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Motion (κίνησις) and Anthropology in the Writings of Gregory of Nyssa

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Tera D. Harmon
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Motion (κίνησις) and Anthropology in the Writings of Gregory of Nyssa

Tera D. Harmon, Ph.D.

Director: Susan Wessel, Ph.D.

Since the middle of the 20th century, scholars have commented on the frequency and range of topics for which Gregory of Nyssa employs the term kinesis. Besides categorizing all creation, including humanity, as the offspring of rest and motion, Gregory uses the language of motion to describe a vast array of human activities, including thought, language, emotion, sin, virtue, and spiritual ascent, among others. While Gregory’s emphasis on motion has been noticed and discussed, it has yet to be analyzed in a systematic or comprehensive fashion.

This study analyzes Gregory’s use of the term kinesis in its varied contexts to develop a synthesis of Gregory’s thought on motion and consider how it relates to his anthropology. By examining descriptions of the motion many entities, both literal and metaphorical, the first part of this study affirms the centrality of kinesis to Gregory’s anthropology. Further, it argues that Gregory considered kinesis to be fundamental to humans, marking them as created beings, separate from God, even in the eschaton. The notions of kinesis and diastema being closely aligned with one another, this dissertation further argues that humans retain their diastemic nature in the resurrection.

The second part of this study explores the implications of an anthropology indelibly marked by kinesis, concluding that kinesis prevents human isolation, both the isolation of one part from another in the same person and the isolation of humans from other humans and from God. Gregory’s kinetic anthropology also lends support to the idea that humans are holistic,
connected between mind and body, intelligible and sensible, rather than dualistically divided.

Finally, it asserts the importance of both continuity and change for humans, emphasizing the importance of a constant identity over time as well as the eternal need for growth.
This dissertation by Tera Harmon fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Church History approved by Susan Wessel, Ph.D., as Director, and by William J. McCarthy, Ph.D. and Dr. Robin Darling Young, Ph.D., as Readers.

__________________________________________
Susan Wessel, Ph.D., Director

__________________________________________
William J. McCarthy, Ph.D., Reader

__________________________________________
Robin Darling Young, Ph.D., Reader
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Introduction

Following the deaths of his brother, Basil, and sister, Macrina, Gregory of Nyssa wrote with concern for the entire scope of the human experience, particularly what happens after death. In *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione* he contemplated doubts about the resurrection and near the end of this treatise summarized human nature in this way: “Who does not know that human nature is like a stream which is always moving from birth to death and that it ceases to move when it ceases to exist? But this movement is not an exchange of place, for nature does not go beyond itself, but it goes forward through change.” He goes on in this passage to compare human nature to a flame, appearing to stay the same, but in reality constantly moving and changing, making it impossible for one to touch the same flame twice. The human person is like a stream and a flame, he says, because although appearing to remain the same person, in reality they are constantly changing and moving forward.

The concept of motion (κίνησις) arises frequently in Gregory’s discussions on human nature. In *De hominis opificio*, his major anthropological treatise, he follows Aristotle in categorizing all creation, including humanity, as the offspring of rest and motion. Metaphors of motion in Gregory’s corpus extend to physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of being human. In addition to describing human nature in terms of motion, Gregory uses metaphors of motion to describe human activities such as thought, language, and emotion. He describes sin as downward motion and virtue as upward motion. Hope and memory are guides in the spiritual motion toward

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the good and after death, the soul continues in infinite motion toward God. In short, every aspect of the human experience is infused with the concept of motion.

*Kinesis* (κίνησις) was a significant philosophical term long before Gregory, being a central term in Aristotle’s exploration of physics. In studying dynamics, Aristotle attempted to organize various types of motion into a framework, beginning many ancient discussions about the nature of movement on earth and in the heavens. One such discussion centered around Aristotle’s theory of natural motion which assumed that every natural body has a resting place that it will move toward unless something blocks its way. Heavy materials, earth for instance, move downward and light ones, such as fire, naturally move upward. Whether an object has an internal source of motion is a litmus test for whether or not it is a natural object; artificial things require an external source of motion. Upholding this view required some careful explanation because he also upheld the view of Plato that all things in motion must be moved by something. Natural versus externally produced motion became a point of discussion prior to Gregory, with Galen denying the principle that objects must have an external source of motion and Alexander of Aphrodisias reasserting it. While Gregory did not formally weigh in on the issue, he borrowed much of his view of natural motion to Aristotle, as will be discussed later.

Another significant Aristotelian development was the distinction between *energeia* (ἐνέργεια) and *kinesis*. Aristotle famously distinguishes the terms in Metaphysics IX.6, saying that motions, such as walking, learning, and building a house have a termination point and

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3 Sambursky, 62-63.


therefore are not ends in themselves, but are ordered to an end. *Energeiai*, on the other hand, are actions such as thinking, understanding, and flourishing that are themselves the ends. Later, Aristotle contrasts pleasure and motion, adding to the definition of motion that it must take place at some rate. Since one cannot be in a state of pleasure quickly or slowly, it cannot be considered a motion. Considerable discussion has taken place regarding Aristotle’s meaning of these passages and Bradshaw summarizes the differences between *energeia* and *kinesis* with the following list: *kinesis* has a termination, is not an end, is complete when it achieves what it aims at, must cease before perfect tense can apply, has parts which are different in kind from one another, occurs quickly or slowly, and is in time. *Energeia* on the other hand has no termination, is an end or has end within it, is complete at any moment, present and perfect tense apply simultaneously, is homogenous, does not occur quickly or slowly, and is in “the now.” Even though he does not adopt the definitions of Aristotle, Gregory’s use of *kinesis* carries the weight of these prior discussions, and the distinction between *energeia* and *kinesis* is especially important in his discussion of the nature of the Trinity and how God interacts with the world, which will be addressed in the first chapter.

Turning now to significant secondary work on Gregory and *kinesis*, a number of commentators on Gregory have noted the significance of motion as it related to various facets of Gregory’s work. Significant mention of *kinesis* in Gregory began in 1930 with *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*[^8], in which Cherniss discusses Gregory’s use of motion as evidence of the influence of Platonism on Gregory. In this discussion, the topic of motion arises in several

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contexts, including the motion of the planets, the flight of the soul, and passions as movements of the soul. Cherniss uses these as examples of Platonist influence on Gregory concluding that Gregory has merely applied Christian names to Plato’s doctrines and called it Christian theology. Although scholarly consensus no longer supports Cherniss’ assertion that Gregory had no philosophical influences other than Plato, Cherniss commented on the importance of motion in general to Gregory and noted his Platonic influence.

After Cherniss, Jean Daniélou recognized the importance of spiritual motion in Gregory’s work,\(^9\) coining the term *epektasis* to describe the notion of the soul’s perpetual progress in sanctity. Following Daniélou, many scholars recognized the doctrine of eternal motion of the soul as a distinctive contribution of Gregory. Besides bringing this notion of spiritual progress to the forefront, Daniélou traced some of Gregory’s antecedents on this topic, including Plato and Origen. From Origen Gregory adopted the notion that change is essential to created being, but Gregory adds to this idea that change can take place in two directions. Furthermore, while acknowledging the Platonic contribution to Gregory’s thought on spiritual motion, Daniélou notes that the idea that change can be good is a significant departure from the Platonic ideal.

One of the significant aspects of motion in Gregory is its necessary association with the created world. In 1988 Hans Urs von Balthasar made important observations regarding motion as a defining feature of the created world and humanity, noting that creation is bounded by the *diastema* (διάστημα), or “spacing”, by which Gregory means the limits of time and space.\(^{10}\) Motion is a central feature of anything within these limits for, at the very least, passing from

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non-existence to existence is a kind of motion. These limits distinguish a being from God, but are part of its character and “are at the same time its contours, its form, indeed, its beauty.”¹¹ Von Balthasar also noticed that while motion separates one from God, ultimately it is what allows a human to ascend toward God.

More recently, Tina Dolidze noted the general importance of motion in Gregory’s work, saying that it finds its way into almost all areas of Gregory’s theology: cosmology, anthropology, Christology, theology proper, soteriology, mysticism and eschatology.¹² Dolidze noticed the importance of the distinction between sensible and intelligible motion in Gregory and identified three types of motion in a hierarchy. At the bottom is cyclical motion that consists of qualitative alteration of matter or the transformation of the elements that occurs in the sensible world. The earth is the arena of this type of motion. Second in the hierarchy is the motion of the planets and the top tier of motion is the linear motion of soul toward the good. Dolidze traces a number of Gregory’s antecedents and determines that Gregory’s contribution lies in lending consequence to the idea of spiritual motion and connecting that type of motion to free will. That is, for Gregory, choosing to do good causes the soul to move ever forward. It is also the innovation of Gregory that this type of forward motion has precedent over other types of motion.

These works established the significance of motion for Gregory, emphasizing how widely he discusses motion, both in range of topic and across his corpus. Recent mentions of motion in Gregory tend to emphasize either motion as a characteristic feature of the created order or the mystical motion of the soul. Motion as a characteristic feature of creation is addressed by Scot

¹¹ Balthasar, 29.

Douglass, who builds on the concept of *diastema* introduced by Von Balthasar and others.\(^{13}\)

Within the boundaries of *diastema*, every created being has a kinetic composition, one that is constantly moving and changing,\(^{14}\) which is significant, in part, because it distinguishes the moving being from the immutable creator.\(^{15}\) As creatures that move within the *diastema*, humans are separated from God both ontologically, being inherently kinetic while God is unmoving, and practically because humans can only move within the space and time of *diastema* and God, by definition, is outside of it.

Following Daniélou, secondary literature also addresses in detail the mystical ascent of the soul toward God. Because of its distinctiveness, *epektasis* has become a characteristic topic of Gregory, widely studied and commented on, with more scholarly discussion than can be listed here. It is generally agreed that perfection for Gregory is in perpetual progress, the soul’s unending following after God that is paradoxically also a kind of stasis.\(^{16}\) The soul ever continues to desire God, moving toward the divine in what Smith calls “creaturely becoming.”\(^{17}\)

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\(^{16}\) This will be further discussed in Chapter 3. Besides Daniélou, other significant works in demonstrating the importance of perpetual progress in Gregory are Everett Ferguson, “God’s Infinity and Man’s Mutability: Perpetual Progress According to Gregory of Nyssa,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 18 (1973): 59-78 and Paul Blowers, “Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of Perpetual Progress” *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 151-171.

\(^{17}\) Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 222.
With extensive work having been done on these aspects of motion in Gregory, why examine this topic further? To date, while good scholarship on *kinesis* in Gregory of Nyssa exists, it is usually ancillary to another topic on which the work primarily focuses: Douglass’ work on *kinesis* is in relation to language, Smith’s is in relation to emotion, even Daniélou focuses on the mystical experience of motion. These works provide rungs in constructing Gregory’s understanding of motion, but they stop short of a full treatment. So far, scholarship has shown us a created world of which motion is a defining feature. All created things move, from the beginning of their existence to the end, and the human soul moves into eternity. Besides this basic framework for the created order, many aspects of the human experience are couched in terms of motion, including birth, death, thought, emotion, language, will, virtue, and time. Scholarship has touched on these aspects of motion with various degrees of thoroughness, but discussions about it are scattered in works on other topics and some aspects of motion remain untouched. What I hope to accomplish in this work is to synthesize these fragments of information on motion and fill in the gaps, determining if Gregory’s musings on motion fit into a coherent whole.

Motion is a complex subject in Gregory, not addressed in any systematic fashion, sometimes indicating literal movement of physical objects and other times entirely metaphorical. Boundary lines are drawn and then those boundaries are crossed: motion is the specific property of the created order and yet the Divine became human. The world, for Gregory, is strictly divided into what is sensible and what is intelligible, and yet he frequently uses examples of motion from the sensible world to illustrate concepts from the intelligible, likening virtue to

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18 Dolidze’s article, “Der κίνησις-Begriff,” is a notable exception to this.
water travelling up a pipe and sin to waves in the ocean. Motion, furthermore, is often an epistemic medium, signaling knowledge of one realm into another, the human voice, for instance, existing as a sign of the motion within the mind. Teasing out these complexities of motion can lead to a richer understanding of how Gregory understands the relationships between God, humans, and the cosmos.

A study like this is important, in part, because motion is an important topic in Gregory’s corpus. Although he did not write a treatise on motion as such, it comes up often and in varied contexts and is particularly significant to his anthropology, defining the human experience. For Gregory, the human person is first and foremost made in the image of God, a condition that explains both human likeness to and difference from God. The goal of human existence is to exercise one’s free will to grow in virtue, becoming ever more like God. Gregory uses language of motion to describe every stage of human existence. Motion is a theologically loaded concept as well for Gregory, being both what separates humanity from the divine and the means by which they ascend to it. Motion is a core component of what it means to be human; it provides the canvas upon which the human life is painted.

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20 Smith, Passion and Paradise, 22-8.

In addition to being an important component of Gregory’s thought, an examination of motion is important because of the kind of anthropology it reveals. Cherniss determined that Gregory’s thought was simply a baptized Platonism, the human person being strictly divided between body and soul with a strong preference given to the soul. Since then, while continuing to acknowledge his debt to Plato and Neoplatonism, scholarship has veered away from understanding Gregory’s anthropology as quite so dualistically divided, to the point where Corrigan assesses that for the first time in history Gregory presents an anthropology in which “soul and body are radically equal from the beginning and develop holistically together.” A close examination of motion in Gregory will support the growing body of literature that understands Gregory’s anthropology as presenting a more holistic human person, body and soul working and moving together.

My basic conclusion about motion is that it is central to Gregory of Nyssa’s anthropology and that it extends from creation into the eschaton. In stating that motion is a vital component of Gregory’s anthropology, I agree with scholars such as von Balthasar, Douglass, and Dolidze who also suggest this. On this point, my contribution to scholarship is in breadth and depth of evidence to support this. I will take a comprehensive approach, bringing together motion in a wide range of topics to demonstrate that Gregory understands people as kinetic. In order to demonstrate that kinesis extends into the eschaton, I will be engaging the work on the topic of diastema done by Verghese, Cvetkovic, Douglass, and to a lesser degree, Balás, Plass, and Mosshammer to suggest that people do not cease their diastemic and, therefore kinetic existence in the eschaton. This assertion disagrees with the understanding of diastema put forward by Hans

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Boersma that humans do cease to be *diastemic* in the eschaton. In response, I offer a possible solution based on two possible senses of *diastema*. After asserting this in chapter 3, much of what follows explores the implications of an anthropology indelibly marked by *kinesis*.

Part of the methodological framework for this study is the use of conceptual metaphor, a field of study founded by Lakoff and Johnson that assesses everyday metaphors not as rhetorical flourishes that express an idea more beautifully, but as concepts that structure language, thought, and action. Following Lakoff and Johnson, proponents of conceptual metaphor theory argue that abstract thought is largely and unavoidably (and, for the most part, unconsciously) metaphorical. Arising from common, cross-cultural experiences, basic conceptual metaphors are the foundation for abstract concepts and only secondarily metaphorical linguistic expressions. Cognitive linguistics is significant to this study because it provides the foundation for asserting that Gregory’s linguistic expressions of motion (a great many of which are metaphorical) reflect his underlying concepts. In other words, when Gregory writes about virtue, for example, as upward motion, the result is not that he has embellished a literal idea of virtue for the purpose of communication; rather, the possibility is open that motion helps to construct how Gregory conceives of virtue. The metaphors Gregory uses serve as windows into his thought.

In their writings on Gregory, both Sarah Coakley and Morwenna Ludlow have treated Gregory’s metaphors as a method of communication rather than a decoration for an argument.

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25 I say it is a possibility that motion constructs Gregory’s concept of virtue following Kövecses’ research on emotion that language not only reflects experiences, but creates them. He notes, however, that while some metaphors construct reality, it seems to be the case that not all metaphors have that power. Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), see pages 17-19, 191-192.
Coakley examines Gregory’s images of the Trinity, looking particularly at how gender factors in these images, and uses them for the purpose of undermining what she calls “the purported hegemony of the ‘three men’ analogy [of the Trinity].” Rather than serve as an accompaniment or be subordinate to Gregory’s argument on the Trinity, Coakley argues for the importance of Gregory’s images and assesses that Gregory’s reflections on the Trinity “find their completion in his exegetical account of The Song, and supremely in the rich if chaotic images of incorporation into the life of the divine energeia.” Ludlow focuses on Gregory’s imagery as a method to communicate his view of human knowledge, arguing that his imagery is “not just a literary technique, but is also a theological method.” She looks specifically at his adoption of images from Greek philosophy, noting that he often uses them imaginatively and for a different purpose than the philosopher from whom he borrowed. While examining different topics, both Coakley and Ludlow emphasize the importance of Gregory’s images and metaphor for understanding his thought on a given topic. In a similar vein, throughout this study I will treat Gregory’s metaphors and images of motion as a central source of information for his anthropology.

In order to analyze motion in Gregory, I will take a two-part approach, the first focusing systematically on instances of Gregory discussing motion in the created, uncreated, sensible, and intelligible orders. These categories provide a reasonable structure for Part I because it is consistent with how Gregory presents the world. Gregory understands all objects and beings as intelligible (νοητός) or sensible (αἰσθητός) and as created (κτιστός) or uncreated (ἀκινήτος). An

object’s designation under these two categories determines its place in the scheme of the cosmos and the rules that govern its motion. Gregory explains,

The most important distinction of all beings is that between the intelligible and the sensible…But reason divides the meaning of this intelligible nature also into two. For logic perceives one kind as uncreated, the other as created, an uncreated nature which makes the created, and a created nature which receives its cause and ability to exist from the uncreated.  

Gregory’s division begins from an epistemological standpoint, separating those things about which one can learn by using one’s senses from those things that only the mind can apprehend. He further divides the intelligible category into things that are created and things that are uncreated. Although it seems that he makes no comment on whether items in the sensible category are created or uncreated, for Gregory, it goes without saying that all things in the sensible category are also created. From these divisions, three broad categories emerge: intelligible-uncreated, intelligible-created, and sensible-created. Motion in each of these categories will be the topic of the first three chapters. The purpose of Part I is to draw the scheme of motion in the world as Gregory sees it, to trace the rules or boundaries of motion, and to construct, as far as possible, Gregory’s system for understanding motion. Chapter One will examine motion in the created and uncreated realms, and I will argue that motion does not take place in the uncreated, but rather marks the boundary between created and uncreated. Chapter

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30 Alden Mosshammer examines the development of these categories in Gregory’s work, noting that in his earlier works, he emphasizes the intelligible/sensible division, while in his later works he focuses on what Mosshammer calls the “double antithesis” of created/uncreated and intelligible/sensible. Alden Mosshammer, “The Created and the Uncreated in Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium 1,105-113,” in El “Contra Eunomium I” en la Produccion Literaria de Gregorio de Nisa, ed. Lucas F. Mateo-Seco and Juan L. Bastero (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, S.A., 1988), 353-379.
Two will examine motion in the sensible world and will demonstrate that motion is central to all created beings and that it is motion that marks a being as created. By examining various facets of intelligible motion, Chapter Three will address intelligible motion within the individuals, such as thought, language, emotion, will, and *epektasis*, concluding that direction is a significant component of motion. Chapter Three will also help to develop a fuller picture of the human person in constant motion.

Part Two will then take seriously the warning given by a number of Nyssen scholars that because Gregory himself is not a systematic writer, we must be careful not to over-systematize his thought.\(^{31}\) Having identified the boundaries of motion in Part I, Part II will look at how Gregory describes motion as going across the boundaries. In Chapter Four, I will explore in more depth motion in knowledge and language, illustrating that motion prevents *diastemic* human beings from living in isolation. Chapter Five takes a deep look at ascent, union, and paradox as ways Gregory describes the motion of the soul’s eternal journey. In it I explore the boundaries of present/future and human/divine and argue that Gregory emphasizes both constant motion and continuity of person as central. Chapter Six brings together the previous chapters and develops three primary conclusions about motion and anthropology in Gregory: first, using motion as a lens for anthropology reveals the human person as a connected, holistic individual; second, motion prevents isolation; and third, motion reveals the importance of both continuity and change for the human person. On the surface, the idea of moving something from one location to another does

\(^{31}\) Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, Early Church Fathers Series (New York: Routledge, 1999). Corrigan asserts that a central feature of Gregory’s thinking is that it is “multiperspectival.” He applies it to the relationship between the soul and the body, saying that he “maps out different views of the mind-soul-body relation depending on the way that relation is lived,” but the concept applies to his understanding of motion as well. Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory*, 46.
not seem particularly deep. What I will argue throughout this study is that motion is about
more for Gregory than changing location, it is about unlimited openness to growth and change.
Chapter 1

Created and Uncreated Motion

The immutability of God was a given for theologians and philosophers of the fourth century and Gregory is no exception in this regard. He accepts that although motion is central to all things created, God does not move. Despite the ubiquity of this notion, it creates tension with other components of Gregory’s thought. How can God be immutable in light of scriptural accounts of God moving? How can a completely unmoving God create and sustain a world defined by its motion? Don’t the very acts of creating and sustaining imply motion? For Gregory, both the way one understands scripture and the technical way in which one speaks of God moving can serve to lessen these tensions.

When discussing motion as it relates to God, the most important distinction is between created and uncreated. The uncreated category is reserved for the divine nature only, which Gregory frequently emphasizes includes Father, Son, and Spirit,¹ whereas everything else that exists is created. Gregory calls the distinction between created and uncreated the “twofold division of existences”² and it is the primary marker in determining the place of something in the cosmos. The difference between created and uncreated is vast, as Gregory explains in Contra Eunomius, his polemical work responding to the Arian bishop Eunomius of Cyzicus:

The barrier which separates uncreated nature from created being is great and impenetrable. One is finite, the other infinite; the one is confined within its proper measure as the wisdom of its Maker determined, the limit of the other is infinity. The one

² Oratio Catechetica SC 39.9-10. Hereafter Cat. or. Translation from NPNF 5.506.
stretches out in measurable extension, being bounded by time and space, the other transcends any notion of measure, eluding investigation however far one casts the mind.\(^3\)

Created nature has boundaries of time and space whereas the uncreated divine nature is infinite and limitless. Because creation fits into the receptacle of time and space and the divine nature does not, the rules governing motion differ for each group. Strictly speaking, motion does not take place within the divine nature because one of the primary attributes of God, according to Gregory, is immutability. Much of his discussion regarding motion and the divine nature, then, is in explaining scriptural texts and theological concepts in which God is said to move and specifying the sense in which God’s activities constitute motion.

**Motion and the Immutable God**

Foundational to Gregory’s theology is the notion that God is immutable, an idea certainly not new to Gregory. Aristotle, for instance, described the divine as ἀκίνητος (unmoved), a term which included change in quantity, quality, or motion in space.\(^4\) For Gregory, however, a number of complicating factors such as biblical descriptions of God moving and the motion of Christ’s nature in the incarnation make it impossible to simply label God as ἀκίνητος with no further explanation. Gregory himself alludes to this tension in *Contra Eun.* writing that scripture often describes God in ways that seem more human than divine. Gregory cites a number of examples, including the Genesis account of God walking in the evening with Adam, assuming his audience agrees with him that God does not literally walk.\(^5\) Because Gregory has these

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\(^3\) *Contra Eun.* 2 GNO 1.2.1.69-70. Translation from Hall, 74.


\(^5\) *Contra Eun.* 2 GNO 1.2.1.424-426.
complicating factors to his assertion of God as immutable, he uses a range of vocabulary and metaphors to explain and nuance what this might mean.

Following Philo and Origen, Gregory frequently uses the word ἄτρεπτος (literally un-turning) to refer to divine immutability, often using the word to contrast God with created beings. In a few instances, he uses the term to describe an essential feature of the uncreated nature, as he does in Oratio catechetica, one of Gregory’s later works defending Christian doctrine, the Trinity, and the incarnation in particular, against Platonist critique. In describing baptism as a way to choose one’s spiritual parentage, Gregory defends the superiority of the uncreated world, saying: “…there is a twofold division of existences, into created and uncreated, and since the uncreated world possesses within itself immutability (ἄτρεπτον) and immobility, while the created world is liable to change and alteration…” In this passage, mutability provides the primary contrast between divine and human and it is the unmoving nature of the divine that makes association with God a preferable option.

He further develops the notion of mutability as a significant contrast between divine and human in De hom. opif., Gregory’s major anthropological treatise, when describing the difference between God as an archetype and human beings as made in the image of that archetype: “the uncreated nature is also immutable (ἄτρεπτον), and always remains the same, while the created nature cannot exist without change; for its very passage from non-existence to existence is a certain motion and change of the non-existent transmuted by the Divine purpose.

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7 E.g., Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.515; De oratione dominica 232.22. Hereafter De orat. dom. (ACW 18.38).
8 Cat. or. SC 39.11. Translation from NPNF 5.506. See also De hominis opificio PG 44.184.40. Hereafter De hom. opif. (NPNF 5.405).
into being.”

Again in this passage, immutability is the defining characteristic of the uncreated vis-à-vis creation and further rationale is given for why anything created cannot, by definition, be immutable: the very event of being created is a kind of motion because in it the change from not existing to existing constitutes motion. A boundary, then, between uncreated and created is mutability: what is created must move and what is uncreated does not. In these two instances, ἄτρεπτος describes God and the primary features that emerge are that Gregory associates this word with the uncreated nature and that he uses it as a contrast between God and humans.

Gregory, however, does not use ἄτρεπτος exclusively for the divine nature, occasionally applying this word to humans or other aspects of creation. In a few instances, Gregory describes the divine nature as ἄτρεπτος, but opens up the definition to describe how human beings can develop divine qualities. For instance, in Oratio catechetica, Gregory encourages his readers to adopt a stable life, grounded in the uncreated nature of the Trinity rather than one that is “tossed about by the waves of this lifetime of uncertainty and change.”

By confessing that the Trinity is uncreated, Gregory asserts, one can enter on the “steadfast (ἄτρεπτον) and unalterable life.”

Additionally, in De oratione dominica, a series of homilies about the Lord’s Prayer, Gregory describes the method by which one can achieve contemplation of God. In the second of these homilies, Gregory comments on the first line of the Lord’s Prayer, saying that in order to address God as “Our Father,” one must first prepare oneself to approach God in such a familiar way: “So first my mind must become detached from anything subject to flux and change and tranquilly rest in motionless (ἄτρεπτῳ) spiritual repose, so as to be rendered akin to Him who is perfectly

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9 De hom. opif. PG 44.184.40-45. Translation from NPNF 5.405.

10 Cat. or. SC 39.34-35. Translation from NPNF 5.507.

11 Cat. or. SC 39.28-29. Translation from NPNF 5.507.
unchangeable (ἀτρεπτον).”¹² Those who still their minds in prayer, then, can adopt, in some part, the divine quality of stability. In addition to describing a strict division between what is uncreated and what is created, these two passages show Gregory using the word ἀτρεπτος to describe a feature of the divine that merits human imitation.

While Gregory generally uses ἀτρεπτος as a divine or human quality, in at least one instance he uses the word more generally to describe how God incorporated heavenly qualities into the earth: “the wisdom of God has transposed these properties, and wrought unchangeableness (ἀτρεπτον), and change in that which is immovable…Hence the earth is stable without being immutable (ἀτρεπτος), while the heaven, on the contrary, as it has no mutability, so has not stability either.”¹³ In this passage about the creation of the earth, God mixed divine qualities with their opposites into the created world so that no created thing would be mistaken for God. While the term is applied to the earth, it still describes the part of the earth that reflects a divine quality.

This examination has revealed that, for Gregory, the term ἀτρεπτος is generally reserved for a specific kind of non-motion that refers to the divine. When the term describes something other than the divine itself, it tends to refer to a divine quality residing in a created entity, such as a human virtue or a divine attribute mixed into creation. While this term is reserved primarily to describe divine qualities, it is not the only term Gregory uses to describe the immutability of God.

In the opening paragraphs of De hom. opif., Gregory supplies two additional terms of non-motion that apply to the divine. He states in a section on the motion of the heaven and the

¹³ De hom. opif. PG 44.129.42-53. Translation from NPNF 5.389.
earth that nothing that is unstable (ἄστατος) or changing (ἀλλοιῶ) can belong to the divine nature. While Gregory frequently associated the word ἀτρέπτος with divinity, he uses ἄστατος differently, often emphasizing that what is unstable is temporal rather than permanent.

Discussing the benefits of seeking the Good in In Ecclesiasten, Gregory notes: “Amid the changes (ἄστάτῳ) of age and time the Good alters not at all.”

In this instance, the Good, which is permanent and unchanging, contrasts specifically with the kinds of changes that take place within time. Furthermore, in De beatitudinibus, Gregory’s series of homilies reflecting on the Beatitudes, he contrasts the permanence of virtue with the instability of time: “The one who achieves something sublime, such as temperance or gentleness or reverence for the Divinity, or any other of the sublime Gospel-teachings, finds his happiness over each of his achievements not to be transient and unstable (ἄστατον), but well founded, permanent, and lasting through every period of his life.”

Again, the word ἄστατος contrasts with permanence, emphasizing its temporal association. In addition to contrasting permanent qualities with those that are ἄστατος, Gregory identifies the term with sin because of its impermanent nature, saying, “The nature of sin is unstable (ἄστατος) and transient. It neither came into existence at the first with creation…nor does it continue to exist into perpetuity with the things which have being.”

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14 De hom. opif. PG 44.132.2-3 (NPNF 5.389).
17 For other examples, see In Eccles. GNO 422.8; De beat. PG 44.1292.34; De virginate SC 4.7.11; De orat. dom. Oehler 288.34; Apologia in Hexaemeron PG 44.81.40.
In addition to having a connotation of impermanence, ἄστατος sometimes indicates instability of a more negative sort. This negative connotation is most clear when he refers to an opposing argument: “Every false and unstable (ἄστατος) opinion on these matters,” Gregory states in De anima et resurrectione, “should be excluded from the true dogmas.”¹⁹ In this case, he considers the notion of the pre-existence of souls to be unstable, in the sense that it is not held firmly to logic or truth. In addition to referring to opinions as unstable, he also uses this word negatively to refer to a general feature about humanity and to a certain lifestyle. In discussing Genesis 3:8, in which God is said to walk in the garden, Gregory takes the movement of God in the passage to indicate “the unsteadiness and instability (ἄστατον) of mankind about what is good.”²⁰ In another exposition of scripture, Gregory explains that when the Psalmist speaks of “waters coming unto the soul,” he means the “unsteady (ἄστατον) and passionate and disturbed life.”²¹ In both of these examples, instability is a feature or way of human life that does not hold firmly to what is good.

Gregory uses ἄστατος most neutrally when referring to physical objects that have some aspect of instability. In Contra Eun. he uses this word to describe the wind and in Apologia in hexaemeron he uses it to describe water.²² In both of these examples instability is a feature of a created object and does not have a negative connotation. Having looked closely at Gregory’s usage of ἄστατος, one can infer that when Gregory says nothing unstable can belong to the

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²⁰ Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.426. Translation from Hall, 155.


²² Contra Eun. 3 GNO 2.3.1.40 (NPNF 5.139) and Apologia in hexaemeron PG 44.89.12-15. Hereafter Apol. in hex.
divine nature, he is indicating that God is free from qualities of the created order that are impermanent and unable to hold firmly to what is good and true.

A more general word for change is ἀλλοίωσις, which Gregory also uses to describe created nature and contrast with the divine, but which has a more neutral meaning. Gregory uses it to describe change for the better and for the worse in matters both mundane and spiritual. It describes the transformation of the soul into something divine as well as the change that food undergoes in the process of digestion. Gregory uses this term to discuss the nature of human life, comparing it to a river that changes as it moves from birth to death and to a fire that looks steady, but is always changing. It is, in fact, a necessary feature of all created life, as Gregory mentions that unlike uncreated nature, created nature cannot exist without change because birth and death are both kinds of changes. In addition to the biological changes of human life, Gregory uses ἀλλοίωσις to describe the optional change that can take place in humans through prayer and virtue.

The history of using ἀλλοίωσις (and its opposite ἀναλλοίωτος) in discussions about God is varied. Aristotle defined ἀλλοίωσις as a change in quality (as opposed to μεταβολή, which is a change in substance and κίνησις, which is a general change in quality, quantity, or movement in

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23 I include the verbal form, ἄλλοιόω.
26 De anima PG 46.141.
27 De hom. opif. PG 44.184.42 (NPNF 5.405).
28 In insc. pss. GNO 5.82.
space) and described heavenly beings as ἀναλλοίωτα, unchanging. Likewise, Plotinus does not allow for this kind of change in the soul and Origen describes God as ἀναλλοίωτος. Philo, however, never used this word to describe God, which Hallman considers surprising since it was ordinarily used as a technical term to describe God. He suggests that Philo considered the term to be inconsistent with biblical accounts of God.

Like Aristotle, Plotinus, and Origen, Gregory does regularly use ἀλλοίωσις to contrast with the divine nature and ἀναλλοίωτος to describe God. He does, however, seem to understand the tension between describing God as absolutely unchanging and accounting for God becoming human in the incarnation. In at least two places, Gregory discusses the phrase “the change (ἀλλοίωσιν) of the right hand of the Most High” from Psalm 77:10, which he takes to mean the incarnation. He alludes to the tension in both places, but he does not address the matter directly. In Contra Eun., Gregory emphasizes that Christ underwent a change from uncreated to created nature in the incarnation: “the immortal and impassible and uncreated Nature came to be in the passible Nature of the creature.” Gregory is arguing against Eunomius, whom he reports saying that Christ did not change as a result of the incarnation because Christ began as a created being. For Gregory, if Christ did not undergo a change in

29 Hallman, The Coming of the Impassible God, 16-17. Plato also used this word to indicate a qualitative alteration. See Dolidze, Der κίνησις-Begriff,” 428.
32 See, for example, Contra Eun. 1 GNO 1.1.169, 280, 435, 513; Contra Eun. 3 GNO 2.3.1.65, 85.
33 Contra Eun. 3 GNO 2.3.4.25. Translation from NPNF 5.185.
nature in order to become human, “the wonder of the doctrine disappears, and there is nothing marvellous in what is alleged, since the created nature comes to be in itself.”

Gregory discusses Psalm 77:10 again as relating to the incarnation in De vita Mosis, the spiritual work written near the end of Gregory’s life, saying, “The Prophet declares: ‘This is the change of the right hand of the most High’ [Ps. 77:10], indicating that, although the divine nature is contemplated in its immutability, by condescension to the weakness of human nature, it was changed to our shape and form.” In this passage, Gregory mentions the change in Christ in order to emphasize that he did it for the sake of humanity, so that people might be set free from sin. Once again, Gregory does not discuss the implications of a God characterized by immutability becoming human, but he insists that it did happen.

Gregory does address the incarnation more fully in Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium, his treatise debating Apollinarius, a contemporary of Gregory known for his understanding of the person of Christ as a divine soul who put on a human body, but did not have a human soul. For Apollinarius, because a human soul necessarily indicated sinfulness, Christ could not have taken one on. Gregory of Nyssa (as well as the other Cappadocians) found his construction of the person of Christ lacking in part for soteriological reasons, as Gregory Nazianzus quipped, what has not been assumed has not been healed. In arguing against Apollinarius, Gregory repeatedly asserts the immutability of the divine nature, using both ἀτρέπτος and ἀναλλοίωσις to describe Christ’s divinity. He further insists that Christ became a human without changing (ἀτρέπτως)

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34 Contra Eun. 3 GNO 2.3.4.23.11-12. Translation from NPNF 5.185.
36 Antirrheticus Adversus Apollinarium (hereafter Antirrh.) GNO 3.1.133, 197.
the divine nature. The human nature Christ put on, however was real and sinful and was the
locus of Christ’s experience of change and suffering. Despite having both divine and human
natures, Christ was not two persons, but one.

What is significant for Gregory regarding divine immutability in the incarnation is that it
is God’s immutable nature that has the power to cure the human tendency to evil. Since humans
so often tend toward sin, they have a great need for immutability and by taking on human
changeableness, Christ enabled human transformation, the ability to change for the better and
become more like divinity, losing the characteristics of fallen humanity. While Gregory remains
consistent that the divine (including the divine nature in Christ) is immutable (both ἄτρεπτος and
ἀναλλοίωσις in this treatise), Christ adopted changeableness in his human nature in order to heal
humanity. This position, worked out in Antirrh., is consistent with Gregory’s comments from
the De vita Mosis passage discussed above in which he writes: “What is impassible by nature did
not change into what is passible, but what is mutable and subject to passions was transformed
into impassibility through its participation in the immutable.”

