

ARISTOTELIAN AND NEOPLATONIC ETHICS IN MICHAEL PSELLOS AND JOHN ITALOS

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines the use made by Michael Psellos and John Italos of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* together with Neoplatonic sources (in particular Porphyry's *Sentences*) on the subject of virtue. Examining chapters 66-81 of Psellos' *De omnifaria doctrina* and Essays 81 and 63 of Italos' *Problems and Solutions*, I argue that both philosophers have a coherent theory of virtue which integrates Aristotelian ethical virtue in the Neoplatonic hierarchy of the virtues.

Keywords: Psellos, Italos, Aristotle, ethics.

In this paper² I would like to consider the way in which Michael Psellos and his pupil John Italos appropriated ancient Greek philosophical ethics by examining in particular the use they made of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (a treatise to which I will refer henceforth as "*NE*") in conjunction with other, Neoplatonic texts, in particular Porphyry's *Sentences*. Some work has been done by modern scholars on the Byzantine reception of Aristotle's *NE*,³ but more remains to be explored in a field to which the present paper wishes to make a contribution. In particular, I propose to examine in detail the way in which two Byzantine philosophers excerpted and modified Aristotle's *NE* and combined it with Neoplatonic materials. I will attempt to see if Psellos and Italos, in excerpting and combining Aristotelian and Neoplatonic sources, do this in the framework of a coherent ethical view, or if they excerpt in the absence of such a view. My analysis will be restricted to the use made of ancient philosophical ethics: I will not attempt to include Christian theological ethics in my approach.⁴

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² A revised and (I trust) improved version of a paper originally published under the title 'Greek Philosophical Ethics in Byzantium: Michael Psellos and John Italos', in: H.-C. Günther (ed.), *Menschenbilder Ost und West*, (Nordhausen 2018), 423-447.

³ See more recently, for example, Ierodiakonou 2005, Barber and Jenkins 2009.

⁴ For a more extensive treatment of ethics in Psellos see Walter 2017, 91-177.

1. Michael Psellos

Psellos' *De omnifaria doctrina*, which he dedicated to his pupil, the emperor Michael Ducas (1071-1078),⁵ is a little encyclopaedia or manual of philosophical knowledge relating probably to his activity as a teacher of philosophy. The work covers, in a series of short chapters, a wide range of subjects - God, the Trinity, intellect, soul, natural science, astronomy, and much more -, including materials taken from ancient sources as well as paragraphs composed by Psellos himself. Having discussed a number of questions concerning the soul, Psellos moves in chapters 66-81 to the domain of ethics, dealing in particular with the subject of the virtues. This part of the manual falls into two sections. In a first section, chapters 66-74 present a theory of the hierarchy of virtues inspired by Neoplatonic sources, making use of Plotinus, *Ennead* I, 2, of Porphyry, *Sentences* chapter 32, and of other later, unidentified Neoplatonic authors (probably Iamblichus and Proclus).⁶ These chapters are then followed by a second section, chapters 75-80, which consists of passages excerpted from Aristotle's *NE*, Book II, on the subject of the ethical virtues. Chapter 81 concludes the series of chapters on the virtues. I would like first (i) to examine the way in which Psellos excerpts *NE* Book II in chapters 75-80 and then (ii) to discuss the relationship these excerpts might have with the Neoplatonic theory of a hierarchy of virtues presented in chapters 66-74, concluding with some consideration of chapter 81.

(i) Psellos, *De omnifaria doctrina*, chapters 75-80

In chapter 75, Psellos reproduces the text of the opening of *NE* II, 1 (1103a14-26) in which Aristotle makes a fundamental distinction between intellectual virtues, which are acquired by teaching and experience, and ethical virtues, which are acquired by habituation. Aristotle's text is reproduced word-for-word, with some slight omissions and with the exception of Psellos' insertion of some words which I highlight in italics:

Virtue being of two sorts, intellectual virtue *by which we think of higher beings*, and ethical virtue, *by which we accustom ourselves to fine things by means of imitation*, intellectual virtue is acquired and increased mostly by teaching, which is why experience and time are required, whereas ethical virtue derives from habituation.⁷

⁵ The Greek text is edited by Westerink. There is an Italian translation by Mussini 1990.

⁶ See Papamanolakis 2007: 231-240; O'Meara 2013-2014: 78.

