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## Themistius

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## CHAPTER 7

### *Themistius*

*Frans A. J. de Haas\**

Themistius (c. AD 317–88) taught at Nicomedia before he started a philosophical school in Constantinople, the city where he also served in the Senate. He entertained good relations with a series of emperors from Constantius II and Julian to Theodosius I, to whom many of his orations are dedicated.<sup>1</sup> Among philosophers he is best known for his paraphrases of a number of Aristotle's works, which probably date to his early teaching career, and were written as part of his personal training – although they also seem to bear traces of use in his school.<sup>2</sup> His treatment of *Posterior Analytics*, *Physics* and *On the Soul* survive in Greek; in Hebrew, Latin and Arabic versions we have his *On the Heavens* and *Metaphysics Lambda*.<sup>3</sup> Modern scholars agree that his paraphrase of *On the Soul* is the boldest of them all. This paraphrase develops a distinctive theory of intellect that shows traces not only of Aristotle, but also of Plato's *Timaeus*, Theophrastus, Boethus,

\* I wish to acknowledge gratefully how much I have benefited from the critical comments of an audience in Oxford in 2015, followed up by extensive written comments from Richard Sorabji, and further audience at CEU in Budapest in 2017, who were the first to hear about the four principles to be discussed below. I thank Anna Marmodoro and István Bodnár for their generous invitations. Needless to say, all errors that remain are mine.

<sup>1</sup> See Kupreeva, 'Themistius' for a recent survey of Themistius' life and works. The current consensus is that Themistius never wrote full commentaries in the style of e.g. Alexander of Aphrodisias, for which see Steel, 'Des commentaires'; Blumenthal, 'Themistius: The last Peripatetic?'. Following custom I shall refer to Themistius' paraphrases with *In DA (On Aristotle on the Soul)*, *In Phys. (On Aristotle's Physics)* so as to distinguish them from Aristotle's works.

<sup>2</sup> See *Orations* 23, 89.20–90.5, ed. Schenkl and Downey. Todd (ed.), *Themistius on Aristotle On the Soul* 2 n. 13 draws attention to *scholē* at *In DA* 32,23 and 108,36 possibly meaning lecture; 39,23 mentioning pupils; and 40,4–5, 46,27–8 invoking previous instruction. Themistius, *On Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*, ed. Wallies, 1.2–13 suggests a possible use by students who have read Aristotle once, and wish to return to his works without having time to study the more elaborate commentaries available at the time.

<sup>3</sup> For editions and translations see the Bibliography. Brague (ed.), *Thémistius: Paraphrase de la Métaphysique d'Aristote*, conveniently combines the Hebrew and Arabic versions of the paraphrase of *Metaphysics* 12 in a single French translation. For an English version of relevant passages from that paraphrase see also Pines, 'Some Distinctive Metaphysical Conceptions'.

Atticus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Plotinus and Porphyry.<sup>4</sup> Themistius offers us a comprehensive multi-layered account of intellect. He gives us [1] a single separate divine intellect that somehow informs all human intellects; [2] its products, the productive intellects in each of us; [3] our innate potential intellect, which together with our productive intellect constitutes our composite mind. Finally, he also gives us [4] a lower ‘common’ or passive intellect that is responsible for rational activity immersed in bodily processes like imagination and memory, and the emotions and desires these give rise to.

Since it is difficult to find a coherent theory of all of these intellects and their substrates in the text of Aristotle’s *On the Soul*,<sup>5</sup> Themistius has carefully to prepare the readers of his paraphrase for the full-fledged theory of intellect he sets out near the end. In this chapter I discuss four principles taken from Aristotle’s *Physics* and *On the Soul* that help Themistius forge a relationship between the various levels of intellect in Aristotelian terms. First, I shall set out Themistius’ theory of intellect in more detail in order to identify the relationships in need of clarification.

## 1. Intellects

Themistius follows Aristotle in accepting the existence of a single divine intellect, which is the highest Being and First Principle. *Metaphysics* 12.6–9 provides him with the most detailed description of this intellect.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Aristotle, Themistius does not limit the function of this intellect to being pure actuality of thinking engaged in thinking itself; nor does

<sup>4</sup> The pioneering work of Schroeder and Todd (eds.), *Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators* (1990), with corrections for Themistius in Todd (ed.), *Themistius on Aristotle on the Soul* (1996), is indispensable. Schroeder and Todd translated just the part of Themistius *In DA* about intellect. In 1996 Todd published a full translation of Themistius *In DA*. In this 1996 translation Todd sometimes deviates from his translation and comments as printed in 1990. Henceforth I refer to Todd’s later translation as ‘Todd 1996’. Ballériaux, ‘Thémistius et l’exégèse’ and ‘Thémistius et le Néoplatonisme’, and Finamore, ‘Themistius on Soul’ stress (Neo)platonian influences in Themistius; Gabbe, ‘Themistius as a Commentator’ and ‘Themistius on Concept’, and Kupreeva, ‘Themistius’ point to Peripatetic and Middle-Platonist influences; Blumenthal, ‘Alexander of Aphrodisias’ and Sharples, ‘Peripatetics on Soul’ emphasize the role of Alexander. For my own interpretation of Alexander on intellect, see my forthcoming chapter in John Sisko’s *Philosophy of Mind in Antiquity*. Even where my reading of Themistius in this chapter differs from the above in more ways than I can record here, I am in their debt.

