

Aristotle
in Byzantium

Edited by **Mikonja Knežević**

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Mikonja Knežević

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Gregory of Nyssa's Teaching on Indivisible Monad and its Philosophical Context

Dmitry Biriukov

The parts¹ of his writings where Gregory of Nyssa allegedly develops a “collective” theory of universals are actively discussed in scholarly literature.² This theory, according to Johannes Zachhuber, presupposes “a view that sees universals as collections of its individual instantiations.”³ Different scholars suggest various understandings of the historical-philosophical background of the corresponding parts of Gregory’s writings. In this essay I will venture to expound my own understanding of Gregory’s ideas.

In the treatise *To Ablabius. On Not Three Gods* Gregory displays a number of peculiar ideas which, as many scholars assume, are bound up with the “collective” understanding of universals.

1. The article was prepared with a financial support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, project 18-011-01243.
2. H. Cherniss, “The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa,” *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 11 (1930) 1–92, at 33; R. M. Hubner, *Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa: Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der ‘Physischen’ Erlösungslehre*, Leiden 1974, Ss. 83-87; D. Balas, “Plenitudo humanitatis: The Unity of Human Nature in the Theology of Gregory of Nyssa,” in D. F. Winslow (ed.), *Disciplina Nostra: Essays in Memory of Robert F. Evans*, Cambridge, MA 1979, 119-121; J. Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, Leiden 2000, 64-70 and *passim*.
3. J. Zachhuber, “Once again: Gregory of Nyssa on Universals,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 56 (2005) 75.

In particular, as a part of his defense against accusations of tritheism (and while using for this purpose the analogy elaborated by the Cappadocians between hypostases of the Trinity and human individuals) Gregory speaks about the use of the plural case applied to a so-called indivisible nature. It corresponds to the species of the thing; and in line with this he contrasts, on the one hand a word usage that is correct in its meaning although is not commonly used, and on the other hand there is a word that is used but not correct in its form. He says that it is not correct to use the word “man” with the meaning of human species in plural, although in colloquial speech such usage is absolutely natural. Instead, the correct usage is that where the word “man” is used as a singular. Gregory states that because the word “man” points to the species, or to the nature, the use of this word in the plural implies the presence of a multitude of natures. It would follow then that human nature is no longer indivisible, something that Gregory regards as absurd:

Φαμὲν τοίνυν πρῶτον μὲν κατάχρησίν τινα συνηθείας εἶναι τὸ τοὺς μὴ διηρημένους τῇ φύσει κατ’ αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς φύσεως ὄνομα πληθυντικῶς ὀνομάζειν καὶ λέγειν ὅτι πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι, ὅπερ ὁμοίον ἐστὶ τῷ λέγειν ὅτι πολλὰ φύσεις ἀνθρώπιναί.

We say, then, to begin with, that the practice of calling those who are not divided in nature by the very name of their common nature in the plural, and saying they are “many men,” is a customary abuse of language, and that it would be much the same thing to say they are “many human natures.”⁴

To elaborate upon his thought Gregory offers the example of *calling upon* a man. Such an action can be either successful or unsuccessful. The bishop of Nyssa says that if the word used for calling upon a certain man has the meaning of a common nature, then such an action will be unsuccessful. It is only when one calls upon the personal name of the intended individual (which distinguishes him from another man) that one will succeed. This is because the personal name points to the subject, individual, while a common

4. *Ad Ablabius (Ad Abl.)*, 40, 5-9 (Jaeger), the translation by W. Moore, H. A. Wilson, in: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 5, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1893, 332.

name suggests only a shared nature. In the course of this epistemological reasoning, Gregory allows himself to make certain ontological utterances. A personal name, Gregory says, distinguishes the individual from the many (who partake of the common nature) although the nature of all individuals is the same (i.e. the same human nature, which is actually the only one to be called “man”):