⁷ Διττῆς οὐσης τῆς ἀρετῆς, τῆς μὲν διανοητικῆς, καθ' ἣν τὰ κρείττω διανοούμεθα, τῆς δὲ ἠθικῆς, καθ' ἣν πρὸς τὰ καλὰ διὰ μιμήσεως ἐθιζόμεθα, ἡ μὲν διανοητικὴ τὸ πλεῖον ἐκ διδασκαλίας ἔχει καὶ τὴν γένεσιν καὶ τὴν αὐξησιν, διόπερ ἐμπειρίας δεῖται καὶ χρόνου· ἡ δὲ ἠθικὴ ἐξ ἔθους παραγίνεται. (Psell. Omn. 75.1-6 Westerink) In this article I will provide the Greek text of passages which I quote from Psellos and from Italos, since the editions might not always be easily accessible to the reader.

I will return below to the possible significance of the words Psellos inserts in Aristotle's text.

Chapter 76 makes use of *NE* II, 2-3, where Aristotle describes ethical virtue as a mean state (of the soul) between extremes of excess and deficiency. Psellos selects phrases in Aristotle which illustrate this theory of ethical virtue by reference to the examples of courage (a mean state of the soul, between foolhardiness and cowardice) and of moderation, adding phrases taken from Aristotle which show how pleasure and pain are associated with the virtues, and how it is that by acting virtuously we become virtuous. Here again Psellos adds a phrase of his own (which I put in Italics):

It is in doing just things that we become just, moderate things that we become moderate, courageous things that we become courageous, *wise things that we become wise*, and thus it is for all virtue.⁸

However, the wisdom in question here, *phronêsis*,⁹ is, for Aristotle, an *intellectual virtue*: can it really be acquired by habituation, by repeatedly doing wise things, in the way that the ethical virtues are? Is Psellos simply embroidering on Aristotle's text in treating wisdom as if it were the same as the other (ethical) virtues? Or does Psellos have deeper reasons for adding wisdom to the text here, in particular a theory of different levels of wisdom, both as an ethical and as an intellectual virtue, a theory which we will meet later in our investigation? For the moment it is difficult to assess the significance of Psellos' insertion. In this chapter, Psellos puts together snippets taken from a wide range of text in Aristotle, rather than excerpting a longer section, as he did in chapter 75.¹⁰

In chapter 77, Psellos returns to providing a longer, continuous excerpt (with some omissions) from Aristotle, *NE* II, 5, showing that ethical virtue is neither an affect (*pathos*), nor a capacity (*dunamis*), but a state (*hexis*), which involves choice (*proairesis*).¹¹ A long continuous excerpt is also provided in chapter 78, taken now (with omissions) from *NE* II, 6, where Aristotle returns to the description of ethical virtue as a state of the soul which is a mean between extremes, adding that there are actions to which this description does not

⁸ καὶ τὰ μὲν δίκαια πράττοντες δίκαιοι γινόμεθα, τὰ δὲ σώφρονα σώφρονες, καὶ τὰ μὲν ἀνδρεία ἀνδρεῖοι, τὰ δὲ φρόνιμα φρόνιμοι, καὶ οὕτως ἐπὶ πάσης ἀρετῆς. (Psell. Omn. 76.10-13 Westerink).

⁹ I translate *phronêsis*, here and in what follows, as 'wisdom' since the usual translation of the term (as 'practical wisdom') is sometimes too restrictive, creating difficulties when *phronêsis* reappears, in Neoplatonic theory, as a higher, theoretical virtue. 'Wisdom' can be either practical or theoretical, or both. When the Aristotelian distinction between *phronêsis* as practical wisdom and *sophia* as theoretical wisdom is in question, I will use the expressions '(practical) wisdom' and '(theoretical) wisdom'.

¹⁰ The snippets correspond to *NE* 1104a12-13, 1104a19-27, 1104b13-16, 1103a34-b2. Westerink's edition provides indications of Psellos' sources, in particular Aristotle and Neoplatonist philosophers.

¹¹ *NE* 1105b19-1106a6.

apply, actions which are immoral and where there can be no question of a mean between excess and deficiency.¹² In chapter 79, Psellos returns to compiling snippets, which are taken this time from *NE* II, 7, showing how a number of virtues and vices correspond to mean states of the soul and to excess and deficiency in these states.¹³ The compilation of snippets taken from *NE* II, 7, on the same subject, continues in chapter 80, but here we can observe that Psellos has rearranged his excerpts in a different order from that in which the passages appear in Aristotle's text.¹⁴

It would seem then that Psellos' excerpting practice varies in chapters 75-80. He can provide fairly continuous passages taken from Aristotle's *NE*, Book II, or he can compile a series of short snippets deriving from a wider range of Aristotle's text, snippets which he can also rearrange on occasion in a different order. This "cut and paste" procedure sometimes involves some rewording of some phrases and the insertion of phrases composed by Psellos himself, insertions to which I will come back in the following section. The series of chapters gives an overview of Aristotle's distinction between intellectual and ethical virtue, his conception of ethical virtue as a state of the soul acquired by habituation, by repeated practice of virtuous actions, a state which represents a mean between extremes of excess and deficiency, this conception of ethical virtue being illustrated by many examples of particular virtues (as mean states) and vices (as extremes).¹⁵

