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Michael Psellos' Philosophical Opuscula on the Soul. Introductory Guidelines Emerged from an On-Going Translation Process

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Abstract

The second volume of "Michaelis Pselli *Philosophica Minora*", which was edited and published in Leipzig, in 1989, contains a large number of opuscula dealing with the soul. It is a rather complex analysis and, even if Michael Psellos was a Christian monk of the eleventh Century who lived in Byzantium and who was a contemporary of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, this analysis is done mostly by using classical philosophical authors (Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Proclus) or Christian authors who were interested in a philosophical approach of such topics, as for example Nemesius, bishop of Emessa, who wrote *On the Nature of Man*, and John Philoponus, the great Christian Aristotelian commentator of the sixth Century. The present paper tries to point out some aspects of these opuscula, without going into a deep and thorough analysis, since the philosophical work of Psellos presented not such a great interest among the scholars as to produce significant articles and studies and, therefore, the secondary literature on this topic is rather scarce. In fact, these philosophical opuscula have never been translated into any modern language and it is my project of translating them into Romanian that aroused my interest for these texts.

Keywords

Soul, intellect, Michael Psellos, Byzantine philosophy, Byzantine theology.

I. Prolegomena

In his book, *Hellenism in Byzantium. The Transformation of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*, Anthony Kaldellis begins the chapter dedicated to Michael Psellos in an apparently discouraging way (although not entirely unjustified), with a question which reveals the difficulty when approaching the works of “the first Byzantine humanist”¹:

“Where to start with Psellos? The word “unique” is often used lightly by historians, but in this case it is no idle epithet. Psellos’ radical philosophical proposals, his manifold and innovative writings on all subjects, his prestigious and historically impactive career at the court, his importance as a source for the eleventh century, and his decisive influence on Byzantine intellectual life, make him the most amazing figure in Byzantine history. He cannot be “explained”, at least not yet”².

Apart from being a living encyclopaedia, the tremendous importance of Psellos for the Byzantine culture lies in his attempt to revive Hellenistic philosophy, to bring Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and especially Proclus (as the last representative of Neoplatonism and as the greatest interpreter of Plotinus) in the forefront and to give them almost the same importance as to the Christian doctrine. His firm conviction was that the Byzantine philosophy is not only a useful instrument, but also an indispensable one for a proper understanding and interpretation of the divine Revelation, which is contained in the biblical texts and explained by the Fathers of the Church³. A text written by Basil Tatakis is explanatory for our topic:

¹ Hans Wilhelm HAUSSIG, *A History of Byzantine Civilization*, Praeger Publishers, London, 1971, p. 323.

² Anthony KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium. The Transformation of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 191.

³ I would like to give only a short example: commenting upon a text from the *Oration* 38 of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Psellos says that the previous interpreters of his theology failed in understanding him properly because they haven’t used the knowledge derived from Socrates (see the text contained in Michaelis PSELLI *Theologica* I, 90, ed. Paul Gautier, *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*, Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, Leipzig, 1989, p. 353). And Ch. Zervos, whose book is still normative in the research of Psellos’ works, says: “In order to explain the theological texts, Psellos follows always the way of Neoplatonists”: Christian ZERVOS, *Un*

“The circulation of ideas in Psellos’ works is clearly dominated by the opinion that the Greek thought and civilization are, despite their perfection, only a preparatory stage. The Fathers of the Church, desiring to study in a useful way the Greek philosophers, considered them to be Moses’ disciples. Psellos sees them as forerunners of Christianity. We see here Psellos in a new light: a philosopher who understands the human thought and thinking as being oriented in a progression towards perfection. Moreover, by presenting the Greeks as Christians unaware of their affiliation, Psellos rehabilitates them in the eyes of the Byzantines. (...) In his effort of rehabilitating them, Psellos will find an ally in the allegorical interpretation. Starting from the idea that the supreme perfection is contained in the Christian doctrine, Psellos was allowed to take, from the Greek civilization, any manifestation, any idea which, according to his vision, announces Christianity and directs the spirit towards it”⁴.

