

WHAT DOES BYZANTINE PHILOSOPHY HAVE IN COMMON WITH ARISTOTLE? (THE CASE OF THEODORE ABŪ QURRAH)

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The title of this paper implies at least two assumptions: 1) that Theodore Abū Qurrah is a representative figure for Byzantine philosophy and 2) that some basic conceptual structures in Byzantine philosophy are dependent on Aristotle's thought. I hope to provide arguments for both these claims in this paper.

1. Preliminary remarks

Some notes concerning the historical grounds for the link between Theodore's philosophy and Aristotelian logic and ontology are here indispensable. Talking about the Aristotelian reception in Byzantium before the 11th c., researchers characterize the situation as "the hidden Aristotle". Indeed, the 11th c. is a renewal of the commentary tradition of Aristotle in Byzantium, who after the seventh century came out of the focus of commentators. But the lack of Byzantine commentaries in the first century of the period that we call Byzantine philosophy should not be interpreted as a complete lack of interest in Aristotelian philosophy. In the ninth century no less influential figure than Patriarch Photios of Constantinople draws the attention towards Aristotle, to whom he openly gives his preference. In his *Amphilochia* many issues, especially concerning the categories and the dialectics of genus and species, have Aristotelian answers.

Three centuries before Photios Aristotelian philosophy was integrated in the Christological speculation by Leontios of Byzantium (6th c.). It should be noted that for the Byzantines Christology is the highest possible level of exercising philosophical speculation, according to the programmatic account of Christian philosophy, drawn by Gregory the Theologian in his *Theological treatises*. Leontios adopts Aristotle's concept of "first essence" (πρώτη οὐσία), in order to explain the concept of ὑπόστασις, underling radically the ontological autonomy of the single thing. "Hypostasis" denotes not merely individualization of the common essence through characterizing features, but most of all – a separate and autonomous agent of essential being. Leontios associates Aristotle's

definition of the single thing as single existence of the essence with peculiar characteristics – καθ' ἑκάστων¹. The single thing is an ontological instance, realizing in itself one or more essences.

John Damascene is the next prominent figure in the history of interconnections between Byzantine philosophy and Aristotelian thought: he gives a philosophically systematic form to Maximos' speculation, using Aristotelian terminology, logic and basic ontological concepts. The dependence of Damascene's gnoseology and ontology on Aristotle, especially in the works *Introduction to Christian dogmas (Institutio elementaris)* and *Dialectica*, gives reason to researchers to speak of the Palestine monk as personification of a "return to Aristotle". As Mossman Rouesche puts it:

If we exclude Maximos, who was a theologian well versed in Aristotle but not an Aristotelian in the sense that the Alexandrian lecturers were, we discover that after Stephanos, the next autor, who is directly dependent on the tradition of Aristotelian reception appears over a century in the person of John Damascene². He uses a great deal of Aristotelian dialectics, ontology and anthropology, without being directly influenced. Damascene's pluralistic conception of science is rooted in Aristotelian epistemology; the coherence between the concept of categories and the essence-energy model also takes into account the principles of Aristotle's metaphysics.

2. Autor and context

Theodore Abū Qurrah lived perhaps between the years 755 and 830, although these dates are highly hypothetical. He was a bishop of Haran – a town in today's South-Eastern Turkey. Theodore worked in a markedly multicultural, multi-religious and multid denominational environment in Palestine and Syria. He was engaged in the polemic against the new religion of Mohammad, as well as in the disputes between the different trends in the Greek-speaking Christian community in the Near East, after this community had permanently left the realm of the Orthodox Christian Empire. We have

¹ Каприев, Г., Византийска философия, София 2011, 53.

² Rouesché, M., Byzantine Philosophical Texts of the Seventh Century, in: „Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik” 23 (1974), 65. It is true that by Maximos Confessor one can also find transformation of Aristotelian philosophical models but in this case the reception is more indirect and is mediated by the anti-Origenist tradition in Byzantine theology.

texts from him written in Greek, Arabic and Syrian. Some of his lost treatises are extant only in Georgian translations from the Middle ages. The entire *oeuvre* of Theodore is awaiting its proper edition.

