

## ON THE SOUL AND THE RESURRECTION

### *Introduction: Mourning Basil's Death and Macrina's Dying*

1. When Basil, great among the saints, had passed from this human life to God and a common access of sorrow came upon the churches, our sister and teacher<sup>1</sup> remained as yet in this life. I went to her then with haste, to share with her the calamity<sup>2</sup> of our brother. Indeed my soul was keening at so exceedingly painful a loss, and I sought one with whom I might share my tears, one who bore the same burden of grief.

2. Alas, when we came before each other's eyes, the sight of the teacher only rekindled the passion, for she too was already in the grip of a mortal illness. She, like an expert equestrian, allowed me briefly to be carried away by the torrent of my grief. Then she then endeavoured to bridle me with words and to steer with the bit of her own reasoning the disorder of my soul. The apostolic saying put forward by her was:

<sup>1</sup> ἡ ἀδελφὴ καὶ διδάσκαλος. Macrina was not only the first-born among the ten children of Emmelia and Basil Senior, but the leading religious spirit in her family, once her paternal grandmother, Macrina the Elder, had died (uncertain, perhaps the 340s). Gregory consistently refers to his sister as his teacher, especially throughout this work, but also in the VSM and in his earliest surviving mention of her, Letter 19. In VSM 8 he reports Macrina's pivotal influence on Basil, but despite the fact that no express mention of her by Basil survives, her continuing influence on him may well be guessed, especially in the early years of Basil's ascetic life at Annisa, 359–62, and in the second period there, 363–65. Much of the shape of the community life taught in Basil's *Small Asketikon* (c. 365/66) derives from the form of ascetic life worked out at Annisa under her guidance. It is a great mistake to suppose, based on older preconceptions, that Macrina could only be Basil's disciple in the monastic life.

<sup>2</sup> ἐπι τῷ ἀδελφῷ συμφορᾷς, this term meaning 'calamity', 'disaster', 'misfortune', almost 'shock' Gregory uses in all the moments of unexpected bereavement in his family: the death by accident of his brother Naucratus, Basil's early death, and Macrina's own death.

**Macrina: 3.** *'One ought not grieve for those who have fallen sleep, for this is the passion only of those who have no hope'* (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4. 13).

But I, with my heart still in a turmoil of grief, retorted:

**Gregory: 4.** 'How can that ever be achieved among human beings, since there is instinct in each of us a natural aversion to death! Those who look upon the dying do not bear the sight easily and those to whom death draws near avoid it all they can. [Kr. 4] Why, even the laws that rule us judge this as the worst of crimes and the worst of punishments. By what construction then are we to consider the secession from life as nothing even in the case of an outsider, to say nothing of our familiars, when they cease from life? **5.** We observe,' I said, 'that all human effort looks to this one thing: how we may continue to live. Indeed it is for this that we have invented houses to live in, that our bodies may not be exhausted by the ambient cold or heat. Again there is the tilling of the earth: what else is it but provision for our life? In fact all concern for our life arises through the fear of dying. What then of the medical art? Why is it held in such honour among human beings? Is it not because it seems somehow by its art to carry on the fight against death? **6.** Why then do we have breastplates, and long shields, and greaves and helmets, and all the defences of armour, and the enclosures of walls and gates barred with iron, and the reinforcements of embankments, and all such things except that we fear death? If death therefore is naturally so fearful, how can it be easy for a survivor to obey this order to remain without grief over one who is falling asleep?'

**Macrina: 7.** 'But what exactly is it about death in itself,' asked the teacher, 'that seems especially grievous to you, since the custom of the unreasoning is insufficient for your aversion?'

**Gregory: 8.** 'What then! Is there nothing meriting grief,' I addressed her, 'when we see one who was so lately alive and vocal becoming all of a sudden bereft of breath and voice and movement, with all the natural faculties of sense extinguished, with neither sight nor hearing any longer operative, nor any other of the means by which sense receives its impressions? If you apply fire or iron to the body or plunge a sword into it or cast it to beasts of prey or if you bury it beneath a mound, it is affected all the same whatever is done to it. **9.** When the change is perceived in all these ways, the principle of life, whatever it may be, vanishes all at once and is no longer evident, just as a lamp is extinguished when the flame, which only a moment before was alight, neither remains in the wick nor passes to some other place [Kr. 6] but vanishes entirely. **10.** How then can such a change be borne without grief by one who has nothing evident to rely on any more? For we hear of the exodus of the soul, and we see what is left. But what it is that has been removed

we do not know, neither what its nature is nor whither it has gone. For neither earth, nor air, nor water, nor any other of the elements<sup>3</sup> shows this force within itself that has quit the body, at the withdrawal of which there remains only a corpse already set for corruption.'

### *Chapter 1: The Soul's Continuance after Bodily Death*

**1.** As I was enlarging on these things, the teacher made a gesture with her hand for silence.

**Macrina:** 'Surely some such fear as this does not disturb you and weigh on your mind,' she said, 'that the soul does not abide forever, but ceases along with the dissolution of the body?'

**Gregory: 2.** I answered rather brashly, without considering too carefully what I was saying, for I had not yet recovered my reasoning from passion. I said that the divine utterances were like commands by which we are constrained to believe that the soul ought to continue forever. We are not led to such a belief by any reason, but it seems that our mind within us accepts slavishly through fear whatever we are bidden, not consenting to what is said by any willing inclination. **3.** Hence our grief over those who have fallen asleep weighs on us all the more, since we do not know for sure whether this life-giving principle still exists in itself or where it is or how it is or whether it no longer exists anywhere at all. **4.** This obscurity about the true state of affairs applies equally to either supposition. To many this seems true, to many others the opposite seems true, and indeed there are some of no small reputation for philosophy among the Hellenes who have thought and taught as much.

**Macrina: 5.** 'Away,' she cried, 'with these nonsensical pagan theories!<sup>4</sup> For by means of them the inventor of lies persuasively fabricates deceptive theories to do injury to the truth. Mark this: such a view about the soul amounts to nothing else

<sup>3</sup> This alludes to the traditional enumeration of the elements as fire, air, water, and earth, attributed to Empedocles, fifth century BC. They reappear at 1.21. Gregory in *On Virginity* 22 says he once listened to a physician discourse on the four elements in the human body. It is a fair guess that this was Basil of Ancyra, a leading Homoiousian bishop and a physician, who wrote *On True Virginity* (PG 30.669–809), once falsely attributed to Basil the Great, in which a ruling idea is keeping the four elements in balance. Gregory appears to have heard him during the sorry pro-Arian Council of Constantinople in 360. See Elm, p. 115.

<sup>4</sup> ἔξωθεν 'of those outside', non-Christians, whether pagans or Jews. This distinction appears fairly often; in this translation it is usually rendered as some form of 'pagan'.

[Kr. 8] than estranging oneself from virtue and looking only to the pleasure of the moment. It dismisses from hope the life looked for in eternity through which alone virtue is of advantage to us.'

**Gregory: 6.** 'How then,' I asked, 'can we reach a firm and unshakable belief in the soul's continuance? For I am also aware that human life will be bereft of the most beautiful thing that life has to offer, I mean virtue, unless an unwavering confidence on this point holds sway in us. What ground for virtue have they who suppose that their existence is limited to this present life and that beyond it there is nothing more to be hoped for?'

**Macrina: 7.** 'Well then,' replied the teacher, 'we must seek where our discussion on these matters may make a suitable beginning. Let your part, if you please, be the defence of the opposing views, for I see that your mind is indeed prone to accept such a brief. Then, once the objection has been stated, the argument for the truth can begin its investigation.'

**Gregory: 8.** Since this was the way she commanded it, I begged her: 'Do not think that I am putting up these objections in real earnest, but rather in order to establish securely the doctrine of the soul by first drawing out what is aimed against this view.' **9.** 'Well then,' I said, 'the supporters of the opposing argument would say this: that since the body is composite, it must be entirely dissolved into that of which it is composed. And when the coalition of elements in the body is undone, each is likely to gravitate towards its own, since it is the very nature of the elements that like is restored to like by some inevitable attraction. Thus the heat in us will be united with heat, the earthy with the solid, and each of the other elements will also pass to its like **10.** so where will the soul *be* after this occurs? If someone should say that it exists in those elements, he would then have to agree that it is the same thing as they are, for a mixture of one dissimilar nature with something alien to it may not be. [Kr. 10]

**11.** 'But if this were the case, the soul would necessarily appear as something variegated, a mixture of opposing qualities. The variegated, however, is not simple, but must be classed with the composite, and all that is composite is necessarily dissolvable.<sup>5</sup> But dissolution means the destruction of the composite, and anything destructible is not immortal — otherwise the flesh itself, dissolvable as it is into its constituents, might also be called immortal. **12.** If, on the other hand, the soul is something other than these elements, wherever can reason suggest that it is? Since

<sup>5</sup> Compare *Phaedo* 78C and *Republic* 611B, where Plato argues for the immortality of the soul on the grounds that it is something simple and unable to be dissolved.

it is of a dissimilar nature, it is not found in those elements, and there is nowhere else in the world where the soul might be, if it is to live in accordance with its own nature. But what is nowhere, plainly does not exist.’

**Macrina: 13.** At these words the teacher uttered a low groan. ‘Perhaps these were the arguments or something like them,’ she said, ‘that the gathering of Stoics and Epicureans brought against the apostle in Athens (cf. Acts 17. 18). I hear that Epicurus was led very far in this direction by his theories. **14.** In his conception the nature of things that exist is fortuitous and mechanical, because there is no providence pervading its affairs. Accordingly he thought that human life is like a bubble inflated by some breath of the body, remaining only as long it is contained in its envelope, and that on the collapse of the swelling its contents too are extinguished along with it. **15.** To him the nature of things that exist is limited to the phenomenal. He made our senses the only measure by which things are to be comprehended. He shut down completely the sensing capacities<sup>6</sup> of the soul and was incapable of contemplating anything intellectual<sup>7</sup> and bodiless. It is just like someone confined in a hut<sup>8</sup> who remains unable to see the wonders of the heavens because he is cut off by the walls and roof from seeing what is outside.

**16.** ‘Truly, all things in the universe perceived by the senses are like earthen walls which for that very reason barricade smaller souls from the contemplation of intellectual realities. Such a one can only see the earth, and water, and air, and fire. But where each of these things comes from, in what [Kr. 12] it has its existence, and by what it is governed, he is unable to discern because of his smallness of soul. **17.** Anyone who sees a garment will reason to<sup>9</sup> the weaver, and from a ship one comes to a conception of the shipwright, and again on seeing a building the hand of the builder comes to the mind of the one beholding it. But these small souls gaze upon the world and their eyes are blind to the one who is declared through all these things.

**18.** ‘And so these shrewd and incisive arguments are proposed by those who teach the soul’s disappearance: that the body is from the elements, and the elements from body, and that the soul cannot exist by itself if it is not one of these elements or in them. **19.** For if these opponents think that if the soul is not

<sup>6</sup> αἰσθητήρια, ‘organs of sense’; essentially the same thing as ‘senses’ just used, but Gregory varies his vocabulary.

<sup>7</sup> νοητῶν, i.e. non-material realities perceptible only on the level of the intellect; often translated in classical philosophical discourse as ‘intelligibles’.

<sup>8</sup> As was Gregory in Sebasteia in early 380 when he wrote his Letters 10, 18, 19, 22, 23.

<sup>9</sup> ἀναλογίζαστο, i.e. will infer to, make ‘analogy’ to.

connatural with the elements it therefore exists nowhere, let them teach first that the life in the flesh is also inanimate,<sup>10</sup> since the body itself is nothing but a convergence of the elements, and then let them say that the soul is not in these either, giving life of itself to the compound. **20.** If, as they think, it is not possible for the soul even to exist after death, although the elements continue to exist, then our very life is shown by them to be nothing but a dead thing. But if on the other hand they do not doubt the soul's existence now in the body, how can they maintain that it vanishes when the body is dissolved into its elements?

**21.** 'In that case let them be equally daring against the divine nature itself! For how can they say that the intellectual and immaterial and formless nature which pervades the wet, and the soft, and the hot, and the solid,<sup>11</sup> sustains all that is, and that although it is not akin to the things which it invests yet it is not incapable, despite its dissimilarity, of being in them? Let them, therefore, entirely remove from their doctrine the divine itself which encompasses all that exists.'

**Gregory: 22.** 'On this point,' I said, 'how can our opponents have any doubt that all things have their being from God and all that exists is held fast in him, or at least that there is something divine that wholly transcends the nature of all that exists?'

**Macrina: 23.** 'Truly, it would be more fitting,' she remarked, 'to keep silence with regard to such doubts than to dignify these foolish [Kr. 14] and impious propositions with an answer, since one of the divine sayings forbids us *to answer a fool according to his folly* (Proverbs 26. 4–5), and he is surely *a fool*, as the Prophet declares, who *says that there is no God* (Psalms 13. 1, 52. 2). **24.** But since it is necessary to discuss this too, I will urge upon you an argument,' she said, 'which is not mine or that of any human being, for this would be a small thing however great the speaker, but one which the whole of creation delivers by means of its wonders, of which the eye becomes the hearer when the wise and skilful argument echoes in the heart from the things which appear. For creation declares its maker openly, for *the very heavens*, as the Prophet says, *narrate the glory of God in utterances without speech* (Psalm 18. 2–4).<sup>12</sup> **25.** For one beholds the harmony of all things in the

<sup>10</sup> ἄψυχον. The very Greek terms lend aid to the argument, since ἄψυχον, 'without life', is literally 'without soul', and ἔμψυχον, 'having life', is literally 'ensouled'.

<sup>11</sup> That is, the four constitutive elements of the cosmos. See Introd.10 and note.

<sup>12</sup> These psalm verses were associated by Christian thinkers with the Pythagorean concept of the 'music of the spheres'. The ideas of Pythagorean astronomy inform this passage with a strange interchange of the aural and the visual. It seems that the 'utterances without speech' of creation resonate in the heart as tones, from which the ear of the heart instructs the discerning eye of the soul.

wonders of the heavens above and of the earth beneath, show all the elements which are contrary to each other by nature are woven together in an inexpressible communion towards the same goal, the power of each contributing to the permanence of the whole.

**26.** ‘One beholds how things which cannot be mixed or allied because of the particularity of their qualities do not secede from each other, any more than they are corrupted by each other when they are tempered towards each other by their contrary qualities. Instead one beholds how those elements which are buoyant by nature are borne downwards, as when the heat of the sun pours down in its rays, while bodies possessing weight are made to rise through becoming attenuated into vapour, so that water contrary to its nature is borne upward and conveyed by winds through the air.

**27.** ‘One also beholds how that fire of the upper air is so borne earthward that not even the abyss fails to share in its heat, how the moisture of the rains which is poured out on the earth, though one in nature, generates myriads of differing plants, fostering the fitting growth of all that is subject to it. One beholds how very swift is the revolution of the firmament, how the orbits within it move in contrary ways, with all the eclipses and conjunctions and the harmonious spacing of the stars.

**28.** ‘When one beholds all these things with the discerning eye of the soul, how can one fail to be taught clearly by the things that appear that there is a divine power, skilful and wise, manifesting itself in the things that are and [Kr. 16] coursing through everything, harmonizing the parts with the whole and completing the whole in the parts, encompassing all with a single power, abiding the same in itself, yet moved about itself, though never ceasing from its motion, yet never changing to a place other than the one it holds?’

**Gregory: 29.** ‘But how,’ I asked, ‘does this belief in the existence of God prove also at the same time the existence of the human soul? For the soul, surely, is not the same thing as God, with the result that if one of them is professed the other must also be professed along with it?’

**Macrina: 30.** ‘It has been said by the wise,’ she replied, ‘that the human being is a kind of microcosm comprising in himself the same elements which go to make up the universe.<sup>13</sup> If this reasoning is true, and it seems probable, we shall perhaps need no other ally to confirm for us what we have assumed concerning the soul. And we have assumed that it exists by itself in a peculiar and distinctive nature apart from the bodily density.

<sup>13</sup> Thinkers of the Hellenistic and Roman eras, e.g. Poseidonius, Philo, Chryssipus, Seneca, etc., commonly inferred the knowledge of God from analogies of microcosm and macrocosm, the little world of the individual human being and the vast world of the universe.

**31.** ‘For just as we come to know the outer cosmos through apprehension by the senses and are guided by these activities of our senses to a conception of a reality and an intelligence beyond the senses, with the result that our eye becomes the interpreter of that all-powerful wisdom which is contemplated in all things, which reveals through itself that which encompasses all things by its means (cf. Wisdom 13. 5).<sup>14</sup> **32.** So also, when we look to the cosmos within ourselves, we find no slight grounds there also for conjecturing from what appears to what is hidden. For what is hidden is something that, being in itself intellectual and without visible form, eludes detection by the senses.’

### *Chapter 2: The Nature of the Soul*

**Gregory: 1.** At this I said: ‘Granted that it is possible to infer the wisdom that transcends the universe from the wise and skilful designs in this harmonious fabric that can be contemplated in the nature of existing things. But for those who would trace the hidden from the apparent, what knowledge of the soul can be gained from the things revealed in the body?’ [Kr. 18]

**Macrina: 2.** ‘Why the soul itself,’ the virgin replied, ‘is a sufficient teacher of what is to be conceived about the soul, especially for those who desire, according to that wise precept, to know themselves.<sup>15</sup> The soul then is something immaterial and bodiless, active and moving in accord with its own nature, and giving evidence of its own movements through the organs of the body. **3.** For the same apparatus of bodily organs exists no less in those whom death has just reduced to corpses, but it remains without movement or activity because the power of the soul is no longer in it. It only moves when there is sensation in the organs and the intellectual power infuses that sensation, moving those organs of sense by means of its own impulses where it pleases.’

**Gregory: 4.** ‘What then,’ I asked, ‘is the soul? Is it possible to delineate its nature by some definition,<sup>16</sup> that by means of the description we may come to some grasp of the subject?’

<sup>14</sup> This seems to mean that even when we reason to the intelligent design that governs the universe, what that wisdom perceives is not itself God, but God in his activities.

<sup>15</sup> That is, the famous motto of the Delphic oracle: γνῶθι σεαυτόν, know yourself.

<sup>16</sup> λογῶ τινὲ, i.e. its ‘logic’, ‘rationale’.

**Macrina: 5.** ‘Some in one way, some in other ways,’ the teacher replied, ‘have offered a definition of it, each defining it as seems best to him. Our opinion about it is this. The soul is an engendered substance,<sup>17</sup> a living and intellectual substance which infuses into an organic and sensate body the power of living and of receiving the impressions of sense, as long as the nature capable of this holds together.’

**6.** As she was saying this she indicated with her hand the physician seated beside her attending to her bodily condition, and said: ‘Here right by us is testimony of what I have said. How, I ask, does this man, when he places his fingers on my artery hear nature somehow calling out to him through the sense of touch and telling him of its particular condition, namely that the body’s infirmity is in fact virulent, and that the disease originates in this or that internal organ, and that the virulence of the fever has reached this or that degree? **7.** How too is he taught by means of the eye other things of this kind, when he observes the way the patient is lying and the wasting of the flesh, and the wan and jaundiced appearance of the complexion, and the look of the eyes [Kr. 20] unconsciously betraying the suffering and pain, all of them indicative of the internal condition.

**8.** ‘So also the ear is a teacher of similar things, ascertaining the condition from the shortness of breath and from the groans emitted with the breathing. One can even say that the expert’s sense of smell is not without use for detecting the pathology, when it discerns the infirmity lurking in the internal organs from the particular quality of the breath. **9.** How could these things be if there were not a certain intellectual power present to each of the organs of sense? What could our hand have taught us by itself, if thought did not lead the tactile sense to knowledge of the subject before it? How could the ear apart from the mind, or the eye, or the nostril, or any other organ of sense, have helped us discern what we are looking for, if each of these existed all by itself?

**10.** ‘But it is the truest of all statements that one of pagan education is recalled to have expressed so well: that it is the mind that sees and the mind that hears.’<sup>18</sup> For if you do not allow this to be true, tell me then, when you look at the sun as you have been taught by the teacher to look, how do you assert that its size is not as it appears to the many from the span of its disk, but that it exceeds many times over the measure of the whole earth? **11.** Do you not confidently maintain that this is so, because you have deduced it by thought from the things that appear in such

<sup>17</sup> οὐσία γενητῆ, i.e. it has come into being, it has a beginning, it is created.

<sup>18</sup> Epicarmus, fragment 249: ‘it is the mind that sees and the mind that hears: all else is deaf and blind’; also quoted by Theodoret in *de Fide* 1.

and such a movement, in such and such interstices of time and space, on such and such occasions of eclipse?

**12.** ‘And when you behold the waxing and waning of the moon you are taught further truths concerning that heavenly body through what appears: that it is without light in its own nature, and that it goes round in the orbit nearest the earth, and that it shines with the rays of the sun as mirrors do, which, when they receive the sun on themselves, do not give back beams of their own, but reflect those of the sunlight from their smooth and shiny surface. **13.** To those who look without enquiry, the radiance seems to come from the moon itself. But what shows that this is not so is that when it comes to be diametrically opposite the sun the whole of the disk that faces towards us is illumined, [Kr. 22] yet its space being lesser, it moves more swiftly round its own orbit, so that before the sun has travelled once round its own course it has completed its own more than twelve times.<sup>19</sup> Hence it happens that the lunar body<sup>20</sup> is not always filled with light. **14.** For in the frequency of its revolutions, the moon which orbits often in a short period does not remain continually facing that body which rotates in a long period. When its position is facing directly opposite the sun it causes the whole side of the moon facing us to be illumined with the sun’s rays, but when the hemisphere of the moon which is always turned toward us moves sideways to the sun, the side facing us necessarily begins to be shadowed, since its exposure to the rays is cut off. **15.** Thus the brightness moves on from the part which can no longer look to the sun to that which still looks to it, until the moon passes directly inside the sun’s orbit and receives its rays from behind, and thus, because it is entirely without light and radiance in its own nature, the side turned to us is invisible while the further hemisphere is all in light. This is spoken of as the complete waning of the moon. **16.** But when as it moves along its own course it has passed the sun again and is transverse to its rays, the side which was previously dark begins to shine a little, for the rays move from the illumined part to that so lately without radiance.

