; 72.10–16).

(c) *Psychology*

The paraphrase of *De anima* is by far the longest and philosophically the most interesting work by Themistius. It has been preserved both in Greek and Arabic.<sup>23</sup> There are a number of controversial topics on which Themistius arrived at his own (authorial) solution of the problem discussed, including the relation of soul to body, sense-perception (the sense of touch against Alexander) and the interpretation of *phantasia*. Aristotle’s discussion of the intellect in *De anima* 3.4–5 is certainly the most important text and a locus of Themistius’ most significant digression, wherein he formulates his original interpretation of Aristotle’s doctrine of *nous* in a polemic against both Alexander and some of his Platonist predecessors.<sup>24</sup> Themistius as usual shows sensitivity to dialectical and logical issues, aiming to reconstruct not just the overall position but the logic of Aristotle’s arguments in the most accurate and convincing way.<sup>25</sup>

There has been a debate over the question of Themistius’ school allegiance in this paraphrase. The view that Themistius’ noetics is a critical development of a number of Platonic doctrines, including Plotinus’ discussion of the soul, was first stated by Ballériaux in his doctoral thesis in 1943 and elaborated further in subsequent discussions. Later on, independently, several scholars, on the basis of the study of Themistian material in philosophical works of late medieval and early Renaissance thinkers, came to the conclusion that Themistius was a Platonist. This view was challenged by Henry Blumenthal and others who drew

<sup>22</sup> ‘The body which rotates has no contrary, as will become clear in a little. Nor does it have any substratum, for elsewhere it was stated that it lacks matter. So the body that revolves exists without having been generated’ (*In Cael.* 14.12–15, trans. Sorabji).

<sup>23</sup> The Arabic version attributed to Ishaq ibn Hunayn is based on a Greek text superior to the one which has been transmitted through Byzantine tradition, which, in combination with the high quality of translation, helped to eliminate a number of lacunae and establish correct readings of several philosophically significant passages. See Browne 1986, 1998.

<sup>24</sup> In the discussion of the *aporai* concerning the soul in Aristotle’s *De anima* 1.1, Themistius shows good knowledge of the Platonic tradition.

<sup>25</sup> Note in this respect several occasions on which he sets out to defeat Porphyry’s logical objections to Aristotle (6.11–33, cf. Todd ad loc.)

attention to Themistius' dependence on post-Aristotelian Peripatetic sources. The most important issues for defining Themistius' philosophical position are the relation of soul to body (taking into account both the interpretation of Aristotelian definition of the soul and soul's role in the operation of bodily faculties) and the doctrine of the intellect.

**EMBODIED SOUL** In his introduction of Aristotle's definition of the soul, Themistius concentrates on a detailed explanation of the text of *De anima* 2.1–3 largely in accordance with the principles of Aristotle's hylomorphism.<sup>26</sup> He defends Aristotle's definition of the soul from the dialectical criticism possibly originating within the Peripatetic tradition, according to which this definition fails to satisfy any of the particular kinds of the soul (vegetative, animal or rational) (*In An.* 48.7–34). To this extent, it is possible to agree with the scholars who take his position on this issue to be largely Aristotelian (see, e.g., Blumenthal 1990).

Still it is clear that Themistius regards the Aristotelian definition of the soul as being in principle, in agreement with Platonic doctrine. This becomes particularly clear from his discussion of 'harmony' theory criticised by Aristotle in *De anima* 1.4, (407b27–408a30), a view according to which the soul is a certain proportion or composition of bodily constituents. This view is discussed by Plato in *Phaedo* 92a6–95a2 and apparently has some following in the earlier Peripatetic tradition (attested for Dicaearchus and Aristoxenus). Alexander of Aphrodisias develops some original arguments against it in his *De anima* (24.18–26.30). Themistius' discussion of this theory differs from Aristotle's in two ways. First, he is more explicit than Aristotle in granting some limited plausibility to this theory, to the extent that when the bodily mixture perishes, soul perishes as well (*In An.* 25.23–33).<sup>27</sup> Second, arguing against an anonymous Platonist treatment of the 'harmony' theory in strictly dualist terms, he defends the consistency of this restricted 'harmony' theory not just with Aristotelian doctrine of the soul, but with Platonic–Aristotelian concordance on the nature of the soul, which he presents in the following way.