In many of his text disputes and treatises, Theodore Abū Qurrah points out that he will use arguments only from reason, and not from any religious or denominational tradition. In such intellectual milieu the Aristotelian logic, as well as the Aristotelian concepts of species, individuals and categories are convenient instruments, due to their “weak metaphysical potential”: they are not necessarily bound to a certain ontological theory. Within the framework of such mental plurality the Aristotelian differentiation between the order of knowledge and the order of being is appropriate. It enables a philosophical discussion on theological positions, without accepting axioms, not shared by the opposite side.

The polemics against the Islam was perhaps an additional instigation for Theodore to deal with Aristotelian dialectics, especially if we take into consideration the interest in Aristotelian heritage on the part of the Islamic theologians. Theodore is addressed as an opponent in many Arabic anti-Christian commentaries, in which the use of the logic, mostly with Aristotelian background, is criticized³. At the same time, from the sixth century onwards the popularity of Aristotle among Muslim scholars was growing. The dynasty of the Abasyds that ruled in Damascus after the eighth century initiated a translation movement, which included translation of philosophical texts from Greek into Arabic. A central figure in this process was a Nestorian under the name Hunayn ibn Ishaq (808-873) who belonged to the circle of Theodore. The scholars belonging to this circle regularly wrote into Arabic⁴.

A prerequisite for the reception of Aristotle in the seventh century in particular is the distribution of logical *florilegia*, containing Aristotelian material and stemming

³ We have scarce but strong documentary evidence for Theodore’s special interest in Aristotelian philosophy. He translated into Arabic the pseudo-Aristotelian Treatise *De virtutibus Animae*. The translation was for one Tahis al-Husayn, governor of Mesopotamia between 813 and 820, who is known to have devoted himself to the study of philosophy in a place not far from Harran Lamoreaux, XVI.

⁴ Griffith, S., *The Church under the Shadow of the Mosque*. Princeton 2007, 119.

from the Alexandrian commentary tradition of Aristotle⁵. These *florilegia* were widely used by Christians of different unorthodox denominations as a tool for learning logic and dialectics. There are two other major factors for the interest of Theodore in the philosophy of Aristotle, which have to do with knowledge of Syrian and Arabic, alongside with the Greek and his affiliation to the intellectual traditions of these languages. An impressive number of Syrians were acquainted with the ideas of the Monophysite theology, which used Aristotelian logic, taught in Alexandria⁶. This process begins with John Philoponos, who was a student of the Neoplatonist Ammonius, son of Hermias in Alexandria.

2. Nature and hypostasis

One of the metaphysical problems Theodore Abū Qurrah deals with is the difference between “nature/essence” and “hypostasis”. We are not going to dwell on all doctrinal issues related to the Christological dogma, on which Theodore comments. Of interest will be only the ontological problems that bear relevance to Aristotle’s philosophy.

The two main Christological doctrines, with which Theodore argues, namely, Monophysitism and Nestorianism, have a common Aristotelian philosophical basis. According to Nestorios and his followers the two natures of Christ, the human and the divine, have two different individual substrates, i.e. two persons. The claim of Nestorians, according to which Christ possesses human and divine person or hypostasis, follows directly from the dogmatic axiom, asserting real and actual presence of humanity and divinity in Christ. The argumentation of the Monophysites goes in the opposite direction. From the Christian dogma “One of the Trinity became man” Monophysites infer, that Christ’s two natures merged into one, or, as Severus

⁵ The Alexandrian Aristotelian School, which is influenced by Neoplatonism, did not suffer from the measures of Justinian I of 529 against non-Christian teach of philosophy and law, remained open and had Christian students at least during the whole early Islamic period (Griffith, S. *Op. cit.*, 109): „But here the Christian students of philosophy, in contrast to ways of the Christian intellectuals of earlier generations, seem to have taken a different approach to their discipline; they did not so much co-opt traditional philosophy and its exercises into a new *paideia*, after the manner of Origen, Evagrius of Pontus, the Cappadocian Fathers, and other prominent Christians of an earlier era. Rather, respecting the integrity of the philosophical enterprise in its own right, their purpose was to use their expertise in its traditional disciplines, and particularly in Aristotelian logic, reasonably to defend the credibility of the truth claims of divine revelation and even to refine the expression of the religious claims themselves”.