<sup>5</sup> In this chapter I shall not discuss the difficulties surrounding the role of intellect in Aristotle’s *On the Soul*. For an entry into relevant parts of the modern discussion see e.g. Modrak, ‘The *Nous*–Body problem’; Frede, ‘La théorie aristotélicienne’; Caston, ‘Aristotle’s Two Intellects’; and Diamond, ‘Aristotle’s Appropriation’.

<sup>6</sup> In Themistius, as in many later authors, the Aristotelian *noēsis noēseōs* (*Metaphysics* 12.9 1074b34), the act of intellection that is identical with itself as its object, is usually described as an intellect that has its own actuality as its object. This facilitates the interpretation Themistius adopts.

it act only as a final cause on which the entire universe depends, attracting everything like an object of love does.<sup>7</sup> For Themistius, the separate intellect is the First Cause in more than one sense. He distinguishes final, formal and efficient causation, and argues that the First Cause is all three types of cause at once (as in human beings the soul has this triple function).<sup>8</sup> It comprises in the single timeless act of thought with which it is identical [1] itself, hence [2] knowledge of its being the First Cause, and, hence, [3] knowledge of the forms of everything it is the First Cause of. In a single act of thought he entertains a single unified thought covering what we know as a *plurality* of objects, indeed, *all* forms, including those that exist in the world as enmattered forms only.<sup>9</sup> An additional argument why all forms the first cause knows must be completely internal to it at all times is drawn from the lack of potentiality that is required in a First Cause. For Themistius this entails that the activity of the First Cause is characterized by lack of effort and fatigue.<sup>10</sup> In the case of any real subject/object distinction, or worse, in the case of a need for abstraction or appropriation of forms that are somehow external to its essence, the act of thought would be less perfect than the notion of a thinking first cause allows for.

By developing the content of this divine thought from its own being as First Cause, Themistius sidesteps Aristotle's argument that objects other than itself would jeopardize the priority of the divine intellect: for in that case the highest being would be dependent on such secondary items to realize its actuality. Although the result resembles Neoplatonist philosophy of Themistius' day, and may be indebted to it for at least part of its vocabulary, this does not mean that Themistius accepts the existence of Platonic Forms in his divine Intellect.<sup>11</sup> His argument explores an alternative route within the boundaries of an Aristotelian framework. Needless to say, in the hands of Proclus, Avicenna, Maimonides, Gersonides, Averroes and Thomas Aquinas this richer concept of the character and actuality of the

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.7 1072a26–b30.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Themistius, *On Metaphysics* 12.6, §14 (with Brague 139 n. 14; 12.9, §§4–6, §14, §19. For the soul as formal, final and efficient cause of the living being see Aristotle, *DA* 2.4, 415b8–23 with Themistius, *In DA* 50,26–9.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Themistius, *On Metaphysics* 12.4, §4; 12.7, §24–9; 12.9, §15, §18; *In DA* 111,34–112,9; *In Phys.* 33.8–11.

<sup>10</sup> Themistius, *On Metaphysics* 12.9, §§5–11.

<sup>11</sup> Themistius follows Aristotle's rejection of Forms, e.g. *On Metaphysics* 12.3, §§15–19; 12.10, §19. For Neoplatonists, of course, the Intellect is not the highest principle but subordinate to the One. For Themistius the Divine Intellect is the highest being as well as the highest principle, in which he remains closer to Aristotle and Middle Platonists like Numenius.

first cause proved highly fertile, if only because it is amenable to alignment with a Creator God.<sup>12</sup>

According to Themistius' paraphrase, Aristotle's *On the Soul* does not focus on this divine intellect but on human intellect, in conscious opposition to Alexander of Aphrodisias.<sup>13</sup> Alexander had argued that the divine Intellect of *Metaphysics* 12 is to be identified with the Prime Mover of *Physics* 8, and also with the productive intellect of *On the Soul* 3.5.<sup>14</sup> Themistius claims that *On the Soul* 3.4, where Aristotle discusses a *nous* without further specifications, is really about the *potential* intellect with which all human beings are born. By means of sense-perception, imagination and the abstraction of general concepts, the potential intellect develops a more or less steady disposition (*hexis*), which is described as a storehouse where the accumulated concepts rest. It cannot be active without images from sense-perception as 'forerunner'.<sup>15</sup> At this stage the intellect has not yet exhausted the potential for which nature has developed it in human beings in the first place, but it cannot actualize itself any further. The potential intellect needs an intellect 'from without'<sup>16</sup> that possesses as its essence the actuality the human intellect has yet to realize to reach perfection. This intellect is thinking itself always without fatigue, lacking all potentiality. Unlike the divine intellect, however, it does not remain separate but combines with the potential intellect to constitute an intellectual form–matter composite – as described, according to Themistius, in the productive and receptive intellects of *On the Soul* 3.5. Once endowed with this additional actuality it is as if the human soul receives a new kind of vision that allows it to handle its concepts in a sovereign way, independently of perception.<sup>17</sup> It can now

<sup>12</sup> See Pines, 'Some Distinctive Metaphysical Conceptions', who traces the echoes of Themistius' view of the First Cause in these philosophers.

<sup>13</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 102,36–103,19. This statement of Themistius led Thomas Aquinas to use Themistius as his champion against the Averroists, who got their inspiration from Alexander.

<sup>14</sup> From Alexander's discussions in *On the Soul* and *On the Intellect* (= *Mantissa*, section 2) it is unclear whether the productive intellect only provides our potential intellect with a first actualization, thus enabling it to develop abstract theoretical concepts from empirical input by itself, or whether when we think it is actually the divine intellect using our material intellect and thinking in us. For the problems involved, see Sharples, 'Alexander of Aphrodisias'; for my view on the material in *Alex. DA* see De Haas, 'Intellect in Alexander'.

