CHAPTER 4

Different Understandings of Proclus' First Principle(s) in Nicholas of Methone and Ioanne Petritsi

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In this article I will compare Nicholas of Methone's and Ioane Petritsi's explanations of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* with regard to Proclus' idea of the One and the multitude of beings. The comparative analysis will reveal important differences, but also similarities between the two receptions. The aims of Nicholas and Petritsi are quite opposed: Nicholas' initial intention was to explain Proclus not in terms of Proclus' thinking itself, but in order to ward Christians from the perils that can come from this text, which, in his opinion contains overt or oblique attacks on Christianity. Petritsi, by contrast, read Proclus as conversant with the very essence and truth of reality through dialectics and philosophical contemplation, and thus cannot be in principle against the revealed truth of Christianity. Therefore, Petritsi saw that his aim was to translate Proclus' philosophical notions to Christian notions and vice versa. We thus get two quite different worlds of the reception of philosophy roughly in the same period of Byzantine history. This period was immediately preceded by Alexios Komnenos closing the philosophical school in Constantinople in 1083, with its rector, or *hypatos*, John Italos being condemned as a heretic. While Nicholas was quite comfortable with this imperialist tendency, in Petritsi the spirit of the school of Italos still lived and thrived in the precincts of the Gelati Monastic School in the Kingdom of Georgia, established by King David IV the Builder (1073–1125), where Petritsi enjoyed a greater freedom than his Byzantine counterparts to express the type of reception of philosophy that fell out of favour in Constantinople itself.

In fact, the 12th-century Byzantine debates about the role of philosophy and dialectics in matters of theology cannot be considered in separation from a broader background of tensions and debates that started as early as late antiquity and the first centuries of persecuted Christianity, and continued with the opposition of the Hellenistic tradition—epitomized by Neoplatonism—and the Christian tradition. Even those Christians who held the greatest openness towards the philosophical tradition, such as Origen or Justin, still clearly

regarded it as "outer wisdom", upholding the exclusivity and uniqueness of the Christian message. Even if many centuries separated those initial tensions from Gregory Palamas' fourteenth century stance, with his blatant insistence that philosophy does not and cannot save, the same attitude is noticeable in Christian thinkers of late antiquity and the entire Byzantine period to varying degrees. A danger always loomed that too much of an interest in, and adherence to, philosophy could mitigate the necessity of the Lord's incarnation, as a unique historical fact, in the matter of salvation. This danger was checked by the Church through councils, such as the Fifth Ecumenical Council which condemned Origenism and its philosophizing tendencies that led to heretical ideas. However, another danger could sprout from the excess of such a condemning atmosphere: the great tradition of the application of dialectics to the Biblical narrative, which led to wonderful theological and Christological clarifications and discoveries, could suffer a setback, and as a consequence a rigidly fideistic attitude, with all its wrongs and pitfalls, could flourish.

The clash between Christianity and Platonism, that, as we have said, epitomized the entire Hellenic philosophical tradition, was in no way so central as in the question of the understanding of God—the first principle of the universe—and His(/Its) relationship with the rest of being. Even though Christians appreciated and admired the loftiness of the Platonic conception of God—for instance, St. Augustine was indebted to the "Platonic books",[1] corresponding to Plotinus' works by all appearances, for helping him to overcome Manichean dualism, and moreover to perceive a presence of the theology of the Trinity in them—Christians still fundamentally followed the Biblical narrative of God as the Person, ὁ ὤν (a notion absent in Platonism) who created the universe and knows and cares for it, and, moreover, who can listen to prayers and respond to them. Exactly these momenta could not be accepted by those entrenched in the Hellenic philosophical tradition: for one thing, the God (or gods) of Hellenic philosophy did not create the universe; neither Plato nor Aristotle would say that the physical universe, as we know it, came into existence as having a starting point (unless we take the story of Plato's Demiurge literally, which all Neoplatonists in fact considered as a metaphor for an eternalist state of affairs). For both philosophers, this would be impossible, since creation, as understood Biblically, would imply a change in God, for God would start to produce in a way he did not beforehand: such a change would sound sacrilegious for a Hellenic ear, since it necessarily tarnishes the notion of changelessness

1 Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, ed. and transl. C.J.-B. Hammond (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

that should apply to deity. Already Plato attacked the idea of the possibility for change in deity in Book 2 of the *Republic*,[2] and this became the gist of Proclus' arguments against Christians, which we see from John Philoponus' responses against Proclus.[3] Christians then seemed to tarnish their God with too much involvement with the world, for creation also implied care of what is created in a volitional act: for to continue thinking in Cartesian lines, if caring for the universe is the same as keeping and preserving it, then absolutely the same energy should be exerted for preservation as for creation, and the two in fact stand for the very same divine activity.

