The Limits of Platonism: Gregory of Nazianzus and the Invention of *theōsis*

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I. Introduction: Genealogies of divinization

THE CONCEPT of *theōsis* (divinization or deification) of the human, which originated in Greek patristic thought, gained a peculiar prominence in the Christian East.[1] This is often remarked upon, and recent work on *theōsis* has clarified the significance of this term in Greek patristic authors; its provenance in the preceding philosophical tradition, however, remains opaque. According to a general consensus, the notion of human assimilation to the divine was both a staple of 'Platonism' and, albeit marginally, contained in the Bible.[2]

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[1] On the history of the Christian notion of divinization see N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford 2004); full bibliography in J. A. Wittung, "Resources on *Theosis* with Select Primary Sources in Translation," in M. J. Christensen and J. A. Wittung (eds.), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Madison 2007) 294–309; a useful summary can be found in H. Alfeyev, *St. Symeon, the New Theologian, and the Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford 2000) 255–269. *Theōsis* is an essential element in the doctrinal system developed in the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and the writings of Maximus the Confessor; in Symeon the New Theologian, it became a foundational idea of the monastic movement that later received the name Hesychasm. The word was calqued into Old Church Slavic (and then borrowed into Russian) as *oboženie*.

[2] The tendency to treat Hellenic 'accretions' to Christianity under the generic name 'Platonism' seems to be rooted in Protestant anti-Catholic apologetics; see J. Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (London 1990) 7–20. Further on 'Christian Platonism' see C. J. de Vogel, "Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?" *VigChr* 39 (1985) 1–62.

This *communis opinio* needs to be questioned on at least three counts.

First, the biblical evidence on divinization is limited to Ps 82:6 "I say, 'You are gods,'" quoted once in the New Testament (Jn 10:34),[3] and the words in 2 Peter 1:4 on the Christians' partaking of divine nature (θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως). Second, as I argue below, a homogenizing approach that treats diverse elements of the philosophical tradition as 'Platonic' overlooks important shifts in the conceptual system of imperial and late antique intellectual culture. Third, the account that emphasizes a merging of Platonism and the biblical tradition cannot explain the peculiar success of the idea of divinization in Eastern Christianity. In what follows, I argue that this success was due to the continued prevalence, in the Eastern empire, of an intellectual tradition that, in some respects, owed more to Stoicism than to Platonism.

The fact that Gregory of Nazianzus was only recently recognized as the first Christian writer to use the term *theōsis* indicates a tendency among the historians of Christian doctrine to overlook the signifier in their pursuit of the signified. In his study of the 'doctrine of deification' in Greek patristic sources, Norman Russell, while rightly stressing the novelty of Gregory's usage, chooses to subsume it under the traditional rubric of the 'Cappadocian thought', even though his own analysis demonstrates that in this particular case the differences between the three Cappadocians far outweigh the similarities: not only was Gregory of Nazianzus the only patristic author of the fourth century to use the term *theōsis*, he also established the essential link between divinization and the individual believer's ethical progress.[4] Russell's account, furthermore, tends to oc-

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[3] The dominant interpretation of Ps 82:6 (cf. Ex 21:6, 22:28, Deut 10:17) is that "gods" stands for "judges" (cf. Theodoret Cyr. *PG* 80.273, 416, 1528).

[4] Russell, *Doctrine* 213–225. J. A. McGuckin, "The Strategic Adaptation of Deification in the Cappadocians," in *Partakers* 95–114, while noting that Gregory of Nazianzus is "insistent on the bold language of deification,"

clude the decisive influence of Gregory's writings on the later Eastern Christian tradition, particularly by positing a distinction between "metaphorical" and "realistic" notions of divinization and assigning Gregory's usage to the former category.[5] Apart from the lack of any obvious criteria for such a distinction, the remarkable success of the term suggests that readers of Gregory did not take his references to *theōsis* as a figure of speech.[6]

The difficulty of clarifying the origins of this notion in either biblical or Platonic sources continues to vex students of Gregory's thought.[7] In light of the scarcity of biblical parallels, it is noteworthy that Gregory never cites 2 Peter 1:4 and only rarely uses the vocabulary of participation.[8] This leads Russell to conclude that in Gregory the Platonic notion of imitation takes the place of the biblical participation: "The believer is not so much incorporated into Christ as led to imitate him."[9] As I

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maintains that "the Cappadocians were collectively taken by the idea" (97, 98–99, 104). McGuckin also wrongly attributes the use of the word *theōsis* to Basil and Gregory of Nyssa (100, 104).

[5] A similar position is expressed in V. Kharlamov, "Rhetorical Application of *Theosis* in Greek Patristic Thought," in *Partakers* 115–131, at 126.

[6] Russell, *Doctrine* 222–223, puts emphasis on a fairly technical passage in *Or.* 42.17 where Gregory draws a distinction between God and creature, noting that a creature is not "God in the proper sense of the word" (κυρίως). I take these words to imply that, while a form of divinization is feasible, the human is not to be conflated with the (Christian Triune) God for which "there was never a time when it did not exist." Arguably, even the most 'realistic' notion of divinization would not involve such a conflation.

[7] D. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1979) 173, sees in Gregory a "recognizable conflation of two views, the biblical and the Platonic." The problem of biblical precedents to Gregory's notion of divinization is discussed in T. T. Tollefsen, "*Theosis* according to Gregory," in J. Børtnes and T. Hägg (eds.), *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections* (Copenhagen 2006) 257–270.

[8] Russell, *Doctrine* 224; for an exception see *Or.* 2.98. By contrast, this notion is central to Cyril of Alexandria's soteriology, on which see D. A. Keating, *The Appropriation of Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria* (Oxford 2004).

[9] Russell, *Doctrine* 224.

argue in this study, there existed a hitherto overlooked non-Platonic and non-biblical notion of 'incorporation' that provided the foundation for Gregory's *theōsis*.

It is often pointed out that the notion of *theōsis* had patristic precedents, most importantly Athanasius' concept of *theopoiēsis*—deification of the human effected, or made possible, by the incarnation of the Logos. We would be wrong to conclude, however, that divinization of the individual—whatever it meant, but particularly viewed as a soteriological prospect—was an undisputed part of the doctrine. Donald Winslow notes that when speaking of *theōsis* Gregory often uses apologetic phrasing (θαρρῶ λέγειν "I dare say," εἰ μὴ τολμηρὸν τοῦτο εἰπεῖν "if this is not a too bold way of speaking"), and points out that "Gregory himself was well aware that the constant use he made of the doctrine of 'deification' … must have been somewhat startling to his congregation."[10] Gregory's coinage (and the meaning attached) was a self-conscious innovation and was in all likelihood perceived as controversial. So much is implied by the avoidance of the term by the two other Cappadocians, as well as by his near-contemporaries, such as John Chrysostom.[11] We may surmise that what was innovative—and problematic—was the application of deification not to humanity, or human flesh, in general ('deified' as a result of Christ's incarnation) but to a particular human being aspiring to ethical perfection. This force of *theōsis* must have made it dangerously close to pagan ideas of apotheosis.[12]

[10] Winslow, *Dynamics* 180.

[11] Cyril of Alexandria is also reluctant to use vocabulary of divinization (in his copious works, *theopoiēsis* occurs but rarely, while *theōsis* is altogether shunned). Keating, *Appropriation* 9, treats Cyril's concept of divinization under the rubric of *oikeiōsis*, rendered as "appropriation of divine life"; he does not, however, discuss the prehistory of the term or its use in other Christian writers.

[12] Christian writers clearly sought to distance themselves from the pagan uses of analogous terms; see Russell's appendix on the "Greek vocabulary of deification" (*Doctrine* 333–344).

