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Person and Nature, Hypostasis and Substance
Philosophical Basis of the Theology of John Philoponus

The theological teachings of John Philoponus are important for several reasons: a) to see the real achievements and influences of Aristotelian logic in regard to theology, b) to see the real consequences of not accepting hypostasis as relational and ontologically based and c) to assess the real consequences of such teachings for Triadology and Christology.[1]

In modern scholarship and possibly at the time in which he lived, John Piloponus was better known and more recognized as a prominent commentator of Aristotle, than as a theologian. His importance is even greater, since some prominent researchers believe him to be the critical intermediary between Aristotle and the Arabs, through which he indirectly influenced the overall development of science in the West, and his ideas have contributed to the rejection of the teachings of Aristotle (Sorabji 1987: 41). Alongside, we find authors who, in contrast to Sorabji, consider the praise of Philoponus to be excessive and that his importance in philosophy is not nearly so large (Ebbesen 2008: 157).

John Philoponus (490–575) was a disciple of Ammonius Hermiae, the leader of the Alexandrian neoplatonic school, which was considered to be the educational center of the entire Orient (Grillmeier 1996: 102). Ammonius, disciple of Proclus, founded the Alexandrian exegesis of Aristotle, whose main objective was to harmonize it with Plato. Ammonius taught all the prominent Neo-Platonists of the next generation, including Asclepius, Simplicius and Olympiodorus, with the exception of Damascius who left Alexandria after clashes with Christians in 488–489. (Devin 2011: 642). John was one of his most able students and publisher of his lectures (Benevich 2011–2012: 104).

John became famous as a prominent commentator and critic of Aristotle, and is considered to be one of the most original thinkers of Late Antiquity (Lang 2001: 3). In addition to the nickname Philoponus (Φιλόπονος – diligent) was also added the nickname Grammarian, as he called himself. John first studied philology, and only later became interested in philosophy. The nickname Grammarian perhaps meant that he taught grammar in the Coptic community in Alexandria (Sorabji 1987: 5-6). Since he became involved with philosophy in a mature age, Simplicius mockingly called him, ὀψιμαθής one that studies in late years (Cael. 159, 3, 159, 7; Phys. 1133, 10; Verrycken 1990: 238). The nickname *philoponus* – 'diligent' was at that time unusual for scholars. Damascius called a few prominent Neo-Platonists 'philoponus', just as Athanasius the Great called Origen (*De Decretis* 27.1.). One also finds a suggestion that he got such a nickname because he joined one of the Christian fraternities that called themselves *philoponi* – the

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[1] This is especially important, since even today, there are theologians who fail to understand the real meaning and contribution of the teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers (see Larše 2015).

diligent ones. From the testimonies of Zacharias Rhetor, who was a member of such a fraternity himself, we know that they existed in Egypt, that in these groups people gathered who gave care to the poor and the sick and also those who were preparing for tough discussions with unbelievers and that some prominent Monophysites, such as Severus of Antioch were their members as well, at least at some point in time in their lives (Grillmeier 1996: 110). Concerning Philoponus, this thesis has not been verified by evidence, only by an Arab legend.

Among experts it was discussed whether John was a Christian from birth, or if he became one later on. Gudeman (Gudeman 1916: 1764-95), argued that John was a pagan who later became a Christian. His contention is based upon the fact that Philoponus only later in life wrote theological debates while he initially dealt only with comments on Aristotle. This thesis was challenged by Evrard (Evrard 1953) who claimed that John was a Christian from the beginning, as shown by his Christian name, while from his works one cannot conclude that he was a pagan. Moreover, Evrard believes that John has always been a faithful Christian, and that this is demonstrated in particular in his opposition to Aristotle's teaching on the eternity of the world. Philoponus' effort to show that the world is not eternal but rather created, was fueled by Proclus' writing *De aeternitate mundi contra Christianos*, which seeks to demonstrate that, based on Aristotle's logic, the world should be eternal, and that, consequently, the Christian doctrine of the world being created cannot withstand analytic philosophical criticism. It is interesting that Philoponus in his work *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, nowhere calls upon divine revelation, but proves on purely philosophical grounds that the world must necessarily have been created if we stick to the logic of Aristotle (Schrenk 1990: 153). The fact that Philoponus is writing against Proclus, indicates that he was a Christian, while the fact that in his writing he does not mention the Christian authorities can be interpreted as proof that he was not a Christian. Verrycken tried to bring these two different viewpoints together (Verrycken 1990: 236). He agrees with Evrard that John was a Christian from the beginning, but considers that Gudeman's insights are not unfounded, insofar as there indeed is a duality in John's work in the first and the second period of his life (cf. Blumenthal 1986: 370). Verrycken believes that John was not a convert, but that in the first part of his life he might have been not interested in Christianity, and that he perhaps was even an apostate. In support of this thesis goes the claim of Zachariah the Scholastic (Verrycken 1990: 240) that John's teacher Ammonius was known as someone who separates the Christian youth from Christianity.

