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Maurice Borrmans MAfr. (1925-2017)
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# Table of Contents

Valentino Cottini  
*Maurice Borrmans. Un profilo* ........................................................................................................ 1  

Marco Zambon  
*“Apprendere qualcosa di sicuro” (ps. Clem. Hom. I 3, 1)*  
*Verità filosofica e verità profetica nella I omelia pseudoclementina* ........................................ 13  

Giovanni Catapano  
*Nobilissimus philosophus paganorum / falsus philosophus: Porphyry in Augustine’s Metaphilosophy* ....................................................................................................................... 49  

Elisa Coda  
*Divine Providence and Human Logos in Themistius Some Philosophical Sources of Discourse* 6 ........................................................................................................ 67  

Henri Hugonnard-Roche  
*E Dio disse: “La terra produca germogli” (Gen. 1, 11)*  
*Sulla tradizione botanica siriaca* ........................................................................................................ 85  

Ida Zilio-Grandi  
*La pazienza dell’Islam: la virtù detta ‘ṣabr’* ...................................................................................... 105  

Patrizia Spallino, Mauro Mormino  
*Cuore, anima e mente Un esempio di circolarità lessicale tra tradizione islamica e cristiana* .................................................................................................................... 119  

Cristina D’Ancona  
*God and Intellect at the Dawn of Arabic Philosophical Thought Plinyus’ Treatise V 4[7], Aristotle’s Metaphysics and De Anima in the Age of al-Kindī* ...................................................................................................................... 133  

Giovanni Mandolino  
*La testimonianza del patriarca nestoriano Israel di Kaškar (m. 872) sulla pseudo-Teologia di Aristotele* ................................................................................................................ 153  

Carmela Baffioni  
*Embryology in an Ismāʿīlī Messianic Context The Manuscript Tradition of the Iḫwān al-Ṣafāʾ* ......................................................................................................................... 167  

Thérèse-Anne Druart  
*Al-Fārābī: A Philosopher Challenging Some of the Kalām’s Views on the Origin and Development of Language* ........................................................................................................ 181
Khalil Samir Khalil S.J.
La doctrine de l’Incarnation de Yabỳa ibn ‘Adi
à la lumière du Traité 17 Sbath .......................................................... » 189

Hans Daiber
Ethics as Likeness to God in Miskawayh
An Overlooked Tradition ................................................................. » 195

Issam Marjani
Avicenne, commentaire de la Sourate al-Alâ
Traduction française du texte établi à l’aide d’un ‘nouveau’ témoin
et relevé des emprunts de Fahr al-Dîn al-Râzî dans son exégèse de la sourate ............ » 205

Emmanuel Pisani O.P.
Le hanbalisme, matrice idéologique du fondamentalisme islamique? ....................... » 233

David B. Burrell C.S.C.
In the Wake of Maurice Borrmans:
Perceptions of Islam and Christianity ................................................................ » 247

Christian Jambet
Le problème de la certitude dans la philosophie de Subravardi ................................... » 255

Cecilia Martini Bonadeo
Una parafraasi araba di Metafisica Iota
Il capitolo XI del Libro sulla scienza della metafisica di ‘Abd al-Latîf al-Bâqdâdî .......... » 269

Richard C. Taylor
Averroes and the Philosophical Account of Prophecy ................................................. » 287

Concetta Luna
Prêcher aux philosophes et aux théologiens:
quatre sermons de Gilles de Rome pour le temps pascal .......................................... » 305

Gianfranco Fioravanti
La Questio ‘utrum passiones sive accidentia sint separabilia a subiecto’
di Antonio da Parma (m. 1327) ............................................................................. » 381

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi
Le ši‘isme entre exercice du pouvoir et sauvegarde de la foi
Le cas d’al-Mâglisi ....................................................................................... » 387

Book Announcements and Reviews ........................................................................ » 397

Jules Janssens
Marc Geoffroy. In Memoriam ................................................................. » 470

Index of Manuscripts ...................................................................................... » 475

Index of Ancient and Medieval Names .......................................................... » 476

Index of Modern Names ................................................................................ » 480
Divine Providence and Human Logos in Themistius

Some Philosophical Sources of Discourse 6

Elisa Coda*

Abstract

Themistius’ Discourse 6 proclaims philantropia as the key term for the affinity between the ruler and God, and logos as the cause of the affinity of all the human beings among them and with God. Against the background of the philosophical paideia that represents Themistius’ project for the élite in Constantinople, the Discourse 6 is analysed in comparison with another rhetorical work that two centuries earlier had been devoted to the same topic: Dio of Prusa’s Olympic Discourse. The two orations share some common features, but the Discourse 6 bears the traces of Themistius’ reading of the Timaeus, as well as of his exegesis of Aristotle’s De Anima.

1. Themistius’ Hellenic Wisdom

The Demegoria Constantii, which announces and motivates Themistius’ (ca. 317-389 AD) adlection to the senate of Constantinople in 355 AD, illustrates his role and importance in the development of the cultural policy of the Empire at that moment:

…

While it is my heart’s desire that philosophy should shine in every part of the world, I especially wish it to flourish throughout our city. And indeed I know that this has happened in her case because of

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* Concordia Luna and Tiziano Dorandi read a first draft of this paper, saving me from many errors and suggesting decisive improvements. My deepest thanks go to them; of all the shortcomings that may remain I only am responsible.

Themistius, since she takes pride in her companies of young philosophers and is a house of learning open to all, so that all men from every quarter have conceded that the city is supreme in philosophy and the teachings of virtue flow forth from her in every direction as if from some pure spring. (...) For in receiving from us a Roman dignity, he offers Hellenic wisdom in return, so that for this reason our city is revealed as the summit both of good fortune and of virtue (trans. Heather-Moncour, p. 111).

Themistius’ pivotal role in conveying to later ages the “Hellenic wisdom” – the σοφία Ἑλληνική mentioned in the Demegoria – is well known. He sided with the idea of ethical and political engagement of the philosopher, who “passing judgment in union with the highest power” does not limit himself to speaking about the philosophical ideals, but is constantly engaged in putting them into practice. This was, in Themistius’ views, the stance of his father Eugenius, who used to declare that his model was Socrates. In his turn, Themistius set for himself the task to promote the σοφία...
Ἑλληνική as the basis of the ideal of cosmic order that should have been shared, in his eyes, by the cultivated élite of his age. To this end, Themistius made use of careful rhetorical tools, of an endless stock of quotations, of allusions to Pagan myths and their philosophical interpretations, and of the reworking of philosophical models. A Platonic philosopher for him is not one who attended Plato's lectures in a remote past; rather, he is the one who puts into practice Plato’s ideal of philosophy as the ruling force of human society.

