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THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN GREEK PHILOSOPHY:
A SYSTEMATIC INTRODUCTION *

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

A. On the Beginnings.

Modern Greek Philosophy has been the object of systematic research for the past few decades, ever since the study of the philosophical texts written during the Turkish Occupation was initially attempted with historical-philosophical criteria, and since facets of the Modern Greek thinking were reconstructed with a view to drawing attention to its conceptual content. The focussing of modern research interest on the forms through which theoretical contemplation was crystallised in the reality of Modern Hellenism resulted in the formulation of the prerequisites that enable us today to comprehend the historical nature of idea formation. At the same time, analytical tools have been generated through which we are now able to eschew resorting to descriptive literary analysis. It is also possible to critically inspect Modern Greek thinking, which to a great extent continues to be unknown, as the majority of evidence on which it is documented remains unpublished. By exploring the thematic constituents and by substantiating the connections and affinities of Modern Greek Philosophy with its Ancient Greek and Byzantine thought, and with European thought in particular, the prerequisite scientific foundations have been laid so that the nature of the Modern Greek theoretical expression can be approached on several strata and come into view, and the self-

* The present study constitutes a part of a synthetic work on Modern Greek Philosophy. We shall therefore limit ourselves to presenting the absolutely essential references.



existant importance of the philosophical and scientific production during the Turkish Occupation can be unequivocally established.

The difficulty in utilising aspects of intellect as a guide to segment History is intensified when dealing with the History of Philosophy, where the temporal landmarks only function conventionally, as signposts that assist in delineating the distinct contributions to this particular field of intellectual production. In order to determine the *beginnings* of Modern Greek Philosophy one should consider not only the singular terms which have been defined as the distinctive features of *philosophising* throughout the long tradition of thought but also their co-existence with the emergence of *Greek awareness* and the nascent *Modern Hellenism*.

Regarding the first condition that needs to be satisfied, the study of available evidence about the stages of Greek thought in its historical impression orient us towards the mid-15th century, a period when the redefinition of the legacy of classical thought by Byzantine Philosophy attained its apex, and the field of controversy between the philosophical traditions of Platonism and Aristotelianism was shaped. The novel methodological element that can be traced in the argumentation of both sides was the systematic resort to the overall interpretive tradition, not just from Greek sources but also Arabic and - especially - Latin ones. As will be subsequently seen, the contact with the scholastic tradition dates from the late 13th and early 14th century.

Both in the teaching establishments and in the philosophical production in Byzantium, classical thought and especially Plato, Plotinus and Aristotle had always exerted an influence, which was at times palpable and at times more discrete, but in the mid-15th century the comparative evaluation of their ontological and cosmological views, with reference to the theological certainties, became the focus of an intense controversy¹. The autonomous dynamics attained by the philosophical debate (rife in theological references, in accordance with the theoretical perspective of the time) that transpired some years

1. See Petsios (2003: pp. 20-56; 2001: pp. 1 et seq.). On more recent bibliography, see Kyrkos (1999), Psimmenos (1988-1989; 2000; 2004). On the issue of the *beginnings* also see the methodological remarks by Noutsos (2005: pp. 28-32, 36-39) [Full references to the studies can be found in the bibliographical section].



before the Conquest of Constantinople and continued for several decades in Italy shaped a field of enquiry that influenced the History of Philosophy and European Culture in general, as well as that of Modern Greek Philosophy in particular. The Greek legacy, which was familiar to the Byzantines, and especially the legacy of Plato, the representatives of Middle Platonism and the Neoplatonics were imparted to Europe. Moreover, Modern Greek scholars, functioning within the new historical, political and financial realities that were shaped following the Fall of Constantinople, made decisive contributions towards the creation of the Humanistic movement². In a parallel development, the rigorous representation of Aristotelianism in the debate and its eventual establishment foreshadowed 16th and 17th century modern Greek thinking, which was not dissimilar, in terms of content or method, to the theoretical premises that were formulated in the particular historical junction, that may be considered as the *beginnings* of Modern Greek Philosophy. As regards the second condition, the *Modern Greek self awareness*, although relevant evidence is also to be found in 13th century texts³, the overall intellectual presence of Plethon, who stressed that «we are of Hellenic Genos, as is evidenced by both our mother language and our traditional education» («Ἐσμεν [...] Ἑλληνες τὸ γένος ὡς ἡ τε φωνὴ καὶ ἡ πατριος παιδεία μαρτυρεῖ»)⁴ constituted a rigorous confirmation of the proliferation, at that particular juncture of time, of the historical prerequisites that assisted in the emergence of *Modern Hellenism*, whose definition in terms of formal characteristics presupposed the novel forms of collective life organisation that appeared during the Turkish Occupation.

B. Encounter with Western Thinking.

Bearing in mind the connective tissue of Ancient Greek thought, which can be traced both in the teaching process and in the structure

2. Geanakoplos (1965); Staikos (1989); Noutsos (2004).

3. Indicatively see Vakalopoulos (1974: pp. 75 et seq.); Mastrodemitris (1983: pp. 32-38). Also see the views articulated by Noutsos (2005: pp. 30-31). At this point one should also underscore that important evidence is provided, among others, by the Theodoros B' Laskaris' *Seventh Lecture on Christian Theology, second lecture against the Latins...* («Τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Θεολογίας, Λόγος ἑβδόμος, ὁ κατὰ Λατίνων λόγος δευτέρος...») (terminus ante quem Christmas 1254). See Laskaris, Theodoros B' (1988, pp. 137-148).