Lang agrees with Verrycken that the philosophical work of Philoponus does not necessarily mean that he was not a Christian, since unlike the Athenian, the Alexandrian Neo-Platonists were not particularly hostile to Christians. Damascius, who listened to Proclus in Athens, even accused Ammonius of approaching Christian leaders for money (Chadwick 2010: 83). The Neoplatonic school at Alexandria not only stayed open at the time of Justinian, unlike the one in Athens, but continued to exist even in the period of Islamic domination (Grillmeier 1996: 108). Evrard showed that Philoponus' work cannot strictly be chronologically divided into philosophical and theological parts, as the *Meteorology*, his last comment on Aristotle and a pure philosophical work (Sorabji 2010: 17), was written after his *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*. On the other hand, *De aeternitate* is also written in a philosophical rather than Christian discourse which may lead

to the assumption that the arguments presented were more directed against certain Platonists, namely Plutarch and Atticus, than paganism in its entirety. Sorabji supports the view that Philoponus used pure philosophical discourse without the Christian argument because the work was intended for the followers of Proclus who would not accept arguments of a different kind (Sorabji 2010: 17). It is interesting that Share found seven citations from the Bible in this work (Share 2014: 4), which does not change the fact that this is a work written in philosophical language, although it leaves room for an interpretation like the one given by Benevich (Benevich 2011-2012: 106), according to which Philoponus' intention was to use purely philosophical arguments to refute philosophical points of view that contest Christianity. Such an assumption could be confronted by the fact that Philoponus' eschatology, presented in a commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*, cannot really be reconciled with the Christian eschatology (Van Roey 1985: 499). This can possibly be explained by the evolution of his way of thinking, although it still casts doubt on the explanation given by Benevich.

While it is clear that one cannot with absolute certainty assess Philoponus' intellectual development, it is clear that there was a transition in his interest from philosophy to theology. The fact that based on Philoponus' philosophical works we cannot determine with certainty what his religious beliefs were, in itself says something, and provides a certain framework for understanding his later theological positions. By all accounts, Philoponus was a Christian from the beginning, but he began to be engaged with theology later in life. The thesis that at the time of his philosophical creativity he was an apostate from the Christian religion is supported neither by sources nor can it be a result of the analysis of his work. Throughout the Christian tradition, Philoponus has always been accused of heresy but not of apostasy (Lang 2001: 6). Lang also emphasizes that the analysis of Philoponus' theological work indicates a strong commitment to the issues he dealt with, which contradicts Verrycken's opinion that Philoponus remained a disguised pagan until the end. However, even Lang admits that there was a certain transition in Philoponus' life, from philosopher to theologian (Lang 2001: 8). And, he agrees with Wildberg, according to whom, when it comes to Philoponus' Christian understanding, there is only a difference in degree of emphasis (Wildberg 1987: 209). In this sense the hypothesis of MacCoull (MacCoull 1995: 269-279) isn't credible either, for it goes to the other extreme, in claiming that the entire philosophical work of Philoponus was in the service of Monophysite theology. As noted by Sorabji (Sorabji 2010: 18), such a claim is incompatible with 2821 pages of comment on Aristotle, which Philoponus left for the world. It is a fact that Philoponus' attack on Proclus in the year 529, with *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, coincides with Justinian's decision to close the neoplatonic school in Athens. It is possible that Philoponus, in an atmosphere of complete dominance of Christianity in the time of Justinian, considered it to be beneficial to offer his service as a seasoned logician to the Church, which was plagued with confusing Christological terminology (Chadwick 2010: 84). Even the work directed against Proclus, which has nothing to do with the Monophysite dispute, could be seen as a form of flattery for the emperor in his attempt to philosophically refute and condemn Origen's doctrine of the eternity of the world that overlapped with that of the Neoplatonists (Grillmeier 1996: 111).