Three other words of motion act as synonyms to the others mentioned and merit brief
mention in this discussion. Τροπή (turning), a Stoic term, is used in a number of the instances
mentioned above and is frequently used with ἀναλλοίωσις as a synonym, describing what human
nature is and what divine nature is not. Dolidze assesses that τροπή is a more intense term than

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37 Antirrh. GNO 3.1.160.
38 Meredith underscores the importance of these three points to Gregory’s Christology. Anthony Meredith, Gregory
of Nyssa, 48.
39 As many have noticed, Gregory’s Christology can seem inconsistent, particularly from a perspective that reflects
post-Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Daley, however, argues that there is internal coherence within his Christology. Brian
40 De vita Mosis SC 2.29 Translation from Malherbe, 40.
41 See, for example, Cat. or. SC 6.70 (NPNF 5.481); In cant. GNO 6.253.3; Contra Eun. 1 GNO 1.1.435, 1.1.513.
ἀλλοίωσις, indicating a complete transformation, more significant than the change from non-being to being. Gregory’s usage of it in describing his theory on motion shows the earth as an arena of qualitative alteration.\textsuperscript{42} Likewise, μεταβολή (change) covers a wide range of topics in much the same way as the other words discussed. In addition to describing changes humans undergo\textsuperscript{43} and contrasting divine nature,\textsuperscript{44} Gregory uses μεταβολή to describe changes in physical objects and circumstance.\textsuperscript{45} Aristotle defined μεταβολή as a change in substance,\textsuperscript{46} but Gregory clearly uses this word more broadly. Finally, Gregory also uses the word ἀμετάθετος (immovable) to describe the immobility of God,\textsuperscript{47} but also uses it in more mundane contexts, such as describing oaths and virtue as being immovable.\textsuperscript{48} This range of vocabulary draws a series of contrasts between divine and human, showing humanity that is subject to biological, temporal, and moral changes and a divine being that is steady and firm.

While the vocabulary used in reference to divine motion underscores God’s immutability, a number of images and metaphors of the divine imply motion. God’s actions in creating and sustaining creation are the source of a number of these images. For example, in explaining what it means for humans to be created in the image of God, Gregory describes God as an artist who uses virtue rather than paint as a medium: “As then painters transfer human forms to their pictures by the means of certain colours…our Maker also, painting the portrait to resemble His own beauty, by the addition of virtues, as it were with colours, shows in us His own

\textsuperscript{42} Dolidze, “Der κίνησις-Begriff,” 428.
\textsuperscript{43} De hom. opif. PG 44.205.39.
\textsuperscript{44} Contra Eun. 3 GNO 2.3.6.76.7; De orat. dom. Ochler 256.9.
\textsuperscript{45} In eccles. GNO 5.286.8, De beat. PG 44.1224.27, respectively.
\textsuperscript{46} Hallman, The Coming of the Impassible God, 17.
\textsuperscript{47} Contra Eun. 3 GNO 2.3.10.17.9; In insc. pss. GNO 5.46.6.
\textsuperscript{48} In cant. GNO 6.375.3, In eccles. GNO 5.289.2, respectively.
The relationship between artist and art is an intimate one and imagining God in this way, applying virtue in different tints and shades, demonstrates the careful and precise motion of God in creating. Beyond creating, Gregory describes God with similar intimacy in sustaining the world. Gregory asserts throughout his corpus that all living things exist because of God’s power. He states this succinctly in In cant., “The earth is sustained by God who embraces it. He changes the functions of the stars above. He sustains the great variety of living beings…All these manifest God’s power.” The sustenance of God is here pictured as God embracing creation, another intimate image of divinity in action.

In addition to implying motion in his own images of God, Gregory also has to explain scriptural accounts of God moving. He notes, for example, in De beat. that Phineas “appeased the wrath of God which had been stirred up (κινηθεὶσαν) against the people.” As I will discuss later, Gregory regularly describes emotion in terms of κίνησις, with one of the words for emotion being κίνημα, a cognate of κίνησις. Describing God as having changing emotions presents a problem with the aforementioned discussion of the immutability of God. God cannot be both immutable and have changing emotions, and yet scripture implies that he does.

Elsewhere, Gregory addresses a more detailed description of scriptural divine motion in the Exodus account of God covering Moses with his hand and passing in front of him. In the story, God agrees to show himself to Moses, given that Moses hides in a rock while God covers the rock with his hand and passes by. Then God will remove his hand so that Moses can view his back, for no one can see the face of God and live. This motion of God covering and moving

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49 De hom. opif. PG 44.137.5-13. Translation from NPNF 5.391.
50 In cant. GNO 6.335.5-11. Translation from McCambley, 207.
51 De beat. PG 44.1276.11-13. Translation from Hall, 72.
presents the same problem with scripture describing something that cannot be properly true of an immutable God. Gregory’s interpretation of this passage is instructive of his view on scriptural motion in general as well as his own use of images and metaphors that imply divine motion. In *De vita Mosis* Gregory explains that the covering and moving are not to be taken literally because doing so would lead to an “absurd conclusion,” namely that God has a physical body with a front and a back. Rather, he says, God’s covering Moses and passing by him are symbols of help and guidance to the one who follows after God. Thus the motion of God described in scripture is, for Gregory, symbolic of God’s interaction with people rather than a literal account of moving.

Gregory addresses scriptural accounts of divine motion in a more general sense in *Contra Eunomium*, acknowledging that scripture describes God as being angry, changing his mind, arising from sleep, “sitting, standing, moving, and many such things which do not naturally belong to God.” The purpose for this, according to Gregory is educational, providing motivation to those who read about God. For example, an angry God inspires fear in those who are not living correctly, God changing his mind reminds readers that their prosperity may not continue, and a walking God encourages people that God is with those who move toward the good. In all cases, accounts of God moving do not refer to literal motion, “but have their uses in meeting the needs of those being educated.” In both scriptural accounts and in his own writing, describing God in motion is a pedagogical tool for the spiritual improvement of the readers.

52 *De vita Mosis* SC 1.2.222.
51 *De vita Mosis* SC 1.2.249-252.
54 *Contra Eun. 2 GNO* 1.2.1.424. Translation from Hall, 155.
55 *Contra Eun. 2 GNO* 1.2.1.424. Translation from Hall, 155.
Although not describing God literally, these images and metaphors provide readers with a way to contemplate God in terms they understand and increase their ability to follow God.

Immutability is an attribute of God that Gregory uses to emphasize the contrast between the uncreated divine and the created order, extending the contrast through physical and biological motion to moral and spiritual motion. Gregory uses this contrast to place motion firmly in the realm of the created, insisting that properly speaking, God is immutable. When he diverges from this rule by using images and metaphors that describe God in motion, it is for the education of the readers, taking into account the kinetic nature of humanity. Having established this prerequisite for discussing how motion applies to the uncreated, I now move to more technical instances in which Gregory does use *kinesis* to describe the divine.

**Divine Motion and the Trinitarian Controversy**

Even with pedagogic license for metaphors that involve God’s motion and allowance for non-literal interpretation of scripture, questions about how an immutable God can create and sustain still prick the mind of the reader. Further light is shed on how Gregory understands this in his argument with Eunomius on the nature of the Trinity. Gregory’s controversy with Eunomius came in the decades after the council of Nicaea in 325 as groups continued to debate the grammar of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Eunomius and his precursor, Aetius, emerged as the key proponents of the Heterousian party, which held that the Father and the Son were unlike in essence (*ousia*). Eunomius became bishop of Cyzicus in 360, but later left it and founded a church in line with their Heterousian position. According to Meredith’s chronology, Eunomius likely penned his *Apology* sometime around or shortly after 360, in which

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56 Lewis Ayers, *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 144-149. Ayers also notes that this group is sometimes referred to as “neo-Arian” or “Anomoian,” but the term “Heterousian” is more precise in indicating their position.
he argues for the distinctness of the Son and Father and the Son’s subordination. Eunomius places considerable weight on the notion of the Father as ingenerate or unbegotten, a characteristic he claims explains the essence of the Father.

Basil’s *Contra Eunomium* followed a few years later in 363 or 364, discussing the nature of the Trinity and the ability of human language to describe it. Eunomius then wrote a defense in response to Basil in 378, his *Apologia apologiae*. By this time, Basil was not in a condition to respond and Gregory took this project on in his three volume *Contra Eunomius* while in Constantinople in 380-1. Gregory found the Eunomian understanding that the Father and the Son have different essences to be particularly dangerous and this fundamental disagreement is at the heart of Gregory’s response to Eunomius. One of Gregory’s concerns in this exchange is to preserve the dignity of the Son, which he thinks Eunomius maligns in making the Son subordinate to the Father. As an outgrowth of the conflict about the relationship between Father and Son, a number of points of Gregory’s thought that come up in this study arise, including the nature of thought, language, and time.

On several occasions in *Contra Eun.*, Gregory makes a correlation between motion and the activity (ἐνέργεια) of God. In these discussions, Gregory’s purpose is to demonstrate that Eunomius brings motion into the being of the Trinity and by doing so, denigrates the Son and the Spirit. In order to understand Gregory’s accusation, it will be helpful to first examine the position of Eunomius. Radde-Gallwitz presents two theses regarding Eunomius’ thought that are helpful in understanding the disagreement between Eunomius and Gregory. First, Eunomius’ primary concern is theological epistemology, knowledge of God, which for Eunomius, must be

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knowledge of God’s essence. Secondly, God is a single simple entity, which Eunomius takes to mean that God’s essence and God’s attributes are identical. As a result, all terms that apply to God must not only refer to the same being, but must actually be linguistically synonymous. “Light,” for example, must have the same meaning as “ingenerate.” Since “ingenerate” is synonymous with God’s essence, the Father must by definition have a different essence from the Son, who is “generate.”

These ideas create friction with Gregory who believes that God’s essence is not fully knowable and that while God’s activities (ἐνέργεια) are not identical to God’s essence, they do provide an avenue for some knowledge about God. Furthermore, Gregory understands Father, Son, and Spirit as having the same essence and sees Eunomius’ separation of their essences as degrading to the Son and the Spirit. Eunomius is committed to the primacy of God the Father, while Gregory emphasizes unity amongst the Trinity. As Barnes explains, while Eunomius uses moral and political language to describe a hierarchical relationship between the Father and the Son, Gregory uses language of ontological unity to describe their equality. For Eunomius, the Father commands and the Son obeys; for Gregory, Father and Son share a unity like that of fire and heat.

Maintaining an appropriate relationship between the essence (οὐσία) and the activity (ἐνέργεια) of God is significant to Gregory’s understanding of the divine. The essence of God is the actual divine being, which humans are not capable of knowing or understanding. God’s activities, rather, are the starting place for human knowledge of God. The scope of divine activity

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includes specific acts of God working in the world (such as creation) and “more generalized modes of acting (or, as we would say, characteristics displayed in acting) such as divine wisdom, power, and goodness.”

According to Bradshaw, Aristotle and Plotinus understood activities as constituting essence, but Gregory (as well as his brother Basil and Gregory Nazianzus) diverts from the concept. For Gregory, God’s activities are neither synonymous with nor entirely unrelated to God’s being. The two are related in a causal structure that Barnes outlines, moving from God’s essence or being (οὐσία) to power (δύναμις) to activity (ἐνέργεια) to works (ἔργα).

In order for a work of God to exist, it must be a result of an activity that in turn comes from a power or capacity of God. God’s activities, then, are not the same as the essence of God, but neither are they divorced from it, as it is through the activities that humans can know something about the essence of God. Since humans cannot grasp the essence of God, it is activities that provide the window to God.

One of Gregory’s concerns in maintaining a separation between essence and activity is to preserve the unknowability of God’s essence. The divine activities manifest and reveal God’s being, but they are not necessary or synonymous with it. While activity does not constitute being, neither can the two be completely separated. Gregory distinguishes himself from Aristotle and Plotinus by separating the essence and the activities, emphasizing that they are not identical, but he calls for more connection between the two than does Eunomius. The activities cannot merely “accompany” (ἕπονται) the being (as Eunomius says) because it is not possible to detach the two from each other. Gregory gives as examples a metal worker and a builder, explaining

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61 David Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 170.
63 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 169-170. See also Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.372-373.
that the concept of each of these contains both the one doing the work and the product itself. Removing either component would render the other non-existent; without a building there is no builder and vice-versa.\textsuperscript{64} For Gregory, an activity of God must bear relation to essence in order to make sense of calling it an activity. How can creation be called creation if it has no real connection with the Creator?

Tollefsen makes two further points about Gregory’s understanding of essence and activity that are instructive.\textsuperscript{65} First, activity is “not some separate reality occurring ‘between’ the cause and the effect,” a move Gregory accuses Eunomius of making. Gregory specifically objects to an activity being something that comes between the Father and the Son. Furthermore, activity cannot be totally removed from essence because it remains with the result of the activity as an imprint of actor.\textsuperscript{66} A piece of art, for examples, bears the imprint of the artist. While the essence of God is more than the sum of the activities, the activities cannot be separated from the actor, as they bear the divine mark and reveal something of its essence.

Eunomius, on the other hand, focuses on the separation of divine activity and essence, holding that since the divine essence is eternal and its activities are not, they cannot be connected.\textsuperscript{67} He focuses, rather, on the hierarchical structure from being to activity, saying that sequence indicates rank. Gregory rejects his understanding of sequence and rank and posits instead his theology of connatural powers. For Gregory, similarity in capacity or power indicates

\textsuperscript{64} Contra Eun. I GNO 1.1.207-210 (Hall, 65).
\textsuperscript{66} Tollefsen, “Essence and Activity, 440.
\textsuperscript{67} Barnes, The Power of God, 189-191.
similarity in essence. Activities demonstrate something about essence, but the true indicator of essence is power. So, for Gregory, power (δύναμις) is a capacity that reflects the essence (οὐσία) and enables the activity (ἐνέργεια). The activity retains an imprint of the divine, but does not contain the fullness of the divine essence.

These differences between Eunomius and Gregory further come to the foreground in Gregory’s references to how motion fits into this schema. Gregory does not use language of motion to apply to the essence of God, but he does use it to discuss God’s activities. In a discussion about whether an activity can be separated from an actor Gregory says, “…the one who speaks of the activity (ἐνέργειαν) comprehends in the word whatever is active in it (τὸ κατ’ αὐτὴν κινούμενον), and the one who mentions the agent, precisely by what he leaves unsaid, indicates also the activity,” and in the following paragraph he writes, “So if the two are conceived together, the activity (ἐνέργεια) itself and the one who performs the action (ὁ κατ’ αὐτὴν κινούμενος)…” In both examples, Gregory uses ἐνέργεια to describe the activity and a participle form of κινέω to describe the one performing, or “moving”, the activity, thus demonstrating a connection between motion and activity.

Although Gregory finds it appropriate to label the activities of God as motion, it is problematic for him that Eunomius describes the generation of the Son by the Father as one of these activities. He accuses Eunomius of maligning the Son by making him the result of one of the Father’s activities. According to Eunomius, the generation of the Son is as follows: the Father uses part of his power to set an activity in motion. The activity produces a work to match

69 *Contra Eun. 1 GNO* 1.1.1.209. Translation from Hall, 65.
70 *Contra Eun. 1 GNO* 1.1.1.211. Translation from Hall, 65.
itself, in this case, the Son.\textsuperscript{71} Gregory likens the process to a leatherworker cutting out a piece of leather with a tool. A circular-shaped blade cuts a circular hole in the leather, a shape that is defined by the tool. Gregory’s problem with this chain of events is that it makes an activity of God prior to the Son; in the analogy, the blade is prior to finished product, positioning the activity as something separate that exists between the cause and effect. This activity, which Gregory calls “a kind of quasi-substantial power, which subsists by itself and apparently operates by voluntary motion” is the “father to the Lord.”\textsuperscript{72} In Gregory’s assessment, Eunomius degrades the Son by making him a product of motion.

Gregory makes a similar argument in \textit{Contra Eun. II}, relating to the notion that the Son was generated as a result of activity. Here he notes that an activity cannot exist by itself without a passive agent: “an activity that brings something into effect cannot subsist simply by itself, without any recipient of the movement (κίνησιν) which action causes…”\textsuperscript{73} He uses as an example a smith who does not exist as a smith without some material to work on. Gregory’s problem with this notion, once again, is what results when this relationship is applied to the Father and the Son. If the Son is a result of an activity of the Father, then that makes the Son a passive agent, “…then the Only-begotten Son is shown thereby to be passive, shaped in accordance with the active motion (κίνησιν) which constitutes him…if one defines the fatherhood as an activity, of necessity one may not describe the being of the Son except as a passive material thoroughly worked upon.”\textsuperscript{74} For Gregory, the result of the Son being a passive

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Contra Eun. I GNO} 1.1.1.242-244.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Contra Eun. I GNO} 1.1.1.245-247. Translation from Hall, 71.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Contra Eun. II GNO} 1.2.1.372. Translation from Hall, 143.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Contra Eun. I GNO} 1.2.1.373-374. Translation from Hall, 143.
material would be that he could not be considered impassible and therefore not truly God. By making the Son subject to motion, Gregory accuses Eunomius of denigrating him.

Gregory also objects to Eunomius’ presentation of the Son’s generation because it is the same process by which everything else in creation was made. For Gregory, if the Son and the rest of creation were generated in the same way, then “there is no difference between the Lord himself and the things that were made by him, save the difference in respect of order.”75 One problem with this assessment is that it makes the Son’s nature mutable, “moved (κινούμενον) either way at will,” and opens up the possibility that the Son is equal to the angels and could fall, as some angels did.76 In this section of text, Gregory accuses Eunomius of debasing the Son by making motion part of his essence.

Having demonstrated that Gregory attributes motion to the divine activities, but not the divine essence, it remains to discuss the position of divine power as it relates to motion. In the above scheme for how divine activity comes to be, power (δύναμις) comes between essence (οὐσία) and activity (ἐνέργεια). Power, in this scheme, is a capacity to enact something and, as Barnes has identified, can either refer to the capacity that is most characteristic of a particular entity (e.g. heat to fire) or any number of secondary capacities an entity may possess (e.g. dryness or perpetual motion of fire). God’s primary power, for Gregory, is the capacity to create.77 Several of Gregory’s writings explore the role of power in divine activity and the relationship between power and motion.

75 Contra Eun. 3 GNO 2.3.2.33. Translation from NPNF 5.156.
76 Contra Eun. 3 GNO 2.3.2.39 Translation from NPNF 5.156.
In *Ad Ablabium*, perhaps written around 377-8, Gregory attempts to explain why we can speak of Father, Son, and Spirit as one God rather than three. In the course of this argument, he proposes that divine nature shares a unity that human nature does not. All divine activity is equally enacted and completed by all three persons of the Trinity and no divine activity is the sole responsibility of Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. In the context of explaining that Father, Son, and Spirit are always mutually engaged in activity, he briefly refers to the process of creation. Explaining 1 Corinthians 12:11, “The one and the same Spirit distributes gifts to every one individually,” he writes, “The movement (κίνησις) of good from the Spirit is not without beginning. We find that the power (δύναμις), which we consider as being before this movement, who is the Only Begotten God, creates everything. Also, the source of all good comes from the Father’s will.” Gregory asserts in this passage that divine power, which in this case is the power to create and distribute gifts, is prior to the divine motion. In the being-power-activity-works schema, then, motion is not the same as power itself, but is subsequent to it. Using the above schema of causation, motion is not properly considered to be part of the divine power (as it not part of the divine essence), but still remains within the realm of divine activity.

Gregory is clear, however, that the motion existing within creation depends on divine power. In arguing that the beauty and complexity of creation points to the existence of a Creator, Gregory notes, “For nothing in us is ungoverned or self-moving (αὐτοκίνητον) or self-sufficient,

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78 For discussion of dating this work, see Lucian Turcescu, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Concept of Divine Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63-64.


80 It is also notable that in this passage Gregory equates power with the second person of the Trinity, a move that Barnes notes is common of Gregory’s later works. Barnes treats this topic in *The Power of God*, 291-296.
but every visible thing about us, every perceptible thing, depends upon the sublime and ineffable Power.”\textsuperscript{81} He makes a similar point in \textit{De anima}, arguing that the motion of the cosmos, among other aspects of creation, points to the existence of “a divine power, skillful and wise, appearing in these things, going through everything, harmonizing the parts with the whole and completing the whole in the parts and governing everything with a single power…”\textsuperscript{82} Both of these passages underscore a reciprocal relationship between divine power and motion. As discussed above, divine power is most often in Gregory the capacity to create, but here the definition expands to include the capacity to sustain the motion of creation. The motion of creation, in turn, reveals the divine power to the one who observes creation because, in Gregory’s logic, it would not be possible for all the complex and perpetual motion of creation to sustain itself.

Finally, it seems a unique property of divine power that it has the ability to move something against its own nature, a feature that is especially important in the incarnation. Gregory adopts the Aristotelian notion that objects tend to move according to their own natures: fire flames upward and streams run downhill. Moving in this manner is neither noteworthy nor admirable, but it would be particularly miraculous if an object were to move against its own nature, if fire were to flame downward or a stream run uphill, for example. Moving against nature is one image Gregory uses to explain the incarnation of Christ: “But this His descent to the humility of man is a kind of superabundant exercise of power, which thus finds no check

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Contra Eun.} 2 GNO 1.2.1.224. Translation from Hall, 108.

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{De anima} PG 46.28.5-9. Translation from Callahan, 204.
even in directions which contravene nature.”

It is not the great wonders of creation that best demonstrate the strength of divine power, but the descent of Christ from divine nature to human nature that is most miraculous. Divine power, then, is prior to the motion itself; it is the capacity to create and sustain, a particularly potent capacity, as it is the only one strong enough to perform the miracle of moving something against its own nature.

Like power, will (βολή) of God to act exists within the Trinity, but does not constitute motion in the essence of God. Firstly, the will of God is shared between all three persons, with no motion of the will from Father to Son to Holy Spirit. Gregory argues in *Ad Abl.* that one reason the Trinity should not be considered three gods is because they share the same will: “there is no real or theoretical extension in the movement of the divine will from the Father through the Son to the Holy Spirit.”

The will of God does not move through the persons, but it is simultaneous and shared between them. Elsewhere Gregory uses the example of a reflection in a mirror to illustrate this concept. Just as the reflection in a mirror does not move by itself, so the Son does not move without the Father, but if the Father does move, then the Son moves immediately and directly.

Secondly, Gregory points out that there is no delay between God’s will to move and the motion itself. The choice to move and the motion happen instantaneously, as Gregory says is the case with the will to see something and actually seeing it. When one makes the choice to see what one is looking at, there is no delay to the act of sight, even though the will to see is an act of

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83 *Cat. or. SC* 24.14-16. Translation from *NPNF* 5.494. Gregory makes a similar point in *Contra Eun. 3* GNO 2.3.3.34.

84 *Ad Abl.* GNO 3.51.19-21. Translation from Pochoshajew, 56.

85 *Contra Eun. 2* GNO 1.2.1.215.
choice and seeing is an operation of nature. Both of these points about the will of God indicate that while the will is present in the activity of God, it constitutes motion neither between the persons of the Trinity nor delay in the motion itself taking place.

It is clear that Gregory confines motion to certain aspects of divinity, specifically avoiding any indication of ascribing motion to the essence of God—Father, Son, or Spirit. To describe the essence of God as moving, as Eunomius does, presumes that one can know the essence of God and leads to the degradation of the Son. Divine power, which is closely associated with essence also cannot be properly described as moving. Motion, rather, belongs to the activities of God, which differ from the divine essence, but share a close relationship to the divine and bear the divine imprint. It is to the activities of motion that I now turn.

**Created Motion**

Two concepts form the framework for the created order in Gregory: diastema (διάστημα) and kinesis. The diastema is the interval or space that is the container for creation, the extension of time and space that provide the boundaries for the created order. Vladimir Cvetkovic outlines two components of diastema that define creation, one is temporal and the other ontological. The temporal border of diastema sets the stage for all of creation between the

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86 Contra Eun. 3 GNO 2.3.6.20 (NPNF 5.203).

87 This is a reading of Gregory developed by Scot Douglass, *Theology of The Gap: Cappadocian Language Theory and the Trinitarian Controversy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005). While he uses these two concepts to provide the framework for his discussion on language, they are useful for describing Gregory’s presentation of the created order in general.

88 Gregory was not the first to use this term as a theological one. Balthasar first suggested that he adopted this term from the Stoics. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*. Verghese outlines the important facets of Gregory’s understanding of the concept in T. Paul Verghese, “Διάστημα and Διάστασις in Gregory of Nyssa,” 243-260. Cvetkovic lists Methodius, Neoplatonists, and anti-Arian polemics, among others, as possible sources for Gregory’s use of this term. Vladimir Cvetkovic, “St. Gregory’s Argument Concerning the Lack of Διάστημα in the Divine Activities from Ad Ablabium,” 369-382. Cvetkovic assesses that by the time Gregory used this term, it was a well-established technical term in the anti-Arian and anti-Anomean debates.
beginning of time and the second coming of Christ, which represents the end of time. All of creation occurs in a sequence, stretched out between two poles. The ontological aspect of diastema refers to the gap, or separation, between the created order and the Trinity. Created things exist in this diastema, within the space of time and with a permanent ontological gap between themselves and the uncreated Trinity.89

Diastema, then, is the receptacle for all created things, which are firmly encased within its borders.90 Outside these limits of space and time is God, who is not confined by these limits: “But the transcendent and blessed life, having no accompanying timespan (διαστήματος), has nothing to measure or assess it. All originated things, being circumscribed by their own limits, are confined to their appropriate size by a sort of boundary as it pleased the wisdom of their Creator, in order to fit the design of the whole.”91 God does not have boundaries, and there exists no diastema within God or between the persons of the Trinity.92

Besides providing spatial and temporal boundaries, the diastema represents the boundary of human reason:

For example, in the contemplation of what is, creation is compelled to go beyond the concept of extension (τὴν διαστηματικὴν ἔννοιαν), yet it does not get beyond it. Together with every concept it thinks of, it surely envisages, comprehended at the same time as the being of what is conceived, its extension (διάστημα); but extension (διάστημα) is nothing but a creature (ἡ κτίσις).93 Yet that Good which we have learned to seek and to guard, and which we are advised to grasp and cling to, being above creation, is above

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90 Callahan notes that Gregory adopts the notion of a receptacle from Plato’s Timeaus, where it is applied to space, but not time. J.F. Callahan, “Greek Philosophy and Cappadocian Cosmology,” 29-57.
91 Contra Eun. 1 GNO 1.1.1.366. Translation from Hall, 89.
92 Verghese, “Διάστημα and Διάστασις,” 249-251. The fact that God has no diastema within Godself represents a problem for some in distinguishing between persons of the Trinity. Cvetkovic attributes Gregory with advancing the resolution to this problem by attributing the difference between the persons to the doctrine of divine generation. Cvetkovic, “St. Gregory’s Argument,” 377-382.
93 Douglass translates this, “diastema is nothing other than creation itself.” Douglass, Theology of the Gap, 40.
comprehension. How could our understanding, which moves about within extended space (τῇ διαστηματικῇ παρατάσει), comprehend what has no extension (τὴν ἀδιάστατον φύσιν)?

Because humans are encased within the limits of the *diastema*, it is impossible to gain a perspective that its outside of space and time. Gregory says trying to do this is like a climber standing on the overhang of a sheer cliff and putting a toe over the ridge to feel what is below: “Having nothing to catch hold of, neither place, nor time, nor space, nor anything else of the kind which offers a foothold to our intellect, but slipping in all directions from what it cannot grasp…” Humans, then, by virtue of being part of creation, are separated even from contemplation of God by the limits of time, space, and place, that characterize the created world.

Within the boundaries of the *diastema*, *kinesis* exists and acts as a necessary component of the created world. The concept of *kinesis* in creation contrasts with the immutability of God discussed above in that all of creation is imbued with motion from its inception. In the opening paragraphs of *De hom. opif.*, while describing the creation of the cosmos, Gregory follows Aristotle in asserting the presence of motion and rest in all natural things, saying “all things that are seen in the creation are the offspring of rest and motion, brought into being by the Divine will.” God instilled motion in every created thing and motion in some form remains a central feature of creation, as Gregory later affirms in the same treatise, saying, “…created nature cannot exist without change; for its very passage from non-existence to existence is a certain motion and

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94 *In Eccles. GNO* 5.412.10-19. Translation from Hall, 125.
95 *In Eccles. GNO* 5.414.2-5. Translation from Hall, 125-126.
96 *De opif. hom. PG* 44.129.5. Translation from *NPNF* 5.389. See Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity*, 122-123 for Aristotle on celestial motion.
change of the non-existent transmuted by the Divine purpose into being.” Motion characterizes the existence of creation in part because the act of changing from non-existence to existence is a type of motion.

_Diastema_ is the stage of the created world and _kinesis_ is the medium of all the action that takes place in it. In addition to the constant motion of physical objects, motion is such a central category to Gregory that he conceives of motion as applying to non-physical concepts as well. Thought, language, will, virtue, sin, and human nature all move as though they were physical objects. Human nature, for example, moves on a vertical plane: “For in us there is a dual nature. One is fine and intelligent and light, while the other is coarse and material and heavy…For that in us which is intelligent and light has its native course upwards, but the heavy and material is ever borne and ever flows downwards.” Gregory conceives of even an abstract concept such as human nature in terms of motion.

Motion is a characteristic, defining concept for everything within the created order, permeating the realms of the physical and intelligible and extending even into the afterlife. To the degree that motion is characteristic of what is created, it is absolutely excluded from the essence of the uncreated, which does not move or change. Asserting God’s immutability, however, raised questions regarding how to reconcile scriptural accounts in which God appears to move, which Gregory addressed by pointing out the non-literal nature of certain scriptural passages and the pedagogic value of speaking of God in understandable human terms. A firm commitment to divine immutability may also seem at odds with a God who creates and sustains,

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97 _De hom. opif. PG_ 44.184.43. Translation from _NPNF_ 5.405. He makes a very similar statement in _Cat. or. 6.69-71 (NPNF 5.481)._

98 _In cant. GNO_ 6.345. Translation from Norris, 365.
and to clarify how God can be both unmoving and creative, Gregory explains that motion is confined to the *energeia* of God and is not a part of the divine essence. Activities of God reflect the divine essence and bear its imprint, but they are not the same as the essence, which is not fully knowable to humans.

To the anthropological discussion that will follow, divine immutability is important prolegomena. The stage of the created world is set with motion coursing through it, but God remains outside space and time that contains motion, both intelligible and sensible. God creates and sustains, but God is not a part of creation and Gregory goes to considerable lengths to protect the distinction between divine and human. Having emphasized God’s role as immutable, we turn to a world filled with motion.
Chapter 2

Sensible Motion

Perhaps the easiest place to start in a world defined by motion is with motion that one can observe with the senses. While one cannot see or feel the motion of thought or spiritual ascent, topics that I will discuss in later chapters, the motions of the planets, the elements, and human bodies are immediately observable. Gregory has a keen skill for observing motion and melding his observations with his philosophic and religious commitments. The result is that looking closely at Gregory’s account of motion in the world around him can shed light on how he sees the world as a whole and the place of people within it. Specifically, the way Gregory discusses motion in these areas gives further proof that motion is a mark of being created and that physical embodiment has lasting impact on the person as a whole. Before beginning this examination, however, it will be instructive to briefly consider Gregory’s division of sensible and intelligible.

In his taxonomy of existence, Gregory categorizes everything that is created as either sensible or intelligible, noting that this is the most important distinction between beings.¹ This notion of dividing reality into these two parts was initially presented by Plato in the *Timeaus* and developed through other philosophers before Gregory picks up the idea.² For Gregory, the sensible are those things that one can learn about through bodily senses and the intelligible are things that are beyond bodily sensation and must be perceived by the mind. Gregory explains the

¹ *Contra Eun. 1* GNO 1.1.1.270.

differences between these two categories several times in his corpus, repeating each time the basic definition of sensible and intelligible and sometimes adding more explanation. In *Contra Eun.*, he adds that the sensible are those things that have quantity and quality, and in *Cat. or.* he emphasizes the difference between the two categories, noting that intelligibles are bodiless, impalpable, and figureless while sensibles are the opposite, bounded by what the senses can perceive. In *In cant.* he further explains that the intelligible is unlimited, having a starting point, but no ending point and, therefore, infinite potential for growth toward the good. Norris points out that Gregory’s concept of intelligible and sensible differs from Plato’s in that Gregory does not equate the two categories with being and becoming, as Plato did. Also, Gregory divides the intelligible category into created and uncreated, reserving for God some of the qualities that Plato associated with all intelligibles.

Since, as examined in the previous chapter, all created things move, this chapter will be an examination of the motion of things that fall into the sensible category, things that one can perceive by sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, including the motion of the cosmos and the elements, motion of human bodies, and the motion of time. I will examine how these things move and how that motion informs Gregory’s picture of the human person. Although Gregory is quite emphatic about the division between sensible and intelligible, I will also claim that there is considerable overlap between the two categories and several types of motion do not fit neatly into either of the two categories.

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3 *Contra Eun.* I GNO 1.1.1.272.

4 *Cat. or. SC* 6 (NPNF 5.480).


Motion of the cosmos and the physical world

In Gregory’s writing, observations about sensible motion can be gleaned from discussions about the cosmos and the elements. In these discussions, Gregory is typically not concerned with sensible motion per se, but is using planetary or elemental motion as an illustration for another topic. Looking at both the content and the broader context of these mentions of cosmic motion can aid the discovery of how Gregory understood sensible motion. The first passage to examine on this topic is at the beginning of De hom opif., when Gregory describes the creation of the heavens and the earth as prolegomena to the topic of this treatise, the creation of humankind. Since this section is a preface to the main topic of the treatise and since Gregory is writing a sequel of sorts to Basil’s Hexaemeron, in which Basil covered the creation of the world, Gregory’s description in this section is quite compact. His description of the natural world, however, is significantly influenced by Aristotle. According to Aristotle, the world is composed of the four elements: earth, water, air, fire, and a fifth element, aether, which was the substance of the celestial bodies. Each element has particular properties and manners of motion. Earth is the element associated with heaviness and downward motion and fire, the opposite of earth, is associated with lightness and upward motion. Water and air are intermediate elements, sometimes acting as heavy and sometimes acting as light bodies, as with evaporation and condensation. An object is considered a natural object if it has an internal source of motion, as earth moves down and fire moves up, all natural objects moving toward their places of rest or

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7 This section concerns De hom. opif. PG 44.128.32-44.132.3 (NPNF 5.388-389).
8 Gregory rejects the existence of a 5th element along with the Stoics. See Jean Daniélou, L’être et Le Temps Chez Grégoire de Nysse (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 79.
fulfillment. The heavens, composed of the element aether, are characterized by regular, perpetual, circular motion. The perpetual motion of the heavens is contrasted with terrestrial motion, which is linear and is not perpetual as it is moving toward the place where it can rest.

The arrangement of the cosmos Gregory presents in the opening of De hom. opif. as he describes how the creation all works together is significantly influenced by Aristotle’s account, particularly concerning the elements and properties of motion. The motions of the heavens and the earth work in a mutually beneficial way as the rapid and perpetual motion of the heavens compresses the earth while the stability of the earth enables the rotation of the heavens. The motion of the heavens does not move the earth and the steadiness of the earth does not slow down the rotation of the heavens. After setting the stage with the arrangement of the heavens and the earth, Gregory moves on to the composition of things on earth. Mixing of opposites figures prominently in the next paragraphs as Gregory describes how created beings take on qualities of the opposing elements. The opposite natures of heaven and earth are woven together in the creation of other objects, which take on qualities of the elements of which they are composed. In this discussion of opposing qualities, the quality he is most concerned with as characteristic of an object is its type of motion. Air, for example, is like fire in its lightness and perpetual motion, but it is not so much like fire as to be completely divorced from earth. Likewise, water, is heavy like earth, but it has a fluid motion which is like the lighter elements. Gregory goes onto say that even the opposing elements themselves have some things in common because all of them change, and change is a kind of motion.

