CHAPTER 19

Early Christian Philosophers on Concepts

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1 Introduction

Early Christian thinkers are still rarely regarded as philosophers, which explains why very little work has been done on their epistemology and logic, the field of ancient *logikē*. They are still mainly or primarily seen as theologians who were engaged with philosophical questions only insofar as these had a bearing on contemporary theological debates.[1] This, however, is only partly true and needs to be qualified. Early Christian thinkers developed sophisticated views on the nature and creation of the world, the status of matter, human agency, the question of what constitutes the good life, and the relation between soul and body, as these topics were of theological significance in a variety of ways, shedding light primarily on how God and man relate to each other. There is no reason to think, though, that this broad theological perspective would diminish the philosophical nature of the engagement of early Christians with such traditional philosophical issues. Indeed, quite the opposite is the case. Their theological perspective would require early Christians to connect these topics to one other, since, as already stated, in their view they all converge on clarifying the relationship between God and man or God and the world. This is also what ultimately motivates the Christian engagement with epistemological and logical issues, such as the nature and role of concepts, as we will hopefully see below.

In the following I will investigate the rather uncharted area of early Christian views on concepts. I will argue that early Christians on the whole

* The paper has benefited much from very valuable comments I have received from two referees, the editors, Gábor Betegh and Voula Tsouna, and from Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, a specialist on the issues I address here. My assistant, Anthony Kroytor, significantly improved the style of the paper. I alone am responsible for its shortcomings. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

[1] I elaborate on the nature of the philosophical work of early Christians in Karamanolis 2021, esp. ch. 1.

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assume a certain position on concepts that becomes part of both their perceptual realism and of an anti-sceptical strategy. Roughly speaking, for them concepts are both mental and linguistic items, that is, mental representations on the one hand and meanings of words on the other; additionally, they maintain that we apprehend reality by means of concepts in both the above senses. The first interesting view on concepts among early Christians is found in an anti-sceptical context in the work of Clement of Alexandria, who, as we shall see, set out to defend the view that humans can attain secure knowledge of the external world and that this knowledge is propositional and conceptual. More sophisticated views on concepts emerge later in the works of Origen, Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa, but remain in much the same vein. Gregory, I shall suggest, defends a theory of knowledge according to which our knowledge is propositional and involves concepts. In his view, as I will explain, concepts are not only constituents of thought, that is, mental objects, but also and quite importantly constituents of propositions. Gregory defends the view that humans have the distinct capacity of producing concepts by means of which we perceive and think. Once again it is a theological issue that triggers the development of such views, namely the debate concerning the nature of names and especially divine names, a debate which was part of the trinitarian controversy. Both Basil and Gregory of Nyssa were involved in these debates. Yet Gregory's view on concepts is particularly sophisticated, and it deserves to be appreciated independently of the theological framework in which it was created. This does not of course mean that I plan to take it out of its context, but rather that I will try to assess it as a philosophical theory of concepts on its own merit.

Before I move on to consider the philosophers of early Christianity who merit close study in this field, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa, a note on terminology is in order. All of them speak of concepts of either the human or the divine mind, and like earlier Greek thinkers, they denote concepts using a variety of terms, such as *ennoia*, *dianoiai*, *noēmata*, *hupolēpseis*, and *epinoiai*. All these terms can signify 'concept', 'conception', or 'conceptualisation', that which the mind grasps and holds, a kind of mental object. Gregory of Nyssa, for instance, uses the terms *noēma*, *ennoia* and *epinoia* to denote both concepts and conceptions, but he differentiates, as we shall see, especially between *noēma* and *epinoia*, reserving the latter also for the faculty that generates concepts. His terminological pluralism and his consistency indicate that he had a well-developed theory of concepts, which, as will be discussed, he partly takes over from his brother, Basil. I shall argue that Gregory is the first Christian

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thinker who emphasised both the role of concepts in human mental life as well as the particular human capacity to form concepts of various kinds.

2 Clement of Alexandria

Clement is the first Christian philosopher whose consideration of concepts is of quite some interest. He speaks of concepts twice in the eighth book of his *Stromata* or *Miscellanies*; first, when speaking of definitions and divisions and second when presenting Aristotle's theory of categories.[2] The first instance foreshadows the second and the two are consistent with each other, although, as usual in his work and especially in book eight of his *Stromata*, the two instances are loosely connected. The first instance occurs in the section on division and definition (*Strom.* 8.17–21.6). Clement examines division and definition because he sees them as methods of figuring out what an object under investigation essentially is, that is, his motivation is primarily epistemological. As he says, definitions supply the knowledge of a being (8.19.1). In this context Clement argues that universal concepts (*katholikai dianoiai*) are involved in the definitions of things. Let us take a close look at the relevant passage:

> οὔτ᾽ αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων οὔτε τῶν ἰδεῶν οἱ ὅροι, ἀλλὰ γὰρ ὧν πραγμάτων ἔχομεν καθολικὰς διανοίας, τούτων τῶν διανοιῶν τοὺς ἑρμηνευτικοὺς λόγους <ὅρους>[3] εἶναί φαμεν. τούτων γὰρ τῶν διανοιῶν καὶ αἱ διαιρέσεις γίνονται.
>
> Definitions are neither of things themselves, nor of [their] forms, but regarding those things of which we have universal concepts, we say that <definitions> are accounts expressing these concepts. For divisions too are divisions of these concepts. (*Strom.* 8.19.1–2; trans. Havrda modified)

Since my argument here rests heavily on the understanding of διάνοια as concept, I would first like to comment briefly on the use of the term in this context. Matyáš Havrda in his recent translation and commentary of *Stromata* 8 translates *dianoia* as 'thought'.[4] I think that this is incorrect

[2] For an edition with a translation and commentary of *Stromata* 8, see Havrda 2016. I will not engage here in the complex questions regarding the nature and sources of this text and its place in the *Stromata*. The fact, however, that there is nothing specifically Christian in that book is no reason to dispute that this is part of *Stromata* and representative of Clement's thought, as I explain below p. 000 Havrda 2016: 11–77 offers an updated, detailed, and clear discussion.

[3] Pohlenz's addition of <ὅρους> (definitions) here is absolutely justified, as the subsequent discussion shows (cf. esp. 8.20.5).

[4] Matyáš Havrda himself understands *dianoiai* as concepts as his index Havrda 2016: 343 (s.v. concept) shows. I am grateful to Matyáš here for a set of comments which helped me a great deal in my discussion of the passage.

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for a number of reasons. Let me start with the fact that the whole chapter as well as the specific section of the text cited above speaks of definitions (*horoi*). A definition involves a subject and an account explaining it (*hermēneutikos logos*). This is what the cited text of Clement says: definitions (*horoi*) are explanatory accounts (*hermēneutikoi logoi*) about certain subjects. We are further told in the text that the *dianoiai* are subject to division, but these cannot possibly be divisions of thoughts but only of concepts of things, as we learn from Plato in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman.* What Plato divides there, are not thoughts or propositions but concepts of things, such as political skill (*politikē*) or animal, doing so in order to define something. A concept such as 'animal', 'plant', or 'political skill' can be divided in more than one way, depending on the criterion we would introduce, and this division reveals the extension of a concept. The extension of a concept, such as 'animal', is important if we want to know what an animal is. Finally, the adjective *katholikos* is generally applied to terms or concepts, not to thoughts; what is universal is the idea or concept of a book or a tree, not thoughts such as 'this book is boring' or 'plants are living beings'. It is difficult to see in what sense such a thought could qualify as universal, while it is easy to see how the concept of book or tree is a universal – we operate with such concepts in our mental life (in our use of definitions, for instance, as we will see below) but not necessarily with thoughts such as those mentioned above. But the crucial question is what is the role of concepts in this context and, more especially, what is their function in a definition.

