# What is the Role of Philosophy in the Major Arguments Made by Basil of Caesarea in Sections 1.1-1.18 of *Against Eunomius*?

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# Abstract

This essay explores the role of philosophy in the major arguments made by Basil of Caesarea in sections 1.1-1.18 of *Against Eunomius*. It discovers that philosophy influenced Basil's epistemological framework, informed his understanding of language, shaped the content of his arguments, and at times informed his interpretation of scripture. The structure of the essay is as follows: after a general introduction, an overview of selected scholarly works on the topic is provided, followed by information on Basil and Eunomius' educations and ecclesial context, as well as an analysis of the content and philosophical context of Eunomius' *Apology*. This introductory material is followed by four sections of analysis which explore (1) Basil's polemical view on the role of philosophy in theology; (2) his arguments against Eunomius' rejection of conceptualisation and privation as ways of understanding the name 'Unbegotten'; (3) his refutation of Eunomius' understanding of 'Unbegotten' as unbegotten substance; and (4) his response to Eunomius' claim that unbegotten substance is incommunicable and, as such, the Unbegotten is beyond comparison or fellowship with the Begotten. This analysis is followed by a discussion of the findings of the analysis, which focuses primarily on Basil's epistemological framework and use of scripture.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

In modern debates about the doctrine of the Trinity, the positions of councils, creeds, and church fathers are often appealed to as an authoritative foundation for a particular school of thought. This argument from authority may be used to place the preferred school of thought outside the reaches of critical reasoning and under the protection of 'historical orthodoxy'. An example of this can be seen in the works of Kevin Giles, who, in his 2006 monograph *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*,[1] argued that his position was the same as that of "Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, Hilary of Poitiers, and Augustine" in contradistinction to his contemporary opponents whom he forcefully compared with "the so-called 'Arians'".[2] Scriptural arguments aside, Giles' methodology was essentially to provide a reading of church history which demonstrated that his position is supported by historical orthodoxy, and is therefore correct. In short, Giles sought to justify his position by securing for it the *authority* of historical orthodoxy.

It is my contention that the 'orthodoxy' of particular ideas is not determined by appeals to historical authority, but by the broader church's acceptance or rejection of its own successive attempts to make sense of divine revelation through various means, including the use of reason and philosophy.[3] For example, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed is not accepted by the church because it is inherently orthodox, but is considered to be orthodox because it has been and is accepted by the church.[4] In this essay I have not sought to test my entire thesis,

[1] While this is not Giles' most recent work, it is a fitting example of the theological approach which I am seeking to address. See also Kevin Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002); Kevin Giles, *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012).
[2] Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 9, 306.
[3] This is not to say that historical perspectives (and especially historical consensuses) should not be given their due *weight*, but that they should not be deferred to solely on the basis of their purported *authority*.
[4] As such, the 381 Council of Constantinople was not considered to be "ecumenical" on the basis of its own authority, but on the basis of its later acceptance by the representatives of the church present at the Council of

but limited myself to demonstrating the use, and exploring the role, of philosophy in the thought of a significant figure from the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity – Basil of Caesarea.

Along with his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and good friend Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil is known as a 'Cappadocian Father'. He is also considered to be one of the "four great teachers of the Eastern church",[5] and is counted among the "three hierarchs" for his contribution to trinitarian theology. The bases for these acclamations are not limited to Basil's theology alone. In modern scholarship, his ability as "an outstanding ecclesiastical politician" is often highlighted.[6] At other times, it is his devout pursuit of, and contribution to, the ascetic lifestyle – a feat which earned him the title "father of Eastern monasticism".[7] Perhaps his greatest achievement was the degree of influence that his thought and political manoeuvring had on the outcome of the ecumenical council of Constantinople (and this even though he had died "at least two years" prior to it).[8] He was also a skilled rhetor and writer, as well as an innovative theologian (although this would not have been a compliment in Basil's context). Among his extant works are *Address to Young Men on Greek Literature* (recommendations to Christian adolescents concerning how they might benefit from their secular education), the *Hexaemeron* (a series of homilies on the six days of creation), *Asketika* (instructions concerning the ascetic life), and two major theological treatises – the earlier *Against Eunomius*, and the later *On the Holy Spirit*. For the purposes of this essay, and with a view to engaging with a primary text in significant depth, my exploration of the role of philosophy in

Chalcedon in 451. Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 291.
[5] Ibid., 267.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 268.
[8] Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood, N.Y: St Vladimirs Seminary Press, 1997), 19.

Basil's thought has been limited to his first theological treatise, *Against Eunomius*, which was translated into English for the first time in 2011.[9]

## ***Against Eunomius***

*Against Eunomius* was written in response to *Apology* by Eunomius of Cyzicus. Eunomius' *Apology* was a defence of his belief that God the Father's substance is defined by the name 'Unbegotten', and the Son's by 'Begotten', and therefore the Father and Son are other in substance. Basil responded by writing a polemical treatise in the style of a judicial oratory, refuting Eunomius' arguments point by point.[10] As such, *Against Eunomius* is *not* a methodical presentation of Basil's own trinitarian theology, but a series of polemical arguments, aimed at either refuting or supplanting the particular ideas of Eunomius' *Apology*.

While *Against Eunomius* as we have it consists of five books, there is a scholarly consensus that the fourth and fifth are pseudonymous.[11] The remaining books have a trinitarian structure; the first focuses on God the Father, the second on the Son, and the third (which is significantly shorter) on the Holy Spirit. Due to the considerable volume of the work,[12] my research has been limited to sections 1-18 of the first book. These sections were selected as they cover a number of Basil's more significant arguments, and the final section finishes tidily, being followed by a clear structural marker.

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[9] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," in *Against Eunomius*, trans. Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, The Fathers of the Church (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 81–196.
[10] Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, The Fathers of the Church (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 38, 42.
[11] Basil of Caesarea, *Letters and Selected Works*, trans. Blomfield Jackson, The Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 2 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1894), http://archive.org/details/St.BasilLettersAndSelectedWorks.
[12] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz's translation fills more than 100 pages.

## Question and Methodology

In light of the above, the question that I explore in this essay is: What is the role of philosophy in the major arguments made by Basil of Caesarea in sections 1.1-1.18 of *Against Eunomius*? While the word 'philosophy' here could denote either the practice of philosophy (to philosophise), or its result (a philosophy), I focus primarily on its result, although not to the exclusion of the practice. This is because, as will become evident, Basil's theology was indebted not only to his own philosophising but also to the philosophies of others.

Before providing an overview of the structure of my essay, it is necessary to outline my methodological decisions. First, as indicated in the question, the bulk of my focus is given to sections 1.1-1.18 of *Against Eunomius* rather than the entire work or the rest of Basil's corpus. Consequently, Basil's other works are only referred to when they aid interpretation of the given section. Further, as much as possible I limit my use of secondary sources to those that deal with the specific sections in question. Second, my question is limited to an analysis of Basil's *major arguments* rather than providing a comprehensive exegesis of the given sections. Third, my question calls for the *analysis*, rather than *evaluation*, of Basil's arguments. As such, I only dwell on the merit of Basil's arguments where it is relevant.

Fourth, I endeavour to understand the role of philosophy in *Against Eunomius* within its particular *historical context*. Positively, this requires considering how Basil was influenced by the philosophical sources of the time, whether directly (e.g. through Basil's own reading of philosophical sources) or indirectly (e.g. through Basil's appropriation of philosophical concepts from ecclesiastical sources). I also seek to understand Basil's use of philosophy in relation to Eunomius' use of philosophy. This necessitates some exploration of the role of philosophy in Eunomius' *Apology*. Negatively, I avoid the trends of homogenising the

theologies of the Cappadocians (especially those of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa), and of reading Basil predominantly through the lense of trinitarian orthodoxy.

Lastly, I only focus on Basil's trinitarian theology where it is relevant to my question. As such, I do not consider issues such as the early development of Basil's trinitarian theology, or the role of Basil's theology in the development of trinitarian orthodoxy.

## Outline

The essay begins with an overview of significant primary and secondary sources, followed by background information – including the educations of Basil and Eunomius, an overview of Eunomius' *Apology*, and a brief exploration of its philosophical background. This introductory material is followed by a four part analysis of sections 1.1-1.18 of *Against Eunomius*. The first part, which focuses on 1.1-1.5a, considers Basil's polemical perspective on the place of revelation and tradition, as well as innovation, rhetoric, and philosophy, in theology. The second part, which focuses on 1.5b-10, considers Eunomius' and Basil's competing understandings of theological language as they are applied to the name 'Unbegotten'. The third part, which focuses on 1.11-1.16a, considers Basil's response to Eunomius' claim that the name 'Unbegotten' should be understood as *unbegotten substance*. The final part, which focuses on 1.16b-1.18, considers Basil's response to Eunomius' claim that unbegotten substance is incommunicable, and as such, the Unbegotten is beyond comparison with the Begotten. The final chapter discusses the role of philosophy in *Against Eunomius* in light of the analysis, focusing on Basil's epistemological framework, understanding of language, use of reason, and use of scripture.

# Chapter 2: Sources

While until recently the bulk of scholarship on *Against Eunomius* has been carried out by French and German scholars, the following selection of sources is limited to English works. Similarly, while there are many scholars who have, at different times, written on various aspects of Basil's thought, the following selection of sources are limited primarily to monographs of particular relevance to my question. Lastly, while often a developmental narrative or thematic analysis of the literature is more engaging, the scope and peculiarity of my question has necessitated that I follow a simple and systematic format in order to avoid unhelpful generalisations about the sources on the one hand, and on the other, cumbersome analysis that ought to be saved for the analysis proper.

Before moving on to specific texts, some general observations about broader scholarship on Basil ought to be made. The first is the trend of seeing Basil's thought as "part of a more or less monolithic 'Cappadocian' theology".[13] Symptomatic of this approach is the tendency to read Basil's *Against Eunomius* in the light of Gregory of Nyssa's *Against Eunomius*, which has as its corollary the tendency to read Eunomius' first *Apology* in light of his second.[14] The second is the tendency to read Basil's works as a whole corpus, and with the intention of tracing the development of the technical terms of trinitarian orthodoxy, rather than seeking to understand each individual work on its own terms and in its own context.[15] While the above approaches may be sufficient for a brief overview of church history, they allow no room for the historical context, idiosyncratic nature, or chronological development of the theologies of Basil and Eunomius.

[13] Mark DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names: Christian Theology and Late-Antique Philosophy in the Fourth Century Trinitarian Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 17.
[14] Ibid., 17–18.
[15] Ibid., 18.

## Primary Texts

When referring to the text of *Against Eunomius* my primary source has been the translation by Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz.[16] Although it is a relatively recent translation, it is the only one published in English, and only the second modern language translation.[17] The publication has a very helpful introductory section, which includes an up-to-date account of the historical context of *Against Eunomius*;[18] observations about the document's genre;[19] an exploration of Basil's scriptural, ecclesiastical, and philosophical sources;[20] and a "Glossary of Technical Vocabulary in *Against Eunomius*".[21] The translation itself is replete with helpful footnotes, including expositions of technical terms and comments on philosophical influences. Unfortunately they did not supply a Greek text with their translation, so where necessary I have made reference to the *Patrologia Graeca*.[22]

For Eunomius' *Apology* I have referred to Richard Paul Vaggione's text and translation.[23] Once again, this is the only English translation of the work, and the second modern one.[24] The introductory material that is specific to the *Apology* is concise but helpful,[25] and the translation is presented opposite the Greek text for easy reference.[26]

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[16] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius."
[17] The earlier translation is in French, see Bernard Sesboüé, *L'Apologie d'Eunome de Cyzique et le Contre Eunome (L. I-III) de Basile de Césarée: Présentation, analyse théologique et traduction française* (Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1980).
[18] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 18–38.
[19] Ibid., 38–46.
[20] Ibid., 55–75.
[21] Ibid., 75–76.
[22] Basil of Caesarea, "Adversus Eunomium," in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 29 (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857), cols. 497–670.
[23] Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon; Oxford University Press, 1987), 3–75.
[24] Once again, the second edition is French, see Sesboüé, *L'Apologie d'Eunome de Cyzique et le Contre Eunome (L. I-III) de Basile de Césarée*.
[25] Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, 3–29.
[26] For Aetius's *Syntagmation* I have referred to the translations of L. Wickham and Thomas Kopecek. See Lionel R Wickham, "Syntagmation of Aetius the Anomean," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19, no. 2 (October 1968): 532–569. and Thomas A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, vol. I (Cambridge, MA: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), 225–297.

## Monographs

My research has uncovered five monographs that are particularly relevant to my question. Two focus on Eunomius and his teacher Aetius, one on the interaction of Basil's trinitarian theology with Greek thought, and the remaining two on different aspects of Basil's thought in *Against Eunomius*.

