

## What is Mortal in the Soul?

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**Abstract:** Byzantine churchmen taught their congregations that the dead were suffering punishment for their sins but that their lot could be alleviated through alms and prayers offered on their behalf. However, not everybody was convinced that this was indeed the case. Some people challenged the conceptual framework on which the care of the dead rested. They claimed that disembodied souls had neither a sense of self nor could feel pain and joy. This alternative view made its first appearance in the sixth century and then resurfaced again in the eleventh century. The present article focuses on two key sources for the later debate, Nicetas Stethatos' treatise *On the Soul* and John Italos' *Opusculum 50*.

**Keywords:** Nicetas Stethatos, John Italos, soul, afterlife, prayers for the dead.



### Ruhların Ölebilen Kısmı Nedir?

**Öz:** Bizans döneminde din adamları cemaatlerine ölümlerin hayattayken işledikleri günahlar için cezalandırıldığını ama durumlarının adlarına yapılan dualar ve sadakatlerle iyileştirilebileceğini söylerdi. Ne var ki herkes buna ikna olmadı. Bazıları söz konusu faaliyetlerin üzerine temellendiği kavramsal çerçeveyi reddediyordu. Onlar bedensiz ruhlarının ne kendilerini bilebildiklerini ne acı ya da sevinç duyabildiklerini iddia ediyorlardı. Altıncı yüzyılda ilk defa ortaya çıkmış olan bu alternatif görüş on birinci yüzyılda tekrar boy gösterdi. Bu çalışma o ikinci münakaşayla alâkalı iki başlıca kaynak, Niketas Stethatos'un *Ruh Hakkında* adlı eseri ve İoannes İtalos'un 50. *Opusculum*'u üzerinde durmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Nicetas Stethatos, John Italos, ahiret, ölümler için dualar.

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## What is Mortal in the Soul? Nicetas Stethatos, John Italos and the Controversy about the Care of the Dead

Byzantine churchmen taught their congregations that the dead were suffering punishment for their sins but that their lot could be alleviated through alms and prayers offered on their behalf. However, not everybody was convinced that this was indeed the case. Some people challenged the conceptual framework on which the care of the dead rested. They claimed that disembodied souls neither had a sense of self nor could feel pain and joy. This alternative view made its first appearance in the sixth century and then resurfaced again in the eleventh century. The present article focuses on two key sources for the later debate, Nicetas Stethatos' treatise *On the Soul* and John Italos' *Opusculum* 50. Nicetas claimed that memory and sense perception were located not in the mortal irrational but in the immortal rational part of the soul and therefore continued to function even after death. By contrast, John declared that not only the irrational but also the rational part of the soul were inactive after death and that only the intellect, which was not related to this world, remained functional.

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In the sixth century the care of the dead was a well-established practice in the Mediterranean world. People said prayers and gave alms on behalf of dead relatives and friends, in the belief that these activities would alleviate the punishments that the dead had to suffer for their sins.<sup>1</sup> This practice gave rise to a new literary genre, the so-called edifying stories. Two types of narratives can be distinguished. In the first type dead sinners appear to the living in dreams or visions, speak about the sufferings that they have to endure, and ask that alms be given and prayers be said on their behalf. After the living have performed these activities the sinners appear to them for a second time and declare that their situation has greatly improved. In the second type the sinners are only presumed dead but nevertheless experience feelings of well-being when relatives and friends say prayers or give alms on their behalf. To this they bear witness when they eventually return to their homes.<sup>2</sup> Such stories show not only that the practice was widespread but also that the audiences needed some reassurance that their efforts were of use to the dead. Indeed, the care of the dead was not as unchallenged as it might first seem. In the late sixth century a group of intellectuals declared that after death the souls were without sensation and could therefore neither be punished for their misdeeds nor receive a reprieve from their punishments through the good works of others. Their views

<sup>1</sup> For Late Antique views on the commemoration of the death, cf. E. Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca, London, 2009), esp. 140-175.

<sup>2</sup> For edifying stories, cf. M. Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford 2012), esp. 21-148.

are known to us because a Constantinopolitan priest by the name of Eustratius attacked them in his treatise *On the State of the Souls After Death*:

Λόγος ἀνατρεπτικὸς πρὸς τοὺς λέγοντας μὴ ἐνεργεῖν τὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ψυχὰς μετὰ τὴν διάζευξιν τῶν ἑαυτῶν σωμάτων, καὶ ὅτι οὐδὲν ὠφελοῦνται διὰ τῶν προσαγομένων ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν εὐχῶν τε καὶ προσφορῶν τῷ θεῷ· ὠφελοῦνται γὰρ ἦτοι κουφίζονται.<sup>3</sup>

Refutation of those who say that **the souls of human beings are not operative** after the separation from their bodies, and that they get no benefit from the prayers and offerings that are presented to God on their behalf, for they receive a benefit, that is, they get relief.

Unfortunately Eustratius neither identifies his adversaries nor tells us how they substantiated their claim that human souls are inactive after death. In order to fill this gap scholars have turned to another text, a collection of *Questions and Answers* by the monk Anastasius of Sinai, which dates to the late seventh or early eighth century.<sup>4</sup> When asked about the fate of the soul after death Anastasius points out that the loss or damage of a body part automatically leads to the loss of the faculty of the soul that is related to it. For example, a blow on the head can cause a person to lose its memory. From this he draws the conclusion that the loss of the entire body must lead to the disappearance of all faculties of the soul:

Χωριζομένης αὐτῆς, λέγω δὴ τῆς ψυχῆς, ἐξ ὅλου τοῦ σώματος οὐκέτι δύνатаί τι ἐνεργεῖν ὧν ἐνήργει, διὰ τῶν μορίων τοῦ σώματος, οὐ λαλεῖν, οὐ μιμηθήσκεισθαι, οὐ διακρίνειν, οὐκ ἐπιθυμεῖν, οὐ λογίζεσθαι, οὐ θυμοῦσθαι, οὐ καθορᾶν.<sup>5</sup>

When it, that is, the soul, is separated from the whole body **it can no longer do anything of what it did through the parts of the body**, not speak, not remember, not discern, not desire, not think, not be angry, not see.

