The Polemical Context and Content of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology

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In this article I will examine Gregory's use of then-contemporary philosophical psychology, specifically Aristotelian psychology, to support a pro-Nicene Trinitarian theology. Such arguments are offered by Gregory as part of his polemic against the anti-Nicene, Eunomius of Cyzicus. I will show, in particular, that Gregory's theological motives so shape his use of psychological language that the latter cannot be properly understood outside the context of the former.

Previous scholarly treatments of the place of psychology in Gregory's thought generally and in his theology specifically have focused almost entirely on questions of Gregory's sources and his relationship to them. Is Gregory's psychology primarily Stoic via Posidonius, as Gronau argued? Is his psychology entirely Platonic, reflecting his true identity as a Platonist with a Christian mask, as Cherniss asserted? Or does Gregory's psychology reveal a modified Platonic understanding that represents (as much as anything) Gregory's own Christian transformation of originally Platonic material, as Daniélou thought?

Along with their limited and burdened scope, studies such as these display two errors of method, errors that have their analogues in many other works on patristic and medieval theology. The first error is the assumption that the psychological models available to Gregory can be found (as it is assumed that Gregory found them) just by reading Plato and Aristotle. In particular, Cherniss' understanding of fourth-century Platonic psychology is based entirely upon a direct reading of dialogues, and he imagines that Gregory's contact with Platonic psychology was as straightforward as that. I will show that the philosophical options available to Gregory, like the contents of the psychologies themselves, were more mediated and hence more complex.\(^4\)

The second error of method is the assumption that Gregory has a single psychology or a single way of describing the soul's structure that he uses everywhere in his writings, whatever the specific theological topic at hand. It is obvious that this assumption does not allow for elaboration or self-criticism in Gregory's thought. Less obviously, the assumption holds that Gregory's theological motives for using psychological language are secondary to some philosophical standard of consistency. The account of Gregory's psychology offered here reverses the assumption. I argue that Gregory's use of psychological concepts varies in relation to his immediate theological end, which is here to refute Eunomius and support a pro-Nicene Trinitarian doctrine. Aristotelian psychology serves as Gregory's principle of unity in a number of related arguments.\(^5\)

Gregory first uses an Aristotelian psychological language to argue for the unity of the soul as a moral subject. This is Gregory's task in *On the Soul and Resurrection*, where he is concerned with the threat posed by the problem of passion to the

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4. One particularly egregious effect of Cherniss' work has been to trivialize the criteria by which a psychological doctrine is said to be 'Platonic'. See, for example, John P. Cavarnos's argument for the Platonic character of Gregory's psychology in "The Psychology of Gregory of Nyssa," dissertation, Harvard University, 1947, e.g., pp. 64, 73.

5. I do not mean to suggest that the fundamentally Aristotelian psychology Gregory uses in his Trinitarian polemics has an equal presence in Gregory's treatments of other theological subjects (say of Christology or of spirituality) or in works from other periods in Gregory's career. Where Gregory's theological purposes are better suited by a psychology that stresses difference or separation, Gregory will use other psychological 'models'. Such is the case in Gregory's earlier *On Virginity* and the later "Canonical Epistle," where the language is more Platonic.
unity of the soul and the possibility of moral action. In On the Making of Man, Gregory uses Aristotelian psychological language to argue for the unity of the mind as a causal and knowing subject. While Gregory is content in On the Soul and Resurrection to discuss the moral unity of the soul entirely in terms of human morality, in On the Making of Man he makes an argument from the human mind’s unity to the unity of the Trinity (in particular, the unity of the Father and the Son).6 In Against Eunomius, Gregory continues his account of the Trinity through analogies with the soul, and he turns directly to refuting the Eunomian psychological critique of pro-Nicene theology.7

PASSION AS A TRINITARIAN PROBLEM

Although scholarly readers typically stress the similarities between On the Soul and Resurrection and On the Making of Man, there are significant differences between the two works. In On the Soul and Resurrection, Gregory discusses the problem posed by the existence of passions for the unity of the soul. This problem is a traditional one in Hellenistic psychologies. It is treated in the works of Galen and Alexander of Aphrodisias, for example.8 And such works

6. References to the Greek texts of these two works are to PG, since there are still no critical editions for either work. Against Eunomius is cited from Contra Eunomium libri, ed. Werner Jaeger, Gregorii Nysseni Opera 1–2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), which series is hereafter abbreviated as ‘Gregorii Opera’.

7. I have found one scholarly precedent for associating On the Making of Man with Against Eunomius. It is Eugenio Corsini, “La polemica contro Eunomio e la formazione della dottrina sulla creazione in Gregorio di Nissa,” Arché e Telos: L’antropologia di Origene e di Gregorio di Nissa (Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1981), pp. 197–212. In Corsini’s opinion (p. 211), parallels between the psychological works and Against Eunomius suggest that On the Making of Man and Against Eunomius are contemporary. Corsini does not treat the psychological background of Gregory’s use of dynamis in Against Eunomius, nor does he explore the faculty psychology of On the Making of Man. Moreover, while Corsini argues that Gregory’s anthropological interests treated directly in On the Making of Man are also found in Against Eunomius 1, I will argue that Gregory’s theological interests treated directly in Against Eunomius 1 are also found in On the Making of Man.

8. The many issues treated in these works point to the fundamental question, much controverted during this time. Do passions exist wholly separate from the
seem very much in the foreground here. Though he writes in the middle of a turbulent theological controversy over the use of any language that suggests passion in God, *On the Soul and Resurrection* makes no reference to this crisis in Trinitarian theology. The concerns that *On the Soul and Resurrection* does address and the language it uses are more typical of late third-century anthropologies than of fourth-century theologies. The lack of sensitivity to the theological problems of passion must be due either to Gregory's ignorance of them or to his use of material that originated before the Nicene—anti-Nicene controversies. That Gregory would be ignorant in 380 of anti-Nicene attention to passion and generation is impossible. Therefore *On the Soul and Resurrection* is best understood not as an example of Gregory's own thought, but as his reception of a traditional, ascetical anthropology.

