

## Themistius on the Aristotelian Soul

Themistius (c. 317-c.388 C.E.) has presented something of a puzzle for modern scholars. In his *Paraphrasis on Aristotle's De Anima* he presents interpretations concerning the soul and especially the intellect. Does he stand in the Platonic or the Aristotelian tradition? How much of his work is informed by Neoplatonic doctrine? I will stake out a position intermediary between those who make him dependent on Neoplatonic ideas and those who downplay the role of Platonism in his work. I propose to examine how Themistius interweaves Platonic doctrines into his interpretation of Aristotle's intellect and show how he makes careful use of Plato's *Timaeus* to support his interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine.

I will examine three passages in Themistius' *Paraphrasis*: 10.23-11.18, 37.2-38.30, and several selections from 93.32-116.17. In these passages he argues that Aristotle's doctrines are correct by comparing them favorably to Plato's doctrines of the soul in the *Timaeus*. In the first, concerning the elements that make up the soul, he tries to show that Aristotle's criticisms are not directed against Plato. Rather, both Aristotle and Plato share the common view that the soul is an intermediary between a higher Intellect and the lower irrational faculties. In the second, he argues that Aristotle agrees with Plato that the rational soul must be fully separate from the lower powers. Where Plato in the *Timaeus* had separated the immortal rational soul from the lower faculties by placing it in the head, Aristotle does the same by having it enter the soul/body complex from the outside. Finally in the third passage, in which Themistius presents his interpretation of Aristotle's active and passive intellects, he makes use of the *Timaeus* to promote his unusual view that there are three intellects (not two). The lowest intellect is equivalent to Plato's two lower soul elements (the spirited and appetitive), which are mortal but tied directly to the body; the higher two together are Plato's immortal rational soul.

This tactic of using Plato to support Themistius' own interpretation of Aristotle allows Themistius to highlight features of his own interpretation that might not be easily seen in Aristotle's text. It is as if one might have doubted Themistius' interpretation: if there is a similar doctrine in Plato, then Themistius is on firmer ground. This activity, using the major philosopher of another school to support that of your own school, is a common tactic of the Neoplatonists, except that they argue in the reverse: if Aristotle supports Plato, then that is further evidence of the correctness of Plato's views. Thus, Themistius is indeed an Aristotelian first, but he uses Platonic doctrine to further support what he considers Aristotelian doctrine. In so doing, he adds credence to his own doctrines of the soul.