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STETHATOS' PARADISE
IN PSELLOS' EKPHRASIS OF MT OLYMPOS
(ORAT. MIN. 36 LITTLEWOOD)

Psellos wrote four short orations describing the beauty of nature of Mt. Olympos where he retired as a monk in 1055. His description reveals his opinions about monasticism and especially the relation between nature and the divine. Therefore they allow one to understand his criticism of Keroularios and Xiphilinos and his endorsement of the ideas of Nicetas Stethatos as expressed in the *Contemplation of Paradise*.

Keywords: φυσικὴ θεωρία, Michael Psellos, Niketas Stethatos, Michael Keroularios, John Xiphilinos, Mount Olympos (Bithynia), Monasticism.

Михаилом Пселлом были написаны четыре короткие речи, посвященных описанию красот природы горы Олимпа, где он постригся в монахи в 1055 г. В этих описаниях обнаруживаются взгляды Пселла на монашество и, в особенности, на соотношение природного и Божественного. Как следствие, эти речи позволяют понять критику Пселла в адрес патриархов Михаила Кирулария и Иоанна Ксифилина, а также его приверженность взглядам Никиты Стифата, выраженных в “Созерцании рая”.

Ключевые слова: φυσικὴ θεωρία, Михаил Пселл, Никита Стифат, Михаил Кируларий, Иоанн Ксифилин, гора Олимп (Вифиния), монашество.

The four monastic orations on Mount Olympos written by Michael Psellos (1018–1081?)¹ are a masterpiece of concision and clarity and delineate with care and precision his views on contemporary mysticism. They endorse contemplation of creation (φυσικὴ θεωρία) as a step towards the divine as expressed specifically by Niketas Stethatos². Moreover, they allow one to establish Psellos' monastic ideal as well as defining three types of monastic life possible at the time. According to Paul Moore's *Iter Psellianum*³ these four works have never been the object

¹ Fundamental monographs dedicated exclusively to the figure of Psellos remain the following: *Безобразов П.* Византийский писатель и государственный деятель. СПб., 1890; *Любарский Я.Н.* Михаил Пселл: личность и творчество // *Две книги о Михаиле Пселле.* М., 2001. For the period 1025–1081 specifically as a context to Psellos' writings and ultimately the inspiration for the previous two works see *Скабаланович Н.А.* Византийское государство и Церковь в XI веке, от смерти Василия II Болгароборцы до воцарения Алексея I Комнина. СПб., 1884 (переизд.: СПб., 2004).

² Some of the recent works on Stethatos are the following: *Krausmüller D.* Private as communal: Niketas Stethatos's Hypotyposis for Stoudios, and patterns of worship in eleventh-century Byzantine monasteries // *Work and worship at the Theotokos Evergetis 1050–1200* / Ed. M. Mullett, A. Kirby. Belfast, 1997. P. 309–328; *Ким Н.* Рай и человек: Наследие преподобного Никиты Стифата. СПб., 2003. Pavel Ermilov has kindly pointed out the following edition: *Первое обличительное слово Никиты Стифата против армянской ереси / Публ. греч. текста, пер., вступит. ст. и примеч. игум. Дионисия (Шленова), публикация грузинского текста М. А. Рапава // Богословский вестник.* 2008. № 7. С. 39–103.

³ *Moore P.* *Iter Psellianum.* Toronto, 2005. P. 357 [930].

of a single article, though they were first edited by F. Creuzer in 1823⁴. They were written when Psellos retired to Mount Olympos in the year 1054, following the example of John Xiphilinos (ca.1010–1075)⁵. The mountain was the seat of innumerable monasteries and had also been an important seat of iconodule worship during the iconoclast period⁶. Psellos seems to have connections with a number of the holy mountain's monasteries⁷, and it seems probable that he retired to the Monastery of the Beautiful Source (Ὠραία Πηγῆ)⁸. Retirement to Mount Olympos could mean political exile as had happened earlier in the century⁹, and his retirement may have also been political¹⁰. Psellos became a monk at the end of 1054 before Constantine IX Monomachos died¹¹, he left for Mount Olympos

⁴ The edition employed is that of *Littlewood A. Michaelis Pselli Oratoria Minora*. Leipzig, 1985. P. 136–137. The edition was reviewed by R. Anastasi (Orpheus. 1987. Vol. 8. P. 175–190), P.K. Georgountzos (Πλάτων. 1986. T. 38. P. 198–199), J. Irigoien (Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé. 1985. Vol. 4. P. 310), A. Leroy Molinghen (L'Antiquité Classique. 1987. Vol. 56. P. 495), *Places E. des*. Chronique de la philosophie religieuse des Grecs (1983–1985) // Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé. 1985. Vol. 4. P. 400; *Schamp J. Michel Psellos à la fin du XX^e siècle: état des éditions // L'Antiquité classique*. 1997. Vol. 66. P. 353–354.

⁵ ἐκείνῳ δὲ συγγενόμενος καὶ πολλοὺς κατασπείσας δακρύων κρουνοὺς, κατήλιπσα ὡς αὐτίκα ἐψόμενος· καὶ ὁ μὲν ἕτερον αὐθις πλάσιν σκηψάμενος, ὡς ὁμοῦ τε τὸ σχῆμα ἐπενδυθεῖη καὶ τετυχηκοὶ θειοτέρως ἰάσεως, οὐδὲν ἀναμείνας εὐθὺς ἀπαίρει πρὸς τὸ θεῖον Ὅρος τὸν Ὀλυμπον. 6.197 Ἐγὼ δὲ παράδειγμα ἐκείνον θέμενος τῆς ὁμοίας μεταποιήσεως, ἥπατός τε πόνον εὐθὺς σκῆπτομαι καὶ καρδιαγλιαν δεινὴν, τὸ τε φρονοῦν μεταπλάττω, καὶ ὡς ἐφρονηκόσι τοῖς πράγμασι τῆ ψυχῇ διαλεγόμενος ἦν, καὶ τὴν φωνὴν ἐπέχων τοῖς δακτύλοις τὴν τῶν τριχῶν τομὴν ἐσχημάτιζον. (*Psellos Chronographia* 6.196.3–197.6 Impellizzeri in: *Impellizzeri S. Imperatori di Bisanzio*. Milano, 1984). On the relation between Psellos and Xiphilinos see *Любарский Я.Н. Михаил Пселл...* P. 248–257, though he only briefly and incidentally mentions Mount Olympos.

⁶ *Talbot A.-M. Olympus Mount // ODB*. Vol. 3. Oxford, 1991. P. 1525.