The lively theological interest in passion is due to the pressures of anti-Nicene polemic, particularly that of Eunomius, who made much of the implication of passion in accounts of the Son's generation from the Father. The theological problem with 'passion' is not simply its materialist connotations or even its suggestion of Gnostic aeons mind in an independent, parallel existence, or do they exist as activities of the mind wholly under its control? For a thorough discussion of the controversy, see Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 33-34 and chapter 5 in its entirety. I am indebted to Inwood for emphasizing in private conversation the confusion in the ancient doxographical materials between the soul's unity and diversity as a psychological question and its unity and diversity as a moral one.

9. While we must recognize the dependence of *On the Soul and Resurrection* upon Plato's *Phaedo*, as shown by Charalambos Apostolopoulos in *Phaedo Christianus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1986), it must be noted that there is nothing about such a dependence that would exclude treatments of theological or cosmological concerns. A reading of contemporary pagan commentaries on the *Phaedo* will show this. Indeed the weakness of Apostolopoulos's work is his assumption that the *Phaedo* was read in Gregory's era only for an account of the soul. A better proportioned picture of how the *Phaedo* was understood in antiquity is given by L. G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1977), 1:7–27.

10. We know from many sources, including Gregory's own *Life of Macrina*, that his sister's theology was deeply ascetic. I understand *On the Soul and Resurrection* to be Gregory's restatement of a moral anthropology that he has received—and with which he is not altogether comfortable, as his comments make clear.
cavorting. The problem is rather that 'passion' often suggests a constraint on free will. The term can be taken as referring to a motive that is fundamentally irrational and unfree.\(^{11}\) The charge that divine generation implies divine passion may seem to be simply one more sub-species of the charge of anthropomorphism, but its real thrust is the argument that divine generation means divine passion and divine passion denies God's freedom and rationality (so far as these two are distinguishable). Theologically, the issue in the controversy among pro- and anti-Nicenes over passion is God's freedom in the generation of the Son. The integrity of that freedom would be jeopardized by the presence of passion, since 'passion' names a kind of production that has a prior and unfree cause.

No one taught the presence of passion in the generation of the Son, but everyone recognized the extreme inappropriateness of any such suggestion. Concern for implications of passion in accounts of the Son's generation seems to have been a feature of anti-Nicene theology in general and of anti-Nicene polemic in particular. Obviously, any discussion of generation broaches the question of passion, especially for interlocutors who seem to have had a keen sense of the irrational quality of procreation.\(^{12}\) We have numerous arguments from both sides rejecting any suggestion of passion within the context of divine generation. Theologians as diverse as Basil of Ancyra, Hilary of Poitiers, and Marius Victorinus go to great pains to make it clear that their use of 'Father' or 'Son' and of the language of generation does not imply passion in the Godhead. The Creed of Sirmium (351), for example, anathematizes those who say that "the Son was born against the will of the Father."\(^{13}\) Somewhat later, Hilary of Poitiers provides


\(^{12}\) In literary terms, the spectre of Gnostic emanationism constantly hovers about, though it is hard to know how many of these references to Gnosticism are to be taken literally. See James E. Hennessey, "The Background, Sources, and Meaning of Divine Infinity in St. Gregory of Nyssa," dissertation, Fordham University, 1964, p. 35, for the argument that Eunomius's theological hierarchy was simply Gnostic emanationism revised. This is certainly wrong.

\(^{13}\) De synodis 25 (PL 10:521A).
the pro-Nicene gloss: "sed mox voluit, sine tempore et impassibiliter ex se cum genitum demonstravit."14

Eunomius's objection to the title 'Father' was that so far as it named a generation by nature or essence it carried sexual associations. Eunomius did not quite charge his opponents with teaching a cosmogony, but he found their favorite language to be infused with materialism. Eunomius recognized something useful in the title 'Father', but the pious content of the title could only be got at by first removing any materialist connotations.15 By 'materialist' Eunomius meant any sense of the generation of an essence by an essence, for the terms of an essential generation reduced, in his opinion, to the process of begetting. The communication of an essence was, in Eunomius's view, necessarily a bodily process—not one dependent on analogous organs, but certainly never separate from passion.16 Eunomius asks, "How can the passion of the communication of essence have any place in God?"17 It cannot, because God is called 'Father' without any reference to a generation by essence or nature. God produces through sovereign authority (exousia), through an act of will which as such is immaterial and passionless. God no more needs or uses essence or body to be a father than God needs pre-existing matter to be a creator, Eunomius says, using a telling analogy. Eunomius concludes that since 'Father' normally names what (re)produces, the title 'Father' is to be


15. Eunomius kept the title 'Father' in his Apology, but omitted it in the Second Apology. Eunomius insisted that the title had to be stripped of its corporeal connotations, the way 'eye' or 'hand' is when attributed to God. But Eunomius stripped so much away that the title ended up having no positive connotations at all. Indeed, and despite his pieties about the title 'Father', he had no real use for it. The title named only a particular instance of creating. There was nothing in it that was not more adequately communicated by Proverbs 8:22, which was what Eunomius understood 'Father' to mean in this instance.

