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Gregory of Nyssa's Engagement with Conceptual Metaphors: The Analogies of "Father," "Son," and "Begetting" in the *Against Eunomius*

Isabella Sandwell

Abstract

This paper explores what Gregory of Nyssa is doing when he claims in the *Against Eunomius* that his use of the language of "father," "son" and "begetting" for the divine is supported by the "apprehension of ordinary people" and by the "judgement of nature." It uses conceptual metaphor theory in order to show that while Gregory recognised the role of ordinary human language in comprehending the divine, and so engaged with normal conceptual mappings from the domain of kinship, he also sought to transform those mappings in order to transform peoples' thought processes and thus how they conceptualized the divine.

Key words

Conceptual metaphor; doctrine; Gregory of Nyssa; Eunomius

Introduction.

Gregory of Nyssa's three books *Against Eunomius* (*Contra Eunomium*) were written between 380 and 383/4 in response to Eunomius of Cyzicus' *Apology for the Apology*, which itself was written to answer Basil of Caesarea's own *Against Eunomius*, which in turn had been a response to Eunomius' *First Apology*.¹ The purpose of Gregory's *Against Eunomius* was to

¹ Books one and two were probably published in 381 with the third book appearing a little later in 383/4. For modern English translations of each book of the *Against Eunomius*, see those by Stuart G. Hall in: Lucas F. Mateo-Seco, and Juan L. Bastero, eds. *El "Contra Eunomium I" en la produccion literaria de Gregorio de Nisa: VI Coloquio Internacional sobre Gregorio de Nisa* (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1988); Lenka Karfiková, Scot Douglas, and Johannes Zachhuber, eds. *Gregory of Nyssa: "Contra Eunomium II": An English Version with Supporting Studies*. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 82 (Leiden: Brill, 2007); and Johan Leemans, and Matthieu Cassin, eds. *Gregory of Nyssa: "Contra Eunomium III": An English Translation*

combat Eunomius' Anomoian doctrine and his attacks on the doctrinal works of Gregory's elder brother Basil of Caesarea. In it, Gregory defends the creed formulated at Nicaea in 325 against Eunomius' position that the Second Person was unlike the First Person, subordinate and created in time by arguing that the First and Second Persons of the Trinity were distinct existences (*hypostases*) with one substance or essence (*homoousios*). At the same time, Gregory asserts the apophatic position of the unknowability of the divine essence in the face of the Anomoian claim that the essences of the First and Second Persons could be known from the names Unbegotten and Begotten.²

Near the start of book one of this work Gregory asserts the importance of the language of father and son for understanding the relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. After quoting an extended doctrinal statement that Eunomius had provided in his *Apology for an Apology*, Gregory tells us that what he most objects to in it is that Eunomius “passes over in silence the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and instead of ‘Father’ he speaks of some ‘highest and most authentic being,’ instead of ‘the Son’ of ‘one that exists because of that being and after that being.’”³ Gregory argues that this is misguided because it means that Eunomius rejects language for the divine that is sanctioned by both scripture and the councils of the Church, the two main sources of authority in the period.⁴ However, Gregory also adds one other factor that makes the language of father and

with Commentary and Supporting Studies. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 124 (Leiden: Brill, 2014). For the Greek text, see: Werner Jaeger (ed.) *Contra Eunomium libri*. Revised edition. 2 vols. Gregorii Nysseni Opera 1-2 (Leiden: Brill: 1960). For an excellent introduction to the *Against Eunomius* see: Matthew R. Lootens, “Gregory of Nyssa’s *Contra Eunomium*: Context, Method, and Theology” (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2015).

² On the thought of Eunomius see: Richard P. C. Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially Chapter 5; Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: Dynamis in Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology* (Washington D. C. The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 173-219; and Lootens, “Gregory of Nyssa’s,” 31–44. See also: Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), 144–149, with references.

³ *CE* 1.156 (Jaeger, I.74). See Lootens, “Gregory of Nyssa’s,” 127 on this point. On Eunomius’ doctrinal statement quoted by Gregory here, see Lootens, “Gregory of Nyssa’s,” 118–125. On Gregory’s response to the statement, see Lootens, “Gregory of Nyssa’s,” 126–153.

⁴ *CE* 1.155–157 (Jaeger, I.73–74).

son compatible with “doctrines of the universal church” that might be less expected.⁵ This is that

all men when they hear the titles “father” and “son” immediately recognize from the very names their intimate and natural relation to each other. Community of nature is inevitably suggested by these titles. So, it is to avoid these concepts of the true Father and the only begotten Son that he [Eunomius] stealthily deprives his hearers of the sense of intimacy which the names bring in with them and, forsaking the inspired words, he uses those coined for ruining the truth to express his statement of doctrine.⁶

Gregory thus places understandings of words that are “immediately recognizable to all” alongside the authority of scripture and church councils as important in sanctioning the use of the language of father and son for the divine.⁷

The same kind of approach can be seen when Gregory identifies the next problem in Eunomius’ doctrinal statement. This is that it suggests that each Person of the Trinity uses its activity to produce the next Person, who can then be called the “work” of the preceding Person, and that each work is ordered in rank according to its place in the line of production.⁸

Gregory argues that one of the ways we might be able to understand “[b]y what logic” Eunomius has come to this position is by looking at how he uses “analogies from the rest of

⁵ CE 1.161 (Jaeger, I.75).

⁶ CE 1.159–160 (Jaeger, I.74–75). For discussion of this passage and the importance of the name “father” in the CE, see Virginia Burrus, “*Begotten not Made.*” *Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 107–110.

⁷ Ramsey Macmullen notes the importance doctrinal language be considered “general” or “standard” because this is what *katholikos* means. See Ramsey MacMullen, *Voting about God in Early Church Councils* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 69. Lootens, “Gregory of Nyssa’s,” 188–194 has some important discussion of Gregory’s appeal to the ‘common usage’ of language and how it relates to his and Eunomius’ theories of language.

⁸ CE 1.212 (Jaeger, I.88).

what is observed in creation” to support what he says.⁹ At this point, Gregory issues a note of caution saying that it is problematic “to make guesses based on lower things about the transcendent,” and says that he was only doing so because it might explain why Eunomius had misunderstood the situation.¹⁰ One such analogy is that of the “birth of animals” because “if he [Eunomius] has observed animal generation” it might seem that “some things do originate through each other.”¹¹ However, Gregory then goes on to argue that this analogy does not really support Eunomius’ argument because even in that case we do not really see “one thing originating from another since the nature is unchanged in the offspring” and “[t]he things which originate from others are of exactly the same kind as those they originate from.”¹² Gregory then goes on to argue that what Eunomius is trying to do with his arguments about natural reproduction is to prevent people from reaching the conclusion they would normally reach about it, which is “the thought of their intimate connexion.”¹³ He then goes on to tell us why it is important to identify how people normally understand something saying,

For who does not know that every argument takes its first principles from things manifest and generally agreed, and thereby brings assurance in matters in dispute, and no unknown thing would ever be apprehended, if things assented to did not lead us by the hand to the understanding of the obscure? But if the things we take as first principles of argument for the clarification of things unknown were in conflict with the apprehension of ordinary people, they would hardly be the means to clarifying the unknown.¹⁴

⁹ *CE* 1.212 and 1.213 (Jaeger, I.88 and 88–89).

¹⁰ *CE* 1.213 (Jaeger, I.88–89).

¹¹ *CE* 1.214 (Jaeger, I.89).

¹² *CE* 1.215 (Jaeger, I.89).

¹³ *CE* 1.216 (Jaeger, I.89).

¹⁴ *CE* 1.219 (Jaeger, I.90).

So, whereas Gregory started this passage by saying that he was going to look at analogies from the human world only to show where Eunomius had gone wrong, he now emphasizes that identifying “the apprehension of ordinary people” of terms being used is important as the basis for “clarifying the unknown” and argues that this ordinary human usage supports his own argument rather than that made by Eunomius.

In this paper, I want to explore what Gregory is doing, when he claims that his use of kinship analogies is the one that is “immediately recognizable to all” and fits with “the apprehension of ordinary people.” I will argue that normal scholarly views of Gregory’s use of analogies do not tell us all there is to know on this topic. Instead I will turn to the fields of cognitive linguistics and conceptual metaphor theory to provide new insights into what Gregory is doing with these claims. I will also explore whether Gregory is really correct in saying that “natural affinity” is what most people will take from the analogies of “father,” “son” and “begetting.” I will show in more detail what Gregory really means by natural affinity and, using the work of Mark Turner in his *Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor and Criticism* (1987), I will argue that this is not what people normally map from analogies involving parents and their children.