There can be little doubt that Eustratius' adversaries shared the views of Anastasius of Sinai. However, it should be emphasised that theirs was not the only conceptual framework that militated against the belief that the dead derive immediate benefits from the good deeds, which the living perform on their

<sup>3</sup> Eustratius of Constantinople, *On the State of the Souls After Death*, ed. P. van Deun, *Eustratii Presbyteri Constantinopolitani De statu animarum post mortem (CPG 7522)* (Turnhout 2006), 3. On Eustratius and his work, cf. N. Consta, 'An apology for the cult of saints in late antiquity. Eustratius presbyter of Constantinople "On the state of the souls after death"' (CPG 7522), *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10 (2002), 267-285.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the seminal article by G. Dagron, 'L'ombre d'un doute: L'hagiographie en question, VIe-XIe siècle', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992), 59-68. On Anastasius, cf. most recently D. Krausmüller, "'At the resurrection we will not recognise one another": radical devaluation of social relations in the lost model of Anastasius' and Pseudo-Athanasius' *Questions and Answers*', *Byzantion* 83 (2013), 207-227.

<sup>5</sup> Anastasius of Sinai, *Questions and Answers* 19.6, ed. A. Munitiz and M. Richard, *Anastasioi Sinaitae Questiones et Responsiones* (Turnhout, 2006), p. 32, 51-55.

behalf. This is evident from a text dating to the first half of the sixth century, a series of *scholia* appended to the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The author of these *scholia*, John of Scythopolis, saw it as his task to explain in greater detail the brief and cryptic statements of Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>6</sup> He has this to say about the different faculties of the soul:

Καὶ πάσας ὁμοῦ τὰς δυνάμεις ἢ ψυχὴ ἐν ἑαυτῇ ἔχει, καθ' ἃς προνοεῖ τοῦ σώματος, καὶ ὅμως ἀσυγχύτως αὐτὰς κατὰ καιρὸν προβάλλει, ... τὴν δὲ αἰσθητικὴν ἐνεργεῖ δύνάμιν περὶ φλέβας καὶ ἀρτηρίας, καὶ τὴν σάρκα, καὶ τὰ νεῦρα· καθ' ἣν δύνάμιν τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀντιλαμβάνομεθα· τὴν δὲ δοξαστικὴν, καθ' ἣν κρίνει τὰ αἰσθητὰ· καὶ τὴν φανταστικὴν, καθ' ἣν φαντάζεται τὰ αἰσθητὰ· ἀναζωγραφικὴν δέ, καθ' ἣν ἀναπλάττει καὶ τὴν μνημονευτικὴν, καθ' ἣν μέμνηται· ὀρεκτικὴν δέ, καθ' ἣν ὀρέγεται, καὶ κινεῖ τὸ ζῶον κατὰ τόπον· καὶ εἰκαστικὴν, καὶ θυμοειδῆ, καὶ ἐπιθυμητικὴν. **ταύτας γὰρ ἔχει δυνάμεις σώματι χρωμένῃ ἐν τῷ ἀλόγῳ αὐτῆς μέρει. μετὰ δὲ θάνατον ὁ νοῦς ὁ μόνος ἔσται ἐνεργῶν, τούτων ἀργουσῶν.**<sup>7</sup>

And the soul has all faculties together in itself with which it cares for the body, and nevertheless sends them forth in an unconfused manner, ... it operates the sensitive faculty in the veins and arteries and the flesh, with which faculty we grasp the sensual things; the faculty of forming opinions, with which it judges the sensual things; and the faculty of imagining things with which it imagines the sensual things; and the faculty of forming images with which it forms images; and the faculty of remembering with which it remembers; and the faculty of yearning, with which it yearns, and moves the animal in place; and the faculty of making guesses, and that of becoming angry and that of becoming desirous. **For it has these faculties in its irrational part when it uses the body. However, after death the only thing operative will be the intellect, while the others will be inert.**

This passage bears a striking resemblance to the statement of Anastasius of Sinai. For John, too, the faculties that permit the human being to have sensation and a sense of self disappear with the separation of the soul from the body. This is all the more surprising as John started from a radically different conceptual framework. Whereas Anastasius was influenced by medical writings, John of Scythopolis is a died-in-the-wool Platonist. He distinguishes between two different elements within the soul, the irrational part and the intellect, and he further contends that the intellect remains active. However, this does not

<sup>6</sup> On John of Scythopolis, cf. R. Aubert, 'Jean, évêque de Scythopolis, dit Jean le Scolastique (première moitié du VIe siècle)', *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastiques* 27 (2000), pp. 617-619.

<sup>7</sup> John of Scythopolis, *Scholia on the Divine Names of Pseudo-Dionysius*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 4 (Paris 1889), 320D10-321A14.

mean that the souls continue to function in their accustomed manner because the mind operates in a sphere beyond time and space.<sup>8</sup>

The debate continued until the early ninth century as is evident from the sermon *About Those Fallen Asleep* that in the manuscripts is falsely attributed to John of Damascus.<sup>9</sup> This sermon contains a spirited defence of the care of the dead against those who reject its validity. Although the author makes no reference to the theories on which such rejection was based it can be assumed that the opponents of the care of the dead were still arguing along the same lines.<sup>10</sup> After the end of Iconoclasm, however, there was a hiatus, which lasted a century and a half. Sources written in those years make no mention of the issue. The debate resurface only in the second half of the eleventh century when the monk Nicetas Stethatos and the philosophers John Italos engaged in it.