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9 Sambursky, The Physical World of Late Antiquity, 1, 62-3.
10 Sambursky, The Physical World of Late Antiquity, 122-3.
In adopting Aristotle’s view of the natural world, Gregory does not merely state his agreement with the accepted cosmology of his time, he also weaves into these paragraphs ideas about how philosophy fits with the scriptural account and about the moral significance of the arrangement of the natural world. Because Gregory understands scripture to be inspired by God and containing truth, his philosophic commitments are secondary to his commitment to scripture.\footnote{See Morwenna Ludlow, “Theology and Allegory: Origen and Gregory of Nyssa on the Unity and Diversity of Scripture,” International Journal of Systematic Theology 4 (2002): 45-66, at 53. A number of studies have been done on Gregory of Nyssa as an exegete. Important facets of Gregory’s approach to scripture are his approach to allegorical interpretation, the importance of sequence (\textit{akolouthia}) in interpretation, and the limitations of human language. In addition to the above article, see Monique Alexandre, “La Théorie de l’Exégèse dans le \textit{De hominis opificio} et l’\textit{In Hexaemeron},” in Écriture et Culture Philosophique Dans La Pensée De Grégoire De Nyssse, ed. Marguerite Harl (Leiden: Brill, 1971) 87-110; Mariette Canévet, \textit{Grégoire de Nyssse et l’Herméneutique Biblique} (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1983); Norris, \textit{Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs} (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), xxiii-liv.}

Gregory takes the opening verse of Genesis, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” to indicate that the rest and motion characteristic of the heavens and the earth are the foundation for the type of motion that exist in all things created subsequently.\footnote{\textit{De hom. opif. PG} 44.129.1-7 (\textit{NPNF} 5:389). Gregory states elsewhere that the phrase “in the beginning” does not indicate a temporal beginning, as all beings were established at once by God. See also \textit{Apol. in hex. PG} 44.72.} In addition to understanding scripture as a framework for his philosophic commitments, he sees the motion of the cosmos and the elements as having a theological purpose. The elemental mixture of opposites described above causes all created things to have some connection with each other and all to be distinct from God:

Hence, the earth is stable without being immutable, while the heaven, on the contrary, as it has no mutability, so has not stability either, that the Divine power, by interweaving change in the stable nature and motion with that which is not subject to change, might, by the interchange of attributes, at once join them both closely to each other, and make them alien from the conception of Deity; for as has been said, neither of these (neither that which is unstable, nor that which is mutable) can be considered to belong to the more Divine nature.\footnote{\textit{De hom. opif. PG} 44.129.50-44.132.3. Translation from \textit{NPNF} 5:389.}
The created elements all have characteristics in common and none share all their characteristics with God, thus keeping people from mistaking created things for God and, in turn, preventing idolatry.

Gregory addresses cosmology and the properties of the elements in much more detail in *Apologia in hexaemeron*, making several more mentions of motion in the sensible world. Written in 379, *Apol. in hex.* begins by indicating the treatise is a response to rejection by some of Basil’s *In Hexaemeron* and Gregory’s own *De hom. opif*. In it, Gregory attempts to answer in more detail questions that remain after the first two treatises. Gregory begins by affirming the inspired nature of the Genesis account of creation and his agreement with Basil’s treatise on the subject, which Gregory esteems as inspired as the Genesis account. The treatise focuses on answering the questions in a way that harmonizes the scriptural account with Gregory’s own philosophic commitments.14

As Gregory works through questions related to the Genesis account of creation, *kinesis* comes up in a few different contexts, usually in reference to how the elements work, the most extensive discussion being on the nature of fire. One of the questions Gregory strives to answer in this text is how an immaterial God created matter.15 He answers this question, in part, by stating that all matter is made up of qualities (e.g. light, heavy, dense, soft) that have a form and are inserted in time. None of these qualities are matter—they exist as ideas in the mind of God—

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15 He has similar discussions of how an immaterial God created matter in *De Anima* *PG* 46.124 and *De hom. opif.* *PG* 44.212-213.
but God combines them in order to compose matter. Gregory suggests that God created the intelligible concepts and set a chain of events in motion that led to the creation of the sensible world. Since Gregory speculates this may be the case, the particular order of events in the creation of the world becomes a significant point of the following sections, as Gregory explains: “Instead, a necessary order of nature follows with regard to the sequence of created beings so that the [Genesis] narrative speaks about each nature which has come into existence. God’s productive words bring each being into existence as befitting him; all are according to a series which are in line with God’s wisdom whose voice is direct.” After emphasizing the importance of the order and sequence of creation, Gregory goes on to describe that sequence in detail.

At the first divine command, “Let there be light,” fire appeared as the source of that light: “For as a whole, and by a single movement (ῥοπή) of the divine will everything came into being and each element was compounded with others; fire dispersed the darkness in every place which

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16 Sorabji notes that while a number of Greek philosophers asked the same question (e.g. Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, Simplicius), Gregory’s answer to the question, that material objects exist as a bundle of ideas in God’s mind, is unique and a precursor to Berkeley’s idealism. Richard Sorabji, Time, Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquities and the Early Middle Ages (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 287-294. Sorabji’s assertion that Gregory was an idealist centuries before Berkeley created some scholarly discussion. For this discussion see Darren Hibbs, “Was Gregory of Nyssa a Berkeleyan Idealist?” British Journal for the History of Philosophy 13, no.3 (2005): 425-435 and Jonathan Hill, “Gregory of Nyssa, Material Substance and Berkeleyan Idealism,” British Journal for the History of Philosophy 17, no.4 (2009): 653-683.

17 Charlotte Köckert explains that Gregory describes the creation of the universe in this work as the planting of a seed. Using the seed metaphor allows for God to create the whole world at once in a potential sense and in an actual sense, the series of events unfolds. She writes: “Applying this model to the generation of the world, Gregory can connect both the concept of an instantaneous and simultaneous creation of the world (καταβολή) and the idea of a successive process of generation (κατασκευή). Thus, he fulfills the expectations which his exegesis of the biblical account of creation had raised: on the one hand he reads the biblical narrative as a successive process of generation; on the other hand he advances a philosophical interpretation the narrative which rejects an anthropomorphic idea of divine action.” Charlotte Köckert, “The Concept of Seed in Christian Cosmology: Gregory of Nyssa, Apologia in Hexaemeron,” Studia Patristica 47 (2010): 27-32, quotation from page 29.

the abundance of matter had kept hidden.\textsuperscript{19} The appearance of fire and light, synonymous in this discussion, is the first event in this series of events Gregory is describing. The notable feature of fire in this section besides its ability to illuminate is its ability to move quickly and easily. In this section, Gregory uses \textit{kinesis} and a couple of its cognates to describe fire, including \textit{εὐκίνητος}\textsuperscript{20} (agile, easily moved, changeable), \textit{ἀεικίνητος}\textsuperscript{21} (perpetually moving), having a \textit{φύσιν κινήσεως}\textsuperscript{22} (mobile nature), and endowed with a \textit{κυκλοειδὴ τὴν κίνησιν} (circular movement).\textsuperscript{23} Fire moves quickly and with ease through the created world, illuminating as it goes.

As an element that can be sensed, fire is part of the sensible world, but it has a kind of intermediate state between intelligible reality and matter because it penetrates and illuminates everything else. Gregory describes fire in the following quotation, which is instructive to quote at length:

Since fire underpins everything, it has shot out like an arrow from the other primal elements and runs on high by reason of its light nature (\textit{τῆς κατὰ φύσιν κινήσεως}), outstripping all other things. Fire passes through perceptible (\textit{αἰσθητὴν}) reality just like thought and does not directly produce motion (\textit{κίνησιν}) since intellectual (\textit{νοητὴς}) creation has nothing in common with that which [is] perceptible (\textit{αἰσθητῶν}), whereas fire is perceptible. Therefore fire has been begotten in the highest realms of creation and is endowed with a circular movement (\textit{κυκλοειδὴ τὴν κίνησιν}). It is conveyed to everything by the underlying power of nature; it does not have a place to which it is immediately conveyed, for all perceptible creation is circumscribed by its own limitations. Having been moved (\textit{κινοῦμενον}), it advances by intellectual (\textit{νοητῆς}) nature, for as we have said earlier, fire does not have the capability to move itself.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Apol. in hex. PG} 44.72.57-44.73.4. Translation from McCambley.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Apol. in hex. PG} 44.73.51, also 44.113.47 and 44.117.43. A few lines previous Gregory uses this same word to describe the divine power.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Apol. in hex. PG} 44.76.41 and 44.80.51.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Apol. in hex. PG} 44.76.53.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Apol. in hex. PG} 44.77.2.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Apol. in hex. PG} 44.76.50-44.77.9. Translation from McCambley.
Because of fire’s mobile nature, it moves through and illuminates everything in the sensible world without itself moving any of the other elements it illuminates. In doing so, fire enables people to “comprehend the firmament, that is, the bounds of matter,” helping them to distinguish between intelligible and sensible. As a created element, fire is part of the sensible world, but it has some connection with the intelligible world, as Gregory indicates in this passage, saying that fire does not move on its own, but is moved by its intellectual nature.

Most of the mentions of motion in Apol. in hex. are in relation to fire, but a few others merit mentioning. The creation of air, Gregory notices, is skipped in the Genesis account of creation. Gregory speculates that this was perhaps the case because of its “supple (μαλακός), pliant (εύεικτος) nature” that has no form or attributes of its own, but makes room for everything around it: “Air by itself is neither luminous or dark; it includes every form, is overcome by every color and accommodates every type of movement (κίνησις).” He later notes that anything that moves can displace air. Both fire and air share a nature that is quickly and easily moved.

Lastly among the created things noted for motion in Apol. in hex. are the stars, which are noted for being both stable and moving. Gregory writes about the stars: “each one has its own place and does not cease its eternal movement (ἀεικίνητος) nor leaves (μετακινέω) its own place. But their stable (ἀκίνητος) order has a nature which perpetually moves (ἀεικίνητος).” The stars

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25 Apol. in hex. PG 44.81.6-7. Translation from McCambley.
26 Apol. in hex. PG 44.88.4-5. Translation from McCambley.
27 Apol. in hex. PG 44.88.11.14. Translation from McCambley.
28 Apol. in hex. PG 44.117.55-59. Translation from McCambley.
are notable for their motion because they move constantly and in a pattern; they are unmoving in the sense that they stay in their place in relation to other cosmic bodies and never move out of the order in which they were put.

Gregory describes the sequence of creation in detail, reconciling the scriptural account with his understanding of the natural world. In describing the mobile nature of fire and air and the perpetual motion of the stars, his primary goal is to show that the sequence of creation in the Genesis account matches the sequence of the creation of elements and cosmos, as he understood it from a philosophical standpoint. In Gregory’s various discussions of the creation account, motion stands out as a notable feature, elements being defined by the how easily and in what direction they move. In these accounts, Gregory does not elaborate on all features of the elements, but he places particular stress on the ways in which the parts of creation move and how their motions synergize with one another to result in an operational and sustained cosmos. The emphasis on motion in Gregory’s discussions on creation suggests again what was discussed in chapter one, namely that motion is a mark of the created.

Two passages referencing the motion of the elements and the cosmos are found in De anima et resurrectione, Gregory’s work on what happens after death. Written in 380, shortly after his sister, Macrina’s, death, Gregory examines his thoughts and emotions about death and resurrection in the style of a Platonic dialogue between himself and his sister. Constructing Macrina after Diotima, the muse of Socrates, Gregory casts Macrina as his teacher, guiding him through his feelings of grief over the death of his brother to hope in the resurrection. Gregory

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29 Although written in the form of a dialogue, the voice of Macrina in the text should not be viewed as the “real Macrina,” as Elizabeth Clark points out, but rather as construction of Gregory. Elizabeth Clark, “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian After the Linguistic Turn,” Church History 67, no. 1 (1998): 1-31.

does not, however, simply put his definitive positions as coming from the mouth of Macrina. Rather, the dialogue format itself allows him to wrestle with his topics and think aloud in his text.\textsuperscript{31}

Early in the dialogue Macrina emphasizes that the harmony of creation points to the existence of a creator. In the description of harmonious creation are the elements that mix together to form the physical world and the movement of the cosmos. All the moving parts of creation that never stop moving or become displaced teach the observer that there is a divine power that permeates creation.\textsuperscript{32} Dolidze identifies two kinds of motion in this passage, the qualitative alteration of the elements, as when they mix to form different substances, and the motion of the heavenly bodies. Tracing the first kind of motion back to Stoic physics, with terminology of harmonic agreement (ἀρμονία) and connection (συνφονία), Dolidze sees Gregory as weighing in on a heated philosophical discussion about whether or not elements were changeable. The Stoics saw the elements as changeable, while their Peripatetic opponents believed only the characteristics of elements change. Plotinus picks up on this debate, asserting that elements and their characteristics are mental images of nature and thus they are changed and at the same time exist unchanged. In this debate, Gregory follows Plotinus.\textsuperscript{33} The second type of motion in this passage, borrowed from Plato’s Timaeus,\textsuperscript{34} is that of the heavenly bodies which always continue to move, never veer off course, never cease to move, and never change places. All these moving pieces complete a working, harmonious whole. Gregory explains the

\textsuperscript{31} For an introduction to scholarly discussion about Macrina, see Morwenna Ludlow, Gregory of Nyssa Ancient and (Post)modern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 202-219.

\textsuperscript{32} De anima PG 46.25.5-46.28.12 (Callahan, 203-4).

\textsuperscript{33} Dolidze, “Der κίνησις-Begriff,” 425-6.

\textsuperscript{34} Dolidze, “Der κίνησις-Begriff,” 426-7.
phenomena of cosmic motion in more detail in *Contra Eun.*, describing a revolving universe with seven inner circles that revolve in the opposite direction of the universe as a whole. Within the inner circles, the planets move in an ellipse and a host of other phenomena, including eclipses, phases of the moon, and the course of the sun all operate flawlessly.\textsuperscript{35}

The descriptions of the cosmic activity in *De anima* and *Contra Eun.* are similar, but Gregory uses them as illustrations for different purposes. In *De anima*, Gregory points out that the harmonious motions of the cosmos indicate a divine power; the mastery and art of the universe can only be the work of a divine being. In *Contra Eun.*, Gregory’s purpose in describing the motion of the cosmos is to question the limits of human knowledge. Much can be learned from observation, but the motion of the cosmos raises many more questions than can be answered by even very intelligent people. If humans cannot even fully understand the movements of the cosmos, how much less can they understand the God who created it?\textsuperscript{36} Despite the different purposes for which Gregory uses examples of motion, the picture continues to emerge of a cosmos in constant motion, marked as a creation and operating harmoniously.

In the second passage in *De anima* about the motion of the cosmos, Gregory explains that by observing the motions of the moon and the sun, one can learn much about them. The waxing and waning of the moon and the phenomenon of eclipses indicate that the moon does not generate its own light, but reflects the light of the sun and that it moves in an orbit around the earth.\textsuperscript{37} Again in this passage, Gregory uses a description of the motion of the heavenly bodies

\textsuperscript{35} *Contra Eun.* 2 GNO 1.2.1.71-78.

\textsuperscript{36} *Contra Eun.* 2 GNO 1.2.1.79.

\textsuperscript{37} Morwenna Ludlow points out that Gregory is not original or particularly up to date in his description of astronomy. Descriptions of the moon’s phases and the sun as the source of light for the moon date back to the Presocratic Anaxagoras. Ptolemy’s second century AD work, furthermore, posited much more complex astronomical observations than the ones Gregory describes. Morwenna Ludlow, “Science and Theology in Gregory
in order to make a point about another topic. In this case, Gregory is discussing the role the senses play in acquiring knowledge, namely that when used judiciously and combined with careful thought, the senses can guide one to further knowledge. Ludlow stresses that in this passage one learns through the senses, by using one’s reason to move through how things appear and understand how they actually are. Those who look at the moon thoughtlessly assume that the light comes from the moon itself, but careful observation combined with reason can lead one to the correct conclusions.

Several of the themes mentioned so far in conjunction with descriptions of cosmic motion come together in a passage in *In inscriptions psalmorum*, one of Gregory’s earlier works, possibly written during his exile between 376-378. Gregory posits in this passage that people find singing the Psalter pleasurable precisely because it is set to music. Since a human is a “miniature cosmos and contains all the elements of the great cosmos,” the cosmic harmony of the universe also applies to the individual person. Gregory then launches into a musical metaphor, comparing the harmony of the universe to a hymn: “Rest (στάσις) and motion (κίνησις) are opposites. They have been combined with one another, however, in the nature of existing things, and an impossible blend of opposites can be seen in them, inasmuch as rest is exhibited in motion and perpetual motion in what is not moved.” He goes on to explain that all

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39 *In insc. pss. GNO* 5.30-32.
41 *In insc. pss. GNO* 5.30. Translation from Heine, 88. Heine notes that the idea of the person as a miniature cosmos was common among the Greeks, first espoused by the presocratic Democritus.
42 *In insc. pss. GNO* 5.31. Translation from Heine, 89.
the heavenly bodies are in perpetual motion, moving in their fixed orbits, but they are stable in the sense that the sequence of their motion is unmoving, as is the fact that they always move in the same way. He concludes saying, “the conjunction, therefore, of that which is at rest with that which is moved, which occurs continually in an ordered and unalterable concord, is a musical harmony which produces a blended and marvelous hymn of the power which controls the universe.”\textsuperscript{43} In terms of information about motion of the physical world, this passage repeats much of the information already covered: the world is composed of the opposites of rest and motion; the concepts of rest and motion are blended in ways so that heavenly bodies are both perpetually moving in that they follow their orbits and unmoving in that their motion never varies; the various combinations of rest and motion result in a universe that has harmonious composition. This passage also resembles the above passages in that in it Gregory uses cosmic and physical motion as an example for a broader point, in this case that the underlying music of the cosmos resonates with the structure of the human person. Because all people have this harmonious structure within them, music, and therefore the music of the psalms, is desirable to them.\textsuperscript{44} Besides again reiterating the constant harmonious motion of the cosmos, this example introduces the connection between the cosmos and human beings, both created and in constant motion.

Before concluding the discussion on cosmic and elemental motion, one more treatise of Gregory’s merits mention. So far, in constructing a framework for how motion operates in the cosmos, the importance and the harmony of motion have become clear. This final example presents a limit to the motion of the cosmos, explaining what the motion of the planets cannot

\textsuperscript{43} In insc. pss. GNO 5.32. Translation from Heine, 90.

\textsuperscript{44} Heine, \textit{Gregory of Nyssa’s Treatise on the Inscriptions on the Psalms}, 12-13.
Contra Fatum is a short work arguing against the belief that the movement of the cosmos in any way predicts or causes earthly events or human behavior. Although Gregory’s cosmology was influenced by Stoicism, as has been discussed above, in this treatise he firmly rejects Stoic determinism.\textsuperscript{45} According to Gregory, those who believe in fate assign to its control wealth and poverty, health and illness, life span, type of death, and various kinds of afflictions and disasters.\textsuperscript{46} Besides a number of logical fallacies Gregory points out concerning the belief in fate, involving oneself its practice creates a number of theological problems, including undermining the power and control of God, denying the importance of free will, and opening up oneself to demonic influence. Gregory argues, for example, that if fate exists, God is not in control: “But if the stars’ movement affirms that destiny governs them with coercion, it would be better to attribute this power to the stars instead of an all-powerful force.”\textsuperscript{47}

This short treatise has numerous references to the motion of the stars and the planets, but little detail about that motion. He does give a brief description of how those who believe in fate say the stars move (i.e. with the light of various stars advancing and retreating as they move in their orbits), but does not indicate whether he ascribes to their account. One of the inconsistencies he finds with the fatalist position is that they elevate one kind of motion in time over another. Both the movement of the stars and birth are kinds of motion marked by time, but his opponent says that only movement of the stars influences fate. Similarly, the motion of rivers is also a motion in time, but does not affect destiny. As Gregory puts it, “You claim that destiny

\textsuperscript{45} For philosophic background and an introduction to this treatise see George Arabatzis, “Power, Motion and Time in Gregory of Nyssa’s Contra Fatum,” in Gregory of Nyssa: The Minor Treatises on Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism, ed. Volker Henning Drecoll and Margitta Berghaus (Leiden: Brill, 2011): 399-409.

\textsuperscript{46} Contra Fatum GNO 3.2.33.

is a continuous movement of time whether it pertains to the movement of rivers, stars, or men...If fate does not cause temporal interruptions with regard to the flow of rivers, motions of ships, or our wanderings, how can the stars’ movement be responsible." Cosmic motion, despite its grand scope, is still motion in time and does not have more power to determine events than do other types of motion in time. What can be said definitively from this work is that regardless of how Gregory understands the stars and planets to move, he does not believe they have any influence over earthly events or human behavior.

Gregory’s descriptions of cosmic and elemental motion show influence of Aristotelian, Stoic, and Plotinian thought. While the particulars of this type of motion are of interest to Gregory and he sometimes describes it at length, he never discusses it simply for the sake of scientific or philosophic discussion. When discussions about cosmic motion arise, they are in service of the theological arguments Gregory is making. Nevertheless, the importance of motion in the foundation of the creation of the world is clear. Every element is endowed with a particular type of motion and these motions work together to allow the world to function harmoniously. Motion is a primary characteristic in the building blocks of the created world. As central as it is for Gregory that God does is not subject to motion, it is equally as central that all created things are marked by motion.

**Motion of the human body**

Gregory was interested in the operation of the human body, devoting long sections to medical explanations. Many discussions of sensible motion refer to the moving of the human body, which is what this section will examine. Motion, for Gregory, was a principle of life:

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48 *Contra Fatum GNO* 3.2.45. Translation from McCambley, 325.
living bodies constantly move, while dead bodies do not. He explains this most clearly in *De hom. opif.*: “This life of our bodies, material and subject to flux, always advancing by way of motion, finds the power of its being in this, that it never rests from its motion.”⁴⁹ He goes on to compare the human person to a flowing river that is always moving, noting that just like the water is always flowing away and being replaced with new water, the body (the material part of the life, as Gregory puts it) is always changing as well in a “succession of opposites by way of motion and flux.”⁵⁰ He concludes the paragraph saying that if it should ever stop moving it would stop living. Motion as a principle of life underscores the importance of the human as a created being. For Gregory, anything that is unmoving is either uncreated or not living, to be living and unmoving is to be divine. The importance of motion for the human body is similar to the motion for the cosmos, in that it marks the human being as created.

Gregory goes on to give an example of bodies in flux, saying that the state of being empty comes after being full and then after being full comes emptiness again. Similarly, one alternates sleeping with wakefulness, continually going back and forth between these opposite states. Furthermore, going through these stages is necessary for the life and health of the body. Gregory makes a similar statement in *De anima*, stating here that human nature is always moving and again comparing the human to a stream that is constantly in motion.⁵¹ In this passage he also adds the illustration of a fire, saying that it is impossible to touch the same flame twice since the flame changes so quickly. He states in this passage: “That part of our nature which flows in and

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⁴⁹ *De hom. opif.* PG 44.165.3-6. Translation from *NPNF* 5:399-400. Ἡ ὑλικὴ καὶ ῥοώδης αὕτη τῶν σωμάτων ζωῆς, πάντα τῷ κινήσεως προέκυψα, ἐν τούτῳ ἔχει τὰ ἐν τῇ δύναμι, ἐν τῷ μὴ στήναι ποτέ τῆς κινήσεως.

⁵⁰ *De hom. opif.* PG 44.165.10-12. Translation from *NPNF* 5:400.

⁵¹ *De anima* PG 46.141.
out and is always proceeding and moving because of changing movement stops when it ceases to live." For Gregory, a living body is always in motion; to cease moving completely is to die.

Asserting that human bodies are always in motion leads to the question of what happens to the body when one is asleep and Gregory proceeds to answer this question following the De hom. opif. passage just quoted. In the broader context of a discussion about whether the ruling faculty of the mind is located in the body, Gregory addresses the question of what happens when a person is asleep. Sleep is necessary in order for digestion to take place, so that nutrients can be diffused throughout the body. Under normal circumstances, when a person is awake, the operations of the mind, the senses, and the nutritive faculty are all in motion. Upon going to sleep, however, the senses are dulled: “and such a condition is sleep, when the sense is at rest in the body, and altogether ceases from the operation of its natural motion,” and the mind ceases moving. Even dreams, Gregory notes, do not count as proper motion since “it is only the conscious and sound action of the intellect which we ought to refer to mind.” Instead, the senses and the mind enter an inactive state, like a smoldering fire, that is neither in full flame nor completely put out, leaving the nutritive faculty as the only one that continues in its natural motion during sleep.

52 De anima PG 46.141. Translation from Callahan, 263.
53 He affirms this again in De hom. opif. PG 44.237.7 (NPNF 5:421) saying, “For in the case of men we consider it an evidence of life that one is warm and operative and in motion, but the chill and motionless state in the case of bodies in nothing else than deadness.”
54 For a treatment of Gregory’s position on the location of the hege
monikon and the interaction of the mind and body during sleep and at other times, see Susan Wessel, “The Reception of Greek Science in Gregory of Nysaa’s De hominis opificio,” Vigiliae Christianae 63 (2009): 24-46.
55 De hom. opif. PG 44.168.1. Translation from NPNF 5:400.
56 De hom. opif. PG 44.168.25-28.
57 De hom. opif. PG 44.168.29-31. Translation from NPNF 5:400.
58 De hom. opif. PG 44.169.39 (NPNF 5:401).
Gregory gives a summary of his understanding of the human body from a medical perspective in chapter 30 of *De hom. opif.*, mentioning the motions of various body parts and systems. He prefaces his medical discussion by saying that all bodily functions serve the purposes of enabling life, the good life, and/or reproduction, and then begins a detailed description of bodily functions and how they contribute to those ends.\(^{59}\) Joints, for example, facilitate the good life because without joints a person would be like a tree, unable to move. The joints, powered by the nervous system (the tightening and relaxation of nerves, as he understood it) allows for various kinds of motion, from the turning of the neck, to the moving of the chin, to walking.\(^{60}\) Gregory considered all movement of joints and muscles to be powered by the nervous system. Heat and liquid mix together in the brain, go through the membrane surrounding the brain, and travel down the spine, which acts like a pipe. They are then distributed throughout the body, supplying the impetus for motion to the bones, joints, and muscles.\(^{61}\)

The lungs are in continuous motion inhaling and exhaling, supplying breath to the heart.\(^{62}\) Gregory compares the perpetually moving nature of respiration to the element of fire, since both have the ability and necessity to be constantly in motion. People are able to breathe involuntarily, for example when they are busy or sleeping, because the lungs are associated with the heart, which is the principle of heat in the human body. The association of the heart and lungs with the element of fire/heat allows for its constant motion because it is the nature of fire to be constantly moving: “for as the operation of motion is proper to heat, and we understand that the principle of

\(^{59}\) *De hom. opif.* PG 44.240.48-50 (*NPNF* 5:422).

\(^{60}\) *De hom. opif.* PG 44.244.17-44. (*NPNF* 5:423).

\(^{61}\) *De hom. opif.* PG 44.249.43-59 (*NPNF* 5:425).

\(^{62}\) *De hom. opif.* PG 44.245.31-46.248.16 (*NPNF* 5:424).
heat is to be found in the heart, the continual motion going on in this organ produces the incessant inspiration and exhalation of the air through the lungs.\textsuperscript{63} The heart in this system is also in constant motion and is identified as the most important organ, but Gregory does not understand it to circulate blood. Rather, it uses breath received from the lungs and nourishment from the stomach to heat the body. For Gregory the human body is in constant motion; motion is the principle determinant of whether a person is alive.

Why might this idea that motion is a principle of bodily life be so important to Gregory? One reason is likely that similar to the cosmos, motion of the human body is a marker of its created nature and also like the cosmos, the purposeful way the parts of the human body move indicate its harmonious design. As mentioned above, the human is in some ways a mini-cosmos and shares some of the same features of the cosmos, including its constant and harmonious motion. Another reason that bodily life and turning to medicine to explain it may have been important to Gregory is that medicine offered a way for Gregory to connect the pieces of the human person. Corrigan notes that Gregory is particularly interested in medicine and the interconnectedness of bodily structures. He suggests that medicine is a “means of describing psycho-physical processes within the human body,” allowing Gregory to connect the physiological and the psychological.\textsuperscript{64} The medical discussions are not just about the operation of the body, as in the examples above, the medical discussions include the interaction of the body with the mind (even though the mind is not a material body part) and discussions about what constitutes the good life. This overlap between parts of the person is the beginning of a theme I

\textsuperscript{63} De hom. opif. PG 44.248.7-11. Translation from NPNF 5:424.

\textsuperscript{64} Kevin Corrigan, Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul and Body in the 4th Century (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009): 147-149, quotation at 147.
will return to several times in this study, for as much as Gregory categorizes and divides into parts, his view of the human person is a holistic one.

Gregory’s insistence on the constant motion of the human body raises some questions about how the body relates to the identity of the person. With a body that is ever changing, what constitutes the real person? Gregory gives some clues as to his thought on human identity in a discussion about what kind of body will exist in the resurrection. The above *De anima* passage comparing the constant motion of human life to a stream and to a flame is in the broader context of answering the question of what human bodies will be like in the resurrection. Gregory raises this question, stating how unfortunate it would be for people to be raised into some the same conditions they experience on earth. It seems untenable to Gregory that people would resurrected as extremely elderly, diseased, or injured. Even if a person died as an infant, it would be terrible to experience eternity in such a state. On the other hand, a person’s bodily existence is closely related to their identity. If all the characteristics are changed in the resurrection, how can one still be considered the same person? How could it be that one could die as a child and be raised as an adult without compromising the identity of the person? The state of a person’s body is significant to the identity of the person as a whole, as Gregory notes, “For I would not be truly I if I were not identical with myself in all details.” It is significant to Gregory that the person being raised is in fact the same person as was alive. This commitment combined with his commitment to a bodily resurrection creates tension with his belief that the intelligible is superior to and more

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66 *De anima* PG 46.140.37-39. Translation from Callahan, 262.
lasting than the sensible. This tension about the location of personal identity is evident in a passage in *Contra Eun.* in which Gregory says it is useless to try to figure this out: “When you remove from the body its colour, shape, solidity, weight, size spatial location, movement, its passive and active capacity, its relation to other things, none of which is in itself the body, but all belong to the body, what will then be left to which the thought of a body applies?—that is something we can neither perceive by ourselves, nor do we learn it from scripture.” In this passage, the answer to the question of where to locate identity is impossible to answer and foolish to try.

In *Contra Eun.* Gregory does not attempt to resolve the tension, but in the dialogue between Gregory and Macrina in *De anima,* Gregory delves into the topic more deeply. In *De anima,* the dialogue genre is such that neither dialogue partner solely represents the actual thought of Gregory of Nyssa on a topic. Rather, the tension-laden truth gradually emerges as the dialogue progresses. In this portion of the dialogue, Gregory questions how bodies affect identity by speculating about what age a person will be in the resurrection and then continues by comparing the person to a stream that is always moving from birth to death and a flame that moves so quickly as to be impossible to touch exactly the same flame twice. Like the stream and the flame, a body is not ever the same body two moments in a row; it constantly moves and changes. The identity of a person is not located in a static concept of the body at one point in time. Rather, he says, in the resurrection, “a kind of all-inclusive man will come into being so

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67 *Contra Eun.* 2 GNO 1.2.1.116. Translation from Hall, 84-85.


69 According to Plato, Heraclitus compares the universe to a river in constant motion, saying that one cannot step twice in the same stream. Plato, *Cratylus* 402a.
that nothing of the resurrected person will be missing in the risen person, the newly-born, the infant, the child, the adolescent, the man, the father, the old man, and all the stages in between.” In this part of the dialogue, Gregory indicates that in the present life, identity is attached to one’s body and to time, but in the resurrection the effect of time collapses, leaving a body that encompasses all time. Although Gregory repeatedly asserts his belief in a bodily resurrection, his difficulty with this idea shows up in his final statement on this subject when he asserts that although the resurrected body will retain its parts, he does not know for what purpose because he expects they will not be needed for any of the activities for which they are presently used.

In Macrina’s response to this, which is the final section of the dialogue, she criticizes Gregory’s need to explain what will happen in the resurrection and, in response to Gregory’s philosophical images and arguments regarding the resurrection, supplies a scriptural image for the resurrected body: a seed. A seed is planted in the ground, experiencing a death of sorts, and as it is raised in growth of a new plant, its form is different from the seed that was buried. In the same way, the resurrected person will have a different form from the present person, having let go of all the characteristics that pertain to sin. As Macrina puts it, “For as the seed, after it is dissolved in the soil and leaves behind its quantitative deficiency and qualitative peculiarity of form, does not give up being itself, but remains itself although it becomes a stalk of grain which differs very much from itself in size and beauty and variety and form; in the same way, human

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70 De anima PG 46.141.44-47. Translation from Callahan, 263.
71 De anima PG 46.145.20-46.160.39 (Hall, 264-272) for Macrina’s response.
72 Caroline Walker Bynum has tracked the use of the Pauline seed metaphor (as well as other metaphors for the resurrection body), noting its use for authors such as Irenaeus and Tertullian. She determines that by the early third century the seed had come to represent continuity of identity in the resurrection. Caroline Walker Bynum, The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 57-58.
nature also lets go in death all the peculiar characteristics it acquired through its sinful disposition.” The person is still the same person, just as the plant is the same plant. Macrina points out that the seed metaphor is also useful because it preserves the notion of resurrection as restoration. Just as the growing seed returns to the state of a plant from whence it came, the resurrected person is a return to human nature, as it was in the beginning. In the same way a plant maintains continuity from one generation to the next, the resurrected person will have continuity with present person. Gregory and Macrina disagree on some particulars of the resurrection, specifically, Macrina disapproves of Gregory’s sceptical approach to scripture. Gregory’s portion of the dialogue emphasizes bodies in forward motion, in a constant state of change from birth to death, while Macrina’s portion of the dialogue focuses on the cyclical motion of the seed growing into a plant and then becoming a seed again. Both examples must be held in view in order to capture Gregory’s thought on bodies and the resurrection.

Gregory’s insistence on the materiality of the resurrection body leads to some question about the mechanics of the resurrection. Since people die, are buried, and decompose, how can their material body exist in the resurrection? Gregory gives some explanation of this in De anima and De hom. opif., emphasizing the soul’s connection with the body as the key to reuniting the elements. In De hom. opif. Gregory addresses this question by asserting that the soul is marked by the body and retains the imprint even after death. Likewise the body—that is the part that is associated with identity and remains constant through the changes of growth and development—receives the same marks, which are like the impression of a seal. At the time of the resurrection,

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\(^73\) De anima PG 46.153.51-46.156.9. Translation from Hall, 269.

\(^74\) De anima PG 46.153.19-46.157.20.
the soul and all the bodily elements that retain the mark of the person recognize one another and come back together.  

In *De Anima*, Gregory adds to this discussion, noting that the body and soul will be reunited: “You will see this bodily garment which is now dissolved by death woven again of the same elements, not according to its present crass and heavy construction, but with a thread resewn into something more fine and delicate.” Although it will be made up of the same elements, the resurrected body will be changed into something of a different texture and will no longer be subject to bodily functions and activities, such as eating, drinking, marriage, working, and running. There is, then, continuity in the material of the body between the earthly and future existences, but Gregory is unclear in this passage on the purpose of resurrecting the individual body parts, as they will not be used for the same functions for which they are presently used.

From Gregory’s speculation on the composition of the resurrection body arises some pertinent information regarding sensible motion and the human body. First, although the term *kinesis* appears in these discussions as a descriptor of corporeal, earthly existence, it is absent from descriptions of motion involved in the resurrection itself. In the passages examined above, Gregory uses metaphors of rising, restoring, changing, and weaving, as well as his explanation of what happens to the physical elements of the body to describe the resurrection. *Kinesis*, however, does not appear in any of these descriptions. Motion is certainly implied in the coming together

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76 *De anima* *PG* 46.108.1-6. Translation from Callahan, 245. Dennis has an informative discussion on this passage as well. T. J. Dennis, “Gregory on the Resurrection of the Body,” 60-64.

77 *De anima* *PG* 46.144.24-50.
of the elements to rejoin with the soul, but he does not use the term. This is not to say that Gregory does not use *kinesis* to describe events that happen after death, as I will discuss in later chapters, but it is not a word he uses to explain the event of the body changing from dead to alive.

