

GREGORY OF NYSSA'S PNEUMATOLOGY IN ITS METAPHYSICAL CONTEXT

by  
J. Lewis

A PAPER

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Gregory of Nyssa has earned a lasting reputation in church history as one of the earliest and most eloquent defenders of what has since come to be recognized as an orthodox pneumatology. Alongside his older brother Basil of Caesarea and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus, together dubbed the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory<sup>1</sup> was a relentless proponent of the Holy Spirit's full divinity alongside the Father and the Son. There are two popular narratives that often feature in the history of Gregory's pneumatological campaigns. One portrays Gregory's successful defense of the Spirit's divinity and of the Trinity as a triumph of authentic Christianity over the Arians, who had fallen away from orthodoxy in no small part due to the influence of Greek philosophy, especially Platonism.<sup>2</sup> In another version, Gregory's defense of the Trinity was itself based more on Platonism than Scripture, contributing to a distortive Hellenization of the faith.<sup>3</sup> So which is it? Did Gregory help save the Christian doctrine of the Spirit from the pagan philosophers, or did his saving smuggle in Plato's ideas through the back door?

This paper seeks to offer some insight into this question by examining the philosophical context of two arguments Gregory leverages to defend the divinity of the Holy Spirit: that the Holy Spirit does not participate in the divine attributes but is himself participated in, and that the Spirit's activities are the same as those of the Father and the Son. To that end, the first section of the paper will trace the development of the concepts of participation and activity (*energeia*) in antiquity, focusing on three key figures: Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus.<sup>4</sup> With this metaphysical

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, the name "Gregory" alone will refer to the bishop of Nyssa; his Cappadocian counterpart with the same name will always be specified as Gregory of Nazianzus.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> See esp. Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Vol. IV, trans. Neil Buchanan (New York: Dover, 1961), 88. Cf. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 31; Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, "The One and the Trinity," in *Christian Platonism: A History*, ed. Alexander J.B. Hampton and John Peter Kenney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 53–78.

<sup>4</sup> That Gregory of Nyssa was aware of and used both Plato and Aristotle is not disputed by scholars. This paper will bypass the contested question of whether and to what degree Gregory made use of Plotinus. In some sense the question is irrelevant to this paper: Gregory was first and foremost a Christian bishop writing to shepherd his flock

context in mind, we will turn in the second half of the paper to the two pneumatological proofs mentioned above. I argue that Gregory does not attack or defend the metaphysical framework of participation and activity developed by Hellenistic philosophers. Rather, he simply takes it for granted—so much so that Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics act as essential premises for his defenses of the Holy Spirit. I conclude with a few comments on the implications of this thesis.

The idea of participation begins with the Greek philosopher Plato (d. 348 BC), who uses the theory to explain the relationship between individual entities and universal characteristics.<sup>5</sup> Its essential features are presented most clearly in the *Phaedo*:

there is a thing, the beautiful itself by itself, the good, the great, and all the rest...if some other thing is beautiful besides the beautiful by itself, it's beautiful for no other reason than that it has a share in ( $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\iota$ ) that beauty. And indeed, I say everything is like this.<sup>6</sup>

In Plato's view, the fact that a single quality is shared by multiple things point to the existence of the true version of that quality: beauty itself, goodness itself, and so on. This "Form" is transcendent and separate from its instances in individuals. In order to keep the Forms from being limited by their participants in the ever-changing physical world, Plato's theory divides reality into two levels. Intelligible reality consists of the Forms, which are eternal, immutable,

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and defend the faith. Plotinus is worth our consideration here not because Gregory was engaging directly with his thought—to assume so would be a misunderstanding of Gregory's corpus—but because he represents developments of the Platonic tradition relevant to Gregory's fourth-century context. On Gregory's philosophical influences see Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa," in *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Philosophy*, ed. Mark Edwards (London: Routledge, 2021), 510; Jean Danielou, "Gregoire de Nysse et Plotin," in *Congres de Tours et Poitiers* (1954), 259–62; Kevin Corrigan, "Creation, Begetting, Desire, and Re-Creation," in Hampton and Kenney, *Christian Platonism*, 88–89; Deirdre Carabine, "The Mystical Journeys of Plotinus and Gregory of Nyssa," in *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, ed. John J. Cleary (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 188–204; John Rist, "On the Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa," *Hermathena* 169 (Winter 2000): 129–151. On the importance of reading Gregory's works within their original contexts, see esp. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrinal Works: A Literary Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Sister M. Annice, "Historical Sketch of the Theory of Participation," *The New Scholasticism* 26, no. 1 (1951): 51; David L. Balas, "Participation," *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Lucas Francisco Mateo Seco and Giulio Maspero (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 581; Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13–14.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, 100b-c, in *Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo.*, ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, Loeb Classical Library [LCL] 36 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); cf. David C. Schindler, "What's the Difference? On the Metaphysics of Participation in a Christian Context," *St. Anselm Journal* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 4–5.

simple, and can only be known with reason. At the top of the hierarchy of intelligible being Sensible reality consists of the material world, in which things perceived with the senses reflect the Forms only imperfectly.<sup>7</sup> Participation (μέθεξις; less frequently μετέχειν, μεταλαμβάνειν, κοινωνεῖν) is the name Plato gives to the relationship by which sensible things derive their qualities and being from the intelligible Forms.<sup>8</sup>

Plato sees the intelligible Forms as more real than objects of sense perception. For instance, no one has ever seen a truly perfect circle, but we know via reason what a perfect circle is—and only a perfect circle, strictly speaking, is a real circle.<sup>9</sup> Thus the lower, sensible world depends on the higher, intelligible world for its being and reality. The intelligible Forms, for their part, depend on the ultimate Form of the Good, the “first principle of all” which “provides the explanation for the existence and essence of the Forms and, indirectly, for everything else.”<sup>10</sup>

But how does a completely transcendent, intelligible first principle cause the being of immanent, material things? Though Plato acknowledged that his theory had gaps,<sup>11</sup> he did not specify how participation bridged this ontological divide.<sup>12</sup> He offered a potential connection