Now, if creation is a volitional activity, then preservation and care are also volitional activities of a personal God. Moreover, creation and care also imply divine knowledge of what is created and cared about, for something unknown cannot be cared for either. But how, a Hellenic philosopher could ask, can the perfect know the imperfect, for does not Aristotle claim that God is a perfect thought of himself—that is to say, of the perfect thought, the νόησις νοήσεως? Thus, it is logically impossible for God to know creatures, far less for Him to listen to their plights and prayers. And how on earth, as Celsus would ask, could such a God care more for humans than for lions or dolphins, or even choose one nation of Israel over other nations?[4] A choosing and selecting God would be too busy, too intermingled with the world, too lacking in lofty transcendence, and instead impermissibly tarnished by an intentional immanence.

Paradoxically, however, what Hellenic thought would regard as claims of impermissible immanence, the Christian or the Biblical God had a clear upper hand over the Hellenic God with regard of transcendence: in fact, the doctrine of creation implied the notion of a complete detachment of God from creatures, in the sense that the universe was not *necessary*, but in a way, *arbitrary*, depending solely on the free volition of God. There is no possibility of such a detachment in Neoplatonism even at the highest degree of transcendence, since emanation implies that the world is a necessary outcome of the very reality of God: it is impossible to think about a god which does not cause the universe through its own outpouring, since the very essence of God implies its outpouring, the world being nothing but this outpouring and manifestation of God, the One, on different levels. To the contrary, Christianity can theorize and posit God even without creation, since creation is not necessary for God

2 Plato, *Republic*, II, 380d, ed. and transl. C. Emlyn-Jones, W. Preddy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

3 John Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, ed. H. Rabe (Leipzig: Teubner, 1899).

4 Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.99, transl. H. Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

and we can think of a case where God exists without the world, while with Neo-Platonists this idea is quite impossible, whatever acrobatics of dialectics they could hazard in attempting to prove the opposite. In this sense, the Christian God is more transcendent and detached from the rest of being (or created being, in Christian terms) than the Neoplatonic One is from being which emanates from It.

Now, the theological issue as to whether Hellenes or Christians had a truer and loftier version of God was also clad by, besides psychological, fervent socio-political concerns. One can surmise that detached philosophical speculations could be in fact fundamentally caused, or at least deeply conditioned by, the social-political setting of the time with all related polemics, passions, and expectations! Christians, of course, could more easily win the souls of people with their teaching of a personal God who cares and listens, albeit being of a totally different nature from that of the created universe, totally beyond, but paradoxically also the most intimately related and reciprocating with it: in this sense, instead of tortuous and painstaking study of liberal arts and philosophy in order to arrive at metaphysical visions, there was the shortcut of a cycle of yearlong liturgical services open to all nations, age and social groups, and prayers directly addressed to God. What could an impersonal Platonic God offer against such a caring and, in a way, easily accessible god? The later Neoplatonists faced this challenge of the rival religion seriously and introduced certain novelties, like theurgy, which claimed a supra-dialectical or non-dialectical participation in deity even by simple people. Quite possibly, given the polemical context, all this was influenced by Christian liturgy which it tried, in fact, to imitate.

The same can be said about Proclus' ἔρως προνοητικός in his *Commentary on Alcibiades*,[5] adapted later by Ps.-Dionysius,[6] which warranted a caring love of higher entities, i.e. gods, for lower beings.[7] Moreover, the later Neoplatonists' attempt, especially Damascius', to detach the first principle (i.e. God) from oneness and even from the causation of beings, so as to reduce deity to ineffability and total silence, perhaps indicates not so much intra-Neoplatonic

5 Cf. Proclus, *In Platonis Alcibiadem I*, 55–56, ed. L.G. Westerink (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1954).

6 (Ps.-)Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus*, ed. B.R. Suchla (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), IV, 10, p. 155, 10–11 (= 705 B–C Migne).