**17.** ‘Do you see then what the sense of sight teaches you? Yet it would never have provided such insight by itself, if there were not something gazing through the eyes and using the data of the senses as guides of a kind to penetrate from what

<sup>19</sup> In the geocentric conception of the solar system, the moon moves around the earth in a nearer orbit in a lunar month while the sun moves round the earth in a more distant orbit once a year. Compare Plato, *Timaeus* 36, 39B.

<sup>20</sup> στοιχεῖον, ‘element’, interpreted here as the moon’s shape, i.e. the hemisphere it presents to view; otherwise, if it is considered to mean its entire sphere, one could translate: ‘it never happens that its form is filled with light’.

appears to what does not appear. **18.** There is no need to enlarge on the resources of geometry that lead us from sensory calculations to what lies beyond the senses, and a myriad other instances besides these, all of which establish that it is possible to ascertain that there is an intellectual substance deeply seated in our nature from the things that are operative in us bodily.’

**Gregory: 19.** ‘Consider this,’ I said, ‘that though all the elements have in common the [Kr. 24] materiality of a perceptible nature, yet there are many individual differences in each form of matter. Motion, for example, is not the same in all elements. Some move upward, some sink down, since their forms are not the same and their qualities differ. What if someone were to say, keeping to the same argument, that they also have a certain innate power in them which gives effect to these intellectual impressions<sup>21</sup> and movements from a natural individuality and power. **20.** I mean the kind of thing we often see activated by the inventors of machines, when matter, skilfully arranged, imitates nature, displaying the likeness not only in outward form, but also in motion, as when the mechanism, resounding in its phonetic part, mimics a kind of voice, though we do not contemplate in these occurrences any intellectual power giving effect to the particular shape, form, sound, and movement.

**21.** ‘What if we were to assert that this is what also happens in the mechanical organism of our nature without any admixture of an individual intellectual substance, that such activity is the result of some kinetic power inherent in the nature of the elements in us, so that it is nothing but an impulsive motion operative in relation to the knowledge that we seek? What would be more likely to be proved by these arguments, that the intellectual and bodiless substance of the soul exists by itself, or that it does not exist at all?’

**Macrina: 22.** She however replied: ‘But your example fights on the side of our argument! Indeed the whole apparatus of the counter-argument brought against us contributes not a little to confirming our conceptions.’

**Gregory: 23.** ‘How do you say this?’

**Macrina: 24.** ‘Because you see,’ she said, ‘to know how to manipulate and arrange soulless matter so that the skill invested in such mechanisms all but takes the place of the soul in this material whereby it is able to mimic movement, sound, shapes, and the like, may be turned into a proof that there is some such case in the human being who is able through the intuitive and inventive power to conceive

<sup>21</sup> τὰς νοητικὰς ταύτας φαντασίας.

[Kr. 26] of these things within himself and to work out such mechanisms beforehand in his mind, and **to** produce them through the operation of his skill, and to realize his thought in matter.

**25.** ‘First he understood that wind is needed to produce any sound, and then in order that wind might be devised for the mechanism he works it out beforehand through reasoning by enquiring into the nature of the elements that there is no vacuum at all in the things that exist, but that the lighter is to be considered a vacuum only by comparison with the heavier, since even the air itself, which has an individual subsistence, is compact and full. It is only by conventional use that a jar is said to be “empty”, for even if it is empty of liquid it is nonetheless full of air, which is what anyone informed will say.

**26.** ‘The proof of this is that when an amphora is put into a pool it does not fill with water immediately, but first it bobs about on the surface because the air that it contains buoys up its cavity. It is not until the hand of the water-drawer forces the amphora below that it takes in water by the neck. **27.** This shows that it was not empty even before it took in water, for a sort of fight between the two elements about the neck can be observed, then the water, forced by the pressure rushes in into the cavity, while the air contained in the cavity is squeezed by the water along the same neck and rushes up in the opposite direction through the same neck, but there it is rebuffed, as the water churns and bubbles against the force of the air.

**28.** ‘Observing this, the inventor<sup>22</sup> conjectured how wind might be introduced into the mechanism in accord with the nature of the two elements. He made a kind of cavity of impervious material that prevented the air within from leaking out in any direction. He then introduced water into the cavity through the opening, measuring out the quantity of water according to requirement. Next he gave a passage to the air on the opposite side through an attached pipe, so that, when compressed by the water, it becomes a more forceful wind, which as it encounters the structure of the pipe, produces a note.

**29.** ‘Is it not clearly proved by such phenomena that there is in the human being [Kr. 28] an intelligence of a different order, distinct from the phenomena, which by its own invisible and thinking nature works out such devices beforehand in itself by conceptualizations, and then brings into the open through serviceable matter the thought conceived within? **30.** For if it were possible to attribute such wonders, as our opponents argue, to the nature of the elements, why, these mechanisms would build themselves for us spontaneously! The bronze would not wait for the

<sup>22</sup> It seems Ctesibius of Alexandria is meant, who is said to have invented the ὑδραύλης, the hydraulic organ, by Athenaeus, περὶ μηχανημάτων 4.174B, written in the second century BC.

artist's skill to be made into the image of a man, but would immediately become so naturally. The air would not require the pipe to produce a tone, but would always be resounding by itself as it chances to flow and move about. Moreover, the upward jet of the water would not be the result of an artificial pressure forced through a channel in an unnatural direction, as it is presently, but would rise into the mechanism entirely of its own accord, being borne upward by its own nature.

**31.** 'If on the other hand none of these results are activated spontaneously by the nature of the elements, but each element is led by skill to a deliberate end, then skill is a certain coherent thought working through matter towards some goal, and thought is a certain movement and operation that belongs to the mind. So you see that even through the counter-arguments put to us, the sequence of the reasoning proves that the mind is something other than that which appears.'

**Gregory: 32.** 'I will agree to this,' I said, 'that what appears is not the same as that which does not appear. However, I do not find in this argument what I am seeking, for it is not yet clear to me what we must consider this non-apparent something to be, except that your argument has taught me that it is not anything material. I do not yet know what is fitting to say about it in itself. This at any rate is what I especially want to learn: not what it is not, but what it is.'

**Macrina: 33.** 'But we learn much,' she replied, 'about many things in just such a way, for we interpret the actual being of whatever it is we seek by affirming what it is not. For example, when we speak of a lack of evil we are proposing the good, and when we call someone 'unmanly', we disclose a coward, and one can speak of many other things [Kr. 30] in a similar way, when we either convey the more positive concept by the negation of bad qualities, or conversely we address our theories to the worse, demonstrating evil through the privation of the good.'<sup>23</sup>

**34.** 'Well then, if you think in just such a way of the subject presently before us, you will not fail to gain a proper conception of what we are seeking, and we are seeking what we are to think of the mind in its very substance. **35.** Granted that you no longer doubt that what we have been discussing does exist because it is

<sup>23</sup> The idea that evil has no existence of itself, but is simply a privation of the good, has one of its earliest Christian expositions in Origen, *Commentaries on John*, PG 14.66A. J. G. Krabinger, ed., *S. Gregorii Episcopi Nysseni de anima et resurrectione cum sorore sua Macrina dialogus* (Leipzig: Gustav Wittig, 1837), p. 201, also cites Plotinus 1.8.1 for the doctrine. Gregory himself discusses it at length in the *Catechetical Discourse*, Chapters 5 and 7. Basil succinctly explains the doctrine in his *That God is not the author of evils*, ch. 5 (PG 31.229–354 (cols 341B–344A)). Though evil does not exist as an ontological principle, he affirms that it certainly has a reality in created existence and experience (344A).

shown to us through its activities, yet if you want to know what kind of thing it *is*, you may discover it well enough when you learn that it is not anything grasped by the senses, neither a colour, nor a form, nor a hardness, nor a weight, nor a size, nor anything in three dimensions, nor localized in some place, nor any of things we predicate of matter, but that is something distinct from all these.'

**Gregory: 36.** At this I interrupted her discourse: 'But if you eliminate all these from the discussion,' I said, 'I do not see how you can possibly avoid excluding with them the very thing we are seeking. I cannot at present see what the attempt to comprehend can cleave to apart from these. 37. For whenever we enquire with the examining intelligence into the things that exist, groping for what we seek like the blind being guided along the walls to the door, we inevitably come upon one of those things mentioned, whether we discover colour, or form, or size, or some other of the things you listed just now. But when it is asserted that it is none of these, we are led by our smallness of soul to think that it is something that does not exist at all.'

**Macrina: 38.** At this she interrupted my speech indignantly: 'Fie on such absurdity!' she said. 'What a conclusion this stunted and earth-bound assessment of existing things reduces us to! If everything unknowable by the senses is to be excluded from existence, surely anyone alleging this would also have to confess this of the very power that presides over and encompasses all that is? When he learns of the divine nature that it is bodiless and without visible form, he will surely argue by the same logic that it does not exist. 39. But if [Kr. 32] the fact that these qualities do not exist in the case of the divine constitutes no obstacle to its existence, how then is the human mind snuffed out of existence at the removal of bodily properties, as if completely used up?'

**Gregory: 40.** 'Well then,' I said, 'in this line of reasoning we only exchange one absurdity for another, for the argument reduces us to the thought that our mind is the same thing as the divine nature, if it is true that neither can be understood except by the exclusion of what is discoverable by the senses.'

**Macrina: 41.** 'Do not say "the same",' said the teacher, 'for this is indeed an impious argument. But say rather, as you are taught by the divine utterance, that the one is like the other. For though that which is *made according to the image* (Genesis 1. 26–27) maintains its likeness to its prototype entirely in every respect, intellectual in relation to the intellectual, bodiless to the bodiless, free of all mass as is that one, and eluding all measurement by dimensions like that one, yet in the particular quality of its nature it is something other than that one. For it would be no longer an image if it were the same as that other in every respect. 42. Rather,

where an aspect is observed in those qualities which are in the uncreated nature, so the created nature shows this aspect in the same qualities. This often happens with a small fragment of glass when it is positioned in the right way towards the sunlight. The entire disk of the sun is seen in it, though it does not appear in it according to its own size, but to the extent that the slightness of the fragment encompasses an impression of the sun's disk. So too the images of those ineffable qualities of the Deity shine forth in the slightness of our nature. 43. Thus reason, guided by these considerations, will not fail to grasp what the mind is in its substance by dismissing bodily qualities from the object of enquiry, and at the same time it will not regard the small and the perishable as equivalent to the unseen<sup>24</sup> and undefiled. It will regard this substance as intellectual, since it is indeed the image of an intellectual substance, but it will not pronounce this image to be the same thing as the archetype.

44. 'The ineffable wisdom of God is so manifest in the universe that we do not doubt that there is a divine nature and power in all that exists whereby they all continue to be. Yet [Kr. 34] if one were to seek a definition of that nature, the substance of God is wholly distinct from everything in creation, both the evident and the conceptual, although it is acknowledged that there is between these a difference of nature.'<sup>25</sup> 45. In the same way it is not at all incredible that although the soul's substance is something quite other by itself, whatever it is conjectured to be, this is no hindrance to its existence, although the things contemplated in the cosmos as its elements do not concur with it in the principle of nature.

46. 'For, as has already been said, in the case of our living bodies which have their subsistence from a blending of these elements, there is no kind of communion in the principle of substance between the simplicity and absence of visible form in the soul and the density of the body, and yet there is no doubt that the life-giving action of the soul pervades them according to a principle beyond human comprehension. 47. Therefore not even when the elements of the body have resolved into themselves is that bond that comes from that life-giving energy destroyed. Just as when that blend of the elements still holds together, each part partakes of the soul'<sup>26</sup> because the soul penetrates equally and similarly each of the members making up the body,

<sup>24</sup> ἀοράτω (invisible) of Krabinger's text, which incorporates the *lectio difficilior* of one codex, the Uffenbach, instead of the ἀορίστω (boundless, limitless) of most codices. Thus ἐπικήρον (perishable) and ἀκηράτω (undefiled, pure) are similar in sound but of distinct fields of meaning. Thus the literary figure is not antithesis, but paronomasia.

<sup>25</sup> That is, the divine nature wholly transcends both the material (bodily) and spiritual (intellectual) creation.

<sup>26</sup> ψυχοῦται, i.e. is 'animated', given life through being endowed with soul.

and yet one could not call it hard and resistant though blended with the earthy, or humid, or cold, or the quality opposite to the cold, though it is in the whole and sends the life-giving power into each part, **48**. so, when that blend is dissolved and has reverted to its own elements, there is nothing against the likelihood that the simple and uncompounded nature which has once by some ineffable principle sprung up with that blend of the bodily elements should always remain with those elements with which it was once mingled, and should in no way be sundered from a coalescence<sup>27</sup> once brought into being. For when the composite is dissolved, that which is not composite is in no danger of being dissolved along with the compound.'

**Gregory: 49.** To this I replied that the elements come together with each other and then are separated from each other, and that this is the constitution of the body and its dissolution, [Kr. 36] no one would deny. Though it is understood that there is a great disparity between each of the elements which are heterogenous among themselves both with regard to their localization in a place and the difference and individuality of their qualities, **50**. yet when they have converged in a given subject, it follows that the intellectual and non-dimensional nature which we call the soul springs up together<sup>28</sup> with that which has been brought into a unity. But once they are divided from each other and each has gone where its nature impels it, what shall happen to the soul when its carriage is thus scattered in every direction?

**51.** Just as a sailor, when his vessel has broken up in a shipwreck, cannot float simultaneously on all the pieces of the boat which have been scattered this way and that over the surface of the sea, but surely seizes whatever comes to hand and leaves the rest to drift on the waves, **52**. in the same way the soul, which is by nature incapable of disintegrating along with the dispersal of the elements, will, if it is reluctant to be parted from the body, surely cling to one of the elements and so be split off from the others. The logic of this argument no more allows us to think it immortal for living in one element than mortal for not existing in the plurality of them.

<sup>27</sup> συμφύσις, i.e. the springing up together of body and soul.

<sup>28</sup> συμφυῶς πρὸς τὸ ἠνωμένον ἔχειν, i.e. the soul does not pre-exist the body but is generated along with the bodily compound in which it acts a life-giving principle. See also 9.19 and note. Cf. *On the Making of Man*, 19.1: 'As man is one, his being consisting of both soul and body, we are to suppose that the beginning of existence is one, common to both parts, lest he be found antecedent and posterior to himself if the bodily element is prior in time and the other a later addition.' This anthropology informs Gregory's several accounts of the Incarnation of the divine in the human at the moment of Christ's conception in the womb of Mary, e.g. Letter 3.16–22 (Silvas, *Gregory*, 128–30) and *Against Apollinaris*, 8 (GNO, III, 223–24).

**Macrina: 53.** ‘But the intelligible and non-dimensional,’ she replied, ‘is neither contracted nor dispersed, since contraction and dispersal are the property only of bodies. No, in keeping with its own nature which is without visible form and bodiless it is equally present at the conjunction of the elements in the body and at their separation, and is no more confined by the compression which attends the conjunction of the elements than it is left behind when they go off to what is akin to them by nature, however wide the disparity contemplated in the heterogeneity of elements seems to be. **54.** For example, there is a great difference between the buoyant and light compared to the heavy and earthy, between the hot compared to the cold, between the humid compared to its opposite. Nevertheless it is no labour to the intellectual nature to be present to each of those elements with which it once cohered when they were combined, since it is not split up by the repulsion of the elements.

**55.** ‘For though these elements are considered to be far removed from each other in locality and particular qualities, the non-dimensional nature does not thereby undergo any hardship [Kr. 38] in being joined to what is separated locally, since even now it is possible for the mind at the same time to contemplate the sky above and be extended to the limits of the cosmos in its busy investigations, and its contemplative power is in no way attenuated by reaching to distances so great. **56.** There is nothing therefore to prevent the soul’s being equally present in the elements of the body when mixed together at their convergence or disbanded at their separation.

**57.** ‘When gold and silver are welded together, a certain technical power can be seen to have welded the materials, and if the one is melted away from the other, the principle of this skill remains no wit less in either, so that when the material is separated into parts the skill is not cut up along with the material, for how can the indivisible be divided into parts? **58.** So, according to the same principle the intellectual nature of the soul can be discerned in the convergence of the elements, and when they are disbanded it is not divided but remains in them. Though it is extended along with them in their separation it is not cut up. It is not chopped up into pieces and sections to accord with the number of the elements, for this is proper to the bodily and dimensional nature, whereas the intellectual and non-dimensional nature is not susceptible to the effects of distance.

**59.** ‘The soul therefore exists in those elements in which it once came into being, for there is no necessity tearing it away from its coherence with them. What cause for gloom is there, then, in this, if the visible is exchanged for that which is without visible form, and why does your mind bear such a grudge against death?’

*Chapter 3: The Emotions and Passions*

**Gregory: 1.** I then took up again in my mind the definition of the soul which she had given earlier in our discussion and said: ‘Your argument does not tell me enough about the powers contemplated in the soul when it says that the soul is an intellectual substance endowing the organic body with a life-giving power ordered to the activity of the senses. **2.** For our soul is not only active in scientific and contemplative thought, being activated in such thinking by its intellectual substance, and it does not only deploy the organs of sense for this activity according to its nature. **3.** Also contemplated in our nature are the great emotions<sup>29</sup> of desire [Kr. 40] and of anger. While both of them have a distinctive existence in us, we observe that the stirring of both is expressed in activities of many and varied differences. One can see that many activities are led by desire, while again many others spring from a basis of anger.<sup>30</sup> None of these is the body, and yet the bodiless is plainly intellectual. **4.** But since our definition puts the soul forward as something intellectual, then one of two alternatives, both absurd, must result from the logic of this argument. Either anger and desire constitute other souls in us, and a plurality of souls is to be discerned instead of one, or not even the faculty of thought in us is to be regarded as soul, if the intellectual cleaves equally to all of them and reveals them all as souls or else excludes each of them equally from what is proper to the soul.’<sup>31</sup>

**Macrina: 5.** She replied: ‘You quite fittingly raise this question already examined by many others: what are we to consider the faculties of desire and of anger to be? Are they found together with the soul’s substance and do they take their

<sup>29</sup> κίνησις, lit. ‘movement’, ‘motion’, which in this context is specifically ‘emotion’.

<sup>30</sup> This is the classic division of emotions into τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν, the ‘concupiscible’ emotions of desire, and τὸ ἐνθυμοειδές, the ‘irascible’ emotions of anger. A great variety of emotions arise from various permutations of either emotion singly or both together; see below, 3.26–28.

<sup>31</sup> W. Moore (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, v, 438, n. 1) comments on the argument here: ‘The syllogism implied in the following words is this: The emotions are intellectual (because incorporeal). Therefore the emotions are soul (or souls). The conclusion is obviously false; logically, by reason of the fallacy of “the undistributed middle”; ontologically, because it requires a false premise additional (i.e. “everything intellectual is soul”) to make it true. Macrina directly after this piece of bad logic deprecates the use of the syllogism. Is this accidental? It looks almost like an excuse for not going into technicalities and exposing this fallacy which she has detected in her opponent’s statement. Macrina actually answers as if Gregory had urged his objection thus: “The emotions are not purely intellectual, but are conditioned by the bodily organism: but they do belong to the expression and substance of the soul: the soul therefore is dependent on the organism and will perish along with it.”’

existence with it at its first constitution, or are they something distinct from it, only coming to be in us later?

6. ‘That they are discerned in the soul is acknowledged equally by everyone, but reason has not yet accurately discovered what we ought to think of them, that any firm conception about them can be maintained. 7. The many still fluctuate in their opinions about them, which are shifting and variable. But in our case, if the pagan philosophy which methodically deals with all these points were a sufficient demonstration of the truth, it would surely be superfluous to add a discussion on the soul to their speculation.

8. ‘But although in the case of the latter their theorizing about the soul proceeded so as far as that which appears gave them license, we are not entitled to such license, I mean of asserting whatever we want to. Instead, we use Holy Scripture as the rule and the norm of every doctrine, necessarily fixing our eyes upon it and accepting only that which is in harmony with the goal of those writings. 9. Accordingly we must set aside the Platonic chariot and [Kr. 42] the pair of horses yoked to it each maintaining a different pace to the other and the charioteer set over them and all other such details with which he philosophizes in figures about the soul.<sup>32</sup> 10. We must also leave aside whatever was said by the philosopher after him,<sup>33</sup> who

<sup>32</sup> *Phaedrus* 246A–B. Plato at first seems to suggest a certain complexity in the soul by describing it under the figure of a charioteer (reason) directing two horses, one noble and disciplined (emotions put to a good use), the other difficult and intractable (emotions ruled by wayward appetites); but later in his work he goes on to argue the simplicity and uniformity of the soul.

<sup>33</sup> That is, Aristotle; see his *De anima* 2.2–3, where he says the human soul comprises in itself all the orders of animate existence. He distinguishes the nutritive, sensate, and intellective functions of the soul in an ascending hierarchy: the first is common to plants, the second to animals, and the last only to man and alone potentially separable from the body. In 3.5 he returns to the intellective, distinguishing between the form-receptive *nous* (mind) and the form-bestowing or agent *nous* (mind). The lower soul, the psyche, is thoroughly merged with the body (2.1) and perishable, whereas the highest aspect of the soul, the agent *nous*, enters from without as something divine and is immortal though not, it seems, in any personal sense (*De anima* 3.1, 3.5, *De gen. animal.* 2.3). Unlike Plato who considered the entire psyche immortal and always of itself in motion (*Phaedrus* 245C), Aristotle denied the psyche any motion of its own. Aristotle generally had a poor reputation with the Church Fathers. Moore (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, v, 439, n. 5) cites Gregory Nazianzen who exclaims (*Oratio* 27): ‘away with Aristotle’s calculating Providence, and his art of logic, and his dead reasonings about the soul, and his purely human doctrine!’ Gregory of Nyssa himself is ambivalent about Aristotle. He has clearly studied him and sometimes uses his concepts and methods, but Aristotelianism was tarred by its association with Eunomius and other heretics who battered especially on Aristotle’s categories of logic. The Latin Fathers also distrusted Aristotle, though they knew little more than his *Categories*. Jerome, for example, noted that it is characteristic of heretics to quote Aristotle.

after he had reasoned technically about phenomena and had carefully examined the question now before us, declared that the soul by reason of these principles was mortal.<sup>34</sup> And we must set aside all those before and since their time, whether they philosophized in prose or in verse.