1. Approaches to Gregory’s use of analogies of father and son for the trinity.

It is likely that Gregory’s concern with what is “immediately recognizable to all” partly arose from his brother Basil’s interest in establishing common usage of words in his debates with

Eunomius.¹⁵ However, the fact that such claims are so central to the *Against Eunomius* also suggests that appeal to the common usage of words has real significance for him too. Thus at 1.225–230 Gregory justifies continuing to refute Eunomius’ views despite the fact that they are the kind of “things as are thought by most people to be of themselves false.”¹⁶ Or again at 1.642–644 he talks of the importance of recognizing the “ordinary and accepted meaning,” the “generally held understandings,” the “customary usage” and “common understanding” of the term “Unbegotten.”¹⁷ The importance of such claims can also be seen from the fact that, as in the example from 1.212–219, it is also quite common to find Eunomius’ concern with the “apprehension of ordinary people” to be connected with what people learnt from observing actual kinship relations.¹⁸ Thus, at the start of book three, Gregory suggests that he and Eunomius both agree that “it is the infallible criterion of truth that these two things coincide with each other, the physical order and the testimony of heavenly knowledge confirming the judgement of nature,” but the problem is that they disagree over what the “natural order” actually implies about the meaning of the term “son.”¹⁹ As he says,

For if the order of nature, as Eunomius himself affirms, attributes the title to the Son because he was begotten, and so the connexion of the term comes about through the relationship of Begotten to Begetter, why does he wrench the meaning of “Son” from its natural affinity, and change the relationship to one of “Made” and “Maker”?²⁰

¹⁵ See Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 143–174.

¹⁶ *CE* 1.225 (Jaeger, I.92).

¹⁷ *CE* 1.642–644 (Jaeger, I.211). Read with Lootens “Gregory of Nyssa’s,” 195–196.

¹⁸ Jaeger, I.88–90.

¹⁹ *CE* 3.1.6 (Jaeger II, 5). On this problem in the *Against Eunomius*, see Lootens, “Gregory of Nyssa’s,” 106–107.

²⁰ *CE* 3.1.20 (Jaeger, II.10).

This echoes the way Gregory started book one with arguments about common usage of terms and again shows the importance of these ideas to Gregory. In fact, we find these two ideas of the ordinary meanings of words and what can be observed from actual begetting repeatedly connected when Gregory combats Eunomius' claim that "the mode of likeness ... follows the mode of generation."²¹ Thus in one example in book one Gregory argues that this claim of Eunomius is misguided because it would lead to the ridiculous idea that the "many different species of beasts" that reproduced in the same way, such as "man, dog, camel, mouse, leopard and the rest" have the same essence.²² In contrast Gregory argues that it "is reasonable and apparent in nature, that the begotten is like its begetter."²³ As he says,

What is born does not resemble the form or mode of its birth. In animal generation birth is the bodily separation, which brings into the open the animal that was perfected by formation in the entrails, but what is born is man or horse or calf or whatever it is that arises by the generative process. How then the mode of likeness of what is born follows the mode of generation, let Eunomius tell us, or someone trained by him in obstetrics. Birth is one thing, the result of birth another.²⁴

For Gregory, this means that Eunomius' view must "[t]o those able to consider the meanings of words with any accuracy ... surely appear utterly unintelligible."²⁵ What is also noteworthy is that Gregory seems to emphasize that what is primarily produced in begetting is another animal of the same species as the parent.

²¹ *CE* 1.446 (Jaeger, I.156).

²² *CE* 1.448 (Jaeger, I.156–157).

²³ *CE* 1.450 (Jaeger, I.157).

²⁴ *CE* 1.453–454 (Jaeger, I.158). See also *CE* 1.458 (Jaeger, I.159).

²⁵ *CE* 1.451 (Jaeger, I.157).

This can be seen explicitly a little later when Gregory uses the example of Adam and Abel to show how two beings could have been brought into existence in different ways, the former created by God and the latter by the “coupling” of Adam and Eve, and yet have exactly the same human nature. As he says, “for humanity is not altered in the case of Adam and Abel by the change in the way they are generated, since neither the order nor the manner of their coming imports any change in nature, but by the common consent of sober men their state is the same, and no one would deny this unless he is badly in need of hellebore.”²⁶ We see a similar pattern in book three where Gregory justifies his view that there is a distinction between begetting and being by referring to what the Lord tells us in the gospel of John when it describes how the mother’s pain at childbirth turns to joy once the baby is born (Jn 16.21). As Gregory says, this passage first tells us about “the birth, which we perceive in the child-bearing, and secondly that which is produced by the child-bearing; the birth is not the man, but the man comes by birth.”²⁷ Thus “we do not identify the man with the child-bearing but accept the proper meaning of each word.”²⁸ He then goes on to use the example of Adam and Abel, to show that two humans, one made by the “one who constructed the universe” and the other begotten by Adam in “accordance with the principle of human begetting,” could have the same nature.²⁹ What he says is important:

The two, Adam and Abel, are one in the definition of their nature (*phusis*), but in the personal characteristics attributed to each, the distinction between them is not ambiguous. It is therefore incorrect to say Adam begot an essential being (*ousia*) different from his own; but rather he begot from himself another self (*ex heautou*

²⁶ CE 1.497 (Jaeger, I.170).

²⁷ CE 3.1.70 (Jaeger, II.29).

²⁸ CE 3.1.72 (Jaeger, II.29).

²⁹ CE 3.1.73 (Jaeger, II.30).

egenēsen allon heauton), in whom was born simultaneously all that defined the being (*logos* of the *ousia*) of the one who did the begetting.³⁰

What we see here is a very strong statement of what is meant by natural affinity: the generation of “another self.” Johannes Zachhuber, in an important but flawed study of human nature in Gregory, discusses the passage just cited and argues that it shows Gregory using the analogy of human nature and of human species to explain how the divine could be two distinct entities, but have the same nature.³¹ In general terms I agree with what Zachhuber says about human nature in Gregory, although I do not accept his particular argument that Gregory subscribed to a model of the Trinity as three coordinate realities. One of the problems is that Zachhuber argues that the passage above does not suggest that Gregory thinks that Abel derives his human nature from Adam via generation, or that he thinks the Second Person of the Trinity derives his “divine” nature from the First Person.³² It seems to me that Zachhuber must be wrong on this, and that precisely what Gregory wants to map from the example of Adam and Abel to the Trinity is that the Son derived the divine nature (nature of the divine species) from his Father just as Abel derived his nature of the human species from Adam.³³ Thus, for Gregory thinking of Abel from Adam as, to paraphrase, “human from human” could be used to illustrate how the First and Second Persons of the Trinity were, quoting the creed of Nicaea, “Light from Light, true God from true God.”³⁴ The question that I want to ask is whether Gregory can really have been correct in this view that what fathers and sons share, and what the former above all else passes on to the latter, was

³⁰ *CE* 3.1.75 (Jaeger, II.30).

³¹ Johannes Zachhuber *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Leden: Brill, 2000), 99–100 and 101 for this passage. See 94–108 for how it relates to other similar passages. For a critique of Zachhuber, see Richard Cross, “Gregory of Nyssa on Universals,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 56 (2002): 372–410.

³² Zachhuber, *Human Nature*, 100–101 and 265.

³³ For a critique of Zachhuber’s denial of derivation in Gregory’s model, see Ayres, *Nicaea*, 205–207.

³⁴ *CE* 3.1.85 (Jaeger, II.33), quoting from the creed of Nicaea.

the nature of the human species? And if not, what is Gregory doing when he repeatedly claims that he has common understanding of fatherhood and sonship on his side?

The normal approach of modern scholarship on Gregory's use of human language and human analogies for the divine is to argue that Gregory did not "put much trust" in any analogy about God and did not really think that "our theological language ... depends upon invoking a non-religious context in which the words have familiar meaning."³⁵ This view has some merit and does capture some of what Gregory says about his use of analogy, particularly in book two of the *Against Eunomius*.³⁶ Here, and elsewhere in his writings, Gregory outlines a well-developed theory of language that can be described as conventionalist in opposition to Eunomius who claimed that names reveal realities.³⁷ As a result, for Gregory human language can only have a limited role in telling us about God and, as Lootens points out, common usage of words is "merely a starting point for thinking about God."³⁸ This is all valid and follows normal scholarly practice of exploring Gregory in his own terms. However, in this article I want to take a different approach that might allow us to get a different perspective on Gregory's references to meanings of words that are "immediately recognizable to all." In particular, I want to follow the work of a number of scholars, such as Mary T. DesCamp, Eve E. Sweetser, Zoltán Kövecses, John Sanders and Antonio Barcelona, who have begun to explore how cognitive linguistics and conceptual metaphor theory, as developed as developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, can help

³⁵ For the first, short quote, see R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 737. The second quotation is from Catherine Osborne, "Literal or Metaphorical: Some Issues of Language in the Arian Controversy," in *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity*. Essays in Tribute to Christopher George Stead in Celebration of his Eightieth Birthday 9th April 1993. Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 19, ed. Lionel R. Wickham and Caroline P. Bammel (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 158. I shall discuss her arguments in more detail later. For more recent expressions of these views, see Ayres, *Nicaea*, 284-289 and 344-383 and Lootens, "Gregory of Nyssa's," 177-188 and 189.

