

“The Ascent of Nature from the Lower to the Perfect”

A Synthesis of Biblical and Logical-philosophical Descriptions of the Order of Natural Beings in ‘De Opificio Hominis’ 8 by Gregory of Nyssa

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Summary

It is suggested that for building his hierarchy of beings Gregory of Nyssa followed two strategies: the strategy of dividing genera and species with the entire “existing” as the summit of the hierarchy, and the strategy of taking the uncreated nature to be the summit of the hierarchy. The evolutionary ascent of natural species and the related topic of the hierarchical taxonomy of being in Gregory of Nyssa’s *De opificio hominis* 8 are examined. It is argued, against K. Reinhardt, G. Ladner, and a number of other scholars, that the influence of Posidonius on this topic in Gregory is not sufficiently well-founded. A brief overview of the taxonomies elaborated by several philosophers of Antiquity is provided. The general conclusion is that the Tree of Porphyry had a direct impact on the classification of beings in Gregory. Alongside this, Gregory seems to manifest Aristotelian, Platonic, and, particularly, Stoic trends. In contrast to previous studies which have only pointed to the similarity between Gregory and Porphyry’s systems without sufficient reasoning on details of it, it is investigated in what sense the similarity is, and it is shown that there are also some significant differences between their ordering of different levels. A suggestion is made as to why Gregory altered the order of hierarchical levels in comparison to that of Porphyry.

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Keywords

hierarchy – ontology – classification – genres and species – Porphyrian tree

In the eighth chapter of his treatise *De opificio hominis* Gregory of Nyssa addresses the topic of the progressive ascent of nature from the lowest levels (vegetative life) to the most advanced (human beings) in accordance with the hierarchy of natural beings. In this regard, some modern authors, in particular, those who are willing to present Christian creationism and modern biological evolutionism as sympathetic, have suggested the presence of an evolutionary trend in Gregory of Nyssa.¹ This article analyzes and clarifies the context and background for Gregory of Nyssa's ordering of natural beings and his dynamic understanding of nature.

1 Hierarchies of Beings in Gregory of Nyssa

First, some words should be said about the hierarchy of beings in Gregory of Nyssa in general. Gregory develops a doctrine suggesting the fundamental division (διαίρεσις) of all beings into classes. In his earlier works, *De opificio hominis* and *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*,² Gregory develops a doctrine according to which beings can be positioned along an ascending ladder of vitality and posited the division of existing beings (τὰ ὄντα) into intellectual beings (τὸ νοητόν) and corporeal beings (τὸ σωματικόν). In these early works Gregory leaves questions concerning the division of intellectual beings for later consideration³ and instead speaks here only about the division of corporeal beings.

Later, in his treatise *Against Eunomius*, Gregory makes a distinction also within the intelligent realm and speaks of the division of beings into three natures: first, intellectual uncreated nature (God), second, intellectual created

1 Cf. A. Weiswurm, *The Nature of Human Knowledge according to Gregory of Nyssa*, Washington, 1952 (Dissertation), p. 10; W. Agar, *Catholicism and the Progress of Science*, New York, 1940, p. 64; E. Messenger, *Evolution and Theology*, London, 1931, pp. 23–26, 121–144; idem, *Theology and Evolution*, London – Glasgow, 1949, pp. 87–101; G. Ladner, “The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa,” *DOP* 12 (1958), p. 75, n. 66. John Behr speaks about the “evolutionary dynamics of creation” in Gregory of Nyssa (J. Behr, “Rational Animal: A Re-reading of Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*,” *J ECS* 7.2 (1999), p. 232). See also the discussion in W. McGarry, “St. Gregory of Nyssa and Adam's Body,” *Thought* 10 (1935–1936), pp. 81–94, and E. Sutcliffe, “St. Gregory of Nyssa and Paradise,” *The Ecclesiastical Review* 84 (1931), pp. 337–350.

2 Gregory of Nyssa, *Opif. hom.* 8; *An. et res.*, in *PG* 46, col. 60AB.

3 According to his own words in *Opif. hom.* 8, in *PG* 44, col. 145.10–11.

nature (angels and human souls) which participate in the first nature in accordance with the goodness of will shown by individuals belonging to that nature, and, thirdly, sensible (τὸ αἰσθητόν) created nature.⁴ In another passage Gregory speaks about the division of beings into uncreated and created, and about the division of created beings into supramundane and sensible.⁵

According to David Balas, "being" (= "that which exists") is the highest level for the hierarchy of divisions in Gregory of Nyssa.⁶ However, I think that we should distinguish between two strategies for building such a hierarchy which are used by Gregory. According to the first, in which each level divides into more specific classifications after the manner of genera and species, "that which exists" is, indeed, the highest level of the hierarchy of divisions. "That which exists" embraces the (intellectual) uncreated and the created. According to the alternative strategy, which Gregory of Nyssa develops in his *Contra Eunomium* and which he applies alongside the first,⁷ the uncreated intellectual being, the higher nature (ἡ ὑψηλὴ φύσις⁸), common to the hypostases of the Trinity,⁹ serves as the highest level of the hierarchy, giving existence to created beings.¹⁰ The intellectual created beings long for this being as it is the source of goodness and they participate in it according to the goodness of their will.¹¹

It seems that, according to the first strategy, inasmuch as existing beings are divided into intellectual and corporeal, and intellectual beings are divided into uncreated and created, we should speak only about the epistemological (and not ontological) nature of Gregory's hierarchy (that is, earlier levels of hierarchy are in no way, except in terms of our knowledge, higher than subsequent ones). It is assumed that "that which exists" – a category which, with its posi-

4 Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, in: Gregorii Nysseni opera, ed. W. Jaeger, vol. 1–2, Leiden, 1960 [below *Eun.*], 1.1.270–277, 1.1.295. We should note that in terms of the relationship between the created intellectual and sensible natures, Gregory of Nyssa, on the one hand, develops a theory of material bodies as a convergence of the intellectual *logoi* (*Hex.*, in *PG* 44, col. 69BC, *An. et res.*, in *PG* 46, col. 124BD), yet, on the other hand, claims that created intellectual and sensible natures have fundamental differences and possess opposing properties (*Or. cat.* 6).

5 Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 4.100–101.

6 D. Balas, *METΟΥΣΙΑ ΘΕΟΥ. Man's Participation in God's Perfections according to St. Gregory of Nyssa*, Rome, 1966, p. 34.

7 Gregory of Nyssa employed both strategies simultaneously in his *Eun.* 1.1,270–277. The strategy of the division of beings was also formulated in *Opif. hom.* 8, in *PG* 44, col. 145.10–11; and in the *Or. cat.* 6.9–14 (*The Catechetical Oration of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. J.H. Sawley, Cambridge, 1903).

