

ASPECTS OF THE UTILIZATION OF GNOSEOLOGY AND FORMAL LOGIC IN GREGORY PALAMAS

CHRISTOS TEREZIS

University of Patras, Greece

terezis@upatras.gr

LYDIA PETRIDOU

Hellenic Open University, Greece

petridou.lydia@ac.eap.gr

ABSTRACT. This article attempts to investigate the way in which Gregory Palamas utilizes Platonic and, mostly, Aristotelian Philosophy which relates to Gnoseology and formal Logic in his attempt to prove the distinction between affirmative and apophatic Theology. In particular, it will focus on terms that capture the way in which human beings attempt to describe both metaphysical and natural-empirical Ontology. The most important conclusion we draw is that Gregory Palamas shows a preference for Aristotelian Logic, which he transforms in a Christian way. This insight arises mainly from the way he makes use of the argument about “qualities”, which, on the one hand, determine the essence of created beings-states and, on the other hand, reflect the manifestations of the divine energy of the Holy Trinity. It is an approach which highlights affirmative theology, without affecting the apophatism of the divine essence.

KEYWORDS: Gregory Palamas, divine qualities, universals, apodictic reasoning, affirmative theology, apophatic theology.

Introduction

In the following study, we will attempt to trace the rationale under which Gregory Palamas uses certain gnoseological and formal Logic positions of Plato and Aristotle in his theoretical perspective to prove the distinction between affirmative and apophatic theology, one of the leading achievements of Christian teaching, which derived its foundations from strict and inviolable ontological data. These are positions which refer to terms such as “universals”, “common concepts”, “axioms” and “per se”, which at the same time reflect how human cognition attempts to describe, through analytical processes and synthetic judgments, ontological domains of both metaphysical and natural-empirical order. From the outset, however, it is

necessary to note that the Christian theologian, and emblematic exponent of hesychasm, does not aim at a systematic discussion of these terms, in the perspective of a coherent system of contemplation¹. He is mainly content to make individual choices of them, according to his own personal needs, which, however, also show how a human being intends and attempts to communicate with God, with the soteriological orientation playing a key role. But at the same time they also indicate the degree of such communication that is possible on the part of man. Thus, we do not have the proper premises to integrate his periodic references in ancient Greek terms into a unified theoretical scheme, which was one of the main issues of research of the Neoplatonic School and of some theologians from the Byzantine and Western Christian world². All these will necessarily lead us to remain mainly at the level of pointing out and formulating hypotheses regarding the extent of their presence in texts of particular theoretical directions, and at a second level to the tracing of certain systematic foundations for issues such as, for example, the gnoseological or ontological version of the “universals”, which had formed a long and impressive tradition³. All that is certain, however, is that Gr. Palamas defines, as in all his other references, by metaphysical criteria the cognitive quests, elaborations and crystallizations of human consciousness, a premise which clearly gives his terms a not exclusively secularized content. We will follow how he draws on the ancient Greek tradition in questions which preoccupied –and concerned– Byzantine thought during the period of the hesychast-anti-hesychast controversy through subchapters of reasoned succession and coherence.

1. “Universals” and divine qualities

Gr. Palamas points out that none of the qualities of God that can be characterized as such is located in a region that exceeds him ontologically and that each of them is governed by his hypostatic uniqueness, that is, by the particular characteristic which he possesses by nature. Whichever of these qualities, then, qualifies to be categorically attributed to God has not the scope of the “universals” –which would

¹ On Gr. Palamas’ theology and the spiritual conflicts of the era of hesychasm, see for instance, J. Meyendorff (1974).

² See, for example, D. M. Armstrong (1978). Also, the 1997 issue No. 1 of the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, with the general title “Les Universaux” the studies of Ol. Boulnois, L. M. de Rijk, Al. de Libera, J. Jolivet.

³ For the universalia in Byzantine thought, see L. Benakis (1978-9) 311-340.

subject Him to states of determination – but of the particular as, so to speak, a specific description of Him⁴. In our view, reference must here be made to the infinite presence of the divine energies, provided, of course, that the total categorical attribution of each of them to the divine substance is excluded, which is also excluded from being identified with only one of them. In general, it is not a question of additions or acquisitions to which God would be subject. He expresses himself by each of these, without, however, diminishing his self-evident unity. The opposite would imply that the Holy Trinity in its original state would be incomplete and in need of supplementary ontological factors.

