

ARISTOTELIAN ATTRACTION AND REPULSION IN BYZANTIUM

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The present article provides an overview of Aristotle's fate in Byzantium from the eighth to the fifteenth century. In opposition to accounts that consider Byzantine philosophy either as a mere continuation of Greek philosophy or as neutrally disposed towards it, the article argues that the reception of Aristotle's philosophy in Byzantium (like the reception of Plato's philosophy) oscillated between enthusiastic approval and vehement rejection: some Byzantines argued in favour even of Aristotle's theology, assessed as admirably monotheistic, whereas others associated Aristotelian science with heresy and Thomism. The article discusses these two extreme positions in conjunction with the moderate assessment of the Stagirite in Byzantium, which focused on his logic and on topics of his physics in accordance with Byzantine eclecticism.

Just as it happened in the Latin West, so it also happened in the Byzantine East: Aristotle was always omnipresent either in a positive or in a negative way; his philosophy was either admired and espoused or downgraded and dismissed. Contrary, however, to the intellectual concerns of their Western peers, whose interpretation of Aristotle was largely shaped by the Arabic tradition (most importantly, through the commentaries of Avicenna and Averroes), in which philosophy appeared free from religious concerns, the Byzantine philosophers did not usually argue about how to interpret Aristotle's philosophy. Instead they mostly argued about its use and its overall value. To take a prominent example, the claim for the unity and singularity of the human intellect, which came to be known as Averroism in the Latin West in the thirteenth century, was rejected by Thomas Aquinas precisely as a false interpretation of Aristotle's noetics; indeed, Averroes himself and the Averroists at the University of Paris put forward the doctrine of the singular human intellect as an accurate interpretation of the passive intellect, which Aristotle discusses in his treatise *On the Soul* III 4–5. There is no doubt, of course, that Thomas was committed to rejecting Averroism for the benefit of the Christian doctrine on the immortality of the individual soul. But what matters for my present purpose is that he did so through what he put forth as a correct interpretation of Aristotle's text. Thomas had also battled against the so-called 'doctrine of the double truth', usually associated with Boethius of Dacia and Siger of Brabant, that is, the doctrine which separates the

truth instilled into the Christian soul by the religious faith from the truth attained by the philosopher through philosophical reasoning. Consistency of thought required Thomas to show that Aristotle's philosophy sided anew with Christianity on the nature of the human intellect. The Thomasian synthesis of Aristotle's philosophy and Christian doctrine succeeded in making Aristotle the most important figure for Latin philosophy, rivalled by no other philosopher until the emergence of Platonist or syncretistic philosophy in the Italian Renaissance. No similar concerns ever arose in the Byzantine East.¹

I. Some preliminary remarks on Byzantine philosophy and spirituality

The Byzantines, in short, espoused the doctrine of the single truth, which was the truth of Orthodox Christianity. Of course, they did not ignore or neglect philosophy. They studied, for instance, Aristotle's treatises in order to acquire the best knowledge of what can be known through philosophy.² Nonetheless, they believed that the highest that man can experience and know in this life could not be known through reason and taught by philosophy. Thus, they had no great interest in seriously debating the meaning or interpretation of a particular Aristotelian doctrine or passage. According to them, not only could the ancient exegetical tradition (including its criticisms against Aristotle) illuminate them sufficiently on most of these topics but also sometimes, and surely with regard to the most important matters, philosophy could lead someone astray. The philosophers of antiquity themselves were a proof of that last point. They were convinced that God or the gods, in other words the first principle(s) of the universe, could be revealed by reason. For the Hellenes, this rational knowledge constituted wisdom and could be taught through the highest branch of philosophy, say, Platonic dialectics or Aristotelian

¹ It is true that, in the early fourteenth century, Theodore Metochites said in his so-called *Miscellanies* that it is impossible to know whether Aristotle believed in the mortality or in the immortality of the individual human soul (see *Theodore Metochites on Ancient Authors and Philosophy. Semeioseis gnomikai* 1–26 & 71, ed. Karin Hult, 3, 6, 5–7). But Metochites did not substantiate his view, nor was he interested in discussing any of Aristotle's relevant texts (he simply repeats his usual contention that Aristotle had recourse to his usual obscurity out of vanity and ignorance). In a more substantial manner, two philosophers of the fifteenth century, John Argyropoulos and George Amiroutzes dealt with Averroism in two separate treatises. Nevertheless, they did so within the tradition of Scholasticism (Argyropoulos wrote his *Quaestio utrum intellectus humanus sit perpetuus* in Latin) and can hardly contradict our verdict. See John Monfasani, 'The Averroism of John Argyropoulos and His *Quaestio utrum intellectus humanus sit perpetuus*', in John Monfasani, *Greeks and Latins in Renaissance Italy: Studies on Humanism and Philosophy in the 15th Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 157–208; John Monfasani, *George Amiroutzes. The Philosopher and His Tractates* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011).

² This is readily exemplified in the Byzantine lists of commentaries on Aristotle, which constitute a sort of bibliography for the study of Aristotle's philosophy. For the contents of these lists see Hermann Usener, 'Interpreten des Aristoteles', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 20 (1865): 133–36; Michael Hayduck, *Stephani in librum Aristotelis De interpretatione commentarium* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1885), v; Paul Wendland, *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis in librum Aristotelis De sensu commentarium* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1901), xvii.

theology or first philosophy. The Byzantines, however, were convinced that it was God himself who annulled Hellenic (and Judaic) wisdom; the Apostle Paul taught it: God is not revealed by reason but has revealed himself through Christ.³

This Pauline, Christocentric view of wisdom created a gap in the Byzantine soul between (divine) truth and (human) knowledge, so that the Greek philosophers, who pretended to have known the divine, were doomed to be considered as ‘the first heresiarchs’.⁴ Still, not every part of Hellenic philosophy could err. The fifth century ecclesiastical author Socrates Scholasticus granted to Paul acquaintance with the teachings of the Hellenes; he claimed that, although neither Christ nor the Apostles espoused the Greek *paideia*, they nevertheless did not expel it.⁵ A new stance towards Hellenic philosophy started to develop and gradually became predominant throughout the Byzantine era: eclecticism.⁶

Byzantine eclecticism towards philosophy can be traced back to the *Stromata* of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215). Clement, who was a Christian convert and thus well-versed in Hellenic ‘wisdom’, was the first to promote ‘eclecticism’ (τὸ ἐκλεκτικόν) as the right stance to be taken by the Christian student towards Hellenic philosophy as a whole:

By ‘philosophy’ I do not mean the Stoic, or the Platonic, or the Epicurean, or the Aristotelian [philosophy], but whatever has been well said by each of those schools, which teaches justice along with a science pervaded by piety — this eclectic whole is what I call philosophy. But whatever these schools have cut away from human reasonings and reminted [as divine], this I would never call divine.⁷

In the last sentence, Clement actually cuts off human reasoning and philosophy from the divine truth which can be revealed only through religious faith and can be

³ Cf. 1 Cor 1: 21–24: οὐχὶ ἐμώρανε·ν ὁ θεὸς τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου; ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔγνω ὁ κόσμος διὰ τῆς σοφίας τὸν θεόν, εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας. ἐπειδὴ καὶ Ἰουδαῖοι σημεῖα αἰτοῦσιν καὶ Ἕλληνες σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν, ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, Ἰουδαίοις μὲν σκάνδαλον ἔθνεσιν δὲ μωρίαν, αὐτοῖς δὲ τοῖς κλητοῖς, Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἕλλησιν, Χριστὸν θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ θεοῦ σοφίαν.

⁴ Cf. *Synodicon Orthodoxiae*, 204 Gouillard: οἱ τῶν Ἑλλήνων σοφοὶ καὶ πρῶτοι τῶν αἵρεσι-αρχῶν.

⁵ Cf. Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 211.5–212.15 Hansen. See Pantelis Golitsis, ‘Εἶναι ἡ φιλοσοφία στο Βυζάντιο ἀντι-βυζαντινῆ;’, *Deukalion* 28 (2011): 50–74.

⁶ Eclecticism, which has been internally associated by Eduard Zeller (1814–1908) to the development of Hellenic philosophy at some stage (most notably, through the eclectic Platonism of Antiochus of Ascalon), is a category that stems substantially from the Christian approach to philosophy; it is therefore not internal but external to it. Zeller, in his turn, was indebted to Johann Jakob Brucker (1696–1770), who used the term ‘eclecticism’ chiefly for describing the philosophy of Ammonius Saccas. Brucker borrowed the term from Diogenes Laertius, who uses it for the school of Potamo of Alexandria.

⁷ Clement, *Stromata*, I, 7, 37, 6 Früchtel/Stählin/Treu: φιλοσοφίαν δὲ οὐ τὴν Στωϊκὴν λέγω οὐδὲ τὴν Πλατωνικὴν ἢ τὴν Ἐπικούρειον τε καὶ Ἀριστοτελικὴν, ἀλλ’ ὅσα εἴρηται παρ’ ἐκάστη τῶν αἱρέσεων τούτων καλῶς, δικαιοσύνην μετὰ εὐσεβοῦς ἐπιστήμης ἐκδιδάσκοντα, τοῦτο σύμπαν τὸ ἐκλεκτικὸν φιλοσοφίαν φημί. ὅσα δὲ ἀνθρωπίνων λογισμῶν ἀποτεμύμενοι παρεχάραξαν, ταῦτα οὐκ ἂν ποτε θεῖα εἴποιμ’ ἂν.

discursively known only through the Holy Scriptures. Clement's verdict constitutes an early expression of the kind of mild anti-Hellenic spirit that became prevalent throughout the patristic and Byzantine philosophical literature. A harsh but sharp expression of this spirit can be seen in the following passage of Gregory Palamas (1296–1357), who was canonised by the Orthodox Church in 1368, that is, during the patriarchate of his disciple Philotheos Kokkinos:

In the case of the secular wisdom, you must first kill the serpent, in other words, overcome the pride that arises from this philosophy. How difficult that is! 'The arrogance of philosophy has nothing in common with humility', as the saying goes. Having overcome it, then, you must separate and cast away the head and tail, for these things are evil in the highest degree. By the head, I mean manifestly wrong opinions concerning things intelligible and divine and primordial; and by the tail, the fabulous stories concerning created things. As to what lies in between the head and tail, that is, discourses on nature, you must separate out useless ideas by means of the faculties of examination and inspection possessed by the soul, just as pharmacists purify the flesh of serpents with fire and water. Even if you do all this, and make good use of what has been properly set aside, how much trouble and circumspection will be required for the task! Nonetheless, if you put to good use that part of the profane wisdom which has been well excised, no harm can result, for it will naturally have become an instrument for good. But even so, it cannot in the strict sense be called a gift of God and a spiritual thing, for it pertains to the order of nature and is not sent from on high.⁸

Of the dead body of Hellenic knowledge, theology (the head) and mythology (the tail) are those parts that must be cut off. Christian thinkers like Palamas did not see human wisdom as the intellectual content of that part of the human soul (i.e., the intellect) that actively participates in the divine, as was the case in the Orphico-Pythagorean tradition developed philosophically by Plato and Aristotle; rather, they saw it as a cosmic (quasi-)wisdom about the natural world. In Palamas' words, this