8 Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 1.1,274,3–4.

9 Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 1.1,274,1–275,1 and 1.1,277,8–13.

10 Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 1.1,271,7–1,272,1; cf. *An. et res.*, in *PG* 46, col. 72D–73A.

11 Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 1.1,274,2–275,1.

tion at the root of the hierarchy, unites and transcends both the uncreated and the created – does not precede the realm of the uncreated in reality, but is the highest level of the hierarchy only in the context of human thought as a result of the analytical capacity of the human mind. This follows from the basic principles of Christian theology; it is also evidenced by Gregory’s references to the process of human thinking, in which he mentions the division of beings into intellectual and sensible, and the division of intellectual into created and uncreated.¹²

Gregory’s development of this strategy of genera-species divisions in relation to corporeal beings (which is, in fact, the natural order of beings in his system) implies the ontological, and not just the epistemological nature of the hierarchy of corporeal beings, as will be seen below.

The second strategy involves a hierarchy that does not correspond to the pattern of genera and species (that is, lower hierarchical levels do not correspond to higher levels as species to their genus or as an individuals to their species), but is, instead, a hierarchy in the true ontological sense. Thus the principal source of being stands at the highest level of the hierarchy (the uncreated nature) and gives existence to other kinds of beings, which are ranked in descending order according to their degree of closeness to the source and of their capacity to participate in it (created intellectual and created sensible natures).

2 The Context of the Topic of the Order of Natural Beings in *De opificio hominis* 8 of Gregory of Nyssa

We should now turn to the order of natural beings in the 8th chapter of Gregory’s *Opif. hom.* Gregory addresses this topic in relation to the first strategy, in which beings are organized according to the pattern of genera-species divisions with “that which exists” as the first-level category.

Starting the discussion with the questions of why human beings have an upright posture and the purpose of hands, Gregory makes a digression and begins to discuss the ordering of creation in relation to “the philosophy of the soul.”¹³ In this discussion Gregory begins by tracing the order of creation as it is

12 Cf. “... In the division of beings we come to know (ἐγνώμεν) such differences...” (Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 1,1,295,1–2); “... But the reason (ὁ λόγος) divides notion [of intellectual beings] into two – the uncreated, and, following it, the created are discerned” (Ibid., 1,1,271,4–5).

13 Gregory of Nyssa, *Opif. hom.* 8, in *PG* 44, col. 144,40–145,9.

described in Genesis,¹⁴ and the correspondence of the order of natural beings to this pattern. Gregory wants to establish the logic of this pattern, followed by the order in which beings endowed with life were created (Gen 1:11–27) and notes that the Biblical ordering, according to which grass is created first, followed by animals (living beings), and then human beings, is evidently connected to the idea that earlier beings form the basis or support for those which follow: grass serves as food for animals, and animals function as support (as well as food) for humans. Gregory connects this order with the ordering of the vital powers of the soul distinguishing, firstly, vegetative and nutritional or natural vital powers belonging to plants, secondly, perceptive vital powers belonging to the animal world, and, thirdly, rational vital powers, belonging to humans. Moreover, each of these powers includes those preceding it, so that animals possess both vegetative and perceptive vital powers, while humans possess vegetative, perceptive, and rational powers.¹⁵

After this Gregory goes on to discuss the division of beings in connection with the order of creation:

Γένοιτο δ' ἂν ἡμῖν τοιαύτη τις ἢ τοῦ λόγου διαίρεσις· τῶν ὄντων τὸ μὲν τι νοητὸν, τὸ δὲ σωματικὸν πάντως ἐστίν. Ἄλλὰ τοῦ μὲν νοητοῦ παρείσθω νῦν ἢ πρὸς τὰ οἰκεία τομῇ· οὐ γὰρ τούτων ὁ λόγος. Τοῦ δὲ σωματικοῦ τὸ μὲν ἄμοιρον καθόλου ζωῆς, τὸ δὲ μετέχει ζωτικῆς ἐνεργείας. Πάλιν τοῦ ζωτικοῦ σώματος τὸ μὲν αἰσθήσει συζῆ, τὸ δὲ ἄμοιρῆ τῆς αἰσθήσεως. Εἴτα τὸ αἰσθητικὸν τέμνεται πάλιν εἰς λογικόν τε καὶ ἄλογον. Διὰ τοῦτο πρῶτον μετὰ τὴν ἄψυχον ὕλην οἷον ὑποβάθραν τινὰ τῆς τῶν ἐμπύχων ιδέας τὴν φυσικὴν ταύτην ζῶην συστήναι λέγει ὁ νομοθέτης, ἐν τῇ τῶν φυτῶν βλάστη προϋποστάσαν· εἶθ' οὕτως ἐπάγει τῶν κατ' αἴσθησιν διοικουμένων τὴν γένεσιν. Καὶ ἐπειδὴ κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν ἀκολουθίαν τῶν διὰ σαρκὸς τὴν ζῶην εἰληχότων τὰ μὲν αἰσθητικά, καὶ δίχα τῆς νοεράς φύσεως ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν εἶναι δύναται, τὸ δὲ λογικὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐτέρως γένοιτο ἐν σώματι, εἰ μὴ τῷ αἰσθητῷ συγκραθεῖν· διὰ τοῦτο τελευταίως μετὰ τὰ βλαστήματα καὶ τὰ βοτὰ κατεσκευάσθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὁδῶ τινι πρὸς τὸ τέλειον ἀκολούθως προϊούσης τῆς φύσεως.

14 Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Hex.*, in PG 44, col. 72 ff.

15 G. Ladner sees here the influence of Aristotelian anthropology (Ladner, "The Philosophical Anthropology," 70), referring to *De anima* 2,3, 414a. H. Drobner speaks about the Stoic background of the anthropological views propagated here by Gregory, yet without reference to philosophical sources (H. Drobner, "Gregory Nyssa as Philosopher: *De anima resurrectione* and *De hominis opificio*," *Dionysius* 18 (2000), p. 94).

We might make a division of our subject in some such way as this. Of things existing, part are intellectual, part corporeal. Let us leave alone¹⁶ for the present the division of the intellectual according to its properties, for our argument is not concerned with these. Of the corporeal, part is entirely devoid of life, and part participates in vital energy. Of a living body, again, part has sense conjoined with life, and part is without sense: lastly, that which has sense is again divided into rational and irrational. For this reason the lawgiver¹⁷ says that after inanimate matter (as a sort of foundation for the form of animate things), this vegetative life was made, and had earlier existence in the growth of plants:¹⁸ then he proceeds to introduce the genesis of those creatures which are regulated by sense:¹⁹ and since, following the same order, of those things which have obtained life in the flesh, those which have sense can exist by themselves even apart from the intellectual nature, while the rational principle could not be embodied save as blended with the sensitive, – for this reason man was made after the vegetating and the pasturing, as nature advanced in an orderly course to perfection.²⁰

Speaking about the division of beings, Gregory intends to describe the natural order in relation to corporeal beings. He states that corporeal beings are divided into those living and those devoid of life; living beings are divided into those which possess sensation and those devoid of sensation; beings with sensation are divided into rational and irrational beings. According to Gregory, such a division of natural beings is not arbitrary, but corresponds to the order of creation described in Genesis. At this point Gregory somewhat changes his language and starts to speak in terms of “nature;” he describes the logic of the order of creation as a consistent movement of nature towards perfection.