The oldest work is Thomas A. Kopecek's *A History of Neo-Arianism*,[27] published in 1979.[28] This two-volume work provides a historical overview of the Neo-Arian movement (now known as the Heteroousions) from the early stages of the Arian controversy through to the "Decline of Neo-Arianism".[29] In the process, Kopecek presented analyses of numerous primary documents, bringing both the ecclesial and philosophical context of each document into account. Of most significance for my research are his expositions of Aetius' *Syntagmation*,[30] Eunomius' *Apology*,[31] and, of course, Basil's *Against Eunomius.*[32] Lastly, while Kopecek suggested a number of different schools of philosophy that may have influenced the Heteroousions (and even Basil), for now it will suffice to mention the significance that he attributed to the "Christian Middle Platonic tradition" which was embodied by figures such as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria.[33]

The second major work on Eunomius is Richard Paul Vaggione's *Eunomius of Cyzicus and The Nicene Revolution*.[34] Vaggione initially set out to write about the Arian controversy, but

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[27] Thomas A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, vol. I & II (Cambridge, MA: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979).
[28] This was the 1600th anniversary of Basil's death, which marks a resurgence in scholarship on Basil, see DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, 15.
[29] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, II:441.
[30] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, I:225–297.
[31] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, II:306–346.
[32] Ibid., II:372–392 Kopecek also provides helpful biographical information about both Eunomius and Aetius.
[33] Ibid., II:378.
[34] Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 2000).

found the task to be "insurmountable" due to the lack of scholarly consensus. For this reason he stepped back from the secondary literature and "read as many [primary sources] as possible with as fresh an eye as possible", before deciding to approach the task from the vantage point of Eunomius' life.[35] The result is a narrative about Eunomius' life that is interspersed with lengthy passages on "theoretical details and wider currents of thought" from the time.[36] Aside from the in-depth biographical material on Eunomius and Aetius, the most relevant part of the work is its original discussion of the relation between scripture, tradition, rhetoric, and philosophy in the chapter entitled "Logic Chopper".[37] Most scholars, when writing about the Heteroousions, draw heavily from the work of Kopecek,[38] and more recently, Vaggione.[39]

My next source is Stephen Hildebrand's *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth*,[40] which was "the first English monograph devoted to Basil's Trinitarian thought."[41] In this book, Hildebrand, who seemed concerned with justifying and perhaps even minimising the role of Greek thought in that of Basil,[42] approached the question of the relation between Greek and Christian thought by analysing a number of Basil's works, especially *Against Eunomius* and *On the Holy Spirit*. Most relevant for this study are the introduction and the second chapter. The introduction includes a brief

[35] Ibid., v–vii.
[36] Ibid., vi.
[37] Ibid., 79–147.
[38] For example, R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381 AD* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 1988), 611–636.
[39] For example, Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 144–149.
[40] Stephen M. Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea: A Synthesis of Greek Thought and Biblical Truth* (Washington: CUA Press, 2007).
[41] DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, 17.
[42] Ibid., 19; Philip Kariatlis's approach is similar to Hildebrand, although he sees no need to justify "the harmonious synthesis of Greek *paideia* and the scriptural worldview" that he finds in Basil. See Philip Kariatlis, "St Basil's Contribution to the Trinitarian Doctrine: A Synthesis of Greek Paideia and the Scriptural Worldview," *Phronema* 25 (2010): 57.

historical overview of the interaction between Christianity and Greek thought,[43] as well as an overview and discussion of theories concerning the relationship between the same.[44] The second chapter introduces and analyses *Against Eunomius*, focusing primarily on the development of technical words from orthodox trinitarian theology such as *ousia* and *hypostasis*. This analysis includes arguments for the Stoic nature of Basil's understanding of *ousia*.[45] *Against Eunomius* is also treated in the fifth chapter with a view to discovering the "scriptural centre" of Basil's understanding of the relationship between the Father and Son.[46]

The final two monographs are both by students of the seminal patristics scholar Lewis Ayres. The first, by Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, is *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*.[47] As the title suggests, it focuses on the role of Basil and Gregory in the historical development of the doctrine of divine simplicity – a doctrine which is pivotal in the conflict between Eunomius and Basil. The book includes discussions of the philosophical background behind *Against Eunomius*, and as such is an indispensable source in the current study. The second is *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*, by Mark DelCogliano.[48] This work focuses on the role of ancient theories of names in the conflict between Eunomius and Basil. It has three chapters focusing on theories of names in the thought of Aetius and Eunomius, and three chapters focusing on theories of names in *Against Eunomius*. This is another indispensable source, and is also the only major source on Basil that, chronologically speaking, does not move its focus beyond *Against Eunomius.*

[43] Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea*, 1–2.
[44] Ibid., 6–14.
[45] Ibid., 46–50.
[46] Ibid., 160–165.
[47] Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[48] DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names*.

## Other Works

Aside from the above monographs, there are also a handful of journal articles that provide convincing arguments concerning the origin of particular philosophical ideas in *Against Eunomius*. The earliest two were both authored by David G. Robertson in the late nineties. The first, "Stoic and Aristotelian Notions of Substance in Basil of Caesarea",[49] presented a qualification to Reinhard Hübner's thesis that Basil's understanding of *ousia* was Stoic rather than Aristotelian.[50] Drawing from a variety of Basil's works, including the first book of *Against Eunomius*, Robertson convincingly argued that Basil's understanding of *ousia* lay "somewhere in between Stoic and Aristotelian doctrines of substance", as well as being influenced by "his theological predecessors and contemporaries."[51] The second, "Relatives in Basil of Caesarea", focused on Basil's understanding of 'relatives', i.e. terms like 'father' or 'son', which imply relation.[52] According to Robertson, Basil's understanding of relatives came from ancient grammarians, who were influenced by the Stoics.[53]

Another significant journal article is "Strategies of Naming in the Polemics between Eunomius and Basil of Caesarea in the Context of the Philosophical Tradition of Antiquity", by Dmitry Biriukov.[54] This helpful article includes a literature review,[55] detailed background on particular ancient theories of names,[56] a convincing argument for the influence of Stoicism

[49] David Robertson, "Stoic and Aristotelian Notions of Substance in Basil of Caesarea," *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (1998): 393–417.
[50] See Reinhard M Hübner, "Gregor von Nyssa, Als Verfasser Der Sog Ep 38 Des Basilius," in *Epektasis: Mélanges Patristiques Offerts Au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1972), 463–490.
[51] Robertson, "Stoic and Aristotelian Notions of Substance in Basil of Caesarea," 417.
[52] David Robertson, "Relatives in Basil of Caesarea," *Studia Patristica* 37, Papers Presented at the Thirteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford, August 16-21, 1999 (2001): 277–287.
[53] Ibid., 281–282.
[54] Dmitry Biriukov, "Strategies of Naming in the Polemics between Eunomius and Basil of Caesarea in the Context of the Philosophical Tradition of Antiquity," *Scrinium* 4, no. 1 (2008): 103–120.
[55] Ibid., 104–110.
[56] Ibid., 113–115, 117–118.

on Eunomius' understanding of names,[57] and a case for the Aristotelian nature of Basil's "views of language structure" in *Against Eunomius*.[58]

## Summary and Significance

A number of observations can be made from the above sources. First, scholarly interest in Basil's *Against Eunomius* has been growing since 1979, including a recent surge in English scholarship. DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz are a driving force in this movement, with two major works and an English translation coming from their efforts (as well as a number of journal articles).[59] Second, while there is much material on the existence and origin of philosophical influences in the works of Basil (and Eunomius), there is little on the *role* of philosophy. Furthermore, those that *do* treat this question, such as Hildebrand, treat it with reference to Basil's whole corpus rather than *Against Eunomius* in particular, and sometimes with a view to defending Basil's thought from accusations of corruption by pagan influence. However, while few have written *specifically* on the role of philosophy in *Against Eunomius*, many that treat the text for other reasons, such as Kopecek and Vaggione, make inadvertent statements about the use and role of philosophy in it. Therefore, due to the paucity of sources that are directly relevant to my question, my use of secondary literature must necessarily be eclectic.

[57] Ibid., 113–116.
[58] Ibid., 116.
[59] DelCogliano in particular has published numerous papers on Basil including: Mark DelCogliano, "Basil of Caesarea on Proverbs 8:22 and the Sources of pro-Nicene Theology," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 59, no. 1 (April 2008): 183–190; Mark DelCogliano, "Basil of Caesarea versus Eunomius of Cyzicus on the Nature of Time: A Patristic Reception on the Critique of Plato," *Vigiliae christianae* 68, no. 5 (2014): 498–532; and Mark DelCogliano, "The Influence of Athanasius and the Homoiousions on Basil of Caesarea's Decentralization of 'Unbegotten,'" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 19, no. 2 (2011): 197–223.

# Chapter 3: Background

## Part 1: Early Life, Education, and Ecclesial Context

### Basil

Basil was born around 330CE in Cappadocia, a Roman province of the region Pontus in Asia Minor.[60] He was born to a "wealthy, landowning family" with a strong Christian heritage.[61] The blood of martyrs came from his mother's side of the family, and from his father's side came an association with Gregory Thaumaturgus, "The 'apostle' of Pontus, who had once been a student of Origen".[62] When Basil was young, his paternal grandmother, Macrina, was "instrumental in the religious education of Basil and his siblings".[63] In sum, Basil received both wealth and faith from his family.

For the most part, Basil's education followed a conventional path (for the wealthy). This ancient Greek pattern of education, like modern education, could be broken up into three stages.[64] The first involved learning to "read, write, and recite short passages from set texts"; the second, known as 'grammatical' education, involved reading and interpreting the canon of Greek classical literature; the third involved learning the art of rhetoric,[65] although some would instead seek out an education in philosophy.[66]

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[60] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 6; Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Cæsarea* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 1.
[61] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 6.
[62] Ibid., 7; Rousseau questions the extent to which Basil's Christian heritage was formative for him, see Rousseau, *Basil of Cæsarea*, 27.
[63] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 7.
[64] However, in the ancient world education was much more costly than it is in many modern countries.
[65] Arthur Holder, "Saint Basil the Great on Secular Education and Christian Virtue," *Religious Education* 3, no. 87 (1992): 396.
[66] For an excellent introduction to the rivalry between rhetoric and philosophy see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 1–17.

Basil first learnt grammar and rhetoric from his father in Neocaesarea.[67] After his father died (around 345CE), he continued his studies in Caesarea, where he first met Gregory of Nazianzus, who became a close friend.[68] When he was about eighteen years old he travelled to Constantinople, where he studied under "the famous rhetor" Libanius for about a year.[69] After this he moved to Athens where he learnt from the sophists Himerius and Prohaeresius for about five years.[70]

While Basil's known teachers were all sophists and so taught rhetoric, the rhetorical curriculum included the history of philosophy as well as the teachings of the four major schools of philosophy. However, aside from the works of Plato and Aristotle, most of this content was mediated through "handbooks and summaries" and so was quite general.[71] In light of these observations, the evidence of a "solid philosophical formation" in Basil's writings can probably be attributed to this general introduction to philosophy.[72] In fact, if he only received a general introduction to the major schools (rather than studying under a philosopher), this would explain his eclectic use of philosophy and absence of loyalty to any particular school.

In 355, Basil left Athens for Caesarea, where he taught rhetoric for a short time,[73] after which he followed the trail of "Eustathius the Philosopher" through "Coele-Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Egypt", studying "ascetic régimes" as he went.[74] Either before or after this

[67] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 7.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Rousseau, *Basil of Cæsarea*, 28,31.
[71] Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 25–26.
[72] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 8.
[73] Rousseau, *Basil of Cæsarea*, 61.
[74] Basil of Caesarea, "Letter I," in *St. Basil: Letters and Selected Works*, trans. Blomfield Jackson, The Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 2 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1894), 263, http://archive.org/details/St.BasilLettersAndSelectedWorks; 'Eustathius the Philosopher' is generally equated with Eustathius of Sebasteia. For example, see Rousseau, *Basil of Cæsarea*, 73.

'tour' of the east, Basil was baptised by Dianius of Caesarea.[75] He then went to his "family estate in Annisa", where he practised the "philosophical life" – a withdrawal from the world and pursuit of inner growth in the tradition of philosophical and early Christian asceticism.[76] Basil was soon joined in this retreat by Gregory of Nazianzus, and this is when scholars suggest that the two may have compiled the *Philocalia* – a series of excerpts from Origen's works compiled in the style of a reference work.[77] In the following years, Basil travelled to and from this retreat in Annisa a number of times.

## Ecclesial Context

Before reaching the goal of our current narrative, it is necessary to step back in order to situate Basil in his broader ecclesial context. In 325, the emperor Constantine called a council in Nicaea in response to division caused by a conflict between the presbyter Arius of Alexandria and his bishop, Alexander. Although the council aimed to address the problem of 'Arianism',[78] and even though the Nicene Creed is now held to be orthodox, the reality is that it was not until the 381 Council of Constantinople that the Nicene perspective triumphed. As such, 'Arianism' (in its various forms) was alive and well during Basil's lifetime.

[75] It was common practice at this time to delay baptism until later in life. DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 9.
[76] Ibid.; For an exposition of the relation between monastic and philosophical asceticism, see Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 10–15.
[77] Rousseau, *Basil of Cæsarea*, 66, 84; DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz note that the authorship of the *Philocalia* has recently been contested. DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, "Introduction," 9.
[78] While Ayres and his students prefer the label 'Eusebian' to that of 'Arian', a discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this essay. See Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 52; and Mark DelCogliano, "Eusebius of Caesarea's Defense of Asterius of Cappadocia in the Anti-Marcellan Writings: A Case Study of Mutual Defense within the Eusebian Alliance," in *Eusebius of Caesarea: Traditions and Innovations*, ed. Aaron Johnson and Jeremy Schott (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013), 263–265, accessed April 24, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/4009883/Eusebius_of_Caesarea_s_Defense_of_Asterius_of_Cappadocia_in_the_Anti-Marcellan_Writings_A_Case_Study_of_Mutual_Defense_within_the_Eusebian_Alliance.