⁷ He had control over the following monasteries on Mount Olympos: Medikion (τοῦ Μηδικίου ἤδη δεσπόζομεν. Psellos Letters: *Σάθας Κ. Μεσαιωνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη*. T. 5. Βενετία, 1874. Σ. 29.264, Laura of megala kellia (τῆς δὲ λαύρας τῶν Κελλίων δωθεῖσας μοι. Psellos Letters: Kurtz–Drexel. Michaelis Pselli Scripta Minora. Milan, 1941. Vol. II. P. 273, 318.2–3; (Σάθας). Σ. 36.270; Kathara, Medikion and new Megala Kellia (Psellos Letters. P. 77.311, Sathas). For a survey of these monasteries most recently see: *Auzepy M.-F. Campagne de prospection 2005 de la mission monastères byzantins de la côte sud de la Marmara // Anatolica Antiqua*. 2006. Vol. 14. P. 369–398; *Geyer B., Lefort J. La Bithynie au Moyen Age*. Paris, 2003 (Réalités byzantines, 9).

⁸ *Gautier P. Eloge funèbre de Nicolas de la Belle Source par Michel Psellos moine à l'Olympe // Βυζαντινά*. 1974. T. 6. P. 19. Other references to this monastery are (Kurtz–Drexel): P. 177, 199.17, 228, 272.7.

⁹ τότε καὶ Συμεὼν πρωτοβεστιαρίος, ὁ τῶν θεραπόντων τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς Κωνσταντίνου, ὅτι μὴ ἤρσκετο τοῖς δρωμένοις, ἀλλὰ τὴν εἰς τὸν Δαλασσηνὸν ἀδικίαν ἐπεβοᾶτο καὶ τὴν τῶν ὄρκων ἀθέτησιν τῶν βασιλείων, διώκεται καὶ τῆς πόλεως, κὰν τῷ Ὀλύμπῳ γενόμενος τὴν κοσμηκὴν ἀπέθετο τριχᾶ, καὶ εἰς ἐν τῷ παρ' αὐτοῦ νεουρηθέντι μοναστηρίῳ (*Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum / Rec. I. Thurn. Berolini; Novi Eboraci, 1973 (CFHB, 5)*. Mich. 4.5.28–32. P. 396). In the Prosopography of the Byzantine World (www.pbw.kcl.ac.uk) he is identified as Symeon (102).

¹⁰ Psellos implies that the cause was connected with politics: γίνεται δ' οὖν ἡμῖν ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ ταύτης πρωταίτιος, τὸν ἀρχικὸν ἐκείνος ἐπὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἐπιβεβηκόσι τροχὸν κινῶν καὶ τοὺς γὰρ πλείονας ἀποκρημνίζων καὶ κατασπών· ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ τῷ κύκλῳ ἐνεβεβήκειμεν, ἱκανῶς διεπτόησε μήπως ἐπὶ μάλιστα διασεισας τὴν ἴτυν καὶ ἡμᾶς ἀπορράξει ἐκείθεν, οὐ πάνυ ἀπρὶξ ἐχομένους τῆς ἀντυγος. (*Psellos Chronographia* 6.193.7–12, Impellizzeri).

¹¹ ἐπεὶ πρὸ βραχέος τινὸς καιροῦ τῆς τοῦ Μονομάχου ἀποβιώσεως τὸ θεῖον ἐνεδύθη σχῆμα (Psellos, Chronographia, 6. Theod. 10.3–4 Impellizzeri). The Chronology of Psellos' monastic retreat is described in: *Gautier P. Eloge funèbre de Nicolas de la Belle Source par Michel Psellos Moine à l'Olympe // Βυζαντινά*. 1974. T. 6. P. 15–22.

shortly afterwards¹². He stayed there a short time, less than a year¹³, when he was recalled by the empress Theodora, probably during the second half of 1055¹⁴.

Psellos' monastic retreat was a time also for meditation and writing as is witnessed by four short orations. They argue that the spiritual dimension of Mount Olympos is also due to its physical beauty, its fruits, trees and animals:

οὐ τὰ κρείττω δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ πρὸς αἴσθησιν τούτῳ πάσης ἄλλης ἡδῖω
τέρψεώς τε καὶ χάριτος – ὑδάτων πηγαὶ καθαραὶ, πόαι μαλακαὶ, εὐθαλεῖς
δένδρων τρυφαί, ὀρνίθων ῥοδαί, εὐπνοὺς ἀήρ, ἡλίου βολαὶ διαυγεῖς, ὠρῶν
συμμετρία, πνεῦμα μὴ λυποῦν (*Psellos. Orat. Min. 36.16–19, Littlewood*).

The mountain is most pleasant, not only for the moral improvement, but also for perception of all other enjoyment and grace – the pure sources of waters, the soft grass, the luxuriant bloom of trees, the bird songs, the sweet air, the bright sunrays, the harmony of the seasons, the harmless wind.

For this reason they enter clearly into the category of an *ekphrasis* of a place¹⁵. However they are mainly theological statements representing Psellos' specific view on monasticism.

The main aim of Psellos' short treatises is to endorse the theory of natural contemplation (φυσικὴ θεωρία). He is interested in pointing out that nature, and specifically Mount Olympos, can make man closer to God¹⁶. He is quick to add that the proximity to the divine is not simply due to the spiritual nourishment one can find and receive, but also the physical¹⁷:

ὃ τε καρπὸς αὐτῷ ξύμπας τῶν ἀρετῶν οὐκ ἐδώδιμος μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ
τρόφιμος καὶ πιαίνων τὸν νοῦν τῷ τε γλυκεῖ καὶ ζωηφόρῳ τοῦ πνεύματος
(*Psellos. Orat. Min. 36.14–16, Littlewood*).

Each fruit of virtues is not only edible, but also nourishing and feeds the intellect by the sweetness and life bearing quality of the spirit.

The idea that the physical beauty of Olympos is important, but is not limited to fauna and flora, music is also included¹⁸. These two elements of nature and

¹² ἐγὼ δὲ ἐξ ἡμισείας ἐδόκουν τῷ φίλῳ προστίθεσθαι, κοινωνήσας μὲν ἐκεῖνῳ τοῦ σχήματος, πόρρω δὲ καθιστάμενος· καὶ ἦν ἂν μέχρι παντός ἐν μεθορίῳ πόθου καὶ τυραννίδος, εἰ μὴ τὸν ἐξ ἀγάπης με τυραννοῦντα μετήνεγκεν εἰς ἑαυτὸν ὁ θεός. *Psellos, Epitaph for John Xiphilinos in: Σάθας. Μεσαιωνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη. Τ. 4. Σ. 441.*

¹³ The prologue of poem 21 refers to the criticism that a monk on Olympus had made to Psellos saying that he did not manage to stay in a monastery for a whole year. Τοῦ Σαββαΐτου πρὸς τὸν Ψελλόν | Ὀλυμπον οὐκ ἦνεγκας, οὐδὲ κἂν χρόνον· | οὐ γὰρ παρήσαν αἱ θεαὶ σου, Ζεῦ πάτερ (*Michaelis Pselli poemata / Rec. L.G. Westerink. Leipzig, 1992. Prol. 21.1–3*).