Philoponus' theological work, in which he insists on consistent monophysite terminology as the sole correct terminology has not contributed to the unity of Christians. His involvement in the field of eschatology and Triadology, led to confusion and division even within the community of monophysites. Philoponus believed that every nature must have a proper hypostasis, which he understood as nature with special properties. According to him, there is no such thing as a universal essence. There is no abstract deity which subsumes the three hypostases of the Holy Trinity, but there are only three specific hypostases with specific characteristics in which they differ from each other and which actualize the divine essence. This concept of hypostasis we find in Posidonius (1st century BC), who was the first to introduce it in philosophy, as "actualization of existence" (Femić Kasapis 2010: § 4.7.4.) That view is consistent with the teachings of Cappadocian fathers. Still, Philoponus failed to point out and explain what the basis of the unity of the Holy Trinity was[2]. This considerable drawback led to charges of tritheism. Moreover, Philoponus is considered as its prominent representative. Hence, he was condemned by several Monophysite Councils (Lang 2007: 81). Many Chalcedon theologians, as we shall see, rightly considered tritheism to be arising from Monophysite Christology, namely from the understanding of hypostases as nature with special properties. This connection will be clear after analyzing Philoponus' Monophysite Christology.

Philoponus intervened in the Christological disputes in an effort to strengthen the Monophysite argument using logical arguments from his comments on Aristotle (Lang 2011: 11). The rationale he used is best presented in the work *Arbiter* (*Diaitetes*), written in the time before the convening of the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553), probably with the aim to influence its decisions (Lang 2011: 30). According to Nikephoros Kallistos, the *Arbiter* was dedicated to Sergius, the Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch who, at the time of the writing abided in Constantinople and was still a presbyter (Chadwick 2010: 87). In fact, it was probably written shortly before 553, after Justinian's Ὁμολογία πίστεως of 551 composed against three chapters of the twelve anathemisms (Bolotov 2006: 339). It is likely that the devoted commitment of Justinian to reconcile with the Monophysites encouraged Philoponus to engage in the discussion that was gaining momentum, and to strongly support the views of those who thought like him, especially as Justinian continued his protective policy towards the Monophysites, lead by Theodora (Grillmeier 1995: 347-9). Probably the atmosphere in Alexandria, where the clergy and the population majority advocated the monophysite position, influenced him as well. And, it is quite possible that he was invited by the advocates of Monophysitism to join the debate and contribute to their cause. The Arabian legend referred to by Verrycken (Verrycken 1990: 258-259), that he allegedly received money from Christians and that this is one of the motives of his volte-face is not supported by other sources, and can be considered as improbable.

In his Christological observations Philoponus held onto the already known monophysite arguments against Chalcedon theologians, including metaphors. So he liberally used the paradigm of relations between soul and body to describe the relationship of the two natures in Christ. According to him, in Christ all the rational movements of the soul are subordinated to divine action in the sense of instruments. As the body serves the soul

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[2] Philoponus was acquainted with the works of the Cappadocians, whose influence on him, especially by Basil the Great has been proven beyond any doubt (Clemens 2015: 77-79).

