

Elements of Ancient Philosophical Doctrine and Their Heritage in the Tradition of Eastern Christian Spirituality

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Abstract: The present study aims to link two traditions that have intersected and interfered over the centuries, one representing the background on which the second has articulated its teaching in the struggle against heresies, and the second representing for many the answer and fulfillment of the first. This is ancient philosophy and Christianity. Beyond the question of terminology, we attempt in this study to identify the doctrinal elements of ancient philosophy that have found their place in one way or another in the Christian spiritual tradition, so that from here on we can understand how the ways of life that ancient philosophy proposed had something to offer to the Christian man.

Keywords: Christian Spirituality, Stoicism, Platonism, Reason, Philokalia, Anthropology, Plato, Epictetus, Providence, God

1. The Ancient Philosophy and the (Philokalic) Christianity

The present study aims to identify some of the elements that allow us to talk about an interference between ancient philosophy and Christian (philokalic) texts, more precisely, with their authors. In addition, we propose to see how and why we can speak of “a legacy of ancient philosophy in Christian spirituality” and which are the main elements of doctrine that have found their place in one way or another, in one form or another, in the Eastern Christian spirituality. Identifying these will allow us, in a future study, to develop insights into the “christianization” of ancient philosophy in many of the texts of the Christian fathers, as well as to understand the similarities between what ancient philosophy proposed through philosophical “ways of life” and what Christianity proposed through the ascetic and mystical life.

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The richness of the ancient Greek philosophical tradition, in its many variants and systems, was one of the main foundations on which the Church Fathers dogmatically shaped the teaching of the revealed Word of Scripture, and this is an indisputable fact. Dogma itself, “from a morphological point of view, is developed through the philosophical language of the surrounding milieu”². Perhaps one of the most striking examples of this is the fundamental term, taken from ancient philosophy and used in defining the most important dogma of the Church, that of the Holy Trinity, *ὁμοούσιος* [consubstantial]³ explicitly naming the consubstantiality between God the Son and God the Father at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325, during the Church’s confrontation with Arius’ contestation of the divine nature of the Son of God and his consubstantiality with the Father. Even the expression of certain dogmas, whether that of the Holy Trinity, of the divine being, of the Hypostases or Persons, of the knowledge of God or of the hypostatic union, is realized in a borrowing of “morphological elements from the language of philosophy, where the tradition of Platonic, Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, Stoic and other philosophical traditions predominates. However, ultimately, the theology and dogmatic terms present, in their various dimensions, a holistic character and a unity which is already a creation in itself and echoes not only in the experience of the ecclesial community but also in the manifestations of culture as a whole”⁴.

The recourse to the terminology of ancient Greek philosophy was not limited to the formulation of dogmas through it, but there was also an interference between the spiritual systems that both Christianity and ancient philosophy proposed. Christianity, in its rejection of Judaism, expanded into a Hellenistic cultural area⁵ which, after Judaism, was the second melting pot from which Christianity was able to assimilate elements of the environment of this world⁶. This area into which Christianity expanded was predominantly a Greek-speaking area and, above all, one which included within itself the main centers of the ancient philosophical schools of Antiquity⁷. Thus, it could only develop and define itself in this cultural and philosophical context, thus taking into account what the culture and

² Nikolaus A. Matsoukas, *Istoria filosofiei bizantine*, trans. prof. Constantin Coman and Nicușor Deciu (Bucharest: Editura Bizantină, 2011), 50.

³ Cf. *The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, <https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj/#eid=76137>, accessed May 26, 2023.

⁴ Matsoukas, *Istoria filosofiei bizantine*, 51.

⁵ Dcn. Ioan I. Ică jr, “De la înțelepciunea lui Israel și a Eladei la înțelepciunea monahilor lui Hristos,” in *Maximele Părinților: sfaturi înțelepte pentru o viață creștină*, introductory study and trans. by dcn. Ioan I. Ică jr (Sibiu: Deisis, 2010), 13.

⁶ Matsoukas, *Istoria filosofiei bizantine*, 80.

⁷ One of the key moments in this regard is the meeting between Paul and the philosophers of Areopagus (cf. *Acts* 17). It is here in the Areopagus that the Apostle Paul demonstrates his ability

wisdom of the time expounded and expressed about God, the universe, creation and existence. The more so as ancient philosophy, through its schools, did not propose a simple speculation, but different “ways of life”, Christianity, often perceived as a new way of life that emerged from Judaism, interfered directly with the other systems it encountered (which is what has happened, moreover, with every culture or religion that has appeared in history). This enriched not the teaching of the Church, which was the same from the beginning – that of the Word revealed by God, the apostolic *kerygma* – but it produced an enrichment at the level of the expression of this teaching and especially at the level of spirituality, at a level of consciousness, in that the very access to ancient philosophy – with its rich tradition – supported the demonstration of the superiority of the Gospel through the very instruments of Antiquity, a superiority given by the death and resurrection of Christ. What happened especially in the Byzantine area was that dogma received a description and an erminia through philosophical and scholarly thought, but not a rational justification. By this, it contributed greatly to the creation of such cultural achievements in the spiritual atmosphere of Byzantium as were: “the formation and formulation of theology itself, historiography, poetry, liturgical texts, music, painting, architecture, the synaxis and others”⁸, but without questioning a split between ecclesiastical and secular culture.