<sup>15</sup> Themistius *In DA* 98,35–99,10; cf. 113,18–21.

<sup>16</sup> For the identification of the intellect 'from without' (*ho exōthen* sc. *nous*) with the productive intellect see Themistius, *In DA* 111,34–35 where the productive intellect is set off against the divine intellect; see also 26,39–27,5 (quoted below p. 127). Elsewhere the term only surfaces in Themistius' discussion of Theophrastus' comments on intellect, 107,30–108,34. For the dubious background of this notion in Aristotle's phrase *nous thurathen* see Moraux, 'À propos du νοῦς' and Caston, 'Aristotle's Two Intellects', 215–16; for its role in Alexander see De Haas, 'Intellect in Alexander'.

<sup>17</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 95,9–20.

‘make distinctions, combine and divide thoughts, and observe thoughts from [the perspective of] one another.’<sup>18</sup> Hence it is in *On the Soul* 3.6 that Themistius will find a description of the activities of the compound intellect once it exists in its second actuality or perfection. Then the human intellect, too, is identical with the objects it thinks, and it thinks itself of its own accord. Its inferiority to the divine intellect does not entail that it can only think enmattered forms, not non-material forms; it can think both, merely not continuously and perpetually.<sup>19</sup> This has the important benefit of explaining why it, as opposed to the productive and divine intellects, can contemplate both good (in a direct encounter with this form, when in activity) and bad (in virtue of the privation of this form, when in potentiality), as well as truth and falsity.<sup>20</sup>

The productive intellect is imperishable on account of its never-failing activity of thinking, and is always separate from the body.<sup>21</sup> The potential intellect, too, always remains separate from the body because all predicates used of *nous* in *On the Soul* 3.4 apply to it: ‘unaffected’ (only perfected), ‘separate’, ‘unmixed’.<sup>22</sup> The composite intellect as a whole, though residing in the human body, thus remains different and separated from it during human life. With reference to Aristotle’s distinction between water as a perceptible compound, and the form of water as its essence,<sup>23</sup> Themistius holds that the intellectual compound is the individual person, ‘the I’ (*to egō*), whereas each individual’s essence, or what-it-is-for-me-to-be (*to emoi einai*), is the formal aspect of this intellectual compound, indeed the ‘form of forms’.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, Themistius has to do justice to Aristotle’s passive intellect (430a24–5) within his framework. Themistius associates this phrase with ‘the common’ (*to koinou*) found in *On the Soul* 1.4 408b24–9. It is a moot point whether this ‘common’ thing (*to koinon*) is the perishable compound of soul and body which is held responsible for emotions, desires and memory (as it is usually taken)<sup>25</sup> or a reference to a common *intellect* (*ho koinos*,

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 99,9–10.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 114,31–115,9.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 111,34–112,24, esp. 112,8–24.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 100,16–102,23.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 104,23–105,12.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 95,35–96,14.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 100,15–101,4. The need to identify the person seems to be partly prompted by the statement ‘we no longer remember’ in *DA* 3.5 430a23–4, which is itself regarded as an echo of *DA* 1.4 408b28, see n. 25. The phrase ‘form of forms’ echoes Aristotle, *DA* 432a2.

<sup>25</sup> Themistius thinks it ludicrous to suggest that the memories ‘we’ do not have concern the activities of the eternal productive intellect, or our awareness of being immortal (102,1–8; 15–18), for no one in his right mind would consider this an option for a mortal intellect. Rather, the question concerns

sc. *nous*). For Themistius it is a common *intellect*, but indeed common in the sense that it explains how a human being can be a compound of soul and body.<sup>26</sup> Its discursive intellectual operations and involvement with the emotions show that it is completely intertwined with the functions of sense-perception and imagination, which thus receive a rational aspect. Its higher degree of potentiality and its involvement with the body explain its intermittent activities, and its susceptibility to fatigue and the vicissitudes of the body, which in the end result in its demise. This passive intellect, Themistius warns his readers, is not identical with the imagination (as Neoplatonists would have it), though Themistius does not quite seem to fulfil his promise that he will argue for the distinction in more detail elsewhere.<sup>27</sup>

This range of intellects raises numerous questions about the transitions or borders between each successive pair of divine, productive, potential and passive intellects. Much is at stake here: do humans end up having a unified intellect or not? How are we to explain the fact that the epithets of the productive intellect in *On the Soul* 3.5 so closely resemble those of the divine intellect? Where does the productive intellect come from?

## 2. Relations

In the remainder of this chapter I shall focus on a number of principles which Themistius employs to support his theory of intellect, especially the relations between the different kinds of intellect and the human soul and body, which serve to render the theory of intellect a coherent whole. These principles are the following:

[P1] Every potentiality has to be actualized by something else that has the actuality since no potentiality can actualize itself.

memories, after death, of our mortal life: this question is answered by distinguishing the productive intellect from the passive intellect. On this interpretation *DA* 3.5 430a22–5 finally resolves the point raised at *DA* 1.4 408b27–9 where Aristotle had already intimated that (productive) intellect might be something more divine and impassible.

<sup>26</sup> Thus Themistius, *In DA* 105,13–106,15 aims at combining both perspectives. Gabbe, ‘Themistius as a Commentator’ has argued that the passive intellect is not a separate intellect but the compound intellect under the aspect in which it informs corporeal and sensitive processes. Her main argument is the fact that it is not mentioned in the form/matter series of 100.28ff. (quoted below p. 118). However, since Themistius regards the compound intellect as immortal, and the passive intellect as mortal, and since he clearly argues for their differentiation in order to preserve consistency in Aristotle, I regard them as different entities.