In my approach to the genealogy of divinization, I put an emphasis not on continuities with the Christian tradition, but on the milieu of late antique philosophical culture in which the concept of *theōsis* emerged. Such a perspective demands a reconsideration of the 'Platonic' aspects of divinization, inasmuch as the dominant conceptual paradigm of late Roman elites was, in fact, heavily indebted to Stoicism. After a close reading of Gregory's *Oration* 4, a text in which *theōsis* is first introduced, I discuss the perceptions, prevalent in late Roman thought, of Nature (*Physis*) as a benign, organic, and 'sympathetic' unity. Finally, I present evidence that such perceptions remained part of the common language of Christian and non-Christian philosophers in the fourth century.

II. Gregory's *Oration* 4: In defense of Christian philosophy

Let us turn to the text in which the term *theōsis* makes its first appearance: *Oration* 4, or the First Oration Against Julian. Remarkably, the verb θεόω, from which Gregory derived the noun *theōsis*, is first used in this speech with negative connotations. Pointing to the essential vice of pagan philosophers whose striving for virtue—and for divinization—was marred by vainglory and self-love (φιλαυτία), Gregory derides Empedocles who threw himself into Aetna for mistakenly believing that he had "deified himself by means of Sicilian craters" (τοῖς Σικελικοῖς κρατῆρσιν ἑαυτὸν θεώσας, ὡς ᾧετο, 59).[13] Christian philosophers, by contrast, seek only "honor from God" or rather—Gregory hastens to add—"even more than that they embrace the familiarity (*oikeiōsis*) toward the beautiful for the sake of the beautiful itself" (τὴν πρὸς τὸ καλὸν οἰκείωσιν ἀγαπῶντες δι᾽ αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, 60). In his commentary on this passage, Alois Kurmann notes that, for a Christian theologian,

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[13] The text used is that of Jean Bernardi, *Discours 4–5: Contre Julien* (SC 309 [Paris 1983]). For a detailed discussion of *Or.* 4, with attention to the vocabulary of *theōsis*, see now S. Elm. *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome* (Berkeley 2012) 336–377.

to posit an absolute ethic is "erstaunlich," and points to the influence of the Stoic axiom *virtus sibi ipsi praemium* and to the fusion of the Platonic (τὸ καλόν) and the Stoic (τὴν οἰκείωσιν) vocabularies.[14] Yet, in effect, Gregory employs traditional philosophical language to posit a distinctively Christian opposition between free exercise of one's will and its renunciation. The "true philosophers and lovers of god" are defined by their disavowal of self in preference to "familiarity" with the divine: divinization is only possible at the cost of self-effacement.

The noun *theōsis* in *Oration* 4 first appears in a lengthy description of the Christian philosophical life, which Gregory deliberately contrasts with a morbid summary of the lives of famous philosophers of the past whose ultimate motivation was earthly glory. By contrast, Christian philosophers "know no measure in their ascent and deification" (μηδὲν μέτρον εἰδότων ἀναβάσεως καὶ θεώσεως, 71). As earlier, the defining feature of Christian divinization is the absence of self-interest, which is made possible by *oikeiōsis*, that is, by redrawing the boundary of the self in a way that implies identification with the divine.[15] In contrast to the familiar Platonic idea of assimilation to the divine, Gregory's divinization does not involve rejection of human nature, in its embodied state, as irrevocably corrupt. Gregory goes on to emphasize that Christian ascetics "lose sight of their nature only where it is necessary to make oneself God's familiars through chastity and self-mastery" (κἀνταῦθα μόνον ἐπιλανθανομένων τῆς φύσεως οὗ δεῖ θεὸν οἰκειοῦσθαι δι' ἀγνείας καὶ καρτερίας, 73). After all, it is the miracle-working dead body of a martyr that furnishes the ultimate proof of the efficacy of Christian *theōsis* (69).

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[14] A. Kurmann, *Gregor von Nazianz. Oratio 4 gegen Julian. Kommentar* (Basel 1988) 203–204. On *virtus sibi ipsi praemium* cf. Greg. Naz. *Ad Nemesium* 210 (ἀρετὴ δέ τε μοῦνον ἄριστον), with the comments in L. Bacci, "Influssi filosofici in scritti di Gregorio Nazianzeno," *RendIstLomb* 138 (2004) 175–205, at 180–181.

[15] Kurmann, *Gregor* 238, rightly glosses the phrase by reference to *oikeiōsis pros to kalon* in *Or.* 4.60.

In fact, the concept of *theōsis* is formulated within the rhetorical structure of *synkrisis*, or contrastive analysis, of the Christian and non-Christian philosophical life. In *Or.* 4.71–72 each of the feats of the philosophers of the past is mirrored and exceeded by a similar achievement of contemporary Christians.[16] In this context, the term *theōsis*, applied to the *telos* of the Christian life, is a rhetorical riposte to Empedocles' failed "self-deification" described at 59. The term recurs, emphatically, in the last sentence of the oration, in which Gregory recapitulates the essence of the Christian life, whose restless drive is contrasted with the static whirling of the pagan life that is compared to a top (an image borrowed from Plato's *Republic*, 436D): "one of the beautiful things (τῶν καλῶν) we have achieved, another we hold on to, and still another we aim at until we reach the *telos* of divinization (μέχρι τοῦ τέλους καὶ τῆς θεώσεως—a hendiadys) for which we are born and toward which we are propelled, those of us at any rate who are advanced in our way of thinking (οἵ γε διαβατικοὶ τὴν διάνοιαν) and expect something worthy of God's magnanimity" (124).

A close reading of *Oration* 4 suggests that Gregory's *theōsis* belongs firmly in the context of fourth-century debates on the nature of the philosophical life that provided the common ground in the polemic in which both Christians and non-Christians took part.[17] Gregory's 'invention' of *theōsis* may be regarded as part of the larger project that he undertakes in

[16] In his commentary, Kurmann notes that Heraclitus' "dejection" (κατή-φεια, 72) corresponds to "the tear which purifies the sins of the world" (τὸ δάκρυον ἁμαρτίας κόσμου καθάρσιον, 71), Socrates' *paiderastia* corresponds to the Christian ἀπαθὴς ἔρως, etc.

[17] See S. Elm, "Orthodoxy and the True Philosophical Life: Julian and Gregory of Nazianzus," *Studia Patristica* 37 (2001) 69–85, and *Sons of Hellenism*. Julian uses a form of the verb θεόω of the souls which, in a deified state (θεωθεῖσαι), share their newly acquired vigor with the body (*Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 178b). As far as our evidence goes, the verb was avoided by all contemporary Christian authors, except for Gregory of Nazianzus (and, interestingly, Apollinarius, who uses the participle τεθεωμένον of Christ's body: fr.147 Lietzmann).

Oration 4: to reclaim for the Christians the elements of the Greek *paideia* that Julian had sought to deny them. In this light, the philosophical provenance of the concept becomes an integral part of the problem of its semantics, both in Gregory and, given Gregory's influence, in later Christian authors.

Scholars have tended to subsume Gregory's *theōsis* under the rubric of the Platonic 'assimilation to God' (most commonly expressed by the phrase *homoiōsis theō*).[18] There are several objections to this interpretation. First and most obviously, this idea was not necessarily perceived as 'Platonic' in the fourth century CE. Perhaps the most important conclusion of Hubert Merki's investigation of the history of the phrase *homoiōsis theō* is its transformation into a commonplace that was at home in all philosophical schools. Furthermore, the word *homoiōsis* is used in Gen 1:26 (of man's creation in the "likeness" of God), and Christian writers, from Clement of Alexandria onward, exploited this ambiguity, with Origen even accusing Plato of plagiarism.[19] By the Byzantine period it had developed into a theological stock-phrase: its semantics was determined less by Plato's usage than by the then-received notion of divinization. Since our task is to construct a genealogy of this notion, it is not to Plato but to the philosophical idiom of the fourth century CE that we need to turn. Moreover, the inventor of *theōsis* Gregory of Nazianzus never in fact uses the particular phrase *homoiōsis theō*, which seems to rule out direct Platonic influence.