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Nicetas Stethatos was monk and later abbot of the famous Constantinopolitan monastery of Stoudios.<sup>11</sup> He was a born polemicist who with his numerous writings intervened in many controversies.<sup>12</sup> The issue of the care of the dead is discussed in his treatise *On the Soul*, which contains lengthy arguments about the nature and the faculties of the soul.<sup>13</sup> This text ends with an emphatic assertion of the efficacy of the care of the dead:

Ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ πάσῃ ἐστὶ καὶ χαρὰ τῇ ἐλπίδι τῆς τῶν αἰώνιων τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀγαθῶν ἀπολαύσεως καὶ πρὸ τῆς μελλούσης τῶν θείων ἐκείνων πραγμάτων ἀποκαταστάσεώς τε καὶ ἀπολήψεως, **μνημονεύουσα** μὲν τῶν ἐναρέτων ἔργων αὐτῆς, ὧν εἰργάσατο ἐν τῇ πληρώσει τῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντολῶν, καὶ **νοερῶς αἰσθανομένη** αὐτῶν δι' αὐτὴν γινομένων εὐποιῶν τε καὶ προσευχῶν.<sup>14</sup>

It (sc. the soul) experiences complete happiness and joy in the hope of the enjoyment of the eternal goods of God even before the future restitution and reward of those divine things, **remembering** its virtuous deeds which it performed in the fulfilment of the commandments of God,

<sup>8</sup> For a fuller discussion of this passage cf. D. Krausmüller, 'Christian Platonism and the Debate about Afterlife: John of Scythopolis and Maximus the Confessor on the Inactivity of the Disembodied Soul', forthcoming in *Scrinium*.

<sup>9</sup> Pseudo-John of Damascus, *About Those who have Fallen Asleep*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 95, 247-277.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. D. Krausmüller, 'Contextualising Constantine V's radical religious policies: the debate about the intercession of the saints and the "sleep of the soul" in the Chalcedonian and Nestorian churches', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 39 (2015), 25-49.

<sup>11</sup> On Nicetas Stethatos, cf. M. Hinterberger, 'Ein Editor und sein Autor: Niketas Stethatos und Symeon Neos Theologos', in P. Odorico (ed.), *La face cachée de la littérature Byzantine. Le texte en tant que message immédiat. Actes du colloque international, Paris, 5-6-7 juin 2008* (Paris, 2012), 247-264.

<sup>12</sup> On Nicetas' involvement in controversies, cf. most recently D. Krausmüller, 'Establishing Authority in the Constantinopolitan Religious Discourse of the Eleventh Century: Inspiration and Learning in the Writings of the Monk Niketas Stethatos', in S. Steckel, N. Gaul, and M. Grünbart (ed.), *Networks of Learning: Perspectives on Scholars in Byzantine East and Latin West, c.1000-1200* (Berlin-Münster, 2014), 107-24.

<sup>13</sup> Nicetas Stethatos, *On the Soul*, ed. J. Darrouzès, *Nicétas Stéthatos. Opusculs et lettres* (Paris 1961), 56-152.

<sup>14</sup> Nicetas Stethatos, *On the Soul*, 72, ed. Darrouzès, 134.

and **intellectually sensing** the good works and prayers that are done for it.

For Nicetas it is two faculties of the soul that allow it to continue functioning as if it were still linked to a body; memory, which gives it a sense of self, and "intellectual" sensation, which makes it aware of what is done in its name in this world. In the text these faculties make their first appearance in a discussion of the soul and its various parts.<sup>15</sup> Nicetas starts by stating which elements the soul consists of, then explains the functions of the different elements, and finally repeats his initial statement but this time with a focus on what happens to the elements at the moment of death:

ἴδια οὖν, ὡς εἴρηται, τοῦ λογικοῦ μέρους τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ διανοητικόν, ἡ γνῶσις τῶν ὄντων, ὁ ἐνδιάθετος λόγος, ἡ **νοερὰ αἴσθησις**, αἱ νοήσεις τῶν νοητῶν, αἱ γενικαὶ ἀρεταί, αἱ ἐπιστήμαι, τῶν τεχνῶν οἱ λόγοι, τὸ βουλευτικόν, τὸ προαιρετικόν καὶ τὸ **μνημονευτικόν**. τὸ δὲ γε **φανταστικόν** καὶ αἱ τοῦ **σώματος αἰσθήσεις** ἰδιά εἰσι τοῦ ἀλογωτέρου μέρους αὐτῆς. τούτων τὰ μὲν ἔχει καὶ φέρει, τοῦ σώματος καὶ τῆς παρουσίας ἐξερχομένη ζωῆς, τὰ δὲ οὐ.<sup>16</sup>

Properties of the rational part of the soul, then, as has been said, are discursive thought, knowledge of the things that really are, the inner voice, **intellectual sensation**, the intellections of intelligible things, the generic virtues, the sciences, the principles of the arts, deliberation, volition and **memory**, whereas the faculty of **imagination** and the **senses of the body** are properties of its more irrational part. Of these it has and carries the former, when it leaves the body and the present life, but not the latter.

This statement is not entirely original. Nicetas has adapted its first half from John of Damascus' *Exposition of Faith*:

Τοῦ δὲ διανοητικοῦ εἰσιν αἶ τε κρίσεις καὶ αἱ συγκαταθέσεις καὶ αἱ ὀρμαὶ πρὸς τὴν πρᾶξιν καὶ αἱ ἀφορμαὶ καὶ αἱ ἀποφυγαὶ τῆς πράξεως, ἰδικῶς δὲ **αἶ τε νοήσεις τῶν νοητῶν καὶ αἱ ἀρεταὶ καὶ αἱ ἐπιστήμαι καὶ τῶν τεχνῶν οἱ λόγοι καὶ τὸ βουλευτικόν καὶ τὸ προαιρετικόν**.<sup>17</sup>

To discursive thought belong the judgements and the agreements and the urges to do things and the promptings to and avoidances of action, and specifically **the intellections of the intelligible things and the virtues and the sciences and the principles of the arts and deliberation and volition**.

