

# Byzantine philosophy inside and out: Orthodoxy and dissidence in counterpoint

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While still in its infancy,<sup>1</sup> the study of Byzantine philosophy has finally emerged as a relatively discrete discipline. Among the many challenges that it has faced before reaching this point has been the suspicion that philosophy in Byzantium operated largely in subordination to Christian theology and should therefore be studied by specialists in the development of Orthodox doctrine. But a discrete modern discipline requires a (relatively) autonomous subject, which is why attention is being drawn to the self-standing commentaries that many Byzantine thinkers wrote on ancient philosophical works that in many respects owe little to their Christian historical context. Byzantine philosophers, moreover, continued the discussion of ancient problems and contributed original arguments to them, and they applied philosophical thinking to the resolution of topics in other fields. It is possible, then, to ‘analyse [their writings] systematically ... to show that their reasoning and argumentation was no less philosophical than the philosophical work of any other period in the history of philosophy’.<sup>2</sup> In a recent presentation of the state of the field, Katerina Ierodiakonou and Dominic O’Meara seem to counter the notion that Byzantine philosophy cannot be studied independently of theology.<sup>3</sup> Besides, neither discipline was institutionalized, which enabled philosophers to operate outside the institutional constraints that existed in the West; philosophy was part of general higher education, making it an attractive field of study; some of the Church Fathers had allowed that philosophy could be an important preparatory step for the study of theology; and, finally, theological debates could often turn on the interpretation of questions in ancient philosophy.

All this is true, but it is possible to go further by attending more closely to the way in which the Byzantines themselves conceived philosophy as a contested ideal, one version of which was perceived to be not only independent but hostile to Christian Orthodoxy. This paper will explore the implications of the fact that the ideal of philosophy was defined simultaneously

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<sup>1</sup> The word is used by Ierodiakonou & O’Meara (2008: 710).

<sup>2</sup> Ierodiakonou (2002: 2).

<sup>3</sup> Ierodiakonou & O’Meara (2008: 715–16).

in contradictory ways, one positive and one negative. This means that the work and careers of philosophers must be situated within a tense cultural dynamic that made the philosophical life permanently fraught with danger and ambiguity. Some Byzantine philosophers, those whose interests brought them closest to the thinking of the ancient Greeks, were therefore required to enter a delicate dance of appearances and constantly renegotiate the terms of philosophy and ‘Hellenism’ in their Orthodox society. Being a philosopher in Byzantium placed one in a position that had no parallel in other fields of activity, requiring that it be studied separately. Finally, this paper will suggest that greater ambitions can be ascribed to some of these philosophers, greater than merely commenting on ancient thought or contributing to theology, adding further reasons to the imperative to study philosophy as a discrete (albeit contested) field. That field, as Ierodiakonou, O’Meara, and others have defined it, is now on a solid footing, but the permanent culture clash that defined *paideia* in Byzantium may have generated more ambition and idiosyncrasy than is reflected in the list of philosophical activities with which we are currently operating. That *all* Byzantine thinkers were dutifully Orthodox is often assumed but has never been proven, and is implausible on the face of it. So, while some scholars have suggested that ‘philosophy in Byzantium is an autonomous discipline’,<sup>4</sup> so far, despite an abundance of promising sources, there has been a general reluctance to push that autonomy beyond the official doctrines of the Church. As a result, the intellectual scene has been cast as far more homogeneous than it was, more homogeneous in fact than it was perceived by the Byzantines themselves, for we have underestimated how semantically conflicted the social and cultural ground of philosophy was and how it was experienced by those thinkers who desired to practise it, at least certain modes of it.

The basic (typological) surveys of the meaning of φιλοσοφία in Byzantium by Franz Dölger and Herbert Hunger showed that it was an ambivalent term. It could, on the one hand, refer to the ‘scientific’ study of the technical questions of ancient philosophy (its ‘wissenschaftstechnischer Sinn’), and here it usually took the form of commentaries and introductions. On the other hand, the word also referred to Christian doctrine, which was believed to have given the true answer to many of those questions. By extending this sense, ‘philosophy’ could refer to the practice of the Christian life, i.e. ascetic monasticism, the Christian version, then, of ‘applied’ or ‘practical’ philosophy. One has to determine from the context which of

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<sup>4</sup> Ierodiakonou (2002: 3); for the position of L. Benakis, see the discussion by Trizio (2007: 277–87).

these two senses—technical or Christian—is meant in a given passage.<sup>5</sup> They could reinforce each other, as when ancient philosophy was used to expound or support Christian doctrine, or they could come into conflict, given that ancient philosophy disagreed on many points with Christianity. In fact, it was perceived by many as a threat to the integrity of the faith.

In this paper, I will focus on the one extreme of this spectrum, namely the notion (or suspicion) entertained by many Byzantines that (Greek) philosophy, even as it was practised in their society, was potentially or essentially hostile to Christian doctrine. In this I will be going against the grain of the scholarship, especially of Patristics and later Byzantine theology, which have tended to see in Byzantium a more or less harmonious synthesis of Christianity and ‘Hellenism’ (the latter conveniently defined as those aspects of ancient philosophy that were accepted by the Fathers).<sup>6</sup> It is not difficult to find statements in the scholarship to the effect that Byzantium was a monolithically Orthodox society, that it was impossible to think oneself outside of Orthodoxy from within its confines. This is often taken for granted even though it has, of course, never been proved, nor can one easily imagine what kind of historical argument could prove it. It is simply asserted, for example, that Psellos was, ‘like all his fellows, a good Christian. There was nothing else to be, except a Moslem or a Jew, and this would have been absurd.’<sup>7</sup> This is *a priori* reasoning, a conclusion drawn before the evidence has been studied. (*All his fellows too?*)

Byzantine Studies in general has tended to base many of its conclusions on preconceptions regarding the Mind of Byzantium, a mode of thinking about cultural Essences that was inherited from nineteenth-century historicism. Other fields have long since given up such notions. (When did classicists last base an argument on the Greek Spirit?) Moreover, the notion crumbles in the face of contrary evidence, which is now gradually emerging. If one looks closely at hagiography, for instance, one finds that Byzantine society was full of sceptics, ranging from village atheists to those who disbelieved in the power of individual saints or suspected the clergy of trickery and deceit.<sup>8</sup> People doubt because they can think, and no religion or ideol-

<sup>5</sup> Dölger (1953); Hunger (1978: vol. I, 4–10); see also Podskalsky (1977: 16–34). The standard survey of the word’s meanings in antiquity by is Malingrey (1961), most of which treats the Fathers. Siniosoglou (2008) has questioned the grounds on which early Christian thinkers appropriated the label of philosophy and argues that modern exegesis should not be bound by it: e.g. *ibid.* (31; 109; 115–16).