The idea that Clement puts forth here is apparently the following: when we define X, we account for it in a certain way or we predicate y on it, that is, we say X is Y. The question now is what the concepts (*dianoiai*) stand on this scheme. Clement apparently suggests that the concepts are what we define, the *definiendum*. Clement addresses the question of what the definitions are definitions of, and he suggests that they are neither of particulars nor of their forms but of universal concepts such as man or animal. Clement addresses the same question as Alexander in *Quaestiones* 1.3, and the background text for both is Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Z.15, 1039b27–1040a29, where Aristotle argues that neither particulars (*kath' hekasta*) nor ideas (*ideai*) can be defined.[5] Clement follows Aristotle in thinking that a universal concept (animal) can be defined, that is, we can give an explanatory account of it. Such a concept can also be divided; the concept 'animal', for instance, can be divided into 'rational' and

[5] See Havrda 2016: 232.

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'irrational', or alternatively into 'domestic' and 'wild', 'terrestrial' and 'winged', and so on (as suggested in the *Politicus*). As I have said earlier, such a division can lead again to definition.

There are two interesting points for us here: first, that Clement regards concepts primarily as subjects of definitions; and second, concepts in his view form a hierarchy, that is, more general concepts can be divided into more specific ones – as I have said, 'animal' can be further divided into 'rational' and 'irrational', 'terrestrial' and 'winged', 'domestic' and 'wild' and so on. When we define a universal concept, we arrange and articulate our concepts in an orderly way, connecting the concept we want to define (the *definiendum*) to more and less general concepts (the *definiens*). This of course is not only a linguistic but primarily a cognitive process; we obtain knowledge of our world through the application of concepts to other concepts. This view is in accordance with the general tone of *Stromata* 8. Although the book as we have it today looks unfinished or like a mere summary of material that has not been properly edited by its author, its first chapter strongly suggests that the author's main concern is epistemological. In this chapter Clement sets out to show that secure knowledge is possible and goes on to establish guidelines for its demonstration, arguing against the Pyrrhonian sceptics who cast doubt on the attainability of knowledge (*Strom.* 8.4). Clement's point about the role of concepts further supports his general epistemological view that secure knowledge of our world is possible precisely because we are in a position to obtain and clarify universal concepts. His next step is to show that we are also in a position to classify things under universal concepts.

Clement does this in the section on the Aristotelian theory of categories, albeit without naming Aristotle (*Strom.* 8.24.1). It is not at all clear why Clement introduces this particular philosophical theory in this part of his work, being the first Christian to do so, as far as we know.[6] Nonetheless the section on the categories is part of the chapter on the principles of knowledge directed against the Pyrrhonians and is a continuation of the section on division and definition referred to above. Apparently, the doctrine of the categories is also regarded from an epistemological point of view: Aristotle is viewed as someone who gives us a clue as to how we conceive and understand the world. Clement starts by focusing on speech (*phōnē*), distinguishing three of its aspects on the basis of Aristotle's

[6] On Clement's reception of the theory of the categories, see Frede 2005: 143–45 and Karamanolis 2017.

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De interpretatione 1, 16a4–9: (a) names that are symbols of meanings or concepts (*noēmata*; which I will explain below) and symbols of things; (b) meanings or concepts (*noēmata*), which are, as he says, likenesses (*homoiōmata*) and imprints (*ektupōmata*) of things; and (c) the underlying things (*ta hupokeimena pragmata*, 8.23.1). Clement then draws an analogy: just as all names are reducible to the finite, twenty-four, elements (*stoikheia*) of language, the letters of the alphabet, all beings (*onta*) are similarly reducible to universals (*katholou*).[7] From this point Clement moves on to the *Categories*, arguing that philosophers have discovered some elements (*stoikheia*), the categories as it will turn out, under which everything in the world can be classified and this is how we manage to obtain knowledge, by relying on universals (8.23.3–4). He explicitly states what these universal classes are: the Aristotelian categories that he subsequently lists (8.23.5–6). Clement concludes by stating that the categories are 'elements of beings in matter' (8.23.6).[8]

Clement does not explain what he means by 'elements of beings in matter'. It is important to notice, though, that in this context he speaks of beings in matter or material beings, which means that he takes Aristotle's theory of categories to apply only, or at least primarily, to sensible, material, beings. Apparently for Clement, material beings are subject to predication and predication is understood to be any of the Aristotelian categories, namely substance, quality, quantity, relation, and so on. Presumably it is precisely these predicates that are elements of beings in matter in the sense that they constitute what material beings actually are, such as 'animal', 'red', 'one-meter-long', 'in the marketplace', etc. Such predicates make something what it is, and in this sense they are elements of it.

The complication, however, is that Clement understands the Aristotelian categories (substance, quality, etc.) not only as elements of material beings but also as elements of *noēmata* (*Strom.* 8.23.1, 3). It is striking that he speaks of beings (*onta*) that are infinite and not just of

[7] τὰ καθ᾽ ἕκαστα εἰς τὰ καθόλου ἀνάγεται. *Strom.* 8.23.3.

[8] τῶν δὲ μὴ μετὰ συμπλοκῆς λεγομένων τὰ μὲν οὐσίαν σημαίνει, τὰ δὲ ποιόν, τὰ δὲ ποσόν, τὰ δὲ προς τι, τὰ δὲ ποῦ, τὰ δὲ ποτέ, τὰ δὲ κεῖσθαι, τὰ δὲ ἔχειν, τὰ δὲ ποιεῖν, τὰ δὲ πάσχειν, ἃ δὴ καὶ στοιχεῖα τῶν ὄντων φαμὲν τῶν ἐν ὕλῃ καὶ μετὰ τὰς ἀρχάς, ἔστι γὰρ λόγῳ θεωρητὰ ταῦτα, τὰ δὲ ἄυλα νῷ μόνῳ ληπτά ἐστι κατὰ τὴν πρώτην ἐπιβολήν. Of things said without combination, each signifies either substance or quality or quantity or a relative or place or time or being-in-a-position or having or doing or being affected. These, we say, are also the elements of things in matter and after the principles. For they can be understood by reasoning, whereas the immaterial entities can be grasped by the intellect immediately. (*Strom.* 8.23.6; trans. M. Havrda modified).

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things, meaning both material things and *noēmata*.[9] One question that arises here is how the categories relate to material beings on the one hand and to *noēmata* on the other and further how *noēmata* relate to universal elements (*ta katholou*, *Strom.* 8.23.3), to the categories.

Clement does not offer an explicit answer. Several hints, however, help us reconstruct his underlying view. Clement follows the tendency of a certain branch of Aristotelianism that frames the understanding of the categories with the distinctions made in *De Interpretatione*.[10] As I have stated above, he establishes an analogy between things and elements such as the categories on the one hand and names and letters on the other – just as the infinite number of names is reducible to the twenty-four elements of language, the letters, so is an infinite amount of things reducible to certain finite elements, to the ten categories. Clement describes a thing as subordinate (*hupotassomenon*; *Strom.* 8.24.1) to a certain class, such as substance, quality, relation, to one of the Aristotelian categories. But Clement had earlier suggested that not only things (*hupokeimena pragmata*) but also *noēmata* are reducible to universal classes, the categories (8.23.3). The fact that *noēmata* are on the one hand symbols of names and on the other likenesses (*homoiōmata*) and imprints (*ektupōmata*) of things suggests that *noēmata* are both meanings and concepts. And if this is the case, then Clement seems to suggest that the categories are universals classifying both things (*pragmata*) and concepts (*noēmata*), and in this sense they constitute elementary kinds of beings (*onta*), which include both things and *noēmata*. When we wish to obtain knowledge either of a thing or of what someone has in mind, a concept, we can proceed in a similar fashion by asking under which of these general elementary classes the thing or the concept falls – that is, whether it is a substance, a quality, a quantity, a relation, etc. In this sense the Aristotelian categories function as elementary concepts by means of which we classify both things in the world and concepts in our minds and thus define and also apprehend them. And in this sense the