⁸ Gregory Palamas, *Pro hesychastis*, I, 1, 21.3–21 Meyendorff: 'Επὶ δὲ τῆς θύραθεν σοφίας, δεῖ μὲν πρῶτον τὸν ὄφιν ἀποκτεῖναι, καθελόντα σε τὸ παρ' αὐτῆς προσγενόμενόν σοι φύσημα· πόσης δὲ τοῦτο δυσχερείας· «Ταπεινώσει» γάρ φασιν «ἔκφυλον τὸ τῆς φιλοσοφίας φρύαγμα». Καθελόντα δ' ὅμως, ἔπειτα διελεῖν καὶ διαρρίψαι κεφαλὴν τε καὶ οὐράν, ὡς ἄκρα καὶ ἄκρατα κακά, τὴν περὶ τῶν νοερῶν καὶ θεῶν καὶ ἀρχῶν δηλαδὴ σαφῶς πεπλανημένην δόξαν καὶ τὴν ἐν τοῖς κτίσμασι μυθολογίαν. Τὸ δὲ μεταξύ, τοὺς περὶ φύσεως τουτέστι λόγους, ὡς οἱ φαρμακοποιοὶ πυρὶ καὶ ὕδατι τὰς τῶν ὄφειν σάρκας ἀποκαθαίρουσιν ἔψοντες, οὕτω σὲ τῷ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐξεταστικῷ καὶ θεωρητικῷ τῶν βλαβερῶν διακρίναι νοημάτων. Οὐ μὴν ἄλλ' εἰ καὶ ταῦθ' ἅπαντα ποιήσεις καὶ καλῶς χρῆσθαι τῷ καλῶς διακριθέντι, ὅσον δὲ καὶ τοῦτ' ἔργον καὶ ὁσῆς δεῖται διακρίσεως· ὅμως εἰ καὶ καλῶς χρῆσθαι τῷ καλῶς ἀπειλημένῳ μορίῳ τῆς ἔξωθεν σοφίας, κακὸν μὲν οὐκ ἂν εἴη τοῦτο, καὶ γὰρ ὄργανον πέφυκε γίνεσθαι πρὸς τι καλόν. Ἀλλ' οὐδ' οὕτως ἂν κληθεῖη Θεοῦ κυρίως δῶρον καὶ πνευματικόν, ἅτε φυσικὸν καὶ μὴ ἄνωθεν καταπεμφθέν. Translation by Nicholas Gendle in Gregory Palamas. *The Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983).

was the ‘middle part’ of the dead Hellenic body, which needed to be sanctioned in accordance with the sayings and teachings of the holy men and theologians of Christianity. It could be usefully handled for some good purpose but it had nothing good *per se*; philosophy does not come from above and is no gift from God, as Palamas asserts, tacitly contradicting Plato.⁹

Despite the claims of the Hellenes, with whom the early heresies and later the rational theology of the Roman Catholic Church were associated, for the Byzantines a human being cannot know God in *statu viae*.¹⁰ On the contrary, the highest that a human being can achieve in this life is to live a life in Christ, that is, to imitate Christ, who was by now the object of ‘true’ (i.e., Christian) philosophy. ‘Christ is the wisdom of God’, as Paul says, and since philosophy is the love of wisdom, true philosophy is the love of Christ; this love is instantiated for the first time in Christ’s disciples.¹¹ It is a pertinent feature of Byzantine spirituality that the truth about God, in other words knowledge of God’s essence, remains out of the reach of the human mind.¹² The Hellenic quest for absolute knowledge turned out to be vain. In as late as in the fifteenth century, an anti-Thomist writer, namely Demetrios Chrysoloras (c. 1360–post 1440), praises the *μωροί* to whom Paul refers (i.e., the simple Christians) to the detriment of the wise:

Therefore, several [fathers of the Church] have shown that the cosmic wisdom can be by no means cause of knowledge of God; nor is it true that those who

⁹ Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 47b1–2: [...] φιλοσοφίας γένος, οὗ μείζον ἀγαθὸν οὐτ’ ἦλθεν οὔτε ἤξει ποτέ τῷ θνητῷ γένει δωρηθὲν ἐκ θεῶν. Palamas also contradicts indirectly George Pachymeres (1242–after 1309), who tacitly quotes the *Timaeus* in the poem of his *Philosophia*.

¹⁰ Cf. 1 Tim 6: 15–16: ὁ μακάριος καὶ μόνος δυνάστης, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων καὶ κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων, ὁ μόνος ἔχων ἀθανασία, φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον, ὃν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύναται.

¹¹ Cf. Neilos of Ancyra, ‘Ascetic Discourse’ (Λόγος ἀσκητικός — PG 79:720A). Emulation of the life of Christ is what gave rise to Christian asceticism. It is worth noting that in Byzantine literature the word *φιλόσοφος* frequently refers to monks, as is famously the case in Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, IV 34 Renauld: ‘By the word “philosophers” I do not here mean those who investigate the natures of beings and seek the principles of the universe and who neglect the principles of their own salvation. I mean those who despise the world and live in the company of supernatural beings’ (translation by Kaldellis). See the classical study by Franz Dölger, ‘Zur Bedeutung von φιλόσοφος und φιλοσοφία in byzantinischer Zeit’, in Franz Dölger, *Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt. Ausgewählte Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Buch-Kunstverlag Ettal, 1953), 197–208, as well as Anthony Kaldellis, ‘Byzantine philosophy inside and out: Orthodoxy and dissidence in counterpoint’, in *The Many Faces of Byzantine Philosophy*, eds Börje Bydén and Katerina Ierodiakonou (Athens: Publications from the Norwegian Institute at Athens, 2012), 129–51, who nevertheless thinks that Psellos is being sarcastic (despite the fact that Psellos himself became a monk later in his life).

¹² The claim of achieving union with God, made by Athonite monks in the fourteenth century and developed into the so-called Hesychast controversy, initially seemed to compromise the Pauline view and was polemised as unacceptable novelty by Byzantine conservative thinkers, such as Nikephoros Gregoras. Gregory Palamas, however, argued in favour of the experience of the monks by claiming that the monks claimed to have *sensed* (that is, not known) in prayer and with their spiritual senses affected by the Holy Spirit, the ineffable light, which was identical to the light of transfiguration seen by Christ on mount Tabor; this was the uncreated energy of God, which saints could ‘see’, and not God’s ‘invisible’ uncreated essence. On the ‘spiritual senses’ see Marcus Plested, ‘The spiritual senses, monastic and theological’, in *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls*, eds Susan Ashbrook Harvey and Margaret Mullet (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2017), 301–12.

stand away from knowledge are not willing to believe in God. Quite on the contrary, [what is true is] that the simple-minded people are faithful to god, whereas the wise [i.e., the philosophers] are, for the most part, unbelieving.¹³

In line with several anti-Latin Byzantine authors, Chrysoloras echoes here the words of Paul: ‘God made the wisdom of this world look foolish’ and ‘because in God’s wisdom the world failed to know God through wisdom, God chose to save all who believe through the simple-mindedness of preaching’.¹⁴ For Chrysoloras and the common Byzantine sentiment, Thomas was too much a philosopher to be truly seen as a Christian ‘living in Christ’.¹⁵ An anonymous author of the eighth century praises St John Psichaita because he neglected the mathematical sciences and ‘left lying on the dunghill the propositions and the syllogisms and the sophisms as webs of spiders’.¹⁶ As these terms actually reproduce the ‘governing goal’ (the *σκοπός*, in the jargon of the ancient commentators) of certain treatises by Aristotle, it was actually Aristotle’s books *On the Interpretation*, *Analytics* (*Prior and Posterior*) and *Sophistical Refutations* that St John Psichaita threw to the dunghill.

Against such a background, Byzantine philosophers (as distinguished from Byzantine theologians) had primarily the role of rehabilitating Hellenic philosophy or wisdom by sorting out and arguing for those Hellenic doctrines that provided correct and useful knowledge within the Christian worldview. Although in the passage quoted earlier Clement of Alexandria mentions all four sects that were re-established in Athens by the emperor Marcus Aurelius in the second century AD, the Epicureans and the Stoics, having jeered at Paul,¹⁷ exempted themselves quite early from the patristic and Byzantine ‘canon’. The part of Hellenic philosophy that finally found its way into Byzantium was mostly Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, chiefly in the shape that was given to them by the Neoplatonic Schools of the fifth, sixth and early seventh centuries. We may say that, from the eighth up to the fifteenth century, the main task of a Byzantine philosopher was to scrupulously examine (late) ancient philosophy from an eclectic point of view. Indeed, this

¹³ Demetrios Chrysoloras, *Dialogus evertens librum Demetrii Cydonii contra beatum Nilum Cabasilam Thessalonicensem* (cod. *Laurentianus plut.* 12.5, f. 13r6–10, quoted by Vasos Pasiourides ‘Theological Encounters and Cultural Identity in Late Byzantium: Demetrios Chrysoloras’ Unpublished Fictitious Dialogue Refuting Demetrios Kydones’ Defence of Thomas Aquinas’, in *Knotenpunkt Byzanz. Wissensformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen*, eds Andreas Speer and Philipp Steinkrüger (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 431–38: Πολλοῖς οὐκοῦν δέδεικται, ὡς οὐδαμῶς ἢ τοῦ κόσμου σοφία γνώσεως αἴτιον περὶ τὸν Θεὸν γίνεται· οὐδ’ ὅσοι πόρρω τῆς ἐπιστήμης πιστεύειν οὐκ ἐθέλουσι τῷ Θεῷ· τούναντίον δὲ μᾶλλον, ὡς οἱ μὲν ἰδιῶται πιστοὶ Θεῷ, σοφοὶ δὲ τὸ πλεόν ἄπιστοι.

¹⁴ Quoted above, n. 3.

¹⁵ Cf. the title of a prominent fourteenth century work on Byzantine spirituality, *Περὶ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῆς*, by Nikolaos Cabasilas Chamaetos.

¹⁶ Cf. Paul Van den Ven, ‘La vie grecque de Saint Jean le Psichaita, confesseur sous le règne de Léon l’Arménien’, *Le Muséon* 21 (1902): 109.15–19: Τὰς δὲ προτάσεις καὶ τοὺς συλλογισμοὺς καὶ τὰ σοφίσματα ὡς ἀραχνῶν ὄντα ὑφάσματα τοῖς ἐπὶ κοπρίας κειμένοις παρήκεν. Ἀστρονομίας δὲ καὶ γεωμετρίας καὶ ἀριθμητικῆς κατεφρόνησεν ὡς ἀνυπάρκτων ὄντων.

¹⁷ Cf. *Acta Apostolorum* 17:18–32.

program was announced in a way by St John of Damascus in the beginning of the eighth century. In his *Fount of Knowledge*, which was to become authoritative, he says:

First of all, I shall set forth the best contributions of the wise men of the Hellenes, because I know that whatever there is of good has been given to men from above by God, since ‘every best giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights’ (James 1:17). If, however, there is anything that is contrary to the truth, then it is ‘a dark invention of the deceit of Satan and a fiction of the mind of an evil spirit’, as the eminent theologian Gregory once said (*Sermon* 39, 3).¹⁸

St John of Damascus secured that the fundamentals of Aristotelian logic, as codified by Porphyry and later Neoplatonist commentators, find a place in his *Fount of Knowledge*; they form the introductory ‘philosophic chapters’ (φιλόσοφα κεφάλαια), which John considered a prerequisite for clarifying theological notions (such as ‘nature’, ‘substance’, and ‘hypostasis’) and, thus, for refuting the arguments of the heretics in the second part of the work (‘On Heresies’; the third part offers ‘An accurate account of the Orthodox faith’).

In general, Byzantine philosophical eclecticism took the form of commending the study of Aristotle’s logic and of the major part of Aristotle’s physics for secular use; this meant that these disciplines should not interfere with the contents of Christian revelation. In virtue of this eclecticism, Aristotle’s correlated physical doctrines on the existence of a fifth element and the eternity of the world, as well as his theology and metaphysics (including his treatise *On the Soul*), which deny (i) the existence of a creator god, (ii) the divine providence towards individual human beings and (iii) the immortality of the individual human soul, were repudiated.¹⁹ The high imperial official Theodore Metochites (1270–1332), who has been praised by various Byzantinists for his rather innovative literary style, actually espouses a very conservative view, when he isolates Aristotle’s logic and physics as the sole domains of Aristotle’s philosophy that are worth studying.²⁰

If studying and excerpting Aristotle’s logic and physics was the mainstream and moderate way of dealing with Aristotle in Byzantium, there must also have been the

¹⁸ John of Damascus, *The Fount of Knowledge*, proem, 43–48 Kotter: Καὶ πρότερον μὲν τῶν παρ’ Ἑλλήσι σοφῶν τὰ κάλλιστα παραθήσομαι εἰδῶς, ὥς, εἴ τι μὲν ἀγαθόν, ἄνωθεν παρὰ θεοῦ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις δεδώρηται, ἐπειδὴ «πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον ἄνωθέν ἐστι καταβαῖνον παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων». Εἴ τι δὲ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀντίπαλον, τῆς σατανικῆς πλάνης «εὗρημα σκοτεινὸν καὶ διανοίας ἀνάπλασμα κακοδαίμονος», ὥς ὁ πολὺς ἐν θεολογίᾳ Ἱρηγόριος.