Having elaborated on the structure of the hierarchy of created beings, Gregory again turns to anthropological issues and links the Biblical passages relating to the components of human beings to the order of creation. In this regard, he cites the Scriptural passages: 1 Thess 5:28, Lk 10:27, 1 Cor 3:3, 1 Cor 2:14–15 and finishes his thoughts with the following words:

16 See the references to the passages of Gregory of Nyssa in note 4.

17 That is, Moses.

18 Gen 1:11–12.

19 Gen 1:20–22.

20 Gregory of Nyssa, *Opif. hom.* 8, in *PG* 44, col. 145,9–145,31, trans. W. Moore and H.A. Wilson, in: Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* (NPNF, 2d series, 5), Grand Rapids, Mich., 1954, slightly revised.

Εἰ οὖν τελευταῖον μετὰ πᾶν ἔμψυχον ἡ Γραφή γεγενῆσθαι λέγει τὸν ἄνθρωπον, οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ φιλοσοφεῖ τὰ περὶ ψυχῆς ἡμῖν ὁ νομοθέτης, ἐπ’ ἀναγκαίᾳ τινὶ τῇ τάξεως ἀκολουθίᾳ τὸ τέλειον ἐν τελευταίοις βλέπων. Ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῷ λογικῷ καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ περιεῖληπται· ἐν δὲ τῷ αἰσθητικῷ καὶ τὸ φυσικὸν εἶδος πάντως ἐστίν. Ἐκεῖνο δὲ περὶ τὸ ὑλικὸν θεωρεῖται μόνον. Οὐκοῦν εἰκότως, καθάπερ διὰ βαθμῶν ἢ φύσις, τῶν τῆς ζωῆς λέγω ἰδιωμάτων, ἀπὸ τῶν μικροτέρων ἐπὶ τὸ τέλειον ποιεῖται τὴν ἄνοδον.

If, therefore, Scripture tells us that man was made last, after every animate thing, the lawgiver is doing nothing else than declaring to us the doctrine of the soul, considering that what is perfect comes last, according to a certain necessary sequence in the order of things: for in the rational are included the others also, while in the sensitive there also surely exists the vegetative form, and that again is conceived only in connection with what is material: thus we may suppose that nature makes an ascent as it were by steps – I mean the various properties of life – from the lower to the perfect form.²¹

Thus, the topic of nature reappears in this passage. After this, in the same chapter, Gregory returns to the issue raised at the beginning of the chapter, and thus writes on the purpose of human hands, “<...> first of all, nature has given them to the body especially for the sake of the word.”²² It can be said that Gregory understood nature as a natural dynamic order of beings or as some kind of dynamic principle, thanks to which the created beings as a whole obtain progressive movement in the direction of increasing vitality.²³

Before moving on to a more detailed analysis of the hierarchy of natural beings in *Opif. hom.* 8, it is worth looking at the development of the topic of nature in the 12th chapter of the treatise in order to detect the logic of Gregory’s thought on the hierarchy of beings. Here Gregory emphasizes the connections between different levels of the hierarchy, which are demonstrated by the ways

21 Gregory of Nyssa, *Opif. hom.* 8, in *PG* 44, 148,17–27, trans. Moore and Wilson; cf. *ibid.*, 145,30–31.

22 *Ibid.*, 148,43–44. Gregory explains the statement that the presence of hands in human beings is connected with the ability of speech, and says that if a person were deprived of hands, he would have to procure food by mouth like animals, and accordingly the human mouth in its structure would not have been adapted for articulate speech.

23 Gregory investigated a similar topic of the ascent of natural species in the measure of participation in the vital power in his *On the soul and the resurrection*, 46, yet, without the topic of progressive movement of nature and without the emphasis on the genera-species division as he did in *Opif. hom.* 8.

in which the Beautiful (that is, the divine) fills beings at each level in accordance with the capacity of that level to participate in the Beautiful through a higher level; thus the nature which follows mind, is adorned by the beauty of the mind, which it possesses according to the participation of the mind in the divine. Thus, according to Gregory, participation in the true beauty runs proportionally through all created beings, so each level of beings participates in the Beautiful through the preceding level²⁴ or, in the words of John Behr, “creation becomes theophanic.”²⁵ If this natural participation becomes disrupted, the vector of participation functions in an opposite manner: matter, deprived of participation in the Beautiful through the natural order of beings becomes deformed and ugly, deviating from nature, and that ugliness is transmitted by the same chain to mind.²⁶ Thus, the concept of nature maintains the connotations of the natural dynamic order of beings, expounded by Gregory in *De opificio hominis* 8, but receives a new, more theologically saturated, meaning associated with a vision of this order’s dynamics as a result of theophany.

3 The Historical and Philosophical Context of the Order of Natural Beings in *De opificio hominis* 8: Posidonius or Porphyry?

Next, we should discuss Gregory’s order of natural beings in *Opif. hom.* 8 in relation to its historical and philosophical background.

John Behr has identified two strategies followed by Gregory in *Opif. hom.* 8: “to explain the unfolding of creation as it is described in the opening verses of Genesis, and to connect this to the various trichotomic concepts used in Scripture.”²⁷ However, we may discern at least one further strategy. D. Balas in his book on participation in God in Gregory of Nyssa mentions the similarity of the hierarchy of beings from *Opif. hom.* 8 to the so-called “Tree of Porphyry” as it is described in *Isag.*²⁸ H. Drobner, likewise, without reference to Balas, notes, in his discussion of Gregory’s division of beings, the use of “the Tree of Porphyry,” that is, the hierarchy of genera and species mentioned by Porphyry in *Isag.*: “substance” (οὐσία) – “body” (σῶμα) – “animate body” (ἔμψυχον σῶμα) – “living being” (ζῶον) – “rational living being” (ζῶον λογικόν) – “human being” (ἄνθρωπος) – “individual human being.”²⁹

24 Gregory of Nyssa, *Opif. hom.* 12, in *PG* 44, col. 161,29–47.

25 Behr, “Rational Animal,” p. 231.

26 Gregory of Nyssa, *Opif. hom.* 12, in *PG* 44, col. 161,47–164,28.

27 Behr, “Rational Animal,” p. 227.

28 Balas, *METΩΥΣΙΑ ΘΕΟΥ*, p. 36, n. 93.

29 Drobner, “Gregory Nyssa as Philosopher,” pp. 92–96.

Within this structure the upper levels function at the greatest level of generality and the hierarchy becomes more specific as one descends further down.³⁰ At the same time, according to Drobner, it is possible that the influence of Porphyry on Gregory of Nyssa was mediated by Posidonius.³¹ Thus, keeping in mind Drobner's comparison with the Tree of Porphyry, we may identify at least three strategies used by Gregory in *Opif. hom.* 8 in his discussion of the order of natural beings, the first associated with cosmogony, the second with anthropology, and the third with logic.