[9] Τῶν γὰρ καθ' ἕκαστα ἀπείρων ὄντων μὴ εἶναι ἐπιστήμην, ἴδιον δὲ ἐπιστήμης καθολικοῖς ἐπερείδεσθαι θεωρήμασι καὶ ὡρισμένοις. ὅθεν τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα εἰς τὰ καθόλου ἀνάγεται. ἡ δὲ τῶν φιλοσόφων πραγματεία περὶ τε τὰ noēmata καὶ τὰ ὑποκείμενα καταγίνεται. ἐπεὶ δὲ τούτων τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα ἄπειρα, στοιχεῖά τινα καὶ τούτων εὑρέθη, ὑφ' ἃ πᾶν τὸ ζητούμενον ὑπάγεται. For there is no knowledge of particulars, as they are infinite, and it is a property of knowledge to be based on universal theorems and definitions. That is why particulars are reduced to universals. But philosophers are occupied with concepts and things; and since the particular instances of these are infinite, certain elements have been discovered for them, too, and everything sought is brought under them. (*Strom.* 8.23.2–3; trans. M. Havrda). Τούτων refers both to *hupokeimena pragmata* and *noēmata*.

[10] See Havrda 2016: 247.

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Aristotelian categories are elements of both beings in matter and of concepts according to Clement; they are classes of both material beings and of concepts.

If this is the case, then Clement distinguishes two classes of concepts, namely (a) concepts of things, such as 'tree' or 'color', and (b) concepts of general entities, such as 'substance' and 'quality'. And he further suggests a hierarchy of these two kinds of concepts such that the concepts of particulars of the first class (*noēmata*), fall under those of general entities of the second class (*katholou*).

If my reading is correct so far, then according to Clement, Aristotle's theory of categories aims to show what the universal kinds under which we classify particular things in the world are. In this sense Clement's presentation of the theory of categories continues and complements his chapter on definition, where concepts and not particulars are presented as subjects of definitions. Here we learn how universal concepts classify particulars. Clement's reference to Aristotle's theory of categories indicates that, on his view, human beings are in a position to form universal concepts under which we classify particulars, both particular, material, things and also concepts of them. Such knowledge of universals enables us to ultimately achieve scientific knowledge, that is, to know the causes of things in general, which means that we are able to know why things are what they are. And by showing how this is possible, Aristotle's theory of categories allegedly disarms the sceptical arguments against the possibility of achieving secure knowledge, or at least this is what Clement claims.

In the chapter on the categories Clement appears to suggest that concepts are both mental items and linguistic significations and that they make up a hierarchy, namely they are structured into more and less general ones, or into concepts of high and lower-order generality. With this claim Clement comes close to Porphyry's interpretation of the categories to the extent that he implies that concepts are abstractions of material things and that they mediate between names and things.[11] We name something X or Y because we have the concept of X or Y, which we can then communicate to others by means of names. Both Clement and Porphyry find this point in Aristotle's *Categories.* Clement's three-tier theory of names, things and concepts mediating between the two is also reminiscent of, and perhaps

[11] Crucial in this regard is Porphyry, *in Cat.* 90.28–91.7; Simplicius, *in Cat.* 10.17–19 (reporting on Porphyry's *Ad Gedaleium*); Porphyry fr. 46 Smith, *in Ptol. Harm.* 13.15–14.28. Porphyry's interpretation of the *Categories* and especially his views on concepts has been subject of a long debate. See Karamanolis 2006: 312–19, Helmig 2012: 171–83, and most recently Chiaradonna 2016.

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influenced by Stoic semantics. Yet in my view Clement is closer to Porphyry in taking the view that the categories are not only significant expressions but also mental items, which have a linguistic expression as well; that is, categories amount to concepts, which Clement specifies as high-order concepts, that is, concepts of high-order generality, through which we come to know the world as it is.

At this point we can hopefully understand in what sense Clement's appeal to the doctrine of the categories forms part of his effort to outline an anti-sceptical epistemology: Aristotle's categories are important elements for human cognition insofar as they constitute classes under which we classify things in the world and think or conceive of them in everyday life.

3 Origen

Origen agrees with Clement in considering concepts to be both mental and linguistic items. He speaks both of concepts in the divine mind, especially in the mind of the Son, and of human concepts, in particular our concepts (*epinoiai*) of God. Origen appeals to concepts while addressing two major philosophical questions: (a) how God created the world, and (b) how God is simple despite the fact that we conceive of him in many different ways. Let me begin by considering the first question.

The issue of cosmogony including the creation of man is central to all early Christian thinkers and Origen is no exception. What distinguishes Origen is that he undertakes to address a number of questions relevant to cosmology that previous Christian thinkers left without a satisfactory answer. One such question was how we should understand the coming into being and formation of matter by an immaterial principle, God. Origen sets out to specify what it means to say that God created the material world. He first eliminates the possibility that God created it from pre-existing matter on the grounds that such a possibility would suggest that God's beneficent activity depends on an external factor, namely matter (Origen in Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 7.20.2–3). Such an external, independent factor or principle, however, would diminish God's potency and freedom of will as well as God's goodness and beneficence (ibid. 7.20.3). Origen further points out that the view that the world has been created from preexisting matter is absurd in other regards as well; for, he says, it is not the case that the world is created out of matter *simpliciter*; rather, the world is created out of a certain kind of matter, namely informed matter, and there is no inert, remaining matter, as is usually

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the case with human craftsmen.[12] In this manner Origen stresses that God is also the creator of matter used in the creation of the world and that this matter is of a certain origin and nature.[13] Origen argues that the matter used in creation was not only of a certain quantity (*Princ.* 2.1.4) but also of a certain kind (*tosautēn kai toiautēn*, in Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 7.20.5, 8). He suggests that matter was flexible enough to take on (*dektikē, eiktikē*) the properties bestowed upon it by its origin, the creator (*Praep. evang.* 7.20.5, 9). If matter was already by its nature equipped with such features by its nature, then, continues Origen, that would mean that the world was created by itself in a kind of spontaneous generation. But this is absurd, Origen says, because the ability of matter to assume different forms and allow for different shapes suggests that it is a product of wisdom (*sophia*) and providence (*pronoia*); otherwise, matter would not transform itself in ways that contribute to the beauty and order of the world (*Princ.* 2.1.4).[14] The fact that matter does so, suggests that it has a nature such that it contributes to the orderly arrangement of the world (Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 7.20.4) as food does when it is taken into the human body.

Clearly, Origen sharply distinguishes between matter and bodies on the one hand and between matter and qualities on the other. Bodies, he claims, consist of matter and qualities, but even matter, he suggests, is never found without qualities.[15] But what is the source of these qualities that inhere in matter and qualify it? Origen answers that God is the source, that is the source of wisdom and providence. It is the wisdom of God, he suggests, that is responsible for the formation of everything, as the following passage shows.

[12] When the Scripture states that God created 'all things by number and measure' [Wisdom of Solomon 11:20], we would be correct in applying the term 'number' to rational creatures or intellects for this very reason, that they are as many as can be provided for and ruled and controlled by God's providence; 'measure' on the other hand will correspondingly applies to corporeal matter, and we must believe to have been created by God in such quantity as he knew would be sufficient for the ordering of the world. (*Princ.* 2.9.1)

[13] Cf. *Princ.* 4.4.8.

[14] By 'matter' we mean that which underlies bodies, namely that from which they take their existence when also qualities have been applied to, or mingled with, them. We speak of four qualities, heat, cold, dryness, wetness. These qualities when mingled with matter (which matter is clearly seen to exist in its own right apart from these aforementioned qualities) produce the different kinds of bodies. But although, as has been said, this matter has an existence by its own right without qualities, yet it is never found actually existing apart from them. (*Princ.* 2.1.4)

[15] *Materiam ergo intellegimus quae subiecta est corporibus, id est ex qua inditis atque insertis qualitatibus corpora subsistunt* (*Princ.* 2.1.4). The idea that qualities inhere in matter is in a way reminiscent of the view found in *Timaeus* 48–53 that properties of the elements hosted in the receptacle.