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<sup>7</sup> “Some of these we say can be seen, but not perceived by the mind, whereas the Forms can be perceived by the mind, but not seen.” Plato, *Republic*, Vol I: Books 1–5, 507b, ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, LCL 237 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 28a, in *Timaeus. Critias. Cleitophon. Menexenus. Epistles*, trans. R. G. Bury, LCL 234 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929); Plato, *Phaedo*, 79a-b; Plato, *Phaedrus* 247c-d, in *Lysis. Symposium. Phaedrus*, ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, LCL 166 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022); David L. Balas, *METOΥΣΙΑ ΘΕΟΥ [Metousia Theou]: Man’s Participation in God’s Perfections According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa* (Rome: Libreria Herder, 1966), 35; Schindler, “What’s the Difference?,” 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> Balas, *Metousia Theou*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 64; cf. Tollesen, *Activity and Participation*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd P. Gerson, “The Perennial Value of Platonism,” in Hampton and Kenney, *Christian Platonism*, 16. See Plato, *Republic* 509b, 510b, 516b-c.

<sup>11</sup> See especially *Parmenides* 130e–133b, in *Cratylus. Parmenides. Greater Hippias. Lesser Hippias*, trans. Harold North Fowler, LCL 167 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926). To examine these problems would take us far off track. For a summary of some of the major issues, see, e.g., Steven Strange, “Plotinus’ Account of Participation in ‘Ennead’ VI.4-5,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30, no. 4 (October 1992): 487–488; Schindler, “What’s the Difference?,” 2–4; and Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, 100d: “Nothing else makes it beautiful than either the presence of or the participation [κοινωνία] of that beauty, or however or in what way indeed you want to name it. You see I’m no longer definite about that [the name or mechanism of participation], but I am definite that all beautiful things are beautiful by the form of beauty.”

between the two categories in the Demiurge in *Timaeus*, a being between matter and Forms who crafts the uncooperative former into an imperfect shape of the latter.<sup>13</sup> But the Demiurge was generally accepted to be a myth—an illustration, not an exposition of the mechanics of Plato’s metaphysics. Still, despite its unanswered questions,<sup>14</sup> Plato’s metaphysical framework proved to have remarkable staying power. It will be helpful for our purposes to pause here and draw attention to a few key features of this framework: the divide between intelligible and sensible reality; the dependence of the lower level of being on the higher, through participation, for its existence; and an absolutely transcendent and simple first principle responsible for all being.<sup>15</sup>

Plato’s student Aristotle (384–322 BC) rejected his teacher’s theory of Forms. He criticized the idea of transcendent intelligible realities from which sensible entities derive their being and qualities throughout his *Metaphysics*, concluding: “To say that the Forms are patterns, and that other things participate in them, is to use empty phrases and poetical metaphors.”<sup>16</sup> In Aristotle’s corpus, form is not a transcendent being (thus the lack of capitalization) but rather that which is common to multiple entities within a class. An individual thing is a substance or essence (*ousia*, οὐσία) consisting of both form and matter.<sup>17</sup> Form is what makes something what it is: a door is a door not because it is made of wood (matter), but because it is wood arranged in a certain way.<sup>18</sup>

Particularly relevant for this paper is Aristotle’s introduction of the concept of *energeia* (ἐνέργεια) to the ancient metaphysical framework of essence and being.<sup>19</sup> This term was coined

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<sup>13</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 37c–47c; Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 65; John Dillon, “Logos and Trinity: Patterns of Platonist Influences on Early Christianity,” in *The Philosophy in Christianity*, ed. Godfrey Vesey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2–3.

<sup>14</sup> See Strange, “Plotinus’ Account of Participation in ‘Ennead’ VI.4–5,” 479–480; Dillon, “Logos and Trinity,” 2.

<sup>15</sup> Gerson, “The Perennial Value of Platonism,” 16–17.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics, Volume I: Books 1–9*, 991a (cf. 1079a–b), trans. Hugh Tredennick, LCL 271 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933).

<sup>17</sup> Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 70–71; David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1043a. As with Plato, then, F/form is what is responsible for an entity’s being.

<sup>19</sup> Tollefson, *Activity and Participation*, 16; Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 1–23.

by Aristotle to describe an entity's exercising, rather than simply possessing, some sort of faculty or capacity (*dunamis*, δύναμις). *Energeia* can also be a state, thus the translation "actuality."<sup>20</sup> A common illustration for the distinction between *energeia* and *dunamis* is that of an acorn and an oak tree. The acorn has the potential or capacity (*dunamis*) to become an oak tree, and it is meant to grow into an oak tree in actuality (*energeia*). The latter is determined by form, which is what gives entities their nature and purpose. An oak tree, we might say, becomes what it is through the change from its potential (*dunamis*) to participate in the universal form of the oak tree to the actuality (*energeia*) thereof. It is in matter that we find an entity's *dunamis* and in form that we find said entity's *energeia*.<sup>21</sup> Thus the *energeia* of something is intrinsically connected to the kind of thing it is: the *energeia* of an oak tree is just its being an oak tree—or, to put it in slightly different terms, its existing in the state defined by the form of the oak tree.

For Aristotle, nothing can move from potentiality to actuality without some sort of cause. Thus his famous Prime Mover argument: the only way to avoid an infinite regression of causes is to posit some unmoved mover who can begin the causal chain of the cosmos. The Prime Mover must be eternal, like motion and time. More importantly for the present discussion, it is not enough for the Prime Mover to have the potential (δύναμιν) to cause motion; it must also actualize (ἐνεργήσει) this capacity. Indeed, it is not possible for the Prime Mover's essence to have or be potency (οὐσία αὐτῆς δύναμις); its essence must be actuality (ἡ οὐσία ἐνέργεια).<sup>22</sup>

The *energeia* of the Prime Mover, according to Aristotle, is pleasure (ἡδονὴ ἡ ἐνέργεια τούτου).<sup>23</sup> Here, it would be more accurate to translate *energeia* as a kind of activity. What kind of

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1048a; cf. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 417a–b, in *On the Soul. Parva Naturalia. On Breath*, trans. W. S. Hett, LCL 288 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957); Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 2–7; Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 16–18.

