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EAST AND WEST: THE FORMATION OF THE TRINITARIAN VOCABULARY AND THE NEO-PALAMITE SYNTHESIS

This article spells out different terminological trends within the Eastern Christian tradition as well as the East-West use of terminology to express the mystery of inner-trinitarian life and God's activities *ad extra*. It also surveys the meaning of the Greek words οὐσία and ἐνέργεια in their evolution from classical Greek philosophy, through the Cappadocians, John of Damascus, and Gregory Palamas, to neo-Palamites such as Sergii Bulgakov and Georgii Florovsky. My task here is to show how the fundamental terms οὐσία, ἐνέργεια and δύναμις functioned in their correlations, whilst forming the subsequent theological traditions of East and West. It is argued that in refining classical philosophical terminology for Trinitarian theology, not only did Eastern and Western fathers have different positions, but also among the Easterners there were considerable differences: a) the phrase *God's essence/οὐσία τοῦ Θεοῦ* for Easterners does not have the same meaning as *οὐσία/substantia* for Westerners in view of the Eastern notion of divine transcendence rendered through the ὑπερούσια language; b) the οὐσία – ἐνέργεια distinction that has now become axiomatic in Eastern Orthodox theology due to the revival of Palamite theology.

Whilst almost all neo-Palamite theologians, including Georgii Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky and John Meyendorff, claim that Gregory Palamas stands in direct theological continuity with the previous patristic teaching on the essence-energies distinction – arguing that the Palamite distinction can be traced to the Cappadocians, Denys the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor – Sergii Bulgakov

acknowledges that this language has been theologically multivalent in the Eastern fathers; particularly the use of ἐνέργεια in particular parallels the perplexing usage of the terms essence/οὐσία and person/ὑπόστασις prior to the clear distinction established by the Cappadocians. This study is vital for understanding issues such as how the East arrived at the essence-energies distinction commonly associated with Gregory Palamas.

I shall also demonstrate that there have been different terminological trends even within the Eastern Christian tradition, let alone the East-West use of terminology to express the mystery of intra-trinitarian life and God's relation to the cosmos. Apparently, the usage of οὐσία, ἐνέργεια and δύναμις has been notoriously difficult to clarify even among professional philosophers and theologian alike, as the meanings of these terms are extraordinarily fluctuating, ambiguous and highly debated. Moreover, behind the divergence in the patristic traditions of the East and West lies both a divergence in the usage of philosophical terminology as well as differing ecclesial, ascetical and theological concerns.

In the terminological chaos marked by the fusion of horizons, there seems to be a fairly general agreement that Plato¹ approximates οὐσία and δύναμις, whereas Aristotle² contrasts ἐνέργεια with δύναμις (act and potency), differing from Plato. My overarching task here is to show how the above terms have been variously translated, interpreted and eventually assimilated within the patristic tradition.

THE LEGACY OF PLATO

Plato was among the first writers³ who utilised the term οὐσία⁴/essence/substance⁵ philosophically, i.e. as distinct from its popular, ordinary meaning – wealth or possession⁶ –

¹ On Plato see Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, Latin text edited by James Hankins with William Bowen; English translation by Michael J.B. Allen and John Warden (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001); Benardete Seth, *Plato's «Laws»: The Discovery of Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Kenneth M. Sayre, *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983); Paul Seligman, *Being and Not-Being. An Introduction to Plato's Sophist* (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1974); Jerry Dell Ehrlich, *Plato's Gift to Christianity: the Gentile Preparation for and the Making of the Christian Faith* (San Diego, California: Academic Christian Press, 2001); John W. Cooper, *Panentheism – the Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006); Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena* (Leuven: Peeters/W. B. Eerdmans, 1995).

² On Aristotle see W. Jaeger, Aristotle, ed. and trans. R. Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948); W. D. Ross, Aristotle's Metaphysics, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1924); Joseph Owens, The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics: A Study in the Greek Background of Mediaeval Thought, with a pref. by Etienne Gilson (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978); David Charles, Aristotle on Meaning and Essence (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Leo Elders, Aristotle's Theology. A Commentary on Book A of the Metaphysics (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972); Michael Frede and David Charles, eds. Aristotle's Metaphysics Lambda: Symposium Aristotelicum (Oxford/New York: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 2000); Michael Wedin, Aristotle's Theory of Substance: The Categories and Metaphysics Zeta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Catriona Hanley, Being and God in Aristotle and Heidegger: the Role of Method in Thinking the Infinite (Lanham, Medison: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000).

³ Parmenides (540-470) is routinely credited as the first among the philosophers who perceived reality in terms of Being in a poem which Anthony Kenny labels as «the founding charter of ontology». See Anthony Kenny, *A Brief History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998) 8.

attaching to it an ontological sense.⁷ Οὐσία is a noun deriving from οὔσα – the feminine singular participial form of «to be» (τὸ εἶναι). Its first everyday meaning is «that which is one's own», one's property or, «substance».

This first idea is of stable, indeed immovable property, real estate, which had an impact on the metaphysical idea of stable being: hence essence. In Plato's early works the preference is given to synonymous terms – τὸ εἶναι and τὸ ὄν⁸ – but from the *Republic* onwards, the usage of οὐσία is fairly well established.⁹

Among the variety¹⁰ of senses in which οὐσία is used by Plato, there are passages that contain οὐσία not as a synonym of «existence»¹¹, but rather as referring to a character/property that can be lost or acquired.¹² This usage reappears in Aristotle, who is known for fixing the terminology to distinguish between *substance* and *accident* – οὐσία and συμβεβηκός – using Plato's own distinction as well as a similar one: οὐσία and πάθος.¹³ Christopher Stead remarks that Plato does not utilise οὐσία in the sense of Aristotelian *first substance*¹⁴ – πρώτη οὐσία – to denote a particular individual being¹⁵. Nor does Plato use

⁴ Arguably, the more accurate translation of the word οὐσία should be «beingness» – to be-εἶναι; being-οὔσα; beingness-οὐσία. For the etymological discussion see Hanley, *Being and God in Aristotle and Heidegger: the Role of Method in Thinking the Infinite*, 58.

⁵ Joseph Owens argues that the etymologically-preponderant translation of the term οὐσία should be «entity» and not the traditional English rendering of οὐσία as «substance». See Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics: A Study in the Greek Background of Mediaeval Thought*, 150. Substance is a derivative of the Latin sub-stantia which is equivalent to the Greek ὑποκείμενον. Aristotle himself, for instance, rejects ὑποκείμενον as a misleading characterization of οὐσία (in the *Metaphysics* 1029a.7-1029a.10: νῦν μὲν οὖν τύπῳ εἴρηται τί ποτ' ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία, ὅτι τὸ μὴ καθ' ὑποκειμένου ἀλλὰ καθ' οὗ τὰ ἄλλα: δεῖ δὲ μὴ μόνον οὕτως: οὐ γὰρ ἴκανόν: αὐτὸ γὰρ τοῦτο ἄδηλον, καὶ ἔτι ἡ ὕλη οὐσία γίγνεται.). Original texts are in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, ed. W. D. Ross, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1924). However, the most problematic issue in rendering οὐσία as substance is that the latter term is not at all connected with the verb «to be»- εἶναι, and, therefore, is deprived of the intrinsic ontological connotation of οὐσία. See Hanley, *Being and God in Aristotle and Heidegger: the Role of Method in Thinking the Infinite*, 58.

⁶ See Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in Aristotelian Metaphysics: A Study in the Greek Background of Mediaeval Thought*, 152 n63.

⁷ A total of almost 200 instances can be traced in Plato. See Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 25. H. Berger in his *Ousia in der Dialogen von Plato* (Leiden, 1961) provides the entire list of Plato's philosophical and semi/non-philosophical usages of the term οὐσία.

⁸ «What is/τὸ ὄν» was set forth as a core theme by Parmenides. See Charles Kahn, «Retrospect on the Verb «to be» and the Concept of Being», *The Logic of Being*, eds. S. Knuutila and J. Hintikka (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986) 3.

⁹ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 25.

¹⁰ A panoramic scheme of Plato's usage is offered by Christopher Stead see his *Divine Substance*, 30.

¹¹ Among the others, *Philebus* 32.a.8-32.b.4: καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ σκόπει εἰ σοι μέτριος ὁ λόγος ὃς ἂν φῆι τὸ ἐκ τῆς ἀπειροῦ καὶ πέρατος κατὰ φύσιν ἐμψυχον γεγονός εἶδος, ὅπερ ἔλεγον ἐν τῷ πρόσθεν, ὅταν μὲν τοῦτο φθειρήται, τὴν μὲν φθορὰν λύπην εἶναι, τὴν δ' εἰς τὴν αὐτῶν οὐσίαν ὁδόν, ταύτην δὲ αὐτὸ πάλιν τὴν ἀναχώρησιν πάντων ἡδονήν. See *Platonis Opera*, ed. J. Burnet, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900).

¹² See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 28.

¹³ Stead, *Divine Substance*, 28.

¹⁴ Aristotle's distinction between «primary substances» such as humans or horses, and the groups that they belong to, for example, humanity, which are «secondary substances» will later be employed by the Cappadocian fathers to establish a clear distinction between ὑπόστασις and οὐσία, primarily on

οὐσία to denote merely «a species» in the sense of Aristotle's second substance – δευτέρα οὐσία.¹⁶

In the Πολιτεία / *Republic*, Plato approximates οὐσία with *truth* – ἡ ἀλήθεια¹⁷ – a type of being contrasted with what Plato calls γένεσις which presupposes development and change.¹⁸ Interestingly enough, Pavel Florenskii's ontological approximation of the truth and being is reminiscent of Plato's approximation of οὐσία and ἀλήθεια. Literally, the Slavonic word which stands for truth, *istina*, is linguistically correlated with the verb «to be» (*est*) – (*i-stina* / *e-stina*); thus Florenskii labels this etymological trend as the «ontological moment of truth».¹⁹

the basis of the difference between *particular* and *common*. The transformation of the ancient Greek philosophical concepts is extensively discussed by Panayiotis Nellas. In a characteristic passage he writes: «[The] cosmology of Plato and the anthropology of Aristotle, both of which left clear traces, have been thoroughly assimilated and broken down as systems, and ... the true elements which they contain have been unified and used to illuminate the real relationship that exists between sensible things and their inner principles». See P. Nellas, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person* (Crestwood, New York, 1987) 59.

¹⁵ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 30.

¹⁶ Stead, *Divine Substance*, 30. Another crucial omission is the use of οὐσία to denote «matter».