The Platonist objection to the 'harmony' theory is that it is not the soul that perishes when harmony is destroyed, but only the ensoulment (*empsukhia*), 'since

<sup>26</sup> As Blumenthal points out, Themistius does not digress on the question of possible separability of the soul or at least one of its faculties and is not interested in any subversive interpretation to which Aristotle's analogy between the soul and the sailor readily lends itself. (*De an.* 2.1, 413a8–9, cf. Themistius *In An.* 43.27.) This contrasts with Plotinus' interpretation of this simile in *Enn.* 3.2.1 (cf. Blumenthal 1968).

<sup>27</sup> This has been related to his appropriation of Alexander's introduction of Aristotle's definition of the soul which does show some parallels with the 'harmony' theory.

the soul itself is separate, but irradiates life [to the body], as the sun [imparts] light to the air' (*In An.* 25.33–4, trans. Todd, lightly modified). Themistius' reply to this objection is two-fold. On the one hand, he points out the logical mismatch between the concept of soul intended by the opponent and that of Aristotle:

For the sun, which is one, supplies light to all bodies, yet they [namely the critics] would not describe the soul that irradiates life to all animals as one. That is why the sun too is one, but not everything shares in light in the same way, but air, water, silver, stone and wood do so in different ways, and distinct colours do so in distinct ways. But if someone says that the soul is one, then by the same token animals must share in it in a variety of ways, and also [on this theory] will differ not in their souls but in their ensoulments. (*In An.* 26.1–8, trans. Todd)

The objection, according to Themistius, misses the point of Aristotle's project, which presupposes the generic perishability of individual embodied souls; these would correspond to the 'ensoulments' of the critic. On the other hand, Themistius acknowledges the appropriateness of the critic's quest for the single soul (which would correspond to the critic's sun simile) and says that Aristotle shares in this quest, even though he does not pursue it in *De anima*.

Next, what [soul] will that one soul be? Whatever it is, it will make no difference to Aristotle's theory at least. For he says that in the present work he is not inquiring into that soul which is single, nor is he defining it, but he is inquiring into the [soul] of a human being, and that of a horse and a cow, and whether they want to give it the name 'ensoulment' or 'soul', he will not object. Instead, just as in defining light as an entelechy of that which is actually transparent, so here too in defining the soul he says that he is not defining the [soul] that is from without and single, but the entelechy *which comes from that [soul] into bodies that have organs, while perhaps being able to define that [external soul] too in the same way*. For nothing prevents one of the two entelechies of transparency from being more perfect [i.e. the sun], and the other less so [i.e. the light]. So too with the soul, one [entelechy] is more perfect [i.e. the soul from without], the other less so [i.e. the soul of each individual]. So the soul of each individual to which you [my opponent] give the name 'ensoulment' and I [give the name] 'soul', he [Aristotle] says is inseparable and perishable, and perishable not in an unqualified way but as light in water. You, as it seems, hold the same view; for while disputing the name, you all too obviously agree on its reference. (*In An.* 26.8–25, trans. Todd)

This line of interpretation is left without any consequences in the subsequent discussion of the definition of the soul (in accordance with the stated remit of Aristotle's study at this point), but we see it resumed in the discussion of the intellect.

**THE DOCTRINE OF INTELLECT** Themistius' treatment of lower cognitive faculties does not claim major doctrinal departures from Aristotelian tradition. The most original and controversial text is the one devoted to *De anima* 3.5.

**ACTIVE AND POTENTIAL INTELLECT** Themistius interprets Aristotelian distinction between the two kinds of intellect, active and potential, at the beginning of *De anima* 3.5 as characterizing the structure of human intellect (102.30–103.19). The role of active intellect consists not just in actualizing the potential intellect, but in 'constituting its potential objects of thought as actual objects' (*In An.* 99.2, trans. Todd, slightly modified). Themistius seems to be distinguishing between the two meanings of potential intellect: potential intellect proper, which is brought about by the active intellect and does not exist apart from the latter, and the cognitive faculties underlying this potential intellect before it is acted upon by active intellect.