Gr. Palamas points out, moreover, that if the qualities are not universals, the question will be raised – in terms, of course, mainly of natural-empirical origin or at least of interpretation – as to how it is possible to form a syllogism without the solidity of a general axiom or a logical basis and the feedings that their content adds⁵. And if the possibility of formulating a syllogism of an evidential character is also excluded, by implication the prospect of structuring the – semantically inferior – dialectic will be further excluded. This rationale explicit in the commitments that are made: any attempt to formulate a dialectical syllogism will then lead to a sophistic result. It will, obviously, be the case in which we will have an phenomenological and non-responsive to reality form of syllogism, that is, an external linguistic form without factual content: «Σοφιστικὸς δ' ὅμως ἔσται, σχῆμα μόνον ἔχων καὶ φαινόμενος, ἀλλ' οὐκ ὧν»⁶. The words will, in fact, be empty sounds. So, from the above passage it follows that a general ontological state or a gnoseological axiom can be defined as “universal”, which in relation to the Holy Trinity could be defined as part to the whole, but only in so far as it is related to the projections of the divine

⁴ Cf. *Epistola 1 ad Barlaam* (A' Πρὸς Βαρλαάμ), 26, A', 239.18-20. (Edition: P. Christou, 1988). In another thematic connection, it is noted that God has His qualities from Himself and does not receive them from another entity or by participation. These are the uncreated qualities of his nature. See *Κατὰ Γρηγοράν*, 31-33, Δ', 254.12-257.1, where, on the occasion of the *Θησαυροί*, P.G.75, 444 B-449 A of Cyril of Alexandria, we read the following: «Ὅρᾷς ὅτι μὴ τὰ ὀνόματα μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ φυσικῶς καὶ ἀχωρίστως προσόντα τῷ Θεῷ πολλά;... ὁρᾷς ὅτι φανερώς οὐκ εἶναι φησὶν οὐσίαν τὰ φυσικῶς προσόντα τῷ Θεῷ; Οὐ τὰ ὀνόματα μόνον λέγων, καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲν τῶν ὀνομάτων φυσικῶς πρόσκειται τῷ Θεῷ» (254.17-23).

⁵ Cf. *Epistola 1 ad Barlaam* (A' Πρὸς Βαρλαάμ), 26, A', 239.20-23: «Πῶς οὖν ἐκ μοναδικῶν γένοιτ' ἂν συλλογισμὸς ἄνευ τοῦ καθόλου;»

⁶ Ibid. 239.23-26. The fact that Gr. Palamas argues that the qualities are not just names, and the fact that they are many in nature without being “natures” in the literal original sense of the term – which refers to the completely “separated” – contributes to the exclusion of the possibility of nominalism. See *Κατὰ Γρηγοράν*, 36, Δ', 259.2-22.

energies. With each particular “universal” as a reference point, therefore, conditions are secured for evidential reasoning concerning an aspect of the divine revelation.

In a following thematic section, Gr. Palamas notes that “universals”, which are principles of proof, have a validity that is established by the method of induction. And induction, as a scientific or philosophical methodological process, consists in the reduction or reference to a higher state of all individual cases without exception, which in themselves do not provide guarantees for explanation: «Ἐπαγωγή δὲ ἔστιν ἐν τῷ πάντα τὰ μερικὰ ἐπαγαγεῖν καὶ μηδὲν ἀφεῖναι»⁷. Here, in other words, the scientific-philosophical principle is put forward that each individual - whether it is isolated or is found in connection with certain others in its existence or its substitution in a being - takes on meaning precisely only if it is integrated into a larger ontic group, of which it is a particular expression or a formal case of application in certain of its functions.

The Christian theologian then observes that on the basis of the theoretical context by which the Greek thinkers move and according to the particular meaning of induction, it is impossible for it to be performed and branched out on strict theological issues. Therefore, in this respect, what appears here as “universal” is not valid in its theological applications and not subject to valid theological knowledge. They are literally beyond all prospect of being regarded as such. And he even adds that not only do we not know the “universals” in a higher mode of gnoseological reductions or methodological processes, but we do not even have a superficial opinion about their content. From these principles, then, how would it be possible to derive a proof which, as far as its conclusions are concerned, is an unchanging opinion⁸? In commenting, we would point out that an undefined version of “universals” is presented here, and it is stressed that such a cognitive deficit puts the reliability of the interpretation and any application of the particulars to a syllogism that has the potentiality to become an extreme argument. The need for the established rational criterion regarding theologizing is therefore put forward as indisputable. It could be argued, moreover, that the reasoning attempt here is aimed at demonstrating the ontological and logical impasses that arise in the examination

⁷ *Epistola 2 ad Barlaam*. (*Β' Πρὸς Βαρλαάμ*), 58, A', 293.9-11. (Edition P. Christou 1988). Cf. Aristotle, *Analytica Priora*, B', 68b8-29.

⁸ Cf. *Epist. 2 ad Barl.*, 58, A', 293.11-16: «Τὰ δὲ μερικὰ ἀδιεξίτητα· τῶν ἀδυνάτων ἄρ' ἐπαγωγήν γενέσθαι καὶ τὰ καθόλου ἄρα ἄπιστα καὶ ἀνεπίστητα καὶ ὅτι γε καθόλου...». Cf. Aristotle, *Analytica Priora*, A', 41b.6-9: «Ἐν ἅπαντι (sc. συλλογισμῷ) δεῖ κατηγορικόν τινα τῶν ὄρων εἶναι καὶ τὸ καθόλου ὑπάρχειν· ἄνευ γὰρ τοῦ καθόλου οὐκ ἔσται συλλογισμὸς ἢ οὐ πρὸς τὸ κείμενον ἢ τὸ ἐξ ἀρχῆς αἰτήσεται».

of theological issues when an investigator relies exclusively on the mundane cognitive approaches of an autonomously functioning Philosophy, which are judged to lack the potential for universal applications, especially in the metaphysical realm.

