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‘THE INSTIGATOR OF ALL VICIOUS ACTIONS’:
PLEASURE, SIN, AND THE GOOD LIFE
IN THE WORKS OF GREGORY OF NYSSA

BY

SIIRI TOIVIAINEN

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is the first scholarly assessment of the role of pleasure in the works of Gregory of Nyssa. The term ἡδονή occurs in Gregory's works more than 300 times, almost always in a negative context. In *Homily 12 on the Song of Songs*, Gregory calls pleasure the 'instigator of all vicious actions'. Thus, I set out to investigate what gives pleasure such a fundamental role in Gregory's understanding of sin. Casting Gregory's thought in the framework of ancient eudaimonistic ethics, I argue that the main problem with pleasure lies in the way in which it obscures that which is truly good: the life of virtue and the attainment of the divine likeness. Through its sensual appeal, pleasure projects a false appearance of beauty and goodness and confuses the mind's judgment. This, for Gregory, is the origin of all sin, both in Paradise and in the life of every postlapsarian individual. I will show that in Gregory's works the life of pleasure comes to denote a fundamental misorientation of the human faculties, the antithesis of the good Christian life. By pursuing sensual pleasure, the individual mistakes the sensible creation for the final level of reality and fails to access the most fulfilling forms of enjoyment. True insatiable enjoyment can only be attained in a spiritual communion with the limitless God.

The thesis is divided into three main parts: In Part I, I investigate Gregory's notion of pleasure and lay the anthropological groundwork for his ethical considerations. Part II looks at the junction between pleasure and sin, showing how pleasure as the false good obscures higher ends, such as the life of virtue and the satisfaction of physical needs. Finally, Part III addresses Gregory's notion of spiritual pleasure and its similarities to and differences from sensual pleasure.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BT	Bibliotheca Teubneriana
GNO	Gregorii Nysseni Opera
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LG	<i>Lexicon Gregorianum</i>
LS	Long and Sedley (<i>The Hellenistic Philosophers</i>)
LSJ	Liddell-Scott-Jones (<i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i>)
LXX	Septuagint
<i>NETS</i>	<i>New English Translation of the Septuagint</i>
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
PG	Patrologia Graeca
<i>PGL</i>	<i>Patristic Greek Lexicon</i>
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
<i>SVF</i>	<i>Stoicorum veterum fragmenta</i>
<i>TLG</i>	<i>Thesaurus linguae graecae</i>

DECLARATION AND STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT

This thesis is my own work, and no part of it has previously been submitted for a degree at the University of Durham or any other institution. References to and quotations from other works have been appropriately acknowledged.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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INTRODUCTION

[T]here is no small danger that [a weak person], misled by his experience of pleasure, may come to think that there is no other good than that achieved through the flesh and, turning his mind completely from the desire for the incorporeal goods, he may become wholly flesh, hunting for the pleasure in these things in every way, so that he becomes a lover of pleasure rather than a lover of God (φιλήδονον αὐτὸν μᾶλλον εἶναι ἢ φιλόθεον) [2 *Tim.* 3:4].¹

For some pleasure (ἡδονή τις) or other is the instigator (καθηγεῖται) of all vicious actions that get carried out (πάντων τῶν διὰ κακίας ἐνεργουμένων), and there is no such thing as sin that is disjoined from pleasure (οὐκ ἔστιν εὐρεῖν ἁμαρτίαν ἡδονῆς διεξευγμένην)...²

It is evident that Gregory of Nyssa has a problem with pleasure. The passages above come from *De virginitate* and *In Canticum canticorum* – the works that bookend Gregory’s corpus – showing that a concern about the detrimental effects of pleasure spans Gregory’s literary career. In this thesis, I set out to investigate what, specifically, makes pleasure such a potent enemy of the Christian life that Gregory mentions ἡδονή over 300 times, almost always in a negative context.³ I will argue that the problem with pleasure lies in the way in which it obscures that which is truly good. We shall see that, for Gregory, pleasure is not only one of the passions but it stands for a fundamentally mistaken direction of life in which the sensible world is treated as the final level of reality. This means that a pleasure seeker fails to access both the highest forms of knowledge and the most fulfilling forms of enjoyment

By warning his audience about the shortcomings of pleasure and drawing attention to the pernicious way in which pleasure prevents the soul’s progress towards the good, Gregory joins a long line of ancient thinkers and taps into one of the most central problems of ancient ethics. As is well known, the relationship between pleasure and the highest good was the main point of

¹ *Virg.* 8 (SC 119, 362); trans. Callahan, 34.

² *Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 350); trans. Norris, 369.