If anyone should be called the heir of the divine Plato’s teachings, it should not be Speusippus or Xenocrates, but the person who made Plato’s vision prevail, that vision that the famous philosopher most wanted to put into practice and that he most wanted to see political power and philosophy coming together, not good judgment and secular authority going their separate ways. (…) Future generations will sing the praises of Theodosius for his summoning of philosophy to the public sphere, just as they will praise Hadrian, Marcus [Aurelius], and Antoninus [Pius], who are his ancestors, his fellow citizens, founders of his line. Theodosius was not content merely to inherit the purple from them; he also brought them back into the palace as exemplars after a long lapse of time and set philosophy by his side, just as they had done.

was rebuked at home by Xanthippe and also by Critias and the Thirty Tyrants, who threatened to kill him and drive him out and do horrible things to him if he did not change his mind and be of service to the regime that was in power. Nonetheless, he never succumbed to fear. He was never frightened, nor did he think that there was any danger so terrible and formidable than to become wicked instead of good, or impious instead of pious. (…) My father showed the world actions of his own that were very similar to those of Socrates” (trans. Penella, The Private Orations, pp. 58-9, modified).

Themistius has repeatedly recourse to Socrates as to his model (Or. 34): cf. L.J. Daly, A Mandarin of Late Antiquity: The Political Life and Thought of Themistius, Dissertation at Loyola University, Chicago 1970 (http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/1019). Socrates is an important figure in the Discourses, addressed as a model of Lebenswahl; this point deserves further investigation that cannot be made here. Bibliographical references on Themistius' political thought are given below, n. 19. See also R. van den Berg, “Live Unnoticed! The Invisible Neoplatonic Politician”, in A. Smith, The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity. Essays in Honour of Peter Brown, The Classical Press of Wales, Swansea 2005, pp. 101-15, esp. 109-10. Van den Berg refers to Or. 26 and Or. 38, pointing to the singularity of Themistius’ stance.

5 Themistius advocated his own approach by explicitly criticizing those who refused to take part in public life; he also had to face the charge of being himself a sophist, flattering emperors to achieve worldly success, rather than the true philosopher he pretended to be. On Themistius’ position cf. Heather-Moncur, Politics, Philosophy, and Empire (above, n. 1), pp. XI-XV; see also J. Schamp, “Thémistios et l’oracle des philosophes”, in F. Karik – E. Song (eds.), Plato Revived. Essays on Ancient Platonism in Honour of Dominic J. O'Meara, Berlin-Boston 2013 (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde, 317), pp. 358-75, esp. 332-40.

6 Or. 34, 7, esp. ll. 7-12 and 17-23, trans. Penella, The Private Orations, p. 214, modified; cf. also Or. 17, 214 A. Similar remarks also in Or. 2, 40 A (to Costance II); Or. 8, 107 C (to Valens); Or. 13, 166 B (to Gratian): references are given in the relevant footnotes by R. Maisano (Temistio, Discorsi, a c. di R. Maisano, UTET, Torino 1995).
Themistius was engaged in the transmission of Platonic and Aristotelian thought first and foremost as a professor of philosophy: he ran his own school since 345 AD, teaching for the most part of his life at Constantinople but also elsewhere. He was also, and for some mainly, a rhetor managing the most prominent positions at the imperial court under the Emperors Constance II, Julian, Jovian, Valentinian the Great and Valens, and Theodosius. His literary output reflects both activities: we have both discourses and paraphrases of Aristotle’s works.

Themistius’ paraphrases were known by pagan, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish authors, being continuously read across the ages and in different cultural landscapes. Most of these paraphrases, even though at an uneven rate, were destined to be read in translation, and this starting from Late Antiquity (in Syriac), through the Middle Ages (in Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin), till the Early Renaissance (in Latin). The rhetorical corpus, on the contrary, had almost no reception in the Syriac and Arabic milieus, also in the Latin-speaking world it is only at the end of the 15th century that a renewal of interest for Themistius’ orations took place. His fame as an elegant orator surpasses the reputation

7 Or. 31, 352 C-D: ‘Εγώ τοῖς δοκιμωτάτοις τῶν ἀρχαίων φιλοσόφων ἀκολουθήσας, οἱ δύο εἶναι τῆς φιλοσοφίας ὁδοὺς ἐξηγοῦμαι, τὴν μὲν θεωτέραν, τὴν δὲ τοῖς κοινοῖς ἄρειομετρέκτην, τὴν ὑπὸν λοιπολοῦν μαζικόμερα συναφές μὲ τὸν ἦκον ἄρδιον ἐξετασθείς, καὶ ἐν πολλαπλαῖοι φιλοσοφίαι εὑλογία, ἐπόμενον Σωκράτει καὶ Ἀριστοτέλει, καὶ πρὸ γὰρ τῶν τοῦ ὑμνουμένων ἑπάτα σφοδρόν, οἱ τὰ ἔργα τοῖς λόγοις ἐγκαταμιξεῖσθαι υπὸ ἀπαφίνειν υπὸ συνετὴς τοῖς κοινοῖς ἐπεθέξεται φιλοσοφίας, τούτως ἦπε παραλαμψής τεσσαράκοντα ἐπὶ ταῦτα σχέδων ἐπέστρεψα λειτουργῆς ὑμῶν ἐκ τῶν λόγων καὶ προσεβίου ἐφεξῆς ὑπὸς αὐτοῦ ἐστὲ προσβείας ὑμῖν ἄτιμας οὐδὲ ἀδάξως οὐδὲ ἀναξίως τῆς ὑμετέρας χειροτονίας, τάς μὲν καθ’ ἐκείνην τάς δὲ τοῖς δοκιμωτάτοις ὑμῶν κοινωνίας’ (I followed the most highly regarded of the ancient philosophers, who

8 Some inaugural discourses are preserved in Greek, in part or in their entirety (Or. 24, to the students of Nicomedia; Or. 27, to those of Paphlagonia; Or. 33, to those of Constantinople); information on Themistius’ students are given in Or. 23, 289 B. Finally, Or. 30 and 32 are considered scholastic exercises.

9 Themistius was senator in 355, proconsul in 358, prefect of Constantinople under Theodosius I, in whose court he was also appointed teacher of his son and successor Arcadius.


11 Unknown to the Latin Middle Ages. For the scanty circulation of some Discourses in Syriac and Arabic see the relevant section by J. Watt in Schamp-Todd-Watt, “Themistios” (above, n. 10), pp. 864-4.


13 Thirty-three orations have come down to us in Greek. However, some of them are fragmentary or incomplete (Or. 23, 25, 33, 28); Or. 12, which is included in several modern editions, is in reality a Humanist compilation in Greek, based on Or. 5 and other sources. The chronology of Themistius’ Discourses is disputed; cf. Maisano, Discorsi (above, n. 6), pp. 107-9.