¹⁷ Origen in *Contra Celsum* 8, 12-8, 16 – alluding to John 14, 6 «I am...the truth» – calls Jesus «the essence of truth / ἡ τῆς ἀληθείας οὐσία». The context of Origen's saying is: Αὐτῷ γὰρ πεπιθόμεθα τῷ εἰπόντι: "Πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμι" καὶ λέγοντι: " Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀλήθεια": καὶ οὐχ οὕτως τις ἡμῶν ἐστὶν ἀνδράποδοι, ὡς οἰεσθαι ὅτι ἡ τῆς ἀληθείας οὐσία πρὸ τῶν χρόνων τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπιφανείας οὐκ ἦν. In *Contra Celsum*, ed., trans. and notes Marcel Baret, vol. 4. SC 150 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968). «Truth» as Stead observes, has «its rather specialized Platonic sense of ideal and eternal reality». In another pericope Origen portrays Jesus as «the archetypal being of truth»/ γὰρ τῆς ἀληθείας πρωτότυπος οὐσία ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ μόνω λέγοντι ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀλήθεια. Therefore, Jesus, according to Origen is labeled as ἡ αὐτοαλήθεια.; fuller quotation is: εἶναι θεὸν καὶ υἱὸν θεοῦ, οὗτος ὁ αὐτολόγος ἐστὶ καὶ ἡ αὐτοσοφία καὶ ἡ αὐτοαλήθεια. Cf. Stead, Stead, *Divine Substance*, 152.

¹⁸ Stead, *Divine Substance*, 37-38.

¹⁹ In his *Stolp i utverzhdnenie istiny* (Moscow, 1914) 15-16 Florenskii writes: «Our Ruthenian word for truth, "*istina*", is linguistically close to the verb "*est*" [to be]. Hence, "*istina*", according to the Russian understanding of it, embodies the concept of absolute reality: *istina* is "what is", the genuinely existent, τὸ ὄντως ὄν or ὁ ὄντως ὄν, in contradistinction to what is imaginary, unreal, unactual. In the word, "*istina*", the Russian language marks the ontological aspect of this idea. Therefore, "*istina*" signifies absolute self-identity and, hence, self-equality, exactness, genuineness. *Istyi, istinnyi, istovyi* [true, authentic, real] are words that issue from the same etymological nest. This ontologism in the Russian understanding of the truth is strengthened and deepened for us if we consider the etymology of the verb *est*. *Ests*' comes from the root *es*, which in Sanskrit gives *as* (e.g., *āsmi* = *esmi*; *asti* = *esti*). *Esm*', *est*' can without difficulty be related to the Old Slavic *esmi*; the Greek *eimi* (*esmi*); the Latin (*e*)*sum, est*; the German *ist*; the Sanskrit *asmi, asti*, etc. But in accordance with certain hints in the Sanskrit, this root *es* signified – in its most ancient, concrete phase of development – *to breathe, hauchen, athmen*. In confirmation of this view of the root *as*, Curtius points to the Sanskrit words *as-u-s* (the breath of life), *asu-ras* (vital, *lebendig*); and, equivalent to the Latin *os*, mouth, the words *ās, ās-ja-m*, which also signify mouth; the German *athmen* is also related to this. Thus, "*est*" originally meant to breathe. Respiration, or breath, was always considered to be the main attribute and even the very essence of *life*. And even today, the usual answer to the question, "Is he alive?" is "He's breathing." Whence the second, more abstract meaning of "*est*": he's alive, he has strength. Finally, "*est*" acquires its most abstract meaning, that of the verb that expresses existence. To breathe, to live, to be – these are the three layers in the root *es* in the order of their decreasing concreteness, an order that, in the opinion of linguists, corresponds to their chronological order.» English translation

In the *Sophist* (247e) Plato expresses the idea that a real being is nothing but power / δύναμις.²⁰ However, Stead argues that

this may perhaps be little more than a debating-point advanced against the materialists, designed to show that some immaterial things are real, since they produce effects; but the aphorism «being is power» was taken out of context by Plato's successors, and is very likely presupposed by Aristotle's counter-argument that actuality, ἐνέργεια, is prior to power, or «potentiality», as it is usually translated by Aristotelian scholars. The Stoics are said to have revived Plato's suggestion that «being is power», and in later philosophy there seems to be little agreement; professional philosophers no doubt had to decide for or against Aristotle's subordination of «power» to «actuality», but the common usage of these terms is extraordinarily fluctuating and confused.²¹

Apparently, for our further discussions related to the patristic period and subsequent Slavic theology, the Platonist sense of «*beyondness*», so to speak, is the most crucial. Relating the Ideas as perfect prototypes to the Idea of the Good, Plato gives us a remarkable statement of divine *transcendence* that later will be taken on board by numerous Christian authors, particularly those who were inclined to elaborate the so-called *mystical theology*.²² In the *Πολιτεία / Republic*, (Book 6, 509 β) Plato says:

...that the objects not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their very existence and essence is derived to them from it, though the good itself is not essence (οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ), but still transcends essence (ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) in dignity and surpassing power (πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος).²³

Stead observes that having said that the good is «beyond being/ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας», Plato «manifestly does not mean that it is too excellent to be real; in his view it is more real than any of its instances. Most probably the term “being” carries the implication of “being so-and-so”»²⁴. The Good of Plato,²⁵ as the ultimate reality, certainly occupies the space that later theism assigns to a personal God,²⁶ whose ultimate divinity is unknowable.

from Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, trans. Boris Jakim, intro. Richard F. Gustafson (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997) 14-15, slightly adapted.

²⁰ Τίθεμαι γὰρ ὄρον ὀρίζειν τὰ ὄντα, ὡς ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις. Quoted in Stead, *Divine Substance*, 45. For a detailed discussion on the role of δύναμις in Plato's philosophy see Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001) 54-93.

²¹ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 45.

²² A good account is in Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys* (Oxford/New York: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1981).

²³ The Greek original is «Καὶ τοῖς γιγνωσκομένοις τοῖνυν μὴ μόνον τὸ γιγνωσκεσθαι φάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρῆναι ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ' ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος» In *The Republic*, ed. and trans. Paul Shorey, vol. 2. The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1906) 106-107.

²⁴ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 41.

²⁵ A sketch on the good of Plato in relation to Aristotle and Plotinus is offered in F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York-London, 1967) 4-5.

²⁶ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 41.

Plato's dictum – principle of divine transcendence (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) – will later have life on its own,²⁷ surfacing in Origen,²⁸ the Nicene Fathers,²⁹ Denys the Areopagite,³⁰ and subsequent Byzantine mystical theology.

What then was the sense given to Plato's famous phrase – «beyond being/ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας» – by Christian commentators? In fact, some Christian authors not only used Plato's dictum, but also considerably extended it, maintaining that the Good transcends all human intellectual capacity and, hence, the category of οὐσία itself.³¹ A few examples of this development are pertinent here.

Origen, in the *Contra Celsum* 6, 64 emphatically suggests that the Logos is «being of beings, and Idea of Ideas» (οὐσίαν μὲν οὐσιῶν λεκτέον καὶ ἰδέαν ἰδεῶν); however, «the Father is beyond everything of this kind» (ἐπέκεινα δὲ πάντων τούτων τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ θεόν).³² Similar language appears in later Platonists, namely, the Neo-Platonists. In Plotinus' *Ennead I, 7* we can find what might be a step further with regard to the *Republic* discussion of the Good. As Plotinus puts it: «For because it [the Good] is beyond being, it transcends activity and transcends mind and thought / Καὶ γὰρ ὅτι ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας, ἐπέκεινα καὶ ἐνεργείας καὶ ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ νοήσεως».³³ A glance at the issue of Eusebius of Caesarea's «baptising of Plato» will give us an insight as to how Plato's dictum was being mulled over by Christian authors on the threshold of the first ecumenical council:

Herein Plato says most distinctly that the intellectual essences receive from the «good», meaning of course from God, not merely the property of being known, but also their existence and essence... So far he [Plato] does not regard the ideas as coessential, nor yet suppose that they are unbegotten, because they have received their existence and their essence from Him who is not an essence, but far transcends essence, in dignity and power (μὴ εἶναι οὐσίαν, ἀλλ' ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχον), whom alone the Hebrew oracles with good reason proclaim as God, as being the cause of all things.³⁴

²⁷ On Plato's dictum in the Hellenistic period, consult John Whittaker's «ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας», *Vigiliae Christianae* 23 (1969) 91-104.

²⁸ Origen enquires «whether we ought to say that the only begotten is being of beings and Idea of Ideas' / Ζητητέον δὲ καί, εἰ οὐσίαν μὲν οὐσιῶν λεκτέον καὶ ἰδέαν ἰδεῶν καὶ ἀρχὴν. (*Contra Celsum* 6, 64) The Greek quotation is in Stead, *Divine Substance*, 152.

²⁹ Gregory of Nyssa will speak of God as transcending all principles: ὃς ἐστὶν ἡ πάντων ἀρχή, τῆς ἐπέκεινα πάσης ἀρχῆς ἡμῖν ἐβρισκομένης, ἥτις ἐστὶν ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων θεός; see *Contra Eunomium* 1.1.531.11-12 in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, ed. W. Jaeger, vol.1 (Leiden: Brill, 1960).

³⁰ God is the Cause of existence while Himself existing not, being beyond Being (ὡς πάσης οὐσίας ἐπέκεινα)... See *The Divine Names* I, 1. The Greek text: Καὶ αἴτιον μὲν τοῦ εἶναι πᾶσιν αὐτὸ δὲ μὴ ὄν ὡς πάσης οὐσίας ἐπέκεινα, καὶ ὡς ἂν αὐτὴ περὶ ἑαυτῆς κυρίως καὶ ἐπιστητῶς ἀποφαίνοιτο. See *PG* 3, 588B. See also Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys*, 164-165.

³¹ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 140.

³² See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 152.

³³ *Ennead I, 7.1.19-21* in *The Enneads*, ed. and trans. A. H. Armstrong, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966) 270-271.

³⁴ In the *Preparation for the Gospel* 11.21; The Greek original is: Σαφέστατα διὰ τούτων οὐ μόνον τὸ γινώσκεισθαι τὰς νοητὰς οὐσίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ἔχειν παρὰ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, δηλαδὴ τοῦ θεοῦ, φησὶν ὁ Πλάτων τὸ τε ἀγαθὸν "μὴ εἶναι οὐσίαν, ἀλλ' ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχον;" ὥστε μὴ ὁμοούσια αὐτὰ τίθεσθαι,

Finally, Plato has to say something extremely crucial about the relationship between the name – ὄνομα and the named. Not for nothing did Aleksei Losev³⁵ and Sergii Bulgakov – the apologists of the glorification of the divine name (*imiaslavie*³⁶) – focus on Platonist foundations for their elaboration of the philosophy and theology of the *imiaslavie* in connection with Palamite thought and the Eunomian controversy.³⁷ In the *Cratylus*, Plato provides a description of a name that refers to the δύναμις of the named,³⁸ where δύναμις has a connotation of «something like its intelligible presence».³⁹ Yet, describing the knowledge provided by names, Plato's inclination to approximate ὁσμία and δύναμις makes his next step fairly easy – he upholds the position that a name refers also to the ὁσμία of the object named.⁴⁰ This type of embryonic *onomato-ontology*, so to speak, when transposed into the realm of theology might well result in the divine *onomatodoxy* – in its

ἀλλὰ μηδὲ ἀγέννητα νομίζειν, ὅτι δὴ καὶ τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὴν ὁσίαν εἴληψε παρὰ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ὁσίας, ἀλλ' ἐπέκεινα ὁσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος: ὃν δὴ καὶ μόνον εἰκότως θεὸν τὰ Ἐβραίων ἀναγορεύει λόγια, ὡς ἂν τοῖς πᾶσιν αἰτίον ὄντα. In *Evangelicae Preparationis*, ed. and trans. E. H. Gifford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903) 3.2, 542.