These [objects of thought] are the enmattered forms, i.e., the universal thoughts assembled from particular objects of perception. Up to this point the potential intellect cannot distinguish between them, or make transitions between distinct thoughts, or combine and divide them. Instead, like a store-house of thoughts, or better like matter, it deposits the imprints from perception and imagination through the agency of memory. But when the productive intellect encounters it and takes over this 'matter' of thoughts, the potential intellect becomes one with it, and becomes able to make transitions, and to combine and divide thoughts, and to observe thoughts from [the perspective] of one another. (*In An.* 99.3–11, trans. Todd)

When actualized by active intellect, potential intellect proper forms a unity with it. The unity is described by Themistius in hylomorphic terms, active intellect being form and potential intellect, matter (*In An.* 99.11–23). Lower cognitive faculties (memory, imagination and sense-perception) provide the necessary psychological substructure for the objects of thought and in this capacity are responsible for discursive processes of reasoning.

**ACTIVE INTELLECT AS THE PROPER SUBJECT OF THOUGHT** Themistius points out that whereas the unity of the potential and active intellect characterizes the structure of human thought and the substance of a thinking agent ('self'), it is the active intellect, the formal aspect of this quasi-hylomorphic unity, that constitutes the agency in a proper sense. Using Aristotle's distinction between *to tode* and *to tōide einai* drawn in *De anima* 3.4, 429b10–14, he distinguishes between 'the myself' and 'what it is to be myself' and explains that the latter is the active intellect (cf. *In An.* 100.16–20, Todd 1996: 187 n. 11). Thus,

although the subject of activity is the composite intellect (active *cum* potential) it acts not *qua* potential, but *qua* actual, since the activity is channelled down to it from the active intellect.<sup>28</sup> The active intellect so understood is not subject to destruction, affection or any combination. This is the first major difference between Themistius and Alexander of Aphrodisias. Alexander explains the attributes of the active intellect listed by Aristotle in *De anima* 3.5 as the properties of the intelligible object of which the human intellect gets its (temporary) share while engaged in the process of thought (Alexander, *De anima*, 89.4–91.6). For Alexander, the human intellect is perishable; for Themistius it has an imperishable component which in fact constitutes our proper self.

Themistius builds on this analysis to propose his solution to the exegetical problem raised by Aristotle's claim: 'But we do not remember because this is unaffected, whereas the passive intellect is perishable' (*De anima* 3.5, 430a23–5). Themistius criticizes the solution proposed by a recent Platonist, according to which 'we' refers to the perishable passive intellect which thus does not remember the life of the active intellect before descent.<sup>29</sup> According to Themistius' analysis, 'we' refers to the active intellect which does not remember the activities of its perishable temporal part after death. Themistius here elaborates on what is essentially a Platonic formulation and solution of the problem, drawing on some aspects of Platonic tradition concerning the self and the intellect (cf. *Alc.* 196b). But his analysis of the problem shows a critical engagement with this tradition, on the basis of what appears to be his original exegesis of Aristotle's text.

THE ACTIVE INTELLECT AND THE ORDER OF THE UNIVERSE Themistius argues against Alexander that the active intellect of *De anima* 3.5 is not identical with the first unmoved mover of the *Metaphysics Lambda* (*In An.* 102.30, cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De anima* 88.17–91.6, *Mant.* 2.107.29–110.3). His criticism is exegetically based: the divine characteristics attributed to the active intellect can single it out only in the context of human soul, not in the rest of the cosmos, where each of the unmoved movers of the heavenly spheres can also be characterized as unaffected, immortal and eternal (*In An.* 103.6–19).

<sup>28</sup> 100.22: '[potential]' in Todd's translation is surely an oversight, the gloss must say 'actual'. *autos* refers to the *ho sunkeimenos nous* and *ekeithen* to the active intellect; cf. the next few lines (100.22–6) where Themistius discusses the potential intellect's inability to receive what the active intellect gives in undivided manner.

<sup>29</sup> Most likely Porphyry in *On the Soul Against Boethus*.