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> In hac ipsa ergo sapientiae substistentia quia omnis virtus ac deformatio futurae inerat creaturae, vel eorum quae principaliter exsistunt vel eorum quae accident consequenter, virtute praescientiae praeformata atque disposita: pro his ipsis, quae in ipsa sapientia velut descriptae ac praefiguratae fuerant creaturis, se ipsam per Salomonem dicit 'creatam esse' sapientia 'initium viarum dei', continens scilicet in semet ipsa universae creaturae vel initia vel rationes vel species. (Princ. 1.2.2)

> It is in this wisdom that there exists every capacity and form of the future creation, both of the primary beings as well as of the secondary ones, which were fashioned and arranged by the power of foreknowledge. For in this wisdom are hosted and prefigured all created things, and this wisdom, speaking through Solomon, says that 'she was created' as 'a beginning of the ways of God' [Prov. 8:22], which means that she contains in herself the principles, the reasons, and the forms of the entire creation.

Origen claims here that God's wisdom is the formative cause of all created entities, of both primary and secondary beings, that is, of both substances and qualities.[16] Further and quite importantly, he identifies divine wisdom with God's Son, Christ (*Princ.* 1.2.1; *In Joh.* 1.19.111).[17] Origen argues that divine wisdom operates as a principle in the world's coming into being in the sense that 'everything comes to be in accordance with wisdom' (ibid.). This wisdom must then have a certain content in accordance with which everything that comes about is formed. In the passage cited above, Origen specifies the content of divine wisdom: the principles, reasons or patterns, and forms (*initia, rationes, species*), in accordance with which everything in the world is created.[18] All three of them make up, as he says, 'a system of objects of contemplation', that is, the objects of God's contemplation or thought.[19] Origen sets out to explain in what sense God as *logos* is a principle and how he hosts in himself the reasons and forms of everything. He does this in the following passage:

> ἐπίστησον δε, εἰ οἷόν τέ ἐστι καὶ κατὰ τὸ σημαινόμενον τοῦτο ἐκδέχεσθαι ἡμᾶς τὸ '"Εν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ logos', ἵνα κατὰ τὴν σοφίαν καὶ τοὺς τύπους τοῦ συστήματος τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ νοημάτων τὰ πάντα γίνηται. Οἶμαι γὰρ, ὥσπερ κατὰ τοὺς ἀρχιτεκτονικοὺς τύπους οἰκοδομεῖται ἢ τεκταίνεται οἰκία καὶ

[16] Cf. *Princ.* 2.1.4, 2.3.2, 4.4.7.

[17] δημιουργός δὲ ὁ Χριστὸς ὡς ἀρχή, καθ'ὅ σοφία ἐστι, τῷ σοφία εἶναι καλούμενος ἀρχή (Christ is creator being a principle to the extent that he is wisdom; he is called 'principle' since he is wisdom) (*In Joh.* 1.19.111).

[18] See *In Joh.* 1.19.114; *Princ.* 1.2.2; *C. Cels.* 5.37.

[19] τοὺς τύπους τοῦ συστήματος τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ νοημάτων (*In Joh.* 1.19.113). Cf. Plotinus' similar argument for the role of the Intellect which through contemplation of the *logoi* accounts for the world in *Enn.* 3.8 [30] and 5.8 [32].

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> ναῦς, ἀρχὴν τῆς οἰκίας καὶ τῆς νεὼς ἐχόντων τοὺς ἐν τῷ τεχνίτῃ τύπους καὶ λόγους, οὕτω τὰ σύμπαντα γεγονέναι κατὰ τοὺς ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ προτρανωθέντας ὑπὸ θεοῦ τῶν ἐσομένων λόγους. 'Πάντα γὰρ ἐν σοφίᾳ ἐποίησε.' Καὶ λεκτέον ὅτι κτίσας, ἵν' οὕτως εἴπω, ἔμψυχον σοφίαν ὁ θεός, αὐτῇ ἐπέτρεψεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ τύπων τοῖς οὖσι καὶ τῇ ὕλῃ <παρασχεῖν καὶ> τὴν πλάσιν καὶ τὰ εἴδη, ἐγὼ δὲ ἐφίστημι εἰ καὶ τὰς οὐσίας.
>
> Consider, however, if we can take this meaning of *archē* for the text 'In the beginning was the Word' [John 1:1], so as to obtain the meaning that all things came into being according to wisdom and according to the patterns (*tupous*) of the system which are present in his thoughts. For I consider that as a house or a ship is built and constructed in accordance with the patterns (*tupous*) of the craftsman, that is, the house or the ship has as principle (*archē*) the patterns (*tupous*) and reasons (*logous*) in the craftsman, similarly all things have come into being in accordance with the reasons of what was to be, which are laid down by God in wisdom. 'For he created everything according to wisdom.' [Ps. 103:24] And we should also say that having created, so to speak, God, the ensouled wisdom, he allowed the coming into being from imposition of the patterns that were in her in beings and matter the emergence of their moulding and their forms and, I would say, also of substances. (*In Joh.* 1.19.113–115)

The impact of the *Timaeus* is more than obvious here.[20] Like Plato, Origen claims that the divine creator creates the world as any other craftsman does, namely according (*kata*) to the reasons and patterns in his mind. And this implies on the one hand that the creation of everything was modeled on such patterns and reasons and on the other that these patterns were imposed on artefacts and make up the forms in them. Origen's view is similar to that of Plotinus in this regard. The *logoi*/*rationes* must be equivalent to Plotinus' *logoi* and must correspond to platonic Forms as presented in the *Timaeus*. For both Origen and Plotinus these *logoi* do not exist independently but only in God, possibly as thoughts of God. Origen and Plotinus represent a tendency of contemporary Platonists to consider Forms as either thoughts of God or as contents of God's Wisdom.[21] The only possible difference here is whether God actively thinks them, or God merely contains them, and this makes up his wisdom. But whatever the case is, there is the same reason why Platonists such as Plotinus and Origen resolutely advocated that doctrine, namely because thus understood Forms are not simply objects for the divine mind or wisdom, as is the case with the objects of human perception, but parts of it. God cannot possibly be mistaken about the Forms. As Plotinus puts it,

[20] See Thümmel 2011: 11–14, 218–19. [21] See Jones 1926 and more recently Dillon 2019: ch. 3.

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how could God recognise justice or beauty if they were outside of him (*Enn.* 5.5.1.28–33); he would need a criterion for their identification, but then the question of what this criterion could possibly be arises. When the Forms are thoughts or contents of the divine mind, then they are immediately known to it. For Origen and Plotinus the creation of the world is the instantiation of these Forms in matter; for them the world then is a system of *logoi* that have their origin in the divine mind and organise the material reality in which we live, especially the material objects around us, in such a way that the world is orderly, coherent, intelligible, and knowable.[22] Material reality is also a world of thoughts, namely the thoughts of the divine mind, as Plotinus shows in *Ennead* 3.8 and as Origen similarly suggests in the passage cited above and elsewhere in *De Principiis*.[23]

That the Wisdom of the Son contains concepts brings with it a significant unwanted consequence, namely that the divine person becomes complex. Since Clement early Christians have debated the issue of God's simplicity. The issue has two aspects that can be formulated as follows: (a) how can God be the source of everything, of plurality, while being simple; (b) how can we call God simple, given his many activities and properties which we conceive of, by calling him by a multitude of names?