Accordingly, Gr. Palamas gives an example of a natural-empirical process. Specifically: a human being saw the eclipse of the sun made by one astronomical conjunction and with a typical recurrence he saw the others that followed, obviously as long as he was alive. Moreover, with the logical power within him, which by its very texture has the ability to combine limits, he constituted the universal knowledge about eclipses. Also, from the daily continuous movement of the sky, analogous impressions of various other astronomical phenomena were repeatedly added, and thus the various on each category of these “universal” phenomena were deduced by human consciousness. «Εἶδον τὴν τοῦ ἡλίου ἔκλειψιν ἐν συνόδῳ γενομένην καὶ τὴν μετ’ ἐκείνην καὶ μάλα ἄλλην καὶ ἄλλην καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐν ἐμοὶ δυνάμεως, ἥτις ἀεὶ πέφυκε τὰ ὅμοια ἐπισυνάπτειν, τὴν καθόλου γνῶσιν ἔλαβον· πάλιν ἐκ τῆς ὁσημέραι συνεχοῦς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κινήσεως, ἐκ πολλῶν τῶν αἰσθημάτων τὸ καθόλου μοι συνήχεται»⁹.

With the above we are first of all confronted with a clear empiricism, but not a simplistic one, since the examination does not remain in a simplistic way within the limits of the object or phenomenon to be ascertained, but puts them under the processing of the cognitive powers of the human mind in systematic terms. In our opinion, two points deserve special observation. First and foremost, the point that the human mind possesses by nature the possibility of deducing the similar, or belonging to the same category, an ability which clearly may indicate that it operates by comparative deductive classificatory powers. Secondly, that a “universal” appears as an a posteriori and not as a pre-existing ontological archetype with cognitive innate validations, which would determine the deductive descending method as the only initially valid. Obviously, at the ontic level, a scientific view of things is proposed and an attempt is made to define as necessary the complementarity between the data of sensory experience and their cognitive processing. In this perspective, Gnoseology is founded without extremes. In fact, in keeping with the analogies arising from the divine level in which the positions of the hesychast theologian move, induction can also be applied to the mode of manifestation of the divine energies. For example, by iteratively confirming that in certain individual beings there is the idiom of life, man, moving by deduction, concludes that God grants life or that one of his energies is life, both in itself and in its ability to provide life. Each idiom pointed out in the natural world is an expression of a special mode

⁹ *Epist. 2 ad Barl.*, 59, A', 293.17-294.3. Cf. Aristotle, *Analytica Priora*, B', 67a.17-30. Cf. P. Aubenque (1962), 447. Cf. R. Roques (1954) 35-67.

of manifestation of the divine energy. And the above correspondence is independent of the variety of ways in which life appears as divine manifestation. It is a multiplicity, so to speak, which reveals an aspect of infinite divine providence¹⁰.

Extending his views, Gr. Palamas stresses that, if the “universal” which is deduced from the logical –and abstract– processing of created beings becomes the principle of art, that is, of an acquired methodical skill, then that which is always in the same state becomes a fixed principle of proof, while the science that results from it is also demonstrative. But it is pointed out that no created being is always in the same state, because nothing is continuously unchanged. Hence, under the force of this variability the principle of proof does not exist – or at least may have limited temporal or local application. To some extent these considerations recall similar Platonic ones about the mutability of the world of sensible experience and the implications that these variations have for gnoseological accuracy¹¹. And since there is no beginning, the prospect of an autonomous, ontological and logical, end, i.e., a coherent and internally grounded realization, disappears. «Τῆς ἀρχῆς δὲ μὴ οὐσης καὶ τὸ τέλος οἴχεται»¹². The following question is therefore raised in the form of a critical conclusion: since Aristotelian proof has shown, by the limitations it imposes, that it can also be shown to be a non-being, in what way, by saying that the divine transcends it, do we discuss about criteria that prove that we are sober and that we correspond to the authentic state of theological questions? In other words, this is a meaningless syllogism or statement, since according to the Christian thinker it is certain that Aristotle cannot possibly provide evidence for everything, a detail that only an inspired believer can secure. «Ἡμεῖς οὖν τοῖς ἐωρακάσι πιστεύοντες τὰ ἐκείνου καταργοῦμεν»¹³.

Gr. Palamas examines a second aspect of the issue being discussed in his approach of the relationship of the “universal” as a common presence with the individual elements in which it appears. He notes that as regards a “universal” and as

¹⁰ Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus*, P.G.3, 856a-857b.

¹¹ Cf. *Epist. 2 ad Barl.*, 62, A', 295.3-7: «ἀεὶ δ' ὡσαύτως ἔχον τῶν ὄντων οὐδέν, οὐ γὰρ ἀδιάκοπον, καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἄρα τῆς ἀποδείξεως οὐκ ἔστι». Cf. Plato, *Cratylus*, 435d-440e. Here we are confronted with the question concerning the possibility of forming valid abstract categorizations, at the moment when the problem concerning the actual possibility of extracting intellectually common features from their concrete intrinsic presence and reducing them to their generalized relevance-unity must be primarily solved.

