

Themistius' Doctrine of the Three Intellects

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Themistius notoriously discovered not two but three intellects in Aristotle's *De Anima*. Besides the two commonly recognized in III.5, he added a lower, mortal form of intellect. This third intellect has been the source of much complaint. Todd calls it "a perverse interpretation" of Aristotle,¹ and Huby is dismissive of Themistius' ability to make a coherent philosophy,² while Gabbe has tried to rehabilitate Themistius and his doctrine.³ In this paper I will re-examine Themistius' doctrine and consider how and why he came to such a strange interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine. Like Gabbe, I believe that there is a consistent doctrine that Themistius is espousing, one that makes a unique and important contribution to Aristotelian studies. Unlike her, however, I do not think that the role of the third intellect can be equated with Aristotle's concept of φαντασία. Instead I will argue for a more Platonically inspired solution.

THE FIRST TWO INTELLECTS (DE AN. III.5)

Let's examine the distinction Themistius makes concerning the three intellects that he discerns in III.5: the productive, potential, and passive intellects. Aristotle begins III.5 by asserting a general rule of the natural world: there is something that serves as matter (ύλη, 430a10) and another that serves as cause or maker (τὸ αἴτιον καὶ ποιητικόν, 430a12). The one that is akin to matter is potentially (δυναμίει, 430a11) all the things that the other actually makes (430a10–13). These differences apply in the case of the soul as well (430a13–14). Aristotle adds: "This intellect is separable, impassive, and unmixed, being in its essence actuality" (καὶ οὗτος ὁ νοῦς χωριστὸς καὶ

1. In *Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators on the Intellect*, ed. Schroeder and Todd (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), 96–97, note 95.

2. Huby, "Stages in the Development of Language about Aristotle's *Nous*," in *Aristotle and the Later Tradition*, ed. H.J. Blumenthal and H. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1991), 142: "He looks at each section [of the *De Anima*] closely as he comes to it . . . But at each point we have only a partial account, and the parts do not add up to a coherent whole."

3. Gabbe, "Themistius as a Commentator on Aristotle: Understanding and Appreciating his Conception of *Nous Pathêtikos* and *Phantasia*," *Dionysius* 26 (Dec 2008): 73–92.

ἀπαθῆς καὶ ἀμιγής, τῇ οὐσίᾳ ὧν ἐνέργεια, a17–18). These words are usually taken to refer to the maker intellect since Aristotle later says that when it is separated from the body, it is immortal and eternal (ἀθάνατον καὶ αἰδίον, a23) and impassive (ἀπαθές, a24), while the passive intellect is destructible (παθητικὸς νοῦς φθαρτός, a24–25). This last “passive” intellect is usually taken to be the same as the one that is all things potentially. Themistius interprets III.5 differently. He sees a productive intellect (from ποιητικόν, 430a12), a potential intellect (from δυνάμει, 430a11), and a passive intellect (from παθητικὸς νοῦς, a24–25). The first two survive bodily death, but the passive intellect does not.

Themistius’ discussion of the productive (ποιητικός) and potential (δυνάμει) intellects in III.5 makes up the largest section of his *Paraphrasis*.⁴ Themistius begins by establishing that the potential intellect is actualized by the productive (98.12–102.29). The productive intellect is characterized as eternal activity: “It is unceasing, untiring, undying, eternal activity” (ἔστι δὲ ἐνέργεια ἄπαστος καὶ ἀκάματος καὶ ἀθάνατος καὶ αἰδίος, 99.37–38). As such its activity is not discontinuous or discursive, moving from topic to topic or form to form (100.4–9). Rather “it possesses all the forms as a whole and projects them all at once” (ἀλλὰ πάντα ἔχοντος ἀρθρώως τὰ εἶδη καὶ ἅπαντα ἅμα προβεβλημένου, 100.9–10). Thus, unlike the potential intellect, which actualizes forms individually over time, the productive intellect is timeless and all-embracing.⁵ The productive intellect is best imagined not simply as the active but separate component of a compounded intellect, but something that is much more unified with the potential intellect that acts as its matter. Themistius makes a comparison that is helpful for understanding the unity of this compound intellect. He compares the way that a craft is related to its matter, but adds that whereas the craft is external to the artwork produced by it, the productive intellect is internal (99.13–18):

4. Blumenthal, “Themistius: The Last Peripatetic Commentator on Aristotle?” in *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and their Influence*, ed. R. Sorabji (Ithaca: Cornell U Press), 118 and “*Nous Pathêtikos* in Later Greek Philosophy,” in Blumenthal and Robinson, 195. Note 11 states that the nature of the *Paraphrasis* changes in this long chapter, becoming more like a standard commentary. Cf. Todd in Schroeder and Todd, 36 and Balleriaux, “Thémistius et le Néoplatonisme: Le Noûs Παθητικός, et l’Immortalité de l’Âme,” *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne* 12.2 (1994): 177 and note 21. It is clear thereby that Themistius realizes the difficulty of the doctrine of the intellects in Aristotle and so offers his students (and readers) a more thorough analysis.