³⁶ On book two, see Osborne, "Literal or Metaphorical," 160-161.

³⁷ For this, see Lootens, "Gregory of Nyssa's," 163-202; Ayres, *Nicaea*, 273-301 and Morwenna Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2008), 234-246.

³⁸ Lootens, "Gregory of Nyssa's," 193.

us find new perspectives on the Christian use of analogies for God.³⁹ This obviously does not replace looking at Gregory in the context of his own theories of language, but I hope to show that it provides a new way of looking at old problems in Gregory's thought. A fascinating project would be to look at how Gregory's and Eunomius' approaches to language, and the knowledge it conveys of God, relate to modern cognitive science, but there is not space for that here.

For cognitive linguists there are many concepts that are "semantically non-autonomous" because they cannot be known by direct experience and so "cannot be structured (understood) in terms of their own domain of knowledge without interference from other unrelated domains."⁴⁰ As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson put it, "[m]etaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be understood totally: our feelings, aesthetic experience, moral practices and spiritual awareness."⁴¹ For cognitive linguistics human minds thus have a natural tendency to map from "more intersubjectively accessible" conceptual domains, that is those that are built up from our embodied experience

³⁹ Mary T. Descamp and Eve E Sweetser, "Metaphors for God: Why and How Do Our Choices Matter for Humans? The Application of Contemporary Cognitive Linguistics Research to the Debate on God and Metaphor," *Pastoral Psychology*, 53 (2005): 207–238; Zoltán Kövecses, "The Biblical Story Retold: A Cognitive Linguistic Perspective," in *Cognitive Linguistics: Convergence and Expansion*, ed. Mario Bdar, Stefan Th. Gries and Milena Z. Fuchs (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011) 325–354; John Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh: How Embodiment and Culture Shape the Way We Think About Truth, Morality, and God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016); and Antonio Barcelona, "The Metaphorical and Metonymic Understanding of the Trinitarian Dogma," *International Journal Studies* 3.1 (2003): 1–27. The classic work of conceptual metaphor theory is George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we Live By*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003). But see also George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

⁴⁰ For the general principle, see: George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 113; Markus Tendahl, *A Hybrid Theory of Metaphor. Relevance Theory and Cognitive Linguistics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 127; Joseph Grady, "A Typology of Motivation for Conceptual Metaphor: Correlation vs. Resemblance," in *Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics* ed. Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. and Gerard J. Steen (Amsterdam and Philadelphia PA: John Benjamins Publishing, 1999), 86; Lieven Boeve and Kurt Feyeaerts, "Religious Metaphors in a Post-Modern Culture: Transverse Links Between Apophatic Theology and Cognitive Linguistics," in *Metaphor and God Talk*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Kurt Feyeaerts (Bern: Lang: 1999), 168; Mary T. Des Camps and Eve E. Sweetser, "Motivating Biblical Metaphors for God," in *Cognitive Linguistic Explorations in the Biblical Studies*, ed. Bonnie Howe and Joel B. Green (Berlin, Munich, Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 215; and Barcelona, "The Metaphorical," 1 and 21. For the quotation, see Boeve and Faeyerts, "Religious Metaphors," 179.

⁴¹ 1980: 193 See also George Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 212 (and see also 203).

and other primal experiences from early childhood, on to “less intersubjectively accessible” ones.⁴² An example would be the way we map from the conceptual domain of seeing to that of understanding in the conceptual metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING.⁴³ Seeing is a complete conceptual domain in human minds with its own structure made up of a number of features that are abstracted from the experience of seeing that we all share due to the shared embodied experience of seeing. For example, our conceptual domain of seeing contains information such as “what we see depends on where we stand and where we direct our gaze,” and “when we do not want to see something, we can close our eyes.”⁴⁴ Because, as Mark Turner puts it, “a great deal of our information comes from seeing” we then make a correlation between seeing and understanding which means that these features of the conceptual domain seeing can then be mapped onto the less “intersubjectively available” conceptual domain of understanding to give it structure and allow us to conceptualize it.⁴⁵ It is this correlative mapping that then “motivates” us to create the individual metaphorical expressions that we do as in “taking a different perspective” on an issue or “closing our eyes to a problem.”⁴⁶

God would be a prime example of a concept that “cannot be understood totally” on its own because, as Boeve and Feysaerts put it, “it is *semantically non-autonomous* ... in the most radical way” and so only be understood in terms of other, more “intersubjectively available” domains.⁴⁷ As a result, Boeve and Feysaerts argue that “all knowledge about God is necessarily metaphorical” and we must thus take the analogies we use for the divine very seriously.⁴⁸ The few cognitive linguists who have worked on early Christian material have

⁴² Sweetser and Descamps, ‘Motivating biblical,’ 10.

⁴³ Mark Turner, *Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor, Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 17.

⁴⁴ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 17.

⁴⁵ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 17.

⁴⁶ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 17–18.

⁴⁷ Boeve and Feysaerts, “Religious Metaphors,” 179.

⁴⁸ Boeve and Feysaerts, “Religious Metaphors,” 179.

often noted the importance of the language of fatherhood for God and have tried to understand the kinds of mappings that are made from the domain of fatherhood to the divine in biblical and other Christian texts.⁴⁹ The problem with the scholarship so far is that it has simply tended to describe how Christian authors used kinship analogies and spot common patterns in what they take from these analogies rather than exploring whether there are more general, cross-cultural ways of mapping from the conceptual domain of kinship to other domains as was the case in *UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING*. Kövecses and Barcelona both refer to a work that might be of relevance here: Mark Turner's work in his *Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor and Criticism* (1987), which looks at kinship analogies in literature from the Bible through to the 20th century and tried to identify the conceptual mappings that underlie them.⁵⁰ However, neither Kövecses or Barcelona engage with Turner's work in any depth and what they do say about it seems to contradict what one finds if one reads Turner's work.⁵¹ In this article, I will suggest that Turner's work can give us insight into how people normally map kinship terms in analogy. The question will then become whether Gregory's use of kinship language fits with the patterns identified by Turner as those most commonly found, and if not what that means for his claim that his understanding of the father-son relationship as signifying natural affinity is really the one shared by all.

One problem with cognitive approaches is that they tend to assert the complete dominance of human language in religious discourse because they argue that religious language works in exactly the same way as any other kind of language and thus that we use the same cognitive processes and "conceptual apparatus" when dealing with religious ideas as when dealing with more "mundane topics."⁵² Boeve and Feysaerts have begun to explore the

⁴⁹ For example, see Descamp and Sweetser, "Metaphors for God" and "Motivating Biblical" and Kövecses, "The Biblical Story."

⁵⁰ Kövecses, "The Biblical Story," 329 and Barcelona, "The Metaphorical," 3.

⁵¹ On the latter point, see footnotes 54 and 65 below.

⁵² For the quote see: Sanders, *Theology in the Flesh*, 175 and 4–5.

problems with this in relation to the works of early Christian authors and try to find rapprochement between Christian approach to language for the divine and those of cognitive linguistics. However, they do not tackle one important issue. This is the fact that one of the goals of authors such as Gregory was precisely to transform how people thought about God so that they could become less human, more able to think in heavenly ways, and thus move a step closer to the goal of divinization.⁵³ We have seen that scholars of Gregory normally tackle this issue by arguing that “our theological language” does not depend upon “invoking a non-religious context in which the words have familiar meaning” because it requires different modes of comprehension.⁵⁴ However, in this article, I shall suggest a different approach. One of the key claims that cognitive linguists make is that metaphor primarily exists at the mental level of concepts in the mind not in language. They thus argue that metaphorical expressions such as “taking a different perspective” are simply “surface realization[s]” of mappings of whole conceptual domains that take place in the mind.⁵⁵ If we accept this, we can see that a concern with finding the right human language to describe God is really a concern to find the right ways of thinking about God. If one wants to change how people think about God, understanding the conceptual mappings that underlie the verbal metaphors they use to describe God would, according to cognitive science, be just the right kind of way to go about things. Far from being something that Gregory did not take very seriously, we could thus say

⁵³ For divinization in the Greek-speaking part of the Roman empire see, for example: Jules Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers*. Translated by Paul A. Onica (Anaheim, CA: A & C Press, 2002) and Frederick G. McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005). See also, Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Greek Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 74–94 and A. N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 86–142.