<sup>27</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 89,24–5; 91,20–9.

- [P2] Lower forms may serve as matter for higher forms in which they culminate.
- [P3] Every actuality of a productive and motive power resides in what is affected.
- [P4] Aristotle's physics of light and colour supports the hierarchy of intellects

The first principle [P1] is applied to the case of the potential intellect. We develop our potential intellect by natural means from the initial stage at birth to a storehouse of concepts that brings it to the verge of actual thinking, but it cannot actualize itself. It remains dependent on the sensible forms in which it discerns the forms it thinks. But because nature does nothing in vain, this potentiality will necessarily have to proceed to the actuality for which it was made. This requires an equally natural actuality within the human soul which turns it into dispositional intellect (*hexis*) in which universal objects of thought and bodies of knowledge exist in actuality:

Since each thing that comes into existence through nature has its potentiality in advance and its perfection as a later consequence, and does not stop at the stage of natural disposition and potentiality (for that would be to have them from nature to no purpose), clearly the human soul too does not [just] progress to the stage of having the potential intellect, and to being naturally fitted for thinking. Instead, the end for the sake of which it was prepared in this way by nature necessarily succeeds the natural disposition. Now the potential intellect must be perfected, yet nothing is perfected through itself, but [only] through something else.<sup>28</sup> Therefore 'it is necessary that these differences exist in the soul too' (430a13–14), and while one intellect must be potential, the other must be actual, i.e. perfect and not at all potential, or due to natural adaptation, but an intellect that is actual, which, by being combined with the potential intellect and advancing it to actuality, brings to completion the intellect as a disposition (*hexis*), in which the universal objects of thought and bodies of knowledge exist.<sup>29</sup>

This principle [P1] thus serves to explain the reason for the distinction, in *On the Soul* 3.5 430a10–14, between the productive and the potential intellect within the human soul: the natural disposition that is potential intellect cannot proceed to its natural end of its own accord. For Themistius, Aristotle's reference to 'each thing that comes into existence through nature' (430a10) is sufficient ground to invoke this general principle of

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Themistius, *On Metaphysics* 12.6 §15, §19.

<sup>29</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 98,12–24 ad 430a10–14, trans. Todd 1996.

Aristotelian physics. Echoing Aristotle (430a12), Themistius compares this productive intellect with craft (*technē*), e.g. the craft of building which grants to the potential house (i.e. the stones) ‘its own power and imposes the form belonging to the craft on to the materials suitable for this end’ (98,27–8). The productive intellect moves the potential intellect analogously to the craft, and it perfects the soul’s natural disposition for thinking, and fully constitutes its *hexis*. Hence, ‘without it nothing thinks’ (430a25). The difference with craft is that craft is not lodged in its matter but operates on it from without. But productive intellect allows us to think when we wish, so it needs to be established *within* the whole of potential intellect, its matter.<sup>30</sup> In other words: the two combine to constitute a form/matter unity.<sup>31</sup>

The second principle [P2], which states that lower forms may serve as matter for higher forms, can then be safely used to connect the actualized potential intellect to the capacities of the human soul as a whole.

Thus what it is to be me comes from the soul, yet from it not in its totality – not, that is, from the perceptive soul, which is matter for the imaginative soul, nor again from the imaginative soul, which is matter for the potential intellect, nor from the potential intellect, which is matter for the productive intellect. What it is to be me therefore comes from the productive intellect alone, since this alone is form in a precise sense, and indeed this is ‘a form of forms’, and the other [forms] are substrates as well as forms, and nature progressed by using them as forms for less valuable [substrates], and as matter for more valuable [forms]. But the highest extreme among forms is this productive intellect, and when nature had progressed that far it stopped, having nothing else more valuable for which it could have made the [productive intellect] a substrate.<sup>32</sup>

The productive intellect that is the essence of the individual human being, whatever its provenance, is not disconnected from the rest of the human soul and body. It serves as the culmination, the ‘form of forms’, of a series of forms that inform lower, less valuable, substrates while themselves serving as lower substrates for even higher forms. The series ranges from the perceptive soul, through imagination and potential intellect, to productive intellect. The series comes to an end when the productive intellect finds the potential intellect in a suitable state to inform it. This is a clear indication that [P1] will not serve to connect the productive intellect to the

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 99,13–23.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 99,18.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 100,28–36, trans. Todd 1996 modified.

divine intellect as an even higher form informing our productive intellect. For this connection we shall need another principle.

It is interesting to note that the series is described as a series of forms, not as a series of matter/form composites, that serve as substrates for higher forms. Perhaps this is a consequence of the expression 'form of forms' in the relevant passage of Aristotle's *On the Soul*. Also, Alexander of Aphrodisias had already described the relationship between these powers of the soul as forms or culminations (*teleiōseis*) supervening on suitable substrates.<sup>33</sup> In Themistius, too, the series does not proceed to potential intellect in the same way as it proceeds to the compound intellect: in Aristotle and Themistius alike, the actuality of perception concerning its object *causes* the image that is the object of the imagination 'bottom-up', not 'top-down'. The potential intellect in its turn fully *depends* on the presence of these images in order to become the storehouse of concepts it develops into, including its dependent mode of thinking them; it does not add anything from itself since 'it is nothing before it thinks' (429b31).