It should be noted that the relationship of the division of beings from *Opif. hom.* 8 with the Tree of Porphyry has not been thoroughly studied; scholars have been more interested in the connection of the ascending movement of nature in Gregory of Nyssa with the teaching of Posidonius. Thus, G. Ladner in his seminal article on the anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa discusses the nature of the graded ascent of nature from the lesser to the perfect in *De opificio hominis* 8 and connects it with the teaching of Posidonius, indicating that it refers to Posidonius' version of Stoic Monism and Pantheism.³² Ladner believed that Posidonius' teaching on man as a binding link and mediator between the animal (living) realm and the divine realm influenced the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa on the order of natural beings. According to Ladner, in his attempts to elaborate on this doctrine, Gregory, as a philosopher, "achieved <...> a real synthesis between the Posidonian-Neoplatonic view of cosmical

30 "In each type of predication there are some most general items and again other most special (εἰδός) items; and there are other items between the most general and the most special. Most general is that above which there will be no other superordinate genus; most special, that after which there will be no other subordinate species; and between the most general and the most special are other items which are at the same time both genera and species (but taken in relation now to one thing and now to another). What I mean should become clear in the case of a single type of predication. Substance is itself a genus. Under it is body, and under body animate body (ἔμψυχον σῶμα), under which is animal; under animal is rational animal (λογικὸν ζῷον), under which is man; and under man are Socrates and Plato and particular men" (Porphyry, *Isag.*, 4,15–27; 10,3–18 (Porphyry *Isagogae*, ed. A. Busse (Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, IV.1), Berlin, 1887), trans. J. Barnes, *Porphyry*, Oxford, 2003, pp. 5–6).

31 Drobner, "Gregory Nyssa as Philosopher," p. 95.

32 Ladner, "The Philosophical Anthropology," p. 71. Ladner does not cite specific passages of Posidonius, but refers the reader to the studies on Posidonius' doctrine on the stages of nature, including W. Jaeger, *Nemesios von Emesa. Quellenuntersuchungen zum Neuplatonismus und seinen Anfängen bei Poseidonios*, Berlin, 1914; K. Reinhardt, *Poseidonios*, Muenchen, 1921, pp. 247ff., 343ff.; idem, *Kosmos und Sympathie*, Munich, 1926, p. 320ff.; idem, "Poseidonios von Apameia," in: *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, hg. A. Pauly, G. Wissowa et al., vol. 43, Stuttgart, 1953, cols. 701f., 773ff.

order and the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.³³ Relying on E. Skard's suggestion that Galen functioned as a mediator between Posidonius and Nemesius,³⁴ and bearing in mind the frequent use of Galen's texts by Gregory, Ladner suggests that Galen was the mediator between the teaching of Posidonius and the "bathmos-doctrine" of Gregory (that is, the doctrine of Gregory on the hierarchical levels of nature).³⁵ In his claim that the doctrine of Gregory on the graded ascent of nature is related to the philosophical system of Posidonius, Ladner probably follows the well-known expert on the teaching of Posidonius K. Reinhardt, whom Ladner cites, among other scholars. Reinhardt discussed the problem of Posidonius' influence on subsequent authors and analyzes the different stages represented by organic beings in relation to the idea of the human being as a mediator between the animal realm and the heavenly realm. Among other passages, Reinhardt points to *Opif. hom.* 8 of Gregory of Nyssa, "καθάπερ διὰ βαθμῶν ἢ φύσις... ἀπὸ τῶν μικροτέρων ἐπὶ τὸ τέλειον ποιεῖται τὴν ἀνοδὸν,"³⁶ noting that this passage demonstrates the presence of these topics in Gregory, although without relation to each other.³⁷

Following Ladner and Reinhardt, D. Balas also suggests that the doctrine of Posidonius was the ultimate source for the doctrine of the ascending order of nature in Gregory as well as of the terminology which he uses for expressing the doctrine (Balas refers to the expression, δύναμις ζωτική);³⁸ at the same time Balas does not exclude the influence of Panaetius.³⁹ Referring to Ladner, John Behr also accepts the influence of Posidonius on Gregory in this respect⁴⁰ (the views of H. Drobner on the subject will be discussed a little later).

Even if we agree that Gregory's usage of δύναμις ζωτική depends on Posidonius, the relationship between Gregory and Posidonius in relation to the ascending movement of nature and, even more, to the hierarchy of beings does not seem to be sufficiently justified. Indeed, when K. Reinhardt speaks about Posidonius' doctrine of the levels of organic beings, with human beings as mediators between the animal and the divine realms, he has in mind the idea of

33 Ladner, "The Philosophical Anthropology," p. 72.

34 E. Skard, "Nemesiosstudien II," *Symbolae Osloenses* 17 (1937), p. 9ff.

35 Ladner, "The Philosophical Anthropology," p. 71, n. 45.

36 *PG* 44, col. 148.25–27; see above n. 21 for the context of the passage.

37 Reinhardt, "Poseidonios," col. 774.

38 See Gregory of Nyssa, *Opif. hom.* 8, in *PG* 44, col. 144.54–55, 59; cf. 176.10. Concerning Posidonius, Balas refers to Reinhardt, "Poseidonios," cols. 648.30–649.66; C. De Vogel, *Greek Philosophy*, III (Leiden, 1959), no. 1176, pp. 251–252; see also F. Sandbach, *The Stoics*, London – Indianapolis, 1989², p. 130ff.