Origen is the first Christian to address this issue. He argues that the various names attributed to God are only human *epinoiai*, human concepts. Origen agrees with Clement here[24] in distinguishing between the utter simplicity of God the Father and the relative simplicity of God the Son. While the Father is indescribable, the Son can be described in many ways, but he, while being a unity, also is a kind of plurality,[25] since he holds in thought the *rationes* (*logoi*) of everything out of which all things in the world come into being. Since the Son is a kind of plurality, it is also more natural that he is conceived of in many ways, that is, we can have various *epinoiai*, conceptions, of him. We can conceive of him, for instance, as the wisdom of God, the power of God, the justice of God, the providence of God, etc. All these descriptions are, however, conceptions

[22] On the constitution of material objects in Plotinus, see Kalligas 2011.

[23] See Berchmann 1984: 129–30.

[24] *Strom.* 4.25.156. For a discussion, see Radde-Gallwitz 2009: 59.

[25] Ὁ θεὸς μὲν οὖν πάντῃ ἕν ἐστι καὶ ἁπλοῦν. ὁ δὲ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν διὰ τὰ πολλά, ἐπεὶ 'προέθετο' αὐτὸν 'ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον' καὶ ἀπαρχὴν πάσης τῆς κτίσεως, πολλὰ γίνεται ἤ καὶ τάχα πάντα ταῦτα, καθὰ χρήζει αὐτοῦ ἡ ἐλευθεροῦσθαι δυναμένη πᾶσα κτίσις. (*In Joh.* 1.20.119; God is absolutely one and simple. Yet because of the plurality of creatures, our savior whom 'God has appointed him as the means of propitiation' [Rom. 3:35] and principle of the entire creation, becomes many, or perhaps this is the case in the sense that the entire creation that can receive deliverance attaches to him).

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that we, humans, have of God the Son, that is, we predicate X or Z of him, depending on how we at the time conceive of God, although the subject of our predications remains one and the same.[26]

Origen is the first Christian thinker to speak of *epinoiai*. The term is probably of Stoic origin;[27] it had already been attributed to Antisthenes, but our source most probably uses Stoic terminology here, which had by then become commonplace.[28] The term *epinoia* is often used by later ancient authors, such as Alexander and Porphyry, to denote what exists only in the mind and not in sensible reality. Alexander, for instance, argues that mathematical entities exist only in *epinoia*, in thought.[29] Origen draws on this tradition and introduces the term *epinoia* into Christian discourse when he discusses the various ways of conceiving of God, that is, God the Son, the wisdom of the Father and creator.

Origen presents his theory of *epinoiai* in his commentary on the Gospel of John. Origen insists that the different *epinoiai* of God the Son we have, are only conceptually distinct, since God the Son is essentially a unity.[30] And God the Son is a unity, because he is an intelligible entity and as such is indivisible and invisible, the wisdom of God the Father (*Princ.* 4.4.1). The *epinoiai* are only human conceptualisations of God the Son and of his contribution to the creation of the world.[31] For Origen, however, *epinoiai* are not only mental items of the human mind, but also linguistic items by means of which we predicate something. We think of God as good or just (or as truth and wisdom), and thus we have the *epinoia* of God's goodness, justice, wisdom and so on, which we accordingly predicate of God. In this sense we gain knowledge of the world around us and also of God, through *epinoiai*. God, however, transcends the world, yet we conceive of God relying only on the manifestations of God in the world. Our conceptions of the world would ultimately correspond to the divine thoughts or

[26] ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ὑποκείμενον ἕν ἐστίν, ταῖς δὲ ἐπινοίαις τὰ πολλὰ ὀνόματα ἐπὶ διαφόρων ἐστίν. (*Hom. Jer.* 8.2, 10–12; SChr 232: 358 Nautin; While the subject is one, yet with respect to the conceptualisations there are many names for the different things). Cf. *In Joh.* 1.31.222. See further Delcogliano 2010: 172–75.

[27] Cf. Sextus Emp., *M.* 9.393–402.

[28] ὁ τοίνυν Ἀντισθένης ἔλεγε τὰ γένη καὶ τὰ εἴδη ἐν ψιλαῖς ἐπινοίαις εἶναι λέγων ὅτι "ἵππον μὲν ὁρῶ, ἱππότητα δὲ οὐχ ὁρῶ' (Ammonius, *In Porph. Isag.* 40.6–8; *CAG* 4.3)

[29] Τὰ δὲ μαθηματικὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς, τουτέστι τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς καὶ τοῖς καθ' ἕκαστα δηλοῦν ὁμοιότητα ἐνυπάρχοντα τούτοις. οὐ γάρ ἐστιν αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτὰ ὑφεστῶτα, ἀλλ' ἐπινοίᾳ. (Alexander, *In Metaph.* 52.13–16; *CAG* 1). David, *In Porph. Isag.* 119.17–24 (*CAG* 18.2) distinguishes further between *epinoia* and *psilē epinoia*, namely the thought of things that are only fantasies and exist only in the mind. On Alexander's views on and use of *epinoiai*, see De Haas in this volume.

[30] *In Joh.* 1.28, 200. See further Hengstermann 2016: 209.

[31] *In Joh.* 2.23, 148.

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concepts, the *logoi* or *rationes*, in accordance with which the world has been created. This means that we conceive of the world in a way similar to that of God. This is what ultimately makes the world intelligible to us. The ability that we have to conceive the world in a way similar to God, accounts at least partly for our likeness to God: we are like God, namely intellects; and we cognise through concepts, which are similar to the divine *logoi*.

4 Gregory of Nyssa

A mere glance through the *Lexicon Gregorianum* makes it immediately clear that the terms *ennoia* and *epinoia* occur very frequently in Gregory's work. The question of course is how Gregory uses them. Gregory, I suggest, uses the term *ennoia* in the sense of 'concept' or 'conception'. He speaks, for instance, of *ennoia tou theou* (*C. Eun.* 1.196.6), *ennoia tou patros* (*C. Eun.* 223.28), *ennoia tēs agathotētos* (ibid. 1.77.16), *ennoia tou aidiou* (ibid. 1.218.11, 219.20), *ennoia tou apeirou* (ibid. 1.129.11), *ennoia tēs haplotētos* (ibid. 1.97.5), *ennoia tēs aphtharsias* (ibid. 1.389.13, 1.379.23), *ennoia tēs theotētos* (2.172.5). It is certainly no accident that almost all these passages and many other relevant ones occur in Gregory's *Against Eunomius* (*C. Eun.*).[32] In the same work, however, the term *epinoia* also occurs very frequently. The question of why this is the case and also how the two terms differ from each other arises. The answer requires an investigation of the nature of this work.

Gregory alongside his brother, Basil, writes a long work against the position taken by Eunomius. Basil wrote his *Against Eunomius* around 363/4, targeting Eunomius' *Apology*, to which Eunomius replied. About twenty years later Gregory writes a detailed reply to Eunomius' *Apology for the Apology*.[33] Eunomius (c. 320–394) belongs to the second generation of Arian theologians and in his writings he probably set out to systematically defend Arian theology. Arius famously maintained that God the Father and God the Son are of similar but not the same substance (*ousia*); for, he argued, God the Father is uncreated while God the Son is a creation of the Father and for that reason the created Son is ontologically different from the uncreated Father. Arianism was condemned at the Council of Nicaea

[32] I use the edition of Gregory's *Against Eunomius* by W. Jaeger (Gregorii Nysseni Opera: *GNO*).

[33] For a reconstruction of the controversy, see Vaggione 1987: XIV-XVII, who also collects the fragments of Eunomius. On Eunomius' beliefs, see now Delcogliano 2010: 32–48, Radde-Gallwitz 2018: 76–112.