16. The Heterousian charge that generation language was sexual was meant quite literally. See Thomas A. Kopecek, A History of Neo-Arianism (Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979) 1:201, for this striking passage from Eudoxius of Antioch: "God was what he is. Father he was not, because he did not have a son: for if there was a son, it is necessary that there also was a female, and conversation, and dialogue, and a conjugal agreement, and allurement, and, finally, a natural organ for generating."

given not to God’s essence, since that does not (re)produce, but to God’s authority or activity, since it is this which (re)produces.\textsuperscript{18}

For those who believed that the Son was like the Father “in all things” (including essence, the view of the Homoiousians), the immediate task was to promote and defend the relationship implicit in the titles ‘Father’ and ‘Son’, since these terms named a relationship of continuity of nature. No one is the father of one different in nature from himself; no one is the son of one who has a different nature.\textsuperscript{19}

The immediate problem with ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ is that the relationship between a father and son is a material one, and fatherhood is an act of passion. The anti-Nicenes already found ousia-based language materialistic in connotation, so any preference for Father and Son language seemed only to confirm their worst suspicions.

The charge that fatherhood presumes passion must have been a telling one, for a defense against this charge is a recurring feature of both anti-Eunomian and pro-Nicene polemics. Indeed Basil of Ancyra considers the charge of passion to be one of the two fundamental doctrines of Heterousian theology. (The other doctrine is that ‘Father’ refers to an activity and not to the essence, and that the Son is like this activity but not like the essence.) In his circular letter, Basil returns again and again to opposing the Heterousian doctrine that the Son is immaterially (non-essentially) generated from the activity with his own doctrine that the Son is generated from the essence but without passion. This doctrine is as much a hallmark of his theology as any emphasis on homoiousia.


19. In Against Eunomius 3/1.75–76 (Gregorii Opera 2:30.18–24), Gregory explores the difference between a human father and a divine Father by considering the relationship between Adam and Abel. The notion of a human father contains, because of its materiality, the notions of both passion and interval. Divine paternity contains neither. This lack of passion and interval is surely due to the lack of God’s material existence, but Gregory does not make this argument. Gregory argues rather that because God’s identity from all eternity is to be a Father, to have a Son is a characteristic of God’s life. Thus too the Son’s identity is to be a fulfillment of the Father. Gregory cleverly uses Athanasius’s old arguments against Asterius: If the Son did not exist, then God was not only without Life, Light, Truth and Power, God was without that divinity which gives existence to Life, Light, Truth and Power. See Against Eunomius 3/1.80–82 (Gregorii Opera 2:32.1–17).
A similar concern with rebutting the charge of a "passionate" generation can be found in Victorinus's pro-Nicene apologetic.20 Victorinus uses statements about the passionless nature of the soul (derived from his two-soul, two-mind psychology) to support his more central concern for the nature of the generation of the Son.21 His argument is built upon an analogy between generation in the soul and generation in God. The soul, like God, has three processions or movements: to be, to live, and to know. Victorinus acknowledges the existence of passion in the soul, but deals with the problem of passion by working within a two-soul, two-nous psychology of a higher and lower soul and nous. The lower soul is susceptible to animal passions, while the passion of the higher soul is only the 'passion' inherent in all movement. Since the higher soul is thus passionless, the inner relations of the Trinity, of which the higher soul is an image, are passionless. It is this higher soul that consists of the three psychological powers Victorinus uses to describe the generations within the Trinity.22 The higher soul's freedom from passion, which translates into the higher soul's essential freedom, is evidence for the passionless and essentially free nature of the Son's generation.23

PASSION AS A MORAL PROBLEM

In the dialogue On the Soul and Resurrection, Gregory addresses the question of whether opposite feelings such as desire and
anger (which Gregory regards as opposites like hot and cold, humid and dry) are in fact "second" souls in us. "Either anger and desire are both second souls in us, and a plurality of souls must take the place of a single soul, or the thinking faculty in us cannot be regarded as soul either (if they are not)."

This question by Gregory is his own reformulation of a traditional problem in moral psychology: How can it be that a single soul wills both good and evil? Macrina's reply in the dialogue makes clear the traditional nature of Gregory's question, since she begins by rejecting previous solutions, including both the Platonic solution of two horses yoked to the chariot and unspecified "Aristotelian" solutions. Her Christian answer is that anger and desire are faculties of the animal soul, not of the distinctly human soul. These feelings cannot belong to the intellectual faculty, because it is the seat of the image of God in humans and God does not have these feelings. Such feelings have some relation to the soul, but they are neither parts nor faculties of the intellectual soul. We can recognize in Macrina's account the vocabulary of the earlier Hellenic debate about the "unity" of the soul, so evident in the writings of Galen and Alexander of Aprodiasias. The debate ranges over fixed topics: the number of faculties (dynameis) in a soul, whether it has one or three parts (merē), whether such divisions imply divisions of essences (ousiai), and whether indeed there are not multiple souls.

Macrina argues in On the Soul and Resurrection that the integrity of the image of God is preserved because anger and desire are faculties of the animal soul rather than of the intellectual. The argument does not satisfy Gregory here, since it seems to deny the positive descriptions in Scripture of desire and anger. Gregory's dissatisfaction forces Macrina to offer a different account of the soul. She now argues that the intellectual faculty alone is in the image of God (thus distinctly human), because it alone performs the action most like the divine—

26. In his article, "The Tripartite Soul and the Image of God in the Latin Tradition," RTAM 47 (1980): 16–52, at pp. 29–30, David N. Bell remarks upon Gregory's "discussion of whether we can speak of 'parts' of the soul at all." Gregory's disinclination to speak of "parts" is due to his preference for a "faculty" psychology.
the discernment of good and evil. The other "elements of the soul," such as the passions, are morally neutral; their value depends upon their use. Macrina supports this division of proper and accidental attributes, as well as their union in the human soul, with the account of creation. Genesis speaks first of inanimate matter, then of sentient creatures, and finally of intelligent ones. She construes this as a series of branching dichotomies: bodies capable of life are either alive or not alive; if alive, either possessed of sense or not; if possessed of sense, either rational or irrational.