as an instrument, we can say that the whole divinity uses humanity as an instrument, so that there is only one act (Lang 2011: 44). This unity of acts accounts for a major reason for applying the analogy of soul-body to Christology. Philoponus sought to provide appropriate terminological solutions in Christology only partially relying on the legacy of Cappadocia. Thus, in the definition of 'nature', he believes that the common content of the nature of each individual or hypostasis suits them, and does not correspond to any other member of the same species. This is important because of the Christological application of the concept of 'nature'. Because if you could say that the common nature of the Holy Trinity incarnated, then it would have to be attributed to all persons of the Holy Trinity, as it would, if the common human nature united with the Logos, which means that the entire human race united with Him (Lang 2011: 62). Philoponus therefore considers that Cyril's formula "one nature of God the Logos incarnated", must be understood in this sense (*Arbiter* VII, 23) — that is, that the phrase "God the Logos" serves to point out the distinction from God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Because of this, in Christ there is a unity of particular and not common nature (Lang 2011: 62). In terms of terminology, Philoponus equated hypostasis and nature, claiming that, if nature in Christology is perceived as particular, then nature and hypostasis are the same thing, except that hypostasis additionally marks those characteristics which separate one individual from another (*Arbiter* VII, 22.21-4 -53.92-5). Philoponus differentiates common nature, the particular nature (that nature which belongs to the individual) and hypostasis, which marks properties that distinguish it from other individuals. In this way, the hypostasis is understood as the particular nature with additional properties.[3]

It is interesting that when it comes to the Holy Trinity, Philoponus believes that the terms ὑπόστασις and πρόσωπον are synonymous, with the only addition that πρόσωπον denotes a mutual relationship (σχέσις πρὸς ἄλληλα) (Lang 2011: 65). This relatedness signified by the concept of πρόσωπον, which Philoponus talks about, for him, however, does not constitute an ontologically foundational fact. Πρόσωπον has the classic meaning of mask, or representative (*Arbiter* VII, 25). Philoponus fails to notice, completely, the reasons why the Cappadocians introduced the term hypostasis into Triadology. In this sense we can say that Philoponus' work represented an attempt at reversing such a line of theological development. When he talks about the way the natures in Christ are united, Philoponus insists that it's a union of two things that are not united with respect to one another but by themselves yet they still differ by kind. This means that the unity of natures in Christ was not created as an external act, but that it happened according to the natures themselves. He therefore considers that the particular nature of the Logos was the one which is embodied, or united with human nature, creating a unity of the particular natures, so that it cannot be considered that the natures are united 'less' and 'hypostases' more, but both are united in the same degree. This view is based on the ontological priority of the essence in relation to the concrete being (Sirkel 2016: 357). That is why, in his opinion, Chalcedon is inconsistent, because it talks about two natures and one hypostasis. According to him, if Chalcedon teaches about one hypostasis, then it must be either complex or simple. If it is simple, then it must be said that Christ is God in the flesh, and if it is complex, this complexity is inevitably in nature, since it is the same as hy-

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[3] On the extensive philological analysis of the three terms, physis, ousia and hypostasis, from their first evidence to the Church Fathers, see: Фемиħ Касапис 2010.

postasis. Therefore, those who furthermore reject one complex nature, adopt multiplicity of hypostases, which is Nestorianism (Grillmeier 1996: 114). Philoponus, therefore, did not understand the distinction the Cappadocians made in the meaning of hypostasis from the concept of nature that is equal with the concept of essence, as well as the importance of its relationality for its ontological foundation[4]. Hypostasis for him was just the nature with individual properties. He therefore considered that in accordance with Aristotelian logic one common nature may have more hypostases, but that two natures that have preserved the numerical duality cannot have one and the same hypostasis (Schrenk 1990: 153), since for him hypostasis means the same or almost the same as the particular nature (Lang 2011: 69)[5]. Therefore, he vehemently opposed the Chalcedon confession of Christ 'in' two natures (ἐν δύο φύσεσι), insisting on the Monophysite 'of'. According to him, it is impossible to speak of Christ, who is 'in' two natures, as one does not say that man is 'in' body and soul but of body and soul, and as one does not say that the triangle is 'in' three corners but ''of', and a house is of wood and stone rather than 'in' wood and stone (Chadwick 2010: 88). In *The Arbiter* Philoponus showed a certain willingness to compromise in that he stated that it is possible to accept the term 'in', although 'of' is more correct, if we talk about 'a complex nature', of Logos. Although from the point of view of the Chalcedon Fathers this was not a compromise, Philoponus waived it after the Council of 553, saying that it had been used only rhetorically. This was in line with the increased sharpness and intransigence he showed after the Council, particularly in the work Τμήματα or *Tomi quattour contra synodum quartem* (four sections against Chalcedon), a work that is not preserved except for one brief remark in Photius' Bibliotheca (55), who mockingly called it 'a comedy in four acts', and a wider recounting in the chronicle of Michael the Syrian (Chabot 1901: 92-121) where we draw upon information about its content. Michael has, as he says, made a summary of Philoponus' work, and he only lined up the arguments, providing evidence for the most important ones.

