Barlaam of Seminara on Stoic Ethics

Edited by
CHARLES R. HOGG JR.
and JOHN SELLARS

Mohr Siebeck

Barlaam of Seminara on Stoic Ethics

ETHICA

SECVNDVM STOICOS

compoſita per
D BARLAAMVM DE SEMINARIA EPISCOPVM
Gyracenſem ex pluribus voluminibus
eorundem Stoicorum ſub
compendio.

PARS PRIMA.

Beatitudo, quid dicatur.

Hominum, alium alio, ſecundum quod humo
eſt, melius viuere putamus. Et ſtatuum homi-
num, alium eligibiliorem, alium minus eligendum
arbitramur. Ergo cum natura noſtra ſit finita, &
non ſit infinitæ bonitatis capax; aliam alia melio-
rem vitam ratione ſumentes, non ad infinitum pro-
cedemus; ſed peruenientes poſtremo ad aliquem ter-
minum bene viuendi: quem iam tranſcendere
natura noſtra de ſui conditione minime valeat.
Quamuis enim non habeamus, quem aſſignabi-
mus, puræ ad eum peruenire: tamen, quia ſub-
ſtantiam & vitam Natura limitatam habemus:
neceſſe eſt etiam, ſummum gradum noſtræ
perfectionis & optimum ſtatum viuendi, ſecun-
dum quod proportionalitas noſtra exigit: eadem
natura præfixum & notum eſſe. Nam opinari
finitam naturam, ad infinitum proficere & per-

Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Clm 111, fol. 341r.
Reproduced with permission.

Barlaam of Seminara on Stoic Ethics

Text, Translation, and Interpretative Essays

Edited by
Charles R. Hogg Jr. and John Sellars

Mohr Siebeck

Charles R. Hogg Jr, born 1956; Senior Affiliate Professor, Grand Valley State University, Allendale (MI).

John Sellars, born 1971; Reader in Philosophy at Royal Holloway, University of London.
orcid.org/0000-0002-2041-8549

ISBN 978-3-16-159527-1 / eISBN 978-3-16-161564-1
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-161564-1

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available at *http://dnb.dnb.de*.

The book was printed on non-aging paper by Laupp & Göbel in Gomaringen and bound by Nädele in Nehren.

Printed in Germany.

Preface

This volume contains the first modern edition and first translation into English (or any language, so far as we know) of Barlaam of Seminara's *Ethica secundum Stoicos* (*ESS*). This text, dating from the first half of the fourteenth century, is the oldest work on Stoic philosophy written after antiquity that we have and so it is of particular interest for the history of the reception of Stoicism. Barlaam of Seminara (or Calabria) is also a fascinating figure in his own right, working within the context of the Byzantine Palaiologan Renaissance, the early moments of the Italian Renaissance, and the rediscovery of Greek philosophy in the West.

The origins of the present book date back to 1997 when Charles R. Hogg submitted an edition, translation, and study of the *ESS* as his doctoral thesis to Indiana University. Some years later, John Sellars, who was working on the reception of Stoicism, had become curious about this work and secured a copy of Hogg's thesis. In time, Sellars and Hogg made contact and a plan was hatched to find a way of publishing the text and translation, along with interpretative essays that would examine the text in detail. The present volume is the result. What follows does not claim to offer the last word on Barlaam; on the contrary, it is the first word, so to speak, and it is hoped that it will prompt others to explore this fascinating text further.

A quick note on the division of labour. The Introduction is a joint effort: the first half on Barlaam is by Sellars; the second half on the text is primarily by Hogg (the section on sources is by Sellars). The Latin text and translation are by Hogg, as is the first interpretative essay on Book 1. The second and third interpretative essays on Book 2 and Stoic ethics in the Middle Ages are by Sellars.

We both thank Mohr Siebeck for welcoming this volume into their list. We also thank the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich for permission to reproduce the image used as the frontispiece and Dawn Sellars for assistance in the final preparation of our manuscript.