³ On the *TLG*, a lemmatized search for ἡδονή yields 344 results.

contention between rationalist and hedonist philosophers.⁴ The foundational texts assessing, and rejecting, pleasure as the highest good include Plato's *Philebus* and Chapter 7 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Neither Plato nor Aristotle considers pleasure wholly evil, but both agree it cannot be called good without qualifications. While some refined, intellectual pleasures belong to the philosopher's life, not all pleasures are good and those that seem most appealing to our senses are particularly base and distracting. The good person, then, takes pleasure in the right things and shuns others.⁵ For the Stoics and eclectic Stoic-influenced thinkers such as Philo and Clement of Alexandria, ἡδονή is one of the main passions and has no role to play in the soul that has attained *apatheia*. Later Graeco-Roman tradition includes a number of works in which Stoic, Platonist, and eclectic philosophers reject pleasure as the good, often as a part of explicit anti-Epicurean polemic.⁶ Where Epicurus is mentioned, he is frequently represented as an advocate of unbridled bodily pleasure, despite the fact that he valued tranquillity of the soul as the highest form of pleasure and advocated a simple lifestyle.⁷

In this thesis, I will cast Gregory's critique of pleasure in the framework of ancient ethics and its preoccupation with pleasure as the false good. To set the scene, the introduction will first address some shared features of ancient conceptions of ethics, in particular the fundamental idea that there is a highest good which every human being ought to pursue in order to reach a state of happiness, wellbeing, or bliss, often conceptualised with the Aristotelian term εὐδαιμονία. While my aim is neither to offer a full account of Gregory's ethics nor of his relationship to the ancient ethical tradition, these overarching concepts are vital for understanding his discourse on pleasure. After a brief introduction to ancient ethics, I will survey the state of relevant scholarship and locate the present work in the wider field of Gregory of Nyssa studies, focussing

⁴ I am using the term 'rationalist' loosely, simply to denote philosophers who located the highest good in matters of the rational mind, i.e. virtue, rather than pleasure. Practically, this covers all major schools and thinkers apart from Epicureans and Cyrenaics.

⁵ See my discussion on the pleasures of the virtuous person in Part III.

⁶ See, among others, Cicero, *De finibus* I-II; Seneca, *De vita beata*; Plutarch, *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*; *Adversus Colotem*; Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertationes* 29-33.

⁷ For the Epicurean ideal, see Epicurus, *Men.* 127-132 (LS 21B), and Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 2.1-61 (LS 21W).

on Gregory's relationship to ancient philosophy and his view of the spiritual relevance of the sensible realm. Finally, I will identify the relevant sources and explain the order in which I will proceed to present my evidence.

Gregory and Ancient Conceptions of the Good Life

While modern ethical theories usually enquire after shared obligations or the consequences of our actions, virtually all ancient thinking on morality and ethics centred on the idea that the human life had a final goal (τέλος, σκοπός) towards which it ought to be directed.⁸ Regardless of the specifics of their philosophical affiliation, most ancient thinkers took for granted that the human life was directed at some highest good which was pursued for its own sake and for which all other goods were pursued.⁹ The goal was anthropologically determined: ancient authors sought to pin down the very essence of human beings and then asked what the individual had to do in order to actualise her true humanity. In other words, being good was synonymous with being truly human. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, one of the most influential and ground-breaking treatments of ancient ethics, Aristotle argued that the highest good and the aim of philosophy was εὐδαιμονία, which is alternately rendered as 'happiness', 'wellbeing', or 'flourishing'.¹⁰ Most ancient thinkers agreed on this general principle and thus ancient ethics with its focus on the attainment of happiness has often been termed 'eudaimonistic ethics'.

Stating that the goal of human life is 'happiness' or the attainment of the highest good says, of course, nothing about how such happiness is understood and

⁸ For Greek terms denoting the 'goal' of the good life, see Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1993), 34. Gregory uses the word τέλος to refer to the final end and eschatological fulfilment of the human life, while σκοπός denotes a goal or principle that directs action especially in ascetical contexts. For the notion of σκοπός in Greek Christianity, see Marguerite Harl, 'Le guetteur et la cible : les deux sens de skopos dans la langue religieuse des Chrétiens', *Revue des Études Grecques* 74, no. 351 (1961): 450–68. Gregory is discussed particularly on pages 458–61.

⁹ Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 30–34.

¹⁰ The name of Annas's work, *The Morality of Happiness*, alludes to the eudaimonistic character of ancient ethics as a whole. A scholarly introduction to the idea of final good and its philosophical rationale can be found in *Ibid.*, 29–42. A *locus classicus* of the ancient notion of good is Book 1 of *NE*.

supposedly achieved. Indeed, ancient authors held different and at times conflicting views about the true good, which I will analyse in more detail in the course of this thesis. Simply put, hedonists, such as the Epicureans and the Cyrenaics, regarded pleasure (ἡδονή) as the good, while non-hedonist thinkers conceived of good primarily in terms of virtue (ἀρετή), which was understood as a perfected intellectual disposition.¹¹ The latter was the opinion held by virtually all ancient Christian thinkers who thought that humans were inherently disposed to seek virtue, but at the same time their virtuousness was entirely contingent upon and relative to God who alone was virtuous and good by nature. Thus, the early Christians agreed with the mainstream of ancient authors that virtue did not simply unfold in human nature as the individual grew up but had to be sought and practised with conscious effort.¹² In this way, the Christian life became largely synonymous with the pursuit of the highest good through the practice of virtue.