⁶ Griffith, S., *Op. cit.*, 110.

from Antiochia puts it, into one composite nature⁷. The Monophysite doctrine is inspired by the intellectual circles in Alexandria, where an intensive Christian perception of Aristotle's *Organon* developed since the fourth century. The rise of Nestorianism is connected with Antiochia – another important intellectual centre for studying and commenting Aristotle in Late Antiquity⁸. Both of these doctrines follow the Aristotelian dialectical model, according to which the ontological principle of the separate being can be explained as a single manifestation of a common nature or essence, bearing a set of individual characteristics. Christ's existing as a separate and unified ontological entity is for the Monophysites a clear indication for his possessing one composite nature. Opposing this position, Leontios of Jerusalem establishes the 'composite hypostasis' (ὑπόστασις σύνθετος) – an ontological model based on Leontios' of Byzantium modification of Aristotle's concept of a single essence. For the Nestorians the fact that Christians believe in two natures in Christ presupposes that two individual substrates of these natures exist as no nature can have real being without individualization. No οὐσία exists only as secondary (δεύτερη οὐσία), i.e. without an individual substrate. Against this view Leontios of Byzantium introduces the concept of "enhypostatisation", which implies that in one hypostasis more than one nature can exist Theodore follows an already elaborated solution, but makes a special recourse to the Aristotelian theory of the common species.

Theodore is a proponent of the new ontological concept of hypostases elaborated by Leontios (*Contra severianum*), Maximos Confessor and John Damascene, but seems to move the discussion back to the Aristotelian terminology. Exactly this is the meaning of his differentiating of two modes of predication, namely logical and philosophical, in his treatise *Explanatio*⁹. According to this classification, terms such as "essence", "living creature", "human-being", as well as proper names, are philosophical terms. They denote single things and not multitudes. No hierarchy is implied between the classes, to which they belong. For instance, the term "living being" includes many different classes of things: man, horse, ox etc. Each of them encompasses a number of single

⁷ A consequence of this latter claim is that the human nature is absorbed by the divine, which possesses greater ontological might.

⁸ Öhler, K., *Die Dialektik des Johannes Damaskenos*, In: „Anthike Philosophie und byzantinisches Mittelalter“, München 1969, 283/343.

⁹ *Explanatio vocum quibus philosophi utuntur, et confutatio haeresis Acephalorum Severianorum, id est Jacobitarum* (Patrologiae cursus completus, ed. J. P. Migne, Paris 1857-1866, vol. 97, col. 1469C – 1492D) (further abbrev. MPG, vol, col.).

things. The ontological content of the term “living being” is not distributed among these classes and single things as in this case no differentiating criteria are applicable. This is why these terms are also transitive. “Living-being” can be correctly predicated of “man”, whereas “man” can be correctly predicated of Peter. Consequently, “living being” can be correctly predicated of Peter. In other words, Peter is a living-being to the same extent, to which he is a man. In the philosophical discourse single things are primary. All their terminological indications are identical in scope¹⁰.

Logical terms are indications of real beings, composed according to the common notions of Porphyry. The multitude of beings is distributed in a hierarchy of classes. In order to be included in philosophical statements, the single thing should be defined as a member either of a class of beings, e.g. of the essence as its species; or of a class of accidents. Theodore is occupied with this theoretical discussion in many places in his treatises, in which he tackles Christological questions. The most detailed account is to be found in the treatise *On the Union and the Incarnation of Christ*¹¹ with reference to the question how should Christ’s hypostasis be defined after his becoming human being. What is the ontological relevance of the predication of human and divine nature to the hypostasis of Christ, provided that “hypostasis” is a self-existent unique being that realizes the ontological capacity of the nature?

Theodore refers implicitly to the model of first and second essence, developed by Aristotle in his works *Categories* and *Topics*. Aristotle illustrates his concept of “first essence” by two types of relations: a) between the essence and the other qualities of the single thing and b) between the first and the second essence. Thus he formulates several principles of the ontology of the first essence. According to the first principle the essence is a holder of things (of qualities or of the second essence), but it is not held by anything; it has no substratum¹². This means that in itself the first essence cannot be defined. This principle has an important consequence: neither is the first essence contained in any other things, nor is it predicable for other substrates. This is why Theodore insists that no single thing can be predicated of the human nature of Christ, i.e. his human nature does not imply a human hypostasis¹³.