(ii) Psellos, *De omnifaria doctrina*, chapters 66-74

What then might be the relation between the series of chapters providing excerpts from Aristotle's *NE*, Book II, and the preceding series of chapters which present a Neoplatonic theory of a hierarchy of the virtues? At first glance, one might think that Aristotle's doctrine of ethical virtue has little to do with the Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues. The Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues describes an ascending scale of types of virtue, going up from natural and ethical¹⁶ virtues, through political and purificatory virtues, to theoretical,

¹² *NE* 1106b36-1107a17. In Westerink's edition, Aristotle's τὸ εὖ ἀκρότης (*NE* 1107a8) appears as τὸ ἐν ἀκρότης; it is difficult to be sure if this change is due to a scribal slip, or if it has more significance.

¹³ *NE* 1107a33-b10, 1107b16-23, 1107b27-30.

¹⁴ *NE* 1108a5-8, 1108a19-23, 1108a13-14, 1108a27-30, 1108a23-26, 1108a33-34.

¹⁵ The theme of virtue as a mean state between extremes, illustrated with examples of specific virtues and vices, is exploited by Psellos in his rhetorical and theological works; see, for example, Psell. Or. Paneg. 4.515-526 Dennis; Psell. Or. Min. 30.82-83 Littlewood; Psell. Theol. 1.8A, 5. Gautier.

¹⁶ 'Ethical' virtue refers here to habits acquired without rationality (as in trained animals and children), as distinguished from 'political' virtue which does involve rationality and which is taken by our Byzantine philosophers, as we will see, to correspond to Aristotelian ethical virtue.

paradigmatic and theurgic virtues, a scale matching the Neoplatonic hierarchy of reality and representing stages in the increasing assimilation of the soul to transcendent divinities.¹⁷ If Aristotle's theory of ethical virtue has little to do with this Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues, then we may think that Psellos has compiled materials which do not belong together in his *De omnifaria doctrina*, thus arousing the suspicion that he might be unreflectively pillaging his ancient sources.¹⁸ However, I think that for Psellos, as we will see, Aristotle's conception of ethical virtue is compatible with the Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues and, indeed, that it fits into this hierarchy.

An indication of this can be found in chapter 75 in the words Psellos inserts, as noted above, in Aristotle's text. In this insertion, Psellos describes Aristotle's intellectual virtues as those whereby we think of "higher beings", whereas ethical virtues are that whereby "we accustom ourselves to fine things by means of imitation". The reference to "higher beings" uses terminology common in Neoplatonic philosophy for referring to transcendent, divine beings, demons, gods, various levels of intellectual and intelligible divinities. Psellos thus links Aristotelian intellectual virtue to the level of what is described as 'theoretical' virtue in Neoplatonic philosophy, whereas intellectual virtue, in Aristotle, is broader in range, since it includes (practical) wisdom. As for ethical virtue being acquired "by means of imitation", we could read this insertion made by Psellos in an Aristotelian way, as meaning that morally virtuous people can act as standards.¹⁹ But in the Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues, what is called 'political virtue' is considered to be an imitation of higher, transcendent activities: (practical) wisdom derives its principles from (theoretical) wisdom and what it does can become an image of a higher, divine life.²⁰

In the series of chapters presenting the Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues, Psellos already introduces elements of the Aristotelian conception of ethical virtue. For example, in chapter 68, having described wisdom as a theoretical virtue, which produces within ourselves an intellectual life, Psellos then adds

¹⁷ On the hierarchy of virtues in Neoplatonism, see Saffrey and Segonds 2001: LXIX-XCVIII, who refer to some of Psellos' works (LXXI, LXXXIX) where the Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues is used, not only in the chapters of the *De omnifaria doctrina*, but also in Psell. Phil. Min. 2.32 O'Meara and in Theol.1.30.54-59 (see also 30, 64-68) Gautier, to which texts one might add *Chronographia* 6.44.6-8 Reinsch. See also Papamanolakis 2007. Walter 2017, 108 attempts to exclude the hierarchy of virtues from Psellos' 'argumentative' writings (on this see the next footnote). If, as Walter sees, Psellos distinguishes between two lives, the practical and the theoretical, these two lives span and do not exclude the hierarchy of virtues.

¹⁸ See Walter 2017, 177, who unfortunately does not analyze carefully texts such as the *De omnifaria doctrina*, a text which he dismisses as 'descriptive' (as opposed to 'argumentative'). Walter's distinction between descriptive and argumentative texts in Psellos seems to me to be artificial, anachronistic and potentially misleading.

