

Rhetoric and the philosopher in Byzantium*

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The scene is familiar. A Byzantine ‘sophist’ enters the stage. The ‘philosophers’ are polite and graciously greet him, yet reject his company. In their eyes, he is not one of them. By contrast, the ‘sophists’ or, as the text also names them, the ‘rhetoro-sophists’ receive him with enthusiasm and grant him an honourable place among themselves. The (early?) twelfth-century author of the *Timarion*, to whom we owe this description,¹ could not have imagined how his positioning of the Byzantine philosopher or, as he prefers to call him, ‘sophist’ would endure beyond the infernal stage of Hades, where *Timarion*’s oneiric experience takes place. Byzantine philosophers may still be valued today for their rhetoric and other technical skills (of, say, copying, collecting, or commenting upon philosophical texts), but rarely for their philosophy.²

The author of the *Timarion* did not, of course, have the future of Byzantine philosophers in mind. What his sarcastic pen was aiming at was to disqualify the philosophical aspirations of self-professed philosophers of his immediate present. He did so by referring to an age-old anxiety of pre-modern Greek writing dating back to, at least, the writings of Plato in fourth-century Athens. The anxiety pertained to the definition and regulation of the relation between discursive content and discursive form, between thought and language, or, as it came to be seen, between philosophy and rhetoric. The anxiety was provoked by the desire on the part of self-proclaimed ‘philosophers’—such as Plato—to mark a distinct, privileged space for their own discursive production within the highly competitive field of public discourse in Athenian social life.³

The negotiation between philosophy and rhetoric remained a constant point of reference for many generations of Greek writers. It was an opposition that would be used in order to separate different professions (βίοι) within the Roman-Greek Mediterranean world. Later, in Patristic writing, a

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¹ *Timarion* (the relevant lines: 1123–35; see lines 1140–41 for the term ‘rhetoro-sophists’).

² For the historiography of Byzantine philosophy, see Trizio (2007). On *Timarion*, this Lucianic twelfth-century text, see Baldwin (1984); Tsolakes (1990); and, recently, Kaldellis (2007: 276–83).

³ See McCoy (2007) with further bibliography.

similar polarity was employed to distinguish different world-views, namely orthodox Christian theology (imagined as true φιλοσοφία) from virtually every other discourse. Middle Byzantine intellectuals, the primary focus of this contribution, inherited this tradition and, as I wish to argue, came to revive and transform several of its inflections, especially after the tenth century.

Timarion's scene is a representative moment in the history of this revival and transformation and I would like to follow two of its leads. Firstly, the ill dreamer, whose prolonged nightmare includes the philosophical rejection and rhetorical embrace of the Byzantine philosopher, is concerned mainly with the position of the Byzantine intellectual within a set hierarchy. Timarion is not interested, that is, in the elaboration of the theoretical issue regarding the relation of content and form, thought and language. Rather, his concern regards status, authority, or what we might call social 'subject-position', the place of the Byzantine intellectual within Byzantine high society.⁴

Secondly, the Byzantine philosopher whom Timarion satirizes is none other than Michael Psellos. This choice is not arbitrary. Among Byzantine intellectuals, Psellos was—perhaps more than anyone else—obsessed with presenting himself as a 'philosopher'; indeed, he was the first in the history of Byzantium (as far as we can tell) to obtain an imperial confirmation of his philosophical profession by receiving the title 'consul of philosophers' (ὑπατος τῶν φιλοσόφων) during the innovative reign of Constantine IX Monomachos.⁵ More importantly, as has been already noted (though not adequately historicized), Psellos was equally obsessed with seeing himself as one who practiced an ideal mixture of philosophy and rhetoric.⁶

Focusing on Michael Psellos along with one of his early Byzantine models and, then, several successors in the twelfth century, this paper will investigate how Byzantine philosophers portrayed themselves as philosophers in relation to rhetoric. My concern is thus what may be loosely termed philosophical self-representation and it is only through this perspective that I

⁴ For the term 'subject-position', see Whitmarsh (2001: 247; 295–301 and *passim*).

⁵ Cf. Kazhdan & Wharton Epstein (1985: 123–27). No specific title for the head of a 'school [παιδοτριβεῖον] of philosophers' is mentioned in the relevant source regarding an earlier similar appointment by Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos in tenth-century Constantinople; cf. Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographia*, ed. Bekker (1838: 446.1–22) (where also mention is made of three further 'schools' of rhetoric, geometry, and astronomy).

⁶ Kustas (1973: 156–57); Anastasi (1974); Ljubarskij (2004: 197–224); Angold (1997: 76–91); Kaldellis (1999: 127–54); Jenkins (2006: 145–51) and, recently, Kolovou (2010) are the most notable discussions.

will touch upon Byzantine conceptions of the philosophical issue regarding how rhetoric as form and profession relates to philosophy. This focus is not because Byzantine thinkers did not discuss the couplet rhetoric-philosophy as a theoretical issue *per se*—quite the contrary, Byzantine theorists often addressed this matter within the sophisticated theories on language and discursive aesthetics they developed. Yet, just like for the Socrates of the Platonic dialogues, for Roman and late antique Greek writers like Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Gregory of Nazianzus, the Byzantine theorists' thinking was, before all else, framed by a desire to define the philosopher's or the rhetor's own image as a creator of authoritative speech.

Synesius of Cyrene on the philosopher's rhetoric

As is the case with much else in Byzantium, so also Byzantine philosophers inherited their intellectual agendas from writers of the first glorious hundred years or so of Byzantine history. These early Byzantine writers were considered canonical reading material and their filtering of an entire earlier tradition—from Plato to the Second Sophistic and Neoplatonism—defined the premises of later Byzantine writing.⁷ Of these authors, it is Synesius of Cyrene (c. 370–c. 413) that will serve as my example here. This choice is justified by a number of reasons. First, Synesius is one of the most self-referential among early Byzantine writers, styling himself consistently as a 'philosopher'. Secondly, unlike, say, Themistius, Libanius, Julian or Proclus, Synesius was viewed in Byzantium as a Christian writer, despite the clearly Hellenic outlook he shared with these writers; he was thus regarded as being part of the interior Byzantine tradition.⁸ Thirdly, unlike other Christian writers who were equally self-referential, like e.g. Gregory of Nazianzus, Synesius summarized for Byzantine writers an emphatically Greco-Roman view of the definition of philosophy and rhetoric. His view, that is, was largely untouched by Christian preoccupations with theology and ascetic praxis. As an influential autobiographical writer, in appearance Christian but consciously Hellenic, Synesius can provide us an insight into the range of arguments that Byzantine writers had at their disposal as they set out to define their philosophical and rhetorical *personae*.

⁷ On this adherence to early Byzantium, see Papaioannou (2008), where there is also further bibliography.

⁸ See the entries in Photios, *Bibliotheca* 26.5b–6a, and the *Suda*, sigma.1511. Both Photios and the *Suda*, while acknowledging Synesius' 'Hellenism', identify Synesius as a bishop and as a 'philosopher' and also praise his writing style.

Set in his own context, Synesius is a typical late antique intellectual. A Christian provincial aristocrat who became a bishop, Synesius traversed the socio-political distance separating his North African province from the new locus of power, Constantinople, as well as the intellectual space spanning from Greco-Roman structures of knowledge to the increasingly dominant Christian faith.⁹ In his various writings, Synesius emerges as a man attempting to retain for himself what he already possesses: a significant social standing and the consequent social authority that this standing could afford.

In the late Roman Mediterranean world, such traditional aristocratic authority was not without challenges. It had to be re-affirmed, indeed proclaimed by the holder himself of social nobility, through acts and discourses of self-fashioning and in direct competition with a series of other emerging positions of authority (imperial, ecclesiastic, and, of course, ascetic). Facing this competition, the position that Synesius adopted through rhetorical self-representation was to root his social status in a traditional intellectual identity, that of the Hellene ‘philosopher’. Though with a long history behind it, this self-identification was not an entirely easy task. Beyond the competition, claiming for oneself the profession of Hellenic philosophy was complicated by the fact that the ‘Hellenic’ tradition itself offered Synesius somewhat fluid understandings—depending on context, genre, or audience—of what it meant to be a ‘philosopher’ as opposed to, say, a ‘sophist’ or a ‘rhetor’.¹⁰ Synesius, therefore, needed to revisit the definition of terms, delimit the boundaries of identities, and, in a sense, reinvent anew a philosophical agenda.