Secondly, the body is significant to identity. Gregory’s anxiety in the passage that gives rise to the discussion about the resurrection body comes about because of the possibility that the body in the resurrection might not match the body on earth closely enough for the person to be the same person. This anxiety would not be an issue if the earthly body had no bearing on a person’s identity. Gregory was not the only late antique Christian author to connect resurrection with personal identity, as Yannis Papadogiannakis has recently demonstrated. Analyzing several texts about the resurrection, Papadogiannakis concludes that the intense examination of bodily resurrection was an expression of concern for identity and an assertion of the importance of the body as “an indispensable and irreducible component of personhood and individuality.”

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78 While the continuity between present person and the resurrected person is stressed in this passage, the difference between the two is emphasized in Gregory’s *De Mortuis*. In this earlier treatise, while not denying the materiality of the body in the resurrection, Gregory denies that the resurrection body will take on the form of the earthly body. Rather, in a move Dennis considers to be one of Gregory’s most original, the form of the resurrection body will match the virtue or evil of the soul. This view is in direct opposition to Gregory’s view in *De anima* in which the resurrection body will match the earthly one. Dennis suggests the difference lies in Gregory’s development of thought, particularly in regard to his influence of the anti-origenist Methodius of Olympus and possible charges of origenism in *De mortuis*. The argument found in *De anima*, that the earthly form of the body does remain in the resurrection, is considered to be Gregory’s final one, as it was written later and it explicitly refutes the earlier arguments for the resurrection body not having the form of the earthly one. T. J. Dennis, “Gregory on the Resurrection Body,” 55-80. Hennessey agrees with Dennis in accounting for the difference between the two works by suggesting that between the time Gregory wrote *De mortuis* and *De Anima* he was influenced by the anti-origenist movement, particularly Methodius of Olympus. L.R. Hennessey, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Doctrine of the Resurrected Body,” *Studia Patristica* 22 (1989): 28-34.

In terms of *kinesis*, while it is clear that motion is a characteristic feature of the earthly body, it is unclear from this passage whether *kinesis* applies to the resurrection body. It seems that perhaps it does not. While discussing the seed metaphor, Macrina notes that in the resurrection, the body changes into a “spiritual and sinless condition,” and then she adds: “This is characteristic of the psychic body (ψυχικό το σώματος) that, through some flux and movement (ροής καὶ κινήσεως), is always being changed from the state it is in into something else.” The phrase psychic body in this case is taken from the 1 Corinthians passage Gregory just quoted, “what is sown in a natural (ψυχικός) body rises a spiritual body.” The motion, then, that characterizes the psychic body is contrasted with the spiritual body, which seems to suggest that flux and motion would not be part of the spiritual body. While Gregory uses motion to contrast the two in this passage, spiritual motion is a significant topic elsewhere, which I will address in following chapters.

Gregory used *kinesis* to refer to human bodies in several ways. First, motion is evidence of a living, animate person, in contrast to a dead one. One way to tell the difference between a living body and a dead one is whether or not the body moves. Furthermore, living bodies are in constant rapid motion and change, never stopping their transformation from one thing to the next. This constant motion is a mark of the human as a created person, in contrast to the unmoving creator. Secondly, motion is part of the operation of certain body parts and enables life and the good life. While the motion in the medical discussions seems to stay in the realm of the

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80 πνευματικήν τινα καὶ ἀπαθή μεταβήναι κατάστασιν. *De anima* PG 46.156.15-16. Translation from Hall, 270.

81 *De anima* PG 46.156.16-19. Translation from Hall, 270.

82 *De anima* PG 46.153.50-51. Translation from Hall, 269. Bouteneff suggests that for Gregory, psychic (ψυχικός) is a middle position between spiritual (πνευματικός) and carnal (σαρκικός), in which one rejects a life of sin, but doesn’t fully participate in the life of the spirit. Bouteneff, “Essential or Existential,” 413.
sensible motion of the human body, it inevitably slips into discussions of the mind and how the body contributes to the good life. Even in these medical descriptions, Gregory’s view of the connectedness of the human person begins to emerge. Thirdly, motion is a characteristic of bodily nature and the specific nature of the individual. The connecting of the body to the identity of the person is another way in which Gregory connects the parts of the human into a holistic being.

**Motion of Time**

Gregory’s understanding of time is closely tied up with *diastema* and motion of the created world. Recalling from the first chapter, *diastema* is the temporal and spatial receptacle of creation; the boundaries within which creation moves. Time as related to *diastema* was first a notion of the Stoics, who said that time was *diastema* of all motion. Plotinus accepted the association of *diastema* and motion, but added that time was the *diastema* in which motion was encased.  

Gregory’s development of time must have been influenced by these antecedents, as commentators such as Callahan and Balthasar have noticed, but other commentators emphasize Gregory’s originality in his conception of time. Mosshammer, for instance, understands Gregory’s view of time as going beyond a measurement of motion to being itself a “a kind of defined space” central to the definition of the created being: “the διάστημα of time is the essential characteristic that distinguishes created reality from the unchanging and unmeasured being of God.”

Time, then, becomes a mark of the created being. As core components of the contents of creation, Gregory’s work contains a number of intersections of time and *kinesis*,

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which will be the topic of this section. In it, I will explore how Gregory understands time and the ways in which time functions as a boundary for motion.

It is not immediately apparent that time would fall into the sensible category for Gregory—time cannot be seen or heard, for instance. Gregory does, however, indicate that for him time is sensible in some cases. Gregory understands measure of time, at least in part, as cosmological. Day and night, for example, are indicated by cosmic motion, as Gregory mentions in *Apol. in hex.*, saying in the first three days of creation, the passing of time had to be distinguished by the light coming from the sun and moon, since the bodies themselves had not yet been created. He goes on to say, “It is evident that our insight becomes clearer when measure of time concurs with the distinction of light,” indicating the cosmic, and therefore sensible nature of time. Although time is sensible in some ways for Gregory, as in its relation to cosmic motion, he also discusses it in ways that connect it more closely to the intelligible, as in when he refers to past and future as experienced in memory and hope, respectively. In that discussion, Gregory approaches time from a psychological, intelligible perspective. In this chapter, I will consider sensible time and the motion associated with it, leaving comments regarding intelligible time for the following chapter.

For Gregory, time and motion often intersect in discussions about the beginning and end of the world. He sets out a general understanding of his view of time in *On the Sixth Psalm, Concerning the Octave*, in which he presents time as a cycle of seven days that rotates until the

85 *Apol. in hex.* PG 44.116. Translation from McCambley.
86 Callahan argues that time for Gregory is primarily objective and cosmological rather than psychological. Callahan, “Cappadocian Cosmology,” 55-56. I think time, for Gregory, has both cosmological and anthropological markers since elements such as human reproduction, hope, and memory play important roles in how humans conceive of time, as I will discuss below.
87 *De anima* PG 46.92.
eschaton, which he labels the eighth day. The eighth day was a frequent symbol for the 
resurrection, as McCambley illustrates, but Gregory is original in making cyclical time a symbol 
of the present age.\footnote{McCambley presents quotations of the eighth day as a symbol of the resurrection from Irenaeus, Origen, 
Eusebius, Athanasius, Didymus, Basil, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom. Casimir McCambley, “On 
the Sixth Psalm, Concerning the Octave by Saint Gregory of Nyssa,” \textit{Greek Orthodox Theological Review} 32, no. 1 (1987): 39-50.} Gregory begins his discussion of time saying that God completed creation in 
six days and then, “the seventh day is the end (\textgreek{πέρας}) of creation and encompasses within itself 
the time (\textgreek{χρόνον}) coextensive with the creation of this world.”\footnote{\textit{In Sextum Psalmum} (hereafter \textit{Sext. Psalm.}) \textit{GNO} 5.188.20-22. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of 
gets to the seventh day and then returns to the first day, going in a seven-day cycle. Gregory 
continues, “We always measure the totality (\textgreek{διάστηµα}) of time through the circle of seven days 
until things endowed with motion (\textgreek{κινουµένον}) pass away and the flux of the world’s movement 
(\textgreek{τῆς ροώδους τοῦ κόσµου κινήσεως}) ceases.”\footnote{\textit{Sext. Psalm.} \textit{GNO} 5.189.4-6. Translation from McCambley, 48.} At this point, cyclical time will cease and the 
occtave, which is not numerically measurable, will begin.

In this passage, two pictures of time stand out. The first is the \textit{diastema} of time—the 
receptacle made up of time and space that contains the cosmos and the second is the cycle of 
time that repeats until the end of the world and “encompasses within itself the time coextensive 
with the creation of this world.”\footnote{\textit{Sext. Psalm.} \textit{GNO} 5.188.20-22. Translation from McCambley, 48.} The motion associated with time in this passage is the flowing 
motion of the world that stops at the end of the seven-day cycle.\footnote{McCambley notes that the phrase “flux of the world’s movement” demonstrates Platonic influence. McCambley, \textit{On the Sixth Psalm}, 41.} Time serves as both a cycle
and a boundary that contains this motion. The motion of the world starts with the beginning of time and will stop on the seventh day.

The motion of the world is also associated with the beginning and end of time in a passage in *De hom. opif*. Making his case for the rationality of a future date at which time will end, Gregory writes that God preordained a set number of humans to be born what that number of souls is reached, “the flux and motion of time (τὴν ῥοωδὴν τοῦ χρόνου κίνησιν) should halt at the moment when humanity is no longer produced by it; and that when the generation of men is completed, time should cease together with its completion.”93 This passage also references flowing motion in conjunction with the end of the time, but in this case it is the flowing motion of time that will cease rather than the flowing motion of the world that will cease at the end of time. Both passages, however, indicate there is to be an end to the world, at which point both time and motion as they are presently conceived will stop. At this point, Gregory continues, “the change in existing things will take place in an instant of time,”94 and people will undergo the resurrection change. Gregory concludes this section by encouraging people to be patient for the end of the world and “wait for the time which is necessarily coextensive with the development of humanity.”95

Gregory gives a very similar picture of time and the end of time in *De anima*, saying: “when our nature has completed its planned sequence, in keeping with the periodic movement of time (τὴν παροδικὴν τοῦ χρόνου κίνησιν), this flowing motion will stop going forward in

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93 *De hom. opif. PG* 44.205.35. Translation from *NPNF* 5:412.
94 *De hom. opif. PG* 44.205.51-52. Translation from *NPNF* 5:412.
95 *De hom. opif. PG* 44.208.14-16. Translation from *NPNF* 5:412.
succession of births.” Once again, time is flowing movement that will cease from its motion when a certain number of people have been born. He goes on in this passage to call this event of time stopping both the resurrection and the end of the world. Several observations about motion in these two passages are pertinent. First, even though these discussions depict sensible time in a straightforward manner as days, months, and years cycling in motion with the cosmos, Gregory’s understanding of time in both passages has an anthropological element as well: the duration of time is specifically linked to the number of human souls. While the marking of time follows sensible phenomena, the cosmos as a whole has an anthropological focus, only lasting as long as it takes for the correct number of human souls to be born. Second, the nature of time is that it is in motion and remains in motion until it stops. At that point both time and humanity undergo changes, time changing from a flowing motion to “a moment” or “a twinkling of an eye,” as Gregory quotes Paul, and humanity changing from weighty flesh to resurrected material.

These three passages about time illustrate how intertwined are the notions of time, motion, and the boundaries of created existence. Both time and the world’s movement have a flowing quality; both creation and humanity are called coextensive with time; time moves in a repeating circle and stretches out with moving creation. In these passages, time is a boundary for a certain kind of created motion, containing all the motion of the present world. When time stops, so will all the motion associated with it, and everything must undergo a qualitative shift in order to continue its existence.

96 De anima PG 46.129.11-14. Translation from Callahan, 256.

97 In Contra Fatum, Gregory says that motion is coextensive with time. This idea is examined in George Arabatzis, “Power, Motion and Time in Gregory of Nyssa’s Contra Fatum,” 399-409.
While time constitutes a boundary in an ontological sense, as just discussed, it also forms a boundary in an epistemic sense: time is the boundary for human reason, as Gregory emphasizes in the Eunomian debate. In a passage in the first book of *Contra Eun.*, Gregory emphasizes the ultimate difference between created and uncreated, focusing on the temporality of the former. All creation has come to exist in an orderly sequence and remains marked by time, while the Creator is not subject to time. As created beings, humans cannot even comprehend timelessness, as Gregory puts it: “Time (ὁ αἰών)⁹⁸ and this world seem to constitute a limit and term for the movement and activity of human reasoning, whereas what lies beyond it remains unattainable and inaccessible to reason.”⁹⁹ The *diastemic* character of humanity is such that it is impossible to comprehend events outside of time.

Gregory makes a similar point in the second book of *Contra Eun.*, noting that our human point of view makes it impossible to comprehend the infinity of God: “Human life moves in measurable time (ἡ ἀνθρώπινη ζωὴ διαστηματικῶς κινομένη), and proceeds by advancing from a beginning to an end, and our life here is divided into past and future.”¹⁰⁰ Because of our *diastemic* nature, humans can only conceive and speak of God improperly in temporal ways. Even knowing that God is not bound by time, it is not possible for humans to grasp the concept

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⁹⁸ Typically in the passages where time and motion intersect, Gregory uses χρόνος for time, but he occasionally uses αἰών. In these contexts, the two words seem to have a similar meaning. Ramelli and Konstan indicate that although in Gregory’s work αἰών does often refer to a future age, but can also apply to the present world: “As we see, αἰών here undergoes an apparent change in sense: it can signify generations, ages (in the plural) and (in the singular) this world, but also lastingness, when it refers to God, although here again, as so often, the sense of absolute eternity—to the extent that it is implied—derives from the nature of the referent; The passage thus nicely shows the semantic polyvalence of this term, the connotations of which are not highly specific or technical, as opposed to that of ἀΐδιος.” Ilaria Ramelli and David Konstan, *Terms for Eternity: Aíônios and Aïdíos in Classical and Christian Texts* (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2007), 184.

⁹⁹ *Contra Eun. 1* GNO 1.1.1.368. Translation from Hall, 89.

¹⁰⁰ *Contra Eun. 2* GNO 1.2.1.459. Translation from Hall, 163.
of time and eternity, except by past and future. Time, then, is a limit not only of human existence; it is also a boundary of human understanding.

Time, for Gregory, is multi-faceted and deeply entwined with various kinds of motion. Time itself is described as motion and as part of the *diastema* it is a container for other types of motion. It is cosmological in that it marks the physical motion of the planets, but it is also anthropological in that its duration is determined by human reproduction. Humans measure time sensibly and objectively by observing natural phenomena, but also intelligibly and subjectively by monitoring their own hopes and memories. Further, time is both objective and subjective in its function as a boundary, containing all the objective motion of living things, as well as the subjective experience of knowledge. The properties of time only apply to the present age, as both time and motion undergo a transformation in the eschaton, a topic I address further in the next chapter.

Gregory’s treatment of motion in the cosmos, the human body, and time illustrate the importance of motion as the fabric of the sensible world. As an integral part of physical created space and a chief attribute of time, motion is central to the makeup of the *diastema*. As a principle of bodily life and human identity it is a necessary component to human experience within the *diastema*. Looking at motion in these three areas of the sensible world has demonstrated that Gregory is consistent in his claim that motion is a principle attribute of life in the sensible world.

In addition to being central to life within the *diastema*, motion provides a lens through which to view the slippery nature of intelligible and sensible as categories. While Gregory emphasizes the difference between intelligible and sensible emphatically and often, the two
categories are not as self-contained as it may first seem; rather there is interplay and exchange between the two. In the example of motion in the physical world, the overlap between sensible and intelligible can be seen on two levels. On the first level, evidence for this appears in some of the specific physical phenomena Gregory discusses. For example, because of its mobile nature, fire is an element Gregory describes as notable for its intermediate state between sensible and intelligible. The notion of idealism, too, with sensible objects having their origins as bundles of ideas, illustrates the connection between sensible and intelligible. On the second level, Gregory’s discussions of cosmic or elemental motion are generally geared toward making a point about intelligible truth. For example, the attributes of the sensible world, including motion, combine in a specific way to prevent people from mistaking the created world for God. The sensible world illuminates the intelligible.

From the examination of motion in the human body the connection between sensible and intelligible is evident in the importance of the physical (sensible) body to a person’s identity, even in the resurrection. Personal identity for Gregory includes sensible and intelligible aspects, both types of which are in constant motion as the person ages and changes and which are reclaimed in the resurrection. While the tensions between the notions of a physical resurrection and the superiority of the intelligible are not fully resolved, in the attempt to work this out, the overlap between sensible and intelligible is visible. Both are subject to motion, both are essential to the makeup of identity, and both play a part in the resurrection, albeit after undergoing transformation.

The examination of the motion of time also illustrates the slipperiness of sensible and intelligible in that it is measured both by cosmological activity and anthropological events. Time
is made up of sensible events, such as the rising and setting of the sun, but it is also made up of intelligible phenomena such as marking the number of souls that must be introduced into the world. As it turns out, the intelligible has flowed into the chapter on the sensible, revealing that the two categories are not as separate as they first appeared to be. In the next chapter, I turn to a discussion of motion in the intelligible world.
Chapter 3

Intelligible Motion

It is perhaps not so surprising that motion is such a pervasive descriptor of the physical existence of the world and human bodies for Gregory, as I explained in Chapter 2, since physical movement is immediately observable. Intelligible motion, however, by definition cannot be observed with the senses and it is therefore more notable that Gregory regularly describes so many of the the intelligible activities of human beings in terms of kinesis. In this chapter I will discuss Gregory’s use of kinesis to describe thought, language, emotion, morality, and spirituality, underscoring the significance of kinesis to Gregory’s anthropology and analyzing what the emphasis on movement means for Gregory’s understanding of the human person. In examining motion within these facets of human life, it will become apparent that one key aspect of intelligible motion is direction.

Thought

One frequent way Gregory refers to the process of thought is as a movement of the mind. As Martin Laird has explained, Gregory uses no single word for the mind or thought, although νοῦς and διάνοια are common. Gregory applies the terms kinesis and kinema to both of these, as well as occasionally to the term νόημα in order to describe a mental process. Most frequently he combines the concept of motion with the term dianoia, for which Laird gives the following working definition in Gregory, acknowledging that he regularly uses other terms: “dianoia is a general term that refers to the discursive state of mind characterized optimally by reason and

performance of ratiocination, but which less optimally can be characterized by the domination of the passions.” In a similar way, combining kinesis or kinema with dianoia or other terms for the mind denotes a general mental process whose value lies in the use to which it’s put.

Gregory does not in any passage that I know of define the term “motion of the mind,” but he regularly refers to thought as such in passages about other topics throughout his corpus, from different periods and in various genres. In a passage arguing that the intellectual activity of the human person is not confined to the body Gregory writes, “while the body’s bulk is limited to the proportions peculiar to it, the soul by the movements of its thinking faculty (τοὺς τῆς διανοίας κινήμασι) can coincide at will with the whole of creation.” Likewise in De anima he refers to thought (διάνοια) as “movement and activity (κίνησις τε καὶ ἐνέργεια),” a necessary component for craftsmanship in this passage. Further, Gregory argues against Apollinarius that Christ adopted a complete human nature, of which a human mind was a component. In this discussion, Gregory characterizes the human thought that Christ adopted as the movement and activity of the mind (διάνοια νοῦ κίνησις ἐστὶ καὶ ἐνέργεια). Movement of the mind is a neural expression explaining the mental process, common to humanity.

As a neutral function, motion of the mind can move in a positive or a negative direction. In De vita Mosis Gregory indicates that it can be negative when moved in the direction of evil by listing various evils that are to be put to death at baptism, including arrogance, anger, malice, and envy. He concludes, “Since the passions naturally pursue our nature, we must put to death in the

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2 Laird, Grasp of Faith, 56.
3 Cat. or. SC 453.10.6-9. Translation from NPNF 5:485.
4 De anima PG 46.40.2-3.
5 Antirrh. GNO 3.1.177.16 and 3.1.164.28. For a summary of this treatise, see Meredith, Gregory of Nyssa, 46-50.
water both the base movements of the mind (τὰ πονηρὰ τῆς διανοίας κίνηματα) and the acts which issue from them.⁶ Some motions of the mind are base and unhelpful for Christian life. In addition to personal evil, motion of the mind can signal corporate erroneous opinions, as Gregory describes in Contra Eun., wondering how various factions in the church have come to their own varied conclusions about God, “each deceiving itself with some new current of opinion (τινὰ τῆς διανοίας κίνησιν).”⁷ Although neutral in and of themselves, motions of the mind can lead toward the evil.

They can also, however, lead toward the good. Comparing thought to water from a fountain that nourishes the plants it falls on, Gregory encourages his readers to use the water of their thoughts on worthy plants: “But the motion of the reasoning faculty (τῆς διανοίας τὸ κίνημα) becomes properly ours only when it is going (κινῆται) in the direction of what is beneficial for us and when it assists us in every way to possess what is good.”⁸ If the water of thought is spent on good thoughts, the result is good, but if it is squandered on evil thoughts, it is no longer a benefit to the person. In another aquatic metaphor in In cant., Gregory compares contemplation (θεωρία) of scripture to a sea on which the boat of the church navigates. Before beginning their journey, the captain and crew say a prayer that “the power of the Holy Spirit may blow upon us and stir up the waves of our thoughts (ἀνακινῆσαι τῶν νοημάτων τὰ κύματα) and that by their means it may prosper the voyage of our discourse and lead it on a direct course.”⁹ In this image, thoughts move as waves through which the church passes, praying for guidance.

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⁶ De vita Mosis SC 1.2.125. Translation from Malherbe, 67.
⁷ Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.99.7. Translation from Hall, 81.
⁸ In cant. GNO 6.275.22-276.2. Translation from Norris, 291.
⁹ In cant. GNO 6.342.3-8. Translation from Norris, 361-363. Norris notes that this metaphor of a voyage with the Spirit as a favorable wind can also be seen in Methodius, Symp. 7.1.
Although both images involve water, the motion of thought functions differently in each: in the first, it is the responsibility of the individual to move thought in a beneficial direction; in the second, thought moves of its own accord, as a wave, and it is the responsibility of the church, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to navigate the course of good thought. In both however, motion of thought can have either positive or negative results.

In order to express what it takes for the motion of the mind to be used for good, Gregory employs another image of water, this time of water in a pipe. If water pours out of some source, he says, and is divided into numerous small streams, it is not particularly useful because each of the streams will be small and weak. If, however, all the streams are funneled into one pipe, the pressure created can cause the water in the pipe to move upward, even though its nature is to have a downward motion. The water in this picture is human thought and the pipe is self-control, by developing self-control, one can take the small streams of thought that are not useful and make them into one large stream that has the power to move upward in contemplating higher things: “so, also, the human mind being constrained from all directions by self-control, as by a kind of pipe, will somehow be taken up by the nature of the movement (τῆς τοῦ κινεῖσθαι φύσεως) to a desire for what is above. It is never possible for what has been put into eternal motion (ἀεικίνητον) by its Creator to stop and use its motion (τῇ κινήσει) for useless purposes once it has been controlled.”\(^{10}\) After the mind has been “diverted from vanities,”\(^{11}\) it is more able to contemplate God. As this passage demonstrates, self-control serves as one of the tools available to direct the motion of the mind in a positive direction.

\(^{10}\) *De virg.* SC 119.6.2.19-29. Translation from Callahan, 30.

\(^{11}\) *De virg.* SC 119.6.2.35-36. Translation from Callahan, 31.
Closely related to the motion of the mind in Gregory is language, the expression of the motion of the mind. Language is a significant topic in the Eunomian debate, Eunomius claiming that the word “unbegotten” relates directly to God’s essence and Gregory claiming that it is not possible for language to capture the essence of God. Gregory’s discussions on the limitations of language are situated in that polemical context. In the second book of *Contra Eun*. Gregory argues that scriptural citations of God speaking or seeing should not be taken literally, as though God has a corporeal body. Language is a gift of God to human beings, “so that by it we might be able to express the movements of the mind (τῆς ψυχῆς τὰ κινήματα).”

Philosophy of language has been the topic of several recent studies on Gregory that emphasize its limited nature. Alden Mosshammer outlined four claims that Gregory made regarding language in opposition to Eunomius: 1) it is a human invention and therefore arbitrary and fallible, 2) it comes from a reality so different from the divine that it cannot address the essence of God, 3) all language, including theological language can only refer to the created order, and 4) language expressing divine truths can have no fixed content, but must be continually reinterpreted. Mosshammer emphasizes nature of language as existing within the *diastema* and therefore its inadequacy to represent the essence of even created things, but especially its limitations for representing things outside the *diastema*. Douglass examined Gregory’s philosophy of language at length, also underscoring the *diastemic* character of

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language for Gregory. Both Mosshammer and Douglass have also explored the connection in Gregory between language and *kinesis*. Mosshammer explains that since everything in the *diastema* is in constant motion, “language belongs to this mobility, discourse is a motion of the speaker reaching out toward the motion of reality, and a precise intersection between word and thing is therefore impossible.”

Douglass sees *diastema* and *kinesis* as twin foundations of the created world, language included. Consequently for language, every word is polysemic and has no single pure meaning.

Without language, the motion of the mind would have no way to be communicated to others. Thus, the very existence of language is as a conduit for the motion of the mind. Gregory defines language as such: “Every word, or every word properly so called, is a sound which denotes some movement of thought (τῶν κατ᾽ ἐννοιαν κινημάτων), and every activity and motion of the healthy mind (τῆς ψυχῆς διανοίας ἐνέργεια τε καὶ κίνησις) aims, so far as it is able, at the knowledge and consideration of excellent things.”

Because words are sounds they are sensible and their purpose is to express a movement of the mind, bringing the intelligible to the sensible world. Language, for Gregory, has a decidedly human character, as he suggests elsewhere in the treatise stating that God does not need language, but “we have labeled our various thoughts with words and syllables, stamping verbal shapes as signs and markers on our mental processes (τῆς διανοίας κινήμασιν), so as to get clear and distinct pointers to our psychic

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16 Douglass, *Theology of the Gap*, 73. Both Douglass and Mosshammer also discuss the implications for scripture and theological language as part of the *diastema* and affected by *kinesis*.

17 *Contra Eun.* 2 GNO 1.2.1.572. Translation from Hall, 188.
processes (τῆς ψυχῆς κινήματον) by the sounds we attach to the ideas."\textsuperscript{18} Language is a series of signs that allows for communication between the corporeal world of the body and the incorporeal world of the mind.

Language is a crossover of sorts between intelligible and sensible, being in contact with the intelligible movement of the mind, but requiring body parts for its production and producing audible sounds. Gregory makes clear the sensible nature of language by explaining its physical nature, saying: "Our speech is expressed through the organs of speech, windpipe, tongue, teeth, mouth, together operating to generate speech, and the pressure of air and the breath from within."\textsuperscript{19} Not only are the body and mind connected by language, but as Gregory argues in \textit{De hom. opif.}, God designed the arrangement of the human body, particularly the face and hands, specifically for the purpose of language production.\textsuperscript{20} The physical nature of language production, however, precludes God from taking part in it. While it is our corporeal nature that makes language possible, it is the same nature that makes it necessary because without it, there would be no need for language. As Gregory puts it:

Even in the case of human nature we should have no need to use verbs and nouns, if it were possible to express clearly to each other the processes (κινήματα) of the mind. As it is, since the thoughts which arise in us are unable to make themselves apparent because our nature is enclosed in its fleshly garment, we are obliged to attach various names to things as signs, and thereby to make the processes (κινήσεις) of the mind accessible to other people.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{Contra Eun. 2 GNO} 1.2.1.168. Translation from Hall, 95.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{Contra Eun. 2 GNO} 1.2.1.200. Translation from Hall, 102.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} \textit{De hom. opif. PG} 44.148.25-149.14 (\textit{NPNF} 5:394-5).
  \item \textsuperscript{21} \textit{Contra Eun. 2 GNO} 1.2.1.391. Translation from Hall, 147.
\end{itemize}
Because of its bodily nature, human minds cannot communicate directly to one another, but instead require a means by which to bring the intelligible motion of the mind into the sensible realm so that it can be heard and understood by others. Language provides such an avenue.  

In addition to expressing the motion of the mind, Gregory also describes language as following the motion of the world. Gregory explains that language follows rather than precedes reality; naming an activity follows the activity, especially in the case of theological language. God’s being exists first, then God’s activities, which humans learn about through their senses, then language is applied. As a result, language does not cause or equate to reality, rather, as Gregory puts it, “the words are a kind of shadow of the realities, matching the movements (κινήσεις) of things which exist.” Language is not only connected to motion by expressing the motion of the mind, it also reflects, in a diminished way, the motion of the whole diastema. Unable to reflect reality perfectly, nevertheless it moves with the motion of the world, presenting reality as if it were a shadow.  

As a human invention and part of the diastema, language is connected both to the motion of the mind and the motion of the created world, but there is another sense in which Gregory refers to language as moving. Although it is well established by Douglass that Gregory considers language to be polysemic, there are meanings and definitions of words that Gregory considers to be inappropriate. On two occasions, Gregory accuses Eunomius of misusing a term by moving it away from an appropriate meaning. Gregory claims that in fixating on the term “unbegotten” as a title for God, Eunomius does not even use the term as it is generally used: “He was well aware

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22 Gregory regularly refers to language as expressing the motion of the mind, but he occasionally refers to it as expressing the motion of the heart or soul. *Contra Eun. 1 GNO* 1.1.1.539.6, *In cant. GNO* 6.235.

23 *Contra Eun. 2 GNO* 1.2.1.150. Translation from Hall, 91.
that, if the customary usage of the terms were preserved, he would find in it no power to overthrow healthy doctrine, but if the words could be shifted (παρακινηθείη) from their common and accepted concepts, he would easily be able to use malpractice with words for doing mischief to doctrines as well.”\textsuperscript{24} In a similar instance Gregory faults his opponents, saying: “These people however, separating (παρακινήσαντες) these expressions from the natural meaning of the terms, strive to attach to them another sense in order to get rid of orthodoxy.”\textsuperscript{25} One of Gregory’s problems with the way Eunomius and his followers approach language is that they change the meanings of words, specifically the word “unbegotten,” in order to change the meanings of orthodox doctrines. Gregory emphasizes the limits of human language, particularly in discussing theology, and there is a sense in which all language is mobile and polysemic, not connected precisely with reality, but there are also for Gregory boundaries of acceptable language and inappropriate ways of defining words for theological conversation.

\textbf{Emotion}

Like thought, Gregory often describes emotion in terms of \textit{kinesis}, as several examples from \textit{De beatitudinibus}, Gregory’s series of homilies on the Beatitudes, demonstrate. In exploring the meaning of justice in \textit{De beat.}, Gregory asserts that the proper way to discover the meaning of justice is to search scripture so that, “with its attendant beauty being revealed, our appetite (ὄρεξις) for loveliness of what has been shewn may be roused (κινηθείη).”\textsuperscript{26} In this example, Gregory describes the experience of the emotion of desire as one of moving. Later on in \textit{De beat.}, when expressing wonder over God’s adoption of people, Gregory writes, “What

\textsuperscript{24} Contra Eun. 1 GNO 1.1.1.643. Translation from Hall, 128.

\textsuperscript{25} Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.19. Translation from Hall 64.

\textsuperscript{26} De beat. PG 44.1233.40-42. Translation from Hall, 48.
word, what thought, what stirring of emotion (ἐνθυμήσεως κίνησιν), with which to praise the surpassing grace?” In this example, Gregory uses motion to describe the human response to God’s love. Gregory even employs *kinesis* in an anthropomorphic sense to describe the anger of God, making the case that anger is not forbidden in every situation because, “This kind of anger is attested by the word of scripture in the case of Phineas, when by the slaughter of the malefactors he appeased the wrath of God which had been stirred up (κινηθεὶσαν ἄπειλήν) against the people.” While κίνησις is used to describe an emotional response that is clearly positive, as in being moved by beauty, Gregory also uses κίνησις to describe movement of an emotional nature that must be eliminated in order to achieve contemplation with God. In *De vita Mosis* Gregory writes that the one who wants to climb the mountain of contemplation of God “must first purify his manner of life from all sensual and irrational emotion (πάσης αἰσθητικῆς τε καὶ ἀλογού κινήσεως).”

In addition to *kinema* (κίνημα) and *kinesis*, Gregory uses several verbal forms of κινέω with added prepositional prefixes in reference to emotion, indicating that emotions are frequently thought of as moving or movable. Gregory uses συγκινέω in reference to stirring up to an emotional state, such as anger or excitement and παρακινέω he uses similarly, indicating

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27 *De beat. PG* 44.1280.34-36. Translation from Hall, 77.

28 *De beat. PG* 44.1276.10-13. Translation from Hall, 72-73. Gregory uses the story of Phineas again in *De anima* as an example for how anger can be used for the good, but in this it is the anger of Phineas, rather than the wrath of God that is said to move. *De anima PG* 46.68.1-2 (Callahan, 225).

29 Additionally, in some instances, being unmoved (ἀκίνητος) in an emotional sense by beauty or desire for God is clearly negative for Gregory. See *In cant. GNO* 6.33.10, *De virg. SC* 119.2.3.

30 *De vita Mosis SC* 1.2.157.6-7. Translation from Malherbe, 78.

31 Gregory uses κίνησις broadly for all types of motion, but κίνημα almost exclusively to indicate motion of an intelligible sort, generally as motion of the mind or soul.

disturbance or provocation, as in moving someone to wrath and hatred, provoking a deity, or having an unsettled soul. Ανακινέω occurs in situations of emotions such as desire and grief being awakened or stirred up, but also in cases of intelligible motion that describes thought more closely than emotion, as in the phrase, “wisdom moves (ἀνοκινοῦσα) all one’s thoughts.” Finally, Gregory very occasionally uses ὑποκινέω to indicate rousing of emotion, as when he describes Miriam as “driven (ὑποκινηθεῖσα)” by jealousy. Gregory uses the concept of motion to apply to a wide range of emotional situations that he deems both positive and negative. In associating motion with emotion, what is moving and how does that inform Gregory’s presentation of the human person?

The association between motion and emotion dates at least from Zeno in the second century BCE who, understanding the soul to be a physical substance mixed with the body, believed emotions to be “contractions, expansions, elations and dejections of the soul.” The later Stoic Chryssipus understood emotions as errant judgments, taking them out of the realm of the physical and locating the passions entirely in the intellect. Not all Stoics followed Chryssipus on this; Posidonius, for example, did not understand emotions as judgments because

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33 *Contra Eun. 3 GNO* 2.3.2.159.4.
34 *De vita Mosis SC* 1.1.62.4, *De orat. dom.* 222.29.
35 *In cant. GNO* 6.81.8.
36 *De anima PG* 46.12.22, *In Eccles. GNO* 5.430.15.
37 *In cant. GNO* 6.334.6; see also *In cant. GNO* 6.342.4.
38 *De vita Mosis SC* 1.62.3.
he allowed for emotions “aroused by the affective movements of the irrational parts.” Galen gave physiological explanations for emotion, namely that emotions were movements in the liver and heart systems that impact the function of other systems. Likewise, Plotinus stressed the physical nature of the emotions. Gregory follows Galen on his medical descriptions of expansion and contraction of the body when it is experiencing certain emotions, contracting when experiencing grief and relaxing when experiencing laughter. While Gregory acknowledges the physiological symptoms of emotions, his description of emotion as motion goes beyond what happens to the body.

Gregory’s most extended and direct discussion of emotions in which he refers to them as motions occurs in De anima. One of the primary topics of this treatise is the dialectical working out of Gregory’s theory on the role and function of emotion. Gregory begins the dialogue in a state of grief over the death of his brother, Basil, for which his sister, Macrina, reproves him, encouraging him to have more faith in the resurrection. With Gregory’s persuasion, Macrina softens her position on emotions from suggesting that they are “warts on the soul” that need to be eradicated to acknowledging that they are morally neutral, taking on the value of the use to which they are put. In this discussion, emotions are sometimes referred to in terms of motion. In beginning this part of the discussion in which Gregory and Macrina attempt to identify the

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42 Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, 97.


44 *De hom. opif. PG* 44.157-160 (*NPNF* 5:397-398).

