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Byzantine Philosophy as a Contemporary Historiographical Project*

Over the last decades the problem of the existence of Byzantine philosophy has been posed in terms of the determination of its status, its function, and its subject matter. To a certain extent, this approach to Byzantine philosophy has been motivated by the increasing disciplinary autonomy reached by the other branches of what is nowadays called “medieval philosophy”. A series of significant scholarly achievements over the last twenty years have contributed to the development of more-or-less well defined scholarly fields of research concerning the medieval Latin, Arabic, and Jewish philosophical traditions. The increasing attention to the philosophy taught in the Faculties of Arts and to the sometimes tortuous events related to the so-called Latin Averroism - for example, the condemnations of 1277 - surely represent one of the relevant directions for approaching the history of medieval Western philosophy in a scholarly way. Something similar might be said about so-called “Arabic philosophy”. In this case, the reception of ancient Greek thought, the reinterpretation of some of its relevant doctrines - like the doctrine of the intellect -, and finally the relationship between rational philosophical activity and Muslim religion are considered to be solid starting points for the exploration of Arabic philosophy, and therefore justify the existence of a modern discipline studying the philosophical achievements and developments of the Islamic World. If this perspective on medieval Arabic philosophy appears too narrow, one can always appeal to the idea of its linguistic unity, a thesis which today is perhaps most widespread¹. The same is valid for the so-called “medieval Jewish philosophy”. In this case, the importance of figures like Moses Maimonides and Ibn Gabirol for Western medieval thought has produced a kind of general scholarly recognition of the existence of such a tradition and of the legitimacy of the modern discipline studying it.

In regard to Byzantine philosophy the situation is much more complicated. In the first chapter of his *La philosophie médiévale*, Alain de Libera devotes his first words to the retarded scholarly development of the study of Byzantine philosophy. He claims that Byzantine philosophy has been mainly ignored and misunderstood, and

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¹ For a reconstruction of the debate on the status of medieval Arabic philosophy, cf. R. BRAGUE, *Wie islamisch ist die islamische Philosophie*, in A. SPEER/L. WEGENER, *Wissen über Grenzen. Arabisches Wissen und lateinische Mittelalters*, 165-193 («Miscellanea Mediaevalia», 33).

has not been deeply studied². However, from the second half of the twentieth century one can find relevant and extremely important attempts to establish not only the basic features and developments, but the very existence of Byzantine philosophy. In this *Forschungsbericht* I shall attempt to reconstruct the scholarly debate on this topic, testing the main interpretive attitudes against some concrete cases of thinkers who lived in the area of the Eastern Roman Empire and who are labelled by most modern historians as “Byzantine”.

1. L’ “essence de la philosophie byzantine”

It has been argued recently that it is still too early to produce a new comprehensive study, a handbook, comparable to B. Tatakis’ *La philosophie byzantine*³. According to this view, mainly expressed by famous scholars like Linos Benakis, the scholarly development in the field of Byzantine philosophy has not yet reached the quantitative and qualitative solidity necessary to give birth to a new - both in contents and approach – handbook or history of the Byzantine philosophical tradition⁴. Against this view, two main objections can be raised.

The first one is that the last 30 years has seen an increasing number of articles, books, dictionaries entries, editorial projects, conferences, and new tools dealing explicitly with the Byzantine philosophical tradition. In this respect, one cannot fail to acknowledge that Benakis himself can be considered a pioneer of this kind of research. It may, however, still be true that Byzantine philosophy suffers from a certain lag in its scholarly development, especially if compared with the history of medieval Latin philosophy. Nevertheless, since the time of Tatakis’ fundamental handbook the situation has significantly, if not radically, changed. Indeed, this very scholarly development has rendered obsolete several views expressed by Tatakis in his masterpiece. As has become quite clear, for example, Tatakis underestimates the impact of the medieval Latin tradition on the Byzantine philosophical and theological tradition, which he sometimes understands in terms of opposition between the Latin West and what he calls, not without ideological motivations, the “Greek East”⁵.

² Cf. A. DE LIBERA, *La philosophie médiévale*, Paris 1993, 9: «La philosophie byzantine est aujourd’hui encore mal comprise, assez généralement méprisée, peu étudiée et jamais traduite.»

³ B. TATAKIS, *La philosophie byzantine*, Paris, 1949. Tatakis’ book has been translated into Spanish by D. Nández (Buenos Aires 1952), into Modern Greek by E.K. Kalpourtsi (Athens 1977) and into English by N.J. Moutafakis (Indianapolis 2003).

⁴ Cf. L.G. BENAKIS, *Epilogue: Current Research in Byzantine Philosophy*, in K. IERODIAKONOU (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, Oxford 2002, 283-288, 285: «Although a lot of work has been done on the subject since then, I believe that we are not yet ready to replace Tatakis’ work with a new, more comprehensive history of Byzantine philosophy.» However, the same scholar writes on page 287 of the same article: «I think that it is much clearer nowadays than it was in Tatakis’ time, what the term “Byzantine philosophy” refers to.»

⁵ Cf. TATAKIS, *La philosophie* cit., 231, 312-313, 230: «Chrétienne, orthodoxe, l’âme byzantine, à la lumière des classiques prend de plus en plus conscience qu’elle est grecque.» The example provided by Tatakis of this “Christian, orthodox soul” is the fourteenth/fifteenth century neopagan Georgius Gemistus Plethon (!). For recent contributions on the Latin-Greek interaction: L. BENAKIS, ‘*Η παρουσία του Θωμά Ἀκινάτη στο Βυζάντιο. Η νεότερη έρευνα για τους δαδούς και τους*

The second objection is a more relevant one, as it involves not only the problem of the availability of sources, primary and secondary literature, but more importantly the problem of the approach to the subject-matter. In his introduction, Tatakis rightly states that in studying Byzantine philosophy one should eliminate of the categories traditionally used for the study of Western medieval philosophy. Byzantine philosophy, he writes, should be considered and understood not through comparison with other traditions, but in its own essence, i.e. in its distinctive character: “l’essence de la pensée philosophique de Byzance”⁶. In this way Tatakis poses a very important problem, namely the necessary autonomy of the historiographical categories according to which the Byzantine philosophical tradition has to be treated. However, nowadays a reader might be a little concerned about the idea of the *essence* of Byzantine philosophy. To what extent, for example, do radically different thinkers like Symeon the New Theologian (X-XI cent.) and Michael Psellus (XI cent.) - studied together by Tatakis in chapter 4 of his book - belong to the same essence, item, or definition of “(Byzantine) philosophy”? To what extent are they both classifiable under a common univocal category? In general, according to what meaning of the word are they both “Byzantine philosophers”?

Both in the *Hymns* and in the *Orations*, Symeon refers to the term “philosophy” following one of the traditional Byzantine understandings of the term at stake. According to Symeon “philosophy” means, on the one hand, the ancient Greek philosophical tradition⁷; on the other, it refers to the ascetic life of the monks,

ἀντιπάλους τῆς Σχολαστικῆς στὴν Ανατολή, “Ζῶ δὲ οὐκ ἔτι ἐγὼ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός. Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν ἀρχιεπίσκοπο Δημήτριο”, Ἀθήνα 2000, 627-649; J. LÖSSL, *Augustine in Byzantium*, «Journal of Ecclesiastical History», 51 (2000), 267-295; S. EBBESEN, *Greek-Latin Philosophical Interaction*, in IERODIAKONOU (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy* cit., 15-30, esp. 25-28; J.A. DEMETRACOPOULOS, *Georgios Gennadios II – Scholarios’ Florilegium Thomisticum. His Early Abridgment of Various Chapters and Quaestiones of Thomas Aquinas’ Summae and his anti-Plethonism*, «Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévale», 69/1, 2002, 117-171; A. FYRIGOS, *Tomismo e antitomismo a Bisanzio (con una nota sulla Defensio S. Thomae adversus Nilum Cabasilam di Demetrio Cidone)*, in A. MOLLE, *Tommaso d’Aquino (+1274) e il mondo bizantino*, Venafrò (IS) 2004, 27-72; J.A. DEMETRACOPOULOS, *Πλήθων καὶ Θωμᾶς Ἀκυνιάτης: ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ θωμισμοῦ*. With four Appendices, including a critical *editio princeps* of Plethon’s *Extracta Thomistica*, Athens 2004 [«Greek Byzantium and the latin West: Philosophy – Studies», 2]; ID., *Manuel Calecas’ Translation of Boethius’ De Trinitate*. Introduction, New Critical Edition, Index Latinograecitatis, «Synthesis Philosophica», 39/1 (2005), 83-118; G. KAPRIEV, *Die nicht-psychologische Deutung des Menschen bei Gregorios Palamas*, «Archiv für Mittelalterliche Philosophie und Kultur», 13 (2006), 187-198; J.-A. DEMETRACOPOULOS, *Georgios Gennadios II – Scholarios’ Florilegium Thomisticum II (De fato) and its anti-Plethonic Tenor*, «Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévale», 74/2 (2007) [forthcoming].

⁶ Cf. TATAKIS, *La philosophie* cit., 5: «Quant aux traits caractéristiques de la philosophie byzantine nous prendrons soin qu’ils se détachent par la suite le plus nettement possible. On les a cherchés jusqu’ici plutôt dans une comparaison entre l’Orient et l’Occident que dans une étude de l’essence de la pensée philosophique de Byzance.»

⁷ SYMEON NEOTHEOLOGUS, *Orationes theologicae*, I,310-311. ed. J. Darrouzès, *Syméon le Nouveau Théologien. Traités théologiques et éthiques*, Paris 1966 [«Sources chrétiennes», 122], 118; II,35-36, 132; ID., *Capita theologica*, 3,24, ed. J. Darrouzès, *Syméon le Nouveau Théologien. Chapitres théologiques, gnostiques et pratiques*, Paris 1996 [«Sources chrétiennes» 51bis], 87; ID., *Hymni*, 21,50-61, ed. J. Koder, *Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, Hymnes 16-40*, II, Paris 1971 [«Sources chrétiennes» 174], 134.

described as meditation on the self and on death⁸. The influence of the pagan Greek philosophical ideal of life on the description of the monastic *askesis* has already been pointed out in studies by distinguished scholars such as Dölger⁹, Leclercq¹⁰, Penco¹¹, Malingrey¹², Podskalsky (who devoted the first chapter of his monumental *Theologie und Philosophie im Byzanz* exactly to this topic¹³), and, of course, Pierre Hadot¹⁴. Perhaps it should be stressed that every attempt to develop a possible way of determining the subject and status of Byzantine philosophy must take into account the definitional dimension of the problem, which also includes the question of the self-understanding of a thinker. Symeon the New Theologian would have called himself a philosopher only insofar as this denomination refers to the peculiarity of the monastic life. He writes: “What man on earth, wise, rhetor, mathematician or otherwise, apart from those whose intellect is purified by the supreme philosophy, the ascetic life, and whose soul has well-trained senses (τῶν κεκαθαρμένων τὸν νοῦν ἐξ ἄκρας φιλοσοφίας τε καὶ ἀσκήσεως καὶ γεγυμνασμένα τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιφερομένων ἀληθῶς αἰσθητήρια), could know only by human wisdom, without a revelation from above by our Lord, God’s mysteries revealed in intellectual contemplation?”¹⁵. The monk is the follower of Christ, his historical model being the Apostles, the Christian martyrs, and Moses, often described as the first philosopher of the Desert.

Although this practical understanding of the term “philosophy” is widely used in Greek literature of the Middle Ages, modern historians have found it to be a less attractive characteristic with which to define Byzantine philosophy, than, say, a theoretical activity devoted to one or more objects or even a speculative approach to theological matters. However, anyone interested in coming to an understanding of the status and function of Byzantine philosophy cannot avoid *in primis* this definitional dimension of the problem. In fact, monastic *askesis* as *meditatio mortis*/μελέτη θανάτου has its remote philosophical source in Plato’s *Phaedo* (81a) and in its Neoplatonic interpretation¹⁶. Furthermore, the historical model of Moses

⁸ SYMEON NEOTHEOLOGUS, *Hymni*, 21,175-176, ed. Koder, 124; 21,374-380, 158; 21,390-391, 160; ID., *Orationes theologicae*, ed. Darrouzès, II, 45-47, 134-136.

⁹ Cf. F. DÖLGER, *Zur Bedeutung von φιλόσοφος und φιλοσοφία in byz. Zeit*, in *Τεσσαρακοταετηρίς θεοφίλου Βορέα*, vol. 1, Athens 1940, 125-136 ; reprinted in ID., *Byzanz u. die europ. Staatenwelt*, Ettal 1954 [repr. Darmstadt 1964], 197-208.

¹⁰ Cf. J. LECLERCQ, *Pour l’histoire de l’expression “philosophie chrétienne”*, in *Mélanges de Science Religieuse*, IX, 1952 ; ID., *Etudes sur le vocabulaire monastique du Moyen-Age*, Roma, 1961.

¹¹ Cf. G. PENCO, *La vita ascetica come “filosofia” nell’antica tradizione monastica*, «*Studia monastica*», 2 (1960), 79-93.

¹² Cf. A.-M. MALINGREY, “*Philosophia*”. *Etude d’un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque, des Présocratiques au IV^e siècle après J. C.*, Paris 1961.

¹³ Cf. G. PODSKALSKY, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz, Der Streit um die theologische Methodik in der spätbyzantinischen Geistgeschichte (14./15. Jh.), seine systematischen Grundlagen und seine historische Entwicklung*, München 1977, 13-48 («*Byzantinisches Archiv*», 15).

¹⁴ Cf. P. HADOT, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, Paris 1995.

¹⁵ SYMEON NEOTHEOLOGUS, *Orationes ethicae*, IX,59-66, ed. J. Darrouzès, *Syméon le Nouveau Théologien. Traités théologiques et éthiques*, Paris 1966 [«*Sources chrétiennes*», 122], 222-224.

¹⁶ Cf. L.-G. WESTERINK, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato’s Phaedo. 1: Olympiodorus*, Amsterdam 1976; 2: *Damascius*, Amsterdam 1977.

as the first philosopher of the desert, fundamental to the so-called “Fathers of the Desert”, was first described by Philo of Alexandria (*De vita Moysis*, II,216,2). It is therefore less surprising that a term used by Plutarch in his *Vitae parallelae* to describe the initiation to the Eleusinian Mysteries, *epopteia*, is then to be found in the Fathers of the Church, as well as in other passages from later philosophical and theological works, according to the meaning to be found also, among many others, in Plotinus and Proclus, namely a form of superior and non-conceptual knowledge of the divine¹⁷.