**11.** 'Instead we will adopt as the guide of our argument, the Scripture, which has legislated that one cannot consider any excellence in the soul which is not also proper to the divine nature. **12.** For he who declares the soul to be God's likeness (Genesis 1. 27 and 2. 7, I Corinthians 15. 45)<sup>35</sup> asserts that anything foreign to God is outside the limits of the soul, for likeness cannot be maintained in deviant qualities. But since nothing of this kind<sup>36</sup> can be contemplated in the Divine nature, one would be right to suppose that such things do not share substance with the soul either.

**13.** 'Now to seek to build up our doctrines by dialectical skill which reaches its conclusions through syllogism and analysis<sup>37</sup> is a form of argument we shall ask to be excused from, as being weak and unreliable for demonstrating truth. **14.** For it is obvious to all that that subtlety in dialectic possesses equal force in either direction, whether for the subversion of truth or the refutation of falsehood. The result is that often we suspect even the truth itself when advanced by means of some such skill, as if the very cunning of these devices were muddling our thought and leading it astray from the truth. **15.** But if one would accept an unprepared argument devoid of all twists and turns, we will express it as best we can, proposing our view of these matters according to the sequence of the scriptural narrative.

**16.** 'What, then, do we claim? That this rational animal, the human being, is the recipient of intelligence and understanding is attested even by those outside our doctrine,<sup>38</sup> and this definition would never have described our nature in this way if it had contemplated anger and desire and all such emotions as sharing the substance of that nature. **17.** For no one would give a definition of any other [Kr. 44] subject by invoking common rather than specific qualities. But since the principles of desire and anger are observed equally in the irrational and the rational natures, one could not reasonably characterize what is common as specific. **18.** How can what is surplus to and excluded from the description of a nature be validly used, as

<sup>34</sup> That is, desire and anger.

<sup>35</sup> Genesis 1. 27–28 does not specify that the soul (only) is created in God's image. To arrive at such a Platonizing notion compatible with Scripture, Gregory has infused Genesis 2. 7, that Adam was created a 'living soul' (ζῶσα ψύχη), into his interpretation of Genesis 1. 27–28.

<sup>36</sup> Again, desire and anger are meant.

<sup>37</sup> The root idea of these Greek words is the 'putting together' and 'taking apart' of arguments.

<sup>38</sup> τῶν ἕξω τοῦ λόγου τοῦ καθ' ἑμας.

if part of that nature, to overthrow the definition of it? For every definition of a substance examines what is specific to the subject in hand. Whatever is outside that specificity is disregarded as extraneous to the definition.

**19.** ‘And yet these activities of anger and desire are acknowledged to be common to all irrational nature. But whatever is common is not the same as that which individualizes. Necessarily therefore, these activities may not be reckoned among those by which human nature is especially characterized. **20.** But just as anyone who sees the principles of sensation and of nutrition and of growth in us does not on that account discard the given definition of the soul — for it does not follow that because *this* is in the soul *that* is not — so, when one detects in our nature the marks of anger and desire, one may not on that account reasonably make war on the definition, as if it failed to fully express that nature.’

**Gregory: 21.** ‘What therefore,’ I asked the teacher, ‘is one to make of this? For I am not able to see as yet how we can fittingly reject as alien to our nature that which is actually within us.’

**Macrina: 22.** ‘You observe,’ she replied, ‘a kind of battle of the reason against them and a struggle to rid the soul of them as far as possible. And indeed there are some in whom this struggle has been achieved, as we hear for example, of Moses, that he was superior to both anger and to desire. History attests both of these in him, that *he was meek beyond all men* (Numbers 12. 3), his freedom from anger being shown in his gentleness and lack of resentment, and that he desired none of those things with regard to which we see the principle of desire so active in the many. **23.** This could not have been so if these faculties were nature and traceable to the principle of substance. For it is impossible for one who has departed his nature to continue to in being at all. But [Kr. 46] if Moses was both in existence and yet without these, then it follows that they are something other than nature and not nature itself. **24.** For nature is truly that in which the existence of its substance is comprehended, and if our estrangement from these emotions lies within our power so that their removal not only does not injure, but is even beneficial to the nature, it is clear then that they are to be considered as externals. They are affects<sup>39</sup> of the nature and not its substance, for the substance is simply that which it is.

**25.** ‘As for anger, the many think it a ferment of the blood round the heart; others a keenness to inflict pain in retribution for pain received. We ourselves would take anger to be an impulse to hurt someone who has provoked us. But none

<sup>39</sup> πάθη, i.e. what the nature undergoes or suffers or has done to it, what in moral discourse (see 3.31) are ‘passions’.

of these tally with the definition of the soul. **26.** Again, if we were to define what desire is in itself, we shall call it a seeking for what one lacks, or a yearning for the enjoyment of some pleasure, or a grief when something on which we have set our heart is not in our power, or a habituation towards some pleasure which it is not possible to enjoy. All these and similar descriptions do indeed indicate desire, but they do not touch the definition of the soul.

**27.** Moreover, among all the other emotions discerned in regard to the soul, some mutual opposites are observable, such as timidity and boldness, grief and pleasure, fear and disdain, and so on. Each of them seems akin to the principles of desire and of anger, while their own nature is identified with an individualizing definition. **28.** Daring and disdain, for example, suggest a certain accentuation of the irascible impulse, while the dispositions arising from timidity and fear suggest a diminishing and weakening of that same impulse. **29.** Grief on the other hand draws its material from both of them, for the weariness of anger, which comes of powerlessness to punish those who have grieved us, itself becomes grief, and our despair of having the things we desire and our privation of the things on which we have set our heart instils a sullen cast of mind. And what is considered the opposite of grief, I mean the thought of pleasure, is similarly divided between anger and desire, for pleasure governs the both of them equally.

**30.** 'All these emotions are around the soul and yet they are not soul, but only like warts growing from the soul's thinking part. [Kr. 48] They are reckoned to be parts of it because they are growing on it, and yet they are not what the soul is in its substance.'

**Gregory: 31.** 'And yet we observe,' I replied to the virgin, 'that they make no small contribution to the betterment of those dedicated to virtue. For Daniel was praised for his desire (cf. Daniel 9. 23, 10. 11, 10. 19, Septuagint) and Phineas propitiated God through his anger (cf. Numbers 25. 11) and we have been taught that *the beginning of wisdom is fear* (Proverbs 9. 10) and have heard from Paul that the goal of *grief according to God is salvation* (II Corinthians 7. 10) and the Gospel legislates for us a disdain for terrors,<sup>40</sup> and what else is *not to be frightened with any amazement* (Luke 21. 9, I Peter 3. 6) but a description of boldness and this last is numbered by Wisdom among the things that are good (cf. Wisdom 8. 7). **32.** The

<sup>40</sup> τῶν τε δεινῶν τὴν καταφρόνησιν. Woods Callahan points out (p. 216, n. 13) that though the sentiment is certainly in the NT, Gregory's phraseology is Platonic. Compare Plato's discussion of courage and his legislation for the ideal state 'concerning the things that are to be feared' (περὶ τῶν δεινῶν), *Republic* 429.

Word shows in all these instances that such qualities are not to be considered passions,<sup>41</sup> for passions would not have been employed to accomplish virtue.’

**Macrina: 33.** ‘It seems,’ replied the teacher, ‘that I myself have occasioned this confusion in reasoning, by not making those distinctions in the argument of the case which would have imposed a certain logical order on our considerations. But now, as far as possible, some such order shall be devised for the investigation, so that by advancing logically in our considerations there may be no more room for such contradictions.’

**34.** ‘We assert, then, that the contemplative, critical, and all-surveying power of the soul is proper to it by its very nature, and that it is through these that the soul preserves in itself the image of the deifying grace, since reason surmises that the divine itself, whatever it might be in its nature, is these at least in these, that is in universal supervision and in discrimination of the beautiful from the worse.

**35.** But when it concerns what lies on the borderland of the soul, capable of inclining to either of two opposites according to its particular nature, the way it is used determines the outcome whether for the good or its opposite. Such for example are anger and fear and any other such emotion of the soul without which human nature cannot be studied. All these we reckon as accretions from without, because no such characteristics are to be found in the beauty of the archetype.

**36.** ‘In the meantime let the following argument of these matters be offered as a kind of training exercise, [Kr. 50] to avoid the sneers of contentious hearers. The Word tells us that the divine proceeded by a certain gradual and orderly sequence to the creation of man. When the foundations of the universe were laid, as the history relates, man did not appear on the earth straightaway. Instead the nature of the irrational animals preceded him, and preceding them were the plants.

**37.** The Word shows by this, I think, that the life-giving power mingled itself with the bodily nature in a certain sequence. First it infused itself into the insensate, and after that advanced into the sensate, and then it ascended to the intelligent and rational.<sup>42</sup>

**38.** Accordingly, some of all the things that exist are with bodies and others are wholly intellectual.<sup>43</sup> Those with bodies are in turn divided into the

<sup>41</sup> *πάθη*, i.e. disordered conditions suffered by the soul: morbid or pathological states. Macrina/Gregory use the term for emotions that have become corrupted: see the definitions at the end of this chapter.

<sup>42</sup> Macrina/Gregory combine the Genesis account of creation with Aristotle’s division of the soul into the nutritive, sensate, and the intellective in *de Anima* 3.1. See p. 189, n. 33 above.

<sup>43</sup> That is, the primordial differentiation of existent beings is between those which subsist in the spatio-temporal-material world (including, for example, light, rocks, and humans), and those

inanimate and the animate — by animate I mean partaking of life. Of living beings, some are endowed with sensation, some have no part in this. Again, of these sensate beings, some have reason, some are irrational.

39. 'Since the sensate life could not subsist apart from matter, and the intellectual could not otherwise come to be in the body if it did not spring up together with the sensate, for this reason it is narrated that finally man was created, that he might encompass every form of life envisaged both of plants and of irrational animals. 40. His nourishment and growth he has from plant life, for such processes can be seen even in plants as they draw in nourishment by their roots and send it forth in fruits and leaves. His constitution as sensate he has from the irrational animals. But the power of thought and reason is unalloyed and particular to this nature, being contemplated by itself. 41. However, just as this nature has the instinct of drawing what is necessary for the material life, which, when it is manifested in us, we call appetite, and we assert that this is an aspect of plant life, since we can see it there too as certain impulses working naturally to secure their proper nourishment and to swell in germination, so too all that is proper to the irrational nature is mingled with the intellectual part of the soul. 42. Among these,' she said, 'is anger; among these is fear and all the other counterbalancing [Kr. 52] activities within us — everything except the power of reason and thought. That alone is special to our life which bears in itself, as has been said, the stamp of the divine character.

43. 'But since, according to the argument which we have just been expounding, the reasoning power cannot otherwise come to be in the bodily life except that it comes into being with the senses, and since sensation already had subsistence in the nature of the irrational animals, a necessary consequence of this alone is our soul's communion with all that accompanies it. 44. These are the incidence within us of what are called "passions", which have not been allotted to human life for any bad purpose at all, for the Creator would be the author of vices if compulsions to wrongdoing had been implanted along with our nature. Instead, these emotions of the soul become the instruments of virtue or of vice according to the way we order our choice, 45. just like the iron that is forged according to the intention of the smith, which takes whatever shape the conception of the smith wills, whether it becomes a sword or some agricultural implement.

which do not, namely the pure 'intelligibles' or spirits (e.g. angels). It unclear whether Macrina implicitly speaks of created beings. If she is not, then perhaps God and the angels would belong in the same class of pure intelligibles. Therefore an even more basic differentiation of 'that which exists' needs to be posited: between the uncreated (or 'non-created', or 'increate') and the created, a distinction of huge importance in Gregory's theology.

46. 'Well then, if reason, that special property of our nature, were to maintain governance over these emotions which have been added to us from without, which indeed the word of Scripture reveals in figures when it commands man to rule over all irrational animals (cf. Genesis 1. 28), none of these emotions would be active in the service of vice. Fear would only generate obedience, and anger courage, and timidity caution, and the impulse of desire would sponsor the divine and undefiled delight.<sup>44</sup>

47. 'If reason, however, casts away the reins like a charioteer who has become entangled in his chariot and is dragged behind it wherever the irrational movement of the yoked horses carries him,<sup>45</sup> then these impulses are changed into passions, just as we see happens with irrational animals. 48. Since in fact reasoning does not preside over the natural impulses innate in animals, the more irascible ones destroy each other under the generalship of rage, while the heavily built and powerful animals gain no benefit from their power, but from their want of reason become the slaves of that which has reason. [Kr. 54] 49. The activities of desire and pleasure in them are not directed to any of the higher realities, and no other impulse observed in them is directed by any reason to the beneficial. 50. So it is with us too, if these impulses are not led by reasoning in the right direction and if the passions prevail against the mastery of the mind, the human being is changed from the rational and the godlike to the irrational and unthinking, being reduced to the level of an animal by the force of these passions.'

**Gregory: 51.** I was greatly impressed by these words. 'Your argument,' I said, 'has progressed so simply and spontaneously and in such orderly sequence, that to anyone of intelligence it will seem to be correct and to diverge in no way from the truth. 52. However, though the syllogism is enough to convince those who are practised only in the technical methods of proof, with us it was agreed that more worthy of belief than any of these technical conclusions is what has been revealed in the holy teachings of Scripture. Hence I think we need to inquire whether the God-inspired teaching concurs with what has been said.'

<sup>44</sup> That is, the consummate joy of union with God.

<sup>45</sup> The allusions are both to Plato's charioteer in *Phaedrus* 246B and to the practice of over-eager charioteers who wrapped the reins fast round their waist so that they could ply their whip on the horses more freely. But this risked just such an entanglement in an accident as is here described. On this analogy the 'letting go' of the reins here means abdicating ordered governance in favour of force, or in classical Greek terms, tyranny.

**Macrina: 53.** ‘And who,’ she replied, ‘would deny that truth is only to be found in that which bears the seal of scriptural testimony? If it is necessary then that something from the Gospel be adduced in support of this doctrine, it will not be untimely to look at the parable of the weeds (cf. Matthew 13. 24–30). **54.** There the householder — and we of course are his household — *sowed good seed.*<sup>46</sup> But the *enemy* watched until the men were asleep, and then sowed worthless seed in the food crop, setting weeds in the very midst of the wheat. **55.** So the two kinds of seed sprouted together, for it was impossible that the seed put in the very midst of the wheat not sprout along with it. But because the roots of the opposite kinds were growing together, the steward of the farm forbade the servants to pull up the useless crop, lest they pull up the nourishing crop along with the alien.

**56.** ‘Now we think that by the good seed the Word means the corresponding impulses of the soul, each of which, [Kr. 56] if it is only cultivated for the good, necessarily puts forth in us the fruit of virtue. **57.** But since there has been sown among these a thoroughly mistaken judgement as to beauty and that alone which is truly beautiful in its own nature (cf. Matthew 19. 17)<sup>47</sup> has been thrown into shade by the sprout of delusion springing up along with it, **58.** for the principle of desire has not sprung up and matured towards that which is beautiful by nature because of which it was sown in us, but it has altered its growth towards the bestial and irrational, the desiring impulse being steered in this direction by the mistaken judgement as to beauty, **59.** and in the same way the seed of anger has not been forged into courage but has only armed us to fight against our own kind, and the power of affection<sup>48</sup> has deserted the intellectual and gone completely mad for the enjoyment of the sensual beyond all measure, and in like manner the other emotions have put forth the worse rather than the better shoots — **60.** because of all this the wise farmer allows the sprouts that have sprung up among his seed to remain there, to ensure that we are not altogether stripped of better hopes if desire were also uprooted along with the useless spouts.

**61.** ‘For if human nature underwent this, what would there be to raise us up to union with the heavenly? If affection is taken away, in what way shall we be united to God? If anger is extinguished, what arms shall we take up against our adversary? **62.** The cultivator therefore leaves the bastard seeds within us, not that they may

<sup>46</sup> That is, his household, his family.

<sup>47</sup> The ultimate and only intrinsic good is the divine. In this teleology our intellectual conceptions of the good govern what we seek and will. According to Plato *Meno* 77C–E, Socrates argued that if one knows what is truly good, one will of necessity act virtuously.

<sup>48</sup> ἡ τε τῆς ἀγάπης δύναμις.

always prevail against the more precious sowing, but that the arable field itself, for so he names the heart allegorically, through the power inherent in it naturally, which is that of reasoning, may cause some of the seeds to wither and render the others fruitful and abundant. But if this does not come to pass, then he reserves for the fire the sorting of the crop. **63.** Accordingly if someone uses these emotions with due reason, holding them in his own power rather than becoming subject to their power, like a king who uses his subjects' many hands for assistance, then he will succeed more easily in his efforts towards virtue. **64.** But if he become theirs, being taken hostage as when slaves [Kr. 58] rebel against their masters, and if he bows ignominiously before their slavish mindlessness and becomes the prey of what was under his yoke according to nature, then of necessity he will turn to whatever the domination of his new masters impels him.

**65.** 'Now if this is how things are, we shall not pronounce these emotions of the soul to be of themselves either virtue or vice, since they lie in the power of those who use them for good or for otherwise. But whenever their movement is towards what is better, then they become matter for praise, as was desire for Daniel, and anger for Phineas, and grief for those who mourn worthily. But whenever their inclination turns for the worse, then they become and are called passions.'

#### *Chapter 4: The 'Place' of Souls in the Afterlife*

**Gregory: 1.** When she had finished speaking she paused and allowed the discussion a brief respite, during which I recollected in my mind<sup>49</sup> all that had been said. Reverting to an earlier line of argument in which it was established that it was not impossible that after the body's dissolution the soul continues in its elements, I asked the teacher this: **2.** 'Where is that Hades as it is popularly called and much bandied about in the custom of daily life and in the writings of both pagans and our own, into which everyone thinks that souls migrate hence as into a kind of repository? Surely you would not call the elements this Hades?'

**Macrina: 3.** 'Clearly,' replied the teacher, 'you have not quite attended to the argument. When speaking of the soul's migration from the seen to the unseen, I thought I had omitted nothing concerning the question of Hades. It seems to me that whether in the pagan or in the divine writings, this word for a place in which

<sup>49</sup> συνελέξαμην τῇ διανοίᾳ τὰ εἰρημένα, an interesting glimpse of Gregory's technique as an attentive listener. The verb bears the sense 'selected and gathered up'.

souls are said to be signifies nothing else but a transition to the non-apparent and invisible world.<sup>50</sup>

**Gregory: 4.** ‘And how is it,’ I asked, ‘that some think that by the “underworld” a place is being named which gives refuge to souls within itself, as if it were a kind of inn adapted to [Kr. 60] receiving such a nature, drawing to itself those that have at last been dragged away from this human life?’

**Macrina: 5.** ‘But our doctrine,’ replied the teacher, ‘will not be injured in any way by such a supposition. For if your account is true, that the heavenly firmament is continuous with itself and seamless and that it encompasses all things within its vault, that the earth and its environs are poised in the middle, and that the movement of all circling bodies is around this fixed and stable centre, **6.** then of necessity, she said, whatever happens to each of the elements in the region above the earth, the same also happens in the region opposite, since one and the same substance extends around its whole mass. **7.** For the embrace of the rays cannot reach all around its spherical shape at one and the same time. It is entirely predictable that on whatever side the sun strikes with its rays, it focuses on some point of the sphere in such a way that if one traced a straight diameter from it one inevitably discovers darkness at the opposite point. **8.** Thus the dark travels around continuously in tandem with the sun’s course, directly opposite the line of its rays, so that the region above the earth and the region beneath it are equally in light and darkness in their turn. Hence we should set aside all doubt that whatever is observed concerning the elements in our hemisphere of the earth, the same holds on the other side. **9.** Since the ambience of the elements is one and the same in every part of the earth, I think it right neither to contradict nor agree with those who raise the objection that we must regard either this or the region beneath the earth as assigned to the souls released from their bodies. **10.** As long as this objection does not shake our principle doctrine concerning the existence of souls after the life in the flesh, our argument will enter into no debate about place, holding as we do that location in a place is a property only of bodies, [Kr. 62] and that since the soul is bodiless, is not by any necessity of its nature detained in any place.’

**Gregory: 11.** ‘But what,’ I asked, ‘if the objector puts forward the apostle who says that at the restoration of all things the entire rational creation will look to him who governs all, among whom he mentions some who are “under the earth” as

<sup>50</sup> εἰς τὸ ἀφανές τε καὶ ἀιεδές. Plato etymologizes the term ‘Hades’ from ἀειδῆ, *aide* (without visible form) in *Phaedo* 80D.

when he says in the Letter to the Philippians: to him *every knee shall bow of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth* (Philippians 2. 10).

**Macrina: 12.** ‘We shall stand by our doctrine,’ answered the teacher, ‘even if we hear them saying this, since even our opponent agrees with us concerning the soul’s existence.<sup>51</sup> So, as we have just said, we make no objection with regard to place.’

**Gregory: 13.** ‘But what is one to say,’ I asked, ‘to those who insist on the apostle’s meaning in this utterance, if one is to interpret the saying without reference to place?’

**Macrina: 14.** ‘I do not think,’ she replied, ‘that the divine apostle was dividing up the intellectual substance according to place when he used the terms “in heaven”, “on earth”, and “under the earth”. But since there are three states in which rational nature exists: one from the very beginning was allotted a bodiless life, and this we call the angelic; another is interwoven with the flesh, and this we say is human; a third is released by death from the things of the flesh, which is contemplated in the case of souls. **15.** Now I think that this is what the divine apostle in his profound wisdom saw when he intimated the future harmony of all rational nature in the good, and so he calls the angelic and bodiless “in heaven”, and that still involved with a body “on earth”, and that already parted from a body “under the earth”. If there is any other nature to be classed among the rational apart from those mentioned, and whether one wishes to call this last “demons” or “spirits” or anything else of the kind, we shall not disagree.

**16.** ‘For it is believed, both in the prevailing opinion and still more in the tradition of the Scriptures, that another nature exists apart, divested of such bodies as ours, which is opposed to the beautiful and injurious to human life, since of its own will [Kr. 64] it lapsed from the better choice, and by this secession from the beautiful it gives subsistence<sup>52</sup> in itself to what is considered its opposite, **17.** and that the Apostle listed this nature, some say,<sup>53</sup> among the things under the earth, signifying in that passage that when evil shall some day be made to vanish through the long courses of the ages,<sup>54</sup> nothing shall be left outside the good, but that even from

<sup>51</sup> That is, after the death of the body.