προσκαλούμενοι γάρ τινα, οὐκ ἐκ τῆς φύσεως αὐτὸν ὀνομάζομεν, ὡς ἂν μὴ τινα πλάνην ἢ κοινότης τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐμποιήσειεν, ἐκάστου τῶν ἀκουόντων ἑαυτὸν εἶναι τὸν προσκληθέντα νομίζοντος, ὅτι μὴ τῇ ἰδιαζούσῃ προσηγορίᾳ ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς φύσεως ὀνόματος ἢ κλήσις γίνεται· ἀλλὰ τὴν ἰδίως ἐπικειμένην αὐτῷ (τὴν σημαντικὴν λέγω τοῦ ὑποκειμένου) φωνὴν εἰπόντες, οὕτως αὐτὸν τῶν πολλῶν ἀποκρίνομεν, ὥστε πολλοὺς μὲν εἶναι τοὺς μετεσχηκότας τῆς φύσεως, φέρε εἰπεῖν μαθητὰς ἢ ἀποστόλους ἢ μάρτυρας, ἕνα δὲ ἐν πᾶσι τὸν ἄνθρωπον, εἴπερ, καθὼς εἴρηται, οὐχὶ τοῦ καθ' ἕκαστον, ἀλλὰ τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς φύσεως ἐστὶν ὁ ἄνθρωπος· ἄνθρωπος γὰρ ὁ Λουκᾶς ἢ ὁ Στέφανος, οὐ μὴν, εἴ τις ἄνθρωπος, πάντως καὶ Λουκᾶς ἐστὶν ἢ Στέφανος.

When we address any one, we do not call him by the name of his nature, in order that no confusion may result from the community of the name, as would happen if every one of those who hear it were to think that he himself was the person addressed, because the call is made not by the proper appellation but by the common name of their nature: but we separate him from the multitude by using that name that belongs to him as his own;—that, I mean, which signifies the particular subject. Thus there are many who have shared in the nature—many disciples, say, or apostles, or martyrs—but the man in them all is one; since, as has been said, the term “man” does not belong to the nature of the individual as such, but to that which is common. For Luke is a man, or Stephen is a man.⁵

Gregory then refines the specifics of hypostases and nature on the basis of the categories countability/divisibility and unity. The hypostases are conformed to countability and division (διαμερισμός), but the nature to unity. Gregory refers to nature as an indivisible monad, although it is present through multitude

5. *Ad Abl.* 40, 10-23 (Jaeger), the translation in: *Ibid.* See also: *De hom. opif.* 16.16-18.

(i.e. through individuals), it is one and undivided by those who take part in it:

Ἄλλ' ὁ μὲν τῶν ὑποστάσεων λόγος διὰ τὰς ἐνθεωρουμένας ιδιότητας ἐκάστῳ τὸν διαμερισμὸν ἐπιδέχεται καὶ κατὰ σύνθεσιν ἐν ἀριθμῷ θεωρεῖται· ἡ δὲ φύσις μία ἐστίν, αὐτὴ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἠνωμένη καὶ ἀδιάτμητος ἀκριβῶς μονάς, οὐκ αὐξανομένη διὰ προσθήκης, οὐ μειουμένη δι' ὑφαιρέσεως, ἀλλ' ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἐν οὐσα καὶ ἐν διαμένουσα κἂν ἐν πλήθει φαίνεται, ἀσχιστος καὶ συνεχῆς καὶ ὁλόκληρος καὶ τοῖς μετέχουσιν αὐτῆς τοῖς καθ' ἕκαστον οὐ συνδιαιρουμένη.

The idea of the hypostases admits of that separation that is made by the peculiar attributes considered in each severally, and when they are combined is presented to us by means of number; yet their nature is one, at union in itself, and an absolutely indivisible monad, not capable of increase by addition or of diminution by subtraction, but in its essence being and continually remaining one, inseparable even though it appears in plurality, continuous, complete, and not divided with the individuals who participate in it.⁶

Later on Gregory gives an example, which is supposed to illustrate what has been said. He states that the words “people,” “army,” and “counsel” are such that taken in the singular they have the meaning of the plural. This statement can be inspected through the word “man,” which itself means something singular—human nature, although what belongs to the human nature is plural (i.e. human individuals, people). Thus, Gregory sums up that it is better to use the term “nature” in the correct way, namely not in the plural but in the singular. And if we cannot use it in such a way in colloquial language, then we must do such differentiation in theological language (and not speak about three divine natures).