Although we can identify this practice of using Hellenistic philosophy for interpreting biblical texts in the writings of several Church Fathers, we note the fact that it had never been used at such a scale and by someone whose fidelity to the Christian doctrine was doubted to such a degree that he was asked to give a confession of faith⁵. Some of the scholars of Psellos’ works suspected that what Psellos was doing was not so much to support and sustain the Christian doctrine by means of the Hellenistic philosophy or to enrich it with the Greek eloquence as to abolish the autonomy of the Christian doctrine by merging it with the Platonic thought and by making these two to reciprocally interpenetrate.

It is worth noting some opinions of the scholars who dealt with the works of Psellos, in order to see how difficult is to make his profile and to reach to some (if any at all!) unanimous conclusions. The first scholar who

philosophe néoplatonicien du XI^e siècle, Michel Psellos. Sa vie. Son oeuvre. Ses luttes philosophiques. Son influence, Éditions Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1919, p. 189.

⁴ Basile TATAKIS, *Filosofia bizantină*, Editura Nemira, București, 2010, pp. 221-222.

⁵ Psellos’ adversaries suspected so much his Christian beliefs and their purity, that they denounced him to the emperor as an unfaithful. The emperor Constantine IX Monomachos demanded a confession of faith, which was provided by Psellos in a written form (see Ch. ZERVOS, *Un philosophe néoplatonicien...*, pp. 212-220).

dealt *in extenso* with the works of Psellos was Christian Zervos – already mentioned above –, who wrote a doctoral thesis defended in 1919, at the Faculty of Letters, in Paris. Based on the analysis of his extended and manifold works, Zervos considers Psellos not an original philosopher, but rather an erudite and a professor, who is primarily interested in making his students acquainted with Greek philosophy; therefore, his philosophical works may be seen as a philosophical florilegium which lacks originality, but which, on the other side, may show us the main philosophical stream Psellos favors⁶.

The same appreciations regarding Psellos' philosophical expertise can be found in the book of Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West*:

“Psellos was enormously learned and this learning extended into regions of pagan learning, and furthermore, probably, his knowledge of Neoplatonism and its religious sources was something that Byzantium had not seen since the pagan Neoplatonists died out after the closing of the Platonic Academy by Justinian in 529”⁷.

If one goes a step further, assertions can be found regarding the attitude of Psellos towards the Hellenistic philosophy: does he esteem it? Does he reject it? Is his attitude rather neutral? Focusing on Psellos' interests in Hellenic philosophy, Anthony Kaldellis, whose remarks opened the “Prolegomena” section, says:

“Psellos is not trying to ‘buttress’ Christian doctrine with philosophy or ‘enrich’ it with Greek eloquence. He is abolishing its autonomy by fusing it with Platonic thought and making the two interpenetrate each other. Despite programmatic statements that ascribe primacy to Christian doctrine, in practice Psellos

⁶ In the same way is seen Psellos by David Jenkins, with reference to his philosophical work: “Many of his philosophical texts are in fact excerpts and paraphrases that merely reflect his wide reading and preferences. When he did apply his learning to a particular issue, it was often in the context of a lecture, speech, or letter”; see David JENKINS, ‘Michael Psellos’, in Anthony KALDELLIS, Niketas SINIOSOGLU (eds.), *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, p. 449.

⁷ Andrew LOUTH, *Greek East and Latin West. The Church AD 681-1071*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 2007, p. 335.

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treats both it and Greek myth as coded versions of the same Platonic doctrines. He is effectively trying to make it impossible for Christians – at least those Christians taught by him – to expound their beliefs without first talking about Proklos. This is subversion, not reconciliation, and it is very cleverly done at that”⁸.

Despite Psellos’ confession of Orthodoxy, which was publicly delivered in order to be absolved of any accusations of heresy, Kaldellis suspects him of subversion and treason. But because Psellos wrote so much, in different areas and on different topics, the observations of Anthony Kaldellis may be only partially correct: depending on the subject he is dealing with, depending on the listeners he addresses to, depending on the conclusion he wants to reach to, Psellos may be seen as much a theologian as a philosopher.