⁵⁴ Osborne, “Literal or Metaphorical,” 158.

⁵⁵ Lakoff ‘Contemporary theory’, 203. See also Tendahl, *A Hybrid Theory*, 113–114 and Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. “What’s Cognitive about Cognitive Linguistics?” in *Cognitive Linguistics in the Redwoods: The Expansion of a New Paradigm in Linguistics* (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996), 1996, 27–53.

that the way he used metaphors and analogies for the divine, was of the greatest importance because it is what enabled him literally to change people's minds.⁵⁶

In this article, I will argue that there is evidence that Gregory was engaging with the kinds of mappings identified by Mark Turner and trying to transform them. I will show (i) that Gregory's claims as to what was "obvious to everybody" from the terms "father," "son" and "begetting" do not match the understandings identified by Turner as being the ones normally made, (ii) that Gregory was ultimately aware of this and (iii) that as a result when he states that he has common opinion on his side he is using this idea as cover to transform how people think about father-son relations and thus how they map from kinship language so that it is more appropriate for what he considers to be correct understanding of the divine. In so doing, I shall also argue that the fact that Gregory seems to accept the kinds of mappings that are identified by Turner as the ones that are most common in the fourth century too provides support for the claims of cognitive linguists that there are conceptual mappings that exist cross-culturally because they are common to human minds in a number of different historical contexts that share similar kinship structures.⁵⁷ At the same time, my arguments will also suggest we might be able to identify traces of human mental processes recognized by modern cognitive science in ancient texts even though we no longer have direct access to the minds that produced and consumed those texts.

⁵⁶ It is interesting that for Gregory language was the product of human minds and that both human language and human minds placed limits on people's understanding of God. See, Lootens, "Gregory of Nyssa's," 188–189. On the dangers of the over-activity of human minds leading to heresy, see Martin Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge and the Divine Presence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 34–62. My aims here have something in common with Inbar Graiver's work on asceticism. See, Inbar Graiver, *Asceticism of the Mind: Forms of Attention and Transformation in Late Antique Asceticism* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2018).

⁵⁷ Turner and other cognitive linguists imply they are talking about human universals, but I think more work needs to be done to prove that.

2. Gregory's metaphorical use of the language of father and son and engagement with conceptual mappings from the domain of kinship

At times in the *Against Eunomius* 3.1, Gregory suggests that Eunomius' view that the *names* of father and son determine divine essence means that he is working with a metaphorical understanding of the divine while he himself, who focuses on the meanings of the names and argues that these determine essence, is working with a model that is more real or literal somehow.⁵⁸ This can be seen in a passage where Gregory compares the way that his own understanding of the term "son" indicates affinity as "observed in realities" with how Eunomius' usage indicates affinity in "verbal expression only" (3.1.94–95 (Jaeger, II.36)). It can also be seen a little later in 3.1 where Gregory includes a passage exploring the kind of metaphorical expressions that might support Eunomius' understanding. He says first,

The supporter of our opponents might say that the titles "son" and "offspring" do not necessarily connote affinity of nature (*phusin*). Indeed, scripture speaks of a "child of wrath," a "son of destruction" and an "offspring of vipers" (Eph. 2.3; Jn 17.12; Mt 3.7), and of course no common nature (*phuseōs*) is implied by such terms. Judas, who is called "son of destruction," is not the same essence as what destruction itself means. The man Judas has one meaning, destruction another. The argument reaches an equivalent conclusion on the other side, too. Some are called "sons of light" and "sons of day" (Jn 12.36; I Thes. 5.5), but they are not the same as the light and the day as defined by their nature. Stones become "children of Abraham" (Mt. 3.9), when by faith and works they acquire for

⁵⁸ For a good summary of the state of scholarship on Eunomius' approach to names and Gregory's response and the philosophical background to both, see Lootens, "Gregory of Nyssa's," 163–184. For the contrast between Eunomius' focus on names and Gregory's on meaning see *CE* 3.1.88 (Jaeger, II.34) and 3.2.100–112 (Jaeger, II.37–42).

themselves a kinship with him. Those who are led by the Spirit of God, as the Apostle says, (Rom. 8, 14), are called “sons of God,” not being the same in nature as God.⁵⁹

However, he then goes to counter this by pointing out that we can also find other ways of using kinship language in the Bible which do imply natural affinity.

Divine scripture can use the word “son” for two ideas, so that for some it is by nature (*phuseōs*), for others such a title is got by construction or acquisition. When it speaks of “sons of men” or “sons of rams” (Ps. 28.1.50), it does indeed imply essential (*kat’ousian*) relation between what is begotten and that from which it derived; but when it speaks of “sons of power” or “children of God” (1 Sam 14.52; 1 Jn 3.2 etc), it refers to the kinship arising from free choice.⁶⁰

Gregory then goes on to characterize these two kinds of sonship as either “with an eye to nature, or else metaphorically, when his chosen behaviour wins the name” such as in adoption or when someone converts to Christianity and becomes a “son of God.”⁶¹ He then argues that “a human being can be called someone’s son” either “truly when one speaks with an eye to nature, or else metaphorically when his chosen behaviour wins the name.”⁶² Or, in fact, a human can be both kinds of “son” simultaneously as in the case of the example of adoption, which Gregory touches on briefly, but on which he does not elaborate: an adopted child does not stop being the natural son of his real father but can still take on the

⁵⁹ CE 3.1.113–115 (Jaeger, II.42). On this passage see: Lucian Turcescu, *Gregory of Nyssa and The Concept of the Divine Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 99–102.

⁶⁰ CE 3.1.116 (Jaeger, II.43).

⁶¹ CE 3.1.123 (Jaeger, II.45).

⁶² CE 3.1.124 (Jaeger, II.45). See also CE 3.1.118 (Jaeger, II.43–44).

“metaphorical” sonship of his adopted father.⁶³ However, if one is talking about God, in contrast, only one of kind of sonship, natural sonship, is applicable because God

being a single Good with his single and uncompounded nature, looks perpetually to the same goal and never changes in response to impulse of choice; rather, he always both wills what he is and, of course, is what he wills, so that in both ways he is properly and truly called Son of God; both because his nature has goodness in itself, and because his purpose has never fallen short of the best, so that he might be given this designation by some metaphorical usage.⁶⁴

In these passages, Gregory opposes “metaphorical” or “verbal” sonship, which seems to involve a relationship that results from people choosing to hold certain characteristics or to act in certain way, with sonship which is somehow less metaphorical and so more literal because it involves father and son sharing an essential nature. In the rest of this section I want to question (i) whether Gregory really is making such a simple opposition and (ii) whether he is right to contrast metaphorical sonship and literal or natural sonship in this way. To answer these question, I will first explore how scholars of Gregory normally tackle this kind of statement in Gregory before turning to show that the finding of conceptual metaphor theory undermine Gregory’s claim that that the kinds of metaphorical expressions that he says supports Eunomius’ position can be dismissed as “only metaphorical” and as having nothing to do with people’s understanding of actual, real kinship relations.

In an important article Osborne has argued that passages such as the one from book 3.1 just discussed do not reveal thinkers like Gregory arguing that their understanding of kinship

⁶³ *CE* 3.1.124 (Jaeger, II.45). See also *CE* 3.1.118 (Jaeger, II.43–45).

⁶⁴ *CE* 3.1.125 (Jaeger, II.45–46). On this passage, see Turcescu, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 99. See also Gregory *CE* 3.1.121 (Jaeger, II.44–45) and 3.1.131–138 (Jaeger, II.47–50).

was more literal than thinkers such as Eunomius, but rather that these thinkers were suggesting that the Second Person “was really a son, not just somewhat like a son, really God, not just comparable with God in some respect.”⁶⁵ Osborne explains this by an argument which has now become common in scholarship on Gregory. This is that Gregory sees the first two Persons of the Trinity to be truly father and son not because he thinks that the human concept of father-son can be applied in every way to the Godhead, but rather because he thinks the terms “have their proper sense only when applied to God.”⁶⁶ According to this view, it is not that the Second Person is literally a son in the same way a human son is, but rather that the Second Person captures something of the epitome of sonship; sonship in its ideal form. The divine thus sets the terms for what sonship is in the human world, not the other way around, and Gregory’s use of the language of kinship should thus not be described as more “literal” because actual human usage of the term “son” is not what is important here. For Osborne this means that it is untrue to say that “all our theological language still depends upon invoking a non-religious context in which the words have familiar meaning.”⁶⁷ It seems to me that Osborne is correct to suggest that Gregory’s use of the terms “Father” and “Son” is not any more literal than Eunomius’ use of them. However, removing his use of the language from the realms of familiar meanings and denying it is metaphorical is also not helpful.