5 January 2022 Charles R. Hogg John Sellars

Contents

II. Interpretative Essays

Abbreviations

Abbreviations of titles of works are explained in the Index of Passages at the end of the volume. Abbreviations used in the apparatus to the Latin text are explained in the Note on the Text, 28–29. Note also the following:

FHSG	Fortenbaugh, W. W., Huby, P. M., Sharples, R. W., and Gutas, D. *Theophrastus of Eresus: Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought, and Influence.* 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1992.
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LS	Long, A. A, and Sedley, D. N. *The Hellenistic Philosophers.* 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
OCT	Oxford Classical Text
OLD	*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare. Second Edition. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
PG	*Patrologiae cursus completus ... series Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne. 161 vols. Paris: Migne, 1857–1866.
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus ... series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne. 220 vols. Paris: Migne, 1844–1863.
SVF	*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. H. von Arnim. 4 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1924.
WH	Wachsmuth, C., and Hense, O. *Ioannis Stobaei Anthologium.* 5 vols. Berlin: Weidmann, 1884–1912. Cited by volume, page, and line numbers.

Introduction

This volume contains the text of Barlaam of Seminara's *Ethica secundum Stoicos*, along with a translation, and a set of interpretative essays. The *Ethica secundum Stoicos* (*ESS*) is a little-known text, rarely mentioned in the scholarly literature on Stoicism. It survives in a single manuscript, now in Munich, and was first printed in 1604 alongside some of Barlaam's letters. It was reprinted in 1725 and, again, in 1865 within Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*.[1] There it has remained, in plain sight, attracting little, if any, attention.[2]

Its author, Barlaam of Seminara (alt. Barlaam of Calabria),[3] usually features in accounts of Byzantine philosophy and, in particular, Byzantine theology but he can hardly be said to be widely known.[4] Historians of classical scholarship often name him as the person who attempted – unsuccessfully – to teach Petrarch how to read Greek.[5] His interactions with both Petrarch and Boccaccio have earned him a small place in the history of the beginnings of the Renaissance. Among Byzantinists he is remembered primarily for his part in the Hesychast controversy during which he came into conflict with Gregory Palamas. His interests were much broader than just theology, however, and he also wrote on mathematics, astronomy, logic, and philosophy.[6]

Barlaam also wrote the *ESS*, although this has not been universally accepted. We shall address the question of authorship further below. Whether Barlaam wrote it or not, though, the *ESS* is a fascinating text that occupies a special

---

[1] Canisius 1601–1604, vi, 79–110; Basnage 1725, iv, 405–422; Migne, *PG* cli, cols 1341–1364.

[2] One of the few discussions of its contents can be found in Mandalari 1888, 73–77.

[3] 'Seminara' is the standard spelling of the place name and the most usual spelling in the scholarly literature (see e.g. Mogenet and Tihon 1977; Carelos 1996), but it is sometimes written as 'Seminaria' (e.g. Meyendorff 1964, 42). Indeed, it is given as 'Seminaria' in the title of the Munich manuscript of *ESS*.

[4] See e.g. Tatakis 1949, 263–266 (tr. 2003, 218–221); De Libera 1993, 41–44.

[5] See e.g. Sandys 1903–1908, ii, 8; Highet 1949, 84; Reynolds and Wilson 1968, 122; Pfeiffer 1976, 14; Hunt et al. 2017, 157; Wilson 2017, 2.

[6] For lists of Barlaam's works, see Sinkewicz 1981, 185–194; Carelos 1996, xxv–xxvi. As Sinkewicz 1981, 152, notes, Barlaam was often described by Byzantine sources as a philosopher. Works not explicitly discussed below include two treatises on solar eclipses (in Mogenet and Tihon 1977), a discussion of Ptolemy's *Harmonics*, and works on arithmetic and the square root.

place in the history of the reception of Stoicism, for it is the oldest extant text devoted to Stoic philosophy since antiquity.[7] Not only that, it reports a novel account of the Stoic theory of emotions, unattested in any of our other sources, which it claims is derived from the books of the Stoics themselves. For these two reasons, it deserves to be far better known than it is. We hope that this volume will contribute to making the text more readily available and accessible to readers with an interest in Stoic ethics and the history of the reception of Stoicism.

1. Barlaam of Seminara

In this section we offer a brief biography of Barlaam and an outline of his varied intellectual activities.[8] This does not pretend to be a complete or definitive account, but simply aims to put the *ESS* into the wider context of his life and works.

