THE MIXED LIFE OF PLATO’S PHILEBUS IN PSELLOS’

CHRONOGRAPHIA (6a.8)

Michael Psellos (1018–1081) used neoplatonic ethics in Chronographia 6a8 in order to discredit Leo Paraspondylos. He was accused of being too strict and distant from the real world of politics. By claiming that the intellect also needs a natural environment, Psellus endorses the neoplatonic reading of Plato’s Philebus and at the same time the contemplation of nature of Maximus the Confessor. In other words he claims the Leo was neither a philosopher nor an accurate theologian and therefore could not be in charge of political affairs.

Keywords: Mixed life, platonic ethics, Philebus, Proclus, Michael Psellos

Some intellectuals believe that a life of the mind is better if separated from the body and some scholars identify this idea with notions found in Plato. Not so Michael Psellos (1018–1081?)1 who in Chronographia 6a.7–82 proposes the idea of an intermediary between a life of intellect and one of passions. O’Meara has studied the passage in relation to a neoplatonic hierarchy of virtues in the wider context of Psellus’ thought.3 The present paper aims to connect Chronographia 6a.8 with notions found in neoplatonic readings of Plato’s Philebus.4 Since the text was probably written in

1 I would like to thank Srdjan Pirivatrić and Riccardo Saccenti for their help and suggestions.


3 D. O’Meara, Political philosophy in Michael Psellus: the Chronographia read in relation to his philosophical work, ed. Börje Bydén, Katerina Ierodiakonou, The Many Faces of Byzantine Philosophy. Papers and monographs from the Norwegian Institute at Athens, series 4, 1, Athens 2012, 153–171. I would like to thank professor O’Meara for showing me an early draft of his paper.

4 On the Philebus some useful studies are the following: J. C. B. Gosling, Plato: Philebus, Oxford 1975; D. Frede, Plato’s Philebus, Indianapolis 1993, and G. van Riel, Pleasure and the Good Life: Plato,
the 1060s, it constitutes important evidence of the study of platonic ethics in eleventh century Byzantium.

At first sight the passage simply proposes the *aurea mediocritas*, the middle of the road attitude which is famously associated with Aristotle. A closer reading reveals the question of neoplatonic commentaries on Plato rather than Aristotle. Psellus’ text is the following:

> Τρεῖς γὰρ μερίδας ταῖς τῶν ψυχῶν προσαρμόζω κατανοῶν καταστάσει, τὴν μὲν, ὅταν αὐτὴ βιῴη καθ’ ἑαυτὴν, ἀπολυθεῖσα τοῦ σώματος, ἀποθανεῖσθαι τῷ μετὰ σώματος αὐτῆς βιῳ κατεύλησα: εἰ μὲν γὰρ τὴν μέσην στάσα, ζωήν μεγαλοπαθῆς τε καὶ πολυπαθῆς, ὥσπερ ἐν κύκλῳ τὸ ἀκριβὲς κέντρον ἀἱροῖτο, τὸν πολιτικὸν ἀπεργάζεται ἄνθρωπον, οὔτε θεία τις ἀκριβῶς γενομένη ἢ νοερὰ, οὔτε φιλοσώματος καὶ πολυπαθῆς ὠμοίωσεν τῇ δὲ γελοῖοι μερίδαις τῷ μετὰ σώματος αὐτῆς βιῳ. (Psellos Chronographia 6a.8.1–9 Impellizzeri)

For when I think of three parts of the souls, I liken them to their situations. The first, when it lives by itself, separated from the body, keeping a strict and rather unyielding nature. I understand the other parts as living with the body. If the soul with much and great suffering keeps a moderate life, as if it held the exact centre in a circle, it forges the social (political) man. The soul is neither exactly divine nor intellectual, nor is it attached to the body with great passions.

Thus there are three types of humans according to Psellus:
1) detached from body
2) a middle solution
3) attached to the body

The first and third are defined by direct references to the Phaedo of Plato. Indeed the expression ἀπολυθεῖσα τοῦ σώματος is a direct reference to Phaedo 65a1–2. Also the expression φιλοσώματος comes from Phaedo 68c1. Plato is here defining the philosopher as someone not concerned by his human passions in a base way, but is rather superior to them. This is the solution also endorsed by Plotinus who is his description of the three types of man⁷, points out that the highest form is that which is detached from bodily concerns.⁸ His idea is that part of the soul remains with the One

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⁵ Ἄρ’ οὖν πρῶτον μὲν ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις δήλος ἦσιν ὁ φιλόσοφος ὑπόλοιπος ὧν μάλιστα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ σώματος κοινωνίας διαφερόντως τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων; (Plato, Phaedo, 64e8–65a2, ed. J. Burnet, Platonis opera vol. 1, Oxford 1900).