With this framework in mind, let us look at how Synesius goes about his self-fashioning. In public settings, Synesius distances himself entirely from rhetoric. In its sharpest, Platonic terms, the polarity is set in Synesius’ introduction to his speech *On Kingship*, addressing the emperor Arcadius and his court.¹¹ Let me paraphrase this lengthy prooemium. ‘I’, Synesius begins,

have not come from a wealthy city, bringing arrogant and luxurious discourses, those vulgar [πάνδημα] ones that rhetoric and poetry (vulgar [πάνδημοι] arts themselves)

⁹ For Synesius’ career set in its socio-historical context, see Cameron and Long (1993); Schmitt (2001); and Rapp (2005: 156–66).

¹⁰ Cf. the pertinent remarks on the term ‘sophist’ in Whitmarsh (2005: 15–19).

¹¹ For the audience of this text, see Cameron and Long (1993: 134–42). The text is echoed in Psellos’ *Chronographia*; see Graffigna (2000).

produce.¹² My recital will not induce pleasure [ἡδονή] aiming at immature listeners. My discourse is not of fluid ethos and stylized diction for the display of fake beauty. Rather, it is philosophy that has come to visit you with discourses of deep and divine manner, discourses that are masculine [ἀρρενωποί] and solemn. Indeed, free speech, the speech of philosophy, is the only one worthy of the king's ear. Mere praise, by contrast, works like poison [φάρμακα] mixed with honey, incurring destruction. It is similar to cookery that incites fake desires and brings ruin, and entirely dissimilar to philosophical discourse, which like gymnastics and medicine pains bodies while saving them. If you are strong enough (even though you are not thus accustomed) to bear the discourse of philosophy, the discourse of truth, then I, Synesius, have been set before you to proclaim it.

There is nothing new in this claim against rhetoric placed strategically at the beginning of a rhetorical piece which among other things aims at establishing its speaker, Synesius, as the authoritative voice of 'philosophy'.¹³ Philosophy and its practitioner are set in direct and, as it seems, non-negotiable distance to rhetoric.

In more private settings, such as the correspondence among friends of shared aspirations, however, Synesius can adopt a somewhat different stance. In the letter, for instance, that begins his letter-collection, Synesius argues that he 'fathers' discourses not simply of the 'solemn' philosophical kind, but also of the 'vulgar' (πάνδημος, literally 'belonging to the entire civic population') rhetoric.¹⁴ Here, rhetoric, though still inferior to philosophy, is integrated in the philosopher's discursive production.

This seemingly ambiguous stance is not surprising. From Plato onward ambiguity is a permanent feature of the philosophico-rhetorical debate. Synesius himself is among those writers that devoted careful thought on the unconditional distinction and, simultaneously, desirable combination of philosophy and rhetoric. This thought is recorded in Synesius' *Dion*, a text that was a standard reading for the highly educated Byzantine élite.¹⁵ The

¹² An allusion to the negative connotation of the word πάνδημος in Plato's *Symposium* (181a) where it is opposed to the word 'heavenly' (οὐράνιος), both applied to Aphrodite in order to distinguish two types of erotic desire.

¹³ For another example see the beginning of Dio Chrysostom's *Olympic Oration* (*Or.* 12).

¹⁴ *Epist.* 1, 1–5, to Nikandros. Synesius' phrase is alluded to in Psellos' *Letter* 5.12–14, ed. Gautier (1986); for its presence in other Byzantine writers see also below.

¹⁵ Of the 58 surviving mss. of *Dion*, the earliest dates to the tenth century: *Par. Coisl.* 249, described in Devreesse (1945: 228–29). The contents of this manuscript are revealing of the kinds of texts with which Synesius was associated in Byzantium and the kind of readers that he attracted (one should note that several marginal scholia accompany the texts). The book begins with the rhetorico-philosophical works of Synesius (including his *Dion*, excluding his letters) followed by a Neoplatonic presentation of the ideal philosopher (Marinus' *Life of Proclus*), then Gorgias with brief extracts from Dionysius of Halicarnassus, then orations of Aeschines and Lysias, and, in conclusion, by Synesius again, his *On Kingship*. See further Brancacci (1985: 201–313) on the influence of, especially,

title of the text refers to Dio Chrysostom, the Greek philosopher-rhetor of the first century CE. The essay begins as a refutation of Philostratus' view of Dio Chrysostom, but then turns to a lengthy self-promoting elaboration of what Synesius considers to be the philosopher's relation to discourse in general, and rhetoric in particular.

Synesius' tone is often polemical, as if he engages in self-defence in the vein of Socrates' *Apology*—indeed, Socrates is a primary model for Synesius in this speech (especially in paragraphs 14–15). Several opponents are in Synesius' mind, as may be gleaned both from *Dion* itself (primarily 8.8–10 and 10.2) and from the letter which accompanied *Dion* when it was sent to Synesius' teacher, Hypatia, in Alexandria (*Epist.* 154). These opponents are contemporary ascetics, who claim to be 'philosophers' but negate discourse entirely, and fellow rhetoricians, who, either as performers or as teachers, submit themselves to their audience's temporary desires for sensual pleasure.

Furthermore, Synesius opposes the Roman Greek rhetorical view regarding the relation between philosophy and rhetoric, best exemplified by Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists*. Unlike Philostratus and other Roman Greek rhetors, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Aelius Aristides—all of whom remained influential for Byzantine writers—Synesius does not wish to defend the philosophical aspirations of rhetoric, but, rather, the rhetorical practices of the philosopher. These earlier rhetors were concerned with the elevation of the status of rhetoric by making it appear as 'philosophical' as possible.¹⁶ By comparison, Synesius (or, for that matter, Gregory of Nazianzus, and, as we shall see, later authors like Michael Psellos) had an almost opposite aim: to open up philosophy so as to allow rhetoric as a supplementary and, possibly, essential component of the philosopher's practice.

What interests me here, beyond the polemics, are the details of the ideal philosopher as projected by Synesius onto Dio, and as embodied in the *Dion* by Synesius himself. Let me distil some of the parameters of this ideal 'philosopher'. Synesius' overarching argument is that, while 'philosophy' allows the philosopher to relate to oneself and to the divine, *logos* (by which Synesius means discursive, linguistic form in general, including rhetoric) is an indispensable tool. With it, the philosopher relates to others, whether for

Synesius' *Dion* in Byzantium; for discussion of the text itself, see Treu (1958) with Schmitt (2001: 37–38 and 67–143).

¹⁶ On the attempt to imagine or defend a more 'philosophical rhetoric' see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Ancient Rhetors* 1; Aelius Aristides, *To Plato, on Rhetoric* (e.g. 74.1–2: φιλοσοφία τις οὔσα ἢ ῥητορικὴ φαίνεται) and Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* (e.g. 1.480.1–11 and 481.12–26) and *Life of Apollonius* 5.40.

the sake of intervening morally in the affairs of the *polis* or for the sake of private pleasure amongst the select few (5.2 with 8.1–9.11). Discourse is thus accorded an important functionality in the public and private sphere and is presented as necessary for the philosopher's earthly, communal existence.

Furthermore, Synesius submits *logos* to an hierarchical distinction between what is termed civic and rhetorical discourse. The former is more appropriate for the philosopher.¹⁷ The latter, by contrast, is the inferior kind, since rhetoric addresses the public settings of the festival and theatre (3.2–5) and aims primarily at sensual gratification (1.4 and 3.5). Be that as it may, unlike the distance instituted between rhetoric and philosophy in the introduction of the *On Kingship*, here in *Dion*, Synesius advocates for a philosopher who must engage with both types of discourse. This engagement is to happen either during the gradual process of philosophical education or, also later, in the philosopher's life (especially 4.1–3).