The case of Psellus, in contrast, is more complex. Regarded by Tatakis as the central figure in Byzantine philosophy, Psellus has been traditionally considered to be the most prominent example of a kind of conciliatory attitude between pagan philosophy and Christianity. Sometimes, as suggested in an otherwise impressive book by Anthony Kaldellis¹⁸, he has even been considered as the representative of a militant form of Neoplatonism, a subversive who renounced Christianity in favour of Hellenic religion. This radical thesis reflects in the end a commonly shared judgment, though very often in a more moderate version. In general the claim that Psellus should be considered the last Neoplatonist with a more or less positive conciliatory attitude towards Christianity is the most widespread. The very title of the first important modern monographic study on Psellus, written by Zervos, is “Un philosophe néoplatonicien du XIème siècle”¹⁹. Psellus himself would have been very happy with this judgment. Throughout the whole of his *Chronography* he tries to convince the reader to acknowledge the fact that he was the first philosopher after an era of intellectual darkness. Nevertheless, it is well known that Psellus himself wrote a funeral oration for a man whom he describes as his teacher (*didaskalos*): this man was John Mauropous. Thus, the period before Psellus could not have been a complete intellectual wasteland. This is just one example that shows how important it is to read Psellus’ *Chronography* while keeping in mind the peculiar rhetorical strategy of the author and, ultimately, his way of conceiving the function of the historian and of presenting himself in regard to the reported events²⁰.

The recent publication in the Teubner series, however, of texts considered by scholars as the most important philosophical witnesses of Psellus’ activity, seems to provide the occasion for a partial re-examination of the traditional judgments on this important author²¹. As we read these texts carefully, we immediately notice that most

¹⁷ Cf. T. KOBUSCH, *Epoptie - Metaphysik des inneren Menschen*, «Quaestio», 5 (2005), 23-36.

¹⁸ Cf. A. KALDELLIS, *The Arguments of Psellos’ Chronographia*, Leiden 1999 («Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters», 68), 185ff.

¹⁹ Cf. C. ZERVOS, *Un philosophe néoplatonicien du XIème siècle: Michel Psellos, sa vie, son oeuvre, ses luttes philosophiques, son influence*, Paris 1920.

²⁰ For recent relevant contributions on Psellus’ use of rhetoric, see: J. WALKER, *Michael Psellos on Rhetoric: A Translation and Commentary on Psellos’ Synopsis of Hermogenes*, «Rhetoric Society Quarterly», 31/3 (2001), 5-40; ID., *These Things I Have Not Betrayed: Michael Psellos’ Encomium of His Mother as a Defense of Rhetoric*, «Rhetorica», 22/1 (2004), 49-101.

²¹ MICHAEL PSELLUS, *Opuscula logica, physica, allegorica, alia*, ed. J.M. Duffy, *Michaelis Pselli Philosophica Minora*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1992; *Opuscula psychologica, theologica, daemonologica*, ed. D.J. O’Meara, *Michaelis Pselli philosophica minora*, vol. 2, Leipzig 1989. Some relevant contributions on Psellus’ philosophical production and its literary aspects are: J. DUFFY, *Hellenic Philosophy in Byzantium and the Lonely Mission of*

of them are introduced by formulas such as *ἡρώτεκας* or *ἡρώτεσας*, “you have asked” and “you asked”. Every single philosophical problem that Psellus subjects to analysis is first briefly and concisely described by the author in a kind of doxographical account. The reader is provided with a genealogy of the crucial concepts necessary for the understanding of the different problems. Various ancient philosophical sources are mentioned, discussed, and compared. However, it is this very same argumentative structure that leads us to acknowledge that these so-called *Philosophica minora* mirror Psellus’ teaching activity as “consul of the philosophers” (a very prestigious teaching position). A set of different opinions and views taken from ancient and late ancient philosophical sources is often present, introduced by the formula *κατὰ τὰς Ἑλληνικὰς δόξας*²². Often Psellus remarks that the doctrines and the views he is elaborating are not his own. Sometimes he seems to appreciate certain achievements reached by the pagan philosophical tradition, particularly those of the Neoplatonist Proclus, especially when these achievements appear to be similar to christian concepts and doctrines. But does this mean that Psellus was actively attempting to reconcile Christianity and Neoplatonism? A like judgment was not rare among erudite Byzantine intellectuals. Photius (IX cent.), for example, was just one among several Byzantine intellectuals who had pointed to the similarities between Christianity and Neoplatonism. Photius himself admitted that with the Proclian tradition, in particular after Ammonius (V cent.) there are no more *dissensiones philosophorum*²³. However, In Psellus’ work this rarely goes beyond a scholarly admiration, and it is more than questionable whether Psellus conceived the similarity he detected between certain concepts from the ancient philosophical tradition and the christian one as the basis for a new philosophical project. I do not think that in the available sources there are consistent traces of any attempt by Psellus to fully realize a project of this kind, beyond the rhetorical emphasis on it to be found here and there in his works.

Understanding this attitude as a kind of enthusiastic attempt to combine Christianity and paganism into a new philosophical system or, even more radically, to state that Christianity can be practiced as a form of philosophical faith, insofar as there is no difference between it and the pagan philosophical tradition, is simply to

Michael Psellos, in K. IERODIAKONOU, *Byzantine Philosophy* cit., 139-156; K. IERODIAKONOU, *Psellos’ Paraphrasis on Aristotle’s De interpretatione*, in K. IERODIAKONOU, *Byzantine Philosophy* cit., 157-181; P. ATHANASSIADI, *Byzantine Commentators on the Chaldean Oracles: Psellos and Plethon*, in K. IERODIAKONOU, *Byzantine Philosophy* cit., 237-252; P. MOORE, *Iter Psellianum: a detailed listing of manuscript sources for all works attributed to Michael Psellos, including a comprehensive bibliography*, Toronto 2005 («Subsidia mediaevalia», 26); D. BURNS, *The Chaldean Oracles of Zoroaster, Hekate’s couch, and Platonic Orientalism in Psellos and Plethon*, «Aries», 6/2 (2006), 158-179; Ch.-E BARBER/D. JANKINS (ed.), *Reading Michael Psellos*, Leiden 2006 («The Medieval Mediterranean», 61); K. IERODIAKONOU/J. DUFFY, *Psellos’ Paraphrasis on De interpretatione. A critical edition*, (forthcoming); K. IERODIAKONOU, *Psellos’ Paraphrasis on the Prior Analytics* (forthcoming). I am told that L. Benakis is about to publish the *editio princeps* of Psellos’ commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics* as part of the project *Commentaria in Aristotelem Byzantina* (Academy of Athens).

²² MICHAEL PSELLUS, *Opuscula logica, physica, allegorica, alia*, 40, ed. Duffy, vol. 1, *Michaelis Pselli philosophica minora*, vol.1, 145,40-42; 45, 162,15-16; ID., *Opuscula psychologica, theologica, daemonologica*, 10, ed. O’Meara, vol. 2, 21,3ff.

²³ PHOTIUS, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 251, ed. R. Henry, *Photius. Bibliothèque*, 8 vols., Paris, 461a31.

go far beyond Psellus' intentions. On the contrary, Psellus seems always keen to stress the differences between Christian theology and ancient Greek philosophy, constantly reminding his pupils that only the former can be considered a source of truth, the latter being useful to reach the state of *polymatheia* and to achieve a full and complete education²⁴. Furthermore, there is no problem in saying that this pedagogical attitude towards ancient philosophy, at least in its general mainstream, can be considered traditional. It reflects the attitude, for example, of Basil the Great in his treatise edited as *De legendis gentiliū libris*²⁵.

As the editor of vol. 1 of the so-called *Philosophica minora*, John Duffy, has stated, one would not be wrong in saying that for Michael Psellus the status of philosophy is close to the semantic area related to the term *polymatheia*, "universal knowledge"²⁶. Even Psellus' theological writings seem to reflect a pedagogical aim, as he uses, in *Theologicum* 3, Gregory of Nazianzus' claim that Eunomius' arguments were paralogisms simply as a starting point for a huge digression on the classification of the different kinds of paralogisms according, for example, to Aristotle and the Stoics²⁷. It is not surprising, then, that in *Theologicum* 74, after the exposition of the Neoplatonic doctrine of *epopteia*, he adds at the end of the treatise that "there is nothing true in this, but we have to learn not only about the therapeutic herbs, but also about the poisonous ones, in order to become healthy with the former and to avoid the latter, without embracing extraneous doctrines as if they were ours"²⁸.

Stressing Psellus' careful professional deontology does not entail adopting the traditional prejudice concerning the lack of originality of the Byzantine philosophical tradition. On the contrary, it raises other important questions. Psellus provides us with precious testimony to the Byzantine understanding of the main ancient philosophical standpoints. His way of comparing the different sources on one specific topic is in itself extremely interesting, in as much as it reflects precisely the standpoints which he thought to be the standard ones for the entire ancient Greek philosophical tradition, as well as the peculiarities of the different philosophical traditions. The range of his philosophical knowledge is surely impressive, but this is not enough, I think, to permit us to apply categories like "la religion des philosophes"²⁹, to cite the title of a famous article by Jean Gouillard, or expressions like "christliche Metaphysik in Byzanz", as suggested by the title of a very well known book by Perikles Joannou³⁰. In fact, the titles of these contributions seem

²⁴ MICHAEL PSELLUS, *Opuscula logica, physica, allegorica, alia*, 7, ed. Duffy, 26, 117-123. Cf. also the case of ID., *Ad discipulos de ventriloquo*, ed. A.R. Littlewood, *Michael Psellus and the Witch of Endor*, «Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik», 40 (1990), 228-331.

²⁵ BASILIUS CAESARENSIS, *De legendis gentiliū libris*, IV, 3 ed. F. Boulenger, *Saint Basile. Aux jeunes gens sur la manière de tirer profit des lettres Helléniques*, Paris 1935 (repr. 1965).

²⁶ Cf. DUFFY, *Hellenic Philosophy* cit., in K. IERODIAKONOU, *Byzantine Philosophy* cit., 150-151.

²⁷ MICHAEL PSELLUS, *Theologica*, 3, ed. P. GAUTIER, *Michaelis Pselli theologia*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1989, 11, 92-14, 177. For an analysis of this and other passages from the *Theologia*, see E. V. MALTESE, *La teologia bizantina nell'undicesimo secolo fra spiritualità monastica e filosofia ellenica*, in *Storia della teologia nel Medioevo*, a cura di G. D'Onofrio, I, Casale Monferrato 1996, 555-587.

²⁸ MICHAEL PSELLUS, *Theologia*, 74, ed. Gautier, 297, 145-149.

²⁹ Cf. J. GOUILLARD, *La religion des philosophes*, in *La vie religieuse à Byzance*, London 1981, 305-324.

³⁰ Cf. P. JOANNOU, *Christliche Metaphysik in Byzanz*, Ettal 1956.

once again to imply the idea that dealing with ancient and late-ancient philosophy means somehow to be part of that tradition, or once again to believe in the possibility of some kind of reconciliation of philosophy with christianity. However, as has been said before, to classify Psellus as a representative of such an attitude would go against the evidence provided by a large number of texts. Moreover, the very fact that Psellus seems to provide in different works different hints related to his way of treating philosophy should at least warn the modern scholar not to attempt such a global reconstruction, where all these different hints are forcibly gathered together into a monolithic interpretation of Psellus' position³¹. The remarks previously made on the difficulty of reading Psellus' allusions to philosophy, for example, in the *Chronographia*, encrypted in rhetoric and in Psellus' way of conceiving his function as historian, can be considered sufficient grounds for this statement.

Thus, just the comparison of the two main figures studied by Tatakis in ch. 4 of *La philosophie byzantine* seems to suggest how difficult is the search for an essence, a specific feature of the Byzantine philosophical tradition. The deeper one goes into the consideration of its intellectual phenomena, the more one faces its variety, its discontinuity, its plurality. Indeed, Tatakis raises important issues, like the necessity of considering Byzantine philosophy in its own particularity, without borrowing categories proper to Western intellectual history. I think, however, that in his approach "Byzantine philosophy" tends to become more a general intellectual history than a genuine attempt to account for the Byzantine philosophical tradition in terms of its status and subject.

It is therefore reasonable to state that the problem of the replacement of Tatakis' book cannot be linked simply to the number of available sources and studies³². More than this, it is a matter of approach. And even the increasing number and the high level of quality of the available sources and contributions do not by themselves provide new hypotheses or scholarly achievements, if these sources are not linked to a new methodological approach. In this respect, limited by the problematic attempt to find a satisfactory balance between the systematic and the diachronic approach, Tatakis' book, I believe, could not entirely deal with the problem of the existence of Byzantine philosophy, accounting for its different forms and characteristics.

2. A "Western" History of Byzantine Philosophy?

Surely Tatakis deserves more consideration if we think that he tried at least to raise again the problem of the existence of something called "Byzantine philosophy" given Hunger's resolute judgment, only ten years after Tatakis' *La philosophie byzantine*, that

³¹ Cf. KALDELLIS, *The Arguments* cit., 197.

³² The same point is expressed in G. KAPRIEV, *The Modern Study of Byzantine Philosophy*, «Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale», 45 (2007) [forthcoming].

there is no Byzantine philosophy at all³³. Hunger himself, however, seems to have changed his mind almost twenty years later, for in his fundamental *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* he poses problems such as the continuity of the ancient-Greek philosophical tradition in Byzantium and the relation between philosophy and theology properly so-called³⁴. One result of this new *Fragestellung* is the coinage of the ambiguous category of “Christian humanism”.

2.1 Objects, *Objektivierungen*, and *Objektivitäten*.

Another impulse to the discussion on the existence of a Byzantine philosophical tradition comes from Klaus Oehler’s *Antike Philosophie und byzantinisches Mittelalter*, a collection of articles published in 1969³⁵. Several things should be said about his main thesis, namely the idea that the Byzantine philosophical tradition can be envisaged as a more or less continuous development of the main ancient philosophical trends, Aristotelianism and Platonism, within a new context, characterized as Christian. In 1990 he himself elaborated on this view, posing the question to what extent ancient and medieval Greek philosophy can be conceived as a coherent whole³⁶. There is no surprise, then, if Oehler speaks about a Neoplatonic Byzantine philosophy to express the continuity of ancient philosophy in this new context. Moreover, if it is surely not the place here to discuss thoroughly the character of Oehler’s approach, nevertheless one cannot help but remark that the core of his approach is rooted in ideas from Hegel’s *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. In particular, it is by means of borrowing Hegel’s notions of *Objektivierung* and *Objektivität* that Oehler explains what he describes as *der Christianisierung der hellenischen Philosophie* and *der Hellenisierung des christlichen Glaubens*.