⁶ Οὐκοῦν ἵκανον σοι τεκμήριον, ἐφι, τοῦτο ἀνδόρρος, ὃν ἄν ἑδίκη ἀγανακτοῦντα μέλλοντα ἀποθανεῖσθαι, ὅτι οὐκ ἂρ’ ἐν φιλόσοφος ἀλλὰ τις φιλοσώματος; ὃ αὐτὸς δὲ ποιοῦν ὡς θεῖα ἢ νοερὰ, οὔτε φιλοχρήματος καὶ φιλότιμος, ἦτο τὰ ἔτερα τουτῶν ἢ ἄμφοτέρα (Plato, Phaedo, 68b8–c3).


⁸ Τρίτον δὲ γένος θείων ἀνθρώπων δυνάμει τα κρείττον καὶ ὀξύτατον ἐλεύθερον εἶδε τὸ ὅσπερ ὅπω ὀξύδορακα τὴν ἄνω ἄγλυν καὶ ἱρήνη ἐκκένωσε τὸν ὑπὲρ νεότητον ἐκ ὑπὲρ ἀμφότερον εἶδος ἡσύχασε τὴν ἀνθρώπον πάντα ἐκαθαιρεῖν τῷ ὑπὸ τῶν ἄνθρωποι, καὶ οἰκεῖον ὃντι, ὅσπερ ἕκ πολλῆς πλάνης εἰς πατρίδα εὐνομὸν ἄνθρωπος (Plotinus, Enneads, 5.9.1.16–21).
and therefore the rest of the soul should detach itself from the passions of the body.\textsuperscript{9} Indeed Gerd van Riel has pointed out that the interest in this mixed life described first in the Philebus occurs starting with Iamblichus (ca. 245–ca 325).\textsuperscript{10}

Psellos in Chronographia 6a8 does not limit himself to a twofold division as seen in Phaedo 65–68, but adds an intermediary type which seems to be based on the threefold division of Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics:

τρεῖς γὰρ εἰσί μάλιστα οἱ προὔχοντες, ὁ τε νῦν εἰρημένος καὶ ὁ πολιτικὸς καὶ τρίτος ὁ θεωρητικὸς. (Aristoteles, Ethica Nicomachea 1095b17–19, ed. I. Bywater, Aristotelis ethica Nicomachea, Oxford 1894)

The main ones are for the most part three: the one mentioned [the one who loves the life of pleasure], and the politician and third the contemplative [philosopher]

Psellos combines this middle type, the politician with the one which is intermediary between two extremes thus establishing that the political man is also the representative of the golden means described by Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics:

Ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρετὴ ἡ ἠθικὴ μεσότης, καὶ πῶς, καὶ ὅτι τοιαύτη ἐστὶ διὰ τὸ στομαστικὴ τοῦ μέσου εἶναι τοῦ ἐν τοῖς πάθεσι καὶ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσι, ἢκανός εἴρηται. διὸ καὶ ἔργον ἐστὶ σπουδαῖον εἶναι ἐν ἕκάστῳ γὰρ τὸ μέσον λαμβανόν ἔργον, οἷον κύκλου τὸ μέσον οὐ παντὸς ἄλλα τοῦ εἰδότος (Arist. Eth. Nic. 1109a20–26 Bywater).

Virtue is a moral middle ground, an intermediary of two evils, one by excess and another by defect. It is enough to say that it is such because it is aimed at the middle in passions and actions. Therefore it is a serious matter. To seize in each matter the middle ground, as the middle of a circle, is not of everyone, but of he who knows.