³⁵ For sections of his archival unpublished essay on this subject see Aleksey F. Losev, «Imiaslavie i Platonizm», *Voprosy Filosofii* 9 (2002) 102-129.

³⁶ For a historical reconstruction of the *imiaslavie* controversy see: A. M. Khitrov, et al, *Zabytyie stranitsy russkogo imiaslavia. Sbornik dokumentov i publikatsii po afonskim sobytiim 1910-1913 gg. i dvezheniiu imiaslavia v 1910-1918 gg.* (Moscow: Palomnik, 2001); Polovinkin S., «Khronika Afonskogo Dela», *Arkhiv sviashchemnika Pavla Florenskogo: Peregiska sviashchemnika Pavla Aleksandrovicha Florenskogo i Mikhaila Aleksandrovicha Novoselova* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1998); Protoierei Konstantin Borshch, *Imiaslavie: Sbornik bogoslovsko publistsicheskikh statei, dokumentov, i kommentariiev*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 2003). Alfeyev, *Sviashchemnaia taina tserkvi: Vvedenie v istoriiu i problematiku imiaslavskikh sporov*. This study is part of a growing body of research aimed at re-evaluating the history and theology of *imiaslavie* vis-à-vis the social, cultural and ecclesial milieu. On *onomatodoxy* see: Robert Slesinski, «Le Nom de Dieu dans la tradition byzantine», *Communio. Revue catholique internationale* XVIII/105 (1993) 62-73; Tittel B. «Vorwort», *Ilarion, Schimonach. Auf der Bergen des Kaukasus. Gespräch zweier Einsiedler über das Jesus-Gebet*. Überetzt und mit einem Vorwort von P. Bonifaz Tittel OSB (Salzburg, 1991) 11-42; A. Nivière, «L'expérience liturgique chez les moines onomatodoxes d'Athos», *Actes du 35e Congres Liturgique de l'Institut Saint-Serge* (Rome, 1989) 247-263; A. Nivière «L'onomatodoxie: une crise religieuse à la veille de la Révolution», *Mille ans de Christianisme russe: 988-1988* (Paris, 1989) 285-294; A. Nivière, *Le mouvement onomatodoxe. Une querelle théologique parmi les moines russes du Mont Athos (1907-1914)*. Memoire de D. E. A. (Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, 1985); T. Dykstra, «Heresy on Mount Athos: Conflict over the Name of God among Russian Monks and Hierarchs, 1912–1914», unpublished M.Th. thesis, St Vladimir's Theological Seminary, 1988; R. Slenczka, «Die Göttlichkeit des Namens und die Rechtfertigung des Senders, Erwagungen zum dogmatischen Problem des Athosstreites von 1910 bis 1913», *Unser ganzes Leben Christus unserem Gott überantworten*. Hrsg. von P. Hauptmann (Göttingen, 1982) 417-433; C. Papoulidis, «A. K. Bulatovic: sa participation parmi les Onomatolâtres du Mont Athos», *Balkan Studies* 16 (1975) 126-129; K. Παπουλίδης, *Οἱ Ρώσοι Ονοματολάτραι τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους*, (Θεσσαλονίκη, 1977) 77-114; B. Schultze, «Der Streit um die Göttlichkeit des Namens Jesus in der Russischen Theologie», *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 17 (1951) 321-394; K. Παπουλίδης, «Ονοματολάτραι. Ἐπεροδιδασκαλία Ρώσων μοναχῶν τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους κατὰ τὴν δευτέραν δεκαετίαν τοῦ 20-αἰῶνος», *Μακεδόνικα* 11 (1971) 117-166; K. Παπουλίδης, «Ἐπιστολή Πατριαρχική καὶ Συνδική πρὸς τὸν ἀγιοπάτην τῆς Ρωσσίας Σύνοδον κατὰ τῶν ὀνοματοθετῶν», *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἀλήθεια* 33 (1913) 445-446; J. Lecombe, «Les moines onomatolâtres», *Echos d'Orient* 16 (1913) 555-556; 17 (1914) 265-266.

³⁷ On the relation between the *imiaslavie* and the Eunomian controversy see Sergii Bulgakov, «Smysl uchenia Grigorii Nisskogo ob imenakh», *Itogi Zhizni* 12-13 (1913) 15-21.

³⁸ Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology*, 72.

³⁹ Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology*, 71.

⁴⁰ Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology*, 73.

Russian embodiment – with its highly controversial slogan «God’s name is God Himself». The Divine Name controversy or *imiaslavie* has been *terra incognita* for a long time and only recently received scholarly attention. Despite the vast research on the history of the Russian Church and Slavic Athonite monasticism, little has been written about the phenomenon of *imiaslavie*, a monastic movement that taught the divinity of the names of God.

The controversial expression – «the name of God is God Himself» – Bulgakov will reinterpret in an orthodox way, explaining that the word *God* means rather divine – Θεῖον, Θεότης.⁴¹ Following the other two adherents of *imiaslavie*, Losev⁴² and Florenskii⁴³, Bulgakov provides the Greek formula to husk the Russian one: τὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ὄνομα Θεός ἐστίν, although not ὁ Θεός.⁴⁴ The reverse formula, Bulgakov argues is heretical: ὁ Θεός τὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ὄνομα ἐστίν.⁴⁵

THE LEGACY OF ARISTOTLE

If we turn to Aristotle, we find striking similarities as well as differences. It is generally acknowledged that Aristotle – drifting away from Plato’s ontological distinctions – focused on what later will be clearly defined as a philosophical distinction between essence and existence. The question for us is: can we locate in Aristotle any «beyond being» notion resembling Plato’s dictum that the Good transcends being/essence (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας)? Rowan Williams rightly concludes that «Aristotle’s God is οὐσία, and it would make no sense to speak of Him as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας.»⁴⁶ However, we can find in Aristotle at least a tiny hint that echoes Plato’s notion of divine transcendence. In the *Metaphysics*⁴⁷ (Λ 7.1072^b, 24-25), pondering over the human and the divine, Aristotle maintains that it is active thinking that is most divine in us and «if God always enjoys this well-being (οὕτως εὖ ἔχει) which we sometimes do, this is wonderful (θαυμαστόν); and if more than this (εἰ δὲ μᾶλλον), more wonderful yet (ἔτι θαυμασιώτερον).»⁴⁸ Aryeh Kosman remarks that the word «more» can be easily overlooked:

What does Aristotle mean by the suggestion – εἰ δὲ μᾶλλον – that the divine may enjoy a mode of being better – *more* well – than the well-being we

⁴¹ Sergii Bulgakov, *Filosofia imeni* (St Peterburg: Nauka, 1998) 327-328.

⁴² Aleksey F. Losev, *Imia. Sochinenia i perevody* (St Petersburg: Aleteia, 1997) 15.

⁴³ Pavel Florenskii, «Imiaslavie kak filosofskaia predposylka», *Sobranie Sochinenii v Chetyrekh Tomakh*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Izdatelstvo «Mysl», 1994-2000) 252-287 at 269.

⁴⁴ Bulgakov, *Filosofia imeni*, 328.

⁴⁵ Bulgakov, *Filosofia imeni*, 328.

⁴⁶ See Rowan D. Williams, *The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky: An Exposition and Critique*, unpublished dissertation (Oxford, 1975) 170.

⁴⁷ On the place of the *Metaphysics* Λ in the *Corpus Aristotelicum* see Elders, *Aristotle’s Theology: A Commentary on Book Λ of the Metaphysics*, 44-49.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Aryeh Kosman, «Metaphysics Λ 9: Divine Thought», *Aristotle’s Metaphysics Lambda: Symposium Aristotelicum*, eds. Michael Frede and David Charles (Oxford/New York: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 2000) 310. The context is γίγνεται θιγγάνων καὶ νοῶν, ὥστε ταῦτὸν νοῦς καὶ νοητὸν. τὸ γὰρ δεκτικὸν τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ τῆς οὐσίας νοῦς, ἐνεργεῖ δὲ ἔχων, ὡστ’ ἐκείνου μᾶλλον τοῦτο ὁ δοκεῖ ὁ νοῦς θεῖον ἔχειν, καὶ ἡ θεωρία τὸ ἥδιστον καὶ ἀριστον. εἰ οὖν οὕτως εὖ ἔχει, ὡς ἡμεῖς ποτέ, ὁ θεός ἀεὶ, θαυμαστόν: εἰ δὲ μᾶλλον, ἔτι θαυμασιώτερον. ἔχει δὲ ὄδω. καὶ ζωῆ δὲ γε ὑπάρχει: ἡ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωῆ, ἐκείνου δὲ ἡ ἐνέργεια: ἐνέργεια δὲ ἡ καθ’ αὐτὴν ἐκείνου ζωῆ ἀρίστη καὶ αἰδιος. φανερὸν δὲ τὸν θεὸν εἶναι ζῶον αἰδιον ἀριστον, ὥστε ζωῆ καὶ αἰὼν συνεχῆς καὶ αἰδιος ὑπάρχει τῷ θεῷ: τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός.

occasionally enjoy? Aristotle's «more» here may recall Plato's description of the good as «beyond substance – ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας» (*Republic* 509b9). Simplicius clearly thought something of the sort, for he supports his claim that Aristotle had in mind something beyond thought by quoting from the lost *On Prayer* Aristotle's assertion that «the divine is either thought or something beyond thought (ὁ θεὸς ἢ νοῦς ἐστὶν ἢ καὶ ἐπέκεινά τι τοῦ νοῦ)» (in *De Caelo*⁴⁹ 485. 19-22; cf. *Eudemian Ethics* VII. 14. 1248^a27). Simplicius's testimony may or may not be accurate, and there may or may not be a connection between it and Aristotle's remark here; but more simply the implications of the remark. The view that Aristotle offers, it seems, is not simply that God thinks as we do, only all the time rather than merely some of the time; it is rather that God engages in an activity that is like thinking, but something *more*. And indeed, Aristotle concludes, that is the case: ἔχει δὲ ᾧδε. And thus, he concludes, the being of the active principle is of this nature, for, as I began this now long introductory remark by quoting, τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός: «this thing we have been talking about God is» (*Met.* Λ 7.1072^b31).⁵⁰

