

Possible Areopagitic Roots of Nutsubidze's Philosophical Inspiration

Introduction

Shalva Nutsubidze's interest toward Dionysius the Areopagite looks quite natural only *a posteriori*, that is, only to those who are aware of his hypothesis identifying Peter the Iberian as the author of the *Corpus Areopagiticum*. His hypothesis was first published in 1942.¹ Obviously, to be able to put forward any idea about the authorship of the *Corpus*, Nutsubidze needed to have a long-time and deep acquaintance with the contents of the Areopagitic works. However, his former philosophical works seem to demonstrate something contrary: Nutsubidze did never refer to Dionysius in his *alethologia*. At first glance, Nutsubidze's own philosophical concept has nothing to do with the Areopagite. However, is this impression true?

Of course, a supposition that Nutsubidze interested in the Areopagite without any purely philosophical reason and simply out of his large interest in the Georgian culture would seem rather problematic psychologically. We know that even Nutsubidze's scholarly interest in Rustaveli was ultimately philosophical one.² Thus, the lack of the references to the Areopagite in Nutsubidze's pre-1942 works is puzzling.

In his alethological works,³ Nutsubidze quotes intensively different philosophers, especially Bolzano and such classics as Descartes and Kant as well as his own German contemporaries, but avoids mentioning the two philosophers to whom his ideas about the "Truth *per se*" were especially close, Dionysius the Areopagite and Leibniz. Indeed, Nutsubidze refers to Leibniz from time to time but he certainly did not consider him as a predecessor of his own distinction between the "being" (*sein*), "thus-being" (*so-sein*), and "more-than-being" (*mehr als sein*). However, here we do know the reason. Of course, the formal structure of these distinctions between the empirical "being" and the potential "more-than-being" actualising itself as "thus-being" sounds Leibnizian for the modern historian of philosophy. However, the most relevant Leibnizian papers on this topic were first published in 1903⁴ and first recognized as such even later, by the father of the modern modal logic Clarence Irving Lewis in 1918.⁵ This direction of thought was then immersed into the mathematical logic and remained too far from Nutsubidze as well as the whole continental philosophy of the interwar period. Thus, it is clear that Nutsubidze

¹ Ш. Нутцубидзе, *Тайна Псевдо-Дионисия Ареопагита* [Sh. Nutsubidze, *The Mystery of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite*] (Tbilisi: Publishing House of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, 1942). Now translated into English by Levan Gigineishvili: Sh. Nutsubidze, *The mystery of Pseudo-Dionysius. (Short version)*, Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University, 2013. Cf. my own appreciation of this identification in B. Lourié, "Peter the Iberian and Dionysius the Areopagite: Honigsmann—van Esbroeck's Thesis Revisited," *Scrinium* 6 (2010) 143–212.

² Cf. M. Makharadze, "Philosophical Ideas of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*," in T. Nutsubidze, C. B. Horn, B. Lourié, with Collaboration by A. Ostrovsky (eds.), *Georgian Christian Thought and Its Cultural Context. Memorial Volume for the 125th Anniversary of Shalva Nutsubidze (1888–1969)*; Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity, 2; Leiden—Boston: Brill, 2014 [thereafter: *Memorial Nutsubidze*], 314–326, with further bibliography.

³ First of all, in the two monographs published in German: Sch. Nutsubidze, *Wahrheit und Erkenntnisstruktur. Erste Einleitung in den aletheiologischen Realismus*, Berlin—Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1926, and idem, *Philosophie und Weisheit. Spezielle Einleitung in die Aletheiologie*, Berlin—Königsberg: Ost-Europa-Verlag, 1931; for the full bibliography of his relevant publications, s. "Selected Bibliography of Shalva Nutsubidze," in *Memorial Nutsubidze*, 3–10.

⁴ L. Couturat, *Opusculs et fragments inédits de Leibniz. Extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque royale de Hanovre*, Paris: Alcan, 1903.

⁵ C. I. Lewis, *A Survey of Symbolic Logic*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1918.

was still unaware of Leibniz's philosophy especially in its part most relevant to him. But there were no such problems with the Areopagite: to Nutsbidze, Dionysius' works were easily available in Greek (in the until-recently standard edition by J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca*, t. 3, Paris, 1857), even though they were still not in vogue among the philosophers.