I emphasize that this division in On the Soul and Resurrection is a Christian response to standing psychological questions about the mind's relation to anger and desire. It solves the questions by asserting that irrational feelings cannot exist in the human rational faculty because such feelings are not found in God, who is the paradigm for human minds. This scheme works only if one has an absolute confidence in God's impassibility. Indeed there is no hint in the dialogue of any wavering about God's freedom from passion. Both the teaching in Genesis about making human beings in the image of God and the reading of the sequence of creation as showing a hierarchy of ensouled being are meant to support the doctrine of human moral


29. The centrality of the question of morality in Gregory's dialogue is important, for it provides the context for Gregory's use of Stoic language. Gregory's psychology of action was not monistic in the Stoic sense. It was not one that "placed the power of reason in charge of the process of generating actions, and did not leave room for a power in the soul which might oppose reason and interfere with its control over the actions of the agent" (Inwood, Ethics and Human Action, p. 33). Gregory clearly does not have a psychology of action that leaves no room for an interfering power in the soul: all the scholarly accounts of his dualism are testimonies to this fact. Yet Gregory's Stoic optimism has been equally obvious when he is compared to Augustine, as Ekkehard Mühlenberg pointed out in his "Synergism in Gregory of Nyssa," Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 68 (1977): 93–122. Gregory describes the relationship of the intellectual faculty to the passions as that of control and transformation: by controlling the passions in their raw state something wonderful is brought out of them (On the Making of Man [PG 44:184C]). This is not the pure monistic Stoicism of Chrysipus, but it is the position one finds mapped out, in Galen's system, by Aristotle and Posidonius. Real conflict is postulated in the soul, but still contained within it and open by nature to solution through the dominion of one faculty over the others.
The solution Gregory offers in the dialogue is truly Christian, but the problematic is found in Posidonius, Galen, and Alexander, to name but a few pagans concerned with a similar problem over the passions.

ONE MIND, ONE GOD

On the Making of Man manifests Gregory's growing role in the polemic against Eunomius. His purpose is to argue that just as the mind is one despite its multiple faculties (dynameis) and diverse operations (energeias), so too God is one. What is worth noting, especially given disagreements over the supposedly Platonic character of Gregory's psychology, is that he argues for the unity of the mind by means of an Aristotelian psychology. Gregory takes Peripatetic arguments against Plato on the unity of the soul and applies them to the mind. He wants thus to argue that the mind is one despite its multiple faculties and operations. The mind has one ousia with three dynameis. In On the Making of Man, Gregory takes this conclusion to apply both to the human mind and—this is the beauty of his argument—to the divine.

Gregory begins On the Making of Man by associating his own Trinitarian doctrine and that of his antagonists, the Anomoians or Heterousians, with opposing psychologies of mind.

... in men, then, even though the instruments of sensation formed by nature may be different, what operates (energôn) and moves by means of all, and uses now one sense and now another, is one and the same, and

30. Cherniss, Platonism, p. 16, understood the Stoic psychology of Posidonius to eliminate any freedom from the change of passion in the soul, since everything in the soul, including the hegemonikon, was susceptible to this change. (This is his understanding of Posidonian psychology.) The argument in On the Soul and the Resurrection is indeed that the soul is unchanging because it is an image of God's unchangeableness; Gregory identifies changeableness with a susceptibility to passions or pathê. But the work's discussion of passion is not as straightforward as Cherniss makes it out to be. For example, the solution that Cherniss refers to, a division between passion-free (changeless) and passion-ful (changing), is only one among several offered in the dialogue. Neither Cherniss nor Cavarnos distinguishes among them.
its nature is not changed by the differences of operations (energeiōn). . . . For [God] says, “Let us make man in our image.” Where then is this Anomoian heresy? What will they say to this speech? How will they defend the absurdity of their teaching against the words just quoted? Will they say that one image can be made to be like many shapes (morphais)?

Gregory moves from a general discussion of the resemblance of human nature to divine nature to the question of unity in human and divine action. Someone might suggest, Gregory offers, that God is related to creation through multiple powers (dynamain). Gregory sees two sorts of objections to divine unity in this suggestion, and he characterizes them both in the language of power causality. The first objection is described in terms of the psychology of human action (which includes knowing) and its analogy to a psychology of divine action. The second objection is described in terms of physiological action, which is obviously in itself restricted to the human case, but which can be applied to God as a way of understanding the relation of single cause to multiple activities. In the quotation given above, Gregory suggests that the Heterousians have raised these kinds of objections in their theology, and his rebuttal of the objections in the case of human nature removes the objection in the case of divine nature. The details of these two arguments are worth repeating here.

In the first description, that of a psychology of action, Gregory says that God does not have many powers for many operations, but only one power, just as we too have only one power of mind for its many operations. Gregory emphasizes in particular that the many senses are animated by one single power. He picks up this theme for the second, physiological, characterization. While different perceptions depend on separate organs, what operates each of these senses and organs is one and does not change its nature according to the sense organ. If this is the case for human souls, one can hardly suspect that God’s nature varies according to his different powers and activities. Though we have many organs, each with separate power and different operation, we are still one; God then is one in essence too.

33. On the Making of Man 6 (PG 44:140A).
34. On the Making of Man 6 (PG 44:140B, dynamis twice; 140A, energeia).
These two causal models, the psychological and the physiological, are each treated in detail by Gregory. Gregory first describes the soul as consisting of three powers, the nutritive, the perceptive, and the rational. Shortly thereafter he pictures organisms as consisting of three powers, the moist, the hot, and the mixing principle, which he associates respectively with the liver (and blood), the heart (and respiration), and the nervous system. Gregory emphasizes that the three powers of the soul, and in particular the power of mind, are not to be associated with any one organ. The power causality described in *On the Making of Man* will be carried into *Against Eunomius*, for Gregory finds in power causality conceptual support for his Trinitarian theology and his anti-Heterousian (or anti-Anomoian) arguments.