5. For the potential intellect as actualizing forms sequentially, see 95.9–34. For it receiving the forms individually from the productive intellect, which contains them without division, see 100.22–26.

For its art is not external to its matter, as the bronze-working art is to the bronze and the carpenter's art to the wood, but the productive intellect enters into the whole potential intellect, just as if the carpenter did not preside over the wood or the bronze-worker over the bronze from the outside but was able to penetrate throughout the whole of it. For in this way the intellect that is in activity, having been added to the potential intellect, becomes one with it. For what is of matter and form is one.

(οὐ γὰρ ἐξῶθεν τῆς ὕλης ἢ τέχνη, ὥσπερ χαλκευτικὴ τοῦ χαλκοῦ καὶ τεκτονικὴ τοῦ ξύλου, ἀλλ' ἐνδύεται ὅλῳ τῷ δυνάμει νῶ ὁ ποιητικός, ὥσπερ ἂν εἰ ὁ τέκτων τοῖς ξυλοῖς καὶ ὁ χαλκοτύπος τῷ χαλκῷ μὴ ἐξῶθεν ἐπεσάται, δι' ὅλου δὲ αὐτοῦ φοιτᾷν οἷός τε ἦν. οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ὁ κατ' ἐνέργειαν νοῦς τῷ δυνάμει νῶ προσγεγόμενος εἷς τε γίνεται μετ' αὐτοῦ· ἐν γὰρ τὸ ἐξ ὕλης καὶ εἶδους.)

Thus the resulting compound is not so divided as that in crafts. The resultant intellect, the compound of productive and potential intellect is really one entity with two aspects.⁶

Earlier, in his paraphrase of III.4, Themistius had argued that the potential intellect is (as Aristotle had said) potentially all the intelligible objects without actually being any of them until it is actualized by the productive intellect (94.5–20). Themistius, following Aristotle's lead that the faculty of intellect is similar to that of perception, thinks that the actual intelligible objects (that exist stored both below in the faculty of imagination and above in the productive intellect) enter and leave the potential intellect. It is a sort of storehouse for intelligible forms,⁷ but purely potential and capable of taking on any form without interference. For this reason, unlike the perceptual faculty, it can have no organ, which would interfere with its ability to take on the intelligible forms (94.20–34).

Themistius discusses the functioning of the compounded intellects in three passages: 95.9–34 (on III.4), 98.35–99.10 (on III.5), and 109.4–18 (on III.6). The potential intellect is able (Themistius says) “to hunt after universals, bring together the similar among the dissimilar and the same among the different” (τὸ καθόλου δύνηται θηρεῦν καὶ συνάγειν τὸ ὅμοιον ἐν τοῖς ἀνομοίοις καὶ τὸ ταῦτόν ἐν τοῖς διαφόροις, 95.11–12).⁸ It is the productive intellect

6. See also 108.33–34, where the productive and potential intellects are “somehow two natures and somehow one, for what is of matter and form is one” (καὶ πῶς μὲν δύο φύσεις τούτους τοὺς νοῦς, πῶς δὲ μίας· ἐν γὰρ τὸ ἐξ ὕλη καὶ εἶδους). Cf. Huby, 142, although she is too quick to find fault with Themistius' method here. The coalescing of the two intellects into a unified self-contained intellect is clear enough and will play an important role in the individual's afterlife, as we shall see below.

7. See 99.6, where Themistius calls the potential intellect a “treasury of thoughts” (θησαυρὸς νοημάτων) before the productive intellect gives it the ability to sort through these thoughts. For a possible Platonic source of the term θησαυρὸς, see Schroeder and Todd, 89 note 54.

8. It is worth noting that what the actualized potential intellect does is similar to what the World Soul in Plato's *Timaeus* does: maps out sameness and difference in the objects it encounters.

that actualizes these intelligible objects in the potential intellect, allowing it to think individual thoughts and so analyze them (99.1–3):

The active intellect having actualized⁹ the potential intellect not only makes it an intellect-in-activity but also makes its potential intelligible objects into actual ones.

(ὁ νοῦς οὗτος ὁ ἐνεργεῖα προαγαγὼν τὸν δυνάμει νοῦν οὐ μόνον αὐτὸν ἐνεργεῖα νοῦν ἐποίησεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ δυνάμει νοητὰ ἐνεργεῖα νοητὰ αὐτῷ κατασκευάσεν.)

When the productive intellect has brought the potential intellect into activity and actualized the objects in it, the combined intellect is then able to discern and combine the intelligible objects so as to form concepts and true or false judgments concerning them (99.4–6 and 109.7–13).¹⁰

As to the status of the productive intellect, Themistius argues against philosophers like Alexander of Aphrodisias. Themistius believes that the productive intellect is not god but something that exists “in the soul,” pointing to Aristotle’s words ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ in 430a14 (102.36–103.6).¹¹ Thus the productive intellect belongs to and forms a compound with the human soul. Nonetheless, the productive intellect is single and shared by a myriad of potential intellects (103.21–104.23).