In 357, "a small council of bishops" came together in the western city of Sirmium and "condemned all use of *ousia*-language" in relation to the Father and Son.[79] The "stark subordinationist agenda" of the resulting Sirmium Confession catalysed the re-evaluation of positions by many in the East.[80] Around that time the main theological factions were the Homoousions, who were adherents to the traditional position of Nicaea; the Homoions, who opposed *ousia*-language and from whom came the Sirmium Confession;[81] the Heteroousions, who were a radically subordinationist offshoot of the Homoion party, and were depicted as the spiritual successors of Arius and so sometimes called 'the Neo-Arian party';[82] and the Homoiousions, who formed in opposition to the Heteroousion party, and included Eustathius of Sebaste and Dianius of Caesarea among their members.[83]

In 358, the Homoiousion and Heteroousion parties sent representatives to Emperor Constantius, seeking his favour over and against one another.[84] The emperor preferred the Homoiousion party, seeing in it an opportunity to achieve theological consensus within the empire. Consequently, after banishing many of the members of the Heteroousion party, Constantius called twin councils, one in the West (Ariminum) and one in the East (Seleucia),[85] hoping to achieve a theological consensus which included the Homoion and Homoiousion perspectives, but not the Heteroousion and Homoousion.[86] Prior to this he called a council in Sirmium in order "to compose a statement of faith that could be presented to both sessions of the double-council," now known as the Dated Creed.[87] Eventually, due to

[79] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 28.
[80] Ibid., 29.
[81] For a discussion of Sirmium 357 and the emergence of "'Homoion' theology" see Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 137–139.
[82] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 29.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 29–30.
[85] Franz Dünzl, *A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church*, trans. John Bowden (London, New York: Continuum, 2007), 96.
[86] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 30.
[87] Ibid.; also see Dünzl, *The Trinity in the Early Church*, 94–95.

the lack of consensus in the East, Constantius sided with the Homoion party, and had the Dated Creed modified to exclude the Homoiousions.[88]

In January 360, a council was called in Constantinople "to ratify the decisions of Ariminum and Seleucia."[89] Basil attended, presumably in the company of Dianius of Caesarea or Eustathius of Sebasteia (both of whom were members of the Homoiousion party).[90] It was at this council that Eunomius, who was part of the Heteroousion party, is purported to have first delivered his *Apology*, so it may have been here that Basil first encountered Eunomius and his teacher Aetius.[91] When it became apparent that his party was losing to the Homoions, Basil "fled Constantinople and returned home."[92] Not long after, Eunomius was appointed Bishop of Cyzicus, and later published his *Apology*.[93] Soon after, around 363-364, Basil responded with *Against Eunomius*.[94]

**Eunomius and Aetius**

Eunomius was born around 324-328CE in Oltiseris,[95] a small, rural village in the Cappadocian district of Corniaspa, near the border of Galatia.[96] While his first language was probably Cappadocian,[97] his father must have known some Greek as he would teach local children how to write Greek during the winter.[98] While not of noble origins like Basil, Eunomius' family did have the means to get him a modest education, and sent him away to

[88] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 31.
[89] Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 164.
[90] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 9–10.
[91] Ibid., 32.
[92] Ibid., 11.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 191.
[95] While the date of Eunomius' birth is uncertain and there are a wide range of scholarly estimates, the most recent major study of Eunomius' life places his birth around 324-328CE, see Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution*, 2.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Hence his lisp. Ibid., 3.
[98] Ibid.

learn shorthand.[99] After his parents' death he went to Constantinople where he tutored the children of nobles and accompanied them to school, thus learning from their education.[100] By 346 he had moved to Antioch where he learnt some rhetoric,[101] and by 350 he had left for Alexandria to become the secretary and student of Aetius,[102] the founder of the Heteroousion party.

Due to the significance of Aetius for Eunomius' theological development, I will also provide a brief account of his education. Aetius was born in Antioch around 313CE.[103] His father was a supplier for the Roman army, but at some point his property was confiscated and he died early.[104] Consequently, Aetius had to learn "the trade of a goldsmith" in order to support himself and his mother.[105] It is evident, however, that before his father's death Aetius had received a basic education – a foundation which he was able to build upon after his mother's death.[106] His first theological teacher, who taught him in Antioch for six months, was one of Arius' early supporters, Paulinus of Tyre.[107] His other three theological mentors, Athanasius of Anazarbus, Antony of Tarsus, and Leontius of Antioch, were supporters of Arius too, but also disciples of Lucian of Antioch,[108] who may have even taught Arius himself.[109] It is important to note that while Aetius' *Syntagmation*, which he wrote late in 359,[110] bears

[99] Ibid., 6.
[100] Ibid., 9.
[101] Eunomius could not actually afford the cost of this education and so had to learn from a new teacher who was trying to build up his 'practice', see ibid., 7–12.
[102] Once again, the date here is unclear, but two of the most significant English studies on Eunomius arrive at similar conclusions. See ibid., 27; and Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, I:26.
[103] Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution*, 14; Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, I:6.
[104] Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution*, 15.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., 16; Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, I:66.
[107] Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution*, 16.
[108] Ibid., 20–22 Lucian of Antioch is also known as Lucian Martyr.
[109] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, I:18; It is more likely that Arius wanted to be seen as a disciple of Lucian. See Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution*, 44.
[110] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, I:226–227.

evidence to his syllogistic style, the bulk of Aetius' education was not philosophical, but theological. In fact, most of his education focused on exegesis.[111]

In summary, the educations of Eunomius and Aetius were significantly different to that of Basil. Basil's Christian family was wealthy enough to give him a conventional, secular education, and it was not until he had completed his studies in rhetoric that he started moving in ecclesiastical circles and pursuing a hybrid of philosophical and early Christian asceticism. Eunomius was trained to be a secretary,[112] and while he sought a higher education, most of his further learning was gained by association, first with the children of nobles, and later working for Aetius. Finally, Aetius received only a basic secular education before moving into ecclesiastical circles, where he then received rigorous exegetical training, yet he expressed himself in philosophical syllogisms. Each education is unique, each has its twists and turns, and each defies any premature attempts to jump to conclusions about the attitudes that these figures held towards philosophy.

## Part 2: Eunomius' Apology

### Analysis

Before analysing the role of philosophy in Basil's response to Eunomius' *Apology*, it is helpful to explore the *Apology*'s main arguments and the presence of philosophy in them. Here I also draw attention to parallels between the *Apology*'s arguments and those of Aetius' *Syntagmation*.

[111] For a detailed discussion of Aetius' education see ibid., I:64–72.
[112] Bear in mind that this was a greater feat in Eunomius' context than it is in the modern western world.

The structure of Eunomius' *Apology* is roughly as follows: sections 1-6 form the introduction, which consists of a justification of the *Apology*'s deliverance,[113] along with the introduction and provision of a creed and the justification of its use as a point of departure for the remainder of the treatise;[114] sections 7-11 consist of arguments related to understanding God the Father as unbegotten essence; sections 12-19 present arguments related to understanding God the Son as begotten essence; sections 20-24 consider the relation of the Father and Son in light of their activities; section 25 considers the relation of the Son and Spirit in light of their activities; and sections 26-28 consist of a summary and conclusion, as well as an appendix which is likely a later addition.[115] The following analysis focuses predominantly on sections 7-19, the common theme of which is the presentation and defence of the Heteroousion understanding of the essence of the Father and Son.

Sections 7-11 can be broken up into two subsections: 7-8 establishes and defends the Heteroousion understanding that God is unbegotten essence, and 9-11 refutes Homoousion and Homoiousion arguments for understanding the Son's essence as unbegotten.[116]

Section 7 established, on the grounds of "innate knowledge (φυσικήν ἔννοιαν) and the teaching of the fathers", as well as syllogisms drawn from the *Syntagmation,* that God is one, and God is "the Unbegotten, or rather… unbegotten essence".[117] Section 8 then defended against alternative understandings of the name 'Unbegotten': it is not a conceptualisation, nor a privation; it is not "applied to a part of him only", "within him as something separate", or

[113] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," in *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, trans. Richard Paul Vaggione (Oxford; New York: Clarendon; Oxford University Press, 1987), 35–37.
[114] Ibid., 37–41.
[115] Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, 12, 16; Kopecek provides an alternate structure, but it is not as convincing. See Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, II:306–307.
[116] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, II:316–317; Vaggione, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, 41–47.
[117] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 41; Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, II:312.

"something different alongside him".[118] Concerning these sections, Kopecek has highlighted strong parallels between the structure and argument of sections 7 and 8 with those of the "first three parts of the *Syntagmation*."[119] Even the three quotes given from section 8, which relate to divine simplicity, correspond with different syllogisms in the *Syntagmation*, demonstrating Eunomius' knowledge of, and reliance upon, Aetius' teaching.[120]

Section 9 included the refutation of arguments concerning how unbegotten essence might be transferred: specifically, separation and division.[121] Once again, these arguments relate to divine simplicity. Sections 10-11 present arguments for why the essence of the Father and Son cannot be the same, most notably that two (contradictory) names cannot be yoked together, so Jesus cannot be both 'Son' and 'Unbegotten'.[122] In sections 7-11, then, Eunomius marshals a number of arguments, many of which stress the importance of the designation 'Unbegotten', and depend on the idea of divine simplicity.

Sections 12-15 establish and defend the Heteroousion beliefs that the Son is begotten essence and therefore different to the Father, but also different from the rest of creation as he was begotten rather than created out of nothing.[123] Sections 16-17 then include arguments against understanding divine begetting as analogous to human begetting (which involves a communication of essence). These arguments hinge on Eunomius' understanding of how human language applies to God. In section 18, this understanding of language is explicitly articulated, with Eunomius arguing that:

> …we need not try to conform meanings to words exactly or try to distinguish those of differing expressions, but must rather direct our attention to the concepts inherent in the

[118] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 43.
[119] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, II:313–314.
[120] Ibid., II:314–315.
[121] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 43, 45.
[122] Ibid., 47.
[123] Ibid., 47–55.

> underlying objects and accommodate the designations accordingly (for the natures of objects are not naturally consequent on the verbal expressions; rather, the force of the words is accommodated to the objects in accordance with their proper status)…[124]

Here Eunomius is arguing that language does not determine the essence of the object to which it refers, but rather the meaning of a word is often accommodated to its object. For example, when the designation 'Father' is used of God, this does not imply that God has experienced the "passion" that accompanies the act of begetting which is necessary to human fatherhood.[125] For Eunomius, the meaning of the word 'Father', when applied to God, is informed by our pre-existing understanding of God as Unbegotten, including the implications of that understanding – in this case the impassibility of God. Lastly, section 19 argues, on this same basis, that other names which are applied to both Father and Son must be understood in light of their true names: 'Unbegotten' and 'Begotten', respectively. Consequently, other names, when used of the Father, have the same meaning as unbegotten, and when used of the Son have the same meaning as begotten.[126] In sections 12-19, then, we see the importance of language in the theology of Eunomius' *Apology* for the understanding of the terms begotten and unbegotten, and for the interpretation of other names that are applied to God.

**Simplicity and First Principles**

In order to better understand Eunomius' appeals to divine simplicity, innate ideas, and understanding God as 'Unbegotten', it is helpful to gain a general understanding of the philosophical origin of these ideas. The idea of simple substances can be traced back to at least the time of Plato. For Plato, true knowledge was to know the *substance* or *essence* of 'forms' or 'ideas', which were universals; i.e. "What many things have in common, or a

[124] Ibid., 55–57.
[125] Ibid., 55.
[126] Ibid., 57–59.

feature they share", such as being round or white.[127] Whereas particulars (sensible objects) could be composite or divisible, forms were incomposite and indivisible; for example, while a rock could be round, brown, and hard, and was therefore composite, the idea of roundness cannot be divided into parts, and so is *simple*. For Plato, then, true knowledge was to know the substance of simple forms.[128] The basic tenets of this theory of knowledge survived through to the fourth century, but talk of 'substance' had become a controversial issue in the theological disputes of the Roman Empire.[129]

Simplicity also featured in Aristotelian and Epicurean-Stoic epistemology, both of which sought to answer the 'learner's paradox' from Plato's *Meno* – "how can one learn if one does not already know something about the sought item? How can it be learning if one does already know?"[130] While the two epistemologies were not exactly the same, the fundamental principles behind their solutions were similar to Descartes' theory of 'innate ideas'.[131] As prior knowledge was thought to be necessary for learning, there had to be certain ideas which were self-evident to all. These self-evident ideas were thought to be simple in the same way that Plato's forms were simple. All other knowledge was built upon these simple first principles. By the fourth century this idea was taken for granted by all sides of the theological debate, although often using different terminology such as 'shared conceptions' (κοινῶν λογισμῶν) or 'natural notions' (φυσική ἔννοια).[132]

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[127] Allan Silverman, "Plato's Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2014. (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2014), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/plato-metaphysics/.
[128] Ibid.
[129] As demonstrated by the previously mentioned Sirmium pronouncement of 357 which banned the use of '*ousia*' terminology.
[130] Radde-Gallwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 47.
[131] This is presumably the reason that Vaggione translated φυσική ἔννοια as "innate idea" rather than the more literal "natural notion"; see Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 42.
[132] Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution*, 88–90.