<sup>52</sup> ὑποστήσασαν, or perhaps ‘personified’.

<sup>53</sup> Notably Origen, according to whose conjectures about *apocatastasis*, hell itself shall eventually cease when all shall be saved.

<sup>54</sup> On the idea of the non-eternity of hell, see below at 6.25, 7.11, 18, and note.

these there shall arise in one accord the confession of Christ's Lordship. **18.** If this is so, then no one can compel us anymore to conceive of a place in the underworld in the expression things under the earth, since the air is poured out evenly on all sides around the earth so that no part of it is left denuded of this mantle of air.'

### *Chapter 5: The Soul's Recognition of the Body's Elements*

**Gregory: 1.** When the teacher had finished expounding these things, I hesitated a moment, and then said: 'I am not yet satisfied about the object of our enquiry, for after all that has been said my mind is still somehow doubtful. I ask please that the discussion return to the same line of reasoning as before,<sup>55</sup> leaving aside the points on which we have already agreed.

**2.** 'For I think that all except those given to excessive controversy will have been quite persuaded by what has been said not to consign the soul after the dissolution of the body to extinction and non-existence, or to maintain that because it differs by nature from the substance of the elements it is impossible for it to be anywhere among the things that exist. For even if the nature that is intellectual and immaterial does not tally with these elements, it is not prevented from being in them.

**3.** This assumption is confirmed for us in two ways: first, that the soul exists in our bodies in this present life even though it is something other than the body in substance; and secondly, that the divine nature, as the argument shows, though it is something wholly other than sensate and material substance, nevertheless pervades everything that exists, and through this permeation of the whole it sustains all things in being. From these considerations, it is consistent that the soul also not be thought outside the things that exist, when it passes from the life contemplated in forms to the unseen.

**4.** 'But how,' I asked, 'once the union of the elements has taken up quite another form through their intermingling with each other, that form in which the soul has become familiar [Kr. 66], when this form disappears along with the dissolution of these elements, as is to be expected, what signpost shall the soul follow after this, now that the recognized form no longer remains?'

**Macrina: 5.** She paused a moment. 'Allow me,' she said, 'to fashion some kind of argument by using an example as best I can, to illustrate the matter before us — even though the idea seems far from any possibility. Grant, then, that in the art of

<sup>55</sup> That is, 2.45, that the soul remains with those elements of which the body had been composed. Gregory's petition twice uses  $\mu\omicron\iota$ , indicating a slightly deprecative, apologetic tone.

the portrait painter it is not only possible to mix contrary colours to achieve a particular tint, as they usually do, but also to separate what has been mixed and to restore to each of the colours its natural hue. **6.** If white or black or red or golden colour or any other hue that was blended to form the given tint were again separated from the mixture with the others and come to be by itself, we would say that the individual appearance of that colour is nevertheless recognized by the artist, and that no kind of forgetfulness will come over him, say of the red or the black for example, if after having become quite a different colour by mixing with the other each returns to its natural hue. **7.** He remembers the way the colours were blended with each other, and knows what kind of colour was mixed with the other and what colour was the result, and how, if the other colour is drained away, it will revert to its own lustre. And if he needs to achieve the same by mixing again, the procedure will be all the easier for him from his having practised it in his craftwork before.

**8.** 'Now, if our argument finds any analogy in this example,' she said, 'we must use it to examine the matter in hand. For this argument, let the soul stand for the art of the painter, and let the nature of the elements be reckoned instead of the artists' colours, and let the varied hue mixed from the different colours and the return of each of these to its own, which we have been allowed to assume, represent the gathering and the separation of the elements. **9.** If, as we were saying in this example, the painter is not ignorant of the hue of each colour, when after been mixed it has returned to its own bloom, but he recognizes the red [Kr. 68], and the black, and any other colour that was used to achieve the form through a distinct communion, recognizing it as it was in the mixture, as it now is in its natural state, and as it shall be again, should the colours be mixed again in a similar fashion — **10.** so the soul knows even after their dissolution the particular nature of those elements whose coming together prepared the body in which the soul itself sprang up. **11.** However far apart their nature drags them from each other through their inherent contrarities which hinder each of them from mingling with its opposite, nevertheless the soul will be in each, being joined to it and abiding in it by its power of recognition, until their convergence again after this dispersal takes place in the same way, in that reconstitution of what was dissolved that truly is and is called resurrection.'

**Gregory: 12.** I interrupted: 'You seem to me by this latest statement to have fought valiantly for the principle of the resurrection. By it the adversaries of the faith might be gently dissuaded from considering it impossible that the elements should come together again and refashion the same human being.'

**Macrina: 13.** 'Yes,' said the teacher, 'what you say is true. For we may hear those who are opposed to this principle asking that, when the elements are

dissolved into the universe each to its own kind, by what device can the warmth that was in this life, once it has been dispersed unalloyed into the whole, be separated again from its own kind in order to constitute this human being who is being refashioned? **14.** For if the individual element does not return exactly, and instead of it something of the same kind replaces it, what shall come to be is something other than the first one, and this would no longer be a resurrection as such but the making of a new human being. **15.** But if it is necessary that the same *return to himself* (Luke 15. 17), it is fitting that he be wholly the same as himself and take up again his original nature in every part of its elements.’

**Gregory: 16.** ‘To meet that kind of objection,’ I said, ‘the above opinion about the soul would be enough for us,<sup>56</sup> [Kr. 70] that it remains after dissolution in those very elements in which it grew up from the beginning, and like someone mounting guard over his own property, it does not let go of its own when they are mingled with their own kind, but by the subtlety and ubiquity of its intellectual power it makes no mistake about the elements, however subtle their diffusion. **17.** Instead it slips in along with its own as they merge with their own kind, and in no way loses its force by accompanying them as they pour back into the universe, but remains with them wherever or however nature arranges them. **18.** But if the power that disposes the universe signals the scattered elements to come together again, then, just as when the different strands that hang from a single pulley all answer at one and the same moment to the pull, so when this one power of the soul draws together the various elements, the cable of our body shall be woven together by the soul as its own converge again, each of them being woven into its ancient and accustomed place and embracing what it recognizes.’

**Macrina: 19.** ‘And another example,’ the teacher continued, ‘might well be added to those we have already examined, to show that there is no great difficulty in the soul’s distinguishing its own among the elements from the foreign. **20.** Suppose then a potter has been provided with clay, and let it be a large supply, and let some of it already be moulded to the state of being finished off as vessels, while the rest is yet to be moulded. Let not all of the required vessels be of the same shape. One is to be a cask, for example, and another a jar, another a plate, or a bowl, or some other useful vessel. Let them not all have one owner, but suppose for the sake of the argument that each has its own master.

<sup>56</sup> At this juncture, Macrina’s and Gregory’s roles are momentarily reversed: she articulates the argument of opponents and Gregory offers the defence.

21. 'As long as these vessels are intact they are of course recognizable to their owners. Yet even if they are broken up, they will nevertheless be identifiable to their owners even from their pieces — one piece for example will belong to a cask, while another kind will belong to a cup. And if they are mixed into the un-worked clay, the discernment of [Kr. 72] what has been already worked from the un-worked clay will be much more unerring.

22. 'Now each human being is in some way a vessel like that.<sup>57</sup> He was moulded from the common material by the convergence of his elements, acquiring at the same time considerable differentiation from his own kind by his individual shape. 23. When that shape is dissolved, the soul which has possessed that vessel nevertheless recognizes its own even from the remains. It will not secede from its own, whether they are in communion with the other fragments or mixed into the un-worked part of the material from which the elements come. It always knows its own as it was when intact in bodily form, and after dissolution it never makes any mistake about its own, led by the signs which persist in the remains.'

**Gregory:** 24. Welcoming what she had said as thought out aptly and appropriately for the aim set before us, I replied: 'It is well to speak of and believe in these things in this way. But what if someone were to urge against our discussion that the Lord's narrative in the Gospel about those who are in Hades is not consistent with our examination? How are we to be prepared to give an answer?'

**Macrina:** 25. She replied: 'The Word certainly expresses the narrative in rather bodily terms, but there are many pointers<sup>58</sup> scattered in it that summon the careful inquirer to a more subtle contemplation. 26. For he who divides the good from the worse *by a great gulf* and has the sufferer craving *a drop of water brought by a finger*, and offers the patriarch's bosom as repose to the one who was ill treated during this life, and tells of their death before this and their consignment to the tomb (cf. Luke 16. 19–31) leads anyone who is not inattentive in searching out these sayings no small way beyond a superficial understanding.<sup>59</sup> 27. For what kind of eyes has the rich man to lift up in Hades, when he has left those of the flesh behind in the tomb? And how can the disembodied feel any flame? And what kind of tongue does he crave be cooled with a drop of water when he no longer has the fleshly one? What is the finger that is to sprinkle him in this way? The bosom of repose itself, what is it?

<sup>57</sup> Gregory returns to this analogy and will later develop it in the *Catechetical Discourse* 8.

<sup>58</sup> ἀφορμᾶς, starting points, prods, thought provokers, pointers to further reflection.

<sup>59</sup> τῆς κατὰ τὸ πρόχειρον διανοίας, i.e. a literal understanding of the parable.

28. 'Inasmuch as the bodies of both of them are in the tomb [Kr. 74] and their souls are not in the body and do not consist of parts, it would scarcely be possible to reconcile the scheme of the narrative with the truth if it were understood superficially. One can only do this by transposing each detail to the level of a contemplation of the mind.<sup>60</sup> 29. Thus the gulf must not be thought of as some chasm in the earth but as a barricade against the communion of incompatibles, for what trouble would it be to the bodiless and the intellectual to span such a gulf, however vast it might be, since what is intellectual by nature can be wherever it wills in no time?'

**Gregory: 30.** 'What then,' I asked, 'are the fire, and the gulf, and the other things that are spoken of, if they are not what they are said to be?'

**Macrina: 31.** 'It seems to me,' she replied, 'that the Gospel signifies by each of these certain doctrines relating to our enquiries into the soul. For when the patriarch says first to the rich man, *you during your life in the flesh received your share of good things* (Luke 16. 25) and says likewise of the poor man that he fulfilled his service<sup>61</sup> during his life by his share of bad things and then comments further on the gulf that walls them off from each other, by such expressions he intimates a doctrine very important for our argument. That doctrine, to my reasoning, is as follows: 32. Originally the life of human beings had only one form, and by one form I mean a life that was contemplated only in the good, unalloyed with the bad. The first of God's laws attests this principle, which gave to man an unstinting participation in all the beauties of paradise, forbidding only that which had a nature mixed of contrarities through the confusion of the bad with the beautiful, and imposing death as the penalty for transgression. (cf. Genesis 2. 17) 33. But man, acting freely by an autonomous impulse, abandoned the lot unmixed with the worse, and drew on himself the life compounded of contrarities.

34. 'Yet the divine forethought did not leave that recklessness of ours without a remedy. But since death necessarily fell upon the transgressors as the sentence for breaking the law, it divided human life into two parts, the one spent in the flesh [Kr. 76] and the other apart from the body hereafter. 35. Their span is not of equal duration, for God has circumscribed the first with the briefest possible limit of time and prolonged the other to eternity. In his love for man he gave him the power to

<sup>60</sup> Compare Gregory's defence of an interpretation of the Scripture that goes beyond the literal sense, in his *Letter to Olympias*, remarked above in the introduction to *On the Soul*, 'Macrina as Philosopher', p. 166.

<sup>61</sup> τὴν λειτουργίαν, lit. his 'liturgy', his due service to God.

choose which of the two he would have, I mean the good or the bad, either in this short and fleeting life or in those endless ages whose boundary is infinity.

**36.** ‘Now these expressions “the good” and “the bad” are equivocal, for each of them can be used with two meanings, one relating to the mind I mean, and the other relating to the senses. Some on the one hand class as good whatever seems pleasant to the senses, while others believe that only that which is contemplated by the intellect is good and should be so named.

**37.** ‘Those, therefore, who have never exercised their reasoning powers and have never enquired after the better way soon squander that portion of the good which is due to their nature on idle indulgence in this fleshly life, storing up none of it for the life hereafter. **38.** But for those who order their own life here with discerning and sober reasoning, enduring in this brief life things painful to the senses and storing up the good for the age that is to come, the result is that better lot which is co-extensive with eternal life.<sup>62</sup>

**39.** ‘This therefore, in my opinion, is the “gulf” which does not come of a rift in the earth, but is made of those decisions during this life which are divided into opposing inclinations. For anyone who has once chosen pleasure in this life and has not cured his recklessness through repentance, renders inaccessible to himself the country of the good hereafter, for he has dug by himself this impassable necessity like a yawning and unbridgeable abyss. **40.** This is why it seems to me that the good state of the soul in which the Word gives repose to the long-enduring athlete is called Abraham’s bosom. For it is related that this patriarch was the first of all who had lived up to that time to exchange the enjoyment of the present for the hope of what was to come. Stripped of everything in which his life had consisted from the beginning, he sojourned among strangers, and thus [Kr. 78] purchased by present afflictions the blessed lot in which he hoped (cf. Genesis 12. 1, Hebrews 11. 8–11).

**41.** Just as by an applied usage we call a certain embrasure of the sea a “bosom”, so the Word it seems to me to convey the sense of that immeasurable good above by the term “bosom”,<sup>63</sup> in that all who sail through this life with virtue, when they set out from here, moor their souls in that “bosom” of the good as in a waveless harbour.

**42.** ‘But for the others the privation of the good now manifest to them becomes a flame smouldering in the soul, so that it craves but does not obtain the consolation of one drop of that sea of the good engulfing the holy. **43.** If you also consider the tongue and the eye and the finger and the other bodily terms which occur in

<sup>62</sup> ‘Life is short, eternity is long.’ The observation is made by Plato in the *Republic* 608C.

<sup>63</sup> The word for a geographic ‘bay’ or ‘gulf’ and for ‘bosom’ is the same in Greek: κόλπος.

the dialogue between the disembodied, you will acknowledge that they accord with the argument we have already worked out by conjecture concerning the soul — if you look carefully into the thought behind the words. **44.** For as the convergence of elements makes the substance of the whole body, so too it is likely that the nature of the members that are in the body is implemented from the same cause. **45.** If the soul therefore is present in the elements of the body when they are again mingled with the universe, it will not only recognize the sum of the elements which once converged to form the whole compound and so remain in them, but it will also not fail to recognize the particular consistency of each of the members and by what morsels among the elements our limbs were completed. It is therefore not at all unlikely that that which exists in the whole sum of the elements also exists in each of them. **46.** And so if one considers those elements in which each member of the body potentially exists and supposes that Scripture is saying that a finger and an eye and a tongue and all the others exist after the dissolution of the compound in connection with the soul, one will not miss the likely meaning.

**47.** ‘Moreover, if such details dissuade the mind from a bodily conception of the story, it is also likely that the above-mentioned Hades<sup>64</sup> is not to be thought a place called by that name, but that we are being taught by the Scripture that there is a certain invisible and bodiless state of life in which [Kr. 80] the soul continues to live.’

### *Chapter 6: The Soul’s Progress toward the Divine*

**[Macrina cont.]: 1.** ‘Yet, we also learn in this story of the rich man and the poor man another doctrine very pertinent to our investigations. The story has it that when that lover of the flesh given to passions<sup>65</sup> realized that his own calamity was inescapable, he gave forethought to those belonging to his family on earth. **2.** When Abraham told him that the life of those still living in the flesh is not unprovided for, since they have guidance at hand, if they will, in the Law and the Prophets, the rich man persisted in begging that the message would take them by surprise and be persuasive if announced by someone come back to life from the dead.’

**Gregory: 3.** ‘What then,’ I asked, ‘is the doctrine in these details?’

<sup>64</sup> That is, at 4.2, and queried again at 5.2.

<sup>65</sup> ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἐμπαθῆ καὶ φιλόσοφον.

**Macrina: 4.** ‘In these,’ she said, ‘that Lazarus’s soul is occupied with present blessings and does not turn back to anything left behind, whereas the rich man is still stuck to the fleshly life even after death, as if with some gum.’<sup>66</sup> Even though he has quit this life he has not divested himself cleanly of it, but is still preoccupied with flesh and blood. For in his plea that those who share family ties with him be exempt from evils it is clear that he is not yet freed from fleshly attachments.<sup>67</sup> **5.** In such details of the story, she said, I think the Lord teaches us this: that especially we who are alive in the flesh must, as far as we can, separate and free ourselves somehow from its inclination by a life of virtue, so that after death we do not need yet another death (cf. Revelation 2. 11, 20. 14) to cleanse us from the residue of this fleshly glue, but that when the bonds around the soul are broken its course<sup>68</sup> towards the Good may be light and unimpeded, with no burden of the body to drag it down (cf. Romans 7. 24).

**6.** ‘For anyone who becomes wholly and completely fleshly in mind, devoting all the movement and energy of the soul to the *will of the flesh* (John 1. 13), such a one even when he is parted from the flesh is not separated from its symptoms,<sup>69</sup> just as those who spend much time [Kr. 82] in places of foul odour are not cleansed of the unpleasantness contracted through their prolonged stay there, even when they pass into sweet-smelling air. **7.** So too in the passage to the invisible and subtle life, not even then will lovers of the flesh be able to avoid dragging with them in some way the fleshly foul odour. And thus they intensify their pains, because the soul has become more material from its immersion in such environs.

**8.** ‘There seems to be some support for this view in what is reported by some, that the shadowy phantasms of those who have fallen asleep are often seen around

<sup>66</sup> ἰξω τινη τῆ σαρκίνῃ ζωῆ . . . προσίσχεται, ‘gum’, ‘glue’, ‘cement’, ‘bird-lime’. The soul hampered by bodily ‘glue’ is a Platonic image with a long career. See *Phaedo* 82E.

<sup>67</sup> Catharine P. Roth explains in *Gregory of Nyssa On the Soul and the Resurrection* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), p. 75, n. 1, that this borrows from Plato’s *Phaedo* (81A–D), in which Socrates says that souls contaminated by attachment to bodily pleasures cannot escape to the invisible divine world after death — only here Macrina replaces the Platonic ‘body’ with the Pauline ‘flesh’, which is the mentality bound to this world that reigns in both body and soul.

<sup>68</sup> δρόμος. Here Macrina/Gregory blend the Pauline image of the race course (Acts 20. 24, 1 Corinthians 9. 24, 11 Timothy 4. 7) and the Platonic image of the soul’s upward flight like a bird (*Phaedrus* 248 C); hence Moore (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, v, 448) translates it as ‘soaring’.

<sup>69</sup> παθημάτων, morbid conditions, pathologies.

the places where their bodies have been laid.<sup>70</sup> If this is really so, then the soul's attachment to the fleshly life here is revealed in that the soul, even when thrust from the flesh, is unwilling to fly cleanly away or to concede that its aspect has been transferred entirely to that without visible form, but remains near the form even after freed from the form, and though now outside it, hovers regretfully over the place of its matter and continues to haunt it.'

**Gregory: 9.** I paused a moment to recollect the thought of what she had been saying. 'It seems to me,' I said, 'that a certain contradiction now crops up between what you have said and our earlier investigation into the passions. For if such emotions of the soul are considered to be active in us due to our kinship with the irrational animals as were listed in our earlier discussion: anger and fear, desire and pleasure and so on, **10.** and if it was asserted that virtue consists in putting these to good use, and vice comes of the failure to do so, and if in addition we argued that each of the other emotions contributes to a virtuous life, and how it is by desire that we are led to God, being drawn up as by kind of a rope from below towards him: the whole argument, I said, seems somehow to contradict our present thrust.'

**Macrina: 11.** 'How do you say this?'

**Gregory: 12.** 'Why,' I said, 'when every irrational emotion is extinguished within us after our purification, this principle of desire [Kr. 84] will wholly cease to exist, and if this is no more, neither will there be any more striving after the better, since no such emotion remains in the soul to stir us up to a longing for the good.'

**Macrina: 13.** 'To this,' she said, 'we reply that the contemplative and discerning principle is proper to the deiform soul,<sup>71</sup> since it is by these we apprehend even the divine. If, then, whether by care exercised here or by purification hereafter, our soul becomes free of its coalescence with the irrational passions, there will be nothing to hinder its contemplation of the beautiful. For the beautiful is somehow attractive by its very nature to all who look towards it. **14.** If the soul then is purified of every vice, it will exist wholly in beauty. Since the divine is by its very nature beautiful, the soul will be joined to it through purity, being joined to its familiar. Were this to take place, there would no longer be any need of the emotion of desire

<sup>70</sup> Macrina/Gregory allude to the discussion of ghosts in Plato, *Phaedo* 81B. Origen, in discussing Celsus's Epicurean view that ghosts are pure illusion (*Contra celsum* 2.60), himself refers back to the *Phaedo* passage being used here.

<sup>71</sup> τοῦ θεωειδοῦς τῆς ψυχῆς.

to guide us to the beautiful. **15.** For anyone who dwells in darkness will be in desire for the light, but once he comes into the light then enjoyment displaces desire. The potency of enjoyment renders desire stale and effete.

**16.** ‘Thus it would be no loss to our participation in the good if the soul were to become free of such emotions and *having returned to itself* (Luke 15. 17) to see itself accurately, of what kind its nature is, and look through its own beauty as in a mirror and image toward the archetype. **17.** For we can truly say that the accurate likeness<sup>72</sup> to the divine (cf. Genesis 1. 26–27) consists in our soul’s imitation in some measure of the transcendent nature. For that nature which is above all thought, whose seat is far from all that is contemplated within us, proceeds in its own life in a very different manner and not as we do in this present life. **18.** For we human beings, whose nature is always to be entirely in motion, are borne wherever the impulse of our choice impels us, for it is not as if the soul is affected in the same way by what lies before it, so to [Kr. 86] speak, and what lies behind it. Hope initiates the forward movement, but memory brings up the rear as that movement advances towards the hope. If hope indeed leads the soul to what is beautiful by nature, the trace that this movement of the will imprints upon the memory is a bright one.