Gregory once uses the noun *homoiōsis* of the soul's "imitation

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[18] E.g. H. Merki, Ὁμοίωσις θεῷ. *Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Freiburg, Swizerland, 1952) 105; C. Moreschini, *Filosofia e letteratura in Gregorio di Nazianzo* (Milan 1997) 33–36; Kurmann, *Gregor* 203–204. The relevant Platonic loci are *Tht.* 176A, *Ti.* 90B–D, *Resp.* 500C, 613A.

[19] *De principiis* 3.6.1. See I. Ševčenko, "The Definition of Philosophy in the *Life of Saint Constantine*," in Morris Halle et al. (eds.), *For Roman Jakobson: Essays on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday* (The Hague 1956) 449–457, reprinted (with an addendum) in *Byzantium and the Slavs in Letters and Culture* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1991) 93–106, esp. 105.

of God and things divine" (ἡ Θεοῦ καὶ τῶν θείων μίμησις: *Or.* 6.14).[20] In this passage, Platonic language, including a description of the soul as made in the image of God, is mobilized in favor of a Stoicizing view of divine economy.[21] When employing the expression "to the extent possible" as a traditional marker of the limits of human aspiration, Gregory uses a late idiom καθόσον/ὅσον ἐφικτόν,[22] never κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, which is the *vox propria* attested in Plato and common in Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil. Curiously, Gregory's usage is quite close to that of Julian, who, when referring to the assimilation to the divine, consistently uses, in place of *homoiōsis*, *mimēsis*.[23] On the whole, the evidence of diction indicates that Gregory is following contemporary philosophical usage, rather than engaging with Plato directly.

A strictly Platonic reading of *theōsis* is invalidated by another, more general reason. Whereas for Plato the 'assimilation to the divine' involves the soul's effort to leave behind the prison-house of the body, Gregory as a Christian philosopher seeks to establish a dynamic relationship which would allow salvation—and divinization—of both body and soul. Countering a common misconstrual of early Christian monastic ethics, Peter

[20] In *Or.* 8.7 and 24.15, both eulogistic contexts, Gregory speaks of "complete assimilation to the archetype" (πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ἐξομοίωσις), using a phrasing that is neither strictly biblical nor Platonic.

[21] Gregory urges "the necessity of benevolence and agreement" (εὐνοίας τε καὶ συμφωνίας ἀνάγκην) in the community in Nazianzus by pointing to the "laws of creation," which are operative in the entire cosmos and demand that "the ties of benevolence, with which the Craftsman Logos tied everything together" (τῆς εὐνοίας ... δεσμῶν, οἷς ὁ τεχνίτης Λόγος τὸ πᾶν συνέδησε), never be loosened. Imitation of God does not entail a "flight" from this world (as in Pl. *Tht.* 176ʙ); on the contrary, it is a product of observing the beauty of the cosmos that "remains within the bounds of its own nature" (ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις ὅροις μένων τῆς φύσεως). For further discussion of such 'Stoicist' moments in Gregory see section IV below.

[22] *Or.* 21.2, 24.15, 38.18, 39.7; this idiom is first attested in Plutarch.

[23] See Merki, Ὁμοίωσις 32–33. Gregory uses *mimēsis* in analogous contexts: *Or.* 39.7, 43.63, *Ep.* 102.10, *Comparatio Vitarum* 15, 43.

Brown observes that it "was the human will, sensed by the monk as an impacted mass of willfulness lodged at the very bottom of his heart, and not the malleable 'clay' of the body itself, that stood 'like a brazen wall' between the monk and God."[24] Similarly pointing to the limits of Christian Platonism, Sergei Averintsev remarks that "Christian *askēsis* ultimately rested on the opposition of 'submission' vs. 'exercise of free will', whereas Neoplatonic *askēsis* rested on the opposition of the 'spiritual' vs. the 'material.'"[25] Averintsev further explains the ad hoc use of 'Platonism' in Christian didactics by the handiness of dualist language for moral exhortation. The prominence of such dualist language (itself typologically common, and not limited to Platonism) varies, within Christianity, between cultures, historical periods, as well as literary genres, and it should not overshadow less trivial conceptual patterns whose origins may have little to do with Plato.[26]

One such conceptual pattern, already noted in the discussion of *Oration* 4, is the language of kinship or familiarity that links God and humanity, or—to use Gregory's phrase—"at any rate those who are advanced in their way of thinking." The vocabulary of *oikeiōsis*, particularly the phrase *oikeiōsis pros theon*, provides an essential gloss on Christian *theōsis* as it implies a transformation of the self, not as a result of forceful rejection of human nature but through a gradual process of "naturalization." In earlier Christian authors, including Clement of

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[24] P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York 1988) 226, quoting *Apophthegmata Patrum* (*PG* 65.336). On the Christian valorization of the body see also 165 ff., 187, 222–223; Brown argues against the view that Christian *askēsis* was driven by "hatred of the body," expressed, e.g., in E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge 1965) 29–36, quotation on 35.

[25] S. S. Averintsev, *Poetika rannevizantiiskoi literatury* (Moscow 1997; first published in 1977) 24; cf. the Italian edition: *L'animo e lo specchio: l'universo della poetica bizantina* (Bologna 1988).

[26] On the plurality of Christian discourses cf. Av. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley 1991), esp. 5.

Alexandria and Origen, the notion of *oikeiōsis pros theon* had come to denote both the act of God, who enters into a relationship of kinship with humanity, and the Christian's acceptance of this kinship.[27] It thus both establishes a precondition for divinization and defines its essence. Indeed, it is even possible to conjecture that Gregory coined the word *theōsis* as a shortcut for the phrase *oikeiōsis pros theon*: these two phrases never occur together, but Gregory combines each with the notion of ascent to God (*anabasis*).[28]

As I show in the following two sections, by the fourth century *oikeiōsis*, originally a Stoic term, became part and parcel of common philosophical discourse (and Neoplatonic synthesis), which was marked by a positive revaluation of nature. In this perspective, Christian and Neoplatonic thought can be seen as participating in the single paradigm, although they differed in their emphases.[29] Attention to *oikeiōsis pros theon* as a key subtext of the concept of *theōsis* is therefore crucial to determining the limits of 'Platonism' in Eastern Christianity.

[27] I discuss the early reception of Stoic *oikeiōsis* in Judeo-Christian sources in "*Oikeiōsis pros theon*: Gregory of Nazianzus and the Heteronomous Subject of Eastern Christian Penance," *ZAC* 16 (2012 forthcoming).

[28] Cf. *Ep*. 212.2: διὰ τῆς πρὸς αὐτὸν οἰκειώσεώς τε καὶ ἀναβάσεως and the combination ἀναβάσεως καὶ θεώσεως in *Or*. 4.71 and 11.2; cf. 21.2, 3.1. Note that *anabasis*, a term with strong Platonic associations, is also used in the Old Testament (e.g. Ps 83:6).

[29] Gregory's thought can often be fruitfully interpreted in the context of Neoplatonism. Gregory refers to those who have "perceived" the Holy Spirit, which they called Nous, as "the ones closest to us among the Hellenes" (*Or*. 31.5). It is likely that Gregory refers to Plot. *Enn*. 5.2 in *Or*. 29.2; see J. M. Rist, "Basil's 'Neoplatonism': Its Background and Nature," in P. J. Fedwick (ed.), *Basil of Casarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic* I (Toronto 1981) 137–220, esp. 215–216 [repr. *Platonism and its Christian Heritage* (London 1985)]; F. W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* (Leiden 1991) 134–135. On Gregory of Nyssa see S. R. C. Lilla, *Neuplatonische Gedankengut in den 'Homilien über die Seligpreisungen' Gregors von Nyssa* (Leiden 2004), who has recently emphasized the "substantielle Identität" (69) of his and Plotinus' teaching, due to their shared intellectual background rather than to direct influence.