¹⁴ ἐπεὶ δὲ ἡ Θεοδώρα τοῦ κράτους ἐπέλιπτο, εὐθύς με μετακαλεσαμένη ἐκτραγωδεῖ μὲν καὶ ἃ παρὰ τοῦ γαμβροῦ πεπόνθει (*Psellos, Chronographia, 6. Theod. 13.4–6 Impellizzeri*).

¹⁵ One may see Hermogenes' *Progymnasma* (*Hermogenes opera / Ed. H. Rabe. Leipzig 1913. C. 10; Arphthonii progymnasmata / Ed. H. Rabe. Leipzig 1926. 10.36.21–10.41.11*). The main work on *ekphrasis* is now: *Webb R. Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice. Farnham; Burlington, 2009.*

¹⁶ τὸ δέ γε θεῖον τοῦτο καὶ πάμφορον ὄρος ἀνάγει μὲν ἀνθρώπους θεῶ, κατάγει δὲ ἀνθρώποις θεόν (*Psellos. Orat. Min. 36.1–12, Littlewood*).

¹⁷ καὶ σε κράμα πεποίηκεν ὁ θεός τῆς διπλῆς ἀρετῆς, ὅση περὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ὅση περὶ τὴν γῆν· (*Psellos. Orat. Min. 36.29–30, Littlewood*).

¹⁸ οἷον μὲν γὰρ σοι τοῦ Δαυὶδ τὸ ψαλτήριον δέκα φθόγγοις ἐντεταμένον καὶ τὰς ἰσαριθμούς αἰσθήσεις τῆς τε ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος ἀντὶ χορδῶν προβαλλόμενον καὶ ἕκαστον ἐκάστῳ καὶ πάντα πρὸς ἄλληλα ποιοῦν σύμφωνα· οἷα δὲ ἡ τῆς ἀηδόνης ἡχώ. (*Psellos. Orat. Min. 36.30–33, Littlewood*).

music being emphasized, direct one's attention to the aesthetic side of life. The perception of vision, touch, taste, smell, and sound are all elevated to a high rank in the four speeches dedicated to Mount Olympos:

ὡς παντοδαπὸς εἶ οὐ τὰς θειοτέρας μόνον χάριτας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ἀνθρωπικὰς καὶ θελγούσας τὴν αἴσθησιν (*Psellos. Orat. Min. 36.27–29, Littlewood*).

You are rich not only in divine graces, but also in human ones and those which enchant perception.

The expression “which enchant perception”, seems without consequence but is actually a statement of purpose. Firstly it defines perception as passive¹⁹. This is important since it states that perception is a recipient of divine action. Secondly it associates a non rational element by referring to enchanting. This choice of words is not accidental. The passive part of the soul is that which is irrational²⁰. Therefore the expression “enchants” is referring an affectation to the non rational part of the soul. Thus perception is important to be in relation with the divine. By contemplating nature one is contemplating elements which are in connection with the divine. This doctrine is known as contemplation of nature (φυσικὴ θεωρία) and is most clearly explained and defended by Maximus the Confessor (7th century):

Τὴν ὀρωμένην ἅπασαν φύσιν ὁ θεὸς ὑποστήσας, οὐκ ἀφήκεν αὐτὴν κατὰ μόνην κινεῖσθαι τὴν αἴσθησιν, ἀλλ' ἐγκατέσπειρεν ἐκάστῳ τῶν αὐτὴν συμπληροῦντων εἰδῶν καὶ σοφίας λόγους πνευματικούς καὶ ἀγωγῆς ἀστείας τρόπους, ὥστε μὴ μόνον διὰ τῶν σιγῶντων κτισμάτων μεγαλοφώνως κηρύττεσθαι τὸν ποιητὴν τῶν κτισμάτων τοῖς τῶν γεγονότων μηνυόμενον λόγοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, τοῖς κατὰ φύσιν τῶν ὀρωμένων θεσμοῖς τε καὶ τρόποις παιδαγωγούμενον, εὐ μαρῶς τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἄγουσαν ὁδὸν τῆς δικαιοσύνης εὐρεῖν (*Maximi confessoris quaestiones ad Thalassium / Ed. C. Laga and C. Steel. Brepols, 1980. 1.51.7–17*).

Since God established the whole of visible nature, he did not let it move only according to perception, but also interspersed in each of the forms completing it with spiritual words of wisdom and manners of civil behaviour, so as to announce loudly, through silent creatures, the maker of creatures by the words of those passed, but also to announce that man was educated with the natural laws and manner of what is visible, in order to find easily the path of justice which leads to God.

The point presented by Maximus is that there are rational elements (λόγοι) within nature which one may contemplate and which by analogy help one to approach God²¹. This doctrine also explains why Psellos refers to rational natures (λογικαῖς φύσεσι) in his first oration for Olympos:

ὁ δὲ λογικαῖς κατακεκόσμηται φύσεσι προκοπούσαις ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς θεὸν ἀναβαινούσαις διὰ τῆς τῶν ἀρετῶν κλίμακος. (*Psellos. Orat. Min. 36.5–7, Littlewood*).

¹⁹ On the question there is an entire essay Psellos (*Michael Psellos. Philosophica Minora // Ed. D. O'Meara. Vol. II. Leipzig, 1989. II, 73*).

²⁰ Τὸ ἄλογον μέρος τῆς ψυχῆς παθητικὸν καλεῖται καὶ ὀρεκτικόν (*Psellos. Phil. Min. II.27.28, O'Meara*).

²¹ For an introduction to the theory of φυσικὴ θεωρία see: *Епифанович С.Л. Преп. Максим Исповедник и византийское богословие. М., 1915 (reprinted in 1996). С. 112, n. 2, 127–129 and Balthasar H.U. von. Cosmic Liturgy. The Universe according to Maximus the Confessor. San Francisco, 2003. P. 303–308.*

Heaven is adorned by rational natures which always progress and ascend to God by way of the ladder of virtues.

Thus Psellos is employing expressions which recall specifically the doctrine of natural contemplation as originally formulated by Maximus the Confessor. Niketas Stethatos had also employed the notion of contemplation of nature as a main theme for the *Contemplation of Paradise* (θεωρία εἰς τὸν παράδεισον). This doctrine does not concern simply the role of physical, scientific or mathematical knowledge, it defines one of the ways in which monks may progress on their religious path. Stethatos points out that his treatise is a discussion on monastic practice:

Παράδεισός ἐστι καὶ ἄλλως, τὸ μέγα πεδῖον τῆς πρακτικῆς φιλοσοφίας (Niketas Stethatos. *Contemplation of Paradise*. 30.1–2. P.190, Darrouzès).