These appeals to first principles, which took place in the realm of epistemology, had precedent in the philosophy of ontology. As far back as Parmenides of Elea (fifth century BCE), the term ἀγέν(ν)ητος (ingenerate/unbegotten) was being used to distinguish things which had their existence in themselves from those which were generated from others.[133] By the second century, Christian apologists such as Justin Martyr were applying this designation to the Christian God, and in the third century Dionysius of Alexandria equated "the *definition* of the term 'ingenerate' with the *definition* of 'God'."[134] So where self-evident ideas had become the philosophical foundation of knowledge, the ingenerate being had become the ontological foundation of the cosmos, and both kinds of 'first principles' were understood to be simple.

Returning to Eunomius' *Apology,* we see how these philosophical ideas influenced his thought. First, in section 7, an appeal to "innate knowledge" formed part of the basis for Eunomius' understanding of God as "the Unbegotten". Second, in section 8, the rejection of understanding 'Unbegotten' as either applying "to a part of [God] only", "within him as something separate", or "something different alongside him" depended entirely upon the idea of divine simplicity.[135] In fact, Eunomius' entire system of thought was dependent upon an innate understanding of God as a simple first principle. This is not to say that Eunomius sourced his theology directly from pagan philosophers,[136] but that his theology unmistakably bears the hallmarks of various philosophical traditions from antiquity.

[133] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism,* I:242.
[134] Radde-Gallwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 77.
[135] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 43.
[136] In fact, Kopecek has made a convincing argument for the ecclesial origin of Eunomius' thought. See Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism,* I:242–266.

**Language**

Eunomius' treatment of the name 'Unbegotten' reveals a distinctive understanding of language, or more specifically, of 'names', which in the ancient world included "proper nouns, common nouns, and adjectives".[137] In order to understand the historical sources of Eunomius' 'theory of names' it is helpful to locate it within the spectrum of ancient philosophical theories of language. On the one hand, there was the Epicurean theory of language that names originated naturally, spontaneously and mindlessly, and corresponded with the substance of the objects to which each name belonged.[138] This theory is typified by the word φύσις (nature). On the other hand, there was the Aristotelian view that language was established by social convention with no correspondence to substance. This theory is typified by the word θέσις (convention).[139] However, the majority of ancient philosophers sat somewhere in between these two poles, generally understanding names to, in some way, correspond with substance, and be given by deities or humans with significant abilities.[140] Eunomius' understanding of names fell within this middle category.

Within this category, Dmitry Biriukov has made a convincing case for Eunomius' theory of names being dependent upon Stoic formal naturalism, [141] the distinctive element of which is the addition of an intermediate element between name and substance – that of 'meaning' (λεκτόν).[142] Two significant consequences of formal naturalism were the provision of explanations for both the existence of multiple words which referred to the same object, and the way that the meaning of names can change depending on the context in which they are

[137] DelCogliano, *Basil of Caesarea's Anti-Eunomian Theory of Names,* 25.
[138] Biriukov, "Strategies of Naming," 117.
[139] It ought to be noted that Biriukov identifies the term 'thesis' with the dispensing of names by the elite, rather than their establishment by social convention, and so would refer to this end of the spectrum as a more inclusive form of 'thesis'. Ibid., 118.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Formal naturalism was also known as "the science of the signified (τὸ σημαινόμενον); Ibid., 114–115.
[142] Ibid., 113–116.

used. Once again, bear in mind that Eunomius probably received his understanding of names from ecclesial rather than philosophical sources (almost certainly from Aetius), and so this identification of his thought with Stoic formal naturalism should be understood as descriptive rather than prescriptive.

Returning, once again, to Eunomius' *Apology*, we gain a deeper understanding of the rationale behind Eunomius' identification of the name 'Unbegotten' with the substance of the Father. For Eunomius, 'Unbegotten' was the name of God which corresponded to his substance. Furthermore, in both his argument that other names which applied to God also meant Unbegotten, [143] as well as his argument for accommodating the 'meaning' (λεκτόν) of names to their objects,[144] we see the influence of Stoic formal naturalism.

In this chapter, then, we have seen some of the roles that philosophy played in Eunomius' theology, particularly in his understanding of epistemology, ontology, and language. As the role of philosophy in *Against Eunomius* is considered in the remaining chapters, not only will I ask how Basil responded to Eunomius' *Apology*, but also how he responded to Eunomius' appeals to these, and other, philosophical concepts.

[143] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 57–59.
[144] Ibid., 55–57.

# Chapter 4: Tradition and Innovation (1.1-1.5a)

This chapter begins the analysis of *Against Eunomius*, focusing on Basil's polemical perspective on the place of revelation and tradition, as well as innovation, rhetoric, and philosophy, in theology.

## Eunomius' Argument

Eunomius opened his *Apology* by framing his arguments as a necessary defence of what he believed were orthodox views against the 'slander' of "knaves and wranglers".[145] Having justified the existence of his treatise, he subsequently made two appeals to his audience: the first asking that they seek to discern the "truth" through "the teaching of our Saviour Jesus Christ", rather than by giving preference to "numbers", positions of authority, or "earlier speakers";[146] the second asking that they do not judge Eunomius and his associates harshly on account of their willingness to "lay out unveiled the naked truth", even at risk of suffering and persecution.[147] Eunomius then proceeded to introduce and present a creed of unknown origin as "a kind of rule or norm" by which his audience could judge his arguments.[148] In the final passage of our current consideration, Eunomius framed the remainder of the treatise as an exposition and interpretation of this creed – an undertaking which was made necessary because of the attempts of others to distort its meaning.[149]

[145] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 35.
[146] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 37.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid., 37–39; While the origin of this creed is unknown, Basil himself attested to its use by "some of the fathers", see Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 88.
[149] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 39–41.

## Basil's Response

### Overview

Like Eunomius, Basil began by justifying the existence of his treatise, framing his own work as a defence of the "truth of the gospel" against "falsehood".[150] Then, after identifying Aetius as the source of the "heresy", Basil argued concerning Eunomius that "if we refute the fully-trained disciple we also refute along with him his teacher".[151] In 1.2, Basil began his refutation of the text itself, beginning with its apologetic genre, concerning which he argued that it was chosen disingenuously with the intention of escaping the "suspicion of innovation".[152] Then, in 1.3, Basil responded to Eunomius' two appeals to his audience, arguing that the first was a rejection of the tradition of the Church,[153] and that the second was the height of arrogance.[154] Lastly, in 1.4 and the beginning of 1.5, Basil responded to Eunomius' presentation of the creed, arguing, in a similar fashion to 1.2, that Eunomius used it disingenuously, with the intention of escaping "the suspicion of innovation" and trapping his audience in "the snares of his sophisms".[155]

### Thematic Analysis

Before beginning the analysis of this section in earnest, some observations about the absence of scholarship on, and the polemical nature of the section ought to be made. First, scholars generally give 1.1-1.5a very little attention.[156] For the most part, this is due to scholarly interest focusing primarily on Basil's theological arguments, which begin in earnest in 1.5. When scholars *do* write more than a passing sentence on 1.1-1.5a, they generally focus on its

[150] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 81–82.
[151] Ibid., 82–83.
[152] Ibid., 83.
[153] Ibid., 86–87.
[154] Ibid., 87–88.
[155] Ibid., 88ff.
[156] E.g. Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea*, 44.

highly polemical and rhetorical nature rather than the actual content of the polemic. For example DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz comment on the intensity of Basil's "vitriol",[157] and Thomas Kopecek accuses him of being "masterfully misleading".[158] However, though it may be highly polemical and rhetorical, the content of 1.1-1.5a is relevant to my question. This is because it is full of appeals to popular epistemological biases, such as the priority of tradition and the suspect nature of innovation.

Due to the recurring nature of these epistemological appeals, I treat this section thematically, rather than systematically. The first theme is Basil's presentation of his polemical treatise as a defence of "the truth of the gospel… the tradition of the apostles and the simplicity of the faith", or, in short, revelation and tradition.[159] The second theme is Basil's characterisation of innovation and rhetoric as tools of the devil, who was seeking to undermine revelation and tradition, supplanting them with "external wisdom" and "plausible arguments."[160]

For the sake of brevity, in considering Basil's approach to divine revelation we will pass over the seemingly straight-forward phrase 'the truth of the gospel', and focus instead on 'the simplicity of the faith' (τό ἀπλοῦν τῆς πίστεως). Basil used this phrase in a number of his works including the first homily of his *Hexaemeron,* where he wrote that we should always "prefer the simplicity of the faith to the demonstrations of reason (τῶν λογικῶν ἀποδείχεων)".[161] The immediate context of this statement was a presentation of speculative philosophical explanations for the immobility of the earth, concerning which Basil warned his readers that if they found these reasons to be plausible then they should "save [their]

[157] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 39.
[158] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, II:373.
[159] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 81 (1.1).
[160] Ibid. (1.1).
[161] Basil of Caesarea, "Hexaemeron," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 8, Second (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 223 (1.10).

admiration for the source of such perfect order, for the wisdom of God", rather than for speculative philosophy.[162] In context then, Basil seems to have been asserting that divine revelation – in this case, the narrative of creation – ought to be preferred over philosophy. This suspicion is confirmed by the final section of the homily where, after more warnings against engaging in philosophy, Basil presented the alternative: "…let us say with Moses 'God created the heavens and the earth.'"[163] While the *Hexaemeron* was a much later work than *Against Eunomius*,[164] if Basil *did* intend for 'the simplicity of the faith' to carry these same connotations in *Against Eunomius*, then it would seem that he was advocating holding to a simple faith that is derived from scripture rather than philosophical speculation.

Having considered Basil's preference for a simple, scriptural faith, we turn now to his defence of 'the tradition of the apostles'. While, as has been shown, Eunomius acknowledged the importance of the Christian tradition in his *Apology*,[165] Basil contended that he was disingenuous in his use of traditional material. For example, in 1.4 Basil characterised Eunomius' use of the creed as no more than a ploy to "escape the suspicion of innovation by accepting the faith of the fathers as being correct".[166] In fact, Basil even interpreted Eunomius' first appeal to his audience – which in the context of the 360 Council of Constantinople was probably made against "the ecclesiastical enemies of the [Heteroousion] party" – as though Eunomius was promoting his own views over and against the "those who have gone before" and "the multitude of those who are currently Christians".[167] In this way Basil argued that Eunomius was against the tradition of the Church.

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[162] Ibid. (1.10).
[163] Ibid., 224 (1.11).
[164] The *Hexaemeron* was published around 378CE. David C DeMarco, "The Presentation and Reception of Basil's Homiliae in Hexaemeron in Gregory's In Hexaemeron," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 17, no. 2 (2013): 333.
[165] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, II:373.
[166] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 88 (1.4).
[167] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, II:373; Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 86 (1.3).

Implicit in Basil's efforts to convince his readers of Eunomius' hostility towards the tradition was the idea that traditional theology is correct theology; therefore, if Eunomius stood outside of the tradition, then his beliefs were false. In fact, we see this preference for the tradition even in Eunomius' *Apology* as it is quoted in *Against Eunomius*: "the pious tradition, which has prevailed from the beginning and has come down from the fathers as a kind of norm and rule (κανόνα)."[168] Notice that the word rule (κανών), which by the second century had come "to stand for revealed truth",[169] is used here with reference to the tradition. It seems then that, at least according to the polemics of Basil and Eunomius, the tradition of the Church stood on a similar level to that of scripture.[170]

While Basil presented himself as the defender of revelation and tradition, he argued that Eunomius used these same things as a cover for the introduction of his own innovations. As mentioned earlier, Basil labelled both the choice of the 'apology' genre as well as Eunomius' use of a creed as attempts to "escape the suspicion of innovation".[171] Furthermore, Basil explicitly identified Eunomius' teacher Aetius as the *originator* of their position, claiming that they wrote things which "no one else ever dared to say".[172] Further, where church tradition was equated with divine revelation, innovation was characterised as coming from outside of the Church, even from the devil himself. This argument arises immediately, with Eunomius being depicted as an instrument of "the enemy of truth", and the means of his innovation being "external wisdom", i.e. wisdom that is external to the Church.[173] For Basil

[168] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 89 (1.4), quoting Eunomius' *Apology*.
[169] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd Edition*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd edition. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 507–508.
[170] While this claim might startle a modern evangelical, it is not dissimilar to one of Irenaeus' main anti-Gnostic arguments in his polemical treatise, *Against Heresies.*
[171] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 88, 84 (1.2, 4).
[172] Ibid., 82 (1.1).
[173] Ibid., 81 (1.1).

then, *Against Eunomius* was a defence of divine revelation and the tradition of the Church, whereas Eunomius' *Apology* was comprised of devilish innovation under the guise of revelation and tradition.