¹⁰ MPG 97, 1472A.

¹¹ *On the Union and the Incarnation of Christ*, in: Theodore Abū Qurrah, translated by Lamoreaux, J., Utah 2005, 103-108.

¹² Top I 5, 102b6-9. Cf. Rapp, C./ Corcilius, K., *Aristoteles Handbuch*, Stuttgart 2011, 335.

¹³ Theodore Abū Qurrah, *Op. cit.*, 103.

Another consequence of the rule formulated by Aristotle is that the essence, which is predicated of the first essence, has a secondary status; it is a “second essence”. Consequently, ‘man’ is predicated of the hypostasis of the Son, just as ‘divinity’ is predicated of him. To the objection that this would imply predication of “man” to divinity, Theodore refers to a consequence of the first principle, known as “Ihnärenzregel”: nature is predicated of a single thing, and never of another nature (φύσις κατὰ φύσεως).

The second principle of Aristotle refers to the identity of the first essence: it is a continual, i.e. it retains its identity when adopting qualities and varying them¹⁴. In that it differs from the second essence, which cannot be preserved when changing its characteristic qualities. This principle guarantees the validity of the claim of theologians that the Son accepted human nature, without divine nature becoming human – in contrast to the position of the Monophysites, who talk about one composite nature:

It was the same Son who became incarnate, and, for this reason, the divine nature is not said to have become incarnate, since it is not possible for “man” to be predicated of it. ... To speak by name of analogy the hypostasis of the eternal Son is like a river that receives two streams: the river is said to receive the streams, but neither of the streams receives the other¹⁵.

Theodore is very much aware of the fact that the explicative potential of these two Aristotelian principles is too weak to reveal the ontological dimensions of the incarnation. Christ not simply accepted the properties of human nature, but became man: ἡ ὑπόστασις ἐνανθρωπήσασα. Therefore, he offers another explanation, which pertains to the third Aristotelian principle, concerning the first essence and his conception of the essence as the ultimate substratum. According to Aristotle, unlike the accidents, adopted by the first essence, the second essence “makes apparent” (manifests) the first essence and indicates what the first essence is¹⁶. Theodore reverts this principle, claiming that:

¹⁴ Cat. 5, 4a 10-11 (quoted from: Aristotelis Opera, ed. Bekker, I., Berolini 1831, vol 1).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Cat. 5, 2b 30-31 (nt. 15).

whatever is referred secondarily from the hypostasis to the nature already existed potentially in the nature, from which nature the hypostasis inherited it in actuality”¹⁷.

For Theodore the second essence is not the common entity, corresponding to the essential definition of the single thing, but an ontological principle, which is dynamically realized by the unique hypostasis. This is why in the same chapter of the treatise Theodore speaks of the nature as being moved by the hypostasis.

At the same time, Theodore reproduces another Aristotelian theory, this of the potentiality of the species, actualized in the first essence as the ultimate substratum (this is the third Aristotelian principle concerning the first essence). This theory is developed by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* 5, 8 and is used, although modified, by Porphyrios. Theodore takes into consideration this context, but returns to the original Aristotelian conceptual structure:

The division of species, which is potentially in the genus but actually in the species, is rightly referred secondarily from the species to the genus: for instance, being rational is potentially in the genus “living being” but actually in the species human being; and thus, the genus “living being” is called “rational” secondarily, in that the species human being is rational. Again, consider the characteristic properties of the hypostasis¹⁸ of each human being. These are understood to be potentially in human nature, but actually in Socrates and Plato, and thus they are referred from the hypostasis of the nature. Now then from the things that were conveyed on account of the hypostatic union from the human mass to the hypostasis of God the Word, nothing whatsoever either potentially or actually, as in the uncreated, immaterial, and passionless divine nature... even though the Son was one of its hypostases¹⁹.