**19.** ‘But if hope has tricked<sup>73</sup> the soul with some idol of the good so that it is defrauded of the better, then the memory that follows upon these events is turned to shame. And thus internal warfare arises in the soul, with memory fighting against hope because it has been such a bad leader of the will. **20.** The passion of shame clearly construes some such a state of mind in which the soul is stung at the outcome and lashes the reckless impulse with remorse as with a whip, courting even forgetfulness as an ally against its tormentor.

**21.** ‘But with us, our nature is so poor in the beautiful that it is always seeking what it lacks, and this appetite for what it misses is the very disposition of desire in our nature,<sup>74</sup> whether it is led astray by bad decisions from the truly beautiful, or even comes upon the good by chance. **22.** But the nature surpassing every good conception and transcending every power, which has no need of anything that can

<sup>72</sup> ὁμοίωσιν, i.e. becoming *like* God, not being the *same* as God; Macrina/Gregory are careful to safeguard theological and anthropological exactitude. There is no scope for pantheism or monism in Cappadocian theology.

<sup>73</sup> παρασωφισαμένης, alluding to the late fifth-century BC debates about the aims of sophists in Athens, who undertook to teach how to persuade hearers that black was white and white was black.

<sup>74</sup> Roth (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*, p. 78) refers to Plato’s *Symposium* 201B, where Socrates asserts that love (*eros*) is always needy.

be regarded as good since it is itself the sum<sup>75</sup> of all good, does not come to be in the beautiful through participation in the beautiful, but itself *is* the nature of the beautiful, whatever the mind may suppose that beautiful to be.<sup>76</sup> **23.** This nature neither admits in itself the movement of hoping, since hope is only active towards something absent, and, as the Apostle says, *does one hope for what one already has?* (Romans 8. 24), nor has it any need of the activity of the memory for its knowledge of things, for whatever is seen does not need to be remembered. **24.** Therefore, since the divine nature outstrips every good, and the good is wholly dear to the good, it follows that in beholding itself it wishes for what it has and it has what it wishes, admitting nothing external to itself.

**25.** ‘Yet nothing is outside it except vice alone, which, paradoxical as it may seem, has its existence in non-existence. For there is no other origin of vice except the [Kr. 88] privation of what is, for that which truly is, is the nature of the good.<sup>77</sup> Therefore anything not found in that which is, is certainly in non-existence. **26.** Once the soul has divested itself of all the varied emotions of its nature and become deiform, and has mounted above desire to that towards which it was once elevated by desire, it offers no more occupation in itself for either hope or memory. **27.** For it has that which it hoped for, and being now wholly occupied in the enjoyment of the good it dismisses memory from its thought. And by being thus conformed to the particular qualities of the divine nature it imitates the life that is above. No other disposition is left to it now but that of love, which cleaves to the beautiful by natural affinity. For this is love, the innate affection for the object of one’s desire.<sup>78</sup> **28.** When the soul therefore has become simple and one in form and accurately godlike, it finds that truly simple and immaterial good which alone is really loveable and desirable, and cleaves to it and is mingled with it through the

<sup>75</sup> πλήρωμα, plenitude, fullness.

<sup>76</sup> Here the divine nature is equated with the Platonic form of the beautiful. Lesser material beings share in the beautiful by participation in a greater or lesser degree in this ultimate beauty. See *Symposium* 211B, *Phaedo* 100C. This use of Platonic philosophy is assimilated to the Gospel saying that *One alone is good, God* (Matthew 19. 17).

<sup>77</sup> Metaphysical optimism, the idea that evil has no real existence but is a privation of the good, which alone has real being, is highly characteristic of Gregory’s thought. In terms of philosophical development, it seems to have come to the fore during Middle Platonism. Its greatest exponents in the third century were Origen (e.g. *Commentary on John* 2.13.92–96) and Plotinus (*Enneads* 1.8.3). See p. 183 n. 23 above.

<sup>78</sup> ἡ πρὸς τὸ καταθύμιον ἐνδιάθετος σχέσις, a habit or innate disposition towards what-is-according-to-one’s heart.

movement and activity of love, fashioning itself according to that which it is ever comprehending and discovering.

**29.** ‘The soul becomes through likeness to the good that which the nature in which it participates is. But since there is no desire in that nature because there is no lack of the good in it, it would follow that the soul also becomes free of any lack and hence expels from itself the movement and disposition of desire, for this arises only in the absence of something yearned for. **30.** It was the divine apostle who introduced this teaching to us, when he foretold a certain ebbing and cessation of all our present strivings, even for the better, but found no limit for love alone. *Prophecies*, he says, *shall come to an end*, forms of *knowledge shall cease*, but *love shall never fail* (I Corinthians 13. 8), which is equivalent to saying that it continues always as it is. **31.** Although he says that faith and hope have remained so far along with love, yet he extends love even beyond them, and with reason. For hope is in motion only as long as the enjoyment [Kr. 90] of things hoped for is not to be had, and faith in the same way is the buttress of things hoped for while they are as yet obscure, for so he defines it: *faith is the upholding of things hoped for* (Hebrews 11. 1). But when that which is hoped for has come, then all other movements ebb away while love alone remains active, finding nothing more to supplant it.

**32.** ‘Love, therefore, is the foremost of all the accomplishments of virtue and of the commandments of the law. So if the soul ever attains this end it will have no need of the others, because it has embraced the sum of all that is and because it seems that love alone somehow preserves within itself the character of the divine blessedness. For the life of the sublime nature is love, since the beautiful is wholly lovable to those who recognize it, and the divine recognizes itself. But then knowledge becomes love, because that which is recognized is beautiful by nature. **33.** The insolence of satiety cannot touch that which is truly beautiful. With no satiety able to disrupt this state of love for the beautiful, the divine life will always be activated through love. This life is beautiful by nature and lovingly disposed by nature towards the beautiful, and knows no limit to the activity of love, **34.** because no boundary of the beautiful can be comprehended such that love might leave off at the boundary of the beautiful. Indeed the beautiful is only limited by its opposite, but since its nature is unreceptive to the worse, it will go on towards the boundless and limitless good.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup> One of the most original and important contributions of Gregory’s theology is his exposition of the divine infinity, which is a development of the Cappadocian doctrine of God’s incomprehensibility (‘ungraspableness’). In Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophy and in Origen’s theology, perfection was seen in terms of a complete (i.e. definite) simple whole. Plotinus in the *Enneads* 6.6.2

35. 'Inasmuch as every nature tends to attract what is related to it, and the human is in some way related to God because it bears within itself imitations of its archetype, the soul is by every necessity attracted to the divine which is akin to it, for it is altogether and in every way necessary that what belongs to God be secured as his own. If the soul then happens to be light and untrammelled, and no bodily burden presses it down, its advance towards the one who draws it becomes sweet and congenial.'

### *Chapter 7: The Pains of Purification*

[**Macrina cont.:**] 1. 'But if on the other hand, the soul is fastened with the nails of passionate attachment to the material state, its case will be something like those bodies buried beneath the rubble of buildings which have collapsed in earthquakes.'<sup>80</sup>

connects the bad, multiplicity, and infinity: 'Multiplicity therefore is a revolt from unity, and infinity a more complete revolt by being infinite multiplicity. Hence infinity is bad, and we are bad when we are a multiplicity.' In this view one can experience satiety even of participation in the divine which leaves the way open to a return to lower orders (Cf. Origen, *On First Principles* 1.3.8, 2.9.2). No, says Gregory, the divine nature is perfect in its very boundlessness and its infinity. It is *πασῆς περιγραφῆς ἔκτός* 'beyond every circumscription' (*Catechetical Discourse* 8.65). The partaker of the divine nature can never be sated with God who has no limits. Perfect spiritual attainment for the human being therefore consists in never finally attaining but always reaching out for the God who is always greater. This is the key to Gregory's mystical theology of *epektasis*, a term he found in Philippians 3. 13. See Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 13–14.

<sup>80</sup> On earthquakes see also 10.41. The entire region of Asia Minor / modern Turkey is on a tectonic plate and historically subject to seismic activity. The most recent catastrophic earthquake at the time of Gregory's writing is the levelling of the city of Nicaea on 11 October 368. See Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.11 (which gives the exact date, and reports another severe earthquake soon afterwards at Germa on the Hellespont); Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.10; Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.21. Basil's homily *that God is not the author of evils* (PG 31.329–54), preached in 369, frequently refers to city-levelling earthquakes, evidently with the recent event in mind. In Letter 26 Basil congratulates and counsels Caesarius on escaping death during this earthquake. Gregory Nazianzen himself says of his brother, *Oratio* 10.10: 'And when, a short time ago, the earthquake occurred at Nicaea, which is said to have been the most serious within the memory of man, overwhelming in a common destruction almost all the inhabitants and the beauty of the city, he alone of the men of rank, or with very few, survived the danger, being shielded by the very ruins in his unbelievable escape' (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, VII, 234). A major earthquake devastated nearby Nicomedia on 28 August 358, which Gregory of Nyssa refers to in his Letter 17 to the presbyters of the city. See Silvas, *Gregory*, pp. 161–69 (p. 166). He also mentions this tragedy in *Against Fate*, GNO, III.2, 52.1–2, 54.1–2.

Let us propose for the sake of illustration [Kr. 92] not only that they are pinned beneath the ruins but they have also been pierced with some metal shards or splinters of wood found in the rubble. **2.** What then are those bodies likely to endure as they are dragged from the ruins by relatives for the holy rites? They shall be all discoloured and torn and mangled in the most dire manner possible, the rubble and the nails lacerating them by the very force necessary to drag them out. It seems to me that some such experience also comes upon the soul when the divine power, for very love of man, drags its own from the ruins of the irrational and material.

**3.** 'For it is not in hatred, not in retaliation for a life of vice, in my opinion, that God brings upon sinners those painful affects. He is only claiming and drawing to himself whatever by his gift has come into generation. But while he who is the source of all blessedness attracts the soul to himself for a better end, this necessarily affects the one being attracted as a painful state. **4.** Those who extract extraneous matter from the gold by fire, not only melt the dross in the fire, but must also melt the pure along with the spurious, so that when the dross is drawn off the gold remains. Even so, when vice is being drawn off in the purifying fire, the soul that is united to it is by every necessity also in the fire, until the admixed dross and spurious matter is dissolved out of it, drawn off by the fire. **5.** If mud of a stickier sort is plastered thickly round a rope, and the end of the rope is put through a narrow opening, and someone pulls on it forcefully from the other side, then of course the rope obeys the one drawing it, while the mud plastered around it is scraped off during the forceful pulling and left outside the hole. Indeed it is just because of this that the rope does not run easily through the passage, but has to endure a forceful tension from the one who pulls it. **6.** It seems to me that one can conceive of the soul in a similar way, as wrapped round by material and earthly attachments, [Kr. 94] toiling and being stretched as God attracts his own to himself, while the alien matter which has somehow sprung up with it is scraped off by force, which of course brings upon it keen and intolerable pains.'

**Gregory: 7.** 'Then it seems,' I said, 'that the divine judgement does not primarily bring punishment upon sinners, but is acting only to separate the good from the bad and to draw into the communion of blessedness, and that it is the severance of what has sprung up together that brings pain on the one being attracted.'

**Macrina: 8.** 'That,' said the teacher, 'is indeed my argument, and also that the measure of pain is according to the measure of vice in the individual. For it is not reasonable that one who has long been involved in forbidden vices and one who has slipped into certain moderate shortcomings should suffer equally in the

purification<sup>81</sup> of their wretched state, but that according to the material available that painful flame will kindle to a greater or lesser degree for as long as it has fuel. **9.** In the case of one with a heavy burden of material, the consuming flame is necessarily great and of longer duration, but in the case of one immersed in the fire to a lesser extent, the punishment mitigates the fierceness and keenness of its activity in proportion to the lesser degree of vice in the subject. **10.** For vice must be utterly and in every way removed from existence, so that, as we said earlier, that which has no real existence may really cease to exist. Vice of its nature does not exist outside the will. Therefore when every will shall come to be in God vice shall retire to complete annihilation, since there shall be no receptacle for it left.'

**Gregory: 11.** 'But what is the good of this fair hope,' I said, 'when one considers how bad it is to endure pain even for a single year, and if that intolerable pain is extended for the duration of an age, what comfort is left from any subsequent hope for one whose punishment is commensurate with an entire age?'<sup>82</sup> [Kr. 96]

**Macrina: 12.** 'It means that care must be taken beforehand,' said the teacher, 'either to keep the soul wholly unmixed and unallied with the defilements of vice, or, if our impassioned nature makes that quite unfeasible, that our failures in virtue comprise only certain moderate and easily curable lapses. **13.** For the Gospel teaching knows a certain debtor of ten thousand talents (cf. Matthew 18. 24), one of five hundred denarii,<sup>83</sup> one of fifty (cf. Luke 7. 41) and one of a *quadrans*, which is the least of coins (cf. Matthew 5. 26), and that God's just judgement eventually comes upon everyone, a judgement that adjusts the payment required to the weight of the debt, yet does not overlook even the smallest of debts. **14.** However the discharging of debts, says the Gospel, is not made through the payment of money, but by the

<sup>81</sup> τῆ καθάρσει τῆς μόχθηρᾶς ἕξεως. The emphasis on καθάρσις, purification, in this chapter is also shared by neo-Platonism, e.g. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.5. On Gregory's recourse to later developments in the Platonist stream, see H. F. Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1930), p. 26, Francis Young, 'Adam and Anthropos, a Study of the Interaction of Science and the Bible in Two Anthropological Treatises of the Fourth-Century (Greg. Nyss.; Nemesius)', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 37 (1983), 110–40 (p. 119), and Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, pp. 19–21, 83–85.

<sup>82</sup> Gregory's ideas on the non-eternity of hell begin to emerge. They are based on Origen's etymology in the *de Principia* of the terms αἰών ('age' / 'eternity') and αἰώνιος ('of an age' / 'eternal') and his decision in favour of the first of these pairs of meaning. The fullest statement of these ideas occurs in Macrina's response to the current query at 7.21.

<sup>83</sup> Some confusion has entered into the transmission of the text, between the one hundred denarii that appear at Matthew 18. 28 and the five talents that appear at Matthew 25. 20.

debtor's being handed over to the tormentors *until*, it says, *he pays back all that he owes* (Matthew 18. 34), which is nothing else than to pay back in torment what is ineluctably owed, **15.** that is, the debt of his share of griefs which he contracted during his lifetime when he recklessly chose pleasure instead, unmixed and unalloyed with its opposite. Thus when he has put off all that is alien to him which is sin, and has discharged the shame of his debts, he shall come into freedom and confidence.

**16.** 'Now freedom consists in reflecting the likeness'<sup>84</sup> of that which is without a master and is self-governing.<sup>85</sup> We were endowed by God with this likeness from the beginning (cf. Genesis 1. 26–27), but it has been enshrouded by the shame of our indebtedness. **17.** All freedom is one in its nature and shares an innate kinship. Accordingly, all that is free shall correspond to its like. For virtue is without master, that is, it is free. Therefore all that is free shall come to be in virtue.

**18.** 'But indeed the fountain of all virtue is the divine nature. Those therefore who have done with vice shall come to be in that nature, so that, as the Apostle says, *God will be all in all* (1 Corinthians 15. 28).'<sup>86</sup> This utterance seems to me to

<sup>84</sup> ἔξομοίωσις, 'becoming like', or 'reflecting the likeness'.

<sup>85</sup> This freedom and sovereignty of the restored and transformed soul is a motif of Gregory's thought. It appears, for example, in *On the Making of Man* 4 and 16, and in *Catechetical Discourse* 5. 'It would be possible to quote similar language from the neo-Platonists (e.g. Plotinus 6.83–6): but Gregory learnt the whole bearing and meaning of moral liberty from none but Origen': Moore, NPNF<sup>2</sup>, v, 452, n. 1. This moral liberty is the very opposite of hubristic licence, for it only comes with perfect correspondence to the qualities of the divine. It is the internalization, realization, and activation of the likeness to God in which man was first created.

<sup>86</sup> This scriptural passage became the cornerstone of Origen's eschatology of *apocatastasis*, in which he at first tentatively and then more firmly advocated the ultimate disappearance of evil (*Contra celsum* 4.69, 72). The consequence is that punishment in the afterlife is not everlasting. It is paradoxical to note that Plato himself taught that there was an eternal Hell, Tartarus, for the 'incurably wicked' — see *Phaedo* 113E–114A, *Gorgias* 525C, and *Republic* 10.615. The conjecture that it was *not* only came in with the later Platonists. In this, Gregory, who is prepared to dissent from Origen on other points, shows himself very much his heir. Thus in dealing with Gospel passages which teach an eternal punishment, he follows Origen's interpretation of αἰών and its adjective αἰώνιος as referring not to 'eternity', but 'of an age'. Controversially, Basil opposed this doctrine in no uncertain terms. See the classic statement of SR 267 where he affirms that the Gospel means what it says when it speaks of everlasting life and everlasting punishment, and you cannot believe the one Gospel phrase and discount the other. It is noteworthy that the ascetic who questioned Basil assumes as a matter of course the doctrine espoused here by Gregory and placed in Macrina's mouth. Basil corrected him. This Origenistic type of eschatology therefore was current even in the ascetic communities who looked to Basil as a father, and most pertinently, even at Annisa itself among his own siblings.

clearly confirm the thought we examined earlier,<sup>87</sup> which asserts that God will indeed become all things, yes, even in all things. **19.** For during our present life which is activated in varied and diverse conditions [Kr. 98], we partake of many things, such as time and air and place, both food and drink, and clothing, and sunlight, and lamplight, and many other necessities of life, none of which is God. That blessedness to which we look forward however has no need of any of these things, because the divine nature will become all to us and replace all, dispensing itself harmoniously to every need of that life. **20.** This is surely clear from the divine sayings, that for those who are deserving God becomes place (cf. John 14. 2–3) and house (cf. Ephesians 2. 19–22) and clothing (cf. Matthew 22. 11–12, Galatians 3. 27) and food and drink (cf. John 6. 35, 48–58) and light (cf. Psalms 26. 1, 33. 6, 118. 105, John 8. 12) and riches (cf. Luke 12. 21, Romans 9. 23, Ephesians 1. 18, 2. 7) and dominion (cf. Matthew 5. 3, 5. 10, 19. 28, Luke 12. 32) and everything conceivable and nameable that contributes to the good life for us.

**21.** ‘But he who becomes all things comes also to be in all things. By this it seems to me that the word teaches the complete disappearance of vice. For if God will be in all things that exist, then vice, clearly, will not be among these things that exist, for if any one were to suppose that it too would exist, how shall God’s existence in all things be safeguarded? The excepting of that one thing elides the comprehensiveness of the term all. But he who will be in all things will never be in that which does not exist.’

**Gregory: 22.** ‘What then ought one to say,’ I asked, ‘to those who are disheartened<sup>88</sup> at the prospect of these distresses?’

**Macrina: 23.** ‘Let us say to them,’ replied the teacher, ‘that you fret and baulk in vain at the necessary sequence of these events, because you are ignorant of the goal to which the economy of each part in the universe tends, and that all must come to the likeness of the divine nature in a certain order and sequence according to the skilful wisdom of their governor. **24.** Indeed, rational nature was brought into generation for this purpose, that the riches of the divine goodness should not lie idle. The wisdom that sustains the universe fashioned certain vessels as it were, receptacles with free wills consisting of souls, for this very purpose: that there would be some capacities able to receive his blessings, capacities that are ever being enlarged by the addition of that which is poured into them.

<sup>87</sup> This seems to refer back to the discussion at 1.21–27.

<sup>88</sup> τοὺς μικροψύχως διακεϊμένους, referring to pusillanimity, lit. ‘smallness of soul’, dispirit-edness, despondency, and pejoratively, meanness, peevishness of spirit, cowardliness.

25. 'For such is the participation in the divine good: it renders one in whom it comes about greater and more capacious,<sup>89</sup> [Kr. 100] since it allows into the recipient an addition of power and magnitude, so that the one being nourished always increases and never ceases to increase. 26. The fountain of the good wells up unflinching (cf. John 4. 14) and the nature of the partaker makes of the entire inflow an addition to its own proportions, since nothing it receives is superfluous and useless. It becomes at the same time more attractive of the better and more able to contain it, each aspect growing along with the other, both the power which is nourished by the abundance of the good so that it grows greater, and the nourishing supply which matches the growth of those incremental powers. It is therefore likely that those in whom there is no limit<sup>90</sup> to retard the increase will ascend to such a magnitude.

27. 'With such prospects before us, therefore, are you upset that our nature is advancing to its proper goal along the path appointed for us? For we cannot in any way run our course towards those good things unless that which weighs us down, I mean this encumbering burden of earthiness, is shaken off from our soul, and we cannot through purity become like to that which is our like unless the sympathy for that earthiness which we have acquired in this life is purged away by a better training.

28. 'But if something in you still clings to this body and if being unyoked from what you love grieves you, do not let this dampen your hope either.<sup>91</sup> You will see this bodily covering which is now dissolved in death, woven again from the same elements, not according to its present dense and heavy texture, but with its fibre spun again into something more subtle and ethereal, so that you will not only have with you that which you love, but it will be restored to you with a brighter and more captivating beauty.'

<sup>89</sup> This is a corollary of Gregory's doctrine of the divine infinity; see 6.39 and note.

<sup>90</sup> Moore (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, v, 453, n. 6) thinks this limit is the body, but not so. The enlarging of our capacity for God is our human vocation even while in the body. It is rather, in Gregory's terms, that sympathy (*sympatheia*) or passionate attachment (*prospatheia*) to the earthy body acts to retard spiritual progress.

<sup>91</sup> Moore (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, v, 453, n. 7) suggests interestingly that Macrina may be referring here to Gregory's brotherly affection for her. Compare his distress on perceiving her imminent death in *Introduct.2*.

*Chapter 8: The Idea of Reincarnation*

**Gregory: 1.** ‘It somehow fits the thread of argument,’ I said, ‘that the doctrine of the resurrection now comes into our discussion. It seems to me indeed that it ought to be true, as well as being both credible and beyond doubt from the teaching of the Scriptures.’<sup>92</sup> **2.** But since the weakness of human thought is somehow strengthened further in such a belief by any arguments available to us, [Kr. 102] it would be well not to run past this subject either without giving it consideration. Let us therefore examine what should be said about it.’