Alongside devilish innovation, Basil also argued that Eunomius misled the innocent "through the use of plausible arguments (πιθανολογία)."[174] While the idea of 'plausible arguments' seems quite neutral to the modern reader, this was not the case in the ancient world. In fact, the apostle Paul referred to πιθανολογία as a means of deceit (Col 2:4), and the connotations surrounding this word date all the way back to the philosopher Plato.[175]

In his *Theaetetus* Plato contrasted the term πιθανολογία with the idea of "cogent proof" (ἀπόδειξιν… καὶ ἀνάγκην).[176] Here Plato characterised 'plausible arguments', which were a feature of rhetoric, as inferior to the demonstration of logical necessity, which was a feature of philosophy. This argument was symptomatic of Plato's generally hostile attitude towards rhetoric. Furthermore, the "absolute priority" that Plato assigned to philosophy over rhetoric was "constantly consolidated and emphasized by most philosophers after him", including Aristotle.[177] Even in the first century BCE it was still Plato who received the blame for the separation of rhetoric and philosophy.[178] Therefore, in accusing Eunomius of using 'plausible arguments' to mislead the innocent, Basil was drawing upon a long tradition of philosophical polemic against rhetoric.

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[174] Ibid. (1.1).
[175] Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd Edition*, 812.
[176] Plato, "Theaetetus," in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. Harold N. Fowler, vol. 12 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), sec. 162e, accessed August 28, 2017, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg006.perseus-eng1.
[177] Samuel IJsseling, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Conflict: An Historical Survey* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 10–33.
[178] James A. Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric: An Introduction* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2005), 103.

The impression that Basil is trying to portray Eunomius as a mere rhetorician rather than a philosopher is furthered through his use of the term 'sophism' (σοφισμά). From the fifth century BCE the term 'sophist' (σοφιστής) was used to refer to a kind of peripatetic tutor who taught rhetoric in exchange for money.[179] In fact, it was in a fictitious dialogue with the sophist Georgias that Plato delivered his most cutting critique of rhetoric.[180] So when Basil wrote that Eunomius wanted to replace the tradition of the Church with his own "sophistical arguments",[181] and that he was trying to catch people in "the snares of his sophisms",[182] he was presenting Eunomius' arguments as nothing more than manipulative and deceitful rhetoric.

In light of the philosophical origins of Basil's polemic against rhetoric, we might be tempted to argue that Basil was presenting Eunomius' arguments as rhetoric in order to exalt the philosophical nature of his own arguments. However, we can dismiss this idea on at least two counts. The first is Basil's formerly mentioned appeal to 'the simplicity of the faith', which he contrasted with the 'demonstrations of reason' (τῶν λογικῶν ἀποδείχεων) in at least one of his later works. The second is in section 1.9, where Basil completely rejected Eunomius' use of Aristotle's *Categories* on the grounds that it was worldly wisdom and so was opposed to the "the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ".[183] So then, it seems that, at least in this polemical context, Basil rejected the devilish innovations of both rhetoric and philosophy, preferring revelation as it was mediated through the apostolic tradition of the Church.

[179] C.C.W. Taylor and Mi-Kyoung Lee, "The Sophists," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2016. (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/sophists/.
[180] Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*, 103.
[181] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 87 (1.3).
[182] Ibid. (1.4).
[183] Ibid., 103 (1.9).

In sum, Basil presented himself as a defender of the simplicity of the faith and a steward of tradition, in contrast with Eunomius who used tradition to conceal his devilish innovations and deceived people with plausible arguments and sophisms. From this polemical perspective, a simple reading of scripture was to be preferred to speculative philosophy. Yet Basil's arguments against rhetoric ultimately came from the writings of philosophers, and it remains to be seen whether Basil's practice later in the treatise lives up to the polemics of his opening rhetoric.

# Chapter 5: Conceptualisation and Privation (1.5b-1.10)

The second section of my analysis focuses on Basil's response to Eunomius' rejection of conceptualisation and privation as ways of understanding the name 'Unbegotten'.

## Conceptualisation (1.5b-1.8)

### Eunomius' Argument

After establishing, on the grounds of "innate knowledge and the teaching of the fathers", that God is "the Unbegotten, or rather… unbegotten essence",[184] Eunomius proceeded to eliminate alternate understandings of the name 'Unbegotten', beginning with 'human invention' or 'conceptualisation' (ἐπίνοια).[185] Eunomius' argument concerning conceptualisation was as follows:

> When we say 'Unbegotten', then, we do not imagine that we ought to honour God only in name, in conformity with human invention [conceptualisation]; rather, in conformity with reality, we ought to repay him the debt which above all others is most due God: the acknowledgement that he is what he is. Expressions based on invention have their existence in name and utterance only, and by their nature are dissolved along with the sounds [which make them up]; but God, whether these sounds are silent, sounding, or have even come into existence, and before anything was created, both was and is unbegotten.[186]

For Eunomius then, names based on conceptualisation had no real significance, whereas names based on natural notions (and tradition) corresponded with reality.

### Basil's Response: Overview

Basil began his response (after some initial comments) by presenting the question, "what in the world is a conceptualization?"[187] In 1.6-1.7, he answered by defining conceptualisation and giving examples of it, defending against Eunomius' accusation of its meaninglessness in

[184] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 41.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid., 41–43.
[187] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 96.

the process.[188] He then considered the presence of conceptualisations in scripture, specifically with reference to Jesus,[189] and consequently argued that the name 'Unbegotten' is indeed conceptualisation. Lastly, in 1.8 he pointed out the inconsistency of Eunomius' elevation of the name 'Unbegotten', arguing that if conceptualisation was invalid, then *all* of God's names should apply to his substance, which would be absurd.[190]

**Basil's Response: In Detail**

While Basil provided an initial refutation of Eunomius' argument,[191] of more interest for this research is Basil's positive argumentation. First, he established the meaning of 'conceptualisation' within "customary usage" (συνήθεια) or "common usage" (κοινὴ χρήσις). While, to a modern reader, the phrase 'common usage' when used in the context of language may sound like the equivalent of 'social convention', it actually refers to "the usage learned in aristocratic education",[192] and had its origins in "Stoic language theory".[193] Consequently, when Basil defined words according to 'common usage', he was not presenting his own understanding of the popular definition of a word, but was providing an authoritative definition from an external source, similar to what is now found in dictionaries.

The definition which Basil provided according to 'common usage' was this:

> …whatever seems simple and singular upon a general survey by the mind,[194] but which appears complex and plural upon detailed scrutiny and thereby is divided by the mind—this sort of thing is said to be divided through conceptualization alone.[195]

[188] Ibid., 96–98.
[189] Ibid., 99–100.
[190] Ibid., 101–102.
[191] Ibid., 96–97.
[192] Radde-Gallwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 121.
[193] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 98.
[194] DelCogliano & Radde-Gallwitz point out that "The phrase 'general survey' (ἀφρόα ἐπιβολῆ) has a long philosophical pedigree", and was used in Epicurean epistemology; Ibid., 97.
[195] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 97.

As Basil expounded upon this definition, he made it clear that, according to 'common usage', conceptualisation was the means by which the human mind divided a simple object into its complex 'conceptualisations'. For example, the human body can be broken into things like "color, shape, solidity, size, and so forth" through conceptualisation.[196] According to this definition, then, conceptualisation is the process of identifying complexity of substance in what at first appears to be simple.

Soon after, Basil gave another example, in which we see evidence of his epistemological framework, as well as what arguably could be his own understanding of conceptualisation, rather than that of common usage.

> …the concept of grain exists in everybody as something simple, by means of which we recognize grain as soon as we see it. But when we examine grain in detail we come to consider more things about it and use different designations to indicate the different things that we have conceived. For the same grain can be called at one time 'fruit,' at another time 'seed,' and again at another time 'nourishment.' It is 'fruit' as the result of farming that has been completed, 'seed' as the beginning of farming to come, and 'nourishment' as what is suitable for the development of the body of the one who eats it.[197]

First, Basil established that *everybody* is able to recognise grain, which is simple, because of their pre-existing understanding of it. As we have seen, this was in accordance with ancient epistemology such as the Stoic concept of natural notions. Then, as humans consider the different uses of grain, they give it different designations (in one context it is called 'fruit', in another, 'seed', etc.). The fundamental difference between this example, and the example of the human body, is that the human body was understood by conceptualisation to be complex, whereas the grain was presented as simple. Because grain is simple, conceptualisation is not a means of distinguishing the multiple simple elements of which it is composed, but of assigning different "designations" to one simple object according to the different contexts in

[196] Ibid., 97–98.
[197] Ibid., 98.

which it is considered. This distinction became of decisive importance when Basil then applied his understanding of conceptualisation to scripture.

However, before Basil moved on to conceptualisation in scripture, he provided a final definition, which at first glance could seem to contradict the above distinction:

> Generally speaking, all things recognized through sense-perception and which seem simple in substrate but which admit of a complex account upon further consideration are said to be considered through conceptualization.[198]

On a cursory reading, Basil appears to be reaffirming the initial definition, however, this definition is more nuanced. First, there are things which not only seem simple, but "simple in *substrate* (ὑποκειμένῳ)",[199] a term which Basil used somewhat interchangeably with 'substance' (as did the Stoics).[200] Second, in this context, conceptualisation is not the means of uncovering the complex *nature* of an object, but a "complex *account*" (i.e. having multiple names). Therefore, Basil's final definition of conceptualisation is consistent with his example of grain, which is simple in substance but bears multiple designations.

Having given the example of grain and provided his modified definition, Basil then drew a parallel between the understanding of conceptualisation "outlined above", and that "learned from the divine word."[201] He argued that the different titles that Jesus applied to himself, such as "'door,' 'way,' 'bread,' 'vine,' 'shepherd,' and 'light,'"[202] were said by way of conceptualisation – an argument which had significant parallels with Origen's treatment of conceptualisation in *Against Celsus*.[203] In the process, he made a number of claims that were

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[198] Ibid.
[199] Basil of Caesarea, "Adversus Eunomium," 524.
[200] See Robertson, "Stoic and Aristotelian Notions of Substance in Basil of Caesarea."
[201] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 99.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Johannes Zachhuber, "Christological Titles – Conceptually Applied?," in *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium II: An English Version with Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the 10th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Olomouc, September 15-18, 2004)*, ed. Lenka Karfíková, Scot Douglass, and Johannes Zachhuber (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 9ff, accessed July 14, 2017,

grounded in philosophical thought. On the one hand, he argued that Jesus "is not a polyonym", meaning that the different titles which Jesus applied to himself were not synonymous (as in the case of words like 'seat' and 'chair'), but carried their own distinct meanings.[204] On the other hand, he also affirmed that Jesus "is one in substrate, and one substance, simple and not composite",[205] protecting himself from the accusation that he perceived each title as applying to a different element of Jesus' being, which would mean that Jesus was complex. In these ways he negated both avenues of understanding designations as defining substance. Finally, he presented his alternative: different conceptualisations correspond to "his different activities and his relation to the objects of his divine benefaction".[206] Therefore, Basil saw the various titles which Christ applied to himself as meaningful, but not with respect to substance as in the case of Eunomius.[207]

After demonstrating that the titles which Christ applied to himself were conceptualisations, Basil went on to argue that the same can be said for those used of God the Father:

> Whenever we consider ages past, we find that the life of God transcends every beginning and say that he is 'unbegotten.' Whenever we stretch our mind forward to the ages to come, we designate the one who is without boundary, infinite, and comprehended by no terminal point as 'incorruptible.' … What reason could there be, then, for denying that each of these names is conceptualized and that they constitute a confession of what truly belongs to God?[208]

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https://www.academia.edu/3816975/Christological_Titles_-_Conceptually_Applied_Contra_Eunomium_II_294-358. It is also worth noting that the term 'conceptualisation' had precedent in Stoic and Epicurean theology, even if Origen's appropriation of it was highly original and driven by exegesis; see Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, II:376 quoting Diogenes Laertius; cf. Radde-Gallwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 66.

[204] Radde-Gallwitz suggests that "Porphyry's 'Commentary on Aristotle's Categories' or something like it" could have been where Basil learned his understanding of polyonyms. Radde-Gallwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 150.

[205] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 99.

[206] Ibid., 100.

[207] It ought to be mentioned that in this same section Basil uses the word ἰδιώμα, which is a significant term in the development of Basil's trinitarian theology, for the first time. DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 99.

[208] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 100.

Whereas Eunomius wanted to identify the name ‘Unbegotten’ as the product of a natural notion about God, and therefore a confession that “he is what he is”, Basil characterised it as a product of human thought, but argued that this did not exclude it from signifying something that “truly belongs to God”.[209]

Having completed his argument for understanding the name ‘Unbegotten’ as conceptualisation, Basil concluded his treatment of conceptualisation with an exposition of the arbitrary nature of Eunomius’ elevation of the name ‘Unbegotten’. First, if conceptualisation is invalid then *all* of God’s names must apply directly to his substance. Consequently, all of God’s names would be synonyms, which Basil held to be absurd as “Each of the names is deprived of its proper signification, and conventions are established that contradict both common usage and the teaching of the Spirit.”[210] Here Basil demonstrated a concern for protecting the diversity of language used of God in scripture, whereas Eunomius argued that all designations used of the Father and Son should be understood in light of the names ‘Unbegotten’ and ‘Begotten’. Lastly, Basil argued that even if all names did apply to God’s substance, then Jesus’ substance would be similar to the Father’s due to the number of names that they shared. For Basil, then, Eunomius’ elevation of the name ‘Unbegotten’ was arbitrary, and his rejection of conceptualisation as a way of talking about God had catastrophic consequences for the diverse signification of language in scripture.[211]

[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid., 102.