¹⁹ On this, see the excellent overview and discussion provided by Börje Bydén, “No prince of perfection”: Byzantine anti-Aristotelianism from the patristic period to Pletho, in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium*, eds Dimiter Angelov and Michael Saxby (London: Ashgate, 2013), 147–76.

²⁰ Cf. Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai*, 11 (‘On Aristotle and his fame in natural science and logic’) and 12 (‘Further on Aristotle and his natural science and logic’).

extremes. Two Palaeologian philosophers, namely George Pachymeres (1242– after 1310) and George Scholarios (1403–1472), the first Patriarch of Constantinople under Ottoman rule (as Gennadios II), were the leading figures of an extremely positive assessment of Aristotle, presented as a monotheist who was closer to Christianity than any other pre-Christian thinker (and, indeed, than several Christian thinkers). At the other extreme, which is paradigmatically instantiated in the fideism of Theodore Metochites' pupil Nikephoros Gregoras (c. 1295–1359/61), Aristotle's physics was rejected as providing insecure knowledge (by the very nature of its subject-matter),²¹ whereas Aristotle's logic was deemed able to secure only a vain exhibitionism, associated with the superficiality of Latin scholasticism. Gregoras' anti-Latinism was shared by the second and third generation of pro-Hesychast thinkers, who developed the teachings of Gregory Palamas and explicitly related Aristotle's syllogistic theory to Thomism and Latin heresy.

II. Aristotle's philosophy excerpted: logic and physics

Insofar as they did not interfere with the revealed truths of Christianity, the dialectical skills acquired through the study of Aristotle's *Organon* were highly estimated in the Byzantine court. Together with predictions of eclipses and other calculations of astronomical phenomena, dialectical battles in the emperor's presence are frequently mentioned in Byzantine narratives. Two examples may suffice. Anna Komnene, daughter of the emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118), recounts how the 'consul of the philosophers' (that is, the imperial teacher of philosophy and sciences in Byzantium) John Italos, before being condemned by the ecclesiastical synod as a Platonist in 1082, had enjoyed a great reputation in the palace under the rule of Michael VII Doukas (1067–1078) thanks to his impressive command of dialectics.²² The monk Nikephoros Blemmydes published his *Introductory Epitome* (*Εἰσαγωγικὴ ἐπιτομή*) in two books — 'On Logic' (*περὶ λογικῆς*) and 'On Physics' (*περὶ φυσικῆς*) — at the instigation of the emperor of Nicaea John III Doukas Vatatzes (1222–1254).²³ In his autobiography, Blemmydes relates that he managed to make a great impression on the emperor by beating the 'consul of the philosophers and the greatest among logicians (*τῶν φιλοσόφων ὕπατος καὶ μέγας ἐν λογισταῖς*)' Demetrios Karykes in logical argument.²⁴

The large number of commentaries and compendia on the *Organon* produced by the Byzantines themselves illustrates the major role that logic played within Byzantine higher education. The text most widely used and copied was probably

²¹ See Ιωάννης Α. Δημητρακόπουλος, *Νικολάου Καβάσιλα κατὰ Πύρρωνος. Πλατωνικός φιλοσκεπτικισμός καὶ ἀριστοτελικὸς ἀντισκεπτικισμός στη βυζαντινὴ διανόηση τοῦ 14ου αἰώνα* (Αθήνα: Παρουσία, 2004), 84–109.

²² Cf. Anna Komnene, *Alexias*, V, 8, 3–4.

²³ See the proem of the work, § 5 (PG 142:689C).

²⁴ Cf. Nikephoros Blemmydes, *Curriculum vitae*, I, 2, 8 Munitiz.

Leon Magentenios' commentary,²⁵ composed in the twelfth century and enriched with additional scholia by Neophytos Prodromenos and John Chortasmenos, who taught at the monastery of Prodromou Petra in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries.²⁶ Even philosophers who, as we shall see, expanded Byzantium's philosophic horizon beyond logic, such as Michael Psellos, Eustratius (metropolitan) of Nicaea,²⁷ George Pachymeres and George Scholarios, dealt extensively with the *Organon*: Psellos composed influential paraphrases on the *On the Interpretation* and the *Prior Analytics*, as well as various synopses of several parts of the *Organon*;²⁸ Eustratius produced an exegetical commentary on the second book of the *Posterior Analytics*;²⁹ Pachymeres composed a synopsis of the *Organon* as the first book of his compendium *Philosophia* (which deals with Aristotle's philosophy in twelve books) and produced a (still unedited) full-blown commentary on all six treatises of the *Organon*;³⁰ Scholarios, who was very well versed into the method and contents of Scholasticism, integrated Latin sources in his prolegomena to Aristotle's logic.³¹

By contrast to the study of logic, the study of physics does not seem to have belonged to the 'canon' of Byzantine philosophy before the eleventh century. Rather, it seems to have attracted the isolated interest of some top scholars, such as the one who is responsible for the production of probably the most important manuscript of Aristotle in Byzantium, namely the *Parisinus graecus* 1853 (codex E). This anonymous scholar of the late ninth-early tenth century, designated in the secondary literature as E²,³² made several scholia in the margins of the text of Aristotle's *Physics* and *Meteorology*. Most of them are taken from Philoponus' respective commentaries but at least one of them seems to be his original contribution; commenting on Aristotle's sentence 'that in which the principle of motion originates for all things

²⁵ See Nikolaos Agiotis, *Leon Magentenios. Commentary on Prior Analytics (Book II). Critical Edition with Introduction and English Translation* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, forthcoming).

²⁶ See Michel Cacouras, 'Jean Chortasmenos, katholikos didaskalos, annotateur du Corpus logicum dû à Néophytos Prodromenos', *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 52 (1998): 185–225.

²⁷ Eustratius and Michael of Ephesus produced a joint line-by-line commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* at the instigation of Anna Komnene. They formed the so-called 'intellectual circle' of Anna Komnene, whose activity was to produce commentaries on those treatises of Aristotle for which there existed no commentaries; see Robert Browning, 'An unpublished funeral oration on Anna Comnena', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 188 (1962): 1–12.

²⁸ See the opuscula numbered from 5 to 15 in Psellos' *Philosophica minora*, vol. I: *Opuscula logica, physica, allegorica, alia*, ed. John M. Duffy (Leipzig: Teubner, 1992). On Psellos' paraphrases on the *Organon* see Katerina Ierodiakonou, 'Psellos' paraphrasis on Aristotle's *De interpretatione*', in *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources*, ed. Katerina Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 157–81.

²⁹ Ed. Michael Hayduck (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1907).

³⁰ See Eleni Pappa, 'Die Kommentare des Georgios Pachymeres zum Organon', in *Lesarten. Festschrift für Athanasios Kambylis*, eds Ioannis Vassilis, Gunther S. Henrich and Diether Reinsch (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 198–210.

³¹ Γεωργίου τοῦ Σχολαρίου προλεγόμενα εἰς τὴν Λογικὴν καὶ εἰς τὴν Πορφυρίου Εἰσαγωγὴν, ἐκ διαφορῶν συλλεγέντων βιβλίων, μετὰ ἰδίων ἐπιστάσεων (Oeuvres complètes de Georges Gennadius Scholarios, eds Martin Jugie, Louis Petit, and Xenophon A. Siderides, vol. II [Paris: Maison de la bonne presse, 1936], 7–113).

³² To my mind, this scholar was probably a pupil of Leo the Philosopher (or the Mathematician).

should be considered to be the first cause',³³ E² sums up, in a concise and clear manner that illustrates his level of philosophical understanding, the way in which, according to Aristotle, the separate, self-existent νοῦς moves the different spheres that constitute the universe:

Here [Aristotle] means the separate [= self-existent] intelligence; for this is the cause of the existence of the sensible world. Indeed, it moves immediately the celestial bodies, in particular those which are most proximate to it by nature, that is, the sphere of the fixed stars; and secondarily with regard to it, [it moves] the spheres that [the sphere of the fixed stars] contains; and, finally, [it moves] those that are in generation. Indeed, each [sphere] is moved by the separate intelligence in accordance with its own nature.³⁴

Nevertheless, it is indicative of the lack of interest in Aristotle's physics during the ninth and tenth centuries that in the title of a compendium conceived for teaching purposes and dated to 1007, which reads *Συνοπτικὸν σύνταγμα φιλοσοφίας καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων μαθημάτων*, 'philosophy' simply means 'logic'.³⁵ A systematic study of Aristotle's physics (where 'Aristotle's' is meant in a large sense so as to include the ancient exegetical tradition) seems to have been inaugurated with the consul of the philosophers (possibly an imperial office that was created especially for him) Michael Psellos (1018–1078 or 1096). Psellos, proud of his own accomplishments in the teaching of philosophy, relates in his *Chronographia* that the philosophical teaching he himself had received was restricted to 'certain simple words and propositions', that is, to Aristotle's *Categories* and *On Interpretation*.³⁶ Psellos composed short treatises on several topics from Aristotle's *Meteorology*³⁷ and, more importantly, he famously proclaimed that the Hellenes 'came to know nature as it has been created by God; therefore, we should draw our theory about natural things from there'.³⁸

³³ Aristotle, *Meteorology*, I 2, 339a23–24: ὅθεν γὰρ ἡ τῆς κινήσεως ἀρχὴ πᾶσιν, ἐκείνην αἰτίαν νομιστέον πρῶτην.

³⁴ *Parisinus gr.* 1853, f. 129v, in *marginē exteriore*: Ἐνταῦθα τὸν νοῦν αἰνίττεται τὸν χωριστόν· οὗτος γὰρ αἰτιός ἐστι τῆς ὑποστάσεως τοῦ κόσμου τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ· προσεχῶς μὲν γὰρ κινεῖ τὰ οὐράνια, καὶ τούτων τὰ προσεχέστερα τῇ φύσει, οἷον τὴν ἀπλανῆ, καὶ ταύτης δευτέρως τὰς ἐχομένας ταύτῃ σφαίρας, καὶ ὑστέρω τὰς ἐν γενέσει· ἐκάστη γὰρ ὡς ἔχει φύσεως οὕτως καὶ κινεῖται ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.

³⁵ This work, which is attributed to a certain Gregorios Aneponymus in some catalogue entries, is widely known as the Anonymous Heiberg after the name of the Danish scholar who produced its edition: *Anonymi logica et quadrivium cum scholiis antiquis*, ed. Johan Ludvig Heiberg (Copenhagen, 1929). On this work, see Sten Ebbesen, *Commentators and Commentaries on Aristotle's Sophistici Elenchi. A Study of Post-Aristotelian Ancient and Medieval Writings on Fallacies* (Leyde: Brill, 1981), vol. I, 262–63.

³⁶ Cf. Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, I, 6, 37 Renauld. See also Michael Psellos, *Oratoria minora*, 8, lin. 154–159 Littlewood, where Psellos boasts to his pupils that he was the first in Byzantium to reveal 'the entire νοῦς of Aristotle' and to teach 'separately (*ιδίᾳ*) [Aristotle's] theories on nature and his treatise on the first substances'; the latter reference may be to book *Lambda* of the *Metaphysics*.

³⁷ See the opuscula numbered from 16 to 31 in Psellos' *Philosophica minora*, vol. I: *Opuscula logica, physica, allegorica, alia*, ed. John M. Duffy (Leipzig: Teubner, 1992).