39 Balas, *ΜΕΤΟΥΣΙΑ ΘΕΟΥ*, pp. 36–37.

40 Behr, "Rational Animal," p. 227, n. 17.

the progressive increase in perfection towards the divine from the animal world to the humans. This, furthermore, implies the idea that animals have three natural abilities – to feel, to move, and to choose good for themselves, while humans, possessing those abilities, also possess the unique ability of reason, due to which the human being can control the above mentioned abilities inherent in the soul.⁴¹ Outlining this doctrine of Posidonius, K. Reinhardt does not give a clear reference to the source, however we can see, from W. Jaeger's study of the sources of Nemesius of Emesa,⁴² to which Reinhardt refers his readers, that the original source was the following passage from Cicero's treatise *De natura deorum*:

If we seek to move forward from the first undeveloped levels of being to the furthest and most perfect, we inevitably arrive at the nature of the gods. At the lowest level we observe that nature sustains plants sprung from the earth, and she bestows on them nothing more than her protective nurture and growth. On beasts she has conferred feeling and movement, and a kind of inclination which prompts them to seek what is good for them, and avoid what is baneful. On humans she bestowed something more noble than this, with the additional gift of reason, to enable them to control their mental inclinations, giving them free rein at one time and holding them in check at another...⁴³

Just like Gregory of Nyssa, the passage speaks about a progressive natural hierarchy. However, in my opinion, there is not enough similarity between Cicero's and Gregory's doctrines to confidently speak about the influence of Posidonius' doctrine on Gregory. Firstly, there is no similarity between the stages in the hierarchy of natural beings in the two authors. Secondly, the description of natural progress by Cicero, as Ladner correctly observes whilst speaking about Posidonius, requires an understanding of the human being as a binding link and mediator between the animal and the divine realms with the gods sitting at the top of the hierarchy. Yet, the motif of the human being as mediator between animal and divine realms is absent in *Opif. hom. 8*'s treatment of the hierarchy of natural beings, and the highest level of the hierarchy in *Opif. hom. 8* is represented, on the one hand, by "that which exists" (from the logical viewpoint of the hierarchy), and, on the other hand, by human beings (from the

41 Reinhardt, "Poseidonios," col. 701–702.

42 Jaeger, *Nemesios von Emesa*, pp. 114–115.

43 Cicero, *Nat. deor.* 2,12,33–34, trans. P.G. Walsh, in: *Cicero. The Nature of the Gods*, Oxford, 1997, p. 59.

viewpoint of the order of natural beings). Thirdly, Posidonius does not write about the dynamic aspect of the natural hierarchy, so clearly exposed by Gregory in his description of natural progress. And fourthly, the concept of *βαθμός* (step, grade) – to which Reinhardt refers when he speaks about the teaching of Posidonius, and on the basis of which he and other scholars infer the influence of Posidonius on Gregory – does not seem to be reliably attested in Posidonius, but only represents Reinhardt's reconstruction of the Greek terminology used by Posidonius on the basis of Cicero's text.

Thus, in my opinion, we should speak about the direct influence not of Posidonius' thought on *Opif. hom.* 8 but of Porphyry's and, more precisely, of Porphyry's *Isagoge* which contains a similar hierarchy of beings to that of Gregory, a fact which was pointed out by D. Balas and H. Drobner.

In this regard, it should be noted that Drobner's idea that Porphyry's influence on Gregory might have been mediated by Posidonius⁴⁴ is redundant (unfortunately, Drobner does not support his suggestion with additional arguments), since the logical framework of Porphyry can be quite clearly seen in Gregory and there is no reason to see Posidonius' doctrine as a mediating link between the Tree of Porphyry⁴⁵ and the hierarchy of beings in Gregory. It is possible that, Drobner's claim rests on references to the teaching of Posidonius as a source of Gregory's passage under discussion in the literature. The statement of D. Balas that the topic of the hierarchy of beings in Gregory of Nyssa looks similar to the Tree of Porphyry and then independently indicated a possible influence of Posidonius and Panaetius on Gregory's doctrine of the ascending order of nature,⁴⁶ seems to be more correct in this regard.

4 The Order of Natural Beings in Gregory of Nyssa and the Tree of Porphyry

While both point out the similarity between the hierarchy of beings in Gregory of Nyssa and the Tree of Porphyry, neither Balas, nor Drobner analyzes how exactly Porphyry's logical framework manifests itself in *Opif. hom.* 8. However, before investigating this in more detail, we should note that the principle of the tree of genera and species may be found in other philosophical texts, the most important of which will be mentioned in the following section.

44 Drobner, "Gregory Nyssa as Philosopher," p. 95.

45 Balas, *METΟΥΣΙΑ ΘΕΟΥ*, p. 36, n. 93.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

4.1 *Genera-species Division in Authors Prior to Gregory of Nyssa*

Alcinous assigns such a division from top to bottom along with the mandatory accompanying procedure of definition to the realm of dialectic,⁴⁷ giving, as an example, the definition of human substance through the division of substance into animate and inanimate beings, and the animate beings into rational and irrational as well as mortal and immortal.⁴⁸ Philo speaks about the division of beings according to the Stoics, who divided beings into corporeal and incorporeal; corporeal beings into animate and those bereft of soul; animate beings into those which possessed reason and those which did not; rational beings into mortal (humans) and divine; and mortal beings into male and female, while the incorporeal beings represent kinds of proposition.⁴⁹ Seneca also discusses the genera-species division of beings, and his position is quite close to that of Porphyry. Explaining Lucilius on "being," "species," and "genus," Seneca speaks about the division of beings into corporeal and incorporeal, the division of corporeal beings into animate and inanimate, the division of animate beings into animals (living beings) and plants, the division of animals into humans, horses and dogs, and the division of humans first into nations and races, and then into individuals.⁵⁰ Clement of Alexandria speaks about the division of animate beings into mortal and immortal, the division of mortal beings into terrestrial and aquatic, the division of terrestrial beings into flying and walking, and the division of the walking beings into those who possess reason and those who do not. In this way Clement arrives at a definition of human beings as animate, mortal, terrestrial, walking and rational.⁵¹ Finally, a contemporary and friend of Gregory, Basil of Caesarea, in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, also describes a genera-species division of "substance" – "animate being" – "human

47 Alcinous, *Epit.* 5,1.

48 *Ibid.*, 5,3.

49 "Some of the beings are corporeal and some are incorporeal (ὅτι τῶν ὄντων τὰ μὲν ἐστὶ σώματα, τὰ δ' ἀσώματα); some [of the corporeal beings] do not have soul and some are animate; some [of the animate beings] are rational and some are irrational, and some [of the rational beings] are mortal, while some are divine. And out of mortal beings, the mankind is divided into male and female. In turn, the incorporeal beings are divided into the completed and incompleted. The completed includes general and specific questions, requests, vows and all that sorts of things, <...> as well as that which the Stoics call the statements <...> In turn, the incompleted incorporeal is divided in the closest manner into the so-called predicates, accidents, and everything else that is of less importance" (Philo of Alexandria, *Agr.* 139 = *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, coll. I (Stuttgart, 1964), vol. II, p. 182).