This is the theory of the golden means, aurea mediocritas, where virtue is defined by an equal distance from extremes. In both Aristotle’s passages and that of Psellos one sees the threefold division, with the reference to the political man and the image of the centre of a circle. Thus two passages, Phaedo 65–68 and Nicomachean Ethics 1095b are at the root of the passage of the Chronographia. However Psellos adds a number of qualifications:

1) strict (ἀτενῆ) not yielding (οὐ ἐνδόσιμον) divine (θεία) intelligible (νοερά)
2) middle of the road (μέσος)
3) attached to the body (φιλοσώματος) full of passions (πολυπαθής) loving pleasure (φιλήδονος)

\textsuperscript{9} Καὶ εἰ χρὴ παρὰ δόξαν τῶν ἄλλων τοιμήσασι τὸ φαινόμενον λέγειν σαφέστερον, οὐ πάσα οὐδ’ ἢ ἠμετέρα ψυχὴ ἔσχεν, ἀλλ’ ἐστὶν τι αὐτὴς ἐν τοῖς νοητοῖς καὶ τὸ δὲ ἐν τῷ αἰσθητῷ εἰ κρατοῖ, μᾶλλον δὲ εἰ κρατοῖτο καὶ θορυβοῖτο, οὐκ εἰ ἀκούσαν ἤμιν εἶναι ἂν θέαται τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἅνω. (Plotinus, Enneads, 4.8.8.1–6). Against this interpretation see Proclus, Elements of Theology, proposition 211.

One should not forget that the aim of this passage is to discredit Leo Paraspondylos\(^\text{11}\) who seemed too strict and yet was dealing with politics, as a form of prime minister, especially in the years 1056–1057. He seemed to be too lofty to be a political man according to the definition of the second group. Thus the first abstract and theoretical life is contrasted with the third type of the lowly and earthly life. Psellos believes that political and concrete actions can be dealt with the second type of life. This is not the result of a compromise, but rather of a different opinion about the nature of man and philosophy. The second type of life is tied to the body but not exclusively. Indeed it is a mixed type. It is a life which is both theoretical and practical. Plato had referred to this in the Philebus:\(^\text{12}\)

\[\text{νικόντα μὲν ἔθεμέν που τὸν μεικτὸν βίον ἡδονῆς τε καὶ φρονήσεως. (Plato Philebus 27d1–2 Burnet)}\]

*We considered earlier on that the mixed life of pleasure and wisdom is successful.*

This mixed life is also summarized in Damascius’ neoplatonic commentary on the same dialogue:

\[\text{Ὅτι ὁ μὲν μικτὸς βίος ἔχει τὰς τοῦ αἱρετοῦ ἱδιότητας, μόνος γὰρ τέλεος τε καὶ ἰκανός ἔστι καὶ ἕφετός· ὁ δὲ νοῦς τὰς γνωστικὰς ἱδιότητας ἔχει· ἢ δὲ ψυχὴ πρῶτῃ τὰς ἡδονικὰς. εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἔστιν ἐν τῷ νῷ ἡ ἡδονή, ἀλλ’ οὕσια ἔστι τοῦ νοοῦ καὶ οἰον νόσης· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ διηρημένον οὕτως ὤστε κατ’ ἄλλο μὲν νοεῖν, κατ’ ἄλλο δὲ ἠδοσθαι. (Damascius in Philebum 257 Van Riel)}\]

*The mixed way of life has the characteristics of the preferable, for it is the only life that is perfect, adequate and desirable; intelligence has the characteristics of cognition; while the soul is the first to show those of pleasure. It is true that pleasure also exists in intelligence, but as the essence of intelligence and a kind of thought; for there is, in intelligence, no division that could make thought and pleasure distinct functions (tr. Westerink in G.L. Westerink Damascius Lectures on the Philebus Westbury 2010)}*

The discrepancy between Plato’s Phaedo and Philebus is an important question which is beyond the scope and ambitions of this essay.\(^\text{13}\) It is necessary to point out that in late Plato and in neoplatonism from Iamblichus onwards this mixed life is important. It stems from the idea that pleasure and intellect cannot be separated. Pleasure is thus defined:

\[\text{Ὡςι δὲ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἡδονῆ. ἦν γὰρ ἀν καὶ δῆξα γνώσεως ἁγαθῶν· νῦν δὲ οὐδεὶς ἂν ἐλοιπὸν ἀνόητος ἄν ἠδοσθαι, μηδὲ τελεῖς ἡδόμενος· οὐτε γὰρ ἐπὶ παρελθόντι, μνήμης οὐκ οὕσης, οὗτε ἐπὶ μέλλοντι, μὴ οὕσης ἐλπίδος, οὗτε ἐπὶ τῷ παρόντι,}\]


\(^{12}\) Plato, Philebus, 22d6, 25b5, 27b8, 27d1, 27d8, 61b6.