Themistius asks whether this active intellect is one or many. The problem itself seems to be a restatement in terms of the intellect of a similar question concerning soul raised by Plotinus in *Enn.* 4.9 [8].<sup>30</sup> Themistius' answer is that active intellect is one and potential intellects are many (*In An.* 103.30–4). Apart from purely exegetical argument based on Aristotle's use of the light simile in *De anima* 3.5, Themistius invokes the 'common notions' (*koinai ennoiai*) and common understanding, for which the unity of active intellect is the necessary condition. This latter argument shows some affinity with the Middle Platonic version of the theory of recollection wherein the activity of the intellect in the disembodied state of the soul described as contemplation of the first intelligibles becomes the 'natural conceptions' in the embodied state of the rational soul (cf. Alcinous, *Did.* 4.6 (155.17–19)).

POTENTIAL AND COMMON (PASSIVE) INTELLECT The view that active intellect is one brings about a further question concerning potential intellect. The analogy with light to sight might suggest that potential intellect has no share in the indestructibility that characterizes active intellect (the difficulty indicated at *In An.* 103.24–6, resumed at 104.23–5). If so, the difference between Themistius and Alexander's Peripatetic noetics might become somewhat elusive: whatever other differences in the interpretation of the active intellect, according to both theories, the human intellect (i.e., 'potential', 'which becomes all things') would be perishable. The issue is probably too important for Themistius to leave it at that. Therefore, to strengthen his claim regarding the immortality of human intellect, he introduces a distinction between the potential and the passive intellect (105.13–33, signalled earlier at 101.5–9). Potential intellect is the one that Aristotle discusses in *De anima* 3.4. Themistius points out that being unaffected (*apathēs*) and unmixed (*amigēs*) with body in *De anima* 3.4 (429a15–27) are the characteristics of human intellect as a whole. Potential intellect has no bodily organ and is nothing until the act of thought. This, according to Themistius, means that the light metaphor should be interpreted differently in the case of the intellect: whereas sense-perception uses bodily organs and therefore is not entirely separate and impassive, potential intellect must be completely unmixed, impassive and separate (*In An.* 105.8–12). Potential intellect is brought about by the active intellect and is its natural 'forerunner', as a ray of light (*In An.* 105.30–4). When Aristotle speaks about the intellect as passive (*pathētikos*)

<sup>30</sup> Although Themistius never in the extant works mentioned Plotinus by name, here he seems to be explicitly contrasting his own approach with that of Plotinus: 'The inquiry pursued by some [thinkers], more recent as well as earlier ones, into whether all souls are one, would be better more correctly conducted into whether all intellects are one' (104.14–16).

and perishable (*phthartos*), he refers not to this potential intellect, but to a lower cognitive faculty common to soul and body. According to Themistius, this faculty – which he calls ‘common intellect’ – is described by Aristotle as the subject of ‘discursive thinking, and loving or hating’ (*De anima* 1.4, 408b25–32).

The distinction between the ‘potential’ and ‘passive’ intellect constitutes the second major departure of Themistius from the Aristotelian interpretation of Alexander of Aphrodisias. But Themistius also applies it to the interpretation of Platonic psychology, suggesting that all the arguments for the soul’s immortality in the Platonic corpus should have as their proper subject only the rational part of the soul, i.e., the intellect, rather than the soul as a whole, which includes the faculties of appetite and spirit.<sup>31</sup> In this way, he secures the agreement between the principles of Aristotelian and Platonic psychology. In fact, he finds some parallels between his reading of *De anima* and Stoicism, because of the clear boundary between rational soul and affections drawn in Stoic moral psychology (*In An.* 107.4–18).

Themistius’ interpretation of Aristotle’s noetics cannot be regarded as Peripatetic *par excellence*. In his case, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak about a version of Aristotelian exegesis which is characteristic of the Platonist authors committed to the thesis of ‘harmony’ between Plato and Aristotle. It is clear also that this commitment does not prevent Themistius from evaluating specific Peripatetic and Platonist arguments on their own merits and formulating his own position accordingly.

#### (d) Metaphysics Lambda

A complete paraphrase of book Lambda is preserved in Hebrew and Latin translations.<sup>32</sup> This paraphrase has several ‘digressions’ which could shed some light on Themistius’ reading of Aristotle’s theology.

<sup>31</sup> Themistius mentions the arguments from self-motion (*Phaedrus* and *Laws* 10), from recollection, and from affinity with God (*Phaedo*). *In An.* 106.29–107.4.