According to Oehler, this process of “hellenization” of Christendom started in the third and fourth century and ended in the fifteenth. One objection that can be raised to this view is that this process, the assimilation of ancient philosophical categories and terms into a new system, seems to be more characteristic of Patristic thought, and even more specifically of Ps.-Dionysius and of so-called early Byzantine thinkers such as Maximus Confessor (VI-VII cent.). Indeed, there were always readers of Aristotle and Plato in Byzantium, as well as reader of the Stoics and of Neoplatonists like Proclus. However, it is perhaps through the philosophical and theological syntheses of Ps.-Dionysius and Maximus Confessor that a number of topics like the knowability of God and the nature of God’s causality became a subject

³³ Cf. H. HUNGER, *Byzantinische Geisteswelt. Von Konstantin dem Großen bis zum Fall Konstantinopels*, Baden-Baden 1958, 15; see also ID., “Philosophie [Byzanz]“, in *Lexicon des Mittelalters*, VI, München 1993, 2092-2100.

³⁴ Cf. H. HUNGER, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, Bd. 1, München, 1978, 4-62.

³⁵ Cf. K. OEHLER, *Die Kontinuität in der Philosophie der Griechen*, in ID., *Antike Philosophie und byzantinisches Mittelalter. Aufsätze zur Geschichte des griechischen Denkens*, München 1969, 15-37.

³⁶ Cf. K. OEHLER, *Die byzantinische Philosophie*, in G. FLOISTAD, *Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey. Philosophy and Science in the Middle Ages*, VI,2, Dordrecht 1990, 639-649.

of discussion, for example, in the fourteenth century with Gregory Palamas³⁷. Moreover, in order to give a hint of the contribution of ancient philosophy to the formation, for example, of Trinitarian terminology it should be enough to recall the relevant case of the Cappadocian Fathers, as well as the later intuitions of Leontius of Byzantium (V-VI cent.), Maximus Confessor, and Theodore Studite (VIII-IX cent.). In general, I think that contemporary scholars agree on the fact that categories like “Platonism” and “Aristotelianism” are vague and inaccurate. The formation of a “technical” theological language is a process involving concept and textual traditions. Generic labels and references to ancient philosophical currents cannot begin to account for the genuine historical complexities. The same can be said about the other great commonplace on the reception of ancient Greek philosophy in Byzantium, namely the so-called “concordism” between Aristotle and Plato, often mentioned in connection with the problem of universals³⁸. In this regard, one could easily say that Platonism and Aristotelianism do not exist as such in Byzantium. As rightly stated by G. Kapriev in his recent *Philosophie in Byzanz*, a clear opposition between these two currents emerges in the Byzantine intellectual history only very late, in the XV century, with the struggle between Scholarios and Plethon³⁹.

In reading Plato and Aristotle the Byzantine intellectuals could neither eliminate nor ignore philosophical traditions like Stoicism, Scepticism, and Neoplatonism. On the contrary, particularly the latter strongly influenced the way in which Byzantine intellectuals dealt with ancient philosophical texts. The Aristotelian commentator Eustratius of Nicaea (XII cent.), for instance, seems to take for granted that the authentic Aristotelian view on the subject and status of Aristotle’s First Philosophy is that metaphysics is mainly a theological science⁴⁰. In doing so he simply proposes what had become the standard Neoplatonic interpretation found especially in Syrianus, Proclus, and Ammonius⁴¹.

³⁷ I shall mention two excellent recent collections of articles stressing the nature and the important role of the Dionysius tradition in Byzantium as well as the features that tradition does not share with the Latin reception of the *corpus dionysianum*. Y. DE ANDIA (ed.), *Denys L'Aréopagite et sa Postérité en Orient et en Occident. Actes du Colloque International Paris, 21-24 septembre 1994. Collections des Etudes Augustiniennes*, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris 1997 («Série Antiquité», 151); T. BOIADJIEV/G. KAPRIEV/A. SPEER (ed.), *Die Dionysius-Rezeption im Mittelalters, Internationales Kolloquium in Sofia vom 8. bis 11. April 1999 unter der Schirmherrschaft der Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale*, Turnhout 2000 («Rencontres de Philosophie Médiévale», 9).

³⁸ The idea of concordism between Plato and Aristotle on this specific topic has been formulated by Lloyd, who discusses the particular case of Eustratius of Nicaea; cf. A.C. LLOYD, *The Aristotelianism of Eustratius of Nicaea*, in J. WIESNER (ed.), *Aristoteles Werk und Wirkung. Mélanges P. Moraux*, t. II, Berlin 1987, 341-351. I shall not discuss here whether even speaking about the problems of universals in Byzantium is appropriate or not, insofar as it implies both, in contents and approach, something which as such is more proper to the Western medieval tradition.

³⁹ Cf. G. KAPRIEV, *Philosophie in Byzanz*, Würzburg 2005, 19; see also G. KARAMANOLIS, *Plethon and Scholarios on Aristotle*, in IERODIAKONOU (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy* cit., 253-282.

⁴⁰ EUSTRATIUS, *In VI EN*, ed. G. Heylbut, *Eustratii et Michaelis et anonyma in Ethica Nicomachea commentaria*, Berlin 1892, [«Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca», 20], 322,13; 324,38.

⁴¹ Cf. K. KREMER, *Der Metaphysikbegriff in den Aristoteles-Kommentare der Ammonius Schule*, Münster 1961; D. O'MEARA, *Le problème de la métaphysique dans l'antiquité tardive*, «Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie», 53 (1986), 3-22; C. STEEL, *Theology as First Philosophy. The Neoplatonic Concept of Metaphysics*, «Quaestio», 5 (2005), 3-21.

Something similar can be said about that version of the so-called “concordism” between Plato and Aristotle that is sometimes generically characterized by scholars as “Byzantine Neoplatonism”. This abstract model should be constantly verified in the texts. For example, Eustratius of Nicaea states that on mathematical objects Plato and Aristotle are in extreme disagreement, for Plato considers universals formed on the basis of particulars, i.e. Aristotle’s universal concepts derived by induction from sense-perception, as even worse than perishable particulars⁴². This proves once again that the idea of concordism between Plato and Aristotle must always be tested against the primary sources. There are topics, such as the nature of mathematical objects, which Byzantine thinkers like Eustratius seemed to clearly identify as points of irreducible difference. Even when this concordance seems to appear in the text, the reader has always to carefully examine the possible sources of this concordance. In fact, in one passage of his commentary on book II of the *Posterior Analytics*, Eustratius himself provides an account of the nature of intellection in which Plato is said to conceive it in terms of recollection, whereas Aristotle conceive it as a movement from potency into act. The problem is that he adds that this process entails the actualization of what is already present in the soul, and whose actualization starts from sense-perception⁴³. It is an account in which Aristotle is presented from a Neoplatonic point of view, insofar as the proper Aristotelian account for knowledge in terms of movement from potency into act is described as the actualization of intelligible contents already present in the soul. In cases like this, it would be better simply to examine the sources - often Proclus - that postulate this apparent concordism, rather than using broad categories. After examining whether and where Proclus himself posits this “concordism”, then we may fruitfully ask how the Byzantine tradition uses Proclus on this matter. But the study of the Byzantine texts and their sources must be at the center. If Eustratius, for example, provides the reader with this account of the Aristotelian view on intellection it is because the image of Aristotle he had was already mediated by later sources⁴⁴. Here the role of Proclus’ interpretation of Aristotelian universal concepts as derived by induction from sense-perception, which according to him play the relevant role of starting point for the process of Platonic recollection, seems to be evident⁴⁵.

⁴² EUSTRATIUS, *In VI EN*, ed. Heylbut, 320,21ff.

⁴³ EUSTRATIUS, *In II A.Po.*, ed. M. Hayduck, *Eustratii in analyticorum posteriorum librum secundum commentarium*, Berlin 1907 [«Commentaria in Aristotelem Graecorum», 21,1], 257,27-32.

⁴⁴ On how the topic of the concordance between Plato and Aristotle developed and consolidated in ancient philosophy, see the recent E. KARAMANOLIS, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*, Oxford 2006.

⁴⁵ On this point, cf. C. STEEL, *Proclus on Innate Knowledge of the Soul*, in J.J. CLEARY (ed.), *The Perennial Tradition of the Neoplatonism*, Leuven 1997, 293-309, in part. 300-301. Recent contributions on the Proclian tradition in Byzantium: M. CACOUROS, *Deux épisodes inconnus dans la réception de Proclus à Byzance aux XIIIe-XIVe siècles: La philosophie de Proclus réintroduite à Byzance grâce à l’Hypotypôsis. Néophytos Prodromenos et Kôntostéphanos (?) lecteurs de Proclus (avant Argyropoulos) dans le ‘Xénon’ du Kralj*, in A.-Ph SEGONDS/C. STEEL (ed.), *Proclus et la Théologie platonicienne: actes du colloque international de Louvain (13-16 mai 1998) en l’honneur de H. D. Saffrey et L. G. Westerink*, Leuven 2000 [«Ancient and medieval philosophy», Series I 26], 589-627; C. STEEL, *Neoplatonic Sources in the Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics by Eustratius and Michael of Ephesus*, «Bulletin de Philosophie médiévale», 44 (2002), 51-57.

There are no Platonists or Aristotelians in Byzantium, nor Neoplatonists, if by these expressions one refers to a kind of philosophical militancy. There are, on the other hand, thinkers who read and quote, for example, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, as well as intellectuals who quote and discuss Proclus. The difficult task is therefore to detect these sources, when they are not explicitly mentioned, and in general to try to understand what their role is within the structure of the single argument or of the whole text. Furthermore, it is important to link the study of the sources with the study of the manuscript tradition of the texts, which can often provide the historian with crucial information on the way a commentator or a thinker proceeds and, ultimately, on his attitude towards the text he is commenting on. In this respect, Sten Ebbesen's study on Michael of Ephesus' (XII cent.) commentary on the *Sophistical Refutations* surely represents a model⁴⁶.

Reading texts such as Psellus' collection of short treatises or John Italus (XI cent.) so-called *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, or even the commentaries written, for example, by Eustratius, Michael of Ephesus, and Theodore Prodromus (XII cent.), can no longer merely involve searching for "originality", whatever this expression might mean. By the same token, it cannot be useful simply to divide thinkers into (Neo)platonists and Aristotelians, as if every Byzantine intellectual had to decide, during their education, to partake in one philosophical current rather than in another – or, even worse, as if they are merely part of the *Zeitgeist*. On the contrary, approaching these texts requires a different kind of evaluation. Not in terms of their originality, but ultimately in terms of their consistency, i.e. the coherence of their structure, the presence and the role of the main sources the author refers to and the reason why he prefers one reading or interpretation rather than another, and, finally, any exegetical innovations in the text.

2.2 Gilson Against Gilson: A Counter-Gilsonian Byzantine Intellectual History

Something else should be said about what nowadays is called "Neopalamism", i.e. the tendency of giving an account of Byzantine intellectual history mainly as a theological development of one unique doctrinal core, the distinction in God between Essence and "energies", between God's essence and its operations in the Economy, from the Cappadocians to the fourteenth century theologian Gregory Palamas, and beyond to the later tradition influenced by the palamite theology. Given that this label does not involve any negative element, the scholar approaching Byzantine intellectual history cannot simply ignore the contributions of scholars like Vladimir Lossky⁴⁷ and John Meyendorff⁴⁸. Their work can be understood as an

⁴⁶ Cf. S. EBBESEN, *Commentators and Commentaries on Aristotle's Sophistici Elenchi. A Study of Post-Aristotelian Ancient and Medieval Writings on Fallacies*, vol. I: The Greek Tradition (CLCAG 7,1), Leiden 1981, 268-285 ("Michael of Ephesus").

⁴⁷ Cf. V. LOSSKY, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Cambridge 1957.

⁴⁸ Cf. especially J. MEYENDORFF, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, Paris 1959 («Patristica Sorbonensia», 3); ID., *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*. New York/London 1974.

attempt to give a full account of the peculiarity of the Eastern theological tradition, i.e. its “otherness” from the Western theological and philosophical tradition.

The interesting thing is that both Lossky and Meyendorff shared a more or less typical Western approach to the matter, similar in certain respects to Étienne Gilson’s approach, who, however, never seemed to have considered including “Byzantine philosophy”, however defined, into his historical vision of the development of medieval philosophical thought. Whereas Gilson seems to conceive the medieval Latin tradition as a teleological development which leads to Thomas Aquinas as its peak, Lossky and Meyendorff seem to stress the central role of the teaching of Gregory Palamas within the Eastern theological tradition. According to Lossky and Meyendorff, the teaching of Gregory Palamas represents the full development of what was first revealed in the teaching of the Cappadocians and of early Byzantine thinkers like Maximus Confessor, the very core of Byzantine theology, i.e. the distinction in God between essence and energies and the living experience of Christendom expressed through the notion of man’s deification by divine grace. Even the conceptual dyptic essentialism-existentialism which often occurs in the writings of Lossky and Meyendorff seems to reflect a kind of counter-Gilsonian attitude, if not the philosophy taught in the ‘50s at the Sorbonne, where Meyendorff defended his doctoral dissertation⁴⁹. This conceptualization seems to be guided by the intention of stressing the “otherness” (not without ideological undertones) of the Byzantine theological tradition in respect to the Western one, i.e. the crucial role of the experiential/existentialist character of theology against the speculative/essentialist character which supposedly prevailed in the West. The interesting element is that, in their criticisms, Lossky (who was Gilson’s disciple and friend) and Meyendorff seem to entirely borrow Gilson’s conceptual apparatus, not in order to refute it, but in order to use it to counter Gilson’s *philosophia perennis*, applying it to what they considered to be the main differences between the development of Western and Eastern theological thought.