7 Cf. D. Heide, "Divine Eros: the Providential and Perfective Ecstasy of God in Dionysius' *Divine Names IV*," in *Dionysius* 37(2019), pp. 44–59 in which the author compares Proclus' and Ps.-Dionysius' usages of the notion. Cf. also: D.A. Vasilakis, *Eros in Neoplatonism and its Reception in Christian Philosophy: Exploring Love in Plotinus, Proclus and Dionysius the Areopagite* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

school quarrels as rather who among the Neoplatonic greats—i.e. Plotinus, Iamblichus, Proclus, Damascius—had a loftier understanding of God, and thus who among them was a better philosopher. But, I would hazard an intuition (although this would require further inquiry) that this was propelled not the least by a need to polemicize against Christianity and achieve the level of the Christian God's transcendence over beings: for, as said above, the Christian God can be considered in His own existence apart from causing the world to exist, to such an extent that He is beyond all other beings. Damascius, in fact, similarly tried to establish a theology of transcendence by detaching the Ineffable even from the One itself, making his Ineffable totally unrelated and detached from anything else, beyond even the notion of causality, with the claim that the more something is detached the nobler it is.[8] Of course, this is so far only a conjecture and intuition, but it is clear from Julian the Apostate's *Contra Galileos* that the superiority of a vision of God, i.e. of theology, was directly related to the political issue of who—whether a Hellene or Christian—was a legitimate ruler of the Roman Empire. Only the best theology, and the best political ideology, for that matter, would fit the aim of the empire.

All these issues are important and come to the fore when we discuss the attitude of Nicholas of Methone and Ioane Petritsi toward Proclus' God or the One. Both Nicholas and Petritsi are Christians, Trinitarians, holding a doctrine and faith in the Christian triune God, and even praying to Him. However, both hold very different attitudes: the polemical attitude of Nicholas of Methone contrasts with the fundamentally reconciliatory and harmonizing attitude of Ioane Petritsi. The difference of attitudes applies not only to the different accounts and different understandings of the Neoplatonic One of Proclus, but also to their different attitudes to philosophy and dialectics in general. Moreover, Nicholas of Methone and Ioane Pertritsi are roughly contemporaries, and their opposing stances show a tension in Byzantium with respect of the role of philosophy and dialectics in Christian life of faith. But why Proclus and his renowned treatise, *The Elements of Theology*? By all appearances, this treatise played the role of a compendium of dialectics and metaphysics in Byzantium: both sympathizers and enemies had to pick the treatise as their main point of reference. In fact, Proclus himself, as we read from Michael Psellos' *Chronography*,[9] was regarded as a kind of epitome of a Hellenic philosopher, for having studied all

8 Cf. Damascius, *De principiis*, Vol. 1, p. 6, 7–p. 7, 4, ed. L.G. Westerink, J. Combès (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1986).

9 Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VI, ed. D.R. Reinsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

philosophers, and especially having gone through readings of Plato and Aristotle, he proceeded to Porphyry and Iamblichus and arrived eventually at the "divine Proclus" from whom he learned the whole of philosophy.

Petritsi has a similar panegyrical attitude to Proclus as the true expositor of Plato, the revealer of the hidden meanings of his dialogues.[10] Not so for Nicholas of Methone, whose occasional admiration of Proclus merges with his more ubiquitous censure and even derision. The problem for Nicholas lay not only in the ideas of Proclus and Greek philosophers in general which were incompatible with Christianity, but rather in their very method: i.e. the method of logical inquiry and dialectics with the purpose of penetrating the depth of reality, ascending to the invisible and stable, perfect roots of reality through this logical-dialectical method. This was considered a danger for certain intellectual and political circles in Byzantium. Exactly this caveat led to the eventual closure of Psellos' philosophical school at the precincts of the Imperial Palace during the time of the school's second *hypatos* John Italos in 1083. But even before this closure, already during the time of the first *hypatos* Michael Psellos, we see a suspicious and censorious attitude towards this school from the side of the official Church. Psellos even had to defend the cause of Plato and philosophy against the onslaught of the Patriarch John Xiphilinos, a friend of his youthful years, urging him to descend to the valleys of dialectics from the dogmatic and mystical heights.[11]

If we look intently at the trials of John Italos, it is clear that the mismatch of his ideas with the established orthodoxy was just a pretext, but the basic motive was, just as in the case of Eriugena a few centuries before in the West, Italos' reliance on the philosophical-dialectical method as a key for arriving at the truth.[12] This could have challenged the authority of the official Church, as the sole fountainhead of truth, and the emperor as well. Petritsi, believed to

10 Ioane Petritsi, *Opera*, t. II: *Commentaria in Procli Diadochi* ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΩΣΙΝ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΝ, ed. S. Nutsubidse, S. Kauchtschischvili (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University, 1937) [იოანე პეტრიწის შრომები. ტომი II. განმარტებაჲ პროკლე დიადოხოსისა და პლატონურისა ფილოსოფიისათჳს. ტექსტი გამოსცეს და გამოკვლევა დაურთეს შ. ნუცუბიძემ და ს. ყაუხჩიშვილმა. ტფილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის გამომცემლობა, ტფილისი 1937].