<sup>21</sup> Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 71–72; Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 17–18.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1071b; cf. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 73; Annice, "Historical Sketch of the Theory of Participation," 55–56; Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072b.

activity? In keeping with the Prime Mover's necessary definition as utterly self-sufficient, that which is most pleasant and does not require any external object: contemplative thought, that is, thought whose object is thought itself.<sup>24</sup> Thus the essence (*ousia*) of the Prime Mover—whom Aristotle at this point in his argument begins to call God—is “a contemplative act turned towards Himself.”<sup>25</sup> Once again, we pause briefly to note two important features of Aristotle’s theory. First, the cause of everything that exists is the Prime Mover. Like Plato’s Form of the Good, the Prime Mover is simple and intelligible, but Aristotle’s theory also emphasizes the importance of the first principle’s being uncaused. Second, we now have the concept of *energeia*, meaning both actuality and activity and in both cases determined by the kind of thing an entity is.

As Plato’s successors attempted to close the gaps he had left them, they engaged with the insights of Aristotle and other philosophical schools. One of the most creative thinkers in this stream is the philosopher Plotinus (d. 270 AD), who later became known as the founder of Neoplatonism.<sup>26</sup> At the top of Plotinus’s hierarchy of being is the perfect and transcendent One. As its name suggests, the One is absolutely simple, with no qualities or properties; even the name “One” does not, strictly speaking, apply, since it is beyond all human language.<sup>27</sup> Among Plotinus’s major innovations is his theory explaining how the One, which is itself beyond being and is perfectly self-sufficient,<sup>28</sup> can be a cause of being for things other than itself.

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<sup>24</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072b; cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1154b, trans. H. Rackham, LCL 73 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926); Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 32–33.

<sup>25</sup> Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> It is important to note, though, that Plotinus would not have considered himself to be starting a new philosophical school or even a new version of Platonism so much as a disciple of Plato defending the system of his teacher. Lloyd Gerson, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–9; C. Fabro, “Participation,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/participation>.

<sup>27</sup> Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, 79; Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 21; Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 73–78; C.A. Dubray and W.A. Wallace, “Emanationism,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/emanationism>.

<sup>28</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* V.4.2.1-24; VI.8.19, in *Enneads I–VI*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, LCL 440–445 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969–1988); cf. Annice, “Historical Sketch of the Theory of Participation,” 58.

Following Plato<sup>29</sup> and Aristotle,<sup>30</sup> Plotinus argues that perfect things reproduce.<sup>31</sup>

Now when anything else comes to perfection we see that it produces, and does not endure to remain by itself, but makes something else. This is true not only of things which have choice, but of things which grow and produce without choosing to do so, and even lifeless things, which impart themselves to others as far as they can: as fire warms, snow cools, and drugs act on something else in a way corresponding to their own nature—all imitating the First Principle as far as they are able by tending to everlastingness and generosity.<sup>32</sup>

In short, since the One is perfect, it must be generative. Plotinus's mention of fire here anticipates one of the crucial developments of his theory. He argues that everything has a twofold *energeia*: the internal *energeia*, analogous to the Aristotelian sense of an activity determined by nature, and a second, external *energeia* derived from the first:

In each and every thing there is an activity which belongs to substance (ἐνέργεια...τῆς οὐσίας) and one which goes out from substance (ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας); and that which belongs to substance is the active actuality which is each particular thing, and the other activity derives from that first one, and must in everything be a consequence of it, different from the thing itself.<sup>33</sup>

Such is the relationship between fire and heat: there is in fire an internal heat which forms the content of its essence (συμπληροῦσα τὴν οὐσίαν), from which the external heat that warms things around it comes into being.<sup>34</sup>

Though the perfection of the One requires that it be generative, as just stated, its perfection also requires that it do so without undergoing change. Plotinus compares this kind of unchanging generation to the way light radiates (or emanates) from the sun and explains it by the two kinds of *energeia*. To oversimplify slightly, from the One's internal *energeia*<sup>35</sup> comes into being its

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<sup>29</sup> E.g., Plato, *Symposium*, 206b–208b.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 415a-b.

<sup>31</sup> Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 23; Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 74–75.

<sup>32</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.4.1.

<sup>33</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.4.2

<sup>34</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.4.2; cf. V.1.6, V.1.3.12–13; cf. Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> According to Plotinus, the One is “beyond being (οὐσίας)” and “transcends activity (ἐνέργειας) and transcends mind and thought” (*Enneads* I.7.1; cf. Plato, *Republic* 509b), so to speak of the internal *energeia* of the One is not strictly correct (thus the disclaimer that our summary is in some ways an oversimplification). Still, Plotinus’s description of the One does not preclude its belonging, one might say, to the transcendent, highest order of being beyond the *ousia* (and *energeia*) of human understanding and language. Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 89–91.

external *energeia*, just like the external heat of fire is generated by its internal heat. But the One belongs to a higher, qualitatively different order of being than fire,<sup>36</sup> so its external *energeia* “acquires substantial existence (ὑπόστασιν λαβοῦσα)” of its own.<sup>37</sup> Plotinus calls this second hypostasis (ὑπόστασις) the Intellect (*nous*, νοῦς). The external *energeia* of the Intellect in turn generates the third hypostasis, the Soul: “Soul is an expression and a kind of activity of Intellect, just as Intellect is of the One.”<sup>38</sup> From the Soul is generated the sensible world.<sup>39</sup> The hypostasis of the Intellect is not simply the external *energeia* of the One, but the external *energeia* of the One recognizing itself as such. The same applies to the Soul’s relationship to the Intellect.<sup>40</sup> Thus lower levels of being depend on their participation in higher levels of being for their existence:<sup>41</sup> “the new entity somehow turns towards the higher... and is thus constituted as itself.”<sup>42</sup>

Before we conclude this background sketch of participation in antiquity, we will take a final pause to highlight a few noteworthy features of Plotinus’s system. As with Plato, Plotinus turns to the concept of participation to explain the relationship between the lower orders of being and the higher orders on which they depend.<sup>43</sup> Plotinus’s creative use of *energeia* to bridge the transcendent-immanent divide illustrates an important development in third-century Platonism, one with particular relevance for this paper: the integration of Aristotelian concepts, including

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<sup>36</sup> Plotinus quotes Plato’s *Timaeus*, 42e: “the Intelligible abides ‘in its own proper way of life’.” *Enneads*, V.4.2.20.