<sup>6</sup> See Kaldellis (2007a: 122–23).

<sup>7</sup> Browning (1975: 10), subsequently endorsed by a number of scholars.

<sup>8</sup> Dagron (1992: 59–69); and Kaldellis (forthcoming a). For the medieval West, see now Arnold (2005).

ogy has ever been able to totally drive this out of all of them, even in societies with far more invasive systems of control than Byzantium could ever muster. I will not, however, be discussing the evidence of hagiography here, which does not concern philosophers directly.

Looking at philosophers of the middle Byzantine period, there is reason to doubt the orthodoxy of Leo Choirosphaktes in the tenth century, Michael Psellos and Michael Attaleiates in the eleventh (the latter more an intellectual perhaps rather than a philosopher), the author of the satire *Timarion* and (provisionally) Theodore Prodromos in the twelfth. Of these men, the faith of all but Attaleiates was doubted or impugned by their contemporaries.<sup>9</sup> In addition to them, Psellos' student John Italos (in the eleventh century) and the latter's student Eustratios of Nicaea (in the early twelfth) were formally accused and indicted on the ground that their involvement with Greek philosophy compromised their doctrinal positions. Scholars have not looked too closely into the question of the actual guilt of all these men, at least not in a way that keeps all possibilities open at the start. It is usually believed that they must have been innocent but set up for political reasons (in part because genuine ideological deviance is considered to have been impossible),<sup>10</sup> though increasingly scholars who believe that intellectual developments are capable of generating historical events such as these are now beginning to downplay political explanations.<sup>11</sup> We might also look with more suspicion into the case of Leo the Philosopher in the ninth century, who was 'outed' after his death but not, as far as we know, formally charged.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that all but one of these men whose faith was questioned identified themselves as philosophers of one kind or another, while the exception, Attaleiates, may have been more exposed to the teaching of Psellos than has hitherto been suspected.<sup>13</sup> Far from a monolithic society, then, our evidence presents us with a pattern of philosophical deviancy, at least *prima facie*. Even if we leave the question of these men's actual guilt open (which is more than many historians have so far been willing to do), we must at least conclude that a learned Byzantine of the

<sup>9</sup> Choirosphaktes: Magdalino (1997: 146–61; 2006: 71–79). Psellos: Kaldellis (1999 and 2007a: ch. 4). Prodromos and *Timarion*: Kaldellis (2007a: 270–83 and forthcoming b). Attaleiates: Kaldellis (2007b).

<sup>10</sup> In general, Browning (1975); Magdalino (1993: ch. 5). Italos: Clucas (1981). Eustratios: Joannou (1954).

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Ierodiakonou (2007); Siniosoglou (2010). The *locus classicus* for this type of discussion is the trial of Socrates; see Ahrens Dorf (1994) for a cogent defence of the autonomy of philosophical history in this case.

<sup>12</sup> Leo: Lemerle (1986: 198–204); also Magdalino (2006: 67–68).

<sup>13</sup> Krallis (2006).

eleventh or twelfth century who considered the predicament of ‘philosophy’ in his society would be more uneasy than the tidy typologies of Dölger and Hunger suggest. We have to reinscribe the term and the ideal of philosophy within a more contested and unsettled cultural space. Philosophy in Byzantium was more ambitious and more dangerous than has hitherto been realized—and I mean ‘dangerous’ in the sense that Socrates does in Book VI of Plato’s *Republic*, where he admits that philosophy may cause intelligent young men to lose faith in their culture’s norms and beliefs (see *Republic* 497d for an extreme formulation).

In the aftermath of Michele Trizio’s critical survey of the discipline, we must speak of philosophy in Byzantium as a diverse cultural practice and avoid postulating any kind of unitary ‘Byzantine philosophy’ with a single essence: ‘There are ... Byzantine philosophies, different manifestations and meanings of the term “philosophy” which cohabit, and sometimes even clash, in the same context.’ What we have, in the end, is ‘a group of texts which in different ways and according to different meanings of the term “philosophy” are influenced to various degrees by the ancient philosophical tradition.’<sup>14</sup> The thinkers I am dealing with here did, at least, have that much in common. Their practice of philosophy entailed a close engagement with the ancient sources, and their heterodoxy was attributed to precisely that engagement. There is no reason to postulate any additional unity or coherence to this group. They were not strict followers of particular ancient schools, but eclectics. They did not found new schools of their own, and each took his thought in a different and idiosyncratic direction. The ties among them, both personal and intellectual, are still unclear. The philosophical links between Leo the Philosopher and Leo Choirosphaktes are tenuous (it is interesting, however, that the latter wrote a poem lamenting the former’s death).<sup>15</sup> We still do not know how to get philosophically from Psellos to Italos and then to Eustratios, except that Proclus was a connecting thread. At the moment, each of these thinkers must be studied on his own terms, as we have no overarching narrative about Byzantine thought in which to place them. Instead of a narrative, then, my discussion focuses on the cultural dynamic of Orthodoxy and dissidence. By a dissident in this context I designate any thinker who self-consciously, even if only covertly, came to certain philosophical positions that were incompatible with Orthodoxy. Byzantine dissidents were not ‘pagans’ (at least not so long as that term requires cult or

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<sup>14</sup> Trizio (2007: 291).

<sup>15</sup> Lemerle (1986: 203–4).

belief in the ancient gods), but their intellectual journeys were helped along by the study of ancient, non-Christian philosophy.