50 Seneca, *Ep.* 58,8–15.

51 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 8,6.

being” – “male” – “an individual.”⁵² Basil wrote this treatise before Gregory wrote *De opificio hominis* and the passage discussing the hierarchy stands largely as a polemic against those who claimed that the Holy Spirit was not “numbered together” with the Father and the Son, but was “numbered under.”

Out of all divisions that we have mentioned, Gregory’s is closest to that of Porphyry, that is, the division into “substance” – “body” – “animate body” – “living being” – “rational living being” – “human being” – “an individual.”⁵³

Speaking about the genera-species divisions in Late Antiquity, we can, following J. Mansfeld, briefly mention some historical and philosophical trends. We can discern a Platonic characteristic in the structure of the genera-species divisions where there is a level which divides into two branches, one of which possesses a privative character with respect to the other (for example, “animate beings” – “inanimate beings,” “mortal beings” – “immortal beings,” etc.). This, generally speaking, involves a hierarchy structured in a tree-like fashion.⁵⁴ A Stoic influence is displayed when the lowest level of division is represented by individuals and not by species, since the standard Aristotelian procedure of the genera-species division does not involve individual beings.⁵⁵ A Stoic-Platonic trend is displayed when the top of the hierarchy is represented by “that which exists,” or “beings” (τὰ ὄντα, τὸ ὄν), and not by substance (ἡ οὐσία).⁵⁶ An Aristotelian trend is demonstrated when the highest level of genera-species division, which implies the construction of the definition, is represented by substance.⁵⁷

52 Basil of Caesarea, *Spir. san.* 17,41,1–22 (Basile de Césarée, *Sur le Saint Esprit*, éd. B. Pruche (sc, 17bis), Paris, 1968).

53 We may note that compared to the Seneca’s taxonomy, which is the closest, after that of Porphyry, to Gregory of Nyssa, Porphyry’s system has the level of “rational,” which is crucial for Gregory.

54 J. Mansfeld, “Substance, Being and Division in Middle Platonist and Later Aristotelian Contexts (Excursus),” in: idem, *Heresiography in Context: Hippolytus’ Elenchos as a Source for Greek Philosophy* (Leiden, 1992), pp. 79, 85–86. Mansfeld notes that this procedure of division is criticized by Aristotle in his *De partibus animalium* A 2–3.

55 Diogenes Laertius, 7.61 (Mansfeld, “Substance, Being and Division,” pp. 95–96, cf. 80).

56 According to J. Mansfeld, this has some parallels with Plato’s *Soph* 246a and possibly *Tim.* 27d (Mansfeld, “Substance, Being and Division,” p. 85, n. 23; p. 90, n. 34). In the division of beings into the bodily and the bodiless, in addition to the Stoic background (*Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, coll. I, vol. II, 182) J. Mansfeld sees a Platonic background (Ibid., p. 87) referring the reader to the same passage of *Soph* 246a (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 8,6,20,2).

57 Mansfeld, “Substance, Being and Division,” p. 79.

Despite the fact that there are reasons to believe that Gregory's scheme was directly influenced by that of Porphyry, each of the above trends, that is, the Platonic, the Aristotelian, and the Stoic, can also be seen in Gregory.

4.2 *Genera-species Division in Gregory of Nyssa and Porphyry: Similarities*

After this brief overview of the genera-species divisions in philosophical thought, we now return to the influence of the Tree of Porphyry on the genera-species division of beings in *Opif. hom.* 8. The following points should be made:

Firstly, the very similarity of the levels within the hierarchies of beings in Gregory and Porphyry evidences a degree of influence.

Secondly, in his discussion of the hierarchy of beings, Gregory uses a genera-species discourse, that is, a discourse, according to which the lower levels of a hierarchy are related to the higher as a species is to a genus (or, equivalently, the higher level to the lower level as a genus to a species);⁵⁸ the same is the case in the Tree of Porphyry.

Thirdly, Gregory speaks about the levels of hierarchy also as species (εἶδος),⁵⁹ a usage which corresponds to Porphyry's logical terminology in *Isag.*,⁶⁰ despite the fact that the Bible, which is discussed by Gregory, uses the word γένος when it describes how God created different kinds of plants and animals (the Septuagint).⁶¹ Thus, in this respect Gregory follows not the Biblical language, but rather logical terminology. Fourthly, the logical language appears in Gregory when he speaks about the genera-species "division" (διαίρεσις; τομή);⁶² the same terminology typically appears in Porphyry's *Isagoge*.

4.3 *Genera-species Division in Gregory of Nyssa and Porphyry: Differences*

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the position of Drobner, who notes the connection between the genera-species divisions of Gregory and Porphyry, does not seem to be entirely correct. Citing a quote from *Opif. hom.* 8 where Gregory speaks about the division of beings,⁶³ Drobner writes, "Gregory presents an exact copy of Porphyry's doctrine of the hierarchy of beings as the

58 It can be noted that Gregory of Nyssa also uses the genera-species framework in his treatise *Ad Graecos ex communibus notionibus* 3,1,16–31, in *PG* 45, col. 184C.

59 Gregory of Nyssa, *Opif. hom.* 8, in *PG* 44, col. 145,2, 145,34, 148,23.

60 J. Mansfeld points to the Stoic origin of the terminology (Mansfeld, "Substance, Being and Division," p. 103).

61 See Gen 1:11–27.

62 Gregory of Nyssa, *Opif. hom.* 8, in *PG* 44, col. 145,10,12,17, see the quote at n. 20.

63 See the quote above, n. 20.

latter explains in the chapter 2 of his *Isagoge* to Aristotle's *Categories*. This doctrine is more comprehensive than the threefold scheme Gregory first deduced from the biblical text, because it comprises the non-animate substances as well and thus takes every kind of being in the universe into account. There cannot be any doubt as to the fact that Gregory took this philosophical explanation from Porphyry, possibly mediated by Poseidonius <...>.⁶⁴ As well as the statement on the possible mediating function of Posidonius, which was discussed above, the claim of Drobner that Gregory uses an *exact* copy of the hierarchy which appears in *Isag. 2*⁶⁵ is not entirely correct, since the division of beings which appears in Gregory is similar to that Porphyry but is in no way an exact copy of Porphyry's scheme, particularly in the form which appears in *Isag. 2*.