¹² *Epist. 2 ad Barl.*, 62, A', 295.7-8. Cf. Aristotle, *Analytica Priora*, A', 46a.10-27.

¹³ *Epist. 2 ad Barl.*, 62, A', 295.8-14, with the following continuation to strengthen the argument: «Πίστιν δὲ ὁμῶς κάκεινος τίνα ἂν παράσχοι, ἐφ' ᾧ γεγενημένων οὕτω ἦν γεγενημένος;»

regards what is implied by the prefix «αὐτό-» (self-) we may observe that if a general has its existence in certain particulars, it will give them in the form of a general category their name. Thus, all men, for instance, are called man by the universal species which has its existence or immanence in each particular man: «Ἐν οἷς γὰρ ἔχει τὸ εἶναι, ἀπ' αὐτῆς ἂν ἐκεῖνα κληθεῖεν, ὥσπερ καὶ ἄνθρωποι πάντες ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ καθόλου εἶδους ἀκούομεν ἐν ἡμῖν ἔχοντος τὸ εἶναι»¹⁴. The detail which we could first of all argue is that metaphysical realism and metaphysical nominalism are put forward. From an epistemological point of view, reference is made to the concept of “universal”. From an ontological point of view, the issue becomes more difficult, based on the phrase «ἔχει τὸ εἶναι (it has being), while no reference is made to «χορηγεῖ τὸ εἶναι» (it grants being). Is a nominalistic solution being proposed here? The question is legitimate, but the broader context of Gregory Palamas' overall position does not necessarily support it explicitly. In his view, we do not face an a priori formation of the general concept, but an a posteriori. The universal “form” is prior to the individual beings, which therefore do not have an autonomous existence and take on their naming at a subsequent level. In this topic Gr. Palamas moves from the Aristotelian Gnoseology to the Platonic Ontology, which he brings out as the premise for every gnoseological declarative sentence and for every nominalistic attribution. We shall choose immanence, since «ἔχει» (has) does not lead to «ἀποκτᾶ» (gains).

Nevertheless, it is not a matter here of a self-constituted and autonomous presence of the “forms”, in the sense that Plato's metaphysical system projects. «Καθ' ἑαυτὴν ἔστιν ὑφ' ἑστῶσα (sc. ἡ ἰδέα ἢ τὸ εἶδος)· καὶ Πλάτων ἡμῖν ἀναβιώσεται μετὰ τῶν τῆς κακοδοξίας τερητισμάτων»¹⁵. The self-constituted of “forms” would lead to a limitation of divine omnipotence and absoluteness and to the foundation of polytheism. It is necessary to understand that the archetype “man” can exist as an original natural seminal reason, but also that it is the product of a special combination of divine energies. It is essentially the instillation in nature of the ontological conditions which are necessary for the emergence and constant presence of the natural genus of men. And this certainly appears in all categories of created beings, which owe their existence to the activation of the particular form corresponding to them. In this sense, the absolute and permanently effective determination of the created world by the divine providences, which constitute the ontological specifications of

¹⁴ *Triad.* (Ἑπερ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων), II, 1, 22, A', 485.18-22. Edition P. Christou 1988.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* A', 485.22-31. It is obvious that, apart from the others, the version of exemplarism as an ontological starting point, which, however, even slightly, would necessarily operate in divine manifestations, is excluded.

creation both at its origin and during its evolutionary development, is emphasized¹⁶. Thus, divine creation includes both the creative and the final cause.

2. "Universals" and the apodictic reasoning

According to Gr. Palamas, the apodictic procedure also appears in special cases. In fact, from the point of view of evaluation and inferential judgments, the proof is not less infallible than its corresponding on general cases, because it is eminently necessary for all unique cases. This compulsory nature of the proof helps to ensure that its conclusion does not deceive our conscience¹⁷. We would note, therefore, that the tendency to define and describe the concrete as necessary in every respect is here evident, and thus the foundation of a somehow a priori idealism, in the sense of dependence, without preconditions of the individual on a general principle or a universal law, is excluded. The problem raised above, then, concerning the degree of validity secures its solution. Not only that, but it is noted that in the case of "universals" it would be possible that there might be logical deception to an even further degree, since the proof referring to its content is sometimes forced to use also imaginative conceptions or to deductions not directly validated. And this is mainly due to the perceptual and cognitive weakness of man, who does not possess the necessary conditions to grasp the whole of the objects on a theoretical level and to formulate them with linguistic brief validity. «Ἐπὶ γὰρ τῶν καθόλου γένοιτ' ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ ἀπάτη, διὰ τῆς φαντασίας, θηρωμένης τῆς τοιαύτης ἀποδείξεως, δυσξυβλήτων τε καὶ δυσπεριλήπτων ὄντων πάντων τῶν ὑποκειμένων»¹⁸. We could therefore argue that here the importance and ontological necessity of nominalism is put forward, which obviously does not exclude metaphysical realism.