Denis Walter, in his book *Michael Psellos: Christliche Philosophie in Byzanz*, in which he analyses Psellos’ theological opuscula, concludes: “Völlig unaristotelisch, sondern vielmehr von den Kirchenvätern geprägt, ist hingegen seine Seelenlehre”⁹.

Even more surprisingly, after analyzing some of the philosophical texts contained in *Philosophica minora II*¹⁰ and in spite of a conclusion leading in the same direction as the remarks of Anthony Kaldellis leaded to, Dominic O’Meara says:

“Pour conclure, je voudrais proposer quelques réflexions, basées sur les *Philosophica Minora II*, concernant la manière dont Psellos envisage le rapport entre philosophie et foi chrétienne. Ce que j’appellerais son attitude “officielle” envers la philosophie semble irréprochable d’un point de vue d’orthodoxie théologique. Il insiste sur la priorité absolue de la doctrine chrétienne: la philosophie grecque apporte peu d’utile et beaucoup de nuisible

⁸ A. KALDELLIS, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, p. 201.

⁹ Denis WALTER, *Michael Psellos: Christliche Philosophie in Byzanz*, De Gruyter, Berlin/ Boston, 2017, pp. 88-89.

¹⁰ Michaelis PSELLI *Philosophica minora II*, ed. D. J. O’MEARA, *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*, Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, Leipzig, 1989.

[...] Là où la philosophie est en désaccord avec le christianisme, elle se voit condamnée sans justification, sans argument¹¹.

At this point we may conclude that, even if there are several different opinions on Michael Psellos' philosophical work and his preferences, two main streams of evaluation are obvious:

a) Psellos is favoring Hellenistic philosophy to the prejudice of Christian doctrine in interpreting Revelation or understanding God;

b) Psellos is an advocate of the Christian doctrine and he uses Hellenistic philosophy only when it serves the interests of Christian beliefs.

If we find ourselves in great difficulty regarding an accurate analysis of Psellos' philosophical and theological work, the main reason would be the lack of thorough studies in this field, the lack of modern translations of his philosophical and theological opuscula, the lack of a precise list of what is really authentic in Psellos' texts and what is not¹².

II. Psellos' Philosophical Opuscula on the Soul: number, sources and content

In 1985 the Teubner series started to publish the various works of Psellos; its aim was to provide a comprehensive publication in distinct categories like hagiography, philosophy, poetry, funerary orations, forensic compositions, theology, etc. Among these volumes there are two concerning Psellos' philosophical opuscula, and these volumes are entitled as simple as possible: *Philosophica minora* I and *Philosophica minora* II¹³. The opuscula dealing with the soul are contained in *Philosophica*

¹¹ Dominic O'MEARA, "Aspects du travail philosophique de Michel Psellos (*Philosophica minora*, vol. II)", in Christian-Friedrich COLLATZ, Jürgen DUMMER, Jutta KOLLESCH, Marie-Luise WELITZ (eds.), *Dissertationum criticae. Festschrift für Günter Christian Hansen*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 1998, p. 438.

¹² An astonishing example of 'word-by-word plagiarism' in Psellos' works is to be found in a theological opusculum (see Michaelis PSELLI *Theologica* II, ed. L.G. Westerink et J.M. Duffy, *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*, Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, Leipzig, 2002, pp. 115-117), which explains the text of Gregory of Nazianzus from *Oratio* 29, 2, PG 36, 76: μονάς ἀπ' ἀρχῆς εἰς δυάδα κινήθεισα μέχρι τριάδος ἔστη ("The Monad, moving from the beginning to Duality, found its rest in Trinity"). The author of this so-called text of Psellos is actually not Psellos, but... St. Maximus the Confessor (see MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Ambigua* 85).

¹³ Michaelis PSELLI *Philosophica minora* II and Michaelis PSELLI *Philosophica minora* I: ed. J. M. Duffy, *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*, Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, Leipzig, 1992.

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minora II and are 31 in total. Out of these, only four have attracted the attention of scholars in such a measure as to press them to write articles, thus illustrating the lack of interest in Psellos' psychology¹⁴. This may be explained if we remember that Psellos is somehow considered a repository of quotations of other writers.