¹⁹ *NE* 1113a31-33.

²⁰ See Plotinus, *Ennead* 1.2.1. 24-25; 7.24-29 Henry Schwyzer; Psell., *Omn.* 71.2-3; 72.1-3 Westerink.

that we have an “ineffable knowledge” thanks to this virtue. We seem here to be in the realm of Neoplatonic theoretical virtue, far from Aristotelian (practical) wisdom. But then Psellos writes:

However, ethical virtue comes from wisdom, but does not act with this wisdom, but is acquired through practice in time. The divinity of virtue traverses all beings. For there is supracelestial and celestial virtue, hypercosmic and encosmic, intellectual and psychic, angelic and human.²¹

Thus wisdom is to be found on different levels of the hierarchy of virtues. It is found as a theoretical virtue, and also produces virtue on a level corresponding to Aristotelian ethical virtue, whose acquisition requires practice.

It would thus appear that Psellos understands Aristotelian ethical virtue as fitting into the Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues, as corresponding to the level which Neoplatonists beginning with Plotinus would call ‘political virtue’. We can therefore argue that in adding a series of chapters excerpting Aristotle’s treatment of ethical virtue in *NE* Book II to the chapters where he presents the Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues, Psellos is not indiscriminately assembling heterogeneous materials, but presenting what he considers to be a coherent theory of virtue. This conclusion can be confirmed, I believe, if we consider the last chapter (81) of Psellos’ series of chapters on the virtues in *De omnifaria doctrina*.

Ethical character is a quality of the irrational part of the soul, when this part is ordered by reason and, as it were, takes on the quality of character (*êthos*),²² in relation to which ethical virtues are indeed constituted and are named.²³ For soul, being fitted together from rational principles and numbers which are substantial, has one part, the intellectual and reasoning part, whose nature it is to dominate and rule the irrational, the passible and irrational being another part. Of this passible part, some of it is more bodily, such as desire, some of it provides strength and power to reason, what is called the spirited part. (Practical) wisdom differs from (theoretical) wisdom in that (practical) wisdom requires chance, whereas (theoretical) wisdom does not even require deliberation in relation to its proper goal. Virtue is a mean, like a harmony and fit modulation, which shuns the excess and deficiency of the vices.²⁴

²¹ ἡ μέντοι ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ ἀπὸ φρονήσεως μὲν πρόεισιν, οὐ μέντοι μετὰ φρονήσεως ἐνεργεῖ, ἀλλὰ τριβῆ χρονίῳ ἐγγίνεται. διήκει δὲ ἡ τῆς ἀρετῆς θειότης διὰ πάντων τῶν ὄντων· ἔστι γὰρ καὶ ὑπερουράνιος ἀρετὴ καὶ οὐράνιος, καὶ ὑπερκόσμιος καὶ ἐγκόσμιος, καὶ νοερά καὶ ψυχικὴ, καὶ ἀγγελικὴ καὶ ἀνθρωπικὴ. (Psell. Omn. 68.8-12 Westerink).

²² See Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* II, 1, 1220b5-6 (indicated by Westerink).

²³ See *NE* 1103a17-18.

²⁴ ἦθος ἐστὶ ποιότης τοῦ ἀλόγου μέρους τῆς ψυχῆς, ὅταν ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου κοσμηταὶ καὶ οἷον ποιότητα ἦθους λαμβάνη, περὶ ὃ καὶ ἠθικαὶ ἀρεταὶ συνίστανται τε καὶ ὀνομάζονται. ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ συνηρμοσμένη κατὰ λόγους καὶ ἀριθμοὺς οὐσιώδεις ἕτερον μὲν ἔχει τὸ νοερὸν καὶ λογιστικόν, ὃ κρατεῖν καὶ ἄρχειν τοῦ ἀλόγου πέφυκεν, ἕτερον δὲ τὸ παθητικόν καὶ ἄλογον.

In this chapter, Psellos presents, once again, the Aristotelian conception of ethical virtue as a mean state of the soul, in relation to the extreme states of excess and deficiency that are the vices. But the soul which Psellos describes is that of Plato's *Timaeus*, as read by Plato's Neoplatonic interpreters, a soul which is put together from "substantial numbers".²⁵ It is also the soul described in Plato's *Republic*, which has a rational part and two irrational parts, desire and spirit.²⁶ It is in terms of these three parts that Plato defines the virtues which the Neoplatonic philosophers described as 'political' and which they fitted into a hierarchy of types of virtue.²⁷ In Psellos' chapter this virtue is identified with the ethical virtue of Aristotle's *NE*. The chapter shows, in a nutshell, how Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ethics are fused together in Psellos' manual.²⁸