³⁸ Cf. Michael Psellos, *Oratoria minora*, 24, lin. 70–79 Littlewood: Ἐγὼ γ' οὖν ὑμᾶς βούλομαι ἀποτρόφους

Ancient physics was thus put on the track of the Byzantine philosophical curriculum. It is again indicative that, a couple of decades later, the consul of the philosophers Theodore of Smyrna, produced an *Ἐπιτομή τῶν ὅσα περὶ φύσεως καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν ἀρχῶν τοῖς παλαιοῖς διείληπται* (*An Epitome of all considerations of the ancients with regard to nature and the natural principles*); this is basically a compendium of Aristotle's *Physics* I–IV, *On the Heavens* and *On the Generation and Corruption*.³⁹ I have already mentioned Blemmydes' *Introductory Epitome* from the middle of the thirteenth century, which comprises, in typically eclectic manner,⁴⁰ topics from both logic and physics. Blemmydes' pupil George Akropolites (1217–1282), who later assumed the restoration of higher education in the recovered Constantinople, is also known to have taught logic and physics.⁴¹ George Pachymeres, who was probably a pupil of Akropolites, wrote a full-blown commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*.⁴² Belonging to the next generation of scholars, Theodore Metochites wrote a paraphrasis on all natural treatises by Aristotle (*Εἰς πάντα τὰ φυσικὰ τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους*), including the treatise *On the Soul* and all the biological and zoological treatises.⁴³ It is worth noting that, when it comes to Aristotle's first philosophy, Metochites expresses his great disappointment and regrets the fact that the previous generations of scribes and scholars preserved the *Metaphysics* for posterity.⁴⁴

μὲν εἶναι τῶν κοινῶν ἐθῶν, τροφίμους δὲ ταῖς ἐπιστήμαις, καὶ νῦν μὲν τῶν νοημάτων ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, νῦν δὲ τὴν γλῶτταν ἀνακαθαίρειν καὶ περὶ τὴν περιβολὴν τοῦ λόγου πονεῖν, εἰδέναι τε ὡς ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ σοφία, περὶ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ διαμαρτάνουσα καὶ τὸ θεολογικὸν μέρος οὐκ ἀναμάρτητον ἔχουσα, τὴν φύσιν οὕτως ἐγνώρισεν ὡς αὐτὸς ὁ πλάστης ἐποίησε. χρὴ οὖν ἡμᾶς ἐκεῖθεν μὲν ἔχειν τὴν περὶ ταῦτα θεωρίαν, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς ἡμετέρας σοφίας τὸν τύπον γινώσκειν καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν, καὶ τὸ μὲν γράμμα ἐπιθραύειν ὥσπερ ἔλκτρον, τὸ δὲ κεκρυμμένον πνεῦμα ὥσπερ μαργαρίτας ἀναχωννύειν. On this passage, see also below, n. 54 and 55.

³⁹ On this work, recently edited by Linos Benakis (Αθήνα: Ακαδημία Αθηνῶν, 2013), see Michele Trizio, 'Ancient physics in the mid-Byzantine period: the Epitome of Theodore of Smyrna Consul of the Philosophers under Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118)', *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale* 54 (2012): 77–99.

⁴⁰ In line with St John of Damascus' *Philosophic chapters*, but this time extending Byzantine eclecticism into physics, Blemmydes included in his *Epitome*, as he himself says in his *Autobiography*, 'those topics that are not remote from usefulness' (Blemmydes, *Curriculum vitae*, II, 75.8 Munitiz: ὅσα μὴ πόρρω τοῦ χρησίμου). These topics are excerpted exclusively from the ancient exegetical tradition on Aristotle's *Organon* and physics (*Physics*, *On Generation and Corruption*, *Meteorology*, *On the Heavens*), whereas some fundamental doctrines of Aristotle on natural philosophy, namely his doctrines on the eternity of the world and the existence of the fifth element, are not excerpted in the *Epitome physica* (in the last chapters, Blemmydes relies on Philoponus' *On the eternity of the world against Proclus*); see Wolfgang Lackner, 'Zum Lehrbuch der Physik des Nikephoros Blemmydes', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 4 (1972): 157–69; Pantelis Golitsis, 'Nicéphore Blemmyde lecteur du Commentaire de Simplicius à la Physique d'Aristote', in *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, ed. Cristina D'Ancona Costa (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 243–56.

⁴¹ According to George of Cyprus' testimony, Akropolites taught Aristotle's logic and physics, as well as 'theology in the manner of Plato' (Πλάτωνα θεολογοῦντα); see Pantelis Golitsis, 'Georges Pachymère comme didascale. Essai pour une reconstitution de sa carrière et de son enseignement philosophique', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 58 (2008): 53–68, at 61–62. The reference to Plato seems to be rather to the (Neo)Platonic tradition, exploited for explicating difficult passages of the Fathers.

⁴² See Pantelis Golitsis, 'Un commentaire perpétuel de Georges Pachymère à la Physique d'Aristote, faussement attribué à Michel Psellos', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 100 (2007): 637–76.

⁴³ An *editio princeps* of Metochites' paraphrase is being prepared by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences (*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca et Byzantina*).

⁴⁴ Cf. Metochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai*, 21 ('On Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Hermogenes' book *On the Method of Force*'). Metochites' rejection of the *Metaphysics* as useless may be read also as downgrading

Thus, it may strike one as strange that, in his *Florentius* or *On Wisdom*, Nikephoros Gregoras downplays the philosophical knowledge of his opponent Barlaam (c.1290–1348), a monk from Calabria, by claiming that ‘the wisdom [...] he drew from Italy was not ‘various and total’ but restricted to Aristotle’s philosophy, namely his physics and his syllogistic theory, because this is the philosophy that is mostly studied by the Latins and the Italians who reside there.’⁴⁵ The study of philosophy during the empire of Nicaea and in the early Palaeologian era did not exceed the contents that Gregoras pejoratively ascribed to the philosophical knowledge of the Italians. And even if things got progressively better, Gregoras’ master Metochites explicitly repudiated the study of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Nonetheless, *Florentius* is a Platonically inspired dialogue and, as the quotation from the *Philebus* implies (30b, *πᾶσαν καὶ παντοίαν σοφίαν*), Gregoras wished to exalt, in line with his master,⁴⁶ his acquaintance with Plato’s philosophy, which was unknown to the Westerners. We should bear in mind, however, that the study of Plato and the Neoplatonic tradition was revived in Constantinople only a couple of decades earlier to a great extent thanks to the teaching, copying and writings of George Pachymeres.⁴⁷ It is indicative of the philosophical climate that reigned in the generation before Pachymeres that Akropolites hints at Blemmydes’ lack of acquaintance with Plato and the Neoplatonists; he complains that his master was unable to provide him with a correct interpretation of a difficult sentence by Gregory of Nazianzus, which he discovered by himself thanks to his personal study of ‘the most divine Plato and the muse-taken Proclus and the inspired men Iamblichus and Plotinus’.⁴⁸ Akropolites may in his turn have influenced Pachymeres.

We may, therefore, say that Aristotle’s logic and physics, read along with the elucidations and criticisms of the ancient exegetical tradition, were at the core of the philosophical activity in Byzantium. What differentiates the work of the Byzantine commentators from the work of their ancient predecessors is basically not the content but the form: the Byzantines privileged the form of synopsis and, to a lesser extent, the form of paraphrasis rather than the line-by-line exegesis, which was the main form of commentary in the ancient and medieval (Arabic and Latin) exegetical tradition. This was due, of course, to the fact that the form of synopsis or compendi-

the activity of previous Byzantine philosophers such as Michael of Ephesus and George Pachymeres, who wrote full-blown commentaries on Aristotle’s treatise.

⁴⁵ Nikephoros Gregoras, *Florentius*, lin. 352–57: *τὴν δὲ ‘σοφίαν’ οὐκ ἐκ Καλαβρίας, ἀλλ’ ἐς τὰ βαθύτερα τῆς Ἰταλίας ἰόντα ἀρύσασθαι, καὶ ταύτην οὐ ‘παντοίαν καὶ πᾶσαν’ ἀλλὰ μόνην τὴν Ἀριστοτέλους, ὅση περὶ τὰ φυσικὰ γίνεται καὶ ὅση περὶ συλλογισμούς, ἐπειδὴ καὶ αὕτη γε ἐς τὰ μάλιστα τοῖς ἐκεῖ Λατίνοις τε καὶ Ἰταλιώταις σπουδάζεται.*

⁴⁶ In several of his *Semeiōseis gnōmikai* (3, 5, 10, 13, 25), Metochites speaks very favourably of Plato, especially when it comes to comparing Plato with Aristotle.

⁴⁷ On Pachymeres’ philosophical manuscripts see Pantelis Golitsis, ‘Copistes, élèves et érudits: la production de manuscrits philosophiques autour de Georges Pachymère’, in *The Legacy of Bernard de Montfaucon: Three Hundred Years of Studies on Greek Handwriting*, eds Antonio Bravo García, Inmaculada Pérez Martín, and Juan Signes Codoñer (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 157–70.

⁴⁸ Cf. Georgios Akropolites, *Opera* (‘In Gregorii Nazianzeni sententias’), 71.1–13 Wirth.

um was better adapted to the needs of Byzantine higher education. Indeed, Byzantine higher education did not aim at training professional philosophers or scholars but at educating the Byzantine aristocracy, from which high church and state officials traditionally came; the compendia enabled such students to have a quick acquaintance with Aristotle's logic and, in some cases, Aristotle's physics. But it was also the most appropriate form for doing philosophy eclectically, as Byzantium wanted it.

III. Aristotle's logic as a source of earlier and later heresies

Although the study and use of logic was not commended by divinely inspired (θεόπνευστοι) men, that is, the apostles and the saints, the dialectical skills that are associated with it were important for Byzantine church politics. Of course, in line with the doctrine of the single truth, granting truth to logic while clarifying Christological or triadological matters was prohibited; the use of syllogisms in theology was readily condemned in Byzantium. In as early as in the work of St John of Damascus (who, as said, included notions of logic in the first part of his *Fount of Knowledge*), the heretical Jacobites (as the monophysites in Syria were called) were dismissed because they admitted Aristotle among the saints and theologised with him, as if Aristotle was the thirteenth apostle.⁴⁹ John explicitly associates Aristotle's syllogistic theory with the heresy of the Aetians and the 'Unlikes' (*anhomoioi*, because for them the Son is completely 'unlike' the Father; they are identical to the Eunomians), a development of Arianism:

These 'Unlikes' and the Aetians totally alienate Christ and the Holy Spirit from God the Father, maintaining strongly that Christ is created, and they say that Christ does not even have a resemblance [with God the Father]. They want to describe [the nature of] God with Aristotelian syllogisms and syllogistic diagrams and [to show] through such [syllogistic] moods that Christ cannot be from God.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, some hundred years later, the Patriarch Photius (810–893) spoke of 'those who go after the truth using logical methods',⁵¹ and Psellos, who appears once more on the scene of Byzantine philosophy as an important figure, clearly in-

⁴⁹ Cf. John of Damascus, *Contra Jacobitas*, 10 Kotter: Οὐκ ἔστι τοῦτο φλήναφος καὶ διανοίας ἀνάπλασμα κακοδαίμονος, δαιμόνων εὕρημα σκοτεινὸν καὶ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς τερθρείας τεράτευμα; Τίς τοῦτο τῶν θεοφόρων εἶρηκε πώποτε, εἰ μὴ που τὸν παρ' ὑμῖν ἅγιον Ἀριστοτέλην ἡμῖν ὡς τρισκαιδέκατον ἀπόστολον εἰσαγάγοιτε καὶ τῶν θεοπνεύστων τὸν εἰδωολάτρην προκρίνοιτε;

⁵⁰ John of Damascus, *De haeresibus*, 76 Kotter: Οὗτοι οἱ Ἀνόμοιοι καὶ οἱ Ἀετιανοὶ παντάπασιν Χριστὸν καὶ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα ἀπαλλοτριῶσι θεοῦ πατρός, κτιστὸν αὐτὸν διαβεβαιούμενοι, καὶ οὐδὲ ὁμοιότητά τινα ἔχειν λέγουσιν. Ἐκ συλλογισμῶν Ἀριστοτελικῶν καὶ γεωμετρικῶν τὸν θεὸν παριστᾶν βούλονται, καὶ Χριστὸν δῆθεν μὴ δύνασθαι εἶναι ἐκ θεοῦ διὰ τοιούτων τρόπων.