<sup>37</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.4.2.36–37.

<sup>38</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.1.6; cf. V.2.1 and esp. V.1.3: “Soul itself is the expressed thought of Intellect, and its whole activity, and the life which it sends out to establish another reality; as fire has the heat which remains with it and the heat which it gives. But one must understand that the activity on the level of Intellect does not flow out of it, but the external activity comes into existence as something distinct.”

<sup>39</sup> A very condensed summary, but sufficient for our purposes given space constraints. For more on the generation of the sensible world, see Lloyd Gerson, “Plotinus,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/plotinus>.

<sup>40</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.2.1.11–20, V.1.3.16–19.

<sup>41</sup> Dubray and Wallace, “Emanationism”; Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 25–27; Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 31.

<sup>43</sup> Though Plotinus frequently uses the terms μετάληψις and μεταλαμβάνειν where Plato prefers μέθεξις. See Balas, “Participation,” 581; Balas, *Metousia Theou*, 4.

*energeia*, into the Platonic metaphysical system.<sup>44</sup> Like both Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus posits a completely simple, self-sufficient, uncaused first principle: the One. Like Aristotle, Plotinus believes that this first principle “must be *energeia*, activity without imperfection or incompleteness.”<sup>45</sup> Everything else that exists is a both incidental and necessary effect of the One’s internal life. Below the first principle is a hierarchy of beings in which what is generated by a higher level of being belongs to a lower level of reality.

Now that we have laid the groundwork for the key concepts we will be discussing through an overview of their background in classical Greek philosophy, we can turn to Gregory of Nyssa. Gregory’s discussions of participation and *energeia* are embedded and indeed are only coherent within his larger framework of thought. This framework has both metaphysical and theological features, neither of which can be neatly disentangled from the other. Later Christian thinkers have often been reluctant to acknowledge the extent to which Gregory and other early Christian Fathers assumed key features of especially Platonic metaphysics. “Platonism” was considered to be a corrupting influence on Christianity, one associated with the various groups opposed to Nicaean orthodoxy.<sup>46</sup> In recent years, however, scholarship on Gregory has started to see more complementarity between the Christian-theological and classical-metaphysical aspects of the Nyssen’s writings.<sup>47</sup> This paper seeks to lend support to the latter approach. As we shall see below, when Gregory invokes the ideas of participation and *energeia* to defend the divinity of the Holy Spirit, he is assuming a certain metaphysical context to these ideas. In the following section, I make the case that this context is not only what makes Gregory’s ideas about

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<sup>44</sup> Gerson, “The Perennial Value of Platonism,” 22–26; see also Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 45–72.

<sup>45</sup> Gerson, “The Perennial Value of Platonism,” 25.

<sup>46</sup> See Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, “The One and the Trinity.”

<sup>47</sup> Examples of this approach include Radde-Gallwitz, Tollefsen, Bradshaw, and Johannes Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology and the End of Ancient Metaphysics: Patristic Philosophy from the Cappadocian Fathers to John of Damascus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

participation and *energeia* make sense; more importantly, it is only within this context that his arguments can be considered effective.<sup>48</sup>

Gregory was born into a wealthy, devout Christian family in Pontus around the mid-330s AD. He began his career as a rhetorician but was appointed bishop of Nyssa in 372 through the influence of his older brother, Basil of Caesarea.<sup>49</sup> Gregory was a supporter of the Nicene formula of 325, but it was not until after Basil's untimely death in 378 that Gregory took up the task of promoting Nicene theology in earnest—first as a guardian of his late brother's legacy, then as a formidable theologian in his own right.<sup>50</sup> Space considerations require us to skip over the history of the Council of Nicaea and its fourth-century aftermath, which formed the theological, ecclesial, and political context of Gregory's work.<sup>51</sup> The basic framework Gregory sought to defend was the same understanding of the Trinity propounded by his brother Basil: God as a common essence (*οὐσία*) in three distinct hypostases.<sup>52</sup> Again, to give a comprehensive account of the ways in which even Gregory alone clarified and defended this claim would take us far beyond our space constraints.<sup>53</sup> Instead, we will focus on two arguments Gregory used to defend the Holy Spirit's status as one of ontological equality with the Father and the Son—that is, the Spirit's sharing the *ousia* of the Godhead. The first we will call in this paper the argument from participation; the second, the argument from unified activity (*energeia*).

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<sup>48</sup> We have elected to skip over the interesting but extremely time-consuming issue of Gregory's theological and philosophical influences, since for this paper the question of *how* Gregory acquired the metaphysical assumptions discussed below is less important than *that* he had them. We will note simply that Gregory appears to have had a classical education and worked within a philosophical-theological tradition shaped particularly by Philo and Origen. For more, see Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology*, 15–71; Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 59–64; Rist, “On the Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa.”

<sup>49</sup> Pierre Maraval, “Biography of Gregory of Nyssa,” in Mateo Seco and Maspero, *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 103–116; Radde-Gallwitz, *Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrinal Works*, 10–12.

<sup>50</sup> Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology*, 18–19; Radde-Gallwitz, *Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrinal Works*, 13–17.

<sup>51</sup> For a history of the Council of Nicaea and the controversies that followed it, see Ayres, *Nicæa and Its Legacy*.

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g., Basil, Letter 38.1–4, 210.5, in Basil of Caesarea, *Letters and Select Works*, trans. Blomfield Jackson, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Vol. 8 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895) [NPNF 2.8], 137–138, 250–51; cf. Tollefson, *Activity and Participation*, 49.

<sup>53</sup> See Ayres, *Nicæa and Its Legacy*.