**Macrina: 3.** At this the teacher replied: ‘Those outside our philosophy, by different theories, in one way and in another, have partially approached the doctrine of the resurrection. Though not agreeing with us in detail, they have by no means failed to evince such a hope. **4.** Some indeed insult our humanity with their lack of distinctions, maintaining as they do that the same soul becomes alternately that of a human being and that of an irrational animal, that it changes bodies and is constantly transmigrating where it pleases, becoming after having been human some winged or aquatic or land animal, and then returning from these to human nature again.’<sup>93</sup> **5.** Others extend this nonsense even to bushes,<sup>94</sup> so that they consider the woody life as congruent with and akin to the soul. Still others hold only this, that the soul is constantly exchanging one human being for another, so that human life is always being conducted by means of the same souls, which are continually coming to be, first in these, then in those.

**6.** ‘But we say that it is well to take the doctrines of the Church as one’s starting point’<sup>95</sup> and admit only such of these philosophical conjectures as show that they

<sup>92</sup> There is a certain confusion in the manuscripts and editions in the latter part of this sentence. Here, Krabinger’s amendment of ἰδεῖν (to see) in some manuscripts to δεῖν is accepted, and full weight given to the μὲν in the first part of the sentence. Thus Gregory is here understood to mean that apart from the assurances that believers can gain from the Scriptures, the resurrection recommends itself to him even on the level of human reason.

<sup>93</sup> The idea of transmigration of souls was usually sourced to Pythagoras and his followers. It is given expression at some length by Plato in the myth of Er, son of Armenius, in *Republic* 614B–621B, where souls are judged after death, punishments and rewards are allotted, and souls choose to be reincarnated as human beings or animals.

<sup>94</sup> It seems that Empedocles is meant. See fragments 127, 146, 147. Celsus also reports this view of Empedocles in the citation by Origen in *Contra celsum* 8.53. Gregory also discusses this view in *On the Making of Man* 28.

<sup>95</sup> ἐκ τῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν δογμάτων ὁρμώμενοι.

accord in some measure with the doctrine of the resurrection. **7.** Their assertion, for example, that the soul insinuates itself into certain other bodies after it is unyoked from these bodies, does not depart too far from the revival for which we hope. For our view, which maintains that the body, both now and in the future, is composed of the elements of the cosmos, is held just the same by those pagans, who do not conceive of any nature of the body apart from a convergence of these elements. **8.** The difference lies in this: we assert that it is the same body as before, fitted together from the same elements, which compacts itself around the soul. They think that the soul migrates to other bodies, whether rational or irrational or even insensate, the composition of which, all agree, [Kr. 104] is from parts of the cosmos. They part company from us in thinking that they are not made of the same elements which in this fleshly life sprung up cleaving to the soul from the beginning. **9.** At least let this pagan philosophy bear witness that the soul's coming to be in the body again is not at all implausible. But it may be opportune to examine the inconsistencies of their doctrine, and from the very sequence of sound argument that emerges for us, to bring the truth to light, as far as possible.

**10.** 'What then is to be said of such views? Those who would have the soul migrating to different natures seem to me to confuse the distinctions of nature. They mix everything up and lump them all in with each other, that is, the rational, the irrational, the sensate, and the insensate, as if these could really come to be in each other with no meshing of nature to debar the one from passing into the other. **11.** They say that the same soul comes into being at one time as rational and intellectual although clad in a body of some kind, and then again that it lurks in a hole with the reptiles, or flocks with the birds, or joins the beasts of burden, or the predators, or those beneath the waves, or even falls into the insensate, taking root and treeifying, sprouting branches and putting forth flowers on them or thorns, or fruit edible or harmful. **12.** This is nothing other to deem that all things are the same and that the nature in all that exists is one, with a kind of muddled and undifferentiated commonality jumbled up in itself, in which there is no individual note to distinguish one thing from another.

**13.** 'Anyone who asserts that what comes to be in everything is the same thing intends nothing else than that all things are one, and the innate differences among existing things in no way hinders the mixing of things which have nothing in common. Thus it will be necessary when one sees a venomous or predatory animal to regard it, despite appearances, as of the same kind and even of the same family as oneself. **14.** Such a one will not even regard hemlock as alien to his own nature, if, which is the case, he sees the human even in plants. He will not regard without suspicion even the grape-bunch itself, cultivated for the purpose of life, for this too

comes from a plant. [Kr. 106] Why even the crops of grain by which we are nourished are plants. **15.** How then shall one put in the sickle to cut down the grain, and how shall one press the grape-bunch, or pull up the thistle from the field, or cut flowers, or hunt birds, or kindle a fire with wood, if one is unsure whether one's hands are raised against family members or ancestors or at least one's own kind, and whether it is with their bodies that the fire is being kindled and the wine bowl mixed and the food prepared?

**16.** 'For to anyone who thinks that in each of these cases the soul of a human being has become a plant or animal, there are no signs to mark which plant or animal has come from a human being and which has come otherwise. **17.** Anyone caught up in such notions will have to adopt an equivalent attitude to everything. Accordingly he must either harden himself even against those in the nature of living human beings, or, if he is inclined by nature to be benevolent towards his own kind, he will be similarly disposed towards every other living thing, whether it happens to be a reptile or a wild beast. Indeed, if one who has accepted such a doctrine goes into a thicket of trees, he will regard the trees as a crowd of human beings. **18.** What then will be the life of such a one, who has either to be respectful towards everything on account of their being of the same kind, or hardened towards human beings because he makes no distinction between them and other creatures? In the light of what we have said, then, such an argument ought to be rejected.

**19.** 'Yet there are still many other considerations which according to sound reasoning steer us away from this theory. **20.** For I have heard those expounding such views<sup>96</sup> saying that there are whole nations of souls living subject to their own particular realm before the life in the body. Such is the subtlety and mobility of their nature that they spin around with the rotation of the universe, but when these souls have lost their wings through some gravitation towards vice,<sup>97</sup> they become embodied, firstly in human beings.<sup>98</sup> After their secession from the human life due to their habituation to the irrational through their passions, they become beasts of burden. From this they fall as far as the insensate life of plants. **21.** Thus what is subtle and mobile by nature, the soul, first becomes heavy and downward-tending and because of vice takes up its dwelling in human [Kr. 108] bodies. Thereupon its power of reasoning is extinguished and it takes up life in irrational

<sup>96</sup> That is, the Pythagoreans, the later Platonists, and Origen (cf. *Contra Celsum* 3.80).

<sup>97</sup> See *Phaedrus* 246B–E on the wings of the soul.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. the myth of Er, mentioned above. Macrina's objections here also dissent from Origen's ideas of the pre-existence of the soul in *On First Principles*. Cf. also Origen, *Contra celsum* 3.80 where he spiritualizes Plato's image of the soul's loss of its wings.

animals. At that point even the gift of the senses is withdrawn and it passes over to the insensate life of plants. But after this it mounts up again by the same steps until it is restored to its place in heaven.

**22.** 'Now such a doctrine can be refuted on its own terms even by those moderately skilled in judgement because it lacks consistency with itself. For if the soul on account of vice is to be dragged down from the heavenly life to the woody life, and again from there, on account of virtue, reverts to the heavenly, this kind of argumentation will be in a quandary which to consider more honourable, the woody life or the heavenly life. **23.** It is like a cycle of much the same recurring patterns, in which the soul wherever it might be is forever unstable. If it is borne down from the bodiless life to the embodied, and from this to the insensate, and from there again it reverts to the bodiless, then those who teach these things are proposing an indiscriminate confusion of the bad and the good. **24.** For neither does the life in heaven continue in blessedness, if vice indeed affects those who live there, nor is the woody life without its share of virtue, since it is from this that the soul's rebound towards the good begins, while from there it begins the life of vice yet again.

**25.** 'For if the soul as it moves about heaven becomes entangled in vice and on account of this is dragged down to the material life from where again it is raised up to dwell on high, **26.** they are maintaining contradictorily that material life is the catharsis of vice, while that unerring heavenly circuit becomes for souls the initiation and cause of vices, if in the former the soul grows wings through virtue and then soars upwards, while in the latter their wings fall off because of vice and they seek the ground, becoming earthbound and immersed in the density of material nature.

**27.** 'But the absurdity of such doctrines does not stop at this inversion of opinions into their opposites, for even their basic conception itself does not always remain firm. **28.** They say, for example, that the heavenly is changeless. [Kr. 110] How then does passion have a place in the changeless? If the lower nature is subject to passion, then how does freedom from passion arise in what is subject to it? They jumble together the incompatible and unite things that have nothing in common, discerning the unchangeable in passion, and again, freedom from passion in the changeable.

**29.** 'Yet they do not always remain consistent even in these views, for to the very place whence they had exiled the soul because of vice they bring it home again from the material as if to a life secure and unalloyed, while it escapes their notice that it was there that the soul became heavy with vice and mingled with this lower nature. **30.** The disparagement of this life and the praise of the heavenly thus becomes confused and jumbled up, for that which was once disparaged leads in their

opinion to the beautiful, while that which was taken for the better starts the soul again on its decline towards the worse.

**31.** ‘Therefore all erroneous and shifting opinions about such matters ought be excluded from the doctrines of the truth. Moreover, let us not follow those who suppose that souls pass from women’s bodies to the life of a man,<sup>99</sup> or conversely, that souls separated from the bodies of men come to be in women, or even that they pass from men into men, or from women into women, since all these have missed the truth. **32.** As to the earlier theory,<sup>100</sup> not only is it rejected as shifting and unreliable of itself, switching its suppositions around into their opposite, but also because it is irreverent, maintaining that nothing of the things that exist is brought into being unless vice gives to each nature its beginning. **33.** For if neither human beings nor plants nor cattle can spring up unless a soul has fallen upon them from above, and this fall comes about because of vice, then obviously they think that vice initiates the constitution of all that exists. And both of these are somehow to happen together at the same time: a human being springs into being from a marriage, and the fall of the soul coincides with the function of that marriage.

**34.** ‘Yet there is something else even more absurd than this. If the irrational nature for the most part mates in the spring, are we to say then that spring causes vice to be engendered in the sphere above [Kr. 112] so that at one and the same time souls filled with vice fall and the wombs of irrational animals conceive? **35.** And what are we to say about the farmer who sets the seedlings of plants in the earth? How is his hand to dig a human soul into the ground along with the plant: by the coincidence of the soul’s moulting of its wings with his impulse to plant?

**36.** ‘The same absurdity exists in the second of the two theories as well, the one in which it is supposed that the soul concerns itself with the intercourse of those living in wedlock, or is on the look-out for childbirth,<sup>101</sup> in order to insinuate itself into the bodies then produced. **37.** What if the man refuses the union,<sup>102</sup> or the woman frees herself of the necessity of labour pains,<sup>103</sup> will vice then cease to weigh

<sup>99</sup> For example, in *Republic* 620BC the soul of Atalanta chooses the life of a male athlete and the soul of Epieus chooses the life of a woman skilled in the arts.

<sup>100</sup> That is, that human souls pass into animals and plants.

<sup>101</sup> In accordance with stoic medicine which held that the human soul only entered at childbirth, a view incompatible with Gregory’s.

<sup>102</sup> γάμον, i.e. marital union. The man frustrates an act of intercourse to avoid procreation (*coitus interruptus*).

<sup>103</sup> That is, she uses means to procure sterility or an abortion. The second-century AD physician Soranus gives advice on contraception, distinguishes between miscarriage and procured abortion,

down that soul? Will it be marital union, then, that gives the first signal to vice above against souls, or does this inclination towards the opposite batten on the soul even without this? **38.** But in this latter case, the soul will have to wander about in the meantime like a homeless vagrant, having put off its heavenly environs, yet not being lucky enough to find a body to receive it.

**39.** 'But how can they suppose after this that the divine presides over the things that exist if they attribute the beginnings of human life to this fortuitous and irrational fall of souls? All that follows must of necessity accord with the beginning, for if the life was initiated by some mechanical accident,<sup>104</sup> its entire subsequent course must also be a series of chances. **40.** In vain do they refer the things that exist to a divine power if they will not say that things in the cosmos are engendered by the divine will and if they consign the beginnings of what comes into being to some evil accident, as if the human life would not be constituted unless vice first gave the signal for life. **41.** If such is the beginning of life, then clearly a sequel will also be set in motion that accords with the beginning. No one would maintain that the beautiful springs from vice or that from good comes its opposite. Rather, as is the nature of the seed so we expect the fruit to be also.

**42.** 'If providence therefore does not pervade everything that exists, this mechanical and accidental process shall govern the whole of life. The forethought that comes of reason will be utterly useless, [Kr. 114] the benefit that comes of virtue will be nothing, and keeping oneself far from vice would also be nothing. Everything will be entirely in the power of whatever carries it along, and our life will not differ at all from boats without ballast, drifting about on the waves of mechanical circumstances, now towards the beautiful, now towards the foul as chance may be. **43.** No benefit consequent upon virtue shall ever come to those whose nature takes its rise from virtue's opposite, for if our life is ordained<sup>105</sup> by God it is acknowledged that vice does not initiate our life. But if we do spring from it, then we shall certainly continue to live in thorough conformity with it. **44.** Consequently, the judgement after this life and the recompense according to merit are shown up as nonsense, as also all the other things asserted and believed that tend to the elimination of vice, for how can the human being who springs from such a source escape it? How could any deliberate impulse towards the life of virtue come

and between contraception and abortion, and justifies the latter if the woman's life is in danger (*Gymnaecia* 1.19.60, 1.20.59–65); he lists some seventeen abortifacient and contraceptive recipes.

<sup>104</sup> ἐκ συντυχίας αὐτόματου τινός.

<sup>105</sup> οἰκονομεῖται, disposed, dispensed, arranged, administered, etc.

about in the human being, whose nature, they allege, takes its rise from vice? **45.** For just as none of the irrational animals attempts to give utterance in human fashion, but uses the voice of its nurture and its nature, deeming it no penalty not have been allotted articulate speech, so in the same way the desire of virtue will never come about in those whose life is reckoned to have its beginning and cause in vice, because it is something quite outside their nature.

**46.** 'But in fact, to all who have purified their soul through reason, the life of virtue is possible through zeal and desire. By this it is clearly proved that vice is not prior in time to life, and that our nature did not derive its first beginnings from such a source, but that it was the all-disposing wisdom of God that initiated our life, and that when the soul came to generation in the manner which is pleasing to its maker, then by its power of volition it was free to choose according to its intention whatever it wished, and this indeed is what it becomes.

**47.** 'We may understand this argument from the example of the eyes. It is their nature to be able to see, but if they do not see, this is either because of choice or from some condition, since what is unnatural may sometimes [Kr. 116] come about instead of what is natural when someone voluntarily shuts his eyes or the sight is occluded by some condition. **48.** Likewise we may say of the soul that it has its constitution from God, and since no vice can be entertained in connection with the divine, the soul is outside any necessity of it. Yet though it came into being in this way, it can be led by its own intention to what it approves, either by wilfully shutting its eyes to the beautiful or sustaining damage to the eye from that insidious enemy who cohabits with our life<sup>106</sup> and so come to pass its life in the darkness of delusion, or on the other hand, by looking purely to the truth and so keeping far from the darkening passions.

### *Chapter 9: The Generation of the Human Soul*

**[Macrina cont.]: 1.** 'Someone then will ask: when and how does the soul come into being? But this very enquiry into how each thing has come into being should

<sup>106</sup> Counterbalancing Gregory's metaphysical optimism and emphasis on human freedom is his strong sense of the moral struggle involved in the human vocation from the time of the Fall. Something close to a doctrine of original sin is expressed at 10.23. Cf. also *Catechetical Discourse 8*: 'Since there has been inbred in the soul a strong natural tendency to evil, it must suffer [. . .]'. The idea here, that there is some almost innate evil within us that must be contended with, will be considerably developed by pseudo-Macarius. See E. V. McClear, 'The Fall of Man and Original Sin in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa', *Theological Studies*, 9 (1948), 175–212.

be excluded entirely from our discussion. Even with regard to what is readily available to our understanding, that is, the things we apprehend with the senses, it would be impossible for investigative reason to conceive how what now appears was constituted. **2.** Even God-inspired and holy men consider it beyond grasping. For *By faith*, the apostle says, *we understand that the worlds were fashioned by the word of God, so that the things which are seen came into being from things which do not appear* (Hebrews 11. 3).<sup>107</sup> **3.** He would not have said this, I think, if he had thought the object of enquiry knowable by the reasoning powers. While the apostle says that it is believed that it was by the divine will that the world itself and all which has come to be from it was fashioned — whatever this world is in which the entire visible and invisible creation is contemplated side by side — yet how this comes about he left out of investigation.

**4.** ‘For I do not think that inquirers will ever succeed in this, for the investigation of these things presents us with many difficulties<sup>108</sup> from the outset. How, for example, can movement come from the nature that is stable?<sup>109</sup> How does the dimensional and complex come from the simple and non-dimensional? Does it perhaps come from the transcendent substance itself? But this is not borne out by the fact that existing things are different in kind to that substance. **5.** Does it come then from some other source? Yet reason cannot contemplate anything as quite outside the divine nature, for such a supposition would drive a wedge between two distinct principles, as if something were conjectured to exist outside the creative cause, from which skilful [Kr. 118] wisdom enlists the resources for creation.

**6.** ‘Therefore, since the cause of all that exists is one and one only, and yet the things brought into existence by that cause are not of the same kind as the transcendent nature, both theories are equally absurd, whether one supposes that the creation is from the divine nature or that the universe is constituted from some other substance, **7.** for either the divine shall be reckoned to exist in the individual qualities of creation, if all that comes into being is of the same kind as God, or else

<sup>107</sup> As Roth remarks (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*, p. 97 n. 1), Macrina could also have mentioned Socrates’ rejection of natural science, described in Plato’s *Phaedo*.

<sup>108</sup> That is, of a metaphysical nature. There is a barrier beyond which empirical investigation cannot go. Measuring and analysing material creation can never yield answers to the ultimate and deepest questions.

<sup>109</sup> Macrina/Gregory address Aristotelian concerns here. Aristotle argued to the existence of an immaterial and noetic God from the necessity of an ultimate source for all the movement in the universe: God therefore is the unmoved mover, beyond which not. The doctrine received its fullest development in his late work *Metaphysics* Θ.8 and especially Λ.8.

a material nature outside of the divine substance will have to be brought in alongside it, comparable to God in unbegottenness,<sup>110</sup> because its being has no beginning. This in fact is what the Manichaeans fantasized<sup>111</sup> and some who borrowed equivalent notions from Greek philosophy,<sup>112</sup> and they made this fantasy their doctrine.

**8.** 'Therefore in order to avoid either of these absurdities that arise from the enquiry into existing things, let us follow the example of the apostle's lack of curiosity and leave aside the question of how each thing exists, observing in passing only this much, that the movement of the divine choice becomes a reality whenever it wills. Its intention takes substance, becoming at once a nature, for whatever that omnipotent authority wills, it does not leave insubstantiated. The actuality of its will is substance.'<sup>113</sup>

**9.** 'Inasmuch as existing things are divided into two kinds, that of the intellectual and that of the bodily, the intellectual creation somehow does not seem inconsistent with the bodiless nature,<sup>114</sup> but approximates it in displaying absence of visible form, intangibility and non-dimensionality, and if anyone supposes that these pertain to the transcendent nature, he will not miss the mark. **10.** The bodily creation, however, being contemplated in those individual qualities that are not shared by the divine, does provide reason with a particular difficulty, namely that it cannot see how the visible comes from the invisible, how the hard and resistant comes from the intangible, how the delimited comes from the infinite, how that which is wholly circumscribed by certain measures contemplated in terms of quantity can come from that which has no quantity and no size, and so on with all the aspects comprehended in the bodily nature. **11.** But of these we can say this much, [Kr. 120] that not one of them contemplated of itself in the body *is* the body, neither shape, nor colour, nor weight, nor dimension, nor stature, nor anything else contemplated as a quality, but each one of them is a category. It is rather their convergence with each other and their union which becomes a body. **12.** Since the qualities which make up the body are grasped by the mind and not by the senses,

<sup>110</sup> κατὰ τὸ ἀγέννητον.

<sup>111</sup> Manichaeans professed an ontological dualism, i.e. two metaphysically distinct and opposing principles of good and of evil. They considered the latter to be the source of material creation.

<sup>112</sup> Most Greek philosophers (and near-Eastern mythologies) thought in terms of a pre-existent matter furnishing the material for the work of 'creation', which consequently was a question of shaping and fashioning as by an artisan, rather than of creation *ex nihilo*.

<sup>113</sup> ἡ δὲ τοῦ θελήματος ὑπαρξίς οὐσία ἐστὶ.

<sup>114</sup> That is, of the divine nature.

and the divine is intellectual, what trouble can it be for the intellectual to fashion the intellectual qualities whose convergence with each other generates for us the nature of the body?

**13.** ‘But let all these be explored aside from our present enquiry. Our question was: if souls do not pre-exist their bodies, when and how do they come into being? In addressing this, however, our argument dismisses any busy enquiry concerning the how as something beyond our reach. **14.** It therefore remains for us to enquire when souls take the beginnings of their existence, which follows from matters we previously examined. For if we were to grant that the soul lives in some special state prior to the body, it would be entirely necessary to deem that the absurdities of those inventors of doctrines have force, according to which souls take up their dwelling in bodies because of vice. **15.** On the other hand, no one of any intelligence would suppose that the generation of the soul comes later and that it is subsequent to the fashioning of the body.<sup>115</sup> For it is plain to everyone that nothing inanimate has any power of movement or of growth in itself, whereas there is no dispute or doubt about the growth or the moving about of those being nurtured within the womb. All that remains is to think that the beginning of the constitution of body and of soul is one and the same.

**16.** ‘We also affirm that just as the earth receives the offshoot of a root from those who till the earth and makes a tree of it, yet it does not itself impart to its nursling the power of growth, but only gives what has been embedded in itself a start towards growth, so also that which is drawn off from a human being for the planting of a human being is in some way living, the animate from the animate, the nourished from the nourished.<sup>116</sup> **17.** If this slip of an offshoot does not encompass all the activities and the movements of the soul to begin with, [Kr. 122] it is no surprise, for neither does the ear appear all at once in the seed of wheat. How indeed could anything so large be encompassed in something so small? But as the earth

<sup>115</sup> Macrina/Gregory reject the Stoic teaching that the human soul only enters at the time of birth.