2 John Italos

Psellos' enthusiasm for late antique pagan philosophers such as Proclus was potentially dangerous and, while giving him the claim to an exotic and high-level intellectual culture, left him open to attack from the wardens of Christian orthodoxy. At one point he was under sufficient menace as to oblige him to retire from the imperial court and take refuge in a monastery, only to return later to the court. However his pupil and successor as professor of philosophy, John Italos, did not escape condemnation by Church authorities in 1082.²⁹ Some of Italos' teaching is probably reflected in a collection of essays, going under the title "Problems and Solutions", which deal with questions concerning logic, physics, psychology, theology.³⁰ Two essays on the virtues (essays 63 and 81) are of most interest to our present purposes: one of them (81) summarizes the Neoplatonic theory of a hierarchy of virtues, whereas the other contains larger excerpts taken from Aristotle's *NE*. As these essays are rarely read, I would like to present them briefly, before discussing what Italos might suggest there as regards the relation between Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ethics.

καὶ τούτου τοῦ παθητικοῦ τὸ μὲν σωματικώτερον ἐστίν, οἷον τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν, τὸ δὲ ἐστὶν ὅπου τῷ λογισμῷ παρέχον ἰσχύνην καὶ δύναμιν, ὃ καὶ θυμοειδὲς ὀνομάζεται. διαφέρει δὲ φρόνησις σοφίας, ὅτι ἡ μὲν φρόνησις τύχης δεῖται, ἡ δὲ σοφία οὐδὲ βουλῆς πρὸς τὸ οἰκεῖον τέλος. μεσότης δὲ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρετὴ οἷον ἁρμονία τις καὶ ἐμμέλεια, τὸ ὑπερβάλλον καὶ ἐλλείπον τῶν κακιῶν φεύγουσα. (Psell. Omn. 81.2-12 Westerink).

²⁵ See, for example, Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed. Diehl, II, 193, 25-27; 239, 5-15.

²⁶ *Republic* 435e-441a.

²⁷ See Plotinus, *Ennead* 1.2.1. 16-21.

²⁸ In 2013-2014, I argue that this fusion can be traced back to ancient Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic sources.

²⁹ See most recently Trizio 2014: 182-4 (with references to earlier literature); Trizio also discusses Italos' attitude to and use of Proclus (184-190).

³⁰ I use the edition published by Joannou and have also been able to consult the edition published by Ceretelli, thanks to photocopies kindly sent to me by Katerina Ierodiakonou.

Essay 81 (“On the Virtues”), a short text, begins as follows:

It has been said earlier³¹ what moderation is, what virtues there are which are mutually entailing, that they are means, or rather that they aim at means. But since virtue has many forms, one form being the political, another the purificatory, another the theoretical, another being said to be the paradigmatic, let us find out what wisdom is said to be in these forms, and what moderation is. For not every form of virtue is a means, as was said³² concerning political virtue, but, in purificatory virtue, let wisdom be the fact of not sharing the same opinions with the body...³³

What follows in the essay is taken from Porphyry’s *Sentences*, chapter 32,³⁴ where (paraphrasing and reworking Plotinus, *Ennead* I, 2) Porphyry lists the four levels (or forms) of virtue distinguished and described by Italos. We notice that Italos considers that the (Aristotelian) definition of (ethical) virtue as a mean between extremes applies in the case of the ‘political’ virtues, but not in the case of the higher levels of the hierarchy of virtues. Italos’ position on (Aristotelian) ethical virtue as corresponding to (Neoplatonic) ‘political’ virtue thus fits with what we have found to be the case above in Psellos’ *De omnifaria doctrina*.

In essay 63 (“On Ethical Virtue and the Rest”), Italos writes as if addressing someone (a pupil?) who is impatient with regard to a discourse which takes away from continuous study of divine things. Italos himself does not want to go through what the ancients said about ethical virtue, but he nevertheless

³¹ This may refer to essay 63.

³² Italos is probably referring to essay 63, 90, 1-25 (quoted in part below n. 41).