Themistius goes on to say that the potential intellect, like the productive, is immortal. He does so by asserting that Aristotle’s reference to ὁ παθητικὸς νοῦς at the end of 5 (430.24–25)—the intellect that is “destructible” (φθαρτός)—does not refer to the potential intellect but to another, lower form of intellect. Let’s examine the evidence that Themistius brings to bear in his argument.¹²

See *Tim.* 37a2–c5. This description of what intellect does is not to be found in the *De Anima*, and so we again see the importance of Plato’s *Timaeus* to Themistius’ psychology. See my “Themistius on Soul and Intellect in Aristotle’s *De Anima*,” forthcoming in the *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium of Ancient Philosophy*.

9. Themistius here uses the verb προαγαγεῖν to express the switching on of the potential state. For the complete meaning of the verb, see 103.31–32, where Themistius says that the productive element “leads it [i.e., the potential intellect] into activity” (ὁ προάγων αὐτὸν εἰς ἐνεργεῖαν). At 109.4–5, he uses the imagery of illumination: “the potential intellect receives its proper form after the productive intellect illuminates it” (Οὗτος τοῖνον ὁ δυνάμει νοῦς ὅταν ἀπολάβῃ τὴν οἰκείαν μορφήν ἐλλάμψαντος αὐτῷ τοῦ ποιητικοῦ). In all three passages he is describing the instantaneous change of state from first to second entelechy.

10. In 109.7–13, it is clear that the potential intellect merely grasps individual forms, but when actualized by the productive intellect can combine these various forms into true or false statements. See also Hubler, “The Perils of Self-Perception: Explanations of Apperception in the Greek Commentaries on Aristotle,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 59.2 (2005): 301.

11. Themistius’ arguments that the productive intellect is not equivalent to the First Unmoved Mover of *Metaphysics* Lambda are given in 102.30–103.19.

12. See also Balleriaux, 178–80.

Themistius connects the passive intellect of III.5 with a discussion in I.4. Aristotle, in the course of showing that the soul does not move, contrasts the changes that take place in the individual with the unaffectedness of the soul itself (408b13–15):

For perhaps it would be better to say not that the soul pities or learns or thinks but that the human being [does so] by means of the soul.

(βέλτιον γὰρ ἴσως μὴ λέγειν τὴν ψυχὴν ἐλεεῖν ἢ μανθάνειν ἢ διανοεῖσθαι, ἀλλὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον τῇ ψυχῇ).

Affections and even thinking are not motions within the soul but within the compound of soul and body. Aristotle continues by giving intellect a higher station than perception (408b18–19): “Intellect seems to be some sort of substance that exists in us and not to be perishable” (ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἔοικεν ἐγγίνεσθαι οὐσία τις οὐσα, καὶ οὐ φθείρεσθαι). So in contrast to affections of the bodily compound and even to perceptions, which at least involve an alteration in a bodily organ, intellect is unaffected and imperishable. Finally, we come to the crucial passage for Themistius’ interpretation (408b25–29):

Thinking and loving or hating are not affections of that [i.e., the intellect] but of this which possesses it inasmuch as it possesses it. On which account, when this [possessor] perishes, it [i.e., the intellect] neither remembers nor loves, for [the affections] did not belong to it [i.e., the intellect] but to the common [compound] that has perished. The intellect is perhaps something more divine, and it is unaffected.

(τὸ δὲ διανοεῖσθαι καὶ φιλεῖν ἢ μισεῖν οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκείνου πάθη, ἀλλὰ τοῦ δι᾽ ἔχοντος ἐκείνο, ἢ ἐκείνο ἔχει. διὸ καὶ τούτου φθειρομένου οὔτε μνημονεύει οὔτε φιλεῖ· οὐ γὰρ ἐκείνου ἦν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ κοινού, ὃ ἀπόλωλεν. ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἴσως θεϊότερόν τι καὶ ἀπαθές ἐστίν.)

Now, it is clear to us that in this passage Aristotle is contrasting the intellect with the composite of body and soul. The compound thinks and feels through the soul, but the intellect is separate and impassive.

Themistius however interprets the Greek words τοῦ ἔχοντος ἐκείνο and τοῦ κοινού as a third kind of intellect, one that is appropriate to the body and perishable. This third, lowest intellect is the one called “the passive intellect” in III.5, the one that Aristotle calls “destructible” (105.22).¹³ Themistius’ interpretation is helped by the fact that he thinks that the intellect described in III.4 is the potential intellect, rather than the intellect composed of the productive and passive intellects (105.22–26):

13. “And so he would say that the passive intellect is the common and destructible one” (ὥστε τὸν κοινὸν ἂν λέγοι τὸν παθητικὸν καὶ φθαρτόν, 105.22).