A full account of Gregory's context is, as just stated, beyond the scope of this paper. Still, to understand these two arguments properly requires a basic understanding of the theology taught by his primary opponent in the Trinitarian controversies: Eunomius of Cyzicus. Although his theology is often described as a form of Arianism,<sup>54</sup> Eunomius never positions himself as a successor to Arius, and the two men advocated quite different theological positions.<sup>55</sup> Eunomius's theology is too complex to recount in detail here,<sup>56</sup> but a sketch of its main features will be sufficient for our purposes.<sup>57</sup> At the core of the Eunomian position is the belief that the nature of God is to be Unbegotten (*ἀγέννητος*), i.e., ungenerated.<sup>58</sup> That is, the term unbegotten describes God's very *ousia*, or essence<sup>59</sup>—it cannot describe some part of God, because God is simple—which means the Son described as Begotten throughout Scripture cannot share God's *ousia*. Eunomius also believed that God's transcendence, simplicity, and freedom meant that God's generative capacity must be separate from his *ousia*. Instead, the Son comes into being through the *energeia* of the Father as a result of the Father's will.<sup>60</sup> The Son, in turn, creates all that is; this includes the Holy Spirit, who as such is ontologically inferior to both the Begotten

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<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 156; Elias D. Moutsoulas, "La Pneumatologie de *Contra Eunomium I*," in *Gregory of Nyssa. Contra Eunomium I: An English Translation with Supporting Studies*, ed. Miguel Brugarolas (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 557; John Rist, "On the Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa," 140.

<sup>55</sup> Ayres, *Nicæa and Its Legacy*, 145; Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 34.

<sup>56</sup> The standard critical edition of the surviving writings of Eunomius is Eunomius, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, trans. and ed. Richard Paul Vaggione (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>57</sup> The following summary is synthesized from Ayres, *Nicæa and Its Legacy*, 144–149; Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 156–161; Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation*, 37–39; Zachhuber, *The Rise of Christian Theology*, 29–32; Michel R. Barnes, "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa: Two Traditions of Transcendent Causality," *Vigiliae Christianae* 52, no. 1 (Feb. 1998): 59–87.

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa," 508.

<sup>59</sup> Thus central to the Eunomian position is the assumption that human beings can know God's very essence.

<sup>60</sup> Despite the claims of, e.g., Balas, *Metousia Theou*, 25 (see also Moutsoulas, "La pneumatologie du *Contra Eunomium I*," 561), Eunomius is not building his theory on a Plotinian foundation here. A core tenet of Plotinian emanation is that the One's generation of the Intellect is completely incidental and necessary result of the One's internal *energeia*, which is a stark contrast to Eunomius's emphasis on the Son's generation's being caused by the will of the Father. See Radde-Gallwitz, "The One and the Trinity," 63–65; Theodor Th. Tollefsen, "Essence And Activity (Energeia) In St. Gregory's Anti-Eunomian Polemic," in *Gregory of Nyssa, Contra Eunomium II: An English Version with Supporting Studies*, ed. Lenka Karfiková, Scot Douglass, and Johannes Zachhuber (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 438–439.

and the Unbegotten, albeit superior to the rest of creation.<sup>61</sup> This subordination of Son and Spirit was, of course, unacceptable to the pro-Nicene Cappadocians. Basil was the first to write against Eunomius's views. After his death, the task fell primarily to his younger brother,<sup>62</sup> who refuted Eunomius on multiple fronts, including by means of the two arguments discussed below.

We turn first to the argument from participation. Gregory is not the first theologian to use participation as an argument for the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. Athanasius raises similar points to defend the divinity of both the Spirit<sup>63</sup> and the Son,<sup>64</sup> and Basil gives a preliminary version of the argument that will be picked up and developed by his younger brother.<sup>65</sup> While Gregory develops this defense most fully in his two refutations of Eunomius, its essential features are conveniently summarized in *To Simplicius—On the Faith*:

the Church believes...concerning the Holy Spirit, that He is uncreated, and that the whole creation becomes good by participation in the good which is above it, while the Holy Spirit needs not any to make Him good (seeing that He is good by virtue of His nature, as the Scripture testifies)...the creation partakes of the gifts, while the Spirit bestows them at His pleasure... one may find multitudes of other proofs from the Scriptures that all the supreme and Divine attributes which are applied by the Scriptures to the Father and the Son are also to be contemplated in the Holy Spirit:—immortality, blessedness, goodness, wisdom, power, justice, holiness—every excellent attribute is predicated of the Holy Spirit just as it is predicated of the Father and of the Son.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted word-for-word by Gregory in *CE* 1, in NPNF 2.5, 50.

<sup>62</sup> Radde-Gallwitz, *Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrinal Works*, 76–79; Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 158. Quotations from Gregory's *Contra Eunomium* 1 and 2 are taken from *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, Etc.*, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, NPNF 2.5 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1893). *Contra Eunomium* 1 (NPNF 2.5 pp. 33–249) is hereafter abbreviated *CE* 1; *Contra Eunomium* 2 (NPNF 2.5 pp. 250–314) is hereafter abbreviated *CE* 2.

<sup>63</sup> Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion* 1.23–27, in *Works on the Spirit: Athanasius and Didymus*, trans. Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 88–96.

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* 46.7–8, in *Athanasius of Alexandria: Select Writings and Letters*, trans. Archibald Robertson, NPNF 2.4 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 29; Athanasius, *Discourses Against the Arians* 3.1–4, in NPNF 2.4, 394–395; Athanasius, *De Synods* 51, in NPNF 2.4, 477.

<sup>65</sup> See Basil, *Letter* 243.4 in NPNF 2.8, 285; Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 9.22, trans. Stephen Hildebrand (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 52–53. See also the very similar points raised by Gregory's contemporary Didymus the Blind in *On the Holy Spirit*, 16–19, 264–268, in DelCogliano, Radde-Gallwitz, and Ayres, *Works on the Spirit*, 148–149, 224–25. For other early Christian uses of participation, see Balas, *Metousia Theou*, 11–14.

<sup>66</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *To Simplicius—On the Faith*, in NPNF 2.5, 338–39.