4. Plethon (1926: p. 247).



and content of Byzantine philosophical texts, it is beyond doubt that during the 15th century all processes designated as philosophy originated in the final two centuries of Byzantium (mid-13th - mid 15th century), when an intellectual blossoming was evidenced, also identifiable in the level of Philosophy. Nikephoros Vlemmydes (1197-1272), whose *Epitomes* of Aristotle's *Logic* and *Physics*⁵ became the standard textbooks for the teaching of Philosophy throughout the Turkish Occupation his disciple Theodoros B' Laskaris (1222-1258)⁶, Nikephoros Houmnos (1250-1327), Theodoros Metochitis (1260/61-1332), Georgios Pachymeres (1242-1310), Maximos Planoudis (1255-1305), Nikephoros Gregoras (1295-1360), Varlaam of Calabria (1290-1350) and the brothers Demetrios (ca. 1324-†1397/98) and Prochoros Kydones (ca. 1335-1368/69)⁷ are a few of the intellectuals who have presented work of significance, in terms of the History of Philosophical concepts (constituted through the critical perception of classical thought and especially the ontological and cosmological dictums of Plato and Aristotle), of the reconstruction of orthodox Byzantine contemplation and of the rejection or acceptance of the western tradition.

The relation with the Ancient Greek intellectual legacy was manifested in print by Theodoros B' Laskaris when he asserted that *«all contemporary philosophy and knowledge, to avoid naming each and every science, has either been discovered by the Hellenes or constitutes an improvement on something which exists, and anyone seeking the all-encompassing experience can learn this»* (αἵσα τοίνυν φιλοσοφία καὶ γνῶσις, ἵνα μὴ κατ' ὄνομα λέγω τὰς ἐπιστήμας, Ἑλλήνων ἢ εὗρεμα ἢ πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον ἔκ τινος ὃν ὑπάρχει μεταστοιχείωμα καὶ ὁ τὴν πείραν ζητῶν τὴν παμφιλόσοφον διερχόμενος μάθοιεν)⁸. This admission would recur in the argumentation of the Modern Greek thinkers during the ensuing centuries and would form a constant element of their *self-awareness* which would be emphatically portrayed during the period of the Enlightenment. However, at this point, it is worth pointing out that the initial contact between Byzantine and western thought materialised within the broader scientific, theological and philosophical framework of the

5. Migne, J.-P. *P.G.*, (142: pp. 688-1643).

6. Laskaris, Theodoros B' (1988).

7. On the distinct contributions of the abovementioned thinkers on the philosophical debate of the time, indicatively see Tatakis (1977: p. 230 et seq.). Compare to Benakis (2002: pp. 533-584, 660 et seq.).

8. Laskaris, Theodoros B' (1988, p. 141).



«*Palaiologic renaissance*», as the period between 1259 and 1453 is conventionally referred to.

According to what is now known, this was the first time when works of Latin literature were translated into Greek by Maximos Planoudes, the learned scholar who taught *Rhetoric, Grammar, Mathematics and Astronomy* in the school of the monastery of Chora. Apart from works by Cato the Elder, Ovid, Juvenal and Cicero, around the year 1281 Planoudes, that «*wisest and most honest monk*» (ὁ «σοφώτατος καὶ τιμιώτατος μοναχός»), according to the titles of his manuscripts, translated *De Trinitate* (: *Περὶ τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος*) by Augustine (354-430)⁹, a fundamental treatise of western theological and philosophical thought. When that book was translated into Greek the psychological teachings on the Trinity became available to Orthodox theologians of the era. As is known, the work would be annotated two centuries later (in 1588) by Maximos Margounios¹⁰. Around the year 1295 Planoudes accurately rendered in Greek and commented on *De Philosophiae Consolatione* (: *Περὶ Παραμυθίας τῆς Φιλοσοφίας*), by Boethius (†525)¹¹ which had become a standard reading and philosophical textbook during the Middle Ages. Planoudes also conveyed into the Greek language a work erroneously attributed to Augustine, *De duodecim abusivis saeculi* (: *Περὶ τῶν δώδεκα βαθμῶν τῆς παραχρήσεως*)¹², a moral teaching work which had originated in the quill of an anonymous Irish monk in the latter half of the 7th century and has been preserved through manuscripts of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

In 1354, Demetrios Kydones, laboriously rendering texts by Augustine and of the augustine tradition into Greek¹³, translated the treatise titled *Summa Contra Gentiles* (: *Κατὰ Ἑθνικῶν, ἢ καθ' Ἑλλήνων*, as the title is mentioned in most manuscripts) by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and the scholastic deduction became known to Byzantium through this apologetic and philosophical text. Kydones subsequently «*published in the Greek dialect*» the «*First Part*» («*Pars Prima*») and the «*First*» and «*Second Part*» («*Prima Secundae*» and «*Secunda Secundae*») of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae (Second Part)*¹⁴, which enco-