## Privation (1.9-1.10)

### Eunomius' Argument

The second alternative understanding of 'Unbegotten' which Eunomius rejected was that 'Unbegotten' is a privative. As Basil later highlighted, Eunomius' understanding of privation can be traced back to Aristotle's *Categories*, which provided the following definition of privation:

> We say that that which is capable of some particular faculty or possession has suffered privation [*sterêsis*] when the faculty or possession in question is in no way present in that in which, and at the time in which, it should be naturally present.[212]

Along these lines, Eunomius argued that God was not "begotten and then deprived of that quality so as to become *un*begotten!"[213] Therefore, the name 'Unbegotten' could not be understood as a privative.

### Basil's Response

Basil's initial response was a rhetorical one, where he identified the word privation as an Aristotelian category, and proceeded to demonise Eunomius on the basis of his use of pagan philosophy.[214] Then he dismissed the importance of the designation 'privative' on the basis of its worldly origin.[215] Next Basil argued, on the basis of the structural similarity between the traditional divine attributes 'unbegotten', "'incorruptible,' 'immortal,' and 'invisible'",[216] all of which begin with "an alpha-privative",[217] that they all ought to be treated in the same way.

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[212] Laurence R. Horn and Heinrich Wansing, "Negation," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2017. (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017), sec. 1.7, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/negation/ quoting Aristotle's *Categories*.
[213] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 43.
[214] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 103.
[215] Radde-Gallwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 103–104.
[216] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 103; According to Radde-Gallwitz, as early as Justin Martyr (second cent. CE) the words ἀθάνατος (immortal) and ἄφθαρτος (incorruptible) were associated with ἀγέννητος (unbegotten). Radde-Gallwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 70.
[217] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 103.

Basil proceeded to provide definitions for each word, presenting them as negative terms, but not in the sense of Aristotle's definition of privation:

> Just as 'incorruptible' signifies that no corruption is present to God, and 'invisible' that he is beyond every comprehension through the eyes, and 'incorporeal' that his substance is not three-dimensional, and 'immortal' that dissolution will never happen to him, so too do we also say that 'unbegotten' indicates that no begetting is present to him.[218]

Having presented these negative definitions, Basil returned to privation. For Basil, all these terms either *are* or *are not* privatives, but if Eunomius wanted to argue that all besides 'Unbegotten' are privative, then Eunomius would have to demonstrate how the other terms corresponded with the Aristotelian definition, e.g. "what is the preceding possession whose privation is revealed by 'incorruptible'?"[219] Therefore, Basil argued that the above terms, including 'unbegotten', are 'privatives', but not in the Aristotelian sense.

As part of his defence of 'privation', Basil also presented an overview of his own understanding of how names apply to God:

> There is not one name which encompasses the entire nature of God and suffices to express it adequately. Rather, there are many diverse names, and each one contributes, in accordance with its own meaning, to a notion that is altogether dim and trifling as regards the whole but that is at least sufficient for us. Now some of the names applied to God are indicative of what is present to God; others, on the contrary, of what is not present. From these two something of an impression of God is made in us, namely, from the denial of what is incongruous with him and from the affirmation of what belongs to him.[220]

Here we see privation situated within a broader understanding of theological language. First, Basil asserted that there is no word which can, by itself, adequately express the substance of God (as Eunomius claimed that 'Unbegotten' does). In fact, not even the multitude of names that are used of God exhaustively describe Him. Concerning these various names, Basil made two claims. First, each name of God "contributes" to our understanding of him "in

[218] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 104.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid., 105.

accordance with its own meaning". This claim stood in opposition to Eunomius' argument that all names which are applied to God are to be understood in light of the natural notion concerning God's true name and substance. Second, some names used of God make positive statements about God, while others make negative statements. This second claim situated privative terms within a twofold understanding of language about God.

On the basis of the above distinction between positive and negative names, Basil argued that it is absurd to argue that a negative name such as 'unbegotten' defines the substance of God. For Basil, a negative name indicated "that which does not have being", and so is not fitting as a definition for the substance of God, which is his "very being".[221] Bear in mind that Basil was *not* arguing that 'unbegotten' is an inappropriate word to use of God. Rather, he was arguing that negative words can only tell us what is not true about something, and therefore cannot say anything positive about the substance of God. This was Basil's final argument about privation.

## Summary and Significance

In sum, Eunomius wanted to eliminate both conceptualisation and privation as alternatives to his understanding of the name 'Unbegotten' as the product of a natural notion about God's substance. Basil rejected Eunomius' argument that names based on conceptualisation had no real significance, arguing first from common usage, and then the diversity of scriptural names applied to Christ, that the name 'Unbegotten' was the result of our inability to conceptualise a beginning to the life of God, and as such is the product of conceptualisation. Further, if conceptualisation *was* invalid then all names would apply to God's substance, so Eunomius' elevation of 'Unbegotten' was entirely arbitrary. Basil also rejected Eunomius' Aristotelian

[221] Ibid., 106.

definition of privation, arguing instead that ‘Unbegotten’ ought to be understood in the same way as words like ‘incorruptible’, which indicate what is not present in God. Lastly, Basil situated his understanding of privation within a broader understanding of theological language, arguing that no single name can define God’s substance. Rather, various names make contributions to our knowledge of God according to their own meaning, and without exhaustively defining his substance. Some of these names make positive claims, others negative.

Already it is apparent that, in practice, Basil was much more indebted to reason and philosophy than his earlier polemics would suggest. This can be seen in: his defence of conceptualisation, which was essentially a function of human reason; his appeal to common usage, which was ultimately dependent on Stoic language theory; his acceptance of divine simplicity, which had its roots in Platonism; his argument about the arbitrary nature of Eunomius’ elevation of ‘Unbegotten’, which was an appeal to logical consistency; and his familiarity with Aristotle’s *Categories*, even if this was only seen in his rejection of the same. These and other observations will be considered in more detail after the analysis.

# Chapter 6: The Mystery of Divine Substance (1.11-1.16a)

## Eunomius' Argument

The third section of my analysis focuses on Basil's response to Eunomius' claim that the name 'Unbegotten' should be understood as *unbegotten substance*. While Eunomius first made this claim in section seven,[222] he restated it at the end of section eight:

> So then, if, as shown by the preceding argument, 'the Unbegotten' is based neither on [conceptualisation] nor on privation, and is not applied to a part of him only (for he is without parts), and does not exist within him as something separate (for he is simple and uncompounded), and is not something different alongside him (for he is one and only he is unbegotten), then 'the Unbegotten' must be unbegotten essence.[223]

## Basil's Response

It was at this point in his rebuttal of Eunomius' argument that Basil chose to provide substantial argumentation against this understanding of 'Unbegotten' as unbegotten substance. However, before moving on to his major arguments Basil made three preliminary comments. First, he clarified his own position on the matter: "I too would say that the substance of God is unbegotten, but I would not say that unbegottenness is the substance."[224] Second, he pointed out that one of Eunomius' arguments about divine simplicity was redundant, as partlessness and simplicity were the same thing.[225] Finally, he argued that his refutation of this understanding of 'Unbegotten' did not need to be comprehensive, as (1) Eunomius' conclusion did not necessarily follow from the given argument, and (2) Basil had already demonstrated the validity of conceptualisation and privation, thereby undoing Eunomius' argument.[226]

In 1.12-1.14 Basil presented his major arguments against Eunomius' claim. These arguments

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[222] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 41.
[223] Ibid., 43.
[224] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 107.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.

can be broken into five sections: (1) the question of Eunomius' (epistemological) sources; (2) the question of the substance of earth; (3) the secrecy of the divine name; (4) the exclusive comprehension of God's substance; and (5) the analogical nature of scriptural accounts of God's substance.

First, after some opening rhetoric about the arrogance of claiming to understand the substance of God, Basil posed the question of the sources of Eunomius' knowledge about God's substance. In response, he presented two possible epistemological avenues – "a common notion", and "the Spirit's teaching".[227] Concerning the common notion, Basil argued that "this tells us that God exists, not what God is".[228] This argument resembled the positions of "both the Epicureans and Stoics",[229] who believed that there was a common notion which included God's existence, as well a number of his attributes.[230] Concerning the Spirit's teaching (by which Basil meant scripture), Basil quoted David (Ps 138:6), Isaiah (53:8), and then Paul (Rom 11:33), all of whom declared something of the unattainable, unknown, or inexhaustible nature of knowledge about God. From this Basil concluded:

> If these things are beyond the understanding of those who have attained the measure of the knowledge of Paul, how great is the conceit of those who profess the substance of God?[231]

Basil's first argument, then, is that God's substance cannot be known either by common notions, or from scripture, and therefore any claim to know God's substance is nothing but arrogance.

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[227] Ibid., 108.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, The Fathers of the Church (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 108; For the Epicurean view see Epicurus' *Epistle to Menoeceus*: Epicurus, *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*, trans. Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 28–29; and Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, I:43-45.
[230] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz identify Basil's *Ep.* 234 as a letter with a 'similar view' to the one articulated here. While it does include a list of attributes, it does not include any talk of common notions; see DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 109; cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters and Selected Works*.
[231] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 109.

Following this argument, Basil asked about the substance of the "earth" (soil), stating that he would believe Eunomius and his followers "when they concern themselves with things beyond every notion" if they could give an adequate account of the substance of earth.[232] Rather than asking about Eunomius' sources, this time Basil asked what "mode of comprehension" (κατάληψις) he would use to understand the substance of the earth.[233] In Stoic epistemology "'comprehension', is the kind of knowledge that stands between 'opinion' (δόξα) and 'scientific understanding' (ἐπιστήμη)", where 'opinion' is a fallible understanding of a proposition, 'comprehension' is a true understanding of a proposition, and 'scientific understanding' is "a systematic comprehension of a whole body of interrelated propositions."[234] According to DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, Basil used this "Stoic technical term… to demonstrate that Eunomius does not have certain, reliable knowledge of the substance of the earth", let alone the substance of God.[235] In response to this question of Eunomius' mode of comprehension, Basil proceeded to discuss two possibilities: "a rational account (λόγος) or sense-perception (αἴσθησις)".[236] After arguing that none of the senses are able to identify substance,[237] Basil moved onto the 'rational account', which he equated with arguments from scripture.[238] Basil then provided a brief discussion of the first verses of Genesis before concluding that "knowledge of the earth's substance is established neither by the testimony derived from sense-perception nor by the teaching derived from the rational

[232] Ibid., 109–110.
[233] Ibid., 110.
[234] DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 110.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 110.
[237] Ultimately, "Basil's enumeration of the proper objects of each of the five senses" is based on Aristotle: DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 110; see also, Aristotle, "On the Soul," in *Aristotle VIII: On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, On Breath*, trans. W. S. Hett, vol. 8, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 8–203.
[238] Concerning the translation of λόγος as 'rational account', DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz write "The term λόγος here has the sense of 'reason' but also the sense of an expression of reason, such as one might find in the Scriptures; hence our translation, 'rational account.'" DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 110.

account."[239] Having ruled out the possibility of comprehending the substance of the earth, Basil reemphasised the sheer arrogance of the claim to understand God's substance.

The next two sections of Basil's argument were primarily scriptural. The first was based on Exodus 3:15 and 6:2-3, from which Basil argued that if God did not reveal his name to the patriarchs, then how could Eunomius say that "God has manifested not only his name, but also his very substance"?[240] The second began with the suggestion that "comprehension of God's substance" is beyond every non-divine "rational nature."[241] Basil supported this argument with Matthew 11:27, and 1 Corinthians 2:10-11, both of which ascribed exclusive knowledge of the Father to either the Son or the Spirit. Basil continued, "What, then, will remain distinctive about the knowledge that the Only-Begotten or the Holy Spirit has," if Eunomius and his followers "have comprehension of the very substance?"[242] For Basil then, scripture showed that knowledge of God's "very substance" was "incomprehensible to everyone except the Only-Begotten and the Holy Spirit."[243]

While, at this point, Basil seemed to have ruled out the possibility of human knowledge of the divine substance, he then proceeded to present an alternate path to knowledge of God – we "gain knowledge of the Maker through what he has made".[244] Basil was not here putting forward a natural theology, but a hermeneutic whereby the 'figurative language' that is used in scripture is understood analogically:

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[239] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 111. Note that the testimony and teaching being "derived" from the senses or scripture reflects ancient epistemology, where knowledge was derived from simple first principles, which, for Christians, often included scripture; see Radde-Gallwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 40–48.
[240] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 112.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid., 113.
[244] Ibid.

> Since whatever the theologians seem to have recorded about the substance of God has been expressed in figurative language or even in allegories, the words transport us to other notions.[245]

Basil then compared those who read this 'figurative language' according to the "mere letter" with those who "ascend, by means of the letter, to the loftier notions".[246] While it may seem as though Basil had here contradicted his earlier arguments, a close reading shows that he had not. In the previous two sections, Basil was arguing against the "comprehension" of God's substance in a technical sense, which involved the true understanding of a proposition. It was in this way that he argued earlier that God's substance was "incomprehensible".[247] In the discussion of figurative language, then, Basil was not arguing for 'comprehension' of God's substance, but of vague, ethereal notions concerning God's substance which could be understood from the metaphorical images of God that are present in scripture. Nevertheless, Basil ultimately discounted "idle curiosity about the substance", arguing instead that we should content ourselves with "the confession that [God] is" rather than investigating "what he is".[248]

## An Alternate Understanding of 'Unbegotten'

Having dealt with Eunomius' claim that 'Unbegotten' should be understood as defining God's substance, Basil presented arguments for an alternate understanding of 'Unbegotten'. First, he established that we understand that God has no beginning from our inability to conceptualise anything greater than God.[249] Then, after using human begetting as an analogy, he argued that "when we talk about God, the term 'unbegotten' does not signify his 'what' but that he is 'from no source.'"[250]

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[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid., 114.
[250] Ibid.