⁵¹ Photius, *Epistulae et Amphilochia*, Epist. 290, 68–69 Laourdas/Westerink: τῶν ταῖς λογικαῖς μεθόδους ἱχνευόντων τὸ ἀληθές.

augurated a neutral stance towards the use of logic in theology—and neutrality, in this context, is tantamount to positivity. In a letter to his friend and jurist John Xiphilinos, Psellos claims that the syllogistic theory is by no means a doctrine alien to the Church and openly speaks in favour of those who try to rationally understand the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers of the Church:

Insofar as syllogisms are concerned, I have not yet come to despise their figure – I wish I could despise them, so that I could see our Lord in [His] figure and not in riddles!⁵² Syllogising, my brother, is neither a dogma alien to the Church nor an incredible position of those who philosophise [viz. as opposed to the divine discourses] but is only an instrument of truth and a discovery of a thing that is sought. And if someone, [reasoning] in a more logical manner [than we do], does not wish to espouse the right reason, nor does he wish to eat solid food but to drink only milk, as the Corinthian does, should we, who do hard work in the precision and explanation of the [divine] discourses, be proscribed?⁵³

Psellos insinuates that logical reasoning is indispensable for those who wish to acquire an *understanding* of the deeper meaning of the Scriptures. Whereas the ancient philosophical texts have no authority in theological matters (they cannot teach the ‘truth’, i.e., the mystery of Trinity),⁵⁴ they do offer the tools for clarifying the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers (most of all, the sermons of Gregory of Nazianzus), which are for Psellos authoritative allegorical or allusive

⁵² A tacit reference to Paul (1 Cor 13:12: βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι’ ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι).

⁵³ Michael Psellos, *Ad Ioannem Xiphilinum Epistula*, lin. 109–118 Criscuolo: Τὰ δὲ τῶν συλλογισμῶν, εἶδους νῦν μὲν οὕτω καταπεφρόνηκα—γένοιτο δέ μοι καταφρονῆσαι, ὥστε ἐν εἶδει ὁρᾶν ἀλλὰ μὴ δι’ αἰνιγμάτων τὸν Κύριον! τὸ γὰρ συλλογίζεσθαι, ἀδελφέ, οὔτε δόγμα ἐστὶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀλλότριον οὔτε θέσις τις τῶν κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν παράδοξος, ἀλλ’ ἢ μόνον ὄργανον ἀληθείας καὶ ζητουμένου πράγματος εὑρεσις. εἰ δέ τις μὴ βούλοιο λογικώτερον τῷ ὀρθοτόμῳ προσιέναι λόγῳ μηδὲ τροφήν ἐσθίειν στερρὰν, ἀλλ’ ἢ μόνον γαλακτοποιεῖν οἷα Κορίνθιος, διὰ ταῦτα ἐν γραφαῖς ἡμεῖς οἱ ταλαιπωροῦντες ἐν τοῖς ἡκριβωμένοις λόγοις ἐσόμεθα; This is a fine example of Psellos’ high prose, in which ambiguity of meaning is combined with hidden references to Christian and secular literature (Aeschines, Hippocratic corpus).

⁵⁴ Psellos actually condemned Hellenic theology as aberrant in content in its major part (cf. *Theologica*, VII, 53–54 Gautier: οὐ γὰρ πᾶσα Ἑλληνικὴ δόξα διαβέβληται πρὸς ἡμῶν, τινὲς δὲ καὶ συνεργοὶ τοῦ ἡμετέρου τυγχάνουσι δόγματος) and as erroneous in method in some cases (ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ σοφία, περὶ τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ διαμαρτάνουσα καὶ τὸ θεολογικὸν μέρος οὐκ ἀναμάρτητον ἔχουσα, quoted above, n. 37); therefore, he commended the study of Hellenic theology with caution as a method for going deeper into the understanding of (and not for modelling the faith to) Christian doctrine. Psellos’ rehabilitation of Hellenic philosophy within Byzantine Christianity is extremely important. The reader who nevertheless is in search of ‘Byzantine crypto-pagans’ may read several studies by Kaldellis and Siniossoglou, e.g., Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), *passim*, and Niketas Siniossoglou, ‘Ἀπὸ τὴν ὀρθότητα τῶν ονομάτων στὴν ὀρθότητα τῶν δογμάτων: τὸ πρόβλημα μετὰ τὴν βυζαντινὴν φιλοσοφία’, *Deukalion* 27 (2010): 45–70.

texts: ‘we should break their letter like the nacre and extract their hidden spirit like the pearl’, as he elsewhere says.⁵⁵

Psellos did not actually make use of syllogisms for that purpose; rather, he appealed to Proclus and Neoplatonist metaphysics to acquire a better understanding of the thought of the Fathers. John Italos, however, who succeeded Psellos in the office of the consul of the philosophers, tacitly refuted St John of Damascus’ view that there cannot be two uncreated principles,⁵⁶ and Italos’ pupil Eustratius of Nicaea ventured to prove the two natures in Christ against the claims of the Armenians (who were monophysites) through ‘rational, natural and theological argumentations.’⁵⁷ Echoing Psellos with a more vivid voice, Eustratius famously claimed that throughout the gospels Christ makes use of Aristotelian syllogisms.⁵⁸ Both Italos and Eustratius were accused of heresy and were respectively condemned, with the emperor’s approval, by the ecclesiastical synods of 1082 and 1117.⁵⁹ By the end of his reign, Alexios I had restored the traditional Byzantine stance towards philosophy and logic.

In the subsequent course of history, however, the Byzantines were compelled to conduct various debates with the Latin Church. Mastery of logic was necessary for defeating the opponent and, what is more, for defeating the opponent with the opponent’s weapon. As the politics vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church was becoming all the more crucial for the destiny of the empire, the need for able dialecticians became urgent in Byzantium. The most notable case is perhaps Barlaam. This Calabrian monk, who had acquired a command of Aristotle’s logic in Italy, made a name for himself in Byzantium by being more knowledgeable in logic and dialectics than any of his contemporary Constantinopolitan dialecticians and philosophers. Barlaam acted as the emperor’s representative in the discussions with the representatives of the Pope John XXII about the union of the Churches, which were held in Constantinople in 1333–1334. In his subsequently published twenty-one treatises *Against the Latins*,⁶⁰ Barlaam opposed the ignorance of the Dominican

⁵⁵ τὸ μὲν γράμμα ἐπιθραύειν ὥσπερ ἔλκτρον, τὸ δὲ κεκρυμμένον πνεῦμα ὥσπερ μαργαρίτας ἀναχννύειν (quoted above, n. 38).

⁵⁶ See John Italos, *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, § 54: *Ei δύο εἰσὶν ἀρχαὶ ἀγένητοι*, which tacitly refers to John of Damascus’ *Expositio fidei*, § 93.

⁵⁷ See the characteristic title of one of his orations (published by Ανδρόνικος Δημητρακόπουλος, *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη* (Leipzig, 1866 [reprinted Hildesheim 1965]), vol. I, I, 7: *Τοῦ αὐτοῦ Εὐστρατίου ἔλεγχος καὶ ἀνατροπὴ τῶν λεγόντων μίαν φύσιν ἐπὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐκ λογικῶν καὶ φυσικῶν καὶ θεολογικῶν ἐπιχειρήσεων, ἐξ ὧν δέικνυται ἀναγκαίως ἐκ δύο φύσεων εἶναι τὸν σωτῆρα Χριστόν μου*.

⁵⁸ See Anthony C. Lloyd, ‘The Aristotelianism of Eustratius of Nicaea’, in *Aristoteles. Werk und Wirkung: Paul Moraux gewidmet*, ed. Jürgen Wiesner (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), vol. II, 341–51.

⁵⁹ On Italos see Lowell Clucas, *The Trial of John Italos and the Crisis of Intellectual Values in Byzantium in the Eleventh Century* (Wien: Institut für Byzantinistik, Neugriechische Philologie und Byzantinische Kunstgeschichte, 1981). On Eustratius, cf. *Synodicon Orthodoxiae*, lin. 388–390 Gouillard: *Τὰ εὐρεθέντα ἀλλότρια τῶν ὁρθῶν δογμάτων τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐν τοῖς γραφεῖσι κατὰ Ἀρμενίων δυοὶ λόγοις παρὰ Εὐστρατίου τοῦ γεγονότος μητροπολίτου Νικαίας τὰ καὶ ἀναθεματισθέντα, ἀνάθεμα*.

⁶⁰ Antonis Fyrigos, *Barlaam Calabro opere contro i latini: Introduzione, storia dei testi, edizione critica*,

friars, who relied on Aristotle's apodeictic syllogism in order to prove veridical theses in Trinitarian theology. According to him, religious truths are revealed by faith and thus provide us with premisses on which only dialectical syllogisms can be built; for these are not apodeictic premisses, to which dialecticians are rationally compelled to consent, but dialectical premisses, that is, beliefs. An Orthodox and a Roman Catholic start from premisses that they do not share (e.g., on the question of the *filioque*); therefore, they cannot reach an agreement about the procession of the Holy Spirit.

As Barlaam's anti-Latin stance was solidly Byzantine, it may seem to be an irony of history that a theologian who was to become a leading figure for the late Byzantine and post-Byzantine Orthodoxy, namely St Gregory Palamas, defended the use of apodeictic syllogisms in theology, wishing to 'demonstrate' that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father. In his epistles to Barlaam, whom he accused of *latinophronia* (Barlaam later converted to the Roman Catholic Church), Palamas claimed that religious truths are not dialectical but apodeictic; for they are revealed by God, and God is the only immutable being on which true demonstrative science, as opposed to opinion, can be founded. This seems to be an attitude close to the fideism of Metochites and Gregoras but without pessimism and with less philosophical vigour.⁶¹ Be that as it may, once the Palamite distinction between God's essence and (uncreated) energies (or the Tabor light) was established and sanctioned, the use of Aristotelian syllogisms to disprove this distinction was prohibited by the Church. Despite the fact that within their anti-Latin polemics both Barlaam and Gregoras had condemned the use of Aristotle's syllogistic theory in theology,⁶² they themselves were condemned because they turned the weapon of logic not against the enemy but against a friend, namely the pious Athonite monk, who represented the traditional Byzantine spirituality, and the Palamite theologian, who undertook to defend him. For surely, only the truly pious (*εὐσεβής*) monk would experience in this world, through his prayer and his self-transformation, a union with God's uncreated energy – not the scholastic nor the philosopher.

Fideism became all the more dominant in fourteenth century Byzantine society. Among the next generation of philosopher-theologians, Prochoros Kydones (c. 1330–1369/71), a former Athonite monk who together with his brother Demetrios translated in Greek the major works of Thomas Aquinas, felt the need 'to defend myself against those who accuse the use of syllogism as an unacceptable perturba-

traduzione e indici (Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1998).

⁶¹ By such reasoning, Palamas seemed to confuse types of reasoning (those based on intuitive irrefutable truths and those based on shared beliefs as the religious dogmas are) with the types of beings (created or uncreated) to which they apply; see Antonis Fyrigos, 'Gregorio Palamas e il "palamismo"', *Eastern Theological Journal* 2 (2015): 205–41, at 207–11.

⁶² See Antonis Fyrigos, 'Barlaam Calabro e la Rinascenza italiana', *Il Veltrio* 31 (1987): 395–403; B. Bydén, 'The criticism of Aristotle in Nikephoros Gregoras' *Florentius*', in *Δῶρον ῥοδοποιίκλον. Studies in Honour of Jan Olof Rosenqvist*, eds Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, Jan Heldt, and Denis Michael Searby (Uppsala, 2012), 107–22.

tion of theology. I believe that every truth [that is, the religious truth too] is either a beginning of a syllogism or a syllogism.’⁶³ By defending the validity of rational theology, Kydones was seen as espousing a Thomistic principle and as substituting the Holy Scriptures with Aristotelian syllogistic, as it had happened in early heresies; he was condemned as heretical by the ecclesiastical synod of 1368. Let me quote the latter’s verdict:

And going on with his writing, [Kydones] puts in between the following chapter titles: ‘That the intellective energy of God is the essence of God’; ‘That the intellective power of God is the essence of God’; ‘That the wisdom of God is the essence of God’; ‘That the truth of God is the essence of God’; ‘That the will of God is the essence of God’.⁶⁴ And *he proves all these not from the divine scriptures, nor by putting forward the sayings of the Saints, but through his own reasonings and using the Aristotelian syllogisms allegedly as proofs.* And when he speaks about God – or, to say it better, when he battles against God – speaking about the most divine light that shone from Christ on the Mount, he puts the following title: ‘That the Tabor light is created’; [...] and he proves this through many syllogisms of Aristotle, and he says and syllogizes many blasphematory and impious things.⁶⁵

The triumph of Palamism in the fourteenth century did not only bring about the condemnation of Byzantine Thomists but also the condemnation of Aristotle *tout court*, who was henceforth considered as an ally of the Latins. By the time the Ferrara-Florence council was summoned during 1438–1439 with the purpose of reuniting the Roman Catholic and the Byzantine Orthodox Churches, George Gemistos, alias Pletho, compared Aristotle to Plato (in his so-called *De differentiis*) only to downgrade the former, claiming chiefly that Plato is higher-minded than Aristotle and closer to Christianity, despite the claims to the contrary by Averroes and his followers.⁶⁶ This was a claim directed also against the preference

⁶³ Prochorus Cydones, *De significatione syllogismi*, lin. 1–4 Tinnefeld: Ἀπολογητέον δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἐγκαλοῦντας τὴν τοῦ συλλογισμοῦ χρήσιν ὡς τίνα θεολογίας χρασμὸν ἀπαράδεκτον· οἶμαι γὰρ ὅτι πᾶσα ἀλήθεια ἢ ἀρχὴ συλλογισμοῦ ἐστὶν ἢ συλλογισμός. The last sentence echoes exhaustive divisions frequently used by Aristotle.