The problem is, as Boeve and Faeyerts argue in their article on cognitive linguistics and apophatic theology, that the kind of approach outlined by Osborne simply involves “reversing the logical cognitive order” so that it “leans upon the ontological order.”⁶⁸ As such, Boeve and Faeyerts argue, it just becomes a way to make affirmations about God rather than fully accepting his unknowability. First, through the use of human language there is “affirmation”

⁶⁵ Osborne, “Literal or Metaphorical,” 154 and 167.

⁶⁶ Osborne “Literal or Metaphorical,” 158.

⁶⁷ Osborne “Literal or Metaphorical,” 158. In the last couple of decades, this view has almost become an orthodoxy for scholars of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa. For example, see Hanson, *The Search*, 737 and Ayres, *Nicaea*, 273-301 and 344–383.

⁶⁸ Boeve and Faeyerts “Religious Metaphors,” 157.

and “something is predicated of God, which afterwards – in a second way – is negated, and finally again is affirmed, but this time in an eminent way, by excellence: God is good; God is not good in the way we humans are good; God is the excellence of goodness.”⁶⁹ I want to challenge this approach of “reversing the ontological order” because it does not pay enough attention to Gregory’s repeatedly stated concern, as seen in sections one and two, to have his ideas about the divine supported by how ordinary people think. I thus want to follow Boeve and Feyaerts in turning to cognitive linguistics, and particularly conceptual metaphor theory, to understand Gregory’s use of analogy because it takes as its starting point that all thought is ultimately metaphorical in nature and thus that all knowledge of anything beyond our most immediate physical experiences can only ever be partial.⁷⁰

In particular, I want to suggest that Mark Turner’s *Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor, Criticism* (1987) can help us understand how mappings from the domain of kinship are normally made in metaphor and can be used as a point of comparison by which to assess to what Gregory says about his own and Eunomius’ use of the language of kinship. In *Death is the Mother of Beauty*, Turner studies metaphorical expressions involving kinship in western literature ‘from the Biblical “Babylon is the mother of harlots and abominations” to Stevens’ “The moon is the mother of pathos and pity” in the twentieth century.’⁷¹ Taking a cognitive linguistic approach, he argues that these kinds of expressions are so prevalent across this wide time period precisely because they are just external, verbal expressions of mappings that actually take place at the conceptual level in the mind.⁷² The assumption is that because kinship relations appear in more or less the same forms, and so are experienced in similar ways, in the western societies that produce the literature he studies, humans in those

⁶⁹ Boeve and Feyaerts “Religious metaphors,” 157 and 158.

⁷⁰ Sanders *Theology in the Flesh*, 7.

⁷¹ Turner, 15. Turner doesn’t reference examples from classical literature, but there are many. For example, (I thank Patrick Finglass for providing these): Sophocles *Ajax* 172–175 “o mighty rumour, o mother of my shame” and *Oedipus the King* 873/4–878/9 “Arrogance begets the tyrant. For tyranny is the child of hubris.”

⁷² Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 15.

societies have built up a number of common-place notions about them that form a conceptual domain that can be mapped on to other kinds of relationships between things or people that are less easy to explain.⁷³ Turner thus describes the metaphorical expressions he studies as “motivated by our knowledge of kinship and our everyday experience with it” and as “consistent with that knowledge and experience.”⁷⁴ The first conclusion we can draw from this is that Gregory would be wrong to argue that his use of kinship language is not metaphorical because it is based in people’s experience and understanding of actual, natural kinship relation and that he is also wrong to suggest that Eunomius’ approach to the language of kinship is “metaphorical” or “verbal only” because it only maps non-essential aspects of kinship relations. Instead, it would be clear that both of their uses of kinship language must be metaphorical *and* based in experience and knowledge of actual kinship. Gregory’s use of the language is metaphorical precisely because it draws on certain features of the way we understand our experience of kinship. Similarly, Eunomius’ use of kinship language is natural because all metaphorical language is based in our experience of actual kinship relations, but that what we can extrapolate from our experience and understanding of kinship is broader than Gregory suggests. Thus, the only difference between Gregory and Eunomius is that they choose to extrapolate and map different things from the field of kinship. The question then becomes that of how can we know which ideas are normally mapped from the domain of kinship.

In his *Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor, Criticism* (1987), Turner identifies ten “commonplace notions about kinship in general and about specific kinship roles” that underlie all the metaphorical expressions involving kinship in the literature he

⁷³ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 15. I say assumption because Turner doesn’t anywhere explain exactly who it is that shares particular sets of commonplaces about kinship and instead just speaks of them as “our.” For the sake of caution, I limit them to societies producing the literature Turner studies rather than assuming anything more universal.

⁷⁴ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 16.

explores.⁷⁵ One of these commonplace notions relates to ideas about what children normally inherit from their parents. As Gregory says, one commonplace idea is that “normally, children inherit salient characteristics of parents.”⁷⁶ It is this commonplace, Turner says, that means that “[w]e are comfortable hearing Telemachus called a ‘true son of Odysseus’ because he shares his father’s capacity (among other things) for artifice, deception and lies.”⁷⁷ We see here that in the commonplace notion of kinship what is thought to be inherited by sons from their fathers, as in the case of Odysseus and Telemachus, is particular characteristics or properties not some intrinsic nature, or essential properties, or anything else that *must* be inherited.⁷⁸ As Turner says, “[o]ften, metaphors of the form ‘kin of y’ mean simply that the kinship term inherits the property of y, or a property with which y is associated ... Emerson’s ‘sons of contradiction’ means people with a penchant for contradiction ... Lawrence’s ‘child of innocence’ means innocent person.”⁷⁹ Similarly, “[s]criptural expressions like ‘child of wrath,’ ‘child of disobedience,’ and ‘child of anger’ all exemplify *inheritance* of characteristics” and “[o]ften inheritance of characteristics dovetails with inheritance of beliefs, as in the Scriptural ‘children of God.’”⁸⁰ As a result, Turner identifies the conceptual metaphors underlying these expressions as AN ABSTRACT PROPERTY IS THE PARENT OF SOMETHING HAVING THAT PROPERTY, as in “a child of evil” where the child has evil as a property and the abstract property evil as its parent.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 22 and 15.

⁷⁶ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 22–23.

⁷⁷ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 22.

⁷⁸ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 22. Barcelona has argued that Turner’s work can be of use to understanding the Christian concept of God but does not explicitly apply what Turner says to the Trinity. At another point in the article, he tells us that “our source domain knowledge of human progeneration includes the specification that a parent hands down to his child genetic heritage, so that it may be said that both share some of their ‘essential’ characteristics” and that it is this idea that is mapped to the divine (Barcelona, “The Metaphorical,” 18). This is actually the opposite of what Turner argues.

⁷⁹ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 35.

⁸⁰ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 35.

⁸¹ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 23.

We see here that the examples cited by Turner show a great degree of overlap with the metaphorical expressions that Gregory conceded might support Eunomius' usage of kinship language in book 3.1. What Gregory actually said was that such examples provided the "strongest evidence" available for Eunomius' view and now we can see why they provided such strong support.⁸² Turner's work suggests that when people use analogies involving what a child inherits from a parent, they will normally call on these commonplace notions that it is external, changeable characteristics.⁸³ This would imply that when people heard the terms "father" and "son" being applied to the divine, they would not have thought it meant affinity of an essential essence, but merely some sharing of certain characteristics, which would fit better with Eunomius' view of the Trinity.

So where does this leave Gregory's claim that his own use of the terms "father" and "son" is less metaphorical and more natural and more agreed upon by all than Eunomius'? We saw in the passage at 3.1.113–125 that Gregory contrasts Eunomius' use of the biblical expressions "child of wrath" and "son of destruction," which he associates with kinship by choice or adoption only, with other biblical phrases such as "sons of men" and "sons of rams" where it is clear that actual sons are being discussed.⁸⁴ A little earlier, as part of his argument against the way Eunomius used the titles "father" and "son" for the divine at 3.1.94–95

⁸² CE 3.1.113 (Jaeger, II.42).

⁸³ This would probably have been the more common assumption in antiquity too. The only thinker in antiquity who had argued that it was the nature of the species that was passed on to a child animal during natural reproduction was Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* and biological works, but the latter were not known in late antiquity and the views expressed in the former about natural reproduction were not considered mainstream. From the time of Galen in the second century AD the idea that what children inherited from their parent was specific characteristics became the more dominant one (See, for example, Roberto Lo Presti, "Informing Matter and Enmattered Forms: Aristotle and Galen on the 'Power' of the Seed," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22.5 (2014): 929–950 and Sophia M. Connell, "Aristotle and Galen on Sex Difference and Reproduction: A New Approach to an Ancient Rivalry," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 31.3 (2000): 405–427). The same basic idea is found in Porphyry's *Ad Gaurum*, even if he understands the means by which this occurs differently from Galen. For Porphyry children did not receive any kind of generic nature, such as the nature of the species, from their parents in natural reproduction, but rather this was supplied by "the intelligible region" or the divine (See James Wilberding, "Porphyry and Plotinus on the Seed," *Phronesis* 53 (2008): 406–432 (especially 419 and 426) and James Wilberding "Neoplatonists on Spontaneous Generation," in *Neoplatonism and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. James Wilberding and Christopher Horn (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 200 and 204.