Pleasure is not the Good, for if it were, it would also be a good apart from cognition. Actually, however, nobody would choose to feel pleasure without having intelligence, even if the pleasure were perfect; for we cannot enjoy the past without memory, nor the future without anticipation, nor the present without reflection; and besides, one would no longer be a human being nor an animal endowed with sense perception, but something like a sea-lung. (tr. Westerink)

The isolation of intelligence is forced and impossible, even more so than in the case of pleasure, for the love of truth is a strong emotion, and so is the joy of attaining it. There is also the general rule that any undisturbed, i.e. natural activity is attended by pleasure, so that this must be true of cognitive activity too. Still, if divorced from pleasure at least theoretically, intelligence will be unworthy of love, unattractive, despicable. This is proved by the fact that knowledge of things [indifferent] is itself indifferent and knowledge of things [to be shunned] is itself the opposite of desirable. (tr. Westerink)

These two passages represent the two extremes of Psellos’ equation. It is important that he identifies the notion of φιλοσώματος with φιλήδονος. This is also carried out in Proclus’ commentary on the Republic. He identifies the important of pleasure as the aspect of life which is connected with passions (πάθη), and places emphasis on great and numerous events as defining the life of the political man which implies accepting passions and what is external to the person. More interesting is that the next step of Damascius’ commentary on the Philebus identifies the notion of mixed life with the life described by Aristotle.


15 <ὁ μὴ τῇ θεωρίᾳ> add. Westerink.
A man cannot really be good without taking pleasure in good actions, nor just without taking pleasure in justice, as Aristotle says [Eth. Nic. I.9,1099a17–19]; and therefore not contemplative either; he may have added, [without taking pleasure in contemplation] (tr. Westerink)

Psellos accepts the notion of the middle life of Aristotle as corresponding with the mixed life of Plato’s Philebus and is therefore following a more platonic reading of pleasure as an integral part of life. Moreover Damascius in his commentary on the Philebus also defines the role of the πολιτικὸς ἀνθρώπος according to the mixed life:

"Ὅτι ἂν πρῶτη μίξει βίου ἐστὶ θεωρητικοῦ, ἐκ τῶν πρῶτων ἡδονῶν καὶ τῶν πρῶτων γνώσεων· ἢ δὲ δευτέρα πολιτικοῦ, ὡς παύεται τῶν τεχνῶν καθοι τινὰς ἡδονὰς ἁναινόμενος (231.1–3 Westerink)

The first combination belongs to contemplative life, that of primary pleasures and primary forms of knowledge; the second to social life, which needs all the arts and crafts, though it rejects certain pleasures. (tr. Westerink)

This is helpful since Psellos also mentions the πολιτικὸς ἀνθρώπος as the middle ground between the hedonist and the intellectual.16 This particular passage of the commentary on the Philbeus allows one to see that Psellos is actually proposing a reading which is closer to that of Proclus rather than Damascius. In the commentary to the Republic Proclus points out that pleasure is part of the ideal city.17

Psellos thought that the middle life, the social life, immersed in the natural world was actually the one which would allow for a more precise contemplation, since nature was a positive element in life. This is mentioned in the commentary on the Philebus 518 and more importantly in Dionysius the Areopagite who says all creation is positive.19 One may add that a positive interpretation of nature is necessary for the contemplation of nature endorsed by Maximus the Confessor.20 The life which is both linked with the body and the mind is necessary both in ordinary life as well as

16 Psellos, Chronographia, 8a.7–8.
17 εἰ δὲ τις τὴν μὲν ἐνυφόσην ἀφέλεω καὶ τὴν διὰ τῆς ἐνθέου μονοσκομῆς παιδείαν, τραπέζας δὲ καὶ ἀπολαύσεις ἁμέτρους καὶ ἁμούσους καὶ πρὸς ἡδονὴν βλεπούσας αὐτὸν ἀποδεχθεῖται νομίζει, πάροικον τὰ τοιαῦτα ὁ Σοκράτης εἰκότας εἶναι φθινῆς ἐντούτοις πολλὶς τὴν ἄπειρον κρατεῖν ἡδονήν καὶ τὸν τοῖς γαστηριμάργοις προσήκοντα βιον. (Proclus, In rem publicam, 131.30–132.7).
19 Numerous essays on the subject. One may single out Ambigua 22 (Θεωρία τοῦ τε φυσικοῦ καὶ τοῦ γραπτοῦ νόμου, καὶ τῆς αὐτῶν κατ’ ἐπαλλαγήν εἰς ἀλλήλους συνδρομῆς) in PG 1128 D – 1133
20 Numerous essays on the subject. One may single out Ambigua 22 (Θεωρία τοῦ τε φυσικοῦ καὶ τοῦ γραπτοῦ νόμου, καὶ τῆς αὐτῶν κατ’ ἐπαλλαγήν εἰς ἀλλήλους συνδρομῆς) in PG 1128 D – 1133
Psellus here is arguing a different point: that the person who wants to understand reality and be a philosopher needs to live both with the visible and invisible aspects of his life. Thus he endorses the mixed life in the way it had been understood by Proclus.