καὶ ὡςπερ λέγεται λαὸς καὶ δῆμος καὶ στράτευμα καὶ ἐκκλησία μοναχῶς πάντα, ἕκαστον δὲ τούτων ἐν πλήθει νοεῖται· οὕτω κατὰ τὸν ἀκριβέστερον λόγον καὶ ἄνθρωπος εἰς κυρίως ἂν ῥηθείη, κἂν οἱ ἐν τῇ φύσει τῇ αὐτῇ δεικνύμενοι πλῆθος ὦσιν, ὡς πολὺ μᾶλλον καλῶς ἔχειν τὴν ἐσφαλμένην ἐφ' ἡμῶν ἐπανορθοῦσθαι συνήθειαν εἰς τὸ μηκέτι τὸ τῆς φύσεως ὄνομα

6. *Ad Abl.* 40, 24 - 41, 7 (Jaeger), the translation in: *Ibid*, slightly revised.

πρὸς πλῆθος ἐκτείνειν ἢ ταύτη δουλεύοντας τὴν ὧδε πλάνην καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ θεῖον δόγμα μεταβιβάζειν.

And as we speak of a people, or a mob, or an army, or an assembly in the singular in every case, while each of these is conceived as being in plurality, so according to the more accurate expression, “man” would be said to be one, even though those who are exhibited to us in the same nature make up a plurality. Thus it would be much better to correct our erroneous habit, so as no longer to extend to a plurality the name of the nature, than by our bondage to habit to transfer to our statements concerning God the error that exists in the above case.⁷

Closer to the end of the treatise Gregory comes back to this theme. He again claims that it is incorrect to use the word “nature” to refer to many, and supports his argument declaring that “nature” cannot decrease or increase, although “nature” is perceived in many. Countability, which implies existence in a mode of multitude, is typical only of something individualized, i.e. confined spatially, etc. Something that is not individualized is neither countable, hence it cannot be represented in a mode of multitude. Such is the relation between the nature of gold (as uncountable and not individualized) and concrete golden coins (as countable and possessing individual features). The same argument is applied to human nature. It consists of many individuals, but “man” in them all is the same and one:

τὸ τῆς φύσεως ὄνομα ἡμαρτημένως ἢ συνήθεια εἰς πλήθους σημασίαν ἀνάγει, οὔτε μειώσεως οὔτε αὐξήσεως κατὰ τὸν ἀληθῆ λόγον προσγινομένης τῆ φύσει, ὅταν ἐν πλείοσιν ἢ ἐλάττοσι θεωρῆται. μόνα γὰρ κατὰ σύνθεσιν ἀριθμεῖται, ὅσα κατ' ἰδίαν περιγραφὴν θεωρεῖται· ἡ δὲ περιγραφὴ ἐν ἐπιφανείᾳ σώματος καὶ μεγέθει καὶ τόπῳ καὶ τῇ διαφορᾷ τῇ κατὰ τὸ σχῆμα καὶ χρῶμα καταλαμβάνεται· τὸ δὲ ἔξω τούτων θεωρούμενον ἐκφεύγει τὴν διὰ τῶν τοιούτων περιγραφὴν. ὃ δὲ μὴ περιγράφεται οὐκ ἀριθμεῖται, τὸ δὲ μὴ ἀριθμούμενον ἐν πλῆθει θεωρηθῆναι οὐ δύναται. ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸν χρυσὸν φαμεν, καὶ εἰς πολλοὺς διακερματίζεται τύπους, ἓνα καὶ εἶναι καὶ λέγεσθαι· πολλὰ δὲ νομίσματα καὶ πολλοὺς στατήρας ὀνομάζομεν, οὐδένα τῆς φύσεως τοῦ χρυσοῦ πλεονασμὸν ἐν τῷ πλήθει τῶν