⁸⁴ CE 3.1.113–125 (Jaeger, II.42–46).

Gregory makes a similar contrast.⁸⁵ He first tried to dismiss Eunomius' use of the language of kinship by suggesting that it amounted to saying that "a structure" is the "son of the constructor" or that "the builder" fathered "the house," both of which sound ridiculous and were not in common usage as metaphorical expressions.⁸⁶ He then goes on to add, "nor do we refer to the vine as the vinedresser's offspring" and goes on to compare this with what he sees as expressions that show the correct use of kinship language in the case of the vine.⁸⁷

If wine is also called by Scripture "offspring (*gennēma*) of vine," even so the phrase should not on the basis of the use of this same word impair the doctrines of true religion. We do not call wine "offspring" of the oak, nor the acorn of the vine, but only where there is a sharing of nature between the offspring and what it comes from.⁸⁸

He then supports this claim with a detailed explanation of how wine has the same nature as the grape of the vine, despite the former being a liquid and the latter solid, and that this is why the analogy "the wine is the offspring of the vine" can be used to understand the relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity.⁸⁹ Gregory thus seems to be trying to make a stark opposition between what he says is Eunomius' non-sensical, non-natural and unfamiliar use of kinship language and his own, that is natural, familiar, and understood by all. As he says, "if wine is not called 'offspring of the oak,' and if 'offspring of vipers' are, as the Gospel says (Mt 23.33), snakes and not sheep, then clearly also the terms

⁸⁵ *CE* 3.1.94–95 (Jaeger, II.36).

⁸⁶ *CE* 3.1.95 (Jaeger, II.36).

⁸⁷ *CE* 3.1.95 (Jaeger, II.36).

⁸⁸ *CE* 3.1.96 (Jaeger, II.36).

⁸⁹ *CE* 3.1.97–98 (Jaeger, II.36–37).

‘Son’ and ‘begotten’ applied to the Only-Begotten do not imply an affinity with something of another kind.”⁹⁰

The problem is that in making this contrast Gregory is misrepresenting the situation in two ways. Firstly, saying that the “builder is the son of the constructor” is akin to the kind of biblical metaphorical expressions that Gregory himself cites as giving the strongest possible support to Eunomius’ view, such as “child of wrath,” is incorrect. In the former case we do not see the building to “inherit” anything at all from the constructor, whereas in the latter something is seen to be “inherited:” an external characteristic or behaviour such as wrath. Eunomius does actually at times express views that would be akin to the statement that the “builder is the son of the constructor” for the Second Person of the Trinity, but we need to be clear that biblical expressions such as “child of wrath” are distinct from this because they are based on one of our common-places understandings of actual, natural kinship relations as revealed by Turner. Thus, two ways of using kinship language for the divine can be said to support Eunomius’ view. One aligns being a father with being a builder because just as a builder creates a house, so the Father creates both the world and the Son. The other allows kinship to be distinct from creating/building but, as in normal metaphorical usage, sees sons to inherit external, changeable characteristics from their father rather than any essential nature. Secondly, if we now turn to Gregory’s usage, once we look a little more closely, we can see that the example “wine is the offspring of the vine,” which Gregory spends a long time explaining in order to provide a biblical example that supports his own position rather than Eunomius’ position, is not all that Gregory purports it to be. As Hall points out, ancient texts often confused *gennēma*, a thing begotten or made, which could be rendered as offspring, with *genēma*, which is from a “different verbal stem and means ‘something

⁹⁰ CE 3.1.101 (Jaeger, II.38).

brought into existence, made,' and is especially used of vegetable produce.”⁹¹ This was the case for scripture as for other ancient texts and so could have been the case for the relevant passages of scripture to which Gregory was probably referring when he cites the expression “wine is offspring of the vine.” Hall argues that the most likely passages are two very similar statements that we find in Mark and Matthew: “Truly, I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit (*genēma*)/offspring (*gennēma*) of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” (Mark 14.25 and almost exactly the same at Mt. 26.29). However, Hall argues that in fact *genēma* was more common in versions of the Greek Bible circulating at the time, and thus what is adopted in modern *New Testament* texts. Of course, there is still the possibility that people would have confused the meanings of such similar words and have read “offspring of” where in fact “fruit of” was the technically correct, however the fact that is grape plant that is being discussed would, I argue, mean that the reading of “fruit of” would have been the usual one. Gregory’s argument here that his approach finds support from Biblical expressions and ordinary usage, is thus not straightforward. People were not necessarily accustomed to statements like “wine is the offspring of the vine” or “wine is begotten” from the vine and in fact, one could argue that these mappings of kinship language sound nearly as odd as saying that the “building is the son of the constructor.”

We thus need to be clear, that while Gregory tries to present a direct contrast between Eunomius’ use of kinship terms and his own, there are actually three usages at work in his debate with Eunomius. i) the “building is the son of the constructor,” which is non-natural and non-sensical; ii) “child of wrath” which is familiar and easy to comprehend and based in our commonplace understanding of actual, natural kinship relations; and iii) “the wine is the offspring of the vine” which could be said to be based in nature, but does not straightforwardly have the biblical precedence Gregory claims for it and might actually have

⁹¹ Hall trans. In Leemans and Cassin, eds. *Gregory of Nyssa*, 61, note 28.

sounded rather odd to people. I want to suggest that Gregory realised that ii) was true and that, as we have suggested already, this was why he cited metaphorical expressions such as “child of wrath” as providing the strongest support for Eunomius’ use of kinship language. I also want to suggest that as a result he tries to associate ii) with i) and with kinship by choice or adoption in order to undermine it by trying to deny it the basis it has in ordinary understandings of actual kinship and suggest it has nothing to do with natural kinship relations, just as creating and adoption have nothing to do with them. At the same time, Gregory tries to present an alternate understanding of what we can map from the analogy of kinship, the inheritance of essential nature, and to present this as the only truly “natural” reading and as the one that comes most easily to people. In order to support this, he tries to propose that there are metaphorical expressions in scripture that support this mapping, but in fact these too are actually unfamiliar.

This allows us to see the extent to which Gregory seeks to transform the taken-for-granted, common-place meanings of kinship language. Instead of mapping the normal commonplace that children inherit external, changeable characteristics from their parents, he wants people to map the less obvious idea that what sons primarily and above all else inherit from fathers is essential nature, by which he means the nature of the species. I want to suggest that Gregory makes the effort to do this precisely because he realises how strong is the tendency for human minds to understand relations between two entities that are otherwise difficult to understand by mapping to them from the domain of kinship and also that he has some inkling that there are normal, commonplace ways of making these mappings that do not, in fact, support his model of the divine. I thus want to suggest that Gregory knew that as much as fighting against the incorrect theological ideas of Eunomius, he was also fighting against the human mind and its processes, or at least the way these played out in certain

western societies, and that as he wanted to succeed in the former goal, he had to engage with the latter too by presenting alternatives to them.

3. Turner and Gregory on the analogy of begetting/progeneration being used to explain causation.

That Gregory was engaging with normal ways of mapping from the conceptual domain of kinship can also be seen if we turn to the way he uses begetting in the earthly world to convey something about divine causation. At 3.6, Gregory tackles Eunomius' claims that the second person of the Trinity: "underwent a passage ... from not being to being" and that no "wise man could accept a son and begotten person existing before his original begetting, since one who exists without begetting needs no begetting in order to be what he is."⁹² Gregory says that in order to answer Eunomius' point outlined here it would be useful "to consider in ... closer attention to detail the actual meaning of 'begetting' (*gennēsis*)."⁹³ He first tells us, "[t]hat this word implies existing from some cause is clear to all," but then says we need to compare it to other "different explanations of things which have come into existence from a cause."⁹⁴ First there is causation "from material and art," such as buildings; second there is causation "from material and nature," in which "nature constructs the generation of living things from each other;" third there is causation "from material emission such as the sun and its ray, or a torch and its light;" and, finally, there is the mind and the word it conceives.⁹⁵ For Gregory, causation "from material and art" could only be applied to

⁹² CE 3.6.1 (Jaeger, II.185) and 3.6.23 (Jaeger, II.194).