The proof of such an interpretation of the mixed life is the passage which concludes the paragraph and somehow explains it:

If the soul turns away from this middle road and lives a life which degenerates towards passions, it accomplishes the pleasurable and hedonistic [way]. If someone managed to look beyond the body and stood at the apex of the intellectual life, what does it have in common with him or with reality? The Bible says: “I shed my cloak, how I will wear it?”. May he climb on a high and lofty mountain and may he stay with the angels, in order that he may be enlightened by a greater light, turning away and refusing mankind. If no one boasts such a nature, if he were to be entrusted with political affairs, may he deal with them politically, and may he not be judged by the correctness of the law; for not all have been precise by the accuracy of the measuring line. Therefore, if asked something ambiguous, he immediately pushed away what followed it.

The biblical passage is from the Song of Songs 22 which Psellus quotes and which had been used by Andrew of Crete 23 and John of Damascus 24 to refer to the incarnation.

A. Another is Quaestiones et Dubia 64, ed. J. H. Declerck, Maximi Confessoris quaestiones et dubia, Turnhout 1982, where the notion of the incarnation is important for the role of natural contemplation.

21 The importance of matter for contemplation is well known for Proclus since it was expressed in Theurgy.

22 ἐξεδυσάμην τὸν χιτῶνα μου, πῶς ἐνδύσωμαι αὐτόν (Cant. 5.3.1 = Psellus, Chronographia, 6a8.14–15).


24 «ἐξεδυσάμην τὸν χιτῶνα μου, πῶς ἐνδύσωμαι αὐτόν;» Ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ ὁ ὅσιος σὺ ἐσχῆς παρείσθησαι, οὐ τῆς σωματικῆς ὀρθότητος τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ καθαρότητος ἐνδυόμενος πεπλαστούργηκεν ἀνθρωπόν. Καὶ τεθέσας μὲν ὁ ἀνθρώπος, ὁ δὲ θνητός ἔνθανότηται καὶ τοὺς δερματίνους χτενάς ἐκδήλωσε: τὴν γὰρ φθορὰν ἀπημφίασαν καὶ ἀθανασίαν περίκειμαι τῇ περιβολῇ τῆς
of Christ, that God had taken a ‘human cloak’. Thus Jesus lived the mixed life, since he combined the two natures, divine and human. The coordination of the spiritual and bodily aspects of Christ was central to someone like Maximus the Confessor who discusses it in the Ambigua Ad Thomam 5 among other places. It here where he says that the two aspects of Jesus coexisted in his person. This was the solution given to the question of monoergist controversy (the single activity of Christ). Psellos also adds that such a person should go on a high mountain and contemplate the great light while turning away from humans. Whatever the exact reference is, it refers to the distance between the physical world and that of contemplation of the divine. Thus Psellos uses biblical interpretations to endorse the social, measured and mixed life since it was the life of the two natures of Christ. One should not forget that the intellectual and philosophical criticism contained in the neoplatonic references would have been perceived as quite recherché. On the other hand the references to the two natures of Christ would have been familiar to a much wider audience. Thus the biblical and theological attacks would have been immediately understood and taken as a very direct criticism and would have made the academic understanding of the mixed life immediately understandable.