7. *Ad Abl.* 41, 7-15 (Jaeger), the translation in: *Ibid.*

στατήρων εύρισκοντες, διὸ καὶ πολὺς ὁ χρυσοὺς λέγεται, ὅταν ἐν ὄγκῳ πλείονι ἢ σκεύεσιν ἢ νομίσμασι θεωρῆται, πολλοὶ δὲ οἱ χρυσοὶ διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῆς ὕλης οὐκ ὀνομάζονται· εἰ μὴ τις οὕτω λέγοι, χρυσοὺς πολλοὺς, ὡς τοὺς δαρεικοὺς ἢ τοὺς στατήρας, ἐφ' ὧν οὐχ ἡ ὕλη ἀλλὰ τὰ κέρματα τὴν τοῦ πλῆθους σημασίαν ἐδέξατο. κυρίως γὰρ ἔστιν οὐχὶ χρυσοὺς ἀλλὰ χρυσεύους τούτους εἶπεῖν. ὡσπερ τοίνυν πολλοὶ μὲν οἱ χρύσειοι στατήρες, χρυσοὺς δὲ εἷς, οὕτω καὶ πολλοὶ μὲν οἱ καθ' ἕκαστον ἐν τῇ φύσει τοῦ ἀνθρώπου δεικνύμενοι, οἷον Πέτρος καὶ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωάννης, εἷς δὲ ἐν τούτοις ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

[I]t has become custom to erroneously use the term “nature” to denote multitude: since according to true reasoning neither diminution nor increase attaches to any nature, when it is contemplated in a larger or smaller number. For it is only those things that are contemplated in their individual circumscription that are enumerated by way of addition. Now this circumscription is noted by bodily appearance, and size, and place, and difference figure and color, and that which is contemplated apart from these conditions is free from the circumscription that is formed by such categories. That which is not thus circumscribed is not enumerated, and that which is not enumerated cannot be contemplated in multitude. For we say that gold, even though it be cut into many figures, is one, and is so spoken of, but we speak of many coins or many staters, without finding any multiplication of the nature of gold by the number of staters; and for this reason we speak of gold, when it is contemplated in greater bulk, either in plate or in coin, as much, but we do not speak of it as many golds on account of the multitude of the material—except when one says there are many gold pieces (Darics, for instance, or staters), in which case it is not the material, but the pieces of money to which the significance of number applies: indeed, properly, we should not call them gold but golden. As, then, the golden staters are many, but the gold is one, so too those who are exhibited to us severally in the nature of man, as Peter, James, and John, are many, yet the man in them is one.⁸

The historical and philosophical context of these positions from the treatise of Gregory of Nyssa’s *Ad Ablabium* has been interpreted in different ways by different scholars. None of the interpretations that I am aware of seem satisfactory. Thus, in his exten-

8. *Ad Abl.* 53, 6 - 54, 4 (Jaeger), the translation in: *ibid.* 335, slightly revised.

sive study, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*,⁹ Johannes Zachhuber tried to prove that in *Ad Ablabium* Gregory manifested his understanding of nature in a collective sense of universals when he was discussing the notion of the total monad. According to Zachhuber, the same idea can be found in the so-called *Letter 38*, while Gregory's concept of the man who was "in" the human individuals and whose correct expression by means of language was only possible in the singular, referred to the concept of the universal immanent to the things.¹⁰ Zachhuber correlated the understanding of universals in a collective sense which, according to him, appeared in *Letter 38*, with the concept of the "whole man" of Alexander of Aphrodisias.¹¹ Zachhuber also understands this concept in the sense of a collective universal.¹² In his study, "Gregory of Nyssa on Universals"¹³ Richard Cross criticized Zachhuber's theory of Gregory of Nyssa's collective understanding of universals. According to Cross, all disputable passages in Gregory are consistent with an understanding of universals in an immanent sense. Cross claimed that in *Ad Ablabium* Gregory not only did *not* follow the collective understanding of universals, but also argued with such an understanding on the part of the Neoplatonists, more precisely, with the understanding of universals appearing, as Cross believed, in Porphyry's *Isagoge*. In his response to Cross, Zachhuber¹⁴ did not discuss Cross's historical and philosophical theory,¹⁵ but instead attempted to reply to Cross's objections to his concept of the collective understanding of universals in Gregory expressed in his book, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*. Zachhuber elaborated his argument by clarifying that the collective sense of a universal / species in Gregory of Nyssa was to be understood not simply in the sense of an integral sum of the individuals belonging to a particular species, but in the sense of a "concrete whole." In that respect Zachhuber suggested that the specific nature of this collective uni-