In order to consolidate this point, Basil turned to the genealogy in the Gospel of Luke, and argued on the basis of Adam coming from God, that the genealogy did not indicate *what* those who were listed were, but "the proximate origin from which each one came."[251] Then, after equating the phrases "from no one" and "without origin" with the word "unbegotten", he argued that it would be absurd to answer the question of God's substance with any of these phrases.[252] Basil then concluded that "the term 'unbegotten'" tells us "what God is like rather than his very nature".[253]

Finally, before moving on to the next part of Eunomius' argument, Basil again made an argument from reason for understanding 'unbegotten' as indicating that something "does not have the origin of its being from another source."[254] Similarly to the section on conceptualisation (1.6), Basil presented the word 'unbegotten' as the past counterpart of "without end", both of which were understood from the process of thinking about the life of God, which is "always outside of and exceeding whatever we can conceive".[255] In this way Basil concluded his argument about the meaning of the name 'Unbegotten' with an appeal to reason.

## Summary and Significance

In summary, Basil refuted Eunomius' claim to understand God's substance by: (1) eliminating common notions and scripture as avenues for understanding God's substance; (2) arguing that even the substance of the earth cannot be 'comprehended' through either 'sense-perception' or 'a rational account' (λόγος); (3) arguing from the secrecy of the divine name in

[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid., 114–115.
[253] Ibid., 115. Bear in mind that "nature" (φύσις) was often used interchangeably with "substance" (ουσια).
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid.

scripture that God's substance must be even more hidden; (4) presenting passages of scripture that assign exclusive comprehension of the divine substance to the Son and Spirit; and (5) presenting metaphorical images of God in scripture as an alternate route to knowledge (but not comprehension) of God's substance. Basil then provided an alternative understanding of 'Unbegotten' using reason – which included conceptualisation and analogy from human begetting – and using arguments from scripture.

In the above arguments we have witnessed some fairly explicit treatments of epistemological sources other than tradition and scripture, including common notions and sense-perception. We have also witnessed a range of ways of treating scripture, from the presentation of propositional truths about comprehension of the divine substance, to hermeneutical arguments for understanding figurative language analogically. These observations and others drawn from 1.11-1.16 will certainly contribute to a clearer understanding of the role of philosophy in *Against Eunomius*.

# Chapter 7: Father and Son (1.16b-1.18)

The final section of this analysis focuses on Basil's response to Eunomius' claim that unbegotten substance is incommunicable and, as such, the Unbegotten is beyond comparison or fellowship with the Begotten.

## Eunomius' Argument

Having presented his argument that God is unbegotten substance, Eunomius introduced the fundamental consequence of this understanding:

> …if God is unbegotten in the sense shown by the foregoing demonstration, he could never undergo a generation which involved the sharing of his own distinctive nature with offspring of that generation, and could never admit of any comparison or association (κοινωνίαν) with the thing begotten.[256]

For Eunomius, because the name 'Unbegotten' is the definition of God's substance, any being that has been begotten cannot be compared to, or associated with God.[257]

## Basil's Response

Basil's initial response was to criticise Eunomius' use of the names 'Unbegotten' and 'Begotten' in place of 'Father' and 'Son' – an argument which he returned to at the end of this section.[258] In order to better understand this criticism, it is helpful to consider similar arguments from sections 1.5 and 2.22.

Basil put this criticism forward first, and in more detail, in section 1.5, where he argued that 'Father' is a superior name because (a) it is scriptural, whereas 'Unbegotten' is not; (b) it includes the meaning of unbegotten; and (c) Father implies "a relation, thereby introducing

[256] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 43.
[257] While Eunomius went on to defend this claim in some detail, Basil addressed Eunomius' claim apart from his arguments, so I will proceed no further in my analysis of this argument.
[258] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 115–116, 118–119.

the notion of the Son."[259] First, the argument that the name 'Father' was scriptural, whereas 'Unbegotten' was not, was not new to polemical works against the Heteroousions, as it had already been argued by Athanasius in a number of his works.[260] Second, concerning the argument that the name 'Father' included the meaning of 'unbegotten', Basil wrote that "…the one who is really Father is the only one who is from no other".[261] In this context, Basil allowed his understanding of the word 'Father' to be determined not by his own "human experience", but by his understanding of God. Once again, this approach to theological language "takes its classic form in Athanasius".[262]

The third idea, that the names Father and Son imply a relation, is revisited in 2.22. While this passage is not within the scope of my analysis, it would be beneficial to consider it briefly in order to better grasp Basil's understanding of the name 'Father'. This will also require a brief exposition of the corresponding section of Eunomius' argument.

First, in section 16 of his *Apology*, Eunomius linked the "communication of essence" that was associated with the title 'Father', with the idea of 'passion' that accompanied human intercourse.[263] On this basis, Eunomius argued that when the name 'Father' was used of God, it had nothing in common with the same word when used of humans.[264] In this way, Eunomius rejected the argument that the names Father and Son indicated a communication of essence.[265]

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[259] Ibid., 94.
[260] These works included *De Synodis* and *Orationes Contra Arianos*; see Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, I:242.
[261] Notice the allusion here to Basil's later argument that unbegotten means "from no source". Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 94.
[262] Robertson, "Relatives in Basil of Caesarea," 278.
[263] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 53.
[264] Ibid., 53–55.
[265] Ibid., 55.

While Basil spent the whole of section 2.22 refuting this argument, our interest lies primarily in his treatment of the term 'Father'. For Basil, when talking about God who is 'holy' and 'impassible',[266] the everyday meaning of the word 'father' should not be rejected, but should be 'purified' of "lowly and fleshly concepts".[267] It follows that the manner of begetting should be laid aside, but the likeness of substance which accompanies begetting should be retained.[268] Further, according to Basil, everyday usage of the names 'father' and 'son' do not primarily "give rise to the notion of corporeal passions", but "indicate only their relation to one another."[269] Having presented these arguments, Basil concluded with a definition of the two names:

> The Father is he who provides to another the beginning of being in a nature similar to his own, whereas the Son is he who has the beginning of this being from another in a begotten way.[270]

Concerning the sources of this understanding of 'Father' and 'Son', it has been argued that Basil's treatment of these names bears strong parallels with the ancient grammarians' theory of 'relatives', which may have been influenced by the Stoics and has similarities with Aristotle's understanding of the same.[271] Robertson identified Basil's "rhetorical and grammatical education" as the source of this influence.[272]

Returning to the sections at hand (1.16b-1.18), after his initial expression of preference for the names 'Father' and 'Son', Basil then responded to Eunomius' argument that "[God] could never undergo a generation which involved the sharing of his own distinctive nature with offspring of that generation".[273] Basil's line of attack was to claim that Eunomius was

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[266] Impassibility had its roots in Aristotelian thought; see Aristotle, *On the Soul*, III, parts 4-5.
[267] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 164.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid. While not insignificant, a consideration of the temporal implications of Basil's language here is beyond the scope of this essay.
[271] Robertson, "Relatives in Basil of Caesarea," 280–283, 287.
[272] Ibid., 287.
[273] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 43.

arguing not that the Father is unable to generate one of the same substance as him, but that he is unable to generate anything at all.[274] For Basil, this meant that "God is not Father and there is no [Son]";[275] a "blasphemous statement" which had high shock value.[276] Whether or not this interpretation of Eunomius' statement was warranted,[277] Basil's definition of 'Father' from 2.22 means that if God cannot provide "to another the beginning of being in a nature similar to his own," then he cannot truly be 'Father'.[278]

Having dealt with the first part of Eunomius' argument, Basil moved onto the second: "He would escape all comparison or fellowship with the one who is begotten."[279] Basil's response to this was composite, alternating between arguments from scripture and arguments from reason. First, he appealed to scripture in defence of the comparison of the Father and Son, citing John 12:45 and 14:9, both of which equate knowledge of the Son with knowledge of the Father.[280] Then, he switched to arguments from reason:

> How could the Son show in himself the one who neither admits comparison nor possesses any fellowship with him? That which is known is not comprehended through that which is unlike and foreign to it, but it is natural for something to become known by what has affinity with it.[281]

We find here an epistemological principle – in order for something known to reveal something unknown, it must resemble that which is unknown in some way. Returning to scriptural imagery, Basil used a "seal" and its "impression" (John 6:27), then an "image" and its "archetype" (Col 1:15) as examples of the above phenomenon,[282] then claiming that Eunomius,

[274] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 116.
[275] A statement which Basil was unwilling to complete, see Ibid., 117.
[276] Ibid.
[277] In keeping with my methodology I will not indulge in a discussion of the merit of this interpretation.
[278] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 164.
[279] Ibid., 117.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.

by his argument, had rejected "all the terms handed down by the Holy Spirit for the glorification of the Only-Begotten".[283]

At this point, Basil presented an argument that was highly significant in his ecclesial context: "In my opinion, I say that 'existing in the form of God' [Phil 2.6] means the same as 'existing in the substance of God.'"[284] As he continued, a hermeneutical argument was revealed:

> For just as "having taken up the form of a slave" [Phil 2.7] signifies that our Lord was begotten in the substance of humanity, so too saying "existing in the form of God" [Phil 2:6] certainly reveals the distinctive feature of the divine substance.[285]

So, for Basil, if "the form of a slave" signifies Christ's full humanity, then, to be consistent, "the form of God" must also signify Christ's full divinity.

Then, after returning to the epistemological principle that the known reveals the unknown through the affinity of the former with the latter, Basil contrasted a series of Eunomius' claims with passages from scripture: comparing John 17:10 with the claim that the Father has no fellowship with the Son; comparing John 5:26 with the claim that the Father has no comparison with the Son; and then arguing that Eunomius' understanding contradicts the claim of Hebrews 1:3 that the son is the radiance of the Father.[286] Finally, Basil returned to his very first criticism, that Eunomius used the names 'Unbegotten' and 'Begotten', rather than 'Father' and 'Son'.

[283] Ibid., 118.
[284] Ibid. Being affiliated with members of the Homoiousion party, Basil's argument for the Son being of the same substance as the Father is a significant one.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid.

## Summary and Significance

In summary, Basil refuted Eunomius' claim that the substance of the 'Unbegotten' is incommunicable and therefore cannot be compared with, and has no fellowship with, the 'Begotten' in the following ways. First, he began and ended with the criticism that Eunomius used the names 'Unbegotten' and 'Begotten' rather than the scriptural names 'Father' and 'Son', an argument which Basil had already presented in 1.5. Second, Basil argued that Eunomius thought that the Father is incapable of generating anything at all, and thus is not truly Father. Finally, Basil argued against Eunomius' rejection of both the comparison of, and fellowship between, the Father and Son by presenting a series of arguments from reason and scripture, most of which were based around the idea that knowledge of the Father is impossible if he shares nothing in common with the Son. The final section also included a hermeneutical argument for the full divinity of the Son.

This section of analysis reveals two quite distinct approaches to points of conflict. The first revolved around the meaning of the name 'Father', and was influenced by the grammatical theory of relatives as well as a range of other arguments that were ultimately based on reason and experience. The second was adopted in response to the ontological separation of Father and Son, and relied on relatively simple readings of scripture, with support from epistemological and hermeneutical arguments. This analysis will be helpful for understanding the role of reason and philosophy in relation to scripture.

# Chapter 8: The Role of Philosophy in Basil's *Against Eunomius*

As seen in the first part of the above analysis, Basil's polemical perspective about the role of philosophy in relation to scripture and tradition was quite black and white. The faith was 'simple', the tradition was pure, and innovation – which was brought about by the means of external wisdom and 'plausible arguments' – was 'satanic'. Because of the priority of tradition, any attempt of Eunomius to ground his understanding in it had to be undermined, so it was declared to be disingenuous and deceitful. Because of the ill repute of innovation, arguments from reason could be discounted as sophistic snares made to trap the simple, and philosophy was discounted as being the wisdom of the world and therefore not of God.[287] In sum, because of the simplicity of the faith and the purity of the tradition, reason and philosophy were deemed to be unnecessarily innovative, and even satanic. However, the above analysis has revealed that, in practice, many of Basil's later arguments were indebted to various schools of philosophy and filled with appeals to reason – even rhetorical arguments. The following discussion draws from this analysis to consider the *role* of philosophy in the major arguments of 1.1-1.18 of *Against Eunomius*, focusing on Basil's epistemological framework, understanding of language, use of reason, and use of scripture.

## Epistemological Framework

As we have seen, in ancient philosophy common notions (under various names) were understood to be the epistemological foundation of all knowledge. In this way Basil was no different than his contemporaries. As evidence, we can recall Basil's argument that a common notion was the source of our knowledge of God's existence. There is also a passage in 1.5 which was not treated in the analysis, where Basil ridiculed Eunomius for seeking to

[287] Ironically, Basil's arguments against sophistry were drawn from philosophical polemic against rhetoric; see pp. 37-38.

demonstrate the validity of a common notion using syllogisms.[288] It is clear then that Basil endorsed the concept of common notions.