45 *De anima PG* 46.56.38. Translation from Callahan, 219.
various parts of the soul and determine whether the desiring and spirited faculties are properly part of the soul, Gregory’s voice in the dialogue states,

For the soul is not only active in connection with knowledge and theory, activating the faculty of intelligence, nor does it control only the senses in its natural operation. There is also perceived in its nature much movement (κίνησις) connected with the desiring faculty (ἐπιθυμίαν) and the spirited faculty (θύμον) and, since each of these is present in us specifically, we see its movement (κίνησιν) proceeding energetically in many various ways.\textsuperscript{46}

In this passage, Gregory presents the activity of the desiring and spirited faculties as movements of the soul. A bit later in the discussion Macrina refers to anger, fear, and “any other impulses in the soul (τι τὸ τοιοῦτον τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ κινημάτων)”\textsuperscript{47} as being on the margin of the soul. She goes on, using Aristotle’s model of the trichotomous soul, as Smith demonstrates,\textsuperscript{48} with vegetative, irrational, and rational parts. The vegetative is responsible for nourishment and growth, the irrational is the part of the soul having to do with sense perception, and the rational is the logical, thinking part (that Gregory sees as made in the image of God). Since the rational part of the soul can only communicate with the body through sense perception, Macrina explains, this irrational part of the soul is necessary. Emotions (πάθη) are part of this irrational part of the soul and Macrina notes that they “have not been allotted to human life for an evil purpose.”\textsuperscript{49} She continues, now referring to the emotions as κινήματα rather than πάθη, “Such faculties (κινήματα) of the soul exist because of the need to choose good or evil.”\textsuperscript{50} She continues her discussion, concluding a bit later with a summary: “If this is so, we shall declare that in

\textsuperscript{46} De anima PG 46.48.50-46.49.3. Translation from Callahan, 215.
\textsuperscript{47} De anima PG 46.57.35. Translation from Callahan, 220.
\textsuperscript{48} Smith, Passion and Paradise, 70-74.
\textsuperscript{49} De anima PG 46.61.8-18. Translation from Callahan, 222.
\textsuperscript{50} De anima PG 46.61.14. Translation from Callahan, 222.
themselves these faculties (κινήµατα) are neither a virtue nor an evil. Whether they are good or not depends upon the use to which they are put. When the activity (κινήσεις) is for the better, then, it is material for praise, as, for example, the desire of Daniel and the anger of Phineas, who rightly lamented his grief. When the activity (ροπή) inclines towards the worse we call it passion (πάθη).” Rowan Williams defines πάθη in this sense as “impulse or affect…divorced from the proper ends of a reasoning being, impulse as leader…not as instrument.” Gregory uses motion in two related but slightly different ways in the previous examples. Sometimes he refers to emotions themselves, particularly anger and fear, as kinemata (κινήµατα), calling them impulses or faculties of the soul and kinesis he uses in this discussion to indicate the activity a person engages in as a result of the emotion. The emotions themselves are neutral; the value of the activity determines the value of the emotion.

Part of the difficulty in determining Gregory’s position on emotion is his inconsistent use of terminology. According to Smith, Platonic and Stoic schools make a distinction between ὁρµαί (impulses) and πάθη (passions), ὁρµαί being the involuntary mental movements that happen as a result of some stimulus, the instinctive feelings one initially has, and πάθη being emotion, properly speaking, or consent to the impulses. Gregory maintains some of this distinction, but is not entirely consistent. He uses ὁρµαί both to mean an impulse or drive of the soul and also an impulse caused by some sensation. Furthermore, he uses πάθη to mean both the morally neutral emotion generally associated with ὁρµαί and the full-blown emotion that is

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51 De anima PG 46.67.42-68.4. Translation from Callahan, 224-225.

typically reserved for πάθη. In the above passage, κινήματα and κίνησις are mixed together with the two other terms, not clearly distinguished, except that κίνησις is a consistently neutral term.

Gregory uses similar language in *De hominis opificio*, in an explanation of the relationship between thought and emotion. In this passage, he argues that reason is the part the human has in common with the divine, whereas passions are the part the human has in common with animals. Impulses of the irrational part of the soul may give the initial impetus of emotion, but the emotion is nurtured by thought to develop it into vice or virtue. Anger, Gregory argues, can grow into various kinds of evils, such as malignity, envy, and deceit if the mind fosters that kind of growth. However, on the contrary, he states, “if reason instead assumes sway over such emotions (κινημάτων) each of them is transmuted into a form of virtue.” He gives examples of anger turning into courage, fear into obedience, and love into a desire for the beautiful. He concludes the section by noting, “we find that every such motion (κίνημα), when elevated by loftiness of mind, is conformed to the beauty of the Divine image.”

In this passage, Gregory uses *pathe* (πάθη), *hormai* (ὁρμαί), and *kinema* (κίνημα) more consistently than he does in the *De anima* passage above. Here, he uses *pathe* in a negative sense to describe what humans have in common with the animals, specifically contrasted with the part of humans made in the divine image. He refers to anger, fear, greed, and pleasure as passions,

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54 Posidonius used the phrase emotional movements (*pathos kinesis*). See Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, 62. Although Gregory referred to emotions as παθή and κίνησις, he does not combine them in a single phrase.

55 *De hom. opif. PG* 44.193.18-21. Translation from NPNF 5:408.

56 *De hom. opif. PG* 44.193.29-32. Translation from NPNF 5:408.
noting that if reason becomes the servant of passion, the image of God in the human is distorted. After this he explains that passion can lead to evils, he changes focus, turning to the neutrality of emotion, saying, “This the rising of anger in us is indeed akin to the impulse (ὁρμῇ) of the brutes; but it grows by the alliance of thought.” After referring to these initial impulses as hormai, he turns to the positive possibilities of emotion when it is controlled by reason. At the point when he begins to discuss the potential for emotion to be positive, he refers to it as kinema and continues to refer to it as such throughout the section in which emotion has the potential to be positive. His use of kinema in this passage is consistent with the usage in De anima, as an activity that takes place in the irrational portion of the soul, morally neutral in itself, that provides the impetus for the person to choose to develop into virtue or vice, but he favors kinema over pathe to describe emotion influenced by reason, moving in a direction toward the good.

Sorabji traces the development of the concept of first movements from Seneca to Origen, Evagrius, and Augustine. Gregory’s use of κίνημα has some things in common with the development of this idea, but does not match exactly the notions of any of them. Seneca’s first movements are involuntary contractions and expansions of the mind that occur before a judgment can take place and are preliminary to an actual emotion. They can include physical symptoms, such as pallor, tears, and sexual arousal. The Stoics developed a term for this, propatheia, which was used by Philo, Origen, and Didymus the Blind. Jewish and Christian writers did not treat the subject as precisely as did Seneca, nevertheless they did employ the term to mean a precursor to emotion. Christ’s weeping and suffering on the cross were often

57 De hom. opif PG 44.193.6-8. Translation from NPNF 5:408.
considered as first movements and not true emotion. In Origen, first movements (κίνημα) change from initial shock to bad thoughts, a significant break from the original Stoic concept.\textsuperscript{59} Gregory’s presentation of the initial experience of emotion is similar to the Stoic concept, although he does not refer it as a first movement or use the term propatheia. Gregory’s presentation of emotional movements is similar to Stoic first movements in the sense that after experiencing an initial stimulus, the person then has the choice about how to proceed with the emotional involvement. Where Gregory differs from the Stoics is in the possibility for transforming the initial impulse of emotion into virtue.

To go back and attempt an answer to the question of what is moving in Gregory’s association of motion and emotion, it is helpful to separate his usage of verbal forms (κινεώ and forms with added prefixes) from his use of noun forms (κίνησις and κίνημα). When Gregory uses a verbal form to indicate emotion or an emotional situation, it generally indicates a person or a group of people changing emotional states: choirs moved to celebrate, soldiers moved to indignation, crowds moved to anger, attempts of a person praying to rouse God to act against an enemy, and the like.\textsuperscript{60} In these verbal usages, emotion is not usually the topic of discussion, the reference to it being ancillary to the purpose of the text. While some information can be gleaned from these references to emotion, for example that Gregory frequently used forms of κινέω to describe people becoming emotional, the conclusions that can be drawn from such use is of limited depth.

\textsuperscript{59} Sorabji, “Stoic First Movements,” 99-100.

\textsuperscript{60} E.g. \textit{In cant. GNO} 6.30.14, 6.81.8, 6.364.12; \textit{Contra Eun. 1 GNO} 1.1.4.5, 1.1.35.15, 1.1.41.3, 1.1.140.5; \textit{Contra Eun. 3 GNO} 2.3.2.159.4; \textit{De orat. dom.} 216.24, 218.6, 222.29
Much more information can be mined from Gregory’s usage of noun forms related to emotion, in part because he uses them in discussions about emotion. In the examinations above of *De anima* and *De hom. opif.*, the movement involved with emotion takes place within the soul. They can be controlled by reason and are entirely defined by the direction in which they are moving. They exist for the purpose of human choice. Between the initial emotional reaction to a stimulus and the development of that reaction in a positive or negative direction is a space for human choice. Gregory often uses κίνησις and κίνημα in that undetermined space when the potential exists for either virtue or vice.

**Will**

In addition to motion of the mind and motion that indicates emotion, Gregory uses the concept of motion to indicate moral or spiritual progress or regress. Gregory generally presents this motion as vertical, up toward good and down toward evil, and describes the subject of this motion variably as the soul, will, virtue, vice, human nature, or simply the person. In this section I will only discuss motion of the living person, leaving motion of the person after death for the next section.

In the same way that constant motion is required for the life of the body, it is also a necessary element of the intelligible part of the human person. In contrast to the uncreated God, who does not move or change, human life begins with a movement from not existing to existing and remains in a state of constant change. Gregory regularly describes this change as movement, having a direction either up toward the good or down toward evil. As he explains in *Cat. or.*, “whatever by the uncreated being is brought into existence out of what was non-existent, from the very first moment that it begins to be, is ever passing through change, and if it acts according
to its nature the change is ever to the better, but if it be diverted from the straight path, then a movement to the contrary succeeds.” Created beings are ever moving, either toward or away from full realization of their natures.

Free will, for Gregory, determines whether the motion proceeds up toward the good or down toward evil. In creating humans, God considered how free will was going to affect the human experience and made adjustments in framing the human person. According to De hom. opif., constant motion toward or away from the good factored prominently in human creation as the reason for the division of humanity into male and female. In De hom. opif. 16 Gregory attempts to reconcile scripture’s pronouncement of humans as made in the image of God with a humanity divided into two genders, a division certainly not present in the divine. He notices that Galatians 3:28 states that in Christ “there is neither male nor female,” while Genesis 1:27 records that God created humans “male and female.” He resolves this problem by positing a double creation following the two parts of Genesis 1:27: “and God created man; in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.” The first creation produced humans in the image of God and the second divided them into male and female. As a result, Gregory concludes that humans have two natures, one in the image of God that corresponds to the intelligible and one corporeal nature that is divided into male and female. The double creation did not take place in time, however, but beforehand in the mind of God, as God realized that creating beings that were so closely entwined with motion and change would result in them moving away from the good. He thus devised the division of male and female in order to provide a method for reproduction. As Gregory states:

61 Cat. or. SC 39.453.8.154-159. Translation from NPNF 5:484.
Now as the former [divine nature] always remains the same, while that which came into being by creation had the beginning of its existence from change (ἀλλοίωσεως), and has a kindred connection with the like mutation (τροπήν), for this reason He Who, as the prophetic writing says, ‘knoweth all things before they be,’ following out, or rather perceiving beforehand by His power of foreknowledge what, in a state of independence and freedom, is the tendency of the motion of man’s will (τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης προαιρέσεως κίνησις),—as He saw, I say, what would be, He devised for His image the distinction of male and female, which has no reference to the Divine Archetype, but, as we have said, is an approximation to the less rational nature.\(^6\)

The intelligible part of the person, like the body, is always in motion and the will is the driving factor determining the direction toward which the person moves.

As a result of this arrangement in which the will determines the direction for the motion of the person, the will is in some ways responsible for human involvement with sin. Gregory explains in *In Eccles.* that although it may seem that God is responsible for the evil and suffering on earth, God only produces good. Evil, then, comes from the corruption of God’s good gift of freedom of motion (ἡ αὐτεξούσιος κίνησις), which became “a means to sin through the sinful use mankind made of it.”\(^6\) He further reasons that free will itself is good because nothing is good that is “constrained by necessity,” but humans abused this freedom, which resulted in the evil that humans now experience. He frames here the experience of being involved with evil in terms of motion: “But that free impulse of the mind rushing unschooled towards the choice of evil became a source of distress for the soul, as it was dragged down from the sublime and honourable towards the urges of the natural passions (κινήσεως).”\(^6\) Freedom of motion, then, was a gift of God to humans which when abused resulted in the downward motion into involvement with sin. In *Cat. or.* Gregory also describes human involvement with sin as a result of the motion

\(^{62}\) *De hom. opif.* PG 44.184.54-185.9. Translation from *NPNF* 5:406.

\(^{63}\) *In Eccles.* GNO 5.301.20-23. Translation from Hall, 50.

\(^{64}\) *In Eccles.* GNO 5.302.1-5. Translation from Hall, 50.
of the will: “Now since by a motion of our self-will we contracted a fellowship with evil,” and concludes that this resulted in a transformation that spoiled human nature. It is important to note that while Gregory does attribute the introduction of evil into human nature as a result of movement and free will, this is not the only way he describes it. For example, just a few paragraphs prior to the previous quotation he blames the devil for mixing evil into the human will, a reminder that Gregory’s understanding of significant theological topics such as sin and free will is multifaceted.

Just as the will can steer the person into sin, it can also propel motion toward the good, and when moving toward the good there is no limit for motion since good is infinite, so one could move infinitely toward it. Gregory explores this possibility for infinite movement toward the good in chapter 21 of Cat. or., explaining God’s original intention in creating humanity, starting with the idea that humans are created in God’s image. By definition, an image is something that shares some features with the original, but is not exactly the same. One significant difference between the image and the archetype in this case is that the image, that is the human, is subject to motion and change, whereas God is not. Being subject to motion is certainly part of the original design because the very event of being created is a motion from non-existence to existence. Motion is a given for humans, existing in two possible directions: toward or away from the good, and the factor determining which direction the human travels is the will. “There is always something towards which the will is tending,” Gregory writes, “the

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66 Cat. or. SC 453.6.111-117 (NPNF 5:481).
appetency for moral beauty naturally drawing it on to movement.” In God’s original design, the human desire for beauty would propel it ever toward the good, but in the opposite direction of the good lays the illusion of beauty and the will can direct the person toward the illusion of beauty. Like the dog who sees in water the reflection of the food it was carrying in its mouth and abandons the real food for its reflection, a person too can abandon real beauty for something seemingly beautiful but illusory. By virtue of being created, a person will be in constant change and motion, and the direction of that motion is determined by the will.

Gregory’s second homily of In cant. also makes reference to the motion of the will in determining the direction of spiritual motion, noting God designed humans in this manner so that they would seek beauty and have good in their lives. Gregory writes: “To the rational nature, however, he gave the grace of self-determination (τὴν αὐτεξουσιον χάριν) and added a capacity to detect what fits one’s purposes. In this way space might be made for our responsibility, and good should not be compelled and involuntary but come about as the product of choice.” Gregory goes on to explain that the motion of the will leads the person toward what is apparently good, but since the “inventor of mischief” abandoned the good and established himself as an enemy of those seeking the good, the apparent good is not necessarily the real one. The good is only truly good if freely sought and the will is the power to enact the decision to seek the good. In order for the soul to move toward the good, then, the rational part of the soul identifies what is good and the will propels its motion forward.

The will appears again as a factor of the soul’s motion upward in Homily 12, this time doing more than propelling motion, it is the locus of a resurrection. In this homily Gregory

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67 Cat. or. SC 453.21.28-30. Translation from NPNF 5:492.
68 In cant. GNO 6.55. Translation from Norris, 61.
explores the notion of death and resurrection, noting that a thing must die in order to experience resurrection. He begins with Song of Songs 5:5, “I rose up to open to my kinsman,” understanding the speaker of the line to be the soul and rising up to indicate resurrection. Death, however, must precede resurrection and in this case death is the death of vice, which when eliminated allows for the soul to rise up. This is possible because of the particular composition of the human person that has both a “fine and intelligent and light” nature that naturally moves upward and a “course and material and heavy” nature that naturally moves downward. The will mediates between the two directions: “Since, then, our motions are naturally opposed, it is not possible for the one to follow its natural course successfully unless the other has been weakened. But our power of choice and self-governance, which is stationed in the middle between these, works both strength in the one that is sickly and weakness in the one that is strong, for it assigns the reward of victory to whichever side it takes.”69 With two natures pulling against one another, the will can tip the balance in either direction. If it sides with the good, it can put vice to death allowing for the rising up of the soul.

The will is responsible for the direction of the soul’s motion, but as Verna Harrison has pointed out, its role in human action according to Gregory is considerably broader. The human person is an agglomeration of capacities and movements, including movements of thought, emotion, virtue, vice, habits, and bodily action. Freedom, which she defines as “self-determination and free choice”, is the key to how all these parts of the human interact. She writes: “it decides what objects will become the focal points of the minds thoughts. It chooses whether emotions will be utilized as virtues or as passions. It determines whether instincts will

be directed toward real bodily needs or misdirected toward superfluous pleasures. In the complex interactions between parts of the human person, the will is the driver, determining the course of the motion.

**Epektasis**

The most well known instance of motion in Gregory’s work is his idea of the soul’s eternal progress toward God, termed *epektasis* by Daniélou. For Gregory, in the eschaton the soul continues to move toward God, always simultaneously experiencing satisfaction in the immediate presence of the divine and increasing its capacity in order to avoid satiation and boredom. Prior to Gregory several briefly indicated human progress toward God, including Philo, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, but with Gregory it became a characteristic theme. Gregory’s insistence that the soul is insatiable in its pursuit of God is likely in response to Origen who attributed the cause of the fall to the soul’s satiety with God. By contrast, Gregory maintained that because of God’s infinite nature and beauty, the soul will never cease to desire and follow after it. Another innovation of Gregory is a departure from the idea that motion of the soul can take place in a linear fashion. The idea of cyclical motion, or motion without progress, was established, but it is Gregory’s innovation that the motion of the soul can result in progress toward God.

Gregory uses a number of different images and explanations to describe the soul’s perpetual movement toward God, including running a race, climbing steps or a ladder, flight,

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71 See Everett Ferguson, “God’s Infinity and Man’s Mutability,” 60-61.


73 Jean Daniélou, *From Glory to Glory*, 46-56.
growth, and continual re-creation. Much of Gregory’s discussion of the motion of the soul after death comes from *Homilies on the Song of Songs (In cant.).* a spiritual collection of homilies composed late in his life. For this collection Gregory defends the use of allegory as an interpretive method, applying the erotic motif of the Song to the soul’s desire for God. In Homily 11 of *In cant.* Gregory illustrates the concept of the soul rising to God with a picture of a bubble rising to the surface. While explaining that the motion is possible because of the particular way God created the human soul on the border between incorporeal, intelligible reality and material, incorporeal reality. From its vantage point on the border of the two kinds of reality, the soul looks up, searching for divinity and notices the beauty of creation, the orderliness of the motion of the heavenly bodies, and the diversity of life on earth. Virtue and holy curiosity allow the soul to recognize all the wonder of creation as divine activity and full of awe, the soul stops to worship the one responsible. In this moment of worship, because of its affinity for and similarity to the intelligible divine nature the soul rises up toward the divine. Like an air bubble at the bottom of a pool, the soul travels up to what it is like. In this description, the soul’s movement upward toward divinity is effected by its particular composition as “on the border” between two types of reality, its posture of virtue that assumes it has shed the entanglements of sin, and its natural similarity to the divine. Reaching the surface is not the end of the journey for the bubble, for as Gregory asserts earlier in the homily, for those who are going upward toward God “the course they run has no end…everything that is laid hold on becomes a starting point for something yet higher.”

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74 See Ferguson, “God’s Infinity,” 61-63.
75 *In cant. GNO 6.333-335.*
76 *In cant. GNO 6.320.* Translation from Norris, 337.
Gregory also describes the process of the soul’s ascent in *De vita Mosis*, another spiritually-focused work composed late in Gregory’s life in which he follows the life of Moses in order to emulate his virtuous life. The Exodus account of Moses seeing the back of God is for Gregory an allegorical account of the soul’s ascent to God. After suggesting that this is a passage to be explained spiritually rather than literally, he begins by explaining principles of the soul’s motion: “Bodies, once they have received the initial thrust downward, are driven downward with greater speed without any additional help as long as the surface on which they move is steadily sloping and no resistance to their downward thrust is encountered. Similarly, the soul moves in the opposite direction. Once it is released from its earthly attachment, it becomes light and swift for its movement upward (τὴν ἐπὶ τὰ ἄνω κίνησιν), soaring from below up to the heights.”

He goes on to say that when ascending toward the infinite God, one can ascend infinitely, the desire to see God never being satisfied. The ascent to God is paradoxically both standing still and motion (κίνησις) because the firmer and more unmoving one is in remaining in the Good, the more one progresses. On the contrary, one who wavers in pursuit of the good does not progress because their movement is like trying to move uphill in the sand with the foot sliding down with every attempt to step. There is much motion, but no progress. By planting oneself firmly in the good, “It is like using the standing still as if it were a wing while the heart flies upward through its stability toward the good.”

The soul is able to advance perpetually, as Gregory explains in chapter 21 of *De hom. opif.*, because of the constantly moving character of human nature and because of the direction of

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77 *De vita Mosis SC* 1.2.224. Translation from Malherbe, 102.

78 *De vita Mosis SC* 1.2.243.

79 *De vita Mosis SC* 1.2.244. Translation from Malherbe, 108.
its travel. As noted previously, by virtue of their created nature, humans are in constant motion. To be otherwise would blur the creator/creature distinction. Gregory also asserts that it is impossible for what is mutable to be more lasting than what is immutable because wickedness is not stronger than goodness. As a result, a being cannot move infinitely in the direction of evil, but it can move infinitely toward the good, for: “that which is always in motion (κινούµενον), if its progress be to good, will never cease moving onwards to what lies before it, by reason of the infinity of the course to be traversed.”

Evil, however, is finite so that when travelling in the direction of evil, one will eventually reach the boundary of evil and turn once more to travel in the direction of the good. Passing the necessary limits of evil and moving once again into the good is one of Gregory’s descriptions of the eschaton: “Paradise therefore will be restored, that tree will be restored which is in truth the tree of life;--there will be restored the grace of the image, and the dignity of the rule.”

Because the soul’s motion toward God is a phenomenon that can begin in the present age and extend into eternity, it is not always easy to identify what changes death may have on the human experience of moving toward God. How far can the soul move toward God in the present age? What changes and what remains the same after the resurrection and in the eschaton? Does kinesis still apply to bodies, minds, and souls in the eschaton? Gregory gives one account of death in In cant. 12, a homily about Song of Songs 5:5-7, the theme of which Gregory takes to be death and resurrection. Death, Gregory points out, is a prerequisite for resurrection and in order for the soul to be raised up, there must first be some kind of death. At the beginning of the homily the death Gregory speaks of is figurative, specifically he discusses the death of vice: by

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80 De hom. opif. PG 44.201.19-22. Translation from NPNF 5:410.
81 De hom. opif. PG 44.204.3-6. Translation from NPNF 5:411.
putting to death various vices, the soul can begin its ascent toward God. The soul’s ascent to God begins before the physical death of the body, but by the end of the homily he turns to a discussion of the soul’s continuing ascent toward God after physical death. He describes death as the moment when God passes by the soul, as he passed by Moses, and the soul moves out to follow God. After death, the soul continues to desire and follow God, ultimately learning that “the true fruition of what she seeks is ever to make progress in seeking and never to halt on the upward path, since her fulfilled desire ever generates a further desire for what is beyond her.”

In the course of this homily, the soul moves continually toward God, but the discussion of death and resurrection changes from figurative to literal, leaving the reader to wonder about the nature of the changes that come about when a person dies.

In some passages the ascent of the soul seems so seamless that it leads one to wonder what differences will be between the present time and the eschaton. Smith, however, demonstrates that although the soul can make progress toward God beginning while the person is still alive, the experience of the soul in the eschaton is qualitatively different than in the present age. In the present, the soul’s experience of God is confined to experiencing the energeia of God, but in the eschaton it will be immediate, uninterrupted, and unmediated. Furthermore, the appearance of God will be so glorious, that the soul will have no desire to turn away from it. The soul experiences a more direct communion with the divine, but what are the implications for the way motion takes place?

82 In cant. GNO 6.356-357.
83 In cant. GNO 6.370. Translation from Norris, 389.
84 Smith, Passion and Paradise, 115-125.
In *De anima* Macrina explains the mechanics of the soul’s motion toward God, attributing the driving factors of motion to hope and memory:

Man, because it is his nature to be always in movement (ἐν κινήσει), is borne wherever the onset of choice takes him, for the soul is not affected in the same way by what comes before and what comes later. Hope is the guide in our motion forward (τῆς ἐπὶ τὸ πρῶτον κινήσεως) and memory follows upon the motion (κίνησιν) effected by hope. If hope leads the soul to what is beautiful by nature, the motion of choice (ἡ τῆς προαιρέσεως κίνησις) imprints a bright track upon our memory; but, if the soul is defrauded of what is better, hope having deluded it by some false image of beauty, shame follows upon what has happened.  

Hope, then, shows the soul where to go and after it has traveled in a certain direction, memory can evaluate whether or not the course it has traveled was a good one. Prior to death, hope and memory propel the soul in this manner setting a trajectory for the soul’s movement upward. The emotions of hope, memory, and desire are necessary in order for the soul to ascend toward God.

The role of emotion in the soul’s movement toward God changes, however, as is made evident by seemingly conflicting accounts of what becomes of the emotions in the eschaton. Just following the above passage about hope and memory, Macrina continues by suggesting that hope, memory, and desire will no longer exist in the eschaton because when the soul possesses what it hopes for, it will no longer have a need for such emotions. These statements are complicated by the fact that elsewhere Gregory makes reference to such emotions being present in the eschaton. Gregory refers to desire in particular as being necessary in order for the soul to continue its motion toward the divine. Wessel has demonstrated that in the case of memory, where the text appears to state both that it will no longer be necessary in the eschaton and that it is the primary factor in the person maintaining their individuality in the resurrection, the dialectical nature of *De anima* allows for Gregory to work through the tensions, gradually

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85 *De anima* PG 46.92.5-18. Translation from Callahan, 238.
shaping their meanings throughout the text. Memory in this view does not cease, but is transformed in the soul’s movement toward the good.\textsuperscript{86} Smith argues that desire, too, is transformed from an emotion stemming from lack to holy enjoyment intensified by realization that “the goods of God will never grow old but will continue to excite the soul and eternally arouse desire for more.”\textsuperscript{87}

When the soul’s emotional propulsion system is transformed, what role will \textit{kinesis} play in its movement toward God? Up to this point I have argued that \textit{kinesis} is a fundamental part of the human person, distinguishing the created from the creator. \textit{Kinesis} is also, however, closely tied to the \textit{diastema}, the extension of time and space that make up the created world. Will time and space cease to exist and the \textit{diastemic} nature of the human person with them, or will the \textit{diastema} continue in some way? Is the soul’s eternal movement characterized by \textit{diastema} and \textit{kinesis} or are these things shed? There are two schools of thought on the future of the \textit{diastema} in secondary literature. Many commentators favor the idea that the \textit{diastemic} character of the person is what marks the person as created, distinct from the Creator and since the created/creator distinction is so fundamental, it must continue in some fashion the eschaton.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{86} Susan Wessel, “Memory and Individuality in Gregory of Nyssa’s \textit{Dialogus de anima et resurrectione},” \textit{JECS} 18.3 (2010): 369-392.

\textsuperscript{87} Smith, \textit{Passion and Paradise}, 213.

\textsuperscript{88} Balás argues for a transformed \textit{diastema} in which “true perfection does not exist in escaping ‘distension’ but rather in a continuous ‘distension’ of a higher order.” David L. Balás, “Eternity and Time in Gregory of Nyssa’s \textit{Contra Eunomium},” in \textit{Gregor von Nyssa und Die Philosophie. Zweites Internationales Kolloquium über Gregor von Nyssa}, eds. H. Dorrie, M. Altenburger, and V. Schramm (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 128-53, at 149. Plass also argues for a transformed \textit{diastema}, saying that people cannot abandon the \textit{diastema} without ceasing to be creatures, but that \textit{diastema} will be transformed into “something between God’s being and mere temporal extension.” P. Plass, “Transcendent Time and Eternity in Gregory of Nyssa,” \textit{Vigiliae Christianae} 34 (1980): 180-192, at 184. Mosshammer argues that Gregory’s usage of \textit{diastema} changed over the course of his work, applying \textit{diastema} only to sensible things in his earlier work, but referring to the intelligible as \textit{diastemic} in later works. Mosshammer “The Created and Uncreated.” Smith also argues that people will retain their \textit{diastemic} character in the age to come. Smith, \textit{Passion and Paradise}, 224.
Hans Boersma, however, argues that Gregory explicitly denies the continuation of *diastema* in the eschaton saying, “for St. Gregory infinite progress in the eschaton is not characterized by *diastema*.”\(^8^9\) He states further: “Gregory nowhere indicates that infinite progress in the hereafter requires *diastema*.”\(^9^0\)

Whether or not people retain their *diastemic* character in the afterlife hinges on the precisely what Gregory means by the term. A significant, perhaps primary, component to the *diastema* is its temporal character; the term *diastema* occurs most often in discussions about time.\(^9^1\) In fact, Boersma’s argument that humans do not retain their *diastemic* character in the afterlife focuses on the temporal aspect of *diastema*, demonstrating Gregory believed ordered, measured time would cease in the eschaton. To the extent that human association with the *diastema* means that people experience time in a measured, chronological way, I agree with Boersma that Gregory believes this will end. Gregory indicates in a number of places, however, that the humans are *diastemic* not only because they are *in* time and space, but also because they have an origin and a perspective indelibly marked by time and space. For Gregory, *diastemic* character is as much about the starting point as it is the ending point, repeatedly emphasizing that God is beyond the comprehension of the human because he has no beginning.

The most extended discussion of this is in *Contra Eun. I* where Gregory’s purpose is to demonstrate the lack of *diastema* between the Father and the Son. In this passage, he repeatedly emphasizes the importance of a being’s beginning for determining their relation to *diastema*:

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\(^9^0\) Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue*, 23.

\(^9^1\) Cvetkovic argues that Gregory’s notion of *diastema* has both a temporal and an ontological component. Cvetkovic, “St. Gregory’s Argument Concerning the Lack of Διάστημα in the Divine Activities From *Ad Ablabium*,” 373-4.
“But the being which is above creation, being separate from all concept of intervening period (διαστηματικοῦ νοηματος), is free from all temporal sequence; it has no such starting point, no end, no manner which involves order as it sets out and ceases.”92 He contrasts the divine life that is not in time with creation, saying: “Creation however moves from an acknowledged absolute beginning as it journeys towards its goal through the temporal periods (χρονικῶν διαστήματων)…All originated things, being circumscribed by their own limits, are confined to their appropriate size by a sort of boundary as it pleased the wisdom of the Creator, in order to fit the design of the whole.”93 The point of contrast between the divine and the created in this passage is that God, who cannot be measured, is unbounded, while creation is encased within the diastema. To prove his claim, Gregory points to the origins of the two: creation has an acknowledged beginning, but the divine has no beginning, a concept that the human mind, diastemic as it is, cannot even fathom. In drawing the contrast between diastemic and adiastemic in this passage, Gregory does not discuss endings or indicate what aspects of the diastema might be shed in the eschaton, rather he distinguishes the two by the difference in their beginnings. Eternity, for Gregory, is surely timeless, as Boersma demonstrates, but even as humans are able to exist in eschatological timelessness, they cannot shed their temporal beginning. Creation is diastemic because it began and although eternity is endless, a created being can never become beginning-less. As Gregory says further down in the same passage: “It is not possible for anything that has come or is coming into existence not to have its being absolutely in space and time.”94 The very coming to be indicates a time-marked beginning.

93 Contra Eun. 1 GNO 1.1.1.365-366. Translation from Hall, 89.
94 Contra Eun. 1 GNO 1.1.1.370. Translation from Hall, 89.
Just as people retain temporal vestiges of their *diastemic* character, they also remain *diastemic* in retaining some spatial qualities. *Kinesis* and *diastema*, as discussed before, are bound together as the two characteristic features of the created world, *diastema* constituting the temporal and spatial boundaries within which *kinesis* takes place. To be *kinetic* means to be *diastemic* in some sense because motion necessarily involves extension, otherwise motion would be without direction or amount. Gregory describes *epektasis*, as I’ve argued in this section, in terms of *kinesis*. Because of the close association between *kinesis* and *diastema*, I believe this indicates that people retain some sense of the spatial aspect of their *diastemic* character after death in the sense that they still move. To lose completely the *diastemic* character in the eschaton would be to lose motion altogether, and Gregory clearly believes the soul continues in motion in the eschaton.

*Epektasis* in the eschaton, although different in some ways from the way people experience spiritual motion in life, has a similar character. Gregory indicates this in two passages that draw a fuzzy boundary between spiritual motion in life and eschatological *epektasis*. In *In Eccles.* Gregory writes:

But I, he says, sought the true Good, which is equally good at any age and every time (γρόνῳ) of life, and of which satiety (κόρος) is not expected nor fullness found. Appetite (δρεξίς) for it and partaking of it are exactly matched, and longing flourishes together with enjoyment (ἀπολαύσει), and is not limited by the attainment of what is desired; the more it delights in the Good, the more desire (ἐπιθυµία) flames up with delight; the delight matches the desire, and at each stage of life (διάστηµα τῆς ζωῆς) it is always a lovely thing to those who partake of it. Amid the changes of age and time the Good alters not at all; when our eyes are closed and when they are open, when we are happy and when we are sorrowful, by day and by night, on land and on the sea, active and at rest, ruling and serving—for every person alive it is absolutely good, since the accidents inflicted on one by chance make it neither worse nor better, nor smaller nor larger.95

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95 *In Eccles.* GNO 5.313.8-314.2. Translation from Hall, 58.
The acquisition of virtue Gregory describes here takes place prior to the eschaton, using phrases “every time of life” and “at each diastema of life”, and yet the terms in which he describes the growth in the good are strikingly similar to the terms Gregory uses to describe epektasis. One desires the good and seeks it, experiencing pleasure and delight in attaining it, but never satiety. Pleasure at achieving the good fuels further desire, which sparks further enjoyment. This is precisely the description of epektasis in the eschaton.

Gregory describes developing virtue in similar terms in a discussion of the Beatitude, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice,” in De beat., arguing that seeking pleasure is transitory, but seeking virtue is eternal. Seeking pleasure of entertainment or food is fleeting, “without staying even for a moment with those who grasp it,” but seeking virtue is “well-founded, permanent, and lasting through every period of life (τῷ τῆς ζωῆς διαστήματι).” 96 It is an activity of the present age, but the categories of time collapse in seeking virtue, as the effects of it are the same before and after the eschaton:

The one who desires virtue makes the good his own possession, since he sees in himself what he has desired. Blessed therefore is he who hungers for temperance; for he will be filled with purity. Being filled, as we have said, does not lead to aversion, but to intensification of the appetite, and both grow together on a par with each other. The desire for virtue is followed closely by the possession of what is desired, and the good arising in the soul brings in with it unceasing joy. Such is the nature of this good that it not only gives sweetness to the one who enjoys it in the present, but in every period of time provides actual joy. 97

Again in this passage seeking virtue is an activity that clearly takes place in the present age, but the description of what happens when one seeks virtue in the present is strikingly similar to epektasis. Seeking after virtue sets in motion a cycle of joy and increased appetite, neither

96 De beat. PG 44.1244. Translation from Hall, 54.
97 De beat. PG 44.1245. Translation from Hall, 55.
diminishes the power of the other. This is the case both in the present age and the
eschatological one.