What this set of philosophers had to face, I maintain, was that the ideal and practice of philosophy was fundamentally and irrevocably conflicted. It is not enough to note as Dölger and Hunger did that the word stood for different things, i.e. ancient pagan thought (which was deemed to be ‘outside’) versus Christian theology (which was ‘inside’), or for different kinds of activities, i.e. theory (whether pagan or Christian) versus ascetic practice (whether informed by theory or not). What we have to imagine in situating a philosopher in this society is how these senses conflicted actively with each other, generating an unsynthesized and so slippery system of values propelling intellectual and social life. The idea of philosophy was not just ‘complex’, it *simultaneously designated opposites* that were, however, inextricably linked. ‘Outside’ philosophy was not a thing of the past, dead and buried with the advent of the true faith; it was an always-present option, one that was deeply implicated in the very construction of the faith itself. The Fathers, for example, appropriated the cultural prestige and epistemological connotations of ‘philosophy’ for their brand of theological synthesis. But, on the other hand, the word has only a negative sense in the one passage of the New Testament where it appears, Colossians 2:8: ‘philosophy and vain deception’. Saint Paul’s experience with the philosophers in Athens was not a positive one,<sup>16</sup> while the Christian tradition generated many zealots who believed that ‘Jerusalem’ should have nothing to do with ‘Athens’.

‘Philosophy’, then, designated simultaneously both the most True and Good as well as the most False and Evil things known to the culture and, to make matters worse, the two could never be firmly separated for anyone engaged in intellectual activity. It is difficult to imagine a more conflicted state of being. One could not pursue philosophy without serious risk of falling ‘outside’, or of being perceived as having fallen there, as all the denunciations and trials reveal. In fact, the passageway between the two was always open: the serious study of theology almost always led to Greek philosophy. ‘Orthodoxy’ as a self-standing, unitary, and uncomplicated stance was problematic, if not impossible. Its own traditions always pointed learned Christians to alternative traditions that had seductions of their own and which supplied the grounds of dissent. The study of Plato and Aristotle would not make one into a ‘pagan’ but it could make one less certain of various Christian doctrines. Coping with this predicament called for sub-

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<sup>16</sup> See Kaldellis (2009: 53–59).

tlety, and perhaps also for evasion and dissimulation, at which the Byzantines were masters, their philosophers especially.

These philosophers invariably found themselves caught up in a game of accusation and defence; and it is worth looking closer at how it was played, for it reveals how key terms were constantly redefined and negotiated, affecting careers and reputations. Consider an example from the ninth century. Leo the Philosopher—mathematician, suspected occultist, classical scholar, scientific inventor, bishop of Thessaloniki, and finally professor of ‘outside’ philosophy in the capital—wrote an epigram ‘to himself’ whose title indicates that he was known by the name of ‘the Hellene’. The epigram thanks *Tyche* for granting Leo a pleasant and quiet life according to the teachings of Epicurus, a daring admission in the Byzantine context. From the way in which it is introduced, the name Hellene seems to have been ascribed to him by others, presumably for his extreme (excessive?) love of Greek thought. Though the word’s main meaning in Byzantium at that time was ‘pagan’, i.e. it designated total outsiders, it is not being used in such a hostile way here, certainly not by Leo in reference to himself. He was here showcasing the word’s potentially positive sense, as one who was learned in ancient wisdom. In this, as in many other ways, Leo was ahead of his time, for that alternative positive sense of ‘Hellene’ would not become more pervasive until the twelfth century. By drawing attention to it in his own less flamboyant times, it seems that he wanted to ameliorate it, given that it could become dangerous in enemy hands. He acknowledged it openly and playfully in order to take the venom out of it. Pagan ‘Hellenes’ were supposed to be secretive and nefarious. Leo was placing the term in a different light by making it open and linking it to a risqué but not necessarily heterodox sentiment, effectively neutralizing it.<sup>17</sup>

But doubts persisted. After his death, Leo was denounced by one of his students, Constantine the Sicilian, for sinking beneath the waves of ‘outside’ impiety and honouring the multitude of Greek gods over the Trinity. Christ has now punished him for his apostasy, Constantine says, for choosing Zeus as his god. In Hades he will find Proclus and Plato, Chrysippus and Hesiod. ‘All too late’, he concludes, ‘did I see the evil in your heart.’ It seems, however, that this poem caused a scandal and Constantine had to defend himself in an *Apologia*. The champion of Orthodoxy was interestingly placed on the defensive. He avers that some had praised him for exposing Leo, the ‘blasphemous apostate from the faith of the Christians’, while others accused

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<sup>17</sup> For the text, see Westerink (1986: 199–200); for discussions, Lemerle (1986: 198–204); Kaldellis (2007a: 182).

him of ingratitude and slander. Against the latter he affirms his faith in Christ and opposition to all Hellenes. It is in these poems by Leo and his student, then, and not in any treatises that they may have written on technical philosophical issues, that we observe the delicate dance of Byzantine Hellenism and Orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup> Much depended, we can see, on the struggle to define and redefine the term ‘Hellene’.

The question here is not so much whether Leo’s studies *actually* caused him to fall from the faith, which always remains a possibility (Constantine may have been telling the truth). The point is how slippery the ground of Hellenism and philosophy was. Constantine attempted to depict Leo as being ‘outside’, as perhaps others had before him. Leo’s response to these accusations, so far as we can tell from his epigram, was not so much to deny the charge by insisting that it was false and that he was really ‘inside’, but to attempt to bring inside more of what had lain outside, or at least to place it in a neutral intermediate space that would not give offence, through a rehabilitation and redefinition of the bad word itself, to extend the boundary and include within the sphere of the permissible more of Greek philosophy (even Epicurus), science and literature (even erotic literature).<sup>19</sup> The boundary itself was in question as well as the meaning of the words that were used to define it. There was room inside for Hellenes so long as they were properly defined. Was ‘Hellenism’ paganism or higher learning and literature? These were perhaps opposite sides of the same coin, but it is possible that no one of Leo’s contemporaries knew just how far outside he had travelled in his own thoughts. This inevitably fuelled suspicion. Be that as it may, we should note that, even though the times were not yet ready for the revival of erotic literature and the like, Leo had a prestigious career despite his Hellenism (whatever that was), while Constantine felt that he had to defend himself against accusations of ingratitude and slander. The defenders of Leo’s memory could cast Constantine’s accusation as a matter of bad taste or bad form (which does not mean, however, that they were not true). Being a philosopher required a certain set of survival skills—and some literary skill. We will consider additional exchanges of this type below.

