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John of Damascus and Christian Discourse: The *Dialectica* Viewed as a NeoPatristic Metastructure in Light of Florovsky, Gadamer, and Ricoeur

Abstract

The present article is a discussion of the philosophical-theological mode in which Christian orthodoxy could critically engage with non-Christian modes of thought in a manner intentionally consistent with native metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions and commitments. Hermeneutics will be more or less the platform on which the notion of "Tradition," informed by Gadamer and Florovsky, is raised so as to articulate how Christian tradition - for the present study largely derived from the philosophical work of John of Damascus - informs a hermeneutic mode of discourse, analysis, and worldview, what elsewhere has been called a hermeneutic of tradition. In

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short, this hermeneutic of tradition relative to historic orthodoxy refers in the first place to the intentional act of understanding according to the Scriptural, Apostolic, Patristic, and Conciliar norms as embodied and expressed by the particular Fathers and Ecumenical Councils of the historic, undivided Church, and the application of these norms, the *regula fidei*, or, perhaps yet more boldly, the "hermeneutic canons," to contemporary problematics. The argument, then, seeks to show in light of Ricoeur's interpretation theory how John of Damascus' *Dialectica* fittingly provides a foundation for Christian discourse, which is to say a foundational conceptual apparatus integrating Christian epistemology and metaphysics into a coherent system of thought which provides tools for engaging contemporary philosophical discourse from within a consistently orthodox perspective.

Keywords

Interconceptuality, Christian philosophy, John of Damascus, NeoPatristic worldview, hermeneutics

1 Introduction

The present article is a discussion of the philosophical-theological mode in which Christian orthodoxy could critically engage with non-Christian modes of thought in a manner intentionally consistent with native metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions and commitments.

Hermeneutics will be more or less the platform on which the notion of "Tradition," informed by Gadamer and Florovsky, is raised so as to articulate how Christian tradition - for the present study largely derived from the philosophical work of John of Damascus - informs a hermeneutic mode of discourse,

analysis, and worldview, what elsewhere has been called a hermeneutic of tradition. In short, this hermeneutic of tradition relative to historic orthodoxy refers in the first place to the intentional act of understanding according to the Scriptural, Apostolic, Patristic, and Conciliar norms as embodied and expressed by the particular Fathers and Ecumenical Councils of the historic, undivided Church, and the application of these norms, the *regula fidei*, or, perhaps yet more boldly, the "hermeneutic canons," to contemporary problematics. The argument, then, seeks to show in light of Ricoeur's theory of interpretation how John of Damascus' *Dialectica* fittingly provides a foundational conceptual apparatus integrating Christian epistemology and metaphysics into a coherent system of thought which provides tools for engaging contemporary philosophical discourse from within a consistently orthodox perspective.

2 John of Damascus and a Living Tradition of Christian Philosophy

In engaging with non-Christian thought, whether it touches on such areas as metaphysics, epistemology, hermeneutics, literary theory, semiotics, rhetoric, etc., there can be a difficult time bringing Orthodox Christian thought to bear critically so as to engage meaningfully and "within a consistent Orthodox perspective."[1] In this situation it becomes ambiguous how to discern objectively what is consistent with Christian thought from what is inconsistent with it. Basil of Caesarea and John of Damascus both utilized the analogy of the bee to provide an image for the Christian engagement with non-Christian

1 Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), p. 117.

thought,[2] and so it is worth observing that bees do not take pollen from all flowers, and moreover, when they do take pollen they convert it for a use specific to the bees' life and worldview.[3] In terms of the analogy the image implies that there is discernment, there is a critical engagement as well as a deep chemical conversion according to which that which is raw is made useful according to the Orthodox *canon*. This issue of discernment, then, is vital both for the protection of the faithful from being led astray by plausible but unsound words and for the intellectually rigorous articulation of the Gospel, responsibly and in coherent terms that are consonant with Orthodox doctrine, terms which do not compromise the integrity of the Christian faith.[4]

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2 John of Damascus, *Fount of Knowledge*, in *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*. tr. Frederic H. Chase, Jr. The Fathers of the Church: vol. 37, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), preface. See also Basil the Great, *Address to Young Men on the Right Use of Greek Literature*, tr. Frederick Morgan Padelford, in *Essays on the Study and Use of Poetry by Plutarch and Basil the Great*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1902), p. 4 (pg 105).

3 <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in868>, May 19, 2015.

4 Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, Pref. I.1: "Inasmuch as certain men have set the truth aside, and bring in lying words and vain genealogies... and by means of their craftily-constructed plausibilities draw away the minds of the inexperienced and take them captive..." Cf. Col 2:4: "I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments." John states much the same of those who "by mixing evil with divine words through unjust lips and a crafty tongue, and trying to cover up its dark and shapeless form and shake the hearts of the unstable from the true customs, handed down from the fathers" (John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, tr. Andrew Louth, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), II.4, repeated III.1). No inconsequential theme, John affirms: "We shall not suffer different things to be thought at different times, changing with the seasons, and the faith to become a matter of ridicule and jest to outsiders" (ibid., I.66). This being borne out in the contemporary world, the variety of Christian sects with their variously held doctrines often do serve as a point of ridicule of the faith by "outsiders" who jest at the thousands of sectarian denominations.

To set the stage for an answer to this, the notion of Tradition as providing "hermeneutic guidance" for a critical engagement with non-Orthodox thought needs to be raised so as to provide a more general framework by which Orthodox thought can be viewed in hermeneutic terms, and into which John of Damascus' work can be incorporated specifically.[5] Hans-Georg Gadamer's discussion of tradition and authority as constituting an integral part of an interpretive community is useful for this, and moreover can be set in conversation with Georges Florovsky's notion of Tradition.[6] What will be identified below as a

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5 That the Patristic notion of tradition amounts to a veritable theology of tradition, in addition to Florovsky who will be discussed at greater length below, see: Tad W. Guzie, "Patristic Hermeneutics and the Meaning of Tradition," *Theological Studies*, 32 (1971), pp. 647-58. See also: Anthony Meredith, *The Theology of Tradition*, (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1971). See also John McGuckin, "Recent Biblical Hermeneutics in Patristic Perspective: The Tradition of Orthodoxy," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 47:1 -4 (2002), pp. 295-326.

6 For a recent assessment of Florovsky's notion of Tradition in terms of his Neopatristic synthesis, see Paul Gavrilyuk's article, "Florovsky's Neopatristic Synthesis and the Future Ways of Orthodox Theology," in *Orthodox Constructions of the West*, (New York: Fordham, 2013), pp. 102-124. Hopefully the present study will answer in some measure to Gavrilyuk's statement concerning Florovsky that, "Though neopatristic synthesis was the guiding vision connecting all aspects of his scholarship, from Russian studies to ecumenical work, Florovsky never developed this vision into a comprehensive theological system" (p. 102). If the current study's argument is sustainable, then hopefully that which was argued to be absent in Florovsky's work will be supplied by John of Damascus. For a more critical view of Florovsky's Neopatristic synthesis, see Pantelis Kalaitzidis' article: "From the "Return to the Fathers" to the Need for a Modern Orthodox Theology" (St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 54:1 (2010), pp. 5–36), in which he states: "This version of the "return to the Fathers," moreover, seems never to return to a focus on the future "together with Fathers" (as Florovsky himself advocated in both his writings and his talks), thus rendering Orthodox theology mute and uneasy in the face of the challenges of the modern world" (p. 9). By setting Florovsky's thought

hermeneutic of tradition, Gadamer's attempt at restoring to the act of understanding, which is to say to hermeneutics, an anti-irrational notion of authority and tradition, provides solid contemporary groundwork for orienting the discussion concerning what is relevant to an "Eastern Orthodox" notion of a hermeneutic of tradition, which is to say the workings out of a particularly Orthodox hermeneutic of *T*radition.[7] As Gadamer

in reference to Gadamer, however, this notion of tradition being merely backwards looking will hopefully be deconstructed. See also the somewhat self-negating critique of Florovsky by Ross Joseph Sauvé, "Florovsky's Tradition," Greek Orthodox Theological Review 55:1-4 (2010). In his article he asserts both Florovsky's warning against using the Fathers as mere proof texts (pp. 217, 221, 222) while also accusing him of absolutizing the appeal to the Fathers (pp. 236, 237) such that he created a sort of patristic fundamentalism. A review of the subjects treated in his collected works, however, especially the final volumes, as well as his substantial correspondence with theologian and scientist T.F. Torrance, shows that he was not in any way a narrow fundamentalist; see: Matthew Baker, "The Correspondence between T. F. Torrance and Georges Florovsky (1950 - 1973)," *Participatio: The Journal of the T. F. Torrance Theological Fellowship*, Vol. 4 (2013): pp. 287-323. A balanced and nuanced assessment demonstrating the flexibility of the Neopatristic synthesis can be found in Paul Ladouceur's article: "Treasures New and Old: Landmarks of Orthodox Neopatristic Theology" (St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 56:2 (2012), pp. 191–227). See also Teresa Obolevitch, "Faith and Knowledge in the Thought of Georges Florovsky," eds. T. Obolevitch and P. Rojek, *Faith and Reason in Russian Thought*, (Krakow: Copernicus Center Press, 2015), pp. 197-218. See also Matthew Baker, "«Theology Reasons» – in History: Neo-Patristic Synthesis and the Renewal of Theological Rationality," *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 4/2010: pp. 81-118.

7 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 277-307. There is a growing body of literature discussing the notion of both a hermeneutic of tradition and a hermeneutic of continuity. See: *The Hermeneutics of Tradition: Explorations and Examinations*, eds. Craig Hovey and Cyrus P. Olsen, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014). See also: Marcia Sa Cavalcante Schuback, "Hermeneutics of Tradition," in *Rethinking Time:*

states, distinct from a coercive tyranny, "acknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true."[8] This accords with the assertion of Florovsky, where rather than being an irrational appeal to mere antiquity, "the appeal to Tradition was actually an appeal to the mind of the Church."[9]

In light of the foregoing, as will be argued in greater detail below, a hermeneutic of tradition relative to Eastern Orthodoxy refers in the first place to the intentional act of interpreting according to the Scriptural, Apostolic, Patristic, liturgical, and Conciliar norms as embodied and expressed by the particular Fathers and Ecumenical Councils of the historic Orthodox Church, and the application of these norms, the *regula fidei*, or, perhaps yet more boldly, the "hermeneutic canons," to present problematics.[10] Not merely a set of prescriptions, then, a "fixed core or complex of binding propositions," or "inherited

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Essays on History, Memory and Representation, ed. A. Ers, (Stockholm, Sodertorn Philosophical Studies, 2011).