11 Michael Psellos, *Miscellanea*. Vol. 5, ed. C. Sathas (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1876), p. 444.

12 This issue is well addressed by Lowell Clucas in *The Trial of John Italos and the Crisis of Intellectual Values in Byzantium in the Eleventh Century* (München: Institut für Byzantinistik, Neugriechische Philologie, und Byzantinische Kunstgeschichte der Universität München, 1981). As the author writes, ancient Christian heresies like Arianism or Apollinarianism were "veiled attacks on Italos for having begun inquiry, using dialectical methods, on the character of the relationship between the two natures of Christ" (p. 35).

be a disciple of John Italos, shares with his teacher the same stance towards dialectics, which for him is the key to the gates of both physical and metaphysical reality and even of the reality of the Biblical text itself, for only dialectics can provide a proper understanding of the Biblical revelation. Nicholas, while respecting the dialectical method and while heavily utilizing it, and even trying frequently to refute Proclus on his own dialectical grounds, still limits the usage of dialectics and relies upon the Bible and the theological-patristic tradition when dealing with the ultimate truth. Thus, by comparing Petritsi and Nicholas, we can see *par excellence* the two rivalling contemporary trends in Byzantium in acceptance and utilization of the Hellenic philosophical heritage, or the "wisdom of Greeks" Petritsi's and Methone's treatments on the One or the Good, the highest metaphysical entity of Proclus, will be an interesting and salient instance of revealing these rivalling trends.

In the following I shall show the differences and likenesses of Nicholas' and Petritsi's attitudes to Proclus' One or Good.

1 Nicholas of Methone's Reading of Proclus' One

First of all, Nicholas thinks that Proclus' purportedly unbiased logical discussion is just a guise, for in reality Proclus wants to deride and debunk the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in the very first proposition: "Every multitude in some way participates in One." Christians, however, worship a multitude alongside the One, for the threeness of the divine hypostases is just as fundamental and principal as the oneness of the divine essence, which position for Proclus would be a gross error. Nicholas' answer derives from Pseudo-Dionysius' doctrine of transcendence, according to which God surpasses all human notions and definitions, even the notion of number: thus, the Trinity is both one and three and neither one nor three, which means simply that those human notions do not apply to the utter transcendence of Christian divinity.[13] Nicholas in

13 Nicholas of Methone, Ἀνάπτυξις τῆς Θεολογικῆς Στοιχειώσεως Πρόκλου Πλατωνικοῦ Φιλοσόφου / *Refutation of Proclus' Elements of Theology*. A critical edition with an introduction on Nicholas' life and works by A.D. Angelou (Athens / Leiden: The Academy of Athens / Brill, 1984), *Proœmium*, p. 4, 19–24: "And one must know that the things demonstrated by him [i.e. Proclus] concerning one and multitude are not at all set against us in regard to the doctrine of the highest Trinity, since to speak as does the great Dionysius, that which is worshipped by us is both one and three and neither one nor three, since it is beyond every one and every multitude, seeing that it is in fact even superior to number, and transcends every word and every concept." (Here and henceforth, I use Joshua Robinson's wonderful translation in *Nicholas of Methone's* Refutation *of Proclus: Theology and*

many other places underlines this point, namely that Proclus' One is not transcendent enough. Moreover, the One's detachment from beings is not clear, and the application of the word πρώτος, "first", implies analytically that it is enlisted with the rest of the reality, being just the first of this continuum of reality.[14] Thus, "every multitude participates in One" for Nicholas in no way applies to the Trinity, since the Trinity for him is the very One, yet not a One that opposes multiplicity, but beyond this opposition even. The Christian Trinity is then not even a subject of the very notions introduced by Proclus. The fundamental principle of logical non-contradiction that something is either one or not-one, applied by Proclus, does not reach and apply to the reality of Trinity at all, since the Trinity is at once entirely one and entirely not-one.[15]