9. Papathomopoulos - Tsavari - Rigotti (1955).

10. Fedalto (1968).

11. Papathomopoulos (1999).

12. Giannakis (1974: 217-258).

13. Niketas (1982: 7-25).

14. Kydones (1976, 1979, 1980, 1982); This edition princeps «was based on five principal manuscripts, among the thirty extant codices containing the complete



mpasses scholastic thought both as content and method. The same scholar can be accredited with the translation of *De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, Graecos et Armenos*, whereas the «Third Part» («Pars Tertia») of the *Summa* was rendered into Greek by Prochoros Kydones, Demetrios' brother, who also translated other works of Aquinas. The most noteworthy of these are *De potentia*, *De spiritualibus creaturis*, which are contrained in the *Questiones Disputatae*, *De aeternitate mundi contra murmurantes*, as well as the «Introduction» of Aquinas' *Commentaries* to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (S. Thomae Aquinatis, *In Metaphysica Aristotelis Commentaria*)¹⁵. Apart from *De libero arbitrio* (*On the free arbitration*) of Saint Augustine as interpreted by the monk Prochoros (: *Περὶ τῆς ἀντεξουσιότητος τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀγνουστίνου ἐρμηνευθὲν παρὰ τοῦ ἱερομονάχου κρηοῦ Προχόρου*)¹⁶, this scholar translated other works by Augustine¹⁷ as well as *De topicis differentiis* by Boethios between 1362 and 1367, a text which had been composed based on Cicero's *Topics* and *De inventione*, Themistios' *Topics* (: *Τοπικά*), which are now presumed lost, and Aristotle's «*Organon*». The same text by Boethios, which had formed the work of reference during the Middle Ages for the instruction of «*Topics*» in the framework of the subject of Dialectic, had been conveyed «from the Latin tongue to the Greek» («ἐκ τῆς λατινίδος φωνῆς πρὸς τὴν ἑλληνίδα») around the year 1267, almost a century earlier, by Maximos Olovolos under the title *An excellent division on the dialectic topics by Boetios a Latin philosopher* (: *Βοετίου φιλοσόφου Λατίνου, Περὶ τόπων διαλεκτικῶν διαίρεσις ἀρίστη*) and was annotated by Georgios Pachymeres¹⁸.

The contact between Byzantine scholarship and western theological and philosophical literature served to open the horizon of familiarisation with different cultural codes. The theological tendencies of the «pro-Thomasians» [Demetrios and Prochoros Kydones, Nikolaos Kavasilas (1320-1391), Theophanes of Nicaea (†1381), Manuel Calecas (†1410), Andreas (†1451) and Maximos († post 1430) Chrisoverges; Bessarion (1403-1472)] and the «anti-Thomasians» [Varlaam of Calabria (1290-1350), Neilos Kavasilas (†1363), Matthaios-Angelos Pana-

translation: *Vaticani graeci* 612 and 611, *Parisini graeci* 1235 and 1237, and *Oxonienis Bodleianus Roe graecus* 21». See Glycofrydi - Leontsini (2003: 179).

15. Papadopoulos (1967: pp. 25-64);

16. Hunger (1990).

17. Hunger (1984).

18. Niketas (1990); Benakis (2002, pp. 187-197).



retos (†post 1369), Kallistos Angelikoudes Melenikiotes (†late 14th c.)¹⁹, Markos Evgenikos (1392-1444)] who argued during that era²⁰, are particularly interesting for the *History of Philosophy*, as is the debate between the proponents of «*hesychasm*» [Gregorios Palamas (†1359)] and their opponents [Varlaam of Calabria (1290-1350), Akindynos (†1348/50)], because the advocates of the various trends exploited the philosophical deduction to a great extent, regardless of their method, their primary theological objectives and their statutory agreements or disagreements. Moreover, their works visibly highlighted the fundamental issue of the relation between «*Philosophy and Theology*», an issue which emerges from the replies to questions concerning the priority of «*reason*» or «*faith*» and the «*limits*» of dialectic in the investigation of truth by revelation.

II. THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONTROVERSY BETWEEN PLATONICS - ARISTOTELIANS

A. *The philosophical context.*

In the 15th century, the constant query concerning the degree of alignment of Platonic or Aristotelian thinking to the theological assumptions which encompassed the «*sacred [...] truth*» (ἀιερὰν [...] ἀλήθειαν) formed the starting point for the debate which unfolded around the questions about the structure of the world, the meaning and role God — his identification with the Aristotelian «*prime mover*» (πρῶτο κινουῦν) or the Platonic «*Creator*» (δημιουργός)—, the relation of «*form*» (εἶδους) and «*substance*» (οὐσίας), and the interpretive adequacy of the theory of «*four causes*» (τεσσάρων αἰτίων). The discussion also focussed on issues such as movement (κίνηση), the *raison d'être* of the “fifth element” (ether) (τοῦ πέμπτου σώματος, τοῦ αἰθέρα), the nature of infinity (τοῦ ἀπείρου), the creation ex nihilo (τῇ ἐκ τοῦ μηδενὸς δημιουργία) and the affinity between *Becoming and Being*, (Γίγνεσθαι καὶ Εἶναι) the possibility that «*nature*» (φύση) and «*art*» (τέχνη) are wilful, as well as the potential that «*luck*» (τύχη) and the «*automaton*» (αὐτόματον) can be justified in a teleologically articulated theory of natural becoming²¹.