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but it did not cease to exist. Eunomius represented a revival of Arianism; he belonged to the group known as the Anomoeans, who took their name from the claim that God the Father and God the Son are dissimilar, rather than similar, as Arius originally suggested. The Anomoeans supported their view of the ontologically distinct nature of the two entities particularly focusing on how names were applied to God the Father and God the Son.[34]

Eunomius accepted a conception of *phusei* significance for the divine names (*C. Eun.* 2.344). He apparently claimed that the difference in substance between the divine persons is suggested and manifested by the different names applied to them, such as Father, Son, Spirit (Basil, C. *Eun.* 2.1.5–9). According to Eunomius, the name 'Son' already manifests the kind of substance that God the Son is, namely a created one (ibid.). Apparently Eunomius went as far as to propose a theory of language according in which names in general reveal the essences of things, since, as he suggests, names were created by God before man's creation and fit the nature of things (Gregory, *C. Eun.* 2.196–198).[35]

Gregory argues strongly against this view of language. He argues that names are human creations and appeals to Scripture (Genesis 2:19–20), according to which it was Adam who gave names to things (*C. Eun.* 2.402) and not God. As Gregory says, Eunomius presents God as a teacher or a grammarian who teaches the first human beings the names of things (*C. Eun.* 2.397–398). Gregory argues that such a view makes no sense. He appeals to the evidence presented by the different languages, which makes it perfectly clear that names are neither unique nor universal but differ from language to language (2.406–408, 546–547). Gregory's point is twofold: first, he suggests that things have an ontological priority over names; God created the things not their names, as the evidence of Scripture suggests;[36] second, he claims that God left it to man to impose

[34] On this issue, see Danielou 1956, Karfikova 2007, Delcogliano 2010.

[35] Εἰπάτω τοίνυν ὁ διορθωτὴς τῶν ἡμετέρων πταισμάτων ὁ θεὸς ἔθετο τὰς προσηγορίας τοῖς οὖσιν; τοῦτο γάρ φησίν ὁ νέος ἐξηγητὴς τῶν μυστικῶν δογμάτων, ὅτι βλάστην καὶ βοτάνην καὶ χόρτον καὶ σπέρμα καὶ ξύλον καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα κατωνόμασε πρὸ τῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατασκευῆς ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῷ παράγειν εἰς κτίσιν τὰ γεγονότα διὰ προστάγματος. Let this corrector of our faults tell us, then, was it God who attached titles to existing things? For what our new expounder of spiritual doctrines tells us is this: before Man was formed, God gave names to bud and vegetation and grass and tree and the like, as he brought his creatures into being by his command. (*C. Eun.* 2.198; trans. Stuart G. Hall).

[36] Cf. *C. Eun.* 2.281: δεικνὺς ὅτι θεὸς πραγμάτων ἐστὶ δημιουργός, οὐ ῥημάτων ψιλῶν. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐκείνου χάριν, ἀλλ' ἡμῶν ἕνεκεν ἐπίκειται τοῖς πράγμασι τὰ ὀνόματα. (demonstrating that God is the designer of real things, not of mere words. It was not for his benefit, either, that names are applied to things, but for our sake. trans. Stuart G. Hall). Cf. ibid. 2.438–439.

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names on things in the world, once again in accordance with the best evidence of Scripture.[37] Names are then human creations, while things in the world are divine creations.

Gregory substantiates this claim further. He argues that man has the cognitive ability to perceive things as they are and to label them with names (*C. Eun.* 2.283, 401) and by doing so he is maintaining the rational nature that God granted human beings (ibid. 2.197). Gregory elaborates further on this last point arguing against Eunomius, who contends that names exist by nature and that they fit the nature of things and reveal its substance, by insisting that names are human inventions (*C. Eun.* 2.148, 401–402, 438). He nonetheless agrees with Basil that this does not mean that names are arbitrary; Gregory rather suggests that names reflect our conception (*epinoia*) of things (*C. Eun.* 2.125).[38] He claims that we, humans, have invented all kinds of things in order to live well, including the arts and sciences, because we are able to conceive things, which is a gift from God (2.178–186). A special human ability is involved here, he argues, namely the ability to invent and to abstract things. Gregory names this ability or faculty *epinoia* as well. This is crucial for us here. He argues that the *epinoia* is the origin of all branches of learning, such as geometry, physics and logic, of philosophy, but also of practical crafts such as agriculture, the skill of navigation, and that of taming animals. All these benefits, he says, have been achieved by *epinoia*. And here is how he defines it.

> ἔστι γὰρ κατά γε τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον ἡ ἐπίνοια ἔφοδος εὑρετικὴ τῶν ἀγνοουμένων, διὰ τῶν προσεχῶν τε καὶ ἀκολούθων τῇ πρώτῃ περὶ τὸ σπουδαζόμενον νοήσει τὸ ἐφεξῆς ἐξευρίσκουσα. νοήσαντες γάρ τι περὶ τοῦ ζητουμένου τῇ ἀρχῇ τοῦ ληφθέντος διὰ τῶν ἐφευρισκομένων νοημάτων συναρμόζοντες τὸ ἀκόλουθον εἰς τὸ πέρας τῶν σπουδαζομένων τὴν ἐγχείρησιν ἄγομεν. (*C. Eun.* 2.182)
>
> According to my definition *epinoia* is a way of finding things what we ignore using what is connected and consequent upon our first idea about an object of an inquiry in order to discover what lies beyond. For after understanding something about the object of our inquiry, we attach to the first idea the thing that comes next thanks to the notions [*noēmata*] that

[37] Eunomius also relied on scriptural evidence such as Psalms 146:4 (*C. Eun.* 2.423) but Gregory argues that such passages have nothing to do with the issue of the nature of names.

[38] Τοῦ δὲ μεγάλου Βασιλείου διορθωσαμένου τὴν ἠπατημένην ὑπόνοιαν και τινα περὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων διεξελθόντος ὡς οὐκ ἐκ φύσεως ὄντων, ἀλλὰ κατ᾽ ἐπίνοιαν ἐπικειμένων τοῖς πράγμασι (*C. Eun.* 2.125; When great Basil corrected their misguided idea, and gave some explanations about the words, as not derived from natures, but applied to their subjects according to *epinoia*; trans. Stuart G. Hall modified).

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> we discover in the course of time, and thus we bring our inquiry to conclusion.

This is a cryptic passage, but the main point is clear. Gregory takes an important step here; he distinguishes between *epinoia* and notions (*noēmata*). He claims that we discover *noēmata*, notions or concepts, by means of *epinoia*, which is described as a way or method (*ephodos*) of finding about what we ignore (*euretikē tōn agnooumenōn*). Gregory develops Origen's doctrine of *epinoiai* and more specifically Basil's view on *epinoia*,[39] who also distinguishes between *epinoia* and *noēma*. The following two passages are important in this regard. They come from a context where Basil sets out to explain what *epinoia* is and he distinguishes it from fantasies, fictions, false thoughts.

> Ὁρῶμεν τοίνυν ὅτι ἐν μὲν τῇ κοινῇ χρήσει τὰ ταῖς ἀθρόαις ἐπιβολαῖς τοῦ νοῦ ἁπλὰ δοκοῦντα εἶναι καὶ μοναχά, ταῖς δὲ κατὰ λεπτὸν ἐξετάσεσι ποικίλα φαινόμενα καὶ πολλὰ ταῦτα τῷ νῷ διαιρούμενα ἐπινοίᾳ μόνῃ διαιρετὰ λέγεται. (Basil, *C. Eun.* 1.6, 21–25)
>
> We see then that what seems simple and singular to the direct application of the intellect in common usage but appears complex and plural upon detailed scrutiny, being divided by the intellect, this kind of thing is said to be divided only by *epinoia*.
>
> Καίτοι τοσοῦτον ἀπέχει τοῦ κατὰ ματαίων μόνον καὶ ἀνυποστάτων φαντασιῶν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦτο τῆς ἐπινοίας κεῖσθαι, ὥστε μετὰ τὸ πρῶτον ἡμῖν ἀπὸ τῆς αἰσθήσεως ἐγγινόμενον νόημα τὴν λεπτοτέραν καὶ ἀκριβεστέραν τοῦ νοηθέντος ἐπενθύμησιν, ἐπίνοιαν ὀνομάζεσθαι. (Basil, *C. Eun.* 1.6, 39–44).
>
> The name of *epinoia* then does not apply only to false and inexistent fantasies, but is the name given to the more subtle and precise reflection of an object after a first conception has been made from sense perception.