8 H.-G. Gadamer, p. 280.

9 George Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing, 1972), p. 83.

10 As G. Florovsky stated: "The famous dictum of St. Vincent of Lerins was characteristic of the attitude of the Ancient Church in the matters of faith: "We must hold what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all" [*Commonitorium*, p. 2]. This was at once the criterion and the norm. The crucial emphasis was here on the permanence of Christian teaching" (Georges Florovsky, p. 73). John of Damascus himself articulated a similar list of elements in his third treatise defending icons: "if anyone proclaims to you anything other than [what] the catholic Church has received from the holy Apostles and Fathers and synods and preserved up to now, do not listen to him" (John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, tr. Andrew Louth, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), III.3.). In other words, the Apostles, Fathers, synods, and "preserved up to now" (i.e. living tradition) are the hermeneutic guide for discerning what is to be accepted or rejected.

doctrines," according to Florovsky these canons of interpretation are instead that which emerges dynamically from the "*sensus catholicus*... the (*φρονιμα εκκλησιατικον* [Ecclesiastical mind])," which is also to say the mind of the Church.[11]

In the words of Florovsky: "The Apostolic Tradition of faith was the indispensable guide in the understanding of Scripture and the ultimate warrant of right interpretation."[12] In other words, though it is not necessary to argue that all non-Orthodox acts of interpretation are faulty, it is yet the synergy of these factors: Scripture and, taken broadly, Tradition, which form and inform the specifically Orthodox interpretive act.[13] On this point Florovsky is forthright:

"Tradition was in the Early Church, first of all, an hermeneutical principle and method."[14] Gadamer, however, clarifies this by noting that authentic understanding cannot be reduced to a purely abstract method, nor to the mere retrieval of dust-laden archives, for tradition is not abstract, but has a primary lived component, a sense not just of that which is handed down, or past, but also inclusive of the living and relational act of handing down: "Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a

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11 G. Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View,* pp. 80, 89. Cf. Ibid, 103. It might be said, however, that, in *not* reducing the Mind of the Church to a finite set of doctrines, this could be taken too far if it were understood to mean a relativity of doctrine, or that dogma is unfixed and not binding.

12 Ibid., p. 77. In this same section Florovsky also quotes an illuminating formulation of the hermeneutic principle from Tertullian: "For only where the true Christian teaching and faith are evident will the true Scriptures, the true interpretations, and all the true Christian traditions be found" (XIX.3). Cf. Ibid., p. 89.

13 Points of difference on this level are not as yet found in the principles, which here are shared between Orthodox and Catholic, but in the "scandalous particularities" of history to which each major historical stream embodies.

14 G. Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View,* p. 79.

process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated."[15] The past and the present thus unite in the event of tradition, and in this sense tradition "describes an element of the ontological substance of understanding."[16] Essentially living, tradition as hermeneutic then functions "to clarify this miracle of understanding… sharing in a common meaning."[17] Without totally removing the notion of method, however, the key point here is to distinguish a hermeneutic of tradition from mere mechanistic formulae. In this light, time, or temporal distance, can be recognized "as a positive and productive condition enabling understanding… filled with the continuity of custom and tradition."[18] In fact, via this continuity Gadamer asserts that temporal distance "lets the true meaning of the [interpreted] object emerge fully."[19]

In restoring the notion of authority and tradition from being relegated to an exercise in authoritarian irrationality, Gadamer also asserts that "there is no unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason."[20] In other words, despite any distortions of this which emerge among the vicissitudes of history, authority and reason go hand in hand. Thus to interpret according to tradition cannot be reduced to a mere parroting. Parroting is the antithesis to tradition and to hermeneutics, for it is the denial of the understanding which sustains the tradition and as such is the first step in a community's self-destruct mechanism. Gadamer's insight, then, can be directly tied into an Orthodox framework. As Florovsky states, "It was assumed that the Church had the knowledge and the understanding of the truth, of the truth and the 'meaning' of the

15 H.-G. Gadamer, p. 290.
16 Ibid, p. 293.
17 Ibid, p. 292.
18 Ibid, p. 297.
19 Ibid, p. 298.
20 Ibid, p. 281.

Revelation. Accordingly, the Church had both the competence and the authority to proclaim the Gospel and to interpret it."[21] The Church, embodying a deep commensurability between knowledge, understanding, and tradition, is therefore a repository of insight into the truth, and since its authority in this sense acts also as a preservative of a living knowledge, for "Faith and Life [are] organically intertwined," there is therefore the real possibility for turning to the Church's tradition for the hermeneutic key to present understanding.[22]

If one is going to follow the logical consequence of Gadamer and, as will be shown below, Ricoeur, then the next logical place to look is at an instance of actual tradition, together with its conceptual apparatus. Damascene explicitly supplies this apparatus, this set of conceptual tools with which one can actually "do" what Gadamer and Florovsky are arguing for.

This, then, is why Florovsky's notion of a Neopatristic synthesis is relevant, for in his return to the fathers he is doing what Gadamer advocates from within a living Orthodox *phronema*, and as such his voice is one in which the substance of Gadamer's arguments function self-consciously within the Orthodox intellectual tradition. Damascene will then emerge within this Neopatristic synthesis as a provider of the conceptual tools with which to integrate what might otherwise appear disparate.

In the above sense, then, Florovsky is understandable as one who is manifesting the principles Gadamer is arguing for, and whose project is therefore in a manner of speaking justified by Gadamer. It is Gadamer's own arguments, therefore, which enables Florovsky's project to speak to contemporary philosophical discourse. Florovsky, for his part, is within an Orthodox idiom working out an application of Gadamer's argument for tradition, supplying through native Orthodox concepts an Orthodox equivalent of Gadamer's arguments. In

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21 G. Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View,* p. 83.

22 Ibid., p. 84.

this sense it can also be shown that bringing these two authors together is not an arbitrary juxtaposition, for Gadamer's work is in this sense highly useful for explaining and clarifying in philosophical and hermeneutic terms what Florovsky is also doing intentionally within an Orthodox philosophical and theological framework, breaking Florovsky's project out of closed sectarian circles.

The foregoing is *contra* Kalaitzidis who was quoted above (see footnote 6) as saying that Florovsky's approach ultimately leaves "Orthodox theology mute and uneasy in the face of the challenges of the modern world,"[23] because a proper understanding of the nature of tradition according to Florovsky and Gadamer makes the reduction of it to a look to the past impossible. Not needing yet another "paradigm shift," this then renders the Neopatristic synthesis an answer rather than an obstacle, for the principles implicate in the Neopatristic synthesis itself are flexible enough to be able to "bring it [Orthodoxy] into dialogue with the difficult and provocative questions posed by modernity and late modernity.[24]

From Florovsky's corpus can be shown such a critical engagement with modern thought; one particularly powerful example may suffice from the opening of his critical assessment of "the metaphysical premises of Utopianism":

> The thoughts and evaluations of each and every one of us are interconnected by a kind of mutual responsibility, and thus the components of human world views are not simply placed next to one another "from without" in a mosaic, "accidental," disjointed manner. Man's "creedal world view" is always integral. Everything in it stems from a single source, everything gravitates toward a single focal point.

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23 Kalaitzidis, p. 9.

24 Ibid., p. 36.

> Everything is organically connected and "interconditional" - each element is defined by the whole of which it is a part and, inversely, somehow reflectively coexists everywhere and in all other elements. It is for this reason that the method of ideally reconstructing a whole by its parts is entirely applicable to world views. Every individual element contains a compressed reflection of the organic whole which contains it, and the character of each element is determined by the particular qualities and structure of the unified system which envelops and forms it, and within which it occupies its own innerly substantiated place. The entire man is revealed in each individual judgment and opinion, - his general world view, his own particular vision of the world. "And just as in a scarcely noticeable dewdrop you can see the entire face of the sun, in the hidden depths you will find a whole cohesive world view." Inversely, it is namely because of the inner cohesiveness and organization of world views that the image of the whole must be anticipated, the unifying principle divined and grasped, in order for each individual judgment to be mastered, each individual thought in its undamaged completeness, in its concrete uniqueness.[25]

In this light it can be seen that the hermeneutic principle undergirding the integrative and holistic Neopatristic synthesis, for example the above idea of a "creedal world view," lends itself well to a critical engagement with modern thought and concerns, for in his assessment of the metaphysics of Utopianism Florovsky articulates a meaningful philosophical engagement that is not a mere parroting of past fathers but one which is able to assess a philosophical system according to its presuppositions.

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[25] Georges Florovsky, "The Metaphysical Premises of Utopianism," in *Philosophy: Philosophical Problems and Movements*, vol. 12 of *The Collected Works*, (Belmont, MA: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1989), p. 75.

Noble states, however, that in splitting tradition and innovation, "Florovsky reifies one form of tradition at the expense of limiting its plurality and further creative development."[26] Noble's critique, however, is shown to emerge from an incomplete assessment of the dynamism of the Neopatristic synthesis, for Florovsky did not merely deride Utopianism for not being Patristic enough. The notions of pluralism and innovation are themselves loaded terms, and though there is not space to examine them in more depth here, it can be said briefly that innovation and pluralism are not identical with responsiveness and coherence. The question then remains for his critics as to what element of Florovsky's thought *necessarily* engenders an impasse as regards Orthodox interaction with modern thought. It does not seem, beyond the mere assertion, that there is anything substantial to validate this claim, unless the critique is centered on Florovsky's failure to identify all the manners in which the Neopatristic synthesis might be made to engage with modern thought, or perhaps on a psychological tendency to become complacent in one's *ressourcement*.[27] What may be a functional obstacle to understanding the dynamism of the Neopatristic synthesis, however, the facet which lends itself to this type of criticism, may be a need to identify key elements of Patristic thought which can be used in articulating creative engagement with modern philosophical thought and concerns.[28]

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26 Ivana Noble, "Tradition and Innovation: Introduction to the Theme," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 59:1 (2015) pp. 7–15, p. 15.

27 For an insightful demonstration of Florovsky's engagement with modern thought, see also Matthew Baker, "«Theology Reasons» – in History: Neo-Patristic Synthesis and the Renewal of Theological Rationality," *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 4/2010, pp. 81-118.

28 Ladouceur expresses a similar difficulty identifying the means of connecting the neopatristic synthesis to present problematics: "One of the weaknesses of neopatristic theology has been its difficulty in coming to grips with modern issues that were unknown in classical

Moving forward, though the foregoing answers in a more general way to the issue of locating Tradition as a living guide to present understanding, a more particular answer as to what may constitute the substantive details of this *ressourcement* is still needed. As Matthew Baker well articulates: "Dogmatic definitions are not merely anti-heresiological, 'but aim also to resolve certain aporiae and philosophical problems.' Patristic dogmas established 'the concepts and even the new categories which could constitute the conceptual framework proper to the presentation of unadulterated Christian truth.'"[29] Returning, then, to John of Damascus, can, and if so to what extent, does his *Fount of Knowledge*, especially his *Dialectica*, speak to this and assist in forming a consistently "Orthodox" metastructure for philosophical and theological discourse, one which can provide Orthodoxy a framework for beginning to speak to issues raised by contemporary philosophical disciplines?[30] Concerning John's

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patristic times or to which the classical Fathers paid scant attention" (Paul Ladouceur, "Landmarks of Orthodox Neopatristic Theology," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 56:2 (2012), pp. 191–227, p. 221. Even here, however, he immediately notes two major *exceptions* to this observation, bioethics and environment, which could lead one to believe that a struggle in bringing Patristic thought to bear on contemporary issues is not intrinsic to the notion of a Neopatristic synthesis.