In Aristotle's thought at various stages of its development, as well as in thinkers of late antiquity, the question of essence-οὐσία is unresolved. Stead suggests a scheme⁵¹ that distinguishes between 28 different senses of οὐσία, whilst the *Patristic Greek Lexicon*⁵² contains 58 subsections to treat the issue. For our purpose the most significant aspect of Aristotle's rich ontological tapestry is his distinction between primary and secondary substances, which – to reach very far afield – provides the platform of the Cappadocian Fathers» distinction between οὐσία and ὑπόστασις. As Aristotle puts it:

Substance (οὐσία) – what is most properly and primarily and especially so called – is what is neither said of a subject nor in a subject; e.g. this man, or this horse. What are called secondary substances (δεύτεραι δὲ οὐσῖαι) are the species in which are the things primarily called substances, together with the genera of these species; for instance, this man belongs in the species, but the genus of the species (γένος δὲ τοῦ εἶδους ἐστὶ) is animal; these, then, are called secondary substances (δεύτεραι οὖν αὐταὶ λέγονται οὐσῖαι) – for instance, man, and animal.⁵³

⁴⁹ In *De Caelo* 485.19-25: τὸ μὲν γὰρ κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ τι προβεβλημένον οὐσίαν ἔχειν λέγεται, τὸ δὲ ἀπ' ἄλλου λαμβάνον μετέχειν: ὅτι γὰρ ἐννοεῖ τι καὶ ὑπὲρ τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης, δηλὸς ἐστὶ πρὸς τοῖς πέρασι τοῦ Περὶ εὐχῆς βιβλίου σαφῶς εἰπῶν, ὅτι ὁ θεός ἢ νοῦς ἐστὶν ἢ καὶ ἐπέκεινά τι τοῦ νοῦ. τὸ δὲ δι' ὀλίγων κινήσεων ἀφικνεῖται πρὸς τὸ ἑαυτοῦ τέλος. In *Simplicii in Aristotelis de caelo commentaria*, ed. I. L. Heiberg (Berlin: Reimer, 1894) 485.

⁵⁰ See Kosman, «Metaphysics Λ 9: Divine Thought», 310-311.

⁵¹ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 133.

⁵² *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Oxford/New York: Clarendon, 1961).

⁵³ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 57. The Greek original is: Οὐσία δὲ ἐστὶν, ἣ κυριώτατα τε καὶ πρώτως καὶ μάλιστα λεγόμενη, ἢ μήτε καθ' ὑποκειμένου τινὸς λέγεται, μήτε ἐν υποκειμένῳ τινὶ ἐστὶν, οἷον ὁ τις ἄνθρωπος ἢ ὁ τις ἵππος. δεύτεραι δὲ οὐσῖαι λέγονται, ἐν οἷς εἶδεναι αἱ πρώτως οὐσῖαι λεγόμεναι ὑπάρχουσι, ταῦτά τε καὶ τὰ τῶν εἰδῶν τούτων γένη· οἷον ὁ τις ἄνθρωπος ἐν εἶδει μὲν ὑπάρχει τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, γένος δὲ τοῦ εἶδους ἐστὶ τὸ ζῶον. δεύτεραι οὖν αὐταὶ λέγονται οὐσῖαι, οἷον ὁ τις ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ ζῶον. Quoted in Stead, *Divine Substance*, 57.

The πρώτη οὐσία is the answer to the question «what is it»: it is meant to denote the individual;⁵⁴ whilst the second substance (δευτέρα οὐσία) refers to the common *genus*. Here we see how the Christian tradition, beginning with the Cappadocians, perfects Aristotle's understanding, because the πρώτη οὐσία (in the case of Socrates) refers to a «who» and not just to a «what». The language of *genus* involves further ambiguities⁵⁵ related to the legacy of Platonism.⁵⁶ Aristotle employs the terms *genus* (γένος)⁵⁷ and εἶδος – sometimes using the latter neither in the sense of «shape» nor species, but «something more like “the shape or form characteristic of a species”»,⁵⁸ Stead remarks,⁵⁹ concluding that «the development of a living creature is regarded as an endeavor to realize this characteristic form, which in its complete articulation is called ἐντελέχεια⁶⁰ or ἐνέργεια, “actuality”».⁶¹

Actualization is the process of bringing the potentiality of a being into ἐντελέχεια – fulfillment of its τέλος through realization of its potential.⁶² Potentiality / δύναμις is a given capacity within beings to be other than they are. Actualized being (ἐνέργειαν οὐσίαν)⁶³ is contrasted by Aristotle with the merely potential. In actual things essence and efficacy (οὐσία and ἐνέργεια) are, according to Aristotle, one and the same. In Λ 6 Aristotle comes up with «a principle whose very essence is activity which does not involve the actualization of any power δύναμις – the *pure act* of Aristotelian tradition.»⁶⁴ This principle moves all things as «thought is moved by the object of thought (νοῦς),⁶⁵ and this is God (τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός)». ⁶⁶ In Λ 7, the First Mover⁶⁷ is described as being ἐνέργεια so that he moves the world as the object of desire.⁶⁸

As mentioned earlier, there are different ways of combining the terms οὐσία, ἐνέργεια and δύναμις in Plato and Aristotle⁶⁹. There can be an approximation of the nearly synonymous terms δύναμις and ἐνέργεια, both of which are contrasted with οὐσία in the case of Plato. Or there can be an approximation of οὐσία and ἐνέργεια that is contrasted with pure potentiality – δύναμις – in the case of Aristotle.

⁵⁴ Stead, *Divine Substance*, 61-63.

⁵⁵ Stead, *Divine Substance*, 61.

⁵⁶ Stead, *Divine Substance*, 61.

⁵⁷ On essence as a form of genus see Wedin, *Aristotle's Theory of Substance: The Categories and Metaphysics Zeta*, 230-257.

⁵⁸ For a discussion on inconsistency of Aristotle's usage of this term see Stead, *Divine Substance*, 73-74.

⁵⁹ Stead, *Divine Substance*, 74.

⁶⁰ Elders, *Aristotle's Theology. A Commentary on Book A of the Metaphysics*, 136.

⁶¹ Stead, *Divine Substance*, 74-75.

⁶² Leo Elders ascribes a vague notion of potentiality – actuality to Anaximander and Anaxagoras. See Elders, *Aristotle's Theology. A Commentary on Book A of the Metaphysics*, 93.

⁶³ *Metaphysics*, 1042b, 10-12.

⁶⁴ Kosman «Metaphysics Λ 9: Divine Thought», 308.

⁶⁵ For an overview of *nous*, see F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York/London, 1967) 132-139.

⁶⁶ Kosman «Metaphysics Λ 9: Divine Thought», 323.

⁶⁷ Elders, *Aristotle's Theology. A Commentary on Book A of the Metaphysics*, 144.

⁶⁸ André Laks, «Metaphysics Λ 7», *Aristotle's Metaphysics Lambda: Symposium Aristotelicum*, eds. Michael Frede and David Charles (Oxford/New York: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 2000) 214-219.

⁶⁹ See Duncan Reid, *Energies of the Spirit: Trinitarian Models in Eastern Orthodox and Western Theologies* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997) 8-26.

It has become conventional to associate the first ontological set with an Eastern-style theology, culminating in St. Gregory Palamas' distinction between God's essence and energy, and the second ontological set – with Western theology beginning from Tertullian and carrying on through Augustine to Thomas Aquinas.⁷⁰ Certainly, this is an oversimplified scheme – albeit not without a grain of truth – but historically it does not stand up to critique considering the numerous exceptions on both sides, as well as their mutual fusion and correlatedness. Inevitably, contemporary readings of both Thomism and Palamism in their numerous versions⁷¹ highly depend upon the continuity or discontinuity of their foundational metaphysics – that stem from privileging one scheme over another.⁷² Therefore, our next section will be on how Hellenistic ontology was «baptised» in the patristic era.

TRINITARIAN THEO-ONTOLOGY IN THE PATRISTIC ERA

Some fathers – Cyril of Jerusalem and Alexander of Alexandria, among others⁷³ – tend to avoid the term οὐσία, utilising ὑπόστασις as a synonymous⁷⁴ term. Tertullian, however, not being influenced by Plato to the extent the Eastern Fathers were, applies the term «substantia» to God without any reservations: *Pater enim tota substantia est, Filius vero derivatio (Adversus Prax. 9)*.⁷⁵

Eastern Fathers who theologized in the orbit of Platonism – keeping in mind Plato's axiom that the good is beyond «essence»/ ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας – were reluctant to apply οὐσία to God unwarrantedly. In this regard East and West differ from each other, at the very

⁷⁰ This bold cliché requires the greatest care if it is to be utilised in any helpful ways, and theologians on both sides quite rarely insert the necessary exceptions, qualifications and nuances.

⁷¹ See Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002). The Palamite theology in the Russian diaspora was reconstructed in various versions by Sergii Bulgakov, Vasilii Krivosheine, Kiprian Kern, Georgii Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky and John Meyendorff.

⁷² A good discussion on the East-West ontological approaches for grounding corresponding theologies is in Reid, *Energies of the Spirit: Trinitarian Models in Eastern Orthodox and Western Theologies*, 1-26.

⁷³ Athanasius the Great, for instance, apologizes for the use of οὐσία (*Decr.* 19) because it is a predominantly philosophical term, which is not found in the Bible, whereas ὑπόστασις appears in Wisdom, St. Paul, and Hebrews. See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 161. In the time of Athanasius the Great, the identification of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις supported the teaching of the divinity of Christ as consubstantial with the Father. Later the identification of οὐσία with ὑπόστασις ended in the belief in the existence of one God, who presents Himself with different *masks*. This is why it was necessary to distinguish the term οὐσία from the term ὑπόστασις person. Detailed discussion in A. Spassky, *Istoriia dogmaticheskikh dvizhenii v epokhu vselenskikh soborov* (Sergiev Posad, 1914) 449.