Two reasons seem to necessitate this integration of discourse in its totality. First, such openness to *logos* is what, in Synesius' view, marks an originally Hellenic philosopher. To be 'precisely Hellenic' and 'native' to the Hellenic heritage, as Synesius wishes to be, is to embrace Hellenic discourse in its entirety (and this includes the inferior rhetoric) and therefore be able to make a genealogical claim on a powerful cultural capital, the capital of Hellenism.¹⁸

Synesius cannot do without this capital if he is—and this is the second reason—to retain his public, aristocratic authority, separate from contemporary competing types of authority defined by Roman/Constantinopolitan imperial power and Christian scripture. Synesius insists that discourse is the tool with which the philosopher may impart morality to 'rulers' and 'private individuals' and thus acquire authority within society.¹⁹ At that, discourse is persistently associated with *δύναμις* and its cognates.²⁰ Resorting to dis-

¹⁷ This is a discourse, we read, that is 'ancient, according to nature, and appropriate to its subjects': τὸ ἀρχαῖον κατὰ φύσιν ἔχον καὶ τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις οἰκεῖον (*Dion* 3.3); see further 1.13, 3.8 and 4.1.

¹⁸ See *Dion* 4.3; see further 6.2, 8, 9.1 ('native' philosopher), 9.3 ('Hellenic conduct'), 9.6 and 11.2 (on the Hellenic genealogy to which Synesius belongs) with *Epist.* 41, 240–43. For such use of Hellenism see e.g. Elm (2003) with Whitmarsh (2004: 139–58).

¹⁹ Cf. *Dion* 1.14; 2.2; 3.1; see further 9.6–10.1 on the practice of virtue as a preparatory philosophical phase.

²⁰ See e.g. *Dion* 3 and 14, on Dio's and Socrates' discursive power respectively, or 5, on the discursive inability of Synesius' opponents, the ones who disregard rhetoric and poetry. See also how it is in discourse that Synesius locates his god-given gift of 'being able for the greatest things and willing the best' (δύνασθαι τε τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τὰ κάλλιστα βούλεσθαι); see *Against Andronikos, To the Bishops* (*Epist.* 41, 106–7).

course may be a necessity, imposed upon the philosopher by his earthly and communal existence. It is also, however, a natural outcome of the philosopher's power of display (5.4): 'As God gave substance to the bodies of forms as visible images of his invisible powers [δυνάμεις], thus also a beautiful soul being fecund with what is best', Synesius argues of the philosopher, 'has its power [δύναμις] transmissible to the outside.'²¹

Synesius, therefore, argues for the philosopher's adoption of rhetoric. This adoption or, indeed, appropriation should not to be confused with some kind of rhetorical philosophy, an indissoluble mixture of the two disciplines. Rather, Synesius envisions a double life for the philosopher. As is made clear throughout the *Dion*, rhetoric and philosophy remain distinct and unmixed enterprises. Tellingly, for instance, Synesius imagines discourse as a performance that surrounds without ever touching the philosopher's true self; it may communicate the philosopher's inner truth to the select few but also conceals it from the uninitiated (5.7 with 18.1–5).

This distinction of the two disciplines—evident in Synesius and elsewhere in contemporary and earlier Greek writing—should be kept in mind because it serves to retain the hierarchical superiority of philosophy and promote it (and not rhetoric) as the primary profession and identity marker. For, though he appropriates rhetoric, Synesius strives to identify exclusively with philosophy. In it, he finds an essential, divinely originating autonomy: 'Why should I be', he claims (12.9–10), 'a slave to anything fixed, when it is possible to fully possess autonomy [αὐτονομία], and lead my discourses where I decide to lead them, not being judged by the negligence of listeners but by having myself as a measure? This is the fate that God gave to me, namely to be without a master [ἄδέσποτος] and free [ἄφετος].' A memorable remark, yet not uncommon among early Byzantine writers.²² The philosopher's autonomy is, for part of this intellectual tradition, an absolute category, indeed an ontological category, the fixed and natural boundary that separates the real philosopher from others that might compete for his superior authority.²³ It is only from this secure horizon that intellectuals/aristocrats like Synesius can open philosophy to rhetoric.

²¹ See further *Epist.* 41, 116–18 and 184–85.

²² Cf. *Dion* 14.5 with Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 36.12, another strong proclamation of the 'philosopher' as an 'autonomous' creature. Cf. also Proclus, *In Remp.* 1.65.8–13.

²³ On philosophy and the philosopher's freedom associated with a specific (aristocratic) *physis*, in other words a specific ontology, see Synesius, *Dion* 6.1, *Epist.* 41, 94–96 and *On Providence* 1.2. The notion is, of course, Platonic (cf. *Phaedr.* 252e2–5) and Neoplatonic (recurrent in Proclus' commentary on the *Republic*).

Michael Psellos, the rhetor-philosopher

This careful appropriation of rhetoric for the philosopher's self-representation will not be repeated in Byzantine writing for some time. Even if the two professions continued to exist and thrive until at least the sixth century in urban centres of the Eastern Mediterranean, neither philosophers nor rhetors seem to have felt the necessity to justify their profession. Teachers of rhetoric like Libanius in Antioch, Gregory's contemporary, or Procopius and Choricus, rhetoricians at the sixth-century school of Gaza, appear self-confident and secure in their practice, showing no need to ground it in the profession of philosophy.²⁴ Similar was the attitude of philosophers. Though they dealt extensively with discursive form and the value of rhetoric—as, for instance, in the Neoplatonic schools of Athens and Alexandria in order both to explicate Plato's texts and clarify Plato's position regarding the epistemological place of discourse—they could do so safely. I mean that these philosophers approached rhetoric primarily from a theoretical perspective, rather than as a more urgent matter of social positioning.²⁵

As we move to later centuries, the concern over the exact relation between philosophy and rhetoric was further diminished, since the fate of the two professions was markedly different. With the transformation and, in large parts of former Byzantine territory, the gradual disappearance of the Greek-speaking urban élite, a process that lasted from the seventh into the early ninth century, the importance of rhetoric receded along with many other aspects of Greco-roman urban culture.²⁶ It is safe to assume that rhetoric did not disappear completely, but, as far as our sources tell us, those who had access to books, writing and public speaking did not place a significant value upon the profession of rhetoric as such.²⁷ Hagiography, church homi-

²⁴ Professing philosophy is not a seminal concern for Libanius (cf. his lengthy autobiographical oration [*Or.* 1]). Similarly, being a 'rhetor' is a recurrent claim in the writings of Procopius and, especially, Choricus; see the latter's *Funeral Oration in Honour of Procopius* 1.11–12 (*Op.* 8) where a personified Rhetoric is introduced lamenting for the loss of her best practitioner, Procopius.

²⁵ See e.g. the Neoplatonic readings of rhetoric and, in general, discursive form in Hermias' scholia on Plato's *Phaedrus*, Olympiodorus' commentary on the *Gorgias*, and, of course, Proclus' commentaries on the *Cratylus* and the *Republic*.

²⁶ For an overview of the fate of the Byzantine urban world in this period, see Haldon (1997) with Wickham (2005).

²⁷ Procopius of Caesarea (writing in the 550s) seems to be the last early Byzantine writer before the tenth century to be designated by the name 'the rhetor'; cf. the manuscript titles of Procopius' works as well as references to Procopius in Agathias, *Histories* 7.22 and

letics, ecclesiastical poetry and biblical exegesis take the place of rhetoric which (along with classicizing poetry) was relegated to past types of discourse, preoccupied with ‘lying’.²⁸

‘Philosophy’, by contrast, remained more or less intact as a claim to authority—despite the feeling of despair that can be felt in some late antique philosophical historiography.²⁹ Whether in John of Damascus’ Neoplatonic definition of philosophy or the revival of the reading of Plato, Aristotelian logic and Neoplatonic thought in the course of the ninth century, whether in the redefinition of *philosophia* as the ascetic way of life in patristic and hagiographical writings or in the association of philosophy with divination and occult practices, the title ‘philosopher’ retained its social currency.³⁰

Nevertheless, gradually, during the tenth century primarily, one witnesses a revival both of rhetoric as a value-giving discursive practice and of the distinction of rhetoric vs. philosophy in definitions of the ideal intellectual.³¹ Practising and being exposed to rhetorical discourse is now again regarded as a welcome preparatory stage and additional qualification in the philosopher’s curriculum vitae—this is particularly the case when tenth-century Byzantine writers refer to the curricula of such early Byzantine ‘philosophers’ as Synesius and Gregory of Nazianzus.³²

9.13–14. For a review of learning in the period between the sixth and the ninth century, see Moffatt (1977).

