
Peter of Ireland, *Writings on Natural Philosophy: Commentary on Aristotle's On Length and Shortness of Life and Death and the Determinatio Magistralis*. Edited with an Introduction and English Translation by Michael W. Dunne. Brepols, Turnhout 2023 (British Library of Christian Sources. Patristic and Medieval Texts with English Translation), pp. 226.

Peter of Ireland (ca. 1200–1260s) is mostly known for his work on natural philosophy, having taught at the University of Naples (1240s–1260s), and his influence on Thomas Aquinas's thought. Regrettably, Peter of Ireland's philosophical views remain understudied, despite Michael W. Dunne's critical edition of his commentary on *De longitudine et brevitate vitae* published in 1993. Dunne has now furnished the critical edition with a translation, shedding more light on Peter of Ireland's natural philosophy.

The volume, which is a continuation of Dunne's project of bringing Peter's ideas to a wider audience (marked by Dunne's prior editions of *Expositio et Quaestiones in Aristotelis librum De longitudine et brevitate vitae* [Louvain-Paris, 1993] and *Expositio et Quaestiones in Peryermenias Aristotelis* [Louvain-Paris, 1996]) contains a reprint of the critical edition complete with an English translation and an introduction, both

authored by Dunne. The introduction outlines Peter's life and work, ponders his influence on Aquinas having possibly been his teacher (as reported by William Tocco, Aquinas's contemporary and his biographer), and offers an overview of the content of the commentary. By way of a bonus, Dunne also provides his English translation of Peter's *Determinatio magistralis* with a reprint of Clemens Baeumker's edition of the text from 1920.

The debate on whether Peter of Ireland was indeed Aquinas's teacher is still unresolved and, given the paucity of available historical evidence, is not likely to be settled any time soon. Yet, as Dunne points out, there is little doubt that when penning his own commentaries “Aquinas had Peter's commentary of the *Peri Hermeneias* in front of him” (p. 13). While the detailed story of Peter of Ireland and Thomas Aquinas still awaits to be told, we know for certain that Aquinas

was strongly influenced by Peter's writings, and perhaps teaching too, and, as Dunne underlines, counted him among the greatest authorities (p. 14). Thus, the edition and translation not only illuminate Peter's nature-philosophical ideas but also portray him as one of Aquinas's doctrinal sources.

Dunne briefly sketches the possible interrelation of Peter and Aquinas to promptly proceed to analyzing the main issues of Peter's natural philosophy in his commentary of Aristotle's *On Length and Shortness of Life*. Following Peter's organization of the commentary, Dunne picks out and discusses the most appealing points from each section of the text: *The Prologue* and *Lectures* from 1 to 7 (each being subdivided into several questions). Crucially, the edition and the translation are placed side by side in a perspicuous layout that is easy to follow, facilitating the comparison of the Latin original and its English version when needed.

Although thirteenth-century questions have a relatively simple form in comparison to their fourteenth-century counterparts, they are by no means literal interpretations of the commented text. Peter's questions vividly show that, while taking Aristotle's treatise as their starting point, they go beyond Aristotelian thematic concerns to examine other problems, a tendency that will reach a pinnacle of refinement in late medieval philosophy and theology. Peter's thought-provoking contribution to the debate on the life and death of beings is perhaps best exemplified by his discussion of the difference between animal and vegetal life and especially by his deliberations on the "lower animals" as a borderline case between beasts and plants, his exploration of the nature and function of sleep, including a puzzling question of whether plants sleep

or not, and finally his distinction between the longevity of animals and the longevity of plants.

The critical edition included in the volume is a reprint of the prior one and, as Dunne explains, it "is substantially the same as that published in 1993." However, it does not contain a *critical apparatus*, which a specialist in medieval philosophy would normally expect. Because the 1993 edition is not easily available, this omission is, in my view, somewhat of a shortcoming of this publication.

A few remarks on the translation of Peter's text are in order. Dunne's translation of Peter's commentary strikes a fine balance between being as close to the original text as possible and adopting contemporary language understandable to modern readers, who are not always acquainted with technical medieval philosophical vocabulary, which in my opinion is one of the greatest assets of the volume. This attitude is well illustrated by employing various English equivalents of the Latin *spiritus* to convey the particular meaning in a given context, rather than rigidly adhering to one term throughout.

The importance of attaching English translations to medieval philosophical texts should not be underestimated. They not only make medieval philosophical writings accessible to a broader readership, but also cast light on the historical development of science and scholarship, affording insight into how the generations before us understood the beginning and end of life and making us realize that we, too, are actively participating in creating the story of life. In this story, nothing is set in stone, and the truth fluctuates as the world and knowledge change, and we change with them.

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