⁶⁴ Kydones’ chapter titles derive from Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 73; see Christos Triantafyllopoulos, ‘The Thomist basis of Prochoros Kydones’ anti-Palamite treatise “De essentia et operatione Dei”’, in *Knotenpunkt Byzanz*, eds Andreas Speer and Philipp Steinkrüger, 411–30, at 424.

⁶⁵ *Tome against the monk Prochoros Kydones*, lin. 236–54 Rigo: Μεταξὺ δὲ προϊῶν ἐπιγραφὰς τίθησι τοῖς κεφαλαίοις τοιαύτας· Ὅτι ἡ νοερά τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐνέργειά ἐστιν ἡ οὐσία αὐτοῦ. Ὅτι ἡ νοερά τοῦ Θεοῦ δύναμις ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία αὐτοῦ. Ὅτι ἡ σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία αὐτοῦ. Ὅτι ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία αὐτοῦ. Ὅτι ἡ του Θεοῦ θέλησίς ἐστιν ἡ οὐσία αὐτοῦ. Καὶ ταῦτα ἀποδείκνυσιν οὐκ ἀπὸ τῶν θείων γραφῶν, οὐ ρητὰ προφέρων ἀγίων, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἰδίους λογισμοῖς καὶ ταῖς ἀποδείξεσι χρώμενος δῆθεν τοῖς ἀριστοτελικοῖς συλλογισμοῖς. Περὶ δὲ τοῦ λάμπαντος ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῷ ὄρει θειοτάτου φωτὸς θεολογῶν, μᾶλλον δὲ θεομαχῶν, ἐπιγραφὴν μὲν τίθησιν· Ὅτι τὸ ἐν Θαβωρίῳ φῶς κτιστόν· [...] καὶ τοῦτο διὰ πολλῶν ἀποδείκνυσιν τῶν τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους συλλογισμῶν, καὶ πολλὰ ἕτερα βλάσφημα καὶ δυσσεβῆ λέγει καὶ συλλογίζεται.

⁶⁶ Cf. Pletho, *On Aristotle’s Departures from Plato*, lin. 3–8 Bydén: Οἱ μὲν ἡμῶν παλαιότεροι καὶ Ἕλληνων

of the western Scholastics. Although Pletho is notorious for his radical thinking on political matters, his anti-Aristotelianism was traditionally Byzantine. There is again something of a historical irony in the fact that Aristotle was vindicated by Pletho's 'conservative' opponent George Scholarios, who is unique in his admiration of Scholastic philosophy and his defence of the Palamite distinction between divine essence and energies.⁶⁷ At the same time, Scholarios associated the hierarchically ordered Platonic hypostases of the Good, the Intelligence and the Soul with the early Christian heresies with regard to Trinity.⁶⁸

It may not be due merely to a rhetorical exaggeration that, in his dedicatory letter to the despot of Mystra, Constantine Palaiologos (who later became the last emperor of Byzantium), with which he prefaces his *Prolegomena to Logic*, Scholarios complains that very few people in Constantinople in his time were apt to understand Aristotelian philosophy and logic.⁶⁹ Scholarios established his own school in Constantinople with the wish to revive Aristotle in fifteenth century Byzantium thanks to his thorough acquaintance with the texts and commentaries of scholasticism. Such a revival would be compatible with the ancient veneration of Aristotle in spite of Pletho's claim to the contrary:

Pletho claims that the oldest among the Greek and Roman philosophers preferred Plato to Aristotle. None of them, however, preferred Plato to such extent as to oppose against Aristotle his own treatise. On the contrary, they explained with much labor the sciences which Aristotle marvelously found and determined for all the genera of being, considering that they act for the benefit of themselves and of mankind, and acknowledging that only Aristotle is and will be worthy of being the leader in philosophy for all people.⁷⁰

καὶ Ῥωμαίων Πλάτωνα Ἀριστοτέλους πολλῶ τῷ μέσῳ προετίμων· τῶν δὲ νῦν, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν πρὸς ἐσπέραν, οἱ πολλοὶ ἅτε ἐκείνων σοφώτεροι οἰόμενοι γεγονέναι, Ἀριστοτέλη πρὸ Πλάτωνος θαυμάζουσιν, Ἀβερὸν τινὶ Ἀραβὶ πειθόμενοι μόνον Ἀριστοτέλη φάσκοντι τέλεόν τι τῆς φύσεως ἐς σοφίαν ἔργον ἀποτετελέσθαι.

⁶⁷ It is indicative of Scholarios' open-mindedness and curious spirit that he sought to find allies of Palamite theology in John Duns Scotus and his followers; see Christiaan W. Kappes, 'The Latin sources of the Palamite theology of George-Gennadius Scholarius', *Nicolaus* 40 (2013): 71–114; Pantelis Golitsis, 'Ἐσέντζια, ὄντοτης, οὐσία: George Scholarios' philosophical understanding of Thomas Aquinas' *De ente et essentia* and his use of Armandus de Bellovisu's commentary', in *Never the Twain Shall Meet: Latins and Greeks Learning from Each Other in Byzantium*, ed. Denis Searby, (Berlin, 2017), 181–98. Scholarios claimed that even Aquinas would be supportive of the Palamite distinction.

⁶⁸ Cf. George Scholarios, *Tractatus de processu spiritus sancti*, 65.38–66.10 Jugie/Petit/Siderides.

⁶⁹ Cf. George Scholarios, *Epistula Constantino Palaeologo dedicata*, lin. 92–93 Jugie/Petit/Siderides: καὶ εἰσὶ φεῦ ἐν ἀπάσῃ τῇ πόλει τρεῖς ἢ τέτταρες, οἱ δυνάμενοι τὰ φιλοσοφίας δέχεσθαι δόγματα.

⁷⁰ George Scholarios, *Against Pletho's ignorance of Aristotle*, 3, 1–8 Jugie/Petit/Siderides: Ὁ μὲν δὴ Πλήθων Ἀριστοτέλους προτιμᾶν φησι Πλάτωνα τοὺς παλαιότερους Ἑλλήνων τε καὶ Ῥωμαίων σοφούς, καίτοι ἐκείνων οὐδεὶς οὕτω προετίμησε Πλάτωνα, ὥστε καὶ ἰδίαν κατ' Ἀριστοτέλους πραγματείαν ἐνστήσασθαι· τοὺναντίον μὲν οὖν, ἅς ἐπιστήμας ἐκείνος τοῖς τοῦ ὄντος γένεσι πᾶσιν ὑπερφυνῶς ἐξευρὼν ἀφώρισεν, ἐξηγήσαντο πολὺν ἀναδεξάμενοι πόνον, ἑαυτοῖς δὲ πού καὶ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις συμφέροντα πράττειν οὕτως ὑπειληφότες, καὶ μόνον Ἀριστοτέλη νομίσαντες ἄξιον ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν ἡγεμόνα πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις εἶναι τε καὶ ἔσεσθαι.

Scholarios' remark promptly brings me to the next and final section of the present contribution.

IV. Aristotle as an exemplary thinker close to Christianity

For some Byzantines, Aristotle was an inspiring philosopher, a Hellene whose philosophy could not only enrich human knowledge about the world but was also useful for strengthening some fundamental dogmas of Christianity. The first scholar who deserves our attention in this respect is the anonymous E², whom I have already mentioned as the person responsible for the production of the *Parisinus gr.* 1853, the important codex produced around 900, which contains Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, as well as his biological and zoological treatises. E² corrected the copying errors made by the four scribes who prepared the manuscript, and at places annotated Aristotle's text. When he arrived at the end of the *Physics*, he added in the margin the following 'heroic verses' (στίχοι ἡρωικοί) (i.e., elegiac distiches):

Mortal as I am, I know that I was born ephemeral but when I search after the
serried multitude of the stars in their circular course,
I no longer touch the earth with my feet but in the presence of Christ himself
I take my fill of the ambrosia that feeds the gods.⁷¹

This is a slightly modified version of an epigram attributed to Ptolemy,⁷² a sample of what has been called in the scholarly literature 'astral mysticism'.⁷³ The epigram, which in all probability did not exist in the main model of the manuscript (since it was not copied by the primary scribe), was added by E² from another source with the following modification: *χριστῶι* instead of *ζανί*, that is, 'in the presence of Christ' instead of 'in the presence of Jupiter'. This is a significant modification; for if E² was interested in copying Ptolemy's epigram for 'bookish' reasons, he would have copied it without modification (and, of course, if he was afraid of being accused of Hellenic polytheism, he would not have copied it all). The modification does not reflect censorship—as un-Byzantine Byzantinists would be too ready to admit—but adjustment of Ptolemy's epigram to the Christian worldview. And if it was adjusted, it was because it had something to say. *Physics* ends by demonstrating the necessity of the existence of an indivisible, and therefore immaterial, first being, which moves the world; in other words, it culminates in God. E²'s engaged reading of Aristotle's

⁷¹ *Parisinus gr.* 1853, f. 67v: οἶδ' ὅτι θνητὸς ἔφην καὶ ἐφ' ἄμερος ἄλλ' ὅτ' ἂν ἄστρον / μαστεύω πυκινὰς ἀμφιδρόμους ἑλίκας / οὐκέτ' ἐπιπαύων γαίης ποσὶν, ἀλλὰ παρ' αὐτῶι / Χριστῶι θεοτρεφέος πίμπλαμαι ἀμβροσίης.

⁷² The Ptolemaic epigram is included in the Anthology of Konstantinos Kephalas, confectioned around 900, later integrated in the so-called Palatine Anthology (IX, 57).

⁷³ Henri D. Saffrey, 'Nouveaux oracles chaldaïques dans les scholies du *Paris. gr.* 1853', *Revue de philologie* 43 (1969): 59–72.

text called into his memory Ptolemy's cosmotheological epigram, which he slightly modified and copied at the end of *Physics*.

E² seems, however, a rather isolated case. As we have seen, Michael Psellos credits himself—and, to some extent, this is certainly true—with the expansion of Aristotelian studies (of Aristotle's *νοῦς*, as he himself says) in the eleventh century Byzantium.⁷⁴ But as Psellos was rather attracted by Plato and the Neoplatonists,⁷⁵ he is at the same time responsible for a pejorative description of Aristotle as vainly trying to surpass his master. In speaking of the heretical Eunomius, Psellos makes a quite interesting comparison:

Thus, the ground for this heresy of his [i.e., Eunomius'] has absolutely no starting point but, I think, the same thing happened to this man that happened to Aristotle the Stagirite. For Aristotle came after many wise men who were born before him and, what is more, he flourished after [the coming to be of] the philosophy of Plato; and because he found that Plato had examined minutely everything, and that some things had been discovered by Plato himself, whereas in other matters Plato had [wisely] followed previous [philosophers], Aristotle did not take the same route as his master; *for he did not want to give the impression that he is not a leader in philosophy and the discoverer of most things but a mere exegete of the Platonic doctrines.* This is why he modified [in words] some of Plato's teachings, whereas he contradicted others. This is, I claim, what has also happened to Eunomius; for having found that the impious persons before him divided among themselves the entire subject-matter of impiety, [Eunomius] did not wish to give the impression that he belonged to that mob of unfaithful and, thus, created for himself a new form of heresy, which need even not be refuted; for it is confused in itself and has been refuted [by itself].⁷⁶

⁷⁴ See also John M. Duffy, 'Hellenic philosophy in Byzantium and the lonely mission of Michael Psellos', in *Byzantine Philosophy and Its Ancient Sources*, ed. Katerina Ierodiakonou, 139–56.