29 Baker, pp. 89-90.

30 Adrahtas sought to answer to this question to some degree in his essay on John of Damascus, "Theology as Dialectics," yet little if any substantive reference is made to the *Dialectica* itself (which is admittedly strange given the title of his essay), but is rather focused on the later and expressly theological chapters. Though his analysis is often excellent and fruitful, it can be contended that his study has to some degree put the cart before the horse, for the philosophical chapters which open the book lay the fundamental intellectual and terminological groundwork for his section on theology, and so, without this section's substance and significance integrated into the understanding of John's theology, the overall force of John's system of thought will suffer attenuation. This lacuna in the study of Damascene will hopefully be addressed to some degree in the present essay. See:

relevance to this, and tying him into the argument as it has developed thus far, Zhyrkova asserts:

> Within the core of that tradition [i.e. Orthodoxy], John himself is an essential element. The sacred tradition of the Church, being in its essence the 'tradition of truth' (*traditio veritatis* or, in the formula of St. Irenaeus, *κανών τῆς ἀληθείας*) does not amount to just historical memory and loyalty to a preserved legacy. Tradition, as has been splendidly put by George Florovsky, 'is the inner, mystical memory of the Church.' Tradition, in other words, is the unity and continuity of the spiritual experience and of the life of grace itself.[31]

In other words, the framework undergirding John's thought, being integrally woven into the Orthodox "tradition of truth," is thus given more substantive weight precisely because the nature of tradition is not merely to parrot what has been said, but to enter into the living mind of the Church. This, however, is not an invitation to arbitrary methodological invention, innovation which merely abstracts from Patristic conclusions without recourse to Patristic presuppositions and methodology, for Fathers such as Damascene have provided substance and guidance for this very process. John himself states: "if anyone proclaims to you anything other than [what] the catholic Church has received from the holy Apostles and Fathers and synods and preserved up to now, do not listen to him nor

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Vassilis Adrahtas, "Theology as Dialectics and the Limits of Patristic Thought in the Post-Modern World: A Reading into St John of Damascus," *Phronema* 18 (2003): pp. 109-127.

31 Anna Zhyrkova, "The Philosophical Originality of a Theologian: The Case of a Patristic Author Forgotten and Overlooked by History," Forum Philosophicum 17 (2012) no. 2, pp. 225–243, p. 239.

accept the council of the serpent, as Eve accepted it and reaped death."[32]

Tradition as understood within Damascene's thought is not something that "changes with the seasons," for it is only by critical comparison with that which is received in the Church that a baseline for evaluation of truth claims is had. His example of Eve is appropriate for the reason that God's revealed will concerning the tree was the only means or standard by which to evaluate the veracity of the serpent's specious counsel in the first place, a standard she did not avail herself of and so fell victim to the serpent's deathly deceit. Rather than seeing this as necessitating a retreat from philosophical acumen, however, this study seeks to assert that the *Dialectica*, as the foundation for the articulation of Damascene's theological thought,[33] constitutes more broadly a semantic template for a coherent interconceptual system useful for discourse,[34] and thus enables a specifically "Orthodox" mode of discourse, one that is able to dialogue with contemporary fields and methodologies.

If, as Gadamer argues, tradition plays a key role in articulating *present* coherent thought, then it might also be noted that any particular tradition that is received is not received void of

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[32] John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, tr. Andrew Louth, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), III.3 (repeated in II.6). John's vision of consequence on this issue is marked: "We do not remove the Ancient boundaries, set in place by our fathers, but we hold fast to the traditions, as we have received them. For if we begin to remove even a tiny part of the structure of the Church, in a short time the whole edifice will be destroyed" (John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, II.12).

[33] For a discussion of how John's philosophical thought informed his theological thought, see: Christophe Erismann, *A World of Hypostases: John of Damascus' Rethinking of Aristotle's Categorical Ontology*, (Studia Patristica L: Peeters Publishers, 269-287, 2011), pp. 271-2, and p. 279.

[34] I.e. a formal thought system useful for critically analyzing, forming, assessing, accessing, asserting, interrogating, refuting, integrating, communicating, etc., meaning.

particular content, but precisely with particular content. It is one thing to argue for tradition abstractly and in principle, and still another to instantiate the argument with the content of an actual tradition. In John of Damascus, then, we are supplied with such vital content for the present intellectual tradition of Eastern Christian thought, a specific content which is therefore not past, but present, living.[35] Since tradition is not a term referring essentially to that which is past, but to that which is present, this renders John's thought intrinsically relevant to *contemporary* Christian discourse. In other words, the present study argues that John's text amounts to an Orthodox tradition of Christian epistemological vocabulary, one that moreover provides the means for critical engagement with non-Christian thought.[36]

That said, an exegetical argument can be made that the title, "Fount of Knowledge," emerging as it does in chapter 2 of the *Dialectica*, does not apply to the trilogy as a whole and is specifically attached to the *Dialectica* itself, indicating that these "Philosophical Chapters" are themselves the "Fount of Knowledge." In order to better understand what Damascene sees as the foundation of all types of knowledge, the question concerning the title of the philosophical chapters is worth examining. Though it may be scholarly convention to apply the title of *Fount* to the whole work,[37] there is sufficient reason why this practice is insufficient and misleading.

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35 This also follows if one frames John's thought as standing at an embryonic stage of doctrinal expression, for in no absolute sense is it every truly "past."

36 Christophe Erismann, *A World of Hypostases: John of Damascus' Rethinking of Aristotle's Categorical Ontology*, (Studia Patristica L: Peeters Publishers, 269-287, 2011), p. 287.

37 Louth, however, seems to accept that the title refers to the whole work, following Allatius, though he seems to also indicate that the *Dialectica* may itself be the *Fount*, without, however, commenting on the significance of why this might matter. See Andrew Louth, *St. John*

Given that John has already given a preface to the work as a whole, describing therein the work's threefold structure, it is significant that he introduces the concept of a *fount* of knowledge only later, two chapters in to the *Dialectica*: "Our purpose (*σκοπός*), then, is to make a beginning (*ἀπάρξασθαι*) of philosophy and to set down concisely in the present writing [i.e. what is generally known as the *Dialectica*], so far as is possible, every sort of knowledge. For this reason let it [i.e. this beginning of philosophy] be entitled (*ὀνομαζέσθω*) a Fount of Knowledge (*πηγή γνῶσεως*)" (*Dialectica*, 2). There is an apparent conceptual connection between "a *beginning* of philosophy"[38] and "a *fount* (or source) of knowledge."[39] Moreover, in the preface to the work as a whole he relates that the first portion of his work will be dedicated to philosophy and knowledge, whereas he characterizes the third portion as being devoted to truth, stating: "Then, with God's help and by His grace I shall expose the truth" (preface).

It seems quite possible, even likely, that John has a distinction in mind between the nature of the subjects dealt with in these different sections, where the first is associated prominently

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Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 31-32, pp. 34f.16. Tatakis also accepts the title *Fount* as referring to the whole work; see Basil Tatakis, *Byzantine Philosophy*, tr. Nicholas Moutafakis, (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2003), pp. 83, 86. Zunjic also applies the title, *Fount*, to the whole work; see: Slobodan Zunjic, "John Damascene's 'Dialectic' as a Bond Between Philosophical Tradition and Theology," in *The Ways of Byzantine Philosophy*, pp. 227-270, ed. Mikonja Knezevic, (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2015), pp. 227-8.

38 <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=A%29PA%2FRCASQAI%2F&la=greek&can=a%29pa%2Frcasqai%2F0&prior=XA/RITOS#lexicon>, May 21, 2015

39 <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=phgh%5C&la=greek&prior=e%29/oike#Perseus:text:1999.04.0058:entry=phgh/-contents>, May 21, 2015.

with a beginning in philosophy and knowledge, and the third with the theological truth of the Church's faith as revealed and maintained by "the divinely inspired prophets, the divinely taught fisherman [i.e. apostles], and the God-bearing shepherds and teachers [of the Church] (*θεοπνεύστων προφητῶν, καί θεοδιδάκτων ἁλιέων, καί θεοφόρων ποιμένων τε καί διδασκάλων*)" (ibid). Given the repetition of the notion of theological truth as coming through *God*-inspired, *God*-taught, and *God*-bearing persons, and holding this together with John's affirmation in the opening two chapters of the *Exposition of the Faith* that knowledge of God *Himself*, rather than knowledge merely of His *existence* (a distinction maintained by John in this context), comes from God Himself via revelation, John repeating also there a similar list of God-infused personages as in the preface, makes the rendering of *Fount* as the title to the philosophical chapters seem all the more justified: "Indeed, He has given us knowledge of Himself in accordance with our capacity, at first through the Law and the Prophets and then afterwards through His only-begotten Son, our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (*Exposito*, 1.1).

Concerning the epistemological necessity of revelation concerning theological truth, at the end of *Exposito* 1.2 John states: "It is impossible either to say or fully to understand anything about God beyond what has been divinely proclaimed to us, whether told or revealed, by the sacred declarations of the Old and New Testaments." It thus seems further corroborated that the theological third part of the whole work is conceptually distinct from the first, the "beginning of philosophy/fount of knowledge" (and its apparent connections to "natural theology," which is an association affirmed in chapters 1 and 3 of the first book of the *Exposito*). As such, if this holds true, the title, *Fount of Knowledge*, is best understood as the specific and proper title of the *Dialectica*, and not of the section on the exposition of the faith. Though this could seem more or less obvious, scholars have generally identified the title

of the *Fount* with the entire work.[40] The divisions of philosophy recounted by John in *Dialectica* 3, however, would seem to bear this proposed distinction out, for philosophy is conceived there as a much broader discipline than theology, theology being a specialization of philosophy, the logical reflection on divine revelation as received and maintained in the Church.

If the foregoing is correct, then it would be natural to identify the *Dialectica* as the *Fount of Knowledge*, for it is the broader subject providing the foundational tools for all knowledge and therefore *a fortiori* any subsequent theological specialization, a theological specialization which is, as noted, dependent on revelation. The tools provided in the *Fount* are thus for knowledge in general, and foundational for treating with theology properly. The importance of identifying the *Fount* specifically as the opening philosophical section is therefore found in that it shows more clearly what the *skopos* of John's conception of knowledge and philosophy are, for he is committing himself to a certain view of the *nature* of knowledge, and thus the boundary of its beginning is significant to consider when considering Eastern Christian thought. John is

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40 For example, see Vassilis Adrahtas, "Theology as Dialectics and the Limits of Patristic Thought in the Post-Modern World: A Reading into St John of Damascus," *Phronema* 18 (2003): pp. 109-127, p. 116. Cf. Anna Zhyrkova, "Hypostasis - The Principle of Individual Existence in John of Damascus," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 61 (1-2), pp. 101-130, p. 101f. Cf. Anna Zhyrkova, "The Philosophical Originality of a Theologian: The Case of a Patristic Author Forgotten and Overlooked by History," *Forum Philosophicum* 17 no. 2 (2012): pp. 225–243, 234. Cf. Michael Frede, "John of Damascus on Human Action, the Will, and Human Freedom," *Byzantine philosophy and its Ancient Sources*. ed. Ierodiakonou, Katerina, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 63-95, 63. Cf. Andrew Louth *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. ix, 13, 23f.18, 31, etc.; although footnote 16 on page 34 seems to indicate some ambiguity, Louth does not mention the possibility that the *skopos* of the title of John's *Dialectica* is informed by his notion of knowledge and philosophy distinct from his notion of revealed truth and theology.

actually endeavoring to articulate the foundations of knowledge in general together with its conceptual-terminological tools, for according to John's notion of philosophy it applies to all true knowledge, and not merely to philosophy as a sub-discipline of scholarly endeavors.[41]

Philosophy is thus treated as comprehensive of all knowledge, and as such integrates all knowledge into a single interconceptual framework or system, envisioning it as a whole, and consequently his *Dialectica* functions as the grammar of an entire worldview.[42] According to John, theology is a distinct class and discipline of knowledge, comprised essentially of revelation, whereas the largely "natural theology" of the philosophical chapters comprises the foundation for coming to articulate and understand said revelation and also for discourse on all manner of knowledge. It is precisely in the *Fount*'s developing an epistemological vocabulary and speaking to such issues as epistemology and metaphysics that renders it such an important voice in coming to terms with non-theological discourse which is yet consistent with Christian philosophical principles. In light of the foregoing, then, the reason for

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41 *Dialectica*, 3. Though this will be addressed more fully below, proof of the foregoing is found in the third chapter of the *Fount* where Damascene divides philosophy into speculative and practical wings, and then subdivides these, on the one hand, into theology, physiology, and mathematics and, on the other hand, into ethics, domestic economy, and politics.