The core components of this argument can be summarized as follows. First, the Holy Spirit is uncreated; we will return to this point below. Second, while creation has goodness only through participation in a higher level of reality, the Holy Spirit is good by nature. Gregory in multiple places invokes this point to affirm the full divinity of the Son as well. That which possesses goodness—or other divine attributes such as life and self-sufficiency—in itself is God.<sup>67</sup> If the Spirit and the Son have these attributes in themselves, as Gregory believes Scripture affirms, they must be fully God.<sup>68</sup> Conversely, to say that the Son (or the Spirit) participates in God's attributes is to place him “on a level with the lowest of created things,”<sup>69</sup> since something that has these attributes by participation necessarily belongs to a lower level of being than that which has them in itself.<sup>70</sup> If we were to arrange this second aspect of Gregory's argument in a syllogism, it might look something like the following:

Premise 1: That which has goodness in itself, rather than by participation, is God.

Premise 2: The Holy Spirit has goodness in itself.

Conclusion: The Holy Spirit is God.

Gregory hints at the third key feature of his argument with his mention of the Spirit's gifts. As is evident in the passage quoted above, Gregory believes that the Scriptural evidence requires that his opponents affirm his second premise, thus forcing them to accept his conclusion.<sup>71</sup> In *Contra Eunomium* 1, Gregory makes a comment that provides further support for his second premise: the Holy Spirit cannot impart to human beings the divine attributes like goodness or holiness if it does not have them in itself:

if this heresy prevails, the Divine Nature cannot be apprehended as transmissive of good, but rather as itself needing goodness: for how can one impart to another that which he does

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<sup>67</sup> See also, e.g., *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, in NPNF 2.5, 449. Goodness is the most important of the divine perfections in Gregory's work. Balas, *Metousia Theou*, 54–75.

<sup>68</sup> CE I, in NPNF 2.5, 210; cf. CE I, in NPNF 2.5, 60–62, 102–103.

<sup>69</sup> CE I, in NPNF 2.5, 236.

<sup>70</sup> See, e.g., CE II, in NPNF 2.5, 313.

<sup>71</sup> We will return to Gregory's first premise shortly.

not himself possess?... Why do they believe in the Holy Ghost, if the same account is given of Him? How are they regenerate by baptism from their mortal birth, if the regenerating Power does not possess in its own nature infallibility and independence?<sup>72</sup>

In short, Gregory argues that to deny his second premise is to deny the Spirit's sanctifying power and thus to deny the effectiveness of baptism, undermining the foundations of the Christian life.

The arguments Gregory presents in support of his second premise are recognizably theological and ecclesial in character: the witness of Scripture, the Christian's experience of growing in holiness, the sacrament of baptism. Gregory's first premise, on the other hand, is assumed rather than argued. When Gregory writes that part of what it means for God to be God is that he has the good through his own nature rather than through participation, he is taking for granted a view of reality that was widely accepted in classical metaphysics. Just like with Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, Gregory believes there is a higher order of being that is simple, self-sufficient, immutable, immaterial, intelligible rather than sensible, simple, uncaused, and perfect; all other things depend on this first principle for their existence.<sup>73</sup> This conception of God owes much to Platonic, and to a lesser degree Aristotelian, metaphysics,<sup>74</sup> but Gregory and his contemporaries did not talk about this idea as the product of a particular philosophical tradition so much as they took it for granted as self-evident. Put differently, that this was the nature of God (or the ultimate cause of the universe) was almost axiomatic in Gregory's circles.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *CE I*, in NPNF 2.5, 62; cf. 238.

<sup>73</sup> For some of Gregory's descriptions of God, see *CE I*, in NPNF 2.5, 257; *CE II*, in NPNF 2.5, 300–302; *The Great Catechism VI*, in NPNF 2.5, 481; see also Ayres, *Nicæa and Its Legacy*, 278–86. It is important to note that when we speak in this paper of Gregory defending the “divinity” of the Holy Spirit, we mean that Gregory was arguing not just that the Holy Spirit was somehow “divine,” but that the Holy Spirit belonged at this highest level of being, the ultimate principle of all reality outside God himself. For essential caveats on the language of divinity when speaking of the fourth century, see Ayres, *Nicæa and Its Legacy*, 14–15.

<sup>74</sup> Radde-Gallwitz, “The One and the Trinity.” Radde-Gallwitz (66–67) also cites Augustine, who says that he learned many true things about God's nature from the Platonists, including several of the characteristics listed above. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 120–26.

<sup>75</sup> Radde-Gallwitz, “Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa,” 512. Thus we find Gregory making such comments as: “We believe that the most boorish and simple-minded would not deny that the Divine Nature, blessed

The same is true for the metaphysical framework undergirding the concept of participation itself. Gregory takes for granted—and writes as if his opponents will do likewise—that there are only two ways to possess an attribute like goodness: either by nature, in which case it is possessed completely and eternally, or by participation in some higher reality which has the attribute by nature.<sup>76</sup> In other words, Gregory assumes a (metaphysical) dichotomy between that which participates and that which is participated—a dichotomy whose heritage, as we have seen, goes back to Plato.<sup>77</sup> Thus Gregory could write that even his opponents agreed on the fact that “uncreate[d] intelligible nature...does not possess the good by acquisition, or participate only in the goodness of some good which lies above it: in its own essence it is good, and is conceived as such: it is simple, uniform, incomposite.”<sup>78</sup> And indeed Eunomius did believe that God must be uncaused, simple, supreme, and non-composite.<sup>79</sup>

This is not to say, however, that Gregory’s view of God is derived solely from Platonist metaphysics. While Gregory’s arguments assume, and therefore require, certain ideas about the nature of the ultimate principle of the cosmos shared with the Greek philosophical tradition, the same arguments also rest on distinctly Christian premises. Chief among these is the doctrine of creation. Alongside the classical divide between intelligible and sensible reality,<sup>80</sup> Gregory introduces the Christian ontological binary of created and uncreated: “The ultimate division of all that exists is made by the line between ‘created’ and ‘uncreated,’ the one being regarded as a

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and transcendent as it is, was ‘single.’ That which is viewless, formless, and sizeless, cannot be conceived of as multiform and composite.” *CE* 1, in NPNF 2.5, 57.