But concerning the potential intellect he says explicitly that it must be unaffected and separable and “receptive of the form and potentially the form without being the form” (III.4, 429a15–16), that it is not mixed with the body (III.4, 429a24–25),¹⁴ that it does not have a bodily organ (III.4, 429a26–27),¹⁵ and that the unaffectedness of it and of sense perception are not the same (III.4, 429a29–30).¹⁶

(ἀλλὰ μὴν περὶ γε τοῦ δυνάμει νοῦ διαρρήδην φησὶν ἀπαθῆ δεῖν αὐτὸν εἶναι καὶ χωριστὸν καὶ δεκτικὸν τοῦ εἶδους καὶ δυνάμει τοιοῦτον, ἀλλὰ μὴ τοῦτο, καὶ μηδὲ μεμίχθαι αὐτὸν τῷ σώματι, μηδὲ ὄργανον ἔχειν σωματικόν, μηδὲ ὁμοίαν τὴν ἀπάθειαν εἶναι τούτου τε καὶ τῆς αἰσθήσεως.)

Thus, Themistius concludes, since the potential intellect has these characteristics but the common intellect does not, Aristotle must have meant to differentiate the two. We will return to the common intellect in the next section.

Themistius returns briefly to the difference between the productive and potential intellects at 105.34–106.14. Both intellects are now called separable, unmixed, and unaffected (χωριστός ... καὶ αὐτός ἀμιγῆς καὶ ἀπαθῆς, 105.34), but the productive intellect is more so (μᾶλλον δὲ χωριστὸν τὸν ποιητικὸν καὶ μᾶλλον ἀπαθῆ καὶ μᾶλλον ἀμιγῆ, 106.8–9).

The distinction that Themistius draws between these two highest intellects is intriguing. It would seem that he coupled his desire for a specifically human intellect with the idea of a separate intellect that is pure actuality. This higher intellect can actualize the potentiality in the individual intellect in each human being. Thus, Themistius might well have thought that the productive intellect alone does not guarantee a survivable individual intellect. The one productive intellect is therefore available to all human intellects, but the human intellect is uniquely our own.

The potential intellect is conceived to be separable from the body and immortal. In order for an individual to think, the potential intellect must remain combined with the productive intellect, and so an eternal mutual co-existence must be intended. There would then be some sort of separate existence for each potential intellect, but (as Themistius makes clear) it would have no memory of this life. The immortal soul would no longer have access to the *phantasiai* in the common intellect, and so its thinking, though still dependent on the productive intellect, would be eternal and without divisions or temporality.¹⁷

14. διὸ οὐδὲ μεμίχθαι εὐλογον αὐτὸν τῷ σώματι.

15. ποῖός τις γὰρ ἂν γίνοιτο, ἢ ψυχρός ἢ θερμός, κἂν ὄργανόν τι εἴη, ὥσπερ τῷ αἰσθητικῷ.

16. ὅτι δ' οὐχ ὁμοία ἡ ἀπάθεια τοῦ αἰσθητικοῦ καὶ τοῦ νοητικοῦ.

17. See 101.5–37.

Since there is but one productive intellect—perhaps conceived along the lines of any of the lower unmoved movers in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*¹⁸—it must be the potential intellect that guarantees any sort of individual immortality. At first glance, it might seem impossible for one potential intellect to differ from another. At 103.26–31, Themistius raised the issue of immateriality as part of the proof that there is only one productive intellect:

If there are many productive intellects, one for each potential intellect, whence will they differ from each other? For, things the same in kind are separated by matter. But productive intellects are the same in kind, if all have the same essence in activity and all think the same things.

(εἰ δὲ πολλοὶ καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον τῶν δυνάμει εἷς ποιητικός, πόθεν ἀλλήλων διοίσουσιν; ἐπὶ γὰρ τῶν αὐτῶν τῷ εἶδει κατὰ τὴν ὕλην ὁ μερισμός, ἀνάγκη δὲ τοὺς αὐτοὺς εἶναι τῷ εἶδει τοὺς ποιητικούς, εἰ γε ἅπαντες τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχουσιν οὐσίαν τῇ ἐνεργείᾳ καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ πάντες νοοῦσιν.)

It would seem that the same argument could be raised about the potential intellects. Once separated from their bodies, they would no longer have a material substratum to differentiate them, one from another. The key, of course, is that individual potential intellects do not have the same essence in activity. Their essence remains potentiality,¹⁹ although eternally actualized by the productive intellect. Thus, they can be uniquely individual yet immaterial.

The individual immortality obtained, of course, has nothing to do with one's previous bodily existence. The passive intellect, the one with direct access to the *phantasiai* of the body, will have perished. The only forms that the potential intellect now possesses *qua* storehouse are those that are actually in the productive intellect (but still potentially in the potential intellect). These are not stored up from bodily *phantasiai*, for the potential intellect no longer has access to these. Thus, the potential intellect, eternally compounded

18. The productive intellect cannot, of course, be one of the unmoved substances, since Aristotle says that there are none besides the 47 or 55 that he has recognized (*Metaphysics* 12.1073a.38–1074a14). Themistius must then be envisioning a separate intellect from them, one that thinks all intelligible objects. On the number of unmoved substances, see Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics: A Revised Text With Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1924), 393–94.