42 Zunjic's otherwise excellent study of how John's *Dialectic* functions as a "bond" between philosophy and theology does not adequately stress the comprehensive nature of philosophy as articulated by Damascene, who in chapter 3 of the *Dialectic* expressly states that philosophy is concerned with all knowledge, both human and divine, practical and speculative, and that theology forms a speciality within the much more comprehensive notion of philosophy. His dialectic thus does not so much create a bond between two self-standing disciplines, but instead provides the conceptual, epistemological grammar for all knowledge, philosophy thus being a genus of which theology is a species.

choosing this specific work of Damascene is due precisely to this comprehensive scope.

Moreover, this text is significant in that Damascene stands in continuity with a long line of thinkers before him, both from within his own Christian tradition as well as from non-Christian thinkers such as Porphyry and Aristotle, and further stands in continuity as an authority with those who went after him. For example, taking John of Damascus' *Fount of Knowledge* thus as an icon or emblem of traditional Orthodox thought and thinking, his use of Platonic and Aristotelian sources is in this sense an icon of the Orthodox dialectic of continuity and discontinuity with Hellenism, taking as he does much from Porphyry's *Introduction* to Aristotle's *Categories* as well as from the Aristotelian commentator Ammonius of Alexandria, in a more or less happy marriage of their thought.[43] On the other hand, the "holy Fathers" which the Damascene consistently draws on are Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, John

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[43] For literature examining Damascene's relationship to Hellenistic philosophy, see: Joseph Koterski, Joseph S.J., "On the Aristotelian Heritage of John of Damascus," in *The Failure of Modernism: The Cartesian Legacy and Contemporary Pluralism*, ed. Brendan Sweetman, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), pp. 58-71. See also: Anna Zhyrkova, "The Philosophical Originality of a Theologian: The Case of a Patristic Author Forgotten and Overlooked by History," *Forum Philosophicum* 17 no. 2 (2012): pp. 225–243. See also: Scott Fennema, "Patristic Metaphysics: Is the Divine Essence for John Damascene and Augustine of Hippo an Ontological Universal?" *Glossolalia* 6:1 (Fall 2013): pp. 1-21. See also: Christophe Erismann, "A World of Hypostases: John of Damascus' Rethinking of Aristotle's Categorical Ontology," Studia Patristica L: Peeters Publishers, pp. 269-287, 2011. For additional titles, see Bibliography. For a full treatment of Porphyry's *Introduction*, see Jonathan Barnes' introduction, translation, and commentary: Porphyry, *Introduction*. tr. Jonathan Barnes, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
For a discussion of Ammonius, see: David Blank, "Ammonius," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/ammonius/>, May 21, 2015.

Chrysostom, Nemesius of Emesa, Cyril of Alexandria, Leontius of Byzantium, and Maximus the Confessor.[44] These Fathers thus form a sort of centuries-long philosophical *cum* theological continuity, the ingredients, so to speak, perhaps even the molecular structure, so to speak, of a hermeneutic of tradition. In other words, Damascene and his text are comprehensive both in terms of the text's *skopos* and in terms of his historic position in living Christian tradition.

Concerning the necessary, which is to say non-arbitrary, relation between theology and philosophy as conceived by Damascene, Zhyrkova states:

> "This work [the *Fount of Knowledge*] is of significance for the history of thought by being the first in which a well-defined methodology is applied to a theological treatise. What is more, for the first time a theologian offers a methodological justification of the structure of his own treatise and defines the role of philosophy in theological discourse."[45]

In short, this integral structure provides a means for framing coherent thought which is not only authentic to Orthodoxy and theologically sound, but is also useful for articulating

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[44] In addition to the preceding footnote, the same is illustrated in the informative introduction to (and in the numerous references and allusions cited throughout) Chase's translation: *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*, tr. Frederic H. Chase, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), xxv-xxix. Tatakis also observes the strong connection between Leontius and Damascene, and also them with Aristotle; see: Basil Tatakis, *Christian Philosophy in the Patristic and Byzantine Tradition*, ed. tr. George Dragas, (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2007), pp. 96-7.

[45] Anna Zhyrkova, "The Philosophical Originality of a Theologian: The Case of a Patristic Author Forgotten and Overlooked by History," Forum Philosophicum 17 (2012) no. 2, pp. 225–243, 231-2

philosophical thought on a variety of issues.[46] As Erismann argues, "His ultimate aim is a rational, structured and correct exposition of the Christian dogma. But in order to achieve it, he must first analyze language and reality."[47] Tying the study of knowledge (epistemology), reality (metaphysics), together even with language itself, John of Damascus states:

> Since it is our purpose to discuss every simple philosophical term, we must first of all know with what sort of terms it is that philosophy is concerned. So, we begin our discussion with sound itself. A sound is either meaningless (*ἄσημός*) or it has meaning (*σημαντική*). If it is meaningless, then it signifies nothing; but if it has a meaning, then it signifies (*σημαίνουσά*) something. Then, again, a meaningless sound is either articulate or inarticulate. Now, that sound which cannot be written is

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[46] That philosophical thought has an integral and inextricable place in Orthodox Christian thought there is a substantive body of literature. For example, see George Karamanolis, *The Philosophy of Early Christianity*, (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2013). See also: Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also Christopher Stead, *Doctrine and Philosophy in Early Christianity*, (Burlington, VA: Ashgate Publishing, 2000). See also *Christian Faith And Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, eds. Lionel Wickham and Caroline Bammel, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993). See also: Constantine Cavarnos, *The Hellenic-Christian Philosophical Tradition*, (Belmont, MA: Institute For Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1989). See also Jaroslov Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 179-83. See also Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), esp. pp. 126-44. For an argument which ties philosophical thought directly into the Church's (capital T) Tradition via the Ecumenical Councils, especially Chalcedon, see Anthony Meredith, *Christian Philosophy in the Early Church*, (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 87-118, esp. pp. 112-13.

[47] Christophe Erismann, *A World of Hypostases: John of Damascus' Rethinking of Aristotle's Categorical Ontology*, (Studia Patristica L: Peeters Publishers, 269-287, 2011), p. 272.

> inarticulate [ex. the sound made by a stone], whereas that which can be written is articulate [ex. *scindapsus*, cf. a snark].
> … Now, philosophy is not concerned with the meaningless sound, whether it be inarticulate or articulate. Again, the sound which has meaning is either articulate or inarticulate [ex. dog barking]. … Now, the articulate sound which has meaning is either universal [ex. man] or particular [ex. Peter and Paul]. It is not with the particular term that philosophy is concerned; rather, philosophy is concerned with that sound which has meaning, is articulate, and is universal, or, in other words, common and predicated of several things."[48]

In short, his conception of philosophy is embedded in the nature of reality, integral with and emerging in relation to intellible, articulate sound. Thus, in addition to articulating the rudiments of a philosophy of language, John's thought also articulates an intentionally Orthodox framework revealing the interconnectivity of subjects as apparently distinct as logic, language, epistemology, and metaphysics, integrating them all together within an authentically Christian philosophy suited to a specifically Christian worldview.[49] Concerning his

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[48] *Dialectica*, 5. John's discussion here goes on to include these distinctions: essential vs non-essential, where essential terms show either "what a thing is" (either signifying several species, in which case it constitutes the genus, or it signifies several individuals differing numerically within a species) or "of what sort it is" (where a rational and an irrational animal are different sorts). This then extends into discussion of the terms difference, genus, and species, and so on to explicate "the five terms to which every philosophical term may be reduced": genus, species, difference, property, and accident. Significantly, all of this is functioning within a semiotic consciousness, that of a meaningful, articulate sound that signifies something.

[49] Ethics can be included in the above list, together with anthropology, as can John's theory of iconic signification. For an example of the

epistemological use of logic and how it is intrinsically related to his conception of language, he states:

> However one should understand that we are beginning with that division of philosophy which concerns the reason (*λογικοῦ*) and which is a tool (*ὄργανόν*) of philosophy rather than one of its divisions, because it is used for every demonstration (*ἀπόδειξιν*). So, for the present, we shall discuss simple terms which through simple concepts signify simple things. Then, after we have explained the meanings of the words, we shall investigate dialectic.[50]

connection John makes between knowledge, metaphysics, anthropology, and ethics: "Nothing is more estimable than knowledge, for knowledge is the light of the soul. The opposite, which is ignorance, is darkness. Just as the absence of light is darkness, so is the absence of knowledge a darkness of the reason. Now, ignorance is proper to irrational beings, while knowledge is proper to those who are rational. Consequently, one who by nature has the faculty of knowing and understanding, yet does not have knowledge, such a one, although by nature rational, is by neglect and indifference inferior to rational beings. By knowledge I mean the true knowledge of thing which are, because things which have being are the object of knowledge. … May those who happen upon this work have it as their purpose to bring their mind safely through to the final blessed end - which means to be guided by their sense perceptions up to that which is beyond all sense perception and comprehension, which is He who is the Author and Maker and Creator of all. … Thus if we apply ourselves in a meek and humble spirit to the attainment of knowledge, we shall arrive at the desired end" (John of Damascus, *Dialectica*, 1). Concerning John's theory of signification: "we ascend by means of images perceived through the senses to the divine contemplations" (I.33), and similarly: "we are led by images perceived through the senses to divine and immaterial contemplation" (I.34). For John's inclusion of language itself into his theory of signification, see also I.45: "Do you see how the function of image and word are one?" See also footnote 36.

50 *Dialectica*, 3. See also *Dialectica*, 64.

In other words, every act of demonstration utilizes reason or logic (*λογικοῦ*) as a tool in order to make said demonstration, and so John is framing his work as a primer in the epistemological framework together with the conceptual tools, i.e. terms, necessary for the rational methodology essential to his Christian notion of knowledge.[51] John's definition of philosophy, then, needs to be brought more fully into consideration for the understanding of the scope of his epistemology and its range of applicability. He states:

> Philosophy is knowledge (*γνῶσις*) of things which are (*ὄντων*) in so far as they are (*ὄντα*), that is, a knowledge of the nature of things which have being (*ὄντων*). And again, philosophy is knowledge of both divine and human things, that is to say, of things both visible and invisible. Philosophy, again, is a study of death… Still again, philosophy is the making of one's self like God. Philosophy is the art of arts and the science of sciences. This is because philosophy is the principle of every art, since through it every art and science has been invented. … Philosophy, again, is a love of wisdom. But, true wisdom is God (*Σοφία δέ ἀληθής, ὁ Θεός ἐστιν*). Therefore, the love of God (*ἀγάπη πρός τόν Θεόν*), this is the true philosophy (*ἀληθής φιλοσοφία*).[52]

John's manifest conception of the exhaustive scope of philosophy is further extended into its primary divisions:

> Philosophy is divided into speculative (*θεωρητικόν*) and practical (*πρακτικόν*). The speculative is divided into theology, physiology, and mathematics. The practical is

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51 For the use of *λογικός* as reason or logic, see: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=logikos&la=greek#lexicon>, May, 19, 2015.

52 *Dialectica*, 3.