Below I will try to trace some Areopagitic roots behind the most crucial concepts of Nutsbidze's *alethology*. Indeed, if these roots are really roots and not simply parallels, they would imply that Nutsbidze's deep interest in the Areopagite arose not later than in the late 1910s. However, I cannot exclude an opposite possibility, namely, that Nutsbidze became acquainted—not on the level of the common knowledge but deeply—with the Areopagite's ideas when his own philosophical system was already matured, that is, not earlier than in about 1920. It is theoretically possible and would perfectly explain why Nutsbidze became so fascinated by the Areopagite. And, finally, the most plausible solution is perhaps a combination of both: Nutsbidze saw his *alethology* in a first outline still without any deep knowledge of Dionysius, but then recognised Dionysius as a source for his own philosophical inspiration. It is to the biographers of Nutsbidze to decide what explanation is right. I would like to offer to them only some food for thought.

Nutsbidze and the Modal World

If we consider the Areopagite as only a philosophical author, putting aside the theological contents of his works, the three philosophical ideas (at the very least) are especially striking: (1) that of the different levels of being and (2) that of the logic of contradiction. These two ideas relate to the domain of ontology but entail the third idea in the domain of epistemology: (3) that of a highest understanding when there is neither assertion nor negation but only some kind of pure contemplation (*theoria*).

In our modern philosophical language, one could reformulate the two first ideas. The different levels of being form ontology structured according to an alethic modal logic,⁶ whereas the logic which is based on contradiction is now, since the 1970s, called the paraconsistent logic.⁷ The third, epistemic idea, seems to be as alien to the modern philosophy as it was in Nutsbidze's time, and, probably, Nutsbidze is its only modern supporter among the professional philosophers.

Let us recall some basic Nutsbidze's ideas to be able to compare them with those of the Areopagite.⁸

Nutsbidze distinguished the “Truth *per se* (ჭეშმარიტება თავისთვის / *die Wahrheit an sich*)” corresponds in some fashion with the “Truth for us (ჭეშმარიტება ჩვენთვის / *die Wahrheit für uns*).” The “Truth for us” is the truth in an ordinary or, I would say, positivistic sense. The “Truth *per se*” is a specific notion introduced by Nutsbidze. It has sense only in Nutsbidze's specific ontology.

This is the ontology of three levels of being: “being” (*sein*), “thus-being” (*so-sein*), and “more-than-being” (*mehr als sein*). The empirical being (*sein*) is considered as a unique realisation (*so-sein*) of some existential possibility which is chosen because of some “more-than-being” (*mehr als sein*) presenting in any particular being.

All this sounds very Platonic, indeed, but there is no, here, any idea of pre-existent ideas in the sense of *universalia ante rem*. The Nutsbidzean “more-than-being” is not an idea in a

⁶ As I tried to demonstrate in B. Lourié, “Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: Modal Ontology,” in: A. Schumann (ed.), *Logic in Orthodox-Christian Thought*, Heusenstamm bei Frankfurt: Ontos-Verlag, 2013, 230-257.

⁷ There is no detailed study so far, but I tried to trace a sketch of the relevant material in B. Lourié, “The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: An Approach to Intensional Semantics,” in *Memorial Nutsbidze*, 81-129.

⁸ For a critical summary of Nutsbidze's alethological ideas, I will follow, first of all, Tengiz Iremadze, *Der Aletheiologische Realismus. Schalwa Nuzubidze und seine neuen Denkansätze*, Tbilisi: Nekeri, 2008, and Demur Jalaghonia, “Alethology as the First Philosophy,” in *Memorial Nutsbidze*, 18-26.

Platonic sense. The Leibnizian ideas on modality would be a much more close parallel. Nevertheless, there are important differences between Leibniz and Nutsbidze, too.

The “more-than-being” is some otherwise unnameable and unspeakable principle presenting in any being and making it “thus-being” (that is, not somewhat “otherwise-being”) but not identical with the being itself. The closest Ancient parallel is perhaps “seminal *logoi*” of the Stoics but hardly in its original context. The whole context of Nutsbidze recalls very much the scheme of Dionysius the Areopagite with its divine *logoi* within the created beings.

The “more-than-being” in Nutsbidze’s thought behaves similarly to the divine Providence with his *logoi* in patristic authors, especially in Dionysius. In Dionysius, the *logoi* are responsible, in any real situation, for the given actualisation of the theoretically possible scenarios. According to Dionysius, this mechanism works because all the created beings are in some kind of communion with the divine being through the divine *logoi* within the creatures. Unlike Dionysius, Nutsbidze says nothing about the divine nature of this “extra-being”, “more-than-being” presented in each creature but, however, insists that such a higher being does exist and is presented within each empirical entity.