In another sense, Paradise is the great plain of practical philosophy.

This is the underlying theme of all four of Psellos' orations on Mount Olympos. They represent an endorsement of φυσικὴ θεωρία in terms anticipated by Niketas Stethatos. They are in tune with the theologian's work in the belief that intellectual readings of biblical events are possible and constructive also for defining monastic practice.

Each one of them alludes to different concepts described and defined by Niketas Stethatos in his *Contemplation of Paradise*. Both writers employ the notion that Creation (Stethatos) or Mount Olympos (Psellos) are intellectual gardens of Eden.

Psellos' first oration deals with the notion of Mount Olympos as a physical paradise which allows one to be in proximity with the heavenly one: it is a place which unites the spiritual with the physical²². This point of view is reinforced by the unusual strategy of comparing Mount Olympos with Eden, pointing out the spiritual and physical fruits of which one may benefit²³. Niketas Stethatos employs the same strategy. Though he believes that the historical Eden has passed since Adam and Eve were expelled from it²⁴, the place currently inhabited by humans is an intellectual Eden which unites both physical and spiritual spheres of life. In the *Contemplation of Paradise* one also finds a long discussion on the nourishment derived from spiritual fruit of the Garden of Eden:

ὡς ἂν διπλῶν ὄντων ἡμῶν διπλὴ καὶ ἡ πανδαισία ἡμῖν ἐξ αὐτοῦ γίνηται, αἰσθητῶς τε ἅμα καὶ νοητῶς· αἰσθητῶς μὲν, ἀπὸ τῶν σπερμάτων καὶ καρπῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ τετραπόδων καὶ πετεινῶν, νοητῶς δὲ, ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρωμένων πάντων αὐτοῦ ποιημάτων, κατὰ τὸν σοφὸν Σολομώντα· Ἐκ γὰρ τῆς καλλονῆς, φησὶ τῶν κτισμάτων ἀναλόγως πρὸς τὸν γενεσιουργὸν ἀναγόμεθα (Niketas Stethatos. *Contemplation of Paradise*. 8.13–19. P. 162–164, Darrouzès).

Since we are twofold, our banquet is twofold, both by perception and intellect. It is sensible because of the seed, its fruits, animals and birds, intellectual because of all visible creatures, according to what Solomon says: "from beauty or creation, he says, we are lead upwards by analogy to the creator".

²² τὸ δὲ γε θεῖον τοῦτο καὶ πάμφορον ὄρος ἀνάγει μὲν ἀνθρώπους θεῶ, κατάγει δὲ ἀνθρώποις θεόν, καὶ κοινόν ἐστιν οἰκητήριον τῶν τε ὑπερφυῶν τάξεων καὶ τῶν τεταγμένων φύσεων (Psellos. *Orat. Min.* 36.11–14, Littlewood).

²³ Psellos. *Orat. Min.* 36.14–16, Littlewood quoted at page 4.

²⁴ Stethatos answers the question of the relation between historical and intelligible Paradise in: Darrouzès J. Nicétas Stéthatos, *Opuscules et Lettres*. Paris, 1961. VI. P. 261–273.

Thus both authors believe that Creation or Olympos bear fruits which provide both spiritual and physical nourishment.

Psellos' second oration on Olympos refers to Mount Sion and the river Aërmon which flows from it. These are not simply geographical points since he also talks about the intellectual Jerusalem. Such references are allegorical, and the only passage in which one finds Sion and Aërmon side by side in the Bible is a short psalm written by King David (132)²⁵. Psellos' allusion to the psalm is emphasized by his discussion of David as a musician in the same oration. Psellos' strategy is to point to Mount Olympos as the place where heaven and earth meet:

καί σε κράμα πεποίηκεν ὁ θεὸς τῆς διπλῆς ἀρετῆς, ὅση περὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ὅση περὶ τὴν γῆν· (Psellos. Orat. Min. 36.29–30, Littlewood).

Moreover, God made you a fusion of a twofold virtue, one heavenly, the other earthly.

The idea that there is a place where heaven and earth meet is one of the main themes of the *Contemplation of Paradise*. However Psellos' passage also employs the term fusion (κράμα) which is elsewhere used to define the union of body and soul²⁶. Stethatos had employed the notion in order to discuss the idea of the earthly paradise. His argument was that since Adam and Eve were humans and lived physically in the spiritual paradise, and since they were both earthly and heavenly, that means that the spiritual and the physical are fused in humans:

Πλάσας ἄνωθεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον διπλοῦν ὁ θεὸς, ἐξ ὁρατῆς λέγου καὶ ἀοράτου φύσεως, ὁρατὸν καὶ ἀόρατον, αἰσθητὸν καὶ νοούμενον, τοιοῦτον ἄρα πεποίηκε κατάλληλον τῶν αὐτοῦ φύσεων καὶ τὸ τούτου σαφῶς ἐνδιαίτημα, τὸν παράδεισον, αἰσθητὸν καὶ νοούμενον, ὁρατὸν καὶ ἀόρατον, τὸ τῆς ζωῆς ξύλον καὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς γνώσεως, ὃ καλεῖται γνωστὸν καλοῦ τε καὶ πονηροῦ, ἐν μέσῳ φυτεύσας αὐτοῦ. Τούτων τὸν μὲν ἐφύτευσε ἐν Ἐδέμ κατὰ τὸν ὁρατὸν κόσμον τούτον, ἐν ἀνατολῇ κείμενον, ὑψηλότερον πάσης τῆς γῆς εἰς τρυφὴν τοῦ Ἀδάμ – τρυφὴ γὰρ ἡ Ἐδέμ ἐρμηνεύεται –, περιλαμπόμενον ἀέρι λεπτῷ εὐκραεῖ τε καὶ καθαρωτάτῳ, φντοῖς ἀειθάλεσι κομώντα, πλήρη φωτὸς καὶ εὐωδίας ἀρρήτου, ὥρας τε πάσης αἰσθητῆς καὶ παντὸς κάλλους ὑπερβαίνοντα ἐπίνοιαν, οἷον ἄρα καὶ ἔδει τῷ κατ'εἰκόνα πλασθέντι Θεοῦ εἰς ἐνδιαίτημα εἶναι· τὸν δὲ, κατὰ τὸν νοητὸν καὶ ἀόρατον, ἐντὸς ὄντα καὶ κείμενον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀνθρώπου τοῦ ἐπὶ μικρῷ τῷ ὁρωμένῳ εἰς μέγαν κόσμον κτισθέντος καὶ πρὸς Θεοῦ τεθέντος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (Niketas Stethatos. *Contemplation of Paradise*. 3.1–18. P. 156–158, Darrouzès).