This is a strategy that Nicholas employs to debunk Proclean categories and put the Trinity beyond their grasp. Not only human intellects but even angelic intellects are unable to grasp the Trinity, and only an ecstasis from oneself can suffice for the union. We can hence see God only by becoming gods: that is, belonging to God, and not to ourselves. Again, in his commentary on the second proposition, "All that participates in unity is one and not one", Nicholas thinks that this claim does not apply to the Trinity, since the Trinity is indeed one, but not through participation in unity: instead, it is the very One-itself, albeit transcending the human notions of oneness and threeness. Nicholas acknowledges the truthfulness of Proclus' reasoning within his own limited categories—in

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14 Interestingly, in a different context, Ioane Petritsi applies the same argument against the canonical Georgian translation of the opening words of John's Gospel, which runs as, "Firstly was the Word", claiming (Ioane Petritsi, *Commentaria*, p. 219) that "firstly" here is not a proper term, for it may imply that the Logos is first in the same row of beings, sharing the same nature with them: hence, the danger of Arianism looms large with such a translation. He offers another, verbatim version, namely "In the beginning was [the?] Logos."

15 Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation*, ch. 1, p. 5, 18–24: "For it is Triad, but also beyond triad and multitude and every number; therefore it is certainly not subsumed with 'every multitude', so that it would 'participate the one' too, but it super-transcends every multitude, and does not participate the One, but it itself is the One, or rather, it is even beyond every one, wherefore it is also not-one, not in the sense that it is inferior to the One, but as super-transcending the kind of one that is opposed to multitude and in this way is co-ranked with it and of the same kind"; p. 6, 4–6: "it transcends every division and demonstration; and in relation to it even the law of non-contradiction falls apart."

this case, that unity must precede multitude—yet this principle does not apply to the oneness and threeness of the Trinity, for the Trinity is itself the One: thus "one" for Nicholas denotes the essential aspect of the Trinity common to all three hypostases, subsisting equally in all the hypostases, but in no way preceding them.[16] In Proposition 6, Proclus introduces the notion of atomic units—henads—saying that "every multitude is either from united things or from henads." Nicholas understands "henads" here to mean the divinities of Proclus, although, objectively speaking, the term does not yet mean that, but simply a notion of atomic units. Nicholas accuses Proclus of polytheism and claims that this unification of henads in one does not apply to the hypostases of the Trinity, for They are not united in one: each of them and all three together are one God. Yet again, the notion of the Trinity eludes Proclean notions and is also, at least what Nicholas thinks to be, a subtle attack by Proclus on the Trinity. In Proposition 7, Proclus speaks of the producer and the produced, which provides Nicholas an opportunity to make a terminological distinction between the Christian notions of birth and procession applied to the Son and the Holy Spirit (respectively), on the one hand, and the creation of the world out of nothing, on the other. And thus, Proclus' saying that "every producer is higher than that which is produced" is fundamentally wrong, for if production means "out of nothing", then it applies only to one God, and thus "every" is a wrong term from the outset here.[17] Again, it is important to notice that Nicholas of Methone criticizes Proclus, not in Proclus' own terms, but by introducing a notion alien to Proclus, i.e. *creatio ex nihilo*.

Nicholas of Methone's criticism of predicating "first" of the One continues in his discussion of Proposition 8, where Proclus predicates "first" of the Good: Nicholas again claims that such expressions defy the transcendence of the supreme principle and cannot be applied to the Christian Deity. In his commentary on the next two propositions, Nicholas critiques Proclus' notion of the self-sufficient (αὐτάρκης), stating that besides the one supreme principle, God, nothing can be self-sufficient, given that it will imply a duality of giver and a receiver in an entity, which is absurd: for if it has, than it does not lack nor gives to itself.[18] However, Nicholas also applies the notion of insufficiency to the Supreme Himself, following St. Gregory the Theologian's own attribu-

16 Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation*, ch. 6, p. 10, 3–20.

17 Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation*, ch. 7, p. 12, 7–10: "But if, besides God, there is nothing else that produces from not being into being, then *every* has been applied there in vain; for it is unfitting that *every* be predicated to the One."