<sup>76</sup> *CE* 1, in NPNF 2.5, 62.

<sup>77</sup> See Radde-Gallwitz, “The One and the Trinity,” 69–75.

<sup>78</sup> *CE* 1, in NPNF 2.5, 60–61.

<sup>79</sup> See Radde-Gallwitz, “Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa,” 507–508.

<sup>80</sup> E.g., *CE* 1, in NPNF 2.5, 301: “the whole world of realities is divided into two parts; that is, into the intelligible and the sensible.” Cf. *CE* 1, in NPNF 2.5, 60–63.

cause of what has come into being, the other as coming into being thereby.”<sup>81</sup> For Gregory, the line between participant and participated runs along the uncreated-created divide—not, as in Plato, between intelligible and sensible.<sup>82</sup> Only uncreated reality has the divine perfections in itself: “The fountain, the origin, the supply of every good is regarded as being in the world that is uncreate, and the whole creation inclines to that, and touches and shares the Highest Existence only by virtue of its part in the First Good.”<sup>83</sup> Since both the Son and the Spirit have these perfections essentially, Gregory argues, they belong with the Father on the uncreated side of the divide.<sup>84</sup> Against Eunomius’s attempt to rank the Spirit somewhere lower than the uncreated God but higher than the rest of the created order, Gregory insists that the Creator-creature distinction is a binary one; there is no possibility of an intermediate being between the two.<sup>85</sup> For Gregory, the entire Trinitarian conflict rests on which side one places the Son and the Spirit: “The whole controversy, then, between the Church and the Anomeans turns on this: Are we to regard the Son and the Holy Spirit as belonging to created or uncreated existence?”<sup>86</sup>

Before we conclude, we will examine briefly another argument used by Gregory to defend the full divinity of the Holy Spirit: the argument from unified activity (*energeia*). In early Christian discussions of the Trinity, the term *energeia* was used rarely and did not carry significant theological weight. The concept became a source of theological controversy in Gregory’s time, in no small part through the writings of Eunomius.<sup>87</sup> Gregory and Eunomius’s

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<sup>81</sup> CE 1, in NPNF 2.5, 209; see also von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought*, esp. 18–23; Balas, *Metousia Theou*, 34–53; Dmitry Biriukov, “‘The Ascent of Nature from the Lower to the Perfect’: A Synthesis of Biblical and Logical-Philosophical Descriptions of the Order of Natural Beings in ‘De Opificio Hominis’ 8 of Gregory of Nyssa,” *Scrinium* 11 (2015): 198–199. As Radde-Gallwitz, “The One and the Trinity,” 65–66, emphasizes, both divisions are important for Gregory.

<sup>82</sup> Balas, “Participation,” 581–583.

<sup>83</sup> CE 1, in NPNF 2.5, 60.

<sup>84</sup> CE 1, in NPNF 2.5, 60–65.

<sup>85</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit, Against the Followers of Macedonius* 17, in NPNF 2.5, 322.

<sup>86</sup> CE 1, in NPNF 2.5, 56.

<sup>87</sup> Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 125–127.

debate over *energeia* is more complex than we have space to examine in full, so we will limit our focus to one important thread running through the argument: the nature of the relationship between *energeia* and *ousia* (nature or essence).<sup>88</sup>

*Energeia* plays a twofold role in Eunomius's argument. The first has to do with the relationship between the three divine persons, as we discussed above. Eunomius believed the Spirit was created through the *energeia* of the Son, who in turn was created through the *energeia* of the Father. For Eunomius, the *energeiai* "follow each Being"<sup>89</sup> such that they are connected to the essence, but also external to it.<sup>90</sup> The second way Eunomius deploys the concept of *energeia* has to do with its effects. For Eunomius, the inferior status of the Holy Spirit is proven by the inferiority of his works, since different works (*erga*, ἔργα) are the product of different *energeia*.<sup>91</sup> The Spirit's works (e.g., sanctification of believers) cannot be equal to the Son's (e.g., the creation of the cosmos), of course, since the Spirit himself is a work of the Son.<sup>92</sup> The implication of these claims, made explicit by Gregory in his rebuttal, is that greater and lesser *energeiai* reflect greater and lesser natures (*ousiai*).<sup>93</sup>

Gregory tackles both aspects of Eunomius's argument in his response. First, he points out that the way Eunomius deploys the concept of *energeia* is inconsistent within his own system. Either the existence of the *energeia* is somehow attached to the essence from which Eunomius insists it must at the same time be distinct, or the *energeia* has some kind of substantial existence

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<sup>88</sup> Other important aspects of this debate include the nature of humans' knowledge of God and the referent of the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but we do not have space to explore those arguments here.

<sup>89</sup> Eunomius's phrase, quoted by Gregory in *CE* 1, in NPNF 2.5, 50.

<sup>90</sup> See Tollefson, "Essence and Activity," 433–434; Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 148; Barnes, "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa," 62–63.

<sup>91</sup> *CE* 1, in NPNF 2.5, 50; see also Radde-Gallwitz, *Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrinal Works*, 92–98.

<sup>92</sup> Radde-Gallwitz, "Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa," 507.

<sup>93</sup> See *CE* 1, in NPNF 2.5, 72–76; Radde-Gallwitz, *Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrinal Works*, 87.

of its own. In the former case, God would no longer be simple;<sup>94</sup> in the latter, the Son is no longer second after the Father, but third, behind this intermediate *energeia*—which would mean that it was the *energeia*, not the Son, who created all things.<sup>95</sup> The Holy Spirit is then demoted to fifth in Eunomius’s hierarchy of being:

How can Eunomius rank our Lord next after the Almighty at all, when he counts Him third only, with that mediating ‘energy’ [*energeia*] placed in the second place? The Holy Spirit also according to this sequence will be found not in the third, but in the fifth place, that ‘energy’ [*energeia*] which follows the Only-Begotten, and by which the Holy Spirit came into existence necessarily intervening between them.<sup>96</sup>

In short, Gregory adamantly denies the possibility of God’s *energeia*’s having its own kind of quasi-existence between the *ousia* of the Father and the other two divine persons.