<sup>15</sup> Nicetas Stethatos, *On the Soul*, 64-67, ed. Darrouzès, 126-130.

<sup>16</sup> Nicetas Stethatos, *On the Soul*, 68, ed. Darrouzès, 130.

<sup>17</sup> John of Damascus, *Exposition of Faith*, 33, ed. M.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 94 (Paris, 1860), 937C.

Extensive quotations from the *Exposition of Faith* are a characteristic of the treatise *On the Soul* as a whole, but they often appear in a modified form.<sup>18</sup> This is also the case here. The elements ἡ γνώσις τῶν ὄντων, ὁ ἐνδιάθετος λόγος, ἡ νοερὰ αἴσθησις and τὸ μνημονευτικόν are not found in John of Damascus' statement and must therefore be regarded as Nicetas' additions to the original text. The last two of these terms have counterparts in the second half the statement: ἡ νοερὰ αἴσθησις evidently corresponds to αἰ τοῦ σώματος αἰσθήσεις, and τὸ μνημονευτικόν is related to the immediately following τὸ φανταστικόν. This can be seen from the following passage in the *Exposition of Faith*, which Nicetas did not adapt but which he undoubtedly knew. There John of Damascus defines memory in the following manner:

Τὸ δὲ μνημονευτικόν ἐστὶ μνήμη καὶ ἀναμνήσεως αἰτίον τε καὶ ταμιεῖον· μνήμη γάρ ἐστὶ φαντασία ἐγκαταλελειμμένη ἀπὸ τινος αἰσθήσεως τῆς κατ' ἐνέργειαν φαινομένης.<sup>19</sup>

The faculty of memory is the cause and receptacle of memory and remembrance, for memory is an imagination that is left behind by a sense perception that appeared in actuality.

Despite these links, however, the two sets of terms are sharply distinguished. Ordinary sense perception and imagination cease to exist at the moment of death because they belong to the irrational part of the soul, which is mortal. By contrast, "intellectual" sensation and memory survive because they are faculties of the immortal rational part of the soul. Thus they can fulfil the function that Nicetas later accords to them, namely to guarantee a continuing sense of self and awareness of this world even after death.

Nicetas' argument appears to be very neat. However, this does not mean that it is without problems. We have already seen that John of Scythopolis locates memory in the irrational part of the soul. Significantly we find a similar view in Nicetas' chief authority, John of Damascus. In his treatise *About the Two Wills of Christ* John elaborates the notion that the human being is a recapitulation of all creation:

Κοινωνεῖ οὖν ... τοῖς ... ἀλόγοις ζώοις ... κατὰ τὸ ζωτικὸν καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἄλογον ὄρεξιν ἧγουν θυμὸν καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν, κατὰ τε **τὸ φανταστικὸν καὶ μνημονευτικὸν** καὶ κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν καὶ τὴν καθ' ὄρμην κίνησιν .... συνάπτεται δὲ ταῖς ἀσωμάτοις καὶ νοεραῖς δυνάμεσι διὰ τοῦ λογικοῦ καὶ τῆς λογικῆς τοῦ νοῦ ὀρέξεως.<sup>20</sup>

It shares ... with ... the irrational animals ... the vivifying faculty and the irrational appetite, that is, anger and concupiscence, and **imagination and**

<sup>18</sup> On Nicetas' use of John of Damascus cf. D. Krausmüller, 'Hiding in Plain Sight: Heterodox Trinitarian Speculation in the Writings of Niketas Stethatos', *Scrinium* 9 (2013), 255-284.

<sup>19</sup> John of Damascus, *Exposition of Faith*, 34, ed. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 94, 937D.

<sup>20</sup> John of Damascus, *On the Two Wills of Christ*, 15, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 95 (Paris, 1860), 144BC.

**memory** and sense perception and instinctual movement ... and it is joined with the incorporeal and intellectual powers through rationality and the rational appetite of the intellect.

Here memory appears with imagination among the faculties of the irrational part of the soul. From this statement one can only draw one conclusion, namely that memory, too, does not survive death.

It is interesting that Nicetas cannot produce a single quotation from John of Damascus that would unequivocally make his case that memory remains active after death. The best evidence that he has to offer is found in a *scholion*, which he later added to the text:

Οὕτω καὶ ὁ Δαμασκηνὸς Ἰωάννης ἐν τῷ οὐδ' κεφαλαίῳ αὐτοῦ περὶ τῆς θείας ψυχῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅτι ἀνθρωπίνως μέμνηται τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς αὐτῆς διατριβῶν καὶ ὅτι καθ' ὑπόστασιν τῷ Θεῷ Λόγῳ ἦνεται.<sup>21</sup>

Thus also John of Damascus in his seventy-fourth chapter about the divine soul of Christ, that it remembers in human fashion its sojourn on earth and that it is hypostatically united with the God Word.

Comparison shows that John did indeed make such a statement in his *Exposition of Faith*. In chapter 74 we read that the resurrected Christ is fully functional, "remembering in human fashion the sojourn on earth", ἀνθρωπίνως δὲ μεμνημένος τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς διατριβῶν.<sup>22</sup> Yet its relevance to the question is doubtful. Unlike ordinary human beings Christ is already risen and thus possesses not only a rational but also an irrational soul. This lack of evidence, however, did not daunt Nicetas. As we have seen he simply modified a quotation from John of Damascus in such a way that it expressed his own views. He clearly expected his readers not to check the original text and therefore to conclude that this had been John's opinion, too.<sup>23</sup>

What has been said about memory and imagination also applies to the second pair, bodily sensation and "intellectual" sensation. In this case Nicetas' argument is even more contrived. The latter faculty resembles the former in all respects, apart from the fact that it does not need the organs of the body. The term νοερὰ αἴσθησις does not appear in John of Damascus' oeuvre. It is likely that Nicetas adapted it from the writings of Symeon the New Theologian where it repeatedly occurs. For Symeon νοερὰ αἴσθησις is closely linked to visions of light and sound, which resemble the effects of ordinary sense perception but can only be perceived by the visionary. In his *Hymns* Symeon lets God speak:

<sup>21</sup> Nicetas Stethatos, *On the Soul*, 74, ed. Darrouzès, 136 (in apparatu): 'auctore Nicetas, ut videtur'.