<sup>32</sup> On the Hebrew translations, see Steinschneider 1884 and 1893, Zonta 1996; on the Latin translation, Todd 2003a. The work is cited by Averroes in his *Long Commentary on Metaphysics and Epitomē* and by Shahrastāni in *K. al-Milāl wa al-Nihāl*. Two surviving Arabic fragments have been published by A. Badawī: an abridgement of Themistius’ paraphrase of Aristotle’s chapters 6–9 from MS 6 Mīm (philosophy) in the National Library of Egypt, Cairo (Badawī 1947: 12–21) and the translation of the first and beginning of the second chapter from MS 4871 Zāhiriyya (Badawī 1947: 329–33). It is not clear whether Themistius wrote paraphrases of other books of *Metaphysics*. Averroes in his *Long Commentary* says that the only ancient commentaries on (the whole of) the *Metaphysics* that are extant are Alexander’s commentary on *Lambda* and Themistius’ paraphrase of the same book. Alexander’s commentary is extant for books A–D, and attested for books E–N (by references in Michael of Ephesus, Syrianus and Asclepius). It is clear that Averroes’ access to Alexander is limited by his source, which also determines his knowledge of Themistius’ paraphrases.

SPONTANEOUS GENERATION Having explained the key role of immanent forms in Aristotle's theory of generation ('man generates man and horse, horse') which leaves no function for Platonic Forms, Themistius raises an objection based on the case of spontaneous generation where there are no relevant immanent forms to account for the coming to be of new organisms (*In Metaph.* 12.3, 9.2–10.4). Averroes, on the basis of this and other passages, suggests that he shares Avicenna's treatment of the First Mover as *Dator Formarum*, taking Themistius' solution to be a version of Platonism. But Themistius' solution as stated in the extant version of his paraphrase contains no explicit reference to transcendent forms. What he suggests is that there is a common explanation to the two types of generation (biogenetic and spontaneous): in both cases the real agency of change belongs to 'forms and proportions' which are at work in nature (9.23–5). In the case of biogenesis, the form of the offspring is obviously similar to the form of the parent. In the case of spontaneous generation, we do not see the form which produces the new organism, but the form, *qua* formula or proportion, is present in the process of generation all the same. Unlike in the first case, it is, as it were, hidden in something different (9.42–10.4). In both cases, the operation of forms in nature has to be referred to the principle that is above nature. Thus, Themistius says, 'the soul that is in the sublunary cosmos, according to Plato, was produced by the secondary gods, and according to Aristotle, by the sun and the (motion) of the ecliptic sphere' (8.19–21). The wording of this conclusion is somewhat vague, but it seems clear that the forms and proportions themselves are still treated as immanent, natural factors. Their origin and function is an effect of transcendent factors, but transcendent in a narrow sense: matching Plato's 'secondary gods' with Aristotle's sun and ecliptic should sound deflationary, even if Themistius' presentation of this account as both Platonic and Aristotelian is in itself significant.

THE FIRST UNMOVED MOVER AS THE 'LAW' OF THE COSMOS In the paraphrase of *Metaphysics* 12.7, Themistius discusses some of the attributes of the first unmoved mover which do not appear or appear only cursorily in Aristotle's discussion. The first unmoved mover is a true (as opposed to derivative) kind of being, one and simple. While there are many intelligible kinds which can operate as unmoved movers, the first among them is substance, and within the category of substance, in turn, the first is the one that is simple, exists in pure actuality, unmixed with any kind of potentiality, of which nothing is predicated and which has no underlying subject, but is truly one and simple nature (19.5–8). Anything that has matter cannot be either simple or one in a proper sense, despite the fact that we apply both terms to many such entities, e.g., when we speak of 'one human being', 'one nation', 'simple sentence'



or 'simple body' (meaning one of the four elements). In 'one man', 'oneness' and 'being' (i.e., 'humanity') are distinct concepts. But in the case of the first substance they are not distinct. Similarly, simplicity in a proper sense refers to the nature which admits of no multitude or composition, not to something of which another thing may be composed, and not in a sense of comparison. This proper simplicity characterizes only the first substance, which is the first unmoved mover, perfection and the end (19.19–24). Themistius makes no attempt to draw a link between the proper and derivative unity and simplicity. Themistius does not pause to explain how the improper oneness and simplicity relate to those of the first substance, but the most likely answer, on the basis of his Aristotelian background, would be that the relation is that of homonymy *pros hen* or *aph'henos*. The text has no reference to this concept, and the wording at times might indeed suggest a wider ontological gap between the two types of concepts (19.14–16). But knowing Themistius' tendency always to find a middle ground between the extreme readings of Platonism and Aristotelianism, we may hypothesize that his position is not different in this case too.