God, from above, created man in two ways, I mean from a visible and invisible nature. He made him visible and invisible, perceptible and intelligible. Therefore he clearly connected the two natures also in his abode, Paradise, and made it perceptible and intelligible, visible and invisible, and planted in the middle the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, which is called the knowledge of good and evil. Of these he planted one in Eden according to this visible world, lying to the

²⁵ 132.1 Ὡδῆ τῶν ἀναβαθμῶν· τῷ Δαυιδ. | Ἴδου δὴ τί καλὸν ἢ τί τερπνὸν | ἀλλ' ἢ τὸ κατοικεῖν ἀδελφοῦς ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό; | 132.2 ὡς μύρον ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς τὸ καταβαῖνον ἐπὶ πάγωνα, | τὸν πάγωνα τὸν Ααρων, | τὸ καταβαῖνον ἐπὶ τὴν ὄψαν τοῦ ἐνδύματος αὐτοῦ· | 132.3 ὡς δρόσος Αερμων ἢ καταβαίνουσα ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη Σιων· | ὅτι ἐκεῖ ἐνετείλατο κύριος τὴν εὐλογίαν | καὶ ζωὴν ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος.

²⁶ Lampe *G.W.H. A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Oxford, 1961. P. 774: “κράμα, 2. union of body and soul”.

east, higher than all land for the benefit of Adam (Eden means benefit) and it shines of fine pure air and most pure, cultivated with evergreen plants, full of light and eternal perfume, and it is superior to the idea of each perceptible season and each beauty. This is how the abode for he who was forged to the image of God should be. He also created another paradise as intelligible and invisible inside man, since man was created for the wide world on account of the small visible one and was placed by God on earth.

Psellos and Stethatos agree that either earth or Olympos represent a mixture of spiritual and physical aspects of life unified in creation.

The third oration recalls Stethatos since it refers to the “pure pleasures” of Mount Olympos and then goes on to describe their physical nature²⁷. Such a discussion of pleasure seems unusual until one sees that it is endorsed also by Stethatos as something spiritual²⁸. The central idea developed is that a spiritually virtuous behaviour has physical effects. If one partakes of pure pleasures, then one achieves immortality:

οὐδὲ δρῦς ἐπὶ σοὶ γηράσκει οὐδὲ φυλλοβολεῖ ἢ συκῆ, ἀλλ’ ἐπ’ ἀθανάτῳ σοὶ καὶ ἀγήρῳ ἀθάνατα καὶ ταῦτα φύεται (*Psellos. Orat. Min. 36.50–52, Littlewood*).

Oak does not age with you nor does the fig shed its leaves, but they grow immortal because of your immortality and incorruptibility.

This is a specific reference to paradise and is also mentioned in Stethatos where fruits and trees do not age:

Παράδεισός ἐστι καὶ ἄλλως, τὸ μέγα πεδῖον τῆς πρακτικῆς φιλοσοφίας, τὸ καταπεπυκασμένον ἀθανάτοις παντοίοις φυτοῖς καὶ ἀρετῶν ταῖς ιδέαις, ἐν ᾧ πεφύτευται πρὸς Θεοῦ τὸ φυτὸν τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς γνώσεως ἥτοι τὸ γνωστὸν καλοῦ τε καὶ πονηροῦ. Ἡ πρακτικὴ φιλοσοφία, ὡσπερ τις φωτοειδῆς καὶ εὐώδης παράδεισος φυτευθεὶς πρὸς Θεοῦ εἰς τὴν ἀνατολήν τῆς αὐτοῦ Ἐκκλησίας, κομᾷ παντοδαποῖς καὶ ὠραίοις φυτοῖς τῶν θείων ἀρετῶν καὶ τρέφει δασιλῶς τοὺς ἐργαζομένους ἐν αὐτῷ τὰς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντολὰς καὶ φυλάσσοντας αὐτὰς τροφή ἀρρεύτῳ καὶ ἀθανάτῳ (*Niketas Stethatos. Contemplation of Paradise. 30.1–11. P. 190–192, Darrouzès*).

In another way, Paradise is also the great field of practical philosophy, covered by all sorts of immortal plants and forms of virtues. Here has been planted by God the plant of life and the tree of awareness or the knowledge of good and evil. As a luminous and perfumed paradise planted by God to the east of his church, practical philosophy grows with all sorts of beautiful plants of divine virtues and nourishes abundantly both those who toil in it according to God’s commandments and those who preserve them with everlasting and immortal nourishment.

Thus Psellos and Stethatos argue that such spiritual pleasure yields a form of immortality.

²⁷ Ὅπῃ σου τῶν μερῶν τρέψω τὸν ὀφθαλμόν, Ὀλυμπε, ἀκήρατοί μοι εὐθὺς προσβάλλουσιν ἡδοναί· λειμώνες ἐνταῦθα, ἐκεῖσε δένδρων εὐθαλεῖς κόμαι, ἡ αὐλαξ βαθεῖα, ἐρίβωλος καὶ πίων ἢ ἄρουρα, ὁ καρπὸς τεθελῶς· (*Psellos. Orat. Min. 36.40–42, Littlewood*).

²⁸ ἢ μὲν γὰρ ἡδονὴ τὴν γνώσιν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τοῦ καλοῦ ποιεῖται, εἰς φυσικὴν χρεῖαν καὶ ἀναγκαίαν μεταληφθεῖσα (*Niketas Stethatos. Contemplation of Paradise. 21.23–24. P. 178, Darrouzès*). The theme is generally addressed at paragraphs 21–24 (P. 178–184, Darrouzès).

The fourth oration compares the image of Mount Olympos with an imperial palace. This is a striking reference to the ordinary and human aspect of civilian life, especially since Psellos is no-where near the imperial palace at this point:

Βασιλείά σοι, Ὀλυμπε, καὶ τὰ Ὅρηια. καὶ ὅτι, κἄν τις ἐκεῖθεν ἦκων τὴν ἐπὶ σοὶ δυσχεράνη διαγωγὴν, ἀλλ' εἰ βούλοιο περιδραμεῖν σοὶ τὰς ἀφανεῖς οἰκήσεις, ὅποσα τέ σοι κατὰ πετρῶν ὄρυκται ἢ αὐτομάτως κεκοίλανται, εὐρήσει ὅπη τρυφήσειεν (*Psellos. Orat. Min. 36.58–61, Littlewood*).

Olympos, the mountains are also your palace because, even if someone comes from there and suffers the path of life for you, but wants to visit your hidden houses, those dug in the stones or those which are hollow by chance, he will find where to live in luxury.