It was not only accusations of heterodoxy that philosophers had to finesse. The ideal of philosophy had, in a different direction, been equated with monastic life, which held a position of commanding prestige in the

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<sup>18</sup> For Constantine’s poems, see Spadaro (1971: 198–205); previously in Migne (*PG* 107: coll. lxi–lxiv; 659–64), misattributed by both editors (Leo VI ‘the Wise’ used to be confused with Leo the Philosopher and Constantine the Sicilian with Constantine the Philosopher, the missionary to the Slavs, as well as with Constantine the Rhodian).

<sup>19</sup> Lauxtermann (1999).



culture. As one can see already in the stark confrontations depicted in the *Life of St Antony* (sections 72–80), a type-scene that would recur in later texts,<sup>20</sup> the vast differences between intellectuals and illiterate ascetics were well understood, yet the ideological revolution effected by early Christianity entailed the appropriation of prestigious sites of Greek culture and their transference to Christian counterparts, which were often their negations. Jesus was now King, martyrs were the new athletes, and desert solitaries were the new philosophers. Revolutions require precisely such stark reversals, paradoxes, and juxtapositions if they are to rewrite social values and establish new modes of power. They are also rarely ever complete. Byzantium was the heir of ancient Greece as it was of early Christianity and so it had to cope with an unsynthesized set of values. For example, the fifth-century ecclesiastical historian Sozomenus was attracted, at different moments, both to learned eloquence as well as to the monks' refusal of all learning.<sup>21</sup> 'Philosophy' also was never in Byzantium exclusively what any one of its spokesmen said it was. How did our more 'theoretical' philosophers distance themselves from the most obscurantist and anti-intellectual elements of the monastic world, to which they were never partial? An ideal candidate for this discussion is Michael Psellos.

The tension within the domain of Byzantine philosophy between (Greek) science and (Christian) asceticism, as well as Psellos' exclusive devotion to the former, are subtly presented in an encomium that he wrote for his mother. I have argued elsewhere that the purpose of this work was to shield him during one of the many moments when the sincerity of his faith had been called into question. He represents his mother as a saintly ascetic who dedicated herself to Christ, a philosopher whose works were calloused knees and an emaciated body. But Psellos weaves his own autobiography into the narrative, enveloping his intellectual career in her alleged sanctity. He presents her as the inspiration of his bookish studies while simultaneously distancing his brand of the philosophical life from hers, thus having it both ways. He addresses her directly toward the end of the oration, contrasting himself to her: 'I do not entirely philosophize according to that philosophy which is so dear to you, and I do not know what fate took hold of me from the very beginning and fixated me onto the study of books.'<sup>22</sup> Not only was his conception of philosophy firmly cognitive rather than ascetic, it was based overwhelmingly on 'outside' books. When he turns to list his intel-

<sup>20</sup> E.g. John Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories: Theophilos* 10 in Thurn (1973: 60).

<sup>21</sup> See Kaldellis (2007a: 141).

<sup>22</sup> Michael Psellos, *Encomium for his Mother* 27a, in Criscuolo (1989); discussion in Kaldellis (2006: 29–49).

lectual interests in this oration and in the *Chronographia*, the vast majority of his discussion is devoted to pagan literature, with small, formulaic appendices regarding his knowledge of ‘inside’ wisdom.<sup>23</sup>

Consider also Psellos’ description in the *Chronographia* of the monks who were favoured by the emperor Michael IV (1034–42):

I know that the man displayed absolute piety after he gained the throne. Not only did he regularly attend church but he was also devoted to philosophers and took very good care of their needs. By the word ‘philosophers’ I do not here mean those who investigate the natures of beings and seek the principles of the universe and who neglect the principles of their own salvation. I mean those who despise the world and live in the company of supernatural beings .... Michael entrusted himself to those men who were devoted to God and had grown old in the ascetic life.<sup>24</sup>

Many things are interesting about this passage. One is that Psellos was perfectly aware of the competing conceptions of philosophy that apparently operated in his society, and could define them precisely. Of course, all educated Byzantines were aware of them to some degree, as their society had never managed or even attempted to create a Christian *paideia* sanitized of all Hellenic contamination; it was ‘contaminated’ from its inception and remained so. Every affirmation of philosophy as the most Christian life, therefore, had to be defensive and had to be asserted always in defiance of lurking Hellenic alternatives. A passage cited often in modern discussions comes from the *Chronicle* of George the Monk (in the ninth century), who included in his account of the reign of Claudius I a digression on the origin of monasticism. His conclusion is that only Christians have philosophized truly, not any Greeks or Jews. The Greeks were the slaves of their passions and spent too much time speculating about pointless things. True philosophy is the way of life prescribed by right belief, which comes from Christ alone.<sup>25</sup> What is interesting, however, is that ‘Christian philosophy’ had to be justified in these terms in the ninth century, when (presumably) there were no more Greek pagans around, and not only then but in *every* century, again and again. The tension was *permanent* and ingrained; the alternatives were always potent.

We see this dynamic in Psellos, only from the opposite point of view. In the passage quoted above, Psellos may seem to be endorsing the monastic notion of philosophy, but if we look closely we see that he is not doing that at all. Psellos’ own conception of philosophy, in the many places where he

<sup>23</sup> Michael Psellos, *Encomium for his Mother* 27–30; *Chron.* VI 36–43.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Psellos, *Chron.* IV 34.1–8; IV 37.2–4.

<sup>25</sup> George the Monk, *Chronicle*, in de Boor (1978: vol. I, 345).

defines it (including the *Chronographia*), was exactly that which he here ascribes to those who ‘investigate the natures of beings and seek the principles of the universe’ (and we should not forget the final thing that he says about them, namely that they ‘neglect the principles of their salvation’). Psellos aggressively belonged to this cognitive and (as he put it in his mother’s encomium) bookish group of philosophers, he systematically sought his bearings in the ancient Greeks, and sarcastically mocked monks throughout the *Chronographia* and other works. He was consciously opposed to Christian monasticism, not merely in believing that monks failed to live up to their ideals but in holding those ideals to be unsuitable for human beings in the first place.<sup>26</sup> His references to monks as philosophers were either sarcastic or (cynically) made in letters to powerful monks or men of the Church whose favour he was currying.