18 Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation*, ch. 9, p. 13, 32–p. 14, 3: "Nothing itself *provides* something to itself, but what *provides* is one thing, and what receives is another. But he says that *the*

tion,[19] but in a superlative sense: i.e. it was insufficient for the goodness of God to be merely contained in God, but rather it must be poured out into beings. He launches the same attack against the term "self-constituted" (αὐθυπόστατος). We shall see below that Petritsi treats this issue in a quite similar way. In his commentary on Proposition 11, Nicholas again attacks the application of the "first" to the One and refers to the authority of Ps.-Dionysius, saying that God pre-contains the entire world in Himself in a transcendent way. Nicholas repeats the same critique in his commentary on Proposition 13 as well, which is interesting, since Petritsi also makes the similar, un-Proclean, claim. In Proposition 12, Nicholas again uses the Ps.-Dionysian form of negative theology to attack Proclus, claiming that Proclus identifies the One and Good with the essence of the Supreme, while in sound theology even those terms are inapplicable: for all terms like good, beautiful, being, power etc. are applied to the Supreme not essentially but according to the particular manifestations of things possessing those traits around God and created by God, such that the attributes are known as God's "hind parts".[20] Proclus, on the contrary, thinks that One and Good describe the very substance of the Supreme, thus reducing the incomprehensible substance to knowability by intellect. Yet this does not seem to be a good reading of Proclus' argument, since Proclus adheres to the standard Neoplatonist position that the One transcends every intellectual grasp, a position on which Plotinus insists and which is at least implicit in Plato. One more aspect that is crucial is the hierarchy and the monadic causes: Nicholas, in fact, limits productive powers to everything but the Trinity alone, and thus rejects the entire hierarchical series of Proclus, stating that there is only one series of beings which all depend on the supreme one principle of the Trinity.[21]

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self-sufficient itself is *provider of what is good to itself*, identifying what *provides* and what *receives*, which indeed seems right neither to us nor to common sense."

19 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 45.5, ed. J.-P. Migne, (Paris: Migne = PG36, 1858), 629a: Ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐκ ἤρκει τῇ ἀγαθότητι τοῦτο, τὸ κινεῖσθαι μόνον τῇ ἑαυτῆς θεωρίᾳ, ἀλλ' ἔδει χεθῆναι τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ὁδεῦσαι, ὡς πλείονα εἶναι τὰ εὐεργετούμενα (τοῦτο γὰρ τῆς ἄκρας ἦν ἀγαθότητος)· πρῶτον μὲν ἐννοεῖ τὰς ἀγγελικὰς δυνάμεις καὶ οὐρανίους.

20 Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation*, ch. 11, p. 16, 2–19. On the reference to God's "hind parts", see Exodus 33:20–23.

21 Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation*, ch. 11, p. 28, 4–p. 29, 28.

2 Ioane Petritsi's Reading of Proclus' One

Let us now see how Petritsi treats the same issues.

For one thing, Petritsi holds a thoroughly positive opinion of Proclus, whereas for Nicholas, Proclus is conversant with demons and a clandestine fighter against the Holy Trinity. For Petritsi, Proclus' metaphysics is based on a well-grounded dialectic that, through the necessary laws of syllogistic, leads to sound conclusions concerning the metaphysical world and entities therein. There is not a single instance where Petritsi would claim to disagree with Proclus. His sympathetic view of the Greek philosopher allows him to regard Proclus' world of ideas and notions with respect and without an ongoing intention, as in Nicholas, to find faults and inconsistencies in Proclus' train of thought. One of the basic critiques of Nicholas, as we have seen, is the usage of the term πρώτος, the first, with respect of the One, which analytically puts the One on the same level with the rest of beings. Petritsi sees through this term and allows for its usage, without seeing the necessity of attacking Proclus on this terminological point, although he could have, in fact, done so, if he wished, because it is exactly on that terminological ground that he attacks the Georgian translators of John's Gospel,[22] which shows that he understands the problematic character of this term.