This beginning, of course, recalls the final section of the *Contemplation of Paradise* where Stethatos also employs the same unusual image to describe paradise:

Ἄλλως γὰρ οὐ δύναται τις εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ βασίλεια καὶ εἰς αὐτὰ τοῦ νοητοῦ παραδείσου τὰ θεῖα καὶ χλοηφόρα χώρια, ἔνθα εἰσὶ τόποι φωτεινοί, τόποι ἀναψύξεως, σκηναὶ δικαίων, ὕδωρ ἀναπαύσεως, χαρὰ, εὐφροσύνη καὶ ἀγαλλίασις. (*Niketas Stethatos. Contemplation of Paradise. 53.1–4. P. 216–218, Darrouzès*).

In another way no one may enter Christ's palace and those divine and grassy places of the intellectual paradise, where there are luminous, restful places, dwellings of the just, water of repose, grace, merriment and great joy.

Thus Psellos and Stethatos compare either Creation or Olympos with the imperial palace of Constantinople.

Thus each of Psellos' four orations on Mount Olympos is centred round a theme which is described and defined by Niketas Stethatos in the *Contemplation of Paradise*. The idea of an allegorical reading of Paradise was not new. Indeed John of Damascus (VIII century)²⁹ as well as Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022)³⁰ had written on the subject. However Niketas Stethatos is clear that his reading of Paradise has never been done before:

Φέρε δὴ εἶπωμεν καὶ περὶ τοῦ θείου καὶ νοητοῦ ἐν τῇ ἀφανεῖ κτίσει πεφυτευμένου τῶν ἡμετέρων ψυχῶν παραδείσου, καὶ τίνα μὲν τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ θεῖα πεφυτευμένα φυτὰ, τίς δὲ ἢ ἐν τούτῳ ἐργασία ἡμῶν, περὶ ὧν οὐδενὶ τῶν πάλαι θείων πατέρων ἢ σοφῶν φιλοσοφήσαντι ἐνετύχομεν (*Niketas Stethatos. Contemplation of Paradise. 18.1–5. P. 174, Darrouzès*).

Come on, let us speak also about the divine and intellectual paradise planted in the invisible creation of our souls, and what are the divine trees planted in it and which is our toil in it. I have not found any of the old holy fathers or wise men who thought about these matters.

What defines Stethatos' analysis is that it is not an allegorical reading of Paradise as such. His aim is not to give an alternative reading to the biblical passage on paradise, but to define contemplation as participation of an intellectual paradise, which is both physical and spiritual. Infact in a letter he clearly distinguishes the biblical Eden from that of his discussion³¹. Psellos applies this

²⁹ *Expositio Fidei, 25 // Kotter B. Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos. Bd. 2. Berlin, 1973.*

³⁰ *Kambylis A. Symeon Neos Theologos Hymnen. Berlin, 1976. Hymn 47. P. 381–384.*

³¹ *Letter 6 // Darrouzès J. Nicetas Stethatos... P. 260–273.*

very same analysis to Mount Olympos. Each of the themes developed in the four orations recall specific discussions of Stethatos. One striking example is the image used in the fourth oration of Mount Olympos as an imperial palace. That was an innovation found in Stethatos' *Contemplation of Paradise*. Psellos does not simply follow in some themes employed in each oration, even his overall strategy recalls Stethatos, especially the insistence on the role of nature in contemplation. Psellos' dependence on Stethatos is not surprising since the latter was considered as the most important theologian of the time³². He was also the chief Orthodox voice in the debate with western delegates in 1054. One may add that since Psellos' text dates from 1054 or early 1055, then Stethatos' *Contemplation of Paradise* is dated from before 1054.

Such agreement with Stethatos in the details, as well as in the general picture, is not simply positive, Psellos used the four orations as his monastic manifesto in order to differentiate himself from other views. His endorsement of nature, reason and theology amount to a statement and place him clearly in relation to alternative theories of monasticism of the time. Indeed Psellos' descriptions in other texts allow one to establish three alternative forms of monasticism.

The first group is that to which Psellos belongs on Mount Olympos. Such a group endorses contemplation of nature and intellectual analysis of the church fathers' writings. A representative of this group is Niketas Stethatos.

The second group rejected material life. In the *Chronographia* written after his return from Mount Olympos, Psellos attacks certain monks whom he classes as Nazireans and who despised the physical aspect of life³³. Among the supporters of such ideas one could find the Patriarch Michael Kerouliarios. Psellos wrote a letter in disagreement contrasting his view to that of the patriarch:

ἐγὼ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ὁμολογῶ, ζῶν ἀλλοιωτὸν καὶ τρεπτὸν, ψυχὴ λογικὴ χρωμένη σώματι, κράμα καινὸν ἐξ ἀναρμόστων τῶν συνελθόντων. Καὶ νῦν μὲν, ὅπῃ δυναίμην, ἐπελαφρίζω τῇ κρείττονι φύσει, τὸ συμφυῆς φορτίον αὐτῇ ἀφαιρούμενος τῆς ἐπαχθείας ὅσον εἰκὸς, νῦν δὲ — ἀλλ' οὐδὲν ἐρῶ δύσφημον! Σὺ δὲ μόνος τῶν ἀπάντων ἄτρεπτός τε καὶ ἀμετάθετος, ὡς περ τις φύσις ἑτέρα παρὰ τὴν ἡμεδαπὴν, ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς βεβηκυῖα καὶ ἀκλινῆς, κὰν σπένδεται τις κὰν δάκρυσιν ἐξιλάσκηται! Τίς ἂν οὖν σου τοῦτο ζηλώσειεν (*Psellos*. *Epistula ad Cerularium*. P. 22.32–23.41, Criscuolo).

I admit to be a man, a mutable and changing animal, a logical soul employing a body, a new fusion from incompatible ingredients. And now I elevate as I may with the better nature, setting aside the congenital burden of hatred as much as is reasonable. Now, I will not reproach you, you are the only one of everyone to be

³² ὃν καὶ ὁ θηρικαῦτα ἐν μοναχοῖς διαπρέπων ὁ οὕτω Στηθάτος λεγόμενος ἐκόλυε μὲν, ἦνευ δὲ οὐδέν. πάντῃ γὰρ ἤττητο τῆς ὥρας αὐτῆς ὁ βασιλεὺς. ἦν δὲ ὁ Στηθάτος οὗτος ἀρετῆς εἰς ἄκραν ἐπιμελούμενος καὶ νηστεία καὶ σκληραγωγία καὶ πάσῃ ἄλλῃ ἀρετῇ ἐντήκων τὸ σῶμα ἑαυτοῦ, ὡς καὶ ποτε τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας ἄσιτος διατελέσαι, μηδενὸς τὸ παράπαν ἐν τῷ μέσῳ γευσάμενος (*Scylitzes*. *Synopsis Historiarum*. Const 9.7.66–71. P. 434). The dependence of Psellos on Stethatos has been studied in: *Lauritzen F*. *Psello discepolo di Stetato* // *BZ*. 2008. 101/2. P. 715–725.