**ARISTOTELIAN LANGUAGE FOR THE MIND'S UNITY**

Although Gregory's argument for the soul's unity in *On the Making of Man* borrows images from Christian sources, its substance is taken from Aristotelian psychology. Wanting to rebut Eunomius by arguing for the unity-in-multiplicity of God, Gregory is led to use language that best emphasizes psychological unity. That language is Aristotelian, though in Gregory's case this is the heavily Stoicized Aristotle he would have found described in the writings of Galen, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Iamblichus.

Gregory's argument in *On the Making of Man* for the unity for the mind begins by returning to the Genesis account of creation given in *On the Soul and Resurrection*. The first living things created were those...
that grew out of the earth. Next came the irrational animals and then, finally, rational human beings. In the Genesis account Gregory finds an Aristotelian threefold division of the soul, namely the capacity for growth and nutrition or the vegetable soul (*threptikon*), next the capacity of sense management (*aisthestikon*), and then what orders it—the intellect (*dianoetikon*).40

Beyond the language for the divisions of the soul, there is another Aristotelian feature of this account. Gregory’s description of the relationship among the types of life rests on the Aristotelian analysis of the soul’s essential unity, according to which each kind of life includes within it all the lower forms. Aristotle’s favorite way of speaking of this fact is geometrical: the rational soul contains the powers of sensation and nutrition the way a rectangle contains a triangle and line.42 Though Gregory, with most every other early Christian, avoids mathematical language for the soul, he keeps the Aristotelian analysis: “There is another form of life besides the vegetable soul, which includes the form [prior to it] in addition to the capacity of sense management.”

In the Hellenistic era Aristotelian psychology was the psychology of the soul’s essential unity, over against the Platonic claims for the soul’s fundamental disunity. Aristotelian psychology is frequently called ‘trichotomous’, while Platonic psychology is tripartite. A good example of this kind of distinction between Platonic and Aristotelian psychologies is provided by Victorinus in his catalogue of contemporary psychologies: “Some believe that there is a body and a triple soul, others a body and a soul that has three powers.” Victorinus

39. Aristotle’s own account of the soul focuses on life as its defining feature: whatever is alive has soul, whatever is not alive does not have soul. See *On the Soul* 2.2 (413a20). Something is said to be alive if it has in it any one of mind, sensation, and either movement in space or the movement of growth and decay, which includes nutrition (or digestion). This list allows Aristotle to determine what is alive or not, and it gives him the means to classify the basic kinds of life according to which of these traits a living thing possesses.


41. Richard Norris, *Manhood and Christ* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 28, agrees that Gregory conceives of “the human organism as a psycho-physical whole.” But Norris places the burden of that case on Gregory’s doctrine that the individual soul comes into existence with the body, and not apart from it.

42. *On the Soul* 2.3 (414b3).
himself believes in a twofold soul and a twofold nous.\(^{43}\) But the best authority for the Hellenistic understanding of various psychologies is Galen, who contrasts Aristotle's and Posidonius's doctrines with Plato's specifically in terms of their different understandings of division in the soul. "Aristotle and Posidonius do not speak of forms (eidlē) or parts (merē) of the soul, but say that there are powers (dynameis) of a single substance (ousias) which stems from the heart."\(^{44}\) Again, "Our soul is not simple or uniform in substance (monoειδὲ kata tēn ousian) but composed of three parts (merōn), each with its own form (eidos) and each having not one power (dynamin), but several."\(^{45}\)

For Galen, the error of Aristotle and Posidonius may be described generally as their postulating too great a unity in the nature of the human soul. They believe that at the level of ousia the soul is one, and that multiplicity begins only at the level of dynamis. Of course, this is the very conclusion that Gregory wants to reach in On the Making of Man, though he understands the description "one ousia with multiple dynameis" to apply first to the human mind and then to God.

If we return to Gregory's account of the soul in On the Making of Man, we note that after he has derived a description of the soul from the Genesis account of the kinds of life, he turns to the divisions

\(^{43}\) Consider Victorinus's survey of psychologies in Adversus Arium 1.62 (Henry 378.6–380.11): "Quidam putant, ex corpore et anima triplici, quidam autem ex corpore et anima tres potentias habente, quidam rursus dicunt, ex corpore et nó partili et anima et spiritu quo consistit fluens corpus, adhuc quidam, de corpore quadripotenti quattuor elementorum et anima duplici et duplici to nó." Victorinus seems to enumerate in order what are broadly Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic (because of the pneuma reference, though admittedly garbled), and Numenian psychologies. The first alternative resembles Galen's description of Plato's psychology, namely, that a human being is made from a body and a triple soul. The second alternative—that a human being comprises a body and a soul having three powers—resembles Galen's account of Aristotle's psychology. Victorinus himself claims the fourth kind of psychology, in which there are two souls, each with a separate nous. These reports make it clear that a trichotomous soul was not exclusively a Platonic doctrine. Indeed, for some the number two was more associated with Plato's psychology than the number three.


\(^{45}\) On the Doctrines 9.9.22 (De Lacy 2:602.19–21, with the English on p. 603). I have somewhat modified de Lacy's translation.
considered in themselves. "Of the bodily things, some have no part in life, while some participate in living powers (ζωτικὲς ἐνεργείας). Of living bodily things, again, some have sensation (αἴσθησις), while some have no part in sensation. Finally what has sensation is again divided into rational (λογικὸν) and irrational (αἴροικον)." Gregory's classification should be compared with what Alexander of Aphrodisias calls the "more common division" of things with soul, namely, the division into plants and animals, with animals further divided into the rational and the irrational.