³³ I quote here Italos’ Greek text at greater length, so as to facilitate comparison with his ancient sources (see next note): Τί μὲν ἔστι σωφροσύνη, καὶ τίνες αἱ ἀντακολουθοῦσαι [corrected from ἀντιακολουθοῦσαι in the edition] ἀρεταί, καὶ ὅτι μεσότητες ἢ μᾶλλον στοχαστικά μεσοτήτων, εἴρηται πρότερον· ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀρετῆς πλείονα τυγχάνει τὰ εἶδη, καὶ τὸ μὲν πολιτικόν, τὸ δὲ καθαρτικόν, τὸ δὲ θεωρητικόν, τὸ δὲ παραδειγματικόν ἔστι λεγόμενον, ζητητέον ποία τις ἐν τούτοις φρόνησις λέγεται καὶ ποία σωφροσύνη· οὐ γὰρ πᾶν εἶδος ἀρετῆς μεσότης ὑπάρχει, ὡσπερ ἐπὶ τῆς πολιτικῆς ἐλέγετο· ἀλλ’ ἐν μὲν τῇ καθαρτικῇ τὸ μὴ συνδοξάζειν τῷ σώματι φρόνησις ἔστω, τὸ δὲ μὴ συμπάσχειν αὐτῷ σωφροσύνη, καὶ τὸ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι θάνατον, ὡς εἰς κενόν τι καὶ μὴ ὄν διαλυθησομένης τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀνδρεία ἔστω, νοῦ δὲ καὶ φρονήσεως αἰεὶ ἀκολουθοῦντος [there is a problem in the Greek text here; Italos’ source, Porphyry, has ἡγουμένου δὲ λόγου καὶ νοῦ] καὶ μὴ ἐνίστασθαι τι καὶ κωλύειν ἑᾶντος, δικαιοσύνη συνίσταται. οὕτω μὲν ἐπὶ τῆς καθαρτικῆς ἀρετῆς διαιρετέον τὰ εἶδη, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς θεωρητικῆς τρόπον ἕτερον· καὶ ἔστω δικαιοσύνη ἢ πρὸς τὸν νοῦν δικαιοπραγία, καὶ φρόνησις ἢ τῶν ὄντων ὄντων θεωρία, καὶ σωφροσύνη ἢ πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸν νοῦν ἐπιστροφή, καὶ ἀνδρεία ἢ κατὰ μίμησιν αὐτοῦ ἀπάθεια. (Ital. 132.6-19 Ioannou).

³⁴ Greek text edited by Lamberz; compare Porphyry’s chapter 32, 24, 9-31, 8 with Italos’ essay 81.6-23 (here and in what follows I add line numbers to Joannou’s edition). Neither Lamberz nor Brisson 2005 examine Italos’ use of this chapter of Porphyry’s *Sentences*. Porphyry’s chapter had already been excerpted by Psell. *Omn.* 66, 70 and 74 and in Psell. *Phil. Min.* 2.110.5-111, 13 O’Meara.

will say now only so much about it as will be of benefit to his addressee in his striving towards the divine, reminding him that ‘virtue’ is said in different ways. Italos in fact distinguishes, in the essay, as we will see, between ‘natural’, ‘ethical’, ‘purificatory’, ‘theoretical’ and ‘noetic’ kinds of virtue, i.e. he follows a somewhat longer list of the levels of the Neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues³⁵ than that which he gives in its Porphyrian version in essay 81.

First discussing briefly the concept of ‘natural virtue’, Italos then defines ‘ethical’ virtue³⁶ as the mean between extremes, succinctly summarizing Aristotle’s doctrine in *EN* II, 1-2.³⁷ Having discussed the relations between the four cardinal virtues in what appears to be his own contribution to the subject, Italos then moves to a treatment of the powers of the soul, of which the virtues are said to be mean states. He recalls Plato’s distinction of the soul into three parts in the *Republic*, while indicating that only the rational part is proper to the soul taken in itself. Both the rational part and the other two parts, spirit and desire, he argues, are good and can serve in the ascent to God: here again, Italos seems to be developing his own discourse on the subject.³⁸ However, our nature, he adds, is such as to incline in two directions, to the good, but also to evil, hence the need in the soul for virtue. Italos then makes use of the image of the soul as a chariot in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, mixing into the image the concept of virtue as a mean between extremes.³⁹ Paraphrasing *NE* II, 8, Italos discusses in more detail some technicalities of the Aristotelian theory of a mean between extremes.⁴⁰ Moving from the level of ethical virtue to a higher level of virtue, Italos notes, as in essay 81, that the latter kind of virtue is not a mean between extremes, but a turning away of soul from the body, a return to itself and to God.⁴¹

³⁵ Psellos gives in *De omnifaria doctrina* both Porphyry’s four levels of virtue (chs. 71, 74) and the longer list (ch. 67) to be found in later Neoplatonists such as Marinus, Damascius and Olympiodorus (see the reference to Saffrey and Segonds given above in n. 17).

³⁶ Which he calls ‘political’ virtue in essay 81.