⁹³ CE 3.6.27 (Jaeger, II.195).

⁹⁴ CE 3.6.27 (Jaeger, II.195–196). A very similar account can be found at *Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii* 88-97 (*GNO* II 348–352).

⁹⁵ CE 3.6.27–29 (Jaeger, 195–196). Hanson discusses this passage, *The Search*, 728 as does Barnes, "Contra Eunomium III.6," in Leemans, and Cassin, eds. *Gregory of Nyssa*, 371–377.

God's creation of the world, but the other three types of causation were applicable to causation within the Trinity and had to be combined with one other to provide a model of causation that was suitable for the divine.⁹⁶

The question then becomes what does causation "from nature and matter," that is natural reproduction/begetting, contribute to an understanding of divine causation. At 3.6 Gregory tells us that this type of causation offers the ideas of "affinity of nature" and derivation: "the ineffable existence (*hupostasis*), beyond description, of the Only-Begotten from the Father."⁹⁷ However, this type of causation also has associations that are inappropriate for divine causation and, as a result, has to be combined with causation as material emission, such as the sun and its radiance or perfume and its odour to make it suitable for the divine.⁹⁸ As Gregory says, the sun and its rays provides a model of causation in which one is "thought of as with the other, no interval intervening between Father and the One derived from him" so suggesting that precisely the problem with begetting was that it did imply such an interval.⁹⁹ We see this stated more clearly a little later where Gregory accuses Eunomius of taking "earthly nature to direct his thought about the only begotten God; and because a cow, ass or camel does not exist before its birth" he wanted to say the same of the Son.¹⁰⁰ And again a little later he concedes that it is "typical of all things that have come into being through generation that they do not exist before being generated" and that Eunomius should thus "correct his concepts through the other kind of generation" such as "radiance of glory" or "odour of perfume" because no one could claim "[t]hat the radiance did not exist before it was generated."¹⁰¹ We can thus conclude that for Gregory begetting is useful as an analogy for causation because it tells us about the affinity of nature between father and son

⁹⁶ CE 3.6.35–39 (Jaeger, II.198–200). See, Barnes, "Contra," 377.

⁹⁷ CE 3.6.48 (Jaeger, II.202). See also CE 3.6.36 (198–199).

⁹⁸ CE 3.6.36–41 (Jaeger, II.198–200).

⁹⁹ CE 3.6.38–39 (Jaeger, II.199–200).

¹⁰⁰ CE 3.6.43 (Jaeger, II.201).

¹⁰¹ CE 3.6.44 (Jaeger, II.201) and 3.6.46 (Jaeger, II.202).

and that the latter derives from the former, but it is problematic because it also implies an interval between father and son and there was a time when the former existed alone without the latter.

Gregory had in fact already noted these problems with what the analogy of begetting might imply in book one of the *Against Eunomius*. Again, this is found in the context of discussing Eunomius' accusation that it is impossible to say that the Second Person of the Trinity was both begotten and had always been in existence along with the Father.¹⁰² Gregory first concedes that begetting in the human/earthly world can give this impression, saying

Man is born in time ... and certain material conditions are the basis for the formation of the living organism; underlying it in accordance with the divine will is nature which works its miracles, from every side gathering what is proper and suitable for the perfection of what is being made, as much as is needed from each of the cosmic elements, and enough help from time and such nourishment from those responsible for forming the one to be born as is necessary for the formation. Nature in short, taking all those steps by which human life is constituted, thus brings to birth what is not. The reason why we speak of the coming to be of what is not, is that what at one time is not, at another time begins to be.¹⁰³

But he then argues that such thinking cannot be applied to the divine because “we think of human generation in one way and speculate about divine begetting in quite another.”¹⁰⁴ So here we do see Gregory saying that there are limits to what concepts drawn from the human

¹⁰² CE 1.617–623 (Jaeger, I.204–206).

¹⁰³ CE 1.624–627 (Jaeger, I.206–207).

¹⁰⁴ CE 1.624 (Jaeger, I.206).

world can tell us about the divine, and so he seems to support the view of Osborne outlined above.

However, I want to suggest that we can find a new approach to such statements if we see that Gregory was not straightforwardly rejecting such mappings from the human world but was rather engaging with them and trying to transform them. In particular, I suggest that this is another example in which we can see Gregory engaging with conceptual mappings identified by Turner in his *Death is the Mother of Beauty*. Turner devotes chapter four of this work to understanding one particular mapping from the domain of kinship that he considers to be particularly important. From his study of metaphorical expressions involving kinship he realised that there were a large number of these that sought to convey notions of causation. So, for example, we often find expressions such as “age is mother of sickness,” which can also be stated as age causes sickness, and “night is the mother of fear,” which can also be stated as night produces fear.¹⁰⁵ In such metaphorical expressions, causes are parents and effects are offspring and Turner thus posits an underlying conceptual metaphor that he calls CAUSATION IS PROGENERATION. Turner lists eight commonplace notions about progeneration that are mapped on to causation in such examples and that differentiate causation as progeneration from other ways of thinking about “how things come to be” such as, causation as necessary and sufficient conditions, causation as action, and causation as interpersonal motivation.¹⁰⁶

First, we can note here that Gregory’s concern at 3.6 with how begetting compares to other types of causation has something in common with Turner’s interest in the way progeneration can be mapped in comparison to other types of causation and that this in itself

¹⁰⁵ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 24.

¹⁰⁶ Turner, *Death is the Mother of Beauty*, 140–142. And see also: 151–167. Here Kövecses misunderstands Turner’s work. He suggests that for Turner CAUSATION IS PROGENERATION is just a sub-category of causation as action, when in fact for Turner they are distinct ways of thinking about causation. Kövecses, “The Biblical Story,” 329.

suggest that Gregory might have been exploring similar patterns of thought to those Turner discusses. This can be supported by the fact that we can note some overlap in the types of causation identified by Turner and Gregory. Gregory's causation by material and nature, is of course Turner's causation as progeneration; Gregory's causation by material and art can be associated with Turner's causation as action and causation as interpersonal motivation (which are connected for Turner, the former being seen as an early stage of the latter);¹⁰⁷ Gregory's causation by material emissions can be associated with causation as necessary and sufficient conditions. The type of causation that Gregory refers to as "the word conceived in the mind," probably not surprisingly, finds no direct match in Turner.

More importantly, though, we can also note quite a high degree of overlap between what Gregory identifies to be problematic about begetting as a type of causation and two of the eight commonplaces that Turner argues are normally mapped from progeneration on to causation. The first of Turner's commonplaces that is relevant here is the one Turner calls "quickness." Turner elaborates on this feature saying,

our perception of the individuation of the child is quick. First the foetus is contained in the mother. The mother is the whole and the foetus is part of the whole ... Then at the moment of birth, the part acquires an individuation distinct from the whole ... if the kinship metaphor focuses on the span of time during which the effect achieves individuation or we come to perceive the individuation, then the space of time must be discrete, discontinuous and fast.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 153–154.

¹⁰⁸ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 147–148.

Turner shows quite what is at stake here by comparing causation as progeneration to causation as necessary and sufficient condition. He says,

when the baby is born, it is a sharply completed result: we cannot hand the baby back to her and ask her to gestate the eyes a little more, or work on the shoulder joints a bit. At the moment of birth, there is a conceptually individuated cause, and a conceptually individuated effect that is sharply complete as an effect. ... [In contrast] [w]hen we see or think of the propagation of electromagnetic waves, the motion of celestial bodies, the motion of gases, we can picture effect flowing into effect continuously and smoothly. At any arbitrary moment, we can call the state an effect, and the effect is not qualitatively different from states before or after.¹⁰⁹

The second of Turner's commonplace notions that is relevant is that of "creation out of nothing." Turner says of this commonplace notion that "a child appears out of nowhere – not exactly nowhere, but out of things or components that are in themselves relatively insignificant or imperceptible (eg. sperm and egg)" and thus that it involves the "creation out of nothing, or, more accurately, the creation of a final state qualitatively different from the initial state."¹¹⁰ Turner again uses comparison with causation as necessary and sufficient condition to highlight exactly what is distinctive here. He says, "[p]hysical explanations of tides, chemical bonding, variable pressure and volume and temperature of a gas, and orbits, for example, all have this common characteristic of change as an alteration or rearrangement of [existing] things without the production of something qualitatively different," which is what he has suggested we see in progeneration.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Tuner, *Death is the Mother*, 165.

¹¹⁰ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 147 and 163.

¹¹¹ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 163–164.