19. Papadopoulos (1970).

20. Papadopoulos (1967: pp. 73 et seq.); Benakis (2002: pp. 633-646).

21. On the relative citations see Petsios (2003: pp. 25 et seq.).



From the perspective of the formal features of available historical-philosophical evidence, the content of the Platonics' and Aristotelians' argumentation, which was not limited to the level of nominal references but ventured deeper into most salient facets of philosophical enquiry, received signification from the previous debate while simultaneously exhibiting characteristics that enable us to trace the responsiveness of philosophy to the horizon shaped not only by the Greek commentary tradition but also by the interpretations of the Scholastics during the Middle Ages. Georgios Scholarios, for instance, acknowledged his debt not only to Theophrastos, Alexandros Aphrodisieus (1st/2nd c. AD), Porphyrios (233-300 AD), Themistios (330-390 AD), Philoponos (490- 570 AD), Syrianos (4th/5th c. AD) and Simplicios (6th c. AD), but also to the Latin «wisdom [which originates] from outside [our] borders», («ὕπερόριον σοφίαν» τῶν Λατίνων) i.e. the Scholastic Philosophy of the «ancient [...] middle [...] and more recent and more precise orientation» (τῆς «ἀρχαιοτέρας [...] τῆς μέσης [...] καὶ τῆς νεωτέρας ταύτης καὶ ἀκριβεστέρας αἰρέσεως»). The Latins were perceived by Scholarios as intellectuals who had «augment Aristotle's philosophy» («τὴν Ἀριστοτέλους φιλοσοφίαν ἐπηύξησαν»)²². In the same line of reasoning one may recognise the beliefs of Bessarion (1403-1472), a man with a profound understanding of scholastic interpretation, that Aquinas constituted the real heir of the «Aristotelian school» («τῷ Θωμᾷ [...] τῆς ἀριστοτελικῆς σχολῆς τῷ ὄντι διαδόχῳ»)²³.

The ventures provided by the argumentation of Georgios Gemistos-Plethon (1360-1452) and Bessarion pollinated the Platonic movement of the Renaissance, and combined with the presence of Greek scholars in the West after the Fall of Constantinople, paved the ground for the philosophical shift of interest to routes which were not exclusively defined by the premises of Aristotelian philosophy. In the meanwhile, the argument accentuated the robust foundations of the Aristotelian structure, which would form the model of philosophical teaching and the theoretical framework for thought within which the philosophy of modern Greek scholars in the 16th and 17th century materialised.

22. Scholarios (1936, VII: p. 3).

23. Bessarion (P.G., 161: p. 200).



B. The philosophical argumentation.

a. Georgios Gemistos - Plethon & Georgios Scholarios.

Plethon's lecture in Florence in 1439 on the topic of *The differences between Aristotle and Plato* (: *Περὶ ὧν Ἀριστοτέλης πρὸς Πλάτωνα διαφέρειται*) formed the theoretical opening of the philosophical debate that would restructure the field of European philosophy and highlight the dynamic of Platonic and Neoplatonic interpretation as being at least of similar rigour with the Aristotelian legacy. In delineating a cosmological view in which the dominant feature was the unity of the universal «Whole» («Ὅλον») and which drew its ontological validity from the affinity between natural *becoming* and its eternal model, Plethon was in sharp contrast with the views of Aristotle, who was described as «uneducated» («ἀμαθαίνων») not only in issues of natural philosophy, but also ontology, such as, for instance, the «homonymy of being» («ὁμωνυμία τοῦ ὄντος») and the views regarding «universality» («καθόλου»)²⁴. Plethon's lecture brought to the historical-philosophical forefront the Platonic and Neoplatonic proposal for the conjunction of «Being and Becoming» («Εἶναι καὶ Γίνεσθαι»), as well as the related elucidations about God and the substance of the soul. His teachings impacted profoundly on western thought, since they sparked the reorientation of philosophy. After the foundation in around 1662 of the *Florence Academy* (modelled after *Plato's Academy*) by Cosimo Medici (1369-1464), the (neo)platonic trend of thought, encompassed in Marcilio Ficino's (1433-1499) treatise *Platonica Theologia de Immortalitate Animorum* (1482), the analogous editions (*Commentaria V perpetua in Platonem* and *Compendium in Timaeum*, 1496), and the Platonic *Corpus* that was translated and annotated by the same scholar (*Plato, Opera*, 1484-1485), fertilised the multifaceted philosophical debate in Italy.

Plethon's philosophical thought constituted the terminus of a long and ripe tradition of interpretations and reinterpretations of platonic philosophy, which he conceived as descending from oriental wisdom and in particular that of Zoroaster. The elements that the Philosopher of Mystras drew from the founder of the Academy looked back on neoplatonic admissions (Plotinus, Porphyrios, Iamvlichos, Proclus),

24. Petsios (2003: p. 26).



resulting in the composition of an original philosophical production, where the views on the affinity of the immortal soul with the perishable body, the role of *Fate* («Εἰμαρμένης»)²⁵, the statutory importance of *virtue*, «a habit», («τῆς ἔξεως») as he writes in the *Laws* (: Νόμοι), «according to which we are benign», («καθ' ἣν ἀγαθοὶ ἐσμέν»), the political cohabitation as well as his teachings about the freedom of man all coalesced with beliefs about gods that originated from the study of Zoroastrianism and ancient Greek mythology. According to Plethon's anthropology, Man was defined as «an immortal creature born to partake a mortal nature» («ζῶον ἀθάνατον θνητὴ κοινωνεῖν φύσει πεφνκός») and as a «composite being», «of two [...], that is, both of divine and of animal» («σύνθετον ὄν», ἐκ δυοῖν [...], θείου τε δὴ καὶ θηριώδους)²⁶ who partakes in a self-contained and eternal divine substance and —simultaneously— in variable and perishable matter, thus being subjected to an unavoidable necessity that governs the function of the Universe and guarantees cosmic harmony. The Greek awareness, which was highlighted in his works, the perceptiveness on which he analysed the social, financial and political problems of the Empire that had accumulated during the first decades of the 15th century, the reform plans and his simultaneous metaphysical concerns all reveal a philosopher who belonged to the border of Byzantine and Modern Greek thought.