Theodore is aware that the terminological and propositional constructions can grasp being to a certain extent. He flatly renounces the claims of those, who insist on absolute congeniality between the cognitive concepts and reality²⁰. Theodore demonstrates that it is impossible to build a coherent model of the ontological status of a hypostasis through the logical terms, i.e. through the terms, based on the member-

¹⁷ Theodore Abū Qurrah, *Op. cit.*, 103.

¹⁸ Here the translation “individuating differences” of John Lamoreaux is misleading.

¹⁹ Theodore Abū Qurrah, *Op. cit.*, 105.

²⁰ For this reason he denies also the etymology as a proper way for knowledge.

class/individual-species relation. In his treatise *Explanation* he examines in detail the relation between human nature and human hypostasis. As a logical term, i.e. as an indication of a class of beings, human nature is incorporeal. At the same time every human being has a body, because the single realization of human nature presupposes a bodily form. As Theodore puts it, human species is not corporeal, but human essence is. Nevertheless, a human being is an individual not of the single nature, but of the common one. Theodore rejects the hypothesis that the concrete bodily form can be explained as a consequence of compilation of accidents. As general concepts, the accidents are also bodiless and are not principles of individuation. So, the ontological pillar of single natural existence is the irreproducible hypostatic countenance, for which no cognitive term can be coined. Theodore calls it: image of characteristic properties (τῶν ἰδιωμάτων ὁ χαρακτήρ)²¹. This image is not even a thing; it is a principle of hypostatic identity. It denotes neither the individual, nor any general quality, to which the individual pertains. It is an immanent boundary of hypostatic existence²².

It is obvious that the ontological principle at stake here is not an Aristotelian one; it is typical of Byzantine ontology. Theodore's own innovation is that he shifts the term "hypostasis" from the ontological realm to the logical one. The reference to the three Aristotelian principles is relevant only on this logical level of analysis.

3. Energy concept

The philosophical speculation of Theodore in his treatise *Disputatio de nomine Dei*²³ accentuates on some of the aspects of the term "energy", stressing the differences with Aristotle's concept. He elucidates the following paradox: although the name "God" is derived from divine energies, it does not denote merely the energies, but the nature of the One acting.

This formulation has a historical background, connected with the transformation of the neo-Platonic reading of Aristotle's theory of essential act in Christian philosophy. In *Metaphysics* Aristotle postulates two aspects of essential energy: movement and act.

²¹ MPG 97, 1488A.

²² MPG 97, 1488A. In the case of the Son of God this immanent boundary is revealed in that he becomes man, according to a relation to another human hypostasis, which identical to the relation he has with his Father, namely as Son.

²³ MPG 97, 1565C–1568C.

Plotinus differentiates between immanent act of the essence (ἐνέργεια τῆς οὐσίας), and transitive act (ἐνέργεια ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας)²⁴ or external act (ἐνέργεια πρὸς τὸ ἔξω)²⁵. Referring to Plato's *Republic*, Maximus underlines that the Good, which he identifies with the One, is beyond being, *epekeina ousias*. Only its external energy can be referred to as an essence. He re-interprets the Plotinian model of the two acts of the One according to the Christian ontology. Following the patristic tradition, he claims that the immanent activity of God, called by him τὰ περὶ θεοῦ, is borne by each of the divine hypostases, the latter being not products of the essence, but constituents of the essence itself. Thus the identity of the energetic manifestation of divinity in itself and *ad extra* is guaranteed not through one single hypostasis, but through the eternal hypostatic communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The thesis of Theodore is built in the context of the Aristotelian concept of the two meanings of “energy” from *Metaphysics*, taking into consideration Plotinus's interpretation and its correction by Maximus Confessor. Nature and energy are two different things (not two realities), the energy denoting the natural activity – both the immanent and the transient one. The fundamental identity of internal and external energy is guaranteed by the fact that the energy is “radiated” by a hypostasis of nature. But nature is predicated of the hypostasis and not of the energy. Theodore specifies that this philosophical explanation is applicable not only to the divine essence, but to all essences. For instance, the name “man” is derived from the energies of man, but denotes human essence and nature; the same is valid for angels and other names of essences. They are derived either from the energies of or from passions, which are also energies²⁶.