The potential intellect, however, is actualized by the next form in the series, the productive intellect. How does this happen? Here the third principle [P<sub>3</sub>] comes into play: the actuality (*energeia*) of a productive or motive power, though identical with the actuality of the recipient matter, resides in the recipient. The principle was elaborately argued for by Aristotle in *Physics* 3.3<sup>34</sup> where he faces the problem that 'production' (*poiēsis*) and 'affection' (*pathēsis*) as distinguished in language must be the same in substrate, even if different in description and definition: they both describe the same motion. It makes no sense to locate the activity of imparting motion within the agent, and the activity of being moved in the patient: this does not account for the fact that the agent is the productive cause of the motion *of the thing moved*, and it entails a motion within the agent that has nothing to do with the motion it is the cause of. The elegant solution is that in all such cases there is only one single actuality (the motion), in which both the potentiality of the agent to produce motion, and the potentiality of the patient to undergo motion find their actualization. Its two names and definitions derive from their respective perspectives on this same actuality: teaching and learning are different and yet the same actuality. But if there is only one actuality, where is it located? It must be in the passive partner, which is moved to actuality by the agent.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Alexander, *On the Soul* 2,10–24,18, with translation, introduction and commentary in Caston, *Alexander of Aphrodisias On the Soul*, with my review (de Haas, 'Review').

<sup>34</sup> For *Physics* 3.3 see the excellent discussion of Coope, 'Aristotle's Account'.

In this sense the agent (teacher) is not cut off (*apotetmēmēnē*) from the recipient (learner), but in contact with it – at least as long as the motion lasts.<sup>35</sup>

This principle [P3] had an interesting history in Neoplatonism when Plotinus used it to argue that e.g. our intellect is never completely cut off from the divine Intellect. Without signalling any disagreement, in *Enneads* 6.3 [44] 23 Plotinus takes Aristotle's phrase 'same in substrate but different in essence' to describe the partial identity of his own hierarchical pair of original and image, which are never cut off one from the other.<sup>36</sup> As such *Physics* 3.3 describes the second, or outward, activity of each hypostasis. Simplicius echoes Plotinus' description in his commentary on *Physics* 3.3.<sup>37</sup>

In Themistius, however, this principle is employed for different aims, both in his own paraphrase of *Physics* 3.3, and in the context of the theory of intellect in *On the Soul*. In his paraphrase of *Physics* 3.3, Themistius elaborates on the example of teacher and pupil.

When the teacher is changed relative to the learner his teaching does not come about in the learner by being completely cut off so that the teacher undergoes no activity (*anenergēton*) and only the learner is active, but the activity of the learner comes about when the teacher is present and active so that the teacher is active and produces precisely the effect that the learner undergoes. But nothing prevents the activity belonging to the changes that differ in kind (producing an effect and being affected) from being one. They will in fact be one with respect to the underlying subject because both are one, given that the object of study, which the teacher is teaching and the learner is learning, is also one and the same, and teaching is nothing other than what comes about from teaching and learning, and likewise too with learning. But these, as we said, are the same in their underlying subject not in their definition. Instead, teaching is the giving of knowledge, learning the taking of knowledge, and the potentiality of the learner is led to activity by the teacher.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* 3.3, 202b5–8, cf. 3.2, 202a5–12 which specifies that in this contact a form is transmitted as in Themistius' craft examples. In its most universal formulation at *Physics* 3.3, 202b19–22 (trans. Hardie and Gaye): 'To generalize, teaching is not the same as learning, or agency as patiency, in the full sense, though they belong to the same subject, the motion; for the actualization of this *in* that and the actualization *of* that through the action of this differ in definition.' At *Metaphysics* 9.8 1050a23–b2 Aristotle refers to the principle with examples of sight, thinking, life, as well as building and weaving. Themistius may have derived some of his favourite examples from this context.

<sup>36</sup> See Lloyd, 'Plotinus on the Genesis', esp. 168–71, who also notes an application of *Physics* 3.3 at *Enneads* 6.7 [38] 40. Plotinus, however, hesitates to fully identify the actualities of original and image because he discriminates between the essential *energeia* of the cause, and its outward *energeia*.

<sup>37</sup> Simplicius, *On Physics* 440.5–17, see Wilberding, 'Aristotle, Plotinus, and Simplicius', esp. 451–4. Simplicius embraces the identification of the two actualities, because he does not accept Plotinus' theory of double *energeia*.

<sup>38</sup> Themistius, *In Phys.* 78.4–17, trans. Todd 2012.

This reading is original in at least three ways. First, it is striking that the underlying subject (*hupokeimenon*) that is supposed to be the sole referent of the names of two processes is no longer the motion (as in Aristotle) but the piece of knowledge transferred in teaching/learning, which is the same in the teacher as in the learner. This identity in itself rules out any Neoplatonic interpretation in which the product is necessarily different, because lesser as an image. In Themistius, as in Aristotle, forms can be transmitted without loss, which will be important when we find this principle applied to the relation between divine and productive intellect.