Since Eastern theology was developed on the terminological and conceptual foundation of ancient philosophy, the connection between them is particularly close. However, in the Christian area there have been tendencies that have differed over time. Syria, for example, through representatives such as Tatian⁹, or Africa, through Tertullian¹⁰, were in opposition to what Athens had to offer the Christian world. In Alexandria, on the other hand, the Christians here, “heirs of Hellenistic sapiential Judaism”¹¹, were more open to ancient philosophy (through representative figures such as Clement¹² or Origen¹³). “For them, ascetic but cultural Christianity was the true philosophy, and Christians the true philosophers, who integrate and fully realize in Christ the ideals of Hellenistic philosophy”¹⁴. This will be the perspective that the Cappadocian fathers, followers – through

and capacity to speak to the philosophers, quoting authors such as Epimenides and Aratus (*Acts* 17:28).

⁸ Matsoukas, *Istoria filosofiei bizantine*, 34.

⁹ Cca. 120-180 A.D.

¹⁰ 160-220 A.D.

¹¹ Dcn. Ioan I. Ică jr, “De la înțelepciunea lui Israel și a Eladei,” 13.

¹² 150-215 A.D.

¹³ 185-254 A.D.

¹⁴ Dcn. Ioan I. Ică jr, “De la înțelepciunea lui Israel și a Eladei,” 13.

Gregory Thaumaturgus¹⁵ – of the great Origen, will approach in the 4th century. The result of the rhetorical and literary translation of this philosophy would be the birth of a “Hellenistic culture Christianized as theological humanism”¹⁶, embodied mainly in the work of St Gregory of Nazianzus¹⁷, who was also the prototype of Byzantine culture thereafter¹⁸. Even if some of these fathers, from an apologetic point of view, did not believe that theology and philosophy were at a gulf, this was done precisely out of a fear of not equating the two directions. In a principle of a double methodology regarding theologizing¹⁹, we find usage of the term/concept of philosophy in different ways in St. Gregory the Theologian, in the same text: once we read “It is not proper to philosophize about God in all of his things”, and then we read “philosophize to me about everything”²⁰. It is an indisputable fact that these fathers, such as Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa or Gregory of Nazianzus, made use of the richness and tradition of ancient philosophy, and that their training was a philosophical one.

For example, we find in St. John Damascene a development of ancient philosophical concepts, but in a concretely Christianized direction, a sign that the Christian fathers succeeded in creating a bridge between the ancient philosophical traditions and Christianity, which later materialized in an organic link between these two traditions. This whole process is seen by the Greek theologian Nikolaos Matsoukas as a grafting of Christian elements onto the philosophical tradition, but at the same time it also takes into account a grafting of “the language of philosophy onto the core of ecclesiastical experience”²¹. However, he points out that it is not a question of compilations between philosophy and theology, insofar as the latter is and expresses an ecclesiastical experience, and thus “a creative, original and free edifice of a spiritual and cultural work”²². Again it is he who gives the example of St. John Damascene. John Damascene offers six possible definitions of philosophy²³, in fact listing the works of philosophy. It is interesting

¹⁵ 210-260 A.D.

¹⁶ Dcn. Ioan I. Ică jr, “De la înțelepciunea lui Israel și a Eladei,” 13.

¹⁷ 330-390 A.D.

¹⁸ Dcn. Ioan I. Ică jr, “De la înțelepciunea lui Israel și a Eladei,” 13.

¹⁹ “There is, first of all, theology as experience, prophecy, and charismatic life, and then there follows theology as a description of this life, its manifestations, and the culture it creates” (Matsoukas, *Istoria filosofiei bizantine*, 32).

²⁰ PG 36, 13CD and 25A, *apud* Matsoukas, *Istoria filosofiei bizantine*, 31.

²¹ Matsoukas, *Istoria filosofiei bizantine*, 49.

²² Matsoukas, *Istoria filosofiei bizantine*, 49-50.

²³ 1) Philosophy is the knowledge of that which exists, of the [principle] by which those which exist exist, namely, it is the knowledge of the nature of those which exist; 2) Philosophy is the knowledge of the divine and human realities, that is, of the unseen and the visible; 3) Philosophy is the contemplation of death by will and of the physical. For life also is of two kinds: the physical,

how these definitions offered by John Damascene are rooted in the conceptions of Plato and Aristotle, but which St. John takes from Neoplatonism, in particular from Porphyry²⁴. Impressive is the way in which the whole philosophical tradition, by its definition, leads, in a new perspective, to the Christian one, to the full meaning of existence. “The understanding of this work [of philosophy] saves us from impotence or improvisation and from understanding these definitions as an anemic rehashing by imitation of ancient Greek sentences. On the contrary, through the interposition of philosophical thought as a macroscopic interpretative view, St. John achieves an astonishing engagement of all the elements of the world and of life”²⁵. The Byzantines themselves understood the world in a perspective of religious and philosophical unity, in which the two could not be separated²⁶. The superiority of theology has not been contested, but clarifications have often been made concerning the two types of knowledge: on the one hand, theology is primarily concerned with the direct knowledge of God, on the other hand, the merit of philosophy is that of “knowing nature as the Creator has made it”²⁷. Thus the merit of ancient philosophy is that it developed itself as the foundation of natural theology. In the realm of Christian philosophy and theology all revolve around knowledge, in a climax of what is true knowledge, that of God, of the Creator, but to Whom we also come through the knowledge of what He Himself has created, and all of which the rational soul [*ψυχῆς λογικῆς*] fulfills: “Nothing