Anti-monasticism is an understudied theme of Byzantine history, to put it mildly, though the evidence for it is substantial (if one counts its pagan enemies in Late Antiquity and many bishops and Christian intellectuals in the same period who opposed the movement on institutional and moral grounds; the Iconoclasts; later Orthodox emperors who tried to curb monastic abuse of fiscal privileges; sceptics in saints’ lives; and the philosophers discussed here). This history has not yet been written, in part because we have become all-too-accustomed to the idea of Byzantium as a big monastery.<sup>27</sup> In this regard (as in many others), Psellos was in the vanguard of a broad shift among Byzantine intellectuals away from monastic values, a shift that peaked in the twelfth century. His successors in this regard were not necessarily philosophers, but they did advocate a more bookish, cultivated Hellenism against the very types whom, say, John Chrysostom and George the Monk had called philosophers in earlier centuries. Eustathios, the Homeric scholar, even wrote a long treatise for the reform of monastic life when he was bishop of Thessaloniki, in which he suggested that monks should read more and not solely in religious literature either.<sup>28</sup> These attitudes were part of the background of the revival of Greek-inspired theoretical philosophy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which occurred as the Christian ideal of practical philosophy, i.e. asceticism, was losing its hold over intellectuals.

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<sup>26</sup> That these were Psellos’ views of philosophy and monasticism is not particularly controversial. See Kaldellis (1999: chs. 10–11; 2007a: ch. 4, citing previous studies).

<sup>27</sup> The notable exception to this trend was Beck (1982).

<sup>28</sup> Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Inquiry into the Monastic Life for the Correction of Its Abuses* 143; 146, in Tafel (1832: 249–50); and now Metzler (2006). For this shift in general, see Magdalino (1981: 51–66) and Kaldellis (2007a: 253–55; 315).

But ultimately the love-hate relationship between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ wisdom was far more critical an issue for Byzantine philosophers than were the changing fortunes of monastic ideals. This was because one could not study philosophy, or use it to elucidate theology, without going ‘outside’, even if only to a limited degree, but that opened one up to potential charges of actually *being* outside. Everyone had to at least *seem* to be inside, but this was especially hard for those like Leo and Psellos whose careers (and inclinations) kept them outside most of the time. We should not doubt that they actually preferred it on the outside, their pious protestations notwithstanding. So they walked the tightrope of appearing to be insiders who spent most of their time outside for professional reasons, while possibly being true outsiders on the inside (in a double sense, i.e. inside their minds and inside Byzantine society). Almost all of them were accused of being ‘really’ on the outside. And, to complicate matters, no one knew exactly where the threshold lay; it was negotiable, which enabled their strategies of defence when they were accused.

The most hysterical denunciations were private (even if publicized), such as by Constantine against Leo and by Arethas against Choïrosphaktes. Here the accused is a false philosopher who only pretends to be a Christian. In reality, he has been seduced by the ‘outside letters’ that he professes and tries to bring others to his apostasy. He is the equal of the emperor Julian (always the bogey-man of philosophy in Byzantium) and even of Satan himself, damned to Hell ‘in the company of your wise Plato’.<sup>29</sup> Official indictments, on the other hand, such as those against Italos (1082) and, later, his student Eustratios (1117), tended to be more precise, specifying the doctrinal errors into which each fell in his attempt to explicate the faith by relying on ‘outside’ philosophy. Among other charges, Eustratios was condemned for saying that Christ used Aristotelian syllogisms.<sup>30</sup> We may imagine the possible misunderstandings that occurred here between the philosopher and his accusers (for example, some may have thought that he was saying that Christ was an Aristotelian), but the root of the unease and so of the scandal probably lay deeper, at a level that was harder to put into words and involved the perceived threat of a renegotiation of the relationship between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. To subsume the words of Christ, even if approvingly, to classification according to the modes and standards of Greek logic blurred crucial distinctions and relations of value. In the Christian

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<sup>29</sup> For Constantine against Leo, see above. Arethas of Caesarea, *Choïrosphaktes or the Warlock-Hater*, in Westerink (1968: 200–212), and trans. in Karlin-Hayter (1965: 468–81); see Magdalino (1997: 151–52).

<sup>30</sup> Joannou (1953: 34).

scheme of things, Aristotelian logic had an instrumental role to play. The ultimate Insider must not be subjected to such profane qualifications, or else the very distinction might become meaningless. This presumptuous way of talking indicated to some that Eustratios had been ‘outside’ too long for his own good.

These proceedings had a grave consequence for Byzantine intellectual history. In their attempt to enforce a strict, uncomplicated, and therefore largely imaginary Orthodoxy, the authorities in this period were further poisoning the already tense relationship with Greek philosophy, which was a supplement to the faith that they could not entirely discard without also jettisoning a substantial part of the Christian tradition. Had Italos *openly* rejected Christianity in favour of Plato or Proclus, then the matter would have been simpler. But he did not, and so his judges had only suspicions to go on, as do we. They decided that he had acted covertly and *insinuated* rather than openly proclaimed his heresies; that he *pretended* to be orthodox in order to poison the minds of his students; and that his true sources were Proclus and Iamblichus.<sup>31</sup> This attitude of suspicion was made official and permanent in the articles appended to the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, a liturgical proclamation that was expanded under Alexios I Komnenos to confront these sinister threats:

Anathema upon those who go through a course of Hellenic studies and are taught not simply for the sake of education but follow these empty notions and believe in them as the truth, upholding them as a firm foundation to such an extent that they lead others to them, *sometimes secretly, sometimes openly* (added italics).<sup>32</sup>

The charges may have been true in any particular case, for instance that of Italos, or they may not have, but the wisdom of the Church in so broadcasting them is debatable. It made the threshold between inner and outer wisdom an even more treacherous place to be, and yet the Church’s own needs required some people to be exactly there, even if only for the exposition of doctrine and the Fathers, the adaptation and application of the faith to new needs and circumstances, and the confrontation of enemies both old and new. This climate of officially recognized suspicion was a recipe for the

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<sup>31</sup> For the documents, see Gouillard (1985, esp. 147.191–92: ‘Italos hastened to hide his own impiety through a pretence of piety’); cf. *ibid.* (155.352–60) for feigned conversion; *ibid.* (147.202) for Proclus and Iamblichus; for a narrative, Clucas (1981). Niketas of Herakleia likewise did not believe Eustratios of Nicaea’s protestations of innocence: *Apologia and Accusation: Why He Does Not Accept the Bishop of Nicaea*, in Darrouzès (1966: 276–309, here 302–3).