The reply to Plethon came from Georgios Scholarios - Gennadios, whose work resonated with the centuries-old tradition of thought that had been structured around the axis of Aristotle's Philosophy and whose founding premises were the conceptual clarifications of his commentators, the critical perception of the fundamental ontological distinctions of the philosopher from Stageira, which had been expressed in the Byzantine patristic philosophy, the interpretations of the Arabs [Avicenna (Abu Ibn Sina, 980-1037), Averroes (Ibn Rusnd, 1126-1198)] and the compositions of the Scholastics (particularly Thomas Aquinas). Aquinas was described by Scholarios as «a wise man [...] and, compared to those who are -among humans- perfect in wisdom, second to none» («σοφὸς [...] καὶ τῶν ἐν σοφίᾳ τελείων ἐν ἀνθρώποις οὐδενὸς ἐνδείξ») ²⁷. Despite the pronounced opposition of Scholarios to the teachings offered by the «doctor communis» of Scholastic Theology regar-

25. Gemistos-Plethon (1982 p. 64).

26. Gemistos-Plethon (2002: p. 613).

27. Scholarios (1931, V: p. 1).



ding major doctrinal problems, such as the *emanation of the Holy Spirit* (ἡ ἐκπόρευση τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος) and the *distinction of divine substance and energy* (ἡ διαφορὰ θείας οὐσίας καὶ ἐνεργείας), they both met at the level of the interpretive approach to Aristotle: The treatises *Selection from the first part of the Ethics by the most wise Thomas de Aquino, fully preserving the number and order of issues* (: Ἐκλογή τοῦ πρώτου τῶν Ἠθικῶν τοῦ σοφωτάτου Θωμᾶ δὲ Ἀκίνο, τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ καὶ τῆς τάξεως τῶν ζητημάτων πάντων πεφυλαγμένων); *On the difference between essence and being by Thomas, translated and brought into the Greek language* (: Τοῦ Θωμᾶ, περὶ διαφορᾶς οὐσίας καὶ τοῦ εἶναι ἐρμηνευθὲν καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἑλλάδα μετενεχθὲν γλῶτταν); *Thomas' interpretation of Aristotle's treatise on the soul* (: Εἰς τὴν περὶ Ψυχῆς πραγματείαν Ἀριστοτέλους ἐξηγήσεις τοῦ Θωμᾶ); *Selections from the introduction by Thomas on Aristotle's Physics* (: Ἐκ τῶν τοῦ Θωμᾶ, Προλεγόμενα εἰς τὴν Φυσικὴν Ἀκρόασιν Ἀριστοτέλους); *Introductions or previews selected from the works of Thomas* (: Προλεγόμενα ἢ Προθεωρούμενα ἐκ τῶν τοῦ Θωμᾶ); *On sophisms, selected from the works of Thomas the philosopher* (: Περὶ τῶν σοφισμάτων, ἐκ τῶν τοῦ φιλοσόφου Θωμᾶ), which were translated by Scholarios and incorporated in his philosophical teachings constituted evidence that he espoused the interpretation of Aristotle, as established the «*princeps scholasticorum*»²⁸ With Scholarios, who produced Greek *Summaries of Summa contra Gentiles* and of the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*²⁹, a decisive step was taken to bring together the ontological, cosmological and gnoseological suggestions of Aristotle and the theological certainties and the texture of Aristotelianism was formulated, which would define subsequent Modern Greek thought.

In its essence, the argumentation of Scholarios, the first Ecumenical Patriarch of the subjugated Greeks after the Fall of Constantinople, in his treatise *Against Plethon's questions on Aristotle* (: Κατὰ τῶν Πλήθωνος ἀποριῶν ἐπ' Ἀριστοτέλει, 1443), would form the charter of Modern Greek Aristotelianism, as the approach of Aristotelian thought would materialise throughout the 16th and 17th centuries along particular leitmotifs: the comprehension of «*nature*» («*φύσεως*») as the point of departure from which the materialisation of beings starts and as the cause of the transformation of the way in which beings

28. Petsios (2003: p. 43, n. 60).

29. Papadopoulos (1967: pp. 65-68); Benakis (2002: pp. 633-646).



exist, the finite and geocentrically structured Universe, which was divided into supra-Lunar and sud-Lunar regions, the nature of the «*prime matter*» («*πρώτης ὕλης*») and of the elements which were produced from it, the causes of creation and of attrition of beings, the substance of movement, the relation between «*eternity*» («*αἰδιότητα*») and «*temporality*» («*χρονικότητα*»), and the connection between the «*mover*» («*κινουόν*») and the «*mover*» («*κινούμενον*») (or: the Creator and the universal becoming), which formed -in various appellations- a central issue of traditional Metaphysics.

The Modern Greek scholar praised the contribution of Aristotle to the comprehensive study of nature [*Had it not been for Aristotle*], he remarked, «*humans would not have partaken in natural philosophy*» («*ὥστ' εἰ μὴ διὰ γε Ἀριστοτέλη [. . .] οὐκ ἂν φυσικῆς φιλοσοφίας τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων μετεῖχε γένος*»)] and dialectics [*we would have neither the dialectic method nor any scientific way in his absence*] («*μεθόδου δὲ διαλεκτικῆς καὶ παντὸς ἐπιστημονικοῦ τρόπου ἐχηρεύομεν ἂν οὕτω πάν*»)³⁰. and he approved of the precedence of physics over mathematics because the former studied beings as perceptible unities of substance and form, whereas the science of mathematics examined beings in a secondary level and an abstract manner³¹. The philosophical works of Scholarios, according to which Philosophy contributed decisively to the «*salvation*» («*σωτηρία*»), «*blessedness*» («*μακαριότητα*»), «*security*» («*ἀσφάλεια*») and «*freedom*» («*ἐλευθερία*») of humans³², formed a study in Aristotelian physics, dialectics and ethics, as these were condensed not only in the *Corpus* of the founder of the Peripatetic School but also in the interpretations and reinterpretations of the ensuing generations. The study of Scholarios' treatises *An excellent and most wonderful fundamental division of the books on Physics, evidencing both the wisdom of the Philosopher who thus ordered them and the ingenuity of what is herein presented, for concise knowledge* (: *Διαίρεσις κεφαλαιώδης τῶν βιβλίων τῆς Φυσικῆς Ἀκροάσεως ἀρίστη καὶ θαυμασιωτάτη, δι' ἧς καὶ ἡ τοῦ Φιλοσόφου σοφία δέικνυται τοῦ οὕτω τάξαντος τὰ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγχίνοια τῶν καὶ διελόντων καὶ ἐκθεμένων ἐνταῦθα, ὥς ὁράται, πρὸς γνῶσιν ἐδύνοπτον*); *Notes on Aristotle's books on Physics* (: *Ἀποσημειώσεις τῶν Βιβλίων τῆς Φυσικῆς Ἀκροάσεως Ἀριστοτέλους*); *Notes on the*