Firstly, the formal, but not the substantial, difference is that the genera-species hierarchy which Porphyry develops in *Isag. 2* is somewhat different in its *structure* to the genera-species hierarchy of beings in Gregory. Porphyry's hierarchy is presented as a listing of successive levels.⁶⁶ The structure of the division in Gregory of Nyssa involves two links at each stage of division; as a rule, one of these corresponds to the possession of a certain specific difference, while the other lacks such a difference (for example, the corporeal beings are divided into those participating in life and those devoid of life, etc.). Thus, Porphyry's hierarchy, presented in *Isag. 2*, in structural terms, corresponds to the *chain*, as it is called by Ammonius of Alexandria,⁶⁷ or the *line*, as it is called by Ibn al-Tayyib,⁶⁸ while the structure of the generic divisions presented in Gregory corresponds to a *tree*, since it has a structure which contains branches. The structure in Porphyry receives the form of a tree only when we correlate what Porphyry says about the sequence of the genera-species division in *Isag. 2* with what he says in *Isag. 3* where he discusses the differences. In chapter 3 Porphyry does speak about the structure, implying a pattern of branches, and utilises a Platonic privative framework⁶⁹ also used by Gregory.

Secondly, in Porphyry the category of substance (ἡ οὐσία) is at the top of the hierarchy,⁷⁰ while Gregory places "that which exists" or "being" in this position

64 Drobner, "Gregory Nyssa as Philosopher," p. 95.

65 Balas notes the similarity between the hierarchy of beings in Gregory and the Tree of Porphyry, but without detailed elaboration on the subject (Balas, *ΜΕΤΟΥΣΙΑ ΘΕΟΥ*, p. 36, n. 93).

66 See the quote in n. 30.

67 Ammonius of Alexandria, *Commentary on Isag.* 70.13.

68 Ibn al-Tayyib, *Commentary on Isag.*, 171; Barnes, "Commentary," p. 109.

69 See above, the text at n. 54.

70 Porphyry, *Isag.* 4,21; 10,14–15 (ed. Busse).

(Gregory writes about τῶν ὄντων).⁷¹ Although these terms are close, their meanings are not identical. In the context of the Tree of Porphyry, "substance" is viewed as an Aristotelian category, thereby inheriting the connotations typical for the concept of categories in an Aristotelian context, while Gregory speaks of "that which exists" without those connotations. When Gregory speaks of τῶν ὄντων as being at the top of the hierarchy, his position is the closest to the Stoic framework, for Gregory simply speaks of "that which exists" in the most general sense. Although both Gregory and the Stoics position this category at the top of their hierarchy of divisions, it does not claim any ontological primacy (as was noted above, for Gregory it would be impossible to put "that which exists" ontologically higher than the Godhead, even though in the genera-species hierarchy which he is building, the levels of "that which exists" and the "rational" are above the level of "Godhead") but, reflecting our intention to comprehend all that exists, it instead refers the reader exclusively to an epistemological context. The link between the concept of "that which exists" in Gregory and the Stoic context is confirmed by the usage of the term: in both cases τῶν ὄντων⁷² is understood in the sense of "...out of everything that exists," and in both cases this category is divided into corporeal and incorporeal beings (ἄσώματα among the Stoics, and νοητόν in Gregory), although Gregory certainly understands the nature of the incorporeal in a completely different manner than the Stoic philosophers. The nature of further divisions along the genera-species hierarchy is understood by Gregory in such a way that they have concrete ontological status, representing the stages of cosmogenesis.

It is worth pointing out another important difference in the schemes of Gregory and Porphyry – the difference in their understanding of the status of the genera-species hierarchy itself. The hierarchy that exists in Porphyry does not claim any ontological status⁷³ and serves only didactic purposes. Gregory's hierarchy of beings, even though it is dependent on Porphyry's, as was stated, is endowed with ontological status in relation to the levels below the level of the corporeal, that is, in relation to the hierarchy of natural beings.

Thirdly, if Porphyry's division extends down to individuals, the division of beings in Gregory of Nyssa does not (what goes back to Aristotelian line in the genera-species divisions), but its final level is the "rational," which corresponds

71 Gregory of Nyssa, *Opif. hom.* 8, in *PG* 44, col. 145,10.

72 In this respect it is important that Gregory consistently speaks of τῶν ὄντων or of πάντων τῶν ὄντων (and not of τὸ ὄν or τὰ ὄντα), as the highest level of the divisions (cf. the quote from the Stoics in n. 49). In addition to *Opif. hom.* 8, in *PG* 44, col. 145,10, see, *Eun.* 1,1,270,1; 1,1,295,1, *Or. cat.* 6,10 (ed. Srawley).

73 See Porphyry, *Isag.* 1,8–12 (ed. Busse).

to human beings. This can be related to the fact that for Gregory, unlike Porphyry, the importance lies not in the logical aspect of genera-species divisions, but in the aspect related to the creation of the world. Therefore Gregory does not bring his genera-species divisions to their logical conclusion.

Fourthly, there is also no exact correspondence between the lowest levels of the hierarchy in Gregory and Porphyry. We should recall that Gregory spoke about the division of beings into the intellectual and the corporeal, of corporeal beings into those participating in life and those devoid of life, of beings participating in life (animal, or living beings) into those having senses and those devoid of senses, and of beings which have senses into rational and irrational. This corresponds to the following succession: existing (ὄντα) – corporeal (σωματικόν) – living (ζωτικόν) – sensible (αἰσθητικόν) – rational (λογικόν).

Yet, the division which Porphyry describes in *Isag.* 2 and which is mentioned by Drobner in relation to that of Gregory, involves a hierarchy of “substance” (οὐσία) – “body” (σῶμα) – “animate body” (ἔμψυχον σῶμα) – “living being” (ζῶον) – “rational living being” (ζῶον λογικόν) – “human being” (ἄνθρωπος) – “individual human being.” It would seem that Gregory’s structure of division as compared to the Tree of Porphyry presented in *Isagoge* 2 omits the level of “animate beings” of the Tree, however Gregory does mention this level immediately after the description of his division of beings, “...after inanimate matter (as a sort of foundation for the form of animate things (τῆς τῶν ἐμψύχων ἰδέας)), this vegetative life was made <...>, then he proceeds to introduce the genesis of those creatures which are regulated by sense,”⁷⁴ and a little later in the same *Opif. hom.* 8, “man was made last, after every animate thing...”⁷⁵ It follows from these passages that according to Gregory, in his hierarchy of genera-species division “animate beings” were placed after “living beings” and before “rational beings,” and were the same as “beings with senses” (“percipient”).