Philoponus tries to prove that any nature by necessity has a certain hypostasis. If Christ's human nature existed before the union with deity, then it certainly should have had its own hypostasis, since one cannot imagine life without hypostases. If there was no human nature, nor hypostasis before the union with the Logos, then there is only one hypostasis and only one nature. For the same reason it cannot be accepted that the human hypostasis exists before union: the separate existence of a special nature cannot be accepted either, wherefrom it follows that there is only one nature.

In Philoponus' time there was already a quite developed doctrine of forms of union. The loosest way of union was called παράθεσις, and that meant two things against each other. Παράθεσις exists with regard to items of the same kind, each of which could be removed. The term μῖξις described a combination, and has been used to denote a condition in which certain properties of different things made it possible for them to be united, as in the case of iron and fire, or light and air. Chrysippus used such an analogy to describe the relationship of body and soul. The term κρᾶσις meant a more complete admixing, in which there is a partial loss of the original features, like mixing different substances that

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[4] For the meaning of relational ontology, see Zizjulas 2015: 19-28.

[5] Experts think that such an understanding by Philoponus is a direct application of the neoplatonic understanding of universals on Christology. The equalization of hypostasis with a concrete reality of particular nature can be found also in the works of Alexander of Aphrodisias (*Quaestiones* I, 3: 7. 32–8. 12).

gives a product of a completely new quality, for example in making alloys. The term σύνθεσις marked the complete unity when an entirely new quality and a completely new end product occurs. (Grillmeier, 1995: 40).

However, Philoponus did not claim that the properties of the divine and human nature changed into something else, but were preserved as in the case of body and soul, where the lesser is protected from the larger (Tmemata XI; Grillmeier 1996: 115). Since for Philoponus hypostasis represents the individual nature, among them there could not exist any difference in the degree of unity, so that one cannot claim any difference between them (*Arbiter* VII, 27-8-55.172-9). Philoponus supported the teachings about a complex nature, believing that Christ does not consist of only deity nor of humanity only (Lang 2011: 76). In his view, only properties that fall within the same *genus* can be mixed, while those that belong to different *genera* cannot. According to Aristotle, species (εἶδος) is composed of a genus (γένος= gender) and specificity (διαφορά). For example, man is an animal by genus and according to the specificity, he is 'two-legged' (see Cat. 5 3a ~ 3, Top. VI. 4 14163 ~ -32ff). Following Aristotle, Philoponus claims that two genera cannot be mixed. This would be contrary to the basic logic, since genus represents the root joint and allows further differentiation. It is possible that Philoponus was under the influence of Porphyry and his interpretation of Aristotle, who for instance says that such a 'gender' (γένος) is a 'living being', the species is 'man' and the specific difference is 'rationale', and the peculiarity (of a species) is 'he can smile' (*Isagoge* 2, 7). Also, genus corresponds to the question what something is, and the difference concerns how that something is. "If anyone asks us what a man is, it should be said 'a living being', because we said that 'living being' is the genus for 'man'" (*Isagoge* 2, 107). Should it be asserted that man and God belong to the same genus, it would result in a denial of the ontological difference of the material and immaterial (Herbert 1984: 3). Thus the properties of the apple, sweetness and color, do not belong to the same genus, and the sweetness does not affect color and vice versa. Philoponus states that speech is not a sentence, that sentence is not a syllabus, syllabus not a letter, but that all belong to the genus of 'word' (Chadwick 2010: 91). It is similar with the soul and the body, or with the deity and humanity, which are not subject to the same *genus proximum* and thus cannot be changed due to the union (Lang 2011: 80). The multiplicity of properties does not imply a multiplicity of natures. Light and shining are properties of fire but not one of them is the nature of fire. Because of this, multiplicity of properties does not imply multiplicity of natures. Hence, in Christ the multiplicity of properties is preserved, although there is only one complex nature and hypostasis (*Arbiter* VII, 38-40; Lang 2011: 82). "If by hypostases we mean the appropriate forms by which each person is different from those of the same essence – God Logos from His Father and the Holy Spirit, and we as individuals of the same species from other human beings – because it is not possible that the properties of the God Logos and the properties of His spiritualized body, which set Him apart from other human beings are the same – therefore it is not possible that there is any hypostasis of deity or humanity in Christ. On the contrary, as is the case with us living beings composed of body and soul, and I mean man, we who have one hypostasis and nature, so it is in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ who was constituted as a perfect totality of divinity and humanity, and we must confess that He is of one complex hypostasis or nature" (*Apol*. I, 7: 66.28-67.6).