A more specific context for the development of Gregory's thought, which I can only briefly address here, was the theological controversies of his day.[30] His principal opponents were the 'Neo-Arian' Eunomius and his followers, who, building on the Christian Platonism of Origen (and very likely also on contemporary Neoplatonism) put forward a subordinationist view of the Trinity. According to Eunomius, inasmuch as the natures of the unbegotten Father and his begotten Son are distinct (their epithets being indicative of their different essences), humanity can no more aspire to any form of 'participation' in God's nature than does his Son. By contrast, in addition to subscribing, in general terms, to the Nicene dogma of the shared essence (*ousia*) of the Father and the Son, Gregory insisted on the equal divinity of the Holy Spirit (questioned or denied by Eunomius and many others, particularly the Pneumatomachians), to which he assigned the central role in the process of divinization. The radical doctrine of *theōsis* should be seen in the light of Gregory's resistance to 'Platonic' dualism: by refuting the subordinationism of the Neo-Arians, Gregory argued that humanity has full, albeit mediated, access to the divine.[31] If we keep in mind the soteriological underpinnings of

[30] On the theological background to Gregory see Winslow, *Dynamics* 130–145; Norris, *Faith* 53–69; C. A. Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford 2008) 153–185, and "The Holy Spirit in Gregory Nazianzen: The Pneumatology of *Oration* 31," in A. B. McGowan et al. (eds.), *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson* (Leiden 2009) 151–162. On Gregory's engagement with Eunomius see Elm, *Sons of Hellenism* 213–267.

[31] Spirit (*pneuma*) appears as a mediating term between soul and body already in Aristotle and in the Stoics. J. M. Rist, "On Greek Biology, Greek Cosmology and Some Sources of Theological Pneuma," *Prudentia* Suppl. 1985, 27–47 (repr. in *Man, Soul and Body: Essays in Ancient Thought* [Aldershot 1996]), notes that, in Stoic thought, *pneuma*, present in each human being as well as in the cosmos, "provides the basis for the notorious Stoic theory of the 'sympathy' or 'fellow-feeling' of the different parts of the universe, earthly and heavenly, for one another" (40). Cf. H. von Staden, "Body, Soul, and Nerve: Epicurus, Herophilus, Erasistratus, the Stoics, and Galen," in J. P. Wright and P. Potter (eds.), *Psyche and Soma: Physicians and Meta-*

Gregory's approach to divine nature, it becomes easier to see the significance of the notion of humanity's kinship with the divine, conveyed by the concept of *oikeiōsis pros theon*.

In this light, we may offer some reflections on why the term *theopoiēsis*, used by Origen and particularly favored by Athanasius of Alexandria, was superseded by *theōsis*.[32] For Athanasius, Christ's assumption of human flesh pointed to the converse possibility of human deification (*De incarn.* 2.54). What remains unexplained are the reasons for the rejection of this term by later Christian writers and their preference for Gregory's *theōsis*. Apart from the weight of Gregory's authority for the Byzantines, which probably constituted the main reason for this shift in usage, there is also a conceptual difference. As it is used by Gregory, *theōsis*—similarly to *oikeiōsis pros theon*—posits the attainment of the divine as ethical process, which can never be brought to completion. By contrast, *theopoiēsis*, in addition to the mechanistic, non-organic idea of fabrication, appears to put emphasis on the benevolent activity of God by whose grace, through the incarnation of the Logos, the human has already, in some sense, been made divine. For Gregory of Nazianzus, *oikeiōsis pros theon* is not directly predicated on the prehistory of human flesh, nor is the latter definitively compromised by the Fall;[33] accordingly, the human's divinization is not for him a

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physicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment (Oxford 2000) 79–116, esp. 111. T. Paige, "Who Believes in 'Spirit'? Πνεῦμα in Pagan Usage and Implications for the Gentile Christian Mission," *HThR* 95 (2002) 417–436, adopts an all too narrow definition of Christian *pneuma* as an equivalent of *daimonion*, downplaying the Stoic evidence. On the Stoic background of Christian *pneuma* see also P. G. Chappuis, *La destinée de l'homme: de l'influence du stoïcisme sur la pensée chrétienne primitive* (Geneva 1926) 71–87.

[32] The verb *theopoieō* was used by Origen (6 occurrences); *theopoiēsis* was the favorite term of Athanasius of Alexandria (24, counting forms of the base verb). As Beeley shows (*Gregory* 277–293), we need not assume direct influence of Athanasius for the dissemination of the notion of the deifying effect of Christ's incarnation.

[33] For Gregory, Adam's untimely eating of the fruit from the tree of knowledge achieves the opposite of what he desired: it estranged (ἠλλο-

mere concomitant, or reverse effect, of Christ's incarnation.[34] In an interesting passage in *Or.* 2, the significance of the incarnation is tied to the establishment of "a familial bond" that links God with both human soul and body, "two disparate elements, tied together through the relationship of familiarity that the mediator entertains toward both of them" (συνεδέθη τὰ διεστῶτα τῇ πρὸς ἄμφω τοῦ μεσιτεύοντος οἰκειότητι, 23).[35] God's initial adoption of humanity (and the ensuing state of *oikeiotēs*) makes possible the ethical work of *oikeiōsis pros theon/ theōsis*.

Rather than focusing on the specific uses to which this concept was put in the Eastern Christian tradition,[36] I will discuss, in what follows, the background of Roman imperial and late antique thought that could shed light on the meaning of *oikeiōsis* outside of Stoicism.

III. From Stoic *oikeiōsis* to para-Christian *sympatheia*

"Whereas the idea of the interpenetration of Christian texts by Greek philosophical ideas and language is commonplace, what that relation contributed to the development of a specifically Christian discourse is, I think, yet to be told."[37] This remark made by Averil Cameron in her 1986 Sather Lectures

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τρίωσεν) him from knowledge (*Or.* 2.25); note that *allotriōsis* is the opposite of *oikeiōsis*. The Augustinian view of the Fall as a defining event in the history of humanity is, by and large, foreign to the Eastern tradition.

[34] Russell, *Doctrine* 222, suggests that Gregory's ethical approach to divinization is in accord with Clement's. On the latter's idea of progressive approximation to God, which begins with baptism, see A. Choufrine, *Gnosis, Theophany, Theosis: Studies in Clement of Alexandria's Appropriation of his Background* (New York 2002) 159–197. Incarnation and divinization are linked in Gregory's *Or.* 1.5, 29.19, 30.14, *Ep.* 101.21.

[35] Similar language is used in Theodoret's epitome of Irenaeus: ἔδει γὰρ τὸν μεσίτην Θεοῦ τε καὶ ἀνθρώπων διὰ τῆς ἰδίας πρὸς ἑκατέρους οἰκειότητος εἰς φιλίαν καὶ ὁμόνοιαν τοὺς ἀμφοτέρους συναγαγεῖν (*Eranistes* p.153 Ettlinger).

[36] I pursue this issue in another venue (see n.27).

[37] Cameron, *Christianity* 10.

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still largely holds true. The dilemma can be summed up as follows: can an imported concept have an impact on a different conceptual framework, or does it remain in use because its original meaning happens to fit within, or is modified to accord to, this framework? I believe that, to stay true to the complexity of the processes of Christianization, we need to posit a dialectical relationship between particular concepts and the patterns of thought which they come to denote. Considered with reference to this dialectic, the use of the same concept is an important indicator of continuity across frameworks.