To a certain extent, therefore, the possibility of the constitution or logical support of universal concepts is called into question. It should be noted, in fact, that in the way the above text is formulated we can argue that the "universal" is not projected as an objective reality from which individualized cases derive, in the form of reflections or individual applications, but as the common or general concept that arises in reasoning inductively. That is to say, an Aristotelian rather than

¹⁶ See L. Benakis (1973) 339-357.

¹⁷ Cf. *Epist. 1 ad Barl.*, 9, A', 212.27-29: «Ἀψευδὴς δὲ οὐδὲν ἦττον ἀπόδειξις ἐστὶ, καὶ γὰρ ἀναγκαία καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν μοναδικῶν καὶ ἀνεξαπάτητος μᾶλλον αὕτη ἢ ἀπόδειξις».

¹⁸ *Ibid.* A', 212.29-32.

a Platonic conception of the question is proposed¹⁹. Apart from the rest, it is noteworthy that crucial cognitive value is given to the representational data of sensory experience, since the particular is the predominantly perceptible phenomenon, that is a specific theophany. The cognitive processes are therefore articulated in their normal way. At the same time, it is pointed out that even for those objects in which the common element is anonymous, in the same way as before it would be possible to have proof. It is not evident here, however, whether this is a form of apophatism or a pointing out of the non-categorical capture of some common and general characteristic, which at a certain moment will possibly become to the appropriate degree perceptible within a new gnoseological organogram. That is, it will be the case of the ongoing conditions of research possibility.

In conclusion, the Christian theologian observes that in various constitutions of “universals” and in each of the individual occurrences in particular, the apodictic procedures are applied and in this way the cognitive result is possible. The particulars, of course, do not have the dimension of universal validity, but they are reliable and, therefore, possess an obligatory character for the mode of operation of man’s consciousness. «Καὶ ἐπὶ τινος εἴδους τοῦ καθόλου καὶ ἐφ’ ἑνὸς ἐκάστου γε τῶν μερικῶν ἀποδείξεις γίνονται, καθόλου μὲν οὐ· πῶς γάρ; Ἀψευδεῖς δὲ καὶ ἀναγκαῖαι»²⁰. Here too, a special emphasis is basically placed on the quality of the specific case, which ensures its demonstrability not only by reducing it to something general, but also on the basis of what it possesses as a unique situation. Therefore, nominalism in its mainly ontological version is further strengthened.

However, in order not to be led into an endless formulation or search for individual apodictic procedures or to avoid assuming that only these are applicable, we should note that it has been emphasized by Gr. Palamas that all human mental movements function reliably only at that level where the theological principles are established and, of course, are objectively conscious. Moreover, in every syllogism, any sentence is formulated presupposes a system of strict theological constants, since the whole of the existent is considered to come from God. Nevertheless, it is clear that the theological principle does not function in the strict sense of ontologically and gnoseologically “universal”, but as a universal methodological principle, that is, as a starting point that helps human consciousness to understand and put into the necessary theoretical boundaries any individual elaboration of it. It is one thing, then, to have a “universal” in which the particulars participate, and another

¹⁹ See Aristotle, *Analytica Posteriora*, A', 81a.38-b.9: «τῶν γὰρ καθ' ἕκαστον ἡ αἴσθησις· οὐ γὰρ ἐνδέχεται λαβεῖν αὐτῶν τὴν ἐπιστήμην· οὔτε γὰρ ἐκ τῶν καθόλου ἄνευ ἐπαγωγῆς, οὔτε δι' ἐπαγωγῆς ἄνευ τῆς αἰσθήσεως». Cf. P. Aubenque (1962) 225-226.

²⁰ *Epist. 1 ad Barl.*, 9, A' 212.32-213.2.

to have a “universal” that functions as a presuppositional hermeneutical basis or as an a posteriori concept. In the final analysis, the Aristotelian orientations of the Christian theologian, even indirectly, are obvious, if not so much at the ontological level, at least at the gnoseological and methodological ones²¹. However, both aspects can coexist in the sense of succession.

3. Apodictic syllogism – Common concepts – Axioms

Gr. Palamas, in another thematic section, points out that, in during the historical and spiritual course of Christianity, none of the thinkers attempted to mention or claimed to have succeeded in understanding the essence of God, and also did not maintain as an intimate attitude to work out such a question. Yet, in spite of this exclusion, it was realized that there are certain theological matters which belong to the possibilities of a human being to investigate and prove, apparently to a certain extent. Among these we may mention that there is a God, that he is one and at the same time is not one, that he does not transcend, according to his personal hypostases, the Trinity, and many other things relating to descriptions of this kind. Hence, if these matters cannot, as far as possible, be proved, any prospect of learning anything about God is excluded, and, in a subsequent stage, the conditions for the constitution of affirmative theology are removed²².