Determining whether or not the *diastema* continues into the next age is not as simple as
saying it continues or it does not because some things marked by *diastema* cease, some change,
and some remain the same. The *diastema* as a container made up of the boundaries of time and
space is transformed from finite to infinite. The present ways Gregory marks time, by
cosmological motion and human reproduction, will no longer exist since the motion of the
cosmos and human reproduction will cease. Space, furthermore, will no longer serve as a
boundary, although materiality will still exist in some sense, since there will be a bodily
resurrection. The *diastema* as a boundary of human reason must also transform as people gain an
understanding of what it means to be timeless. In the present age, the *diastema* serves as the
boundary of human thought and reason because people cannot fathom what it means to be
outside time and space. Trying to understand what it means that God has no beginning is like
trying to climb a cliff with no footholds; there’s nothing familiar to grasp. In the eschaton, this
perspective must change, as people exist in timeless eternity they will have mental footholds for
what it means to be timeless. It is in this sense that hope and memory are no longer used to mark
time, but are transformed.

While the *diastema* as a boundary will no longer exist, it must be the case for Gregory
that humans retain their *diastemic* character. People will still have their origins in time and space,
which is a significant point for Gregory because it is what differentiates them from God. Besides
simply having a beginning, people remain *diastemic* in the sense that they are measurable beings.
With no interval, there would be no difference between the creation and the creator. People must
retain the gap between themselves and God in order to maintain their ontological distinctiveness. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist with no gaps between them, but humans cannot enter into that space without measure, even in the eschaton.

Since I understand Gregory to say that the diastema ceases to function as a boundary, while humans retain their character as measured creations, remaining separated from God by a gap, I propose that the spiritual progress people experience in the eschaton can still be considered kinesis. When Gregory refers to the end of time as the time when motion ceases, he is referring to cessation of the present things that mark time such as motion of the cosmos, human reproduction, psychological time markers such as hope and memory. In the eschaton, rather than ceasing, kinesis is transformed, allowing the soul to expand infinitely in its longing for and enjoyment of God, while still maintaining the gap between creature and creator. This solution explains how Gregory can talk about the end of time as the cessation of motion and still refer to the soul’s growth toward God in the eschaton in terms of motion. The transformation of motion can also explain how Gregory seems to resist referring to the resurrected body in terms of kinesis (as I suggested in Chapter 2), but still uses kinesis to describe spiritual progress.

Conclusions

The examination of motion in these three chapters has demonstrated its importance to Gregory’s anthropology. It is a key part of what it means to be human, separate from God, and living the diastema. In constructing a framework for how motion operates in Gregory, chapter one developed the most important distinction, which is between created and uncreated. The uncreated is not subject to motion, whereas the created is. In the second chapter, the examination of motion in the sensible world developed the concept of motion by adding that created things
not only experience motion, motion is a central component of what it means to be created. In this chapter it has become clear that direction is a key component to motion as Gregory’s concern in approaching thought, language, emotion, will, and spirituality is whether motion in these categories directs a person toward or away from virtue and true beauty. In this respect, motion is about change, a topic I will revisit in Part II. Having developed an idea for the boundaries within which motion operates in Part I, Part II will turn to how motion operates across those boundaries. Even in this part, the examination has begun to reveal a blurring of the intelligible/sensible and the present age/eschaton boundaries. The characterization of humans as dualistically divided between body and soul does not hold up under close scrutiny, nor does the stark division between the life of virtue now and the age to come. In Part II I will delve into these boundaries and others more deeply and draw conclusions about how Gregory’s view of motion impacts his anthropology.
Motion in the Gaps: Knowledge and Language

To be diastemic is to have gaps.¹ In contrast to the adiastemic God who has no measurement and for whom exists no lag between intention and action, humans have many epistemological and communicative gaps within themselves and between themselves and others. Gaps exist between happenings and perception, perception and knowledge, knowledge and language, a person and other people, and a person and God, among others. Gregory mentions several of these gaps in a discussion on theological language in book 2 of Contra Eunomius: “If however the Being [of God] exists prior to the actions, and we know the actions through the perceptions of sense, and if we describe these in such words as may be possible, what still remains so terrible about saying that the names are more recent than the things?”² Whereas Eunomius understands language as relating directly to God’s essence, Gregory posits several gaps between God and language, including gaps between an action and sense perception of the action, between perception and knowledge of the action, and between knowledge of the action and language to communicate the action. Something as simple as making a statement requires overcoming gaps of perception, knowledge, and communication.

One significant gap for Gregory is the gap between the mind and the body. The body picks up stimuli around it through the senses, the information from the senses must pass over into the mind, and then if the mind wants to communicate its thoughts, they must be put into

¹ Both Douglass and Verghese use the word “gap” as a definition for diastema. I find it a useful image to describe what it means for humans to be diastemic and have adopted the term to explore this topic. Douglass, Theology of the Gap, 6; Verghese, “Διάστημα and Διάστασις in Gregory of Nyssa,” 253.
² Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.150. Translation from Hall, 91.
language and then transferred back to the body for words to be formed with the body and
projected as stimuli for another person to sense. The mind and body must be connected for
information to flow back and forth between the two. Gregory compares this connection to that of
a musician playing an instrument: the mind being the musician and the body being the
instrument. To the degree that the instrument of the body is in working order, the mind can use
the body to express itself, “Now since the mind is a thing intelligible and incorporeal, its grace
would have been incommunicable and isolated, if its motion were not manifested by some
contrivance. For this cause there was still need of this instrumental organization, that it might,
like a plectrum, touch the vocal organs and indicate by the quality of the notes struck, the motion
within.”\(^3\) The gap between mind and body is like the gap between musician and instrument, their
connection not being instant or unmediated, but rather requiring skill and proper functioning of
both parts in order to communicate.

Another diastemic gap humans experience is the gap between intention and action.
Whereas, for God, there is no difference between the will to act and the action itself, for humans
there is space between intention to do an act and the completion of the act. God’s intention and
action are like light and flame, the light coming from the flame and shining in the same instant of
the flame’s existence. Human intention and action, however, are like the potential of a
shipbuilder and the finished ship. A person may have the expertise and desire to build a ship, but
is only a shipbuilder when the art is put into practice.\(^4\) The space humans experience between
deciding to do something and completing that action is a result of their diastemic construction.

\(^3\) *De hom. opif.* PG 44.149. Translation from *NPNF* 5:395.
\(^4\) *Contra Eun.* 2 GNO 1.2.1.228-230.
Besides internal gaps between knowledge, language, intention, and action, humans experience communication gaps between themselves and other people. Language allows for people to express their thoughts to others, but it cannot communicate immediately or perfectly. “If it were somehow possible to reveal the processes of the intellect in some other way, we could do without the recurrent use of words, and we would more clearly and immediately deal with each other, exposing by intellectual impulses the very essence of the topics which the mind is engaged upon.”⁵ Although words allow for communication of thoughts by signs, the necessity of language arises from embodiment, which produces gaps between thought and expression and between one person and another.

To be a diastemic human being is to have these gaps within oneself and between oneself and others. Because human existence is characterized by these spaces, some force is necessary in order to move across the gaps, otherwise people would be a mind and a body unable to express thoughts or communicate with each other. Kinesis is a force that moves back and forth between the otherwise isolated parts. Part I primarily focused on motion within various categories (thought, emotion, body, intelligible, sensible, etc.), although it became clear that these categories are not as airtight as Gregory sometimes indicates. Part II will focus on motion between the categories, motion as the force that moves people across the gaps of their diastemic existence. In this chapter, I revisit knowledge and language as examples of phenomena that summarize diastemic existence and illustrate these gaps and how they can be navigated.

⁵ Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.392. Translation from Hall, 147.
Knowledge

One significant example of *kinesis* crossing people over their *diastemic* gaps is the case of knowledge. Gregory writes frequently about the function, importance, and limits of knowledge and *kinesis* factors prominently in these discussions. In chapter 3, I addressed Gregory’s concept of thought as motion of the mind and in this chapter, I will discuss how motion is the factor that prevents knowledge from being isolated in the mind of the thinker. Motion reveals, leads to knowledge, and crosses the boundaries of mind/body and intelligible/sensible.

Knowledge and other functions of the mind are of central importance to Gregory, the rational part of the soul being the part that is created in the image of God. Human creation in the image of God is the foundation of Gregory’s anthropology, establishing the relationship between humans and the created world as well as the source of similarities and differences between humans and God. The importance of human knowledge for Gregory is also evident in his account of the creation of the universe, explaining that God’s motive in forming parts of the universe as composite mixtures of characteristics is to prevent the creation from being mistaken as the creator. As Gregory explains it: “the wisdom of God has transposed these properties, and wrought unchangeableness in that which is immoveable; doing this, it may be, by a providential dispensation so that that property of nature which constitutes its immutability and immobility might not, when viewed in any created object, cause the creature to be accounted as God.”

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6 That is not to say that knowledge is the only function of the soul that reflects the image of God. Virtue, for example, is also a function of the rational part of the soul. See Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 21-47.

7 See, for example, *De hom. opif.* Chapter 16, PG 44.177.37-187.55. For a discussion of how Gregory’s understanding of knowledge fits into his anthropology as a whole, see Robin D. Young, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Use of Theology and Science in Constructing Theological Anthropology,” *Pro Ecclesia* 2.3 (1993): 345-63.

8 *De hom. opif.* PG 44.129. Translation from *NPNF* 5:389.
of God’s purposes in the construction of the universe was to create it in such a way that humans would know what was God and what was not. This would, in turn, prevent idolatry. Human understanding is significant enough to be a factor in the composition of the universe. Furthermore, Gregory’s primary categories of classification, intelligible and sensible, are epistemological categories. That is, objects and ideas are classified based on how a person comes to know about them: either through sense-perception (sensible) or thought (intelligible). This puts knowledge at the center of Gregory’s system of classifying the world.

As part of the created existence, human knowledge is *diastemic*, characterized by gaps and motion. Besides the mind/body gaps between sensing stimuli, developing knowledge, and communicating it, there are gaps within the knowledge process itself, as Gregory describes knowledge in dynamic terms. One significant term Gregory uses for knowledge is ἐπίνοια, which indicates both a result of thought as well as a thought process moving through stages from information to conclusion. Gregory defines the term in *Contra Eun.*, “As I see it, mental conception (ἡ ἐπίνοια) is the way we find out things we do not know, using what is connected and consequent upon our first idea of a subject to discover what lies beyond. Having formed an idea about a matter in hand, we attach the next thing to our initial apprehension by adding new ideas, until we bring our research into the subject to its conclusion.” Gregory further notes in this passage that it is by ἐπίνοια that humans have been able to develop the disciplines geometry,

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9 Scot Douglass also makes the observation from this passage that the construction of the universe had an epistemological motive. Douglass, *Theology of the Gap*, 47.


11 *Contra Eun.* 2 GNO 1.2.1.182. Translation from Hall, 97.
arithmetic, logic, and philosophy, as well as make discoveries that led to advancements in navigation and agriculture. It is following a train of logic and building one thought upon another in order to make meaningful conclusions. Antigone Samellas highlights the role of experience the process of knowledge, noting that people come to knowledge when they apply reason to their experiences of sense perception. Senses provide information, but the person must apply reason in order to interpret the data. This process from sense data to applied reason to knowledge or understanding further demonstrates the crossover from sensible event to intelligible thought. This is a dynamic process, perceptions, thoughts, and ideas moving across gaps to form conclusions.

Scot Douglass describes ἐπίνοια as a kind of imagination and mentions two further ways in which it operates in a diastemic gap, first as “in the διάστημα between the reception of God’s revelation and the production of theological discourse.” Because people are diastemic, they are incapable of receiving an adiastemic revelation from God in an unmediated way. All language about God, therefore, is a product of conceptual thought moving across the gap between revelation and language. Further, Douglass suggests ἐπίνοια is also situated in the gap between “the lives of ancient saints and the life-choices of contemporary believers,” as Gregory uses biblical figures, such as Moses, as exemplars for behavior of people who lived many centuries later under much different circumstances.

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Knowledge is clearly important to Gregory and motion frequently factors into discussions about knowledge. One of the clearest examples of this is in the many instances of motion of an object leading to knowledge of another object. The harmonious motion of nature, for example, should lead a person to knowledge of God. In a discussion on the idea from Psalm 18 that nature can take part in “speech without sound,” in *Contra Eunomius* Gregory comments, “One may hear them [the heavens] instructing us as if in speech, ‘As you look to us, you men, to the beauty and the greatness in us, and to this perpetually revolving movement, the orderly and harmonious motion, always in the same paths and invariable, contemplate the one who presides over our design, and through the visible thing about is, every perceptible thing, depends upon the sublime and ineffable Power.”\(^\text{15}\) The patterned and constant way the heavenly bodies move should serve as evidence for the beauty and power of the creator. Motion of the heavens in this instance leads to knowledge of the Creator.\(^\text{16}\) Motion can also reveal information in an intentional way, as when motions of the body can reveal to others the thoughts of the mind: “There are occasions when by simply nodding we make it clear to others what needs to be done, and even the eye glancing in a particular direction indicates the purpose we have in mind, and a hand moving in a certain way either forbids something or allows it to be done.”\(^\text{17}\) The motion of body language reveals to other people the intelligible motions in the mind.

In both of these examples, observing literal motion brings people over the intelligible/sensible gap by using sense perception to give them information about intelligibles. In the case of the heavens, using the sense of sight to observe cosmic phenomena leads to

\(^{15}\) *Contra Eun.* 2 GNO 1.2.1.224. Translation from Hall, 108.

\(^{16}\) Gregory makes a similar point in *De anima* when the voice of Macrina explains that movements of machines serve as evidence of the mind that invented them. *De anima* PG 46.36-37 (Callahan, 208-210).

\(^{17}\) *Contra Eun.* 2 GNO 1.2.1.208. Translation from Hall, 104.
knowledge about God and in the case of body language, sight also serves as a tool to give information about the thoughts of another person. In these two examples, crossing over the intelligible/sensible gap is also crossing over the mind/body gap, by using the senses of the body to feed information to the mind.

In addition to knowledge that results from stimuli outside the body, there is knowledge that does not come from sense perception, but rather from virtue. In Homily 3 of In cant., Gregory describes in several images the interplay of virtue and knowledge in the advancement of the soul toward God. In explanation of the phrase “my spikenard gave forth its scent” in Song of Songs 1:12, Gregory compares the combined quality of virtues to a particular mixture of fragrances that make up one scent called “spikenard.” A person should gather virtues, as if gathering the aromas of various flowers in order to make one’s life fragrant. Gregory then switches from an olfactory to an optical image, saying that if one were to gather up these fragrant virtues, one would then be able to better understand the incomprehensible God because that person’s soul would be reflecting God, as though the soul were a mirror reflecting rays of the sun. Understanding of God which was before inaccessible by reason becomes accessible by virtue transforming the human soul into a mirror of God. The person can then better understand God by looking at God’s image as reflected in the virtuous one’s soul. Gregory concludes,

Where this idea is concerned, it is one and the same thing to speak of rays of the sun or of emanations of virtue or of sweet aromatic scents. For no matter which of these we adopt to express the point of our text, all of them give rise to a single notion: that knowledge of the Good that transcends every intellect comes to us through the virtues, even as it is possible through some image to get a glimpse of the archetypal Beauty.\[18\]

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The virtuous life transforms the person to be more like God, which in turn leads to knowledge by recognizing the image of God reflected in the soul of the person.

In Homily 2 of *In cant.*, instead of virtue leading to knowledge, knowledge of oneself is a type of virtue, giving solid grounding for the journey through life. Gregory argues in this homily that, “Our greatest safeguard is not to be ignorant of oneself and not to suppose that one is looking at oneself when in fact one is viewing something else, something that hangs about the outer edges of oneself.”¹⁹ Those who do not know themselves are inclined to guard their transitory aspects, such as beauty, glory, wealth, power, or strength, leaving unguarded the parts that are permanent. When people do this, they are making an error in judgment, failing “to achieve a sound judgment about reality.”²⁰ The antidote for those who focus on transitory things, caring too much for the allure of their present situation, is to realize the position of humanity in relation to the rest of creation, as Gregory beautifully extols at the end of this homily:

The passage says, then, ‘Have a care to yourself, for this is the sure safeguard of <your> good things. Know how much you have been honored by the Maker above the rest of creation. Heaven did not become the image of God, nor the moon, nor the sun, nor the beautiful stars—nor a single other one of the things that appear in the created order. Only you came into existence as a copy of the Nature that transcends every intellect, a likeness of the incorruptible Beauty, in impress of the true Deity—a model of that true Light in the contemplation of which you become what it is, imitating that which shines within you by the ray that shines forth in response from your purity. None of the things that exist is so great as to be compared to your greatness. The whole heaven is contained in the span of God’s hand; earth and sea are encompassed by his hand. But at the same time this One, being such as he is and so great as he is, grasping the whole creation in the palm of his hand, becomes limited for your sake and dwells in you and is not confined as he penetrates your nature.’²¹

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¹⁹ *In cant.* GNO 6.63-64. Translation from Norris, 71.
²⁰ *In cant.* GNO 6.65. Translation from Norris, 73.
²¹ *In cant.* GNO 6.68. Translation from Norris, 75.
Knowing this about oneself, Gregory asserts, will keep one from focusing on the temporary, being taken too much by the beauty of the world so as to neglect the beauty of the image of God within the person. Knowledge in this way leads to the virtue that will keep one focused on the journey ahead, not being distracted by worldly glitter.

The concept of motion in Homily 2 contains some tensions because it is characteristic both of the world that is passing away and the journey of the virtuous one through life. The virtuous person should not abandon the stability of God for the world, Gregory says, because matter is “always in process of being altered by some flux and motion (ῥοής τινος και κινήσεως).” Trying to hold onto the moving world as though it is solid can only lead to frustration. At the same time, however, that the motion of the transitory world is precisely what makes it unreliable, the metaphor Gregory uses to describe the stable, correct course of action is also one of motion: a journey. The verse that Gregory is explaining is Song of Songs 1:8, “If you do not know yourself, beautiful among women, go in the footsteps of the flocks, and feed the kids by the shepherd’s tents.” The footsteps of the flocks he takes to mean the wandering paths of predecessors who cared more for customs of the world than for the reality of following the good. Gregory encourages his readers to know which footprints to follow, to disregard the wandering footprints, and to follow the correct set of footprints. Following the correct footprints is a metaphor of motion, living life as moving in either good or bad direction. The last two examples have demonstrated both that virtue leads to knowledge and knowledge leads to virtue. Although knowledge does not necessarily lead to good (as virtue does) and has distinct limits (as I will discuss below), it can aid in bridging the gap between people and God. The most

22 *In cant.* GNO 6.64. Translation from Norris, 73.
impenetrable diastemic gap is the one between humans and God and while that gulf can never be fully crossed, the goal of the human life is to strive toward God. Virtue and knowledge can propel one another, moving the person toward God.

In *In cant.*, Gregory also sometimes frames *epektasis*, the soul’s eternal movement toward God, in terms of knowledge. While *epektasis* is not primarily about expanding knowledge, it is one aspect of what expands as the person grows toward God. In Homily 11, Gregory explains the phrase, “The voice of my beloved knocks at the door,” from Song of Songs 5:2 to indicate that the bride, being led by the voice of the bridegroom knocking at the door, has not yet seen the bridegroom and therefore still has more to learn. Like the bride waiting behind the door, the soul has limited knowledge of the Bridegroom:

“For the soul has known (ἐγνώ) him [the Bridegroom]—to the extent that she has comprehended (κατέλαβεν) him—in what has already come to pass, but since that which is not yet comprehended (τὸ μὴ ποικὶ κατειλημμένον) is infinitely greater than that which has been comprehended (τὸ καταλημμένον), the Bridegroom is manifested to the soul frequently and promises the Bride by his voice that he will be revealed as one who has not yet been seen.”

Gregory goes on to give an example of the fountain from the creation story in Genesis that is large enough to water the earth. If a person were to see the fountain, that person could still never claim to have seen all the water in the fountain because new water would always be coming to the surface. Similarly, when looking at the divine, there will always be something new to see and comprehend. Because of this, “the Bride, ever amazed and marveling at what is known (τὸ γνωσκόμενον), never brings her desire for the object of her vision to a halt at what has already

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been apprehended.”

In this example, knowledge is part of the process of *epektasis*, ever moving and being transformed as it grows toward God.

In a similar passage, explaining that in the ascent of the soul one can always ascend further, Gregory adopts the Apostle Paul’s phrase “from glory to glory” to describe the process of transformation the soul experiences, explaining that “glory is always being received and that what is forever being discovered (τὸ λαμβανόμενον καὶ τὸ ἀεὶ εὑρισκόμενον), no matter how great and exalted it is, is believed to be less than what is hoped for.”

The main concern of this passage is to describe the continual nature of growth of the soul in the good, and it can be taken from the above quotation that one of the qualities the soul continually grows in is knowledge, or what has been received and discovered. Gregory expresses this thought even more clearly in Homily 8, again while discussing the nature of *epektasis* and explaining that each new advancement one makes toward God serves as a new starting point for further advancement. In this discussion Gregory indicates that knowledge is part of advancing from beginning to new beginning, saying, “The desire of the soul that is ascending never rests content with what has been known (τὸν ἐγνωσμένον). In turn mounting upwards by way of one greater desire toward another that surpasses it, that soul is always journeying toward the infinite by way of higher things.”

Knowledge, then, is among the qualities of the soul that experience expansion and continuous growth, each new stage being the beginning for the next.

In the soul’s ascent to God, knowledge plays a role as being constantly expanded and renewed. Knowledge has limits and at some point releases into unknowing, an experience which

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24 *In cant.* GNO 6.322. Translation from Norris, 339.
26 *In cant.* GNO 6.247. Translation from Norris, 261.
I will discuss below. It does, however, have a place in the ascent, which is an infinite closing of the gap between the human and God. Knowledge is tied up in the motion, which carries people through the gap between created and uncreated. While this gap is never fully crossed, in moving through the gap the soul experiences constant growth and satiety.

This examination of knowledge has uncovered several ways in which knowledge and motion interact in order to bridge *diastemic* gaps, including gaps between intelligible and sensible, mind and body, understanding and language, even the human and God. Knowledge does not have the same role in every case: information moves across the gap of the body into the mind to become knowledge, knowledge again moves across the mind/body gap to become language in order for information to cross the gap between two people. In the soul’s ascent toward God, knowledge and virtue cooperate to propel the soul into the gap between the human and God. Further, it is within the human/divine gap that knowledge is constantly renewed and expanded as the soul grows eternally toward God. Although knowledge doesn’t function precisely the same way in every example, in each example it is closely tied with motion, serving as part of the equation that moves people into and through various *diastemic* gaps. Chapter 3 demonstrated that even contained within the human mind, knowledge is a kind of motion and this discussion has shown that knowledge does not stay contained within the human mind, but that it moves in and out of the mind and through the soul.

Despite its significance for the human person, knowledge has limits, particularly as it relates to human understanding of and ascent toward God. Because of the gap between the uncreated God and created human, a person cannot understand the nature of God, but rather understands God as if looking at an image in a mirror or hearing a riddle. There is a certain
likeness in the reflection that a person can recognize, but it fails to fully represent the divine. As Gregory explains, “the divine nature transcends the mind’s grasp…Thus all our thinking is inferior to the divine understanding.”\(^{27}\) It must be the case that the human cannot fully know God because, as von Balthasar explains, to know something is to possess it. In Stoic thought, to comprehend something is to grip it tightly in one’s hand and it is precisely this gripping tightly that Gregory accuses Eunomius of attempting to do with God. Human understanding of God cannot be grasping or possessing, but instead must point in the direction of God without ever reaching God.\(^{28}\)

Gregory further explores the incomplete nature of human knowledge in Homily 11 of *In cant.* While addressing ways in which knowledge aids in ascent toward God as in the image of the fountain discussed above, Gregory also in this homily emphasizes that human knowledge is incomplete. Human understanding of the divine does not come in “a great torrent or deluge of knowledge,” as Gregory explains, but rather in a drizzle or drops of dew.\(^{29}\) Having presented this image of human knowledge as drops of water, Gregory turns the image, saying that although the knowledge one might have of God is a few dewdrops compared with the torrent of truth about God, these drops of partial knowledge become rivers as their depth and teaching is explored. He sets Paul as an example of dew-drop turned to river, saying: “Paul was such a river…And flooded with all this deep talk as he was, he still indicates by what he says that by comparison with the true Word, this speech is on the order of a dewdrop.”\(^{30}\) Gregory then turns the image

\(^{27}\) *In cant.* GNO 6.86-87. Translation from Norris, 97.  
\(^{29}\) *In cant.* GNO 6.326. Translation from Norris, 345.  
\(^{30}\) *In cant.* GNO 6.326. Translation from Norris, 345.
once again suggesting that if the drops of human knowledge appear as rivers, waves, and oceans, “what is one to think about that Wellspring who says: ‘If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink’?”

On the one hand, human knowledge is miniscule in comparison to the vast amount of truth about God; on the other hand, this partial knowledge is rich and satisfying food for contemplation.

Partial knowledge serves a necessary purpose, but has a limit. For example, observing and understanding the works of God found in the beauty and complexity of creation lead one to the knowledge that God sustains the earth. This knowledge results in the observer marveling and worshiping the God who created such things. In the soul’s journey upward, “once she has grasped the marvels produced by God’s working, she cannot for a while progress further by her busy search for knowledge, but is filled with wonder and worships the One who is known to exist only through the things that his activity brings about.”

The search for knowledge must at some point pause for marvel and worship in order for the soul to continue its ascent toward God. Gregory goes on to point out that this stage of partial knowing is temporary, for in the eschaton “we will no longer know in part” as Paul wrote. Eschatological knowing will no longer be partial and based on the works of God, but this kind of knowing is one that humans cannot presently understand.

In exploring human knowledge about God in this homily, Gregory also touches on development of knowledge. Gregory does not present anything as systematic as steps of epistemic development, but he speaks of various stages of knowledge in the soul’s ascent to God.

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31 In cant. GNO 6.327. Translation from Norris, 345.
32 In cant. GNO 6.334-335. Translation from Norris, 353.
33 In cant. GNO 6.336.
Those who would advance in knowledge of God, Gregory notes, follow the example of Moses to whom God first appeared in light, then a cloud, and then in darkness. This final stage of knowledge Gregory calls darkness, saying, “But the soul that has made its way through these stages to higher things, having left behind whatever is accessible to human nature, enters within the innermost shrine of the knowledge of God and is entirely seized about my the divine darkness.” To enter this state of darkness, one must abandon “everything that appears and is comprehended” in order to contemplate what is invisible and incomprehensible.34

Gregory uses the example of Moses to discuss in more detail the ascent from light to darkness in *De vita Mosis*, noting as he did in *In cant.*, that one’s first experience with religious knowledge comes as light.35 The religious novice comes out of darkness into the light, but continuing in the spiritual ascent, one will eventually experience knowledge of God as darkness: “But as the mind progresses and, through an ever greater and more perfect diligence, comes to apprehend reality, as it approaches more nearly to contemplation, it sees more clearly what of the divine nature is uncontemplated.”36 Seeing God in the darkness, as Moses did, represents coming to understand that God is cannot be grasped by human knowledge. Ultimately, humans cannot fully know God. He calls this state “seeing that consists in not seeing”37 and coming to know that the “divine is beyond all knowledge and comprehension.”38 One reason this stage of darkness is necessary is because it prevents idolatry. Because human understanding cannot accurately

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34 *In cant.* GNO 6.323. Translation from Norris, 341.
35 *De vita Mosis* SC 1.2.162.
36 *De vita Mosis* SC 1.2.162. Translation from Malherbe, 80.
37 *De vita Mosis* SC 1.2.163. Translation from Malherbe, 80.
38 *De vita Mosis* SC 1.2.164. Translation from Malherbe, 81.
represent God, all concepts of God are guesses and approximations and worshipping a human concept of God amounts to idolatry.\textsuperscript{39}

That worshipping a human conception of God amounts to idolatry seems to present a problem for Gregory because humans can have no pure knowledge of the essence of God. What then are they to worship, if not an imperfect understanding of God? A discussion of knowledge from \textit{Contra Eun.} can perhaps help to further explain knowledge and its limits for Gregory. In order to discuss the role of knowledge in spiritual ascent in \textit{Contra Eun.}, Gregory uses the example of Abraham’s journey as an allegory for ascent of the soul. Knowledge is a significant part of the journey as Abraham “rose up so far in his breadth of knowledge as to be reckoned the measure of human perfection.”\textsuperscript{40} What made Abraham exemplary, however, was not his breadth of knowledge, but his use of knowledge to propel him to virtues beyond knowledge. All of the things Abraham learned, what he “grasped as his reasoning advanced,” he used as “means and a staircase for his upward journey, always standing on what he had discovered.”\textsuperscript{41} Climbing this staircase ultimately led Abraham not to further knowledge about God, but to faith, for “when he had surpassed every verbal description of his nature which might be applied to God, having cleansed his mind of such notions, he resorted to faith, pure and unadulterated by any ratiocination, and he took as his indicator, infallible and manifest, of the knowledge of God just this—that he believed God to be greater and higher than any epistemological indicator.”\textsuperscript{42} Knowledge served as the staircase, but there was a place at which knowledge had to merge with

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\textsuperscript{39} De vita Mosis SC 1.2.165.  
\textsuperscript{40} Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.86. Translation from Hall, 78.  
\textsuperscript{41} Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.89. Translation from Hall, 79.  
\textsuperscript{42} Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.89. Translation from Hall, 79. 
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faith in order for Abraham to continue. Knowledge, although helpful for the spiritual ascent, is not the goal of the soul’s journey and by itself cannot propel people to God. As Gregory continues in the same passage, “there is no way to come near to God, unless faith interposes and of itself joins the enquiring mind to the incomprehensible nature.” At some point, further knowledge is no longer useful in the ascent toward God without the aid of faith, which Martin Laird defines in this passage as “Gregory’s term for that faculty of union between mind and God.” Gregory points out that it was Abraham’s faith, not his knowledge, which God credited to him as righteousness. The reason faith is superior to knowledge for Christians is that knowledge can assent “only to what is learnt,” but in Christianity, assurance is found not in things that are learned, but in things that are hoped for. Faith and knowledge both being faculties of the mind that must be operative for the soul’s ascent, Laird distinguishes between them, saying, “In contrast to knowledge which thrives on seeing what becomes visible to the mind, faith negotiates the paradox of seeing the invisible.”

Morwenna Ludlow examines Gregory’s use of ladder imagery in this passage and in other places in Gregory’s corpus, suggesting that the image is both epistemological and eschatological. She characterizes Gregory’s use of the ladder image as a refraction of both Jacob’s ladder from Genesis as well as the steps from Plato’s Symposium. By saying he “refracts” the image, she means that Gregory adopts the image, but does not copy it for the same

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43 Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.91. Translation from Hall, 80.
44 Laird, Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith, 73.
45 Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.93.
46 Laird, Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith, 75.
purpose. Rather, he uses the image in different ways to fit his purposes. Examining several instances of the ladder or stair image in Gregory, Ludlow sees development, with increasingly robust eschatological meaning his later writings. In *Contra Eun.*, Ludlow concludes that while the eschatological dimension is not as strong as in some later texts, it is still present to some degree. What Gregory emphasizes with the ladder image in this instance is the gap between God and humans and the limits of human knowledge.

This discussion of knowledge and its limits has highlighted the *diastemic* nature of humans, full of spaces, and addressed ways in which knowledge and motion intersect, from literal motion revealing knowledge, to the motion of knowledge crossing the mind/body barrier, to knowledge as part of the soul’s motion toward God. Human knowledge, partial and limited as it is, plays a role in the motion of information across boundaries and the motion of the human to the divine. In its involvement with motion across *diastemic* boundaries, knowledge helps to prevent isolation, a theme to be developed further in the next section discussing the motion and limits of language.

**Language**

A discussion of epistemology in Gregory moves naturally to a discussion of language because knowledge and language are so closely related for Gregory, language being a vehicle for knowledge. Chapter 3 introduced the concept of language in Gregory and explained some its characteristics and this chapter will develop those concepts and discuss their implications for Gregory’s anthropology, beginning with a review of the basic contours of the nature and function of language. Like knowledge, language moves people through *diastemic* gaps, both the intelligible/sensible gap within the human and the communicative gap between people. Language
begins with a thought in the mind of the person that needs to be communicated. In order to do this, the thought must first be coded into language and then expressed using sounds. Gregory explains the connection between knowledge and language, saying: “Every word, or every word properly so called, is a sound which denotes some movement of thought; and every activity and motion of the healthy mind aims, so far as it is able, at the knowledge and consideration of existent things.”48 Like thought, language strives to overcome diastemic gaps, but the role of language is to catch the motion of the mind and render it sensible so that others can hear (or see, in the case of written language) and transfer it into their own minds. The process of producing language, which Gregory describes as “stamping verbal shapes as signs and markers on our mental processes,”49 serves the epistemic purpose of moving information from one mind to another. One uses language as a vehicle for expressing thoughts (which presumably exist apart from language) in order to “get clear and distinct pointers to our psychic processes by the sounds we attach to the ideas.”50 Transferring information from one mind to another is the sole purpose of language, as Gregory indicates when he says language would be unnecessary if people could communicate the motions of their minds in some other way.51

In serving as a conductor of knowledge, language is necessarily bodily, being comprised of sounds made with mouth, teeth, tongue, breath, and other body parts. Gregory details the bodily nature of speech in Contra Eunomium, giving a medical description of all the body parts that must work together in order to produce speech. His purpose in making this explanation is to

48 Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.572. Translation from Hall, 188.
49 Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.168. Translation from Hall, 95.
50 Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.168. Translation from Hall, 95.
51 Contra Eun. 2 GNO 1.2.1.391.
emphasize the necessity of a body for producing speech and suggest that Eunomius is incorrect in holding that God literally speaks because to suggest that God speaks is to say that God has a body.\textsuperscript{52} Gregory clearly thinks this is an outrageous notion and instead understands language as a human invention and a concession to human embodiment.

In the second book of \textit{Contra Eun.}, Gregory makes a lengthy argument for language as being a human invention and not a divine one.\textsuperscript{53} Gregory describes God’s role as creating reality and giving humans the faculty for language and the human role as applying words to the reality God created. He likens the invention of language to the activity of animals, saying that in the same way God gives animals the power to move, but does not control each step, God also gave people the ability to create language, which allows them to then “apply signs to realities.”\textsuperscript{54}

Gregory summarizes his position on the creation of language, saying:

\begin{quote}
What springs up at God’s will is the reality, not the name, so that the reality which substantively exists is the work of the Maker’s power, but the sounds which identify things, by which verbal reasoning distinguishes things individually for accurate and distinct reference, these are the product and invention of the faculty of verbal reasoning, whereas this verbally rational faculty and nature itself is the work of God.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

God creates reality, including humans and their ability to name that reality, but God does not apply language to reality; that is the particular job of humans. To attribute creation of language to God would not only imply that God has body parts, but would equate God with every person

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Contra Eun.} 2 GNO 1.2.1.200-204.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Contra Eun.} 2 GNO 1.2.1.237-293 (Hall, 111-125) concerns this topic. For an excellent, concise discussion on the \textit{diastemic} character of language and its implications, see Mosshammer, “Disclosing But Not Disclosed: Gregory of Nyssa as Deconstructionist,” 99-123.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Contra Eun.} 2 GNO 1.2.1.243.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Contra Eun.} 2 GNO 1.2.1.246. Translation from Hall, 113-114.
who created a word.\textsuperscript{56} Gregory considers creating reality to be far superior to creating language because, as I will discuss below, he presents language as insubstantial and motive.

Like thought, language moves people through \textit{diastemic} gaps, crossing boundaries between mind and body. Because of its close ties both to knowledge and to embodiment, language is a particularly important example of crossing the boundary between intelligible and sensible. As intelligible entities, thoughts are not perceivable to other humans because they lack sensible markers. People perceive with their senses and without sensible markers, thoughts remain undetectable. Language embodies thoughts with sounds, rendering the thoughts sensible and therefore perceivable to other people. In this way, language is motion, grasping the intelligible and moving it across the gap to the sensible. Unlike thought, however, language is able by transferring information from one person to another to cross the \textit{diastemic} gaps between people. The communication that takes place in when one uses language bridges the distance between two people, transferring a thought from one person to another. Whereas thought uses motion to cross \textit{diastemic} gaps, language is the motion transferring information from one mind to another.