which we experience, and the life by free will, which by effort we acquire in place of the earthly one. Of two kinds is also death: physical, that is, the separation of the soul from the body, and [death] of the will, by which, despising the life here, we hasten on to the life to come; 4) Philosophy is the likeness of God. We resemble God in wisdom, that is, in the true knowledge of what is good; and in justice, that is, in dividing equally and judging impartially; and in holiness, that is, in that which is above justice, namely, in doing good to those who do wrong to you; 5) Philosophy is the art of the arts and the science of the sciences. For philosophy is the beginning of every art; by it every art and every science is discovered. Art is that which, in some, departs in part. Science is that which in nothing deviates. But the only one that does not really deviate is philosophy. According to the opinion of others, art is that which is done with the hands, and science is every rational art: grammar, rhetoric, and those of this kind; 6) Philosophy is the love of wisdom. And true wisdom is God. Love of God, this, then, is true philosophy [*Φιλοσοφία πάλιν ἐστὶ φιλία σοφίας. Σοφία δὲ ἀληθὴς ὁ θεὸς ἐστίν· ἢ οὖν ἀγάπη ἢ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀληθὴς φιλοσοφία*]; P.B. Kotter, “Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos – Volume 1,” in *Patristische Texte und Studien 7* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969): 47-95, 101-142, <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?2934:002:14390>, accessed May 28, 2023 (Matsoukas, *Istoria filosofiei bizantine*, 37-38).

²⁴ Vasile Adrian Carabă, “A fi filosof în Bizanț – istoria unui concept,” in Basile Tatakis, *Fi-losofia bizantină*, trans. by Eduard Florin Tudor, introductory study and afterword by Vasile Adrian Carabă, foreword by Émile Bréhier (Bucharest: Nemira, 2013), 26.

²⁵ Matsoukas, *Istoria filosofiei bizantine*, 39.

²⁶ John Meyendorff, *Teologia bizantină: tendințe istorice și teme doctrinare*, trans. and foreword by Rev. prof. Alexandru Stan (Bucharest: Nemira, 2013), 93.

²⁷ Mihail Psellos, *Cuvânt către ucenicii săi neglijenți*, ed. by J.F. Boissonade (Nürnberg, 1838; Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1964), 151, *apud* Meyendorff, *Teologia bizantină*, 93.

is more precious than knowledge; for since knowledge is the light of the rational soul, so unknowledge is its darkness” [*Οὐδὲν τῆς γνώσεώς ἐστι τιμιώτερον- εἰ γὰρ ἡ γνώσις φῶς ἐστι ψυχῆς λογικῆς, τοῦμπαλιν ἡ ἄγνοια σκότος*]²⁸.

Eastern Christian spirituality had the opportunity to define itself in relation to the other spiritual systems of Antiquity, developing and taking into its own schemes what it found compatible with the Gospel and with its own way of formulating and living according to the ancient philosophical schools.

These connections between philosophy and Christianity raise many questions, especially with regard to the interest of Christian spirituality in philosophical teaching and philosophical way of life. The 170 antonian chapters, the work that inaugurates the massive collection composed by St. Macarius of Corinth, the *Philokalia*, are a direct testimony that in the framework of Eastern philokalic spirituality one is dealing with a heritage of ancient philosophy, a sign that the Christian (monastic) tradition has understood that the philosophical [tradition], understood in the perspective of a higher knowledge of God and not understood as an end in itself, can truly bring value to spirituality. Whether it is Antony the Great, or another Byzantine monk, Antony (“Melissa”, the bee), or another Christian author completely different, the 170 chapters of the *Philokalia* are the result of a compilation of texts belonging mainly to Stoicism and Platonism, and thus to ancient Greek philosophy, but in an attempt to convert them to Christianity and Christian ascetic spirituality. Therefore, what we aim to emphasize in our study is a strict understanding of this philosophical heritage, which we later find embodied and valorized in Christian spirituality. Some preliminary questions are: how does ancient philosophy communicate with Christianity? What elements of ancient philosophy can find their place in the frameworks of Christian spirituality? Did ancient philosophy in any way prepare the emergence of Christianity? How can a spiritual system founded on the word of the Gospel be expressed in the terms and concepts of philosophy? What are the similarities between the spirituality of the ancient philosophical schools of Antiquity and the Christian philosophical spirituality?

The heritage of ancient philosophy in Eastern philokalic spirituality resides, in particular, in some of the main issues that both directions encountered and more or less dealt with according to their own methodologies or principles, insofar as they concerned elements of doctrine, spirituality, asceticism and so on. Without pretending an exhaustive analysis of these topics, we will focus in the following on a few themes to highlight from a philosophical perspective, as they were understood by those who contemplated and lived them within the ancient philosophical schools. This will enable us to see in parallel how ancient

²⁸ Kotter, “Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos,” 47-95, 101-142, <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?2934:002:7258>, accessed May 28, 2023.

philosophy and Christian spirituality used similar tools in shaping a way of life or, more precisely, how the latter understood the realities of Antiquity in its own terms and from its own perspectives, inheriting and sometimes Christianizing them.

2. Being a Philosopher, Philosophizing and Living Philosophically

If we have so far highlighted some aspects concerning the connection between ancient philosophy and Christianity and, briefly, the ways in which the two have intertwined, the former providing the substance or background of Christianity with a terminological and conceptual shape/form, it is now appropriate to begin a brief analysis focusing on ancient philosophy itself, which can be understood in its own terms and in its own context of development.