But, according to the Byzantine thinkers’ point of view, if we are properly able to investigate and know about these things, and even by seeking the relevant information from those theologians who know them methodologically and with scientific competence, we will gain a clear image of how to approach them. Thus, we will understand that some questions about God are known, some others are under investigation and conceptualization, and some others are proven. On the other hand, however, there are some others that cannot be approached by our intellect, nor are they nor will they be the subject of any investigative approach. «Τὰ μὲν ἄρα τοῦ Θεοῦ γινώσκεται, τὰ δὲ ζητεῖται, ἔστι δ’ ἃ καὶ ἀποδείκνυται, ἕτερα δὲ εἰσιν ἀπερινόητα πάντη καὶ ἀνεξερεύνητα»²³. In the region of these last two questions are classified the manner of the birth of the Son, of the proceeding of the Holy Spirit, of the perfect and unrevealed to human consciousness origin of the Holy Trinity

²¹ For a systematic approach of this topic, see Al. de Libera (2005) 211-264.

²² Cf. *Epist. 1 ad Barl.*, 8, A’, 211.26-212.5: «... ἔσται ζητῆσαι τε καὶ ἀποδείξαι». The terms «ζήτησις» and «ἀπόδειξις» are validating the spirit of inquiry that characterizes this passage, which follows realistic schemata.

²³ *Ibid.* A’, 212.5-9.

collectively, of its indivisible and perfect hypostatic distinction, and all that is approached exclusively by faith²⁴.

And using the gnoseological method of analogy, Gr. Palamas mentions that it can be argued that, just as conception with man's sensory capabilities does not need logical proof in matters within its scope, in the same way faith does not need analogous proof in areas where it has exclusive competence. «Ὡς γὰρ αἴσθησις ἐν τοῖς ὑπ' αἴσθησιν λογικῆς οὐ δεῖται δείξεως, οὕτως πίστις ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις ἀποδείξεως»²⁵. We see that in this passage the realism and autonomy of direct intuitive experience are proposed as given. According to these gnoseological delimitations, then, Gr. Palamas holds that it is a sharp gnoseological and moral deviation to think that one knows what transcends cognition and to maintain, by application, that what God knows is not of the same identity or physiology as what is sought and proved about his activities. That is, he raises questions of conditions and limits of possibility. In addition to the above, however, he submits as a validating thesis that there are many common concepts and logical axioms which, since they offer deep and complete knowledge in a way that is beyond the apodictic plan, become apodictic principles for anyone who knows how to use them: «Ἔστι γὰρ κοινῶν ἐννοιῶν καὶ ἀξιωματῶν ἀπορήσαι οὐκ ὀλίγων, ἃ κρείττω ἢ κατὰ ἀπόδειξιν παρεχόμενα τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἀποδεικτικαὶ τῷ ἐπισταμένῳ χρήσασθαι γίνονται ἀρχαί»²⁶.

According to what we have examined, we see that an attempt is made to highlight the necessity to delimit precisely the levels that constitute the object of man's reference, a specialization that contributes to the separation of the contents of his consciousness movements and his cognitive result, without, however, the above specializations leading to schisms. This is a separation which reflects a clear realism, since metaphysical reality, regardless of how it is approached or understood, is the axis for any operation of human mental centers. This function is obviously not one-dimensional in its references, since the projections of the divine are endless.

At the same time, the view is also anticipated that God reveals certain idioms of his way of life, while some others remain unrevealed, in the organogram of his activity in the natural world. The degree of divine revelations therefore determines the degree of man's conscious activation and receptivity, which are subsequently reflected in categorical schemes.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.* A', 212.9-11: «... ὧν πίστεως ἐπιστημόνως ἔχομεν».

²⁵ *Ibid.* A', 212.11-13.

²⁶ *Ibid.* A', 212, 13-19. Cf. Aristotle, *Analytica Posteriora*, A', 76b.3-22. Also, P. Aubenque (1962) 216-217.

Gr. Palamas also believes that, if the argument concerning temporal priorities is not used with the proper adequacy as a proof, it can cause serious gnoseological problems in the way of approaching the created world. Thus, if we permanently seek temporal precedent in the proof, we will necessarily accept no apodictic process and no conclusion for either heaven or earth or sea or air. We will obviously hold the same attitude for beings existing in their domain, since what is true of the whole is also true of the parts that are its contents or presuppose it²⁷. Obviously, the above will happen because a theory of sequential evolution will be accepted based on the intellectual choices of researchers, and no further elaboration will be necessary. He actually adds that in order not to fall into the danger of endless logical attempts and not to overturn ontological successions, it is necessary to bear in mind that common concepts, axioms, terms, propositions, syllogisms, divisions and analyses are schemes used in scientific research. At the same time, that these as a whole have a reason for existence and application, precisely because the created world already exists, functions and evolves. They are, therefore, the intellectual products and methodological tools of the supreme ultimate, in the evolutionary development of creation, created being, namely man and, therefore, come after the created world. «Διανοίας γὰρ ἔστι ταῦτα τοῦ ὕστατα κτισθέντος»²⁸.