³³ ἀπαθανατίζουσι τε τὴν μερικὴν φύσιν καὶ ἰσῶσιν ἡμῖν τὴν φυσικὴν κίνησιν: *Chronographia* 6 *Theod*. 18.60–62. For a discussion about the Nazireans see: *Lauritzen F*. *Psellos and the Nazireans* // *REB*. 2007. Vol. 65. P. 359–364.

unchanging and immutable, as if another nature beside our own, progressing on its own and unerring, even if someone is spent and even if he is propitiated with tears! Who would envy you this?

This statement that man is a mixture of spiritual and physical was part of the doctrine expounded in Stethatos' *Contemplation of Paradise*. Thus Psellos condemns the type of monasticism which rejects the notion of contemplation of nature (φυσική θεωρία). There is also a political dimension to this point of view. Psellos claims that the empress had been under the control of monks who held such opinions³⁴. Indeed the passage on the Nazireans is inserted within a discussion concerning political matters at court³⁵. In theology, Psellos considers them mistaken since they disdain the physical aspect of the union of body and soul. Thus even when he had left Mount Olympos, he was upholding the value of contemplation of nature as essential for monasticism. Thus Psellos seems to have held the same opinion about the Nazireans before and after his retirement to Mount Olympos.

The third group is that represented by the monks who believe in the material aspect of religion rather than the abstract. They prefer the irrational powers of matter and tend to exclude rationality within religion. The clearest example is that of the two monks who had established the monastery of the Nea Moni at Chios³⁶. While Constantine Monomachos was in exile on the same island they had prophesized his accession to the imperial throne³⁷. Once he had married the empress Zoe, he gave imperial endorsement to their form of monasticism and endowed them with the monastery which still survives³⁸. After the emperor's death in 1055, they were prosecuted by the church authorities and condemned³⁹. In Psellos' prosecution against Keroularios one of the chief accusations was that the patriarch had not enforced the condemnation of the monks from Chios and

³⁴ οὔτοι δὴ καὶ τὴν βασιλίδα ἐξηπατήκασιν ὡς ἐσομένην αἰίζων, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐκείνη μικροῦ δεῖν αὐτῆ τε διέφθαρτ' ἂν καὶ τὰ πράγματα πάντῃ διέφθειρεν (*Psellos*. Chronographia 6. Theod. 18.66–69, Impellizzeri). Among them one may include Leo Paraspondylos. On Paraspondylos and Psellos see: *De Vries-van der Velden E. Les amitiés dangereuses: Psellos et Léon Paraspondylos // BS*. 1999. Vol. 60. P. 315–350.

³⁵ Concerning political advisors who had monopolized Theodora's attention to the detriment of such personalities as Psellos himself.

³⁶ The two monks are Niketas and Ioannes. In the Prosopography of the Byzantine World (www.pbw.kcl.ac.uk) they are respectively Niketas 166 and Ioannes 438. There is also a third one according to the tradition of the monastery. Interesting is also the role of the nun Dosithea. However for a general description of the monastery and its history see: *Яковенко П.А. Исследования в области византийских грамот. Грамоты Нового монастыря на Хиосе // Ученые записки Юрьевского университета, 1917; Bouras Ch. Nea Moni on Chios: History and Architecture. Athens, 1982.*

³⁷ According to the tradition of the acoluthia. See: *Bouras Ch. Nea Moni on Chios...* P. 25.

³⁸ See also the chrysobulls of Constantine IX Monomachos in: *Miklosich Fr., Müller I. Acta et Diplomata monasteriorum et ecclesiarum orientis. Vol. 5. Vienna, 1887. P. 1–8.*

³⁹ ἐπὶ τούτοις καὶ ὅσον οικεῖον θεῶ, οἱ τῶν τῆδε ἀπάραντες πρὸ τῆς φυσικῆς μεταθέσεως μονασταὶ καὶ οἱ τούτων καθηγεμόνες· οὐκ ὀλίγοι δὲ καὶ τῶν ἀρχιερέων, ὅσοις μὴ διεφθάρη παρὰ τοῦ ἀπατήσαντος δαίμονος τὰ κινήματα. οὔτοι μὲν οὖν κατὰ τὰς οικείας τάξεις περιεστῆκεισαν, ἀνεγινώσκοντο δὲ τὰ μαντεύματα καὶ ἡ ἐπίμκτος ἐκείνη θεολογία. εὐθὺς οὖν ἅπαντες ἠρυθρίασαν, μᾶλλον μὲν οὖν ἠλάλαξαν ταῖς φωναῖς καὶ τῶν ἐξάρχων τῆς ἀσεβείας κατεψηφίσαντο καὶ τὰς συγγραφὰς βλασφημίας κατωνομάκασιν καὶ πίστewας ἄλλοτρίωσιν τὴν ἐκείνων δόξαν ἐνόμισαν καὶ συνοδικῇ ἀποφάσει τὴν κρίσιν ἀνέθεσαν (*Psellos*. Orationes Forenses et Acta / Ed. G. Dennis. Leipzig, 1994. 1.462–473).

had even protected them while the emperor was away⁴⁰. In that remarkable speech Psellos accuses them of pagan divination and even compares their prophecies to those of the Chaldean Oracles:

Ἀπήλεγξα τοῖς Χιώταις τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ θείου λόγου διάστασιν κοινὰς καὶ παρ' ὑμῶν ἐννοίας λαβῶν. τὸ εἶδος τῆς διεφθαρμένης αὐτῶν δόξης παρέστησα. εἰς εἰδικὰς τοῦτο αἰρέσεις τῶν τε πάνυ γνωρίμων ὑμῖν καὶ τῶν ἀγνωστων τισὶ συγκρίνας ἀνήνεγκα. Ἑλληνικὴν αὐτῶν τὴν ἀπάτην ἀπέδειξα, χαλδαίζουσαν, ἀτεχνῶς ἀπατηλὴν, προσκειμένην καὶ πονηροῖς πνεύμασι, τοῖς Πορφυρίου λόγοις ἀκριβῶς ἑοικυῖαν, τῆς τοῦ Νεστορίου λύττης τὴν μανίαν ἀπεικονίζουσαν (*Psellos. Orationes forenses et acta. 1.1202–210, Dennis*).