According to Themistius, the first unmoved mover cannot be either a subject or a predicate (19.7–8). This interpretation of the first principle as 'verging on the ineffable' does have some Platonic connotations. It is impossible to align it with the system of Plotinus, where the distinction between the first and the second god (or the One and Being) is clearly drawn in a way that excludes the possibility of treating the first principle as the intellect, while Themistius in this respect firmly stays on Aristotelian ground. But Themistius' interpretation has a number of affinities with the Middle-Platonist reading of Aristotelian theology, where the first god is described as the cause of the active intellect and has all the attributes Themistius mentions.<sup>33</sup>

Themistius compares the first unmoved mover of the cosmos to the law of a polity which is a good by itself and essentially (19.25–9), but points out a distinction. Whereas the law is not a substance and has limited existence, the first unmoved mover is a substance, permanent, simple and existing in actuality (19.32–6). The analogy would be more precise were one to think of political law as a living being, thinking itself and in this way moving the political government, causing this motion by being the object of desire. In this way the first unmoved mover is the principle of the hierarchy of beings which desire it.

Themistius points out that the nature of this desire is different both from (a) the desire underlying the process of 'becoming like' the divine substance and (b) the lower kind of desire which informs our appetites for food, etc.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Alcinous, *Didasc.* 10, one of the first extant examples of Platonist reading of *Metaphysics* 12. Note also that the first god of Numenius is described as the intellect (frs. 16, 17, 20 *Des Places*).

(20.11–15). Rather, the desire for the first substance should be compared with the desire of the citizens to obey the laws of their city. Of the two alternatives, the first one refers to a radical interpretation of the Platonic concept of ‘becoming like god’ (*homoiosis theōi*) (*Th.* 176b1), which Themistius respects.<sup>34</sup> The second alternative probably is meant to correspond broadly to various naturalist interpretations of desire for the ‘first appropriate thing’ (*prōton oikeion*) in Hellenistic philosophy, where the object of such desire can be construed as pleasure (Epicureanism) or self preservation (Stoicism), both taken in the narrow sense of the ‘cradle arguments’. Themistius’ middle ground consists in sticking to the principle according to which the desire for the highest good consists for each kind of being in adhering to the laws and principles of the cosmic order. The political metaphor signals a link to Themistius’ practical philosophy, where Themistius exploits exactly the same opposition:

Realise, [sir], that up and down are not simple concepts. Epicurus is certainly trifling, as is anyone who admires him and has become enamoured of bodily pleasure. Plato, on the other hand, is always in the upper sphere, as is anyone who follows Plato and seeks to become like god. But I stand between these two men, being content to be sometimes ‘up’ and sometimes ‘down’. For me, being in the lower sphere does not mean being there completely; for when I am there, I depend on the upper sphere and take my directions from on high. (*Or.* 34.30, trans. Penella)

THE OBJECTS OF DIVINE THOUGHT Themistius details the argument showing that the object of divine thought is one and not plural, but adds that divine intellect also thinks all things which exist (32.14–15). He explains that this thinking differs from the way human intellect thinks of multiple objects:

It thinks of them not by way of examination, taking one after the other, or by removing one while accepting the other, but it grasps all of them together and simultaneously. (32.15–18)

Presumably, Themistius thinks that simultaneous and intuitive rather than discursive nature of divine thought, secures the unity of its object within the apparent multiplicity. He failed to convince at least some of his readers. Thus, Averroes took his thesis that the objects of divine thought are plural to be a conscious departure from the Aristotelian position. As far as Aristotle’s text goes, Averroes is certainly right.