> divided into ethics, domestic economy, and politics. Now, the speculative is the orderly disposition of knowledge (*γνῶσιν κοσμοῦν*)… Practical philosophy… is concerned with the virtues (*άρετάς*)."[53]

The scope of philosophy, then, is clearly quite comprehensive, and intends to cover "every sort of knowledge," whether speculative or practical.[54] This notion of knowledge, therefore, is holistic in the sense that it is not dis-integrated, but integrated within a common reality, both physical and metaphysical.

The foregoing *skopos* can also speak to such contemporary disciplines as semiotics. For example, Charles Peirce, the founder of semiotics, stated that "Logic, in its general sense, is… only another name for semiotic, the quasi-necessary, or formal, doctrine of signs."[55] John, drawing on a similar foundation of logical thought via such figures as Aristotle and Porphyry, even developing in relation to his logical thought a theory of iconic signification, marks an express point of contact between specifically Orthodox thought and contemporary semiotics.[56]

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53 *Dialectica*, 3.

54 Dialectica, 2. It is interesting to note that practical philosophy is divided according to the relative scope of community, from individual to household to government, and that the notion of virtue seems to apply in some sense to each level.

55 C.S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), p. 98.

56 For a fuller discussion of the relationship between logic and semiotics, with reference to its historical dimension, see John Deely, "The Relation of Logic to Semiotics," Semiotica 35-3/4 (1981), pp. 193-265. One particularly telling phrase of John of Damascus concerning the relationship between signs and language states that one "kind of image is twofold: through words written in books - for letters depict the word… and through things seen by the sense of sight" (John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, tr. Andrew Louth, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), III.23). In other words, both language and objects of sight function as images which signify, where "the image was devised to guide us to knowledge and to

Though a full exposition of Damascene's thought in light of semiotics is not possible here, in order to show more deeply that Damascene's logical philosophical thought is apropos, not only for Orthodoxy *qua* Orthodoxy, but also engages via its "canons of terminology" with difficulties encountered in contemporary philosophical discourse, one way of entering into this problematic is by observing a particular tension between what has been called "natural language" versus "ordinary language" philosophy.[57] In discussing specifically pre- and early Modern era philosophical discourse, Deely quotes Boehner: "There was the unity of an unbroken academic tradition guaranteed by the use of common textbooks."[58] In contrast to this he observes today "the terminological confusion of modern philosophy."[59] Part of this problem he identifies as being rooted in "the inadequacy of the identification of a mythical 'ordinary' language which is distinct from technical vocabularies and wholly artificial systems alike."[60] Answering why: "For what is 'ordinary' is decidedly relative to and completely determined by the popular culture and consciousness of specific groups within the human population, a given structure that is the product of past changes viewed apart from that past and apart too from the future changes it harbors within itself." Distinct from what Deely, building on Roman Jakobson, calls "natural language," "ordinary language" fails to link "the individual user to to an entire population of

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make manifest and open what is hidden" (Ibid, III.17). More directly stated: "the function of image and word are one," (*Three Treatises*, I.45).

57 Charles S. Peirce, "What Pragmatism Is," The Monist, Vol. 15, No. 2 (April, 1905), pp. 161-181, p. 164.

58 John Deely, *Introducing Semiotic: Its History and Doctrine*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 165.

59 Ibid., p. 166.

60 Ibid., p. 88.

previous speakers."[61] As he says, "In short, every 'ordinary language'... is a sociological subspecies abstracted within a natural language."[62]

Though arguably out of fashion as a current topic of debate, this notion of "ordinary language philosophy" is a potent symbol of the exact quandary which non-traditional intellectual pursuits necessarily find themselves. Damascene thus offers an antidote from within an Eastern Orthodox *phronema* to this problematic, for in looking at his *Dialectica* one sees that, not merely dealing with theology or even philosophy understood as a subdiscipline of knowledge, he treats of the entire epistemological condition of man, from physics to political science to ethics, etc. Not an individualistic system, nor merely a series of moveable cut-and-paste theological conclusions, it has intellectual roots coming from Aristotle to the Neoplatonists to Classical Christian thought, and thus it provides a dynamic vocabulary, a semantic template for framing, interpreting, and addressing a comprehensive range of epistemological issues.[63]

Natural language, containing as it does a linguistic community's technical vocabularies such as that provided by John of Damascus, "links the individual user" of a community's language to a certain lexical continuity, where "the time axis is part and parcel of the system."[64] Ordinary language, being a "synchronic abstraction" cuts off a language user from being in continuity with a discourse's lexical continuum.[65] It is precisely in retaining continuity with a community's lexical continuum that discourse retains diachronic coherence in any given "synchronic state," leaving the community connected "to the

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61 Ibid., p. 89.

62 Ibid.

63 One might also note that the living Catholic tradition of Thomism in philosophy as represented by such authors as Feser and Oderberg offer a Catholic counterpart to what Damascene may offer to the Eastern Orthodox world.

64 Jakobson, quoted in Deely, p. 89.

65 Ibid, p. 89.

particular ways in which they have experienced the world in terms of idiosyncratic as well as specific needs, interests and concerns."[66] For Orthodox discourse this is a way of manifesting the essential substance of tradition via a diachronic semiosis, for "It carries an entire tradition of perceptions and orientations distinguishing a people, even at intersections of enculturated social life, modifying this tradition in the present and extending it into the future through the individuality of its users who are… both constituted by and constitutive of the linguistic and cultural tradition they express, in a kind of circular feedback relationship."[67] Tradition, then, as the dynamic context stabilizing a discourse's authentic terminology, is vital to maintaining continuity of thought where present discourse and future developments happen within an unbroken continuum of "perceptions and orientations."

Concerning what is at stake as regards how the above relates to specifically Orthodox discourse, as one Patristic scholar observes of the breakdown that occurs when the continuum of theological discourse is discarded: "In short, such an approach to theology undermines the very gospel itself."[68] In other words, kerygma and theology are implicit in each other, and so the relationship between the gospel and its diachronically unfolded systematic theology is not an arbitrary but a necessary one. As such, and perhaps emerging as a consequence of the "scandal of particularity,"[69] the type of

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66 Ibid, pp. 88-9

67 Ibid, p. 90.

68 John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), p. 174.

69 Though there is not room to explore it here, Florovsky's notion of "Christian Hellenism" as an "eternal category of Christian existence" seems to bear some resemblance to the "scandal of particularity" as if it were its natural and logical extension, an ever widening ripple radiating from the Cross. See Georges Florovsky, "Ways of Russian Theology," in Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 4: Aspects of

system inherited and articulated by the Damascene is simply the manifestation of that which is intrinsic in the gospel from its very foundation, with a further consequence that it ties all of reality together in a comprehensive epistemological and metaphysical whole, touching, as Damascene does, on knowledge itself, and therefore all areas of knowledge, including areas as seemingly disparate as physics, ethics, biology, politics, and theology.[70]

Widening this observation to include the Greek philosophical discourse that, like the bee, Damascene critically sifted, Zhyrkova states: "Partaking in the established tradition, John not only recognizes that Greek philosophy has some true

Church History, 195. Florovsky's use of the notion of "the scandal of particularity" is mentioned briefly in Paul L. Gavrilyuk's Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance, (Oxford, 2014), p. 151. Florovsky utilizes the same idea in one the three principles of his "theological will": "In studying the Acts of God, we see "the scandal of particularity," that is to say, salvation has come "from the Jews" and has been propagated in the world through the medium of Hellenism. To be a Christian means to be a Greek, since our basic authority is forever a Greek Book, the New Testament. The Christian message has been forever formulated in Greek categories. The old Hellenism was dissected, baptized, regenerated, converted to become the Christian Hellenism of our dogmatics - from the New Testament to St. Gregory Palamas in the fifteenth century, and even to our own times. One cannot revert back to Hebraism or even to pre-Christian Hellenism, and all attempts to reformulate the historical dogmas of the undivided Church in categories of modern philosophies should be resisted as misleading and fruitless" (Peter A. Chamberas, *MA* 45:1, Winter (2003), pp. 49-66, 65). See also: Andrew Blane, "A Sketch of the Life of Georges Florovsky," in *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman,* ed. Andrew Blane (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), pp. 11-217, pp. 153-5.

70 Behr further maintains that "the manner in which the Fathers thought through" the apostolic gospel proclamation and the concomitant issues raised by the traditioning of this discourse is key to attaining an accurate picture of what is happening in Christian thought (John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death*, p. 176).

elements and is useful for theology, but also turns it into one of the bases for theological discourse."[71] This manner of Patristic philosophical and theological thought, then, is not arbitrary, neither is it merely culturally utilitarian, and therefore it cannot be divorced from the Fathers' diachronic lexicon nor casually excised from Orthodox discourse.[72] Theological discourse must be inclusive of "the way in which they did theology, rather than simply appropriating for our own purposes the formulas they produced as a result."[73] In other words, getting to the inner workings of Patristic thought, not just Patristic conclusions, is necessary to actually understanding what is at work in their discoursing on Christ, never "forgetting the basic principle that conclusions without the arguments that lead to them are at best

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71 Anna Zhyrkova, "The Philosophical Originality of a Theologian", p. 230.

72 In this light, any idea that suggests the Church Fathers were simply cultural relativists adopting "culturally relevant" language merely "to suit the times" ought to be discarded.

73 John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death*, p. 176. Showing what would be involved in a critical reappropriation of Damascene's thought, as well as providing a Patristic justification for Behr's approach, Zhyrkova states: "John of Damascus did not just rely on a selected school of philosophy. On the one hand, in the Dialectic, he outlined a traditional Neoplatonist curriculum containing components based on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories* - and, in addition, in his treatment of philosophical notions involved in Christological argumentation, he seems to have used the works of his Byzantine predecessors, such as Leontius of Byzantium, Anastasius Sinaita, and Maximus the Confessor. On the other hand, his method consisted very much in redefining some and recombining other philosophical concepts. John's metaphor of the bee gives a very good insight into his approach. For a bee not only chooses the right flowers to collect nectar from but also transforms the latter into tasty, healthy and condensed nourishment. As with the bee, John did not simply put together various philosophical contents. Frequently he altered philosophical ideas for theological reasons, sometimes doing it in a very subtle manner. Nevertheless, those alterations several times resulted in the formation of radically new philosophical contents" (Zhyrkova, pp. 230-1).

ambiguous."[74] This, however, is not a matter of idle historiographic curiosity, is not merely a concern with past Orthodox thought, but is also vitally constitutive of what animates present Orthodox thinking and discourse. What then is the grammar of this premodern discourse?

3 John of Damascus' *Dialectica* as Providing a Metastructure for Discourse

Plato and Aristotle agreed: one does not begin a search for knowledge with either a question or set of questions, but first and foremost with wonder.[75] According to Plato (via Socrates), this wonderment is the beginning of philosophy, of a knowledge which transcends the tangible.[76] According to Aristotle, this wonderment likewise leads to a desire for a knowledge which transcends mere utility.[77] Following upon the heels of a sense of wonder, then, is a quest for metaphysical knowledge. Yet, since human knowledge is bound up with words, as implied by John in the fifth chapter of the *Fount*, in order to ask a question or discourse on knowledge, one must have words with which to frame the question and proceed with any relevant inquiry.

Words, however, must communicate meaning, for without meaning there is no sense, and without clear sense there is only dulling ambiguity, for the greater the semantic ambiguity, the greater the ambiguity of the discourse. Thus philosophy, as a semantic discipline, must be clear in the use of its semantic instruments, the tools of its terminological trade.

In order to discourse on language-as-discourse, then, as trivial an observation as it may seem, one must use language. The

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74 John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death*, p. 173.