I refuted the Chian monks on the basis of their divergence from the divine writ by employing your common views. I presented the form of their corrupt opinion. I connected it to particular heresies and compared them to some which you know well and others you do not know. I demonstrated that theirs is a pagan deception, oracular, simply deceitful, subject also to evil spirits, similar precisely to Porphyry's opinions, and illustrating the madness of Nestorius' folly.

Psellos, while accusing them, refers specifically to the different qualities of material and immaterial entities⁴¹. He seems to attribute them the idea that matter was uncreated⁴². To this he answers in a theological treatise that everything was created by God, one of the chief presuppositions behind contemplation of nature as part of contemplation of the divine:

ἐπειδὴ γὰρ οὐδὲν τῶν ὄντων ἀγέννητον ἄνευ τῆς θεαρχικῆς καὶ τρισυποστάτου τριάδος, μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἡ σοφία πρὸ τῆς τῶν κατὰ μέρος δημιουργίας κτίζεται τῷ θεῷ (*Michaelis Pselli Theologica / Ed. P. Gautier. Leipzig, 1989. I.10.22–24*).

Since everything is generated by the Godhead and the Trinity of three persons, so wisdom as well is created together with the others by God before the creation of particulars.

Within this group of monks one may include also John Xiphilinos. The future patriarch was still on Mount Olympos when Psellos wrote to him a letter about the relation between contemplation and culture⁴³. What emerges clearly is that Xiphilinos adopted an anti-intellectual stance. He thought that logic and reason detracted from real life as did geometry and mathematics, and also seems

⁴⁰ Καὶ ἵνα τὰ ἐν μέσῳ ἐάσω, ὁμοῦ τε ὁ μέγας ἡμῶν αὐτοκράτωρ τῶν βασιλικῶν σκήπτρων ἐπέληπτο καὶ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς πρώτην ὑπὲρ ἐκείνων ἀφήκε φωνὴν, τὸν καιρὸν τῶν φροντῖδων ἀρπάσας καὶ πείσας ἐξ ἐφόδου τὸν αὐτοκράτορα· οὐπω γὰρ εἰδὼς ἦν, οὐθ' ὅτι δοξάζειν κακῶς εἴλοντο, οὐθ' ὅτι ἐντεύθεν τῆς πόλεως ἀπελήλαντο (*Psellos. Orationes Forenses et Acta. 1.487–492, Dennis*).

⁴¹ Εἰρηκῶς γὰρ οὗτος περὶ διαφορᾶς τῶν καλουμένων θεῶν δυνάμεων, ὡς αἱ μὲν ὑλικώτεραι, αἱ δὲ αὐλότεραι, καὶ αἱ μὲν ἰλαραί, αἱ δὲ ἐμβριθεῖς, καὶ αἱ μὲν μετὰ δαιμόνων, αἱ δὲ καθαρῶς παραγίνονται, εὐθὺς ἐπιφέρει περὶ καιρῶν καθ' οὓς καλοῦνται, καὶ περὶ τόπων ἐν οἷς, καὶ περὶ τῶν ὁρώντων τὸ θεῖον φῶς ἀνδρῶν ἢ γυναικῶν, σχημάτων τε τούτων καὶ θεῶν συνθημάτων, καὶ μέτεισιν οὕτως ἐπὶ τὰς ἐνθεαστικὰς θεαγωγίας (*Psellos. Orationes Forenses et Acta. 1.303–10, Dennis*).

⁴² εἰ μὲν γὰρ κοινὰ ἡμῖν πρὸς τοὺς Ἑλληνας καὶ ἡ τῶν ἐκείνων ἀρχῶν ἡμεῖς ἐξηρτήμεθα ἢ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἐκείνοι, πρεσβεύσομεν καὶ τὴν ὕλην ἀγέννητον (*Psellos. Orationes Forenses et Acta. 1.358–360, Dennis*).

⁴³ *Criscuolo U. Michele Psello, Epistola a Giovanni Xifilino. Napoli, 1990*². For further bibliography see: *Moore P. Iter Psellianum... [142] Ep. 142. P. 51–52.*

to accuse Psellos of believing that the objects of such studies somehow exist. Psellos' answer is that the rational elements (λόγοι) in nature are worth studying and employs the precedent of Maximus the confessor's inclusion of mathematical sciences within the contemplation of nature:

Αἰ μὴ οὐσαι αὐται γραμμαί, μισολογώτατε σύ, ἀρχαὶ τῆς συμπάσης φυσικῆς θεωρίας εἰσί. Τὴν δέ γε φυσικὴν θεωρίαν καὶ ὁ κοινὸς Μάξιμος, ἢ μᾶλλον ἐμὸς – φιλόσοφος γάρ, – δευτέραν μετὰ τὴν πράξιν τίθησιν ἀρετὴν, τὴν μαθηματικὴν οὐσίαν μὴ προσποιούμενος (*Psellos. Epistula ad Xiphilinum. 3.70–75. P. 51, Criscuolo*).

You most anti-logical person, these lines which do not exist are principles of all natural contemplation. Even our Maximus, or rather my own (for he is a philosopher), placed natural contemplation as a second virtue after practice, even if he did not pretend that mathematics has substance.

In this passage Psellos points out that contemplation of nature (φυσικὴ θεωρία) is not simply appreciation of natural beauty in a religious sense, it also understanding of those sciences which depend on natural investigation, such as mathematics and geometry. These are the intermediary entities which are not visible but are part of the visible world, and which Maximus the Confessor had accepted as legitimate objects of Creation.

Thus Psellos manages to place himself clearly within the tradition of monastic contemplation as described by Maximus the Confessor and Niketas Stethatos, and to reject the solely spiritual or the anti intellectual forms of monasticism also practiced and endorsed by some of his contemporaries. Psellos' endorsement of φυσικὴ θεωρία is not simply due to his resistance to the other two forms, he also accepts those who follow his same ideals in a questionable way. The most fascinating case is that of the Monk Elias, who seems to have been theologically well versed, though his social behaviour was somewhat reproachable⁴⁴.

Thus Psellos is willing to endorse these ideas even if someone does not follow them in an ideal way, rather than to endorse someone who strictly and admirably follows ideas with which he does not agree. Thus the four orations written by Psellos on Mount Olympos are not simply rhetorical exercises but statements about how he viewed monasticism. They are impressive for their concision and their dependence on the most recent developments in orthodox thought expressed by Niketas Stethatos, especially on the idea of an intellectual paradise as witnessed within creation. Moreover, they endorse the study of texts as part of monastic practice as well being consistent with ideas he expressed after he had returned to Constantinople. Indeed his retirement was not inconsistent with his ideas, rather it was another expression of his person according to his typically multifaceted but consistent personality.

⁴⁴ *Любарский Я.Н. Михаил Пселл... С. 280–285.*