Another example of the borrowing of Gilsonian categories is the following one. It has been said before that Meyendorff legitimately attempts to point out the uniqueness of the Orthodox tradition, which he identifies *tout-court* with the history of Byzantine philosophical and theological thought. However, Barlaam the Calabrian (XIV cent.), the *casus belli* of the so-called Hesychast controversy, which in its first phase involved a discussion of the nature of theological argument and in what sense theological arguments can be said to be demonstrative, is labelled by Meyendorff as a “nominalist”, the perfect example of a fideistic attitude, insofar as Barlaam denied the validity of Aristotelian apodeictic syllogisms in theology, supposedly reducing theology to something subject to mere opinions⁵⁰. But once again, this description of

⁴⁹ Cf. J.A. DEMETRACOPOULOS, *Is Gregory Palamas an Existentialist? The Restoration of the True Meaning of his Comment on Exodus 3, 14: Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν*, Athens 1996; M. KOTIRANTA, *The Palamite Idea of Perichoresis of the Persons of the Trinity in the Light of Contemporary neo-Palamite Analysis*, in *Byzantium and the North*, «Acta byzantina fennica», 9 (1997-1998), Helsinki 1999, 59-69.

⁵⁰ Cf. J. MEYENDORFF, *Un mauvais théologien de l'unité au XIV^e siècle: Barlaam le Calabrais, in 1054-1954: L'église et les églises*, 2, Chevetogne 1955, 47-64; ID., *Humanisme nominaliste et mystique chrétienne a Byzance au*

Barlaam's attitude is entirely borrowed from the description of William of Ockham as "nominalist", often according to a pejorative meaning of the word, by some Western Neothomists. Unfortunately, in his later writings Meyendorff almost ignored, or did not fully take into account, the evidence produced by G. Schirò in 1957 that Barlaam's position on the use of apodeictic syllogisms in theology, namely that theological arguments cannot be called apodeictic in the strict Aristotelian meaning of the word⁵¹, had a great influence in Byzantium. Barlaam's works on this subject were quoted *verbatim* even by important fourteenth century "palamite" theologians, who supposedly shared Gregory Palamas' view that theological arguments can be said to be apodeictic⁵². Needless to say, this evidence, grounded on a direct study of the source material, undermines what is definitely one of the most relevant interpretive schemes for describing the fourteenth century Byzantine debate on the nature of theological arguments.

In Lossky and Meyendorff's approach, philosophy properly so-called is mainly understood as a series of episodes of Platonically inspired divergences from an homogenous theological pattern represented by the development of the distinction in God between His transcendent Essence and His operations *ad extra*. In this approach, then, the status of philosophy seems partially to coincide with what is blamed in almost every condemnation of heresies, i.e. pagan philosophy, especially the Platonic tradition, as the cause of every doctrinal mistake. Understood in this way, not only is there no possibility for something called Byzantine philosophy to exist according to the plurality of its intellectual phenomena, but even the Byzantine theological tradition is reduced to a progressive but monolithic development of one and the same doctrinal core.

It is interesting enough to note that all the solutions to the problem of the existence and the nature of Byzantine philosophical tradition that we have seen ultimately reveal striking similarities in their respective approaches. They all share the feature of giving an account of Byzantine philosophy, or even of Byzantine thought as a whole, grounded on the determination of its "essential character". The paradox is that, on the one hand, every historian mentioned above seems to be conscious of the fact that Byzantine philosophy, whatever the expression might refer to, cannot be reduced to one or more of the categories traditionally employed in Western intellectual history. On the other hand, all their approaches seem to depend, though in different ways, upon traditional Western historiographical parameters, like in the case of Oehler's Hegelian perspective or Lossky's and Meyendorff's peculiar Gilsonian attitude. In regard to the latter, by stressing the "existentialism" of the Byzantine theological tradition, they suddenly become "essentialist" in their approach as they try to point out the one unique hidden core, the essence, of this tradition. "Au-dessus de la lettre de l'histoire pour atteindre l'esprit que l'âme", wrote Gilson

XIV^e siècle, «*Nouvelle Revue Theologique*», 79 (1957), 905-914. For more on the Hesychast controversy, see below at and around footnote 54.

⁵¹ See e.g. ARISTOTELES, *Analytica Posteriora*, A2,71b19-22.

⁵² Cf. G. SCHIRÒ, *Il paradosso di Nilo Cabasila*, «*Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici*», 9 (1957) [Silloge Bizantina in onore di Silvio Giuseppe Mercati], 362-388.

in his *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale*⁵³. It is this core (or these cores), that in this perspective is supposed to justify the unity of one or more chronological periods. In this particular history, there is no room for differences, breaks or ruptures that are not then reabsorbed into the mainstream. Everything is ultimately referable to one or more ideal paradigms, like in the case of all the forms of more-or-less Christian humanisms. But did Gregory Palamas know that he was an “existentialist”? And did famous thirteenth/fourteenth century erudite Theodore Methochites, for example, call himself a “humanist”?

It is striking that two fundamentally *anti-essentialist* scholars, who stress the existentialist character of their respective kinds of *philosophia perennis* (like Gilson and Meyendorff) tend both to be *essentialists*, I would say, in their historical perspectives. In this respect, one can still fruitfully use Tatakis' book, not only because there is no one who can write a replacement, as Benakis has said, but precisely because Tatakis' book does not seem to have fully accomplished the task that its own author had announced in the introduction to *La philosophie byzantine*. As it turned out, in this book the reader cannot find any trace of the *essence* of Byzantine philosophy, no matter how strictly or loosely the meaning is attributed by Tatakis to the word “essence”, but just a general, if not generic, Byzantine intellectual history where the boundaries between philosophical and theological inquiries remain undefined. This is something very different from the stringent attempt to isolate something essential to Byzantine philosophy that we have seen here in the other historiographic methods.

I would like to make clear that I do not think that attempt at definition is a problem in itself. Every definition of Byzantine philosophy is liable to provoke debate, and most of the definitions that have been analyzed here belong to the work of distinguished scholars whose contributions to Byzantine studies remain essential. However at stake here is not only the content of each definition, but the way in which the very same question - what is Byzantine philosophy? i.e. what is its essence or what are its characteristic features – is posed. I believe that it is much more difficult to find the essence or the specific character of Byzantine philosophy than to detect the common element shared by many contemporary approaches to the Byzantine philosophical tradition. This common element, as mentioned, is the temptation to identify historical periods or phenomena by means of features which, according to historians, constitute the real essence of these phenomena.

3. *Methodenstreit* and *Methodenfrage*

It would not be improper to claim that a step forward in the scholarly development of our topic is represented by Gerhard Podskalsky's *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz*, published in 1977. For the impressive amount of documentation and the deep study of the primary and secondary literature, this book can be considered in some respects a masterpiece. The new element in the book is the approach the author takes, expressed by the term “*Methodenstreit*”, i.e. the discussion concerning the more

⁵³ Cf. É. GILSON, *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, Paris 1932, 1944 (II ed.), 152.

appropriate theological methodology in regard to the possibility of conceiving theology as an Aristotelian demonstrative science. According to this approach, philosophy is mainly understood as the speculative, in the sense of apodeictic, dimension of the theological discourse. Podskalsky's focus is on the fourteenth century, the moment in which, perhaps, the possibility of a scientific foundation for theological reflection, i.e. a theology grounded on the epistemic requirements sketched by Aristotle in his *Posterior Analytics*, becomes subject to a violent controversy, the so-called Hesychast controversy, sketched above. However, Podskalsky did not confine himself to the struggle between Gregory Palamas and Barlaam the Calabrian on the legitimacy of apodeictic syllogisms in theology⁵⁴. On the contrary, he attempts to reconstruct in general the historical link between Byzantine philosophy and theology in terms of a distinction between dialecticians and anti-dialecticians, i.e. between the supporters of the demonstrative character of theology and those who found this characterization to be in error. The great advantage of this approach is that the expression "Byzantine philosophy" receives immediately a well defined status, no longer to be understood in terms of general intellectual history or generically as the monolithic development of "post-patristic" Christian thought. Furthermore, interestingly the author attempts to depict his historical reconstruction starting from the many terminological occurrences of the term "philosophy" in Byzantine literature⁵⁵. However, there are two main objections that the historian can raise to Podskalsky's view.

⁵⁴ New editions and contributions on Barlaam the Calabrian: A. FYRIGOS, *Barlaam Calabro, Opere contro i Latini. Introduzione, storia dei testi, edizione critica, traduzione e indici*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1998 («Studi e Testi», 347-348); reviewed and supplemented by J.A. DEMETRACOPOULOS, *Further Evidence on the Ancient, Patristic and Byzantine Sources of Barlaam the Calabrian's Contra Latinos. À propos de A. Fyrigos* (ed.), *Barlaam Calabro, Opere contro i Latini*, «Byzantinische Zeitschrift», 96 (2003), 83-122; A. FYRIGOS (ed.), *Barlaam Calabro. L'uomo, l'opera, il pensiero. Atti del Congresso Internazionale (Reggio Calabria, Seminara, Gerace, 10-12 dic. 1999)*, Roma 2001; ID., *Dalla controversia palamitica alla polemica esicastica (con un'edizione critica delle Epistole greche di Barlaam)*, Roma 2005 («Medioevo», 11); reviewed and supplemented in J.A. DEMETRACOPOULOS, *New Evidence on the Ancient, Patristic and Byzantine Sources of the Greek Epistles of Barlaam the Calabrian. À propos de A. Fyrigos* (ed.), *Dalla Controversia palamitica alla controversia esicastica. Con un'edizione critica delle epistole greche di Barlaam*, (forthcoming). Demetracopoulos is also working on the critical edition of Barlaam the Calabrian's *Ethica secundum Stoicos*, to be published by the Academy of Athens in the *Corpus philosophorum medii aevi - Philosophi byzantini*. Recent contributions on Gregory Palamas and the so-called Hesychast controversy: V. PERISHICH, *Person and Essence in the Theology of St. Gregory Palamas*, «Philotheos», 1 (2001), 131-136; R.-E. SINKIEWICZ, "Gregory Palamas", in C.G. CONTICELLO/V. CONTICELLO (eds.), *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, vol. II (XIIIe-XIXe s.), Turnhout 2002, 131-188; T. BOIADJIEV, *Meriston Symbolon. Gregorios Acindynus and the Debate on Tabor Light*, «Synthesis philosophica», 39/1 (2005), 57-71; G. KAPRIEV, *Der Begriff 'Erfahrung' bei Gregorios Palamas*, «Quaestio», 4 (2004), 137-147. A. RIGO (ed.), *Gregorio Palamas e oltre. Studi e documenti sulle controversie teologiche del XIV secolo bizantino*, Firenze 2005 («Orientalia Venetiana XVI»); J. NADAL-CAÑELLAS, *La résistance d'Acindynos à Grégoire Palamas: enquête historique, avec traduction et commentaire de quatre traités édités récemment*, Leuven 2006 («Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense. Études et documents», 50-51); G. KAPRIEV, *Es sind zwei Augen der Seele. Vernunft und Offenbarung gemäß der Hesychasten des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts*, in G. KAPRIEV/G. MENSCHING (hrsg.), *Vernunft und Offenbarung. Die Wurzeln der europäischen Rationalität in der lateinischen und byzantinischen Tradition*, Sofia 2006, 57-69.

⁵⁵ Cf. PODSKALSKY, *Theologie und Philosophie* cit., 16-34.

The first one is related to the consequence that Podskalsky draws from his intuition that the non-scientific status of theology is the mainstream for Byzantine thought. He seems to claim that exactly because of this fact philosophy could preserve its epistemic autonomy. However, Podskalsky does not go beyond this consideration, which seems to derive from what he thinks to be the situation in the West, where, allegedly, philosophy entirely served the purpose of a scientific foundation of theology, clarifying how this autonomy is produced. I shall discuss the topic of the autonomy of the Byzantine philosophical tradition below. Here it suffices to draw attention to the fact that it is not clear whether Podskalsky's autonomy is grounded on a professional/institutional basis, e.g. on the model of the *magistri* of the Western Faculties of Arts, or precisely on an epistemic basis, i.e. a subject or a definition peculiar to the philosophical endeavour, or a philosophical approach to a certain number of topics common to a certain number of Byzantine thinkers. In either case, as we will see, historians struggle with the insufficiency of the documentation which can support either of these two possible ideas of autonomy.

The second objection is a more substantial one. There are other phenomena, even occurring in Podskalsky's main focus - in fourteenth century Byzantium - which do not fall under the category of "Methodenstreit", though they certainly do involve discussion on the relation between philosophy and theology. These phenomena are part of a debate among Byzantine thinkers on the status and function of philosophy in terms of its actuality, or in terms of its "practical" value. How to explain, for instance, that in the first lines of Gregory Palamas' *Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* the disciple asks the teacher to comment on the claim that without pagan wisdom (ἐξω σοφία) monastic life cannot reach the state of perfection⁵⁶? Monastic life is in itself a form of philosophy, the true philosophy, the monks being the *sectatores Christi*. However, at stake here there is surely something more, i.e. whether this true philosophy, ascetic life, does or does not involve a form of contemplative, and not purely active, life. As Palamas makes it clear, the alternative is between life according to knowledge (γνώσις) and life according to practice (πρᾶξις)⁵⁷. On this point the Athonite monk is clear: only πρᾶξις, the "active" life, leads monks to salvation. Perhaps the perspective adopted by Podskalsky does not really allow us to grasp the terms of this, only apparently secondary, part of the so-called "Palamite controversy". Nor is this an isolated case. How to understand, otherwise, Nicholas Cabasilas' (XIV cent.) position expressed in the text edited as *Quaestio de rationis valore*⁵⁸? There, as well as in two other texts⁵⁹, Cabasilas expresses the view that

⁵⁶ GREGORIUS PALAMAS, *Pro hesychastis*, 1,1,1,8-24, ed. J. Meyendorff, *Grégoire Palamas. Défense des saints hésychastes*, Louvain 1973 [«*Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense. Études et documents*», 30], 8.

⁵⁷ GREGORIUS PALAMAS, *Pro hesychastis*, 2,1,11,24-25, ed. Meyendorff, 247.

⁵⁸ Cf. J. DEMETRACOPOULOS, *Nicholas Cabasilas' Quaestio de rationis valore: An Anti-Palamite Defense of Secular Wisdom*, «*Βυζαντινά*», 19 (1998), 53-93 (edited text pp. 55-57). On Cabasilas' attitude towards ancient Greek philosophy, in particular towards skepticism, cf. J.-A. DEMETRACOPOULOS, *Νικολάου Καβάσιλα Κατὰ Πύρρωνος. Πλατωνικός φιλοσκεπτικισμός καὶ ἀριστοτελικός ἀντισκεπτικισμός στή βυζαντινή διανόηση τοῦ 14ου αἰώνα*, Athens 1999.