The *logoi*, in Dionysius, or the “more-than-being,” in Nutsbidze, effectuate their choice among the different possibilities, whose reality is different from both reality of the empirical being and reality of the Platonic ideas which exist *ante rem*. The different possibilities for the scenarios of situations are real in some potential sense, without actualisation. Here, the closest parallel would be, probably, Leibniz, but mostly in the works still unknown to Nutsbidze. But otherwise the closest parallel is the Areopagite, I think, where this potential reality is that of the operational space of the divine Providence. The actualisation of this potential reality leads (in the Areopagite but not in Nutsbidze) to the *theosis* (divinisation), its rejection leads to annihilation.

Without any theological speculation, Nutsbidze applies a very similar scheme to the real world. The empirical beings and empirical situations are actualised—become real—because they are led by the “more-than-being” within them. But this “more-than-being” operates within a world of potentiality, where any given ontological entity must be considered as “thus-being,” that is, one of the many possibilities.

These possibilities where the “more-than-being” operates form the world of the “Truth *per se*,” the Nutsbidzean analogue of the Dionysian universe as it is seen by the Providence of God.

Nutsbidze and the Logic of Contradiction

Indeed, in the world of potentialities, there is no ordinary logic. First of all, the law *tertium non datur* is excluded, as it is excluded from the modal logics at all. The “more-than-being” effectuates its choice among the mutually incompatible possibilities, and, among these possibilities, the Law of Excluded Middle does not work. This point would be common to Nutsbidze, Dionysius, and even Leibniz, because this is the very basic notion of the modal logic.

However, Dionysius and Nutsbidze, unlike Leibniz, go further. According to Nutsbidze, in the domain of “Truth *per se*,” there is no contradiction, or it is rather beyond the very principle of contradiction. Not only the Law of Excluded Middle but even the Law of Non-Contradiction does not work. This domain, in Nutsbidze, acquires the propriety of the Dionysian divine realm which is equally beyond the assertion and the negation.

This thesis belongs to neither any kind of modal logic nor any kind of the Platonism (including even the closest one to Dionysius, that of Proclus⁹). In the 1970s, the logics which do not avoid the contradiction but are based on it are coined “paraconsistent.” The most of them are

⁹ For the relevant difference between Proclus and Dionysius, s. C. Steel, “Beyond the Principle of Contradiction? Proclus’ ‘Parmenides’ and the Origin of the Negative Theology,” in M. Peckavé (ed.), *Die Logik der Transzendentalen. Festschrift für Jan A. Aertsen zum 65. Geburtstag*, *Miscellanea mediaevalia* 30; Berlin—New York: W. de Gruyter, 2003, 581-599.

based on the contrary oppositions, which, according to the classical Law of Non-Contradiction, contain two statements that could be simultaneously false but not simultaneously true (“All S are P” vs “No S is P” and “Some S are P” vs “Some S are not P”). The most radical kind of the paraconsistent logic called “dialethic” by Graham Priest is, however, based on the contradictory oppositions, that is, the statement that could not, according to the Law of Non-Contradiction, to be simultaneously either true or false (“All S are P” vs “Some S are not P” and “No S is P” vs “Some S are P”).¹⁰

The contrary oppositions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. E.g., “He is happy” and “He is sad” are mutually inconsistent but not necessarily mutually exhaustive: it is possible that somebody is neither happy nor sad but it is considered impossible (in any non-paconsistent logic) that somebody is simultaneously happy and sad. The contradictory oppositions are necessarily mutually exclusive. E.g., “he is sitting” and “he is not sitting.” This is the very kind of opposition on which the dialethic paconsistent logic is based.

Such oppositions remind quite well the Dionysian teaching about the divine names. Namely, Dionysius insists that the name of every created being or idea or even non-being (μη ὄν) is a divine name, but, in the same time, God *is not* any of them. Thus, any affirmation that “God *is* (something)” must be counterpoised by the symmetric affirmation that “God *is not* (the very same thing).” Then, Dionysius adds that the truest and highest knowledge of God is “higher than any assertion or negation,” that is, beyond both cataphatic and apophatic theology.

To be able to compare these Dionysian ideas with those of Nutsuhide, we have to recall their relation to the created world. According to Dionysius, the names of created things become the divine names because all these things contains the divine *logoi* as a kind of some—let I call this in a Nutsuhidean way—“more-than-being.” The Dionysian “more-than-being” is a divine reality, that is, God himself. In Nutsuhide, there is no such definitiveness. He has preferred to define his “more-than-being” in an apophatic way, that is, limiting himself to indication that there is something higher than a simple being.