<sup>22</sup> John of Damascus, *Exposition of Faith*, 74, ed. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 94, 1105A.

<sup>23</sup> For a parallel for this rather dubious strategy, cf. Krausmüller, 'Hiding in Plain Sight', 201-202.

Μόλις δυσωπηθεις ταῖς προσευχαῖς Συμεῶν τοῦ πατρός σου ἀρχήθην μόνῳ τῷ νοῖ ἐν νοερᾷ αἰσθήσει φωνῆς σε κατηξίωσα, ἔπειτα καὶ ἀκτῖνος.<sup>24</sup>

Barely persuaded through the prayers of Symeon, your father, I have initially deemed you worthy of a voice in the mind alone **through intellectual sensation**, then also of a ray.

As the editor of Symeon's oeuvre Nicetas was intimately familiar with Symeon's thought-world. Thus it is not surprising that his treatise *On the Soul* contains a very similar passage:

Διὰ δὲ τῆς νοερᾶς αἰσθήσεως αἰσθάνεται πως μυστικῶς τε καὶ νοερῶς τῶν γενομένων ἐν αὐτῇ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἐνεργειῶν καὶ φωτοχουσιῶν, ὡσαύτως τῶν κινήσεων τε καὶ ἐλλάμψεων, ἔσθ' ὅτε καὶ τῆς φωνῆς ἀκούει αὐτοῦ, λαλοῦν γάρ ἐστι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ὀπτασίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις Κυρίου νοεροῖς ὀρᾷ ὀφθαλμοῖς δι' αὐτῆς.<sup>25</sup>

Through the intellectual sensation it (sc. the soul) senses mystically and intellectually the operations and illuminations of the Holy Spirit that it receives, and likewise the movements and illuminations, sometimes also it hears its voice, for it is speaking, but it also sees with intellectual eyes through it the visions and revelations of the Lord.

Nicetas' innovation is to create a link between the notion of intellectual sensation and the afterlife, which is not yet present in Symeon's writings. Such a move is not without precedent in Greek theological literature. The closest parallel is found in a Late Antique collection of *Questions and Answers* that is attributed to Justin Martyr.<sup>26</sup> There it is asked how the disembodied soul of the Good Thief could enjoy the sensual beauty of the garden of Paradise. The answer reads as follows:

Ἔχει τε τοῦ παραδείσου τὴν αἴσθησιν κατὰ τὴν ἐννοηματικὴν λεγομένην αἴσθησιν, καθ' ἣν ὀρώσιν αἱ ψυχαὶ ἑαυτάς τε καὶ τὰ ὑπ' αὐτάς, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους τε καὶ τοὺς δαίμονας· οὐ γὰρ νοεῖ οὔτε ὀρᾷ ψυχὴ ψυχὴν οὔτε ἄγγελος ἄγγελον οὔτε δαίμων δαίμονα, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν ῥηθεῖσαν ἐννοηματικὴν αἴσθησιν ὀρώσιν ἑαυτοὺς τε καὶ ἀλλήλους, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὰ σωματικὰ πάντα.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymn*, 55, ed. A. Kambylis, *Symeon Neos Theologos, Hymnen* (Berlin and New York, 1976), 82. Cf. B. Fragineau-Julien, *Le sens spirituels et la vision de Dieu selon Syméon le nouveauthéologien* (Paris, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Nicetas Stethatos, *On the Soul*, 66, ed. Darrrouzès, 128.

<sup>26</sup> On this text cf. Y. Papadoyannakis, 'Defining Orthodoxy in Pseudo-Justin's *Quaestiones et Responsiones ad Orthodoxos*', in H. Zellentin, E. Iricinschki (ed.), *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen, 2008), 115-127.

<sup>27</sup> Pseudo-Justin, *Questions and Answers*, ed. J. C. T. Otto, *Corpus apologetarum Christianorum saeculi secundi*, V (Jena, 1881), 437C.

He had the sensation of Paradise **through the so-called intellectual sensation**, through which the souls see each other and what is below them, and also the angels and demons. For neither does a soul intuit or see a soul nor an angel an angel nor a demon a demon, but according to the afore-mentioned intellectual sensation they see themselves and each other and also all that is corporeal.

It is evident that the concept of ἀέννοηματικὴ αἴσθησις, which functions just like ordinary perception but is not in need of the organs of the body, has a direct counterpart in Nicetas' νοερά αἴσθησις. However, it is doubtful that Nicetas was aware of this text. His writings give the impression that he had a rather limited knowledge of earlier theological literature since he normally quotes only from John of Damascus or Pseudo-Dionysius.