19. Cp. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12. 1074b18–21 (on the supreme intellect): εἴτε νοεῖ, τούτου δ' ἄλλο κύριον, οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ τοῦτο ὃ ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ ἢ οὐσία νόησις, ἀλλὰ δύναμις, οὐκ ἂν ἡ ἀρίστη οὐσία εἴη· διὰ γὰρ τοῦ νοεῖν τὸ τίμιον αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει. Our potential intellects are like this hypothesized lesser intellect that would depend for thought on something more honorable, namely the productive intellect. Although Themistius paraphrases Aristotle's words in his *Paraphrasis in Metaphysica* 9, he does not make any reference there to the productive and potential intellects in human beings. For Themistius' *In Metaph.* in Latin, see 30.25–38 Landauer; for the Hebrew version, see Brague, *Thémistius Paraphrase de La Métaphysique D'Aristote (Livre Lambda)* (Paris: Vrin, 1999), 108, para. 3.

with the productive, does not think discursively or remember its previous life. Rather, it shares the life of the productive intellect, eternally engaged in pure thought. One might characterize it as dependently intellectualizing, for without the productive intellect its forms could never be actualized and thinking could not occur.²⁰

THE COMMON INTELLECT

It should be noted that the passive intellect is directly associated with the body and limited in its intellectual powers. Themistius makes this clear in his commentary to III.5 (101.18–37), when he compares Aristotle’s words in I.4, 408b25–29 to those in III.5, 430a21–25. Here for the first time Themistius explicates his doctrine. The context is the productive/potential intellect’s loss of memories of the embodied life. Why does the compound of the higher intellects not remember? Themistius first quotes Aristotle in I.4, 408b25–29 (translated above), and interprets the passage to mean that lower-order thinking (διανοεῖσθαι, as opposed to the pure thought of the higher intellects) and memory belong not to the higher intellect but to the common intellect. He thus reinterprets Aristotle’s words οὐ γὰρ ἐκείνου ἦν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ κοινοῦ, ὃ ἀπόλωλεν (that these affections “did not belong to it [i.e., the intellect] but to the common [compound] that has perished”) to mean that thinking and memory belong to a third intellect denominated the “common” one.

Themistius next (101.23–27) quotes from III.5, 430a21–25, where Aristotle says that the intellect always is thinking and when separated is immortal and eternal (ἀθάνατον καὶ αἰδίου, 430a23). Aristotle continues (430.23–25):

But we do not remember, because this is unaffected, but the passive intellect is destructible, and without this it thinks nothing.

(οὐ μνημονεύομεν δέ, ὅτι τοῦτο μὲν ἀπαθές, ὃ δὲ παθητικὸς νοῦς φθαρτός· καὶ ἄνευ τούτου οὐθὲν νοεῖ.)

20. Martin, “The Nature of the Human Intellect as it is Expounded in Themistius’ *Paraphrasis in Libros Aristotelis De Anima*,” in *The Quest for the Absolute*, ed. FJ. Adelman (Chestnut Hill and the Hague, 1966), 11–12, wrongly asserts that Themistius does not believe that the potential intellect is immortal. He cites 103.24–26, 104.23–25, and 102.33–36 in support of his conclusion. In the first and third passages, however, Themistius is comparing the productive intellect with the passive, not with the potential. As 105.22–26 and 105.34 show, Themistius does believe that the potential intellect, like the productive, is unaffected by and separable from the body and the lowest intellect. Thus, it is best to understand Themistius as conjoining the productive with the potential and contrasting both with the passive. The second passage, as Schroeder and Todd, 106, note 130, rightly see, raises an aporia. The rest of Themistius’ discussion (104.24–105.14) shows that the potential intellect is “altogether unaffected and separable” (παντάσπιν ἀπαθῆς καὶ χωριστός, 104.29) and so, like the productive intellect, immortal. (Cp. 104.30 and 105.4, where the potential intellect is explicitly mentioned.)

These words are notoriously difficult and can bear many different translations. It is not our concern to decide what Aristotle intended, but rather to see how Themistius interpreted the passage. Interpreting the meaning of this passage in relation to that in I.4—how is it that we do not recall our former earthly life—Themistius associates the “we” of this passage with the productive/potential intellect and the “passive intellect” with the so-called “common intellect” of I.4. The cryptic final clause therefore means that without the common intellect the productive/potential intellect thinks and recalls nothing of its prior life. Thus, Themistius discerns in Aristotle’s writings a third, lower form of intellect that performs such tasks as discursive thinking and recollection. There is more involved to this intellect, as we shall see, but since it is associated with lower-order thinking that occurs in time and is changeable, it is thereby involved in what we would call intellectual acts. It is therefore a lower-order intellect that is directly involved with the body and ultimately perishable.

Before we look at the role of this intellect in Themistius’ philosophy, let us briefly consider Gabbe’s interpretation.²¹ Gabbe argues that Themistius introduced the common intellect as a faculty that would “discern enmattered forms—i.e., sensible particulars—on the reasonable assumption that the productive and potential intellects are responsible solely for our contemplation of un-enmattered forms” (75). Furthermore, she resists the idea that it is “a distinct third intellect that stands alongside its productive and potential counterparts” (75) and instead asserts that “the part of the soul described as *pathêtikos* is *nous* only in a tangential sense” (82). She then attempts to show that Themistius is equating the passive intellect with the faculty of imagination. There are some points in favor of her interpretation. First, the imaginative faculty does make judgments, and so is in a sense “intellectual” in that regard.²² Second, as Gabbe herself points out, the later commentators Philoponus and Stephanus both associate Aristotle’s *pathêtikos nous* with *phantasia*, and so Themistius could have made a similar identification.²³ There are, however, difficulties with this idea.