⁷⁵ Psellos' admiration towards the Platonists is readily seen in the expression *νόες γυμνοί* ('naked intellects'), which he uses to describe them in his *Discourse on Soul*; cf. Psellos, *Philosophica minora*, II, 78.3–4 O'Meara: *ἄνδρες ὑπὲρ τὰ σώματα καὶ αὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο νόες γυμνοί, καὶ σύμπαντες οἱ Πλατωνικοί.*

⁷⁶ Michael Psellos, *Theologica* II 14.97–113 Gautier: *οὐκ ἔχει οὖν ἀφορμὴν οὐδεμίαν αὐτῷ ὑπάρξεως ὁ τῆς αἰρέσεως λόγος, ἀλλ' οἶμαι τὸν ἄνδρα ταῦτόν πεπονθέναι τῷ Σταγειρίτῃ Ἀριστοτέλει. ἐκεῖνος γὰρ ἐπὶ πολλοῖς σοφοῖς τοῖς πρότερον τῷ βίῳ παραγενόμενος, καὶ μάλιστα γε μετὰ τὴν Πλάτωνος ἀνθήσας φιλοσοφίαν, ἐπειδὴ πάντα ἐκεῖνον εὗρε διακριβώσαντα, καὶ τὰ μὲν αὐτὸν ἐξευρόντα, τὰ δὲ τοῖς προηγησαμένοις ἀκολουθήσαντα, οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν ὁδὸν τῷ διδασκάλῳ ἐτράπετο, ἵνα μὴ δόξη οὐκ ἀρχηγὸς εἶναι φιλοσοφίας καὶ εὐρετὴς τῶν γε πλειόνων, ἀλλ' οἷον τῶν Πλατωνικῶν δογμάτων ἐξηγητής. διὰ ταῦτα τὰ μὲν μεταμείβει τῶν ἐκείνου, τῶν δ' ἐναντίας ἀφῆκε φωνάς. τοιοῦτον δὲ φημι πεπονθέναι καὶ τὸν Εὐνόμιον. εὐρηκῶς γὰρ τοὺς πρὸ αὐτοῦ δυσσεβεῖς κατανειμαμένους ἑαυτοῖς τὴν σύμπασαν ὕλην τῆς ἀσεβείας, ἵνα μὴ ἐκεῖθεν δόξη τὸν τῆς ἀπιστίας πλουτεῖν συρφετόν, καὶ τὸν εἶδος αἰρέσεως ἀνέπλασεν ἑαυτῷ, ὃ μὴδὲ δεῖν φημι τῶν ἀνατρεπόντων, αὐτὸ γὰρ ὑφ' ἑαυτοῦ συγκέχεται καὶ ἀνατέτραπται.*

In the next century, however, Aristotle attracted some followers, to the detriment of Plato's superiority. In particular, Nicholas bishop of Methone wrote a refutation of the *Elements of theology* by Proclus,⁷⁷ whom Psellos had exceedingly admired for his philosophical endeavours. Moreover, in his objections to Soterichos Panteugenos, pronounced in 1156/1157, Nicholas explicitly praises 'the extraordinarily wise Aristotle' for attacking the Platonic Ideas, that is, the theory of Forms:

Plato, the most prominent among the sages of the Hellenes, fabricates certain 'Ideas'; this is how he calls the genera and the species. For this reason, he claims that some of these Ideas are more universal henads, whereas others are more particular [henads]; but he does not introduce them as having no real existence, as this new sage [i.e., Soterichos] surmises. Quite on the contrary, insofar as he claims that these are primary and self-subsistent substances or natures, [and are such] to the highest degree the more universal [henads], which give existence to the more particular, he proclaims them to be first and second gods and says that the rest of beings acquire their existence from them. But the extraordinarily wise Aristotle, who came immediately after him in time, rejected Plato's doctrine abundantly; he successfully named Plato's arguments in favour [of the existence] of the Ideas 'twitterings',⁷⁸ because they do not contribute anything to our comprehension of being and differ in nothing from empty noises, which are useless for the production of harmony. This is why the philosophers who succeeded Aristotle in the Peripatos [i.e. the ancient commentators] declared that these very ideas are simply concepts [in our thought].⁷⁹

Some clarifications about the content of the controversy between Nicholas and Soterichos are necessary. Soterichos had accused the deacon Basileios, teacher of

⁷⁷ Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation of Proclus' Elements of Theology*, ed. Athanasios D. Angelou (Athens, 1984). See lately Joshua Robinson, 'Proclus as heresiarch: Theological polemic and philosophical commentary in Nicholas of Methone's *Refutation of Proclus' Elements of Theology*', in *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism*, ed. Sergei Mariev (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 103–36,

⁷⁸ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I 2, 83a 33.

⁷⁹ Ανδρόνικος Δημητρακόπουλος, *Εκκλησιαστική Βιβλιοθήκη* (Leipzig, 1866), 324.9–27 (Τοῦ αὐτοῦ Νικολάου ἐπισκόπου Μεθώνης ἀντίρρησης πρὸς τὰ γραφέντα παρὰ Σωτηρίχου τοῦ προβληθέντος Πατριάρχου Ἀντιοχείας, περὶ τοῦ «Σὺ εἶ ὁ προσφέρων καὶ προσφερόμενος καὶ προσδεχόμενος»): Ἰδέας μὲν γάρ τινας ἀναπλάττει Πλάτων ὁ τῶν παρ' Ἑλλήσι σοφῶν ἐξοχώτατος, οὕτω τάχα τὰ γένη καὶ τὰ εἶδη καλῶν- ὄθεν καὶ τούτων τὰς μὲν καθολικωτέρας τὰς δὲ μερικωτέρας ἐνάδας φησὶν, ἀλλ' οὐχὶ καὶ ἀνυποστάτους ταύτας εἰσάγει κατὰ τὴν ὑπόθεσιν τοῦ νέου τούτου σοφοῦ· πολλοῦ γε καὶ δεῖ· καθ' ὅσον καὶ πρώτας εἶναι ταύτας καὶ ἀνυποστάτους οὐσίας εἴτουν φύσεις, μάλιστα τὰς καθολικωτέρας, ἐξ ὧν καὶ τὰς μερικωτέρας ὑφεστάναι δισχυρίζεται, ὥς καὶ θεοὺς ταύτας πρώτους καὶ δευτέρους ἀναγορεύειν, κάκ τούτων αὐθις τᾶλλα λέγειν ὑφίστασθαι. Ἀλλὰ ταύτην τὴν τοῦ Πλάτωνος δόξαν ἀρκούντως ἀνέτρεψεν ὁ μετ' ἐκείνον εὐθὺς τῷ χρόνῳ περιττὸς τὴν σοφίαν Ἀριστοτέλης, ὃς καὶ τερετίσματα τοὺς περὶ τῶν ιδεῶν τούτων λόγους τοῦ Πλάτωνος εὐστόχως ὠνόμασεν, ὥς μὴδὲν πρὸς κατάληψιν τοῦ ὄντος συντείνοντας, μὴδὲ ψόφων κενῶν καὶ πρὸς ἀρμονίαν ἀσυντελῶν διαφέροντας. Ὅθεν καὶ οἱ τὸν Περίπατον Ἀριστοτέλους διαδεξάμενοι, αὐτὰς δὴ ταύτας τὰς ιδέας ἐν ἐπινοίαις κείσθαι ψιλαῖς ἀπεφήναντο.

the Gospel at the Patriarchal School, of heresy because the latter distinguished the two natures in Christ by saying that they have come about as two distinct energies – God as Word who becomes Man corresponds to the energy of the ‘sacrificer’ (θύτης), whereas the flesh of Man who becomes God corresponds to the energy of the ‘sacrifice’ (θύμα). According to Soterichos, this claim brought Basileios close to espousing the heresy of Nestorianism, that is, the distinction of two persons in Christ, the one (human) being inferior and the other (divine) superior. It seems that for Soterichos, who was reading Plato in accordance with Proclus, Basileios was worse than Plato, who posited the hierarchy in the intelligible world as a thing stemming from our understanding, as a conception in our thought. Nicholas undertook to defend the deacon Basileios.

In the aftermath of the condemnation of ‘Platonists’ such as John Italos and Eustratius of Nicaea in the late eleventh and the early twelfth century, political and ecclesiastical opponents could be accused of Platonism all too easily. Nicholas argued that the introduction of two natures that are distinct only in thought (in other words, that we understand as distinct, whereas in reality they are only one), as the two energies were for Basileios, has nothing heretical in itself. Heresy emerges when distinct natures are brought about together with distinct hypostases (say, the distinction of Logos and Christ). Plato was a heresiarch precisely because he thought that the Ideas do not only exist in thought but are distinct self-existent hypostases, that is, *henads* which are divided into superior and inferior depending on the degree of their universality. Nicholas brought Aristotle and the Peripatos forward as witnesses for the correctness of his interpretation of Plato. Aristotelianism was now used as a weapon against Platonism within theological controversies.⁸⁰

Nonetheless, the Psellan motive of Aristotle’s vain rivalry with Plato was revived in the fourteenth century in accordance with the general anti-Latin sentiment. It is a pertinent motive throughout Theodore Metochites’ *Miscellanies*, in which Aristotle is frequently presented as a self-loving man,⁸¹ who only pretended to be wise (φιλαυτία and δοξοσοφία are the two qualities which by not being present in

⁸⁰ Nicholas of Methone may have thus played a pivotal role for the revival of Aristotelian studies in the twelfth century. It is worth noting that the text of the *Metaphysics* in the *Par. gr.* 1853, which we mentioned earlier, is extensively annotated by a scholiast (E^Σ) in accordance with the teaching of an unnamed διδάσκαλος; in one scholium (f. 231v) Aristotle is called φιλοσοφώτατος (‘a philosopher to the greatest extent’; compare this characterisation with the adjective ἀφιλόσοφος [see below, n. 82], which Metochites uses for describing Aristotle’s attitude towards Plato) over and above Plato: καὶ ὁ φιλοσοφώτατος Ἀριστοτέλης εἰς τὴν τοῦ Πλάτωνος δόξαν τὴν Ἀναξαγόρου τε καὶ τῶν Πυθαγορείων συναγαγὼν καὶ ταύτην ἀξίως εὐθύνας, καὶ τὰς τῶν ῥηθέντων ἀνδρῶν δόξας ταύτῃ συνανατρέπει. On E^Σ and his annotations see Pantelis Golitsis, ‘Trois annotations de manuscrits aristotéliciens au XII^e siècle: les Parisini gr. 1901 et 1853 et l’Oxoniensis Corp. Christi 108’, in *Storia della scrittura e altre storie*, ed. Daniele Bianconi (Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2014), 33–52.

⁸¹ The maxim ‘amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas’ (cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I 6, 1096a 12–17) is explicitly declined by Methochites, *Semeioseis gnomikai*, 10 (‘That all wise men were disrespectful towards their predecessors, and on Plato and Aristotle’), 4, 1–3 Hult.

Metochites, enable him to raise himself to a higher level than the ancient philosophers):

In the same way, or indeed much more, we have reason to wonder at a similar trait in Aristotle, and we certainly have no wish to play down his lack of moderation towards the admirable Plato, his guide to the whole wisdom, and his constant disagreement with and opposition against him, which we ascribe to a reprehensible and unphilosophical attitude.⁸²

As Psellos did before them, Metochites, as well as his pupil Nikephoros Gregoras, sought philosophical inspiration in Plato. But it seems to me that they, unlike Psellos, turned to Plato not in the spirit of a genuine philosophical interest but mostly out of a reaction to the Westerners, to whom Plato remained essentially unknown. Both Metochites and Gregoras were epistemological pessimists, who declined even for physics the possibility to yield secure scientific knowledge and sought spiritual refuge and human wisdom in the harmless knowledge of the mathematical sciences. They turned to rhetoric and astronomy, when the time was ripe for philosophy. They were not committed Platonists.