Nicetas presents his argument in a rather forceful manner. He claims that intellectual sensation is more powerful than its ordinary counterpart and that memory will also be stronger after death.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that he did not feel quite certain that his argument would be accepted because in another section of the treatise *On the Soul* he offers a slightly different explanation. He first declares that during our lives our guardian angels help us in all situations and then contends that this activity does not end with death:

Πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ μετὰ πότμον αὐτὸν τε καὶ τοὺς συλλειτουργοὺς ἔξει τούτου κατασκιάζοντας καὶ ἐπαναπαύοντας καὶ συνδιαιτωμένους αὐτοῦ τῆ ψυχῆ καὶ οἷον τὴν **μνήμην κινουῦντας** αὐτῆς εἰς τὸ ἀναμνημονεύειν τῶν παρ' αὐτῆς γεγονυῶν ποτὲ πράξεων ἀγαθῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ ἢ καὶ ἀναγγέλλοντας αὐτῆ, ἀγγέλους ὄντας, καὶ **νοερώς ἐμφανίζοντας** τὰ ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς ἐνταῦθα νόμῳ θεῷ παρὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γινόμενα;<sup>29</sup>

How will it not after death, too, have him and his fellow-servants as providing it with shade and rest and as living with his soul and so-to-speak **moving its memory** so that it remembers the good deeds that it once performed in this life, or announcing to it as angels and **intellectually making manifest** that which is done for it here by human beings according to divine law.

Here one gets the impression that the soul is after all not quite capable of using its memory and intellectual sensation on its own and that it needs the help of an angel in order to activate these faculties. This "belt-and-braces" approach is hardly surprising when we consider on what shaky foundations Nicetas' argument rested.

<sup>28</sup> Nicetas Stethatos, *On the Soul*, 73, ed. Darrouzès, 136.

<sup>29</sup> Nicetas Stethatos, *On the Soul*, 73, ed. Darrouzès, 134-136.

Having concluded our analysis we need to ask: why did Nicetas put so much effort into creating a conceptual framework that could undergird the care of the dead? An answer is provided by a further *scholion*, which was in all likelihood also added by Nicetas himself:

Κατὰ θνητοψυχητῶν αἰρετικῶν λεγόντων συνκαθεύδειν τρόπον τινὰ μετὰ θάνατον τῷ σώματι τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ μηδὲ τῶν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς γινομένων ἐνταῦθα ἢ τῶν ἐκεῖθεν ἀνιαρῶν καὶ ἄλλως ἐχόντων αἰσθάνεσθαι, ὡς ὁ νέος ἀπομάντης καὶ σαγοπῶλός φησι, ὁ καλούμενος ψευδωνύμως φιλόσοφος.<sup>30</sup>

Against the heretical "deadsoulers" who say that after death the soul sleeps in some way together with the body and does not sense what done for it here or what is painful and otherwise there, as the new conjecturer and rope-seller who is wrongly called philosopher says.

From this passage it is clear that Nicetas responded to the views of a contemporary who did not agree with his belief in an active afterlife. Unfortunately, it is not immediately clear whom Nicetas had in mind. The epithets ἀπομάντης and σαγοπῶλος are without doubt derogatory terms but we no longer know their precise meaning. More helpful is the identification as a philosopher. On the strength of it Jean Gouillard and Jean Darrouzès, the editor of Nicetas' treatise, identified Nicetas' adversary with John Italos, the successor of Michael Psellos as "consul of the philosophers".<sup>31</sup> However, this is not more than a hypothesis. In order to substantiate it one needs to show that Italos had indeed considered the soul to be inactive after death.

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The starting point for the discussion must be *Opusculum* 50 because it deals with a related subject matter. It is addressed to Emperor Michael VII who was interested in theological questions and had a reputation for piety:

Πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα κϋρ Μιχαήλ, εἰ αἱ ψυχαὶ ζητήσαντα, ὡς λέγουσί τινες, ἀνάβασιν δέχονται ἀπολυθεῖσαι τοῦ σώματος, ἐν ᾧ δέδεικται καὶ ὅτι ἄθάνατος.<sup>32</sup>

To the emperor Lord Michael, who had asked whether the souls are capable of ascent after they have been liberated from the body as some say, in which it is also shown that it is immortal.

<sup>30</sup> Nicetas Stethatos, *On the Soul*, 74 ed. Darrouzès, 136 (in apparatus): "auctore Niceta, ut mihi videtur".

<sup>31</sup> J. Gouillard, *Léthargie des âmes et culte des saints: un plaidoyer inédit de Jean diacre et maïstôr*, in *Travaux et Mémoires* 8 (1981), 171-186; and Darrouzès, *Opuscles et lettres*, p. 21. On John Italos, cf. M. Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni (1081-1261)* (Cambridge, 1995), 50-54; and J. Gouillard, 'Le procès officiel de Jean l'Italien. Les actes et leurs sous-entendus', *Travaux et Mémoires* 9 (1985), 133-174.

<sup>32</sup> John Italos, *Opusculum* 50, ed., P. Joannou, *Joannis Itali Quaestiones quodlibetales* (Studia patristica et Byzantina 4, Ettal, 1956), 63-69, esp. 63. For an earlier interpretation, cf. E. Stéphanou, 'Jean Italos: L'immortalité de l'âme et la résurrection', *Échos d'Orient*, 32 (1933), 413-428.

In this *opusculum* John Italos attacks the view that a soul can improve its lot after death through repentance. His refutation is based on philosophical arguments and Biblical proof texts. He contends that if one accepted such a view one would not only arrive at absurd conclusions but also flatly contradict the words of Jesus.<sup>33</sup> That this issue has a bearing on the question that concerned Nicetas Stethatos can be seen from the last paragraph of the *opusculum*:

Ψυχὴν δὲ τυχεῖν ἀναπαύσεως ἀγίων δεήσεσιν ἢ συγγενῶν εὐποιΐαις ἢ προσευχαῖς ἢ νηστεΐαις πρὸς τὸν θεὸν παρρησίαν ἔχόντων, μετὰ θάνατον ἴσως οὐκ ἄτοπον, ὡς πολλῶν μεμαρτυρηκότων τὰ τοιαῦτα, οἷς οὐ χρὴ ἀπιστεῖν.<sup>34</sup>

That after death the soul gets rest through the prayers of the saints or through the good deeds or prayers or fasts of relatives who have outspokenness before God, is perhaps not unreasonable since many have witnessed such things whom one should not distrust.