⁵⁹ Cf. NICOLAUS CABASILAS, *Προσφώνημα εἰς τὸν ἔνδοξον τοῦ Χριστοῦ μεγαλομάρτυρα Δημήτριον τὸν μυροβλύτην*, ed. Th. IOANNOU, *Μνημεῖα ἀγιολογικά*, Venezia 1884, 67-114; ID.,

Christian perfection requires, in Aristotelian terms, the exercise or the actualization of man's proper essence, namely rationality. In this respect, even among saints, claims the author, those who devoted themselves to profane learning can be considered superior to those who did not.

Even preserving the focus on the relation between philosophy and theology, one can notice that often the above mentioned cases of Palamas and Cabasilas entail more than the pure discussion on theological methodology. Moreover, because philosophy is juxtaposed by Podskalsky with theology, philosophy is an autonomous discipline defined by its providing or not providing theology with the tools for the search of apodeictic truths. Philosophy becomes in this view not even *ancilla theologiae*, but a mere *organon*, i.e. a logical apparatus essential for the foundation of a science, in this particular case for the foundation of theology on scientific grounds. It may be argued that Podskalsky's intention was exclusively to survey the relationship between philosophy and theology. However, even if this is the case, the example of Nicholas Cabasilas leads to the conclusion that Byzantium saw a much more varied display of meanings, status, and functions of philosophy than has been traditionally thought, even in regard to the relationship between philosophy and theology. From the *Methodenstreit*, Podskalsky's perspective, then, we are back to the *Methodenfrage*.

4. Systematic and Discontinuous Thought

Every attempt to detect something which identifies Byzantine philosophy *in re* – or *in spe!* – raises obvious problems: the definitional essence can be, for example, so broad that it becomes vague and ambiguous, like in the case of the different kinds of “humanism”, theocentric, anthropological, or generically Christian. Or, it can be narrow, so narrow that just a few thinkers could be considered part of it, as is the case with the claim of the autonomy of philosophy in Byzantium.

Definitions and periodizations are not in themselves problematic; however, they are useful only if recognized as being merely conventional, i.e. artificial and grounded on common agreement⁶⁰. For example, if we realize that there is no historical period whose essential property is to be “Byzantine”, then also the controversial issue of the beginning of something called “Byzantine philosophy” becomes less relevant. The quest for a Byzantine period in general, as well as in the specific case of the beginning and the end of Byzantine philosophy, is, on the one hand, impossible to solve in itself, on the other, easy to solve if the results of this quest are accepted as

Epistulae, ed. P. Enepekides, *Der Briefwechsel des Mystikers Nikolaos Kabasilas*, «Byzantinische Zeitschrift» 46 (1953), 29-45, *Ep.* 8. Scholars recently diverged on how long Cabasilas held the view that only philosophical activity can lead to sanctification: Demetracopoulos (cf. *Nicholas Cabasilas' Quaestio de rationis valore cit.*, 58ff.) found traces of this view also in Cabasilas' later masterpiece *The Life in Christ*; M.-H. Congourdeau, on the other hand, is keen to restrict this radical thesis to Cabasilas' youth; cf. M.-H. CONGOURDEAU, *Nicolas Cabasilas et le Palamisme*, in RIGO, *Gregorio Palamas cit.*, 191-210.

⁶⁰ Cf. L.M. DE RIJK, *La philosophie au moyen âge*, Leiden 1985, 1-81.

the mere result of a scholarly agreement, which will as a consequence always remain a possible point of discussion.

The publication in 2005 of Georgi Kapriev's *Philosophie in Byzanz*⁶¹ represents another important step in the history of the development of this topic. The German title is not entirely identical with the original title of the Bulgarian edition (2001), inasmuch as in the latter we find the following subtitle: "Four Centers of Doctrinal Synthesis". This phrase is very important, since it makes it clear that Kapriev's aim is not simply to produce an exhaustive book which could replace Tatakis on the basis of a more comprehensive investigation. Rather, Kapriev seeks to discuss, through the analysis of four Byzantine thinkers, a possible new approach to Byzantine philosophy. In particular, the purpose, both historical and hermeneutical, of this book is to discuss, through a study of the primary sources, one of the most widespread commonplaces in regard to Byzantine philosophical and theological production, namely its "unsystematic" character. In this respect, Kapriev points out how much this commonplace is grounded on the assumption that systematic thought is necessarily expressed in systematic texts. This association is perhaps valid in the case of the thirteenth or fourteenth century Western medieval tradition, but it cannot be applied as such to the case of the Byzantine philosophical tradition. On the contrary, Kapriev argues that "systematic" thought exists foremost in the mind of the thinkers, and it is not obliged by some inner necessity to find explicit literary expression⁶².

On Kapriev's view, the extension of the term "philosophy" (in Byzantium) is basically equivalent to the speculative dimension of theology, and it is ultimately strongly grounded in what he defines as the *Zeitlichkeit* and the *Geschichtlichkeit* of the very divine Economy⁶³. According to this view, (Byzantine) philosophy is the expression of the same divine Economy within human reason, whose function is then the discursive expression of the history of the world and salvation. This is why, according to Kapriev, not only is philosophy within the Economy, and as such within a temporal and historical dimension, but it is in itself historical, insofar as the faculty which performs the philosophical activity is a created, direct expression of the

⁶¹ Cf. n. 40. See also G. KAPRIEV, *Gibt es eine byzantinische Philosophie?*, «Ostkirchliche Studien», 51/1 (2001), 3-28; ID., *Zeitlichkeit und Geschichtlichkeit als Grundelemente der byzantinische Philosophie*, in G. KAPRIEV/G. MENSCHING (eds.), *Die Geschichtlichkeit des philosophischen Denkens in Europa*, Sofia 2004, 58-71.

⁶² Cf. KAPRIEV, *The Modern Study* cit. (see note 32).

⁶³ Cf. KAPRIEV, *Zeitlichkeit und Geschichtlichkeit* cit., 71: «Der Gegenstand der christlichen Philosophie wird im Bereich der göttlichen Ökonomie lokalisiert, der notwendigerweise mit der Zeit und der Geschichtlichkeit verbunden und eigens der menschlichen Vernunft zugänglich ist ... Die *Zeitlichkeit* und die *Geschichtlichkeit* sind nicht nur Momente des Wesens des Philosophierens, sondern bilden auch Grundelemente der Philosophie überhaupt, aus denen die *differentia specifica* der Philosophie sich ergibt». Kapriev had already developed this particular understanding of what he himself calls "christliche Philosophie" in his monograph on Anselm; cf. G. KAPRIEV, *...Ipsa vita et veritas. Der 'ontologische Gottesbeweis' & die Ideenwelt Anselms von Canterbury*, Leiden-Boston-Köln («Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters», 61), 223-233; 266-273; 278ff.

Economy⁶⁴. Along these lines, Kapriev states that this entails a fundamental distinction between different kinds of knowledge. On one hand, there is a theological knowledge, linked entirely with a direct experience of God in God himself; this type of experience is above time and history and it is often to be found in certain texts from monastic literature described as the summit of our knowledge of God. On the other hand, there is what is accessible within a temporal dimension to human reason, which has as its objects not only the attempt to define against the heresies the trinitarian dogma and the operations *ad extra* of the Trinity, but also the realm of created beings and the Incarnation. It is this latter kind of theology that, according to Kapriev, coincides with (Byzantine) philosophy, as its highest part⁶⁵. In this respect, also the perspectives of Lossky and Meyendorff are given renewed value. The difference is that the idea of Byzantine theology as the perennial development of one hidden and unchangeable doctrinal core is no longer considered as an essential force within history, but rather, according to Kapriev, as the governing idea through which a large number of Byzantine thinkers understood themselves in relation to the tradition.

Also in this case there are two main objections to this view, not related to its validity, but to its breadth. Kapriev seems to reject what we previously called the “practical” element or meaning of “philosophy” in Byzantium. However, as was mentioned above in relation to Podskalsky’s approach, there are an enormous number of texts from the monastic tradition where the monastic life is defined as “philosophy”, its model being the Platonic *meditatio mortis* (*Phaedo*, 81a). For example, in his *Scala Paradisi*, John Climacus (VI-VII cent.) celebrates the ancient Greeks for having discovered the idea of *meditatio mortis* (μελέτη τοῦ θανάτου), which according to him is very similar to the Christian idea of remembrance of death (μνήμη τοῦ θανάτου)⁶⁶. What is more, the descriptions of the Christian ideal of life by means of classical definitions of philosophy are very common. Philosophy as *meditatio mortis* is one of the six classical definitions of philosophy which appear in Damascenus⁶⁷ and,

⁶⁴ Cf. KAPRIEV, *Zeitlichkeit und Geschichtlichkeit* cit., 69: «Der Gegenstand der Philosophie ist demgegenüber definitiv mit der Geschichte verbunden. Die ganze Ökonomie erstreckt sich in der Zeit und ist ohne die Zeitlichkeit undenkbar, weil sie eben die Heils- und Weltgeschichte umfaßt.»

⁶⁵ Cf. KAPRIEV, *Zeitlichkeit und Geschichtlichkeit* cit., 69-71: «Darüber hinaus ist der Gegenstand der spekulativen Theologie nicht allein die Trinität und ihre naturhafte Äußerungen *ad extra*, sondern auch die Schöpfung und die Inkarnation und das mit ihnen Verbundene. Das theologische nachdenken kann demnach das Zeitliche und Geschichtliche keinesfalls entfernen. ... Auf dieser Perspektive wird die Unterscheidung zwischen der Theologie als Gottesschau, spekulativer Theologie und Philosophie möglich. Die theologische Existenerfahrung steht außerhalb von Zeit und Geschichte und ist diskursiv nicht zu äußern. Die spekulative Trinitätstheologie steht wenigstens mit der Entfaltung ihrer Begrifflichkeit in einem Zusammenhang mit der Zeit und Geschichte, während die Theologie, welche die göttliche Ökonomie erörtert, Zeit und Geschichte in ihrem Gegenstandsbereich umfaßt, wodurch sie der Philosophie nahe steht und herkömmlich mit dieser identifiziert wird». Cf. also KAPRIEV, *Philosophie in Byzanz* cit., 13-20; 263-282.

⁶⁶ JOANNES CLIMACUS, *Scala Paradisi*, ed. P. Trevisan, *S. Giovanni Climaco: Scala Paradisi*, 2. vol. Torino 1941, I, 253. Cf. also JOANNES MOSCHUS, *Pratum Spirituale*, 156, *Patrologia Graeca*, 87/3, 3025A.

⁶⁷ JOANNES DAMASCENUS, *Dialectica sive Capita philosophica*, 3,5-12, ed. H.B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 1 [«Patristische Texte und Studien», 7], Berlin 1969, 56.

earlier, in David⁶⁸ (VI cent.) and Ammonius⁶⁹. This definition seems to offer many Byzantine thinkers the possibility of describing the nature of the ascetic life. The case of the fourth definition is even more striking. “Philosophy” is, according to it, assimilation to God as far as humanly possible. Plato is mentioned as the direct source of this definition. John Duffy already detected the influence of this definition of philosophy again in Climacus⁷⁰. In fact, this definition is already present in its Christian version in Clemens of Alexandria (II-III cent.) and in other writers of the fourth and fifth centuries⁷¹. Furthermore, there is another definition among the six classical ones, which serves to describe the monastic life. It is the fifth one, ascribed to Aristotle, which says that “philosophy” is the art of arts and the science of sciences. A late eleventh century oration called *De disciplina monastica et de monasteriis laicis non tradendis*, ascribed to Johannes Antiochenus, patriarch of Antioch, speaks of ascetic life as “monastic philosophy”, describing it as “the art of arts and the science of sciences”⁷². More than this, even in the Suda lexicon under the lemma “philosophy” we find the following formulation: “Philosophy is a correct moral practice combined with a doctrine of true knowledge about Being”⁷³. Once again there is a stress on the practical dimension or meaning of the word “philosophy” which cannot be ignored. I think that most scholars are still not keen to fully recognize this particular practical status of Byzantine philosophy, although it has its roots clearly in ancient philosophical sources and thus it can be traced back to the process of the assimilation of ancient philosophy into Christian thought.

In any case, there is another objection that the historian can raise to Kapriev’s perspective. In Kapriev’s historiographical reconstruction, “philosophizing” is the rational activity grounded on God’s self-revelation to human beings through the so-

⁶⁸ DAVID, *Prolegomena Philosophiae*, ed. A. Busse, *Davidis prolegomena et in Porphyrii isagogen commentarium* [«Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca», 18.2] Berlin 1904, 20,27-31.

⁶⁹ AMMONIUS, *In Porphyrii Isagogen sive quinque voces*, ed. A. Busse, *Ammonius in Porphyrii isagogen sive quinque voces* [«Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca», 4.3], Berlin 1891, 3,21-10,24; ELIAS, *In Porphyrii Isagogen*, ed. A. Busse, *Eliae in Porphyrii isagogen et Aristotelis categorias commentaria* [«Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca», 18.1] Berlin 1900, 8,8-25,22; Cf. also MICHAEL PSELLUS, *Opuscula logica, physica, allegorica, alia*, 49, ed. Duffy, 181,106-119; NICEPHORUS BLEMMEDES, *Epitome logica, Patrologia Graeca*, 720A-724B. Prof. Carelos is preparing the critical edition of this latter work in the framework of the *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi – Philosophi Byzantini*.

⁷⁰ Cf. DUFFY, *The Lonely Mission* cit., 143.

⁷¹ CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, *Stromata*, II,22,13,3,3-4; THEODORETUS CYRRHENSIS, *Graecarum affectionum curatio*, XII,19-21,1-17, ed. P. Canivet, *Théodore de Cyr. Thérapentique des maladies belléniques*, 2 vols. [«Sources chrétiennes», 57] Paris 1958, 424 (quoting Clemens); cf also H. MERKI, **ΟΜΟΙΩΣΙΣ ΘΕΩ**. *Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott z. Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor v. Nyssa* («Paradosis». Études de littérature et de théologie ancienne, 7), Fribourg 1952. Even a late author, generally considered “Palamite”, Theophanes Nicaenus (XIV cent.), witnesses the Christian usage of this definition as he describes the participation of men in the divine energy as assimilation to God as far as humanly possible; THEOPHANES NICAENUS, *De lumine Thaborio orationes i-v*, ed. Ch.-G. Soteropoulos, **Θεοφάνους Γ΄ επισκόπου Νικαίας περί Θαβωρίου φωτός, λόγοι πέντε**. (Τὸ πρῶτον νῦν ἐκδιδόμενοι), Athens 1990, 1,518-521; 1, 637-639.