If the energy is co-eternal with God himself, what is the status of its results? If God and his energies were one at the same thing, this would mean that the results of the products of the energy are ontological results of divine being, i.e. the created world

²⁴ Bradshaw, D., *Aristotle East and West. Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*. New York 2004, 297. Plotin, *Enneads* V, 4, 2; 27-39 (further abbrev. as Plot. and quoted from: Plotin, *Enneads*, ed. Henry, P./ Schwyzer, H., III, Oxford, 1964)

²⁵ Plot. IV, 5, 7, 35 (nt. 24).

²⁶ MPG 97, 1568 B: Φύσις ἄρα ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς ὄνομα, φύσεώς ἐστι δηλωτικόν. Ὡσπερ γὰρ τὸ ἄνθρωπος ὄνομα, παρά τινος ἐνεργείας ἐστὶ σημαντικόν, ἀλλὰ τῆς φύσεως καὶ τῆς φύσεως καὶ τῆς οὐσίας ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ψυχὴ, καὶ ἄγγελος, καὶ σχεδὸν πάντα ὀνόματα τῶν οὐσιῶν, ἀπὸ τῆς ἐνεργείας ἢ τοῦ πάθους εἴρηται, οὐ μὴν ἐνέργειαν, ἢ πάθος σημαίνει, ἀλλ' οὐσίαν, καὶ φύσιν οὕτως μοι νόει καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ὀνόματος.

is co-eternal with God. This is impossible and impious²⁷. On the one hand, God's energy is a true and complete realization and manifestation of divine essence. On the other hand, the results of the energy do not bear the same properties as divine nature, they are determined in time. It should be noted here that when talking about the natural act Theodore uses the word ἐνέργεια in singular, even when understood as a passive capacity: πάθος. When talking about the causal consequence of energy, he uses a plural form: ἀποτελέσματα. The results are actualizations of the natural energy that are circumscribed and, consequently, multitudinous. The production of results is a special aspect of the energy ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας, which not only reveals the nature, but has some causal effect – producing things. This type of energy is not orientated towards the entelechy of the essence or nature, but towards something external and different from natural being. Characteristic of the result of divine energy is that it is contained in time and in space.

The categories “time” and “place”, to which all other categories are subsumed, are interpreted as characteristics of the energetic manifestation of beings. At stake is a re-interpretation of Aristotle's concept of categories and its subordination to another Aristotelian ontological model, namely essence (οὐσία) – capacity (δύναμις) –energy (ἐνέργεια). The tendency is available already in the philosophical works of John Damascene, especially in the works *Dialectica* (in connection to the category πρὸς τι) and *Expositio fidei* (in connection to the category που). In this respect, Theodore can be seen as a continuator of John, who provides a much more systematic account of this subordination.

The starting point for Theodore is that “time” and “place” are not of bodily nature and do not belong to the subject, of which they are predicated. Things are said to be *in* time and *in* place. But containing and contained are not identical. There is a distinction between the thing and its topological localization and chronological determination. For Theodore, to be in something means to be comprised by something.

In a fragment, written in Greek, Theodore discusses the question whether time is contained in time or not. He develops the argument that if time were contained in time, it would be a body, because only body can be contained *in* something²⁸. As it is not a body, it is not contained in time. But neither is time outside time, otherwise there would

²⁷ MPG 97, 1558A.

²⁸ MPG 97, 1585 B – C.

be a division in the category itself. This is the dialectical mode of treating time. Theodore offers also apodeictic, necessary reasoning concerning the phenomenon “time”. For him, just as it is for Aristotle, time is a relative term, denoting the *quantum* of movement. But this measure of movement is heterogeneous in respect of the body, which is moving, and in respect of the movement itself. It is a characteristic of movement, through the meditation of which it is in the body. One can draw the conclusion that time is an indication of realized capacity for passive action of a thing.

Theodore develops his concept of “place” by analogy with that of time. One of the necessary arguments of Abu Qurra for the thesis that time cannot be contained in time is the analogy with the category “place”. Place cannot be contained in place, because only a body can be a container of something, but “place” is not a body. Also for Aristotle place is not a body, but a determination of a limited thing: τὸ πέρασ ἐν τῷ πεπερασμένῳ. So “place” is localization, but this localization can be both of a single thing, and of a species of things. In his texts Theodore uses only the more concrete concept of place. Besides, he connects it more directly to the corporeal aspect of being, but in a specific way.