Second, the activity of teaching/learning is more clearly described as a relation. This reading supports the unity of the activity concerned, and also leads to the postulation of a third definition of motion:

But if a third definition must be added, we shall not be off track if we use what has been stated here: namely, change is the actualization of what potentially can produce an effect and what potentially can be affected as relative to one another.<sup>39</sup>

As Todd acutely observes,<sup>40</sup> whereas we read in Aristotle: ‘the [actualization] of what potentially can produce an effect and be affected *insofar as it is such*’ (202b26–7), Themistius changes the last couple of words to ‘*as relative to one another*’ to agree with his earlier account. But in Aristotle this so-called definition was introduced only as a more familiar way of expressing motion, a corollary rather than a third definition.<sup>41</sup>

A third modification concerns the notion of being cut off. By defining change between agent and patient as a relation, the possibility is clearly ruled out that the agent is cut off from the patient in any way. Themistius interprets the notion of being cut off in terms of a lack of activity on the part of the teacher, and rules it out because this would entail that there is only activity on the part of the pupil. When Themistius applies the principle in the context of *On the Soul*, it is safe to assume it must have its new meaning.

Themistius reminds us of his treatment of *Physics* 3.3 at least twice in his paraphrase of *On the Soul*.<sup>42</sup> At *On Aristotle, On the Soul* 84.4–6 the reference is triggered by an appeal to this principle in *On the Soul* 3.2 426a2–6, which is and generally applied to all perception in 426b8–9. There it supports

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 79,6–8, trans. Todd.

<sup>40</sup> Todd (2012) 165 nn. 813–14 *ad loc.*

<sup>41</sup> The first definition is Aristotle, *Physics*, 201a10–11 ‘the actuality of the potential as such’, the second 201a27–9 ‘the actuality of the moved *qua* moved’.

<sup>42</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 60,16; 84,4–6.

Aristotle's claim that the actuality of hearing (*akousis*) and the actuality of sounding (*psophēsis*), or being actually 'hearable', are the same actuality, residing in the organ for hearing where the potentiality for hearing is located. Interestingly, Aristotle adds that 'for that reason it is not necessary that the mover is moved'.<sup>43</sup> In the case of intellects it is important that this is entailed by principle [P3].

How, then, does [P3] play a role in Themistius' theory of intellect? As we have seen above, Themistius elaborates on Aristotle's reference to craft in *On the Soul* 3.5 430a12 to explain that the productive intellect grants the potential intellect its own *power* and imposes its *form*, and thus 'perfects the soul's natural disposition for thinking, and fully constitutes its *hexis*'.<sup>44</sup> But if the productive intellect turns out to be the form that resides within the potential intellect and becomes unified with it, how can it be described as 'separate, unaffected, and unmixed' (430a17–18) as well as 'immortal and eternal' (430a23)? How can these epithets – which led Alexander of Aphrodisias and others to identify the productive intellect with the divine intellect of *Metaphysics* 12, as well as the prime mover of *Physics* 8 – apply to the human productive intellect? At first Themistius sees the need to mitigate the sense of the terms 'separate, unaffected, and unmixed' by taking them as qualifications of productive intellect *relative to* the potential intellect that apply more to the former than to the latter. After all, the latter is far more naturally cognate (*sumphuēs*) with the soul, viz. from birth, than the former, which somehow appears on the stage later in the development of human intellect.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, according to Aristotle the productive intellect 'produces all things' (430a12), and the potential intellect 'becomes all things' (430a14–15). How is this possible if the productive intellect is in the human soul, but (apparently) not innate? The epithets that match the description of the divine intellect point the way to a solution. Themistius stresses the importance of the existence in the human soul of both a plurality of concepts as matter, and a creative (*dēmiourgia*) and leading (*archēgos*) power as productive intellect.

For in a way it becomes the actual objects by being active in its thinking; and the one [aspect] of it, in which there is a plurality of its thoughts, resembles matter, the other [*sc.* its thinking] a craftsman. For it is in its power to comprehend (*perilabein*) and structure (*morphōsai*) its thoughts, since it is

<sup>43</sup> Themistius had already recalled the latter proposition at 14,28–15,17, reminding us of *Physics* 8.5.

<sup>44</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 98,30–2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 105,34–106,14.

productive, and thus the founder (*archēgos*) of these thoughts. That is why it also most resembles a god; for god is indeed in one respect [identical with] the actual things that exist, but in another their supplier (*chorēgos*). The intellect is far more valuable (430a18–19) insofar as it creates than insofar as it is acted on; that is because the productive principle is always more valuable than the matter [on which it acts].

Also, as I have often said, the intellect and object of thought are identical (just as actual knowledge and the very object of knowledge), yet not in the same respect. It is an object of thought insofar as it has conjoined with [itself] the potential intellect, while it is intellect as it is itself actual.<sup>46</sup>

This passage, along with its context, attributes to the productive intellect the functions of the divine intellect: it is both identical with all things that exist – in a much stronger sense than Aristotle had in mind in *On the Soul* 3.5 – and it supplies, or creates, everything that exists. Hence it resembles a god. The form that joins the potential intellect holds all that exists as objects of its own single thought: ‘it is intellect as it is itself actual’, which thinks always, not intermittently or discursively.<sup>47</sup> Only when it is an object of thought of a human potential intellect does it become an object of thought in a more mundane sense.

If, then, productive intellect as form has the same functions and qualities as the divine intellect, I suggest there is every reason to regard it as the actuality of both the divine intellect and our potential intellect, duly residing in our potential intellect. After all, ‘while I am discursively thinking and writing my compound intellect is writing *qua* in actuality (not *qua* in potentiality), because to be active (*energein*) is channelled to [the compound intellect] from [the productive intellect]’.<sup>48</sup> More clearly:

There is no need to be puzzled if we who are combined from the potential and the actual [intellects] are referred back to one productive intellect, and that what it is to be each of us is derived from that single [intellect]. Where otherwise do the common notions (*koinai ennoiai*) come from? Where is the untaught and identical understanding of the primary definitions and primary axioms derived from? For we would not understand one another unless there were a single intellect that we all shared.