Southern Italy

Barlaam was born in Seminara, a town in Calabria in southern Italy, at some time around 1290.[9] Calabria is sometimes referred to as the 'toe' of the 'boot' of Italy, close to Sicily. The southern part of Italy had long been Greek speaking. In antiquity it was known as 'Magna Graecia' and was home to philosophers such as Pythagoras, Parmenides, and Empedocles. The region remained Greek speaking in the Middle Ages, possibly repopulated by Greek emigrés in late antiquity.[10] Slav invasions of Greece and the Arabic conquest of Greek-speaking territories in the eastern Mediterranean, including Alexandria, may have displaced local populations; one medieval source reports that *en masse* "the city of Patras emigrated to the territory of Rhegium in Calabria".[11] The region was also part of the Byzantine Empire from the sixth to the eleventh century, at which point it came under control of the Normans. But Greek language and culture remained firmly ingrained and it was widely known throughout Europe as a Greek-speaking region. Writing in the 1270s, not long before Barlaam was born, Roger Bacon advised readers of his *Compendium studii philosophiae* keen to learn Greek to "go to Italy in many parts of which the

[7] As such, it receives a brief mention in Spanneut 1973, 187.

[8] The foundational modern biographies of Barlaam, on which many subsequent accounts draw, are Mandalari 1888 and Lo Parco 1905. Particularly valuable are three more recent articles by Robert Sinkewicz, 1980, 1981, 1982. Briefer useful overviews in English include Setton 1956, 40–45; Demetracopoulos 2017; Trizio 2017.

[9] On his date of birth, see Mandalari 1888, 27.

[10] See the discussions in Tozer 1889; Charanis 1946; also Mandalari 1888, 3–24.

[11] This comes from the *Chronicle of Monemvasia,* cited in Charanis 1946, 84.

clerics and the people are native Greeks".[12] In 1300 there were numerous Greek bishops in the region and around twenty-five Greek monasteries.[13]

It is likely, then, that Barlaam was a native Greek speaker and was brought up within the Orthodox Church.[14] There is little information about Barlaam's early life, except that as a young man he became a monk at the Basilian monastery of St Elias located in Galatro, just over twenty miles from Seminara.[15] Given his wide intellectual interests spanning well beyond theology to include philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy, it has been suggested that Barlaam may have also spent time in some other school or schools in Italy.[16] But the truth is that we know almost nothing about the first half of his life spent in Italy. What we do know is that around 1325 he headed east, first to Arta and Thessaloniki, finally arriving in Constantinople around 1330.[17]

Constantinople

At the time when Barlaam headed for Constantinople, it was in the middle of what has been labelled the 'Palaiologan Renaissance'.[18] This was a period of cultural reassertion that took place in the aftermath of the fourth crusade, during which the city of Constantinople fell to Latin invaders in 1204. After this cataclysmic event, the Byzantine government continued in exile in Asia Minor, retaking Constantinople in 1261 under the leadership of Michael VIII Palaiologos.

The Byzantine state was inevitably weakened by the experience and its empire was significantly reduced in extent. Whether consciously or not, Byzantium under the Palaiologans made up for this loss of political power by

---

[12] Roger Bacon, *Compendium studii philosophiae* 6.87; text and translation in Maloney 2018, 86–87.

[13] See Loud 2016, 144.

[14] D'Agostino 2001, 73, suggests that Barlaam was entirely Greek in culture. Others have argued that he possessed a distinctively Western attitude (e.g. Ierodiakonou 2002, 226). The latter view has perhaps in part been shaped by the polemics of Nikephoros Gregoras, who presented Barlaam in a number of his works as an outsider with very bad Greek (see e.g. Gregoras' *Byz. hist.* 11.10 [*PG* cxlviii, 760–761] and the comments in Mariev 2016, 101). Similarly, O'Meara 2017, 180, claims that Barlaam was "well educated in Latin philosophy and theology, and enthusiastically appropriated the philosophical culture of Byzantium".

[15] See Trizio 2017.