On the basis of the above, if we necessarily seek priority with regard to the cognitive schemes and their objects of reference, we will render the science of beings unfeasible, because we will be obliged to place it outside the ontological domain in which they exist or operate. It is obvious that, by excluding such a reflection as superfluous, a consistent realism is also here introduced. Ontology precedes Gnoseology and is its necessary presupposition, a sequence which means that the processes of the latter cannot be defined as unconditioned and a priori. Human consciousness, then, seems not to contain by nature any particular concept but to form its concepts a posteriori, a view that presupposes an internal disposition for such a reference. We could therefore introduce here, with the appropriate adaptations phenomenological intentionality²⁹. This is a point of view, however, which is not strictly delimited and requires permanently modest approaches. By extension, it is

²⁷ Cf. *Epist. 1 ad Barl.*, 10, A', 214.9-13.

²⁸ Ibid. A', 214.13-16. It is clear in the whole argument that a somehow theory on correspondence is formulated. On the one hand, there is the constitutive position of objects and, on the other hand, we see the empirical propositions by which cognitive access to them is made. These propositions are true when their content reflects, in the form of structural parallelism, empirical reality, which is independent of any conceptual or linguistic-syntactic approaches to it.

²⁹ See Ed. Husserl (1977).

emphasized that, if we form and use the new concepts, axioms and other gnoseological “tools” in a precise way, we have the possibility of recommending evidence for certain ways of God’s existence.

From this point onwards the issue can easily be transferred to the level of divine revelations. Here, according to Gr. Palamas, we will argue that we must accept as self-evident and unprovable principles and characterize as divine proofs all the statements that are in accordance with what the Holy Spirit has communicated to inspired men. With such considerations as a springboard, we can be led to reliable concrete and permanent conclusions. The messages, therefore, or revelations of the Holy Spirit are the firm substrate and immovable principle for any reasoning process, the invariable criterion for the verifiability or falsifiability of any sentence: «Ἄρ’ οὐχ ὡς αὐτόπιστους καὶ ἀναποδείκτους δεξόμεθα ἀρχάς, καὶ πᾶν ὅ,τι ἂν τούτοις ἔπαιτο καὶ ἐκ τούτων ἀναγκαίως συμπεραίνεται οὐκ ἀποδείξεις θείας προσερούμεν;»³⁰

4. *Intrinsic concepts and productive knowledge*

Moving along the same axis of apophatism, Gr. Palamas observes that to claim that one could point out and interpret where the divine reasons are located, quasi as concepts in the mind of the Creator, would be an improper and erroneous assessment. And if it is not possible for him to discover these reasons, it will not be possible for him to understand the images of them in the human soul with the help of cosmic wisdom³¹. Although we have not the necessary evidence to assert that such a thing is here proposed, nor that it is even put forward as a hypothesis, we might, by a first open reading of the text or by a simple interpretation of its terms, observe that the consciousness of a human being contains the images of the divine reasons before he has even come into communication with the world of sensible experience. If the above possibility is validated –with the creation of man in the image of God “feeding it”–, a contrary view to that which we have indicated in the preceding paragraph will be proposed. By implication, then, we shall be led to the following: the wisdom resulting from man’s observation of the phenomena does not function in the total fact of knowledge exclusively but in a subsidiary way. We would therefore note in a modest way that conceptual realism is proposed here, but in a peculiar function, Images are instilled in man’s cognitive centers –obviously as general conceptual schemata of ontological origin- and need only the sensory-perceptual

³⁰ Ibid., A’, 214.16-215.2. Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus*, II, P.G.3, 637C.10-14. As J. Meyendorff (1953) 109 observes, for Palamas, Theology, unlike Philosophy, has its mastery in the proof of what already exists, since it deals with truths revealed by God.

³¹ Cf. *Triad.*, I, 1.2, A’, 362.7-11.

stimulus to become conscious and become active cognitive material. It would be, by analogy, a return to Plato's theory of recollection³².

After this concise parenthesis, returning to the syllogisms of the text, we find the following conclusion of the Christian theologian: that the cognitive movement that seeks to grasp what is in accordance with the divine image by relying only on the terms and resources of worldly wisdom ends up acquiring the idiom of false knowledge. «Ψευδογνωσία τοίνυν ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκ ταύτης (sc. τῆς ἕξω) σοφίας τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ θεουμένη γνῶσις»³³. By implication, the soul that has this knowledge cannot use it as a causal starting point to make it conducive to self-truth, nor can it retain it as a guide to the discovery of each individual truth. Here as well, according to the hesychast theologian, we must bear in mind that the beginning of all wisdom that is constituted is the knowledge of universal Wisdom, as far as this is possible³⁴. We would point out that in this respect a form of productive method is rather proposed, as an illumination of the individual from the whole. The highest Wisdom will inevitably serve as such a resource that we shall distinguish it and prefer it from the lowest Wisdom. Therefore, in order to achieve this, Palamas points out that, instead of the earthly and useless wisdom, we shall prefer the one that is beneficial in a greater degree, that is, the heavenly and spiritual wisdom, which comes from God and returns to him, and also makes those who acquire it conform to his authentic way of being³⁵. We conclude, therefore, that divine Wisdom is not a mere cognitive resource, but has crucial consequences for human morality, since it transforms it and transports it to another level of existence and life. Given the above, we could argue that the concepts implanted in human consciousness or those of divine reasons are self-activated to recover their archetypal state, which is in a latent state. Therefore, the cognitive centers of a human being are not in a state of unwritten territory, although it is not possible to determine absolutely what their actual content is.