In particular, the continuity between Stoic and Christian conceptual usage, at least in the case at hand, is best approached not as an example of the influence of one philosophical system on the other, or—in the vein of the traditional history of ideas—as an example of the peregrinations of the idea of 'incorporation' wherein lexical manifestations may vary but content is assumed to be the same. A more opportune method is furnished by the discipline of historical semantics, which—particularly in post-war Germany—has been closely linked to conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*). The property of historical semantics that is most relevant for us is its commitment to the lexical manifestation of a concept. I believe that the post-Stoic history of *oikeiōsis* calls for precisely such a lexicalist approach. Notably, because of its morphologically transparent, yet conceptually extensive, semantics, a recognizably "Stoic" term could survive in cultures that never knew of Stoicism and its terminological nuances.[38]

A particular strand within historical semantics that in my view could shed light on the genealogy of divinization is the approach pursued in Hans Blumenberg's work. Seeking to sup-

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[38] In Eastern Slavic translations from Greek as well as in original texts, *oikeiōsis* was rendered as *prisvoenie* 'making one's own', a term often applied to a saint's 'endearment' to God; see B. Maslov, "*Prisvoenie k Bogu / Oikeiosis pros theon*: The Afterlife of a Stoic Concept in Old Rus'," in V. Izmirlieva and B. Gasparov (eds.), *Translation and Tradition in "Slavia Orthodoxa"* (Berlin 2012).

plement the methods of traditional *Begriffsgeschichte*, Blumenberg argued that certain concepts should be understood as fundamentally figurative. For example, the history of the concept of truth consists of a sequence of metaphors (e.g. the light of truth, truth as a counteracting force, 'naked' truth). Such conceptual metaphors "enrich the world of concepts (*Begriffswelt*), without losing their fundamental quality," namely their irreducibility to a logical definition.[39] I suggest that divinization in Christian discourse may similarly be understood as a concept that, while lacking a well-defined terminological content, was continually informed by various metaphors. These metaphors may carry particular philosophical or cultural associations, such as 'assimilation to God', 'kinship with the divine', 'salvation', 'ascent', etc. Originally also a metaphor of the household, by the fourth century *oikeiōsis* had developed into a fairly well circumscribed concept. It was this concept, I argue, that informed the meaning of a newly invented term, *theōsis*.

There are two parts to the story of *oikeiōsis* outside and after Stoicism. First, it is the story of its use in Christian discourse in the period of direct Stoic influence (roughly, through the second century); this story can explain distinctly Christian connotations that this concept assumed. Second, it is the story of the common discourse of the educated elite, Christian and non-Christian alike, which preserved certain 'Stoic' characteristics through the fourth century.[40] It is the latter story that the fol-

[39] H. Blumenberg, "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 6 (1960) 7–142, quotation at 9–10. On Blumenberg's approach see R. Zill, "'Substrukturen des Denkens.' Grenzen und Perspektiven einer Metapherngeschichte nach Hans Blumenberg," in H. E. Bödeker (ed.), *Begriffsgeschichte, Diskursgeschichte, Metapherngeschichte* (Göttingen 2002) 209–258.

[40] R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford 2000) 337–339, is the only discussion of the Eastern Christian reception of *oikeiōsis* that I am aware of. Sorabji argues that Maximus the Confessor's concept of natural will, *thelēsis* (as opposed to deliberative will, *prohairesis*), accords with the Stoic definitions of *oikeiōsis*. Early Christian uses of this concept and some aspects of its Medieval and modern reception are addressed, respectively, in Maslov (n.27 and 38).

lowing analysis brings to the fore.

In the fourth century, most writers making use of the word *oikeiōsis* were not aware of its Stoic origins. Yet its very survival as a living part of common philosophical vocabulary indicates a continuity in the common conceptual framework that was only later monopolized by Christianity.[41] So our task will be to describe the intellectual ambience in which the concept of *oikeiōsis pros theon*, in the period from the second to the fourth centuries, made sense to both Christians and pagans.

Within Stoic philosophy, the logic of *oikeiōsis* explained one's commitment to things external to self as an extension of the natural impulse of self-love that guarantees an individual's physical well-being.[42] The Stoics argued that all instances of al-

[41] Several Christian concepts have been argued to have a Stoic pre-history. See J. M. Rist, "*Prohairesis*: Proclus, Plotinus *et alii*," in *De Jamblique à Proclus* (Vandoeuvres 1975) 103–117 (repr. with postscript in *Platonism and its Christian Heritage*), on *prohairesis*; J. Mansfeld, "Resurrection Added: The *interpretatio christiana* of a Stoic Doctrine," *VigChr* 37 (1983) 218–233 (repr. in *Studies in Later Greek Philosophy and Gnosticism* [London 1989]), on the Stoic doctrine of the cosmic cycle as entailing the resurrection of the body; R. Sorabji, "Stoic First Movements in Christianity," in S. K. Strange and J. Zupko (eds.), *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations* (Cambridge 2004) 95–107, on the "first movements" (*propatheiai*) in Evagrius; by contrast, Augustine viewed *propatheiai* as indications of moral weakness (S. Byers, "Augustine and the Cognitive Cause of Stoic 'Preliminary Passions' (*Propatheiai*)," *JHPh* 41 [2003] 433–448); Lilla, *Neuplatonische Gedankengut* 97–101, on *apatheia*; Lilla 107–112 and J.-J. Duhot, "Métamorphoses du ΛΟΓΟΣ: du Stoïcisme au Nouveau Testament," in G. Romeyer Dherbey and J.-B. Gourinat (eds.), *Les Stoïciens* (Paris 2005) 453–466, on *logos*; M. Frede, "John of Damascus on Human Action, the Will, and the Human Freedom," in K. Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources* (Oxford 2002) 63–95, at 78. on *to auteksousion*; see n.31 above on *pneuma*. On Christian Stoicism in general see M. Spanneut, *Le stoïcisme des Pères de l'Église* (Paris 1957) and *Permanence du stoïcisme. De Zénon à Malraux* (Gembloux 1973) 130–178.

[42] M. Pohlenz, *Grundfragen der stoischen Philosophie* (Göttingen 1940) 1–47. A number of recent studies deal with the philosophical significance of the concept. See R. Radice, *Oikeiosis. Ricerche sul fondamento del pensiero stoico e sulla sua genesi* (Milan 2000); R. Bees, *Die Oikeiosislehre der Stoa* I (Würzburg 2004). The concept is related to broader cultural context in G. B. Kerferd, "The

truism, including self-sacrifice, could be explained, in one way or another, by positing a broader concept of the self. G. B. Kerferd has even suggested that the modern expression that best conveys its meaning is "the process by which we search for and achieve a sense of personal identity."[43] Of principal importance to the reconstruction of the term's meaning is the notion of widening circles of *oikeiōsis*, which extends the force of self-love to ever more distant objects, and potentially the whole of humanity.[44]

Oikeiōsis thus easily assumes a cosmological dimension and can be linked to universal *sympatheia*, which places the individual within the global workings of nature.[45] In this broader meaning, *oikeiōsis* entered the conceptual world of Neoplatonism, whose version of Platonic philosophy in many ways responded to contemporary concerns.[46] For instance, in *Enn.*

Search for Personal Identity in Stoic Thought," *BRL* 55 (1972) 177–196; M. W. Blundell, "Parental Nature and Stoic οἰκείωσις," *AncPhil* 10 (1990) 221–242; G. Reydams-Schils, "Human Bonding and *Oikeiôsis* in Roman Stoicism," *OSAPh* 22 (2002) 221–251.

[43] Kerferd, *BRL* 55 (1972) 178–179. As pointed out by Bees, *Die Oikeiosislehre* 248–249 n.150, it is important to disengage Stoic *oikeiōsis* from Platonic *epimeleia heautou* ("care of the self").

[44] Attested in Hierocles, a second-century Stoic philosopher, who most likely drew on earlier sources; cf. Cic. *Off.* 1.17 for a similar concept of *gradus societatis*. The collocation *oikeiōsis pros theon* is not attested in Stoic sources; the notion of the divine as the *telos* of *oikeiōsis* is nevertheless prominent in Philo and Clement of Alexandria, which may indicate that it originated in Stoicism. Note Epictetus' notion that all men are brothers by virtue of being Zeus' progeny (*Diss.* 1.13.3).

[45] Bees, *Die Oikeiosislehre* 149–199.