75 Plato, *Theaetetus*, 155d; and Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b12.

76 Plato, *Theaetetus*, 155d-e.

77 *Metaphysics*, 982b21. Cf. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, III.29, where he lists wonder and desire as a form of veneration and worship.

question of language, then, is fundamental to the present inquiry. Language, however, as was noted above, is a type of tradition, which is to say it exists within a community, both synchronically shared and diachronically handed down. But language as a term is very abstract, for language is only instantiated in particular words. Particular words, then, being the building blocks of language, are among the first issues needing to be dealt with in order to use them to erect coherent thoughts for the sake of an integrated discourse. Using undefined words necessarily renders discourse ambiguous, even incoherent, and so it is perhaps not surprising, then, to observe that John of Damascus, following a long tradition of philosophers, of "wise and godly men," lays the foundation of his *Fount* via the clarifying of terms, for it is these root terms which will enable his language to function as reasoned discourse, which is to say that the Damascene's opening efforts function as a hermeneutic key, a grammar, so to speak, for knowledge.[78] Erismann states of John's continuity with that which preceded him:

> One of the features of his method is that he combines with Aristotelian theses what he calls "the opinion of the fathers", i.e. generally the Cappadocians, but more often Maximus the Confessor, and summaries of logic such as that of Anastasius Sinaiticus, or the *Doctrina Patrum de incarnatione Verbi*, a seventh century *florilegium* dealing with Christology.[79]

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[78] *Dialectica*, p. 2.

[79] Erismann, p. 272. Ables also observes that John's philosophic works "greatly exceed extant lists of terms to which he may have had access" (Scott Ables, "John of Damascus on Genus and Species," *The Ways of Byzantine Philosophy*, ed. Mikonja Knevevic, (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2015), pp. 271- 287, pp. 271-2.

It is via this integrated system of linguistically codified concepts *cum* worldview where one can argue that understanding is made possible, where coherent thought-structures, i.e. philosophy, can be made possible, and consequently a "Christian metaphysics."[80] No sharp division, moreover, as Ables argues, "philosophy and theology in late antiquity were closely related enterprises."[81]

John's notion of language, however, is not an isolated system of signs, a closed world of meaning "within which each item only refers to other items in the same system."[82] In a move echoed over a millennium later by Ricoeur, who states that the "intentional pointing toward the extra-linguistic" relies upon a "previous and more originary move starting from the experience of being in the world and proceeding from this ontological condition towards its expression in language,"[83] Damascene likewise founds his philosophical discourse on being, for after deconstructing a position which attempts to undermine philosophy, a position which militates against knowledge of real being, the Damascene immediately establishes the starting point of his philosophical thought: "Since, then, there is such a thing as philosophy and since there is knowledge of things that are, let us talk about being (*ὄντος*)."[84] In other words, being, which is to say ontology, is the starting point. Being, which John defines in the fourth chapter as "the common name for all things which are," is the first item of knowledge, the foundation of philosophical endeavors, and is thus the principle from which a specifically Orthodox philosophical discourse naturally begins.[85] The terms he builds

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80 Ibid.

81 Scott Ables, "John of Damascus on Genus and Species,", p. 273.

82 Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University University Press, 1976), p. 6.

83 P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 21.

84 *Dialectica*, 3.

85 *Dialectica*, 4.

on are thus not merely a semiotically closed system, but are rooted "extra-linguistically" in the ontologically prior experience of being itself, thereby proceeding "from this ontological condition towards... expression in language." In short, word and being are deeply implicated in each other.

Building on John's Patristic thought, as will be made more evident below, it is misleading to speak of philosophy in terms of questions or problems, or even as merely descriptive.

According to him philosophy is the science of knowing true knowledge, a knowledge which works with both questions and descriptions, but is yet more fundamental than that, a "true knowledge of all things that are."[86] Reporters describe, and in describing they also interpret, and even raise questions, but reportering and philosophy are not identical tasks. What philosophy is concerned with transcends the task of the reporter, and does this, according to at least one source, by its being "the science in which natural reason seeks an understanding of all things by a knowledge of their first principles."[87] In other words, not merely description, philosophy involves understanding by means of first principles. It is a knowing, self-aware, or critical application of ontologically prior first principles expressed semantically to the effect of understanding "all things," or in John's language, "all things which are."

In discoursing about language and its role in philosophical knowledge, then, a distinction must be made between discourse as purely local and contextual, on the one hand, and discourse as reasoned inquiry or examination proceeding according to first principles, on the other. Similar to the tension observed above between ordinary language philosophy and natural

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86 *Dialectica*, 1.

87 Bernard Wuellner, S.J., *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2012; orig. pub.: Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1956), p. 91.

language philosophy, what might be termed contextualism, like ordinary language philosophy, attenuates the diachronic aspect of semantic-conceptual structures and so fails to fully establish the diachronic parameters which enable sustained philosophical inquiry and discourse. Though this point could seem only too evident, it is significant insofar as it shows that in order to perpetuate philosophical discourse there must be something more substantial than a discourse which fails to internalize integrated and stable structures of concepts. In other words, theological discourse can never be reduced to or founded upon the ephemeral and the accidental, what might otherwise be called "local" or "contextual" theologies.[88] The problem with contextual theology according to Damascene's thought would be the replacing of the substantial with the accidental, exchanging substance for accident.[89] In essentializing the accidental, contextualism misses the metaphysical mark of knowledge's proper object, which

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88 Kalaitzidis' appeal, *contra* Florovsky, to contextual theology is thus no answer to the problem of making relevant "modern Orthodox theology" (Kalaitzidis, pp. 26-7), for in arguing that theology is radically contextual he ignores key historical facts about Patristic theology, that it was maintained and developed without break across centuries and major cultural shifts up to the present day. If the need to be radically contextual were true of theology, then the continuity of theology would be impossible in principle, for theology would be founded on that which ceaselessly changes rather than on that which is eternal. Moreover, he presupposes that not only was pre-modern philosophy merely contextual, but that "modern" philosophical-theological trends have actually transcended the horizon of Patristic discourse, something he provides no real evidence for but merely asserts (ibid, pp. 24-5).

89 "Being is the common name for all things which are. It is divided into substance and accident. Substance is the principal of these two, because it had existence in itself and not in another. Accident, on the other hand, is that which cannot exist in itself but is found in the substance" (*Dialectica*, 4).

according to Damascene is being.[90] Local and contextual theology considered as discourse would thus have the self-limiting effect of disintegrating the diachronic coherence of theology, for contextualism finds its conceptual root in the accidental and so in principle subdivides infinitely according to the endless varieties of possible points of departure.[91] In short, the type of interconceptual structure provided by John of Damascus is not only an antidote to this type of disintegration, but is also a necessary condition of stable theological discourse. Following both Aristotle and his commentators, and, as he calls them, the "holy Fathers" of the Church, John of Damascus manifests this distinction in his *Fount of Knowledge*, maintaining the traditioning of language necessary for philosophy. Concerning the continuity of Patristic usage of Aristotelian thought, Erismann observes:

> Several Patristic authors use Aristotelian logic in their dogmatic discussions, the most striking examples being Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, Leontius of Byzantium, Maximus the Confessor and John Philoponus. This movement reached a phase of intense activity during the middle Byzantine period, in the works of theologians such as Anastasius Sinaiticus, Theodore of Raithu and John of Damascus.[92]

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90 "Philosophy is knowledge of things which are in so far as they are, that is, a knowledge of the nature of things which have being" (*Dialectica*, 3).

91 I.e. A Street theology, B street theology, C Street, and so on, subdivided further as A1 Street theology, A1.5, A2, A2.5, and so on in an endless series of ever subdividing contextual theologies with increasingly self-isolating terms of discourse.

92 Christophe Erismann, *A World of Hypostases: John of Damascus' Rethinking of Aristotle's Categorical Ontology*, p. 271.

Structurally and intentionally divided into thirds, as discussed above the entire first third of the book is devoted to what he and others call philosophy.[93] What is especially noteworthy about this section on philosophy, however, is that, rather than being a catalogue of conclusions, as also noted above it is devoted to explaining the definitions of key terms, the terms which lay the foundation for "doing" reasoned inquiry, for discoursing on knowledge, including the theology dealt with in the last third of his work and rendering the *Fount* "much more than just a list of terms or compendia, but a complete if minimal handbook of logic."[94] What this section of his work does, then, is create a metastructure in which these terms can interact and inform each other, providing thereby an integrated platform for Christian discourse on all types of knowledge about reality for, in the words of Ables, "John realizes that something more than defining terms is needed, for confessional interlocutors continue to fail to come to terms with each other."[95] Picking up then on this together with the importance of ontology for Damascene's work, Erismann further argues: "The result is an ontology - a theory of the basic items of reality - which is of Aristotelian inspiration, and demonstrates an immanence realism (as opposed to a Platonic realism which postulates separated universals) and an essentialist position."[96] In short, reducing neither to Platonism nor Aristotelianism, John's work is "part of a process to canonize a logic" that was in its deepest structures commensurate with the Biblical, Patristic, and ultimately Orthodox *phronema*.[97]

In this light, the Damascene's approach suggests that it is not enough merely to define one's terms as if each term exists

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93 "First of all, then, it is best to know just what philosophy is" (*Dialectica*, 2).

94 Scott Ables, "John of Damascus on Genus and Species,", p. 273.

95 Ibid., p. 277.

96 Christophe Erismann, *A World of Hypostases: John of Damascus' Rethinking of Aristotle's Categorical Ontology*, p. 270.

97 Scott Ables, "John of Damascus on Genus and Species,", p. 284.

independently, as if knowledge is a loose collection insights, but that knowledge, and therefore its discourse, including the very language used to enact this discourse, requires an integrated system of interrelating terms that, moreover, correspond with Christian metaphysics and epistemology. Since John is dealing with the most basic or fundamental terms, his chapters on philosophy might be likened unto an Orthodox Christian *Isagoge* or *Categories*, an introductory Christian logic, for it is rooted in the establishing of an interconceptual system of basic terms with which to think and reason responsibly about truth. What is hermeneutically key, however, is that John does not take for granted a mass of confused terms. Nor is it a basket of juxtaposed, disintegrated neologisms that he is establishing, but founds his discourse on knowledge with an explicit starting point within an established interconceptual system.[98] One discourses via particular languages, and so Damascene's *Fount* functions to both reveal and establish the structure in which a particular Orthodox language and worldview can unfold in an integral fashion: "Following other theologians, mainly Maximus the Confessor, John endorses an interpretation of the extension of logic that allows its use in a theological context."[99] Building on this in a further comment on Damascene's use of Aristotelian logic, Erismann corroborates this view of the *Fount*'s structure:

> This high valuation of logic is noticeable in the arrangement of his works. First comes a *Dialectica*, which gathers the philosophical tools which a Christian theologian needs to master; these are mainly concepts which stem from the *Categories* and the *Isagoge*. John believed that an adequate understanding of these notions

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98 Damascene repeats on more than one occasion that he will say nothing of his own. For example, see Dialectica, preface. cf. ibid., 2.

99 Christophe Erismann, *A World of Hypostases: John of Damascus' Rethinking of Aristotle's Categorical Ontology*, p. 271.

> allows us both to disprove heresies and to state doctrine correctly.[100]

It is therefore, according to the text of the *Fount*, precisely the integral structure of this language system which makes a metastructure for non-disintegrated knowledge possible, what John calls philosophy.