²⁸ Typical is the phrase by Basil of Caesarea anthologized in the 8th-century compilation *Sacra Parallela* (in Migne, *PG* 96: col. 341.19–23): Ῥητορικὴ καὶ ποιητικὴ, καὶ ἡ τῶν σοφισμάτων εὗρεσις, πολλοὺς ἀπεσχόλησεν, ὧν ἡ ὕλη τὸ ψεῦδος ἐστίν. Οὐτε γὰρ ποιητικὴ συστήναι δύναται ἄνευ τοῦ μύθου, οὔτε Ῥητορικὴ ἄνευ τῆς ἐν τῷ λέγειν τέχνης, οὔτε σοφιστικὴ ἄνευ τῶν παραλογισμῶν. This conception of rhetoric is a Byzantine commonplace, especially in monastic literature; cf. e.g. Theodore the Studite, *Epitaphios on Plato, his Spiritual Father*, proem (*PG* 99: col. 804a) and Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Orations* 9.59.

²⁹ Cf. Damascius, *The Philosophical History* 150, ed. Athanassiadi (1999).

³⁰ The Neoplatonic and ascetic definitions are conveniently reviewed in Duffy (2002: 139–43) with further bibliography. On the profession of *philosophia* appropriated by ascetics see e.g. Darrouzès (1961, index s.v. ‘philosophia’). On the ninth-century revival, see Lemerle (1971). On logic, see Bydén (2003: 217, n. 6). On *philosophia* and the occult, see Magdalino & Mavroudi (2006: esp. p. 13). See further Bydén (2003: 1–39), for a recent account on philosophy and philosophers in Byzantium.

³¹ Niketas David from Paphlagonia (late 9th–early 10th c.), Arethas’ pupil, who, in the manuscript titles of his works, is designated as ‘rhetor’ and ‘philosopher’ alternatively, is a good example of this trend. See also John Geometres, *Letter Describing a Garden* 9.

³² See e.g. *Suda*, sigma.1511 on Synesius and, especially, gamma.450 on Gregory of Nazianzus, who καὶ ἐξ φιλοσοφίαν ἐξήσκητο καὶ ῥήτωρ ἦν ἀμφιδέξιος (notably, the same exact wording is given in the biography of Apollinaris of Laodicea, who is presented as an acquaintance of Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea: alpha.3397).

This revival of rhetoric as profession should be placed within the context of the intellectuals' position in the shifting social structures of Constantinopolitan politics, from the ninth through to the twelfth century.³³ To some extent, certain features of Synesius' late antique situation remain intact in middle Byzantine Constantinopolitan society. This is a society in which social authority continues to be determined by acts and discourses of self-fashioning. Constantinopolitan—courtly or urban—aristocracy, clerics and monks, intellectuals, teachers and bureaucrats all continue to compete within a fluid social arena that is defined more by shifting networks of kinship and friendship, than by any stable social stratification.³⁴ Of course, certain people and groups fare better than others in achieving, maintaining and re-enforcing their authority particularly through association with by now well-established social formations. The court, the monasteries, and the church—to name the three most important such formations—and the individuals that become part of them remain the primary producers of social meaning and, consequently, holders of authority.

As far as we can tell, during most of the ninth and part of the tenth century, Byzantine intellectuals indeed emerge through the ranks of hegemonic social formations and those social groups that belong to the upper echelons of Byzantine society. Theodore the Studite, patriarch Photios, Constantine VII, but also Leo the Philosopher, Arethas, Niketas Magistros, Theodore Daphnopates, and John Geometres are members of an intellectual élite chiefly by already being members of a social élite.³⁵ This is a social status that they share with the early Byzantine intellectuals whom they value and imitate. Like Synesius and Gregory of Nazianzus, most of these Byzantine writers add intellectual authority (occasionally infused with Hellenic cultural capital) to a pre-existing social power. They already possess this power through their aristocratic lineage and association with the powerful social formations mentioned above.

By contrast, authors like the so-called Anonymous Professor (ed. Markopoulos 2000), a tenth-century Constantinopolitan teacher, John Sikeliotes, a commentator of Hermogenes in the early eleventh century, Michael Psellos and John Italos, teachers of philosophy in the eleventh century, and Michael Italikos and Theodore Prodromos, rhetoricians of the

³³ The picture provided here cannot but be a cursory one; for some preliminary discussion of the social position of Byzantine authors, see Beck (1978: 123–25) with Kazhdan & Wharton Epstein (1985: 130–33).

³⁴ Cf. Haldon (2006; 2009).

³⁵ Cf. Lauxtermann (2003: 34–45) for a discussion of similar issues from the perspective of patronage.

twelfth, represent a new intellectual type in Constantinopolitan culture. These writers—most characteristically among them Psellos—acquire access to political authority primarily by creating an intellectual authority for themselves.³⁶ This intellectual authority is produced through semi-private teaching—and, thus, through the most precarious and least defined of Byzantine institutions, the school—as well as through public speaking.³⁷ Intellectual authority is thus made through the profession of philosophy and rhetoric, in a social environment in which teachers and rhetorical performers are more easily expendable—in comparison to, say, aristocrats, bishops, or abbots. Intellectuals like Psellos are not insiders of the Byzantine economy of power; rather, they operate peripherally. In effect, they produce philosophical and rhetorical meaning, yet neither for an audience that is given nor with a fixed place in the Byzantine cultural market.

In precisely this setting—the increasing visibility of philosophers/teachers and rhetors/performers in Constantinopolitan society—, Psellos revives a Synesian framework in order to configure the relation between the two professions. As was the case with Synesius, Psellos identifies himself first as a philosopher, sometimes adopting a strict opposition between philosophy and rhetoric and distancing himself safely from the latter and its practitioners.³⁸ Following Synesius, Psellos speaks equally of the necessity of discourse and invents various ways in which rhetoric may be acceptable for the philosopher.³⁹ He writes, for instance, of the ‘civic’, ‘ancient’ and ‘purified’ rhetoric that he, unlike his contemporaries, pursues and imparts, and he also defends both the classical and the late antique roots of this elevated rhetoric.⁴⁰

³⁶ In this, Psellos and other such Byzantine intellectuals were much like Cicero, ‘a political outsider without the authenticating pedigree of ancestors who had held high elected office’, or like Stephen Greenblatt’s Renaissance writers, who could not root ‘personal identity in the identity of clan or caste’; see Dugan (2005: 1) with Greenblatt (1980: 9).

³⁷ On middle Byzantine (especially 11th-century) education, see Lemerle (1977), with Agapitos (1998) and Markopoulos (2006); on rhetoric, see Mullett (2003). On the rise of the importance of *paideia* during the course of the tenth century, see, further, Gaul (2010: 76–77).

³⁸ See e.g. *Phil. min.* I 36.10–14 or *Letter* 110, ed. Sathas (1876: 354.23–29).

³⁹ See e.g. *Letter* 11, ed. Sathas (1876: 242.21–25).

⁴⁰ Cf. *Letter* 224, ed. Kurtz & Drexler (1941), with Synesius, *Dion* 3.3; and *Chron.* VI 23 with Synesius, *Letter* 1. See also Psellos, *Letter* 174, ed. Sathas (1876: 442.23–25): ἐργάζομαι δὲ οὐ τὴν πᾶνδημον ῥητορικὴν, οὐδὲ τὴν θεατρικὴν καὶ ἀκόλαστον ... ἀλλὰ τὴν οἰκουρὸν τε καὶ σώφρονα with n. 14 above. On Synesius’ *Dion* and its presence in Psellos’ presentation of the rhetorical style of Gregory of Nazianzus, see Levy (1912: 41); for further Synesian allusions in Psellos, see Papaioannou (2000).