Both Gregory and Alexander understand their descriptions of the three powers in the soul to be an account of the soul that preserves an essential unity. Alexander is concerned to preserve the unity of the soul as a whole, while Gregory is concerned to preserve the unity of the mind over against the multiplicity of the mind's faculties and operations. This common concern with psychological unity is indicated by the way in which both Alexander and Gregory end their accounts of the trichotomous union by referring to the abstraction of a smell from some sweet thing. Alexander says: "To make distinctions in the soul is like dividing an apple into its fragrance, color, shape, and sweetness." Gregory says, turning the analogy around a bit, "For when one sees honey, and hears its name, and receives it by taste, and recognizes its odor by smell, and tests it by touch, he recognizes the same thing by means of each of his senses." The different faculties of the mind exist in the mind as the name, taste, odor, and shape of honey exist in honey. Gregory takes this Aristotelian image for the unity of the soul, turns it first into an argument for the unity of the

49. On the Making of Man 10 (PG 44:153B). The use of smell as an illustration of a quality abstracted without injury to fundamental unity is a commonplace among Gregory's immediate philosophical predecessors. John Ellis, "The Problem with Fragrance," Phronesis 35 (1990): 290–302, acknowledges the early Neoplatonic use of this commonplace, but focuses his research on late Neoplatonism. Other writers use the smell of an apple, oil, or flower as an example, while Gregory uses honey, evidence again of the Aristotelian character of his language (see Aristotle Categories 9a29–34).
mind, and through Genesis 1:26, into an argument for the unity of God.\textsuperscript{50}

**GREGORY’S TWO RESPONSES TO THE CHARGE OF A PASSIONATE GENERATION**

Gregory’s full treatment of the Trinitarian implications of the problem of passion occurs in the last book of *Against Eunomius* (written in 381 or 382). Here Gregory draws upon old anti-Eunomian and pro-Nicene polemic from the end of the 350s for his basic arguments against Eunomius’s critique of passion-language in pro-Nicene doctrine, namely Basil of Ancyra’s earlier defense of divine generation against the same criticism. Basil uses the accepted doctrine of God’s passionless act of creation to support his thesis that the act of divine generation is also passionless.

For the Eunomians, the relationship between God the Father and the second Person is best described by the relative titles ‘Creator’ and ‘creature’. In Eunomius’s theology, God’s creation of the second Person is passionless because creation is an act of will and not of nature. The fact that a Creator and creature have dissimilar natures goes almost without saying, though it is this tacit assumption of dissimilarity that Eunomius means to advance. Basil prefers the titles ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ (rather than ‘Creator’ and ‘creature’) because they describe a relationship of similar natures, yet he remains sensitive to the theological problems suggested by such titles. Since among humans fathering is a passionate act, it is necessary to remove from the idea of generation any human (or more accurately, any corporeal) aspects of generation. The suggestion of passion or materialism in the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ can be corrected by applying to generation the impassibility implicit in the relationship between Creator and

\textsuperscript{50} In *Ennead* 5.1.6, Plotinus also uses the analogy of fragrance to suggest the productiveness of the One and its relationship with the Intellect. Just as heat comes from fire, cold from snow, and an odor from a fragrance, so too does the Intellect come from the One. In *Against Eunomius* 1, Gregory uses the same three analogies to suggest the kind of unity he understands to exist between a nature and a power (Gregorii Opera 1:87.12–13).
Basil admits that Eunomius is right in saying that the clearest example of passionless production is the act of creating; thus a proper understanding of divine generation takes the passionless and free character evident in creating and applies it to generating. With this argument Basil can offer a correct understanding of the kind of relationship named by the titles 'Father' and 'Son'.

Gregory takes this argument over from Basil. In Against Eunomius 3.2, he specifically argues that just as creation is a passionless act, so too generation is a passionless act:

If they judge the Godhead according to what is in us, they must not confess either that God begets or creates, for neither of these is done in us passionlessly. Thus they must either separate from the divine nature both creation and generation, in order that they might guard passionlessness in God against both—and let them entirely cast out from their doctrine faith in the only-begotten [Son], so that the Father may be kept entirely beyond passion, neither tiring in creating nor becoming soiled in generation—or, if they agree that the one activity is exercised by the divine power passionlessly, they should not do battle against the other.

Gregory improves upon Basil’s argument in a subtle way. If creating is a passionless activity (energeia), and if creating and generating are activities of the same power (dynamis), then generating is also a passionless act, because both activities flow from the same source. Here power causality developed in On the Making of Man provides conceptual support. Gregory’s new insight is his understanding that generation and creation are two activities of a single power. He can now argue that if one of these activities is rational and passionless

51. See Epiphanius Panarion 73.3.1–4.2 (Holl 271–272).

52. Basil is drawing upon earlier Christian accounts of creation that established God's priority to matter and that couched the act of creating in terms of the will (in part to distinguish the Christian doctrine of creation from Gnostic cosmogonies). What makes Basil’s argument work, though he seems unaware of the point, is that God’s creating is a passionless act, not because of the nature of creating, but because of the nature of God. There is nothing in the idea of creation that makes it passionless. God generates and creates without passion because of the kind of being God is, not because of what generating or creating presupposes.

53. Against Eunomius 3.2.62–63 (Gregorii Opera 2.73.1–10).

54. Gregory’s description of creation and generation as activities of a single power is part of his fundamental understanding that God is by nature productive. This natural productivity expresses itself as both generation and creation.
(both Eunomius and Gregory agree that creating is), then another activity of that same power cannot be irrational, since the same power cannot be both rational and irrational.