⁷⁴ Basil the Great makes a huge conceptual leap by emphasizing the distinct ontologically-integrated existence of the Father, the Son and the Spirit in the divine Trinity. Whereas in classical Greek thinking the term ὑπόστασις was a purely ontological category like substance (οὐσία), Basil makes the identification of the ontological category of ὑπόστασις with, for lack of a better term, existential or relational notion of «person» (πρόσωπον). See G. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London, 1952) 244. In saying that the πρόσωπον or person is a ὑπόστασις, Basil the Great gave to the notion of person an ontological significance. «Person» no longer simply partook of being (substance or *essence*) which somehow preceded it; *person* became *being*; or, being became personalized. A crucial improvement has been introduced: the new ontological category known as πρόσωπον or ὑπόστασις became, by being *personal*, a *relational* idea. See J. Zizioulas, «The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution», *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Acts*, ed. C. Schwöbel (Edinburgh, 1995) 47. See also M. Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001) 169-171.

⁷⁵ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 161. More on the Son's derivation see Stead, *Divine Substance*, 179.

least, on the terminological level. Western theology, with some exceptions, employed the relatively coherent Aristotelian concept οὐσία/essence, whereas Eastern theology vacillated between different – often incoherent, or even contradictory concepts and terminologies.

Leaving aside the question of the intrinsic coherence of the ontological systems of Plato and Aristotle, a crucial point for our theological, particularly Trinitarian, discussions, is that some elements of Platonism, alongside purely biblical revelational insights, resulted in the extension of the patristic Trinitarian vocabulary. Namely, apart from the traditional (*i.e.* Platonic and Aristotelian) ontological vocabulary, stood the growing tendency – in light of the impact of Neo-platonic tradition on Christian mysticism – to formulate God's transcendence in terms of ὑπερούσιος οὐσία, ὑπερούσια, ὑπερουσιότητα or ὑπέρθεος θεότης. This tendency, evolving from Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite, Roman the Melode and Maximus the Confessor, finds its expression in John of Damascus's *Exposition of Orthodox Faith*:

Therefore, we believe in one God: one principle, without beginning (μίαν ἀρχὴν ἀναρχον), uncreated, unbegotten, indestructible and immortal, eternal, unlimited, uncircumscribed, unbounded, infinite in power, simple, uncompounded, incorporeal, unchanging, unaffected, unchangeable, inalterate, invisible, source of goodness and justice, light intellectual and inaccessible; power which no measure can give any idea of but which is measured only by His own will, for He can do all things whatsoever He pleases; maker of all things both visible and invisible, holding together all things and conserving them, provider for all, governing and dominating and ruling over all in unending and immortal reign; without contradiction, filling all things, being their conservator and first possessor; pervading all substances without being defiled, removed far beyond all things and every substance (ὄλαις οὐσίαις ἐπιβατεύουσιν καὶ πάντων ἐπέκεινα) as being supersubstantial and surpassing all (ὡς ὑπερούσιον καὶ ὑπὲρ τὰ ὄντα οὐσαν), supereminently divine (ὑπέρθεον) and good (ὑπεράγαθον) and replete (ὑπερπλήρη); appointing all the principalities and orders, set above every principality and order, above essence and life and speech and concept (ὑπὲρ οὐσίαν καὶ ζωὴν καὶ λόγον καὶ ἔννοιαν); light itself and goodness and being (αὐτοαγαθότητα, αὐτοζωήν, αὐτοουσίαν) in so far as having neither being nor anything else that is from any other; the very source of being for all things that are, of life to the living, of speech to the articulate, and the cause of all good things of all; knowing all things before they begin to be; one essence, one godhead, one virtue, one will, one operation, one principality, one power, one domination, one kingdom (μίαν οὐσίαν, μίαν θεότητα, μίαν δύναμιν, μίαν θέλησιν, μίαν ἐνέργειαν, μίαν ἀρχήν, μίαν ἐξουσίαν, μίαν κυριότητα, μίαν βασιλείαν); known in three perfect Persons (ἐν τρισὶ τελείαις ὑποστάσεσι) and adored with one adoration, believed in and worshiped by every rational creature, united without confusion and distinct without separation (ἀσυγχύτως ἡνωμέναις καὶ ἀδιαστάτως διαιρουμέναις), which is a paradox (παράδοξον). We believe in Father and Son and Holy Ghost in whom we have been baptized.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ St John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 37 (New York, 1958) 176-7. Slightly adapted. See *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, vol. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), 18-19.

The same intricate language – employing classical philosophical vocabulary with further modifications – will reappear in Gregory Palamas. The inevitable questions that arise from the aforementioned terminological development in the East are: how correlated is the term ὑπερούσιον with the Nicene ὁμοούσιον, which in fact was introduced in a more Aristotelian technical sense into the Creed; and how did this contribute to the subsequent clash between Palamism and Thomism in terms of created and uncreated grace?

In fact, the phrase «God's essence/οὐσία τοῦ Θεοῦς» – has a different meaning for a Westerner and an Easterner. For the former οὐσία/*substantia* refers to God's ultimate aseity (unknowable, imparticipable); whereas for the latter, the same sense is reserved for ὑπερούσια; οὐσία in the eyes of Westerners, becomes to a certain extent participable through the energies (ἐνέργειαι), according to the common interpretation of Gregory Palamas, who extrapolated the monastic experience of the union with God through prayer into the realm of dogmatic theology. Certainly, in the eyes of a Westerner who looks through Aristotelian spectacles, this double-layer-ness of Eastern theo-ontology is rather questionable and problematic. It entails the problem of preserving what is called God's simplicity, which seems, in the eyes of Thomists, to be jeopardised, and claimed to be preserved by the neo-Palamites.

Another question might be: how did the East arrive at the language of ὑπερούσια and employ it for Trinitarian theology? The following survey will be very sketchy, and therefore by no means conclusive.

Under the influence of Plato's famous dictum that the Good is beyond essence/ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, the language of ὑπερούσια appears in a neo-Platonist who exerted huge influence on Denys the Areopagite, namely, Proclus⁷⁷ (410-485), who says: Πᾶς θεός ὑπερούσιός ἐστι καὶ ὑπέρζωος καὶ ὑπέρνους (*Institutio theologica*, 115.1)⁷⁸ or similarly, πᾶς θεός ἐν τῷ εἶναι θεός οὐσίωται, μᾶλλον δὲ ὑπερουσίωται (in *Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, 364.20).⁷⁹

There are numerous occurrences of the term ὑπερούσια in various Christian authors. Theodoret of Cyrus's God also transcends everything that exists (ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ὄντα ἐστι) and he is the one who ὑπερούσιος ὢν (In *Explanatio in Canticum canticorum*).⁸⁰ In Roman the Melode's hymnographical language, the Virgin gives birth to the superessential One (Ἡ παρθένος σήμερον τὸν ὑπερούσιον τίκτει)⁸¹, therefore, even dogmas of the Church are superessential (ἐν φρεσὶν θεῖς δαψιλῶς ὑπερουσίου δόγματος).⁸² Likewise, Denys the Areopagite elaborated his doctrine of the supra-essential Godhead (ὑπερούσιός Θεαρχία) in somewhat extravagant vocabulary. «The Existent God», according to Denys, «is, by the nature of His power, superessentially above all existence

⁷⁷ Proclus has been labeled as a «Christian Proclus». See Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys* (Oxford/New York: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1981) 161-64; See also H. D. Saffrey, «Un lien objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus», *Studia Patristica* 9 (1960) 98-105.

⁷⁸ See Proclus Diadochus, *The Elements of Theology*, revd., trans., introd. and comment. E. R. Dodds, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) 100.

⁷⁹ See in *Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed.E. Diehl, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903) 364.

⁸⁰ PG 81. 116.39.

⁸¹ See *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina*, eds. P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1963) 1.

⁸² See *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Dubia*, eds. P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1970) 179.

(ὑπερούσιός ἐστι); He is the substantial Cause and Creator of Being (δημιουργός ὄντος), Existence (ὑπάρξεως), Substance (οὐσίας) and Nature (φύσεως), the Beginning and the Measuring Principle of ages (μέτρον αἰώνων); the Reality underlying time and the Eternity underlying existence».⁸³

In the East, by the time of John Damascene, the ὑπερούσια language becomes a part of the ordinary trinitarian vocabulary alongside other trinitarian terms that seem to be synonymous for contemporary theologians – περί οὐσίας καὶ φύσεως for instance – however, not quite synonymous in the patristic age.

A good example of how John of Damascus brings together numerous, often conflicting, trinitarian terms (ὑπερούσιος οὐσία, φύσις, μορφή, θεότης, ὑποστάσεις, πρόσωπα) is in his *Institutio Elementaris*: Ἔστι μὲν ὑπερούσιος οὐσία καὶ φύσις καὶ μορφή ἢ ἀκατάληπτος θεότης, ὑποστάσεις δὲ αὐτῆς καὶ πρόσωπα πατήρ, υἱὸς καὶ τὸ πανάγιον πνεῦμα.⁸⁴ And also his similar expression, Ἔστιν οὖν ὑπόστασις μὲν καὶ ἄτομον καὶ πρόσωπον πατήρ, υἱὸς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον· περιεκτικὸν δὲ αὐτῶν εἶδος ἢ ὑπερούσιος καὶ ἀκατάληπτος θεότης.⁸⁵ For John of Damascus, being/essence/οὐσία might be predicated of God and creatures alike,⁸⁶ therefore, God is beyond essence; he is the superessential essence: Οὐσία τοίνυν ἐστὶ θεὸς καὶ πᾶν κτίσμα, εἰ καὶ ὁ θεὸς ὑπερούσιος οὐσία ἐστίν.⁸⁷

In the *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* John of Damascus, following Denys the Areopagite, discusses theological epistemology and onomatology. If we are to name God, how do we do this, taking into account that «He did not grant us the knowledge of his essence»; «how can there be knowledge of the superessential? (τὸ ὑπερούσιον πῶς γνωσθήσεται;)» he asks. Apparently, God «receives names drawn from all that is, even from the opposites: for instance, He is called light and darkness, water and fire, in order that we may know that these are not of His essence (ἵνα γινώμεν, ὅτι οὐ ταῦτα κατ' οὐσίαν ἐστίν) but He is superessential, hence unnameable (ἀλλ' ἐστὶ μὲν ὑπερούσιος, διὸ καὶ ἀκατονόμαστος); but inasmuch as He is the cause of all, He receives names from all caused by Him (ὡς δὲ πάντων τῶν ὄντων αἴτιος ἐκ πάντων τῶν αἰτιατῶν ὀνομάζεται).»⁸⁸ Divine names that stem from the apophatic way of speaking (θεῶν ὀνομάτων τὰ μὲν ἀποφατικῶς λέγεται), indicate

⁸³ In *Divine Names* V, 4. See *Dionysius the Areopagite: On the Divine Name and the Mystical Theology*, ed. Clarence Edwin Rolt (London/New York: Society for promoting Christian Knowledge/the Macmillan Company, 1920) 135. The Greek text reads: «Ὁ ὢν ὄλου τοῦ εἶναι κατὰ δύναμιν ὑπερούσιός ἐστι, ὑποστάτις αἰτία, καὶ δημιουργός ὄντος, ὑπάρξεως, ὑποστάσεως, οὐσίας, φύσεως ἄρχη καὶ μέτρον αἰώνων καὶ χρόνων ὄντοτης, καὶ αἰὼν τῶν ὄντων χρόνος τῶν γινομένων, τὸ εἶναι τοῖς ὁπωσοῦν οὐσι, γένεσις τοῖς ὁπωσοῦν γινομένοις, PG 3. 817C.