The pivotal issue, then, is the establishing of a hermeneutic key or legend by which this process can be undertaken. Given that John of Damascus is functioning within what can be called a hermeneutic of Tradition, a species of the hermeneutic of continuity, and that he is also engaged in the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity with the broader Hellenistic philosophical milieu, it is reasonable to take his *Dialectica* as providing for the philosophically informed hermeneutic task. It is important, however, to note that this not a mere capitulation to Hellenism *qua* Hellenism. As Erismann states:

> Not only did John of Damascus accept that logic of pagan origin may be used by a Christian, he also considered dogmatic orthodoxy to be essentially determined by a clear understanding of logic and an adequate definition of terms. According to John, heresy is generated by the lack of precision of notions such as *essence*, *nature*, and *hypostasis*, and not by the use of Aristotelian logic.[101]

One key element of this methodological use of reason (*λογικοῦ*), which according to John is the "first division" (*ἀρχόμεθα*) of philosophy, is that it is "a tool (*ὄργανόν*) of philosophy… used for every demonstration (*πᾶσαν ἀπόδειξιν*)."[102] Therefore, John of Damascus' *Dialectica* can be framed as providing the core

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100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.

102 *Dialectica*, 3. This notion of reason being a tool is also of Aristotelian provenance, and is actually a position which is in opposition to the Stoic view, which subsumed logical reasoning into philosophy itself.

elements of an entire epistemological and hermeneutical system, and by extension be regarded as fruitful for articulating a method of rationally coherent epistemological acts, which is to say the interpretation and understanding of "things that are" knowable (*γνῶσις τῶν ὄντων*).[103]

In the context of his *Fount*, John begins by establishing the situation to which he is speaking, what could be called his *problematique*: "Nothing is more estimable than knowledge (*γνώσεώς*), for knowledge (*γνώσις*) is the light of the rational (*λογικής*) soul."[104] This is the

ground on which he argues for the ontological relationship between knower (*ψυχής λογικής*) and knowledge. Like eyes for seeing sights, and ears for hearing sounds, it is precisely in acts of knowledge that this rational soul, this knower, finds the full expression and exercise of its ontology. Ignorance, on the other hand, is the denial of the rational being: "Ignorance is proper to irrational beings, while knowledge is proper to those who are rational."[105] It is the nature of a rational soul to come to knowledge, whereas ignorance in a rational soul is opposed to the very nature of the rational soul: "Consequently, one who by nature (*φύσιν*) has the faculty of knowing (*γνωστικω*) and understanding (*επιστημονικω*), yet does not have knowledge, such a one, although by nature (*φύσιν*) rational (*λογικός*), is by neglect and indifference inferior to rational beings."[106] By not coming to knowledge, the rational soul denies its own nature and fails to be fully human. The analogy he gives for this is primal: "Just as the absence of light is darkness, so is the

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[103] *Dialectica*, 3. This portion of the argument is not yet concerned with whether John's thought represents Orthodoxy per se, but is intended at showing more generally that his thought can be read properly as semiotics.

[104] *Dialectica*, 1.

[105] *αλόγον μέν γάρ ή άγνοια ίδιου, λογικών δέ, η γνώσις.*

[106] *Dialectica*, 1.

absence of knowledge a darkness of the reason." Knowledge and understanding are, therefore, essential to the very nature and being of the rational human soul, and so by framing his knowledge and philosophy in this manner, he has placed the *problematique* of knowledge squarely within his metaphysics of human ontology, with implications for the field of anthropology as well.

Concerning the ethical dimension of his anthropology, and putting into clearer relief the manner in which his system is integrated, since according to Damascene knowledge is of that which has real being (*οντων*), "because things which have being (*οντων*) are the object of knowledge," the notion of ignorance is not metaphysically neutral, but is precisely associated with non-existence and false knowledge, where false knowledge is knowledge of that which does not have being: "False knowledge, in so far as it is a knowledge of that which is not, is ignorance rather than knowledge. For falsehood is nothing else but that which is not."[107] Thus the issue of coming to knowledge and understanding is elevated beyond mere curiosity, but is instead linked ethically to the very nature and act of human existence, and so the *problematique* of knowledge as presented by Damascene inextricably links an Orthodox Christian metaphysics together with epistemology and ethics, and thereby gives an ethical imperative to his hermeneutics together with an epistemological and ontological realism.[108]

It might be noted again here that, in identifying what John of Damascus contributes to the structure (and structuring) of Christian thought, it is not necessary to argue that he is unique

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[107] Ibid.

[108] Given the status Damascene ascribes to knowledge, where "nothing is more estimable than knowledge" (*Dialectica*, 1), its ontological status in relation to man's being a rational being (ibid), and also that reason or logic (*logikos*) is used "for every demonstration" (Ibid, 3), it would seem that logic as *organon* would be Damascene's epistemological "mode," what amounts to a "logic as epistemology."

in all respects from non-Christian thinkers. Recalling the opening discussion of the bee, an image derived from Basil (fourth century), one of his avowed principles is precisely to take the best from non-Christian thought and put it to Christian use within the Christian system, for Christianity is not an isolated (or even isolating) system of thought. Thus to show that what Damascene's thought is on a subject is not to distinguish it from all others, per se, but to show what the content of his view of Christian knowledge is, what is specifically appropriate to a Christian view of knowledge. In that he is utilizing the thought of philosophers such as Aristotle and Porphyry in addition to the "holy Fathers," this holistic integration of knowledge moreover does not need to render Damascene's system, insofar as it can be classified as systematic, "unique" among all great philosophies, but shows how this phenomenon is internalized within specifically Christian discourse. Moreover, since this phenomenon is shared with other systematic philosophies, it reveals one of the ways in which Christianity as a whole system can dialogue with other whole systems.

Though certainly more could be said concerning what immediately follows in the Damascene's laying of the foundation of his philosophical thought, especially concerning his identifying Christ as the subsistent (*ενυπόστατος*) wisdom and truth, that in Him is bound up all true knowledge, and that it is He who speaks through Scripture, thus linking metaphysics, epistemology, and hermeneutics into an indissoluble bond with Christology, there is yet a further task confronting the understanding of the Damascene's hermeneutic, that of the conceptual grammar he establishes as the means to this knowledge and understanding. Moreover, concerning the ethical dimension of what can be termed his hermeneutic theory is that in approaching the "true knowledge of all things that are," he states that one must endeavor to "proceed without letting the spiritual eye of [the] soul be dulled by passions

(*πάθεσι*)."[109] In other words, the ethically charged movements within the soul can affect the clarity by which the mind would attempt to discover or appropriate knowledge, and so in a manner of speaking he is ethically linking hermeneutics (and also philosophy) with asceticism.[110] That said, the "purpose" or *skopos* (*σκόπος*) that the Damascene assigns concerning the "blessed end" (*μακάριον τέλος*) of knowledge is not knowledge for mere knowledge's sake, as if knowledge was not intrinsically ethical, but that the mind (*νουν*) of those who happen upon his work "be guided by their sense perceptions (*αισθήσεων*) up to that which is beyond all sense perception (*αισθήσιν*) and comprehension (*κατάληψιν*), which is He who is the Author and Maker and Creator of all."[111] In fact, he censures the notion of operating aimlessly, comparing it with "fumbling in the dark," and as such the hermeneutic task as envisioned by his philosophy presupposes that real knowledge is not only possible, but that its possibility is requisite to the *skopos* of being itself.[112]

With the foregoing in mind, it is possible to more fully appreciate the hermeneutic dimension of what Damascene calls the *Fount of Knowledge*.[113] One of the clearest proofs of the possibility of the usefulness of the *Fount* is not only its place in the structure of the trilogy itself, functioning as its beginning (*ἀρχόμεθα*), but also in the integrated nature of this structure, for the theology section presupposes and relies upon the

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109 *Dialectica*, 1.

110 It is in this sense that the Damascene can say at the end of chapter one: "Thus, if we apply ourselves in a meek and humble spirit to the attainment of knowledge, we shall arrive at the desired end."

111 *Dialectica*, 1. Though it goes beyond the bounds of the present essay, it is worth noting that by invoking the notion of being led from senses to that which is beyond the senses, the Damascene has aligned his philosophy with classical realism.

112 *Dialectica*, 2.

113 *Dialectica*, 2. He supplies the title of his work in chapter 2: "*ΠΗΓΗ ΓΝΩΣΕΩΣ*".

intellectual foundation laid in the *Fount*. They thus also reinforce each other's normative status, and so render the *Fount* a ground or means by which "Orthodoxy," as inclusive of a native mode of discourse, can critically interface with disciplines that are not explicitly or directly "Orthodox." More than a structure, since it can contain multiple modes of discourse rooted in a shared set of diachronic presuppositions, Orthodoxy itself can be understood as a global metastructure for discourse, which is also to say a comprehensive worldview useful for several types of immanently, transcendentally, and ultimately (i.e. teleologically) integrated webs of discourse, whether logical, semantic, semiological, iconological, hermeneutical, metaphysical, epistemological, existential, ascetical, psychological, ethical, philosophical, theological, etc.

Building on Ricoeur's analysis of the structural model, and demonstrating its manifestation in what appears to be an intentionally systematic philosophy native to classical Christianity, Damascene's philosophical thought could be said to constitute an authentic Ricoeurian interconceptual system, for "in such a system no entity belonging to the structure of the system has a meaning of its own; the meaning of a word, for example, results from its opposition to the other lexical units of the same system."[114] Ricoeur has thus justified to a large extent Damascene's philosophical project considered insofar as it is systematic and interconceptual. Though many organized bodies of thought may seek to manifest this principle to greater or lesser degrees, the global nature of Damascene's articulation of this system is firmly grounded in *Christian* metaphysical and epistemological commitments, and unites, as mentioned above, such things as physics, mathematics, economics, and theology. This supports the thesis that John's thought articulates an

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[114] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, p. 5.

authentic and stable Orthodox metastructure for discourse capable of engaging meaningfully with non-Christian modes of thought. What Ricoeur is advocating is found precisely in John's thought, which as observed above was situated within a Patristic theological continuum; the language used to articulate philosophy and theology is in this way an integral network of meanings. Moreover, this network of lexical meanings implicates the entire world in a Christian metaphysics, one which speaks to issues of being, knowledge, reality, language, ethics, etc. In short, John of Damascus articulates an interconceptual framework for a Christian worldview.

As noted above, given the content and nature of Damascene's thought, the ontology implicate in language, it is thus possible to avoid Ricoeur's criticism of Saussure that the finite semiotic system is "closed," "i.e., without relations to external, non-semiotic reality."[115] Ricoeur states of the "event of language" that is discourse: "Events vanish while systems remain." This is to say that there is a "virtual system" or "code" implicate in discourse events whose synchronic aspect puts "the system outside of successive time."[116] Not virtual in the sense of being unreal, its non-existence is found in its standing outside of temporal succession, where this system or code is actualized in "unique acts of discourse."[117] Thus it is a dialectical relationship between event and meaning which mediates the vanishing temporality of discourse with stable meaning, what Ricoeur calls the "propositional content."[118]

Applying the foregoing to John of Damascus, it is his lexical interconceptual code or system which can emerge in relation to a present discourse such that the Orthodox canon of truth as maintained in the Orthodox theological continuum, and as

115 Ibid, pp. 5-6.
116 Ibid, p. 9. Cf., ibid, p. 3.
117 Ibid, p. 9. Cf., ibid, p. 11.
118 Ibid, p. 9.

mediated via his philosophical system, can be brought to bear from outside of successive time upon present problematics. It is this act which constitutes a critical Orthodox Christian analysis of various incoming messages. Without this "propositional content," however, an Orthodox form of discourse is made impossible and therefore unable to be held in tension with non-Christian thought. Without use of and access to the underlying code, it would actually be impossible to relate Orthodox Christianity in any meaningful way to any discourse, or even to itself, for the vanishing element of language events will swallow any stable meaning - what Ricoeur calls a discourse's propositional content; he states: "It is not the event insofar as it is transient that we want to understand, but its meaning."[119] Consequently, any discourse analysis must be aimed at this meaning, which is to say the implicate virtual system actualized in any meaningful language event. An Orthodox Christian "linguistics of discourse," then, must be informed by its own system, its own canon.[120]

Consequently, without the underlying principles, code, or canon, Christian discourse disintegrates. Heresy understood as representing a conceptual-canonical boundary is in a hermeneutic sense the inexorable result of being insufficiently informed by canonical propositional content. In brief, it is a charge of logical inconsistency relative to first principles. The problem of relating this propositional content to present discourse is thus vital for Orthodoxy, which is why John of Damascus' work can be so useful, for it builds and develops expressly on a grand synthesis of philosophical and theological thought. Concerning Damascene's intentional continuity, Fennema argues:

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119 Ibid., p. 12.