It is clear that Gregory of Nyssa did not write about ethics in the same deliberate way as Aristotle or even the Christian teacher Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215) who explicitly cites and compares different ancient views of the good life.¹³ In this thesis, I have nonetheless chosen to talk about Gregory’s ‘ethics’ rather than ‘morality’ or ‘moral psychology’ because it is clear that his view of the moral progress is underpinned by general principles that are consistent enough to suggest a more sustained reflection on the good life.¹⁴ In fact, Gregory’s conception of the good Christian life rests on a recognisably eudaimonistic foundation: the attainment of the highest good informs the whole spiritual life

¹¹ Cicero’s *De finibus* presents and critiques the different notions of goodness of the main philosophical schools (Epicurean, Stoic, Academic). On the Stoic notion of good, see LS 60, and also 58 and 63.

¹² On the latter point, see, e.g. Clement of Alexandria in *Strom.* 7.3.19.3, and my discussion in Chapter 5.

¹³ *Strom.* 2.21.

¹⁴ On the distinction between ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ in the context of early Christian studies, see Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 3–5. As Meeks, who prefers the term ‘morality’ in his investigation of the first two Christian centuries, explains: ‘I take “ethics” in the sense of a reflective, second-order activity: it is morality rendered self-conscious; it asks about the logic of moral discourse and action, about the grounds for judgment, about the anatomy of duty or the roots and structure of virtue. It is thus ... “the science of morality.” “Morality”, on the other hand, names a dimension of life, a pervasive and, often, only partly conscious set of value-laden dispositions, inclinations, attitudes, and habits.’

from the moment of conversion to the eschatological fulfilment. However, while Gregory is aware of the term εὐδαιμονία and some of its derivatives, for him the word does not denote the ultimate goal of the human life. As Friedhelm Mann has showed, its use is limited to earthly wellbeing and health.¹⁵ Much more central is the word μακαριότης, which can also be translated as ‘happiness’, ‘blessedness’, and ‘bliss’.¹⁶ In the specifically Christian usage, the adjective μακάριος (‘blessed’, ‘happy’) is the key word of the Beatitudes to which Gregory dedicates a collection of sermons. Furthermore, μακαριότης is a fundamental characteristic of God’s own being:¹⁷ for Gregory, the divinity itself is ‘the one thing truly blessed’ from whom humans as the image of God derive their blessedness.¹⁸ Consequently, the ‘blessed’ or ‘happy’ life (ὁ μακάριος βίος, ἡ μακαρία ζωή) denotes the divine life itself, and also the human life after death and the renewed earthly life after death to sin.¹⁹ The latter is, of course, modelled after the former. In *Homily 1 on the Beatitudes*, Gregory defines μακαριότης as the ‘possession of all things held to be good, from which nothing is absent that a good desire may want.’²⁰ Interestingly, enjoyment seems to play a key role in Gregory’s conception of the blessed state: the person who is called blessed, should ‘thoroughly relish (εὐφραίνεσθαι) the things that are set before him for his enjoyment (εἰς ἀπόλαυσιν).’²¹ I will return to the characteristics of this blessed form of enjoyment a number of times in the course of this thesis.

For Gregory, the ideal of μακαριότης sets the course of the Christian life: ‘The goal of the life according to virtue is blessedness’ (τέλος τοῦ κατ’ ἀρετὴν βίου μακαριότης ἐστίν), Gregory argues in *In inscriptiones psalmodum*, one of his many works that offer an exposition of the spiritual progress.²² Here we see both the ancient *eudaimonistic* concern for the τέλος of the human life and the

¹⁵ Friedhelm Mann, ‘Zur Wortgruppe μακαρ- in De Beatitudinibus, im übrigen Werk Gregors von Nyssa und im Lexicon Gregorianum’, in *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on the Beatitudes: An English Version with Contemporary and Supporting Studies: Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14-18 September 1998)*, ed. Hubertus R. Drobner and Alberto Viciano (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 336.

¹⁶ See especially 345–49 in Mann, ‘Zur Wortgruppe μακαρ-’.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 344–45.

¹⁸ *Beat. 1* (GNO VII/2, 80–81); trans. Graef, 87–88.

¹⁹ Mann, ‘Zur Wortgruppe μακαρ-’, 338–40.

²⁰ *Beat. 1* (GNO VII/2, 79–80); trans. Graef, 87.

²¹ *Beat. 1* (GNO VII/2, 80); trans. Graef, 87.