30. Scholarios (1935, IV p. 5).

31. Petsios (2003: pp. 35-36).

32. Scholarios (1936, VII: p. 8).



four books on the Heavens (: Σημειώσεις ἐκ τῶν περὶ Οὐρανοῦ Βιβλίων Τεσσάρων); From the Meteorological Books A-D (: Ἐκ τῶν Μετεωρολογικῶν Βιβλίων Α'-Δ'); A preamble to Logic and on Porphyrios' Introduction (: Προλεγόμενα εἰς τὴν Λογικὴν καὶ εἰς τὴν Πορφυρίου Εἰσαγωγὴν); An elucidation of Aristotles' book Categories (: Εἰς τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους Κατηγοριῶν ἐξήγησις)³³; An elucidation of the book on Interpretation (: Εἰς τὸ περὶ Ἑρμηνείας βιβλίον ἐξήγησις), as well as Notes on the three books on the Soul (: Σημειώσεις ἐκ τῶν περὶ Ψυχῆς βιβλίων τριῶν), so as to limit ourselves to some, bear testimony to a thorough knowledge of the familiar concerns and unequivocally attest to the high level of philosophical study in Constantinople during the mid-15th century.

b. Georgios Trapezountios & Bessarion.

The Aristotelian Georgios Trapezountios (1395-1472), working in the same direction of thought, composed the treatise *Comparationes Philosophorum Aristoteles et Platonis* (ca. 1455) in which he attacked platonic philosophy with harsh remarks. The founder of the Academy was criticised as being «inexperienced» and «unlearned» («rudis») as regards dialectics and mathematics; his contribution to natural Philosophy was also assessed as being of inferior importance and his metaphysics rejected. With his polemics Trapezountios attempted on the one hand to clarify the distance between platonic teachings and the «universal truth» («καθολικὴ ἀλήθεια») of theology, and on the other hand to compliment the superiority of Aristotle, who was considered «great» («magnus»), «better learned than Plato» («doctior est Platone») and «superior to all» («princeps omnium») in both dialectics and the study of nature³⁴.

On the opposing pole of the debate, one can find Bessarion, a disciple of Plethon and later Cardinal of the Catholic Church. In his book *In Calumniatorem Platonis* (: Ἐλεγχοὶ τῶν κατὰ Πλάτωνος βλασφημιῶν, post 1455; publication of the Latin translation, 1469), the learned scholar, whose overall intellectual presence impacted decisively on the humanistic movement in Italy, countered the views of Trapezountios using structured argumentation, without degenerating into a personal argu-

33. Petsios (2003: p. 32, n. 23).

34. Petsios (2003: pp. 32-34).



ment, and defended Platonic Philosophy with arguments drawn from the entirety of History of Philosophy. Simultaneously, he acknowledged the contributions of Aristotle, the doyen, in his words, of «*all our science*» («πάσης ἡμῖν ἐπιστήμης»)³⁵, through the methodological perspective «*that we shouldn't defame Plato in Aristotle's defence, but justly preserve the works of both*» («ὅτι οὐ δεῖ Πλάτωνος ἀπολογούμενον Ἀριστοτέλους καταφέρεισθαι, ἀλλ' ἐκατέρω τὰ γινόμενα σώζειν δίκαιον»)³⁶. Bessarion considered that Plato philosophically contemplated «*about the divine and immaterial and the thought of the prime and true being*» («περὶ τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἄυλα καὶ τὴν τοῦ πρώτου καὶ ὄντως σκέψιν»), whereas Aristotle «*excellently and perfectly*» («ἄριστα καὶ τελεώτατα») investigated «*what was below the Moon and within nature*» («τὰ ὑπὸ σελήνην καὶ τὰ φυσικὰ τοιαῦτα»)³⁷.

Therefore, the evaluative priority attributed to Plato, or rather the primacy which Bessarion acknowledged to him, referred to the hierarchy of levels, or, as he himself remarked, was based on the qualification «*in as much as the supernatural is superior to the natural*» («ὅσῳ τὰ ὑπερφυσικὰ τῶν φυσικῶν ὑπερέχει»)³⁸. The evidence that Bessarion drew from the Commentaries of the «*genuine*» («γνησίῳ») interpreters of Aristotle in order to substantiate his view that the premises of Aristotle's philosophy were incompatible with the ontology emanating from the Christian teaching, underscored the demand for a self-referring view of the works of Aristotle, i.e. for its emancipation from the metaphysical exploitation of the Scholastics. In the same period, the latter attempt was undergoing attack from a strictly orthodox theological perspective, as can be evidenced by the observation of Joseph Vryenios (†1437/1438), whose *Collected Works* were published by Evgenios Voulgaris (1768-1784), that the «*Philosophy*» of Aristotle is «*of course good [...] and useful and beneficial to speech [...], but in matters of natural events, as well as issues above nature, it does not have the same rigour*» (ἡ φιλοσοφία τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλη εἶναι «καλὴ μὲν [...] καὶ χρήσιμος καὶ εὐρετικὴ λόγων [...], ἀλλ' ἐν τοῖς φύσει γινομένοις, οὐ μὴν δὲ καὶ τοῖς ὑπὲρ φύσιν ταύτην κέκταιται τὴν ἰσχύν»)³⁹.