Another important difference between Petritsi and Nicholas is that the Georgian philosopher does not take Proclus' One as a notion that does not reach the level of the transcendence of the Trinity, but, on the contrary, identifies the One with the Supreme principle of Christianity—although he does not identify the Trinity with the One, but rather God the Father with the One. Thus, for Nicholas, the term, "One", in a Christian understanding is beyond Proclus' notion of unity, the participation of which implies a multiplicity that acquires unity, and this One denotes the entire Trinity, whereas for Petritsi, Proclus' One is correlated with the Christian Trinitarian person of the Father. As for the other two hypostases of the Trinity, Petritsi says that those in Proclus' language are called the First Limit and the First Infinity, which are the principles of the henadic gods. For Nicholas, who adheres to a nominalist view, the "Limit" is a limit of any given thing and thus independently of that thing it cannot exist substantially or hypostatically, whereas Infinity is the privation of limit and hence does not exist at all: thus, the gods which derive from those non-existent principles do not exist. But Petritsi constructs an ingenious scheme saying that only the One in the Trinity is absolutely imparticipable

22 See footnote 14.

and transcendent, whereas the Logos, as the Limit, is the participable cause of the henads, which, because of this participation, only have a derivative deity and are called "divinized gods", that is to say, divinized through participation in the Limit. The Limit is also called the "second One" that derives from the first One, the Father, and enters into communion with the henads, in fact creating them.[23] In this way, by relativizing the henads' divine status Petritsi dispenses with the problem of Proclus' polytheism, which sounds so unacceptable and idolatrous to the Christian ear. Infinity, or the Holy Spirit for Petritsi, has a function of multiplying beings, and on all levels of reality where there is an interplay of the Limit and Infinity. Petritsi only speaks once about the "consubstantiality" of the Trinitarian hypostases, but does not put much emphasis on this specifically Christian-Trinitarian term.[24]

An additional important distinction between Petritsi and Nicholas is that Petritsi follows Proclus' basic hierarchical structures and allows for the productive powers of other entities, like the henadic and monadic causes, whose productivity imitates the One, the producer of all. He does not distinguish in a strict terminological way between "creation" and "birth-giving", or "coming out", as does Nicholas, when he drastically differentiates between the Son and the Holy Spirit's derivation from the Father and creation out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Petritsi never applies the term "out of nothing"[25] and there is a kind of a terminological indifference between the production of things by the One and the production of things by other, intermediary causes.

Having specified these important differences, we should proceed to note some less important similarities between Nicholas and Petritsi:

First, Petritsi also holds a very lofty, Ps.-Dionysian idea about the transcendence of God, since, for Petritsi as for Dionysius, God or the One is beyond all human naming and concepts, and even the terms "one" and "good" are predic-

23 Ioane Petritsi, *Commentaria*, pp. 157–158: "Every created one (i.e. henad) is both one and not one, for it is one through that by which it participated in being created; but since it is created, it is not one. In fact, every created [entity] is different from the uncreated [entity], and the first One is above participation, while the second and created (i.e. henad) is a participable cause of all its participants. In fact, the Causes of the henads differ, for there is the first One, the cause of henads, but without giving His properties to the subsequent ones (i.e. henads); and there is the [other] One produced by Him, who gives His properties in the series of henads."

24 Ioane Petritsi, *Commentaria*, prop. 10. 37. 22–24: "The center of the true Being is the One Itself, and those two causes of the beings [Limit and Infinity] are *means* consubstantially [that is, consubstantially with the One]."

25 Although he has a term for absolute nothingness in an opposing pair of "existence" vs "non-existence" (in Georgian: **ა**-ობა ("***a*-*oba***")- existence vs. არ-**ა**-ობა ("***ar*-*a*-*oba***")—non-existence, nothingness).

ated of the One improperly, for those terms do not reveal the ineffable essence of the One. Not only do terms like Good, One, Power etc. apply to the One, but even pronouns like "he" or "it" fall short with reference to the One, probably because those pronouns entail some notion of pointing and indication, but the One cannot be even pointed at. Petritsi then refers to the One as the "it"-less It or "him"-less Him.[26] The One is even beyond causality and "only silence dared worship him by ceasing from words" (*Commentaries*, 46,6). Furthermore, the being of the One for Petritsi stands aloof from the opposition between being and not-being, since it is a completely different type of absolute being that has nothing opposed to Himself.[27] Thus, Petritsi preserves the absolute transcendence and unknowability of the One, which is for him the Father, but unlike Nicholas, he does not pit this idea against Proclus, appreciating in Proclus himself the same vision.

Besides, as mentioned above, Petritsi, like Nicholas, also says that the One transcendently pre-contains the blueprint of all plurality of beings in Himself in an indistinguishable way, which makes both him and Nicholas different from Proclus.