Both passages converge in maintaining that *epinoia* is what we generate with our minds, elaborating on the mental image that our intellect first grasps. There is actually little difference between the first and the second passage; both assert that *epinoia* is a later product of our minds that comes about as a result of an elaboration on a mental image, an intellectual grasp (*noēma*), that we first have of something. To follow Basil's example, we conceive something as grain, which we can afterwards consider and accordingly call 'fruit', 'seed', or 'nourishment'; all these are aspects of

[39] On this, see Sieben (1998) and Radde-Gallwitz (2010): 22–24.

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the same thing made up conceptually (*kat' epinoian*; *C. Eun.* 1.6, 44–53). Basil distinguishes here between *epinoia* and *noēma*, as Gregory later does.[40] The *epinoia* is responsible for the generation of further *noēmata*, notions; we can think of something, such as the grain, as X, Y, or Z, fruit, nourishment, or blessing. In this manner further notions are generated from a first one. Basil is quick to move to apply his theory of *epinoia* to the discussion of divine names and thereby articulate an answer to the challenge posed by Eunomius' theory of names and his neo-Arian theology (*C. Eun.* 1.7).[41] His suggestion is that our first notion of God can easily generate further notions upon reflection, but this process does not say anything about the divine properties, let alone about the divine nature, but only about the divine activities (*energeiai*) as we conceive them; the divine nature remains simple and one.

Eunomius maintained that the pluralism of features applied to divine nature do not do justice to it; for if there were a plurality of divine features, it would suggest that God is a composite entity, and this would be at odds with God's substance being utterly simple. Therefore Eunomius coined a new term, *aggenēsia* (unbegotteness), in order to do justice to God's simplicity and unbegotten nature.[42] Basil and Gregory replied that the names we give to God form part of our concept of God, which cannot be grasped by any single name, as Eunomius thought, because the divine nature is a cluster concept, that is, a concept consisting of many properties (Gregory, *C. Eun.* 2.145). Following Basil (*C. Eun.* 1.7), Gregory argues that there are many ways of conceiving and naming God depending on the perspective we take at a given moment (*C. Eun.* 2.475–476).[43] This means that we can operate with many different conceptions of God and apply them to him through the use of different names, depending on which side or aspect of him we wish to emphasise. Both Basil and Gregory maintain that names are human inventions that we have created in accordance with our conceptions of things, our *epinoiai*, and that naming amounts to the application of a conception.

One first conclusion is possible from the above. Both Basil and Gregory distinguish between initial and secondary concepts, between first and

[40] For a discussion of these passages of Basil, see Delcogliano 2010: 165–68, Radde-Gallwitz 2010: 22–24.

[41] On Basil's argument against Eunomius' theory of names, see Delcogliano 2010: 135–88.

[42] See Gregory's comment on that term in *C. Eun.* 2.142–145.

[43] Elsewhere Gregory suggests that each term used for the divine nature, including the term '*theos*', contains a unique concept (*To Ablabius*, *GNO* p. 43), and in this sense the concept 'god' is not a cluster concept, but that of divine nature is. I am grateful to Andrew Radde-Gallwitz for this point.

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second order concepts. In their texts they describe a process according to which we move from an initial mental grasp or first apprehension of the mind that happens through sense perception, as they say, to a more elaborate concept that we form later on upon reflection and more detailed scrutiny of a given object, and they call the latter *epinoia*. We find again a hierarchy of concepts, as with Clement. Yet Basil and Gregory do not distinguish like Clement between concepts of things such as 'tree' and 'animal' (*noēmata*) and concepts of general entities, such as 'substance' and 'quality' (*katholou*), but between initial concepts (*noēmata*) of things in the world and more refined concepts of the same things (*epinoiai*). And they suggest that the initial, first order concepts arise when our intellect comes to contact with the objects of the external world, while the second order concepts, the *epinoiai*, arise not through the contact of the intellect with the external world objects but through the activity of the intellect alone. Furthermore, whereas initial concepts are in a way determined from the contact of the intellect with the objects of the external world, and thus they are limited, there can be any number of *epinoiai*, since the intellect generates them from its own resources and upon reflection of the first order concepts the *noēmata*; the material of *epinoiai* so to speak are not external, material objects, but first order concepts.[44] And while first order concepts are limited, second order ones are not, reflecting the resourcefulness of our mind. God, for instance, is a first order concept, but God as omnipresent, as omnipotent, as light and so on are second order concepts.

A further conclusion is also possible, namely that *epinoiai* are not only mental items but they have a linguistic nature as well. When we conceive of something, we also name it, and we can give more names to it in accordance with the more elaborate second order concepts that arise in our minds. Basil's earlier cited example of the grain that can be variously conceived and named is telling;[45] 'Grain' is the first order concept, while the second order concept is 'fruit', 'nourishment', a more general notion under which we classify 'grain' upon reflection. Both Basil and Gregory suggest that names are human constructions or inventions that often result from second order concepts, *epinoiai*, which we primarily invent with our minds. Names not only correspond to concepts but attain significance insofar as they correspond to either first or second order concepts. This

[44] One is reminded of the distinction between first and second level concepts in Frege's philosophy. First level concepts correlates objects with truth values, while second order concepts correlates concepts and relations with truth values. First order concepts in Gregory correlate objects to mental items, second order concepts correlate concepts and relations to further concepts.

[45] See e.g., Basil, *C. Eun.* 1.6, 47–54.

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means that names are neither mere sounds nor mere labels; rather, names are significant because they represent or at any rate capture a mental item, by means of which we apprehend things in the world. The fact that we use names in order to communicate a concept suggests that concepts have linguistic content or propositional nature. Basil and Gregory argue that God is an exception in this regard because he cannot be fully apprehended and conceived of by the human mind, despite the different names we apply to him that correspond to different conceptions of him since God is an infinite entity. We can and we do apply a plurality of names to God in accordance with our many conceptions of him. As with all other things, though, the divine names that we compose, reflect our conception of God, not the infinite essence of God – the latter, they suggest, remains, at least partly, a mystery to us.[46]

Basil and Gregory follow up on the issue considered by Origen of whether a multiplicity of names speak against divine simplicity, but their answer is significantly more complex than his. In their view, God's simplicity is not threatened by the plurality of names, because a thing itself does not acquire a component when described in yet another linguistic way; names are human ways of describing the divine substance, which correspond to our different conceptions of it.[47] We use them because no single name is comprehensive (*perilēptikon*) enough to fully describe God (Gregory, *C. Eun.* 2.145), who is an infinitely complex entity.

From what has been said so far, it becomes clear that both Basil and Gregory assume that we, humans, have the ability to think conceptually and to conceive things in different ways. It is this ability that explains why we are in a position to invent a multitude of names and apply them to God or to any other object. And the question is how and where they talk about this ability.

We need to remember here that Gregory defined *epinoia* as a way or method of finding things that we ignore (*ephodos heuretikē tōn agnoumenōn*). Basil also described *epinoia* as a kind of reflection of what we conceived (*tou noēthentos epenthumēsin*). These descriptions suggest that *epinoia* is not only a second order concept with linguistic content, as I said above, but also an ability or a faculty that we have. As Gregory says, it is a *dunamis* by means of which we find or invent things.[48] In this

[46] Gregory argues that God cannot be described entirely in positive terms and that our inquiry for God is necessarily open-ended (*C. Eun.* 2.953–6, *Vita Mosis* 376D–377B); cf. Basil, *Letter* 234.