²² *Inscr. I.1* (GNO V, 25).

notion that the life that leads up to it is a 'life according to virtue'. In *De beatitudinibus*, Gregory makes another statement concerning the goal of life, which offers a close parallel: 'The goal of the life according to virtue is the divine likeness' (τέλος τοῦ κατ' ἀρετὴν βίου ἐστὶν ἡ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ὁμοίωσις).²³ For Gregory, then, God himself is the very good whom advanced Christians love for his own sake, not because of fear of punishment or hope of external rewards.²⁴ The concept of virtue is anchored in God's very being: in *Oratio catechetica*, Gregory argues explicitly that God is the 'true virtue.'²⁵

We have already seen that, for Gregory, μακαριότης is one of the key characteristics of God's own nature and the divine likeness. Thus, it is no surprise that the goal of the life according to virtue is defined both as blessedness and the divine likeness. In *inscriptiones psalmorum* Gregory makes a related statement arguing that the 'likeness of God' is the limit of man's happiness (ὄρος ἐστὶ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης μακαριότητος ἡ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ὁμοίωσις).²⁶ As Mann notes, such happiness through likeness is nothing else than the restoration of the image of God in man.²⁷ Although Gregory discusses the τέλος of the human life in a Christian context, which is shaped by the biblical uses of μακάριος and the Christian doctrine of the image and likeness of God, conceptualising the τέλος of the virtuous life as a 'likeness of God' is not an exclusively Christian phenomenon. This ideal can be traced back to Plato himself, and it was widely accepted as the goal of the good life by Middle and Neo-Platonist thinkers.²⁸

From his Christian perspective Gregory argues that the divine likeness and, thus, the final human good is revealed in the person of Christ who sets an example of the perfect humanity that every Christian ought to imitate. However, the actualisation of virtue cannot be reached through mere mimicry of the life of

²³ *Beat.* 1 (GNO VII/2, 82); my translation.

²⁴ For the different incentives of the Christian life, see *Cant.* 1 (GNO VI, 16).

²⁵ *Or. cat.* 15 (SC 453, 220).

²⁶ *Inscr.* I.1 (GNO V, 26).

²⁷ Mann, 'Zur Wortgruppe μακαρ-', 345.

²⁸ See *Theaet.* 176b, and John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 44.

Christ, but it entails an actual participation in Christ himself. For Gregory, Christ is, in fact, the very Good and the unity of virtues in which humans share before the fall and which they must reattain in the postlapsarian existence. Thus, Hans Boersma suggests that in Gregory's works 'virtue' denotes 'the moral skills required for progressive participation (μετουσία) in the heavenly or eschatological reality of God's life... For Gregory, every step in virtue is an advance in one's participation in Christ, since "virtue" is a synonym for "Christ".'²⁹ This progressive participation in virtue and Christ is the essence of the Christian life.³⁰

Before turning to the topic of pleasure, it is necessary to make a few general observations on Gregory's terminology of the good life: To discuss the notion of goodness, Gregory makes use of two key terms, τὸ κάλον and τὸ ἀγαθόν.³¹ The latter means 'good' in the general sense and is the usual term when Gregory refers to the divine goods (τὰ ἀγαθά). The former, notoriously difficult to translate, refers especially to the attractive aspect of goodness as the object of love and desire. Thus, it is often translated as 'beauty', both in reference to the divine beauty and the transient beauty of the material world. However, even τὸ κάλον can denote goodness in a broad moral sense without a clear connection to its attractive quality, and can also be rendered as the 'fine', the 'noble', or, simply, the 'good'. We shall see that Gregory tends to move fluidly between the two terms without drawing attention to their differences. In this work, I will translate both of them as 'good', except in cases where the aesthetic and attractive aspect is so crucial that 'beautiful' becomes the more natural translation. Especially in my analysis of Gregory's reading of *Genesis* 3, mere convention requires the translation of κάλον as 'good' in harmony with the 'knowledge of good and evil', even if its aesthetic implications are crucial for Gregory's interpretation. Regardless of the translation, we should always keep

²⁹ Hans Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ For these terms in Gregory and their intellectual background in biblical and philosophical sources, see Ilaria Ramelli, 'Good/Beauty', in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, trans. Seth Cherney, *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 356–63.

in mind the overlapping aesthetic, erotic (in the sense of ‘love-inspiring’) and ethical connotations of the word.

We can now conclude that, for Gregory, the main reference point of the good life is God, and perfect goodness is manifested in the person of Christ. Thus, the final good of humans lies in the divine likeness, which is actualised through a participation in the divine goods, which Gregory often equates with virtues. This is the state in which humans were first created but which they lose in the fall. The main aim of the Christian life, then, is to turn back towards the good and restore the divine likeness in one’s soul. This is where the role of pleasure as a deceptive false good becomes of utmost importance.