And finally, having encountered the term αὐθυπόστατος, or "self-producing", Petritsi's Christian ear, just like Nicholas', is pricked by the problem of ascribing to an entity other than God a self-sufficient status. Petritsi thus thoroughly relativizes these terms, saying that when Proclus speaks about the self-sufficient or self-constituted, this does not mean that such entities are not created by the One and do not depend on the One, but that they, *qua* monads, do not depend on anything below the series under their sway. Alternatively, he explains that something is self-sufficient (უმოქენო /*umoqeno*/—αὐταρκής) or self-subsisting (თვითმდგომარე /*t'vit'mdgomare*/—αὐθυπόστατος) as not requiring the substratum (ქუემდებარე /*quemdebare*/—ὑποκείμενον) of matter.[28]

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26 Ioane Petritsi, *Commentaria*, p. 37: "Where there can be observed neither parts no whole, there can be applied neither "it", ["he"] nor "to it", ["to him"], but we can worship [Him] with those names only from the perspective of the subsequent beings".

27 Ioane Petritsi, *Commentaria*, p. 170: "The featureless One Himself likely transcends both being and not-being, for opposite to the non-being is the First Being, which is the True Being (i.e. the world of intelligible ideas), but the One who is above henads, has nothing in opposition of Him."

28 Ioane Petritsi, *Commentaria*, p. 98: "He (Proclus) posits the immaterial ideas as self-standing (self-creating) and as ceaseless sources of their own existence. In fact, he says that they are causes of their properties because of their natural immortality and ceaseless life, positing them above all change, alteration, temporal motion and corporeal encompassment, saying that they aren't produced by others, by which he even more differentiates them from the bodily ideas, for all bodily ideas acquire their being through others, being unable to stand by themselves, even if they belong to heavenly bodies, for they are in

3 Concluding Remarks

Overall Petritsi relies on Proclus' metaphysics as the true one and tries to approximate Trinitarian doctrine with it—to Christianize, as it were, Proclus and the entire Hellenic philosophical heritage through him. In other words, Petritsi wishes to create a bridge between dialectic and revelation. By contrast, Nicholas wants to debunk Proclus' metaphysics as fundamentally erroneous with regard to the Trinity and even with regard to itself.

This shows two different, conflicting attitudes within the Byzantine intellectual circles of the 11th to 12th centuries. This conflict is civilizational, in fact, for the two attitudes can give birth to two different worlds. Nicholas' stance, from a Christian perspective, has a positive side, in that it claims the existence of a specific knowledge of reality that is, in principle, unapproachable by reason and any human capacities and, thus, is to be given by God alone in revelation. Revelation, in this sense, is an interpersonal medium of the Personhood (or, to be more precise, Persons) of God interacting freely with human persons, serving as an effective check on human arrogance. On the other hand, there is a danger here of separating philosophical discourse from Christian theology and making the latter a totally different world of notions and ideas. Nicholas does not exactly do this, since he himself relies heavily on dialectic and ontological principles, albeit with a specific nominalist twist, but he finds it proper and permissible to attack a philosophical text not in terms of the text itself, but in terms of ideas that are hardly addressed and considered by the author of that given philosophical text. This tendency, if brought to an extreme, creates an unbridgeable breach between Christianity and philosophy, preventing the possibility of communication and mutual enrichment.

Petritsi presents a contrary stance (alongside Petritsi's teacher John Italos, for that matter), for he very optimistically claims that philosophers and Christians have the same innate dialectical *logos* in themselves and that the divine Logos illuminates it, providing insights into it regardless of religious differences. Thus, in the world of Petritsi truth can be discussed and negotiated between Christian and Hellenic philosophers with a greater delicacy and responsiveness, without imposing one's own categories upon the others, but with an attempt to find a common epistemological-ontological ground between different truth-seeking traditions. Moreover, for Petritsi, even Biblical revelation itself cannot be properly understood without the dialectical *logos* and

need of matter, as an accident (შემთხვევითი /*s'emt'xvevi'ti*/—τὸ συμβεβεκόν) is in need of a substrate (ქუემდებარე /*quemdebare*/—τὸ ὑποκείμενον)."

the philosophical method. This stance has its salutary benefit in providing a vast space for dialogue and interaction between Christianity and philosophy, with the prospect of the above-mentioned mutual enrichment. However, one risk here is that Petritsi nearly equates Christian revelation with dialectic in terms of their importance for the human endeavor for true meaning and perfection. A consequence of this is a potential blurring of that specific salvific scandal in Christianity which radically differentiates it from the tradition of Hellenic philosophy. I think this great tension and the necessity to strike a correct balance are a perennial challenge and task for Christian philosophers.

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