<sup>32</sup> Gouillard (1967: 59); trans. Wilson (1983: 154).

detection of additional threats, even, sometimes, when they did not really exist.

It has been said that ‘the crisis was more one of confidence in the cultural superiority of Orthodoxy. Its guardians had seen their space invaded literally and metaphorically, and they were putting up more and higher barriers to keep insiders in and outsiders out.’<sup>33</sup> But how could anyone know for sure who was what? More importantly, how did the philosophers themselves cope with this climate of suspicion and accusation? I have argued elsewhere that a standard response to suspicion is dissimulation, or, in its extreme form, lying. It is unlikely that *all* the accusations were unfounded, and the example of George Gemistos Plethon at the very end of the Byzantine era shows that a philosopher could think and say exactly the sorts of things that were imputed to others before him. Just because Psellos and the others *said* they were orthodox when they were challenged does not prove that they really were.<sup>34</sup> And even if Italos was set up and convicted of specific heresies that were not his own does not mean that he was not guilty of other thought-crimes of which he was suspected (it is possible, after all, to frame a guilty man). Each case must be examined on its merits, using all the evidence available for it. However, we should not allow the outdated model of a universally pious Byzantium, where dissent was not even thinkable, to influence whether we accept a philosopher’s protestation of innocence. In many cases, we may never know the truth of the matter, but even this situation is more interesting, both historically and philosophically, than the old model. It is, after all, the exact situation in which the Byzantines lived, both the philosophers and their critics.

Coping is one thing, responding another. I have already discussed Leo’s attempt to ameliorate the label ‘Hellene’. Let us consider two rhetorical defences against similar charges, both of which seem to have been mostly private affairs. I have chosen Psellos’ response to John Xiphilinos, a friend who would become a patriarch, and Theodore Prodromos’ defence against a certain Barys, because they exhibit curious parallels and are not as well known as they should be.

Psellos’ angry letter responds to one by Xiphilinos that has not survived, in which Xiphilinos seems to have doubted Psellos’ commitment to the faith, at least to the monastic vows they had both promised to take when they fled the court of Constantine IX Monomachos shortly before that emperor died (1054). Xiphilinos also stated or implied that Psellos preferred to

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<sup>33</sup> Magdalino (1993: 386).

<sup>34</sup> The comments of John Stuart Mill (1985: 91) are apt.

study Plato—whom he called accusingly ‘*your Plato*’—than to practise Christian philosophy. The charge was substantially true. Xiphilinos no doubt knew from their acquaintance that Psellos had no personal interest in the monastic life and had recourse to it at that moment for political reasons. But the sincerity of Psellos’ Christianity had recently been called into question by others too, possibly the patriarch Michael Keroularios, who forced him to produce a confession of the faith. Moreover, Psellos was (or was about to be) engaged in a vicious feud with the monks on Mt Olympus in Bithynia, who mocked his inability to handle any deprivation and his addiction to Hellenic goddesses. The pious artifices and defensiveness of the *Encomium for His Mother* belongs to this period. The philosopher could not afford another challenge to his already shaky position, and this by a friend.<sup>35</sup>

For these reasons, I view Psellos’ anger as more bluster than indignation (‘that I have abandoned God and cling to Plato and the Academy, well, I don’t know how to endure this’, etc.). At first, he wants to cast the words ‘*your Plato*’ back at Xiphilinos. A Christian, Psellos seems to argue, should study Plato in order know where Plato is right and where wrong. Psellos implies that by performing this pious duty he himself was more Christian than Xiphilinos. But then he turns around and defends Plato by saying that Plato set the foundation for Christian dogma and was read by the Fathers too. He calls on the authority of Maximus the Confessor—‘I should call him *mine*, for he was a philosopher’—to show that his own philosophical studies have not placed him outside the Christian tradition. He later cites Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea as well, who had mixed Greek philosophy with Christian doctrine. It is Xiphilinos’ rejection of this tradition that makes him a ‘Plato-hater’ and ‘misologist’, i.e. a hater of logic and debate, which alludes to Socrates’ famous discussion in the *Phaedo* (89d ff.). One cannot have true virtue *and* false notions, he goes on to argue, so in effect Christians *have* to philosophize, by which he seems to mean study Greek philosophy. Psellos was certainly aware that at no time in Christian history had the study of Greek philosophy been required or even recommended officially, so his position here would come across as a rather impudent paradox, at least to the likes of Xiphilinos. Though he admits that it would still be possible for someone ‘not to accept the orthodox doctrine in a spirit of rational inquiry’, acknowledging then that philosophy does not necessarily lead to Christianity, he insists throughout that he himself does accept Christ.

What was unstable in this whole exchange was precisely the meaning of ‘philosophy’, which causes Psellos to vacillate between indignation at the

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<sup>35</sup> For the context, see Kaldellis (2006: 6). The letter is in Criscuolo (1990).

‘*your* Plato’ charge (no, he says at first, Plato is *yours*, not mine; he has power over you because you have not studied him) and his later affirmation that ‘Plato *is* mine’ (because I am a philosopher and good Christians must be philosophers). He ends by asking forgiveness for his tone and allowing Xiphilinos an opening to retract the accusation: ‘I was acting under the assumption that to be ranked with Plato meant that I was being separated from our divine men.’ What he wanted to hear from Xiphilinos was something like ‘I didn’t mean it that way’.

The life of Prodrornos is less well known (and less studied), so we cannot place his defence against a charge of heresy in a biographical context. In many satirical works, essays, and the letters that he exchanged with the self-proclaimed philosopher Michael Italikos, Prodrornos adopts a philosophical and specifically Platonic persona.<sup>36</sup> Future studies will hopefully elucidate this brilliant author as fully as he deserves, showing whether his multifarious corpus is informed by consistent philosophical concerns throughout. Here we will consider a poem (*Poem* 59) responding to the charge of an otherwise unknown Barys, which means ‘heavy’ or ‘oppressive’ but was evidently a real name, given that Prodrornos mocks it and it is attested in Byzantium. The *gerousia* that Prodrornos addresses in the first line (the ‘synod’ of line 125) is not necessarily to be taken literally but may refer to the poem’s readership; it is an imagined speech of defence before us. ‘Defence’ is perhaps not the right word as the poem delivers a vicious attack on Barys that echoes Psellos’ letter to Xiphilinos and may have even been based on it.