The tradition speaks of the origin of the word “philosopher” in connection with Pythagoras, who “was the first to use the term «philosophy» and called himself a philosopher in a conversation in Sicyona with the tyrant Leon of the Syconians or Phliasians, as Heraclitus of Pontus describes him in his writing «On the Woman in a Faint», saying that no man is wise, but only the god. Philosophy used to be called wisdom, and he who practiced it was called wise, to show that he had attained to the highest degree of perfection of soul; a philosopher was the lover of wisdom”²⁹. Therefore, only the god is wise, and man can only be a lover of wisdom [φιλόσοφος], and this idea will also be found in Socrates³⁰. The knowledge of this lover of wisdom is what we call “philosophy” [φιλοσοφία]³¹. It seems unlikely, however, that Pythagoras or Heraclitus would have known terms like philosophos, philosophhein [to philosophize] or philosophia, words which do not actually appear until the 5th century, in the time of the historian Herodotus, in whom one can glimpse the use of a form similar to these terms³².

The ancient thinkers who were called “philosophers” by their followers distinguished themselves by proposing a rational explanat

ion of the world, breaking away from the cosmogonies of the Near East and archaic Greece before them, proposing theories of the origin of man, the world and cities³³.

²⁹ Diogenes Laertios, *Despre viețile și doctrinele filosofilor*, I.12, trans. by C.I. Balmuș, introductory study and commentaries by Aram M. Frenkian (Iași: Polirom, 1997), 67.

³⁰ Platon, “Apărarea lui Socrate,” in *Platon – Opera integrală*, volume 1, trans., general introduction, introductions and notes by Andrei Cornea (București: Humanitas, 2021), 80.

³¹ Carabă, “A fi filosof în Bizanț – istoria unui concept”, 9.

³² Pierre Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, trans. and notes by George Bondor and Claudiu Tipuriță (București: Trei, 2020), 32-3.

³³ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 16.

It is essential to note that this knowledge – philosophy itself – did not mean in Antiquity at all what modernity has understood or what we today call the action of “philosophizing”. Far from being merely speculation carried out in the realm of the mind, ancient philosophy placed at the center of all its aspects the living of life in a certain way, in a certain manner³⁴. “At least since Socrates, the choice of a way of life does not come at the end of philosophical activity, as a kind of appendix, but, on the contrary, at its origin, in a complex interplay between the critical reaction to other existential attitudes, the overall vision of a particular way of living and seeing the world, and the voluntary decision itself”³⁵. There are several other aspects: the way of life or existential choice is the origin and foundation of any philosophical discourse, and together they come into being and take substance only in communities, in well-defined groups, in “schools” that come to define themselves in accordance with a set of philosophical principles³⁶.

Socrates remains, as it seems, the philosopher par excellence, the philosopher to whom the entire philosophical tradition has referred throughout history. Whether historical or mythical Socrates, the image that the first generation of his disciples gave to posterity has done much to define the “philosopher”³⁷. Thus, starting with Socrates, the Platonist definition of the philosopher will be given in the “Banquet” dialog: “the philosopher knows nothing, but is aware of his non-knowledge”³⁸. This is what Socrates will try to offer to his disciples and interlocutors through his very way of philosophizing: to make others aware of their own non-knowledge³⁹. Moreover, knowledge is thus not one of concepts, but it is mainly concerned with such values as death or moral right and wrong, the latter belonging to free choice and commitment⁴⁰. Going forward from here, the philosopher will be the one who will have the ability to help others to realize in a real way what is the true good and true value⁴¹. It follows that, at the foundation of Socratic knowledge, is the love of the good⁴², as a virtue and the supreme value

³⁴ We will focus in particular on the studies of researcher Pierre Hadot.

³⁵ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 15.

³⁶ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 15-16.

³⁷ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 42.

³⁸ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 46.

³⁹ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 46.

⁴⁰ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 57.

⁴¹ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 59.

⁴² André-Jean Voelke, *L'idée de volonté dans le stoïcisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973), 194.

of existence, and that philosophy is not or does not remain just wisdom, but is “a way of life and discourse determined by the idea of wisdom”⁴³.

The emergence of the Platonic Academy made possible an ethic of dialog, in which ideas and theories circulated among ancient thinkers such as Plato, Speusip, Xenocrates, Aristotle, but not always in agreement on Plato’s theories and ideas. It was precisely this ethic of dialogue that created within the Academy a Platonist way of life, based on adherence to this ethic of dialogue, on the experience of logos, of the love of the Good and the practice of dialogue, meant to bring a change⁴⁴. “In Plato’s view, the choice of the philosophical way of life was the most important”⁴⁵. This implied the responsibility and the following of “spiritual exercises”, which took the form of an effort to be renewed every day, the valuing of virtue rather than pleasure, the observance of a diet, the emphasis on training the higher part of the soul, which is the intellect⁴⁶, all of this in a continuous tension and concentration in preparation for death. The Platonic school was joined by the school of Aristotle, which, unlike the former, which saw in philosophy a political end, the latter involved only training in the virtue of the philosophical life⁴⁷. It is a “life lived in accordance with the spirit”⁴⁸. In the Aristotelian perspective, the philosophical way of life is the “contemplative” one⁴⁹.

The Hellenistic period⁵⁰ will bring with it a new political order in which the old philosophers will no longer find their place as before, with the transition from a democratic to a monarchic regime. However, this will continue to motivate them to practise philosophy and to form groups, philosophical communities. The change of regime did not, however, lead them to distance themselves completely from political life, which they continued to engage in at various levels⁵¹. During this period, the “way of life” chosen by the philosopher placed him within a school. The main schools, towards the end of the 4th century BC, were to be found in Athens: “founded by Plato (the Academy), Aristotle (the Lyceum), Epicurus (the Garden) and Zeno (the Stoa)”⁵². In addition to these four Athenian schools,

⁴³ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 76.

⁴⁴ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 97-8.