[46] G. M. Gurtler, "Sympathy: Stoic Materialism and the Platonic Soul," in M. F. Wagner (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Nature: Studies in Plotinus' Enneads* (Albany 2002) 241–276, discusses the significance of Stoic *sympatheia* in Plotinus' thought, in particular the ambivalent role of the soul's *sympatheia* with the body. A. Pigler, "La reception plotinienne de la notion stoïcienne de sympathie universelle," *RPhA* 19 (2001) 45–78, argues that Plotinus, building on Stoicism, makes a case for a transcendent cause behind the organic unity—and *sympatheia*—of the natural world. See also A. Graeser, *Plotinus and*

3.5.1 Plotinus' use of *oikeiōsis* points to the positive revaluation of Nature: commenting on the treatment of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*, Plotinus says that *oikeiōsis* toward the beautiful is in accord with Nature and God, hence there is no fault in the admiration for the earthly beauty for those who are chaste, but deems it a sin when it tends toward the sexual (*mixis*). As in the Christian interpretation of *oikeiōsis*, it is the disinterestedness of the subject that converts a natural tendency into a philosophical virtue.[47] Pierre Hadot speaks of an un-Platonic "rehabilitation" of the sensible world and corporeality in Plotinus, which is usually explained as a reaction to Gnosticism.[48] This observation brings into focus the clash of Platonic and Stoic conceptual frameworks. On the one hand, in their appropriation of 'Stoic' material the Neoplatonists could piggyback on Plato's occasional descriptions of the world as a single organism (*Ti.* 30A–C, *Phdr.* 246B–D); on the other, Porphyry in *De abstinentia* acknowledges the Stoic provenance of *oikeiōsis*, but nevertheless makes full use of it to argue for a vegetarian diet.[49] The basic incompatibility of the Platonic and the Stoic approaches was obvious to the second-century anonymous commentator on Plato's *Theaetetus*, who insisted that the notion of justice must be grounded on the transcendental principle

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the Stoics (Leiden 1972), esp. 68–72, who remarks that even when using elements of the Stoic doctrine Plotinus "is certainly not aware that he is 'stoicizing', but would claim that he was merely making explicit the implications of the Platonic doctrine itself" (70).

[47] The crux of the matter (how can *oikeiōsis* be ultimately derived from self-love?) was already present in the uncertainty among the Stoics as to whether pleasure (*hēdonē*) is to be considered part of licit *oikeiōsis* (Pohlenz, *Grundfragen* 6–7). The word *oikeiōsis* also occurs elsewhere in Neoplatonic sources (Bees, *Die Oikeiosislehre* 161 ff., discusses Plot. *Enn.* 4.4.45.1, Iambl. *De myst.* 3.16).

[48] P. Hadot, "L'apport du néoplatonisme à la philosophie de la nature en Occident," in *Tradition und Gegenwart: Eranos Jahrbuch 1968* (Zurich 1970) 91–132, esp. 118–121.

[49] O. Goldin, "Porphyry, Nature, and Community," *HPhQ* 18 (2001) 353–371.

expressed by the idea of "similarity to God" (ὁμοιότης πρὸς τὸν θεόν), rather than the Stoics' "notorious" doctrine of nature-induced fellowship of the human race (πολυθρύλητος οἰκείωσις).[50] Yet this opposition was no longer relevant for Plotinus and his followers, who were comfortable with both 'Platonic' *homoiōsis* and 'Stoic' *oikeiōsis*.[51]

The use of the divine as an ethical paradigm, which, as Anthony Long points out, was made possible by a "radical fluidity in the concept and connotation of the divine" in Archaic and Classical Greece, was shared by all Greek philosophical systems.[52] Yet, as David Sedley emphasizes, for both Plato and Aristotle, assimilation to the divine is achieved only at the level of intellection, through contemplation;[53] it has little to do with practical ethics. Moreover, the notion of *homoiōsis theō kata to dunaton* is predicated on privileging soul over body, as well as one of the three parts of the soul (intellect) over the other two (spirit, appetitive drive). As expressed in the classic Platonic locus (*Tht.* 176B), *homoiōsis theō* is an "escape from here to there"; it amounts to a rejection of the material world.[54] The

[50] Anon. in Pl. *Theaet.* 5–7. On this text's stance toward *oikeiōsis* see Reydams-Schils, *OSAPh* 22 (2002) 240–243.

[51] As Merki, Ὁμοίωσις 12–17, 31, has shown, the Stoics, in their occasional use of the idea of *homoiōsis*, sought to ground it in the human kinship with the divine, and this link reappears in Neoplatonic sources, which consistently describe the *telos* of *homoiōsis* as the return to the original state of the soul. For discussion of the differences between the Stoic, uniform notion of *physis* and the Neoplatonic *physis*, whose corporeality is commensurate with the degree of 'fallenness', see P. Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2006) 50–75.

[52] A. Long, "Ancient Philosophy's Hardest Question: What to Make of Oneself," *Representations* 74 (2001) 19–38, at 21.

[53] D. Sedley, "The Ideal of Godlikeness," in G. Fine (ed.), *Plato* II *Ethics, Politics, Religion and the Soul* (Oxford 1999) 309–328.

[54] The emphasis on intellection is, on the whole, maintained by Plotinus (Sedley, in *Plato* II 322–324). J. Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca 1999) 52–71, points to the problematic standing of the *Theaetetus* passage in Plato's oeuvre; particularly atypical is the radical version of contemplative

Stoics assumed a rather different account of human nature: *oikeiōsis* replaces the logic of 'escape' by a logic of 'expansion' that obeys a natural, instinctual mechanism, in accord with the basic injunction of a life *kata physin* "in accord with Nature." A Stoic sage learns to accept the world that is governed by universal *sympatheia* and benign forces of 'familiarization'. The Neoplatonic acceptance of the conceptual metaphor of *oikeiōsis*, which went along with a much more nuanced view of the interaction between soul and matter than we find in Plato, signals an important change in the 'deep syntax' of Roman imperial culture.

Broadly put, this change had to do with a revaluation of the natural world that was underway in the post-classical period. Upheld by Hellenistic natural philosophies, a positive view of *physis* prevailed in the imperial period when Stoicism became, in Brent Shaw's formulation, the "latently dominant ideological system" or "the silent medium of thought" of the elite. Within this ideological system, Nature was the key metaphor that subtended a "divine economy in which every thing and person had its place and proper function."[55] The "natural functional harmony of the organism" was perceived as a patent guarantee of Nature's rationality. Similarly, Sergei Averintsev speaks of the

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life that it enjoins, which jars with the image of the politically engaged philosopher in the *Republic*. (It was no doubt in part for this reason that, as noted by Sedley, modern scholars have undervalued the importance of the concept of *homoiōsis theō* for the reception of the Platonic corpus in antiquity.) S. Lavecchia, "Die ὁμοίωσις θεῷ in Platons Philosophie," *PPh* 31 (2005) 321–391, without engaging with Annas' arguments, concludes that *homoiōsis theō* is, in fact, central to Plato's philosophy. On Plotinus' interpretation of *Tht.* 176A–B in *Enn.* 1.2 see D. J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2003) 8–10.

[55] B. Shaw, "The Divine Economy: Stoicism as Ideology," *Latomus* (1985) 16–54, at 18 and 37. For one example of the revaluation of the corporeal in the Hellenistic and imperial period, consider *psykhē* "soul," which was consistently theorized as embodied, both by philosophers (Epicureans and Stoics) and medical writers. Von Staden, in *Psyche and Soma* 79–116, traces the process by which the soul came to be viewed as 'somatic' and hence subject to the laws of *physis*.

universal cult of *physis* in place by the second century.[56] 2 Peter 1:4, the classic New Testament locus on 'participation in the divine nature', is an echo of this newly acquired significance of *physis*.[57] Even such a fierce critic of the Stoics as Plutarch, whose worldview Averintsev characterizes as "cosmological optimism," has a tendency to uphold the 'organic' and oppose, in an ideologically significant way, *oikeios* (one's own) vs. *allotrios* (other's).[58] In the words of Peter Brown, Plutarch espoused a "benevolent dualism," which assigned to the body a "rightful place in a great chain of being."[59] Such a view was a common property of imperial Roman Weltanschauung, most eloquently reflected in Stoic corporealism.[60]

In sum, the reception of the Christian view of the body by the Roman elites took place in a culture dominated by an

[56] S. S. Averintsev, *Plutarkh i antichnaia biografiia. K voprosu o meste klassika zhanra v istorii zhanra* (Moscow 1973) 67.