Commitment to Plato was frequently associated in Byzantium to Hellenic polytheism. Byzantine Aristotelians, by contrast, saw in Aristotle a forerunner of Christian monotheism, indeed the unique monotheist among the polytheist philosophers of the entire Hellas. There are two instances of enthusiastic admiration for Aristotle: the one is a poem by George Pachymeres, with which he crowns his full-blown commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*,⁸³ and the other is a comment by George Scholarios on *Metaphysics* XII 7, where Aristotle resumes his teaching about the existence of a self-existent, eternal and immobile *ousia*.⁸⁴ For the two Palaeologian philosophers, Aristotle incarnates human wisdom, having recognized the one divinity (the *πρῶτον κινουὺν ἀκίνητον* or *the νοῦς* or *νόησις νοήσεως*, of which he respectively speaks in *Physics* VIII and in *Metaphysics* XII 7 and 9) before the revelation of Christ. The most important lesson that Aristotle can teach to humanity is not his logic and his

⁸² Metochites, *Semeiōseis gnomikai*, 25, 2 Hult: τοῦθ' ὡσαύτως, ἢ μάλισθ' ὡς ἀληθῶς καὶ πολλῶ γε πλεόν, θαυμάζειν ἔχομεν Ἀριστοτέλους καὶ τὴν ἀμετρίαν αὐτοῦ κατὰ τοῦ θαυμαστοῦ Πλάτωνος, τοῦ πάσης τῆς σοφίας ἡγεμόνος αὐτῷ, καὶ διὰ πάντων ἀντιπολιτεῖαν πρὸς αὐτὸν Πλάτων καὶ ἀντίπραξιν ξυνορᾶν βουλόμεθα πάντως, καὶ γνώμης οὐ χρηστῆς καὶ ἀφιλοσόφου τιθέμεθα (translation by Hult). Cf. also *Semeiōseis gnomikai*, 3, 2, 1 Hult: 'For the man wants to censure all his predecessors and strives eagerly after this, trying to show that they have failed to find the truth about reality in practically all matters' (Βούλεται μὲν γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ πάντας αἰτιᾶσθαι τοὺς πρὸ αὐτοῦ, καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο σφόδρ' ἐπείγεται, καὶ δεικνύει πειρᾶται περὶ πάντας σχεδὸν ἀτευκτοῦντας τῆς περὶ τῶν ὄντων τῆς ἀληθείας); translation by Hult.

⁸³ On this poem see Pantelis Golitsis, 'A Byzantine philosopher's devoutness to God: George Pachymeres' poetic epilogue to his Commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*', in *The Many Faces of Byzantine Philosophy*, eds Börje Bydén and Katerina Ierodiakonou, 109–27.

⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII 7, 1073a3–11: Ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν οὐσία τις ἀίδιος καὶ ἀκίνητος καὶ κεχωρισμένη τῶν αἰσθητῶν, φανερόν ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων. δέδεικται δὲ καὶ ὅτι μέγεθος οὐδὲν ἔχει ἐνδέχεται ταύτην τὴν οὐσίαν...

physics, so greatly admired by all people and nations, as Scholarios says, but the conviction that the human intellect can acquire through reason a correct understanding of God and, therefore, live accordingly.

For Pachymeres, Aristotle's philosophy was capable not only of generating knowledge about the human soul and the natural world that surrounds the senses, but also of instilling the right convictions about the knowledge that man can have of God in this world. In his commentary on *Physics* VIII 6,⁸⁵ Pachymeres does not hesitate to identify Aristotle's first unmoved mover with the 'blessed and only sovereign', of whom Paul speaks in his *First Epistle to Timothy*.⁸⁶ And in the poetic epilogue of the commentary, Pachymeres does not only praise Aristotle for his intellectual findings but also commends the Philosopher as an example of how any rational human being should stand before God.⁸⁷ More specifically, Aristotle is praised for 'having found' a providential pole (i.e., God), who is nameless, eternal, powerful, partless and unmoved,⁸⁸ and 'having stopped' there. To put it differently, Pachymeres praises Aristotle for having determined God's properties and not having committed himself to a vain pursue of knowledge of God's essence. One can hardly dissociate Pachymeres' poem from a concern against contemporary claims of union with God, which predated the official Hesychast doctrine.⁸⁹

Scholarios, in his turn, presents Aristotle as the only ancient monotheist, a real forerunner of Christianity, who possessed the truth about God before the revelation of Christ:

In what follows, Aristotle posits even more brilliantly the unity of the divine essence, arguing both from the intellection and from the order of beings with regard to the First as the common good and useful, although here too he does so sparingly out of fear, as we have said, of the many. It is in the end of book *Lambda* that he rejects in a more lucid manner the multiplicity of prin-

⁸⁵ Aristotle, *Physics*, 258b13sq.: "Ὅτι δ' ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τι τὸ ἀκίνητον μὲν αὐτὸ πάσης ἐκτὸς μεταβολῆς, καὶ ἀπλῶς καὶ κατὰ συμβεβηκός, κινητικὸν δ' ἑτέρου, ὅλον ὥδε σκοποῦσιν..."

⁸⁶ 1 Tim 6: 15–16 (quoted above, n. 10). See Golitsis, 'A Byzantine philosopher's devoutness to God' (quoted n. 83), 114.

⁸⁷ George Pachymeres, *Poetic epilogue to the commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, lin. 19–21 Golitsis: 'Vain is he who wishes to seek further / since you, who are wise, who know the measures of human wisdom / and have reached what on account of so many fortifications is unconquerable, have stopped (κενὸς ὃς γε μαστεύσοι / ἢ ὅτε σύ δε σοφὸς σοφίης μέτρα οἶσθα βροτείης / καὶ οἱ προσκύρσας ὅς' ἐρύματ' ἀδηρίτω, ἔσσης)'.
⁸⁸ George Pachymeres, *Poetic epilogue to the commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, lin. 13–15 Golitsis: εὖρες καὶ πόλον, οὐτι γ' ἔρημον ἐόντα προνοίης / εὖρες νώνυμον ἀίδιον κράτος ἀμερὲς αἰὲν / ὡσαύτως ἔχον, ἢ δ' ἀκίνητον ὑπ' οὐδενὸς ἄλκαρ. Pachymeres' reasoning might be compared to Thomas' first of the 'five ways' (*quinque viae*) that prove the existence of God, that is, the argument from motion (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3).

⁸⁹ Note that the *The Life* of patriarch Athanasios I, who was Pachymeres' main opponent, was written by a Palamite, namely John Kalothetos. Note also that Nikephoros the Hesychast, whom later Hesychasts recognized as their forefather, was Pachymeres' contemporary. On Nikephoros and early Hesychasm see Antonio Rigo, 'Niceforo l'esicasta (XIII sec.): alcune considerazioni sulla vita e sull'opera', in *Amore del bello. Studi sulla Filocalia*, ed. Olivier Raquez (Magnano, 1991), 81–119.

ciples and gods, and that he posits that there is a unique king of the universe and a unique God.⁹⁰ You, Aristotle, have come to be the only real philosopher in Hellas and have been rightly called ‘the philosopher par excellence’, you who are the last in time among the great philosophers of Hellas, those who started from a faint point and progressed through time in wisdom, the one succeeding the other; but you are the summit above all, so that those who lived shortly before you (sc. Plato) are with regard to you what <all> previous philosophers were with regard to them. And, for the time being, I leave aside the part of your philosophy that has been studied with great care and has been admired in every language of the world and by every nation. For you are the only, the first and the last inventor of philosophy, and the author and teacher of the race of men. But it is your most lucid doctrine about the one God and your repugnance against the irrational polytheism that I now timely make the unique cause of the miracle that surrounds you (for I think that you are the only one among those philosophers, or the first among few, who has done that), since the divine logos along with the soul, which He, in dispensing the salvation of men, has received, was directly known by you. You were the wise above all Hellenes; this is why you received the truth about divine things from there, according to what time could allow, being pure in nature and in study and life, which are necessary to faith. This is what I think; our Lord Jesus Christ knows what has become of you.⁹¹

By contrast to Metochites’ self-loving and unphilosophical Aristotle, the Philosopher is here presented by Scholarios as a model for true thought and pious life.

The polemical texts between Pletho and Scholarios on the value of Aristotle and Plato as philosophers close to Christianity (and, subsequently, as philosophers *tout*

⁹⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII 10, 1076a 4: οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη· εἷς κοίρανος

⁹¹ George Scholarios, *Praise of Aristotle*, eds Petit/Jugie/Siderides, vol. 8, p. 506, line 28 – p. 507, line 11: Ἐφεξῆς δὲ καὶ λαμπρότερον τὴν ἐνότητά τῆς θείας οὐσίας ἔκ τε τῆς νοήσεως ἔκ τε τῆς τῶν ὄντων πρὸς αὐτὸ (sc. τὸ πρῶτον) τάξεως ὡς κοινὸν ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐχρηστον, εἰ κἀνταῦθα φειδομένως τῷ δέει τῶν πολλῶν, ὡς εἴρηται, τίθησιν. Ἐν δὲ τῷ τέλει τοῦ Λ καὶ φανερώτερον τὴν πολυαρχίαν ἀναιρεῖ καὶ πολυθεΐαν, καὶ ἓνα μόνον βασιλέα τοῦ παντός καὶ Θεὸν εἶναι τίθησιν. Ὅντως φιλόσοφος σὺ μόνος ἐν Ἑλλάδι καὶ γέγονας καὶ δικαίως οὕτως ἐκλήθης κατ’ ἐξοχήν, Ἀριστότελες, ὕστατος μὲν τῷ χρόνῳ τῶν μεγάλων παρ’ Ἑλλάδι φιλοσόφων κατὰ καιρὸν προβαινόντων ἐξ ἀμυδροτάτης πρώτης ἀρχῆς καὶ προκοπτόντων ἐπὶ σοφίας, ἄλλου μετ’ ἄλλον εὐθὺς ἐκ διαδοχῆς· κορυφαῖος δὲ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν αὐτός, ὥστ’ εἶναι τοὺς μικρῶ πρό σου παραβαλλομένους σοὶ ὅπερ ἦσαν οἱ πρότεροι πρὸς ἐκείνους. Καὶ τὴν μὲν ἄλλην σου φιλοσοφίαν παρίημι νῦν ὑπὸ πάσης γλώττης ἐν κόσμῳ καὶ γένους παντός πολλῇ σπουδῇ γνωρισθεῖσαν καὶ θαυμασθεῖσαν· σὺ γὰρ μόνος καὶ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος τῆς φιλοσοφίας εὐρετὴς καὶ συγγραφεὺς καὶ διδάσκαλος τῷ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὑπῆρξας γένει· ἀλλὰ τὴν περὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς Θεοῦ καθαρωτάτην σου δόξαν καὶ τὴν τῆς ἀλόγου πολυθεΐας ἀποστροφὴν αἰτίαν μόνην ποιοῦμαι νῦν ἐγκαίρως τοῦ περὶ σὲ θαύματος (οἶμαι δὲ σε καὶ μόνον τῶν ἄλλων φιλοσόφων ἐκείνων, ἢ πρῶτον ἐν ὀλίγοις, πεποιηκέναι) τῷ θείῳ Λόγῳ μετὰ ψυχῆς, ἣν οἰκονομῶν τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων σωτηρίαν προσεῖληφεν, ὑπὸ σοῦ εὐθὺς γνωρισθέντι· σοφός τε γὰρ ὑπὲρ πάντας ἦσθα τοὺς Ἑλληνας· διὸ καὶ τὴν περὶ τῶν θείων ἀλήθειαν ἐντεῦθεν ἔσχες, ὡς ὁ καιρὸς ἐδίδου, φύσει τε καὶ σπουδῇ καὶ βίῳ καθάρειος, ἃ πρὸς τὴν πίστιν ἅμωφ ζητοῦνται. Οὕτω μὲν ἐγὼ νομίζω· ὁ δὲ δεσπότης ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς οἶδε τί σοι γέγονε.

court) inaugurated the last controversy in Byzantium. A great deal of this philosophical controversy, which was subsumed in Cardinal Bessarion's *Against the calumniator of Plato*,⁹² directed against George Trapezountios, took place in Italy after the *halosis* of 1453, so that, at least geographically and historically, it does not really belong to Byzantine philosophy. By looking at the course of philosophy in Byzantium retrospectively, one may find it meaningful that, in proper Byzantine territory, be it in Constantinople or in Mystra, philosophy ended in controversy and by being ultimately hostile towards both Plato and Aristotle.

⁹² Ludwig Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1927 [repr. 1967]), vol. 2.