The psychological opuscula mentioned above deal with the soul from different perspectives. We mention some of them: what is the soul? what is the intellect? the triune soul (or better, the three souls?): vegetative, irrational, rational; the faculties of each partition of the soul/ of each soul; the soul as an intermediary being/ thing, between the intellect and the body; the unity of body and soul; the (apparent) development of the soul together with the body; different kinds of intellect (ἀμέθεκτος νοῦς – the impaticipable/ unpossessed intellect, μεθεκτὸς νοῦς – the participable/ possessed intellect); on the question if the intellect is the eye of the soul or not; the contemplation of the intellect; on illumination etc.

The sources of these miscellaneous theories, opinions and ideas on soul are miscellaneous themselves. We may group them as follows:

A) Plato and his Neoplatonist followers: Plotinus, Porphyrius (the editor of *Enneades*), Iamblicus (Syrian neoplatonist philosopher, 245-325), Hermias of Alexandria (410-450), Syrianus, teacher of Proclus (he wrote commentaries on Aristotle as well), Proclus, Simplicius (490-560), Damascius, “the last of the Neoplatonists” (458-538).

B) Aristotle and his followers: Aspasius (80-150), Alexander of Aphrodisias (around 200 AD).

C) Christian authors:

a) authors with a higher philosophical interest: John Philoponus (490-570, commentator on Aristotle)¹⁵, Synesius of Cyrene (373-414, bishop of Ptolemais), Nemesius, bishop of Emesa (in the fourth century);

b) authors which were rather integrated in the so-called ‘traditional Christianity’: Origen, Methodius of Olympos, Evagrius, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, John Damascene.

¹⁴ It is an observation made by the scholar Frederick Lauritzen in his article entitled “Psellos' Philosophical Works”, which was presented at the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, held in Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016. The article may be found at this website address: https://www.academia.edu/27747144/Psellos_Round_Table_23_August_1830_Room_11_Faculty_of_Philosophy_Belgrade, accessed June the 10th 2020. Since then, the situation remained almost the same.

¹⁵ It is worth noting the fact that the most extensive opus on the soul (no. 13) has 41 and a half pages and only one source: John PHILOPONUS, *In Aristotelis De Anima Libros Commentaria*.

The issues analyzed and the sources used by Psellos give us the impression that he is nothing else than a compiler or, even worse, a plagiarist, while his texts are nothing else but a series of excerpts and summaries of longer texts, in order to be used in a pedagogical context¹⁶. This may be true as long as a thorough analysis of Psellos' philosophical work is still lacking; nevertheless, Dominic O'Meara is giving three examples of apparent originality of Psellos in dealing with philosophical issues, only to refute them as original a few paragraphs further¹⁷.

It is not the purpose of this paper to develop each topic (it would not be possible either!); nevertheless, we will present in some detail two of these opuscula, which may be illustrative of the way in which Psellos uses the sources: opus 21 (Ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ νοῦς ὀφθαλμὸς τῆς ψυχῆς – That the intellect is not the eye of the soul) and opus 16 (Λόγος περὶ ψυχῆς).

II. 1. Opus 21 (Ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ νοῦς ὀφθαλμὸς τῆς ψυχῆς – That the intellect is not the eye of the soul)

The first one deals with the relationship between the intellect and the soul. The intellect was sometime defined as “the eye of the soul”. In his *Expositio fidei*, St. John Damascene makes such a comparison when he says:

“The soul, accordingly, is a living essence, simple, incorporeal, invisible in its proper nature to bodily eyes, immortal, rational and intellectual, formless, making use of a body as of an instrument and being the source of its powers of life, growth, sensation, generation, having the intellect not as something different from itself, but as its purest part (for as the eye to the body, so is the intellect to the soul)”¹⁸.

¹⁶ These assumptions are expressed in D. JENKINS, “Michael Psellos”, p. 449 and in D. O'MEARA, “Aspects du travail philosophique de Michel Psellus”, p. 432.

¹⁷ See D. O'MEARA, “Aspects du travail philosophique de Michel Psellus”, pp. 434-438.