15 Some inaugural discourses are preserved in Greek, in part or in their entirety (Or. 24, to the students of Nicomedia; Or. 27, to those of Paphlagonia; Or. 33, to those of Constantinople); information on Themistius’ students are given in Or. 23, 289 B. Finally, Or. 30 and 32 are considered scholastic exercises.

as a philosopher, but even if the paraphrases are consulted chiefly in search for specific exegeses of one or another Aristotelian passage, philosophy – not rhetoric – was for Themistius the pinnacle of wisdom, and specific philosophical doctrines are interspersed also in the *Discourses*, but for the most part outside a technical context, as this article aims to show.

Notwithstanding his importance, Themistius has been studied in an oddly asymmetrical way. Historians focus on the *Discourses*, almost completely discarding the philosophical works. His political thought has attracted much attention, with special reference to his conception of Imperial power,\(^16\) that becomes even more significant against the background of the relationship between Hellenism and the Roman Empire, or Hellenism and Christianity towards the end of Antiquity.\(^17\) Scholars noticed several features of Themistius’ vision of history and politics, pointing to his conception of true kingship: the philosophical justification of its divine origin and the use of the model of the *basileus* as “living law” (νόμος ἔμψυχος, *Or*. 5, 64 B) have been highlighted,\(^18\) as well as the political function of the ideal of philanthropia.\(^19\) Other topics that have attracted scholarly interest are his relationship with Julian\(^20\).

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\(^{19}\) It was first J. Scharold, *Dio Chrysostomus und Themistius*, W. Trinkl, Burghausen 1912 (Wissenschaftliche Abhandlung zum Jahresberichte des Königlichen humanistischen Gymnasiums Burghausen), pp. 11-32, to remark that the model of Themistius’ φιλάνθρωπος βασιλεύς is Dio of Prusa. On Themistius’ *philanthropia* cf. L.J. Daly, “Themistius’ Concept of *Philanthropia*”, *Byzantion* 45 (1975), pp. 22-40; G. Downey, “*Philanthropia* in Religion and Statecraft in the 4th Century after Christ”, *Historia* 4 (1955), pp. 199-20; Dagron, “L’Empire romain d’Orient” (above, n. 16), pp. 136-7. Also Julian the Emperor, who was a pupil of Themistius, had recourse to this notion and gave it a special twist, according to M.C. De Vita, *Giuliano Imperatore filosofo neoplatonico*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2011 (Temi metafisici e problemi del pensiero antico. Studi e testi, 121), pp. 248-9: “Giuliano esorta poi alla pratica della *philanthropia*, che viene esaltata con numerosi *exempla* di tradizione ellenica, quasi a sottolineare, indirettamente, l’indebita ‘usurpazione’ del concetto da parte dei cristiani del tempo”. Valuable remarks are offered also by M. Schramm, “Platonic Ethics and Politics in Themistius and Julian”, in R.C. Fowler (ed.), *Plato in the Third Sophistic*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2014 (Millennium Studies in the Culture and History of the First Millennium CE, 50), pp. 131-44: “Themistius’ political theory is based on the paradigm of the Republic with a few Hellenistic elements (the king is a philosopher, he is god-like, and his main virtue is φιλανθρωπία), whereas Julian used the *Laws* with elements from Iamblichus’ philosophy (the king is only a guardian of the godly laws and needs help from gods, demons and philosophers, and his main virtue is piety, or εὐσέβεια)” (pp. 131-2). However, as observed by Van den Bergh, “Live Unnoticed!” (above, n. 4), pp. 108-9, with n. 27 on p. 113, it was Themistius who taught Plato’s *Laws* to Julian.

\(^{20}\) For a valuable overview on Themistius and Julian cf. Heather-Moncur, *Politics, Philosophy, and Empire in the
and religious tolerance as a key-concept of true kingship. Conversely, historians of philosophy only seldom take into account the discourses, as if they were of little interest to explore Themistius’ Aristotelianism. An all-round picture is hampered also by the fact that the paraphrases preserved in Greek are far better known than those surviving only in the Oriental tradition, notwithstanding their importance: the paraphrases of *On the Heavens* and of Book Lambda of the *Metaphysics* are lost in Greek and especially that of *On the Heavens* is almost totally discarded as a source for understanding Themistius’ own philosophical stance, due to the fact that it exists only in a Hebrew version made out of the Arabic lost version of the lost Greek original, and in a Latin version of the Hebrew version.

Among the topics that the historians of philosophy usually discuss, a prominent position is granted to the question of Themistius’ philosophical allegiance. According to some, his work unquestionably belongs to the Neoplatonic tradition. For others, Themistius’ exegeses fully belong to the Aristotelian and Peripatetic tradition, with no special traits of the Neoplatonic typical themes. Notwithstanding the different perspectives, there is a general scholarly agreement that the *paideia* advocated by Themistius is the real key to understanding his thought. There are indeed different

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21 See above n. 17.


ideas on his conception of the political engagement of the philosopher, whether or not it is the same as that of the later Neoplatonic philosophers – most noticeably, D.J. O’Meara disagrees with this; but it is fair to say that for Themistius if the philosopher holds a position apt to influence the lawmaker, the philosophical ideals can be transformed into concrete rules for social life.

An ecumenical vision completes this position. The exposure of the élite to a training in Hellenic wisdom is for Themistius independent of any specific religious affiliation and, in the same vein, he is alien from any specific philosophical affiliation to this or that school, if this means antagonism among them. This was neither Plato’s nor Aristotle’s attitude, in Themistius’ eyes: his stance when he deals with this point, coupled with the presence of Platonic and Neoplatonic topics in his Aristotelian paraphrases, made him to be classified among the proponents of the “harmony between Plato and Aristotle.” However, it is primarily his ideal of paideia, in my opinion, that inspires his treatment of the topic of Plato and Aristotle in agreement.