[57] S. Finlan, "Second Peter's Notion of Divine Participation," in S. Finlan and V. Kharlamov (eds.), *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Eugene 2006) 33–50, esp. 36–39.

[58] Averintsev, *Plutarkh* 67.

[59] Brown, *The Body* 27.

[60] A. Long, "Soul and Body in Stoicism," *Phronesis* 27 (1982) 34–57, at 37, speaks of "a great chain of being" in Stoicism. There is also a dualist strand in Stoicism, which imbues the human soul (as opposed to animal soul) with *logos*, a strictly divine attribute; it is precisely the rationality of the human soul that explains the disregard for the body that has informed the popular notion of 'Stoicism' (Long 52–53). This view of the human soul as partaking in the divine *logos* was inherited by Christianity. On different versions of 'dualism' in ancient philosophy, particularly within Platonism, see A. H. Armstrong, "Dualism Platonic, Gnostic, and Christian," in D. T. Runia (ed.), *Plotinus amid Gnostics and Christians* (Amsterdam 1984) 29–52, esp. 29–41 (repr. in *Hellenic and Christian Studies* [Aldershot 1990]). On the problem of the relationship of body and soul in Neoplatonism, and the proliferation of mediating levels between the two, see H. J. Blumenthal, "Some Problems about Body and Soul in Later Pagan Neoplatonism: Do they follow a pattern?" in H. D. Blume and F. Mann (eds.), *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für H. Dörrie* (Münster 1983) 75–84 (repr. in *Soul and Intellect: Studies in Plotinus and Later Neoplatonism* [Aldershot 1993]).

ideology of *physis* that was at odds with the dualism of Plato (although less so with its reformulation in Neoplatonism). As Averil Cameron remarks, the imagery of the organic body proved very serviceable to Christian discourse, as it "provided the potential for a totally integrated rhetoric of God, community, and individual. The psychological and ideological advantages of this integration would be hard to overestimate."[61] The concept of *oikeiōsis* was one of the important, yet hitherto overlooked, components of this organicist rhetoric.[62]

Admittedly, the Pauline notion of the flesh "suffused the body with disturbing associations" that could easily assume a Platonic tinge.[63] Yet, as remarked upon above, in so far as we view Christianity as an ideological system, rather than a philosophical or theological doctrine, contradictions are inevitable; it is precisely these vacillations that allow for historical change, and regional or cultural variation, within a religion. The contrast between East and West is a case in point. The argument has often been made that a more serene view of human nature prevailed in Eastern Christianity, where the "cosmological optimism" (to use Averintsev's phrase) of an imperial self-consciousness resonated longer than in the West. This general characterization is oversimplified and open to criticism. Yet, given our current state of knowledge, it is not devoid of heuristic value. In the words of R. A. Markus, although "Christians necessarily repudiated any divinization of the world," including "the pagan Stoic cosmic religion," "a residual trace of the holiness of the natural world as a whole was never lost in Eastern theology." It therefore "remained inhospitable to the stark way of opposing regenerate with unregenerate nature that dogged

[61] Cameron, *Christianity* 69.

[62] For *oikos* as a metaphor of God's relationship with humanity, cf. the Pauline view of believers as God's *oikeioi* (Eph 2:19, cf. Gal 6:10) and the prominent Eastern Christian metaphor of divine *oikonomia*.

[63] Brown, *Body* 48. For a discussion of the limitations of Paul's Platonism see T. K. Heckel, "Body and Soul in Saint Paul," in *Psyche and Soma* 117–131.

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Western theology."[64] Similarly, Yuri Lotman speaks of the widespread perception of Nature as 'divine' among the Eastern Slavs.[65] In this light, Pierre Hadot's observation that "there is no longer a divine presence in Nature"—in the wake of the Christian mechanistic representation of Nature as God's creation—may not be applicable to the Christian East.[66] The fact that the discourse of divinization, so prominent in Eastern Christian theology, was until very recently regarded as something of a scandal in the Catholic West points to the reality of this conceptual rift.[67] While in the fourth century these differences were not quite as pronounced, it is there that the origins of this rift are to be sought.

IV. Conclusion: *Physis* in the fourth century

In conclusion, I return to Gregory of Nazianzus and the

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[64] R. A. Markus, *Christianity in the Roman World* (London 1974) 165. Maximus the Confessor, in particular, contributed "unambiguously to the affirmation of the constitutive status and function of the material order in God's scheme of bringing the universe to perfection" (A. Cooper, *The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor* [New York 2005] 3). Cf. L. Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood 1985] 93: "social life and virtues are seen by Maximus in the light of the nature (*physis*) of man, the nature that is common to all men, and the principle of which (the *logos* of nature) excludes any split or separation within the individual or between different human beings."

[65] J. Lotman, "Die Frühaufklärung und die Entwicklung des gesellschaftlichen Denkens in Russland," in H. Grasshoff and U. Lehmann (eds.), *Studien zur Geschichte des russischen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts* III (Berlin 1968) 93–119, 557–559, quotation on 109. Contrast the account of Eastern Christian 'Platonism' in, e.g., de Vogel, *VigChr* 39 (1985) 37–47: "Without being disloyal to this world, they [East Christians] truly keep their distance from the visible things, penetrated by the conviction that the Invisible is so much better" (47).

[66] Hadot, *The Veil* 84.

[67] Note that the notion of *deificatio* makes occasional appearance in the works of Augustine, where, however, it is to be interpreted in a strictly Neoplatonic context; see G. Folliet, "'Deificari in otio'. Augustin, *Epistula 10,2*," *RecAug* 2 (1962) 225–236.

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intellectual world of the fourth century and focus on several passages that show that the ideology of benevolent *physis* remained part of the cultural mainstream. This is perhaps nowhere so obvious as at the highpoint of Gregory's refutation of Julian in *Oration* 4. As Gregory seeks to demonstrate, the Greek classics, when used for religious instruction, contradict the basic view of the world that both Gregory and Julian share,[68] that of the harmonious universe governed by the forces of benign nature. Rehearsing the rhetorical form of superlative statement, familiar both from Greek poetry and the wisdom tradition,[69] Gregory proclaims (120):

ἄριστον ὁμόνοια καὶ τὸ συμφρονεῖν ἀλλήλοις πόλεις καὶ δήμους καὶ οἰκίας καὶ τοὺς καθ' ἕκαστον, νόμῳ καὶ τάξει φύσεως ἑπομένους ἢ πάντα διεῖλέ τε καὶ συνέδησε καὶ τὸ πᾶν τοῦτο κόσμον ἕνα ἐκ πλειόνων πεποίηκε.

The best thing is concord and mutual agreement between cities, nations, households, and individuals, who all follow the law and order of Nature which has both distinguished and bound together everything and made this entire and manifold world a unity.

Julian's failure to act on this commonsensical understanding, as seen in his opposition to the Christians, was his greatest mistake: only his inability to grasp the absolute primacy of the *oikeion*—what is one's own by nature—could have brought him to undertake a fatal campaign against the Persians, having first alienated the Christians in his own realm. For, as Gregory phrases it in the language of *oikeion* vs. *allotrion*, "civil war is more unnatural than war waged on foreigners, as the eating of one's own flesh is more to be shunned than the eating of the flesh of another" (109). While maintaining its supreme ideo-

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[68] See Kurmann, *Gregor* 407, on Gregory's rapprochement with the "pagan" worldview in this passage.