Theodore leads the discussions on the term “place”, mainly in his Arabic texts, where he tries to demonstrate that there is no contradiction between the omnipresence of God and his dwelling in a man:

Let no one deny that the eternal Son, along with the Father and the Spirit, is in every place and at the same time that he, apart from the Father and the Spirit, differentiated is activity ... according to the different capacities of the soul and body and every other human member²⁹.

“Place” is predicated not of divine essence itself, but of its activity, which is not contained, but indicated in a bodily form. “Divine place” does not denote the bodily substrate of divine activity, but the true presence of divine activity in the contingent. Theodore supports with examples of the Old Testament³⁰. The paradigm of divine place on earth is Christ himself, who is a “place” of divine nature. One of the main examples, on which Theodore dwells in his text *On our salvation*, is God sitting on a throne of God, in order to be praised by the cherubim. The examples indicate that “place” is an

²⁹ *On the Death of Christ*, in: Theodore Abū Qurrah, translated by John C. Lamoreaux, Provo, Utah 2005, 124.

³⁰ “Again, when he appeared to Moses in the bush [Exod. 3:2], he was not seen in any other place as he was seen by Moses in the bush. Yet, we all know that he was both in the bush and equally in other places during the time that he was enclosed in the bush” (*Ibid.*).

indication of activity, the activity of presence. The incorporeal presence of God in a place has a phenomenological function: it is a focus for God to be prayed and glorified, i.e. to step in relations with men. From this perspective the analogy of place and time receives a special relevance: at stake are two types of manifestation of natural activity: movement and existential energy. Time is an indication of the movement of a thing, while place – an indication of its presence, understood as a natural activity, according to the Aristotelian meaning.

But in so matching the Aristotelian concepts of “time”, “place” and “energy” Theodore introduces also a new ontological agent of realizing the energy; it is not any more the Aristotelian πρώτη οὐσία, but the hypostasis. The difference becomes clear from Theodore’s explanation how divine natural activity dwells in the hypostasis of Christ. The analogy between the throne of God in heaven and the body of Jesus Christ (“this body became for us analogous to the throne in heaven”) does not indicate to a bodily substratum, which the Son chose to manifest his divine activity. This will be exactly the heresy of Nestorianism, which for Abu Qurrha is an undue projection of Aristotelian ontology in the field of Christian dogmas, as already explained. The bodily presence of God in a human body is realized not through a bodily substratum, but through the hypostasis of the Son. This means that the appearance of God, i.e. of his natural activity in place, is not a manifestation merely of his nature, which is “uncontained, uncircumscribed and without limit”³¹, but a revelation of a personal, hypostatic countenance. This countenance is not an instrument for localization of the divine activity, but an eternal form of existence of divine nature. Following John Damascene Theodore, stresses that Jesus is born through the participation of the entire Trinity and that the throne, spoken of in The Old Testament, is an image of the incarnation. The manifestation of this activity did not take place automatically and constantly, but at the discretion of the Son as its hypostatic agent:

the eternal Son held back the glory of his divinity and did not manifest it in his body... he let human actions such as eating, drinking, sleeping and so on be manifested in it...³².

³¹ *On Our Salvation*, in: Theodore Abū Qurrah, translated by Lamoreaux, J., Provo, Utah 2005, 135.

³² *Ibid.*, 138.

There is here some inhomogeneity of presence, which is of different kind from the inhomogeneity of time. As David Bradshaw notices commenting the Aristotelian concept of time in *Physics*:

A movement is “in time” because it exhibits temporal inhomogeneity; hence, as Aristotle remarks, the very existence of something that is “in time” implies that time exists (221a24–25)³³.

As we have demonstrated, Theodore has in mind this concept and he wants to develop a contrary model, concerning the existential energy, connecting in with the category “place”.

For Aristotle the idea that energy is of an essence implies that the energy is teleologically determined by the essence. The energy is a realization of a natural capacity – existential and causal. In this sense energy cannot be potentiated, it does not have more or less; it is always complete. Theodore demonstrates that the completeness of essential manifestation has two components – stability of the essential principle and dynamism of different characteristics of existence. The ontological instance that rules this dynamism is not the essence but the hypostasis. The hypostasis is the source of the existential disposition, through which essence is realized.