Gregory's next occasion in Against Eunomius 3 to respond to the charge of attributing passion to the Godhead is not provided by the problem of divine generation, but by Eunomius's critique of his opponents' doctrine(s) of the Incarnation. Eunomius evidently argued that a doctrine of the full divinity of the Son, in which the Father and Son shared the same nature, necessarily led to the understanding that God the Father shared the suffering of the Son. To say that the Father suffered was unacceptable to all sides. It offended against the notion of divine impassibility, and it violated the accepted aetiology of suffering, which understood suffering to be caused only to material bodies. The suggestion that the One God suffered was offensive; the idea that the simple immaterial God, the Highest Good, suffered was irrational. By insisting upon the different natures of God the Father and the Son, Eunomius limited suffering to the created nature of the Son, ensuring that the nature of God remained above it.55

Gregory's response to this criticism by Eunomius again develops reasoning from On the Soul and Resurrection. There Gregory argued against Macrina's rejection of all passions as inappropriate to the image of God by pointing out that Scripture frequently spoke positively of passions like anger or desire when they followed God's will. In On the Making of Man, Gregory argues similarly that any feeling conformed to God's will does not lead to sin and is not a passion strictly speaking. Whatever the Son felt or did, whatever he suffered, came about from following the will of God the Father and so was sinless. Indeed, since these experiences are the result of fulfilling

55. Eunomius's theology has so many peculiarities that I do not want to charge him with more than he deserves, and so I must be clear that his inability to conceive of God (the Father) suffering as Christ suffered on the cross was not something unique to him or to anti-Nicenes. The difference between Eunomius and Gregory on this point may be summarized as follows. Eunomius sees in the events of Christ's 'Passion' clear evidence of the ontological distance between the two Persons, even while he counts Christ's "obedience unto death" awe-inspiring evidence of the Son's perfect obedience and thus a sign of the moral continuity between them. Gregory tries to find as much continuity as he can between the events of the Son's life and the life of the Father, and so finds in the Son's perfect obedience a sign of the ontological continuity between the two Persons.
the Father's will, they are not passions or suffering at all, but rather things done (erga). Gregory interprets the erga of the Incarnation no longer as events that happened to the Son (and thus to the divine nature), but as erga done by God the Father through the Son. Gregory uses the familiar dynamis-energeia-erga causal sequence to describe the relationship between those seeming passions and the divine nature. The second Person is the dynamis of God, by Whom God acts. The activities of this power produce the works of the Father's will.

Marius Victorinus had already offered a similar argument in the 350s in his own pro-Nicene rebuttal of the criticism that divine generation presupposed divine passion. "Et quoniam omnis potentia naturalis est voluntas, voluit vita movere semet ipsam, insita iuxta substantiam motione inpassibiliter erecta in id quod est. Naturalis enim voluntas, non passio."56 There is one difference between the two accounts, however. While Gregory connects this passionless power to the causal sequence of dynamis-energeia-erga, Victorinus connects it to the procession theology of interior and exterior motion,57 a transcendentialized tonos model that never appears in Gregory's thought.58

TRANSFORMING TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGIES

By advancing this kind of argument for the unity of the Trinity, Gregory transforms not only pagan doctrines, but Christian as well. For example, Eusebius of Caesarea had already offered the simile

56. *Adversus Arium* 1.52 (Henry 352.22–25).
57. Consider also the continuation of the passage (Henry 352.25–31).
58. And not without reason. Hilary's account of the Council of Sirmium, 351, suggests both that Victorinus was not the only Christian to use the causality of dual motion in support of his Trinitarian theology, and also that in 358–359 (when Hilary wrote *De synodis* and Victorinus the first part of *Adversus Arium* 1) Latin bishops would have recognized these doctrines. Hilary's gloss on Article 6 is an explicit attack on a position similar to Victorinus's, namely the theological application of dual motions (*De synodis* PL 10:490C). Hilary here offers, in Stoicized language, the theology that appears under Neoplatonic form in Victorinus. We have the language of expansion and contraction, which Hilary criticizes for its materialist content. (The references to spirit as well as to power are conventional in descriptions of dual motion.) Finally, Hilary provides an alternate account safe-guarding God's freedom of will, since he evidently feels that the freedom of God's will is at issue here.
of fragrance from oil to describe the Son's unity with the Father, but he did so in an argument against polytheism rather than in one for the Son's unity with the Father. Gregory marks his transformation of traditional psychologies particularly in dealing with New Testament passages that seem to describe the soul as having three powers. The first is 1 Thessalonians 5:23, where Paul prays for the complete grace of "body and soul and spirit." The second is Mark 12:30, where Christ exhorts his followers to love God with their entire "heart and soul and mind." Gregory reinterprets these scriptural passages in line with Aristotelian psychology. According to Gregory, "body" in Thessalonians means the nutritive power, "soul" the sensitive, and "spirit" the intellectual. So too the Marcan passage: the nutritive, sensitive, and intellectual powers are "heart, soul, and mind."

Given that 1 Thessalonians 5:23 already had an important history, Gregory's comments on this scriptural passage are an explicit act of transformation. The Pauline formula is Origen's preferred psychological model in On First Principles, where he advances it against a recognizably Platonic tripartition. Origen's own concern is to provide a psychological foundation for the difference between the flesh and the spiritual (a distinction not quite equivalent to that between passion and intellect). This difference is so fundamental for Origen that he goes on to explore the doctrine of "two souls" in order to ground it.

In contrast, Gregory interprets the scriptural passages so as to diminish the radical difference between the body, soul, and spirit. While for Origen the trichotomy describes the entire human organism, for
Gregory it describes only the human soul: the scriptural term ‘body’ refers to the nutritive power and not to the corporeal body per se. The existence and nature of the body is accounted for by the Aristotelian presupposition that all soul exists in body. \(^6^4\) Gregory’s identification of the scriptural trichotomy with the Aristotelian trichotomy removes the tripartite content of the former, for the distinctions no longer name separate natures. Moreover, Gregory’s reinterpretation of the scriptural texts distances his own psychology from Origen’s.