⁴⁵ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 99.

⁴⁶ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 100.

⁴⁷ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 115.

⁴⁸ Aristotel, *Etica nicomahică*, X, 1177a-1178a, *apud* Pierre Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 116.

⁴⁹ Pierre Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 119.

⁵⁰ Period in Greek history from Alexander the Great (late 4th century B.C.) to the Roman domination (late 1st century B.C.).

⁵¹ Cf. Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 139-40.

⁵² Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 145.

there were others, including two famous trends: skepticism (Pyrrhonism) and cynicism⁵³.

Although all these schools preached love and the search for wisdom according to a way of life, each was distinguished by a “lifestyle choice”, an “existential decision”⁵⁴. In one form or another, peace of the soul was sought, each of these philosophies aiming in a therapeutic direction. However, most of the differences between them can be seen in terms of their teaching methods. For example, Platonism, Aristotelianism and Stoicism derive from the Socratic tradition, all three aiming at the love of the Good, which is the “primordial instinct of the human being”⁵⁵.

3. Elements of Philosophical Anthropology

“The search for wisdom and the achievement of a wise life have always been part of the preoccupations of the human spirit and we find them attested, along with religion, art and literature, in the most ancient cultures which have transmitted their experience in written form”⁵⁶. Fundamentally, since Socrates, the purpose of philosophy has been to define what is the true good and what is true value, how they are realized and how they can be attained by man. At the basis of these must be the love of the good⁵⁷, which in fact defines the Socratic knowledge. According to this line of understanding, man moves towards the absolute value of the moral intention, for which the philosopher is able to lay down his life – like Socrates – for justice and in complete moral purity⁵⁸. This takes the form of a life of wisdom [sophia], which, far from being understood (especially in Antiquity) as merely theoretical knowledge, is “a skill, a skill in life”⁵⁹. In reaching towards the Good, towards true wisdom, which is the god’s alone, the philosopher becomes an intermediary, a mediator, like Eros⁶⁰, who has the capacity (not an absolute one) to offer other people something of the knowledge and wisdom to which he has access⁶¹.

⁵³ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 149.

⁵⁴ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 150.

⁵⁵ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 151.

⁵⁶ Dcn. Ioan I. Ică jr, “De la înțelepciunea lui Israel și a Eladei”, 5.

⁵⁷ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 59.

⁵⁸ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 59..

⁵⁹ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 73.

⁶⁰ Cf. Platon, “Banchetul,” in *Platon – Opera integrală*, volume 2, trans., introductions and notes by Andrei Cornea (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2022), 477-538.

⁶¹ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 77.

According to the dialog “The Banquet”, philosophy takes on the valence and meaning of an experience of love, and Socrates, the philosopher par excellence, gains the status of a *daimon*⁶², being a mixture of humanity and divinity⁶³. It is Stoicism that will take over most of the definition of the philosopher and most closely resemble Platonism. Philosophy and wisdom will stand out as distinct, the latter representing – for the Stoics – a transcendence unattainable or accessible only under conditions of sudden mutation⁶⁴. Even if the other philosophical schools will differ in some respects from Platonism or Stoicism, for all of them philosophy will represent an exercise of wisdom and towards wisdom, and thus the continuous assumption of a specific way of life by man⁶⁵.

This whole system, the whole life of the one who puts himself at the service of philosophy and the search for wisdom, unfolds in a full understanding of the relationship between soul and body, matter and spirit. In addition to the emergence of this dualism, philosophy comes to be placed in a relationship with death, which is understood as a passage through which man frees himself from the burden of matter, represented by the body⁶⁶. Thus philosophy remains not only a way or a means to free the soul from matter, but also a way of orienting it towards the intelligible world. In this sense, philosophy comes to be that which presupposes a concrete environment in which wisdom can be realized, thus making use of all that the intelligible and the sensible spheres presuppose and offer. The ways in which these complex systems, favored by clear principles and classifications, will develop, will give substance to the philosophical systems constructed and constituted within the schools. Stoicism, for example, will see in wisdom the knowledge of human and divine things, a deep understanding of the laws of nature and of the Logos (the universal principle that governs the universe), and the love of this wisdom, in concrete terms, is the pursuit of virtue⁶⁷, which for Socrates was knowledge. It was not just an abstract knowledge of the good, but “one that chooses and wills the good, that is an inner disposition in which thought, will and

⁶² δαίμων, -ονος, ό, ή: god, goddess, of divine power, deity, power controlling the destiny of individuals, in general, spiritual or semi-divine being inferior to gods (cf. *Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, [https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/indiv/lexica.jsp#qid=112345&q1=DAI%2FMWN%2C%20-ONOS%2C%20O\(%2C%20H\(&q=%CE%B4%CE%B1%CE%AF%CE%BC%CF%89%CE%BD%2C%20E2%80%91%CE%BF%CE%BD%CE%BF%CF%82%2C%20E1%BD%81%2C%20E1%BC%A1&usr_input=greek](https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/indiv/lexica.jsp#qid=112345&q1=DAI%2FMWN%2C%20-ONOS%2C%20O(%2C%20H(&q=%CE%B4%CE%B1%CE%AF%CE%BC%CF%89%CE%BD%2C%20E2%80%91%CE%BF%CE%BD%CE%BF%CF%82%2C%20E1%BD%81%2C%20E1%BC%A1&usr_input=greek), accessed September 29, 2024).

⁶³ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 79.

⁶⁴ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 79-80.

⁶⁵ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 80.

⁶⁶ Carabă, “A fi filosof în Bizanț – istoria unui concept”, 12.