21. Gabbe, 75–90.

22. Pseudo-Simplicius, *In De An.* 202.2–9 gives this as a reason for his belief that Aristotle calls imagination intellect, explaining that imagination possesses a νοερὸν ἴδιωμα (202.6).

23. Gabbe, 82 and note 17. See Blumenthal, “Neoplatonic Interpretations of Aristotle on *Phantasia*,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 31.2 (1977): 255; “*Nous Pathêtikos* in Later Greek Philosophy,” 202–04; “*Simplicius*,” *On Aristotle’s On the Soul 3.1–5* (Ithaca: Cornell U Press, 2000), 131, note 205. “Neoplatonic Interpretations of Aristotle on *Phantasia*,” 255, adds Asclepius to the group as well: “Similarly Asclepius, commenting on *Metaphysics* 1010b 1–2, says in so many words that Aristotle in his treatise on the soul, clearly referring to III.5, calls *phantasia nous pathêtikos* (in *Metaphysica* 280.16–17).” So too Pseudo-Simplicius.

The key passage for the interpretation of the passive intellect as the faculty of *phantasia* is 96.8–97.7, where Themistius discusses how the intellect judges both the thing itself and its essence.²⁴ Themistius uses the example of water. When we judge that this cold, wet stuff before us is water, we are judging the form and the matter, and Themistius says that sense perception or *phantasia* is adequate for such a judgment:

The perceptive faculty is sufficient for us, and more also its companion imagination.

(ἀποχρῶσα ἡμῖν ἐστὶν ἡ αἰσθητικὴ δύναμις, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ σύζυγος αὐτῇ φαντασία, 96.12–13).

When we judge the essence of water, however, we use another faculty or the same faculty applied in a different way (ἄλλῳ ἔχον, 96.14), for there is no matter involved. Themistius concludes (96.19–21):

For with regard to water [what judges] required imagination's report but with regard to the essence of water it is sufficient for itself.

(πρὸς μὲν γὰρ τὸ ὕδωρ δεῖται τῆς φαντασίας ἀπαγγελλούσης, πρὸς δὲ τὸ ὕδατι εἶναι ἀπόχρη ἑαυτῆ.)

Themistius goes on (96.21–27) to interpret this double judging faculty in line with Aristotle's example of a straight line and the same line bent (III.4, 429b.14–18), indicating that the intellect judges both water and its essence, but in the former case intellect is “as though compounded” (ὡσπερ σύνθετος, 96.25) when it judges water and “as simple” (ὡς ἀπλοῦς, 96.25–26) when it judges form alone. Thus it is the intellect in both cases that does the judging, but assimilated to its object. But which intellect?

Gabbe must re-adjust her original claim that the passive intellect is imagination in light of the passage above, and she says instead:

The shift we see in 96,8–21 from the claim that *phantasia* discerns the objects as a whole to the claim that intellect does so as a compound, indicates that *phantasia* operates in conjunction with intellect when making these kinds of judgments.²⁵

But this is tantamount to saying that the judge is not *phantasia* but rather intellect, and this indeed is exactly what Themistius does say: the intellect judges water in one way and the essence of water in another. It uses *phantasia* to make the first judgment, but it is the intellect that does the judging. The reasonable conclusion, then, is that *phantasia* is not the same as the intellect that judges.

24. Gabbe, 84–87.

25. Gabbe, 86.

The intellect that does the judging in both cases must be the same, if the line analogy borrowed from Aristotle is to be valid. Gabbe, however, tries to argue that the intellect that judges water is the passive intellect while the one that judges the essence of water is the potential/productive intellect.²⁶ This division is not conformable to Themistius' text.

There is further proof of my claim in what follows in Themistius, where he brings in Plato to corroborate his interpretation of Aristotle (96.27–30).²⁷ Whereas (Themistius writes) Aristotle had compared the judging of the productive/potential intellect to a straight and bent line:

Plato likens the activities of the intellect to circles, one smoothly-running and the other straight.

(Πλάτων μὲν γὰρ κύκλοις ἀφομοιοῖ τὰς ἐνεργείας τοῦ νοῦ τῷ τε εὐτρόχῳ καὶ τῷ ὀρθῷ, 96.27–28)

The reference is to the Circles of the Same and the Different in Plato's *Timaeus* 37a2–c5. These two circles make up the World Soul (and we have similar circles in our own souls). The *Timaeus* passage describes how the circles judge things in the world. The Circle of the Different comes into contact with perceptible objects and “going straight” (κύκλος ἰῶν, 37b7) announces what they are to the whole soul; the Circle of the Same, “running smoothly” (εὐτρόχος ὦν, 37c2) does the same for objects or reason. Thus, in the Platonic passage as well, it is the same intellect doing the judging but in two different aspects.²⁸

If my interpretation is correct, then there is but one referent for the intellect that judges both water and its essence, and that is the productive/potential intellect. It makes use of *phantasiai* (stored forms extracted from matter by the senses) but it is not itself the faculty of imagination.