Gregory returns to Mark 12:30 twice in Against Eunomius 1. As part of his argument that the honor accorded the Son is not less than that accorded to God the Father, Gregory refers to the command, “Love God with our whole heart and power \((dynamis)\).”\(^6^5\) Gregory speaks of the natural disposition of our soul to recognize Christ’s wonders and the moral injunction for us to respond with love and honor. The Marcan formula is also an example of such an injunction, though Gregory cites it in the modified form I have given. Heart and power are correlates to the love and honor we are enjoined to give God; Gregory alters the Marcan passage to emphasize power since it is the site of honor, as the heart is the site of love.\(^6^6\) Gregory’s polemical purpose, at this point, is better served by a dichotomous psychology than a trichotomous one.

The impact of power \((dynamis)\) in this passage from Against Eunomius is all the greater for coming after three references to Christ’s power. Gregory argues that there are no grounds for different degrees of honor to be paid to the Father and Son since there is no

\(^6^4\) Or, as Nemesius puts it, “Soul does not exist by itself, as Aristotle says” (On the Nature of Man [Telfer 277]). Here again we see why Norris emphasizes Gregory’s doctrine of the co-generation of the soul and the body.

\(^6^5\) Against Eunomius 1.337, 340 (Gregorii Opera 1:127.9, 27).

\(^6^6\) If one reads the reference in Against Eunomius to the Marcan passage together with On the Soul and Resurrection, then there are more possible meanings for the specific division that Gregory is indicating by “heart and power.” The primary division in Against Eunomius is between sensible and intelligible, which “heart and power” could certainly suggest. Indeed, Gregory there does not seem to use the Marcan text to describe the human soul, but to characterize the whole of human existence, either as desire and intellect, or corporeal and incorporeal. Since Gregory regularly speaks of the highest faculty as the power of the human soul, power in the abbreviated citation can be assumed to mean mind; the use of heart to mean lower soul is clear from the above passages from On the Making of Man. The sense of the passage seems overdetermined.
difference in the degree of *dynamis*, *doxa*, and *sophia* that belong to each of the Two.  

67. "If we think of royal *dynamis* and *axia*, the Son is King," adds Gregory in proof.  

68. Whoever values these attributes values Christ, because Christ is God's Power and Wisdom.  

69. Gregory reclaims *dynamis* for his Trinitarian theology, in the first place, by linking it to the perfect nature of God. He goes further, however, for he gives a Trinitarian interpretation to the *dynamis* in the second place by associating it with the scriptural command to worship. The enjoining of our *dynamis* becomes a proof for the validity of *dynamis* as a Trinitarian title.

Gregory will return to this scriptural trichotomy in his writings against Apollinarius, who, Gregory believes, built his account of Christ upon the more traditional interpretation of Paul's trichotomy in 1 Thessalonians.  

70. The case of Apollinarius, like the case of Origen, finds this Pauline text used to support an account of human nature that stresses the differences among the kinds of life out of which human nature is composed. Apollinarius's doctrine that the divine nature takes the place of the human intellectual soul in Christ depends upon the possibility that the intellectual soul might exist separately from the lower souls as well as from the body.  

71. Gregory's psychology in both *On the Soul and Resurrection* and *On the Making of Man* does not admit this possibility. In *Against Apollinarius* Gregory explicitly rejects the Pauline psychological trichotomy from 1 Thessalonians.

67. Against Eunomius 1.334 (Gregorii Opera 1:126.11ff).  

68. Against Eunomius 1.335 (Gregorii Opera 1:126.17).  

69. Against Eunomius 1.335 (Gregorii Opera 1:126.25).  


71. Many scholars have mentioned similarities between Gregory's arguments against Eunomius and Nemesius's arguments against Apollinarius, on the one hand, and the doctrines of Christ in the theologies of Arius, Eunomius, and Apollinarius, on the other hand. See, for example, Norris, Manhood and Christ, p. 28; Ladner, "The Philosophical Anthropology," p. 71, n. 43; and the Telfer translation, On the Nature of Man, 285–286 and 301–302. Recent treatments of Arius's Trinitarian theology have begun to look for its precedent within Origen's account of the Incarnation rather than, as had earlier been the case, within Origen's account of the Trinity.

72. Against Apollinaris 36 (Gregorii Opera 3.1:185–187).
CONCLUSION

This essay sprang from a simple, but previously unexplored observation: Any understanding of *On the Soul and Resurrection* and *On the Making of Man* must begin with an awareness that the two texts were written in early 380 within months of one another. This awareness focuses our attention on the variable influence of philosophical sources within theological contexts. Indeed, it suggests that these two texts are an excellent test case for the theological adaptation of philosophical terms and models. The most important theological issue of 380 is Trinitarian. *On the Making of Man* addresses this issue, but *On the Soul and Resurrection* does not. Instead the dialogue seems to address ascetical issues current much earlier, at the turn of the century. The temporal displacement of the specific theological concerns of *On the Soul and Resurrection* (for they are not contemporary concerns) corresponds to the displacement in voice: the dialogue records the ascetic moral theology in the mouth of Gregory’s older sister, Macrina.

These two texts seem to use similar philosophical language to address the particular issues at hand. Even so, while the same terms and concepts appear in both texts, there are clear differences in Gregory’s use of them. These differences correspond to the different theological motives in the two texts. Beyond lessons about looking for sources and influences in the right places—say, in proximate authors such as Galen and Alexander—I would want the final lesson to be just this conclusion about the plasticity of philosophy in the hands of a deeply speculative theologian.

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