⁸⁴ *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, vol. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969), 20.

⁸⁵ *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, 24.

⁸⁶ However, according to John of Damascus, nothing in creation can adequately portray the inner life of the Holy Trinity, i.e., the superessential divine essence. All creation is subject to corruption, he concludes: Τὸ γὰρ κτιστὸν καὶ σύνθετον καὶ βευστὸν καὶ τρεπτὸν καὶ περιγραφτὸν καὶ σχῆμα ἔχον καὶ φθαρτὸν, πῶς σαφῶς δηλώσει τὴν πάντων τούτων ἀπηλλαγμένην ὑπερούσιον θεῖαν οὐσίαν; Πᾶσα δὲ ἡ κτίσις δῆλον ὡς τοῖς πλείοσι τούτων ἐνέχεται καὶ πᾶσα κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτῆς φύσιν τῇ φθορᾷ ὑπόκειται. In *Expositio Fidei*, see *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, vol. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), 25.

⁸⁷ In *Dialectica*, see *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 1, 59.

⁸⁸ NPNF 9. 14. Adapted.

the superessential (τὸ ὑπερούσιον); such are non-essential (οἷον ἀνούσιος), timeless, without beginning, invisible (ἄχρονος, ἀναρχος, ἀόρατος)...because God above all things (ὑπὲρ πάντα ἐστὶ). Some names have a kataphatic (τὰ δὲ καταφατικῶς) signification, as indicating that he is the cause of all things (ὡς αἰτίου τῶν πάντων) ... These, then are the affirmations and the negations, but the sweetest names are a combination of both (γλυκυτάτη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἐξ ἁμφοῖν συνάφεια): for example, the superessential essence (ἡ ὑπερούσιος οὐσία), the Godhead that is more than God (ἡ ὑπέρθεος θεότης), the beginning that is above beginning (ἡ ὑπεράρχιος ἀρχή) and such like.⁸⁹

A few passages further, John of Damascus makes it clear that God's simplicity must be preserved, i.e. that there is not a synthesis in the Godhead (οὐ σύνθετόν ἐστιν ἡ θεότης):

However, whenever I think of the relation of the Persons to one another (πρὸς ἄλληλα σχέσιν τῶν ὑποστάσεων), I know that the Father is a superessential sun (ὅτι ἐστὶν ὁ πατὴρ ὑπερούσιος ἥλιος), a well-spring of goodness, an abyss of essence, reason, wisdom, power, light and divinity, a begetting and emitting well-spring of the good hidden in himself.⁹⁰

Given the Eastern fascination with Denys, it comes as no surprise that the notion of superessentiality (ὑπερούσιον) of God as it is articulated in John Damascene is not the last word in the development of the notion of divine transcendence in Eastern theology. If in the first millenium the fathers were reluctant to apply οὐσία to God, and preferred the term ὑπερούσια as an expression of God's transcendence and beyondness, in the second millenium, Gregory Palamas, prompted by Denys and Maximus the Confessor, takes a further step in this regard. God, according to Gregory, is transcendent even to his ὑπερούσια. In the *Against Akindynos* he says that God transcends not only all beings, being ὑπερούσιος, but also that «his very superessentiality self-super-essentially unlimitedly transcends»⁹¹ (αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὑπερουσίου αὐθυπερουσίως ἀπείρως ὑπερέχων)⁹². Gregory Palamas, following Gregory the Theologian⁹³ and Denys the Areopagite,⁹⁴ resists the essentialist concept⁹⁵ of God, saying that when God spoke to Moses, He did not say «I am

⁸⁹ In *Expositio Fidei*, see *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 2, 35-36; *NPNF* 9: 14. Adapted.

⁹⁰ St John of Damascus, *Writings*, 196, but changing «negation» to «relation». The Greek original is: Ὅταν δὲ τὴν πρὸς ἄλληλα σχέσιν τῶν ὑποστάσεων ἐννοήσω, οἶδα, ὅτι ἐστὶν ὁ πατὴρ ὑπερούσιος ἥλιος, πηγὴ ἀγαθότητος, ἄβυσσος οὐσίας, λόγου, σοφίας, δυνάμεως, φωτός, θεότητος, πηγὴ γεννητικὴ καὶ προβλητικὴ τοῦ ἐν αὐτῇ κρυφίου ἀγαθοῦ. See *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 2, 36.

⁹¹ See Γρηγορίου του Παλαμα, *ΣΥΓΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΑ. ΤΟΜΟΣ Γ'.* ΑΝΤΙΠΡΗΤΙΚΟΙ ΠΡΟΣ ΑΚΙΝΔΥΝΟΝ. ΠΡΟΛΟΓΙΖΕΙ ΠΑΝΑΓΙΩΤΗΣ Κ. ΧΡΗΣΤΟΥ (ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗ, 1970) 14-15, 251.

⁹² This extravagant phrase is indeed difficult to render in English. The wider context is: Καὶ γὰρ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν θέσιν καὶ ἀφαίρεισιν καθὰ καὶ μικρὸν ἀνωτέρω εἶρηται τὸ θεῖον κατ' οὐσίαν, οὐχ ὑπὲρ τὰ κτιστὰ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτῶν τῶν ὑπὲρ τὰ ὄντα ὄντων ὑπερουσίως ὑπερκείμενον, καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὑπερουσίου αὐθυπερουσίως ἀπείρως ὑπερέχων, κατὰ τὸν πολὺν τὰ θεῖα Μάξιμον. See *ibid*, 251.

⁹³ *Homily* 45, 3; *PG* 36. 625C.

⁹⁴ In the *Divine Names* V, 4-5. *PG* 3. 817C-820AB.

⁹⁵ John Meyendorff, emphasises Palamas's dictum that «the essence is necessarily being, but being is not necessarily essence» (See Παλαμα. *ΣΥΓΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΑ. ΤΟΜΟΣ Γ'.*, 31-32, 184) concludes that this is the very heart of Palamism, namely, that God can manifest himself in his very being and, at the

the essence», but «I am that I am» /hyha rva hyha (Exod. 3: 14). «It is not therefore He-that-is who comes from the essence, but it is the essence which comes from He-that-is, for He-that-is embraces in Himself all Being (τὸ εἶναι)».⁹⁶

The patristic authors as well as the medievals were interested in the revealed divine name not only *per se*, but insofar as it bridged the gap between the biblical revelation and the Greek concept of Being, constructing the so-called «onto-theology» which in recent decades received criticism that has been augmented by the deconstructionist ethos, appealing to postmodern sensitivities. Apparently, both Palamas and Aquinas have been liable for critique in light of Heidegger's grand narrative of the abandonment by Being. Yet, despite the deconstructionist tendencies with regard to onto-theology, the latter has not died out; on the contrary, it received a new impetus and is being pursued – albeit cautiously – with new dynamism.⁹⁷

Still more intriguing is Gregory Palamas's teaching on Θέωσις, for which he inevitably had to clarify terminology pertaining to the theology of the real participation of the human person in the Divine Being, inasmuch as human beings are called to partake vitally of the divine energy, rising to the rank of «sharers of the divine nature» (θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως), according to the words of the New Testament (2 Peter 1:4). Without embarking on a full discussion, it seems appropriate to first ask: what do we participate in – God's nature (φύσις), essence (οὐσία) or super-essence (ὑπερούσια) from Palamas's vantage point?

Apparently, Palamas insists that there is no question of approximating the New Testament term «nature» (φύσις) with the patristic notion of οὐσία;⁹⁸ all that the Apostle tried to express was the *reality* of our participation in the *very* life of God;⁹⁹ he speaks of the promises «given»; therefore by «nature» Peter means sanctifying and deifying grace, and certain Fathers have occasionally utilized the term in this way.¹⁰⁰ As Palamas himself puts it: «Theologians have been accustomed to label as nature and essence (φύσιν καὶ οὐσίαν) not only the nameless (ἄνόνημον) and hyper-onymous (ὑπερώνυμον) supressentiality (ὑπερουσιότητα) which passes beyond all names, but also the productive power of essence (οὐσιοποιὸν δύναμιν) and of all the natural attributes (τὰ φυσικῶς προσόντα) of God.»¹⁰¹

same time, He remains imparticipable in His essence. See Jean Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris, 1959) 292-93. This obviously raises more questions than it answers.

⁹⁶ *Triads*, III, 2, 12. Quoted in John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 213.

⁹⁷ See Paul Ricoeur and André La Cocque's *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Richard Kearney, «The God Who May Be», *Questioning God*, eds. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001) 153-185; Jean Greisch, «Idipsum: Divine Selfhood and the Postmodern Subject», *Questioning God*, John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001) 235-262.

⁹⁸ Palamas, speaking of deification, makes it clear that men cannot become «gods» except through grace (θέσει or χάριτι) and not through nature (φύσις). See Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, 248.

⁹⁹ See Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, 248.

¹⁰⁰ See Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, 248.

¹⁰¹ The Greek original is Οὐ γὰρ τὴν ἀνόνημον μόνην καὶ ὑπερώνυμον ὑπερουσιότητα ἐκείνην φύσιν καὶ οὐσίαν εἰώθασιν οἱ θεολόγοι καλεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν οὐσιοποιὸν δύναμιν καὶ τὰ φυσικῶς προσόντα τῷ θεῷ πάντα τοῦ τῆς φύσεως καὶ οὐσίας ἀξιοῦσι προσρήματος, καὶ ταῦτα μᾶλλον καὶ γὰρ ἀπὸ τούτων τὸ νόμα μεταφέρεται πρὸς ἐκείνην ὡς ὑπερβαίνουσαν ἅπαν τὸ διὰ φωνῆς σημαίνον. See Παλαμα, *ΣΥΓΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΑ*. ΤΟΜΟΣ Γ', 1-4, 130.