Having made the necessary preliminary point that the Spirit is not himself the product of an intermediate *energeia*, Gregory proceeds to offer positive evidence for the Spirit’s full divinity: what we are calling the argument from unified *energeia*.<sup>97</sup> Again, Gregory is not the only church father to make this argument; similar versions can be found in Athanasius,<sup>98</sup> Basil,<sup>99</sup> and Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>100</sup> But it is Gregory who develops the argument most fully, both in his debates with Eunomius and in other works, especially *On Not Three Gods*.<sup>101</sup> Gregory maintains that the same activities (*energeia*) are accomplished by all three persons of the Trinity, which points to their shared nature (*ousia*).<sup>102</sup> Chief among these is the work of giving life to humankind in salvation.<sup>103</sup> Gregory brandishes Eunomius’s own evidence against him on this point. Eunomius

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<sup>94</sup> Note that as with the argument from participation, the simplicity of God is assumed by both parties and features in Gregory’s defense.

<sup>95</sup> CE 1, in NPNF 2.5, 54–58; see also Tollefsen, “Essence and Activity,” 438–39.

<sup>96</sup> CE 1, in NPNF 2.5, 58.

<sup>97</sup> See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 159–160.

<sup>98</sup> Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion* 1.31, in DelCogliano, Radde-Gallwitz, and Ayres, *Works on the Spirit*, 100–101.

<sup>99</sup> Noted in Moutsoulas, “La Pneumatologie du *Contra Eunomium I*,” 560.

<sup>100</sup> See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 160 n 19.

<sup>101</sup> See *ibid.* and Radde-Gallwitz, *Gregory of Nyssa’s Doctrinal Works*, 94–111.

<sup>102</sup> E.g., CE 1, in NPNF 2.5, 72;

<sup>103</sup> CE 2, in NPNF 2.5, 132–143; cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Not Three Gods*, in NPNF 2.5, 334.

claims that Spirit “accomplish[es] every operation and all teaching” among believers, to which Gregory poses the question: “What operation?”<sup>104</sup> If it is, as Eunomius himself suggests, the same salvation as worked by the Father and the Son, this shows that the Spirit shares their nature. Gregory offers one of his favorite examples to illustrate the point, that of fire:

For just as, if anything should perform the functions of fire, shining and warming in precisely the same way, it is itself certainly fire, so if the Spirit does the works of the Father, He must assuredly be acknowledged to be of the same nature with Him. If on the other hand He operates something else than our salvation, and displays His operation in a contrary direction, He will thereby be proved to be of a different nature and essence. But Eunomius’ statement itself bears witness that the Spirit quickeneth in like manner with the Father and the Son. Accordingly, from the identity of operations it results assuredly that the Spirit is not alien from the nature of the Father and the Son.<sup>105</sup>

Gregory’s frequent use of the fire metaphor to make this argument is telling.<sup>106</sup> It emphasizes a close relationship between *energeia* and *ousia*: light and heat are bound up with what fire is.<sup>107</sup>

Once again, we find that metaphysics is crucial to Gregory’s pneumatological arguments. Gregory and Eunomius have clashing views of the *energeia* of God, but they share the core assumption that his *energeia* reveals something about his nature. This concept has its origin in classical metaphysics. As we saw above, the term *energeia* itself was coined by Aristotle, who used it to describe the activity or state of a thing constitutive of its being—and, notably, applies the concept to the ultimate causal principle of the cosmos.<sup>108</sup> In Gregory’s view, the problem with Eunomius’s use of *energeia* is not his belief that God’s *energeia* gives us insight into his nature; the problem is that Eunomius has the wrong (metaphysical) idea about God’s *energeia*—that *energeia* have their own kind of intermediary existence—and *how* it relates to his nature.

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<sup>104</sup> *CE* 2, in NPNF 2.5, 132.

<sup>105</sup> *CE* 2, in NPNF 2.5, 132.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *CE* 1, in NPNF 2.5, 76; Barnes, “Eunomius and Gregory,” 73–77.

<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, as with fire—but not as with humans—in God the impulse to do something coincides smoothly with the power to do it. Radde-Gallwitz, *Gregory of Nyssa’s Doctrinal Works*, 97–98.

<sup>108</sup> See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 170.

Let us return to the question we posed at the beginning of this paper. Did Gregory of Nyssa formulate his pneumatology as a bastion of orthodoxy against ancient Greek philosophy, or did his defense of the Spirit smuggle dangerous Platonic elements into the nascent doctrine of the Trinity? I propose that neither of these options is a helpful way of framing the question. Both accounts assume a relationship between Christian theology and Hellenistic metaphysics that sets the two against each other as competitive theories of reality. As we have seen, this was clearly not the view Gregory held. To borrow from the framework of philosopher Charles Taylor, I suggest we will understand Gregory of Nyssa (and the Fathers generally) best when we treat the ancient philosophical traditions with which they engaged not simply as beliefs but also, and perhaps even more so, as the conditions of their belief.<sup>109</sup> Gregory was first and foremost a Christian theologian. He was also a cultured fourth-century thinker, and while he used the theories available to him in a Hellenistic society, it was not his primary project to either dismantle or promote them. Simply put, Gregory used philosophical concepts to advance his theology, not vice versa. The aspects of Gregory's pneumatology we have examined in this paper make this clear: he takes for granted that some features of the classical metaphysical system are correct and relies on them to defend the Holy Spirit's equal divinity in the Trinity. Moreover, Gregory's adaptation of this system, such as the centrality of the uncreated-created distinction, show that he had no qualms about using those features he found useful while discarding others. Gregory, that is, did not treat Platonism as a comprehensive theory of reality that must be either adopted or rejected wholesale. Whether Gregory was a "Platonist" is, I suggest, a misleading and frankly uninteresting question. Much more fruitful is the question of how Greogry put Platonism to use in developing creative solutions to the theological dilemmas of his day—in pneumatology, Trinitarian doctrine, and beyond.

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<sup>109</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007).