9. J. Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance*, Leiden 2000.

10. Ibid. 116.

11. Alexander of Aphrodisias (Alex. Aphrod.), *In Met.* 426, 19-26 (Havdduck).

12. J. Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 88.

13. R. Cross, "Gregory of Nyssa on Universals," *Vigiliae Christianae* 56 (2002).

14. J. Zachhuber, "Once Again: Gregory of Nyssa on Universals."

15. Ibid. 78.

versal in Gregory was such that the relation between the universal and the individual in it was similar to oneness-in-multiplicity as it was understood by Plotinus when he spoke of the one and the many in the hypostasis of the Mind.¹⁶

As opposed to the previous studies, I believe that the specific philosophical doctrine developed by Gregory in his treatise *Ad Ablabium* (with some important points discussed in *Letter 38*) is based on the tradition of *The Categories* of Aristotle and the Neoplatonic commentaries on this treatise.

In this regard, I discern several trends that were essential for Gregory's specific approach and his use of philosophical language for describing the problem of the relationship between the general and the particular in *Ad Ablabium* and *Letter 38*. The following trends are manifested in the preceding philosophical tradition of antiquity associated with *The Categories* and their commentaries: 1) the principle that division corresponds to the particular and individual, while unity corresponds to the species and the natural; 2) the concept of monad / common man as applied to mankind; 3) the argument of the participation of the individual in general, or of individuals in nature; 4) the principle of the indivisibility of species by the individuals that participate in it; and 5) the principle of "greater-lesser."

We should start with the last point. When Gregory says in *Ad Ablabium* that the monad (that is, the nature or species) does not increase with addition and does not reduce with subtraction,¹⁷ he expresses, in other words, the thought from the passage in his *Contra Eunomium* I, 1, 173, 2 – 175,¹⁸ that human nature is always

16. Zachhuber referred to *Enneads* V, 9, 6, 8-11 and IV, 2, 1, 62-66 as an example.

17. *Ad Abl.* 40, 24 - 41, 7 (Jaeger), see above.

18. "What less did David have than Abraham in terms of being, because he was signified as fourteen generations later? Was there some change in humanity in his case, and was he less a man, because born later in time? Who would be so stupid as to say that? The logos of essence (τῆς οὐσίας ὁ λόγος) is identical in both cases, and is in no way changed with the passing of time. Nor would anyone say that the one is more a man because he preceded in time, while the other participates less in that nature (μετέχειν τῆς φύσεως) because he lived his life after others, as if human nature were spent by those predecessors, or time had used up power in those who went before. Neither is it possible to define the limits of nature in temporal terms, but it

in the same way present in mankind, although the individual humans belonging to it are born and die in time. The passage reveals a clear Aristotelian/Porphyrian context associated with the topic of “greater–lesser” in connection with the category of substance.¹⁹