[16] See Mogenet and Tihon 1977, 149. Barlaam's knowledge of mathematics and astronomy might suggest an education covering the four numerical arts of the quadrivium. This was also an established part of Byzantine higher education, on which see Constantinides 1982.

[17] See Sinkewicz 1982, 184; also Mogenet and Tihon 1977, 149; Demetracopoulos 2017.

[18] For a defence of this term see Fryde 2000, 11–13, and for some doubts see Ševčenko 2002, 284. Alongside these two works, note also Runciman 1970. The term is also discussed in Bazzani 2006.

reasserting the value of Greek culture and learning, perhaps with a renewed awareness of how easily it might be lost, as indeed much was during the period of occupation. There appears to have been a concerted effort to copy manuscripts in order to ensure the survival of texts and there was a flourishing of intellectual activity. The Patriarchal school in Constantinople – the main centre for both theological and secular higher education – was re-established and became a centre for the study of philosophy, science, and philology.[19]

Among the significant intellectuals active in the early part of this period one might note George Pachymeres (1242–1310) and Maximos Planoudes (1260–1310), both of whom had died when Barlaam was a young man and before he reached Constantinople. Pachymeres wrote works drawing on Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius. Planoudes mastered Latin and translated works by Cicero, Boethius, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas into Greek, as well as making significant contributions to mathematics.[20]

In the next generation the figure of Theodore Metochites (1270–1332) stands out.[21] He had wide intellectual interests, including astronomy, literature, and philosophy. He became a member of the imperial court, amassed a significant fortune and a substantial library. He also used his fortune to pay for the restoration of the church at the monastery of Chora, close to his own palace. Among the many mosaics that he commissioned (and survive today) is a portrait of himself offering the monastery to Christ. One of his most interesting works in the present context is his *On Morals, or Concerning Education* (Ἠθικὸς ἢ περὶ παιδείας), a treatise inspired by the Greek philosophical tradition that extols the value of education, virtue, and wisdom as antidotes to adversity and the vicissitudes of fortune.[22] Among the many ancient points of reference, a number of Stoic influences have been noted in this work.[23] After a turbulent political career which included a period of exile, Metochites spent the last couple of years of his life in the Chora monastery and died in 1332, just after Barlaam had arrived in Constantinople.

---

[19] On higher education in Byzantium in this period, see Constantinides 1982, esp. 50–65. On the teaching of philosophy in particular, see ibid. 113–132.

[20] On Planoudes' translations from Latin to Greek, see Appendix B 'Medieval Translations' in Pasnau 2010, ii, 793–832, esp. 793–796, 799, 800–801, 824. One might also note that, in the other direction, Barlaam's contemporary from Calabria, Nicholas of Reggio, translated works by Galen into Latin in the early fourteenth century. Earlier, in the 1260s and 1270s, William of Moerbeke had of course translated many of Aristotle's works into Latin, along with Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle by Ammonius and Simplicius, as well as works by Proclus (see Fryde 2000, 103–143).

[21] For overviews of Metochites and his interests, see e.g. Tatakis 1949, 249–256 (tr. 2003, 206–212); Wilson 1996, 256–264; Fryde 2000, 322–336; Bazzani 2006. Note also the introductions in Hult 2002; Xenophontos 2020.

[22] See the recent new edition with translation in Xenophontos 2020.

[23] See Xenophontos 2020, xvi–xvii.

Among Metochites' students was Nikephoros Gregoras (1296–1361), who went on to teach at the monastery of Chora.[24] Like his teacher, Gregoras had a wide range of intellectual interests, including theology, philosophy, astronomy, and history. He was widely read in ancient texts, having access to Metochites' library. As well as Plato and Aristotle, he read Plotinus closely and knew Diogenes Laertius.[25] Like his teacher, Gregoras was an admirer of Plato and critical of Aristotle, making him unsympathetic to Latin scholastic philosophy. It was within this context that he becomes especially relevant for Barlaam, because Gregoras was highly critical of Barlaam, whom he saw as in some respects an Aristotelian. Gregoras' dialogue *Florentios* was written as a polemic against Barlaam.[26]

It was in this intellectual context, then, that Barlaam found himself when he first arrived in Constantinople. While there, he was attached to the Akataleptos monastery.[27]

