

HISTORICAL SYNOPSIS OF THE
ARISTOTELIAN
COMMENTARY TRADITION
(IN LESS THAN SIXTY MINUTES)

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CHAPTER 1

PERIPATETIC SCHOLARS

Aristotle of Stagira (384–322 BCE)

- ◆ Exoteric works: Protrepticus, On Philosophy, Eudemus, etc.
- ◆ Esoteric works: Categories, Physics, De Caelo, Metaphysics, De Anima, etc.
- ◆ The legend of Aristotle's misappropriated works
- ◆ Andronicus of Rhodes: first edition of Aristotle's works (40 BCE)

Early Peripatetic commentators

- ◆ Boethus of Sidon (c. 75—c. 10 BCE) comm. on Categories
- ◆ Alexander of Aegae (1st century CE) comm. on Categories and De Caelo
- ◆ Adrastus of Aphrodisias (early 1st century) comm. on Categories
- ◆ Aspasius (c. 131) comm. on Nicomachean Ethics
- ◆ Emperor Marcus Aurelius establishes four chairs of philosophy in Athens: Platonic, Peripatetic, Stoic, Epicurean (c. 170)

Alexander of Aphrodisias (late 2nd —early 3rd century)

- ◆ Extant commentaries on Prior Analytics, De Sensu, etc. Lost comm. on Physics, De Caelo, etc.
- ◆ Exemplar for all subsequent commentators.
- ◆ Comm. on Aristotle's Metaphysics
- ◆ Only books 1—5 of Alexander's comm. are genuine; books 6—14 are by ps.-Alexander . . . whodunit?

Themístius (c. 317—c. 388)

- ◆ Paraphrases of Physics, De Anima, etc.
- ◆ Paraphrase of Metaphysics Λ (Hebrew translation)
- ◆ Last of the Peripatetics

CHAPTER 2

NEOPLATONIC SCHOLARS

Origins of Neoplatonism

- ◆ Ammonius Saccas (c. 175—242) forefather of Neoplatonism
- ◆ Plotinus (c. 205—260) the Enneads
- ◆ Reality explained in terms of hypostases:
THE ONE—> THE INTELLECT—> WORLD SOUL—> PERCEPTIBLE WORLD
- ◆ Porphyry of Tyre (232–309)
 - ◆ Life of Plotinus
 - ◆ On the School of Plato and Aristotle Being One
 - ◆ On the Difference Between Plato and Aristotle
 - ◆ Isagoge (Introduction to Aristotle's Categories)

What is Neoplatonism?

- ◆ A broad intellectual movement based on the philosophy of Plotinus that sought to incorporate and reconcile the doctrines of Plato, Pythagoras, and Aristotle with each other and with the universal beliefs and practices of popular religion (e.g. divination and theurgy).
- ◆ Philosophical motivation: to accommodate highly respected Aristotelian doctrines in logic, science, ethics, etc. Principal challenge for commentators: harmonizing Aristotle with Plato.
- ◆ Standard curriculum: Aristotle's logical, ethical, scientific works, metaphysics leading to theology, followed by Plato's dialogues culminating in Timaeus and Parmenides
- ◆ Religious motivation: to provide an intellectual counterweight to Christianity (legitimized with Edict of Milan, 313)

Neoplatonism a 'big tent' with four poles: Plato, Pythagoras, Aristotle, pagan religion

- ◆ Iamblichus (c. 242—325) On the Pythagorean Life, On the Mysteries, Protrepticus
- ◆ Julian the Apostate (331—363; emperor 361—363) studied theurgy with Maximus of Ephesus
- ◆ Plutarch of Athens (350—432) and restoration of Athenian Academy
- ◆ Syrianus (latter half 4th century—c. 437) comm. on Metaphysics 3, 4, and 13-14 (overlap with ps.-Alexander comm. on books 13-14)
- ◆ Proclus (c. 411—485) comm. on Timaeus, Republic, etc.; Elements of Theology and Elements of Physics

Neoplatonism and Christianity

- ◆ Hypatia of Alexandria (350—415) comm. on mathematical treatises; editor of Ptolemy's Almagest
- ◆ Ammonius son of Hermias (c. 440—526) comm. on De Interpretation and Prior Analytics; lectures on Aristotle's Categories, Physics, Generation & Corruption, etc. (preserved in Philoponus' commentaries)
- ◆ Simplicius (6th century) comm. on Aristotle's Physics, and De Caelo (overlap with ps. Alexander)
- ◆ John Philoponus (c. 490—570s) Christian comm. on Categories, Physics, Meteorology, and De Anima
- ◆ EMPEROR JUSTINIAN CLOSES ACADEMY IN ATHENS (529)