⁷² JOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Oratio de disciplina monastica et de monasteriis laicis non tradendis*, PG 132, 1141A.

⁷³ *Suidae Lexicon*, ed. A. Adler, *Suidae lexicon*, 4, Leipzig 1935, 733.

called “energies”; thus, all those thinkers or texts which do not fall under the category of speculative or discursive theology cannot be called “philosophers”. The Byzantine commentary tradition on Aristotle, for example, does not fit with the paradigm of “philosophy” sketched by Kapriev. Even erudite and eclectic authors like Psellus or George Pachymeres (XIII-XIV cent.) do not fall under this archetype, not to mention all those thinkers whose literary production ranges from philosophy to poetics, rhetoric and even history, like for example Theodore Prodromus mentioned above. Even this might not be a problem in itself, once one acknowledges that no periodizations or attempt at definition will be able to cover the multiform Byzantine intellectual history. The fact that this multiformity is hardly graspable by only one approach might simply lead to the formulation of other categories for the source material that does not fit into the main system of classification. In this respect, Kapriev’s book solved the problem of the supposedly “unsystematic” character of the Byzantine philosophical tradition, but left unresolved, I think, the problem of its supposed “continuity”, i.e. whether or not Byzantine Philosophy can be conceived as a continuous whole.

The more one takes into account the differences among texts, contexts, and even social roles of the Byzantine thinkers, the more one realizes how discontinuous and multiform this tradition is. It is not a matter of mere chronological succession from philosophy having one status to its having another but, more radically, it is a matter of different endeavours which often coexist in the same place and at the same time. The commentator on Aristotle’s logical works, the consul of the philosophers (after the eleventh century probably the most prestigious teaching position in philosophy), and the hesychast monk are, for example, three intellectual types. However, no one would want to say that every commentator worked in the same way, or that every consul of the philosophers organized his teaching activity in the same way, or that Symeon the New Theologian said exactly what Gregory Palamas said. Furthermore, the intellectual scene in fourteenth century Constantinople was not identical to the one in contemporary Thessalonike⁷⁴. Moreover, within each city there might have been differences in the teaching of the different schools. In the end, by “discontinuity” I do not intend to give a pejorative description of the Byzantine philosophical tradition; on the contrary, I want to stress its richness, the huge variety of its intellectual phenomena, its non-essential character.

5. Autonomy, Autonomies, and *Fachdisziplinen*

Linus Benakis’ thesis on the status of Byzantine philosophy is extremely interesting. I refer particularly to the view expressed by Benakis in an article called *Die theoretische und praktische Autonomie der Philosophie als Fachdisziplin in Byzanz*⁷⁵. In this famous

⁷⁴ Cf. F. TINNEFELD, *Intellectuals in Late Byzantine Thessalonike*, «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», 57 (2003), 153-172.

⁷⁵ L. BENAKIS, *Die theoretische und praktische Autonomie der Philosophie als Fachdisziplin in Byzanz*, in M. ASZTALOS/J.-E. MURDOCH/I. NIINILUOTO (eds.), *Knowledge and the Sciences in Medieval Philosophy*.

contribution Benakis characterizes the status of Byzantine philosophy as grounded on a twofold autonomy, namely a theoretical and a practical one. In Benakis' view, the theoretical autonomy is mainly due to the fact that in Byzantium theology never became a science or "a systematic method for the dialectical elaboration of Christian truths"⁷⁶. Therefore, according to Benakis, Byzantine philosophy remained the science "of the cognition of fundamental truths concerning man and the world"⁷⁷. However, also in this case some objections can be raised.

In general, Benakis ascribes the autonomy of philosophy to the fact that it never served as the apodeictic structure for theological investigation. In so doing, he seems to reduce philosophy, in its interaction with theology, to logic, or, to be more precise, to the Aristotelian *organon*⁷⁸. The question becomes, then, whether or not the theoretical autonomy of philosophy can be grounded on the refusal to accept the Aristotelian *organon* as a valid theological method by many, but not all, Byzantine thinkers.

Nowadays Byzantine logic is doubtless liable to be identified as part of that branch of modern studies which falls under the category of "Byzantine philosophy". However, if we read some late ancient and Byzantine texts we realize that this claim should not be taken for granted. Take, for example, the famous *Dialectica* of John of Damascus. Not only are the famous six definitions of "philosophy", mentioned above taken from late ancient sources, in particular from Ammonius, but also the context of John's summary seems to be formed entirely by Ammonius' determination of the scope and function of the text he is commenting on, i.e. Porphyry's *Isagoge*. In these texts, as well as in a large number of other works, there is a discussion of whether logic is a part (μέρος) of philosophy or simply an instrument or *organon*⁷⁹. Ammonius, for example, seems to stress the view that (Aristotelian) logic is not properly a part of philosophy, but only its *organon*⁸⁰. Late ancient commentators explicitly recognize that according to the Platonists logic is part of philosophy, in the sense that dialectics is the best part of it, while for the Peripatetics logic is only an *organon*⁸¹. Late commentator Philoponus reconstructs the ancient philosophical debate on this topic, claiming that the Stoics considered logic a part of philosophy,

Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Medieval Philosophy (S.I.E.P.M.), Helsinki 24-29 August 1987, v. I, Helsinki 1990 («Acta Philosophica Fennica», 48), 223-227.

⁷⁶ Cf. BENAKIS, *Die theoretische* cit., 224, 227.

⁷⁷ Cf. BENAKIS, *Die theoretische* cit., 224.

⁷⁸ Cf. BENAKIS, *Die theoretische* cit., 224.

⁷⁹ ELIAS, *In Porphyrii Isagogen*, ed. A. Busse, *Eliae in Porphyrii isagogen et Aristotelis categorias commentaria* [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca 18.1] Berlin 1900, 26,35ff.; JOANNES ITALUS, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, q.16, ed. P.-P. Joannou, *Joannes Italos. Quaestiones quodlibetales (Ἀπορίαι καὶ λύσεις)* [«Studia Patristica et Byzantina» 4], Ettal 1956. On this problem in the ancient and late-ancient philosophical tradition, cf. H.-B. GOTTSCHALK, *The Earliest Aristotelian Commentators*, in R. SORABJI (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, Ithaca (NY), 1990, 55-81,66; R.-W. SHARPLES, *The School of Alexander?*, in SORABJI, *Aristotle Transformed* cit., 83-111,96; S. EBBESEN, *Porphyry's Legacy to Logic: A Reconstruction*, in SORABJI, *Aristotle Transformed* cit., 141-171,144.

⁸⁰ AMMONIUS, *In Porphyrii Isagogen sive quinque voces*, ed. A. Busse, *Ammonius in Porphyrii isagogen sive quinque voces* [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca 4.3] Berlin 1891, 23,1-24.

⁸¹ See for example DAVID, *In Porphyrii isagogen commentarium*, ed. A. Busse, *Davidis prolegomena et in Porphyrii isagogen commentarium* [«Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca», 18.2], Berlin 1904, 120,28-121,2.

the Peripatetics only an instrument of it, whereas according to the Platonists logic might be both a part and an instrument of philosophy. However, in regard to the position of the Platonists he seems to distinguish between a logic *ἄνευ ὕλης*, which can serve as organon, and a logic *μεθ' ὕλης*, which can be considered part of philosophy only insofar as it represents the concrete application of the first kind of logic. Philoponus seems to consider this distinction to be essential, insofar as logic cannot be both part and instrument of philosophy. He therefore rejects the view of those who claim that logic can be part and instrument of philosophy, exactly in the way in which the hand is both part and instrument of the body. In fact, remarks Philoponus, the hand is not part and instrument of the same thing; it is part of the body, but instrument of the soul. By using this analogy, he therefore states that logic is the instrument of the true knowledge, philosophy, but not part of it⁸². In his commentary on the *Categories*, Simplicius solves the problem by stating that the *Categories* itself is one of the instrumental writings of Aristotle, “whereas logic in itself is the instrumental part of philosophy like the rulers and plumb-lines used by carpenters and architects”⁸³. Thus, according to Simplicius logic can be said in general to be both, part (although only instrumental) and instrument of philosophy. However, a Byzantine thinker like John Italus, Psellus’ follower as consul of the philosophers, decisively concludes that logic cannot be considered a part of philosophy, but only its instrument⁸⁴.

It may well be true, then, as I. Hadot has said, that some commentators seem to confuse Platonic dialectic and Aristotelian logic, when they sometimes seem to claim that logic is both part and instrument of philosophy, although Philoponus’ argument, for example, seems clearer than this statement by Hadot might suggest⁸⁵. In any event, the mainstream in Byzantium appears to have considered Aristotelian logic properly so-called, i.e. what Alexander of Aphrodisias defines as “the logic and syllogistic discipline...under which falls the apodeictic, dialectic, examinatory and even sophistic methods”⁸⁶ as an instrument or tool of philosophy, and not as one of

⁸² JOANNES PHILOPONUS, *In Aristotelis Analytica Priora commentaria*, ed. M. Wallies, *Ioannis Philoponi in Aristotelis analytica priora commentaria* [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca 13.2] Berlin 1905, 6,19-9,20; ELIAS, *Commentarius in Aristotelis Analytica Priora*, L.G. Westerink, *Elias on the Prior Analytics*, [«Mnemosyne», ser. 4, vol. 14.] Leiden 1961, 134,4-137,37.

⁸³ SIMPLICIUS, *In Aristotelis categorias commentarium*, ed. K. Kalbfleisch, *Simplicii in Aristotelis categorias commentarium* [«Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca», 8], Berlin 1907, 20,8-12.

⁸⁴ JOANNES ITALUS, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, 16, 40-42, ed. Joannou.

⁸⁵ Cf. I. HADOT, *Simplicius. Commentaire sur les Catégories. Traduction commentée sous la direction de Ilsetraut Hadot*, f. I, Leiden-New York-Copenhagen-Köln 1990 («Philosophia antiqua. A Series of Study on Ancient Philosophy», vol. I), 183-188, in part. 187-188. For an account of the importance of this debate in ancient and late-ancient philosophy, cf. P. HADOT, *Les divisions des parties de la philosophie dans l'antiquité*, «Museum Helveticum», 36 (1979), 201-223; P. MORAUX, *Diogène Laërce et le Peripatos*, «Elenchos», 7 (1986), 245-294; I. MUELLER, *Stoic and Peripatetic*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», 51 (1969), 173-187; H.B. GOTTSCHALK, *Aristotelian Philosophy in the Roman World from the Time of Cicero to the End of the Second Century AD*, in W. HAASE (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, II, 36.2, Berlin 1987; TAE-SOO LEE, *Die griechische Tradition der aristotelischen Syllogistik in der Spätantike*, Göttingen 1984 («Hypomnemata», 79).

⁸⁶ ALEXANDER APHRODISIENSIS, *In I A.Po.*, ed. M. Wallies, *Alexandri in Aristotelis analyticorum priorum librum i commentarium*, Berlin 1883 [«Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca», 2.1], 1,3-5.

its proper parts. Even John of Damascus seems to follow Ammonius' scheme, i.e. given the definitions of philosophy it is clear that Aristotelian logic cannot be considered properly one of philosophy's parts⁸⁷.

What is relevant here is that this *excursus* raises again the definitional question on the nature of Byzantine philosophy, especially if, as according to Benakis is the case, the autonomy of philosophy is determined by the fact that it was never part of a project of establishing theology on scientific grounds. But if this is correct, then given that logic is not properly philosophy, but a tool or a philosophical instrument, the subject of the interaction with theology was not properly philosophy, but only Aristotelian logic as a systematic structure for the scientific discourse, i.e. a "philosophical" *organon*. It can be added that it is certainly true that in several documents, especially in the texts of the doctrinal condemnations, the use of syllogisms in theology is labelled a sophistical practice, and therefore sometimes as a philosophical practice in the pejorative and generic meaning of the word. However, the terminology used in these documents does not show, I think, a clear identification between apodeictical demonstration or Aristotelian logic, on the one hand, and philosophy *tout-court*, on the other. Rather, these documents simply follow the famous ἀλιευτικῶς, ἀλλ' οὐκ Ἀριστοτελικῶς of Gregory the Theologian's *Oration* 23, namely the advice, common among the Fathers of the Church, to use logical arguments only in order to refute heresies, thus excluding their use in systematic theology⁸⁸.

Is this enough to claim that the fact that theology never became a science contributed to philosophy's own autonomy? If this were the case, then given the validity of Benakis' model, we would have only an autonomous logic or an autonomous philosophy according to its method, but not a philosophy that is autonomous according to its definition. Even in the Latin West, I would say, where according to Benakis' point of view, and on different grounds also according to Podskalsky's thesis, philosophy served the purpose of giving a scientific foundation to the theological discourse, philosophy preserved a kind of autonomy. The Faculty of Arts, for example, provided students with the possibility of learning disciplines such as grammar, logic, physics, biology, ethics, and metaphysics within an established *curriculum* of studies. The *artistae* were also claiming for themselves the freedom to teach and elaborate on a certain number of topics using philosophical sources and from a philosophical perspective⁸⁹. Indeed, Byzantium did not have an educational system comparable to Western Universities, nor, conversely, were the

⁸⁷ JOANNES DAMASCENUS, *Dialectica sive Capita philosophica*, 3,58-62, ed. H.B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 1 [«Patristische Texte und Studien», 7], Berlin 1969, 57.

⁸⁸ GREGORIUS NAZIANZENUS, *Orationes*, 23, PG 35, 1164D. An example of this is to be found in PHILOTHEUS COCCINUS, *Antirrhethici duodecim contra Gregoram*, ed. D.V. Kaimakes, *Φιλοθέου Κοκκίνου δογματικά ἔργα Μέρος Α'* (Centre for Byzantine Research «Thessalonian Byzantine Writers», 3), Thessalonica 1983, 8,723-730.

⁸⁹ Cf. J. MARENBO, *The Theoretical and Practical Autonomy of Philosophy as a Discipline in the Middle Ages: Latin Philosophy, 1250-1350*, in ASZTALOS/MURDOCH/NIINILUOTO (eds.), *Knowledge and the Sciences* cit., 262-274. Cf. also F.-X. PUTALLAZ/R. IMBACH, *Profession: Philosophie. Siger de Brabant*, Paris 1997, 107-121.