¹⁸ P. Bonifatius KOTTER O.S.B., *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos II. Expositio fidei* 26 (II, 12), PTS 12, Walter De Gruyter, Berlin-New York, 1973, p. 77: Ψυχὴ τοίνυν ἐστὶν οὐσία ζῶσα ἀπλή, ἀσώματος, σωματικοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς κατ' οἰκείαν φύσιν ἀόρατος, λογικὴ τε καὶ νοερά, ἀσημάτιστος, ὀργανικῶς κεχρημένη σώματι καὶ τούτῳ ζωῆς ἀυξήσεώς τε καὶ αἰσθήσεως καὶ γεννήσεως παρεκτικῆ, οὐχ ἕτερον ἔχουσα παρ' ἑαυτὴν τὸν νοῦν, ἀλλὰ μέρος αὐτῆς τὸ καθαρῶτατον (ὥσπερ γὰρ ὀφθαλμὸς ἐν σώματι, οὕτως ἐν ψυχῇ νοῦς). The English translation is ours.

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Michael Psellos refutes this idea: the intellect is not the eye of the soul and there are a couple of reasons why it cannot be so. Here is the kernel of the argumentation:

“I say that the intellect is not the eye of the soul, for the eye is a serving instrument, moved by another agent and aroused towards sensation, while the intellect has complete authority over the soul and leads it up to more divine illuminations, drenching it with divine light and filling it with the immaterial forms. But [the intellect] is not a faculty/ power of the soul, it is rather a primary and eternal essence, surpassing soul in power, in beauty and in all other order; it [*i.e.* the intellect] does not belong to the soul but rather fashions it after itself, it does not have its abode in the soul, but within itself. And again, by fixing itself in the intellect, the soul does not separate itself from its proper self-movement; for, since it is what it is, that is self-movable, acquires strength from the intellect and makes use of the faculties/ powers with more precision”¹⁹.

And then Psellos goes further on by re-asserting the distinction between the intellect and the soul:

“The intellect is immovable, the soul is self-moving; the former is eternal according to its essence and act, the latter is eternal only in essence while mutable according to its act. The intellect exists always along with the superior genera, while the soul, because of its inner double faculties/ powers, faces on both ends (directions) and sometimes turns to the better lot, sometimes to the worse. The intellect, without being moved, possesses the

¹⁹ Michaelis PSELLI *Philosophica minora* II, 21, 95-96: Λέγω ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν ὀφθαλμὸς ὁ νοῦς τῆς ψυχῆς. ὁ μὲν γὰρ ὑπηρετικόν ἐστιν ὄργανον ὑφ’ ἑτέρου κινούμενον καὶ πρὸς αἰσθησὶν διεγειρόμενον, ὁ δὲ γε νοῦς κατάρχων ἐστὶ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ ἀνάγων μὲν αὐτὴν πρὸς τὰς θειοτέρας ἐλλάμψεις θεοῦ τε ἄνωθεν φωτὸς ἐμπιπλῶν καὶ τῶν ἀυλοτέρων εἰδῶν πλήρη ποιῶν. ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ δύναμις ἐκείνης ἐστίν. οὐσία γὰρ ἐστὶν ἀρχικὴ καὶ αἰώνιος καὶ δυνάμει καὶ κάλλει καὶ τοῖς ὅλοις πρεσβείοις ὑπερανέχουσα τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ οὐκ ἐκείνης οὐσα ἀλλ’ ἐν αὐτῇ ταύτην ἐδράζουσα. Ἄλλ’ οὐδὲ αὐθις ἡ ψυχὴ τῷ νοῦ αὐτὴν ἐπερείασα τῆς οἰκείας αὐτοκινήσιας ἐξέστηκεν. Οὐσα γὰρ ὅπερ ἐστὶν αὐτοκίνητος ἐπιρρώννυται μᾶλλον ἐκεῖθεν καὶ ἀκριβέστερον κέχρηται ταῖς δυνάμεσιν.

thing thought; the soul, on the contrary, cannot come to any conclusion unless it moves through syllogistic propositions. We do not refute totally the analogy of the eye regarding the soul, so let the intellect be and be named a certain truer essence of the soul; and if someone would like to name ‘eye of the soul’ the brightness of the soul caused by the intellect, we will not reprove him totally”²⁰.