And Plato’s [statement] is true, ‘If there was not an <affection> that was identical, although individually different for different human beings, but instead any one of us was uniquely affected in comparison with other

<sup>46</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 99,20–30, trans. Todd 2016 modified.

<sup>47</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 100,4–14.

<sup>48</sup> Todd 1996, p. 125 translates ‘for activity from the [*potential*] intellect] is channelled to it’. This cannot be right for reasons explained in the text.

people, it would not be easy for that person to indicate to another how he was personally affected.' (*Gorgias* 481c5–d1)

Similarly with bodies of knowledge, the teacher's objects of thought are identical to those of the learner; for there would not even be any teaching and learning unless the thought possessed by teacher and learner was identical. And if, as is necessary, [that thought] is identical, then clearly the teacher also has an intellect identical to that of the learner, given that in the case of the intellect its essence is identical with its activity.<sup>49</sup>

The last paragraph invokes principle [P<sub>3</sub>] as illustrated by the identity of the content involved in teaching and learning. This identity rests on the identity of essence and activity. Teacher and learner must have the same productive intellect if in active intellect essence and activity are identical. This 'horizontal' agreement between actualized intellects must rest on a prior thinking that is always actual.

This passage may suggest that there is not only one divine intellect, but also one single productive intellect for all of us. However, the context of the quotation above suggests otherwise. It involves the fourth principle [P<sub>4</sub>], the physics of light, to which we now turn. It is best to start with a series of quotes that address an intriguing question:

What does, however, justify a really extensive examination is whether this productive intellect is one or many. This is because based on the light with which it is compared (430a15) it is one. For light too, of course, is one, as even more is the [entity that] supplies the light, [the one] through which all sight among animals is advanced from potentiality to activity [i.e. the sun]. So [on this analogy], the imperishability of the light shared [by everyone with sight] has no more relation to each organ of sight than does the eternity of the productive intellect to each [one] of us.<sup>50</sup>

Themistius addresses the problem of the unity or multiplicity of the productive intellect. On the one hand, Aristotle's reference to light (in the singular) seems to suggest there is only one. Light as such is one and the same thing everywhere (i.e. the actuality of the transparent, according to Aristotelian physics). If the reference to light is understood as a reference to the sun, who is the supplier of the light that actualizes the objects of perception for all animals, the unity of light is even more obvious. This type of identity, however, does not give us the eternity of the productive intellect, in the same way as the seeing eye does not share in the imperishability of the source of the light that actualizes it. This is undesirable, to say the least.

<sup>49</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 103,36–104,11, trans. Todd 1996.

<sup>50</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 103,20–6, trans. Todd 1996.

If, on the other hand, there are many [productive intellects], and one for each [individual] potential [intellect], on what basis will they differ from one another? For where [individuals] are the same in kind, division occurs in respect of matter, and so the productive [intellects] must be the same in kind, given that they all have their essence identical with their activity, and all think the same objects. For if they do not think the same, but different, objects, what will be the process for apportioning [different intellects to different individuals]? From what source will the potential intellect also come to think all objects, if the intellect that advances it to activity does not think all objects prior to it?<sup>51</sup>

If we consider the other option, viz. that each of us has our own productive intellect, a problem of discernibility arises. For if our numerous productive intellects are all thinking the same thoughts (viz. all objects), which they are because that actuality is their essence, it seems impossible to conceive of their difference.

However, this lack of differentiation would have two important benefits: it explains the identity of objects of thought that all human beings share (common notions, untaught insight into primary definitions and axioms, indeed knowledge of all forms that we come to know and are able to communicate about). These are said to derive from a prior intellect that is already thinking them in actuality. Second, also in teaching and learning, Themistius reminds us, the content is the same in teacher (divine intellect) and pupil (productive intellect).<sup>52</sup>

So can we preserve these benefits, and at the same time avoid the problems? The analogy of light has the potential to do just that:

Now [the solution is that] the intellect that illuminates (*ellampōn*) in a primary sense is one, while those that are illuminated (*ellampomenoi*) and that illuminate (*ellampontes*) are, just like light, more than one. For while the sun is one, you could speak of light as in a sense divided among the organs of sight. That is why Aristotle introduced as a comparison not the sun but [its derivative] light (*DA* 3.5a15), whereas Plato [introduced] the sun [itself], in that he makes it analogous to the good (*Rep.* 6.508b–509b).<sup>53</sup>

The solution is to distinguish between a single illuminating intellect, i.e. the divine intellect (the analogue of the sun), and numerous illuminated intellects that are at the same time illuminating others, i.e. the multiple productive intellects that actualize our potential intellects, and are in that

<sup>51</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 103,26–32, trans. Todd 1996.

<sup>52</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 103,36–104,14.

<sup>53</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 103,32–6, trans. Todd 1996.

sense indeed multiplied among them. Hence Aristotle was right to refer to *light* instead of the *sun*: our productive intellect is like shared light, an illuminated and illuminating intellect. Owing to the identity of activity and essence in all active intellects, Themistius can have unity in multiplicity. For regardless of the multiplicity of productive intellects, they are all identical in their essence and activity of thinking all objects, similar to light that is essentially the same thing no matter where the sun scatters its rays.