⁶⁷ Carabă, “A fi filosof în Bizanț – istoria unui concept”, 14.

desire are but one”⁶⁸, just as Plato and Aristotle would link knowledge to desire and affectivity⁶⁹.

Despite their significant differences, Platonism and Stoicism share many similarities in their anthropological conceptions, and it is with these that Christianity will come to most closely resemble. It is also these conceptions that can help to shape a broader understanding of the anthropology of ancient philosophy. Both Platonism and Stoicism hold a dualistic view of man, seeing man as consisting of a physical and a spiritual component. In Platonism, these are identified with the body and the soul. The body is associated with the sensory world, is in a constant state of change⁷⁰, and therefore cannot be the source of truth or definitive knowledge. The body is also seen as susceptible to physical desires and pleasures that can distort the search for truth and knowledge. The soul, on the other hand, is linked to the world of ideas or forms, which is constant and unchanging. The soul is seen as capable of pure and true knowledge. In Plato’s philosophy, the soul is considered immortal⁷¹ and pre-exists in the world of forms before it is incarnated/embodied in a body. It is also Platonism that develops the tripartite aspects of the soul. Plato develops, for example, a theory of this tripartition, where the soul is divided into reason [*logistikon*], anger/anger [*thymos*] and desire/ lust [*epithymia*]⁷². Reason is the divine and immortal part of the soul, desire is associated with bodily/corporeal needs, but there is also the spirit, which is the energetic part of the soul, the one that mediates between reason and desire. In Stoicism, we know them as reason/logos and body. Posidonius would be the one who deviated the most from the “orthodoxy” of Stoicism, especially in terms of psychology, the psychological constitution, the soul of man. While most of the Stoics before him, such as Chrysippus, adopted a monistic psychology, in which reason and affectivity were not separated into distinct faculties, Posidonius followed Plato in proposing a tripartition, dividing the soul into the rational faculty, the faculty of vigor/mood and the faculty of desire⁷³. The body is also seen here – in Stoicism – as being in a state of constant change. However, the Stoics do not see the body as a prison for the reason, but rather as a vehicle through which the individual experiences and interacts with the world. As far as reason is concerned, it is the essence of human nature for the

⁶⁸ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 99.

⁶⁹ Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?*, 125.

⁷⁰ Platon, “Phaidon,” in *Platon – Opera integrală*, volume 2, 405-7.

⁷¹ Perhaps the best-known image of the immortal soul that Plato creates is that revealed by the “myth of the cave”; cf. Platon, “Republica [514a-520a],” in *Platon – Opera integrală*, volume 3, trans., introductions and notes by Andrei Cornea (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2022), 273-80.

⁷² Platon, “Republica,” 188-9.

⁷³ John Sellars, *Stoicism* (Cheshma: Acumen, 2006), 10.

Stoics and has a mastering function, “for it is proper to the movement of reason and mind to impose its limits and never to be overcome either by the movement of the senses or by that of the impulses. For each of these two is of an animal nature, but the mental wants to be first and not to be dominated by them”⁷⁴. Also the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, speaking of the rational faculty, says: “do not allow this faculty⁷⁵ to be enslaved, nor to be moved like a puppet according to the contrary impulses of social life, nor to complain of the destiny destined in the present, nor to fear that «ordained» in the future⁷⁶. It is that which enables men to understand the universal laws [logos] and to live in accordance with them, reason being rooted in the soul⁷⁷. To live in accordance with nature means to accept calmly and without destructive emotions the external events that are beyond our control and to focus on what we can control: our own attitudes and behaviors⁷⁸.”

As we have seen briefly, both philosophies attach great importance to rationality. In Platonism, reason is associated with the soul and is considered the path to truth and knowledge. In Stoicism, on the other hand, reason is seen as the essence of human nature and the way in which man connects to logos, the universal law of nature. “The ancient conception of human reason is that which enables us to be in touch with the world”⁷⁹. Stoicism includes complex philosophical theories, especially in terms of ontology, epistemology and ethics, but these theories are situated within a very particular conception of what philosophy is and means⁸⁰. In short, they proposed a materialist ontology where God pervades the entire cosmos as a material force.

⁷⁴ Marcus Aurelius, *Gânduri către sine însuși*, VII, 55, trans., notes and index by Cristian Bejan (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2020), 104.

⁷⁵ “τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν is the leading part of the soul, at the level of which representations, assent, impulses, and reason appear. It is situated at the level of the heart. In Marcus Aurelius, the leading part of the soul is also called διάνοια (intelligence) or νοῦς (intellect)” (Marcus Aurelius, *Gânduri către sine însuși*, 26, footnote 1).

⁷⁶ Marcus Aurelius, *Gânduri către sine însuși* II, 2, 26.

⁷⁷ Seneca, “Scrisoarea XLI,” in *Seneca, Scrisori către Luciliu*, trans. and notes by Gheorghe Guțu, introduction and chronological table by Dionisie Pîrvuloiu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2020), 137.

⁷⁸ “Of all things, some depend on us, some do not depend on us. Opinion, impulse, desire, aversion, and, in one word, all things that are our own works, depend on us. The body, wealth, opinions, public offices, and, in a word, all that do not represent our own deeds, do not depend on us”; “Ench” [Manualul], I.1, in Epictet, *Opera omnia: conversații, manualul, fragmente, gnomologion*, trans., introductory study, chronological references, notes and index by Cristian Bejan, Bilingual Edition (Iași: Polirom, 2022), 481.

⁷⁹ Dürr, *Paul on the Human Vocation. Reason Language in Romans and Ancient Philosophical Tradition* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 3.