This same context is manifested in the words of Gregory when he justifies the use of the term “nature” only in the singular and says that nature can neither decrease nor increase.²⁰

abides in itself and preserves itself through all posterity. But time passes in its own way, whether it contains or bypasses nature, which remains fixed and unchanged in its own defined limits” (C. *Eun.* I, 1, 173, 2 – 175, 3, the translation by S. G. Hall, in: F. Mateo Seco, J. Bastero (ed.), *El 'Contra Eunomium I' en la produccion literaria de Gregorio de Nisa. VI Coloquio Internacional sobre Gregorio de Nisa*, Pamplona 1988, 60-61, slightly revised). Gregory develops this topic in the context of polemics with the statement attributed to Eunomius, that the principle of “greater–lesser” is applied to the category of substance. Gregory objected to this statement, insisting that the principle of “greater–lesser” is applied not to substance but to attributes (for instance, see: “By what wisdom he learnt the greater and lesser degrees of essence? What reasoning produces a difference of such a kind that one essence exists more than another essence? I refer specifically to the meaning of “essence”; he <Eunomius> should not bring forward differences of qualities or of characteristics, such as are apprehended about an essence by the intelligent mind, which are something other than the subject itself” (C. *Eun.* I, 180, 1 – 182, 1 (Jaeger), the translation in: *Ibid.* 61, slightly revised). In this way, Gregory, on the one hand, accuses Eunomius of ignorance of the basics of dialectic and thus false premises in theology, and on the other hand, he develops his own philosophy regarding the principle of “greater–lesser.” See: D. Biriukov, “Eunomius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Principle of ‘the More and the Less’ and Its Application to the Category of Substance,” *Scrinium: Journal of Patrology and Critical Hagiography* 14 (2018) 467-474.

19. Aristotle mentions this in *The Categories* 2b, 26-27 and then in 3b 33ff he explains what he has in mind, namely that it is not possible to speak about the first essence (individual) as pertaining in a greater or lesser degree to the second essence (its species) than the other first essence (another individual) pertains to it or than it itself pertains at some different time. If to speak just of the fragment from C. *Eun.* I, 1, 173, 2-175, 1 (Jaeger) (see the previous reference), there the combination of the theme of participation in the general substance with the theme of “greater–lesser” refers to Porphyry's *Isagoge* (X, 17, 3-13). But the argument about the inapplicability of the principle “greater–lesser” to the general nature, related to the topic of time, recalls how Aristotle in *The Categories* is talking about the impossibility of the application of this principle to the category of essence, who in the same context deals with the problem of time (Cat. 3b33-4a9).

20. *Ad Abl.* 53, 6 - 54, 4 (Jaeger), see above.

Gregory's argument in *Ad Ablabium* and especially in *Letter 38* is based on the premise that the particular and the individual correspond to division, while the species and the natural correspond to unity. Thus, in *Letter 38* Gregory writes:

it is impossible in any way to think of a severance or a division, so that the Son is considered apart from the Father, or the Spirit is separated from the Son; but there is found in them a certain inexpressible and incomprehensible union and distinction, since neither the difference of the persons breaks the continuity of the nature, nor the common attribute of substance dissolves the individual character of their distinctive marks. But, do not wonder if we say that the same thing is both joined and separated and if, as in a riddle, we contrive something both strange and incredible, a conjoined separation and a separated union.²¹

This premise also appears in *Ad Ablabium*, where Gregory explains, "The idea of the hypostases admits of that separation which is made by the peculiar attributes considered in each severally, and when they are combined is presented to us by means of number."²² Here we can see the expression of an important argument of *Isagoge* where the movement along the genera/species hierarchy towards the more particular is associated with the concept of division, while the movement towards the more common is associated with the concept of unity. As Porphyry explains, the individual is associated with divisibility, while the general is associated with unity. Porphyry speaks about it in the same passage of *Isagoge* where he addresses another important issue for the kind of philosophy Gregory elaborates in *Ad Ablabium* and *Letter 38* –