Nevertheless, beyond Synesius or any other premodern Greek writer, Psellos' most frequent stance on the matter is to advocate the indissoluble mixture of philosophy and rhetoric, the creation of a 'commingled science' (σύμμικτος ἐπιστήμη), as he calls it.⁴¹ It is this mixture which Psellos propagates in his lectures and letters, which he ascribes to his most cherished models, such as Plato and Gregory of Nazianzus, and about which he praises intellectual figures of the past and the present (most important among them is the tenth-century writer Symeon Metaphrastes, nearly an 'alter ego' for Psellos, for whom he wrote an extensive encomium).⁴² Most interestingly, when writing in the first person singular, Psellos' adopted persona is consistently that of a learned man who perfectly joins philosophy with rhetoric: 'in my soul', he writes, 'as if in a single mixing bowl,⁴³ I mix philosophy and rhetoric together'.⁴⁴ For the first time in the history of the philosophico-rhetorical debate, the combination of philosophy with rhetoric is imagined as the ideal philosopher's unified and single discursive practice.⁴⁵

In order to highlight some of the details as well as the importance of this self-representational gesture, it is worth looking closer at one of the many instances in which Psellos describes this 'commingling'. The text is the lengthy autobiographical digression that Psellos inserts into his *Chronographia* while describing the reign of his most important patron, the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (Book VI, chs. 36–46). Written sometime in the early 1060s, this narrative describes Psellos' gradual entrance to Monomachos' court in 1043 (when Psellos was twenty-five years old).

Psellos begins by presenting the two fundamental areas of his studies: 'rhetorical discourse in order to be able to mould [πλάσασθαι] language'

⁴¹ *Letter 223*, ed. Kurtz and Drexler (1941: 265.5–6).

⁴² Of the numerous examples, see *Letters* 174 and 188, ed. Sathas (1876); *Theol.* I 98 (on Plato); *Poem* 7.177–78; *Theol.* I 102.4–6; *Theol.* II 6.139–40 (the last three references on Gregory of Nazianzus); and *Or. hag.* 7 *passim*, esp. ll. 62–70 (on Symeon Metaphrastes). Cf. *Theol.* I 79.73–78 (a critique of the style of Maximus the Confessor, the 'philosopher') and *Theol.* I 47.80–89 (a critique of John Sikeliotas; in Psellos' view, Sikeliotas, though a 'sophist' in reality, titled himself a 'philosopher' and attacked such able 'sophists' as Synesius, Libanius or Procopius).

⁴³ An allusion to Plato, *Timaeus* 41d4–6?

⁴⁴ *Or. min.* 8.191–92: ὡσπερ ἐφ' ἐνὶ κρατῆρι τῆ ἐμῆ ψυχῆ φιλοσοφίαν καὶ ῥητορικὴν ὁμοῦ συγκεράννυμι. See also Kustas (1973: 196–97).

⁴⁵ In this respect, I disagree with the view put forth in Jenkins (2006: 145) that 'it would be difficult to argue that he [*i.e.* Psellos] was any more insistent than Dionysius of Halicarnassus had been in the 1st century' with respect to the mixture of rhetoric with philosophy. For Dionysius of Halicarnassus, see the discussion above.

and ‘philosophy in order to purify the mind’ (ch. 36). His contact with rhetoric, Psellos declares, was such that he could possess its ‘powers’ (δύνασθαι is the verb used) of argumentation, but not so much that he might ‘follow’ rhetoric ‘in every aspect’. Psellos graduated to philosophy, starting with ‘natural’ discourses and reaching ‘first philosophy’ (namely theology)⁴⁶ by way of the ‘middle knowledge’ (namely mathematics, as may be inferred from ch. 38). So far so good; like a good ‘traditional’ intellectual, Psellos appropriates rhetorical discourse as an introductory step toward higher pursuits. Indeed, the paragraphs that follow in the narrative (chs. 37 through 40) tell only of Psellos’ philosophical achievements: his resuscitation of wisdom, his intellectual journey from the commentary tradition to the original sources, Aristotle and Plato, and then back to Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and the ‘great harbour’ of Proclus. Finally, we read of Psellos’ ultimate exploration of all—even extra-discursive—knowledge, using as his intellectual base his own ‘single science of everything’.

After such a curriculum of gradual intellectual ascent, one might not expect to encounter rhetoric again. Yet Psellos returns to rhetoric in chapter 41. Unlike his earlier remark where he seemed unwilling to identify with the study of rhetoric, here he states directly that his discourse always combines both rhetoric and philosophy, a combination that, as he claims, makes him unique. Rhetoric in this chapter is not presented as simply preparatory of philosophy; rather, it is regarded as a fundamental constituent of the philosopher’s discursive practice. Indeed, after Psellos has recounted his engagement with theology and patristic writings and repeated his unmatched contribution in the Constantinopolitan revival of classical and early Byzantine knowledge (chs. 42–43), he seems to nearly forget his ‘philosophical’ identity. For he concludes his autobiographical digression with three paragraphs (chs. 44–46) devoted almost entirely to a disturbingly self-confident praise of his own unique rhetorical nature, to what he alludes as his ‘natural virtue’, and its enchanting effect upon Constantine Monomachos.

Thus, while Psellos begins his philosophical self-representation by preventing himself from being completely immersed in rhetoric, the narrative returns to the mixture of philosophy with rhetoric, and then reaches its culmination in equating Psellos’ ‘nature’ with his pleasure-generating eloquence.⁴⁷ The pattern is not uncommon in his texts and, I would argue, is

⁴⁶ A common Neoplatonic term, ultimately from Aristotle (*Metaph.* VI 1025b3–1026a32); see, e.g., John Philoponus, *On Aristotle On the Soul* 58.7–21 with Psellos, *Phil. min.* II 13, 37.32–38.13.

⁴⁷ For a different reading of this section of the *Chronographia*, see Kaldellis (1999: 127–41). Though Kaldellis is right to argue that one of the main themes of the *Chronographia* is

telling of Psellos' approach. Psellos first rehearses the constraints of the Byzantine tradition, where rhetoric is a clearly distinct and hierarchically inferior category. Then proceeding beyond the tradition, he joins philosophy with rhetoric in a nearly indissoluble mixture. In due course, Psellos will occasionally identify with what, until then, had been regarded as inferior, namely rhetorical appearance and its affectations.⁴⁸

Let us look at two more examples, two texts that stem from Psellos' educational practice. The first is an attempt at a definition of philosophy (*Phil. min.* I 2), while the second is a university lecture that addressed the insistent desire of Psellos' students that their philosopher-teacher should lecture on the value of myth (*Or. min.* 25). In the former text, Psellos imagines philosophy both as an autonomous entity (philosophy, we are told, 'is both in everything and outside everything') and as a universal activity: philosophy 'spins around together with the heaven' and mixes all knowledge (20–28). This philosophical totality of knowledge includes rhetoric, which is explicitly placed, as one might expect, toward the bottom of the epistemic ladder.⁴⁹ Yet, in defining rhetoric, Psellos imagines this inferior discipline in terms that are strikingly reminiscent of philosophy's qualities. Rhetoric too is a universalizing practice that mixes everything (69–71)—Psellos even posits a possible comparison of rhetoric too with 'the heaven that has its perfection in the infinity of its motion' (76–78). And, like philosophy, rhetoric too is autonomous—indeed Psellos names rhetoric, and rhetoric alone, an *αὐτονομοθεσία*, a discipline regulated solely by its own principles (80–84).

In the second text, Psellos assumes a similar stance. His lecture on myth is structured around an intricate rhetorical strategy that divides the lecture (a total of 188 lines in the Teubner edition) in two. During the first half of the lecture (lines 1–95), Psellos feigns a strong resistance to his students' desire to talk about myth. He, a philosopher, has by now 'traversed matter and has ascended almost to the Forms' and thus reacts to those who wish of him to imitate a 'sophist' like Dio Chrysostom in offering an encomium of myth. At nearly the exact middle of the text (line 96 onward), however, Psellos

'the rise of Psellos himself and the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy in his thought and career' (ibid. 138), I find somewhat unconvincing the notion that rhetoric was integrated by Psellos only to the extent that it provided a disguise for his 'true' project (namely philosophy and its Platonist and likely anti-religious thrust).

⁴⁸ For more examples and further discussion, see Papaioannou (forthcoming).

⁴⁹ For this hierarchical structure, see O'Meara, 'Political Philosophy in Michael Psellos' (in this volume).

changes his course and begins to discuss myth, offering an impressive defence for its value.