⁸⁰ Sellars, *Stoicism*, 2.

“Human beings are understood in very many Greco-Roman contexts as having a role in the wider cosmos, and this role is based on their position/role and the capacity with which they are endowed⁸¹. This capacity is based on man’s endowment with reason, which enables him to fulfill his purpose, if he uses reason in the right way”⁸². There are various texts that discuss what it means to be human and share the idea that human beings have a purpose in the cosmos. What this role is in concrete terms, what the cosmos is actually like, how it is to be understood and what the exercise of rational capacity entails in concrete terms, these are the elements that make the difference between the different conceptions⁸³. Consensus is based on the acceptance of the idea that man is certainly distinct from other creatures, from animals, from creation, in that he is endowed with reason⁸⁴. The purpose of human life has to do with the very way in which the components of human nature interact with the way individuals relate to the world around them. This purpose, however, is concerned with what we call “the fulfillment of the spiritual/rational [λογικός] human being”, and this is precisely because of the role of reason in human life and the capacity it gives man to access higher realities, to come into contact with the laws of nature and the universe. The attainment or self-realization of the rational or λογικός man in ancient philosophy involves a persistent search for truth, virtue and wisdom, which is achieved through the active cultivation of this higher rational faculty.

The Stoic perspective on anthropology may to a large extent represent a culmination in the development of the problematic of human reason. This is because in Stoicism one can sense an approach in which “increasingly what it means to be human is associated with the central capacity that distinguishes it, the endowment with reason”⁸⁵. However, similar aspects could also be found later, in the late Platonic tradition or in Judaeohellenistic writings. Stoicism strongly emphasizes the difference between man and animals⁸⁶. “The Stoics’ emphasis on

⁸¹ For a more correct and concrete understanding of the role of man in the cosmos, through the gift of reason, in the Greco-Roman context of Antiquity, we refer to the fundamental study by Dürr, *Paul on Human Vocation*, 91-133 (for contextualizing “reason” in ancient Greco-Roman anthropological reflections), 134-175 (for the shift towards Epictetus’ philosophy and the idea of a human calling/vocation based on reason).

⁸² Dürr, *Paul on the Human Vocation*, 4.

⁸³ Dürr, *Paul on the Human Vocation*, 4.

⁸⁴ Simon Dürr argues for this with anthropologically relevant texts from early Greek literature, such as Hesiod, Alcmaeon, Protagoras, Sophocles, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle (Dürr, *Paul on the Human Vocation*, 92-120).

⁸⁵ Dürr, *Paul on the Human Vocation*, 121.

⁸⁶ “Zenon proclaims, and the whole portico babbles, that man is born for nothing but virtue; by its brilliancy it draws souls to itself, without any outward advantage or alluring reward. And that pleasure of Epicurus’s is shared only by the herd animals among themselves, with which it would be an iniquity to associate man and the wise.” (Augustin, “Contra academicenilor [III, 7, 16],” in

this difference can be attributed partly to an ethical-protreptic concern, which links the rational nature of humans to their unique responsibility for appropriate behavior, and partly to their pronounced doctrine of providence, which assigns to humans the first place, with reason as the supreme gift⁸⁷. From here we move on to other essential aspects that the endowment of reason presupposes, such as man's relation to and knowledge of the divine, human creativity and freedom, the human potential for justice and injustice, good and bad⁸⁸.

Providence is a central doctrine of ancient Stoic philosophy. It is central to our understanding of the relationship between God and the world and, implicitly, the relationship with man, even involving what we might call "cosmological ethics"⁸⁹. As far as the Stoics were concerned, they "were convinced that the universe and all that it contains are governed by a supreme power, to which they gave names such as God, the Soul of the World, Reason [*logos*], Nature [*physis*], Providence, Active Cause, Necessity, Destiny, Fate, Common Law and Zeus"⁹⁰. The concept of providence attempted to answer – in ancient philosophy – questions about the existence and nature of the divine, the order of the world and man's place in the cosmos. In this sense, we choose to refer to this doctrinal aspect, following on from the anthropological elements that we have previously expounded. There are also analyses according to which a tension could be glimpsed between what we would call providence (God, who pervades the whole cosmos, forms the cosmos into a harmonious whole and orders events in a providential way) and fate (a continuous series of causes⁹¹, an order and an ineluctable connection between events). Among the materialist-naturalist Stoics, a causal determinism would be found, while among the pantheist-religious Stoics, the doctrine of divine

Hans von Arnim, ed., *Fragmentele stoicilor vechi. Zenon și discipolii lui Zenon*, 186, Bilingual Edition, trans. and notes by Filotheia Bogoiu and Cristian Bejan, introductory study by Filotheia Bogoiu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2016), 237).

⁸⁷ Dürr, *Paul on the Human Vocation*, 120.

⁸⁸ Dürr, *Paul on the Human Vocation*, 120-121.

⁸⁹ This cosmological ethic assumes that "universal nature and our own [human] nature have something in common, that cosmic nature has a rational structure, and our nature – which, according to Chrysippus, is a microcosmic instance of universal nature, insofar as natures are parts of it – also has such a structure"; Marcelo D. Boeri, "Does Cosmic Nature Matter? Some Remarks on the Cosmological Aspects of Stoic Ethics," in Ricardo Salles, ed., *God and Cosmos in Stoicism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 173.

⁹⁰ Jaap Mansfeld, "Providence and the Destruction of the Universe in Early Stoic Thought. With Some Remarks on the «Mysteries of Philosophy»," in *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 129.