Pleasure Seeking as the Antithesis of the Good Christian Life

While the true and final good was understood to be located in virtue and often in God, ancient philosophers would also discuss the existence of lesser, instrumental goods that simply facilitated the actualisation of the final goal. And, in the most basic sense, ‘good’ simply denoted that which each individual had chosen as his or her highest goal. This is the notion Aristotle called the ‘apparent good’, and here pleasure was the chief candidate: ‘[T]he desired and the wanted are either the good or the apparent good (ἢ τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἢ τὸ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν). This is why the pleasant is desired; for it is an apparent good – for some think it such, and to some it appears such though they do not think it so.’³² Gregory formulates a similar distinction in *Cant.* 14: “[G]ood” is ambiguous, being applied on the one hand to what really *is* good and on the other to what is not (ἐπί τε τοῦ ὄντως ὄντος τοιούτου καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος μὲν) but which because of a mistake (δι’ ἀπάτης) presents the appearance of being what it is not (δοκοῦντος εἶναι ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν).³³

³² *EE* 1235b25–29; trans. Barnes & Kenny, 162. For a comprehensive scholarly account, see Jessica Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception, Phantasia, Thought, and Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³³ *Cant.* 14 (GNO VI, 420); trans. Norris, 447. See also *Cant.* 2 (GNO VI, 55); *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 416, 400); *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 200B); *Or. cat.* 21 (SC 453, 242–244). On the apparent good in Gregory, see also J. Warren Smith, *Passion and Paradise: Human and Divine Emotion in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 83.

Regardless of philosophical affiliation, ancient thinkers argued that the moral progress entailed a constant choice between that which is truly good and that which simply appeared to be so. The purpose of philosophical education was to provide people with the correct criteria for making the choice and gradually instill the practice of virtuous choice so that it became a habit. Conversely, most ancient thinkers agreed that people who lacked philosophical training would automatically regard pleasure as the good. Whereas the development of virtue required study and practice, pleasure appeared instantly appealing. While the Stoics argued that the attraction to pleasure was entirely based on a false judgment, other thinkers, such as Plato and Aristotle, took its appeal seriously and agreed that humans had an innate tendency to seek it.³⁴ However, they, too, criticised the irrational, animal-like common people who did not have any understanding of the true good and higher pleasures of the mind and pursued bodily pleasure in their place.

Like most ancient thinkers who admitted the presence of irrational elements in the soul, Gregory explains the lure of the apparent good by appealing to the affinity between humans and animals. While humans are created to actualise the divine likeness through the use of their rational mind, at the same time the lower, irrational parts of their souls naturally gravitate towards mere self-preservation and self-gratification. Thus, Gregory argues that humans are at once pulled towards two different and often conflicting notions of the good: that of the mind (virtue) and that of the senses (pleasure).³⁵ In fact, we can argue, as Smith does, that 'the apparent good is that good which is apprehended by nonrational creatures by the senses.'³⁶ The attraction to pleasure as the good is a characteristic humans share with animals, whose conception of the good life is limited to fulfilling the immediate impulses of the body and ensuring its continued existence. But whereas irrational animals can never reach a higher understanding of the good, in humans the animal drives ought to be overruled by the good of the mind, virtue, which reflects the divine goods and is the basis

³⁴ See my discussion on the 'cradle argument' in Chapter 4.

³⁵ See *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 416, 396), and also *An. et res.* (PG 46, 81C).

³⁶ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 83.

of our divine likeness. While sense perception can only grasp the goods available to us in the present moment, the representative faculties of the mind – chiefly memory and hope – enable the human soul to compare its present state to goods available in the past and in the future. Thus it can assess what it has lost and what it may gain at a later stage, and forego present goods for the sake of greater satisfaction that lies in the future.³⁷ The double notion of good and the human ability of to engage in ‘hedonic calculus’ will receive ample attention later in this thesis.

The pull towards two different directions turns the human life into a struggle where the individual must learn to pursue the real good and reject the false good that competes for her attention: ‘Virtue means to turn one’s soul to nothing here on earth, but to have one’s effort directed towards what through faith lies in our hopes before us,’ Gregory argues in *In Ecclesiasten*.³⁸ However, the choice is complicated by the fact that most humans find pleasure attractive and the true good unappealing. To this Gregory replies:

If you reckon zeal for the good (τῶν ἀγαθῶν σπουδή) to be irksome, then compare it with the opposite way of life (τῷ ἐναντίῳ βίῳ), and you will find how much more irksome is vice (ἡ κακία), if you keep your eye not on the present but on the hereafter. The one who hears about Gehenna will no longer avoid the pleasures of sin (τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἡδονῶν) by toil and effort, but fear aroused in his mind will be quite enough to banish passions.³⁹

The passage reveals a number of themes that will recur in our investigation of pleasure in Gregory of Nyssa: First, characteristically of ancient moral accounts, the good and evil life are presented as opposing goals and a choice.⁴⁰ Second, the good life appears toilsome while sin appears pleasurable and appealing. Third, only an investigation from an eschatological perspective instead of a

³⁷ On the ability of rational beings to reflect on past and future pleasures and thus maximise the overall yield of pleasure, see James Warren, *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6–9, 104–28.

³⁸ *Eccl.* 6.4 (SC 416, 316); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 103.

³⁹ *Beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2, 147–148).