Probably this problem is a false problem and it is likely that, considered from different perspectives, both hypotheses are true: on one side, the intellect is the eye of the soul when we consider the function/ the activity of the intellect, which is analogous to the function/ the activity of the eye within the body, that of seeing (the intellect sees/ contemplates the intelligible things, the eye sees/ contemplates the sensible things), and of enlightening (and the intellect enlightens the soul with superior illuminations); on the other side, the intellect is not the eye of the soul if we would understand the intellect as an instrument of the soul or as a faculty/ power of it. Of course, this distinction does not entirely solve the question raised here, in this opus, and there is need for further investigation and analysis.

II. 2. Opus 16 (Λόγος περὶ ψυχῆς)

As regarding the opus 16, the discussion is on the problem of a growth/ development of the soul. Someone asked Psellos the following questions: if the soul is perfect at the moment of one’s birth, while the body in which he rests is not and there is an obvious growth/ development of the body from the imperfect state to the perfect one, why the new-born babies are so imperfect from the psychological point of view? Should we not talk about a simultaneous growth/ development of body and soul?

²⁰ *Philosophica minora* II, 21, 96: Ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἀκίνητος, ἡ δὲ αὐτοκίνητος, καὶ ὁ μὲν αἰώνιος καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ἡ δὲ τῇ μὲν οὐσίᾳ ἔστηκε, μεταβάλλει δὲ ταῖς ἐνεργείαις, καὶ ὁ μὲν αἰεὶ τοῖς κρείττοσι πρόσεστι γένεσιν, ἡ δὲ κατὰ τὴν διπλὴν ἑαυτῆς δύναμιν ἐφ’ ἑκάτερα βλέπει καὶ νῦν μὲν τῷ κρείττονι μέρει, νῦν δὲ θατέρῳ κατὰ γεται, καὶ ὁ μὲν μὴ κινήθεις ἔχει τὸ νοούμενον, ἡ δὲ οὐδὲν ἂν τῶν ὄντων συμπερανεῖ μὴ κινήθεις διὰ προτάσεων, ἵνα δὲ μὴ παντάπασιν τὴν τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ ἀναλογίαν ἐπὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπωθώμεθα, ὁ μὲν ἀκριβεστέρα τις οὐσία τῆς ψυχῆς ἔστω τε καὶ λεγέσθω. Τὴν δὲ ἐκεῖθεν ἐνδιδομένην ἔλλαμψιν τῇ ψυχῇ εἴ τις ὀφθαλμὸν ἐκείνης καλεῖν βούλοιο, οὐ πάντῃ μεμψόμεθα.

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On the other side, if we should talk of such a simultaneous growth, then the soul is, at the beginning, in an imperfect state, as the body is, and it develops from imperfect to perfect, which is absurd. This hypothesis is recorded in Gregory of Nyssa's *De opificio hominis*, in which the Cappadocian father speaks about the relationship between body and the activities of soul²¹. Likewise, Plotinus speaks of the impossibility of a growth of the soul, because the soul is intelligible and the intelligible beings cannot grow. He says:

“For if soul, being a body, was to cause growth, it would have to grow itself, obviously by the addition of similar body, if it was going to keep peace with the body it was causing to grow. And what is added will be either soul or soulless body. And if it is soul, where will it come from, and how will it get in and how is it added? But if what is added is soulless, how will this become soul and how will it come to agreement with what was there before, and be one with it and share the same thoughts with the soul which was there before, but not be like a strange soul which will be ignorant of what the other soul knows?”²²

This kind of dilemmas, as the one contained in the text above quoted, is to be found in the text of Psellos as well. Starting from the Aristotelian idea that the growth is a form of change, and from the Aristotelian-Platonist principle that the intelligible is not subjected to any change, Psellos reaches the conclusion that the soul is either a sensible/ corporeal being, in which case he is subjected to change, or he is an intelligible being, in which case he is not subjected to change. The first option is absurd. There is no growth of the soul, parallel to that of the body. If it were so, then the opposite would be correct also: there would be a decrease of the soul, parallel to that of the body. On the contrary, the activity of the soul is getting bigger and brighter as man gets old and a man is wiser when he is old than when he is young.