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21. *Epistle (Ep.) 38, 4, 81-91*, the translation by Sister Agnes Clare Way, C.D.P., in: Saint Basil, *Letters*, Vol. 1 (1-185), The Catholic University of America Press 1951, 90 (Οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐπινοῆσαι τομὴν ἢ διαίρεσιν κατ' οὐδένα τρόπον, ὡς ἢ Υἱὸν χωρὶς Πατρὸς νοηθῆναι ἢ τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Υἱοῦ διαζευχθῆναι, ἀλλὰ τις ἄρρητος καὶ ἀκατανόητος ἐν τούτοις καταλαμβάνεται καὶ ἡ κοινωμία καὶ ἡ διάκρισις. οὔτε τῆς τῶν ὑποστάσεων διαφορᾶς τὸ τῆς φύσεως συνεχῆς διασπώσης οὔτε τῆς κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν κοινότητος τὸ ἰδιάζον τῶν γνωρισμάτων ἀναχεύσεως. Μὴ θαυμάσης δὲ εἰ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ συνημμένον καὶ διακεκριμένον εἶναι φαμεν καὶ τινα ἐπινοοῦμεν, ὥσπερ ἐν αἰνίγματι, καινὴν καὶ παράδοξον διάκρισιν τε συνημμένην καὶ διακεκριμένην συνάφειαν).
22. *Ad Abl. 40, 24 – 41, 2.*

the subject of “common man” as applied to the human race. This passage of Porphyry also contains the Aristotelian concept of the participation of individuals in their natural species which, as we have seen, Gregory also uses in *Ad Ablabium*.²³ Thus, all these topics may be found in Porphyry in a passage from the second chapter of *Isagoge*:

So, when we are descending to the most special items, it is necessary to divide and to proceed through a plurality (διὰ πλήθους), and when we are ascending to the most general items, it is necessary to bring the plurality together into One (συναίρειν εἰς ἓν). For species—and still more, genera—are that which gather (συναγωγόν) the many items into a single nature (εἰς μίαν φύσιν); whereas the particulars or singulars, in contrary fashion, always divide (διαίρει) the one into a plurality. For by participating in the species (τοῦ εἴδους μετουσίᾳ) the many men are one man, and by the particulars the one and common (ὁ εἷς καὶ κοινός) man is several — for the singular is always divisive whereas the common is collective and unificatory.²⁴

Keeping in mind the fact that Gregory uses these three points from a single passage of the *Isagoge* while developing his theory of the general and the particular, it can be argued that the *Isagoge* (and specifically that passage) significantly influenced Gregory's elaboration of principles appearing in his *Ad Ablabium*, Letter 38, and other texts of Gregory on the subject.

It seems that Gregory's use of the concept of the monad (μονάς), which is absent from Porphyry's *Isagoge* can be related to Porphyry's concept of the “common man.” Writing about the monad, Gregory must have reformulated the notion of “common man” from Porphyry, enriching it by the additional connotations associated with an emphasis on the unity and integrity of nature / species.

However, Richard Cross suggests that in this passage of the *Isagoge* Porphyry elaborates the collective understanding of the universals that implies that species are divided by the individuals. Cross believes that Gregory of Nyssa argues precisely with this notion when he proposes that the monad (that is, the nature or spe-

23. *Ad Abl.* 40, 24 - 41, 7 (Jaeger), see above.

24. Porphyry (Porph.), *Isagoge (Isag.)*: 6, 16-23 (Busse), the translation by J. Barnes, in: Porphyry, *Introduction*, Oxford 2006, 7.

cies of the thing) is *indivisible* by the individuals participating in it.²⁵ I believe Cross's understanding of Porphyry is wrong. Cross does not take into account the fact that the positions expressed by Porphyry in the *Isagoge* do not claim ontological status, but are rather logical exercises as Porphyry clearly states in the beginning of his treatise.²⁶ Therefore, in attributing the collective understanding of the universals to Porphyry, Cross unjustifiably "ontologizes" a purely *logical* discourse. When in his logical framework Porphyry says that the individual divides the unity into multiplicity, this in no way implies that the real unity (species) consists of multiplicity (individuals). It means that if we build up a generic hierarchy in our mind, the higher we ascend along the hierarchy of commonness with our mind, the greater degree of unification we will find in the order of the hierarchy, whereas the lower we descend with our mind, the greater degree of division we will find there. This is the exact meaning of Porphyry's words that the individual is associated with divisibility, while the totality is associated with unification. When Gregory borrows this concept from Porphyry, he follows Porphyry in his statement that the species are characterized by unity, while the individuals are characterized by division and multiplicity, and this is why the individual/species discourse implies a "conjoined separation and a separated union."²⁷ Yet, neither in the case of Porphyry nor in the case of Gregory does it mean that in reality the species are divided into parts by the individuals, or the collective understanding of a universal (= species).