If this paragraph is indeed part of the original text and not a later addition we can conclude that John made an important qualification: while the lot of disembodied souls cannot be improved through their own efforts it can be changed through the efforts of the living. This is exactly what Nicetas set out to defend in his treatise *On the Soul*. Thus one might conclude that there is agreement between the two authors and that Nicetas' polemic was either based on a misunderstanding or not directed against Italos at all.

However, a radically different picture emerges when we turn to the first part of *Opusculum* 50. As is indicated in the title it provides proofs for the immortality of the soul. Italos describes Plato's and Aristotle's theories and then sets out how they should be evaluated. He argues that Plato serves as a corrective for passages in Aristotle's oeuvre, which suggest that the rational soul is inseparable from the body, and that Aristotle serves as a corrective for passages in Plato's oeuvre, which suggest that the irrational soul, too, is separable from the body.<sup>35</sup> There is little surprising in this approach: John Italos simply follows the lead of Late Antique philosophers who had attempted to harmonise the teachings of the two greatest ancient philosophers.<sup>36</sup> Yet this is not all that Italos has to say. Before he turns to the second issue, the possibility of improvement after death, he makes the following statement:

Διττῆς γὰρ οὐσίας τῆς φθορᾶς, καὶ τῆς μέν, μερῶν διαλύσεως, τῆς δὲ ὑπαρχούσης εἶδους μεταβολῆς, ἑκατέραν ἢ τῆς ψυχῆς οὐσία διαπέφρευεν· οὐ μὴν ἤδη καὶ ἐνέργεια, ἥτις καὶ χρονικὴ καὶ μεταβατικὴ

<sup>33</sup> John Italos, *Opusculum* 50, ed. Joannou, 66-68.

<sup>34</sup> John Italos, *Opusculum* 50, ed. Joannou, 69.

<sup>35</sup> John Italos, *Opusculum* 50, ed. Joannou, 63-65.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Stéphanou, 'Jean Italos', 420-421.

λέγεται εἶναι, καὶ αὐτοκινησία, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων κινουμένων αἰτία τῆς κινήσεως· ἔδει γὰρ οὕτως ἔχειν· τὸ γὰρ μήτε πρῶτον μήτε πάλιν ἔσχατον ὄν, μέσον που τῶν εἰρημένων τέτακται· ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν κατ' ἄμφω ἀθάνατα, τὰ δὲ καὶ θνητὰ καθ' ἑκάτερον, τὸ δὲ τούτων μετέχον καὶ τοῦτο κάκεινο· ὃ δὴ καὶ θνητὸν εἶναι καὶ ἀθάνατον λέγεται, οὐ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ τὰ αὐτά, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν, ὡς οὐσία τις, τὸδέ, ὡς ἐνέργεια· ἀθάνατος ἄρα ἢ ψυχὴ ἐνέργειαν ἔχουσα θνητὴν οὐκ ἀεί, ἀλλὰ ποτέ· καὶ δῆλον ὡς διὰ τὴν παράβασιν.<sup>37</sup>

Since corruption is twofold, either the dissolution of parts or the change of form, the substance of the soul escapes either of them, but not indeed also its activity, which is said to be temporal and proceeding and self-movement and cause of the movement of others that are moved. It should be thus because that which is neither the first nor again the last is somehow situated in the middle of what has been said, but the ones are immortal in both respects and the others are mortal in both respects whereas that which participates in them is both this and that. Therefore it is called both mortal and immortal, not both in the same respect but it is the one thing insofar as it is substance and it is the other thing insofar as it is activity. The soul is then immortal and has a mortal activity, not always but sometimes, and it is obvious that this is so because of the fall.

The threefold distinction to which John Italos refers here reflects the ontological hierarchy of intellect, rational soul and irrational soul. The former two are immortal substances whereas the last one is mortal. However, Italos does not only consider the being of these entities but also their activities. Here he proposes a different classification. The intellect perceives its objects in their entirety so-to-speak at one glance and therefore needs no time in order to function. It is thus eternal both as regards its substance and as regards its activity. The rational soul, on the other hand, perceives its objects by distinguishing between them and by moving from one to the other. It thus needs time, just as the irrational soul does when it activates its own faculties. This gives it an intermediate position: eternal in its substance but subjected to time in its activities. In the last sentence Italos then introduces a further qualification. He states that the activity of the soul is not always mortal but only at a certain time and declares that this is the result of the fall. This may be a reference to the Origenist myth according to which immortal intellects descend to the level of the soul, which is affected by mortality.<sup>38</sup>

John's claim that the activity of the rational soul is not eternal is rather startling. However, it is not without precedent. The same argument is already found in Proclus' *Elements of Theology*:

<sup>37</sup> John Italos, *Opusculum* 50, ed. Joannou, 66.

<sup>38</sup> Such an interpretation is tentatively suggested by Stéphanou, 'Jean Italos', 421.