120 Ibid.

> Damascene relies upon the philosophical categories of primary/secondary substance to articulate theology. This is no mere accidental occurrence or arbitrary decision on Damascene's part, for he is chiefly indebted to the Eastern fathers of Origen of Alexandria, Athanasius the Great, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Theologian, and Maximus the Confessor for having established patristic precedent in using them.[121]

In other words, this continuity of philosophical *cum* theological thought serves as a grammar for Orthodox Christian discourse, and to justify it historically "we can note that Damascene has roughly five hundred years of Eastern patristic precedent for strictly using the categories of the philosophers to articulate theology."[122] What this means is that, via Damascene, Orthodox theology can be said to contain within itself a "linguistics of discourse," a semantic field where discourse on vital subjects of knowledge can be enacted. What is more, "For the Damascene, philosophy provides theology with notions and conceptions that enable the elucidation and accurate formulation of theological issues."[123] In other words, the philosophical grammar Damascene articulates also has a universal scope which touches on all issues of knowledge. Since philosophy is, in John's system, comprehensive of theology, which is to say theology has a narrower focus and exists as a discipline within philosophy, it thus cannot be understood as restricted to theological issues, but functions within a broader interconceptual whole.

It is this transtemporal code, canon, or system whose propositional content gets disclosed in discourse. Of this Ricoeur states: "What can be communicated is first of all the

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121 Scott Fennema, "Patristic Metaphysics: Is the Divine Essence for John Damascene and Augustine of Hippo an Ontological Universal?", (*Glossolalia* 6:1 (Fall 2013): 1-21.), pp. 15-16.

122 Ibid., pp. 16-17.

123 Ibid.

propositional content of discourse."[124] In other words, there is a transtemporal meaning which informs any temporal locutionary act, for "discourse [is] event plus sense."[125] It is thus via the transtemporal code that an intersubjective communication of meaning or knowledge is enabled and enacted, for "the self-transcendence of the event in its meaning - *opens* discourse to the other."[126] In order to escape private worlds of meaning, then, which is to say solipsism, propositional content is required to jump the intersubjective gap, which is precisely what tradition supplies, as per Gadamer above, and what Damascene articulates in terms which integrate a philosophical discourse constituting the interconceptual elements of a cosmic Christian worldview. As Ricoeur states, "The message has the ground of its communicability in the structure of its meaning."[127] In other words, the transtemporal interconceptual structure is what grounds a message's communicability.[128] It is thus on this ground that an Orthodox Christian might engage *incoming* messages with the elements of a specifically Orthodox hermeneutic of Tradition.

It is in this context, that of the structure of meaning, where meaning can be transmitted across the intersubjective gap, in "the dialectic of *self* and the *other than self*."[129] Without a framework of meaning, however, it is not possible to impart meaning to any locutionary act, and not only impartation, but

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124 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another, tr. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992*, p. 16.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.

128 This would make deconstructionism difficult to sustain on its own ground, for in disallowing a stability of meaning structures, the medium by which communication of its principles is rendered impossible in very principle.

129 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 3.

also reception for communication includes not only these other-directed acts, but also other-receptive acts, which is to say listening. One not only communicates according to a framework of meaning, one also listens according to or from within a framework of meaning. Concerning the communicative act, Ricoeur states, "As long as one remains within the circle of sameness-identity, the otherness of the other than self offers nothing original."[130] In other words, where a structure of meaning is required for meaning in a locutionary act, intersubjectivity is required for authentic communication. If this is true, and the locutionary act of a discourse event requires a transtemporal propositional content, the converse follows that listening implies a subjective space and meaning structure which, constituting self, then receives the communication of other than self. This is another way of articulating the notion that worldview actively structures information into a conceptually viewable world, where meaning is generated from the interconceptual structure involved in receiving information, discourse, and dialogue.

There is no uninterpreted meaning, and all meaning requires a framework of interpretation, and so arises the problem of just what options are available for frameworks of interpretive acts that contain the possibility of obtaining meaning. In other words, there is no metaphysically, epistemologically, hermeneutically, or ethically, etc., neutral interpretive act; each act of interpretation implicates some framework of meaning. Just as it is impossible to communicate to other than self without propositional content, there is an equal impossibility of listening to other than self without a framework in which to assess for potential meaning. It is thus in a self-consciously maintained framework of meaning where the meta-analysis of other than self's frameworks of meaning is made possible. Rather than feigning no system in order to listen "neutrally,"

130 Ibid.

which is to say the impossible position of an act of listening which is also not employing some framework of meaning, the illusion of neutrality is dispensed with and is replaced instead with "hermeneutic hospitality," which is to say that reception of other than self is obtained precisely in the context of self's native propositional content in an intersubjective event.[131] Where "the solitude of life is for a moment… illuminated by the common light of discourse," it becomes clear that the structures of meaning enabling this discourse actually involve entire worldviews.[132]

It might be said, however, in light of Gadamer's articulation of tradition discussed above, as well as Ricoeur's own notion of the dialectic of self and other, the very idea of "the solitude of life" is somewhat impossible, for the experience of self implies an interpreted world, an interpretation which implicates a framework of meaning which is traditioned across time via linguistic and conceptual communities. By conceptual community is meant a community of shared meaning which is not restricted merely to linguistic, socio-cultural, or political phenomena, as is the case in communities constituted by conversion and which may not share linguistic or cultural norms. Transcultural, translinguistic, and transtemporal "communities of belief" manifest this. For example, a Spanish Catholic and an African Catholic may speak different languages and have different cultural forms and norms, but there is in the

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131 It is from this ground that apologetics is established, for in the encounter of distinct systems of meaning the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity arises, where a hermeneutic of continuity recognizes consonant meaning in the other than self and a hermeneutic of discontinuity recognizes discordant meaning.

132 P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 19.

context of their Catholic faith a communal property not accounted for in purely linguistic or socio-cultural terms.[133]
In this sense, Ricoeur is closer to the truth when he states that "the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other," and more than other-than-self, entire systems of meaning embedded and transmitted in conceptual communities with their concomitant worldviews are all contained virtually within the self and the other than self. These are brought into dialectical tension in events of discourse, both in acts of transmission of meaning as well as reception of meaning, each mode structured according to an implicate and global system of meaning.[134]
Though there is not sufficient space to explore deeply the potential connections with Zizioulas, his notion of "being as communion," seems to approximate in Orthodox terms the Ricoeurean notion of "oneself as another." For example, grounding his notion of being as communion in God, Zizioulas states: "His [God's] being is identical with an act of communion."[135] In this sense, "the concept of the person is inextricably bound up with theology."[136] Thus, "being is *constituted* as communion."[137] Moreover, in terms of salvation history, "viewed from the point of view of ontology, the fall

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133 Islam also manifests this phenomenon, where on the linguistic and sociocultural level there may be great diversity, but on the religio-conceptual level, inclusive of liturgical language (Arabic) and ascetic practices (such as Ramadan), there is yet a common bond. Orthodox Christianity manifests this phenomenon as well, though without a shared liturgical language across all jurisdictions; the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, for example, translated as it is across several languages, serves particularly as a transcultural bridge for Eastern Christian communities of belief.

134 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 3.

135 John D Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 44.

136 Ibid., p. 50.

137 Ibid., p. 101.

consists in *the refusal to make being dependent on communion*."[138] In a phrase with key elements reminiscent of Ricoeur's statement above, Zizioulas also states: "Being a person is fundamentally different from being an individual or a 'personality,' for a person cannot be imagined in himself but only within his relationships."[139] In short: "*To b*e and *to be in relation* [are] identical."[140]

Zizioulas' thought can also be seen to displace certain artificial notions of knowledge, reorienting it according to his relational ontology, when he argues that, for example, "Knowledge and communion are identical."[141] As observed above, John of Damascus also relates knowledge to ontology insofar as man is rational by nature, for "knowledge is proper to those who are rational."[142] If knowledge is "the true knowledge of things which are, because things which have being are the object of knowledge," then it would seem that Damascene would not only implicate human *being* with knowledge, but also leave room for a relational ontology of *being knowing being*.[143] Even the entire movement of Christian life is expressed in simultaneously gnoseological and relational terms: "Let us put aside every anxiety of the mind and approach the truth [who is Christ] unhampered by material considerations. And let us not be satisfied with arriving speedily at the gate, but rather let us knock hard, so that the door of the bridal chamber may be opened to us and we may behold the beauties within. Now, the gate is the letter, but the bridal chamber within the gate is the beauty of the the thoughts hidden behind the letter, which is to

138 Ibid., p. 102
139 Ibid., p. 105.
140 Ibid., p. 88.
141 Ibid., p. 81
142 *Dialectica*, 1.
143 Ibid.

say the Spirit of truth."[144] Considering the strong Christological bridal chamber imagery, John certainly holds that the notion of knowledge has communal properties.

To conclude, though only the surface has been scratched via Gadamer, Florovsky, Ricoeur, and John of Damascus himself, it has been shown that John of Damascus' *Fount of Knowledge* functions to integrate Christian epistemology and metaphysics into an interconceptual system which provides tools for engaging contemporary philosophical discourse from "within a consistent Orthodox perspective." By laying a broad and comprehensive conceptual *cum* philosophical foundation which implicates Christian knowledge and theology in an integral worldview, Damascene opens a space for engaging disciplines such as hermeneutics, semiotics, and, in principle, any area of human knowledge and inquiry. Though much more can be and needs to be said, Damascene's metastructure for discourse has in key ways been shown to function within a continuity of Orthodox thought, providing the necessary rudiments to Christian knowledge, and like the skillful bee takes the best pollen from the choicest flowers of non-Christian thought, "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."[145] Moreover, maintaining the integrity of the Christian faith, the dialogue with non-Christian disciplines can, via Damascene, not only engage but moreover listen from within a Christian framework. In this sense it provides the tools for a powerful hermeneutic of continuity, one which can navigate the dialectical tension of continuity and discontinuity, ensuring that the wheat of truth be shifted from the chaff of error, justifying a confidence in Christian inquiry. To close with an enduring exhortation from John of Damascus:

> Christ is the subsistent wisdom and truth and in Him are all the hidden treasures of knowledge. … Let us knock hard, let us read once, twice, many times. By thus digging

144 Ibid.
145 2Co 10:5.

> through we shall find the treasure of knowledge and take delight in the wealth of it. Let us seek, let us search, let us examine, let us inquire. … Thus, if we apply ourselves in a meek and humble spirit to the attainment of knowledge, we shall arrive at the desired end.[146]

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146 *Dialectica*, 1.

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