Debates with Dominicans

In 1334, two Dominican bishops – Francesco da Camerino and Richard of England – arrived in Constantinople with a view to engage in discussions regarding the union of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. They had already been engaged in missionary activity in the East and felt confident that such a union might be possible.[28] The Emperor Andronicus III asked Barlaam to speak on behalf of the Orthodox Church in the ensuing discussions with the two Dominicans, and, in 1335, Barlaam delivered two discourses.[29]

One of the central issues in the schism between the Eastern and Western Churches was the ongoing controversy over the use of the word *filioque* ('and from the son') in the Creed.[30] The Nicene Creed, produced by the first council of Constantinople in 381, stated that the Holy Spirit 'proceeds from the Father'

---

[24] On Gregoras, see e.g. Guilland 1926; Tatakis 1949, 256–261 (tr. 2003, 212–217); Wilson 1996, 266–268; Fryde 2000, 357–373. An older biography is printed in *PG* cxlviii 19–58. His letters are edited and translated into French in Guilland 1927; there is a more recent edition in Leone 1982–1983 (not seen).

[25] On Plotinus see Mariev 2016; on Diogenes Laertius see Fryde 2000, 361.

[26] See the edition with Italian translation in Leone 1975 and esp. the Introduction, 15–35, on the dispute with Barlaam. Its philosophical content is discussed in Mariev 2016. On the dispute with Barlaam, see also Guilland 1926, 16–30 and, on the *Florentios*, 165–170.

[27] So Talbot 1991.

[28] See Sinkewicz 1980, 490–492. The event is described in Gregoras, *Byz. hist.* 10.8 (*PG* cxlviii 701–721).

[29] See Sinkewicz 1980, 492. The texts are edited in Giannelli 1946, 185–208, who gives them a much later date. Here we follow Sinkewicz's assessment.

[30] For a thorough study of the topic see Siecienski 2010, which touches on Barlaam at 143–145.

(ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, in Latin: *ex Patre procedit*).[31] A number of early Latin councils added the word *filioque*, in effect claiming that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son. In this they were echoing the use of this phrase in a number of Latin Church Fathers, including Tertullian, Ambrose, and Augustine.[32] As far as the Orthodox Church was concerned, this was an unwarranted and heterodox addition.[33]

During the discussions, the Dominicans appear to have put forward a number of arguments in favour of the *filioque*. It is conceivable that they may have been drawing on arguments on this topic made by their fellow Dominican Thomas Aquinas, who, in his *Summa theologiae*, explicitly challenged the wording of the Creed from the council at Constantinople.[34] Indeed, it has been commented that "Thomas's position on the *filioque*, like his opinion on so many subjects, became the position of the [Catholic] Church itself".[35] The fact that Barlaam explicitly mentioned Thomas in his responses adds weight to the suggestion that Thomas was a key point of reference in the discussions.[36]

In response to this, Barlaam published his discourses (*Κατὰ Λατίνων*, *Contra Latinos*), setting out his position more fully.[37] His aim was to show – against the Dominican envoys – that it is not possible to gain knowledge of God by the use of human reasoning. In particular, he wanted to challenge the Dominicans' use of syllogistic arguments in the ongoing theological discussions.[38] While

---

[31] Compare with John 15:26: ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται.

[32] For discussion, see Siecienski 2010, 51–71. For Augustine, see e.g. *De trinitate* 4.20.29 (*PL* xlii, 908): "the Holy spirit proceeds not only from the Father but also from the Son" (*non tantum a Patre, sed et a Filio procedere Spiritum sanctum*).

[33] The first person in the East to comment on this issue was Maximus the Confessor, in the seventh century; see further Siecienski 2010, 73–86. Later, in the ninth century, Photius argued against the *filioque* and his position became foundational for the Orthodox view. See further Kolbaba 1995, 42–43; Siecienski 2010, 100–104.

[34] See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I q. 36 a. 2. See the comments in Sinkewicz 1981, 165. Thomas also discussed the *filioque* in his *Contra errores Graecorum*, which is discussed in Siecienski 2010, 128–131.

[35] Siecienski 2010, 131.