If the Common Intellect is not the faculty of imagination, what is it? Gabbe has argued that it is not actually an intellect at all, and she has understood the word “common” as “describing the cooperative efforts of the intellect and body.”²⁹ But if it is not an intellect, why does Themistius call it one? And what is the meaning of the word “common?” It is time to consider what Themistius says about this mysterious entity.

26. Gabbe, 86: “It is reasonable to assume that the compounded intellect mentioned at 96,25 is the passive intellect, since it is combined with body and soul, while the potential and productive unity is wholly unmixed and uncompounded (*haplous*) with body (97, 25–26).”

27. For Themistius' use of Plato, see my forthcoming article (note 8, above).

28. Strictly speaking, the World Soul is a soul and not an intellect, but it should be remembered that it is rational soul only. It has no irrational or spirited part. As such, it is akin to the immortal intellect in Aristotle's *De Anima*.

29. Gabbe, 89.

In his discussion of the common intellect at 105.13–34, in which Themistius finds evidence for the common intellect in I.4 and distinguishes it from the potential intellect since the common intellect is perishable and closely associated with the body, Themistius ends with the metaphor of the πρόδρομος, “forerunner” (105.30). The common intellect is a forerunner of the productive, just as the sun is of light or a flower of fruit (105.30–32). He concludes (105.32–34):

For in the case of other things nature does not immediately provide the final product without a preamble, but things that are weaker but related appear as forerunners of the more perfect products.

(οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἡ φύσις ἀφρομίσαστον τὸ τέλος εὐθὺς παραδίδωσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ καταδέεστερα μὲν συγγενῆ δὲ τῶν τελειοτέρων προτρέχει.)

This sentence suggests that the common intellect, related in kind to the productive but inferior to it, appears earlier in the human being as a preamble to the more perfect intellect (already in existence and prior in actuality). If so, the common intellect is an intellect of sorts, but of a weaker variety. It is weaker, of course, because it cannot perform the higher-level intellection of the productive/potential intellect, which can think form without *phantasiai*. But how is it related to it?

Themistius provides an answer by reference to Plato’s *Timaeus* (106.14–107.29). This is not an unusual strategy for the Peripatetic philosopher, who willingly uses Plato to explicate a problematic Aristotelian text.³⁰ Here he can use Plato to describe both how the term “intellect” can be appropriately ascribed to the common intellect and how it is related to the higher intellect. Themistius describes the similarity between the doctrines of the two philosophers in this way (106.14–16):

Destructible is what he [i.e., Aristotle] calls the common [intellect], according to which a human being is composed of soul and body and in which there are spirit and appetites. Plato also calls these destructible.

30. See my forthcoming article (note 8, above). See also Balleriaux, 188–91, although I cannot accept his argument that Themistius proves himself a Platonist. Themistius is using Plato as support for his Peripatetic position. See Blumenthal, “Themistius: The Last Peripatetic Commentator on Aristotle?”, 123, who concludes that Themistius “was predominately a Peripatetic;” Huby, “Stages in the Development of Language about Aristotle’s *Nous*,” 140; and Todd both in Schroeder and Todd, 34, and in *Themistius: On Aristotle’s On the Soul* (Ithaca: Cornell U Press, 1996), 2. See also Guldentops, “Themistius on Evil,” *Phronesis* 46. 2 (2001): 208, where he concludes his study of Themistius’ view of evil by saying: “His Peripatetic philosophy, influenced in some respects by Plato and to a lesser degree by Neoplatonism and Stoicism, convinced him that everything in the universe is basically good;” cf. 190.

(φθαρτὸν δὲ λέγει τὸν κοινόν, καθ' ὃν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ συγκείμενος ἐκ ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος, ἐν ᾧ θυμοὶ καὶ ἐπιθυμίαι· ἃ καὶ Πλάτων φθαρτὰ ὑπολαμβάνει.)³¹

Themistius quotes *Tim.* 69c5–e4, in which the younger gods fashion a body and house in it both the immortal rational soul made by the Demiurge and the lower mortal soul (spirited and appetitive) that they themselves had fashioned. The lower, mortal soul possesses “terrible but necessary passions” (δεινὰ καὶ ἀναγκαῖα παθήματα, 106.19–20), which include pleasure, pain, audacity (θάραξ, 106.20), fear, anger (θυμός, 106.21), and hope, mixed with “irrational sense perception” (αἴσθησις ἄλογος, 106.22). Thus, the passions in the mortal soul in the *Timaeus* are equated with the perceptive, desiderative, and imaginative faculties in the *De Anima*. In both works, they are affections that are common to the body and soul, and specifically to those aspects of the soul that are mortal. Themistius goes on to say that the arguments that Plato gives in various dialogues for the soul's immortality apply “for the most part” (σχεδόν τι, 106.30) to the intellect (106.29–107.4). Thus, Themistius equates the two lower souls of the *Timaeus* with the common intellect and the Platonic rational soul with the productive/potential intellect.