Faculties of Arts comparable to the school of philosophy directed by the consul of the philosophers. However, the point is that the equivalence or the association upon which Benakis' assumption is grounded, between scientific theology and *philosophia ancilla theologiae* and, on the other hand, between non-scientific theology and autonomous philosophy, is in this respect historically and terminologically problematic. The fact that in the Latin West philosophy or, to be more precise, Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, served the purpose of the scientific foundation of theology does not automatically entail that philosophy became handmaiden of theology. In this respect it should be stressed that it is theology which, in order to acquire a scientific status, has to conform itself with the requirements of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. Conversely, the sole fact that in Byzantium there was no successful attempt to ground a scientific theology on these epistemic requirements does not automatically entail the existence of an autonomous philosophy.

A further objection can also be raised in regard to the second dimension of Benakis' theoretical autonomy, i.e. the epistemic one. He claims that philosophy in Byzantium was for the whole Byzantine period (which according to him goes from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries) the proper science for the cognition of truths concerning man and the world⁹⁰. According to Benakis this science avoided possible involvement in theological controversies, thus having a different development from that in Western Scholasticism. I shall not discuss this latter claim. I will note, however, that Benakis' recent comment on K. Niarchos' thesis concerning the relative continuity between ancient and Byzantine philosophy, i.e. that this continuity claim fails to acknowledge the Christian character of Byzantine philosophy, clashes with Benakis' statement on its autonomy *vis-à-vis* theology⁹¹.

In general, claiming that Byzantine philosophy is something determined by one subject or one field of investigation, e.g. the truths on Man and the world, has one main disadvantage, namely the lack of textual support for a thesis of this kind. In fact, there are very few thinkers or groups of thinkers who explicitly refer to this definition of philosophy being the core of their intellectual activity. For example, even the rather frequent occurrence of the term "knowledge of beings" (γνῶσις τῶν ὄντων) or "knowledge of things divine and human" as a generic description of the philosophical survey does not in itself represent a proof in favour of the existence of an autonomous Byzantine philosophical tradition. This is because this and similar definitions, inherited from the late-ancient philosophical tradition, are hardly to be found in Byzantium as referring to an autonomous philosophical inquiry free from any theological concern. As a matter of fact, often these definitions also occur in the monastic tradition to describe the preliminary stage of purification in man's

⁹⁰ Cf. BENAKIS, *Die Autonomie* cit., 224: «Trotz der radikalen Inbesitznahme des Begriffs φιλοσοφία durch den Siegeszug des Christentums für christliche, asketische und mönchische Weisheit, blieb Philosophie während der ganzen byzantinischen Zeit (9.-15. Jahrhundert) die Wissenschaft von der Erkenntnis aller für menschen und Welt grundlegenden Dinge».

⁹¹ Cf. BENAKIS, *Epilogue* cit., in IERODIAKONOU, *Byzantine* cit., 287. The contribution by Niarchos that Benakis refers to is K. NIARCHOS, *ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΗΝ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΗΝ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΟ*, Athens 1996.

ascension to God, and in this context clearly it does not account for the character of Byzantine philosophy as autonomous from theological concerns as Benakis alleges⁹².

The very summary of the traditional six definitions of philosophy by John of Damascus, in which the definition “knowledge of beings” is included, is taken from second - and even third - hand sources⁹³. Neither this set of definitions as a whole nor any one of them taken singly can be univocally used for the definition of Byzantine philosophy, for this set of definitions cannot be taken out of its original context, namely the ancient and late-ancient philosophical problem of the status of logic in regard to philosophy. One could also legitimately ask, if we accept “knowledge of beings” as a definition that accounts fully for Byzantine philosophy, on what grounds can we ignore other classical definitions of philosophy inherited by the Byzantines and used quite frequently, such as “*meditatio mortis*”.

Futhermore, if we accept Benakis’ particular view of Byzantine philosophy, i.e. the idea that it deals with truths on man and the world, while avoiding theological controversies, only a few thinkers will be considered “Byzantine philosophers” properly so-called. Benakis’ highly selective definition does not seem to occur frequently enough to argue that it applies to the whole Byzantine philosophical tradition, and often, as has been said before, it occurs in contexts in which it is not characterized as autonomous from other superior forms of knowledge, but only as preparatory to them. This, of course, does not mean that in Byzantium there were no autonomous philosophical trends or attitudes. In this respect, one would be wrong in claiming that Byzantine tradition of commentators on Aristotle, for example, is not autonomous, i.e. autonomous *vis-à-vis* the late-ancient tradition, or that the Byzantine commentators did not develop any interesting arguments or exegetical solutions which had not already been elaborated by the commentators of the V-VI centuries⁹⁴. In these respects, Benakis’ approach can be accepted. However, the more general idea of a strong epistemic autonomy of Byzantine philosophy requires further proof and arguments. It is more than questionable whether the available source material will allow us to view Byzantine philosophy in this way.

The second kind of autonomy sketched by Benakis after the theoretical one is more interesting. Benakis explicitly speaks of a “practical autonomy”, referring to the level of institutional practice. The author is one of the few scholar who have recognized the fact that the Byzantine philosophical activity often, but not always, takes place in a particular context, namely that of fulfilling the goal set by the imperial authority, of training state functionaries and bureaucrats. In this respect, Benakis

⁹² For examples of this occurrence of the definition “knowledge of beings”, see KAPRIEV, *Philosophie in Byzanz* cit., 96-98; 271-273.

⁹³ On this relevant point, cf. M. ROUCHÉ, *The Definitions of Philosophy and a new Fragment of Stephanus the Philosopher*, «Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik», 40 (1990), 107-128; D.R. REINSCH, *Fragmente einer Organon-Handschrift vom Beginn des Zehnten Jahrhunderts aus dem katharinerkloster auf dem Berge Sinai*, «Philologus», 145 (2001), 57-69.

⁹⁴ On the tradition of the Aristotelian Commentators in late-ancient and Byzantine thought, cf. R. GOULET, “Aristote de Stagire”, in *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques, Supplementum*, Paris 2003, 108-654; J. SELLARS, *The Aristotelian Commentators: a Bibliographical Guide*, in P. ADAMSON/H. BALTUSSEN/M.W.F. STONE (ed.), *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries*, v. 1, London 2004, 239-262.

seems to have been the one who, after an article of 1926 by A. Andréadès⁹⁵, has most stressed the link between teaching activity and the need to recruit experts and well educated bureaucrats for the administration of the Empire. The famous chair of “consul of the philosophers”, probably first held by Psellus, was nothing more than an official position granted by the Emperor; the same was true for the chair of “guardian of the laws”, the director of the school of Law, first held by John Xiphilinus (XI cent.).

In Byzantium there were no universities, nor Platonic Academies. Psellus simply calls the place where he used to teach “school” (σχολή); John Mauropous does the same in his *Novel*, a document celebrating the foundation of the school of Laws. Reconstructing the practice of teaching/learning and its link with the circulation of texts and manuscripts still remains essential, especially for an educational model so different from the Western one. In this respect, contributions like those of P. Lemerle⁹⁶, C.N. Constantinidis⁹⁷, and S. Mergiali⁹⁸ are essential, although further progress is both desirable and necessary. The private context, however, seems to be also relevant: the case of Aristotle commentators Eustratius of Nicaea and Michael of Ephesus working in the service of Anna Comnena is in this respect paradigmatic. Further research should also focus on the importance of the study of the manuscript tradition of texts. The work of Michael Cacouros represents in this respect a model. Questions like the identity of a scribe, the place and context of his activity, and the nature and extent of the circulation of one or more manuscripts can be decisive for putting texts in their proper context and detecting their function⁹⁹.

But for all the fruitfulness that Benakis’ view clearly has for understanding relevant features of the Byzantine philosophical tradition, nevertheless several points remain problematic. In fact, on the one hand, we have a theoretical autonomy, i.e. a *Fragestellung* more or less independent from any theological concerns or from

⁹⁵ Cf. A. ANDRÉADÈS, *Le recrutement des fonctionnaires et les universités dans l'empire byzantine*, in *Mélanges de droit roman dédiés à Georges Cornil*, Paris 1926; 19-70. Cf. also, of course, P. LEMERLE, *Élèves et professeurs à Constantinople au X^e siècle*, in *Académie des Inscriptions et de Belles-Lettres: Comptes rendus des séances de l'année 1969* (November-Décembre); B. LAOURDAS, *Intellectuals, Scholars and Bureaucrats in the Byzantine Society*, «Klironomia», 2 (1970), 272-291; F.S. PEDERSEN, *On Professional Qualifications for Public Posts in Late Antiquity*, «Classica et medievalia», 31 (1976), 161-213.

⁹⁶ Cf. P. LEMERLE, *Le premier humanisme byzantin. Notes et remarques sur enseignement et culture à Byzance des origines au X^e siècle*, Paris 1971 («Bibliothèque byzantine. Études», 6).

⁹⁷ Cf. C. N. CONSTANTINIDIS, *Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries (1204- ca. 1310)*, Nicosia 1982.

⁹⁸ Cf. S. MERGIALI, *L'enseignement et les lettrés pendant l'époque des Paléologues (1261-1453)*, Athens 1996 («Etaireia ton philon tou laou», 5).

⁹⁹ Cf. M. CACOUROS, *Un manuel de logique organisé par Jean Chortasmenos et destiné à l'enseignement. Catalogue du manuscrit*, «Revue des Études Byzantines», 54 (1996), 49-98; ID., *Le Laur. 85,1 témoin de l'activité conjointe d'un groupe de copistes travaillant dans la seconde moitié du XIII^e siècle*, in G. PRATO (ed.), *Actes du V^e Congrès International de Paléographie grecque, Crémone, 5-11 octobre 1998*; ID., *Néophytos Prodromenos copiste et responsable (?) de l'édition Quadrivium-Corpus aristotelicum du XIV^e siècle*, «Revue des études byzantines», 56 (1998), 193-212; ID., *Un manuel byzantin d'enseignement destiné à être copié 'à la pecia'?*, «Gazette du livre médiéval» 36 (2000), 17-24; see also the recent M. CACOUROS/M.-H. CONGOURDEAU, *Philosophie et sciences à Byzance de 1204 à 1453: les textes, les doctrines et leur transmission. Congrès international d'études byzantines, 20e, Paris, 2001*, Leuven 2006 («Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta», 146).

theological controversies; on the other hand, a practical autonomy, which is indeed grounded in the practice of the teaching/learning process. It is unclear, I think, how to combine the two, namely the status of the philosophical investigation and its institutional context, especially because Benakis' theoretical autonomy entails high-level philosophical production, while the practical one is linked by Benakis only to the basic teaching of the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium* in the schools of philosophy. Recently Benakis seems to have partially dropped the practical/institutional autonomy in favour of the theoretical one. He claims that "Byzantine philosophy refers to the autonomous philosophical activity of the Byzantines in the teaching of philosophy and the writing of commentaries on ancient philosophical texts (chiefly concerning logic and physics), as much as in their treatises on more general subjects, for instance on Nature and Man, which aimed at rebutting ancient doctrines and at advancing new arguments in the light of the New Weltanschauung"¹⁰⁰. The concept of "Weltanschauung" is needless to say problematic, and perhaps out-dated. Can we not legitimately ask what is the *Weltanschauung* of the commentator working at the imperial court? And what is the *Weltanschauung* of the teacher of the *Quadrivium*, or (at opposite extreme) of the hesychast, who nevertheless, as Kapriev shows, calls himself a philosopher? What is the common ground between all these different types of intellectuals? If one of the philosophical topics par excellence is Nature, what is the *Weltanschauung* of a commentator on Aristotle's *Physics* like Psellus? It seems to me that his only *Weltanschauung* was the text he was commenting on, its exegesis and its interpretation.

As said before, if the common ground we are seeking is a particular area of interest, like Nature and Man, even if (although Benakis does not say this) this interest fits into a kind of behavioral framework belonging to the autonomous philosophical practice, then only a few texts could be included in it. Once again, in my opinion, the aim should not be to provide at all costs an image of Byzantine philosophy as a whole, but to point out the different Byzantine philosophies, the different social practices and the different manifestations of the term "philosophy" in Byzantium. According to what meaning or meanings does the word "philosophy" occur? And, even more, who calls himself "philosopher"?

The interesting thing is that, on the one hand, Benakis rightly points out the incommensurability between the Byzantine and Western traditions. On the other, the only typology to which his view partially corresponds is the *magister* of the Western Faculty of Arts, who wanted to assume for himself the prerogative and the freedom to teach on certain topics according to his own approach, claiming for example that the thesis of the eternity of the world is philosophically valid according to the principles of natural science, i.e. according to the inner principles of that discipline¹⁰¹.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. BENAKIS, *Epilogue* cit., in IERODIAKONOU, *Byzantine* cit., 287. However, elsewhere Benakis stresses more the professional/institutional model of thinkers in Byzantium, claiming that "The prevalent model of the thinker in Byzantium was a sort of encyclopedic teacher of philosophy who kept in touch with the sciences of the Quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music) and other disciplines and set the philosophical tone of the scientific curricula". Cf. L. BENAKIS, "Byzantine Philosophy", in E. CRAIG (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 2, 160-165, 161.

¹⁰¹ Cf. PUTALLAZ/R. IMBACH, *Profession: Philosophie* cit., 75-106.

I think that, despite the enormous contribution provided by Benakis to Byzantine studies, his view leads too much in the direction of a “Byzantine Averroism” which, apart from the already mentioned case of Nicholas Cabasilas’ *Quaestio de rationis valore*, and perhaps from some texts of Barlaam the Calabrian and some others, is hardly to be found in Byzantium.

I borrow from John Marenbon a threefold distinction of the term “autonomy” with regard to philosophy¹⁰²: autonomy with regard to the definition; autonomy with regard to the truth of its individual conclusions; autonomy with regard to truth about the subject considered by the philosophical investigation. If we take this as given, then one cannot help but notice that most Byzantine thinkers attribute to philosophy an autonomy with regard to its definition (e.g. knowledge of beings), although this does not automatically mean that they identify their own intellectual activity with this definition. Just a few Byzantine thinkers, I think, went beyond this, defending stronger meanings of “autonomy” than the first and most basic one mentioned above. There is, quite to the contrary, a strong professional attitude in many authors whose activity was somehow linked to the public dimension of teaching. The case of Psellus, who constantly warns his students to put some distance between them and what he was teaching, asking them to consider it just as something useful to their education, is in this respect more than relevant.