It is in this vein that this harmony is presented as the legacy of Themistius’ father Eugenius:

Or. 20, 235 C
Τὸ μὲν οὖν πρόσωπον καὶ τὸ σχῆμα ὅλον μονοὺ δῆθεν ἐπῆν ἑαυτόν ἀριστοτέλους τοῖς μυστηρίοις. ἀπενεχθεὶ τὸ ὅμως συνανεῴγκνυτο τῶν σοφῶν τὰ ἀνάκτορα, καὶ συνεπώπεσε τὰ ἱερὰ καὶ ὅσα Πυθαγόρας ὁ Σάμιος ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκόμισεν εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ ὅσα ὅστε ἐποίησεν τῇ ποικίλῃ στοᾷ Ζήνων ὁ Κιτιεύς. τὰ μὲν γὰρ Πλάτωνος τοῦ μεγάλου ἀγχίθυρα τε ἐποίησεν καὶ ὅσα τῷ ἀντίκα περιβάλλων, καὶ οὕδε μεταμφιέσθη τὴν στολὴν μεταβαίνων εἰς τὴν Ἀκαδημίαν καὶ ὅσα καὶ ἔλαττον περιελθοῦσα τ哧 τὰς ἐπιβουλὰς τῶν δογμάτων

To be sure, the visage and shape impressed upon these sacred mysteries were almost entirely those of Aristotle. Nevertheless, my father helped to open up all the shrines of the sages. He was one of those who were fully initiated in the sacred knowledge that Pythagoras of Samos brought back to Greece from Egypt and in what Zeno of Citium later taught in the Painted Stoa. He always displayed the works of the great Plato right at the door [of Aristotle’s ‘temple’] and in the very temple precinct. When

25 O’Meara, Platonopolis. Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2003, 2005, p. 208: “[Themistius] shares with the Neoplatonic philosophers of his time neither their metaphysical and political theory, nor their attitude to the involvement of the philosopher in political life. Themistius appeals to a monarchic ideology of a traditional kind such as that advocated by Dio Chrysostom in the second century AD. Themistius’ view of the political vocation of the philosopher appears to be more sanguine, optimistic, if not disingenuous, than that of the Neoplatonists. His subordination of the philosopher to the king, of knowledge to action, is certainly a reversal of the Neoplatonic scale of values”, ibid., p. 208.

26 O’Meara, Platonopolis (above, n. 23), p. 99, outlines as follows the grounds for the political engagement of the Neoplatonic philosopher in Late Antiquity: “As the primary expression of political science, the expression of divine model, a transcendent good, law communicates the good, as a common good, to lives lived on the human level. It expresses moral values and makes possible the benefits which they bring”.

27 Hadot, Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism (above, n. 22), pp. 56-60 and 74-97.
passing from the Lyceum to the Academy, he did not change his clothes; he would often first make a sacrifice to Aristotle and then end by worshiping Plato. (...). For he (scil. Eugenius) felt that Aristotle’s philosophy is an excellent preliminary rite to Plato’s frenzy and, at the same time, a defensive wall and safeguard for it. Plato’s philosophy is still too accessible, still assailable by sophists, he thought; Aristotle provided fortifications for him, fenced him in on all sides, and kept his teachings from being assailed by plots. (...) My father, then, never quarrelled with the wise Plato, nor did he think that Aristotle ever did so lightly. (...). For no philosophical school has settled far off from the others or keeps a great distance between itself and another school. The schools of philosophy are like side roads that, though they break away and deviate from a wide and long highway, nonetheless all reach the same point in the end, some of them extending the road, others shortening it (trans. Penella, pp. 54-55, modified).28

Themistius was convinced that various ways might lead to one and the same truth, great enough and universal enough to include them all; hence, his treatment of tolerance (especially religious),29 that in his view an emperor was expected to practice, is less a plea for a solid state than an exhortation to imitate in mankind that universal rule imparted by the divine Intellect upon the multifarious cosmos. This was Themistius’ spiritual world and the intellectual task he set for himself, and this granted him a posterity in cultural areas as different as the Arabic and Latin Medieval worlds, and the Early Reinaissance Europe.

2. Themistius’ Discourse 6 and Dio of Prusa’s Olympicus

Ready to promote religious tolerance for the philosophical reasons just mentioned,30 Themistius uses the language of the Greek religion both public and mystic, not without echoing also some Christian images; he does not refer in his speeches to any specific creedal tenet.31 The Orphic mysteries, as well as the doctrines of ‘Orphic’ origin allegedly taught to Pythagoras and thereafter transmitted to Plato and Aristotle, feature among the elements of the cultural heritage of a learned man. His writings are free from that militant paganism which after Julian will nourish the

28 Cf. Marinus, Proclus ou sur le bonheur. Texte établi, traduit et annoté par H.-D. Saffrey et A.-Ph. Segonds avec la collaboration de C. Luna, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2001 (CUF), p. 109, who quote this passage in their commentary upon the education imparted by Syrianus to the young Proclus in the same way, namely going from Aristotle to Plato, as follows: “La doctrine générale des néoplatoniciens est que l’Aristotélisme sert de ‘sacrifices préparatoires’ à la mystagogie de Platon, cf. Thémistius, Or. 20, t. II, p. 6.13-19”.

29 See esp. Or. 5 and 6.

30 Them., Or. 5, 70 A: ταύτῃ νόμιζε γάνυσθαι τῇ ποικιλίᾳ καὶ τὸν τοῦ παντὸς ἀρχηγέτην· ἄλλως Σύρους ἐθέλει πολιτεύεσθαι, ἄλλως Ἐλλήνας, ἄλλως Αἰγυπτίους, καὶ οὐδ’ αὐτοὺς Σύρους ἡμοίοις, ἄλλ’ ἤδη κατακεκερμάτισται εἰς μικρά. εἷς γὰρ οὐδεὶς τῷ πέλας τὰ αὐτὰ ὑπείληφεν ἀκριβῶς, ἀλλ’ ὁ μὲν τοδί, ὁ δὲ τοδί. τί οὖν βιαζόμεθα τὰ ἀμήχανα? (“Consider that the Creator of the universe also takes pleasure in such diversity. He wishes the Syrians to organise their affairs in one way, and the Greeks in another, the Egyptians in another, and does not wish there to be uniformity among the Syrians themselves but has already fragmented them into small sects. No individual has exactly the same beliefs as his neighbour, but one man believes this and another that. Why then do we use force where it is ineffectual?”), trans. Heather-Moncur, Politics, Philosophy, and Empire in the Fourth Century [above n. 1] p. 170).

31 Themistius is not usually considered as one who entered the debate on the priority of Greek over Judaeo-Christian moral teaching, however, there are also other opinions about his position in the debate: cf. Heather-Moncur, Politics, Philosophy, and Empire in the Fourth Century (above n. 1), pp. 7-11 and 61-69.
religiosity\textsuperscript{32} of late Neoplatonism,\textsuperscript{33} as well as from any ‘theological’ exegesis of Plato’s dialogues. The strenuous defense of pagan cults – be they Greek or Barbarian – that characterizes previous authors like Porphyry,\textsuperscript{34} or later ones like Proclus,\textsuperscript{35} can hardly be found in his works.