[36] See e.g. Barlaam's *Contra Latinos*, Tractatus A IV, 8 (Fyrigos 1998, 560), noted in Demetracopoulos 2004, 111–112, who agrees with Fyrigos and Sinkewicz (1981, 165) that Barlaam had no direct acquaintance with Thomas Aquinas' works and what he knew of Thomas's ideas would have come via his Latin interlocutors. See also Flogaus 1998, 6. For further discussion of the reception of Thomas Aquinas in Byzantium, see Plested 2017.

[37] These are edited and translated into Italian in Fyrigos 1998. For a helpful discussion of their sources see Demetracopoulos 2004, who notes Barlaam's frequent use of Platonic phrases (87, 106–108), and debts to earlier Byzantine philosophers such as Nikephoros Blemmydes and Theodore Metochites. More relevant in the present context is Barlaam's use of Stoic logical notions, which are known to us only via Sextus Empiricus (ibid. 101; cf. 119).

[38] See Sinkewicz 1982, 188. On the place of Aristotelian logic in the subsequent dispute between Barlaam, Palamas, and Gregoras, see Ierodianonou 2002.

such methods may be appropriate in other domains of human inquiry, they are out of place when it comes to theology. It has been suggested that Barlaam's position reflects the influence of the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius.[39]

Barlaam's argument was that the use of Aristotelian syllogistic arguments is inappropriate in theological debates because in this context they would be unable to meet the requirements set out by Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics*. According to Aristotle, demonstrative (ἀποδεικτικός) understanding depends on premises that are true, primitive, immediate, and "prior to and explanatory of the conclusion".[40] The premises are, in effect, the causes of the conclusion. In the context of theology, any argument that concluded with a statement about God would make that statement secondary and derivative from the premises. But all true statements about God must be primary and fundamental, and so this kind of syllogistic argument cannot be used in theology.[41]

Further, Barlaam went on to argue that many doctrines held by Christians that derive from scripture ultimately contradict the sorts of primitive, self-evident premises upon which Aristotle thought syllogisms could be built. As such, syllogistic reasoning can only challenge firmly-held Christian beliefs and so it would be impious to engage in this in the context of theological discussions.[42] One of Barlaam's targets here was Thomas Aquinas, who – as we have seen – was probably a key point of reference for his Dominican interlocutors. Thomas's application of Aristotelian logic to theology was, as far as Barlaam was concerned, wholly inappropriate.[43]

An additional reason to doubt the applicability of Aristotelian logic to theological questions is the fact that syllogistic demonstration deals with universals. The conclusions generated are never specific to just one particular but instead apply to an entire class of entity. God, however, is singular and unique, and so this type of demonstration has no place in discussions of His attributes.[44] This is, in effect, an affirmation of the absolute transcendence of God, and on

---

[39] See Sinkewicz 1982, 189, 191; also Sinkewicz 1981, 174. Barlaam is said to have held some kind of official position as an interpreter of Pseudo-Dionysius (see Mandalari 1888, 71; Kolbaba 1995, 50; cf. Gregoras, *Byz. hist.* 19.1 [*PG* cxlviii, 1185]).

[40] Aristotle, *An. post.* 71b19–25.

[41] See Barlaam's *Contra Latinos*, Tractatus B V (Fyrigos 1998, 380–412), summarized in Sinkewicz 1982, 189–190.

[42] See Sinkewicz 1982, 192.

[43] On Barlaam and Thomas Aquinas, see Sinkewicz 1982, 194–195, who notes that Barlaam's knowledge of Thomas was minimal and probably restricted to what he heard from his Dominican interlocutors. Others have suggested that Barlaam, coming from the West himself, was "probably well-informed" about Aquinas (Ierodiakonou 2002, 227). See also n. 36 above and the discussion in Flogaus 1998, 5–10.