²¹ See GREGOIRE DE NYSSE, *La creation de l'homme, Sources Chrétiennes* 6, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1943, pp. 225-226.

²² PLOTINUS, *Enn.* IV, 7, 5, 12-21. For the English version see *Plotinus. With an English Translation by A.H. Armstrong in Seven Volumes. IV. Enneads IV. 1-9*, Cambridge Massachusetts, London, 1984, p. 351.

But if the soul is an intelligible being, why he does not act with his full capacities/ abilities in the body of the new-born babies? The answer is very simple: because the body is an instrument for the soul, and the body of a baby is not yet capable of manifesting the whole range of the soul's activities and abilities. Only in a perfectly grown body the soul can express itself totally²³.

This solution is also to be found in Neoplatonic sources²⁴. What is really to be appreciated is, as O'Meara says, "une maîtrise de la littérature antique concernée, un talent de dialecticien non négligeable, une prise de conscience claire des problèmes que pose la psychologie néoplatonicienne et des moyens de les résoudre"²⁵.

III. Conclusion

Being involved in an on-going process – that of translating into Romanian the philosophical opuscula of Michael Psellos –, it is very difficult at this point of my work to draw firm conclusions. For some, Psellos consistently sees himself as a philosopher whether he be explaining a doctrine of Aristotle or commenting on a passage of the New Testament²⁶. On one occasion, he says about him that he is a 'lone philosopher in an age without philosophy'²⁷. For others, it seems that Psellos gives absolute priority to the Christian doctrine, while there is little help from the part of the Greek philosophy, and the latter should be rejected whenever it comes into disaccord with the Christian teachings²⁸. Anyway, it seems beyond doubt the fact that Psellos struggled, in the eleventh century, to give the Greek

²³ Psellos is of the opinion that St. Gregory of Nyssa himself thought of this solution when he used the term 'growth/ development' instead of 'manifestation': ἴν' οὖν καὶ τοῦτο διαλύσωμεν, ἴσθι ὅτι ἀντὶ τῆς ἐκφάνσεως τὴν αὐξήσιν εἴρηκεν ὁ πατήρ.

²⁴ See D. O'MEARA, "Aspects du travail philosophique de Michel Psellus", p. 436.

²⁵ D. O'MEARA, "Aspects du travail philosophique de Michel Psellus", p. 436.

²⁶ See, for instance, John DUFFY, "Hellenic Philosophy in Byzantium and the Lonely Mission of Michael Psellos", in Katerina IERODIAKONOU (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 150.

²⁷ Michaelis PSELLI *Oratoria minora*, ed. A.R. Littlewood, *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*, Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, Leipzig, 1985, 6, 52-3, p. 20: φιλοσοφῶ μόνος ἐν ἀφιλοσόφοις καιροῖς.

²⁸ This seems to be one of the conclusions of D. O'MEARA, "Aspects du travail philosophique de Michel Psellus", p. 438.

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philosophy a more substantial role in intellectual life and to re-establish contact with the philosophical exegetical tradition within the Church, represented, among others, by Nemesius, Philoponus, Photios. The sources he employed are a strong proof.

It is clear, on the other side, that the philosophical activity of Psellos in Byzantium provoked retaliation from the conservative representatives of the Christian Church. What happened to his student and successor as Consul of the Philosophers at the University of Constantinople, Ioannes Italos, is of great relevance. Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) started a persecution against all who were fond of Hellenic philosophy in interpreting Christianity. Italos was formally charged before an ecclesiastical-imperial tribunal with an assortment of heresies and the crime of using Hellenic philosophy to interpret Christianity. He was forced, eventually, to recant and confined to a monastery. Eustratios, bishop of Nikaia, himself a student of Ioannes Italos, was condemned in 1117 by the Church because he used reason in clarifying the faith and was supposed to have been led into heresy. Higher education was reorganized in the capital and was placed under the strict supervision of imperial and ecclesiastical authorities. The professors employed to teach had the job to ensure the conformity of higher education to traditional religious standards. It seemed that the philosophical project of Psellos failed in the next century, even if Hellenism flourished in other ways. But this is another topic...