Three concepts that were closely related to common notions were epistemological simplicity, ontological simplicity, and substance ontology. First, as we have seen, in ancient epistemology the referent of a natural notion was always simple. An example of this concept in *Against Eunomius* is Basil's argument that "the concept of grain exists in everybody as something simple".[289] We also saw Basil's acceptance of this idea's ontological equivalent – the simplicity of God – when Basil corrected Eunomius' use of terminology relating to divine simplicity.[290] This concept of ontological simplicity went hand in hand with the idea of substance. Knowledge of substance was the highest form of knowledge, and, as we have seen, the idea that the name 'Unbegotten' defined the substance of God was one of the primary points of conflict in the debate between Basil and Eunomius.

Whereas Eunomius understood the name 'Unbegotten' to be the product of a natural notion (φύσις), Basil argued that it had its origin in human conceptualisation (θέσις).[291] As we saw, conceptualisation referred to the use of *reason* to provide a complex account of a simple object. Further, conceptualisations like 'Unbegotten' corresponded with activities, relations, and attributes, rather than with substance. It was this concept of conceptualisation that formed the decisive difference between Basil's epistemology and that of Eunomius. This is particularly relevant for my question as it attributed the origins of certain names to *human reason* rather than to 'nature', or revelation.

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[288] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 92 In this same passage Basil also uses the Epicurean term "preconception" (προλεπσις).
[289] Ibid., 58.
[290] Ibid., 107.
[291] The terms θέσις and φύσις typify the two poles of ancient debates about the origin of language; see p. 30.

Another epistemological avenue which Basil recognised was sense-perception. We saw this in both his elimination of the senses as a mode of comprehending the substance of the earth,[292] and also in his second definition of conceptualisation, where objects were recognised "through sense-perception".[293] There is also a passage which was not treated where he argued that "someone who uses rational argumentation to prove what is already quite well known through sense perception is considered to be utterly absurd."[294] While the idea of sense-perception may not seem overly philosophical, it was classically treated by Aristotle in his *On the Soul*, and the influence of this work can be seen in "Basil's enumeration of the proper objects of each of the five senses".[295] This provides yet another example of the significant role that philosophy played in Basil's epistemological framework.

## Other Philosophical Influences

Within the context of his epistemological framework, Basil also appealed to sources from his grammatical education, as well as logical consistency. First, Basil's understanding of language was influenced by the grammarians, who were themselves influenced by various sources including the Stoics. Evidence of the former influence was primarily seen in Basil's appeal to common usage as a means of understanding the word conceptualisation,[296] as well as parallels between the grammatical theory of relatives and Basil's understanding of the names 'Father' and 'Son'.

Basil's appeals to logical consistency will be considered within the context of one of his arguments. In section 1.8 Basil refuted Eunomius' argument that 'Unbegotten' was not

[292] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 110.
[293] Ibid., 98.
[294] Ibid., 92.
[295] Basil outlined the objects of the senses in his elimination of sense-perception as a means of learning the substance of the earth; see DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 110.
[296] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 97–98.

conceptualisation on the basis that Eunomius did not apply his reasoning consistently, and arbitrarily elevated the name 'Unbegotten'.[297] According to Basil, if conceptualisation was not a valid way of talking about God (as Eunomius had claimed) then it would follow from their shared epistemological framework that all names used of God would apply to God's simple substance and so be synonymous. This would "contradict both common usage and the teaching of the Spirit",[298] by which Basil meant it would not make adequate sense of the diverse signification of names applied to God in scripture. In this instance then, Basil disqualified Eunomius' argument on the basis of its inconsistency, as well as pointing out the problematic nature of the logically consistent form of his argument.

## Use of Scripture

Having begun to explore the importance of reason in Basil's arguments, as well as having established the importance of philosophy for Basil's epistemological framework and understanding of language, it is time to consider the role of philosophy and reason in relation to scripture. At times Basil's use of scripture is fairly simple, as advocated in his earlier polemics. For example, Basil appealed to Matthew 28:19 as a basis for calling God Father,[299] and quoted Matthew 11:27 in conjunction with 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 to show that "comprehension of God's substance" is exclusive to members of the godhead.[300] Both of these examples demonstrate a 'simple' reading of scripture.

Other arguments included the introduction of hermeneutical principles alongside scriptural references. For example, in 1.17-1.18, while demonstrating that the Father can be compared with the Son and has fellowship with the Son from straight-forward readings of a series of

[297] Ibid., 101–102.
[298] Ibid., 101.
[299] Ibid., 94.
[300] Ibid., 112.

verses (John 6:27; 12:45; 14:9; 17:10; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3), Basil also appealed to the epistemological principle that the known reveals the unknown through the affinity of the former with the latter.[301] Similarly, with reference to Philippians 2:6-7, Basil argued on the basis of logical consistency that if "the form of a slave" indicated Christ's humanity, then "'the form of God' certainly reveals the distinctive feature of the divine substance."[302] Another hermeneutical argument was seen in section 1.14, where Basil argued that figurative language about God's substance ought to be understood analogically, as a literal reading of all such accounts contradicted the doctrine of divine simplicity. The introduction of hermeneutical principles such as these highlights the fact that while the *content* of scripture was rarely disputed, its *meaning* was a subject of much debate. As such, reason and philosophy were often drawn upon to aid the interpretation of scripture.

Aside from introducing hermeneutical principles, Basil sometimes presented arguments from scripture that were tangential to the meaning of the passages in question. For example, on at least two occasions Basil made arguments from the use of language in scripture. The first instance was in 1.7, where he argued from the names that Jesus called himself (door, way, bread, etc.) that it was legitimate to understand divine names as conceptualisations.[303] The second instance was in 1.8, where Basil argued from the diversity of names applied to God in scripture, in conjunction with the diverse signification attributed to them by common usage, that it would be absurd to understand all of God's names as synonyms.[304] From these examples we see that sometimes scripture was seen as an authoritative source from which to make rational arguments about language, even if those arguments were not directly related to the interpretation of the passages in question.

[301] Ibid., 117–118.
[302] Ibid., 118.
[303] Ibid., 99–100.
[304] Ibid., 101–102.

The final point of this discussion of the role of philosophy in relation to scripture is that Basil treated both as valid sources of knowledge, and often supported scriptural arguments with philosophical ones and vice versa. For example, in his arguments that humans cannot comprehend the substance of God, Basil presented both common notions and scripture as possible paths to this knowledge. Similarly, in his arguments against human comprehension of the substance of the earth, Basil presented both sense-perception and scripture as possible avenues. Further, in some of the above examples Basil presented scripture in conjunction with common usage or divine simplicity.

**Synthesis**

The above analysis has revealed a variety of approaches to scripture, ranging from 'simple' readings, through to arguments from scripture supported by, or interpreted through, philosophical arguments and vice versa. Concerning the relation between scripture and philosophy in the thought of Basil, a number of points can be made. First, when it came to God's name, Basil prioritised scripture over the philosophical elements of his epistemological framework. This is clearly seen in his arguments for the primacy of the name Father; especially that 'Father' is found in scripture, whereas 'Unbegotten' is not. Second, as much as Basil may have advocated 'the simplicity of the faith', he often used reason and philosophy in order to support his interpretation of scripture, especially in contexts where the interpretation of the passage was controversial, as with Philippians 2:6-7. Lastly, Basil was not ashamed to be seen appealing to extra-biblical epistemological sources, as seen in him explicitly identifying common notions and sense-perception, alongside scripture, as possible sources of knowledge.

In sum, reason and philosophy influenced Basil's epistemological framework, informed his understanding of language, shaped the content of his arguments, and often informed his interpretation of scripture. This picture stands in stark contrast to Basil's opening polemics, which exalted the simplicity of the faith and the purity of the tradition over and against innovative thinking.

## Broader Reflections

Aside from the influence of the grammarians and the introduction of conceptualisation, most of Basil's philosophical presuppositions were shared by Eunomius. In fact, while the subject of the debate was the ontological relationship between the Father and Son, many of the arguments revolved around the implications of common notions, divine simplicity, and substance ontology, all of which were taken for granted by both parties. Their questions arose from attempts to reconcile this shared epistemological framework with the content of the faith. For example, if we know about God through a natural notion, what is the content of that notion? Does it include knowledge of God's substance? And if God is simple – as the subjects of notions are – how can God be triune? Would not a triune being be composite? And how can a simple entity have multiple names? Perhaps the names are actually synonyms? As we can see, while both sides appealed to scripture and tradition, they also had a shared philosophical foundation.

Arguably, the difference between Eunomius and Basil's theological methodologies could be typified by Eunomius' initial appeal to "innate knowledge and the teaching of the fathers",[305] and Basil's passing appeal to "common usage and the teaching of the Spirit".[306] Eunomius'

[305] Eunomius of Cyzicus, "The Apology of Eunomius," 41.
[306] Basil of Caesarea, "Against Eunomius," 101.

theology gave more weight to 'innate knowledge' (representing the philosophical epistemology of the time) and 'the teaching of the fathers' (representing the Christian Middle Platonic tradition, in which Aetius' thought was rooted).[307] On the other hand, Basil prioritised 'common usage' (representing conventional understandings of language as embodied by the grammarians),[308] and 'the teachings of the Spirit' (representing scripture). The outcome of the former approach was a more metaphysical theology that claimed exhaustive knowledge of God through 'natural' (φύσις) means, whereas the latter approach led to a more 'rational' theology (θέσις) that ascribed mystery to God on the basis of scripture and reason. Nevertheless, regardless of the differences between the two approaches, and regardless of which side won the debate, it is indisputable that philosophical concepts played a critical role in this stage of the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

[307] Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism*, I:272.
[308] In fact, in his later work, *Ad Adolescentes*, Basil presented Greek education as necessary preparation for the task of reading scripture. For a summary and discussion see Robert E Winn, "Revisiting the Date of Authorship of Basil of Caesarea's Ad Adolescentes," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44, no. 1–4 (1999): 294; cf. Hildebrand, *The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea*, 2–4; and Holder, "Saint Basil the Great on Secular Education and Christian Virtue," 401–402.

# Chapter 9: Conclusions

In response to appeals to the authority of 'historical orthodoxy' in modern debates about the Trinity, I contended that the 'orthodoxy' of a particular idea is not determined by authority, but by the broader church's acceptance or rejection of its own successive attempts to make sense of divine revelation through various means, including the use of reason and philosophy. In this essay, I tested part of my thesis by demonstrating the use, and exploring the role of, philosophy (and reason) in the thought of Basil of Caesarea, limiting myself to sections 1.1-1.18 of his first theological treatise, *Against Eunomius*. The following is a summary of my findings.

First, Basil received a secular education, from which he learnt grammar, rhetoric and basic philosophy. The impression that philosophy made on him was also seen in his pursuit of philosophical and early Christian asceticism. Basil's education was the source of at least some of the philosophical and grammatical influences that were found in *Against Eunomius*.

Second, Eunomius' *Apology* was influenced by a range of philosophical concepts, including ancient theories of language, and philosophical epistemology – from which came the concepts of simplicity, substance ontology, and natural notions. Eunomius and Basil shared similar epistemological frameworks, but had considerable differences in their understandings of language.

Third, *Against Eunomius* 1.1.1-18 contains two conflicting pictures of the role of philosophy in theology. Initially we saw Basil's polemical perspective, where the faith was simple and the tradition was pure, but innovation by means of rhetoric and philosophy was not only

unnecessary, but devilish.[309] However, Basil's material refutation of Eunomius' arguments contained evidence of philosophical influences, especially in his epistemological framework, understanding of language, and interpretation of scripture. His arguments also involved appeals to reason. The influence of philosophy on Basil's epistemology was seen in his acceptance of common notions, divine simplicity, substance ontology, conceptualisation, and sense-perception. The influence of philosophy on Basil's understanding of language was seen in his appeals to common usage, and in parallels with the theory of relatives. The role of philosophy in Basil's interpretation of scripture was varied. Readings ranged from simple hermeneutics, through to arguments from scripture supported by, or interpreted through, philosophical arguments and vice versa. However, when it came to the name of God, Basil gave scripture priority over philosophy. Lastly, Basil's use of reason was seen in his appeals to logical consistency and his hermeneutical arguments.

In contrast with Eunomius, Basil seemed to give less weight to philosophical epistemology and tradition, and more to grammatical thought and scripture. Nevertheless, both utilised philosophy in their search for theological truth.

## For Further Study

While there are a variety of related topics that require further study, I will name only a few. First, the role of philosophy in the rest of *Against Eunomius* is yet to be treated in sufficient depth, and, even in the sections I have treated, it would be interesting to more deliberately compare the role of philosophy in *Against Eunomius* with that of Eunomius' *Apology* rather than considering it in isolation. Similarly, the role of philosophy could be explored in Basil's

[309] We also saw that Basil's polemic against sophistry ultimately stemmed from the writings of Plato; see pp. 37-38.

other works, approaching them on their own terms and in their own context rather than treating them in the context of 'Cappadocian' thought or trinitarian orthodoxy. Lastly, this study did not treat the relationship between philosophy and tradition due to its complexity – this is another area which could benefit from further research.[310]

[310] See DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, *Against Eunomius*, 60–66.

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