This ingenious solution finds further support in the fact that according to Themistius light [P4] itself is an example of principle [P3]: the activity of an agent in a thing that is being affected. In Themistius' summary:

It has, then, been stated what transparency is, and similarly what light is too: that it is neither fire, nor body at all, nor an effluence of any body (that would also make it a body). Instead, it is the presence of fire or something like it in what is transparent, but a presence that is not like that of [objects] that are blended with one another, or juxtaposed with one another in the same place (for these are all ways that bodies are affected). Light is more like the activity of an agent in a thing that is being affected, specifically, in a thing that is brought to perfection.<sup>54</sup>

We can now see that this passage from the discussion of light in *On the Soul* 2.7 supports the use of light as the analogue of productive intellect in the discussion of *On the Soul* 3.5. As many philosophers before and after Themistius realized, light is a perfect analogue for immaterial agents. Furthermore, this quote describes light as 'the presence of fire or something like it in what is transparent'. Themistius explains this presence as 'a relation of the thing that is present to what it is present in, and it is not [itself] a body' (60,20–2). So light is not only like the activity of an agent in something that is affected by it, it is also a relation of something to what it is present in: again the description of immaterial agency that Themistius had already deduced from *Physics* 3.3.

For Themistius, light has other attractions, too: it comes in different degrees. Paraphrasing Aristotle's discussion of light in *On the Soul* 2.7, he states that the sun 'is always actually transparent, since it also always has light, while air and the other transparent bodies are at different times potentially or actually transparent'.<sup>55</sup> This is a perfect analogue for the difference between the (illuminating) divine and (illuminated and illuminating) productive intellects on the one hand, and, on the other hand the (illuminated) actualized human intellects that can only comprehend

<sup>54</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 60,11–16 commenting on *DA* 2.7, 418b20–6, trans. Todd 1996.

<sup>55</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 59,29–31, trans. Todd 1996.

the thinking they are joined with by stretching it out in time: discursivity and intermittent activity are the best they are capable of.

In his paraphrase of *On the Soul* 1.4 Themistius inserts a discussion directed against an opponent (probably Porphyry) who supposedly claimed that not soul (*psuchē*) but the ensoulment (*empsuchia*) perishes with the body.<sup>56</sup> Although Themistius rejects the relevance of the distinction in that context, he is willing to differentiate between the light of the sun and the light the sun gives to the air, and he describes the difference as a difference in degree of perfection of transparency. What is more, he uses this distinction as an analogy to support the difference between a world soul and individual souls that are distributed from it – even though he repeats that only the latter are the topic of *On the Soul*.<sup>57</sup> At the end of the passage Themistius summarizes:

In general, how will the soul that supplies vegetative life be established in the body from without, or the one that supplies spiritedness or appetite? Intellect can perhaps be established from without and illuminate the soul with a rational capacity, but these [other] natures must exist in, and be connected with, bodies if they are going to provide their own functions.<sup>58</sup>

It is clear that the model applied to the intellect later in the paraphrase was already used in relation to levels of soul in the context of *On the Soul* 1.4. The remark on intellect reads as an announcement of the quotation from *On Aristotle, On the Soul* 103,32–6 above.<sup>59</sup>

This use of the theory of light [P4] has more Aristotelian roots than one might expect, and hence need not refer to a Platonic strand in Themistius. In fact in *On Sense Perception* 3, 439a18–b19 Aristotle describes light as a single nature and power that is inseparable from what it exists in, and is found in different degrees that explain both transparency and colour. It is called light, or the transparent in actuality, when the body it inheres in has no fixed boundaries (like air or water); in a body with fixed boundaries the limit of the transparent is visible on its surface as colour, or, if weaker, as a mere glow in the dark. Themistius shows awareness of this discussion, and informs us that Sosigenes, the teacher of Alexander, inserted it in his

<sup>56</sup> For the identification of Porphyry, who is not mentioned by name, see Moraux, 'À propos du νοῦς', with Todd (ed.), *Themistius on Aristotle on the Soul*, 163 nn. 21–3.

<sup>57</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 25,33–27,5. The language of unity and differentiation is similar as in 103,26–32 (quoted above p. 125) with reference to the multiplicity of productive intellects.

<sup>58</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 26,39–27,5, trans. Todd 1996.

<sup>59</sup> In the sequel, 104,14–21, Themistius proceeds to show that this model works better to explain the multiplicity of intellects than it does to explain the notorious problem of the multiplicity of souls, because souls have several different capacities.

comments on *On the Soul*.<sup>60</sup> In this sense Aristotle's statement in *On the Soul* 3.5 that light produces actual colours from potential colours is more than just an analogy. Although Themistius does not explicitly apply all aspects of Aristotle's theory of light to his theory of intellect, the reference shows that a hierarchical series of intellects as analogues of types of light should be perfectly at home in a Peripatetic environment.

### 3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to shed new light on the complex theory of intellect advanced by Themistius in his bold 'paraphrase' of Aristotle's *On the Soul*. As a commentator he is careful to identify the various types or functions of intellect that Aristotle mentions in his text (or so he thinks). Therefore he has to distinguish between a divine, productive, potential and common intellect. In addition, Themistius goes to considerable length to show how these four intellects are related. I have identified four principles familiar from Aristotle's physical and psychological writings, which Themistius employs in new and original ways. We have seen that these principles were deployed in his paraphrase of *On the Soul* well before their application to the theory of intellect – whether Aristotle's text invited a reference to any of the principles or not – as if to prepare the reader. Together these four principles enable Themistius to solve traditional questions, and repudiate rival interpretations. Their further purpose, however, is to prove that the four intellects are properly related in Aristotelian terms, and thereby to establish a coherent account of human beings as rational individuals who share in divine knowledge, while being unified compounds of soul and body.

<sup>60</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 61,21–34.