[44] On this see Barlaam's first letter to Palamas (*Ep. Gr.* 1), dated to 1335, in Schirò 1954, 251–254, with Sinkewicz 1981, 170.

this – as we have noted – Barlaam was probably influenced by the Neoplatonic tradition via Pseudo-Dionysius.[45]

It was around this time that Barlaam also wrote *Solutiones*, in response to a series of questions posed by George Lapithes.[46] This has been described as his "sole Greek philosophical work".[47] The central theme is one common in the Byzantine philosophical tradition, namely the reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle. In general, Barlaam's concern was to defend Aristotle, both from charges of inconsistency and from disagreeing with Plato. It has been suggested that Barlaam's knowledge of Aristotle's philosophy was perhaps limited to the *Physics*.[48] This may have reflected his broader and not uncommon view that Aristotle's philosophy was primarily applicable to the natural world while it was Plato's that addressed the immaterial world studied by metaphysics. In this sense – and very much within the spirit of the wider Neoplatonic tradition – Barlaam valued the philosophy of both Plato and Aristotle, seeing them as complementary rather than in conflict.[49] As in the *Contra Latinos*, Barlaam argued in the *Solutiones* that the limitations of human reason mean that it will not be possible to grasp fully divine truths. Thus, any contradiction that might seem to exist between human truths and divine truths will only ever be apparent.[50]

Barlaam's position, then, was one of epistemological caution, warning against extreme dogmatism on either side of the debate between the Eastern and Western churches. It has been described by some commentators as "theological agnosticism".[51] One can see how this might be a useful position to hold for someone involved in discussions aimed at bringing about reconciliation between the two sides, for although accepting it might require some compromise

---

[45] Sinkewicz 1981, 176. It seems worth stressing that for Barlaam 'Pseudo-Dionysius' was not the late antique author heavily influenced by Neoplatonism that we identify with the name today, but rather 'St Dionysius', contemporary with the apostles, baptised by St Paul (cf. Acts 17:34), and first bishop of Athens (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.4; 4.23). See e.g. *Contra Latinos* Tractatus B, VII, 6 (Fyrigos 1998, 452; Kolbaba 1995, 76–77); *De papae principatu* 5 (in Kolbaba 1995, 98–99; also *PG* cli, 1262; this is *Anti-Latin Treatise* 21 in Sinkewicz's numbering, 1981, 189).

[46] Text and discussion in Sinkewicz 1981.

[47] Sinkewicz 1981, 152.

[48] Sinkewicz 1981, 162. Barlaam was of course also well versed in Aristotle's logical works.

[49] See further Sinkewicz 1981, 164.

[50] See Sinkewicz 1981, 174, citing *Solutiones* V, 2.4–8.

[51] See both Meyendorff 1964, 43, and Siecienski 2010, 145. It is worth contrasting this cautious scepticism in theology with Barlaam's approach to the study of the natural world. In his works on astronomy (in Mogenet and Tihon 1977), Barlaam offers complex and precise calculations regarding solar eclipses. There seems to be no doubt at all about the possibility of knowledge in the realm of physics.

by both parties, neither would be forced to renounce their own view and embrace that of the other side.

The Hesychast Controversy

The precise dating of Barlaam's anti-Latin works is unclear and has been a subject of scholarly debate.[52] Early versions of some of these texts came to the attention of Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), a monk in the community at Mount Athos.[53] Barlaam and Palamas exchanged letters briefly and Barlaam revised some of his texts in order to reduce the possibility of misinterpretation.[54] In these Barlaam again argued that there can be no Aristotelian demonstrations about God, because such demonstrations apply to universal claims, whereas God's attributes are unique.[55] Palamas went on to write his own treatise against the Latins in which he warned against making any theological compromise and questioned Barlaam's account of the doctrine of *filioque*.[56]

This opening dispute with Palamas laid the foundations for what came to be known as the Hesychast controversy. In 1337 Barlaam encountered a number of Hesychast monks in Thessaloniki. They held that through the act of silent meditative prayer (ἡσυχία) it is possible to attain direct communion with God. Barlaam had grave concerns about this view and considered it potentially heretical. As a consequence, he reported the Hesychast monks to the Synod in Constantinople. This led to further correspondence with Palamas, who took the side of the Hesychasts.

One of the concerns of Palamas was that Barlaam's position might lead to the conclusion that knowledge of God is impossible. While Palamas shared Barlaam's concerns about the Latins' use of Aristotelian logic in theology, he nevertheless wanted to hold on to the idea that knowledge of God can be achieved. If not by reason, that knowledge must come via mystical contemplation.[57] This led Palamas to go on to draw a distinction between inner and outer wisdom. Although the outer wisdom of logical argumentation may not be able to secure knowledge of God, the inner wisdom of direct experience offers another route. He later characterized this as "divine illumination".[58] This direct

[52] See the discussion in Kolbaba 1995, 59–60, and Fyrigos 1998, 211–218.