4. Anthropology

In his work *Theologus Autodidacticus*, in which he tries to develop a criterion for differentiating the true religion, he also comments compares the extent, to which the promises of the different religion for felicity meet the potential of human nature. His perspective is that only Christianity offers goods, proper to human nature, goods that provide perfect fulfillment of the complex of natural desires. He does not apply the Platonic hierarchisation of desires according to a normative scheme, based on the opposition “corporeal-spiritual”, as it is common in Christian literature at that time, but uses Aristotle’s ergon-argument.

The prerequisite of Aristotle’s ergon-argument is that the Good of each being is realized only when its ontological goal, or its function, is achieved. Aristotle uses this principle as a normative criterion for assessing human acts³⁴. Human ἔργον consists in

³³ Bradshaw, *Op. cit.*, 11.

³⁴ EN II 5, 1097b27-28. (*Ethica nicomachea*, quoted from: *Aristotelis Opera*, ed. Bekker, I., Berolini 1845).

the optimal realization of the capacity for knowledge, as it is the one peculiar of man. This is the good of the man as such.

For Abu Qurra there are different levels of natural good, some of them exceeding the natural boundaries and having to do with immortality and eternal life:

If our nature obtains these [the natural goods in narrow sense – S.M.], it enjoys felicity; if it does not, it is wretched. In the same manner our mind recognizes that there are other desires implanted in our nature. These are yet not of this world. They represent rather perfect felicity and consummate longing ... to live forever and not to die, ... a body that cannot be touched by infirmity, injury, change or corruption³⁵.

He does not speak of rejection of the created goods or hierarchisation of the natural desires. All natural capacities – all examples that he gives pertain to both bodily and intellectual desires – are realized optimally with a supernatural ergon. This supernatural ergon is seen as impregnation with the essential activity of divine essence. It leads to man's becoming God not essentially, but according to the energy:

He generously grants himself to us, and we dwell with him and touch him, partaking of his sweetness and felicity through these desires. It is for these that our souls long... Through him, we become gods and enjoy him forever... Accordingly the summit of our nature's felicity is that we become gods and enjoy God. We do not mean to suggest that we shall change from our human nature and become gods by nature. This is impossible. It is not right for the created to become uncreated; rather, we remain as we were in our human nature, while coming to contain God's nature and through it becoming gods – without change³⁶.

Important to note is that the criteria for assessing the natural desires are not doctrinally based, but have a universal ontological validity. The Aristotelian model of natural normativity serves as "geltungstheoretisches Kriterium" for discerning the true religion. Unprecedented is also the insertion of the energy-concept in such theoretical discussion, which validates fundamental theological criteria.

5. Conclusion

³⁵ *Theologus Autodidacticus* Lamoreaux, in: Theodore Abū Qurrah, translated by John C. Lamoreaux. Brigham Young University Press. Provo, Utah 2005, 16.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 17. Here follows the example of iron heated in fire, stemming from Gregory of Nyssa.

This research has reached conclusions concerning Theodore's view on universals, his concept of hypostasis and his interpretation of Aristotle's Categories. Theodor reverts the Aristotelian hierarchy of the first and the second essence in order to show that the hypostasis is an actualization of the essence. A major outcome of Theodore's reading of Aristotle's philosophy is the conclusion that it is not appropriate for defining the ontological concept of the term 'hypostasis' in Christian philosophy. He even demonstrates that no term is appropriate to define the unique. Through subtle usage of the Aristotelian concept of categories he coins new argument, supporting the thesis about the economic implications of the metaphysical structure – i.e. the concept, according to which there is a deep structural connection between the ontological foundation of reality and divine revelation.

The task of this text was not to position Theodore in the tradition of Aristotle's reception, but to study the congeniality of this Byzantine philosopher with Aristotelian thought. The usage of Aristotle by Theodore is very creative, the major outcome of it being the terminological precision with which this author formulates the concepts of enhypostatisation and of essential energy, which are characteristic of Byzantine philosophy.