³² Plato elaborates his theory of recollection in his dialogue *Meno* mainly with gnoseological arguments and in his dialogue *Phaedo* mainly with ontological arguments. Cf. for instance, Yv. Brès (1968) 148-173.

³³ *Triad.*, I, 1.2, A', 362.11-12.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, A', 362.12-24.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, A', 362.24-27: «καὶ ὄντως ἀρχὴ σοφίας γινῶναι σοφίαν, ὥστε διελέσθαι καὶ προελέσθαι τῆς χαμερποῦς καὶ γήινης καὶ ἀνονήτου τὴν μεγαλωφελὴ καὶ οὐράνιαν καὶ πνευματικὴν καὶ παρὰ Θεοῦ καὶ πρὸς Θεὸν ἐρχομένην καὶ Θεῷ τοὺς κτισαμένους συμμόρφους ἀποδεικνύσαν».

5. *The internal cognitive processes of man*

In another thematic section, Gr. Palamas observes that the highest of man's qualities is the intellect. It is his unique, perfect, undivided and unified essence, which possesses abstract, concentrating and cohesive idioms. In particular, it delimits and reduces to a single cognitive system, as a species of species, even the manoeuvres of the intellect, by which the reliability and truth of scientific research and knowledge are confirmed, as they proceed like reptiles by the methods of gathering data and dividing them into general or specific categories. «Τοὺς κατὰ διάνοιαν ἀνελιγμούς, ἐν οἷς καὶ τὰ τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ἔχει τὴν ἀσφάλειαν, σχεδὸν κατὰ τὰ ἐρπυστικά τῶν ζώων ἐν συναγωγῇ καὶ διαιρέσει προΐοντας, καὶ ὀρίζει καὶ ἐνοποιεῖ, ὅτε εἶδος οὖσα τῶν εἰδῶν»³⁶. Indeed, the intellect is a fine quality, since –although it is directed towards sensible objects and is led by them towards the multiplicity and multiformality of cosmic life, projecting to all of them the rational energies corresponding to them– it possesses, however, another higher energy. With this energy it does not externalize, as a sort of referentiality, his inner dynamism, but shows that he has the capacity to activate it himself as such. The above is accomplished in the case in which it will acquire the ability to remain within itself when it separates itself from that worldly conduct which has a variety of references and a multitude of characteristics and when at the same time it shows –a choice that will also depend on the moral level of the subject to which it belongs– abstinence from lower-level preoccupations³⁷.

So, when the mind acquires the energy per se, which is essentially a self-reference as a turning towards its interiority and its surveillance, transcending itself through its strengthening, it could even unite with the Holy Trinity³⁸. The Christian theologian's transfer of the question to the interior of human consciousness should not lead us to the version that mental movement here functions simply as a psychologism or as an intellectualism or as a support for idealism. The turn towards interiority, that is, towards elaborate logical processes, is essentially a prerequisite for a self-concentration in order to understand that everything that exists is nothing but a faint reflection of God, to whom a human being refers, in terms most

³⁶ *Triad.*, I, 3, 45, A', 456.27-457.8. Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus*, 7, 1, P.G.3, 865c.

³⁷ Cf. *Triad.*, I, 3, A', 457.8-12: «... Καὶ νοῦς... ἅτε φύσει τὴν μετὰ σώματος ἔχον συμπλοκὴν καὶ τοῖς σωματοειδέσι γνώσεσι συμπεφυρμένος καὶ τοῖς τοῦ τῆδε βίου πολυτρόποις καὶ δυσapoβλήτοις σχέσεσι».

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, A', 457.22-25. Of course, the mentioned union is by grace and not by substance, because otherwise pantheism or the co-essence of the divine and the human would be introduced.

purified and free from the distortions imposed by external distractions. Here everything works in a transcendental way. The appreciation of the human mind puts things in their normal state. In order for the reduction of a human being to the Holy Trinity to have full meaning, it must be performed with all of its powers, and that too in an unbroken and harmonious coordination with each other. It should also be noted that the above-mentioned also proposes the overcoming of simplistic empiricism, for the very reason that it has a limited range of cognitive achievements.

Conclusions

The point of view that emerges from what we have elaborated leads to the conclusion that Gr. Palamas clearly moves in the direction of Aristotelian Logic under certainly its Christian reading and analogous transformation. The point is proved by the terminology he uses as well as by the way in which he intertwines empirical material with his thoughtful reconstruction of it. In this perspective, his argument about “divine qualities” is quite interesting. Specifically, on created beings these qualities determine their essence, their ability to be reduced to existence. In the case of the Trinity, however, they are modes of manifestation of the divine energy, descriptive of its inexhaustible creative character. On the supernatural level, therefore, the nominalist version of empty ontologically divine names is excluded, while this version is also not particularly common in the description of the cosmic level. At the same time, however, the possibility of a theoretical conception of the divine essence remains out of the question, and thus apophatism remains unscathed. And this very last point transfers the definitive competence of the approaches to mystical theology, which the Byzantine hesychast has elaborated extensively in a number of his treatises.

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