While language serves to move people across \textit{diastemic} gaps, as a human invention it is itself part of the \textit{diastema} and has limitations. For as powerful a role as language plays in transmitting thought and connecting mind and body, language is still insubstantial. Gregory discusses the insubstantiality of language in a passage \textit{Contra Eun.} 2. In the context of the passage, Gregory reports Eunomius as claiming that people should not apply the term “unbegotten” (the term which Eunomius considers to represent the essence of God) to God

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Contra Eun.} 2 GNO 1.2.1.291.
“conceptually” (κατ᾽ ἐπίνοιαν) because ‘what is so spoken,’ he says, ‘is as fleeting as the words themselves.’”\(^{57}\) Gregory’s argument against this position is that all language is fleeting and insubstantial. “We are not like potters or brick-makers;” Gregory explains, “when the words have once been formed in our mouth, we do not keep intact what is expressed in speech, but as soon as the word is uttered, what is said is no more.”\(^{58}\) Words are not substantive and do not last after they are spoken, with no trace left in the place they were spoken. It is not just words that represent “conceptual” thought that are insubstantial; all language is fleeting. As further evidence, Gregory suggests that written words, which have an imprint remaining after they are spoken, are not necessarily more substantial thoughts than those that are only spoken and not written down. The quality of the thought is not reflected in whether or not the idea is written or merely spoken.\(^{59}\) In any exchange of ideas, what remains after the conversation is not the sound or breath of the words, but the sense of what is said that has been impressed on the hearer’s mind.\(^{60}\) It is a limit, then, of language that it is insubstantial and fleeting. It does not last, but in order for it to be valuable, the content of it must be transferred to the mind of a hearer.

The human, insubstantial nature of language has implications both for theological language, how people talk about God, as well as for how to understand the act of God talking to people. As a diastemic, human invention, marked by insubstantiality and motion, language can never speak of the essence of God. If thought is unable to grasp the nature of God, language, as a vehicle of thought, is even less able to do this. Gregory discusses the limits of theological

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\(^{57}\) _Contra Eun._ 2 GNO 1.2.1.44. Translation from Hall, 69.

\(^{58}\) _Contra Eun._ 2 GNO 1.2.1.44. Translation from Hall, 69.

\(^{59}\) _Contra Eun._ 2 GNO 1.2.1.46.

\(^{60}\) _Contra Eun._ 2 GNO 1.2.1.48.
language in the first homily of In cant., comparing theological language to perfume. He states, “…the Nature that has no boundaries cannot be accurately comprehended by means of the connotations of words. On the contrary, all the power of concepts and all the significance of words and names, even if they seem to have about them something grand and worthy of the divine, cannot attain the nature of the Real itself.”  

Not being able to approach communicating the divine nature, what language can do is offer a faint vapor of the divine. In explaining Song of Songs 1:3, “your name is perfumed ointment emptied out,” Gregory explains that the names humans have made for God are not the perfume itself. “Rather,” he says, “does our theological vocabulary refer to a slight remnant of the vapor of the divine fragrance.”  

It is as though all the perfume has been poured out of the container and what is left is not the perfume itself, but a faint fragrance of the perfume that used to be there. Based on that slight remaining fragrance, humans can make a guess about the nature of the perfume that was in the container. Gregory concludes, “the perfumed ointment of the Godhead, whatever it may be in its own essence, is beyond every name and every thought, but the marvels discerned in each name and thought provide matter for our theological naming.”  

Theological language cannot approach the nature of God, but the slightest hint of the scent that is the perfume of God give enough fodder for the theological imagination to generate the names of God, such as “wise, powerful, good, holy, blessed and eternal, and judge and savior and the like. And all these refer to some slight trace of the divine perfume that the whole creation imitates within itself.”

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61 In cant. GNO 6.37. Translation from Norris, 39.
63 In cant. GNO 6.37. Translation from Norris, 41.
64 In cant. GNO 6.37-38. Translation from Norris, 41.
In the same way language about God is marked by the limitations of language, language from God comes in the form of human language, with all of the same characteristics and limitations that apply to language that is invented by humans. Like all other language, words coming from God will be insubstantial and polysemic.\textsuperscript{65} Since scripture is made up of language, even though it has a divine message, it must be interpreted with view to the limitations of language.\textsuperscript{66} One way that Gregory addresses this is an emphasis on the multiple senses of scripture. In his prologue to \textit{In cant.}, Gregory gives a defense for his non-literal interpretation of the Song of Songs, noting that some church leaders think scripture should only be interpreted literally. In his explanation, Gregory compares the literal sense of the text to the sensible and the allegorical (or anagogical, as Gregory notes he is not particularly interested in what the other type of interpretation is called) to the intelligible. Literal interpretations are sometimes profitable, but Gregory suggests and gives examples for many times when he suggests they are not. In those instances, one must turn to a more spiritual interpretation. He writes: “One ought not in every instance to remain with the letter (since the obvious sense of the words often does us harm when it comes to the virtuous life), but one ought to shift to an understanding that concerns the immaterial and intelligible, so that corporeal ideas may be transposed into intellect and thought when the fleshly sense of the words has been shaken off like dust.”\textsuperscript{67} Gregory suggests here that the literal sense is “corporeal” and when approaching these texts the interpreter should move to an interpretation that is “immaterial and intelligible.”

\textsuperscript{65} For a discussion of Gregory’s understanding of language as polysemic, see Douglass, \textit{Theology of the Gap}, 73-79.

\textsuperscript{66} Mosshammer makes this point, noting that multiplicity of interpretations is necessary because of the gap between language and reality. Mosshammer, “Disclosing But Not Disclosed,” 115.

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{In cant.} GNO 6.6-7. Translation from Norris, 5.
In applying the sensible/intelligible distinction to different types of interpretation, Gregory makes two claims about motion. First, he pictures the act of interpretation itself as a kind of motion. Norris observes about Gregory’s approach to scripture in *In cant.* that non-literal interpretation, whether it is called allegory, anagogy, or spiritual, is to transpose the meaning of the text: “The equivalence here of the spiritual, the pure, and the intellectual is manifest. All of them, in Gregory’s mind, have to do precisely with the distinction between perceptible and intelligible realities, and an exegesis involving ‘transposition’ is seen as necessary because (1) the text at hand gives an account of perceptible realities, but (2) the reality it ultimately concerns is of the intelligible order. It is the gap between these that “allegory” bridges.” The literal sense of the text, the obvious matters about which the text is concerned, is the sensible, corporeal understanding of the text because that reading concerns the reality of the sensible world. But scriptural texts, for Gregory, also must have something to say about the intelligible world and there is a gap between these, just as there is always a gap between sensible and intelligible. Allegory is a tool that provides motion across the gap from sensible understanding of the text to intelligible or spiritual understanding of the text.

Interpretation of a text is a kind of motion, but good interpretation also fuels motion of the reader upward on the spiritual ascent. Later in the prologue to *In cant.*, Gregory gives a number of examples from the gospels in which he finds it clear that something other than the obvious is the purpose of the text and suggests that these examples are there to encourage readers “to ascertain by every possible means whether perhaps one can discover a meaning higher than that of the surface sense, one that leads the mind upward in the direction of something more

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divine and incorporeal.” Finding these spiritual meanings of the text, Gregory suggests, can move the mind forward in its ascent toward the divine. Norris characterizes Gregory’s understanding of the text of the Song of Songs as having a “sacramental character” such that those who understand the text not only read about the soul’s ascent toward God, but by understanding it participate in the same progress.  

One appropriate approach to theological language, given the human, *diastemic* character of language is to understand all speech and text, including scripture as polysemic. Another strategy Gregory gives to address the difficulties of kinetic people using kinetic language to try to name an immutable God is to recognize silence as an important part of theological speech and to discern the difference between the time for speech and the time for silence. In his discussion of speech and silence, Gregory maintains the distinction between God’s activities and God’s essence, encouraging speech about the former and silence about the latter. Scripture tells of God’s activities and it can be useful in advancing the life of virtue to speak of the power, or the wonder, or the works of God, but since humans cannot understand the essence of God, they should not speak of it. When scripture speaks of God, it talks about God’s activities or features, but not about God’s being itself. Following the example of scripture, people should also “honor in silence” God’s being, not investigating things that are “beyond the reach of the mind.”

Attempting to speak of the being of God is to place language above God, an assertion no person

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69 *In cant.* GNO 6.10. Translation from Norris, 9.


71 *In Eccles.* GNO 5.415-416.

72 *Contra Eun.* 2 GNO 1.2.1.105. Translation from Hall, 105.
of faith could make.\textsuperscript{73} The appropriate way to treat God’s being is to recognize its position as above human thought and language and to honor it in silence.

Another intersection of speech and silence appears in Homily 7 of \textit{In cant.} in a discussion of various attributes of the Bride’s beauty found in Song of Songs 4:1-4. Gregory understands the Bride to represent the church with the extolled body parts—eyes, hair, teeth, lips, neck, and breasts—each standing for members of the church who perform different functions in accordance with their individual giftedness. The teeth, for instance, represent those teachers who break knowledge up into smaller bites to render it ingestible and useful for others\textsuperscript{74} and the lips are those who benefit the church with their graceful speech.\textsuperscript{75} Teeth and lips are notable for their use of speech, but in this catalogue Gregory also underscores the place of silence. The Bride’s eyes represent the noblest part of the body for their role in recognizing, instructing, and guiding, but eyes, Gregory notes, come in pairs and this is to indicate that humans have two parts, the sensible and the intelligible: “For where the good life is concerned, there is a portion of it that is manifest, so as to be known to human beings, and there is a portion that is hidden and ineffable, seen only by God.” These hidden attributes Gregory esteems more highly than what is visible, saying, “what is marveled at in silence is set apart from that which has been praised.”\textsuperscript{76} The hidden parts are not only concealed from sight, but also from speech, with the result that marveling in silence is the only proper response.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{In Eccles.} GNO 5.411.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{In cant.} GNO 6.224.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{In cant.} GNO 6.228-229.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{In cant.} GNO 6.219. Translation from Norris, 231.
Gregory summarizes these points from Homily 7 in Homily 15 when he discusses Song of Songs 6:6-7, which is identical in parts to Song of Songs 4:1-4. He repeats his interpretation of the beauty of the Bride’s teeth and lips as representing those who engage in the ministry of the word and again understands the phrase “outside the veil” as a reference to silence. Praise, Gregory explains, is not great because of what it is able to say, but because of what it must leave unsaid: “Hence, one who says outside your veil [of silence] is clearly asserting that the things that can be expressed by speech are great and beauteous—those, namely, that are outside the veil [of silence], but those that are outside of speech, those that are veiled in silence, unutterable and incapable of being articulated, are altogether greater and more wonderful than those that are spoken.” Speech, in these homilies, is necessary and beneficial to the church, moving people along in their ascent by confessing Jesus and instructing others. Speech, however, is finite, incapable of adequately addressing every mystery. Although Gregory does not mention in these two homilies the specific topics that speech cannot cover, he is clear that there are times in which language is inadequate and topics about which one does not speak. When the capabilities of language are surpassed, the appropriate response is to marvel in silence. Silence, as Douglass points out, is not separate from the motion of theological discourse for Gregory, but rather part of it: “Theological language, therefore, stretches back and forth toward God, first finding its limit in the creation of a (non)space of silence and then rebounding back into discourse.”

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77 Norris notes that the word “veil” (σιώπησις) is related to the verb “to keep silence” (σιωπάω). Gregory understands what is “behind the veil” to be concealed from sight and unspoken. Norris, Homilies on the Song of Songs, 231 n. 15 and 485 n. 30.

78 In cant. GNO 6.456. Translation from Norris, 485.

79 Douglass, Theology of the Gap, 166; pages 164-173 discuss silence as part of theological language.
not to patch over the *diastemic* gaps between humans and God, but to uncover and expose them for the purpose of maintaining a proper understanding of the difference between creator and creature.

As with knowledge, the discussion of language has exposed a number of ways in which speech moves people across *diastemic* gaps. In the transfer of information from the mind of one person to the mind of another language crosses gaps between the mind and the body as well as the gaps between one person and another. The motions of knowledge and language work together to navigate the gaps between people. The discussion of knowledge and language has also uncovered some ways in which *diastemic* humans move into the gap between humanity and God in spiritual ascent. Knowledge and virtue can fuel the ascent, as can careful interpretation of scripture and theological discourse. Both knowledge and language, however, have limits, which Gregory is quick to mention. Humans cannot know or speak of everything and they are wise to be aware not to depend too heavily on their own abilities to talk about God lest they risk worshipping their own mental conception or linguistic construction of God rather than the reality of God. In a world full of moving parts, it is not easy for a moving human to grasp the truth and put it into language and, as a result, knowing the limits of knowledge and language is crucial to theology. This discussion has also demonstrated, however, that the limits of knowledge and language are less like barriers than gateways to the soul’s ascent. In the soul’s journey to move in the gap between itself and God, knowledge moves into unknowing and language into silence. Unknowing and silence, though, do not impede the soul moving toward God, but facilitate it.
Chapter 5

Motion in the Gaps: Ascent, Union, and Paradox

Given the limited nature of thought and language for Gregory, his use of image is particularly welcome. One of the strengths of Gregory’s writing is a facility moving between argument and image, often weaving the two together in such a way as to render either one ineffective at communicating his message if studied in isolation. This is especially true when Gregory writes about the relationship between God and the human person because he relies so heavily on images to explain this connection. While Gregory does sometimes use argument to explain this relationship, he is also likely (particularly in his later works) to use image and paradox to communicate what cannot be entirely captured in language. This chapter will explore some of the images of the soul’s relationship to God through time, further illustrating the kinetic nature of the human person both in the present and the future.

Ascent

Perhaps the primary image Gregory uses to discuss the relationship of the human soul to God is the image of ascent, the soul moving toward union with God. It is the overarching narrative of *In cant.*, as Gregory explains at the outset of the work: “I testify as one who is about to treat the mystical vision contained in the Song of Songs. For by what is written here, the soul is in a certain manner led as a bride toward an incorporeal and spiritual and undefiled marriage with God.”

I discussed this image in chapter 3, arguing that spiritual progress, both in the present and eschatological ages, can be considered *kinesis*. Taking this assertion as a starting

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1 *In cant.* GNO 6.15. Translation from Norris, 15.
point, this discussion of Gregory’s images of ascent will consider how motion functions in these images and how the motion involved in these images can enlighten our conception of Gregory.

Images of ascent in *In cant.* depict motion as both linear and cyclical, emphasizing concurrent advancement toward God and repeated beginning. Ascent itself, as an image, is linear, indicating upward motion, but it is not the only such image; Gregory uses a number of images that indicate linear progress. In a straightforward image of upward linear progress, Gregory uses the image of climbing stairs to represent the motion of the soul toward God. In describing the progress of the soul in virtue in Homily 5, Gregory writes, “We see, then, that the Bride is being led by the Word through the ascents of virtue up to the heights, just as if she were climbing stairs.” In another image of upward motion, Gregory compares the soul to a bubble, rising up to the surface of the water.

In Homily 5 of *In cant.*, the mobility required for the soul to ascend to God is depicted as flowing water as Gregory explains a previous time in history when human nature experienced a winter: “There was a time when humanity was frozen stiff by the chill of idolatry because the changeable (εὐκινήτου) nature of human beings had been altered to conform to that of unchangeable (ἀκινήτων) idols.” When Jesus came, however, he brought spring, which caused the soul to thaw and melt into flowing water: “So it is that the person who has been petrified by the frost, once warmed by the Spirit and heated by the ray of the Word, again becomes water that

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2 See chapter 3 above for a discussion of Gregory’s innovation in using images of linear motion to indicate spiritual progress.
3 *In cant.* GNO 6.158. Translation from Norris, 171.
4 *In cant.* GNO 6.334.
5 *In cant.* GNO 6.147. Translation from Norris, 159.
springs up to life eternal.”⁶ Ascent becomes possible when the soul is thawed from its winter of idolatry and melts into flowing water that can, because of its mobility, ascend to God.

In Gregory’s images of ascent, the upward progress takes place as a result of virtue; the more the soul practices virtue, the higher it climbs. Gregory calls the ascent an “ascent of virtue”⁷ and notes frequently that only by living a life of virtue can the soul move on its journey. In Homily 6 of In cant., Gregory writes, “It is not by some spontaneous coincidence nor by blind chance that this upward ascent becomes hers. No, the beauty becomes hers through her own labors in the way of self-control and diligence.”⁸ That virtue fuels the ascent is significant for Gregory because it creates the possibility for unlimited progress since there is no limit for the good.⁹

In De virg., Gregory offers another image of water, the image of water moving through a pipe, as an example of how virtue propels the ascent. In this image, the mind is likened to water flowing from a source, which is then diffused into many streams. None of the streams can be used for farming because the flow of each is too weak. If the water flowing out, however, is constrained by a pipe, the water can be diverted in any direction and used for any number of purposes. The human mind is like this in that by self-control one can divert thoughts upward, focusing them on one thing, rather than being scattered by thinking about various pleasant diversions. The result of this would be that the mind “would move with its own natural energy and nothing would prevent it from being borne upwards and fastening itself upon the truth of

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⁶ In cant. GNO 6 147-148. Translation from Norris, 161.
⁷ In cant. GNO 6.158.
⁸ In cant. GNO 6.188. Translation from Norris, 201.
reality.”¹⁰ In this, the virtue of self-discipline can make the motion of the mind useful, moving it to desire things above. Again in this image it is the fluidity of water that provides the point of analogy between water and the soul. In order to ascend, the soul must be able to flow and move.

Several times in In cant., a mention of limits or boundaries is occasion for Gregory to use cyclical imagery to describe the soul’s relationship to God. While the primary image for spiritual progress in In cant. is upward motion, a number of times Gregory notes that as the soul comes to a limit, that limit becomes the starting point for further progress in virtue. Homily 6 contains a discussion of these limits, beginning with an explanation of the world being divided into intelligible and sensible. He differentiates the two by their ability to be limited, saying the intelligible has no limit, while the sensible is entirely limited.¹¹ He goes on to explain that the intelligible is divided into uncreated and created, a distinction of Gregory that will be familiar by this point. The created intelligible has its life in participation with the uncreated as it changes to become more and more like the God. “For this reason,” Gregory writes, “no end point can be conceived for it [the created intelligible] either, and its growth toward the better is not confined to any limit, but the good that is given at any particular time is always a starting point for something more and better, even though it already appears to be as great and as complete as possible.”¹² Coming to what seems like the limit of growth brings one back around to a new beginning, in a cyclical, or perhaps spiral image of progress toward God. Gregory repeats this concept in Homily 8, saying that what one understands at any given time is not one’s limit for

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¹⁰ De virg. SC 119.6.2. Translation from Callahan, 30.
understanding because people are in the process of ascending, “the outer limit of what has been discovered becomes the starting point of a search after more exalted things.” Again here what was once the limit becomes a starting point as one circles around to start again.

Gregory’s account of the creation of humans as sexed and the transformation of sex and gender as the soul progresses offers further information for reflection on the role of virtue in the ascent of the soul to God and on spiritual progress as being imagined as both linear and cyclical. One of the fundamental tenets of Gregory’s anthropology is the creation of human beings in the image of God. The division of humanity into two sexes creates a problem for Gregory, however, because God, being neither male nor female, is not divided in this way. How, then, can humanity made in the image of God be divided into two sexes? Further, Gregory quotes Galatians 3:28, which states that in Christ Jesus, “there is neither male nor female.” There is, then, a tension between humanity created in the image of God and humanity as divided into male and female, as Gregory points out in his explanation of Genesis 1:27, “and God created man; in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.” Gregory resolves this tension by interpreting Genesis 1:27 as indicating a two stage process of creation. In the first stage, God created humans in God’s image and in the second stage God created them male and female: “Thus the creation of our nature is in a sense twofold: one made like to God, one divided according to this distinction.”

The purpose for this distinction, as Gregory goes on to explain, was for humans to have a method for procreation. In the original design, humans would have been able to procreate

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13 In cant. GNO 6.247. Translation from Norris, 261.
14 The following discussion is drawn from chapter 16 of De hom. opif. PG 44.177.37-185.55 (NPNF 5:404-406).
15 De hom. opif. PG 44.181.16-19. Translation from NPNF 5:405.
without sexual contact as the angels do: “but whatever the mode of increase in the angelic
nature is (unspeakable and inconceivable by human conjectures, except that it assuredly exists),
it would have operated also in the case of men.”\textsuperscript{16} God, however, knew before the actual creation
that humanity, with its free will, would not always choose the good and with the motion of the
human will tending downward, humanity would lose its ability to procreate like the angels.
Seeing that this would happen, God devised the division of humanity into male and female so
that humans would be able to procreate and bring the correct number of souls into existence.\textsuperscript{17}

A further assertion follows from this particular construction of humans, namely the place
of humans as intermediate between God and animals. This design for humanity, as partly
fashioned in the image of God, but sharing in common with animals the same method of
reproduction, places humans in a median position between the two: “While two natures—the
Divine and incorporeal nature, and the irrational life of brutes—are separated from each other as
extremes, human nature is a mean between them.”\textsuperscript{18} Humans are made in the image of God, but,
as Gregory points out frequently, an object that is made in the image of something means that
some features are alike and some are different. If the object were like the archetype in every
respect, it would be the archetype, not an image of it. In the case of humans, they share with God
the ability to freely practice virtue: “the principle of all excellence, all virtue and wisdom, and
every higher thing that we conceive: but pre-eminent among all is the fact that we are free from
necessity…for virtue is a voluntary thing, subject to no dominion.”\textsuperscript{19} As Gregory goes on to

\textsuperscript{16} De hom. opif. PG 44.189. Translation from NPNF 5:407.
\textsuperscript{17} De hom. opif. PG 44.189.
\textsuperscript{18} De hom. opif. PG 44.181.28-31. Translation from NPNF 5:405.
\textsuperscript{19} De hom. opif. PG 44.184.23-30. Translation from NPNF 5:405.
explain, the primary difference between humans and God is that humans are created and God is uncreated and one important result of that distinction is that humans are mutable, in a constant state of motion, while God is immutable. The mutability of humans combined with their intermediate position and their freedom to choose means that humans can choose virtue or vice and that choice results in motion either upward toward their God-like nature or down toward their animal-like nature.

The explanation of the creation of humans uncovers three *diastemic* gaps: between the human and God, between humans and one another, and between present and eschatological bodies. The first two I will treat briefly because they are similar to gaps already explored and the third I will examine in some detail. The gap between human and God is evident from the intermediate place humans have between God and animals. Being created in the image of God, humans can ascend through the gap toward God through virtue, as described in the previous section. Second, the introduction of sexual procreation placed gaps between people as Gregory indicates in a comparison between human and angelic procreation. In the original plan for humanity, humans were to reproduce as the angels do, without sexual intercourse.\(^\text{20}\) Gregory declines to discuss how exactly angels reproduce, indicating that their method is “inconceivable,” but he does say that angels “exist in countless myriads, being one essence, and at the same time numerically many.”\(^\text{21}\) Angelic existence is characterized by being of one essence, a characteristic humans apparently lost upon the introduction of sexual reproduction.


\(^{21}\) *De hom. opif.* PG 44.189-15.18. Translation from *NPNF* 5:407.
A diastemic gap can also be detected between present human bodies and eschatological ones. Gregory’s account of the double creation of humanity reveals a staged existence, moving first from God’s original intention for humans to the actual construction of humans, to the eschatological experience of humans, which Gregory describes as a return to the original state. The space between God’s original intention for humans and their actual construction is not a diastemic gap, since it happened outside of time and fully within the mind of the a diastemic God, that is God did not create the original human and then at a later time create the human divided into male and female, but rather since God made the decision to divide humans into two sexes based on foreknowledge of what would happen, the two stages of creation took place in the mind of God before actually creating humans.  

There is, however, a diastemic gap between the present body of humans and the eschatological one, which is crossed by the motions of time, virtue, and transformation.

One of the ways Gregory describes the resurrection is as a return to the first stage of creation, prior to the division of sexes: “Now the resurrection promises us nothing else than the restoration of the fallen to their ancient state.” Smith sees further evidence for eschatology as a

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23 De hom. opif. PG 44.188.40-42 (NPNF 5:407). Reading Gregory as saying that sex is provisional and temporary is standard in scholarly literature on the topic. See, for example, Verna E. F. Harrison, “Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology,” Journal of Theological Studies 41 (1990), 466-469; Valerie A. Karras, “Patristic Views on the Ontology of Gender,” in Personhood: Orthodox Christianity and the Connection Between Body, Mind, and Soul, ed. John T. Chirban (Westport, Conn: Bergin & Garvey, 1996), 113-118; and J. Warren Smith, “The Body of Paradise and the Body of the Resurrection: Gender and the Angelic Life in Gregory of Nyssa’s De Hominis Opificio,” Harvard Theological Review 92 (2006), 207-228. One major exception to this is John Behr, who argues that gender in On the Making of Humanity “is in no sense ‘economic’: it is not brought into operation by humanity’s fall, nor is it abandoned in the final transformation.” John Behr, “The Rational Animal: A Rereading of Gregory of Nyssa’s De Hominis Opificio,” Journal of Early Christian Studies 7 (1999), 245. Smith argues persuasively that Behr’s reading of Gregory is not supported by the text.
return in the preface of *De opif. hom.*, which states: “For it is necessary to know those things concerning man which came to be—of that which we believe to have come to be, of that which we expect to appear later, and of that which is now seen and leave nothing unexamined.” Smith notes that the grouping of past and future together suggests that past and future belong together, with present standing out in comparison to the other two.\(^{24}\) The first stage of creation to which people return in the eschaton is not the pre-lapsarian stage of Adam and Eve in the garden, but to God’s original intention of humanity.\(^{25}\) It is significant for Gregory that all humans are included in the original, first stage creation of humanity because it is the equal distribution of the image of God to all that is the basis for equality among humans.\(^{26}\) That all humans have a mind is evidence for Gregory that all bear the image of God: “the man that was manifested at the first creation of the world, and he that shall be after the consummation of all, are alike: they equally bear in themselves the Divine image.”\(^{27}\) In the eschaton, humans return to a stage of creation in which they contain the image of God, but are not sexually differentiated and do not procreate by sexual intercourse.\(^{28}\)

Although biological sexual differentiation will be eliminated in the eschaton, a number of commentators have argued persuasively that gender remains an important category in the eschaton. Valerie Karras explains that although physical sexual characteristics will no longer

\(^{24}\) Smith’s translation reflects the correct order in the Greek, which is rearranged to read past, present, future in Wilson’s NPNF translation. Smith, “The Body of Paradise and the Body of the Resurrection,” 219.


\(^{26}\) *De hom. opif.* 16.16-18 PG 44.185.

\(^{27}\) *De hom. opif.* PG 44.185.43-46. Translation from *NPNF* 5:406.

\(^{28}\) This does raise some questions regarding the purpose for genitalia and other unused organs in the eschaton, as Gregory understands that even though the body will be resurrected with its parts, the body parts will not be needed or used for sex, eating, digestion, respiration, etc. Smith discusses this ambiguity in Gregory in Smith, “The Body of Paradise and the Body of the Resurrection,” 219-227.
exist in the eschaton, gender will remain as “liberated from the strictures of physical sex.”\textsuperscript{29}

While Gregory is quite clear that humans will not retain their physical sexual characteristics in the eschaton, the gendered way he speaks of the soul and the soul’s ascent to God suggests that the transformation of eschatological gender is part of the motion that drives the soul toward God. Sarah Coakley mentions several references to Gregory’s sense of gender fluidity, which merit some discussion here. In \textit{De vita Mosis}, Gregory describes the beginning of the life of virtue as giving birth to oneself, which because of humanity’s mutable nature is a matter of choice: “We are in some manner, our own parents, giving birth to ourselves by our own free choice in accordance with whatever we wish to be, whether male or female, molding ourselves to the teaching of virtue or vice.”\textsuperscript{30} Becoming a parent of oneself in this passage involves both genders because “parents” in this passage is literally “fathers” (\textit{πατέρες}) and “giving birth” (\textit{τίκτονες}) is the activity of the mother. Further, the type of life to which one is born (male or female) is a matter of choice. In this passage, Gregory associates male with the life of virtue and female with passion, but this association (as both Coakley and Harrison point out) is not one that Gregory uses consistently throughout his corpus.\textsuperscript{31} Further, Harrison argues that this passage, although seemingly a condemnation of feminine, actually values both sexes because of its emphasis on


\textsuperscript{30} \textit{De vita Mosis} SC 1.2.3. Translation from Malherbe, 32.

spiritual motherhood: “the virtuous human person is at once the mother giving birth and the male child being born, and continues to be both through eternal progress.”

In the ascent of the soul to God, Gregory describes the soul in both masculine and feminine terms, switching from one to the other as the soul advances. Harrison identifies three stages from the first homily of *In cant.*, each stage corresponding to one of the three books of Solomon. In the first stage, the soul is a male youth pursuing Wisdom in order to court and then marry her. In the second stage, the soul and wisdom remain married, but their positions are reversed: “That is why the one who is called ‘son’ in Proverbs is here called ‘bride,’ and Wisdom, correspondingly, is transferred into the role of bridegroom. This is to assure that the human person, once separated from the bridegroom, might be betrothed to God as a holy virgin...” In the third stage, the stage of eternal progress, the soul remains a bride, continuing to seek, but also acting, as Harrison has demonstrated, as a receptacle, receiving drink from Christ the fountain of life, milk from the divine breast, and scent from the groom’s perfume. Karras summarizes Gregory’s view of eschatological gender as: “calling on women to be ‘male’ in terms of spiritual strength in this life, and on men to be ‘female’ in terms of spiritual fecundity in the next. Thus, the best traits of both genders are to be cultivated by all human beings irrespective of sex.”

This discussion of gender has revealed two kinds of motion through the gap between the present and the eschatological body. As commentators have noticed, Gregory does not present

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32 Harrison, “Gender, Generation, and Virginity in Cappadocian Theology,” 64.
34 *In cant.* GNO 6.23. Translation from Norris, 25.
eschatology in a systematic way, insisting on the resurrection of the body, but not elucidating how the body fits into the soul’s ascent to God.\textsuperscript{37} Humanity’s return to the first stage of creation is a cyclical motion, coming back around to God’s original intention for humanity. Passing through this gap by time and virtue brings one back to the humanity God first intended. Looking at a different facet of the eschaton (noting the inadequacy of language and Gregory’s tendency to present concepts in a multi-faceted manner), another type of motion seen here is the linear motion associated with ascent toward God. This linear ascent is made possible by the particular human construction of median position between God and animals and the freedom to choose virtue in order to ascend toward God. In the ascent, gender transformations fuel the motion forward as the soul develops virtues of both genders.

**Virtue, Time, and Motion**

It is clear from the above discussion that virtue is the fuel for the soul’s ascent toward God, but the relationship between virtue and motion goes deeper than this causal one. Virtue causes the soul to advance and can do this infinitely only because of the infinite nature of virtue. Virtue, unlike evil, is inexhaustible, which is the foundation for the soul’s ability to progress forever in virtue, but not in evil.\textsuperscript{38} As a result of the infinite nature of the soul’s pursuit of virtue, developing virtue is not a static achievement, but a movement, as Ferguson explains: “Because of the infinite nature of virtue, participation in virtue can never be expressed as an attainment; it can only be expressed as movement.”\textsuperscript{39} To be virtuous is to be moving further into virtue.

\textsuperscript{37} See, for example, Coakley, “The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God,” 67; and Smith, “The Body of Paradise and the Body of the Resurrection,” 226-228.

\textsuperscript{38} De hom. opif. 21.2.

\textsuperscript{39} Everett Ferguson, “God’s Infinity and Man’s Mutability,” 67.
Gregory captures this notion of transforming virtue in an image he uses in *In cant.* in which he describes the history of humanity in terms of the changing of seasons. In Homily 5, Gregory comes to Song of Songs 2:11, which reads, “For behold, the winter is past, the rain is gone, it has departed.” He explains that the change of seasons should be understood in a figural sense: “By all this, the enigma of a winter like this points, at a deeper level, to the situation of beings that are ensouled and endowed with the power of choice.”\(^{40}\) The beginning of humanity, as he goes on to explain, was springtime in paradise, complete with the “blossom of immortality.” “But the winter of disobedience dried up the root,” he continues, “The blossom was shaken off and fell to the earth; the human being was stripped of the beauty of immortality, and the green grass of virtues was dried up as love for God became cold in the face of burgeoning lawlessness.”\(^{41}\) When Jesus came, he inaugurated a new spring, allowing for the possibility of new blossoms and growth toward fruition. In this new season of growth, the blossoms are virtues, which, he says, flower in the present but do not bear full fruit. The present is a spring: “For since the Word is describing the spiritual springtime to the Bride, and since this season is a halfway house between two others—between wintry desolation and the summer’s sharing in the harvest—for just that reason, while he openly proclaims the passing of evil things, he does not yet point to the full fruits of virtue.”\(^{42}\) Virtue in this scheme is in a place of transition, from blossom in the present to full fruit in the future. In the blossom stage, the virtues give off sweet fragrances, but they do not yet lead to the sober drunkenness that is characteristic of a later

\(^{40}\) *In cant.* GNO 6.152. Translation from Norris, 165.

\(^{41}\) *In cant.* GNO 6.153. Translation from Norris, 165.

\(^{42}\) *In cant.* GNO 6.155. Translation from Norris, 168-169.
stage in the journey. The experience of exercising virtue changes as the soul advances, transforming from blossom to full fruit.

Virtue grows and develops between the present life and the age to come, but remains a constant feature of spiritual ascent in both times, raising questions about how time factors into the ascent. In previous chapters I argued that one significant diastemic marker of human beings is their relationship with time. Marked by a time-stamped beginning and existing as part of the flowing motion of time, humans experience time as a boundary that cannot be penetrated until earthly bodies are traded for eschatological ones. The change between the present age and the eschatological one is a momentous one, for although humans will still be created beings with their origin in time, they will no longer be bounded by it. Given the stark differences between life in the present age and life in the age to come, it is curious that in images of ascent in In cant., experiences of the present and the future run so seamlessly together that it can be difficult to tell in a given passage to which age Gregory refers. It is clear in Homily 12 that Gregory uses images of ascent to describe the soul’s relationship to God in both the present and the future age. Describing the ascent to God as a perpetual exodus and entrance, Gregory writes, “That soul neither leaves off coming in nor ceases going out but is ever entering into what lies beyond by the progress she makes and always taking leave of what she has already apprehended.”

Although this process is described as perpetual, it becomes clear that it takes place in the present age a few lines later when Gregory describes Moses’ ascension in terms of the events of his life such as living in the wilderness, freeing the people from Pharaoh, smiting the rock, receiving the

43 In cant. GNO 6.354. Translation from Norris, 375.
Moses effected the steps of his ascent by actions he took in the present age, but throughout the homilies, the ascent of the soul is something that continues into the eschatological age. Later in Homily 12 Gregory asserts, “That is why the Bride who runs toward the Bridegroom does not find any stopping place in her progress toward the better.” The ascent of the soul toward God happens both in the present life and the one to come.

Even though the ascent begins in the present life of the soul, it starts with a death and resurrection. Just after describing the acts of Moses that resulted in his ascent is the following statement:

So it is in our present case. The soul, at the moment when through death she has been raised, when she has been filled with myrrh, when by her deeds she has touched her hands to the bar and hoped to bring the One she longs for into her house—at just that moment he passes her by, while she, no longer remaining where she was, moves out, but following the Word who leads her forward.

The soul begins to follow after God when God passes by, which happens at the moment of death. This death is not literal, as the beginning of Homily 12 makes clear, but the death to self and the resurrection that occurs at the point of baptism. Myrrh is a symbol for putting to death passions and putting one’s hands to the bar a symbol of faith and works that bring one to the entrance of the kingdom. Gregory summarizes this process in the voice of the Bride: “I have received the power of the resurrection by mortifying my earthly members, and the mortification of such members was effected voluntarily.” The death to passion and resurrection through baptism begin the ascent. Gregory also traces the beginning of the ascent to baptism in Homily 9 saying

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44 In cant. GNO 6.354-355.
46 In cant. GNO 6.357. Translation from Norris, 377.
that in order to have good teachings, one must first become the Lord’s sister by good works and the Lord’s bride by the “birth from above.”