This defence consists of pressing further both the philosophical and rhetorical value of myth advocated by earlier philosophical and rhetorical theory. In earlier writing, myth is useful either as a cover for philosophical truth (as Neoplatonic exegesis of Homer argued—for instance in Proclus' commentary on the *Republic*) or as preparatory for the acquisition of the skill of persuasion (as was claimed in Byzantine discussions of the *progymnasma* of *mythos*—for example in John Doxapatres' eleventh-century commentary on Aphthonius). For Psellos, however, this valuation of myth is not enough. Rather, in this lecture, myth is imagined as—significantly for us here—an 'arrogant *rhetor* ... who fashions and refashions his intended meaning in whichever way he wills' and is proclaimed to be 'music, superior to philosophy' (173; a strategic misreading of Socrates' final moments in Plato's *Phaedo*).⁵⁰ Though in the beginning of the text Psellos, the 'philosopher', distances himself from the inferior discourse of myth, by the end of the lecture he has elevated myth, the 'rhetor', to an unprecedented height.

These two texts with their parallel imagining of the two disciplines (philosophy and rhetoric) and the temporary favour granted to inferior discourse (the *αὐτονομοθεσία* of rhetoric in the first and myth imagined as a personified rhetor in the second) should not be read as Psellos' elaboration of a philosophical question. Psellos does not put forth here any detailed elaboration of the relation between philosophy and rhetoric or between myth and philosophical discourse. Psellos, I believe, has a different concern. Both texts are about self-representation, about promoting Psellos with his rhetorical philosophy as the ideal intellectual figure.

Notably, the first essay ends with Psellos' wish that someone 'who has arrived at the habit of knowledge [*ἐπιστήμη*]' might exist, a person who, in a contemporary world of people who only practice separate disciplines, would 'bring together into one thing' and 'unite and mix together' the vari-

⁵⁰ According to Plato's *Phaedo* (60d–61b), Socrates had a recurrent dream to 'create music and work at it', which he revisited during his final moments. Initially, Socrates interpreted the dream as a mere cheer for him to continue exactly what he was doing: philosophy, 'the greatest kind of music' (a phrase which was, notably, evoked in Neoplatonic definitions of philosophy with which Psellos would have been familiar; cf. e.g. Proclus, *In Remp.* 1, 57.8–23 and 60.24–25 and David, *Proleg.* 25.19–24 with John Tzetzes, *Chil.* 10.597). Then, however, Socrates decided that the dream was urging him to practice 'music' in the regular sense; hence, he turned to the making of poetry (though still without 'creating myths!'). By contrast, as Psellos cites the story, it is myth that is implied as 'the greatest kind of music'. For the episode in the *Phaedo*, see Roochnik (2001); for Psellos' reading, see also Kolovou (2009).

ous types of knowledge (including rhetoric) in order to produce one single and ‘most beautiful living creature upon earth’. Who else is that ‘someone’ if not Psellos himself who repeatedly proclaims his proficiency in every type of knowledge and, especially, his mixture of rhetoric with philosophy?

Similarly, Psellos concludes his lecture on myth by urging his students to welcome myth into their very inner core, their soul: ‘Should we not receive him’, Psellos asks, ‘with utter reverence? Dine him with the best that we have? Let him rest in our soul as if in a house, providing him our mind [νοῦς] as his bed, entirely covered with beautiful sights? If we let him inhabit us in this manner, he too will honour us back and give us the starting points of fictions [πλάσματα] and the art and power of persuasion.’ Who else, we might ask, is this skilled visitor than Psellos himself, the rhetor, to whom, for instance, Monomachos, as we read in the *Chronographia* at the end of the section discussed above, allowed entrance to his very ‘heart’?⁵¹

The philosopher’s politics

With its explicit mixture of philosophy and rhetoric and its temporary valuation of the inferior discipline, Psellos’ self-representational stance is unlike anything else in his distant and immediate past. While other Byzantine writers, such as Synesius, occasionally join the two professions and flirt with the aesthetic value of rhetoric, they neither put the mixture of philosophy with rhetoric so ostensibly on display nor does their flirting with rhetorical identity ever result in sacrificing—however temporarily—the traditional belief in the primacy of philosophy. By contrast, Psellos maximizes what is a latent notion in Greek autobiographical tradition: rather than preparatory, supplementary, or just superfluous, rhetoric is central to the philosopher’s social persona.

At that, Psellos is innovative when placed in the history of Greek philosophers’ self-referential writing. Simultaneously, as I would like to argue, he brings to the fore—though, as we shall see, with a twist—certain conceptual trends that are evident in middle Byzantine rhetorical theory. Just like Byzantine self-representation, the field of Byzantine rhetorical theory (for instance, the commentaries in Hermogenes’ corpus and Aphthonius’ *progymnasmata*) remains largely unexplored, especially in

⁵¹ *Chron.* VI 46: Τοῖς μὲν οὖν ἄλλοις καιρὸν εἶχε καὶ μέτρον ἢ πρὸς αὐτὸν εἴσοδος, ἐμοὶ δὲ καὶ αἰ τῆς καρδίας αὐτῷ πύλαι ἀνεπετάννυντο, καὶ κατὰ βραχὺ προϊόντι ξύμπαντα ἐπεδείκνυτο.

regard to the question that interests us here, the relation between rhetoric and philosophy.⁵²

Among Byzantine rhetorical theorists, the work of John Sikeliotes in the early eleventh century mentioned above, stands out for its attempt to redefine rhetoric in accordance to theological or, better (as Sikeliotes himself saw it), philosophical premises.⁵³ In the introduction to his commentary on Hermogenes' *On Forms*, Sikeliotes suggests that the πάνδημος rhetoric (an evocation of a Synesian concept) is necessary for all those who desire to learn the 'science of politics' (πολιτική ἐπιστήμη), 'even if', Sikeliotes continues, 'Plato—unworthily of Plato himself—condemned [κατεπαυεῖν]⁵⁴ the fire of rhetoric which is beneficial to the public and belongs to everyone [πάνδημος]'.⁵⁵

Accordingly, Sikeliotes imagines the ideal rhetor as what he calls a 'civic [πολιτικός] philosopher'.⁵⁶ This philosopher is, as he explains in the commentary itself, 'a rhetor who is not simply a rhetor, but someone who orders and adorns moral character, leading humankind toward what is more rational and, indeed, truly human by turning ... all irrationality to its opposite' (376.3–14). The primary examples of such political philosophers are, as one might expect, the 'teachers of the Church' who 'fashion and order not only cities, but also moral character' (469.27–470.1). The fathers, we read, 'joined civic discourse' with whatever is 'absolutely necessary' for man to 'commune' with God and thus 'raised our nature to the nature of eternity'. This new kind of rhetoric, Sikeliotes further states, 'is the true civic discourse [πολιτικός λόγος], the one that grants lawfulness to the powers of our souls, those intelligible cities [πόλεις], ... introducing peace ... and transferring us to that original polity from which we were snatched away' (466.17–470.7).

⁵² Kustas' admirable work (1973) is the first attempt to map Byzantine rhetorical theory, though many of his arguments would now require revision.

⁵³ Sikeliotes' work is to be placed during the reign of Basil II (after 1000?) though the details of his biography are unknown, except what one might glean from an autobiographical note he inserted in his commentary to Hermogenes (see *Commentary on On the Forms*, ed. Walz 1834: 446.24–448.15), where Sikeliotes refers to speeches that he composed (no examples of which survive), one of them delivered in the Constantinopolitan suburb of Pikridion at the order (?) of Basil II. On Sikeliotes see Kustas (1973: 21 and *passim*), with Mazzucchi (1990) and Conley (2003).

⁵⁴ The word is wrongly translated as 'loben, preisen' in LBG, citing this very passage.

⁵⁵ *Prolegomena*, ed. Rabe (1931: 393–95).

⁵⁶ See *Commentary on On the Forms*, ed. Walz (1834: 466.1–470.7 with 217.7–8; 376.3–4). Sikeliotes' terms here may partly originate in Hermias, *Scholia on Plato's Phaedrus* 221.13–24. On the emphasis on the 'civic' definition of rhetoric in Byzantium, see further Schouler (1995).

What seems to be at stake here is the anxiety to retain the value of rhetoric in a social context, such as that of medieval Constantinople, where the models of public speech are no longer pagan rhetors, but Christian ‘philosophers’ like Gregory of Nazianzus (or indeed like Sikeliotēs himself who is titled ‘philosopher’ in the manuscripts that transmit his commentary). For Sikeliotēs, the way to address this anxiety is to regard rhetoric as a necessary part of the philosopher’s political responsibility, which is translated in his view as the responsibility to impart morality. Rhetoric can thereby be reclaimed as a proper philosophical activity, which addresses the needs for correct *politeia*, whether communal polity or, more importantly, personal way of life (the main Byzantine understanding of the term *politeia*).