Prodrornos declares that he would have turned the other cheek (ll. 40–42) if the attack had been about worldly things, such as family, poverty or stupidity, but a slur on his faith required response. Barys had called him impious, and to remain silent would constitute a denial of God (l. 65). After citing some examples of righteous anger from the Old Testament (ll. 69–91) and declaring his faith in the Trinity, Prodrornos comes to the heart of the matter: he has been branded as a heretic because of his involvement with ‘outside wisdom’, specifically Plato and Socrates (ll. 105–6; 119–20). He immediately notes that one would then also have to brand as heretics Basil, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus (ll. 115–18). Prodrornos would he happy to be a heretic in their company. He later invokes the piety

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<sup>36</sup> For Prodrornos in general, see Hörandner (1974: 21–56); and 474–83 for *Poem* 59: ‘To Barys who, babbling, branded him with the name of a heretic’ (followed by a commentary), on which see Magdalino 1993: 390–91; Kazhdan (1984: 87–114: ‘Theodore Prodrornos: A Reappraisal’); and Kaldellis (2007a: 250–52; 270–76). His Platonism has not yet been studied from either a literary or a philosophical standpoint.



of the men in his family who raised him, specifically his grandfather and his uncle, who seems to have been a bishop in Rus' (ll. 184–90).<sup>37</sup> This invocation reminds us of Psellos' strategy in the *Encomium for His Mother*. The argument that follows in Prodromos' poem (ll. 191–203) likewise seems to be modelled on the letter to Xiphilinos. I did study outside texts, Prodromos admits, but I chose from them what was useful for the faith and discarded the rest. I studied logic so as not to fall into traps and bad reasoning. Plato, Aristotle and natural science are good for morals, politics and proper thinking, which is the same aggressive counter-argument made by Psellos against Xiphilinos. (The remainder of the poem is an attack on Barys himself.)

It is not strictly necessary that Prodromos was imitating Psellos here, as these were the kinds of arguments that someone in his position would naturally make in defence of his intellectual pursuits, but the correspondence is close and Psellos was well known among the twelfth-century humanists.<sup>38</sup> We observe the aggressive tone (more restrained in Psellos' case as the addressee was a friend), but in both cases this may have been as much strategy as genuine indignation (and it helps here that people can become indignant *that* a serious charge has been made against them, even if it is a true one). We note too the use of pious relatives as shields to deflect criticism, a saintly mother in Psellos' case, a bishop-uncle in that of Prodromos; the invocation of Fathers who had studied Greek thought, especially Basil, Gregory (either one), and Maximus; the standard claim that in reading 'outside literature' one had selected the good and rejected the bad; and the further argument that logical reasoning (which, apparently, one could learn only from the Greeks) was indispensable for good Christians.

Basil, the Gregories, and Maximus functioned as the protective talismans of Byzantine philosophy. According to Arethas, Choiosphaktes had compared himself to Gregory of Nazianzus and we know that Italos cited him too when he was being interrogated by the emperor's synod.<sup>39</sup> And not merely in Byzantium: in a unique episode from twelfth-century Kievan Rus', the metropolitan Klim Smoljatič was accused of vainly trying to make himself into a philosopher, and of citing Homer, Aristotle and Plato instead of Scripture. As in the cases of Psellos and Prodromos, all we have is Klim's response, which is conciliatory in tone and consists mostly of quotation of Scriptural passages. One of the points of this strategy, other than to prove that Klim does in fact know Scripture, is that the Bible must be inter-

<sup>37</sup> The identity of this uncle has occasioned debate. See Franklin (1984: 40–45).

<sup>38</sup> Kaldellis (2007a: 226–28).

<sup>39</sup> Arethas of Caesarea, *Choiosphaktes or the Warlock-Hater*, in Westerink (1968: 206; 210). Gouillard (1985: e.g. 145; 152–53).

preted because it cannot always be taken literally, and to interpret one must go beyond the letter of the text. ‘I inquire into the true meaning of what is said ...’ but, Klim adds, ‘I do not think that what I wrote was “philosophy”.’ The only non-Scriptural authority that he cites is, typically, Gregory of Nazianzus, who appears here ‘sailing to Athens as a young man, wishing to study the writings of the Athenians’.<sup>40</sup> The problem had been exported, and so too the standard response.

The Fathers’ ‘insider’ credentials were impeccable as they had defined the faith, yet they had also spent considerable time studying ‘outside’ wisdom. They were a bridge between the two thought-worlds, or rather proved that the two were not separate at all, that attempts to sever them must fail. The Fathers justified a form of Christian Hellenism or philosophy, but not necessarily the one practised by the likes of Psellos and Prodrimos, so we must suspect a degree of cynicism behind their invocation. Psellos rejected precisely the ascetic ‘Christian philosophy’ pioneered by Basil and Gregory and he revived Platonism in ways that they would not approve. And while we do not know what prompted Barys’ accusation, Prodrimos wrote satires that contained subtle blasphemies,<sup>41</sup> and pushed his thought in directions with no precedent in the Fathers (Lucian, for example, was his guiding star in much that he wrote). We may, then, wonder whether these Byzantine philosophers only *hid* behind Gregory (and his like) when they were challenged, but otherwise made their own way beyond them in terms of their literary and philosophical experimentations.<sup>42</sup> Psellos certainly knew that Gregory of Nazianzus would have disliked his project to rehabilitate the body and his argument that anti-Christian thinkers were essential for the understanding of Christian doctrine. There was a gap, in other words, between what the philosophers *professed* when challenged and what they *did* when left to their own devices. Contemporaries were sceptical, and we should be too.

In conclusion, it is possible that some Byzantine philosophers went beyond merely using philosophy to promote sanctioned theological objectives or writing technical but safe commentaries on the ancient thinkers. Many sources warn us that some were led by their study of ancient texts to doubt

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<sup>40</sup> Klim Smoljatič, *Epistle to Foma*; trans. Franklin (1991: 31–53; see the introduction, lviii–lxxii). I thank Olenka Pevny for this reference.

<sup>41</sup> See Roilos (2000: 113–20; 2005: 253–88); Kaldellis (2007a: 270–76).

