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Anexa nr.6

ABSTRACT OF THE HABILITATION THESIS

TITLE :

Insights into Reality and Beyond: The Interplay of Philosophy and Theology from Late Antiquity to Byzantium

Field of habilitation: **Philosophy**

Author**: Vlad Marilena-Silvia**

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Abstract

This habilitation thesis presents the main directions of my research, focused, on the one hand, on the complex relationship between Greek Neoplatonism and its theological reception in early Byzantine thought, and, on the other hand, on the recovery of Greek philosophy in the post-Byzantine cultural sphere. My research has been developed in single-authored books and specialized studies published in international journals and collective volumes, as well as in translations from Ancient Greek accompanied by commentary and critical explanatory notes.

Regarding the first line of inquiry, my investigation has focused on the methodological and conceptual shifts marking the transition from the thought of Neoplatonic philosophers such as Proclus and Damascius to the Christian tradition represented by the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite. At the center of this research lies the problem of the first principle of reality: the ways in which it is articulated in different philosophical and theological contexts, how it generates the subsequent levels of reality, and how it structures reality as a unified whole. In addition, my study examines how the existence of a first principle affects the very nature of discourse and sets the limits of conceptual thought, given that its nature remains essentially ineffable.

First, I have examined the idea of a principle beyond being and thought, a notion central to the Neoplatonic tradition. I have shown that this notion of transcendence has its own history and undergoes a process of internal development. The idea of a transcendent principle is not a fixed doctrinal given, but a conception in continuous evolution, which over time acquires greater complexity and depth. There is a dynamic interplay between philosophical thought—seeking to articulate a principle beyond all things—and its constant

dissatisfaction with the notions of transcendence that emerge from its own pursuit.

At the same time, I have examined the radical aporetic methodology developed by Damascius, which represents the culmination of the Neoplatonic quest for a wholly inaccessible first principle. Unlike his predecessors, who elaborated indirect and negative discourses on the principle, Damascius undermines any attempt to confine or crystallize it within a conceptual expression. Rather, he embraces the paradox that the first principle must remain beyond discourse, not merely as a theoretical formulation of pure negativity, but as an insurmountable existential impasse that philosophical thought must acknowledge and assume as such. My studies show that this radical approach marks a decisive moment in the history of Neoplatonism and anticipates the later development of negative theology.

I have also examined the transformation of certain Neoplatonic concepts within the Dionysian corpus, where the notion of a first principle is elaborated through the lens of Christian theology. Dionysius the Areopagite adopts the Neoplatonic theory of divine processions and reconfigures it from the perspective of the divine names, which at once reveal and conceal the ultimate reality—God or *thearchia*—and His presence in everything that exists. The concept of hierarchy plays a crucial role in structuring reality, presented as a mediated ascent and as a process of participation in divine illumination. Dionysius does not merely borrow Neoplatonic concepts; he actively transforms them, seeking to address the various conceptual tensions inherent in late Neoplatonism.

I have examined the role of language and discourse, analyzing how apophatic language functions as a philosophical and theological instrument that goes beyond mere negation, operating as a mechanism through which the limits of thought are confronted. Both Damascius and Dionysius employ a strategy that makes use of language's very incapacity for expression. This incapacity does not appear as a limitation or a failure, but as a means of indicating the presence of that which cannot be articulated directly. This perspective is essential for understanding how late antique philosophy approached divine transcendence, not as a theoretical abstraction, but as the ultimate aim of human thought, which is actively dedicated to grasping reality as a whole.

My analysis has focused on specific meta-discursive procedures that late antique thought integrated alongside theoretical and conceptual description. Techniques such as divination, prayer, silence, unification, and illumination capture the deeper significance and

ultimate aim of Neoplatonism, as well as of the theological tradition represented by Dionysius the Areopagite. This aim is not to convey a description – even a paradoxical one – of reality and its principle, but rather to awaken a distinctive way of perceiving the principle of reality, in accordance with the manner in which it affects us.

The second line of my research, developed especially over the past five years, addresses the reception of Greek philosophy in the post-Byzantine world. In particular, I have focused on the post-Byzantine Aristotelian tradition, through the study and translation of the philosophical works of Theophilos Korydalleus, a key seventeenth-century figure in the transmission of classical Greek thought into the early modern period. Theophilos Korydalleus stands out for his systematic effort to revisit, in the terms of late Aristotelian scholasticism, the entire Aristotelian corpus, providing detailed and rigorous commentaries. His work on the treatise *On the Soul* is a privileged example of how the philosophy of Greek antiquity was reinterpreted and integrated into a post-Byzantine educational and theological framework. My research on Korydalleus's work involves editing and translating the Greek manuscripts, with the aim of producing a bilingual edition accompanied by explanatory critical commentary.

This research involves not only reconstructing the textual history of his commentaries, but also offering a philosophical contextualization of Korydalleus's positions in relation to the Peripatetic tradition and to other philosophical influences detectable in his discourse. At the same time, my work seeks to recover a transitional period in the culture of Southeastern Europe, in which Greek philosophy – though often overshadowed by theological dominance – continued to be cultivated, transmitted, and reinterpreted. Through this project, I aim to contribute to the re-evaluation of an important yet little-known segment of the history of philosophy, bringing to light the subtle continuity between the ancient heritage, late Byzantine milieus, and the philosophical reconfigurations of the early modern period. Korydalleus thus emerges not merely as a faithful exegete of Aristotle, but as a thinker deeply engaged in the problem of transmitting and reinterpreting tradition within a cultural context under the pressure of major historical and epistemic shifts.