CHAPTER 3

ARABIC SCHOLARS

Arabic translations of the Metaphysics used by commentators

- ◆ Syriac: Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 873) lost
- ◆ Arabic: Ishaq ibn Hunayn (d. 913)
- ◆ Arabic: Ustāṭ (9th century)
- ◆ Arabic from Syriac: Abū Bīṣr Mattā (with comm. of Alexander and Themístius)
- ◆ Arabic: Abū Zakariyā Yahya (d. 974)

Arabic treatises and commentaries referring to the Metaphysics

- ◆ Al-Kindi (c. 800–870) On First Philosophy
- ◆ Al-Farabi (c. 870–950) The Harmony of Plato and Aristotle
and Treatise on the Intellect
- ◆ Avicenna (Ibn Sina, c. 970—1037) The Cure
- ◆ Maimonides (1135—1204) Guide of the Perplexed
- ◆ Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1126—1198) De Substantia Orbis; comm.
on Physics, De Caelo, Metaphysics [the latter including
numerous citations from Alexander and Themistius]

CHAPTER 4

BYZANTINE SCHOLARS

The Byzantine Renaissance

- ◆ Founding of the University of Constantinople by Constantine IX Monomachus (1046) Michael Psellus (c. 1017—c. 1078)
- ◆ The Circle of Anna Comnena
- ◆ Eustratius of Nicaea (c. 1050—c. 1120) comm. Nicomachean Ethics
- ◆ Michael of Ephesus (late 11th—early 12th century) comm. on Sophistici Elenchi, Parva Naturalia, biological works, ethics, etc.
- ◆ George Pachymeres (1242—1310) comm on Physics, Metaphysics, etc.
- ◆ Basil Bessarion (1399—1472) translation of the Metaphysics (c. 1452)
- ◆ FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE TO THE TURKS (1453)

CHAPTER 5
LATIN SCHOLARS

Latin translations of Aristotle's Metaphysics

- ◆ Vetustissima (books 1-4, James of Venice, c. 1150)
- ◆ Vetus (revision of vetustissima)
- ◆ Media or translatio anonyma (Gerard of Cremon, d. 1187?)
- ◆ Nova (with Averroes commentary, prob. Michael Scot, 1220s)
- ◆ Γ = William of Moerbeke (c. 1260-1277) (books 1-10, 12-13.2 rev. of media)

Latin commentaries on Aristotle's Metaphysics

- ◆ Averroes (translated by Michael Scot)
- ◆ Thomas Aquinas (1225—1274)
- ◆ Giles of Rome (c. 1243—1316)
- ◆ John Buridan (c. 1301—c. 1361)
- ◆ Paul of Venice (1369—1429)
- ◆ Francisco Suárez (1548—1617)

CHAPTER 6

MODERN SCHOLARS

Modern scholarship

- ◆ Invention of printing press: Gutenberg Bible (c. 1454)
- ◆ Aldus Manutius publishes editions in Greek of Aristotle (1495–1498) and Plato (1513) Giles of Rome (c. 1243—1316)
- ◆ Juan Ginés Sepúlveda, Latin translation of Alexander of Aphrodisias comm. on Metaphysics 1-12
- ◆ Founding of philology (Friedrich August Wolf, 1759—1824)

Critical editions

- ◆ Aristotelis Omnia, Prussian Academy, ed. Immanuel Bekker (1831)
- ◆ Hermann Bonitz: Alexander's comm. on Metaphysics (1847), Bonitz' comm. on Metaphysics (1848), Index Aristotelicus (1870)
- ◆ W. D. Ross (1924) and Werner Jaeger (1956) editions of Metaphysics
- ◆ S. Fazzo (2012) and S. Alexandru (2014) editions of Metaphysics Λ
- ◆ Oliver Primavesi new edition of Metaphysics in progress
- ◆ Commentary in Aristotelem Graeca ed. Hermann Diels [vol. 1 Alexander of Aphrodisias comm. on Metaphysics ed. Michael Hayduck] (1882—1909) [trans. in Ancient Commentators on Aristotle, ed. R. Sorabji]

POSTSCRIPT

Who wrote the commentary on Metaphysics 6—14?

- ◆ Alexander of Aphrodisias himself (Sepúlveda)
- ◆ Alexander of Aegae (Francesco Patrizi of Cherso)
- ◆ An early Neoplatonist quoted by Syrianus (Hermann Bonitz, Leonardo Tarán)
- ◆ A Platonist in late antiquity to plagiarized Syrianus (Jacob Freudenthal)
- ◆ Michael of Ephesus (Karl Praechter, Concetta Luna, etc.)

TO BE CONTINUED . . .