The association of rhetoric with ‘politics’ and its consequent inclusion in the philosopher’s identity are notions that Psellos was all too happy to adopt. He too, after all, imagined Christian writers as both ideal rhetors as well as ideal philosophers; and he too insisted on the reintegration of political praxis in the philosopher’s discourse.⁵⁷ Indeed, one might say that, to some extent, Psellos’ self-representation embodies the philosophico-rhetorical qualities ascribed to rhetors of the past by contemporary rhetorical manuals, such as Sikeliotēs’ *Commentary*.

Yet, just as when compared with Synesius’ autobiography so also when juxtaposed with contemporary rhetorical theory, Psellos’ version of the philosopher-rhetor is markedly different in one seminal respect. While both Synesius and Sikeliotēs emphasize the philosopher’s moral responsibility, disguised as *civic* responsibility, so as to justify the practice of rhetoric and involvement in political matters, this is a responsibility that does not figure prominently in Psellos’ self-representation. This does not mean that Psellos is some kind of an amoralist, either in theory or in practice—indeed, in the context of teaching or the writing of history, for instance, Psellos has much to say about virtues, and, following the Neoplatonic structuring and terminology of virtues, ‘political’ (πολιτικά) virtues at that.⁵⁸ In self-representational writing, however, Psellos refrains from regarding his rhetoric and consequent politics as imparting or contributing to good morals. Instead, Psellos places at the foreground a view that is either morally indifferent or, at the very least, ambiguous. In the stead of morality, Psellos projects theat-

⁵⁷ See *Poem* 7.177–78 or *Theol.* I 102.4–6 (on Gregory of Nazianzus). On Psellos and politics, see the next footnote.

⁵⁸ This is nicely elaborated in Dominic O’Meara’s essay in this volume.

rics and erotics, those, as we have seen, inferior aspects of public, ‘vulgar’ rhetoric, by portraying the political sphere as a theatrical arena, where the philosopher’s superior rhetorical performance incites irresistible desire.

The speeches by which Psellos, at different stages of his career, defended the philosophical value of his involvement in Constantinopolitan public affairs and the acquisition of imperial titles and honours, might suffice to show his approach. In these texts, the philosopher’s moral role—Christian or otherwise—is nearly never evoked in support of Psellos’ politics. Rather, the most prominent idea is that he follows the example of such (as Psellos regards them) politically active philosophers as Plato and Aristotle and, indeed, that he supersedes them by mixing their philosophy with Demosthenic rhetoric. The metaphor that gradually dominates Psellos’ argumentation is that of politics as a competitive stage (theatre, stadium or battlefield) in which he, again ‘by his nature’, excels.

Here are the speeches in sequence: In *To Those Who Think that the Philosopher Desires to Be Involved in Political Affairs, and because of This Disparage Him* (*Or. min.* 6), Psellos claims that he is a philosopher who still remains in the human *theatron*, as a knowledgeable, observing spectator. In *To the Slanderer Who Dropped [sc. against Psellos] a Defaming Leaflet* (*Or. min.* 7), Psellos juxtaposes his discursive ‘performative’ ability (μιμούμενος) to an accuser who has entered the political ‘stage’. Against his opponent’s second-rate imitation of Aristophanic ‘drama’, Psellos sets his own model, Plato, ‘who performs [ὑποδύεται] Socrates’. In *When He Resigned from the Title of Protoasekretis* (*Or. min.* 8), Psellos likens himself to ‘dancers’ and glorifies his ability to mix philosophy and rhetoric and thus assume a variety of forms (184–210). In *To Those Who Begrudge Him the Honorary Title of Hypertimos* (*Or. min.* 9), Psellos ridicules the inability of his opponents to compete with him. At the end of the ‘contest’ and as the *theatron* is still present, Psellos is appointed by the judge as the leader. Finally, in *To Those Who Begrudge Him* (*Or. min.* 10), Psellos proclaims that ‘he becomes an actor of another’s form’ leaving his opponents at a loss, for all they can do is remain spectators of his performance: ‘If you choose to run again and again in competition with me, and then you lose,’ Psellos concludes, ‘you will become—rather than competitors—spectators, sitting somewhere high on the *theatron*, watching my race.’⁵⁹

When involved in politics, Psellos the philosopher-rhetor is thus not an agent of morality but simply an inimitable performer, an ingenious actor.

⁵⁹ *Or. min.* 10.103–7: συντρέχειν πολλάκις αἰρούμενοι καὶ ἠττώμενοι ἄνω που τοῦ θεάτρου καθήμενοι θεαταὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ δρόμου ἢ ἀνταγωνισταὶ μοι γενήσεσθε.

Indeed, civic morality is further set aside as Psellos recurrently refers to the incitement of private desires provoked by his performance. The intricate narrative of the *Chronographia* with which I began is instructive in this respect. After having narrated the curriculum of his intellectual formation, Psellos claims that his rhetorical achievement causes an intense and eroticized reaction on the part of the emperor: ‘Just like those possessed by the divine are inspired in a manner that cannot be communicated to others, he too could find no cause for his pleasure and would almost kiss me. This is the extent to which he was immediately entranced by my eloquence.’⁶⁰ It seems that ἔρωσ, the desire that a good performer arouses, and thus the patronage and support he raises, rather than political ἦθος, is the intended rhetorical effect of the philosopher’s involvement in politics, in the philosopher’s aspiration to climb up the social ladder.⁶¹

Rhetoric and philosophy after Psellos

Despite Psellos’ self-projected confidence, the actual social fate of the Byzantine intellectual did not change radically, either for himself or for the generations of philosophers and rhetors that succeeded him in late eleventh- and twelfth-century Constantinople.⁶² Nevertheless, Psellos’ valuation of rhetoric marks a significant transition for the conception of rhetoric as this is evident in several twelfth-century writers, especially those associated with Anna Komnene in the second quarter of the twelfth century and those that followed Eustathios of Thessalonike toward the end of that same century.⁶³

For these writers, Psellos’ insistence on the mixture of philosophy with rhetoric becomes a topos.⁶⁴ The renewed interest in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* also

⁶⁰ *Chron.* VI 46: ὁ δὲ, ὡσπερ οἱ θεοφορούμενοι ἀδήλως τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐνθουσιῶσιν, οὕτω δὴ κάκινω αἰτίαν οὐκ εἶχεν ἢ ἡδονῇ, καὶ μικροῦ με δεῖν κατεφίλησεν, οὕτω μου τῆς γλώττης εὐθὺς ἀπηώρητο.

⁶¹ See further e.g. *Chron.* VI 161 or *Letters* 6 and 69 (ed. Sathas 1876).

⁶² See Magdalino (1993: 316–412).

⁶³ For Psellos’ influence on twelfth-century writers, see Papaioannou (forthcoming) with further bibliography.

⁶⁴ See Anna Komnene, *Alexias* 15.7.9.24–26; Michael Italikos, *Orat.* 15 (150.11) and *Letter* 5 with Criscuolo (1971: 60–62; 69); Nikephoros Basilakes, *Or.* B1.19 (18.14–18) and B4.5 (78.10–17); Eumathios Makrembolites, *The Story of Hysmine and Hysminias* 7.14; Theodore Prodromos, *Monody for the Holiest Metropolitan of Trebizond kyr Stephanos Skylitzes* 36 and 54–55 in Petit (1903); Niketas Eugeneianos, *Funeral Oration on Theodore Prodromos*, 456.6–11 in Petit (1902); John Tzetzes, *Letter* 77; Gregory Antiochos, *Funeral Oration on Nicholas Kataphloron* 58.23–59.5, ed. Sideras (1990); and Michael Choniates, *Discourse to the Patriarch Michael* 80.2–28 with Kolovou (1999: 266–70). See also Wilson (1983: 171), on the scribe Ioannikios and his self-representation.

belongs to this post-Psellian world where intellectuals search for further philosophical justification of their pursuit of discursive performance.⁶⁵ Indeed, for the first time in Byzantine history, it seems as if, equally to and, sometimes, regardless of philosophy, rhetoric by itself is considered capable of promising some kind of social authority.