35. Bessarion (*P.G.*, 161: p. 688).

36. Bessarion (1967, II: p. 82).

37. *Op. cit.*, p. 24).

38. Petsios (2003: pp. 34-35).

39. Vryenios (1768, p. 85 = 1991: p. 95).



Through the multifaceted philosophical themes which emerged from the debate, which also encompassed the distinct contributions of the Aristotelian Theodoros Gazes (1400-1475) *To Plethon, in defence of Aristotle* (: *Πρὸς Πλήθωνα ὑπὲρ Ἀριστοτέλους*), *On willing and unwilling* (: *Περὶ ἐκουσίου καὶ ἀκουσίου*) and *Disputation* (: *Ἀντιρρητικόν*), an essay by the platonic Michael Apostolis (1422-1480), *Regarding the opinions of Theodoros Gazes against Plethon on Aristotle's essence* (: *Πρὸς τὰς ὑπὲρ Ἀριστοτέλους περὶ οὐσίας κατὰ Πλήθωνος Θεόδωρον τοῦ Γαζῆ ἀντιλήψεις*, 1461) -which was however criticised by Bessarion- and the Aristotelian Andronikos Kallistos' (†1486) treatise *Regarding the views of Michael Apostoles against Theodoros* (: *Πρὸς τὰς Μιχαήλου Ἀποστόλου κατὰ Θεόδωρον ἀντιλήψεις*), we may constue that, regardless of the nominal admissions, interest in Plato was emphatically renewed during the mid-15th century, while the validity of Aristotelian Dialectics was affirmed, the developments of his moral writings were utilised, and the importance of his teachings on the access of nature was confirmed.

Moreover, two interpretive stances were codified as regards his work: firstly, the medieval-scholastic stance, according to which the views of the philosopher from Stageira were incorporated in many ways to the theological structure of world view and secondly, a self-contained study of Aristotelian thought independent from the theological premises, with a parallel reading of the *in extenso* elucidations of the ancients, among whom the prime rank was held by Alexandros Aphrodisieus, and the later commentators. At this point, it is worth noting that during this period (1468-1469) we also witness in [the writings of] Theodoros Agalianos (Theofanes of Medeias, ca. 1400-1474) and Georgios Ameroutsis (†post 1470) a debate indicative of the intellectual concerns of the time, namely the controversy regarding «*prescience*» («*πρόγνωση*») and «*predestination*» («*προορισμός*»)⁴⁰, a multifaceted philosophical issue which affected, among others, Georgios Scholarios in his later writing period⁴¹.

C. Theoretical reorientations.

During the early stages of the emergence of Modern Hellenism, the contact which had taken place with Medieval Philosophy and the specialised techniques which were invented in Italy, based on natural

40. Petsios (2003: pp. 50-51).

41. Tatakis (1977: p. 276).



research *per experimentum* all constituted the initial step for Modern Greek thought in its exchanges with the western European intellect. Andronikos Kallistos stressed that in his times, the Latins «*have improved a lot on all the sciences and the methods of speech, as none of those dealing with Plato and Aristotle*» («*τάς [...] ἐπιστήμας ἀπάσας καὶ τὰς μεθόδους τῶν λόγων οὕτω τοι λίαν ἠκρίβωσαν, ὥς μηδὲ τοῖς περὶ Πλάτωνα καὶ Ἀριστοτέλη*») and underscored the constant study of the phenomena by his Moderns by emphatically pointing out that «*if they [i.e. the ancients] appeared now, they would accede to us*» («*εἰ περιεῖεν ἐκεῖνοι νῦν, παραχωρήσαι ἂν ὁπωσοῦν*»)⁴².

In this observation, which reflected a very broad debate, as can be evidenced by Michael Apostolis' monograph, *A discourse towards those who claim that the Westerners are better than the Easterners on the entirety of Philosophy, and that they have better explained the way of Christ's first birth and the emanation of the Holy Spirit* (: Λόγος πρὸς τοὺς διῶσχυρισαμένους τῶν Ἀνατολικῶν εἶναι τοὺς Ἑσπερίους κρείττους τὰ εἰς πᾶσαν Φιλοσοφίαν καὶ δῆθεν κάλλιστα εἰπόντας περὶ τοῦ τρόπου τῆς πρώτης γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῆς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἐκπορεύσεως)⁴³, Aristotelian Kallistos was in agreement with the Platonic Bessarion. By projecting his belief that «*the Latins [...] have advanced in such a degree of wisdom*» («*οἱ Λατῖνοι [...] εἰς τόσον σοφίας προήθησαν*») thanks to exploitation of the knowledge that they had inherited «*from the Greeks*» («*παρ' Ἑλλήνων*»), the latter considered it an urgent demand to transplant («*μεταγαγεῖν*») the technical knowledge so that his contemporary Greeks might develop certain practical skills. Bessarion realised that at his time a very widespread shift was taking place from the intellectual process to the application of conclusions through craft. He also comprehended the financial and social consequences of the new discoveries. For this reason, in around 1444 he persistently urged Konstantinos Palaiologos, the Despot of Mystras, to take measures that would permit the learning of the four basic crafts, that is mechanics, iron-forging, gun-making and ship-building, which he described as «*necessary and useful to those who wish to live well*» («*ἀναγκαίαι καὶ χρησίμοις τοῖς εὖ ζῆν ἐθέλουσιν*»)⁴⁴. His proposal was based on the theoretical premise that «*we [...] will not receive anything foreign but*

