Perkams, M. 2008. *Selbstbewusstsein in der Spätantike: Die neuplatonischen Kommentare zu Aristoteles' "De anima"*. Pp. 468. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter. ISBN: 978-3-11-020492-6. Price €98.

The title of Perkams' (henceforth P.) study (a published version of his *Habilitation*) is slightly misleading, but in a good way. While it promises to discuss theories of self-consciousness in the Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima*, it delivers much more: a large part of the volume surveys the commentators' interpretations of Aristotle's difficult text and the different theories of soul they find therein.

Three commentaries make up the raw material for P.'s investigation. There is, firstly, a commentary by John Philoponus on the first two books of *De anima* which survives in Greek, while his commentary on book three has come down to us in Moerbeke's Latin translation. We have, secondly, a commentary which the manuscripts ascribe to Simplicius, but which, for philological and doctrinal reasons, is almost certainly not by him. P. accepts the conclusions of Ferdinand Bossier's and Carlos Steel's ground-breaking research (briefly discussed on pp. 149-151), and assigns this second commentary to Priscian of Lydia, who is otherwise known to us as the author of a paraphrase on Theophrastus' *De sensibus*. Finally, there is a commentary on the third book of *De anima* that a few manuscripts claim comes 'from the voice of Stephanus'. Under the name of Stephanus, we also have a commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione*. P. thinks that the Stephanus who commented on *De anima* is the same Stephanus who commented on *De interpretatione*, citing parallels in style and content as evidence (pp. 237-238).

In his introduction, P. sets out the significance of these three Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima*. By giving centre-stage to the rational soul and its ability to relate to itself in complex ways, the Neoplatonists touch on an issue of lasting relevance to philosophical anthropology. A second key question that runs through the commentaries is how the empirical person is constituted as a soul-body compound, and here too, Neoplatonism may provide us with interesting parallels to modern philosophical debates (p. 5).

Two further claims P. makes in the introduction are worth singling out here, as they sum up his general approach: firstly, we should take the Neoplatonic interpretations of *De anima* seriously, without dismissing them as distortions of Aristotle's thought from the outset (p. 14); and secondly, the late antique commentaries on Aristotle may not be best described as 'Neoplatonic', but should rather be seen as the product of a 'Neoplatonic Aristotelianism' where the sustained engagement with Aristotle's text may have led to results that are not easily mapped onto a generic Neoplatonic 'system' (p. 18).

The first part of the book follows this agenda, and takes us through the commentaries by Philoponus, Priscian and Stephanus. P. has interesting things to say about each of them. His presentation of Philoponus' commentary is finely sensitive to the internal tensions within the work; he explains them by distinguishing a layer of material derived from the seminars of Ammonius from Philoponus' own interventions, which occasionally disagree with Ammonius, but not openly. A fascinating case in point is the question of innate knowledge: while Ammonius seems to have seen that Plato and Aristotle are in disagreement on this question, Philoponus rejects any notion that Aristotle could have conceived of *nous* as a *tabula rasa* in the sense of a first potentiality (pp. 125ff.).

In the case of Priscian's commentary, P.'s makes the interesting suggestion that Priscian pursued 'a kind of research project' (*eine Art Forschungsprojekt*), seeking to clarify Iamblichus' doctrines through the explanation of authoritative texts (p. 155). Fundamental to Priscian's understanding of *De anima* is a theory of double entelechy: soul is an entelechy of the body in the sense that it forms and animates it, but also in the sense that it moves and directs the body. P. suggests that the doctrine may in part be a reaction to Damascius' views, whose discussion on self-motion in *De principiis* P. contrasts with Priscian's approach (pp. 162 ff.). Priscian's doctrine that the soul undergoes change not only in its activities, but also in its essence, is discussed at some length by P., who relates it to a principle of Iamblican ontology, according to which a disrupted and imperfect activity cannot proceed from a substance that is free from affections and perfect (p. 227).

Stephanus' commentary, finally, cuts a less impressive figure than the other two. Although P. finds evidence for considerable originality (see p. 269 on *dianoia*), there are undeniable tensions in the work (see p. 265 on the relation between intellect and discursive thought). Some of these tensions can be explained by Stephanus' use of his sources; the deeper reason, however, may well be that, as P. suggests, seventy years after the closing of the Athenian school, Stephanus did not undergo a thorough Neoplatonic education (p. 279).

The second part of the book deals with self-consciousness in the *De anima* commentaries. P. begins with an overview of theories of self-consciousness in Neoplatonism, discussing the views of Plotinus, Iamblichus, Proclus and Philoponus (pp. 305-335). Stephanus, too, makes a brief appearance with his excursus on *to prosektikon* (pp. 404-408), a special faculty of attentiveness that pertains to the rational part of the soul. The real focus of interest, though, is Priscian. P. discovers a remarkably complex and unified theory of self-consciousness in his commentary: under the general heading of 'self-reversion', one can distinguish a number of ways of relating to the self in Priscian, depending on the level of human cognition or awareness one is examining.

A concluding perspective sums up the significance of Priscian's theory. Although recognition of self (*Selbsterkenntnis*) would seem like a theoretical phenomenon, we should not underestimate its moral import: when we recognize ourselves, we grasp an ideal of life (*ein Lebensideal*) of ourselves as rational natures, and so come one step closer to realizing it (p. 420).

The book contains an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources, and indices *rerum*, *nominum* and *locorum*.

In conclusion, P's study is likely to be indispensable for anyone with a serious interest in either Neoplatonic theories of the soul, the *De anima* commentaries, or the development of theories of self-consciousness in late antiquity. It is well structured, thoughtful and clearly presented. One of its central theses, that even a theory as intricately Neoplatonic as Priscian's account of self-consciousness, is at bottom 'a form of Aristotelianism' (*eine Art von Aristotelismus*; p. 420) may strike some as provocative, but it is much to P's credit that he has taken the debate forward.

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