[69] Cf. the opening of Pind. *Ol.* 1, "Water is best" (ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ). On the "riddles of the superlative" (τί μάλιστα) in the Greek wisdom tradition see I. M. Konstantakos, "Amasis, Bias and the Seven Sages as Riddlers," *WJA* 29 (2005) 11–46, at 20–22.

logical value, the *oikeion* can assume different meanings. In *Or.* 5.100, it refers to Gregory's attachment to Hellenic letters (*hoi logoi*) of which Julian sought to deprive the Christians. In *Ep.* 10, written in the same period, it stands for Gregory's Christian faith. In *Or.* 4.47, the world is described as God's *oikeion*, which he governs and heals, even if "those undergoing treatment are annoyed" (κἂν οἱ θεραπευόμενοι δυσχεραίνωσιν). The meaning of *oikeion* has come to exceed any simple definition of what constitutes the self and its immediate surround. It is now a matter of the individual's agency (*prohairesis*) and self-conscious, 'philosophical', construction of one's life.

Gregory's employment of an organicist rhetoric is not an obvious development within a doctrine that has embraced, indeed placed at its center, the notion of a complete overhaul of the natural world effected by Christ's incarnation. This rhetoric also implies a polemic with Neoplatonism, for which, inasmuch as Nature is clad in traditional religious practices to avoid being exposed to the many, "to renounce traditional cults, as the Christians do, means prohibiting oneself from knowing Nature."[70] Gregory's response in *Oration* 4 is that Greek religious practices are culturally specific and therefore have no claim to being "natural."

In *Or.* 6.8, Gregory refers to the insidious power of the *oikeion* when describing the paradox of divine providence, which first alienated some members of the Christian community in Nazianzus but then brought them back into the fold. The irrational ease of reconciliation, preceded by a forced, unnatural act of revolt, can be paralleled in the natural processes of the material world:

> ὢ τοῦ παραδόξου τῆς ἰατρείας … καθάπερ τῶν φυτῶν ἃ βίᾳ χερσὶ μετασπώμενα, εἶτα ἀφιέμενα πρὸς ἑαυτὰ πάλιν ἀνατρέχει καὶ τὴν πρώτην ἑαυτῶν φύσιν, καὶ δείκνυσι τὸ οἰκεῖον, βίᾳ μὲν ἀποκλινόμενα, οὐ βίᾳ δὲ ἀνορθούμενα.

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[70] Hadot, *The Veil* 67–68.

> The paradox of healing! … compare the plants which, when pulled back forcefully by hands and then released, return swiftly to their proper state—the one that is theirs by nature—and show forth their *oikeion*: although turned aside by force, it is not by force that they become straight again.

In this passage, as often, the organic is the paragon of that which defies—and does not require—explanation. One might say that Gregory here applies a quintessential ideological operation: a belief is correct because it is ingrained in nature. Yet we must keep in mind the powerful soteriological prospect promised by a firm grounding of Christian philosophy in the natural world. In his *Life* of Basil, Gregory of Nyssa has Basil describe the fallen state of the world "as the common exile of all nature" (κοινὴν τῆς φύσεως ἐξορίαν, 10). Contrast the import of this phrase with the Platonic image of the body as the prison-house of the soul: what is to be aimed at is not heroic 'escape' by an individual philosopher, but patient endurance of exile, which, precisely inasmuch as it is shared by all, must be temporary. For Gregory of Nazianzus, as well as for Basil, *physis*—whether that of the human, or that of the world—is eminently redeemable.[71]

In conclusion, I would like to ponder a very different interpretation of *oikeiōsis* by Themistius, generally regarded as a moderate Platonist. For the common late antique view of *physis* as a force that unites the microcosm and the macrocosm, wrapping the individual in the benign workings of Nature, may in itself invite very different kinds of ethics.

In *Oration* 6—dating from the mid-360s, and thus contemporary with Gregory's key pronouncements in *Orations* 4 and

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[71] P. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley 1994) 221–222, points to the importance of the concept of nature for Basil, as well as its Stoic background: "Human nature, in both its potential and its destiny, should make a life of virtue easy" (222). Gregory of Nyssa's view of the material world is generally less positive, yet for him, too, *physis* stands for "im Grunde nichts anderes als *eikōn theou* oder *homoiōsis theō* als ursprüngliches Zustand" (Merki, Ὁμοίωσις 96; see also 126–128 on his appropriation of *Tht.* 176A–B, perhaps mediated by Plotinus *Enn.* 1.2).

5—Themistius strikes a distinctly 'Stoic' note in his praise of the new emperors Valens and Valentianus. The mutual brotherly affection exhibited by the emperors, their *philadelphia*, is a "mark" (σημεῖον) of the essential imperial virtue, *philanthrōpia* (*Or.* 6.91c–d). For "goodwill (εὔνοια) toward one's family members is the beginning and the basic constituent (ἀρχὴ καὶ στοιχεῖον) of goodwill toward all humanity (πρὸς ἅπαντας ἀνθρώπους)." A philosophical gloss follows: "For nature, privileging the human beyond the rest of the animals and binding us together with all our kith and kin (πρὸς ἅπαν συνδέουσα τὸ ὁμόφυλον), has cast its prelude beginning from those nearby and from the family hearth (ἐκ τῶν ἐγγύθεν καὶ ἀφ' ἑστίας καταβέβληται τὰ προοίμια), so that the lover of one's household follows the lover of one's brother, he in turn is followed by the lover of one's fatherland, and that one is fol-lowed by the lover of humanity." Indeed, the benign force of one's inborn nature is irresistible: "it is impossible for the one caught in the doorway of nature not to become subject to its forward motion (καὶ οὐκ ἔνεστιν ἐν τοῖς προθύροις τῆς φύσεως ἑαλωκότα μὴ γενέσθαι καὶ προϊούσης κατήκοον)."

The appearance of a 'Stoic' notion in a 'Platonist' author confirms once again that such hard-and-fast distinctions do not hold for the intellectual world of the fourth century. It is undeniable, however, that the concept of *oikeiōsis* takes on a Platonic coloring in this passage. The *telos* of the expanding circles of *philia* is love of humanity—God's most distinctive virtue, and hence the one most appropriate for an emperor. Inasmuch as *philanthrōpia* is defined by Themistius as the supreme quality of God, love for the fellow human can be thought of as mimesis of the divine.[72]

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[72] See L. Daly, "Themistius' Concept of *Philanthropia*," *Byzantion* 45 (1975) 22–40, on Themistius' conceptualization of *philanthrōpia* and its close alignment with the idea of *homoiōsis theō* (*Or.* 15.188b, 19.227a). More gen-erally, on *philanthrōpia* as the preeminent imperial virtue see H. Hunger, "ΦΙΛΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΑ. Eine griechische Wortprägung auf ihrem Weg von Aischylos bis Theodoros Metochites," *AnzWien* 100 (1962) 1–20 (repr. in

Themistius' interpretation of *oikeiōsis* permits us to see both what he shared with his Christian contemporaries (a positive view of *physis*, the expansive logic of familiar attraction), and what made Christianity distinctive—and distinctly un-Platonic. In particular, while the principle of the mimesis of the divine is also important in Christian sources (most importantly, in the hagiographical paradigm of *imitatio Christi*), it was not the only, or the most significant, mode of approximating the divine in Eastern Christianity. In terms of Blumenberg's approach to historical semantics, 'imitation' was not the chief metaphor that informed the concept of *theōsis*. In the conceptual world of the Christian East, the mechanism of saintly imitation is supplemented by the dynamic of *oikeiōsis pros theon* or 'familiarity' with the divine, both pre-given and subject to self-conscious cultivation. It is this conceptual metaphor, rather than the Platonic injunction of *homoiōsis theō*, that should be seen as the principal foundation of the idea of *theōsis*, as it was put forward by Gregory of Nazianzus.[73]

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