42. Kallistos (1967, III: p. 197).

43. Apostolis (1949).

44. Bessarion (1967, III: p. 447); Noutsos (1980:90); Petsios (2003: pp. 54-55).



what is our own from our debtors, for they are obliged to produce upon demand» what «was not given to them but taken» («ἡμεῖς [...] οὐδὲ ἀλλότριόν τι ληψόμεθα ἀλλὰ τὰ αὐτῶν παρὰ τῶν ὀφειλόντων ἀποληψόμεθα, ὀφείλουσι γὰρ ὄντος τοῦ ἀπαιτοῦντος ἀποδοῦναι» ἐκεῖνα τὰ ὅποια δὲν «ἀπέλαβον ἀλλὰ ἔλαβον»)).⁴⁵

This was an argument which would recur in later literature and would constitute -mutatis mutandis- a *locum communem* of the Modern Greek Enlightenment during the 18th century, when the familiarisation with the concerns of *experimental philosophy* would be formulated in totally different terms. What is particularly important for the approach attempted here is that an unequivocally positive stance was formed in the mid-15th century on the accomplishments of the recent generations. The views expressed by Kallistos and Bessarion constituted revealing evidence for the earlier presence in Greek thought of the debate regarding the superiority of the “*ancients*” or the “*moderns*”. Moreover, their positive attitude towards the modern intellect, which was accepted after critical evaluation, should be registered as an important contribution to a line of enquiry whose various stages preclude uncompromising schematisations.

The migration of Greek scholars to Italy during the 15th century provided the spark for a rebirth of theoretical interest in extrinsic wisdom, thus inaugurating a new period in Modern Greek thought⁴⁶. Even at the end of the 14th century (1397) Manuel Chrysoloras (†1415) first taught Greek literature in Florence, according to the interpretive methods which had been formulated in the University of Constantinople, the «*Καθολικὸν Μουσεῖον*», and Georgios Trapezountios, who produced a rich writing and translating work, lectured on *Rhetoric*, *Logic* and *Poetics* in the Universities of Italy (Venice, Florence, Rome) from the beginnings of the 15th century. From 1440 to 1449, in Ferrara and subsequently from 1450 onwards in Rome, Theodoros Gazes rose to be one of the most important thinkers of the time and was entrusted by the Pope Nicolas V (†1455) with the responsibility of translating Greek texts among which the most important were the works of Aristotle that were to be republished several times.

Great importance is placed by research on the teachings of Ioannis Argyropoulos (1410/15-1487) in the University (Stadium) of Florence

45. Bessarion (*op. cit.*; pp. 447-448); Also Petsios (2003: pp. 54-55).

46. On this, see Geannakopoulos (1965); Staikos (1989); Noutsos (2004), passim).



(1457-1471) and subsequently in Rome, where he built on the tradition that had been established by Manuel Chrysoloras⁴⁷, Georgios Trapezountios and Theodoros Gazes. Argyropoulos had a profound understanding of Platonic and Aristotelian thought, but focussed his teaching interests on Aristotle, as did Andronikos Kallistos, who succeeded Argyropoulos in the Studium of Florence (1471-1475), while at the same time Demetrios Chalkokondylis (1423-1511), «a zealot of Plato and the Academy»⁴⁸, presented his lectures in the Studium of Padua (1463-1475) and in Florence (1475-1490), in the place of Kallistos, revolving around the axis of the Philosophy of the founder of the Academy. Within the humanistic landscape that was formed in Italy after the Fall of Constantinople, the trends of Platonism and Aristotelianism retained their respective alignments but were gradually emancipated from the spirit of the controversy and coalesced around the demand for a universal education of man, which was to be achieved through the study of the classical texts, in the publication of which the role of Modern Greek scholars proved decisive.

As is characteristically stated by Kodrikas «By virtue of its hospitality, Italy was the first to favourably receive the seeds of Greek education, and fortunately protected the sparks of learning from being extinguished. The despondent descendents of the Hellenes who sought refuge there, bearing the Greek Letters, were restored as belated fathers of a novel Greek Literature, which once again begot the spread of the enlightenment and ennoblement of Europe»⁴⁹.

47. Cammeli (2006).

48. Cammeli (2004: p. 49).

49. Kodrikas (1819: pp. 142-143): «Ἡ Ἰταλία πρώτη διὰ τῆς φιλοξενίας τῆς ὑπεδέχθη εὐμενῶς τὰ σπέρματα τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν μαθημάτων, καὶ διέσωσεν εὐτυχῶς ἄσβεστον τὸν σπινθῆρα τῆς μαθήσεως. Οἱ ἐκεῖ καταφυγόντες δυστυχεῖς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀπόγονοι, συμμετακομίσαντες τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ Γράμματα, ἀπεκατεστάθησαν πατέρες ὀφειγνεῖς μιᾶς νέας Ἑλληνικῆς Φιλολογίας, ἣ ὅποια ἐκ νέου ἐπροξένησε τὴν ἔκτασιν τοῦ φωτισμοῦ καὶ ἐξαιγετισμοῦ τῆς Εὐρώπης».



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