⁴⁰ On these two-way conceptions of human life in Greek, Jewish, and Christian sources, see Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*, 69–71.

focus on the present life will reveal which of these goals is truly good and enjoyable, and which truly toilsome and painful. Finally, the passage alludes to the close connection between pleasure and sin. My main argument in this thesis is that pleasure is not only one of the passions but pleasure seeking is, for Gregory, a result and sign of a fundamental misunderstanding of the final goal of the human life and the reality as a whole. Thus, if a life of virtue is the paradigm of the Christian life, life of pleasure stands as its sinful opposite, the life that leaves the individual untouched by the truths of the Christian faith and binds him to the repetitive cycles of the material world with no linear progress towards a higher intellectual reality.

State of Scholarship

This thesis is the first comprehensive investigation of Gregory of Nyssa's view of pleasure. In fact, even minor scholarly works on the topic are close to non-existent, as are comparable accounts of pleasure and anti-hedonism in other patristic writers. However, the topic of the present study belongs to the realm of Nyssen's ethics, which has garnered some attention especially in more recent scholarship. So far, Sandra Leuenberger-Wenger's monograph *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa* remains the only comprehensive work dedicated explicitly to Gregory's ethics.⁴¹ Leuenberger-Wenger approaches the topic chiefly from the perspective of Christian identity formation: by asserting the importance of certain ethical norms and rejecting others, Gregory creates a conception of a good Christian life which helps him define who Christians are and who they are not vis-à-vis other groups. Leuenberger-Wenger draws particular attention to the way in which Gregory uses Christian education in the form of preaching, catechesis, and correspondence to support the gradual development of a Christian identity in his audiences. In contrast to the present study, Leuenberger-Wenger's focus is on social history and Christian formation rather than the specifics of philosophical and theological argumentation.

⁴¹ Sandra Leuenberger-Wenger, *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa*, Studien zu Antike und Christentum 49 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

However, she, too, frequently highlights Gregory's affinity to and place within ancient virtue ethics.⁴²

While Leuenberger-Wenger's work remains the only monograph explicitly dedicated to Gregory's ethics, it is not the only precursor to the present study. The eudaimonistic character of Gregory's ethics has been noted in several works, especially in the supporting studies on the *Homilies on the Beatitudes*, published in the proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa.⁴³ I have already highlighted Friedhelm Mann's contribution. To offer another example, Robert Louis Wilken begins his article by noting the importance of the word 'blessed' or 'happy' as the key word of Gregory's homilies. While Wilken says that his observation seems at first obvious, he contends that the word carries a number of meanings that connect Gregory to 'ancient writings that address the question of how one is to live' (he mentions Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Seneca's and Augustine's identically named *De vita beata*). 'Happiness', says Wilken, was 'a key term in ancient morality'. Thus, '[i]ts appearance in the beatitudes would have triggered associations in the mind of ancient readers that are foreign to moderns unschooled in the eudaimonistic ethics of the ancient world.'⁴⁴

The role of virtue and, implicitly, virtue ethics is also prominent in Hans Boersma's *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*.⁴⁵ I have already cited Boersma's observations on virtue and the divine likeness as the *telos* of the Christian life. I will return to Boersma's contribution later in this section where I assess the place of this study within the field of Gregory of Nyssa studies. For

⁴² See especially the chapter 'Vervollkommnung als Tugend' in *Ibid.*, 171–233.

⁴³ Hubertus R. Drobner and Alberto Viciano, eds., *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on the Beatitudes: An English Version with Contemporary and Supporting Studies: Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14-18 September 1998)* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

⁴⁴ Robert Louis Wilken, 'Gregory of Nyssa, De Beatitudinibus, Oratio VIII: "Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted For Righteousness' Sake, for Theirs Is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 5,10)', in *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on the Beatitudes: An English Version with Contemporary and Supporting Studies: Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14-18 September 1998)*, ed. Hubertus R. Drobner and Alberto Viciano (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 243.

⁴⁵ See especially the final chapter 'Virtuous Body' (211–246) where the author's focus is not limited solely to matters of embodiment.

now, we can simply note that Boersma, too, points out Gregory's 'thorough-going distrust of the pleasures of the body.'⁴⁶

At the other end of the moral spectrum, J. Warren Smith's *Passion and Paradise: Human and Divine Emotion in Gregory of Nyssa* presents an extensive account of Gregory's conception of passions and what might be called his moral psychology.⁴⁷ Since Gregory understands pleasure not only as one of the passions but as *the* fundamental passion, Smith's work provides an important conversation partner to the present study. Smith makes many valuable observations, especially concerning the way in which passionate impulses can be transformed into vice or virtue depending on the judgment of the mind, and his work has helped me grasp a number of issues in Gregory's anthropology. At the same time, I have also sought to offer additional and critical views on certain points made by Smith, particularly as regards the chronological development of Gregory's thought and his place within the ancient intellectual world.