The \textit{Discourse 6}, \textit{Φιλαδελφίας ἤ περί φιλανθρωπίας} (\textit{Brotherly love, or On Philanthropia}) addresses the Emperors Valens and Valentinian\textsuperscript{36} and was read in the Senate of Constantinople in front of Valens.\textsuperscript{37} Its main topics are the \textit{divisio imperii}, which Themistius describes as the ideal condition for good relations between the two emperors, and the exhaltation of the role of Constantinople as the capital of the Roman Empire. The city is depicted at the end of the speech as...
“a place through which all must pass who arrive from and set out in all directions, so that whenever it keeps them closest to home, it puts them at the very centre of the whole empire. (...) it has long been the hearth of the Muses of Plato and Aristotle, and now no less, by God, preserves the kindling sparks”. The assessment of the importance of Costantinople as the “New Rome” is a key point in Themistius’ view of imperial policy. This political stance of Discourse 6 gives also room to philosophy.

From the outset a close relationship between βασιλεία and philosophy is asserted: “there is a goodwill and affinity between kingship and philosophy that comes on you, Kings, from high and God sent both down to earth for the same purpose – to care for and correct mankind, the one teaching what is good, the other putting it into practice”. Kingship and philosophy derive from God, whose power endures “for all time, according to its own laws, which it itself has laid down and preserves unchanged for the protection of creation”. The states which are characterised by disorder (ταραχή), like Minos’ and Lycurgus’ tyrannies, are transient; Valen and Valentinian, on the contrary, rule in a way that imitates the changelessness of the divine cosmic order. Their proclamation descends from above, ἄνωθεν κάτεισιν (73 C), through divine consent (ἐπινεύσαντος τοῦ θεοῦ), although performed through the διακονία of human beings.

The official and even ceremonious stance of this part of Discourse 6 is evident: the proof of the divine consent to the election of the two emperors is provided, says Themistius, by their mutual affection (εὔνοια) and respect (σπουδή). Thus, allusions to the political value of power-sharing in the division of the Empire intertwines with the plea for the independence of Costantinople. Discourse 6 is meant to provide the doctrinal basis for these political assessments, and it is philosophy that grants it. First comes the topic of philanthropia.

The foundations of this practice lie in that the whole of mankind shares in the same origin: one and the same God. All human beings have a common father; they are the only ones among living beings to be aware of this common nature, and this is made possible by intellect, “the divine seed” which exists only in them. For this reason everyone can recognise in another human being his brother, sharing like him in an intellection that spreads from the same origin.

38 Or. 6, 83 D-84 A.
40 Or. 6, 72 A-B: ἄνωθεν, ὁ βασιλείας, εὔνοια καὶ συγγένεια βασιλείας πρὸς φιλοσοφίαν ἐστι καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν αὐτὴν χρείαν κατέπεμψεν ὁ θεὸς ἀμφότερος εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἐπιμελεῖσθαι καὶ ἐπανορθοῦσθαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, τὴν μὲν διδάσκουσαν τά ἀγαθά, τὴν δὲ χορηγοῦσαν, trans. Heather-Moncur, Politics, Philosophy, and Empire in the Fourth Century (above n. 1) p. 181. The εὔνοια and the συγγένεια of the emperors is also a sign of the lasting alliance between kingship and philosophy.
41 Or. 6, 73 A: κατὰ τοὺς νόμους τοὺς ἑαυτῆς διεξοδήσας τῶν ἄρχων ἀδελφῶν διαφυλάττει, trans. Heather-Moncur, p. 182.
42 Themistius alludes to the proclamation (ἀνάρρησις) by the Homeric saying “the will of Zeus” (τοῦ Διὸς βουλή): 73 C.
43 Themistius’ plea in Discourse 6 has been interpreted as an attempt to influence in his own favour the imperial policy-making: see Vanderspoel, Themistius and the Imperial Court (above, n. 16), pp. 148-53, and Dagon, “L’Empire romain d’Orient” (above, n. 16), pp. 95-112. However P. Heath, “Themistius a Political Philosopher”, in M. Whitby (ed.), The Propaganda of Power. The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity, Brill, Leiden - Boston - Köln 2018 (Mnemosyne, Supplements, 183), pp. 125-50, points to the fact that Themistius’ self-portraits as “championing senatorial opinion to the emperor”, in Or. 5 and 16 “are perhaps the most blatant instances of Themistius selling, or attempting to sell, imperial policy to the Senate, rather than representing senatorial opinion to the emperor” (p. 145).
44 Or. 6, 76 B: “Both (the Princes) conduct with the same bridles (ἀγουσιν ἀμών ταῖς συνταξι ἄνως)".
καίτοι πάσω τοῦ σώματος ἐναργεστέρα ἡ κατὰ ψυχὴν συγγένεια καὶ ὁμοιότης, ὅταν ὡς πέφυκε διασῴζηται; περὶ ἀρετῆς ἅπαντες ἀμφισβητοῦμεν, κακίαν ὁμολογεῖν αἰσχυνόμεθα, μονωθέντες ἐπιβοώμεθα ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς θορύβοις, ἀπαράκλητοι συντρέχομεν εἰς τοὺς κινδύνους, μιὰ τροφῆς ἢμᾶς τιθηνεῖται, τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλατταν καὶ τὸν ἀέρα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ, καὶ δὴ καὶ φυτὰ καὶ ζῷα, καὶ τὰ μὲν διενειμάμεθα πρὸς ἀλλήλους, τὰ δὲ ἐτι καὶ νῦν ἀνέμητα ἡμῖν ἀποκάλυξεν καὶ κατὰ στιχονομένων ἀλοθυκνώμεθα τοῦ πατρὸς ή σαφέστερον ή ἀμυδρότερον. καὶ γὰρ εἰ τὰ ἔργα ἔλεης ἐφιέδώσωμεν ἀλληλικότερον, ἀλλ' εἰς ἐκείνον γε ἐανεκτύνεσθαι. Οὐκ ἄρα μάτην ὁ σοφώτατος ῞Ομηρος ἀπεσχεδίαζεν ἐν τοῖς ἔπεσι, συνεκαίνειαν τὸν αὐτὸν καὶ ἑνὸς πατέραν τε θεῶν τε. καίτοι διὰ τί αὐτὸν οὐχ ἵππων λέγει πατέρα οὐδὲ μὰ Δία κυνῶν ἢ λεόντων; ὅτι τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις ζῷοις οὐ μέτεστιν, οἶμαι, οὐδὲ μικρὰ μερὶς τοῦ γεννήτορος· οὖν οὔτε ἐκεῖνος οὔτε ἀλλήλων, εἰς ἀνθρώπους δὲ μόνους καθήκει τοῦ δευτέρου κρατῆρος ἀπορροή. καὶ τὸ λόγου κοινωνεῖν οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἢ τὸ κοινωνεῖν τοῦ θείου σπέρματος. And yet is the spiritual kinship and likeness not much more obvious than the physical, when it is preserved as it was created? We all try to outdo each other in virtue, we are all ashamed to admit to wickedness, we cannot endure in isolation, we call for each other's help in emergencies; we hasten unsummoned into dangers, a single nurse nurtures us, we hold a common ancestral property – the earth, sea, air and water, indeed all that grows and lives – some of which we have divided up between us as possessions, the rest remaining as yet undivided among us. I pass over the rest. We alone of all creatures of earth recognise our Father, either more clearly or more dimly, and even if we are set apart from one another in hierarchical order, we all lean on Him for support. Surely Homer, in his great wisdom, was not casually improvising in his verses when ceaselessly celebrating the Father of both men and gods as one and the same. And yet why does he not call him father of horses, or by Zeus, of dogs or lions? Because in all other beasts there is not, in my opinion, the smallest share of their creator. And so they have no understanding either of him or of each other: it is on mankind alone that the outpouring from the second bowl flows down. To share the faculty of reason is nothing other than to share the divine seed (trans. Heather-Moncur, pp. 188-9).