Such Philoponus' Christology has necessarily determined his Triadology. The informed reader will recognize that the very fact of identification of nature and hypostasis points out problems that will inevitably arise in the field of Triadology. The distinction between γενικὴ οὐσία and ἰδικὴ οὐσία, which is essentially an application of Aristotle's distinction of first and second substance, and identification of ἰδικὴ οὐσία with ὑπόστασις inevitably led to the question of unity of God. In the matter of terminology it's even more complex, since Philoponus, in the only surviving fragment of *Arbiter* in Greek, provided by St. John Damascene (Louth 2005: 48), equates φύσις to πρόσωπον. Thus we get a terminological equivalence according to which the terms οὐσία, φύσις, ὑπόστασις and πρόσωπον are equivalent. It is, therefore, neither accidental nor groundless that Philoponus was blamed for the introduction of Aristotle's ontology into theology (Lang 2007: 82). The legitimacy, even the necessity of the use of philosophy in theology was demonstrated by the Fathers before Philoponus. Nevertheless, his use of philosophy has not proved itself to be helpful. Equating Christological key concepts, by distinction of which the Cappadocian Fathers established the foundations of the Christian ontology of person, led to insoluble problems. If in the Holy Trinity we are talking about three hypostases which are identified with ἰδικὴ οὐσία, then it follows that there are three different natures which have their own independent existence. Philoponus had omitted the teachings of the Cappadocians on the Monarchy of God the Father, according to which the Hypostasis of the Father is the cause and principle of the existence of the Son and Spirit. Since hypostasis for Philoponus was not equated with person, but represented only individual nature, for him it was not possible to establish the unity of the Holy Trinity. Determining the unity of the Holy Trinity on assumptions which were held by Philoponus, is only possible if the essence is declared to be the principle and source of God's being. But then the price for that would be to relativize hypostasis. Since Philoponus didn't try to determine the unity of the Holy Trinity on the grounds of nature, and on the other hand didn't establish it on the basis of the person of the Father as the Cappadocians did, his thesis led to three-deity. Philoponus' reasons were related to the Christological implications of Triadology, of which he was aware. If he had consistently applied the Triadology of the Cappadocians, the definition of hypostasis deriving from it should be applied to Christology, and then it would be impossible to defend the monophysite position, especially the persistent denial that hypostasis identifies with person and semantically indicates distance from essence / nature. As noted by Lurje, from the perspective of Monophysites, this triadological explanation was the most consistent, although it's not likely that St. Cyril would have agreed with him (Lurje 2010: 206).

