

PSEUDO-SIMPLICIUS

STEEL (C.) (trans.) *'Simplicius': On Aristotle On the Soul 3.6–13*. With A. Ritups. Pp. x + 230. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2013. Cased, £70. ISBN: 978-1-78093-208-8.

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In *Inferno* IV, when Dante catches sight of him in a mild foyer to the spiralling pit of hell, Averroes is simply described as 'he who made the great Comment'; but in *Convivio* IV, the only other place where Dante references him, Averroes is specifically 'the Commentator on Aristotle's *De Anima* III'. Dante wrote this in the first decade of the fourteenth century, when Averroes was still, in effect, the commentator on *De anima* 3. But by the last decades of the fifteenth century, a 'Simplicius' commentary on the *De anima* was being circulated in Italy by émigrés from Constantinople. This commentary rapidly exerted an influence on the likes of Pico della Mirandola and Agostino Nifo. It saw a first Greek edition in Venice in 1527, with a complete Latin translation appearing in 1543, also in Venice. As its first translator pointed out in his prefatory letter, Averroes had a contender in this *De anima* commentary. The title of a 1553 Latin translation then left no doubt: here was the *Commentaria Simplicii Profundissimi & acutissimi philosophi in tres libros De Anima Aristotelis*. And by the end of the sixteenth century, this commentary had inspired a vocal coterie in Italy, the so-called *sectatores Simplicii*.

Despite the fervour of these *sectatores Simplicii*, there is now a stable consensus that their *De anima* commentary is pseudo-Simplician. S. has long been convinced that the work should be attributed to Priscian of Lydia; and in this he is preceded by Francesco Piccolomini, a sixteenth-century opponent of the *simpliciani* who also put Priscian forward as the commentator. I. Hadot has fiercely criticised this re-attribution in a 2002 article in *Mnemosyne*, 'Simplicius or Priscianus? On the Author of the Commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*', and S. refers to the dispute in his introduction. He is sanguine: 'As no other scholar apparently shares Hadot's view, there is no need for further polemics' (p. 32 n. 6). And regardless of attribution, it is agreed that this *De anima* commentary originated in Simplicius' circles; that it represents 'an original and personal engagement with Aristotle's text' (p. 4); and that the commentator 'uses various philological strategies to make sense of an obscure text' (p. 7). On this last point, S. is effusive: 'Modern commentators could learn with profit from his attempts "to set right" a difficult text . . . without intervening with conjectures' (p. 7).

The manuscript basis of S.'s translation is broader than that of M. Hayduck's semi-critical Greek edition (1882), which has been faulted for only collating a single fourteenth-century manuscript (the *Laurentianus* 85.21) and a single sixteenth-century edition of the commentary (the *Aldina*). In preparing his translation, S. consulted another fourteenth-century manuscript (which shows emendations and annotations by Cardinal Bessarion) and a mid-fifteenth-century manuscript. Nevertheless, he is generous: 'Hayduck was basically right: it is indeed possible to constitute a critical text with the *Laurentianus* and the *Aldina*' (p. 149). A concise list of S.'s proposed corrections to the Greek and reconstructions of outstanding lacunae are included at the back of the volume.

S.'s is the final volume of the first ever English translation of this *De anima* commentary, and gives us ps.-Simplicius on *De anima* 3.6–13. The translation is nuanced and reliable, though at places the syntax could be smoothed out ('That also oysters have maturity and decline, all agree . . .', p. 101); the volume's apparatus, which is credited to Arnis Ritups, is ample. And while ps.-Simplicius has never had English-speaking sectaries, his *De anima* commentary is cited once by Bishop Berkeley and repeatedly by Lord Monboddo in the eighteenth century, while Thomas Taylor incorporated excerpts into

the notes to his 1808 English translation of the *De anima*. In short, ps.-Simplicius' Greek commentary has a place in the modern British reception of the *De anima*. The present translation, similarly, should inform contemporary work on the *De anima*, and on the Neoplatonists' appropriation and transmission of Aristotle.

Ps.-Simplicius' text is of course too dense to reprise here, but there is much that is of interest in his negotiation of time-statements in the last pages of the *De anima*, since it is in these pages – not the last paragraphs of *Physics* 4 – that Aristotle investigates the problematic link of 'time' to the 'soul'. (And when Plotinus takes up the question of time in *Enneads* 3.7, he – like contemporary philosophers – turns to *Physics* 4, not *De anima* 3.) Those who are interested in Neoplatonic conceptions of time – and more generally, in the concept of time in Late Antiquity – would do well to consult this commentary, and the other surviving Greek commentaries on *De anima* 3.

There is a single, colourful passage that indicates how ps.-Simplicius' commentary on the soul also opens onto the terrain of the body – sexuality, and so on – in Late Antiquity. In *De anima* 3.9 Aristotle writes that 'the heart' is moved when we think of menacing things, whereas 'if the object is pleasant, *some other part*' is moved. It is a pleasure then to see ps.-Simplicius' gloss: 'The heart, for instance, may be set in movement among fearful things and the generative organs [γεννητικὰ μέρη] upon the thought of sexual pleasure [ἀφροδισιαστικῶν ἡδονῶν]' (p. 102). This is doubtless the sense of Aristotle's euphemistic text, and ps.-Simplicius sees the deeper import of sexual excitation with perfect clarity: 'The intellect is *not wholly master* [οὐ τὸ ὅλον κύριος] of the movement of the living being' (p. 102). How far removed are we, here, from Augustine's discussion of post-paradisiacal arousal in his *City of God against the Pagans*? Or from Proclus' refusal of a disciple who was 'pursuing philosophy, but at the same time devoting his life to the pleasures below the belly [τὰς ὑπογαστρίας ἡδονάς]', as Damascius reports?

The early modern *sectatores Simplicii* likely misattributed their *De anima* commentary, but in this they were correct: Averroes is not 'the Commentator on Aristotle's *De Anima* III'. Ps.-Simplicius' reading of the book is still challenging, at places suddenly illuminating. And it is no small thing for us to have access now – in conscientious English, and in full – to this methodical, lexically sensitive commentary on the soul from the immediate circle of the last representatives of a 'Platonic succession' in Athens.

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PETRA PAPYRI VOL. 4

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Volume 4 of the Petra papyri represents the third volume published by a joint US–Finnish team in a projected 5-volume series.¹ These documents hardly need an introduction. Found

¹Since the appearance of the 4th volume, the 2nd has also been published: L. Koenen, J. Kaimio, M. Kaimio and R.W. Daniel (edd.), *The Petra Papyri II* (2013).