Incidentally, Cross also notes the words about united division and divided unity in Gregory's *Letter 38*, describing them as paradoxical. However, Cross does not realize that these words mean the same as what Porphyry discusses in the *Isagoge* 2: 6, 16–23 (Busse) (see above), and incorrectly understood them in the sense of the collective meaning of the universals.

Thus, when Gregory uses Porphyry's subject, his theological language manifests the elements of logical discourse. In general, in *Ad Ablabium* and *Letter 38*, Gregory combines epistemological, ontological, and logical discourses.

25. R. Cross, *Gregory of Nyssa on Universals*, 376ff.

26. Porph., *Isag.* I: 1, 8–12 (Busse).

27. *Ep.* 38, 4, 91.

The ontological sense clearly appears in the words of Gregory concerning the indivisibility of the monad/nature. Cross concludes that exactly on the basis of that statement Gregory argues with the Neoplatonists and with Porphyry that the universal/nature/species should not be understood in a collective sense. Indeed, Porphyry does not mention the indivisibility of species by the individuals in the *Isagoge*. Yet, since the arguments presented in the *Isagoge* do not claim ontological status, they do not require such an explanation.

A similar subject occurs in Dexippus, another commentator on *The Categories* of Aristotle. Discussing the topic of homonyms, Dexippus argues that the common name is not divided by those participating in it, that is, those to whom that name is applied:

τοῦ ἀδιαίρετου τὸ μὲν παρὰ μέρος εἰς χρῆσιν λαμβανόμενον λέγουσιν ὥσπερ τὸν ἵππον καὶ τὴν λύραν, τὸ δὲ ἀθρόως καὶ ἀμερίστως πλείοσιν ὑπάρχειν δυνάμενον ἀδιαίρετον παραλείπουσιν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ τρόπος τῆς ἐπὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος κοινωνίας· αὐτῷ γὰρ τῷ μὴ διαιρεῖσθαι τούτῳ καὶ πάρεστι πᾶσι τοῖς μετέχουσιν αὐτοῦ.

of the indivisible, one type is said to be taken for individual use consecutively, e.g. the horse and the lyre, while that which can be availed of simultaneously and undividedly by many is left as indivisible proper, and it is this latter that is the mode of the commonness of the name; for it is precisely by virtue of its not being divided that it is present to all entities that partake in it.²⁸

I am not claiming that Gregory is influenced by Dexippus when he speaks about the indivisibility of the participated monad. Rather, bearing in mind Dexippus's statement, it can be argued that the concept that the general is not divided by the particular that participated in it, is a part of the tradition of commentaries on *The Categories* of Aristotle in antiquity, and Gregory might well have been aware of that tradition.

Thus, I believe that in analyzing the historical and philosophical background of the premises appearing in Gregory of Nyssa's *Ad Ablabium* and *Letter 38* as regards his discussion of the general

28. Dexippus, *Categories*, 1, 12: 19, 11-16 (Busse), the translation by J. Dillon, in: Dexippus, *On Aristotle's Categories*, Cornell University Press 1990, 43.

and the particular, there is no need to look for the sources of Gregory's inspiration either in Alexander of Aphrodisias or in Neoplatonic authors as it was done by Johannes Zachhuber. Instead it can be argued that in his general treatment of these subjects Gregory relies on the Peripatetic philosophical context, manifested, for example, in his use of the principle of "greater–lesser" and the concept of the participation of individuals in their natural species. The main source of the Peripatetic ideas for Gregory was Porphyry's *Isagoge*, which is especially evident in the concepts of "indivisible monad" as well as the association of the individual with "divisibility" and the general with "unity," although Gregory might also have been aware of other writings belonging to the tradition of commentaries on Aristotle's *The Categories*.