Since Palamas's theology employs the term energies/ἐνέργειαι to stand for operations which are distinct from, and even contrasted with, the essence/οὐσία, he is often prompted to ensure God's simplicity by reiterating that the essence is the cause of the energies. «Trihypostatic essence (τριυποστάτω οὐσία)», he writes, «is transcendent as the cause of natural energies and powers (τῶν φυσικῶν ἐνεργειῶν τε καὶ δυνάμεων); and in the trihypostatic essence there is one transcendent cause (ἐν τῷ ὑπερκείμενῳ ὡς αἴτιον), the Source (ἡ πηγαία) of the Godhead (θεότης), according to Denys».¹⁰² This statement stems from a divergent reading of Denys¹⁰³ who speaks of «transcendent essence/ὑπερκειμένη οὐσία» and «downward divinity/ὑφεμένη θεότης».¹⁰⁴ Meyendorff remarks that these expressions were taken by Barlaam in an Arian sense, according to Palamas, who clearly perceives this Dionysian language as the distinction between the essence and energies in the bosom of one unique God.¹⁰⁵ This has to be, of course, a very loose reading of Denys by Palamas.

The term ἐνέργεια had an extremely intricate history of development in patristic literature, particularly in view of the correlation with the term power/δύναμις. The trinitarian use of ἐνέργεια should be properly placed in the context of a causal sequence describing God's productive capacity οὐσία/δύναμις > ἐνέργεια > ἔργα.¹⁰⁶ In theology ἐνέργεια has been often used to describe the Incarnation¹⁰⁷, as God's self-revelation. It has also been used as a term to denote the will (βουλή)¹⁰⁸ of God and occasional¹⁰⁹ gifts of grace. Gregory of Nazianzus, for instance, uses ἐνέργεια in an accidental sense; for him ἐνέργεια is not contemporaneous with οὐσία. Exploring the status of the Holy Spirit, Nazianzen writes: «if He were an Accident (συμβέβηκεν), He would be an Activity

¹⁰² Palamas's own words are: 'Ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν ἐνεργειῶν τε καὶ δυνάμεων ἐν τῷ ὑπερκείμενῳ ὡς αἴτιον, ἡ τριυπόστατος οὐσία, κἀν τῇ τριυποστάτῳ οὐσίᾳ ἐν τῷ ὑπερκείμενῳ ὡς αἴτιον, ἀπὸ πηγαία» κατὰ τὸν μέγαν Διονύσιον «θεότης», ἐξ ἧς πρόεισι καὶ εἰς ἣν ἀναφέρεται «τὰ ὑπερούσια φῶτα» τῆς θεότητος. See Παλαμάς, *ΣΥΓΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΑ*. ΤΟΜΟΣ Γ', 31-32; 61-62.

¹⁰³ In *Letter to Gaius*, PG 3. 1068-1069.

¹⁰⁴ See Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, 300.

¹⁰⁵ See Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, 300.

¹⁰⁶ For an excellent study of the role of causal language in Trinitarian theology in the 4th century see Michel René Barnes, «The Background and Use of Eunomius' Causal Language», *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993) 217-236.

¹⁰⁷ St Clement in *Stromata* 5.55.3 and 7.7.7. See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 279.

¹⁰⁸ One example is Eunomius, who says: «Granted the effects [ἔργα] had a start, the action [ἐνέργεια] is not without beginning, and granted the effects come to an end, the action is not without ending. There is no need, therefore, to accept the half-baked opinion of outsiders and unite the action to the essence. On the contrary, we must believe that the action which is the truest and most befitting God is his will [βουλή]». See *Apology* 23:14-17. Quoted in Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology*, 191; For Gregory of Nyssa, the operation of will is correlated with power, not with the energy. Christ is, according to Gregory of Nyssa, the power and wisdom of God, hence His will suffices to effect the existing things because his will is power (δύναμις). *NPNF* 5:111. Cf. *Refutatio Confessionis Evnomii* (70.1-6); Χριστός δέ ἐστιν ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ δύναμις καὶ σοφία, δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο καὶ οὗ χωρὶς τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν οὐδέν, καθὼς Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖται. εἰ οὖν πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, ὁρατά τε καὶ ἀόρατα, ἐξαρκεῖ δὲ πρὸς τὴν τῶν ὄντων ὑπόστασιν ἡ βούλησις μόνη δύναμις γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ βούλησις, τὸν ἡμέτερον εἶπε λόγον ἐν ἀτονούσῃ τῇ λέξει Εὐνόμιος. See *Contra Eunomium Libri*, in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, ed. W. Jaeger, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill 1960) 341.

¹⁰⁹ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 279.

(ἐνέργεια) of God, for what else, or of whom else, could He be, for surely this is what most avoids composition? And if He is an Activity (εἰ ἐνέργεια), He will be effected, but will not effect and will cease to exist with the cessation of his production, for this is the kind of thing an activity is (τοιούτον γὰρ ἡ ἐνέργεια)».¹¹⁰ Therefore, Nazianzen rejects the term ἐνέργεια in relation to the Spirit, whereas other authors (Athanasius in *Contra Arianos*. 2,2) for instance, applied it to the Son as well as to the Holy Spirit.¹¹¹

Paradoxically, Gregory of Nyssa used the pair ἐνέργεια – δύναμις¹¹² in a non-Aristotelian sense¹¹³, whereas John Damascene had an almost Aristotelian understanding of energy as an active movement of nature (ἐνέργειά ἐστι φύσεως κίνησις δραστική), the power of essence (ἐνέργεια γὰρ ἐστιν ἡ φυσικὴ ἐκάστης οὐσίας δύναμις τε καὶ κίνησις) and the actualization of potency (Λέγεται πάλιν ἐνέργεια καὶ τὸ ἀποτελεσμα τῆς δυνάμεως).¹¹⁴

NEO-PALAMITES AND THE ESSENCE-ENERGIES DISTINCTION

Whilst almost all neo-Palamite theologians, such as Vasilii Krivosheine, Kiprian Kern, Georgii Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky and John Meyendorff, claim that Gregory Palamas stands in direct theological continuity with the previous patristic teaching on the essence-energies distinction – arguing that the embryo of Palamism can be traced to the Cappadocians, Denys and Maximus the Confessor – Sergii Bulgakov quite honestly acknowledges

¹¹⁰ *Theological Oration* 31:6; *NPNF* 7. Transtlation adapted. The original is εἰ μὲν οὖν συμβέβηκεν, ἐνέργεια τοῦτο ἂν εἴη θεοῦ. τί γὰρ ἕτερον, ἢ τίνας; τοῦτο γὰρ πως μᾶλλον καὶ φύγει σύνθεσιν. καὶ εἰ ἐνέργεια, ενεργηθήσεται δῆλον ὅτι, οὐκ ενεργήσῃ, καὶ ὁμοῦ τῷ ενεργηθῆναι παύσεται. τοιούτον γὰρ ἡ ἐνέργεια. πῶς οὖν ενεργεῖ, καὶ τότε λέγει, καὶ ἀφορίζει, καὶ λυπεῖται, καὶ παροξύνεται, καὶ ὅσα κινουμένου σαφῶς ἐστίν, οὐ κινήσεως; εἰ δὲ οὐσία τις, οὐ τῶν περὶ τὴν οὐσίαν, ἤτοι κτίσμα ὑποληφθήσεται, ἢ θεός. *PG* 36,140,36-38.

¹¹¹ See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 279. Origen speaks of the Spirit as «an energetic substance»; Eusebius applies a similar language to the Son. *Ibid*, 279.

¹¹² Gregory of Nyssa argues in *Against Eunomius* 3.4.34 that what is done by the Son is done by the Father since the Son is the Power of God (δύναμις τοῦ πατρὸς) by which the Father acts (ἐργάζεσθαι). See Χριστὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνη ... πάντα ταῦτα τοῦ πατρὸς ἐστὶν ἔργα, τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ ἔργα γενόμενα, καὶ οὕτως ἀληθεύει δι' ἀμφοτέρων ὁ λόγος καὶ πάντα τὸν πατέρα ἐργάζεσθαι λέγων καὶ χωρὶς τοῦ υἱοῦ γίνεσθαι τῶν ὄντων οὐδὲν ἢ γὰρ τῆς δυνάμεως ἐνέργεια εἰς τὸν οὐ ἐστὶν ἡ δύναμις τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔχει. ἐπεὶ οὖν δύναμις τοῦ πατρὸς ὁ υἱός, πάντα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐστὶν ἔργα. *Contra Eunomium Libri*, in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, vol. 2, 147.

¹¹³ See Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology*, 293.

¹¹⁴ The entire chapter 23, *librum* II – Περὶ ενεργείας – of the *Exposition of Faith* is dedicated to the energy theme: Καὶ πάλιν: Ἐνέργειά ἐστι φυσικὴ ἢ πάσης οὐσίας ἔμφυτος κίνησις. Ὅθεν δῆλον, ὅτι, ὧν ἡ οὐσία ἡ αὐτή, τούτων καὶ ἡ ἐνέργεια ἡ αὐτή, ὧν δὲ αἱ φύσεις διάφοροι, τούτων καὶ αἱ ἐνέργειαι διάφοροι: ἀμήχανον γὰρ οὐσίαν ἄμοιρον εἶναι φυσικῆς ενεργείας. Ἐνέργεια πάλιν ἐστὶ φυσικὴ ἢ δηλωτικὴ ἐκάστης οὐσίας δύναμις. Καὶ πάλιν: Ἐνέργειά ἐστι φυσικὴ καὶ πρώτη ἢ ἀεικίνητος δύναμις τῆς νοεράς ψυχῆς, τουτέστιν ὁ ἀεικίνητος αὐτῆς λόγος φυσικῶς ἐξ αὐτῆς αἰετῶς πηγαζόμενος. Ἐνέργειά ἐστι φυσικὴ ἢ ἐκάστης οὐσίας δύναμις τε καὶ κίνησις, ἧς χωρὶς μόνον τὸ μὴ ὄν. Λέγονται δὲ ἐνέργειαι καὶ αἱ πράξεις ὡς τὸ λαλεῖν, τὸ περιπατεῖν, τὸ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα. Καὶ τὰ πάθη δὲ τὰ φυσικὰ πολλάκις ἐνέργειαι λέγονται οἷον πείνα, δίψα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα. Λέγεται πάλιν ἐνέργεια καὶ τὸ ἀποτελεσμα τῆς δυνάμεως. Διττῶς δὲ λέγεται καὶ τὸ δυνάμει καὶ τὸ ενεργεῖα. *PG* 94, 949-952.

that this language generally, and the use of ἐνέργεια particularly, parallel the perplexed usage of the terms essence/οὐσία and person/ὑπόστασις prior to the clear distinction established by the Cappadocians.

Drifting from the inherited Solov'evian definition of Sophia¹¹⁵ as *all-unity* (*vseiedinstvo*), Bulgakov being prompted by Palamas, re-envisages Sophia as the energy of God in the sense of θεός, although not ὁ θεός. In his mature sophiology this will translate into a formula: «Σοφία so far as the hypostasis of the Father is concerned, connotes predominantly οὐσία – prior to its revelation as Σοφία».¹¹⁶ The Father's οὐσία as Love-Sophia reveals «the hidden essence of the Father; she is His genuine predicate, whose true Subject He is.»¹¹⁷ Consequently, the Father is *Sophia*, but *Sophia* is not the Father. Σοφία is *Deus revelatus* in relation to *Deus absconditus*¹¹⁸. Arguably, what Bulgakov is trying to express is this: the Father is Σοφία-οὐσία, but Σοφία is not ὑπερούσια.