⁹¹ "In order to understand the thesis of destiny we must understand what they [the Stoics] mean by the chain of causes." (Susan Sauvé Meyer, "Chain of Causes: What is Stoic Fate?," in Ricardo Salles, ed., *God and Cosmos in Stoicism*, 72; for the whole study, see 71-90: on Stoic Causes, Stoic Cosmology, Compassion/Sympathy, Prior Causes-Desire-Compassion).

providence would be at issue⁹². But not all Stoics and not all scholars who have dealt with Stoic philosophy have always seen fate and providence as two different things.

Ancient philosophers, especially those in the Platonic and Stoic traditions, paid particular attention to this concept as they sought to understand how the universe is ordered and governed. Plato presents a vision of the world that is shaped and ordered by a Demiurge, who arranges and molds chaotic matter according to ideal or eternal forms⁹³. In this sense, the world is, in a certain way, the product of the providential action of the Demiurge, who acts with goodness and intelligence to bring order and harmony to the cosmos. The Stoics, however, developed a teaching of providence that sees nature as organized and directed by Logos or divine reason. For the Stoics, everything that exists and happens in the world is the result of a divine plan, a result of universal reason. Chrysippus, one of the leading Stoics of Antiquity, states that “all things happen according to destiny”⁹⁴. Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher of the Roman period, insists in particular on the doctrine of providence⁹⁵, how man can recognize it and what he should do on the basis of this recognition of it: “On the occasion of each of the events that take place in the world, it is easy to praise Providence, if one possesses these two qualities: the ability to understand what is happening to everyone and the feeling of gratitude”⁹⁶. Epictetus finds its particular role in the fact that excerpts from his works are found textually in the 170 antonian chapters that open the collection of ascetical and mystical writings entitled *Philokalia*. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that “Epictetus is the most important ancient author and dialog partner for Paul when it comes to the connection between the human endowment with reason and the calling/vocation of human beings in the world in which they are placed”⁹⁷. Thus, the insights of ancient Stoic philosophy, especially those presented in the work of Epictetus⁹⁸, are of particular interest for Christianity and Eastern spirituality.

⁹² Sellars, *Stoicism*, 99-100.

⁹³ Platon, “Timaios [29a-30b],” in Platon, *Opere*, volume 7, ed. by Petru Creția, trans., preliminary clarifications and notes by Andrei Cornea and Cătălin Partenie (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1993), 143-144.

⁹⁴ Diogenes Laertios, *Despre viețile și doctrinele filosofilor*, VII, I, 149, 250.

⁹⁵ See *Conv (Discourses/Conversații)* I, 6 and I, 16, in Epictet, *Opera omnia*, 59-63, 95-97.

⁹⁶ *Conv* I, 6, 1, 59.

⁹⁷ Simon Dürr, *Paul on the Human Vocation*, 135. These parallels between Epictetus and St. Paul are, in fact, the focus of Simon Dürr’s study. “For Bonhöffer, for instance, Epictetus, among ancient writers, is the one who is closest to early Christianity in terms of the ethical and religious content of his philosophy” (Simon Dürr, *Paul on the Human Vocation*, 136, footnote 8).

⁹⁸ Written mostly by one of his disciples, Arrian.

But the matter of providence and destiny, and thus of a doctrine which speaks of a universal Reason at the helm of the universe, involves another aspect: the problem of evil. In this case, one might ask: how is it possible for evil to exist in a world of the divine soul, in a world governed by divine providence? Here Stoicism speaks of evil as correlative to good. “In the absence of evil, good would have no meaning. Evil is therefore necessary.”⁹⁹ In this way, good and evil are defined in terms of virtue and vice. The only true good is virtue, and the only true evil is vice. Everything else – wealth, health, sickness, death – is neither good nor evil in itself, but is considered indifferent. This does not mean that they do not matter at all, only that they are not good or bad in themselves, but depend on how they are used or treated. “When he [man] encounters evil, he must become capable of lifting himself up to the divine law, for which evil is but an indispensable element”¹⁰⁰.

These Platonic and Stoic perspectives reflect a conception of the universe as an ordered and rational system in which everything happens according to a providential plan. Despite the differences between these two philosophical traditions, both are attempts to interpret the world in which we live, with a strong emphasis on the idea of providence. This belief in providence provided not only a framework for understanding the nature and purpose of existence, but also a basis for ethics and morality, since it suggested that human life has a meaning and direction given by a larger divine plan. But this direction that man follows must be in accord with the destiny that is destined for him, and for this he lives in the world, and in the search for the good, for absolute value and wisdom, he lives philosophically, that is, in a certain way, assuming a condition that defines his life and behavior.

The aim of this study was to identify the main doctrinal elements of ancient philosophy (in particular the Platonic and Stoic schools), especially the anthropological elements. This identification represents a foundation for the development of a particularly relevant topic, that of the link between ancient philosophy and Christian spirituality, a topic which allows us to speak of a heritage of ancient philosophy in Christian spirituality. Beyond the linguistic tools that ancient philosophy “offered” to Christianity in its doctrinal articulation, ancient philosophy and its classical schools represented ways of life that proposed a conversion of man along the path of acquiring wisdom. Is Christianity not also proposing a new way of life? We think so, but much more than that, since Christianity offered the great novelty of death and resurrection with Christ.

⁹⁹ Jeanne Hersch, *Mirarea filozofică. Istoria filozofiei europene*, trans. by Drăgan Vasile (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997), 71.

¹⁰⁰ Hersch, *Mirarea filozofică. Istoria filozofiei europene*, 71.