Philoponus had not realized that it is necessary to distinguish between the divine and material mode of existence. In the fourth chapter of the *Arbiter*, he writes that that which is the general characteristic of human nature — to be rational and to die,[6] when

6 It is interesting that Philoponus in his work *On Resurrection* which is preserved only in fragments, but for which there is evidence by other authors, says that after the resurrection humans will have bodies that will be different from the present ones, and which – and this is important – will not be of the same nature as the ones we now have. This new body will be glorified while the current will completely vanish. This example only further confirms our belief that the main problem with Philoponus was that he failed to go beyond the boundaries of philosophical thought and therefore could not understand the term hypostasis in the sense in which it was defined by the Cappadocians (Schrenk 1990: 154-155). It should be mentioned here that Philoponus made one statement here which is very important, and that is the assertion that all that is created must perish. This teaching is called the principle of extinction. In patristics we can find similarities with this

it is regarded as concerning one individual, no longer affects anyone else. This he reinforces with the fact that when an individual of one species is suffering, another individual does not, when one dies the others do not, when one is born, others aren't (*Arbiter* VII, 22: 22,17). This is true — but we are talking about the mode of existence of the created and fallen nature. Philoponus is talking about separated or particulate existence (μερικωτάτην ὕπαρξιν) which belongs to the individual and "that does not coincide with any other except itself. For the rational and mortal living creature that is in me is not shared with any other man" (*Arbiter* VII, 22: 21-23). In accordance with Aristotle[7], Philoponus feels that a general nature does not exist except in the abstract, which is in line with other interpreters of Aristotle, like Alexander of Aphrodisias, for whom hypostasis represents 'concrete and physical existence' while for Ammonius of Alexandria it was synonymous with εἶναι (Lang 2007: 94). Of course, the problem is not that Philoponus adopts the philosophical tradition according to which the nature or essence is not something that can be thought of independently of the concretely existing beings. The problem is that he understands hypostasis in a reduced way compared to the Cappadocians, identifying it only as an individual nature.

Philoponus claims that the hypostatic differences of the traits of divine persons are a specific distinction that belongs to every being in itself (αἱ καθ᾽ αὐτάς), which makes a substantial difference (οὐσιώδης διαφορά), which is stocked in the logos of essence (λόγος τῆς οὐσίας) (Lang 2007: 96) corresponding to the same species. In this way Philoponus not only claims that the divine nature really exists in hypostases, but goes further and finds that there are three different natures, due to the differences of the hypostases, and that they do not belong to the same species. Since the divine nature is really divided numerically by the properties of every hypostasis, each of them represents a special kind, which are mutually different by their different essences (ἑτεροειδεῖς) (*De theologia* 13: 153).

In that case, we cannot talk about the unity of God, for such a theology does lead to three-deity. The problem in Philoponus' setting was not that he claimed that nature can exist only in a specific hypostasis – this is nothing new, St. Gregory of Nyssa already claimed that[8]. The problem is that for him the term hypostasis had ontological value only insofar as it represented the actualization of γενικὴ οὐσία. Precisely because of that had the Cappadocian Fathers emphasized the equivalence of the terms οὐσία and φύσις on the one hand and their contrast to the terms ὑπόστασις and πρόσωπον on the other. Hypostasis as a person was for the Cappadocians not only nature with special features, but the one person that when it comes to God is characterized by advantage in relation to nature. The Hypostasis of God the Father is not determined by the natural characteristics of Deity, but it is the cause and the very nature of God. The debate about whether the tritheism emerged as a result of the influence of philosophy on theology, or the misinterpretation of some expressions of earlier Fathers is not essential here. Even if we agree with Lang's thesis (Lang 2007: 87) that the interpretation of the Fathers had a key role in de-

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understanding but never in the form of necessity, but more in the form of a possibility. Creation could slip into non-being because it is created. For Philoponus, this claim has become an imperative – the creation must disappear.

[7] For instance in *De anima* 402b: τὸ δὲ ζῷον τὸ καθόλου ἤτοι οὐθέν ἐστιν ἢ ὕστερον – which is directed against Plato's understanding of the ontological topic of generality.