The topic of the unity of mankind as the offspring of a unique God whose rationality pervades the entire cosmos obviously echoes Stoicism, but other elements are detectable that provide an interesting example of the way in which Themistius intertwines his rhetoric and his activity as a philosophy teacher.

First an account of the common background of Discourse 6 is in order. Immediately adopted by Christianity, the topic of the παρουσία of the one invisible God to each and every human being has famously been traced back to Stoicism by Eduard Norden in his analysis of Paul's Areopagus speech.

45 See e.g. II. I 544, III 68 and V 426; on the ever recurring formula "πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε" see G.M. Calhoun, “Zeus the Father in Homer”, Transactions of the American Philological Association 66 (1935), pp. 1-17 (the quotation, p. 1). In the Timeaus, too, the Demiurge is ποιητὴς καὶ πατήρ, 28 C 3; ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ, 37 C 7. Cf. also below, n. 54.

46 Tim., 41 D 4-7: "When he had finished this speech, the turned again to the mixing bowl he had used before (ἐπὶ τον πρότερον κρατῆρα), the one in which he had blended and mixed the soul of the universe, He began to pour into it what remained of the previous ingredients and to mix them in somewhat the same way, though these were no longer invariably and constantly pure, but of a second and third grade of purity" (trans. D.J. Zeyl in Plato. Complete Works, Edited with Introduction and notes by J.M. Cooper, Associate Editor D.S. Hutchinson, Hackett, Indianapolis-Cambridge 1997, p. 1245).
Since then, this topic counts as a commonplace in reconstructing the salient trends of ancient Stoicism in the Imperial age and in late Antiquity.\(^{47}\) That Themistius’ *Discourse 6* belongs to this tradition is shown by the fact that here too, as in other earlier examples, resonates that magnificent synthesis of the theology of ancient Stoicism that is Cleanthes’ *Hymn to Zeus*. This is true in particular for the topic of the *κοινὸς λόγος*,\(^{48}\) but also the idea of God as a father who originates the harmonious differences of the entire universe belongs to the same tradition of thought. All this is reminiscent of the intermingling of Stoicism and the *Timaeus* that is such a prominent feature of Graeco-Roman philosophy between Hellenism and the Imperial age.\(^{49}\)

Calling attention to the Stoic background of Acts 17, Norden had observed that the omnipresence of the divine lurks in the background of both Paul’s *parousia* of God to each and every human being (Acts 17, 27) and the *Olympicus* of Dio of Prusa (ca. 40–ca. 120 AD).\(^{50}\) Also the topic of the innate feeling of God as the cause of the order of the universe (πρώτη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐννοία) is widespread. J. Scharold, the early 20\(^{th}\) century scholar who listed a number of parallels between Themistius’ rhetorical works and the orations of Dio of Prusa, claiming that Dio is almost everywhere the source of Themistius,\(^{51}\) referred to the πρώτη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐννοια as to a point of contact between

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48 Cleanthes’ *Hymn to Zeus* is preserved by Stobaeus, *Ecl. I* 1, 12 = no. 537 in *SVF* I; cf. the still fundamental essay by M. Pohlenz, “Kleanthes’ Zeushymnus”, *Hermes* 75 (1940), pp. 117-232, and now the commented translation by J.C. Thom, *Kleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2005 (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum, 3). It is thorough the *κοινὸς λόγος* that, in this hymn, Zeus rules the universe (ὑπάτος βασιλεὺς διὰ παντός πάντος); the last verse celebrates the *κοινὸς νόμος* to which Gods and mortals are equally submitted, as to Zeus’ γνώμη. For a general overview see K. Algra, “Stoic Theology”, in B. Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 153-78. E. Asmis, “Myth and Philosophy in Cleanthes’ *Hymn to Zeus*”, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 47 (2007), pp. 413-29, remarks: “Following Cleanthes, he [= a Stoic reader of the Hymn] equates the lightning, in the first place, with the all-pervasive, ever-living fire of Zeus [...] with both ‘common reason’, koinos logos, and ‘common law’, koinos nomos. Logo pervades all things as the rational force of fire. ‘Law’ is logos viewed as an imperative force: it is reason that commands right action and prohibits wrong-doing. (…) For the Stoic, the image of lightning unifies the entire poem by means of a conceptual progression that begins and ends with nomos. The semantic weight of the lightning bolt, concentrated in line 10, spread out, so to speak, from the center to the periphery. The term nomos is first introduced in 2 as the culmination of a series of attributes of Zeus; and it closes the poem in the last line as the ultimate object of worship” (pp. 419-20).


51 Scharold, *Dio Chrysostomus und Themistius* (above, n. 19), p. 46, concludes his comparison stating that “Ein Rückblick auf die im vorausgehenden angeführten Stellen, die beiden Rhetoren gemeinsam sind, rechtfertigt die wiederholt aufgestellte
Themistius’ Discourse 1 and Dio’s Olympicus.52 The fact that now we can read the Olympicus in the brand-new critical edition accompanied by comprehensive introduction and detailed commentaries by G. Ventrella, T. Grandjean and L. Thévenet permits a comparison of the ways in which these two rhetorical pieces – the Olympicus at the end of the 1st cent., and Discourse 6 towards the middle of the 4th – elaborate on the Homeric and Platonic topic of divine fatherhood along the Stoic lines of logos as the token of the συγγένεια between mankind and God. This is what the two orations have in common; in the next section I will focus on some differences. Let’s first read the relevant passage of Dio’s Olympicus.

Olympicus (Or. XII), 27-29


52 Scharold, Dio Chrysostomus and Themistios (above, n. 19), p. 14, refers to the Olympicus in relationship to Themistius’ Or. 1, as for the topic of the universal feeling of the divine (πρώτη τοῦ θεοῦ ἔννοια) based on the universal grasp of the cosmic order.