Πᾶσα ψυχὴ μεθεκτὴ τὴν μὲν οὐσίαν αἰώνιον ἔχει, τὴν δὲ ἐνέργειαν κατὰ χρόνον. ἢ γὰρ ἄμφω αἰωνίως ἔξει, ἢ ἄμφω κατὰ χρόνον, ἢ τὸ μὲν αἰωνίως, τὸ δὲ κατὰ χρόνον. ἀλλ' οὔτε ἄμφω αἰωνίως (ἔσται γὰρ ἀμέριστος οὐσία, καὶ οὐδὲν διοίσει τῆς νοερᾶς ὑποστάσεως ἢ ψυχῆς φύσις, τῆς ἀκινήτου ἢ αὐτοκίνητος) οὔτε ἄμφω κατὰ χρόνον· εἴη γὰρ ἂν γενητὴ μόνον καὶ οὔτε αὐτόζως οὔτε αὐθυπόστατος· οὐδὲν γὰρ τῶν ὑπὸ χρόνου κατ' οὐσίαν μετρομένων αὐθυπόστατον. ἢ δὲ ψυχὴ αὐθυπόστατος· τὸ γὰρ κατ' ἐνέργειαν πρὸς ἑαυτὸ ἐπιστρέφον καὶ κατ' οὐσίαν ἐπιστρεπτικόν ἐστι πρὸς ἑαυτὸ καὶ ἄφ' ἑαυτοῦ προϊόν. λείπεται ἄρα τῆ μὲν αἰώνιον εἶναι ψυχὴν πᾶσαν, τῆ δὲ χρόνου μετέχουσαν. ἢ οὖν κατ' οὐσίαν αἰώνιός ἐστι, κατ' ἐνέργειαν δὲ χρόνου μέτοχος· ἢ ἔμπαλιν. ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἀδύνατον. πᾶσα ἄρα ψυχὴ μεθεκτὴ τὴν μὲν οὐσίαν αἰώνιον ἔλαχε, τὴν δὲ ἐνέργειαν κατὰ χρόνον.<sup>39</sup>

Each soul that can be participated in has its substance as something eternal and its activity in time. For it will either have both eternally or both in time or one of them eternally and the other in time. But it does not have both eternally (for in this case it would be an indivisible substance and the nature of the soul would differ in nothing from the existence of the intellect, the self-moved one from the unmoved one), nor does it have both in time for then it would be only becoming and not living out of itself and existing out of itself. Yet the soul exists out of itself because that which in activity returns to itself is also in substance returning to itself and proceeding from itself. It remains then that the whole soul is in one respect eternal and in another respect participating in time. Either it is eternal in substance but participating in time in its activity; or it is the other way round. But the latter is impossible. Therefore each soul that can be participated in has its substance as something eternal and its activity in time.

The similarity between this passage and Italos' argument is evident. However, Proclus never goes so far as to say that the soul is therefore mortal. Italos takes the diametrically opposite approach. In his *Opusculum* 37 he states:

Τῶν γὰρ ὄντων τὰ μὲν καὶ οὐσίαν καὶ ἐνέργειαν ἐν αἰῶνι, τὰ δὲ καὶ ἐν χρόνῳ ἔχοντα φαίνεται, τὰ δὲ μεταξύ· ἃ δὴ ἀμφοτέρων τῶν ἄκρων μετειλήφασιν, καὶ τὴν μὲν οὐσίαν αἰώνιαν λέγουσιν, ἐν χρόνῳ δὲ τὴν ἐνέργειαν· θνητὴν δὲ διὰ ταῦτα τὴν μὲν ψυχὴν τις εἶναι ἀποφηνάμενος, οὐχ ἁμάρτοι τῆς ἀληθείας· τὸ γὰρ κατὰ τι τῶν λεγομένων θνήσκειν πεφυκὸς εἰκότως ἂν λεχθεῖθι θνητόν· εὐλαβητέον δὲ τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτῆς

<sup>39</sup> Proclus Diadochus, *The Elements of Theology*, 191, ed. E. R. Dodds, Proclus. *The Elements of Theology* (Oxford, 1963), 166.

τῆ ἐνεργείᾳ παραβάλλειν ὡς πάντῃ ἀθάνατον οὕσαν καὶ τῶν σωμάτων χωριστήν.<sup>40</sup>

Of the beings the ones appear to have both substance and activity in eternity, the others also in time, and the others in-between, which participate in both extremes, and they say that they have their substance as something eternal and their activity in time, and if one declared the soul to be mortal because of this, one would not be far from the truth. For that which is in one respect by nature capable of dying could by rights be called mortal. One must be careful, however, not to confuse its substance with its activity because the former is entirely immortal and separable from the bodies.

Here the soul as a whole is declared to be mortal albeit in a much modified manner. Such a statement was surely highly provocative at the time. Indeed, even Proclus' original hypothesis met with considerable resistance. It was already rejected in Late Antiquity by an indignant John Philoponus and it was to be rejected again by Nicholas of Methone in the twelfth century. Both authors declare that a substance without any activity cannot exist.<sup>41</sup> Thus we can conclude that Italos was indeed a self-declared "deadsouler". Indeed, he went much further than Nicetas seems to have realised. As we have seen Nicetas tried to salvage memory and sensation by attributing it to the rational part of the soul. By contrast, Italos considered even the rational part of the soul to be inert after it had been separated from the body.

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In the second half of the eleventh century the conceptual framework that underpinned the care for the dead came under attack. This attack was not based on the crude monism of the *Questions and Answers* of Anastasius of Sinai but on a Platonic understanding of the soul as being comprised of parts that were quite distinct from one another. John Italos declared that after death only the mind remained active whereas both the rational and the irrational part of the soul ceased to function and could therefore be regarded as dead. This conclusion became known to Nicetas Stethatos who then launched a vicious attack against Italos. However, it is very doubtful that Nicetas ever took the trouble to read Italos' works since his arguments are simplistic and ineffectual. Not only is his conceptual framework shaky in the extreme but he is also incapable of finding proof texts in Patristic theological literature that would support his views. Despite this fact Nicetas could be confident that he represented the mainstream

<sup>40</sup> John Italos, *Opusculum* 37, ed. Joannou, 46.

<sup>41</sup> John Philoponus, *Commentary on Aristototele's treatise On the Soul*, ed. M. Hayduck, *Ioannis Philoponi in Aristotelis De Anima libros commentaria* (Berlin, 1897), 15; and Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation of Proclus' Elements of Theology*, ed. A.D. Angelou, *Nicholas of Methone. Refutation of Proclus' Elements of Theology*, Athens, 1984, 52.

and that his arguments would receive widespread acceptance. By contrast, Italos ended his days as a condemned heretic.

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