<sup>42</sup> I have argued that Psellos’ professed admiration for Gregory of Nazianzus did not extend far into his basic attitudes; it was rhetorical, i.e. stylistic, or cynical, depending on the circumstance: Kaldellis (2006: 37–40; 2007a: 207–9; 217–18).

certain tenets of Orthodoxy and embrace views antithetical to them, for example astrological (in the case of Choïrosphaktes), regarding what attitudes one should have toward the body, or in rejecting monasticism. We, in turn, should be ready to recognize the feat of reasoning one's way out of a strongly established religion and adopt ancient or novel ways of thinking about physical, metaphysical, or ethical issues as a philosophical achievement in its own right.

Further exploration of the tense dialectic between Orthodoxy and dissent in Byzantium must not limit its horizons to the analytical tradition of modern academic philosophy, for much of ancient and Byzantine thought concerns broad cultural, ethical, and political topics that do not closely match modern curricular standards and methods of argumentation regarding logic, epistemology, and the philosophy of mind and language. We should be ready to relax the boundaries between general intellectual history and the history of philosophy, for we are not all in agreement over what constitutes philosophy and we do not yet possess, in the case of Byzantium at least, such an abundance of material that we can afford to be choosy. To give an example from the classical world, Herodotus has been discussed as a philosopher in a broader sense, for instance in his application of Greek science and practice of cultural relativism following (and perfecting) the teachings of the Sophists.<sup>43</sup> It is generally understood that ancient philosophy, in all its diverse genres and forms, differed notably in its interests and methods of demonstration from modern analytic philosophy. It would be more productive to assume, if only as a working hypothesis, that the same was true in Byzantium. We might risk losing much if we limit our focus to authors, or rather individual works that present themselves as technical elaborations or commentaries on the ancient technical traditions of philosophy, and so produce only doxography and philosophical *Quellenforschung*. Casting our nets widely will bring in a larger catch, not only because many (or most) Byzantines who wrote technical manuals also wrote in other genres as well, inviting intertextual readings, but also because we must factor in the Byzantine nexus of belief and power, the 'inside-outside' problem with which most ancient thinkers did not have to cope. In studying the Byzantines' inquiries into the highest questions and assessing their declarations of belief, we must consider the social and institutional power of an established religion and the sanctions that it could bring to bear against dissidents. In one sense, this too makes Byzantium more interesting than antiquity.

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<sup>43</sup> Lateiner (1989); Thomas (2000).

For instance, Herodotus had his Byzantine counterparts. The historian Michael Attaleiates was perhaps not a technical philosopher, but still he managed to produce a case for the equivalence of all religions, and his views on history and politics set him outside the bounds of Orthodoxy. To arrive at these conclusions he turned to ancient sources and models, including the history of the Roman Republic (as did many political philosophers in the modern period). His political thought looked to the past, and in his attempt to explain the current misfortunes of the Roman state and provide solutions for the future he rejected Orthodox ways of thinking, in some cases explicitly.<sup>44</sup> We may or may not want to consider his thought ‘philosophical’ (or Herodotus’ for that matter), but we would do well to consider his reflections as part of the background discussion that was going on at the time that all Byzantine thinkers were negotiating the boundaries between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’.

To cite another form of analysis that should be brought into close relation with doxography and philosophical *Quellenforschung* in the Byzantine context, it seems that even those who had a technical training in philosophy could express their philosophy (or aspects of it) in narrative mode, as Psellos did in the *Chronographia*. The *Timarion*, an anonymous satire of the late eleventh or twelfth century that was probably rightly suspected by Constantine Akropolites in the fourteenth century of being deliberately anti-Christian, appears to be a frivolous text on the surface but nevertheless has, I believe, a serious purpose. Its narrator emerges at the end of the work as one interested primarily in philosophy, and in the afterworld that he depicts, pagan gods and philosophers are dominant. They were right all along, it turns out, and this realization is accompanied by numerous subtle (and some not-so-subtle) slurs on Christianity. The narrator shows his hand toward the end when he takes up personally with the ancient philosophers, a group who will apparently not accept Christians in their midst. Interestingly, they reject Italos because he has not rejected his baptism, but they accept Psellos; that he, by mutual consent, ends up with the orators instead is an interesting commentary by the author on Psellos’ true proclivities, but the fact that he thinks that Psellos had renounced his baptism, thereby making him at least formally acceptable to the ancient philosophers if not lionized by them as he is by the orators, is obvious and telling. Oddly, this text has not yet been studied as a work of philosophy, or at least as a work which contains, in its

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<sup>44</sup> For the text, see Pérez Martín (2002); for a discussion, Kaldellis (2007b).

narrative of the afterworld, a commentary on the contemporary scene of Byzantine philosophy.<sup>45</sup>

To conclude, it is possible that Byzantine philosophy has not been fully appreciated because we have presupposed that Byzantine culture was far more static and monolithically pious than it really was. At the heart of the question of philosophy was in fact a fluid and dangerous boundary between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ that never became static. All Byzantine philosophers had to finesse it in various ways, making their works and proclamations inherently ambiguous. ‘Byzantium saw a much more varied display of meanings, status, and functions of philosophy than has been traditionally thought, even in regard to the relationship between philosophy and theology.’<sup>46</sup> We are only now beginning to seriously study genres such as Byzantine satire, while histories such as that by Attaleiates have received little critical attention. The question of the autonomy of Byzantine philosophy will require much philology and cultural hermeneutics. The prospects are exciting, but will be realized only when we apply to Byzantine texts and their social contexts the same sophistication that has traditionally been reserved for classical works (where now many assume, perhaps excessively, that almost every writer was a dissident of some sort). Philosophy in Byzantium was a contested space, a site of conflict about fundamental matters (inside vs. outside, pagan vs. Christian, revelation vs. reason, science vs. pietism, and so on.). The persistence of these tensions was inherent in the never fully synthesized intellectual tradition that the Byzantines had inherited. They were worked out again and again in the classroom, in theoretical treatises, in novels and satires, and in the subtle dances of Byzantine intellectual history.

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<sup>45</sup> For the text, see Romano (1974); trans. Baldwin (1984); for discussion, Kaldellis (2007a: 276–83; and esp. forthcoming *b*).

<sup>46</sup> Trizio (2007: 271).

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