6. Byzantine Philosophy between Projects and Objects

To come back to what I wrote at the beginning of this article, it is surely true that among what scholars consider the four main families in medieval philosophy - Arabic, Byzantine, Hebrew, and Latin - the development of the history of Byzantine philosophy exhibits a case of retarded development. However, one should be reluctant to link the hesitant development of the study of the Byzantine philosophical tradition simply to the allegedly unsatisfactory quantity of editions and translations of primary source material that have been produced since Tatakis’ book (1949). On the contrary, it might be better to attribute it to a reluctance to address the *Methodenfrage*. Generally speaking, the debate on “Byzantine philosophy” has often involved a kind of curious *petitio principii*, so that people spoke of “Byzantine philosophy” simply assuming that something existed corresponding to this term, without questioning its existence. Or - and this has been my major point in this article - in posing the question “what is Byzantine philosophy” it has been taken for granted that something invariable, constant, and unchangeable existed as the essence of philosophy in Byzantium, to be inflected, like we inflect a noun, in accordance with the different phenomena under consideration. Looked at in this light, even historical reconstructions which appear to be different, are in fact quite similar, as they all share the same approach, i.e. the tendency to recognize in their material or in the subject of

¹⁰² Cf. MARENBO, *The Theoretical* cit., in ASZTALOS/MURDOCH/NIINILUOTO (eds.), *Knowledge and the Sciences* cit., 271-272.

their research intrinsic historical determinations, an immanent ontological structure which forms the basis of their categorization.

It is important to stress that all the scholars who have taken part in the debate on Byzantine philosophy have made crucial contributions to the development of the field. However, the more we study the texts from the Byzantine philosophical tradition broadly construed, the more we detect a wide variety of meanings and functions attached to the term “philosophy”. I believe, that these are traces of the irreducibility of what scholars call “Byzantine philosophy” to any objective determination. In the case of the thesis concerning the autonomy of Byzantine philosophy, there is, I think, something even more interesting, i.e. the more-or-less conscious attempt to adapt to Byzantine “philosophers” a model borrowed from the attitude towards philosophy proper to certain thirteenth century *artistae*. Or, and I will briefly touch on this point later, the tendency to attribute a modern conception of autonomy, which hardly fits Byzantine intellectual history¹⁰³. The result, as we have seen, is that in this case Byzantine philosophy becomes a category so narrow that it remains almost an empty class, including a very small number of thinkers or texts, leaving uncategorized the vast majority of Byzantine intellectual endeavours.

The problem is, I think, that what Benakis calls “practical autonomy” does not work as an explanatory model for Byzantium in the same way that it works for the Latin West. This has immediately, I think, a consequence also in respect to what Benakis calls the “theoretical autonomy” of Byzantine philosophy, described as a kind of secular approach to a certain number of topics, whose status remains therefore unclear and as such difficult to detect in the available source material. Such a strong and selective meaning of “theoretical autonomy” requires an equally strong meaning of “practical autonomy”, which, however, does not appear to be found in Benakis’ reconstruction.

But Benakis’ thesis, along with Kapriev’s one of the most interesting in the last years, leads also to another consideration. It seems that in the scholarly development of the problem at stake there are in a certain sense two paths. The first is the “traditional” path, which takes its point of departure in Tatakis along the lines sketched above. The other path seems to originate in Benakis’ approach. I think that the latter approach reflects the experience of an increasing number of scholars working on Byzantine philosophy, including Benakis himself, garnered in part through the more general debate on the methodological approach to medieval philosophy which took place in recent years in the framework of the S.I.E.P.M. (Société Internationale pour l’Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale)¹⁰⁴. In particular, precisely the discussion on medieval philosophy in terms of “status” and “autonomy” is one of the most important points to which scholars have recently

¹⁰³ On this tendency in history of Medieval philosophy, cf. MARENBOON, *The Theoretical* cit., in ASZTALOS/MURDOCH/NIINILUOTO (eds.), *Knowledge and the Sciences* cit., 274

¹⁰⁴ Cf. J.A. AERTSEN/A. SPEER, *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter?*, Akten des X. Internationalen Kongresses für mittelalterliche Philosophie der S.I.E.P.M., 25. bis 30. August in Erfurt («Miscellanea Mediaevalia», 26), Berlin-New York 1998.

contributed. This discussion itself follows two main lines, the analytic approach¹⁰⁵ and the “Heideggerian” one, developed mostly in France¹⁰⁶. The position held by Benakis, on the autonomy of philosophy in Byzantium, which I think is nowadays very widespread, belongs to this particular debate, and to this extent it should be considered as belonging to another path than what we labelled as the “traditional” one.

However, when using the concept of “autonomy”, we must always be aware of whose autonomy we are discussing: is this a concept of autonomy native to, in our case, the Byzantine tradition, or is it a modern conception of “autonomy” imposed on the Byzantine materials. The latter kind of “autonomy” is obviously different from the former, insofar as it is grounded on a modern meaning of the word, although it is often ambiguously invoked by scholars in order to prove that the material subject to their inquiry is purely or authentically philosophical. On the contrary, it is necessary to distinguish, once we pose the question about the status of Byzantine philosophy, to what extent this status, in the case of the concept of “autonomy”, belongs to the tradition we are studying and to what extent it belongs to the discipline or the research field of our scientific survey.

The consequence of making this distinction is that, perhaps, the quest for a Byzantine philosophy should be revisited from a new perspective, in which the posing of the question does not automatically involve the determination or pre-determination of the intrinsic distinctive character of the Byzantine philosophical tradition. If we appeal to this perspective, it would not be wrong to claim that Byzantine philosophy as such does not exist; there are, on the contrary, Byzantine philosophies, different manifestations and meanings of the term “philosophy” which cohabit, and sometimes even clash, in the same context. There are Byzantine philosophers, people who call themselves “philosophers”, though according to different meanings of the word. And there are Byzantine philosophical texts, i.e. texts in which the discussion, the influence, or the re-elaboration of concepts and doctrines coming from the ancient philosophical tradition are in evidence.

The alternative, if one dislikes a mere nominalistic understanding of Byzantine philosophy, is to open it to a wider dimension: a group of texts which in different ways and according to different meanings of the term “philosophy” are influenced to

¹⁰⁵ Cf., for example, N. KRETZMANN/A. KENNY/J. PINBORG (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy. From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism (1100-1600)*, Cambridge 1982; C. PANACCIO, *De la reconstruction en histoire de la philosophie*, in G. BOSS (ed.), *La philosophie et son histoire*, Zürich 1994, 173-195; ID., *La reconstruction transtemporelle et l'étude de la philosophie médiévale*, in AERTSEN/SPEER (eds.), *Was ist Philosophie cit.*, 360-367; S. EBBESEN, *Doing Philosophy the Sophistic Way. The Copenhagen School, with Notes on the Dutch School*, in R. IMBACH/A. MAIERÜ (eds.), *Gli Studi di Filosofia Medievale tra Otto e Novecento. Contributo a un bilancio storiografico* («Storia e Letteratura. Raccolta di studi e testi», 179), Roma 1991, 331-359; ID., *Logic – Philosophy of Language and a Whetstone for the Philosopher's Linguistic Tools*, in AERTSEN/SPEER (eds.), *Was ist Philosophie cit.*, 38-47; J. MARENBON, *What is Medieval Philosophy?*, in ID., *Aristotelian Logic, Platonism, and the Context of Early Medieval Philosophy in the West*, Aldershot-Burlington-Singapore-Sidney 2000, xvii, 1-21.

¹⁰⁶ For an historical reconstruction of this line, cf. P. PORRO, *Heidegger, la filosofia medievale, la medievistica contemporanea*, «Quaestio», 1 (2001), 431-461; R. IMBACH, *Heidegger et la philosophie médiévale. A propos d'un nouvel annuaire philosophique*, «Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie», 49 (1992), 426-459.

various degrees by the ancient philosophical tradition. A “group of texts”, not a group of thinkers, because an author might have produced, for example, a philosophical text and a series of *carmina*, as in the case of Theodore Prodromus, or a series of philosophical texts and a series of homelies, as in the case of Gregory Palamas¹⁰⁷. Indeed, we might pose another kind of question entirely. No longer “what is Byzantine philosophy”, with all its assumptions, instead we might ask “who were the Byzantine philosophers”, “who in Byzantium called himself *philosopher*”¹⁰⁸. By means of such a study, which must start from the occurrences of the term “philosophia”, we can perhaps give a provisional account of all the different status, functions, and meanings of “philosophy” in Byzantium. “Philosopher” is the monk, who describes his life in the handbook of monastic prescriptions (*praktiká*) using the expression *meditatio mortis*; “philosopher” is also the Aristotle commentator, like Michael of Ephesus, who is described in a funeral oration as φιλόσοφος καὶ ἄμα πολιτικός, which in this context means “mundane” philosopher, a professional working at the imperial court, opposed to the traditional image of the philosopher “by choice of life” (τοῦ βίου αἵρεσις). Again, “philosopher” is the *polyhistor*, for example Psellus, as well as the theologian, the “true philosopher”, who after the model of Gregory the Theologian’s *Orations* uses the term “philosophy” in order to express the rational development of a content of faith, which he experiences as God’s self-revealing within the divine Economy.

All of these are Byzantine philosophers, insofar as they call themselves “philosophers”, but none of these practices can be used to identify one single “Byzantine philosophy”. None of these philosophers in Byzantium, ultimately, seems to conceive his activity as a mere continuation of an ancient or late-antique ideal of philosophy or seems to believe that Christendom is a mere accident to be ignored in the philosophical endeavour. The main objection that can be raised to the idea of conceiving Byzantine philosophy as a multiform display of functions and status, even if it is grounded on well established terminological occurrences, is that this would lead to a kind of relativism or a mere nominalistic approach to the matter¹⁰⁹. In response I would maintain that this is precisely the consequence one draws from holding that there are intrinsic historical determination, or from the related belief that history consists of different replies to the same problems or that, even more, history is simply the teleological development of a hidden core which constantly repeats itself, generating differences which then are reabsorbed into it. In this respect, the most relativistic attitude is precisely the tendency to transform the different modern approaches to Byzantine philosophy into self-existing (immanent) *objects*. The movement should be in the opposite direction, i.e. realizing that approaches, definitions, and periodizations are conventional and extrinsic; they are not real

¹⁰⁷ A good example of this kind of approach is Wilson’s description of Arethas of Caesarea; cf. N.G. WILSON, *Scholars of Byzantium*, London 1983, 121-135.

¹⁰⁸ For a perfect example of this approach, in the case of Medieval Arabic Philosophy, cf. R. BRAGUE, *Sens et valeur de la philosophie dans les trois cultures médiévales*, in AERTSEN/SPEER, *Was ist Philosophie* cit., 229-244.

¹⁰⁹ On this topic, cf. A. DE LIBERA, *Archéologie et reconstructions: sur la méthode en histoire de la philosophie médiévale*, in AA.VV., *Un siècle de philosophie, 1900-2000*, Paris 2000, 552-587.

objects, but *projects*, namely attempts to spotlight one or more aspects of the Byzantine philosophical tradition without pretending to be exhaustive or to grasp its essence.

It could also be said that in this way we have to introduce aspects of “Byzantine philosophy”, which are less interesting or relevant to us, or simply less consistent from a speculative point of view like the one linked to the “monastic philosophy”. But this is exactly the point: in posing the question of the status of Byzantine philosophy we cannot simply decide what is philosophical or not by starting from a concept of philosophy which is only partially representative of this tradition or, *a fortiori* from a modern concept of philosophy. Quite the contrary, the approach to this question should be dependent upon the inner criteria of the subject at stake, starting from what the thinkers and texts of the Byzantine tradition define as “philosophy”. This is not a reduction of the studies on the Byzantine philosophical tradition to a mere lexicography. It is a way to clarify the range and domain of the modern studies by starting from the inner criteria of the tradition under investigation.

Over the last years several contributions, editions, articles, entries in dictionaries stand as a sign of the growing modern interest in Byzantine philosophy. The establishment of the Anastos Library at the University of Notre Dame (Indiana), under the supervision of C. Barber and D. Jenkins, has meant the creation of a new important center for Byzantine studies. The ‘Theodore Metochites’ project at the University of Göteborg, under the supervision of B. Bydén, is another sign of the vitality of this field of study. Furthermore, in the new edition of the Ueberweg History of Philosophy, the Byzantine philosophical tradition will receive thirty times more space than in the previous edition, which devoted to this subject only seven pages¹¹⁰. Of course, one cannot refrain from remarking on the importance of the *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi – Philosophi Byzantini*, published by the Academy of Athens with Linos Benakis as general editor.

Things are rapidly changing then. Scholars are starting to dismiss the idea that a tradition, like the Byzantine, is relevant only insofar as it had a substantial impact on the Latin West¹¹¹. In particular, scholars working directly on the Byzantine philosophical tradition are starting now also to pose the methodological question concerning the status of both their own discipline and the tradition which they study. It is this discussion which gives importance also to the other questions which arise from the study of the source material, namely the organization of the schools, the structure of the *cursus studiorum*, the relations between scribes and readers, the role and the influence of theological institutions like the Patriarchal Academy, the interaction between East and West, and even more from the study of the texts, their tradition, their sources and the organization and nature of the different arguments

¹¹⁰ Cf. G. KAPRIEV (ed.), *Byzantinische Philosophie* (=Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, Begründet von Friedrich Ueberweg, völlig neubearbeitete Ausgabe, hg. von H. Holzhey, Die Philosophie des Mittelalters, Bd. 1/1) (in prep.).

¹¹¹ Cf. for example Couloubaritsis’s approach in L. COULOUBARITSIS, *Histoire de la philosophie ancienne et médiévale*, Paris 1998, 7.3, 939-994 (*Au carrefour de nouveaux chemins de la Pensée – De Rhazes à Saint Anselme*); 8.4, 1117-1161 (*Néoplatonisme scientifique et aristotélisme théologique – De Nicéphore Blemmyde à Saint Bonaventure*).

which constitute their structure. This set of questions is not supposed simply to eliminate the “traditional” one, namely the problem of the beginning of a Byzantine philosophical tradition, the relation between philosophy and theology, and the other issues which characterized the historical debate in the past. On the contrary, it could be a way of establishing the discussion on more secure grounds.

Given that in the coming years also this new set of questions might itself be dismissed or considered outdated, the new contribution to the development of the modern field of study called “Byzantine philosophy” may be precisely the discussion of methodological problems, the problem of the approach or the approaches to a material that, if simply treated as a whole, tends to be less interesting and perhaps intrinsically weak.