The reason Themistius gives for the inclusion of all things as objects within the scope of divine thought is that the divine intellect as the first unmoved mover

<sup>34</sup> The more adequate interpretation would include the phrase *kata to dunaton anthrōpōi*, cf. Themistius *Or.* 2.43.1–7 Downey and Norman; 6.116.19–22; Themistius, *In Or.* 15, interprets it in terms of developing political virtue of justice (273.11–274.3 Downey and Norman).

is the principle of their being.<sup>35</sup> By 'all things' Themistius seems to mean the whole of the cosmos. He does not go into further details of their ontological status *qua* objects of the divine thought, but spends most of the argument showing the difference between the feeble human intellect which cannot grasp all things at once and needs to be discursive and the powerful divine intellect which has enough resources to exercise the atemporal intuitive apprehension of all things that are and of which it is the principle. If the argument from comparison is to work, we need to assume that in both cases he talks about the intellection with respect to the same class of objects.

Themistius may be making tacit use of the idea of divine providence as developed in the late Peripatetic tradition, particularly in the works of Alexander of Aphrodisias according to whom divine providence operates at the level of individuals in the heavenly realm and at the level of species in the sublunary world of generation and corruption. Alexander's concept of divine providence exploits the causal role of the first principle rather than its activity of thinking. In Alexander's interpretation the divine thought concentrates on itself and exercises its providence by the very activity of thinking itself and setting the goal for desire and emulation by the heavenly bodies, whose motion in turn maintains the stable order of generation in the realm of four elements (cf. *Quaest.* 2.3, *De providentia*). On Themistius' reading, the causal role of the first unmoved mover seems to presuppose a more direct involvement with the contents of the cosmos as the objects of divine thought.

Themistius' interpretation of *Metaphysics Lambda* does advocate a concordance between Plato and Aristotle. In the interpretation of the problem of generation, Aristotelian position seems to be described as acceptable also to Platonists. In the description of the first unmoved mover, Themistius elaborates in great detail on its transcendent attributes. The thought thinking itself somehow accommodates thinking of all things in the universe. But notably, the hierarchy of beings is organized in accordance with the principles of Aristotelian teleology, i.e., the first unmoved mover is the final cause of the cosmos and as such it is the object of desire for all its components. Themistius makes no explicit suggestion that the divine thought produces its objects in the act of thinking. The aspects of production and thought are brought closer together than we find them in the Aristotelian mainstream, but they are still sufficiently separate. We do not find in Themistius' account either the 'Middle-Platonic' idea that Forms are the thoughts in the mind of god or the Plotinian scheme according to which

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Alcinous, *Didasc.* 10. Brague quotes Plotinus *Enn.* 4.4 [28], 2.11. As noted above, Themistius never refers to Plotinus by name in his works, and the impression one gets is close to the conclusions stated by Ballériaux 1994, according to which Themistius' Platonism is closer to Middle-Platonic doctrines, possibly with some influence of Porphyry.

thought (or intellect, *nous*) is ontologically derivative from the absolute unity of the first principle.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION:  
THEMISTIUS' PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAL

The philosophical position we find in Themistius' extant works could be described as an original synthesis within the broad tradition of concordance between Plato and Aristotle.<sup>36</sup> His synthesis reflects some aspects of this tradition, but it has some unique features which set it apart from the philosophical mainstream. Themistius was a champion of a practical rather than contemplative life-style for a philosopher. This did not diminish the importance of theoretical philosophy in his eyes; on the contrary, he emphasized its importance as an instrument for educating a philosopher's mind, making it equal to the task of tackling public affairs. Furthermore, correct understanding of the principles of philosophy was decisive for its practical efficiency. But this practical commitment brought about a different attitude towards the school divisions in philosophy: Aristotelian paraphrases frequently convey a belief that true principles are expressible in all the right philosophical systems. Therefore what may appear as a compromise is for Themistius a necessary procedure of presenting the true answer in its most complete form.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> What is more commonly described as 'Middle Platonism' was perceived by many authors as a genuine symbiosis.

<sup>37</sup> This attitude is well illustrated by the treatise *On Virtue* where three different systems of ethics (Epicurean hedonism, Aristotle's virtue theory and Socratic-Cynic ascetic naturalism) are all regarded as different ways to achieving the *summum bonum*. The choice of ethical system is made on a pragmatic basis in accordance with individual circumstances and disposition, but the assumption is that the correct choices will gradually suggest themselves, at the same time eliminating the incorrect choices.