³⁷ Αὕτη τοιγαροῦν ἡ ἠθικὴ καλουμένη ἀρετὴ τὸ μὲν ὄνομα ἐκ τοῦ ἔθους παρείληφε παρεγκεκλιμένου εἰς τὸ ἡ τοῦ ε· τὸ δὲ πρᾶγμα μεσότης τίς ἐστὶ διὰ τὴν ἐξ ἀκροτήτων συμβαίνουσαν ἀεὶ φθορὰν τοῖς πολιτευομένοις κατ’ αὐτάς· αἱ γὰρ ἐλλείψεις φαρματικαὶ ὁμοίως ταῖς ὑπερβολαῖς· ὅθεν οὐκ ἀρεταί, ἀλλὰ κακίαι τοῖς παλαιοῖς ὠνομάδαται [keeping the reading of the mss.]. (Ital. 87.19-23 Ioannou).

³⁸ Ital. 88.3 – 89.2 Ioannou.

³⁹ Ital. 89.3-25 Ioannou.

⁴⁰ Ital. 89.26-39 Ioannou; see *NE* 1108b13-1109a19.

⁴¹ Περί μὲν οὖν τῆς ἠθικῆς ἀρετῆς ἱκανὰ τὰ εἰρημένα· περί δὲ τῆς ἀνωτέρας καὶ κρείττονος λέγωμεν ὧδε, ἥτις οὐκ ἐν μεσότητι καθάπερ αἱ ἄλλαι δύο τινῶν ἀκροτήτων γνωρίζεται, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἐπιστροφῇ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν ἀνάτου πρὸς ἑαυτὸ καὶ ῥύπων παντοίων καθαρισμῶ καὶ ἀποστροφῇ τῶν τῆδε χαρακτηρισμῶν· οὐ γὰρ οὕτως ἡμᾶς ἡ ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ διετίθει τελέως, ὥστε μηδενὸς ἄψασθαι σωματικοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἔχεσθαι μὲν καὶ τούτων παρεκελεύετο, συμμέτρως δὲ καὶ προσηκόντως· ἡ δὲ τῶν αἰσθητῶν πάντη καθαρπάζειν βούλεται τὸν ἑαυτῆ προστετηκότα, κρειττόνως τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς γνωρίσασα μέγεθος καὶ ὅθεν ἐλίλυθε καὶ πρὸς ὃ τὴν τοιαύτην σπεύδειν εἰκὸς ὑποδεικνύουσα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις. (Ital. 90.1-9 Ioannou).

Using the Neoplatonic definitions of the purificatory virtues, Italos shows this in relation to each of the four cardinal virtues as taken on higher levels of the hierarchy of virtues. Thus wisdom, on the higher level, is knowledge of the summit of being and moderation is the complete purification of the soul, love of and assimilation to the One.⁴² After a digression in which he shows the many meanings of the expression 'one', identifying the supreme, ineffable One, source of all unity and being, with the Christian Trinity, Italos then shows that 'purificatory' virtue brings us nearer to union with the One than does ethical virtue.⁴³ He then mentions yet higher levels of virtue, the 'theoretical' and 'intelligible', but says that it is inopportune to treat of them here, since they would require a more extensive explanation.⁴⁴

Italos then takes up a question which is recalled in essay 81, that of the mutual implication of the virtues, arguing at length that virtues involving rationality imply each other.⁴⁵

The essay ends with paraphrases of and excerpts taken from *NE* II 5, where Aristotle relates virtue to a state of soul, rather than to a capacity or affect of soul,⁴⁶ and from *NE*, II, 7, where Aristotle sets out a series of virtues and vices as corresponding to means and extremes.⁴⁷ These passages in Aristotle

⁴² Ital. 90.12-25 Ioannou; for Italos' source, see above, n. 34 (the use of Porphyry in essay 81).

⁴³ Ital. 91, 12-28 Ioannou.

⁴⁴ Τοιούτους ἡμᾶς αἶ τε ἠθικαὶ καὶ αἱ καθαρτικαὶ μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων γενέσθαι διδάσκουσιν ἀρετῶν· ποίων δὴ τούτων; τῶν θεωρητικῶν λέγω καὶ νοητῶν περὶ ὧν οὐκ εὐκαιρὸν ἐστὶ διαλαβεῖν ὡς μείζονος δεομένης τῆς αὐτῶν θεωρίας ἐξετάσεως. (Ital. 91.28-31 Ioannou)

⁴⁵ Ital. 91, 29ff. Ioannou. This question had been discussed by Plotinus, *Ennead* I, 2, 7 and by later Neoplatonists such as Damascius, *Commentaria in Platonis Phaedonem*, ed. Westerink, I, 138-140.

⁴⁶ Ital. 94.6-16 Ioannou; see *NE* 1105b20-1106a12.