Thus, the logical structure of Nutsuhide’s ontology is similar, in many respects, to that of Dionysius. It is, too, modal and paconsistent, even dialethic. However, Nutsuhide is always silent about the divine matters. His works looks as a secular recension of Dionysius.

Nutsuhide and the Paconsistent Epistemology: the *Theoria*

Except the theology, Nutsuhide follows Dionysius even in the epistemology. He answers—and answers in a very Dionysian way—the question about the nature of knowledge of the dialethic reality. Indeed, the logical reasoning in any somewhat traditional sense is inapplicable here, even in the sense of some non-classical logics. Thus, Nutsuhide applies the Dionysian (and patristic) term *theoria* to coin this kind of understanding which he puts higher than any rational knowledge.

Nutsuhide himself considered such an epistemology as illogical—because he was unaware yet of the paconsistent logic as a special field of the logic as a scholarly discipline. I would call this epistemology logically precise because it is based on the simultaneous mental grasping of both parts of the contradictory opposition. The same was the prerequisite condition for going beyond the assertion and the negation in Dionysius.

Outside theology, this epistemology must be called-for in such fundamental domains as, for instance, semantics of indirect meanings in the logic of natural language and the logic of artistic perception. It could explain such things as artistic apprehension or scholarly intuition...

¹⁰ As a good introduction to the early history of the paconsistent logic, one can suggest G. Priest, R. Routley, J. Norman, and A. I. Arruda, *Paraconsistent Logic: Essays on the Inconsistent*, Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 1989; cf. a much shorter but more up-to-date review, G. Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. As a special introduction to the paconsistent logic based on the contradictory oppositions, one can use G. Priest, *In Contradiction. A Study of the Transconsistent. Expanded edition*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006.

I think that, as a philosopher, Nutsubidze perhaps belongs rather to the present epoch than to his own. The time when similar logical ideas started to be discussed on a large scale begun, I think, in the 1970s, whereas Nutsubidze died in 1969.

Nutsubidze vs Losev

As a post-scriptum, I am unable to refrain from a comparison between the two most influential and somewhat antagonistic philosophers, who were considered, in some way, as successors of the Areopagite during the Soviet times, Nutsubidze and Aleksej Fëdorovich Losev (1893—1988). Both of them have had their own understanding of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and even, although occasionally and indirectly, were cooperating in the struggle against the Soviet censorship.¹¹ However, their vectors of understanding Dionysius seem to me quite opposite. Nutsubidze preserved the paraconsistency of Areopagitic thinking but separated it from the theology. Losev's reading of Dionysius was rather a return to the Proclean framework: without dialethism but, instead, with pre-existent ideas.¹² If my understanding is right, one can call the Nutsubidzean approach as a secularisation of Dionysius, whereas Losev's one—his “re-paganisation.”

¹¹ Their indirect collaboration resulted in—whereas after the death of Nutsubidze—the publication in Tbilisi of the Russian translation of Proclus, *Elementa theologiae*, prepared by Losev (Прокл, *Первоосновы теологии*. Пер. и комм. А. Ф. Лосева, Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1972). At that time, a publication of a Russian translation of a Neoplatonic philosopher, especially with the word “theology” in the title, would be unimaginable in the Russian Federation (then a part of the USSR). Both Losev's admiration and criticism toward Nutsubidze's work is explained by himself in his “Aesthetics of Renaissance”: А. Ф. Лосев, *Эстетика Возрождения. Исторический смысл эстетики Возрождения*, Moscow: Mysl', 1998, 18-33.

¹² As it became especially clear in Losev's understanding of the (Areopagitic!) topic of the divine names. Cf. Losev's idea of an *eidos* of a created thing in his “Philosophy of the Name” (1927) with a conclusion that the name of a thing is a magical tool, so that “[t]he nature of a thing is, therefore, magical” («Природа вещи, стало быть, магична»): А. Ф. Лосев, *Бытие. Имя. Космос*, Moscow: Mysl', 1993, 762-763. On a traditional patristic approach in the same historical context of the early 20th century theological quarrels, s. Т. А. Сенина, *Последний византиец. Религиозно-философская мысль иеросхимонаха Антония (Булатовича) и ее византийский контекст* [Т. А. Senina, *The Last Byzantine. The Religious and Philosophical Thought of the Hieroschemamonk Antony (Bulatovich) and Its Byzantine Context*], St Petersburg: Dmitry Bulanin, 2013.