<sup>116</sup> ἐξ ἐμψύχου ἔμψυχον (the ensouled from the ensouled), τρεφομένου τρεφόμενον. In short, human semen is something alive in itself and somehow transmits ‘soul’ (= life) in the begetting of a new human being. This doctrine is traducianism, i.e. the idea that the soul is passed on from one’s progenitor(s) in the moment of conception. See also *On the Making of Man* 19.5. Since there is no idea that the woman also contributes necessary ‘seed’ to conception, but only the environment necessary to nurture the new life, the ‘quickening’ of what is conceived is thought to be due solely to the semen. Yet traducianism is not the last word of Gregory’s thought and contrasts with his spiritualizing concepts of the soul elsewhere. Compare his description of the human soul as ‘an influx of the divine in-breathing’ (*Against Apollinaris* 12).

nurses it with the nourishment suitable to it, the wheat becomes an ear without changing its nature in the soil, but simply developing it and bringing it to maturity through the activity of that nourishment. **18.** Just as in the sprouting of those seeds the growth towards maturity advances little by little, so in the same way in the constitution of the human, the power of the soul reveals itself in proportion to bodily size.<sup>117</sup> First it is present in that which is being formed within<sup>118</sup> through the capacities of nutrition and growth. After that, it introduces the gift of the senses to those who have come into the light. Then somewhat like the fruit that appears on a plant that has been growing for a while, it displays in a certain measure the power of reason, not all of it at once, but growing in a steady progress along with the shooting up of that plant. **19.** Inasmuch as that which is drawn off from animate beings to give a start to the constitution of another animate being cannot itself be dead, since deadness comes from the privation of the soul and it cannot be that the privation of something is the way to acquiring it, we grasp from these considerations that in the constituting of that which is compounded from both<sup>119</sup> there is a common passage of both into being. The one does not come first and the other follow afterward.<sup>120</sup>

**20.** 'Reason necessarily foresees that the increase in the number of souls will level off, in order that nature may not flow on forever pouring out successive generations and never ceasing from that forward movement. **21.** But we think that the reason why our nature must surely at some time come to a standstill is that since every intellectual nature is stabilized by its own plenitude, it is likely that at some time our humanity will also reach a limit, and in this show itself not alien to the intellectual nature. Thus it will not always be despised for seeming to be in a defective state, since this continual addition of successive generations implies that our nature is deficient.

<sup>117</sup> In asserting that at conception the human being is fully constituted, body and soul, as in a seed, and that all that remains are successive stages of growth and maturation, the medically literate Macrina/Gregory firmly reject the ideas of Stoic-influenced physicians, such as Soranus, that the unborn is not really alive and a human being till it draws breath after birth.

<sup>118</sup> τοῖς ἔνδοθεν πλασσομένοις.

<sup>119</sup> That is, body and soul.

<sup>120</sup> This is a very important statement of position, already anticipated at 8.15 (see note), that the soul is generated simultaneously with the body at conception. In this Macrina/Gregory decisively reject Origen's speculations on the pre-existence of souls (e.g. *Contra celsum* 3.75) alluded to at 9.14. The individual human is therefore already fully constituted at the moment of conception. The only difference between its state then and later after it is born and during its life until death, is its position along an unbroken continuum of growth and maturation (10.49, 72).

22. ‘Whenever our humanity shall have attained its proper fullness,<sup>121</sup> this flowing movement of its nature will altogether cease as it comes up against its [Kr. 124] necessary limit. Some other condition will then carry on our life, other than the present succession of generation and corruption. 23. If there is no generation, then by every necessity nothing will be destroyed, for if synthesis must precede dissolution — by synthesis I mean the passage into being through generation — then necessarily, if this synthesis does initiate the process, no dissolution will follow. Hence it is shown in advance by credible argument that the life after this life is stable and indissoluble, unchanged by any generation or corruption.

### *Chapter 10: The Resurrection of the Body*

**Gregory: 1.** The teacher finished her exposition, and to the many sitting by the argument seemed now to have reached a fitting conclusion. Yet I feared that if the teacher succumbed to her infirmity, which indeed is what happened, we would no longer have one among us to solve the objections of pagans to the resurrection, and hence I spoke up.

2. ‘The argument has not yet touched the most important of our enquiries into doctrine. I mean, that the God-inspired Scriptures in both the new and in the old teaching not only declare emphatically that as our nature proceeds in a certain order and sequence through the cyclic movement of time, this on-flowing current of successive generations will come to a stop, 3. but also that when the plenitude of the universe no longer admits further increase, the entire complement of souls will return again from their formless and scattered state to subsistence and manifestation, the very same elements reverting to each other in the same connecting chain. 4. In the divine teaching of the Scriptures this restoration of life is called the

<sup>121</sup> Macrina/Gregory argue not only for the perfecting of each human being, but also for a kind of *collective* perfecting, or coming to full term of ‘the human’. According to *On the Making of Man* 16.16–18, it is ‘the entire plenitude of the human’ which images God, and since the plenitude of human nature had pre-existence in God’s foreknowledge (19.1), he has ordained a definite number of souls (17.4), which were destined before the Fall to come into being as angels, but which after the Fall, would come into being through the ministry of sexual differentiation. Moore analyses the thought of this section (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, v, 459, n. 7): ‘Each individual soul represents, to Gregory’s view, a “thought” of God, which becomes visible by the soul’s being born [better translated as ‘generated’]. There will come a time when all these “thoughts”, which complete, and do not destroy each other, will have completed the πλήρωμα (Humanity) which the Deity contemplates. This immediate apparition of a soul as a “thought” of God is very unlike the teaching of his master Origen: and yet more sober and more scriptural.’

resurrection, the same term comprising the entire movement of the elements and the raising up of the earthy being.’

**Macrina: 5.** ‘But which of these points,’ she said, ‘has been left unmentioned in what has been said?’

**Gregory: 6.** ‘Why, the very doctrine of the resurrection itself,’ I replied.

**Macrina: 7.** ‘But surely,’ she said, ‘many of the things we have just been discussing<sup>122</sup> bear on that goal.’ [Kr. 126]

**Gregory: 8.** ‘Then do you not know,’ I asked, ‘how great a swarm of objections our antagonists bring against us concerning this hope?’ And straightaway I endeavoured to spell out all the ways in which these challengers contrived to refute the resurrection.

**Macrina: 9.** She replied: ‘It seems to me that we ought first to briefly run through the declarations of this doctrine scattered through the divine Scripture, so that from there we may give the finishing touch<sup>123</sup> to our argument. **10.** Well then, I have heard<sup>124</sup> David saying in the midst of his praises in the divine songs, at the end of the hymnody of the hundred and third psalm where he has taken God’s adornment of the universe as his theme: *You shall take away their breath and they shall fail and return to their dust. You shall send forth your Spirit and they shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth* (Psalm 103. 29–30). **11.** He says that the power of the Spirit which *works all things in all* (I Corinthians 12. 6) gives life to those it enters and on the other hand deprives of life those it quits. Since, as it says, the failure of living things comes about at the withdrawal of the Spirit, and the renewal of what has failed comes about at his advent, and according to the order of the statement the failure of what is to be renewed comes first, we hold that in these words that mystery of the resurrection is being announced to the Church, David foretelling this very gift by the prophetic spirit.

**12.** ‘You will find this same prophet also saying elsewhere that *the God of all, the Lord of everything that is, has shone upon us, to establish the feast with thick branches*<sup>125</sup>

<sup>122</sup> 7.28 and most of Chapter 8, as well as Chapter 5 earlier in the dialogue.

<sup>123</sup> ἡ κορωνίς, like the winner’s wreath at the games.

<sup>124</sup> This is a testimony to the oral culture surrounding the Scriptures. Macrina has an aural knowledge of texts through constant chanting and reciting them.

<sup>125</sup> ἐν τοῖς πυκάζουσι, this anomalously verbal form is to be accommodated to the adjective πυκνοῖς or the passive participle πεπυκνωμένοις, meaning ‘thick’, ‘dense’, ‘closely packed /

(Psalm 117. 27, Septuagint), meaning by the phrase *thick branches* the feast of tabernacle-fixing<sup>126</sup> which was instituted of old in the tradition of Moses. **13.** I think that the law-giver was prophetically announcing beforehand the things which are to come, for though the feast was being repeatedly celebrated, it was not yet accomplished. **14.** For the truth was indeed being foreshadowed as a type in the figures<sup>127</sup> of those recurring celebrations, but the true tabernacle-fixing itself was not yet. Therefore on this account, according to the prophetic word, the God and Lord of all has shown himself to us to institute for human [Kr. 128] nature the tabernacle-fixing of our housing that was dissolved, when the body condenses again at the convergence of its scattered elements. **15.** For that expression 'thick covering' signifies according to its own meaning an encircling cloak and the adornment provided by it. **16.** Now the phrasing of the psalmody continues in this way: God and Lord has shone upon us; institute the feast with thick branches even to the horns of the altar, which seems to me to announce in figures beforehand that one single feast is to be instituted for the whole rational creation, and in that assembly of the good the inferiors will join in the dance with their superiors.<sup>128</sup>

**17.** 'For in the typological arrangements of the temple<sup>129</sup> not all were allowed to pass within its outer perimeter, for gentiles and foreigners were all forbidden entry. And again, of those who did come within, not all were granted equal access further within, but only those who had been sanctified by a purer way of life and by certain sprinklings. **18.** Yet again, not everyone even among these could set foot within the inner temple,<sup>130</sup> but it was lawful for priests alone to enter within the veil, when required by their priestly duty. **19.** But even to the priests the hidden,

covered'. Commentators dependent on the Septuagint text interpreted it to refer to branches or boughs; others interpreted it to mean 'crowds'.

<sup>126</sup> That is, the Feast of Tabernacles/booths/huts or *Sukkot*, originally a late autumn harvest festival celebrated with pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Cf. Exodus 23. 16, 34. 22, Leviticus 23. 33–35, 39–43, Deuteronomy 16. 13–16, Ezekiel 3. 4, Nehemiah 8. 14–18.

<sup>127</sup> ἀινίγματα, i.e. 'hints', 'riddles', pointers to something else.

<sup>128</sup> The type is that the gradations of admission to the innermost shrine of the temple (here the horned altar) will be abolished, and all will gain access. The anti-type is that then the human shall be on a par with the angelic and/or those of different degrees of spiritual attainment in this life will eventually reach parity in divine communion.

<sup>129</sup> The typological exegesis here depends on the exposition of the temple liturgy in Hebrews 8–10.

<sup>130</sup> ὁ ἕνδοον ναὸς, the sanctuary proper, the 'holy place' or *Hekal* which was entered through a veil. In it were found the altar of incense, the great seven-branched lampstand (the *menorah*), and the table of the loaves of offering.

innermost shrine of the temple<sup>131</sup> where stood the altar<sup>132</sup> adorned with its jutting horns, was inaccessible, except for the one who held the highest rank of the priesthood, who once a year on a certain designated day passed within alone, bearing an especially sacred and mystic offering.

20. If such were the distinctions that applied in this temple which was an image and an imitation of the intellectual realm, then it is not the whole of the rational nature that can approach the temple of God, that is to say, the confession of the great God. No, those who have gone astray in false opinions are outside the precinct of the divine, 21. while of those who through this confession have been admitted within, some who have been purified beforehand by sprinklings and by chastity are preferred to the others, and of these some who have been already consecrated<sup>133</sup> have still further privileges, even to being counted worthy of the inner mysteries.

22. The meaning [Kr. 130] of the imagery may be brought out more clearly. From the teaching of the Word one can ascertain the following points: that some of the rational powers have been fixed like the holy altar of incense in the innermost shrine of the deity. Again some of these appear pre-eminent, jutting forth like the horns, while others are arranged around them in first or second place in a

<sup>131</sup> τὸ δε ἀπόκρυφόν τε καὶ ἄδυτον τοῦ ναοῦ. The holy of holies, the *Debir*, containing the Ark of the Covenant, capped by the 'mercy seat' and flanked by images of two cherubim with outstretched wings. The jar of manna and Aaron's rod were kept here, apparently (Hebrews 9. 4) within the Ark together with the tablets of the covenant.

<sup>132</sup> Macrina/Gregory here follow Hebrews 9. 3 in locating the altar of incense within the holy of holies. This is not the arrangement of Exodus 30. 1–10, 40. 1–8, 18–33, and Leviticus 16. 11–14, which place the altar of incense in the holy place immediately before the entrance into the holy of holies. Incense was burnt on the altar of incense twice daily, hardly possible if it were located within the holy of holies. There were in fact two veils, one at the entrance to the holy place, and one at the entrance to the holy of holies. The altar of holocaust on which animal sacrifice was offered and the laver of washing were outside in the court before the holy place. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest took fresh incense, live coals from the altar of holocaust, and the blood of sacrifice, passed within the first veil and burned incense in the holy place, and then passed through the second veil bearing the blood of sacrifice with which he then sprinkled the 'mercy seat'.

<sup>133</sup> ἀφιερωθέντες. Macrina/Gregory refer to virgins and ascetics, though it is noteworthy that the priests in the temple cult are held to be their type. This is possible perhaps because it is not the external worship that is being considered but the internal and existential liturgy of every human being in relation to God. Gregory's earliest work, *On Virginity*, very possibly written after consultation with Macrina, is full of a sense of the special divine access given to those who are virgins for the Lord, i.e. those who have progressed from physical virginity to the interiorized virginity of total inward dedication to God.

certain sequence of rank. **23.** The race of human beings, however, was expelled from the divine precinct because of indwelling vice, but when purified with sprinkled lustrations it enters again within. Since all the intervening barricades by which our vice has fenced us off from what lies within the veil are eventually to be done away with (cf. Ephesians 2. 14), when the tabernacle of our nature is set up again in the resurrection, and all the indwelling corruption of vice has vanished from the things that exist, then the common feast will be instituted around God by those who have thickened<sup>134</sup> again through the resurrection. **24.** One and the same gladness will be set before all, with no difference any longer dividing off the rational nature from an equal participation in the good, for those who through vice are now outside shall then be admitted within the inner shrine of the divine blessedness and shall bind themselves to the horns of the altar of incense, that is, to the most supreme of the transcendent powers.

**25.** ‘The apostle says this same thing more plainly when he interprets the final symphony of the universe with the good, when *every knee shall bow to him, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Philippians 2. 10–11).

**26.** Here, instead of the horns, he speaks of the angelic and heavenly and with the other terms he refers to us, the creation we think of next to that, and says that one festival united in voice<sup>135</sup> shall prevail for all. That festival shall be the confession and the recognition of *the one who truly is*. (Exodus 3. 14, Septuagint)<sup>136</sup>

**27.** ‘One could choose,’ she said, ‘many other passages of Holy Scripture to confirm the doctrine of the resurrection. There is Ezekiel for example, who, soaring in the prophetic spirit over all the intervening time and its long duration, [Kr. 132] stands, by means of his prognostic power, at the very moment of the resurrection and gazes at what is to come as if already present, bringing it before our eyes in his description. **28.** He saw a great plain stretched out to an immense distance, and upon it was a vast mound of bones scattered about haphazardly this way and that. Then by the divine power the bones at once began to move towards their own kind that had once belonged to them, and to grow into their familiar sockets, and then clothe themselves with sinews, flesh, and skin, which is the thickening spoken of

<sup>134</sup> The same word as the ‘thick’ branches, here referring to the ‘condensing’ again of the body.

<sup>135</sup> Literally, ‘symphonic’.

<sup>136</sup> τοῦ ὄντος ὄντος. The Septuagint text of God’s self-disclosure to Moses is ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν, ‘I am he who is / the existent one’. Beginning with the Jewish philosopher Philo and continuing in the Christian tradition, this phrase was confidently identified with the expression for the divine in the Platonic tradition, τὸ ὄντως ὄν, ‘that which really is’.

in the psalmody. It was the life-giving Spirit awakening all that lay prostrate there (cf. Ezekiel 37. 1–14).

**29.** ‘But with regard to the apostle’s description of the wonders attending the resurrection, why repeat it, since it is readily available to all enquirers: how, for example, *at a certain cry of command* and the *sound of trumpets*, says the Word, all that lies dead shall be *changed all at once in a moment of time* to the condition of immortal nature (I Thessalonians 4. 16, I Corinthians 15. 51–52).

**30.** ‘The utterances in the Gospel I will also pass over lightly, because they are quite clear to every one. For the Lord not only declares in word that the dead<sup>137</sup> shall be raised again (cf. John 5. 25–29), but accomplishes in deed the resurrection itself, beginning this wonder-working with demonstrations of power nearer to us and less likely to be disbelieved. **31.** First he displays his life-giving power in the case of diseases unto death when he abrogates these conditions with one word of command (cf. Matthew 9. 18–25, Luke 7. 1–10, John 4. 46–53). Next he awakens a child who has just died (cf. Luke 8. 49–56). Then he makes a young man already being carried out for burial sit up on the bier and so restores him to his mother (cf. Luke 7. 11–15). **32.** After that he leads forth alive from the tomb Lazarus whose corpse was four-days dead and already decomposing, having given life by his voice of command to that which had lain prostrate (cf. John 11. 17–44). **33.** Then after three days he raises from the dead his own human body pierced through as it was with the nails and spear (cf. John 10. 17–18, Matthew 28. 6, Luke 24. 36–40), and brings the prints of those nails and the spear-wound as testimony of his resurrection (cf. John 20. 26–27).

**34.** ‘But I do not think it is necessary to go into these things in detail,<sup>138</sup> for no doubt lingers for those who have received the tradition of the written accounts.’

**Gregory: 35.** ‘But this,’ I said, ‘was not in question. Most of your hearers will agree both from the scriptural proofs and from the arguments already examined that there at some time there will be the resurrection and that the human being will be brought before the incorruptible [Kr. 134] tribunal.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>137</sup> τοὺς νεκροὺς, i.e. the bodies of the dead.

<sup>138</sup> *On the Making of Man* 25.7–11 rehearses in greater detail this progressive display by the Lord of the power of resurrection.

<sup>139</sup> This is the correct order. The envisaged sequence of states seems to be (1) bodily death and survival of the bodiless soul, (2) remediation of the soul almost as a necessity of nature, (3) the general resurrection, (4) purification of the risen body as required, (5) the general judgement which discloses the moral weight of each life, and (6) final bliss/restoration of all things. See 10.56–58,

**36.** ‘But what does remain to be examined is whether what we hope for will be like what is now. Because if it is, then as I said,<sup>140</sup> human beings had better flee the hope of the resurrection. For if human bodies are to be restored to life again as they are when they cease to live, then all that human beings can look forward to in the resurrection is unending misfortune. **37.** For what could be a more pitiful sight than bodies shrivelled in extreme old age and changed into something unsightly and distorted, the flesh on them all wasted with the length of years, the skin all withered into wrinkles about the bones? With the sinews contracted through their no longer being enriched with their natural moisture, the whole body shrinks and becomes an absurd and pitiful sight, the head bent towards the knee, the hands on either side unable to carry on their natural activity, shaking continually with an involuntary trembling. **38.** What again of those whose bodies are wasted through chronic disease? They only differ from bare bones in that they seem to be covered with a tissue of thin and already worn-out skin. **39.** What also of those swollen with the affliction of dropsy and of those who have succumbed to the sacred disease!<sup>141</sup> What word would suffice to bring before the eyes the horror of the disfigurement? Gradually the rottenness pervades all the limbs and organs and sensation and devours them. **40.** What of those mutilated in earthquakes, or battles, or from some other cause who live on in this misfortune for a time before they die, or those disfigured in some way from birth who have grown up with twisted limbs? What is one to say of them? **41.** And concerning newborn infants who have been exposed or strangled or died a natural death, what is one to think if they are to be brought back to life again just as they were? Are they really to continue in their infancy? What could be more wretched! Or are they to reach the measure of their stature? Yes, but with what sort of milk is nature to nurse them again?

**42.** ‘Thus if the body is to live again the same [Kr. 136] in every respect as before, then what is being expected is misfortune. But if it is not the same, the one awakened will be someone other than the one prostrate. **43.** If, for example, it was a child who fell, but it is an adult who rises again, or the reverse, how can we say that it is the one lying prostrate who is raised up, when the fallen one is being substituted by reason of the difference in stature? **44.** Instead of the child, one sees an adult; instead of the elder, one sees someone in the prime of life. In fact, one

10.80, 10.84, 10.107–11. Gregory discusses resurrection, remediation, and judgement in that order in *Catechetical Discourse* 35.

<sup>140</sup> See 10.8.

<sup>141</sup> The ‘sacred disease’ in Hippocratic medicine usually refers to epilepsy, but here it evidently means leprosy and/or gangrene.

beholds another entirely: the agile instead of the cripple, or one of firm flesh instead of one wasted away, and so on with all like cases, not to go through each of them for fear of burdening the argument. **45.** If the body is not to come to life again as it was when it was mingled with the earth, then it is not that which has died that shall be raised again, but rather the earth shall be fashioned again into another human being.

**46.** 'What then is the resurrection to me, if instead of myself it is someone else who shall come to life? For how could I recognize myself when I see in myself what is not myself? For it could not truly be myself unless it were in every respect the same as myself. **47.** It is as if I were to retain in memory the features of a certain person in this present life. Let us suppose for the sake of argument that he had sparse hair, prominent lips, a somewhat snub nose, a pale complexion, grey eyes, white hair, and a wizened body, and that I then went to look for such a one, and met a youth with a fine head of hair, a beak of a nose, dark skin, and in all other respects quite different in his bodily features. When I see this one, am I likely to think of that one?

**48.** 'But why dwell any further on these lesser objections and neglect the stronger? For who does not know that human nature is like a stream, advancing continually from generation<sup>142</sup> to death in a certain forward movement and only leaving off that movement at the same time that it ceases to exist? **49.** This movement does not involve a change of place, for our nature does go out from itself. No, its progress is by internal alteration instead. This alteration, as long as it is what it is called, never remains at the same stage, for how can the alteration of something be achieved through sameness? **50.** It is like the fire on the wick which, as far as outward aspect goes, always appears the same, since the continuity of its movement always [Kr. 138] shows it uninterrupted and one with itself. But in truth it is forever supplanting itself and it never remains the same. For as soon as the moisture extracted by the heat bursts into flame it is burnt up and changed into smoke, the movement of the flame always being activated by the alterative power and of itself converting the subject-matter into smoke. **51.** Thus it is impossible for anyone touching the flame twice in the same place to come into contact with the same flame twice, since the ongoing change is so rapid it does not wait for a second touch, however quickly this may be done. No, the flame is always new and fresh, constantly being born and always supplanting itself and never remaining the same.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>142</sup> γενέσεως, i.e. not birth but the constitution of the body-soul entity at conception. See 9.19.