[53] On Palamas, in particular see Meyendorff 1964; note also Tatakis 1949, 270–276 (tr. 2003, 224–229).

[54] There are two letters by Barlaam addressed to Palamas (*Ep. Gr.* 1 and 3), dated to 1335 and 1336, in Schirò 1954, 229–266 and 279–314. Palamas' letters to Barlaam are in Chrestou 1962–1992, i, 225–295.

[55] See Barlaam's first letter to Palamas (*Ep. Gr.* 1), dated to 1335, in Schirò 1954, 251–254.

[56] For discussion of the opening dispute between Barlaam and Palamas, see Ierodiakonou 2002. On the dispute in general see Louth 2017, 337–339; Russell 2017.

[57] See further Ierodiakonou 2002; Russell 2017, 495.

[58] See e.g. Palamas, *Capita 150*, chs 65–66 (Sinkewicz 1988, 158–161; also *PG* cl, 1168).

experience of God involved, for the Hesychasts, a whole series of practices, from the constant repetition of certain words of prayer to specific breathing exercises. For Barlaam, it was absurd to think that such physical practices could contribute to an intellectual communion with God. For Palamas, by contrast, this stress on the body underlined "a Christocentric conception of human life",[59] which is to say that it stressed the fact that God Himself had chosen to take human form.

Palamas went on to write a number of polemical works against Barlaam, including his *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* and his *Dialogue Between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite*.[60] In the former, Palamas responded directly to Barlaam's treatises. In response to Barlaam's claim that God is beyond human knowledge, Palamas countered that God is equally beyond unknowing.[61] Both Barlaam and Palamas were engaging with the tradition of negative theology and both cited Pseudo-Dionysius in their support; at times, the dispute can appear to be about who best understands the Areopagite.[62] As the controversy reached a wider audience, Nikephoros Gregoras became embroiled. Broadly sympathetic to Neoplatonism, Gregoras was, like Barlaam, critical of Palamas.[63] He ultimately lost out in the ensuing dispute and, again like Barlaam, was condemned and forced into exile. However, he was no fan of Barlaam either.[64]

It has sometimes been claimed that Barlaam's objections to Hesychasm reflected his training in rational Western theology.[65] On this view, Barlaam's training in Aristotelian logic led to a deep-seated scepticism with regard to such mysticism. Yet, as we have seen, Barlaam was equally critical of the Western application of logical argumentation to problems in theology. It is important, then, to distinguish between three positions: i) the claims of the Latin Dominicans that knowledge of God is possible via rational theology; ii) the claims of the Hesychasts and Palamas that knowledge of God is possible via direct experience; and iii) Barlaam's own view, drawing on the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, that any kind of firm knowledge of God is

[59] Meyendorff 1983, 5; cf. Russell 2017, 497.

[60] The former is edited and translated into French in Meyendorff 1973 and partially translated into English in Meyendorff 1983. The latter is translated into English in Ferwerda 1999 (not seen).

[61] See Meyendorff 1983, 13.

[62] See, for example, *Triads* 2.3.68 (Meyendorff 1973, ii, 531; trans. in Meyendorff 1983, 68–69); also *Capita 150*, chs 65–66 (Sinkewicz 1988, 158–161; also *PG* cl, 1168).

[63] See Russell 2017, 501–502. On Gregoras and Neoplatonism, see Mariev 2016.

[64] On Gregoras' criticisms of Barlaam (in his *Florentios*) and Palamas, see Ierodiakonou 2002, 221–224, along with items cited in n. 26 above.

[65] See e.g. the entry on Hesychasm in Cross 1958, 633. For the claim that Barlaam brought a distinctively Western outlook to the debate, see also Ebbesen 2002, 26; Ierodiaknou 2002, 226.

Index of Greek and Latin Words

Greek Words

Latin Words

Index of Passages

Index of Subjects and Names