Moreover some contemporary texts refer to the imitation of Christ, such as poem 40 of Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022). In it Christ speaks in the first person and explains how he took on ‘the cloak’ and that his followers should attempt to suffer what he suffered as well.

\[
\text{ἐγὼ γὰρ ταῦτα δι’ ὑμᾶς ἐπαθον ἐκουσίως,}
\text{ἐσταυρώθην, ἀπέθανον θάνατον τῶν κακούργων,}
\text{καὶ δόξα κόσμου γέγονε ζωῆ τε καὶ λαμπρότης}
\text{καὶ νεκρῶν ἐξανάστασις καὶ καύχημα ἀπάντων (75)}
\text{τῶν πιστευσάντων εἰς ἐμὲ τὰ εἰς ἐμὲ ὀνείδη,}
\text{καὶ ὁ ἀσχήμων θάνατος ἐνδύμα ἀφθαρσίας}
\text{καὶ ἀληθοῦς θεώσεως πᾶσι πιστοῖς ὑπῆρξε.}
\text{διὸ καὶ οἱ μιμούμενοι τὰ ἐμὰ σεπτὰ πάθη}
\text{συμμέτοχοι ὑπάρξουσι καὶ τῆς θεότητός μου (80)}
\text{καὶ βασιλείας τῆς ἐμῆς ἐσονται ἀληθονόμοι}
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25 B. Janssens, Maximi Confessoris Ambigua ad Thomam una cum Epistula secunda ad eundem, Turnhout 2002.


27 There may be an indirect reference to the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor. On the question see F. Lauritzen, Psellos the Hesychast: A Neoplatonic Reading of the Transfiguration on Mt Tabor, BSI 70 (2012) 167–180.

28 A similar argument was formulated by Psellos when writing his essays on Mt. Olympus around 1054–1055. See F. Lauritzen, Stethatos’ Paradise in Psellos’ ekphrasis on Mt. Olympus, VV 70 (2011) 139–151. The association of Plato with Maximus the Confessor is the topic of his letter to John Xiphilinos. See U. Criscuolo, Michele Psello, Epistula a Giovanni Xifilino, Naples 1973.

συγκοινωνοῦ τε ἄγαθῶν ἀφράστων, ἀπορρήτων 
γενήσονται καὶ σὺν ἐμοὶ ἔσονται εἰς αἰῶνας.

For I suffered voluntarily for you.
I was crucified, died a death of criminals
And the world’s glory became life and splendour
And the resurrection of the dead and the boast of all
Those who believed in me instead of the reproaches against me.
And that horrible death was cloak of immortality
and of true deification for all believers.
Therefore those who also imitate my blessed sufferings
Will be participants of my divinity.
They will inherit my kingdom,
They will share all unsaid and secret goods,
They will be with me for ever.

In this poem one may see the idea that imitation of Christ, a form of deification, means also taking over his sufferings. Thus deification which is the aim of contemplation envisages a mixed life: one which is divine and one of pleasures and pains. Psellus’ reference to the incarnation indicates clearly that for him the mixed life is itself divine. Therefore contemplation, as a pure intellectual abstraction, means neglect of the historical Christ. For these reasons Psellus believes the mixed, measured life was positive. His argument against Leo Paraspondylos is that he avoided the physical aspect of life in favour of the purely spiritual:

Διὰ ταύτα γούν κάκεινος ἐν ἄφιλοσόφοις φιλοσοφῶν πράγμασιν, οὐ φιλόσοφος, ἀλλὰ μιμούμενος φιλόσοφον ἔδοξεν. (Psell. Chronographia 6a.9 Impellizeri)

Therefore, since he philosophized in non-philosophical matters, he was not a philosopher, but seemed to imitate a philosopher.

Not being able to judge correctly a situation means not understanding it. Therefore, on the basis of neoplatonic interpretations of Plato’s Philebus and such ideas as those of Symeon the New Theologian, Psellus deemed his approach incorrect. He thought that Leo Paraspondylos was not able to contemplate correctly. Thus the criticism against Leo was not that he was superior, but that his intellectual stance did not allow him to be a philosopher, either in a pagan or in a Christian sense.
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МЕШОВИТИ ЖИВОТ ПЛАТОНОВОГ ФИЛЕБА
У ПСЕЛОВОЈ ХРОНОГРАФИЈИ (6а.8)

Михаило Псел (1018–1081) користио је неоплатонистичку етику у Хронографији 6а.8 да би дискредитовао Лава Параспондила. Он је оптужен да је превише строг и удаљен од стварног света политике. Тврдећи да је интелекту такође потребно и природно окружење, Псел одобрава неоплатонистичко читање Платоновог Филеба и у исто време размишљање о природи Максима Исповедника. Другим речима, он тврди да Лав није ни филозоф ни веродостојан теолог и да због тога не може да води политичке послове.