In the ascent of the soul, the death and resurrection that matter are not the death of the body and the resurrection into the eschatological age, but the death to sin and resurrection of baptism. These mark the beginning of the soul’s ascent to God, a journey that does not stop, even at the subsequent death and resurrection of the body. Time collapses in a sense here, as Gregory reframes the important boundary as the one that marks the beginning of the soul’s ascent. In Gregory’s understanding of the universe, the temporal boundary between the present age and the age to come is a significant one, as discussed in previous chapters. The experience of the divine in the two ages will be different, the experience of human knowledge will be different, and the boundary is impenetrable until time ceases. The temporal existence of humans is one of the primary markers of the diastema and the gap between present and future is one of the diastemic gaps that define human existence. Despite the vast differences between the present age and the eschatological one, when Gregory writes about the ascent, there is more contrast between the time before and the time after one began the ascent than there is between before and after the resurrection of the body. It is as though the gap is crossed when the soul begins its upward journey and as it ascends, it floats so smoothly past the eschatological change that often a reader must look closely at any given mention of the ascent of the soul in order to determine if Gregory is referring to ascent that takes place in the present age or the one to come.

Gregory further examines some of the intersections of virtue, time, and satiation in De beat., emphasizing another way in which virtue is not subject to time. In this passage, Gregory

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48 *In cant.* GNO 6.263.
states that in contrast to the pursuit of pleasure, the pursuit of virtue leads to “happiness over each of his achievements not to be transient and unstable, but well-founded, permanent, and lasting through every period (διαστήματι) of his life.” When seeking any object of desire, time factors into the cycle of desire and satiety because after achieving the object of one’s desire, there is a period of satisfaction before the desire returns. Desire for food abates after eating for a time until one gets hungry again. It takes time before one can arouse desire after one has been sated. The seeking of virtue, however, operates differently: “The acquisition of virtue, however, when people once have it firmly planted in them, is not measured by time or limited by surfeit, but evermore produces for those who live by it the feeling that is fresh and youthful and in its prime. For that reason God the Word promises satisfaction to those who hunger for these things, a satisfaction which sharpens the appetite by fullness, and does not blunt it.” The desire, seeking, and acquiring of virtue does not require an inactive refractory period of satisfaction. The satisfaction serves to further the appetite for more virtue, not dull it. Although Gregory is focused in this text on the present acquisition of virtue and not explicitly on eschatology, this example further illustrates that virtue is unhinged from the normal rules and boundaries of time.

**Mingling**

Gregory uses images of linear and cyclical movement to illustrate the virtue-fueled ascent of the soul, but the ultimate goal of virtue is participation with the life of God and Gregory uses other images to depict that relationship. In homily 9 of *In cant.*, Gregory states that the purpose

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49 *De beat.* PG 44.1244. Translation from Hall, 54. There is a very similar passage in Homily 2 of *In Eccles.*, which reads: “But I, he says, sought the true Good, which is equally good at any age and every time of life, and of which satiety is not expected, nor fullness found. Appetite for it and partaking of it are exactly matched, and longing flourishes together with enjoyment, and is not limited by the attainment of what is desired; the more it delights in the Good, the more desire flames up with delight; the delight matches the desire, and at each stage (διαστήματα) of life it is always a lovely thing to those who partake of it.” *In Eccles.* GNO 5.313 (Hall, 58).

50 *De beat.* PG 44.1244-1245. Translation from Hall, 54.
of the ascent: “For the goal of the whole life of virtue is participation in God,”\textsuperscript{51} indicating that the ascent itself is a means to an end. Like the ascent, however, participation is also a motion because divine infinity allows for the soul to move ever deeper into participation with God.\textsuperscript{52} In explaining the notion of participation with God, Gregory illustrates with images of mixing and union. In the first homily of \textit{In cant.}, Gregory explains some principles of his interpretation of the Song of Songs, particularly the allegorical nature of his exegesis. In his allegory of the Song of Songs, the Bride and the Bridegroom of the text should be taken to represent the soul and God: “What is described here is an account of a wedding, but what is intellectually discerned is the human soul’s mingling with the Divine.”\textsuperscript{53} It becomes more clear as Gregory continues that he is likening the consummation of the marriage in Song of Songs with the union of the soul to God, noting that the companions of the Bridegroom rejoice because the “undefiled marriage is being consummated—the marriage by which the soul that is joined to the Lord becomes ‘one spirit,’ as the apostle says.”\textsuperscript{54} After warning that one should not focus too closely on the literal meaning of Song of Songs, Gregory explains that the reason for using erotic imagery to describe the relationship between the soul and God is to equate the level of intensity of erotic passion with the intensity with which one should desire spiritual union:

This is why, moreover, the most intense of pleasurable activities (I mean the passion of erotic love) is set as a figure at the very fore of the guidance that the teachings give: so that by this we may learn that it is necessary for the soul, fixing itself steadily on the inaccessible beauty of the divine nature, to love that beauty as much as the body has a bent for what is akin to it and to turn passion into impassibility, so that when every bodily


\textsuperscript{52} See Ferguson, “God’s Infinity and Man’s Mutability,” 67.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{In cant.} GNO 6.22-23. Translation from Norris, 25.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{In cant.} GNO 6.24-25. Translation from Norris, 27.
disposition has been quelled, our mind within us may boil with love, but only in the Spirit, because it is heated by that ‘fire’ that the Lord came to ‘cast upon the earth.’

Besides marital consummation, Gregory uses several other images to describe the union of the soul to God in which the soul takes in or is penetrated by the divine. A bit further in Homily 1, Gregory explains the meaning of Song of Songs 1:2, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.” The kisses represent encounters with the divine that leave the soul more desirous of the divine than before the kiss. The mouth of the Bridegroom is the “fount of the spiritual life,” out of which come the words of eternal life. When the Bride kisses the mouth that is the fountain, the words of life flow into her: “Since, then, it is necessary for the one who draws drink from the fount to fix mouth to mouth and the fount is the Lord who says, ‘If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink,’ it follows that the soul, thirsty as she is, wills to bring her own mouth to the mouth that pours out life, saying Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.”

The kisses of the Bridegroom involve the soul taking in the divine wisdom as if putting its mouth to a fountain.

Immediately following the description of the kisses is an image of breastfeeding that Gregory draws from the next line of Song of Songs, “for your breasts are better than wine.” Gregory takes the breasts to represent “beneficent activities of the divine Power” (as opposed to the divine Being itself) which flow into the person who receives it. “Through them,” Gregory writes, “God suckles the life of each individual, bestowing the food that is appropriate to each of

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55 In cant. GNO 6.27. Translation from Norris, 29.
56 In cant. GNO 6.32-33. Translation from Norris, 35.
those who receive it.” Both kissing and breastfeeding images picture divine nourishment as flowing into the ascending soul, providing fuel for the upward journey.

Part of the picture of union is the divine entering into the soul, but the penetration goes both ways, as there are also images of the soul entering into the divine. Gregory compares the Song of Songs to the Tabernacle in Homily 2 and its interpretation he likens entering into the Tabernacle’s various rooms. The primary points of contact between the text and the tent are the difference between the visible outside, the veiled inside, and the treasure concealed at the innermost point of each. “The outward appearance of the sacred tent of witness,” as Gregory writes, “was not so precious as the beauty hidden within it.” While the outside of the Tabernacle was constructed with curtains and coverings of skin and cloth, the inside contained gold, silver, dyed veils, and treasure. Likewise the Song of Songs has both an external and an inner meaning, its external coverings being “a set of erotic words and expressions that evince an orientation to an object of desire, offer a description of something beautiful, and make mention of bodily members, both those that are seen and those that are concealed by clothing.” This outer meaning conceals an inner meaning that is more beautiful and more valuable, dealing with “the heavenly and incorporeal way of life.” The Song of Songs is not only like the Tabernacle in having outer and inner parts, but like a priest, the interpreter of Song of Songs can enter into the inner chambers of the Tabernacle only after preparing for entrance by bathing: “The condition for discerning them [the ideas hidden in the text] is that we take care to prepare

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57 In cant. GNO 6.33-34. Translation from Norris, 35.
58 In cant. GNO 6.43. Translation from Norris, 47.
59 In cant. GNO 6.44. Translation from Norris, 49.
60 In cant. GNO 6.45. Translation from Norris, 49.
ourselves for entrance upon the holy of holies by washing off in the bath of reason all the filth of shameful thinking.” 61 Understanding the text of Song of Songs is no mere intellectual exercise for Gregory, it first requires a base level of virtue, a washing away of impure thinking. Interacting with the Song of Songs does not just give information about how the soul might ascend toward God, rather understanding and ascent are integrated, the reader comprehends more of the text only by partaking in what it describes.

Gregory gives further indication in Homily 1 that entering into the text of Song of Songs is entering further into participation with God, inviting the reader to join him as he prepares to begin his exegesis of the text: “Let us then come within the holy of holies, that is, the Song of Songs.” 62 He goes on to discuss interpretation of this text a bit further, including the need for the soul to have a purified disposition before commencing before writing: “By these prefatory materials let the Word teach us one thing: it is not any longer human beings who are brought to the shrine of mysteries of this book. They have been changed in nature into something more divine by the Lord’s instruction.” 63 Interpretation and understanding of Song of Songs are inextricably tied with the soul’s advancement in its journey to God, pictured here as penetrating further into “the shrine of mysteries.”

Gregory portrays the soul uniting with God as both God entering the soul and the soul entering God and in one final image I will discuss, he shows God and the soul as mingling with one another. Song of Songs 4:15 calls the bride, which Gregory interprets as the soul, “a well of living water flowing from Lebanon.” This is paradoxical to Gregory because wells normally

61 In cant. GNO 6.45. Translation from Norris, 49.
63 In cant. GNO 6.29. Translation from Norris, 31.
contain still water, not living water: “And the most unbelievable thing of all is this: that of all the wells that contain a mass of water, only the Bride contains within herself water that is in transit, so as to possess a well’s depth, but at the same time a river’s unceasing motion.”

Because other scriptural references to living, or moving, water refer to divinity, Gregory understands this scripture to be describing the soul’s participation with the divine: “And may we too, having taken possession of that well, become participants in that water.” God’s living water flows into the well of the soul and then flows out. In this example, the motion of the soul is not described in terms of ascending to God, but of participating with God, the divine flowing in and a mixture flowing out.

Paradox and Motion

Having examined images of ascent and images of union, I will address one other type of image. Consistent with Gregory’s commitment to the limitations of discursive reasoning, in describing the experience of the soul in the ascent toward God, he employs paradoxical images. These paradoxes serve to capture the sense of both continual motion of the soul into further participation with God and a transformation in the quality of a familiar experience. Paradox, as Averil Cameron has explored, was both central to Christian belief and influential in its spread. Paradox uses language in attempt to describe what is indescribable, a central task of religion. In late fourth-century Christianity, the nature of Christ and the virginity of Mary were primary topics of paradoxical language, as writers explored the logical tensions between Mary being both virgin and mother and Christ both representing reason as the Word and being beyond.

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64 In cant. GNO 6.293. Translation from Norris, 309.
65 In cant. GNO 6.294. Translation from Norris, 309.
description. Other topics for paradoxical musings included representing virgins as the true brides of Christ, extolling chastity in erotic language, and upholding Christian simplicity of knowledge and lack of education as being true philosophy, using content and forms of late antique education to praise its absence. Each of these paradoxical constructions attempts to craft religious meaning out of making possible the impossible, a core assertion of Christianity.

In addition to some of the topics mentioned above, Gregory delves into paradoxes involved with the ascent of the soul. In homilies 5 and 10 of In cant., Gregory describes the soul’s movement toward God as “sober drunkenness,” highlighting the qualities of virtue and ecstasy that accompany the ascent. In homily 5, sober drunkenness is the full fruition of the blossom of virtue. In relating the human experience to the change of seasons, as I described above, the virtues are the blossoms of spring that give off good fragrances, the aroma of Christ. But when the season turns from spring to summer, the blossoms turn to fruit, which is made into wine that causes “good and sober drunkenness.”

Explaining the experience of sober drunkenness, Gregory writes: “What I am referring to is the drunkenness that occasions that self-transcendence (ἔκστασις) by which people move out of the material sphere toward what is more divine.” He explains it further in homily 10, saying: “all drunkenness tends, in those who have been mastered by wine, to bring about a displacement (ἐκστάσιν) of discursive thought. Hence what he prescribes here came to pass then because of that divine food and drink, and indeed always comes to pass when a change and displacement from worse to better accompany the food and

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67 Cameron, Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire, 165-175.
68 In cant. GNO 6.156.
69 In cant. GNO 6.156. Translation from Norris, 169.
In its ascent, the soul moves outside of itself, beyond the limitations of thought and language in a manner similar to drunkenness, but it moves in a different direction. Sober drunkenness is an image of the ecstasy of drunkenness moved in a divine direction, a description of the transcendent quality of inebriation if it were to be infused with virtue.

Similar to the paradox of sober drunkenness and discussed immediately after it in homily 10 is the image of wakeful sleep. Gregory reflects on Song of Songs 5:2, which reads, “I sleep, but my heart lies awake,” and develops from this line an image of the ascent in which parts of the person are inactive and other parts are fully engaged. In the typical experience of sleep, both the sense perception and the intellect are relaxed, with bodily sensations, thoughts and emotions all inactive. In wakeful sleep, however, while the senses remain inoperative, the intellect is active “without any distraction from the organs of sense perception.” Gregory clarifies that the senses are not only dulled to perceiving things that lead to vice, such as silver and gold which lead to greed, but the senses are also unable to perceive phenomena like the sun and stars. The purpose of the putting to sleep of the senses is not to disparage the senses, but to allow them to be transformed:

“When the vision of the truly good leads us to look beyond all such things, the bodily eye is inactive, for then the more perfect soul, which uses its understanding to look only on matters that are beyond seeing, is not drawn to any of the things to which that eye directs its attention. In the same way too the faculty of hearing becomes a dead thing and goes out of operation when the soul occupies itself with things beyond speech.”

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70 *In cant.* GNO 6.308. Translation from Norris, 325.


72 At least he does not disparage sight and hearing. In the following paragraph he refers to smell, taste, and touch as the “more bestial senses.”

73 *In cant.* GNO 6.313. Translation from Norris, 329.
Sight and hearing become inactive so that the soul can focus on matters beyond seeing and hearing. With this paradoxical image of wakeful sleep, Gregory again describes the transformation of the soul in its ascent by taking using a familiar image and moving it in a divine direction.

In *De vita Mosis*, Gregory presents another paradoxical image of ascent, the still motion: “This is the most marvelous thing of all: how the same thing is both a standing still and a moving (κίνησις). For he who ascends certainly does not stand still, and he who stands still does not move upwards. But here the ascent takes place by means of the standing. I mean by this that the firmer and more immovable one remains in the Good, the more he progresses in the course of virtue.” He goes on to say that those who are not firmly grounded in the Good may move a lot without making progress, like a person walking uphill in the sand. For those who are rooted in virtue, however, “it is like using the standing still as if it were a wing while the heart flies upwards through its stability in the Good.” Again here Gregory uses a tension in language to indicate the continual transformation of the soul and to acknowledge that the ascent of the soul is an experience beyond thought and language.

Gregory employs a number of other paradoxes to the same ends: divine darkness, the sweet blow, undefiled consummation, all of which emphasize participation with God as an ongoing process that defies the boundaries of human thought and language. These paradoxical images underscore the importance of the limits of human understanding and the unlimited

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74 *De vita Mosis* SC 1.2.243. Translation from Malherbe, 107-108.
75 *De vita Mosis* SC 1.2.244. Translation from Malherbe, 108.
76 In cant. GNO 6.322-323, *De vita Mosis* SC 1.2.162-168.
77 In cant. GNO 6.361-362.
78 In cant. GNO 6.23-27.
potential for growth and transformation. At the same time, they insist on the Christian belief that God achieves the impossible for the human soul, making it both sated and growing, rational and ecstatic, *diastemic* and endless. Martin Laird writes about these paradoxes: “For Gregory, to be human is to be grounded in paradox. To be human is to be finite and at the same time to participate in the transcendent.” 79 It is this position of humans as creatures in relationship with the uncreated that Gregory attempts to convey with these paradoxical images. They highlight the *kinetic* nature of humanity, which is always moving even as the quality of motion is transformed in the ascent to something beyond the ability of the human mind to presently grasp.

I have attempted to show how through his use of imagery, Gregory navigates the *diastemic* gaps between the human and the divine and between the present and the future. By examining these images, it becomes clear how central mutability is to Gregory’s notion of being human. The *diastemic* gap between human and divine can never fully be crossed, but the perpetual motion into that gap, straining forward toward the divine, is the soul’s eternal project. Gregory describes this process with moving images of ascent, which is itself a motion; union, which involves the motion of moving and flowing into one another; and paradox, which shows how the soul continues to move beyond the time when the normal types of motion with which we are familiar cease to be meaningful. In addressing the *diastemic* gap between the present and the future Gregory reframes the significant temporal boundary as the one that marks the beginning of one’s ascent to God, rather than the one that marks the entry into the eschaton. In collapsing time in this way, Gregory emphasizes the continuity of the person throughout the ascent: while significant transformations take place in the eschaton, the person who began the

ascent with death to sin and resurrection in baptism is the same person who continues to
strain after God into eternity. Through both gaps, virtue fuels people to linear ascent, moving
deeper into the limitless God and cyclical images of ascent arise to remind the audience that in
moving deeper, one does not lose their identity as a person because forward motion is also a
return to the beginning.
Chapter 6

Humans in Motion

By this point it has become clear that Gregory uses language of motion to describe nearly every major activity of humans. Motion characterizes events such as birth, death, bodily life and human nature, as well as human actions of thought, free will, emotion, virtue, vice, and speech. References to humans as motive beings extend throughout genres and timespan of Gregory’s corpus. Motion defines both the human being’s difference from the divine and her way of participating with it. Having delved into the breadth of motion for the human experience, this chapter will examine some conclusions about humans in motion and how these conclusions advance the current state of research on Gregory’s anthropology.

From the beginning I have suggested that looking deeply into Gregory’s language of motion would lend support to the idea that Gregory understood humans to be holistic beings, their parts connected and working together. Gregory’s dividing of the human person and its parts into categories such as intelligible and sensible, mind and body, living and dead can leave the impression that these binaries are firm markers. His language about these categories can be quite emphatic.¹ Nevertheless, repeatedly in the course of this study, motion between these binaries has shown overlap and connection between the categories. The distinction between intelligible and sensible is, according to Gregory, the most significant categorization and yet this study of motion has uncovered a number of human functions that require seamless crossover between

¹ A number of scholars have read the division between mind and body to emphasize the ultimate preference for the mind and liability of the body in Gregory, suggesting that the perfect state of humanity is bodiless (See A. H. Armstrong, “Platonic Elements in St. Gregory’s Doctrine of Man,” Dominican Studies 1 (1948): 113-126.) and that Gregory’s whole anthropology is directed toward overcoming corporeality. (See Ladner, “The Philosophical Anthropology of St. Gregory of Nyssa.”)
intelligible and sensible. A clear example of this comes from the discussion of thought and language in chapter 4. In order to do something as simple as respond to a question, a person must use senses to hear the question, think about the question and response in the intelligible mind, and then say the answer by encoding the intelligible thought back into sensible form. Engaging in conversation requires the constant connection and transfer between sensible and intelligible. Another example of motion between intelligible and sensible is in regard to the ascent of the soul. Both the soul and God are intelligible entities and yet the soul’s motion toward God is propelled by bodily acts of virtue. Acts of virtue performed by the sensible body result in motion of the intelligible soul. Further, the discussion of emotion in chapter 3 revealed another set of complex interactions between intelligible and sensible. Emotional impulses impact both mind and body, producing both physiological arousal and impetus for a response. While the emotional impulses themselves are morally neutral, the response is value-laden and directs the soul either upward or downward. In experiences with emotion, decisions and spiritual progress or regress take place in the intelligible mind, while emotional impulses and carrying out the decisions relate to the sensible body. All parts must function together in order for the emotional process to operate. Although Gregory makes distinctions between intelligible and sensible, mind and body that are important to him, the constant and intimate connection required does not allow for the categories to be divorced from one another. Rather, intelligible and sensible must work symbiotically for the advancement of the human.

In addition to the sense of cooperation given by the connection between intelligible and sensible, Gregory further indicates the holistic nature of the human person by comparing it to the cosmos. The discussion on motion of the cosmos in chapter 2 covered Gregory’s emphasis on the
cosmos as a union of opposites in which all the parts worked together to create unity and balance. In the third chapter of *In insc. pss.*, Gregory compares the human person to the universe, writing that a person is a “miniature cosmos and contains all the elements of the great cosmos.”

He goes on to describe the arrangement of the cosmos as having many varied parts, all of which move together to create a harmonious tune. Like the diverse pieces of the cosmos that all work together to create a balanced harmony, the human person (made in the image of the one who created the cosmos, as Gregory notes) combines its varied parts to produce harmonious music.

Suggesting that Gregory understands humans to be holistic beings with their varied parts working together does not indicate that the distinctions he makes between the categories are unimportant to him. On the contrary, Gregory sees significant differences between intelligible and sensible, as he repeatedly indicates. What I am suggesting is that the connections between the categories that have become evident in the examination of motion highlight the necessity of intelligible and sensible working together in order for the human person to function. Although Gregory sometimes expresses preference for the intelligible over the sensible, he writes about the structure of the human in such a way as to make both parts necessary.

Rather than seeing this as contradictory or inconsistent, I follow scholars such as Smith and Corrigan in characterizing Gregory’s theological approach as “kaleidoscopic” or “multiperspectival.” This kind of reading of Gregory acknowledges that Gregory is not a systematic author, being uninterested in constructing a single, seamless system of theology, but instead uses varying terminology and image depending on the specific topic about which he is

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3 *In insc. pss.* GNO 5.32-33.
writing. Rather than discounting Gregory for his apparent inconsistencies, understanding Gregory in this way allows appreciation for his ability to hold competing ideas in tension with one another. This kaleidoscopic approach weds nicely with Gregory’s own view of human knowledge as limited and contextual.

Another conclusion this examination of motion has revealed is that motion prevents isolation, allowing for communion within the person, between a person and other people, and between a person and the divine. Within the person, it is motion that keeps the mind and body in connection with one another, allowing for sense data to be translated into intelligible understanding. Without motion, the mind would be isolated from the world, as it would be unable to gather information from it. Likewise, without motion, people would not be able to communicate with one another, as Gregory indicates in *De hom. opif.*: “Now since the mind is a thing intelligible and incorporeal, its grace would have been incommunicable and isolated, if its motion were not manifested by some contrivance.”\(^5\) In this example, Gregory goes on to compare the body parts associated with speech to an instrument and the mind to a musician, who, without an appropriate instrument, would be unable to express its music. Motion works on two levels in this example, the motion within the mind needing to be expressed and the motion of activity between mind and body, compared to a musician and instrument. Without the motion of interactions that take place between mind and body, the mind would be isolated and the person unable to communicate with others.

Besides the isolation that would exist between the mind and body of the person and between a person and other people, discussions of motion in Gregory also indicate that motion

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\(^5\) *De hom. opif.* PG 44.149. Translation from *NPNF* 5:395.
prevents isolation of a person from God. As argued in chapter 5, motion is necessary in order for the soul to ascend toward God because people are propelled by the motions of virtue and free will toward communion with God. Unlike God, who is in constant immediate communion with Godself, people do not automatically have communion with God, but it is motion that keeps people ever in growing participation with the divine. In preventing isolation, motion leads the person to communication and communion with other people and with God.

The third broad conclusion of this examination of motion in the human person is that in Gregory’s writing, motion serves to highlight the importance of both continuity and change for human identity. Suggesting that Gregory expresses concern for the continuity and change of particular persons raises a question about Gregory’s notion of human individuality, a topic undergoing development throughout late antiquity. Some have argued that the concern for the individual was born out of the Trinitarian debates of the fourth century: in debating how Father, Son, and Holy Spirit related to one another, the idea of an individual was applied to humans as well. Zachhuber, however, argues that the development of the notion of individuality was more complex, and did not reach fruition until the Christological controversies of the fifth century. Rather, he ascribes to the Cappadocians an earlier theory of individuality in which the universal nature (ousia) and individual person (hypostasis) are intrinsically connected: “the individuals are

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6 See Alexis Torrance and Johannes Zachhuber, eds., *Individuality in Late Antiquity* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2014). The essays in this collection discuss various ways in which the concept of individuality developed during late antiquity, and particular the ways in which Christian theology prompted these developments.


nothing other than the universal nature in its concrete existence." As a result of this, the Cappadocian Theory emphasized the connection of individuals to their universal nature and not necessarily the uniqueness of the individual. He argues, then, that the Cappadocians did not, in fact, pioneer a notion of the individual as special or different from other individuals. Even if, as Zachhuber suggests, the Trinitarian formulation of the Cappadocians did not birth a new notion of the individual, Gregory’s writing demonstrates at least an underlying awareness and anxiety for the ways in which a person changes and remains the same throughout life and into the eschaton.

Throughout this study, I have mentioned many examples of motion indicating continuity and change in a person. In chapter 2, I discussed Gregory’s concern for the body as an important piece of the identity of the person. He reveals this concern in discussions about what will happen to the body in the resurrection, maintaining that while the body changes (throughout life and also in the resurrection), it will remain the body of the particular individual. This conviction about the body, that although it changes, it retains a sense of continuity, applies to the human person as a whole. Humans, in all their various parts and relationships, are in a constant state of motion, as I have now asserted many times, and this motion entails both change and continuity for the person.

It is not difficult to see the many instances in which motion indicates change. I have discussed, for example, how Gregory uses language of motion to indicate changes such as growth in virtue, development in thought, expression in language, passage of time, aging, even events such as birth and death, as well as many others. Change is the concrete experience that the

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9 Zachhuber, “Individuality and the Theological Debate about ‘Hypostasis’,” 99.
language of motion indicates. That Gregory emphasizes so strongly that humans are in constant motion means that they are always changing, never exactly the same from moment to moment.

What is more surprising to find, however, is that while a fundamental piece of Gregory’s anthropology is that humans are constantly changing, he has a deep concern for the continuity of the person as well. This concern is most evident in discussions on the resurrection when Gregory stresses the necessity for the post-resurrection person to be the same person who existed prior to the resurrection. He explains there will be physical continuity in *De hom. opif.*, suggesting that the resurrected body will be recreated from the same atoms from which it was originally composed. The soul marks the physical building blocks of the body so that it, even though the body continues to change after death by decomposing, the soul will recognize the particles and the two can be reunited in the resurrection. Even though both the body and the soul undergo constant motion and change, in the end, it matters to the identity of the resurrected person that the soul is connected to the same body, which is recomposed of the same atoms.

Another example of concern for retaining the identity of the person in the resurrection is in the final pages of *De anima*, in which Gregory and Macrina discuss particular concerns for how the person will experience the resurrection. In the dialogue, the voice of Gregory raises questions about the age of resurrected individuals and the usefulness of particular body parts, while the voice of Macrina suggests that his doubts are misplaced. As discussed in chapter 2, uncovering the thought of Gregory in this work depends on understanding the nature of the dialogue genre, in which neither the voice of Gregory nor the voice of Macrina is the true

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10 *De hom. opif.* PG 44.225-227 (*NPNF* 5:418-419).
opinion of Gregory of Nyssa, but rather the truth emerges as the two present arguments over the course of the work.\textsuperscript{11} In this section, Gregory speculates whether and in what ways “what is hoped for is related to our present existence”\textsuperscript{12} and in the ensuing discussion, each focuses on a different way in which individuals retain continuity amid change. Gregory’s concerns are for continuity between the present body and the resurrection body, noting that physical particularities affect identity and wondering how the resurrection can account for the ever-changing nature of human life. Drawing the image of a stream from philosophy,\textsuperscript{13} Gregory wonders how the resurrection can work for an individual who constantly moves “forward through change,” the water flowing through the stream changing every moment. Similarly, a living person is like a flame that, although joined to itself from one moment to the next, cannot be touched twice in the same place. If people are moving every moment, like the stream and the flame, how can a resurrected individual taken from a representative sample of that person accurately encapsulate that person’s identity?

While Gregory’s concerns for the continuity of the person center on the relationship between the present and resurrection body, Macrina’s reply shifts the discussion to suggest that the continuity between present and resurrected person lies in their virtue, or lack thereof. She suggests Gregory is too concerned with the physical particularities of the resurrection given that the “anticipated existence” will be “so different from the fluid and transitory course of this


\textsuperscript{12} De anima PG 46.137. Translation from Callahan, 261.

\textsuperscript{13} Plato reports Heraclitus as comparing the universe to a river, stating that one cannot step twice in the same stream. Plato, Cratylus 402a.
life.”¹⁴ Macrina uses the image of a seed, taken from 1 Corinthians 15, to illustrate continuity and change. While the plant differs in many ways from the seed, it has continuity with it, for although the seed leaves behind its “quantitative deficiency and qualitative peculiarity of form, does not give up being itself, but remains itself although it becomes a stalk of grain which differs very much from itself in size and beauty and variety and form.”¹⁵ Rather than an image of forward motion like the stream, Macrina chooses an image of cyclical motion, emphasizing the resurrection as a return to original nature, like seed grows to plant and returns again to seed. Although the voices of Gregory and Macrina disagree about what subjects related to the resurrection are appropriate for speculation, both show concern for continuity of the person amid constant change. Gregory shows concern for continuity of the body while Macrina suggests that virtue will be the primary connection between the present and future life of the individual, but both point out that through all the various motions of change in life, the individual remains the same person.

Two further examples of eschatological motion further illustrate Gregory’s concern for continuity throughout the motion of change. In chapter 3 I argued that as people experience transformation in the eschaton, they will retain their kinetic nature. Their bodies, emotions, capacity for virtue, and ways of experiencing time and space will all be altered, but each will remain a diastemic individual with beginnings in time and space, ever in motion toward God. One result of this retention of kinesis in the eschaton is an undercurrent of continuity of person and maintaining identity, even in the dramatic changes of the resurrection. Because it is the

¹⁴ *De anima* PG 46.149. Translation from Callahan, 266.
¹⁵ *De anima* PG 46.156. Translation from Callahan, 269.
nature of the human to be in constant motion, in the eschaton, constant motion itself becomes a point of continuity.

Finally, in chapter 5 I suggested that in some of Gregory’s discussions about the ascent of the soul, he reframes the concept of time to emphasize the beginning of the soul’s ascent as the significant beginning, while downplaying the transition of the resurrection. Collapsing time in this way to focus on the continuity of the soul’s ascent before and after the resurrection rather than emphasizing the dramatic eschatological transformation of the person further indicates an emphasis on maintaining the identity of the person through the changes of the resurrection. In kaleidoscopic fashion, Gregory focuses in some places on the transformations of the resurrection and in other places on the continuity of the person through those changes, indicating both aspects are central to his anthropology.

In coming to the end of this study, we can see how looking at Gregory’s writings through the lens of motion can shed new light on some facets of his anthropology, including its focus on the holistic person, its direction toward communion, and its emphasis on both continuity and change. Gregory did not develop his ideas in a vacuum and throughout this study I have pointed to some of his philosophical and religious antecedents and influences. Before finishing, I have one final suggestion about Gregory and motion, a speculation about why motion as a significant facet of human life may have resonated with Gregory personally. Motion in Gregory’s writings is about change, about human beings connecting all the parts of themselves and overcoming barriers in order to orient their lives toward ever increasing participation with God. It does not seem to me like too much of a stretch to say that Gregory experienced personal growth and
change in his own life and to suggest that perhaps these experiences could have informed his framing of the human experience in terms of motion.

Gregory’s family was notable for their devotion to the Christian faith and contribution to its development, to the extent that Silvas calls them, “unarguably the most remarkable single family in the records of Christian piety.” In addition to his most famous siblings, Basil, an influential bishop and champion of asceticism, and Macrina, his sister who turned their household into an ascetic retreat, Gregory had another brother, Peter, who became a bishop, and at least two other siblings who devoted their lives to virginity and asceticism. Gregory held Basil and Macrina in especially high regard, esteeming them as teachers of the faith as well as having personal attachment to them. Gregory’s wrote *Contra Eun., De hom. opif.*, and *Apol. in hex.* as either continuations or defenses of projects Basil began, referring to Basil as “father and teacher” in *De hom. opif.* and suggesting in *Apol. in hex.* that Basil’s commentary on the six days of creation, his *Hexaemeron*, was not inferior to what Moses wrote in scripture. Gregory was grieved upon Basil’s death and travelled to visit Macrina for consolation: “My soul was sorrowful as I suffered the pain of this affliction and I was seeking someone to share my tears, someone whose burden of pain was equal with my own.” Gregory esteemed and grieved for Basil, but his opinion of Macrina was possibly even higher. He cast Macrina as the teacher in the dialogue between the two of them in *De anima*, writing in a letter that she was “mother in place

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18 *De hom. opif.* PG 44.125.

19 *Apol. in hex.* PG 44.61.

20 *De anima* PG 46.12. Translation from Callahan, 198.
of our mother,” and he composed *Life of Macrina*, the story of her life in honor of her virtue. He also records several times his emotional turmoil at her sickness and death, one such instance being as he was leaving her funeral: “When everything was accomplished and it was necessary to go back, I fell upon the tomb, and kissed the dust and retraced my steps, downcast and tearful, thinking of the good of which my life had been deprived.”

Despite his high opinions of and apparent love for his siblings, it appears that for a significant portion of Gregory’s life, his illustrious family may have overshadowed him. Unlike a number of his siblings, Gregory did not join the family ascetic project immediately upon reaching adulthood. Silvas suggests that there is evidence that upon completing his education, Gregory participated to some degree with his brother, Basil, in his ascetic experiment in Annisa between 358-363. Despite his early trajectory for an ascetic and ecclesiastical career, Gregory opted for a secular career as a rhetor and marriage. Given all Basil and Macrina had done to promote celibacy, they cannot have been pleased with his decision. After the probable early death of his wife, Gregory again reoriented his career toward the ascetic and ecclesiastical, taking up writing projects on Basil’s behalf and eventually agreeing to become a bishop, albeit reluctantly. Although Basil appointed Gregory as bishop, he seems not to have considered him

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22 *Vitae sanctae Macrinae* SC 178.36 (Callahan, 188).
25 Silvas notes Basil’s influence in the transition from freelance male ascetic communities to more formal, ecclesiastically endorsed monastic groups and his role in elevating the severity of the sin of abandoning one’s commitment to celibacy. She wonders what role Gregory’s marriage may have had in Basil’s undertaking of this project. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: Letters*, 24-5.
particularly capable at handling ecclesiastical politics, writing in Letter 215 that Gregory was “inexperienced in the affairs of the Church.”28 In fact, the only surviving correspondence between Basil and Gregory is Basil’s Letter 58, in which he reprimands Gregory, calling him naïve and untrustworthy after a situation in which Gregory’s servants delivered Basil a series of forged letters.29

Compared to Basil, the model ascetic and proficient politician, and Macrina, the paragon of virtue and virginity, Gregory’s path to joining the family projects of ascetic practice and ecclesiastical influence was not so direct. In taking a detour through a secular career and marriage, Gregory suffered the disappointment of family and, if the pitfalls of marriage about which he writes in De virg. are autobiographical, also suffered losing a wife and possibly a child as a result.30 After this, Gregory made a significant change in his life, redirecting his life to work for the Church and to better fit in with his family. While this particular change happened relatively early in Gregory’s life, the necessity of change in the spiritual life became an increasingly important theme in his writings through the years, developing his notion of epektasis most fully in his final works. Whether it was a cause or a result of his view of constant motion, Gregory seems to have seen in himself what he may not have seen in his siblings: a continued necessity for growth and change.

Given this development in Gregory’s own life combined with his anxieties about death, so evident in De anima and Vitae sanctae Macrinae, it is not surprising that it would be important for Gregory that the possibility of human change and transformation extend beyond

28 Letter 215.3. Translation from Silvas, 82.
29 Letter 58.
30 For an explanation of this scenario, see Silvas, Gregory of Nyssa: Letters, 24-5.
death. *Kinesis* describes the world, human bodies, and time, but it is also the language of thought, emotion, virtue, and ascent, the attributes that mark humans as different from the divine, and simultaneously enable their progress toward it. It connects all the parts of a person together, allows for communication with other humans and the divine, and describes the ability to continue transformation, even after death. To be without *kinesis* in the eschaton would be to abandon much of what makes a person human. *Kinesis* is ultimately a word of potential and vulnerability, opening up possibilities and making room for choice, allowing humans, limited though they are, almost unlimited capacity for transformation.
## List of Abbreviations

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<td>Ad Abl.</td>
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<td>Antirrh.</td>
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