At the same time, while Porphyry does not mention “percipient” in the context of the division in *Isag.* 2 (something which is incorrectly referred to by Drobner in relation to Gregory’s scheme), he discusses this later, in the third chapter, where the structure of the genera-species division is presented as a tree with branches. It follows from *Isag.* 3 that “percipient” constitutes a specific difference for the genus of “living,” (“animal”)⁷⁶ which means that “percipient” distinguishes the species of “living” from the genus of “animate.” Porphyry discusses this in the context of his argument about the specificity of

74 Gregory of Nyssa, *Opif. hom.* 8, in PG 44, col. 145,18–23, trans. Moore and Wilson.

75 Ibid., 148,17–18, trans. Moore and Wilson.

76 It seems that Porphyry followed Aristotle in this regard. Cf., for example, Aristotle, *Exercitationes de generatione animalium* 2,1, 732a.

species-related differences which, depending on one's point of view on a species within a genera-species hierarchy – "from bottom up" or "from top to bottom" – might either act as species-defining or to divide a genus into species. Porphyry lists differences of the "living," including animate, percipient (when the hierarchy is viewed downwards from the "living"), rational and non-rational, mortal and immortal (branches which are formed when the hierarchy is viewed upwards from the "living"). Further Porphyry speaks about the division according to distinctive differences in relation to "substance" (as the top of the hierarchy) and lists those differences, mentioning animation and its absence as well as capacity and incapacity in relation to the percipient, which form the "living" as a result of the division of substance.⁷⁷

Gregory's level of "sensible beings" is also present in the Tree of Porphyry as a species-related distinction, distinguishing the species of "living" within the genus of "animate." Thus, according to the Tree of Porphyry, being sensible ("percipient") is the substantial quality for the level of "living" located beneath the level of "animate beings" and corresponding to the level of "living" in the hierarchy. This is not consistent with Gregory's understanding as he, as we have seen, places "sensible beings" not on the same level as "living beings," as it is in Porphyry, but alongside "animate beings."

In addition, two levels – "living beings" and "animate beings" – are arranged in opposite orders by Gregory and Porphyry: in Gregory "living beings" precede "animate beings" (= "beings having senses"), while in Porphyry "animate" precede "living."

The reason why Gregory changed the order of the genera-species hierarchy, present in the Tree of Porphyry, must have been related to his desire to reconcile the logical and philosophical structure of division, conventional at the time, with the Biblical account, that is, with how the Bible describes the order of the creation of natural beings, and with the logic of this order. Indeed, the Biblical text says that the world of plants was created prior to the world of animals (living beings).⁷⁸ This determines the structure of division of beings in Gregory, according to which living beings precede animate beings. For this reason Gregory diverges from the order of the hierarchy of beings that appears in the Tree of Porphyry.

77 Porphyry, *Isag.* 10.3–9; 14–18 (ed. Busse).

78 Cf. Gen 1:11 and 1:20.

5 Conclusion

It can be concluded that in *Opif. hom.* 8 Gregory of Nyssa intended to achieve a synthesis between Biblical and the school Platonic descriptions of the order of natural beings. These descriptions, taken by themselves, are similar in structure, but diverge in several aspects which were therefore in need of harmonization.

As far as Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of nature is concerned, the very fact that Gregory speaks of "nature" as a *dynamic* principle due to which created beings acquire progressive motion,⁷⁹ an idea that stands in contrast to his philosophical predecessors, may, in my opinion, justify discussion of the evolutionary aspect of Gregory's doctrine. This aspect is also reflected in Gregory's idea that each subsequent level of this dynamic natural order incorporates the preceding levels. Moreover, the concept of nature as a dynamic principle, which Gregory uses, can be traced back to an Aristotelian understanding of nature. Although Ladner, referring to Aristotle's *Hist. an.* 8.1, 588b, argues that the influence of the Aristotelian doctrine of natural progress on Gregory was indirect,⁸⁰ it can be assumed that Gregory had a direct knowledge of this doctrine, as is demonstrated in *Opif. hom.* 8. It is demonstrated by two facts: firstly that both authors understand nature as passing from the lesser to the more perfect natural species,⁸¹ and secondly that other Aristotelian motifs can be found in *Opif. hom.*, including Gregory's treatment of the anthropological problems, which indicates that Gregory's interest in Aristotle must have been quite consistent.

Nevertheless, the Aristotelian understanding of the *structure* of the transition between the natural species, is obviously opposite to that of Gregory: according to Aristotle, the boundaries between the stages of the movement of

79 According to the logic of *Opif. hom.* 8, the source of this dynamic is God who, in this way, created natural beings. This means that creation and progressive (evolutionary) natural development, in this paradigm, coincide. In general, we can note that Gregory of Nyssa has a two-fold doctrine of the order of creation. On the one hand, it implies the instantaneous bringing into being of created beings in their entirety when all things started to exist in their potentiality (*Hex.*, in *PG* 44, col. 72), on the other hand, it means their actualized progressive development in time, which represents an important aspect of the act of creation. We may say that creation is instantaneous, keeping in mind the boundaries separating created beings from non-being on the one hand, and from uncreated beings, on the other. Creation possesses development and order when created beings are regarded within their own limits.

80 Ladner, "The Philosophical Anthropology," p. 71, n. 47.

81 Cf. Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 8.1, 588b and *Gen. an.* B 1, 732b–733a.

nature are blurred and invisible,⁸² while Gregory, following the Biblical text and the logical discourse of genera-species divisions, focuses on their qualitative difference from each other.

Thus, the concept of the progressive graded movement of nature in Gregory of Nyssa represents a synthesis of anthropological, cosmogonic, logical, and natural philosophic discourses. This concept is partly based on the Biblical account and partly on the ideas borrowed from the Greek logical and philosophical tradition. Gregory changes the logical structure of the hierarchical tree of beings, typical for his time, exactly because of his desire to synthesize the Scriptural teaching about the order of natural beings and the doctrine of the order of beings which was widespread in the ancient philosophical tradition⁸³.

82 "Nature proceeds little by little from things lifeless to animal life in such a way that it is impossible to determine the exact line of demarcation, nor on which side thereof an intermediate form should lie. Thus, next after lifeless things comes the plant, and of plants one will differ from another as to its amount of apparent vitality; and, in a word, the whole genus of plants, whilst it is devoid of life as compared with an animal, is endowed with life as compared with other corporeal entities. Indeed, as we just remarked, there is observed in plants a continuous scale of ascent towards the animal. So, in the sea, there are certain objects concerning which one would be at a loss to determine whether they be animal or vegetable." (Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 8,1,4–5, 588b, trans. d'A.W. Thompson).

83 For my further study of the problem of taxonomy of being in the Patristic tradition after Gregory, and about Gregory's influence on it, see my papers: D. Biriukov, "Hierarchies of Beings in the Patristic Thought: Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius the Areopagite," in: *The Ways of Byzantine Philosophy*, ed. M. Knežević, Alhambra, CA – Kosovska Mitrovica, pp. 71–88; D. Biriukov, "Hierarchies of Beings in the Patristic Thought: Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus and the Palamite literature," in: *Scr 10: Syrians and the Others: Cultures of the Christian Orient in the Middle Ages*, ed. B. Lourié, N. Seleznyov (2014), pp. 281–304.