54 Dio Chrysostom, Olympicus, 22: οὗτος γὰρ δὴ κοινός ἀνθρώπων καὶ θεῶν βασιλεὺς τα καὶ φρέων καὶ πρώτας καὶ πατέρας, “alike of men and gods the king and ruler and lord and father”, trans. Cohoon, p. 25. For Zeus as ‘father’ in the Homeric poems see above, n. 45.
Now concerning the nature of the gods in general, and especially that of the ruler of the universe, first and foremost an idea regarding him and a conception of him common to the whole human race, to the Greeks and to the Barbarians alike, a conception that is inevitable and innate in every creature endowed with reason, arising by nature without the aid of a human teacher or priest, deprived of love and joy has made its way because of mankind's kinship with the Gods and of the many pieces of evidence of the truth, which did not suffer the earliest and most ancient men to doze and grow indifferent to them; for inasmuch as these earlier men were not living dispersed far away from the divine being or beyond his borders apart by themselves, but had grown up in his company and had remained close to him in every way, they could not for any length of time continue to be unintelligent beings, especially since they had received intelligence and the capacity for reason on this, illumined as they were on every side by the divine and magnificent glories of heaven and the stars as well as of the sun and moon, by night and day encountering varied and dissimilar forms, seeing wondrous sights and hearing manifold voices of winds and forest and rivers and sea, of animals tame and wild; while they themselves uttered a most pleasing and clear sound, and taking delight in the limpid and intelligent quality of the human voice, attached symbols to the objects that reached their senses, so as to be able to name and designate everything perceived, thus easily acquiring memories and concepts of innumerable things. How, then, could they have remained ignorant and conceived no inkling of him who had sowed and planted and was now preserving and nourishing them, when on every side they were filled with the divine nature through both sight and hearing, and in fact through every sense? (trans. Cohoon, pp. 31 and 33, modified).57

The parallel reading of the two texts shows more than one affinity in the two orations. For Dio as well as for Themistius mankind shares in an innate knowledge of the divine that is both common and exclusive: all human beings, and only human beings know God by nature, not by instruction; proof is given through a comparison with other living beings, the animals, whose lack of articulated language (in Dio) or of rationality (in Themistius) prevents them from being aware of something that human beings, instead, spontaneously know: God's universal causality (τοῦ πάντων ἡγεμόνος ... δόξα καὶ ἐπίνοια κοινὴ τοῦ ξύμπαντος ἀνθρώπου γένους in Dio, αἰσθανόμεθα τοῦ πατρός in Themistius). However, Themistius' treatment bears the clear traces of his activity as a professor of philosophy.

3. Themistius, the Rhetor and Themistius, the Commentator

Under closer inspection some differences appear in the use of the image of the “seed” by Dio and Themistius.58 While Dio’s allusion to the principle who “had sowed and planted and was now preserving and nourishing (τοῦ σπείραντος καὶ φυτεύσαντος καὶ σῴζοντος καὶ τρέφοντος)” echoes the λόγοι σπερματικοί attesting the divine as omnipresent in nature – a basically Stoic

55 Reference to previous scholarship on Stoic theology with special reference to Posidonius as a possible source of Dio of Prusa is given in Russell’s commentary ad loc., quoted above, n. 53, p. 177, now superseded by Ventrella - Grandjean - Thévenet, quoted above n. 53, pp. 37-62, on the sources of the Olympicus, esp. pp. 40-46 on the sources of the passage quoted above.
58 On the sources of Dio’s use of this image cf. Ventrella (above, n. 53), pp. 279-81, pointing to Stoic sources, chiefly Chrysippos.
idea, even though some scholars have detected also Platonic themes in it⁵⁹ – Themistius refers to the *Timaeus* as to his explicit source. When writing that “To share the faculty of reason is nothing other than to share the divine seed (οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἐστὶν ἢ κοινοῦσαν τοῦ θείου σπέρματος)”, he is quoting verbatim *Tim.* 73 C 7.⁶⁰ This quotation is connected, in Themistius’ presentation, to another one that occurs earlier in the *Timaeus*, that of the “mixing bowl” of *Tim.* 41 D 4. Both quotations are combined to each other and with another passage, less literally echoed, in which the Demiurge is depicted as sowing the souls (*Tim.* 41 D 8 - 42 A 2) to provide a consistent account of the divine ancestry of mankind based on clearly recognisable allusions to Plato.

Homer’s claim that Zeus is the father of both men and gods – not of irrational animals – is explained along the lines of the *Timaeus*: they only, men and gods, share in rationality, although to different degrees. The passage just mentioned, with the Demiurge sowing the souls in different bodies, heavenly and terrestrial, according to a hierarchy,⁶¹ forms the background of this claim. Even more explicit is the reference to the “mixing bowl”, that contains a detail apt to prove that Themistius does not limit himself to referring generically to the narrative of the generation of the soul in the *Timaeus*, but has in mind a precise scholarly tradition. He says: “it is on mankind alone that the outpouring from the second bowl flows down”. In this sentence the allusion to a “second” bowl is puzzling, because the bowl in the *Timeus* is obviously only one;⁶² note, however, that there is a well-established exegetical tradition (Atticus, in part Plotinus, Porphyry, and Theodorus of Asine) that understands the expression ἐπὶ τῶν πρότερον κρατήρα in the sense of distinguishing two “bowls” in the myth of the production of the soul.⁶³ The rationale for keeping distinct the bowl in which the cosmic soul had been mixed from that in which the individual souls are produced by the Demiurge, after his speech to the heavenly gods (*Tim.*, 41 A 7 - D 3), lies exactly in the hierarchy thus established

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⁶⁰ Plato, *Tim.*, 73 C 7; the expression belongs to the section in which the formation of the human body is described, and the narrow context is that of the construction of head as the seat of the soul (73 C 6 - D 1): “He then proceeded to mold the ‘field’, as it were, that was to receive the divine seed, making it round, and called this portion of the marrow ‘brain’” (trans. Zeyl, quoted above n. 45, p. 1274).