[47] Basil, *C. Eun.* 2.29.13–24, Gregory, *C. Eun.* 2.148; 2.163–4. See further Radde-Gallwitz 2009.

[48] ἐπινοητικὴ καὶ εὑρετικὴ τῶν ζητουμένων δύναμις (Gregory, *C. Eun.* 2.185; cf. 2.181–182, 189–190).

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sense *epinoia* is a faculty that God has granted us analogous to the faculty of *proairesis*, which enables us to consider alternative courses of action and decide on what is best. According to Gregory, it is not God who gave us the art of medicine or the art of architecture and everything that comes along with them; God only granted us the mind necessary to invent them (*C. Eun.* 2.186–7). When we invent something such as a craft or a tool to be used for a craft, Gregory says, we also invent a name for it; the faculty *epinoia* has the ability to generate both concepts and names. For Gregory the two form a unity, since, as I said earlier, names reflect our conceptions of things. If both concepts and names are products of *epinoia*, then this should be a certain faculty that we have. The construction of names, their application to things around us and, more specifically, to God, is possible because we, humans, have the ability to generate concepts, and we can do that both from objects of sense perception but also from concepts. This is the case because human beings have an intellectual nature, that is, they are intellects equipped with the faculty of conceptual thinking.

This is a point that Gregory makes clear in his work *On the Creation of Man* (*De hominis opificio*), in which he devotes an entire section to the nature of human intellect (*nous*).[49] There Gregory claims that the human intellect is something that God granted us and something that God shares with humans, which means that we are of the same intellectual nature as God (*De hom. opif.* 149B). Gregory argues that man is an intellectual entity (*noeros*), yet our intellect, unlike God's, operates by means of bodily organs (149BC). This happens in two ways (152B): first, the intellect expresses itself through speech and, second, acquires knowledge through the senses. Gregory likens the intellect's connection to the senses to a city with many entrances; as with multiple gates leading into the same city, so too are the sense data provided by the various senses channeled to the intellect (152CD). Gregory, however, argues that it is not the senses but rather the intellect that knows through the senses (*dia tōn aisthēseōn ho nous energei*; ibid. 152A), a passage reminiscent of *Theaetetus* 184d–185b, a point that Gregory repeats in *De anima et resurrectione* (32A). Further, he goes on to argue that the intellect permeates the entire body through its activities (161b) and therefore the attempts to localise the intellect in the body make no sense (156CD), since every part of our body has been shaped by the intellect (161AB). This means that the intellect is not part of us but rather the element that permeates our entire nature and makes it intellectual and rational (177B). This element of ours is God's gift,

[49] See Karamanolis 2021: 123–25.

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Gregory suggests (164CD). The intellectual nature of the human body that Gregory defends, may well mean that everything that we perceive has a conceptual nature, be it a sight, a taste, or touch of this or that part of the body. Gregory does not elaborate on the conceptual character of our experience, but he says enough to show that our body perceives by means of the intellect, meaning fundamentally in a conceptual manner.

This has both an epistemological and a theological consequence. The theological one is that humans are similar to God in being of intellectual nature, and being of such nature they are able to think conceptually. Gregory stresses this in many passages of *De hominis opificio*. The epistemological consequence is that we can grasp the *logoi* that God uses in the creation of the world, that is, the concepts in the divine intellect. And this is not an accident. Gregory substantiates this claim on the grounds that God has granted man the ability of *epinoia*, the ability to generate concepts by elaborating on first order concepts.

From the above it becomes clear that both Basil's and Gregory's contribution is not limited to articulating an objection to Eunomius' theory of names, particularly divine names, and disarming the latter's view that the plurality of names suggests ontological complexity; they rather set out to outline a theory of how human beings conceptualise, how we produce concepts by means of which we both cognise and engage with the world, in order to show that divine names are human creations. The creation of names is only one aspect of this human ability, which Eunomius either overlooked or seriously underestimated. In doing so, Eunomius apparently underestimated the intellectual abilities of God's most significant creation, human beings.[50] While Eunomius belittles *epinoia* as something meaningless (*asēmanton*) and nonsensical (*adianoēton*) for life, apparently in comparison with God's creation, and at any rate untrustworthy (*C. Eun.* 2.180),[51] Gregory argues instead that *epinoia* is essential for humans; not only is *epinoia* the origin of all branches of learning, but it also is characteristic of the ability of human mind to think conceptually. And this more specifically means that the human mind both perceives external objects conceptually and also elaborates on these

[50] On whether Eunomius himself spoke of *epinoiai*, see Radde-Gallwitz 2010: 23–24.

[51] ἀσήμαντον εἶναί φησι τὴν ἐπίνοιαν, ἀδιανόητον, τὰ παρὰ φύσιν σοφιζομένην ἢ διακολοβοῦσαν ἢ ὑπερτείνουσαν τὰ ὡρισμένα μέτρα τῆς φύσεως ἢ ἐξ ἑτεροφυῶν συντιθεῖσαν ἢ τερατευομένην ταῖς ἀλλόκοταις προσθήκαις. (*C. Eun.* 2.180; Concept is meaningless, he says, nonsensical, playing unnatural tricks, whether by shortening or by stretching the size prescribed by nature, by combining different things or by making a monster with incongruous additions. trans. Stuart G. Hall modified).

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first concepts, generating concepts from concepts. This ability of humans also explains how we conceive of God; the human conceptualisations of God reflect not the divine nature but the human ability to form concepts.

Gregory's reply to Eunomius apparently targeted Eunomius' assumptions about the rational nature of human beings. Gregory set out to redeem human reason by showing that it operates by means of concepts, that this ability is a God-given gift. Thereby he aimed to defend the view that human beings are like God because they think in terms of concepts.[52] Gregory' theory of concepts, which is an elaboration of Basil's theory, is part of his more general theory of human reason. Such a theory complements the theories of his Christian predecessors who were mainly concerned with scepticism about knowledge by adding a dimension pertaining the nature of the human mind. According to Gregory we not only have the ability to conceive of the external reality and attain knowledge of it, but we can also elaborate on our conceptions of that reality and come up with several new, more refined conceptions of it. This does not make our knowledge of the external world questionable, but it does show the creativity and independence of the human mind. And this was something that Gregory no doubt wanted to emphasise.

5 Conclusion

We have seen that from fairly early on Christian thinkers became interested in concepts because they were interested in the relation between God and man, and between God and the world, but their concern with these topics led them to explore the human ability to form concepts. Clement introduces concepts in order to defend the possibility of attaining secure knowledge and disarm the challenge of scepticism; for him concepts are both mental and linguistic items which constitute subjects of definitions and by means of which we classify things in the world and cognise them accordingly. Origen is the first Christian thinker to present a theory of *epinoiai*, a theory of how we produce different conceptions of the same thing. Origen seeks to articulate an answer to the question of how God's many names do not impute complexity to God's nature. His answer is that the various names we apply to God, to God the Son in particular, are different conceptions produced by the human mind and not features of the divine nature. Basil and Gregory of Nyssa adopted Origen's theory of

[52] For a more amply presentation of Gregory's philosophy of human nature or anthropology, as is often called, see Zachhuber 2000.

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conceptions and developed it further. Gregory often speaks of the concepts that we have as well as of various conceptions not only of the things around us but, quite importantly, also of God. This, he suggests, characterises human beings in general and is indicative of our distinctive cognitive ability; we are able to think conceptually and apply our concepts to the things around us but also to our initial concepts and generate further concepts. We do this when we invent things, when we engage in science or practice a skill and also when we create names for things or classify things in different ways. Concepts bring us in contact with the world and through them we are able to reliably apprehend it through. Furthermore, concepts enable us to be creative in the world; they enable us to invent things but also to classify things in the world differently and in more elaborate and refined ways and thus to conceptualise things differently. For Gregory in particular this is indicative of the range of human conceptual thinking and of the resourcefulness of our minds.

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