<sup>143</sup> 10.52 clearly alludes to the philosophy of Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic philosopher famous for his 'all things are in flux' (Plato, *Cratylus*, 439C, cf. 411C, *Theaetetus* 132C), and 'one cannot

**52.** 'It is rather like this with our bodily nature, for the process of inflow and outflow which is always going on in our nature through the alterative movement only stops when it ceases from life. As long as it is alive there is no stop, for it is either being filled or dispelling, always engaging in one or the other. **53.** For if someone is not the same as he was even yesterday but by alteration becomes something else, when the resurrection shall bring our body back to life again, that single one will become a sort of crowd of human beings, that is, if nothing of the one being raised is to be missing: the newborn baby, the infant, the child, the lad, the man, the father, the elder, and all the stages in between.

**54.** 'Moreover, both chastity and lack of self-control are operative in the flesh, and both those who endure the pains of tortures on behalf of piety and those who take the soft option at such a prospect declare themselves through the senses of the body. How then can justice be secured at the Judgement?

**55.** 'Or the same one now offends and now cleanses himself by repentance and then, as it may happen, relapses into his offence, both the defiled and the undefiled body alternating in the course of his nature, neither of them prevailing in any lasting way. **56.** Which body shall be punished along with this reprobate? That which is shrunk with old age and near to death? But [Kr. 140] this is not the same as that which accomplished the sin. Ah — that which defiled itself with passion? But then where is the elder? For either this latter shall not be raised again and the resurrection will be ineffective, or else this is the one that shall be awakened, while the culpable body will escape justice.

**57.** 'Let me also raise another of the objections put to us by those who do not accept our argument. Nature, they say, does not make any part of the body without a function. Some bodily parts, for example, afford the basis and power of life in us — without them our life in the flesh cannot possibly be sustained. Such are the heart, liver, brain, lungs, stomach, and the other internal organs. Others are assigned to sensory activity, and still others to the activities of doing and moving about, while others are adapted to the transmission of posterity. **58.** Now if the life after this one is to continue in the same conditions, the transition amounts to nothing. But if the word is true, as indeed it is true, which defines marriage as having no part in the way of life after the resurrection (cf. Matthew 22. 30), and that the life then shall no longer be maintained by eating and drinking (cf. Romans 14. 17), what use shall there be for these parts of our body, if the activities for which our members now exist are no longer to be expected in that life?

step into the same river twice' (Plato, *Cratylus*, 402A), which was also alluded to here in 9.20. See also *On the Making of Man* 13.

**59.** 'If the organs for marriage exist for the sake of marriage, then when this is no more, we shall have no need of those organs for this purpose. And so also of the hands for working, the feet for running, the mouth for taking in food, the teeth in grinding it for nourishment, the entrails for digestion, the excretory passages for dispelling that which has all been used up. **60.** When these activities are no more, then how or for what purpose shall those members that came into being on account of these activities exist? Consequently, if those things which are going to contribute nothing to that other life ought not be about the body, then surely none of the parts which now make up our body would exist at all? **61.** The life then would subsist in other ways, and one could no longer call such a state a resurrection in which each of the members does not rise along with the body due to their uselessness in that life. **62.** But if the resurrection is to be effective in all these members, then the author of the resurrection will be fashioning parts in us that in that life are vain and meaningless. [Kr. 142] And yet it is necessary that we believe that there is a resurrection, and that it will not be vain.

**63.** 'We must therefore attend to the argument, that we may thoroughly secure the probability of this doctrine in every respect.'

**Macrina: 64.** When I had finished this speech, the teacher replied: 'You have assailed the doctrines of the resurrection not without gallantry using the rhetorical art as it is called, running round the truth in circles with attractively subversive arguments, **65.** with the result that those who have not looked into this mystery of the truth too closely might be affected by the plausibility of your argument and think that the doubt raised against what we have been saying is not entirely beside the point.

**66.** 'Yet the truth, she went on, is not so, even though we may be unable to oppose your argument with matching rhetoric.<sup>144</sup> The true rationale of these things is still laid up in the hidden treasures of Wisdom (cf. Sirach 1. 25, 4. 18, Proverbs 8. 21), and will not come to light until we are taught the mystery of the resurrection by the deed. Then we shall have no more need of fine phrases to clarify the things for which we now hope. **67.** Those awake during the night may have many arguments about what the brilliance of the sun might be. But the grace of its radiance has only to shine forth to render futile the descriptions of reason. So too every

<sup>144</sup> 'καὶν ἀδυνατῶς ἔχωμεν ἐκ τῶν ὁμοίων ἀντιρητορεύειν τῷ λογῷ, in other words: even though I may not be able to mount a formal antirrhetic against your argument, i.e. a detailed refutation and attack in the controversial manner. This sentiment surely suggests something of Macrina and Gregory's actual conversation.

conjectural reasoning touching our future condition will be shown to be nothing when the experience of what we looked for has overtaken us.

68. ‘But the objections brought against us should not be left wholly unexamined. We therefore take up our argument concerning these questions as follows. First, one must gain a clear concept of the scope of this doctrine of the resurrection, that is, why it was spoken of by that holy voice and why it is believed in. 69. In order then to encompass it in a certain definition, we will say this, that the resurrection is the restoration of our nature to its original condition.<sup>145</sup> 70. But in that first life of which God himself was the artificer it is likely that there was neither age nor infancy nor any of the sufferings of our varied illnesses nor any wretchedness of the body whatever, for it is unlikely that God could be the artificer of such things. 71. Instead, [Kr. 144] human nature was something divine before our humanity succumbed to the impulse of vice and all these things beset us along with the entry of vice. Accordingly the life that is without vice is under no necessity whatever of existing in those conditions that came about because of vice.

72. ‘When one travels in icy conditions it follows that the body grows cold, and when one goes about in the hot sun the complexion is darkened, but if one avoids both of these, it follows that one is completely free of both the darkening and the cold. No one would reasonably expect the outcome of a certain cause if that cause is not present. 73. In the same way our nature, in becoming subject to passion, necessarily incurred what follows from a life of passion, but when it has turned back again to that blessedness free of passion, it will no longer incur what follows from vice. 74. Since all that was mingled with our human nature from the irrational life was not in us before our humanity fell through vice into passion, then of necessity when we abandon passion, we shall also abandon all that is observed in company with it. No one therefore could reasonably expect in that other life the things that accrue to us through passion. 75. If someone clad in a tattered tunic is stripped of that covering, he would no longer see on himself the unseemliness of what has been discarded. So also with us, when we have put off that dead and repulsive tunic made for us from the skins of irrational animals — for when I hear *skins* (Genesis 3. 21) I take it to mean the aspect of the irrational nature with which we

<sup>145</sup> ἀνάστασις ἐστὶν ἡ εἰς τὸ ἀρχαῖον τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν ἀποκατάστασις, ‘original, ‘ancient’, ‘primordial’ nature, referring to the state before the Fall. Moore observes (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, v, 464, n. 1) that the definition is couched in Platonic terms (cf. *Symposium* 193D). It is the key concept in Gregory’s exposition of the resurrection, reappearing at 10.101, and in *On Virginity* 12, *On the Making of Man* 17.2, *On Ecclesiastes* 1, *Funeral oration for Pulcheria* 3, and *On the Dead* 3.

were clothed when we became habituated to passion.<sup>146</sup> In putting off that tunic then, we shall cast off along with it all that belonged to that skin of the irrational animals that was about us. And what we received from the skin of the irrational animals was sexual intercourse, conception, childbearing, sordidness,<sup>147</sup> breast-feeding, nourishing, excretion, gradual growth to maturity, the prime of life, old age, disease, and death.

**76.** 'If that skin shall no longer envelope us, how shall those things derived from it be left behind in us? But since another state is hoped for in the life that is to come, it is foolish to object to the doctrine of the resurrection on account of things which have nothing [Kr. 146] in common with it. **77.** What, for example, has being wrinkled or smooth-skinned, emaciated or plump, or any other condition attendant upon a bodily nature in flux, have in common with that life, which is foreign to the on-rushing and transitory character of this life? **78.** The rationale of the resurrection requires only one thing, that a human being has come into being through generation, or rather as the Gospel says, that *a human being is born into the world* (John 16. 21). The length or brevity of life, or the manner of death, whether it happened this way or that, are irrelevant when it comes to examining the rationale of the resurrection. **79.** Whatever circumstances we may care to imagine, it all comes to the same thing. Vicissitudes of this sort neither retard nor advance the resurrection. Anyone who once began to live most certainly comes to life when the dissolution which has come upon him in the meantime through death is rectified in the resurrection.

**80.** 'As to how and when the dissolution came about, what has this to do with the resurrection? The investigation of it looks to other criteria, such as whether someone has lived in pleasure or affliction, according to virtue or vice, in a way worthy of praise or of blame, whether he has passed his time wretchedly or well. All these aspects and others like them are ascertained from the length of his life and the character acquired therein. **81.** In order to pass judgement on the actions of his life, it would be necessary for the judge to probe what he has undergone, his humiliation, his disease, his old age, his prime, his youth, his wealth, and his poverty: how anyone placed in each of these circumstances ran the course of the life allotted him well or badly; whether he was able to receive many good things or many ills during

<sup>146</sup> Macrina/Gregory accommodate the Genesis text to the seaweed on the image of the sea-god Glaucus (Plato, *Republic* 613C). The coat of skins represents the passions contracted by fallen man through his perverted use of emotions as passions. Cf. the more positive or clinical account of what the human in its unfallen state takes from the animal nature in 3.40, 44.

<sup>147</sup> Possibly referring to menstruation in women and discharges in men.

a long life, or never reached even the beginning of either of these, but ceased to live before his mind was formed.

**82.** ‘But whenever the time comes that God shall bring the nature of the human being back to its primal state through the resurrection, it will be idle to talk of such matters then, and to imagine that God’s power can be hindered from its goal by such protests. **83.** He has but one goal: that once the whole plenitude of our nature is brought to completion from the first human being to the last,<sup>148</sup> [Kr. 148] — some having been cleansed straightaway from vice in this life, others having been healed afterwards by the fire in fitting periods of time (cf. 1 Corinthians 3. 15), while others during this life were equally ignorant of the experience of the beautiful and of vice — to offer to all a participation in the beautiful which is in him, which, as the Scripture says, *no eye has seen, or the hearing taken in, or has it entered into his reasonings* (Isaiah 64. 4, 1 Corinthians 2. 9). **84.** But this is nothing else, at least in my reckoning, than coming to be in God himself, for that good which is beyond hearing and eye and heart must be that which transcends the universe.

**85.** ‘But the difference between a life of virtue and a life of vice will be shown hereafter especially in this: whether one comes to participate in the hoped-for blessedness more quickly or slowly. The duration of the healing will be wholly in proportion to the degree of vice present in each. The healing of the soul will consist in its catharsis from vice, which can in no way be accomplished without painful affects, as was examined earlier in our discussion.

**86.** ‘One would perceive more readily how superfluous and irrelevant are these objections if one only stooped to look into the depths of the apostolic wisdom. In clarifying the mystery concerning these things to the Corinthians, who were perhaps putting the same objections to him as are proffered today by those who mishandle the doctrine in order to disturb believers, he proceeds on his own authority to cut short the audacity of their ignorance, and this is what he says: **87.** *You will then say to me: How are the dead raised, and with what kind of body do they come? O foolish!* he says, *That which you sow is not given life unless it dies. And when you sow, you do not sow the body as it shall come to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has willed* (1 Corinthians 15. 35–38). **88.** Here, it seems to me, he bridles the mouth of those who betray their ignorance of the due limits of nature and who measure the divine power by their own strength, even to thinking that only so much is possible to the divine as

<sup>148</sup> That is, the idea that there is a definite *pleroma*, sum, or plenitude of human nature to be reached. See 9.22 and note.

can be encompassed by human comprehension, and that what is beyond us also exceeds the divine power.

**89.** ‘For the one who asked [Kr. 150] the apostle how are the dead raised? clearly implies that once the body’s elements are scattered there is no way that they can come together again, and that since this is impossible and there is no other body available apart from such a convergence, **90.** he asks this in the manner of clever dialecticians, now by some species of logic taking what he had hypothesized as conclusive: if a body is a convergence of elements and a second assemblage of these is impossible, what kind of body will they use who rise again? This argument, which they think put together with some technical sophistication, the apostle calls foolishness on the part of those who have not noticed in the rest of creation the superabundance of the divine power. **91.** For he omits the loftier wonders worked by God, which could have led his hearer into a quandary, such as, “What is a heavenly body and where does it come from, that of the sun for example, or that of the moon, or that which appears in the stars? What of the firmament, the air, the water, the earth?” (cf. I Corinthians 15. 40–41). Instead, he refutes the inattention of the objectors by using things we grew up with and are more common. **92.** Surely even farming teaches you, he asks, that he is a fool who estimates the superabundance of the divine power by his own measure? Where do the bodies come from that spring up from seeds? What initiates their sprouting? Is it not a death, if death is the dissolution of what has been constituted? **93.** For indeed the seed would not begin to germinate unless it were dissolved in the soil and became spongy and porous enough to mingle its own qualities with the surrounding moisture, and thus become transformed into a root and shoot. Yet it does not remain even in that state, but changes again into a stalk with intermittent nodes girding it as with so many braces to enable it to carry on its erect shape the ear weighed with the fruit.

**94.** ‘Where then were all these features of the full grain before the dissolution in the soil? But of course they come from the seed. If that had not been first, the ear would not have come about. **95.** Just as the body of the ear springs up from the seed, when the divine power skilfully draws it from that very thing, [Kr. 152] and it is neither wholly the same as that seed nor altogether different, **96.** so, he continues, the mystery of the resurrection is already prefigured for you through these wonders worked in seeds, inasmuch as the divine power, in the exceeding greatness of its command, not only restores to you that which was once dissolved, but also gives you in addition other things great and beautiful, through which your nature is adorned in a manner still more magnificent. **97.** For *It is sown*, he says, *in corruption, it is awoken in incorruption; it is sown in weakness, it is awoken in power;*

*it is sown in dishonour, it is awoken in glory; it is sown a material<sup>149</sup> body, it is awoken a spiritual body* (I Corinthians 15. 42–44). Though the grain of wheat on its dissolution in the soil leaves behind its slender bulk and the particular quality of its shape, it does not quit itself, but abides in itself even as it grows into an ear that differs very greatly from itself in size, beauty, complexity, and shape.

**98.** In the same way, though human nature loses in death all the particular qualities it acquired through its disposition subject to passion — dishonour I mean, and corruption and weakness and the differences of age—yet it does not lose itself. Instead, as if growing into an ear, it is changed into incorruption, and glory, and honour, and power, and consummate perfection. Its life is no longer ordered to material properties, because it has passed over into a spiritual condition free of passion. **99.** For it is the particular quality of the material body that through a certain flux and movement, it is always being altered from its present state and passing on to something else, but none of those things<sup>150</sup> which are observed not only in human beings but also in plants and irrational animals shall be left in the life that then shall be.

**100.** ‘It seems to me that the apostolic word supports in every way our conception of the resurrection and demonstrates the very thing that our definition encompassed, where we said that the resurrection is nothing other than the restoration of our nature to its original state.’<sup>151</sup> **101.** For in the first creation<sup>152</sup> [Kr. 154] we learn from Scripture that the earth first sprouted *the green herb*, as the Word says, and then that seed came from this sprouting, and when this was shed on the ground, the same form as that which originally sprouted shoots up from it again (Genesis 1. 11–12, Septuagint). **102.** This, the divine apostle says, also comes about in the resurrection. We learn from him not only that our humanity will then be changed into something nobler, but also that what is hoped for is nothing other than what was in the first place. **103.** For since in the beginning it was not the ear that came from the seed, but the seed from the ear, and after this the ear sprang up around the seed, the sequence in the example clearly indicates that the entire

<sup>149</sup> ψυχικὸν, transliterated: ‘psychic’, interpreted variously as ‘natural’, ‘material’, and ‘unspiritual’.

<sup>150</sup> Setting aside the καλὰ (beautiful things) which appears anomalously in some manuscripts and in Krabinger’s edition, but is not in all manuscripts.

<sup>151</sup> See above at 10.70.

<sup>152</sup> Literally, ‘the first *cosmogony*’. The second creation was inaugurated by Christ’s resurrection and is extended in the general resurrection.

blessedness that shall sprout again for us through the resurrection is a return to the grace of the beginning. **104.** At the beginning we too were in a way the full ear,<sup>153</sup> but we were withered in the scorching heat of vice, and the earth received us when we were dissolved in death, but in the springtime of the resurrection it will again manifest this *bare kernel* (1 Corinthians 15. 37) of our body as an ear, tall, flourishing, and erect, reaching up to the heavenly heights, and instead of stalk and filaments, adorned with incorruption and with all the other God-befitting marks. **105.** For *this corruptible*, it says, *must put on incorruption* (1 Corinthians 15. 53). This incorruption, and glory, and honour, and power are acknowledged as proper to the divine, and they once attended him who came into being *in God's image* (Genesis 1. 27) and are still hoped for again. **106.** The first human being, Adam, was the first ear. But with the entry of vice, human nature was divided up into a multitude, and, as happens to the grain in the ear, each was stripped of the form of that ear and put to moulder in the soil. But in the resurrection we spring up beautiful again as in our ancient generation, only instead of that single primal ear we become the countless myriads of ears in the cornfields (cf. Mark 4. 28–29, John 4. 35).

**107.** 'The life of virtue will be distinguished from that of vice in this: those who cultivated themselves in virtue during their life here [Kr. 156] spring up immediately as a perfect ear. **108.** Those on the other hand in whom the power of the material seed becomes depleted and wind-blasted through vice during this life, as the experts in such things say happens to 'hornstruck' seeds so-called,<sup>154</sup> though they spring up at the resurrection, will meet with great severity from the judge, because they have no strength left to shoot up again into the form of the ear and

<sup>153</sup> Macrina/Gregory are speaking of man's collective spiritual history, meaning here the prelapsarian state of the first creation. Gregory does have a strong doctrine of man's Fall, and at the same time a great emphasis on the free will of each human being, but has not quite integrated these two stances to explain how each human being comes into being handicapped by the collective Fall of man, though no personal vice has yet been entered into.

<sup>154</sup> A string of three rare words occurs here: ἐξίτηλός (faded, depleted, attenuated), occurring (inter alia) in Plato, *Republic* 497B for seed sown in alien soil; ἀνεμόθορος (blasted by the wind) in the Septuagint, Deuteronomy 28. 22, and Hosea 8. 7; κερασβόλα (hornstruck) in Theophrastus *On the Causes of Plants*, 4.12.13, Plutarch *Convivial Questions* 2.700c, referring to seeds too hard to germinate or use in cooking, because, so it was believed, they had hit against the horns of the ox while being sown. Moore (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, v, 467, n. 4) quotes hexameters of Gregory Nazianzen, referring to 'Opp. t. II, pp. 66–173': 'there is a dry unsoakable seed which never merges into the soil or swells with the rain; it is harder than horn; its shell has struck the horn of the ox when the ploughman's hand is scattering seed over his land'. Plato uses κερασβόλα in *Laws* 853D, to refer to someone who is stubborn and intractable in their adherence to evil.

become what we were before the fall to the earth.<sup>155</sup> **109.** The cure undertaken by the overseer of the crop is to collect the weeds and the thorns which have grown up with the seed, all the power of whose root has been so diverted to nourish the bastard plant that the genuine seed has had to remain unnourished and stunted, choked by this sprouting contrary to nature. **110.** Then, when all that is bastard and alien is culled from the part needing nourishment and is made to disappear in that fire which consumes all that is contrary to nature (cf. Matthew 13. 24–30),<sup>156</sup> nature shall thrive also among these and ripen into fruit, thanks to such a cure, and then after long cycles of ages it shall receive again that common form which was bestowed on us by God at the beginning.

**111.** ‘Blessed are they in whom the perfect beauty of those ears shall appear together with them as soon they spring up in the resurrection. Yet we say this not as though any bodily differences will be manifest at the resurrection between those who have lived according to virtue and those who have lived according to vice, as if to suppose that one will be imperfect of body, while another will be perfect. **112.** Just as the prisoner and the free are both much alike in body in this life but there is a great difference between them with regard to pleasure and grief, so I think we should reckon the difference between the good and the bad in the time after this.<sup>157</sup> **113.** For the perfection of bodies that spring up again from that sowing in death is said by the apostle to consist in incorruption and glory and honour and power (cf. I Corinthians 15. 42–43), but any deficit in these does not imply some bodily mutilation of the one who has sprung up, but a privation and estrangement from each of those things understood [Kr. 158] as belonging to the good.

**114.** ‘Since one or the other of these two opposed concepts, that is either good or vice, must certainly apply to us, it is clear that to say someone is not in the good demonstrates that he is certainly in vice. **115.** But in connection with vice there is no honour, no glory, no incorruption, and no power. Hence we must necessarily dismiss all doubt that anyone to whom all these do not apply is involved in their opposites, that is, with weakness, dishonour, corruption, and everything else of that kind. We spoke of this earlier in our discussion when we said that the passions that come from vice become very hard to expel from the soul, because they have

<sup>155</sup> The ambiguity here seems to arise from the conflation of that primal fall in the moral sense which impaired man collectively, and the fall of the seed on the ground according to the metaphor. It cannot mean the fall of souls to the earth into bodies, a notion advanced by Origen but rejected by Macrina/Gregory above in 9.19.

<sup>156</sup> This reprises earlier exposition of the Gospel parable at 3.51–58.

<sup>157</sup> That is, between the general resurrection and the final *apocatastasis* / restoration.

permeated the whole of it and grown up with it and become one with it. **116.** But when these passions have been purged from it and made to disappear through the medicinal work of the fire, then each of the things reckoned to be for the better shall enter in their stead: incorruption, life, honour, grace, glory, power, and anything else of the kind that we conjecture is contemplated in God and in his image, which is human nature.