The debate over Sophia (*Spor o Sofii*) will bring Bulgakov and his early opponent Florovsky, who opposed his allegedly illegitimate use of Palamite thought for the construction of his *sophiology*, to the unrecognised incoherencies within Palamite theology. Florovsky, like Lossky uncritically took for granted the continuity of the distinction between essence and energies from the Cappadocians all the way to Palamas. Florovsky, in one of his letters to Bulgakov, writes,

The very terminology – *ousia* and *energeia* has its beginning in Basil the Great. I see no difficulty in this terminology. Aristotle has nothing to do with this. [...] It is this that is «Energy», «Glory», «Sophia» – a non-hypostatic revelation of «*the same*» God. Not «essence», not «personhood», not «hypostasis». If you like, yes, – Divine *accidentia*...¹¹⁹

Bulgakov seems to be a lot more subtle in grasping the ambiguities of the essence-energies distinction retrospectively and the difficulty that Palamas had in grappling with patristic usages of the notion of ἐνέργεια. Palamas was even compelled to admit that the energies might be called συμβεβηκός πρὸς¹²⁰. Indeed, as I demonstrated in some detail, the term ἐνέργεια has been used inconsistently within patristic tradition. Gregory of Nazianzus, for instance, used ἐνέργεια in an accidental sense; for him ἐνέργεια is not contemporaneous with οὐσία, whereas Athanasius (in *Contra Arianos* 2,2) applied ἐνέργεια to the Son as well as to the Holy Spirit.

¹¹⁵ In a series of lectures *Chteniia o bogochelovechestve* [*Lectures on Godmanhood*] (1877-1881), Solov'ev, having introduced his ambiguous insights about Sophia, reminded his audience – Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, among others – about a personified Wisdom in Prov. 8 and Christ the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23-31). Moreover, Solov'ev remarked, that dedicating their most ancient cathedrals to St Sophia, «the substantial Wisdom of God», the Slavs gave to this idea a new articulation, unknown to the Greeks, who conflated *Sophia* with *Logos*. Or as he himself puts it: «Alongside with the individual, human image of the divine – the Mother of God and Son of God – the Slavs knew and loved under the name of Saint Sophia, the social embodiment of the Godhead in the Universal Church. And now we ought to give a rational expression to this idea, to the idea that was revealed to the religious sensibility of our ancestors.» See *La Russie et l'église*, SS 10:310.

¹¹⁶ Bulgakov, *Sophia, The Wisdom of God*, 41.

¹¹⁷ Bulgakov, *Utshitel'*, 419.

¹¹⁸ Bulgakov, *Ikona i Ikonopochitanie*, 51.

¹¹⁹ Pis'ma G. Florovskogo S. Bulgakovu i S. Tyshkevichu, Simvol 29, September 1993, 205-206.

¹²⁰ *Capita* 127; PG 150. 1209C.

Whilst Florovsky and later Lossky would use Palamas without actually subjecting his theology to a rigorous scrutiny, Bulgakov tends to be more sophisticated and aware of the ambiguities and inconsistencies related to Palamism. His reply to Florovsky's reads as follows:

I think that your «sophia-clasm» (*sofieborstvo*) leads you towards such dubious ideas as «accidentality (*aktsidentalnost*)» of the energies and the disguised splitting apart of the Holy Trinity («Glory» is thus Sophia, the entire O[ld] T[estament] testifies of this!), when you subdivide the relation of the created conscience to God as to the hypostasis of Christ and to hypostasis of the Spirit, and therefore inevitably employ either «philosophy of all-unity, [or] monism of Karsavian sort. Particularly, as far as St Gregory Palamas is concerned, there need to be a distinction between the hesychast aspect of his teaching, where the [monastic] feat¹²¹ (*podvig*) speaks itself and of itself and religious-philosophical formulation of the teaching on ἐνέργεια which is, if not directly insufficient, then, in any case needs clarification, at the very least, of the notions. Aristotelian ἐνέργεια is taken not in relation to δύναμις, but to οὐσία; therefore, we are having a pair of notions that are difficult to combine. This, of course, pertains to the form of theological expression, and not to the matter as such, however, terminological difficulties lead to obscurities unless they are overcome; this is a full analogy with the terms οὐσία and ὑπόστασις prior to the Cappadocians. The polemic with Palamas, particularly that he introduces polytheism (*mnogobozhie*), is fully analogous to the accusation of the *Sophiamachoi* (*sofiebertsev*) regarding the fourth hypostasis.¹²²

Being challenged by his mentor thus, Florovsky, would amend his views on *accidentality* of the energies two years later after Bulgakov's letter. He reformulates his argument in a more balanced way, saying that

The active Divine power does not separate itself from the Essence. This «procession» expresses an «ineffable distinction», which in no way disturbs the unity «that surpasses essence». The active Power of God is not the very «substance» of God, but *neither is it an «accident» [symbebêkos]*; because it is immutable and coeternal with God, it exists before creation and it reveals the creative will of God. In God there is not only essence, but also that which is not the essence, although it is not accident the Divine will and power His real, existential, essence-producing providence and authority. St. Gregory Palamas emphasises that any refusal to make a real distinction between the «essence» and «energy» erases and blurs the boundary between generation and creation both the former and the latter then appear to be acts of essence¹²³.

¹²¹ A literal translation of «podvig» would be «feat», but the English term has some exhibitionist connotations which are completely lacking in the slavic word. «Podvig» in the ascetic monastic literature denotes the spiritual combat, interior struggle and ascetic endeavors aiming at perfection of the Christian identity.

¹²² A letter of Bulgakov to Florovsky (20/VII.926. Paris) in Sergii Bulgakov, «S. N. Bulgakov, Pis'ma k G. V. Florovskomu [1923-1938]», ed. Ekaterina Evtukhova, *Issledovaniia po istorii russkoi mysli. Ezhegodnik 2001/2002*, ed. M. A. Kolerov (Moscow: Tri Kvadrata, 2002) 211-212.

¹²³ Georges Florovsky, «Tvar i Tvarnost» [1928], CW III, 69.

The necessity to demarcate the line – in the polemic with Bulgakov's sophiology – between the generation and creation, in Florovsky, is not properly balanced, as it seems to suggest that essence and energy are two acting agents within one Godhead. The difficulty that Florovsky faces brings him to another difficulty, namely, that the idea of the world is *eternal*, but not *co-eternal*, or «rather that the Divine idea of the world is eternal by another kind of eternity than the divine essence»¹²⁴. In this vein, the energies are eternal but not coeternal, in the sense that the Son and the Spirit are coeternal with the Father. It can be argued that in attempting to free the Trinity from the necessity of the world, Florovsky subjects the Trinity to an inward necessity; by making the substantial generation and procession subject to necessity, the notion of the *perichoresis* is undermined. Florovsky tents to ignore Bulgakov's subtle attempts to hold together the two antinomic poles, namely, to be able to «simultaneously unite, identify, and distinguish creation and God's life».¹²⁵

Summary

An attempt has been made to sketch the divergent terminological trends within Hellenistic philosophy which exerted influence upon, and was considerably transformed by, the subsequent patristic tradition of West and East and modern Orthodox theology.

The meaning of the Greek terms οὐσία and ἐνέργεια has been surveyed in their evolution from Greek philosophy, through the Cappadocians, John Damascene and Gregory Palamas, to neo-Palamites such as Sergii Bulgakov and Georgii Florovsky.

The legacies of Plato and Aristotle have been explored in light of the formation of Christian theology and particularly trinitarian theology that employed terms: οὐσία, ἐνέργεια, δύναμις and ὑπόστασις. It has been pointed out that in refining classical philosophical terminology for trinitarian theology, not only did Eastern and Western fathers have different positions, but also among the Easterners there were considerable discrepancies.

Broadly speaking we may therefore say that Plato approximates οὐσία and δύναμις, whereas for Aristotle it is οὐσία and ἐνέργεια; at the same time, Aristotle contrasts οὐσία with δύναμις, whereas Plato contrasts οὐσία and ἐνέργεια. Likewise, later in Platonist systems what a thing is (οὐσία), is usually contrasted with what it does (ἐνέργεια); whereas in Aristotelian systems, activity (ἐνέργεια) is what a thing is essentially (κατ' οὐσίαν). Hence energy (ἐνέργεια) is equated with essence (οὐσία).

The highly conventional cliché – that the Aristotelian interpretation of οὐσία – ἐνέργεια was eventually taken on board by medieval authors in the West, whereas the Platonist interpretation was employed in the East – is neither historically nor theologically accurate. Despite a certain degree of consistency among the fathers, the patristic thrust towards «baptising» classical philosophy tended to blur the binary conceptual interpretations. Gregory Nazianzen's use of ἐνέργεια owes something to Plato and Aristotle alike; John Damascene's interpretation of ἐνέργεια has Aristotelian connotations, as has been noted. The category of ἐνέργεια has been theologically multivalent, and even the Eastern fathers were by no means consistent in following either Platonist or Aristotelian usage. Therefore, standardization of the trinitarian vocabulary was, and remains, an unfulfilled dream. The phrase «God's essence/οὐσία τοῦ Θεοῦ» does not have the same meaning for Easterners as

¹²⁴ Florovsky, «Tvar i Tvornost» [1928], 56.

¹²⁵ Sergii Bulgakov, *Nevesta Agnusa* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1945) 52.

οὐσία/*substantia* does for Westerners in view of the Eastern notion of divine transcendence rendered through the ὑπερούσια language.

All patristic refinements and «baptisings» led, gradually, to a sophisticated variable trinitarian vocabulary that bore little resemblance to either classical Hellenistic usage or biblical parabolic narrative language. Various theological/ecclesial concerns also came into play. The previous language was tapped by Gregory Palamas to describe the new complexities (the οὐσία – ἐνέργεια distinction for humans to become gods through grace) of interrelated processes (divinization/θέωσις as a call to realise the *imago Dei*, mental prayer etc).

Given the preponderance of Aristotelian philosophy in the West, it should come as no surprise that Palamism generally, and the essence-energies distinction particularly, have often been misunderstood in view of the Aristotelian legacy of the potentiality-actuality distinction.

However, the attempts to divide East from West on the basis of the imagined role of Platonist and Aristotelian legacies as their respective metaphysics are no longer credible; regardless of whether these attempts stem from Lossky's, Florovsky's or Yannaras's adherents. Whatever East and West were, and are now, the impact on them is a lot more complicated than just Platonist East and Aristotelian West.

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