While the topic of pleasure has been left largely unattended within early Christian scholarship, specialists of ancient philosophy have offered more extensive treatments. Some of the earlier investigations of ancient notions of pleasure include Jussi Tenkku's *The Evaluation of Pleasure in Plato's Ethics* and Gosling and Taylor's *The Greeks on Pleasure*.⁴⁸ However, the past two decades in particular have witnessed a burgeoning scholarly interest in the topic. While David Wolfsdorf has focussed on the ancient philosophers' reply to what he calls 'the identity question of pleasure' (i.e. 'what is pleasure?'), Gerd Van Riel has turned to the place of pleasure in ancient conceptions of the good life.⁴⁹ We should also highlight the work of Jessica Moss who has produced a number of pieces on the topic of pleasure as a false good, particularly in the works of Plato

⁴⁶ Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 215.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 21–103.

⁴⁸ Jussi Tenkku, *The Evaluation of Pleasure in Plato's Ethics* (Helsinki: Societas Philosophica, 1956); Justin Cyril Bertrand Gosling and Christopher Charles Whiston Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

⁴⁹ David Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Gerd Van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life: Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists*, *Philosophia Antiqua* 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

and Aristotle.⁵⁰ Furthermore, during the writing of this thesis, James Warren published a monograph on ancient notions of intellectual pleasures.⁵¹ These recent contributions from the fields of philosophy and classics have provided invaluable insights and parallels as I have sought to identify the key features of Gregory's conception of pleasure.

Finally, we should consider the place of this study within the broader field of Gregory of Nyssa studies. Warren Smith's survey on the development of scholarship provides a helpful starting point for this discussion. In *Passion and Paradise*, he identifies three main phases of Gregory of Nyssa studies. I will go on to suggest that there are signs of an emerging fourth phase, which attempts to strike a balance between old and new interpretations of Gregory. But let us first see how Smith outlines the stages of scholarly engagement with Gregory's works.

Smith points out that the interest in Gregory's works was renewed in the West with the rise of the Neo-Patristic movement in Roman Catholicism. He argues that the first two phases of this new scholarly interest concerned Gregory's thought 'as a philosophical system with a strong mystical component and, later, the sources of his thought in classical and Hellenistic philosophy.'⁵² The first, philosophical-mystical trajectory included the influential works of Hans Urs von Balthasar (*Présence et Pensée*) and Jean Daniélou (*Platonisme et théologie mystique*) whose take on Gregory as a judicious synthesiser of (chiefly Platonist) philosophy and mysticism with orthodox Christian belief has influenced a number of later interpretations.⁵³

⁵⁰ See, in particular, Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good*; 'Pleasure and Illusion in Plato', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 72, no. 3 (May 2006): 503–35.

⁵¹ Warren, *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*.

⁵² Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 11–12.

⁵³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Présence et pensée: Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1942); Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique* (Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1944). Among later works in the same trajectory, see, for example, Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

However, as Smith notes, Gregory's role as a synthesiser of 'Greek' and 'Christian' learning was not only met with approval. A second scholarly trajectory emerged from scholars whose thinking was influenced by Adolf von Harnack's 'Hellenization hypothesis'. Perhaps the most notable and, later, most notorious of these treatments was Harold Cherniss's *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*, in which the author came to conclude that Gregory's theological oeuvre did not amount to much more than thinly veiled Platonism peppered with a few characteristically Christian dogmas.⁵⁴ This, in Cherniss's view, resulted in a distorted version of both.

Whether the scholars were appreciative of Gregory's theological project like Daniélou or critical like Cherniss, their assessments shared the general assumption that there was a clear line of demarcation between Gregory's identity as a 'Christian' and that as a 'Platonist'.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Smith argues that they resulted in a monolithic interest in Gregory's affinity with a single school of ancient philosophy. Both of these perspectives have been criticised in more recent scholarship, and I will return to them later in the introduction as I explain with more detail my method of reading Gregory alongside other ancient authors.⁵⁶

The third trajectory of scholarship is termed by Smith 'the Erotic Phase'. This group of works reflects the general interest in the body in late ancient studies, which has flourished ever since Peter Brown published his influential work *The Body and Society* in 1988.⁵⁷ For Smith, the phase includes a number of works with varying methodologies that address aspects of embodiment, gender,

⁵⁴ Harold Fredrik Cherniss, 'The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa', *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 1, no. 11 (1930): 1–92.

⁵⁵ Cherniss, for example, supposes that Gregory's simultaneous interest in Greek literature and Christian doctrine lead to 'an acute civil war within him at all times'. See, *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁶ For a later critique of Cherniss's method and assumptions, see Michel René Barnes, 'The "Platonic" Character of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology' (Unpublished), 7–12, accessed 6 November 2016, <https://www.scribd.com/document/113647649/The-Platonic-Character-of-Gregory-of-Nyssa-s-Psychology-Unpublished-Barnes>. Some aspects of Daniélou's work are criticised in Sarah Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa', in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 37–42.