Themistius then gives three reasons why the term “intellect” may properly be applied to the common intellect. First, the irrational passions are amenable to reason (107.7–8):

For the passions of the human soul are not altogether irrational, since they are also obedient to and educated and chastised by reason

(οὐ γὰρ παντάσῃν ἄλογα τὰ πάθη τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης, ἃ γε καὶ ὑπακούει τῷ λόγῳ καὶ παιδεύεται καὶ βουθεῖται.)

Themistius adds (107.9–12) that the passions in human beings alone are thus amenable. Animals lack reason, and so their passions are not regulated by it.³²

31. The term θυμοὶ (“spirit”) is nearly impossible to translate. It is meant to include all that Plato included by the second part of the soul: anger, high spiritedness, desire for honor or glory, etc. The Greek word ἐπιθυμίαι, therefore, is meant to encapsulate the desires of the lowest part of the soul, the appetites. Todd, in Schroeder and Todd, 110, note 142, points out that the word κοινά appears in *De Anima* 403a4, “in a passage where the passions (*pathê*) are described as ‘common’ (*koina*) to the soul and body.” In this same passage, the terms ἐπιθυμῆναι (“to have an appetite for,” a7) and θυμός (a17) appear as *pathê* of the body and soul. It is likely, then, that Themistius had this passage in mind along with that in I.4 in his comparison with Plato's *Timaeus*.

32. This is reminiscent of Aristotle's discussion of the causes of locomotion in III.9–10. There animals are moved by appetite; human beings by practical reason. Contemplative reason is not part of the cause of motion in human beings, for it does not deal with what is to be avoided or pursued. Thus, here too it is a lower-order reason that contributes to motion, just as in I.4 it was discursive thinking that belonged to the composite of soul and body.

Second, passions such as audacity, fear, and hope concern future events and so are in part rational (107.9–14). Themistius again contrasts passions in animals, saying that these involve merely immediate pleasures and pains. Thus, again, the passions in the lower human soul have a rational component.

Third, human passions partake of reason to the extent that they can be moderated and so become virtues (107.14–16). As Themistius writes (107.16–17):

This is a sign that their nature is not irrational but without due measure.

(τοῦτο δὲ σημείον τοῦ μὴ τῆν φύσιν αὐτῶν ἄλογον εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἄμετρον.)

So the passions are not innately irrational but rather capable of being trained by reason and converted into virtues.

For these three reasons (their amenability to reason, their relation to future events, and their ability to be converted into virtues), the passions in the lower soul can be considered (at least to some extent) rational. On this point, Themistius believes, Plato and Aristotle are agreed. Therefore, the common intellect partakes of both the irrational and rational, and to the extent that the mortal nature in us (the spirited and appetitive aspects in Plato and the nutritive, sensitive, and imaginative faculties in Aristotle) are controlled by reason, they act in unison with intellect and are to that degree intellectual themselves.

Finally, Themistius says that these passions and the passive intellect may be called the same (καὶ εἶη ἂν ταῦτόν εἰπεῖν παθητικόν τε νοῦν καὶ πάθος λογικόν, 107.18–19), and he adds that the intellect itself (i.e., the productive/potential intellect) could only be bound and attached to the body through these intermediary passions (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἄλλως οἶόν τε ἦν τὸν νοῦν ἐγκατοικίζεσθαι τῷ σώματι μὴ διὰ μέσων τῶν παθῶν συνδούμενον καὶ συναπτόμενον, 107.21–22). Thus, the common intellect, which is these passions that are amenable to reason, is the bond that connects the productive/potential intellect to the body, and through this lower intellect the higher intellect controls and rules the corporeal body.

It should be clear now why Themistius could claim that the common intellect was in fact an intellect. Gabbe was correct that it was not strictly speaking an intellect, and it certainly forms no part of the productive/potential compound. It is, however, the instrument through which the intellect reaches the body and controls it. As such, it is an intermediary susceptible to the rational control of the intellect proper.

It should also be clear that the common intellect is not simply the imagination alone. The imaginative faculty is too narrow in its operation to account for all the ways that the intellect uses the body. It needs the *phantasiai*, to be

sure, to create concepts and think. But it also needs the other psychic faculties and its desires in order to feed, care for, and control the body. Themistius believed that in order for the productive/potential intellect to rule and use the body, it had need of an intermediary that was neither body nor intellect, but one that would allow the intellect access to and governance over the body. He found it in the quasi-rational bodily affections, which he argued were, *qua* mean, both rational and non-rational and so, to the extent that they could be used by the intellect, they could be called intellect.

Themistius' doctrine of the three intellects is based on an incorrect interpretation of Aristotle's text, but it coheres as a theory of how the individual thinks—both in an embodied and disembodied state. It also guarantees some sort of individual immortality. Themistius' may not be a valid interpretation, but it is a workable doctrine, if one divorces it from Aristotle's.

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