Two telling examples will suffice. The first is from Michael Italikos (c. 1090?–before 1157), an author well versed in both rhetoric and philosophy. Italikos begins one of his letters to an unknown addressee (*Letter 13*) by claiming that ‘after comparing science against science, I find philosophy quite lacking in comparison to rhetoric’; and, following a lengthy comparison of the two ἐπιστήματι (with an emphasis on rhetoric’s ‘political/civic’ function), Italikos concludes: ‘compared with philosophy, rhetoric appears to me more heavenly’.⁶⁶ Some fifty years later, in another rhetor, Euthymios Tornikes (late 12th–early 13th c.), we encounter one of the most extravagant encomia of rhetoric in middle Byzantine writing. In his *Encomium to Alexios III Komnenos* [1195–1203] ... *Urging the Emperor to Make Him a Rhetor*, Tornikes, citing Synesius, writes: ‘In this way, this, the most beautiful and most public [πάνδημος] rhetoric benefits us in every respect ... by immortalizing good emperors and by preserving up to the present day its familiar and dear name, the sophists.’⁶⁷

It would be a mistake to read Italikos’ and Tornikes’ words as empty wordiness, excessive remarks necessitated simply by occasion and genre,

⁶⁵ See John Italos, *Rhetorical Method*, ed. Kečakmadze (1966: 35–42) (on which cf. Conley 2004 who downplays, too strongly in my view, the revival of Aristotle’s views on rhetoric in Italos), and the two commentaries, one anonymous (12th cent.?) and the other by Stephanos Skylitzes (12th cent., first half), both edited in Rabe (1896); for Skylitzes see also Hörandner (2007). Comparable are also the intricate views on (as well as practice of) rhetoric and philosophy by Theodore Metochites as excellently analysed in Bydén (2002).

⁶⁶ Ἐπιστήμην πρὸς ἐπιστήμην ἀντεξετάζων, εὕρισκω φιλοσοφίαν παρὰ πολὺ λειπομένην ῥητορικῆς ... συγκρινομένη ῥητορικὴ θεσπεσιωτέρα φιλοσοφίας μοι καταφαίνεται. For Italikos, cf. Papaioannou (2007).

⁶⁷ Darrouzès (1968, sect. 2, 140.30–31): Οὕτως ἡ καλλίστη καὶ πάνδημος αὕτη ῥητορικὴ πανταχόθεν ἡμῖν ἐπιχορηγεῖ τὰ καλά, τοὺς ... ἀγαθοὺς αὐτοκράτορας ἀπαθανατίζουσα καὶ τὸ οἰκεῖον ταύτη καὶ φίλον ὄνομα μέχρι δὴ καὶ ἐς δεῦρο, τοὺς σοφιστάς, περισώζουσα. Cf. Synesius, *Epist.* 1 (cited also above): Παῖδας ἐγὼ λόγους ἐγεννησάμην, τοὺς μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς σεμνοτάτης φιλοσοφίας καὶ τῆς συννάου ταύτη ποιητικῆς, τοὺς δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς πανδήμου ῥητορικῆς. See also section 1 in Tornikes’ speech (139.1–2): Ὡ καλὸν τοῦτο πάλαι κρατήσαν ἔθος, ἀγωνίσματα καὶ λόγους τῆς πρέσβας καὶ πανδήμου ταύτης ῥητορικῆς μέσοις ἀνακτόροις ἐνσοφιστεύεσθαι ... ἄνδρα τρόφιμον τοῖς τῆς ῥητορικῆς ὅλοις τετελεσμένον ὀργίοις καὶ <τοῖς> τῆς συννάου δὲ σοφίας, ποιητικῆς τε καὶ γραμματικῆς. The phrase appears also earlier, in the circle of Anna Komnene, in George Tornikes’ (between 1110 and 1120, died 1156/7) *Proimion for When He Became Teacher of the Psalter*, ed. Darrouzès (1970: 78.3–6).

letter-writing and speech of praise respectively. Rather, the remarkable value accorded to rhetoric suggests a social context where rhetoricians feel confident to invest in this value for their social advancement. Rhetoric is regarded as a valid profession and practice in which writers pride themselves and with which they praise their teachers, friends and associates.⁶⁸ To value rhetoric in this way was not a self-evident matter nor simply an ‘ideologically safe’ choice,⁶⁹ but rather a remarkable novelty.

The same point may be made also from a different perspective. The reader of twelfth-century writing will find also here affirmations of the value of philosophy over and above rhetoric. Nevertheless, even some of these more traditional views are expressed either within discussions focused on rhetoric or in genres conditioned by rhetoric. For instance, in Stephanos Skylitzes’ commentary on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* we encounter the idea that rhetoric is subordinate to philosophy (ed. Rabe 1896: 268.27–28). This opinion, however, is expressed in a context where a philosophical justification of rhetoric is at work. Take also *Timarion*, with its ridiculing of the philosophical aspirations of rhetors like Psellos. One should not forget that the text itself is a fictional dialogue, in the tradition of playful Lucianic rhetoric, the kind of rhetoric which only now, after a silence of several centuries, is possible again in Byzantium in the context of the highly rhetorical twelfth-century culture.⁷⁰

Comparable is the situation in another text, with which I would like to conclude. Manuel Karantenos, a minor late twelfth-century intellectual, ad-

⁶⁸ E.g., Italikos’ *Letter* 24 is addressed to a ‘rhetor’ while Italikos himself claims to be an accomplished ‘rhetor’ and ‘sophist’; *Letter* 14: 144.10–11. In his *Monody*, mentioned above (ed. Petit 1903), for his teacher and friend Stephanos Skylitzes (metropolitan of Trebizond at the moment of his death and likely the author of one of the two surviving Byzantine commentaries on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*), Theodore Prodromos recurrently commends Skylitzes for his rhetorical eloquence while spending no word on the likely *philosophia* of his metropolitan friend. Similarly, in his *Funeral Oration* on Theodore Prodromos, also mentioned above, Niketas Eugeneianos dwells on the rhetorical (rather than philosophical) virtues of his friend, whom he, nevertheless, addresses as ‘philosopher’; Petit (1902: 463.3–4). Cf. also Constantine Manasses, *Discourse to Michael Hagiotheodorites* 400–401, ed. Horna (1906). In the same vein, Eustathios of Thessalonike spends much time on (his) rhetoric while no single word on *philosophia* as a tool for self-promotion in his *Letters*, ed. Kolovou (2006).

⁶⁹ Cf. Magdalino (1993: 335) on rhetoric as an ‘ideologically safe’ choice.

⁷⁰ Cf. the apophthegmatic definition of *philosophia* by John Tzetzes where philosophy is opposed to highly rhetorical discourse, yet within a poem explicating words and phrases from Tzetzes’ letters—both letter-writing and verse being exactly rhetorical enterprises; see *Chil.* 10.590 with Bydén (2003: 5). For the revival of fiction in this period see Mullett (2007) and Agapitos (2012).

dressed, in a brief essay, a student's question on 'the difference between mystical and superior philosophy and that lowly and vulgar [πάνδημος] rhetoric'.⁷¹ Karantenos asks his student to use his imagination, his καταληπτική φαντασία, and envision both disciplines personified before his eyes. An elaborate description follows, reminiscent of Lucian's *Dream*.⁷² the 'immovable and divine' female philosophy with her 'masculine gaze' is contrasted sharply with the 'effeminate' young male that is rhetoric. The conclusion is obvious: the student must embrace philosophy and avoid rhetoric lest he lose 'the nobility of his soul'. This fear is an old one and Karantenos is in good company, as we saw above, to rekindle it.⁷³ Nevertheless, that Karantenos employs a fanciful, imaginative, Lucianic rhetoric in order to make his 'philosophical' point gives testimony to the value rhetoric had, since Psellos, acquired in the rhetorico-philosophical debate.

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⁷¹ Another reference to Synesius' Platonic phrase, this time, however, restored to its negative Platonic connotations. The text is edited in Criscuolo (1975–76); for Karantenos see Browning (1962: 198–200) and Roilos (2005: 31; 154–55).

⁷² On which see Gera Levine (1995).

⁷³ For one further personification of philosophy as the 'best mistress' Penelope, reserved only for the 'truly philosopher' Odysseus, see Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Comm. in Homer's Odyssey* 1.27.10–20.

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