[8] In Ep. 38, 2, which was preserved under the Name of Basil the Great.

fining the tritheism theology, the fact remains that this interpretation was carried out under the influence of philosophical doctrines, especially Aristotle. Philoponus' reasons for his tritheism position are based on philosophical reasons (Osborne 1989: 390). After all, the impact of philosophy on theology is not exactly a novelty. The problem is this: since like the Nestorians, Monophysites tried to solve the problem of the incarnation based on nature and not on person, they came to the conclusion that the nature of God the Logos was the one which was embodied, and not His person. If the nature was embodied, then it must be the one divine nature that involves the other two persons of the Holy Trinity, for the divine nature does not exist by itself, i.e. it exists as such only in our minds, while in reality it exists only in the concrete hypostases, where the term ὑπόστασις is understood as nature with special properties. Since they did not distinguish between nature and person, Monophysites came to the paradoxical situation that for the sake of preserving the oneness of Christ they sacrificed the unity of the Holy Trinity. Tritheism, which emerged as a result of the radical fight against Nestorianism in the field of Christology, appeared as a triadological Nestorianism. Philoponus consistently applied the presuppositions of the Christology he advocated on to Triadology.[9] In accord with Aristotle, he could not accept the existence of the divine nature in itself, in which concrete hypostases participate. But, as we have seen, the Cappadocians didn't claim that, either. The problem is that by reducing hypostases to nature, Philoponus neither terminologically nor conceptually could find a way to postulate the unity of the Holy Trinity, which in the Cappadocian theological tradition is grounded not in the unity of nature, but in the oneness of the person of God the Father as the source and cause of God's being.

The charges against Philoponus, brought forth by George the Hieromonk, which said that he in theology used the ἀριστοτελικαὶ τεχνολογίαι (Lang 2007: 83), were by no means unfounded. Philoponus understood the term hypostasis in a limited way and only as individual properties of nature. If we agree with such an understanding of the term, then his argument would be sustainable, and the Chalcedon Council would be wrong. However, if we understand hypostasis not only as individual properties of nature, but as a certain way of existence of natures that transcends – although also includes – their general and individual properties, then things stand quite differently. And herewith lies the basis of Philoponus' and generally of the Monophysites' lack of understanding of Chalcedon. For Chalcedon, hypostasis is not the same as individual properties. Hypostasis is a *concrete way of existence* that includes natural properties, both general and specific (because it is clear that as there is no nature without hypostasis, so there is no hypostasis without nature, or natural features), but which – when it comes to the Holy Trinity – is not determined by these properties. The mystery of incarnation, at least as it was understood by the Chalcedon Fathers, and later by St. Maximus the Confessor, on the basis of Cappadocian theology is possible precisely because of the fact that the Divine Hypostases are not determined by their natural properties. This observation of the relationship of nature and hypostasis is from the point of view of material nature impossible, since when it comes to material nature, the opposite is true – hypostasis, or person, is determined by

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[9] Among the Monophysites, something similar happened with Julian of Halicarnassus, who consistently deducted the consequences of the Christology of Severus and concluded that the body of Christ, because of the unity of natures, was undecaying even before the Resurrection. Julian and Philoponus were both condemned by the Monophysites. But that condemnation only negated their conclusions, though the premises they started on were not questioned (see Đakovac 2015: 201-214).

nature. The next key feature of the Cappadocian concept of hypostasis that Philoponus also didn't have in mind is *relatedness*. Earlier we mentioned that Philoponus, however, did talk about hypostases in terms of relationality. However, he didn't understand the relationality of hypostases ontologically. For him, hypostasis, as an individual nature, first exists and only thereafter enters into a relationship. The relationship is not constitutive of it, rather, it is somewhat arbitrary. For the Cappadocians however, person does not simply exist in and of itself, but in relation to another person which gives it its identity. It is in these segments that we see the difference between the philosophical and theological use of these terms, which Philoponus did not take into account. By preserving philosophical consistency, Philoponus came to a conclusion that was logically sustainable. However, he failed to keep pace with the terminological and conceptual leap made by the Cappadocian Fathers, who were followed by the Council in Chalcedon. Philoponus remained a prisoner of Aristotle's logic which (again), in and of itself, showed itself as insufficient for use in theology.

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