⁴⁷ Ital. 94.17-32 Ioannou; see *EN* 1107a34ff. I give here a longer sample of these excerpts, so that the reader might more easily compare them with Aristotle's text. Καὶ ταῦτα μὲν οὕτως· διευκρινητέον δὲ πάλιν ἡμῖν τὰς μεσότητος βέλτιον· ὅτι περὶ μὲν φόβους καὶ θάρρη μεσότης ἢ ἀνδρεία, ὑπερβολὴ δὲ τοῦ μὲν φοβεῖσθαι ἀνώνυμος, θρασύτης δὲ τοῦ θαρρεῖν· καὶ τούτων πάλιν ἢ ἔλλειψις, τοῦ μὲν θαρρεῖν δειλία, τοῦ δὲ φοβεῖσθαι οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἄλλ' ἢ εἰρημένη· σωφροσύνη δὲ τίνων ἂν λεχθῆι μεσότης; ἢ δῆλον ὡς λύπης τε καὶ ἡδονῆς· καὶ γὰρ ἐπὶ τούτων ἢ μὲν ὑπερβολὴ ἀκολασία ὀνομάζεται, ἢ δὲ ἔλλειψις ἀκατανόμαστος· σπάνιοι γὰρ οἱ ἐλλείποντες κατὰ τὰς ἡδονάς· λεγέσθω δὲ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀναισθησία ἢ καὶ ἠλιθιότης ὡς ἔνιοι· ὁ αὐτὸς δὲ λόγος καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρετῶν. εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλαι περὶ ταύτας μεσότητες, τρόπον μὲν τινα ὑπὸ ταύτας ἀναγόμεναι, τρόπον δὲ τινα καὶ ἄλλο τι παρ' αὐτάς εἶναι δοκοῦσαι, καθάπερ ἐπὶ τῆς λεγομένης ἐλευθεριότητος ἔστιν εὐρεῖν· μεσότης γὰρ αὕτη περὶ δόσιν χρημάτων καὶ λῆψιν, ὧν ὑπερβολὴ μὲν ἄσωτία, ἔλλειψις δὲ ἀνελευθερία, ἐναντίως ἔχουσαι περὶ τὰ ἀντικείμενα· καὶ γὰρ ἡ ἄσωτία τῇ μὲν δόσει ὑπερβάλλει, ἐλλείπει δὲ τῷ ἐναντίῳ, ὁ δὲ γε ἀνελεύθερος ἐναντία τούτων διαπράττειται· ἢ δὲ μεγαλοπρέπεια καὶ αὐτὴ μεσότης οὕσα, δύο ἔξει ταύτας ἀκρότητας, ὑπερβολὴν ὁμοίως καὶ ἔλλειψιν, ὧν τὴν μὲν ἀπειροκαλίαν ὀνομάζουσι, τὴν ὑπερβολὴν, τὴν δὲ μικροψυχίαν, τὴν ἔλλειψιν (Ital. 94.17-32 Ioannou).

had also been exploited by Psellos in *De omnifaria doctrina* (chapters 77 and 79), but Italos provides fuller excerpts from them and he seems to be using Aristotle's text directly.

3 Conclusion

Italos' essays show more explicitly what we have found suggested already in Psellos' *De omnifaria doctrina*. In excerpting passages from Aristotle's treatment of ethical virtue in *NE*, which they combine with accounts of a hierarchy of virtues taken from Neoplatonic sources, both philosophers have a coherent view which integrates Aristotelian ethical virtue in the Neoplatonic hierarchy in the sense that Aristotelian ethical virtue corresponds to what Plotinus had called 'political' virtue in the hierarchy. The Aristotelian concept of ethical virtue as a mean between extremes is accepted as applying to the level of 'political' virtue, but rejected when it comes to defining the higher levels of virtue, where Plotinus and Porphyry are followed.

Psellos and Italos use a variety of techniques in excerpting their ancient sources – extracts of continuous passages, snippets taken from various places and combined in varying orders, paraphrases or rewriting -, but they are not mindlessly compiling materials with no thought of achieving philosophical coherence in what they do. Italos, in his essays, seems freer in the way he writes than is Psellos in his little manual, showing that he can philosophize with the same mastery of his subject as that of his ancient sources, bringing philosophical ideas into relation with Christian theology. However, in other writings, Psellos can show the same freedom and creativity.⁴⁸ For both philosophers, the adoption of Aristotle's theory of ethical virtue in *NE II* as part of a wider context provided by the Neoplatonic theory of a hierarchy of virtues implies a Neoplatonic view of human nature: humans are essentially rational souls which find themselves in bodies, obliged to administer bodily affairs and called to cultivate virtue in this context (this is the role of Aristotelian ethical virtue), but whose destiny lies in a transcendent life of the soul assimilating itself and uniting itself to God (this is the role of the higher virtues of the Neoplatonists).

⁴⁸ See O'Meara 1998.

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