⁶¹ *Tim.*, 41 D 8 - 42 A 2: “And when he had compounded it all, he divided the mixture into a number of souls equal to the number of the stars, and assigned each soul to a star. He mounted each soul in a carriage, as it were, and showed it the nature of the Universe. He described to them the laws that had been foreordained: They would all be assigned one and the same initial birth, so that none would be less well treated by him than any other. Then he would sow each of the souls into different degrees. The passage just mentioned, with the Demiurge sowing the souls in different bodies, heavenly and terrestrial, according to a hierarchy, forms the background of this claim. Even more explicit is the reference to the “mixing bowl”, that contains a detail apt to prove that Themistius does not limit himself to referring generically to the narrative of the generation of the soul in the *Timaeus*, but has in mind a precise scholarly tradition. He says: “it is on mankind alone that the outpouring from the second bowl flows down”. In this sentence the allusion to a “second” bowl is puzzling, because the bowl in the *Timeus* is obviously only one; note, however, that there is a well-established exegetical tradition (Atticus, in part Plotinus, Porphyry, and Theodorus of Asine) that understands the expression ἐπὶ τῶν πρότερον κρατήρα in the sense of distinguishing two “bowls” in the myth of the production of the soul. The rationale for keeping distinct the bowl in which the cosmic soul had been mixed from that in which the individual souls are produced by the Demiurge, after his speech to the heavenly gods (*Tim.*, 41 A 7 - D 3), lies exactly in the hierarchy thus established


⁶³ Cf. D’Ancona et al., *Platonico. La discesa dell’anima nei corpi* (*Enn. IV 8*[6]), *Plotiniana arabaica (pseudo-Teologia di Aristotele, capitoli 1 e 7; Detti del Sapiente Greco)*, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2003 (Subsidia mediaevalia patavina, 4) pp. 172-3, with bibliographical references to previous literature.
between the soul of the cosmos and the individual souls. Different in degree, as shown by the fact that they are produced not in the mixing bowl of the cosmic soul, but in a “second” one, they share nonetheless in the “divine seed” of rationality that brute animals do not possess.

For this reason, adds Themistius, animals cannot be aware of their creator, nor can they know (or understand) each other: “Because in all other beasts there is not, in my opinion, the smallest share of their creator. And so they have no understanding either of him or of each other (ὅτι τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις ἅπασι ἡ ἀδίδακτος καὶ ὁμοία τῶν πρώτων ὅρων σύνεσις καὶ τῶν πρώτων ἀξιωμάτων).

This topic, in turn, reveals Themistius the professor of philosophy. The idea comes from his exegesis of Aristotle’s De Anima, III 5, 430 a 25, where he presents, as an additional argument supporting the unicity of the Agent Intellect for the whole of mankind, the presence in mankind of the common notions (κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι). These make human beings capable of understanding, without any previous instruction and all in the same way, the primary definitions and axioms (ἡ ἀδίδακτος καὶ ὁμοία τῶν πρώτων ὅρων σύνεσις καὶ τῶν πρώτων ἀξιωμάτων).

To this common share in rationality we owe, says Themistius, that we human beings understand each other, that we can overcome the subjectivity of sense-perception – as taught by Plato – and that the student understands the teacher and vice versa:

μήποτε γὰρ οὐδὲ τὸ συνιέναι ἀλλήλων ὑπήρχεν ἄν, εἰ μὴ τις ἔνας νοῦς, οὗ πάντες ἐκοινωνοῦμεν, καὶ τὸ Πλάτωνος ἀληθές, ὡς εἰ μὴ τι ἦν <πάθος> τοῖς μὲν ἄλλο τοῖς δὲ ἄλλο τι ταῦτα, ἀλλὰ τις ἦν ἄλλοι ἤποι τᾶς πάθος, οὐκ ἦν ἄλλοι, οὐκ ἦν ἄλλοι τοῖς μὲν ἄλλος, οὐκ ἦν <πάθος> τοῖς δὲ ἄλλος, εἰ μὴ τοῖς μὲν τοῖς δὲ ἄλλος. ὡς εἰ μὴ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀλλὰ τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις, οὐκ ἦν ἄλλοι, ἢ μὴ τοῖς μὲν <πάθος> τοῖς δὲ ἄλλοις, οὐκ ἦν ἄλλοι. ὡς εἰ μὴ τοῖς μὲν <πάθος> τοῖς δὲ ἄλλοις, οὐκ ἦν ἄλλοι, οὐκ ἦν ἄλλοι, ἢ μὴ <πάθος> τοῖς μὲν τοῖς δὲ ἄλλος, ἢ μὴ τοῖς μὲν τοῖς δὲ ἄλλος, οὐκ ἦν <πάθος> τοῖς μὲν τοῖς δὲ ἄλλος. ὡς εἰ μὴ τοῖς μὲν <πάθος> τοῖς δὲ ἄλλοις, οὐκ ἦν ἄλλοι, οὐκ ἦν ἄλλοι, ἢ μὴ <πάθος> τοῖς μὲν τοῖς δὲ ἄλλος, ἢ μὴ τοῖς μὲν τοῖς δὲ ἄλλος, οὐκ ἦν <πάθος> τοῖς μὲν <πάθος> τοῖς δὲ ἄλλος, ἢ μὴ τοῖς μὲν τοῖς δὲ ἄλλος, οὐκ ἦν <πάθος> τοῖς μὲν τοῖς δὲ ἄλλος.

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 people, it would not be easy for that person to indicate to another how he was personally affected. 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. But surely the reason why only in the case of human beings is there teaching, learning and mutual understanding generally, but not at all in the case of the other animals, is that the constitution of other souls is also not such that it can receive the potential intellect and be perfected by the actual intellect (trans. Todd).

64 Themistii In libros Aristotelis De Anima paraphrasis edidit R. Heinze, Reimer, Berlin 1899 (CAG V.3), pp. 103.36-104.2.
65 Ibid., p. 104.2-14.
Daily experience, the comparison with other animals, the teaching of Plato, and the reference to
the universal and spontaneous share in the ἀδίδακτος καὶ ὁμοία ... σύνεσις of the first principles of
reasoning concur in the explanation of the Agent Intellect and of its role as the unique principle of
intellection for the whole of mankind. This topic, on which Themistius elaborates in the scholarly
context of his exegesis of Aristotle’s *De Anima*, features also in the *Discourse 6*, echoed by the
expression τὸ συνεῖναι ἀλλήλων in both places.

*Discourse 6* is a laudatory speech grounded in Themistius’ views on kingship. It has an obvious
ceremonial stance and implies recourse to a great amount of literary antecedents and sources to
be fully understood. But the foundations of its key concept, *philanthropia*, are philosophical.
They consist of the idea that through rationality mankind shares in the affinity with that divine
ancestor who is the ποιητὴς καὶ πατήρ of the *Timaeus*, but also the divine Intellect of Aristotle’s
*De Anima*. This part of the *Discourse 6* can be fully appreciated only if one takes into account
Themistius’ idiosyncratic way to understand Plato and Aristotle in agreement. They agree with
each other because they share in a common legacy of rationality that no educated man can disavow.
As shown by the passage of the paraphrase of the *De Anima*, in his eyes a Platonic epistemology
provides arguments for Aristotle’s Agent Intellect. Themistius the philosopher and Themistius
the rhetor shed light on one another; by examining in close connection the two sides of his literary
output one can reconstruct a profile that is neither that of an intellectual of the Second Sophistics,
nor that of a Neoplatonic philosopher in the sense that this label has after Proclus.