Themistius (C. 317-C. 385 Ce) Encyclopedia Article

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Themistius (C. 317–C. 385 Ce)

Themistius is one of the principal Greek commentators on Aristotle. He was born at Byzantium, the son of a philosopher (Eugenius), and received a traditional education in Greek culture at various locations. In his twenties Themistius established a philosophical school at Constantinople (as Byzantium had by then become), and prepared the paraphrases on several Aristotelian works that represent his main contribution to the ancient philosophical tradition. After about 350 CE he became involved in the political life of the eastern Empire, and served several emperors as an ambassador, administrator, and adviser. This phase of his career is richly documented in his orations, some of which reflect his philosophical interests.

Themistius cannot be easily labeled by his philosophical affiliation. His extant paraphrases of Aristotle's *De anima, De caelo, Metaphysics* Book 12, *Physics*, and *Posterior Analytics* follow the Aristotelian text closely and are designed to facilitate study. He was clearly influenced by the work of the great Peripatetic commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias. However, at times Themistius reveals some knowledge of the Platonic tradition, notably in his response to Aristotle's account of the intellect in *De anima* Book 3, chapter 5. He is most safely described as a philosophical scholar who absorbed the Platonic tradition without allowing it to dominate his interpretations, as it did in the case of later commentators, notably Simplicius and Philoponus.

Themistius was respected by Aristotelian commentators in later antiquity, in the Arabic, Hebrew, and western medieval Latin tradition, as well as during the Renaissance. Some of his texts are in fact extant only in Arabic. His interpretation of the active intellect was suggestive enough to allow for the notion of the immortality of the individual soul, and, as such, was welcome within the Christian tradition.

See Also

Aristotle.

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