What we thus learn from Turner's work about progeneration as a form of causation is that it involves the creation of an individual who is clearly and decisively distinct from the parent at a particular moment in time and also the creation of a new being who seems to come from nowhere because there is little continuity with the substances from which it was originally made. In the examples in book one and book three it seems as if Gregory is admitting that most people would have thought that begetting in the earthly world has these characteristics and that it is this that makes it an imperfect analogy for the causal relationship between the divine Persons of the Trinity. In the example from book one, the fact that the baby is seen to be created out of "cosmic elements" and "nourishment" provided by the mother over a long period of time suggests the "coming to be of what was not" and similarly, the sudden nature of birth clearly makes it appear that "what at one time is not, at another time begins to be."¹¹² There is a creation of a new being qualitatively different in nature from the elements from which he was constituted and there is the creation of a distinct being at a particular moment in time. Similarly, in the examples from book three, Gregory accepted that begetting and birth suggested the quick and sudden creation of a new being at a particular moment in time who did not exist in any recognisable way before.¹¹³ We can thus see how Eunomius might well have claimed, as Gregory suggests he does, that saying the Second Person was begotten implies that he was created in time and that he thus could not have co-existed eternally with the Father.¹¹⁴

It is precisely because Gregory recognises all this that he says that causation "from nature and matter" has to be combined with causation by material emission and here too we see him engaging with ideas that are also of interest to Turner. Just as Turner contrasted

¹¹² CE 1.626–627 (Jaeger, I.206–207).

¹¹³ CE 3.6.38–39, 3.6.43 and 3.6.44 (Jaeger, II.199–200, II.201 and II.201).

¹¹⁴ See Eunomius, *First Apology*, which unlike the *Apology for an Apology* that Gregory answers in the *Against Eunomius* survives independently of Gregory. 13.7–14 shows Eunomius making just this point and expressing it in very similar terms to Turner. See Richard Vaggione ed. and trans. *Eunomius, The Extant Works* (Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 43.

causation as progeneration with causation as necessary and sufficient condition so Gregory saw the type of causation that works by material emission to correct failings in begetting as a type of causation. Thus, while Turner characterizes causation as necessary and sufficient condition as the creation of an “effect that is not qualitatively different from states before or after” and the “rearrangement of existing things without the production of something qualitatively different,” so Gregory says causation by material emission provides a model in which “the original remains as it is, while what flows from it is considered in itself” so that the sun and its ray, a torch and its light and a scent and its perfume all “remaining undiminished in themselves, have each instantly accompanying them the characteristic stuff issuing from them.”¹¹⁵ And it is these characteristics that allow Gregory to talk of this as a type of causation in which one is “thought of as with the other, no interval intervening between Father and the One derived from him.”¹¹⁶ What we see here is that Gregory seems to recognise similar contrasts between causation as progeneration and causation as necessary and sufficient condition to those identified by Turner. Gregory then uses these characteristics to show how the two types of causation need to be combined to create a suitable model for understanding divine causation. As Gregory says, “[b]y the term ‘Son’ the affinity of nature is made known, by ‘radiance’ the close bond and inseparability.”¹¹⁷ This all suggests that the commonplace understanding of progeneration/begetting and the way they were mapped in analogy were similar in the ancient world to what they were in the literature studied by Turner. It also suggests that Gregory recognizes these mappings and the fact that they supported Eunomius’ view rather than his own.

However, there is at least one indication that Gregory was also doing more than this and that he was at times trying to suggest different ways of understanding begetting so that it

¹¹⁵ *CE* 3.6.28 (Jaeger, II.196).

¹¹⁶ *CE* 3.6.39 (Jaeger, II,200).

¹¹⁷ *CE* 3.6.48 (Jaeger, II.202).

no longer entailed individuation, distinction and creation of something new at a particular moment in time. In book one, just after the passages we just looked at where Gregory tells us that the problem with begetting is that it seemed to imply “the coming to be of what is not,”¹¹⁸ he goes on to say that this is not the end of the story because in fact begetting can be thought of in a different way that is appropriate for the divine. He says,

Even with men it is not, strictly speaking, possible to say that any was not when he was begotten. Many generations before his physical birth Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek; the Apostle says that Levi who receives tithes paid tithes and cited as proof of his statement the fact that he was in the loins of his father, when Abraham met the priest Most High (Heb.7.5-10). So in a way a man exists when he is begotten, and according to the apostolic testimony, pre-exists through community of being (*dia tou koinou tēs ousias*) in his parent; how then in the case of the divine nature do they dare propose this expression “When he was not, he was begotten,” of him who is in the Father? - as the Lord says, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (Jn 10.38).¹¹⁹

This is a really striking image because Levi is Abraham’s great-grandson. To make it work, we must imagine Levi in the loins of his father, Jacob, who must then be envisaged as in the loins of his father, Isaac, who is in the loins of his father Abraham so allowing Levi to be there when his great-grandfather paid tithes to Melchizedek. However, rather than envisaging a Russian doll image, which is what the original passage from Hebrew might suggest, for Gregory, what allows for “a man” such as Levi to already exist before his physical birth is

¹¹⁸ CE 1.624–627 (Jaeger, I.206–207).

¹¹⁹ CE 1.634–636 (Jaeger, I.208-209).

that he “pre-exists through the community of being (*ousia*)” with his male ancestors. What this seems to imply is that Levi actually existed before he was born in the form of the *ousia* that he shared with his father. This also implies a derivative model in the sense that Levi is not given the same *ousia* as his male descendants at a later stage after conception and once in the mother’s womb, but rather always has it even when he is a potential being in his great-grandfather’s loins. Or, at the very least, the *ousia* that Levi and Abraham have in common is seen to pre-exist in Abraham and so, it is implied, was passed down to Levi via the male line. In her discussion of Athanasius’ very similar use of the same biblical example of Levi and Abraham, Virginia Burrus has pointed out that Athanasius “directs our attention away from sons emerging in time from wombs, to sons eternally quiescent in fathers’ loins; away from children born to words uttered; away from female birthing to male generativity.”¹²⁰

This need to shift the focus away from the female body can be supported by the fact that it is also clear from what Turner says about the commonplaces of “quickness” and “creation out of nothing” that it is the role of the female body in reproduction that leads to people thinking in these ways about progeneration. It is the sudden emergence of the baby from the mother’s body that leads to Turner’s feature “quickness” and it is the time spent in the mother’s body that leads to the transformation of “something relatively imperceptible (eg. Sperm and egg)” into a baby that makes it appear that something was created out of nothing.¹²¹ By focussing on the community of essence Gregory can avoid these. In fact, doing this actually makes causation as progeneration more like causation as necessary and sufficient condition in the first place. For example, focus on the “community of essence” allows us to think of the relationship between Levi and Abraham more as an “effect flowing into effect continuously and smoothly” and as there being “no interval between” them and suggests that

¹²⁰ Burrus, *Begotten Not Made*, 56 on Athanasius *Ar.* 1.26.

¹²¹ Turner, *Death is the Mother*, 147 and 163.

there is no qualitative difference between them, but rather an emanation of “existing things,” in this case “essence.” As Gregory says of the sun, perfume etc, “remaining undiminished in themselves” they “have instantly accompanying them the characteristic stuff issuing from them.”¹²² This is what I think Gregory means when he says that Eunomius must “correct his concepts [of begetting]” by looking to examples of causation such as a radiance and its light. It is not just that he thinks we need to take different things from each analogy and combine them, but rather that we should actually use the radiance and the light to help us rethink our conception of begetting. Focusing on the nature/essence of the species that pre-exists in the father in exactly the same form as in the son and, at the same time, removing any implications of a female body or of the matter that the ancients thought the mother supplied to the process of begetting enables this.¹²³

4. Conclusions

In both the examples we have looked at we have seen that rather than dismissing normal commonplace ideas of kinship out of hand, Gregory engaged with them and admitted that they were the ones usually held by people, but then worked to transform what people extrapolated and mapped from kinship to suit his own purposes. Gregory realised that if he wanted to change how people thought he first had to acknowledge and engage with their normal conceptual mappings and that the best way to do this was by working carefully with kinship analogies for the divine. I would thus like to suggest that we need not pose a strict dichotomy between on the one Gregory “reversing the ontological order” and seeing analogies as little more than vague guides to the divine or, on the other hand, the idea that one

¹²² *CE* 3.6.28 (Jaeger, II.196).

¹²³ *CE* 3.6.32–37 (Jaeger, II.197-199).

can only understand God in human terms and using human conceptual apparatus. Rather, Gregory engaged with normal human thought processes and conceptual mappings precisely because he wanted to transform them and make them less human. The analogies of father and son for the divine were absolutely crucial to Gregory because by making them his own, he could engage human thought processes and, literally, change people's minds so that they were less human, less commonplace and so stranger and more divine. Claiming that he was using such terms according to ordinary human usage was just the sleight of hand by which he achieved this.