⁵⁷ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

sexuality, and desire.⁵⁸ What most of these works have in common is a focus on positive evaluations of embodiment in ancient ascetical works and, more specifically, in Gregory of Nyssa. Often, they seek to counterbalance Gregory's supposed Platonism and consequent body-soul dualism that have been emphasised in earlier research. This is the trajectory where Smith locates his own monograph *Passion and Paradise*. The interest in 'The Erotic Nyssen' has not diminished since Smith's study was published in 2004. For example Sarah Coakley's works at the crossroads of ancient Christianity and modern systematic theology can be located in this trajectory, culminating in *God, Sexuality and the Self*, the first volume of her systematic theology, which centres on the concept of desire and explicitly draws on Gregory's thought.⁵⁹

Despite locating his own book in the Erotic Phase, Smith makes some astute observations concerning the potential shortcomings of the new trajectory. While he agrees – as I do, too – that Gregory's asceticism is not extreme by the standards of his time, he notes that the recent interest in the body and emotions in Gregory's theology has often led to 'sanitized' and overly coherent and consistent interpretations of his thought.⁶⁰ The focus on positive aspects of desire, sexuality and the like has overshadowed tensions and contradictions that are characteristic of Gregory's treatments of these topics. At times, the authors have presented conclusions that are in line with their modern-day, or postmodern, Christian sensibilities and could perhaps be derived from Gregory's works, yet remain unarticulated in the original sources. In other words, the contemporary scholarly interest in the body and the irrational has led to interpretations that overstate the positive value of these matters in ancient sources, often as a reaction to earlier scholarship. Smith seeks to set right the problems of tendentious body-positive readings by drawing attention to tensions in Gregory's evaluation of the place of the body and the passions and 'acknowledging his *difference* from us, as another voice that challenges our

⁵⁸ Much of this scholarship is critically surveyed in the part entitled 'Sex, Gender, and Embodiment' in Morwenna Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 163–227.

⁵⁹ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁶⁰ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 16–17.

theological assumptions.’ For Smith, these tensions are often due Gregory’s many ‘religious commitments’ that are not always ‘easily integrated’ with each other or with certain philosophical assumptions.⁶¹ Thus, he joins Balthasar, Daniélou, Boersma and many others who approach Gregory chiefly as a Christian theological thinker as opposed to a quasi-Platonist philosopher.

I have cited Smith’s account of the different phases of Nyssen scholarship because I think it captures well the history and trends that have shaped the academic discourse in the field. Furthermore, it will help me place my own thesis among the other works. However, before defining my own position, I will suggest that since the writing of *Passion and Paradise* in 2004, there have been further developments in the field. Here, I am thinking particularly of Hans Boersma’s *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach*, which joins the discussion on Gregory’s view of the body, but offers an important corrective. The overarching thesis of Boersma’s work is that Gregory’s theology is fundamentally ‘anagogical’. By this he means that Gregory’s focus rests at all times on the soul’s progress towards the divine, culminating in a participatory union which restores the divine likeness lost in the fall.⁶² This concern, argues Boersma, also informs Gregory’s view of embodiment and materiality: both are useful so far as they serve the anagogical ascent, but will ultimately be found only instrumental or ‘penultimate’. The final level of reality and our union with God rest on the intelligible plane, removed from the spatio-temporal constraints of the present world.⁶³ Boersma’s argument is intended as a critique of the predominant current of contemporary scholarship. In many ways, he identifies the same problem that Smith seeks to set right in *Passion and Paradise*: recent interpretations of Gregory’s view of the body are often driven by a contemporary interest in the body and bodily forms of knowing. Thus, scholars read ancient sources with a strong modern-day ethos and end up with excessively positive evaluations of the place of the body in Gregory’s works. But whereas Smith is content to discuss some ambiguities, Boersma presents a more comprehensive corrective: ‘we should not so highlight

⁶¹ Ibid., 18.

⁶² Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 3.

⁶³ See, for example, Ibid., vii, 87.

Gregory's positive appreciation of embodiment as to lose sight of the profoundly otherworldly cast of his overall theology.'⁶⁴ He argues that 'Gregory consistently aims for anagogical progression in the divine life and that this almost always implies a turn away from the material toward the spiritual.'⁶⁵ The participation in the divine reality is a markedly spiritual matter, even if the body, too, gets its share in the divine beauty through its association with the soul.

Thus, argues Boersma, it is 'important to underscore that for Gregory embodiment and virtue stand in the service of the anagogical pursuit of otherworldly realities, since recent trends in contemporary scholarship go too far in highlighting Gregory's appreciation of the goodness of the created order, and in so doing they remove the tension that typically characterizes his thought.'⁶⁶ While the contemporary interpretations include varying approaches and overall assessments of Gregory's theology, they miss the point that Gregory is a 'radically anagogical theologian' who, despite his positive remarks, does not share the same appreciation of the embodied existence that has characterised scholarly interest in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.⁶⁷ While Boersma remains mindful of Gregory's positive remarks on the human body and its crucial role in the process of coming to know the divine, he points out that the hierarchy between the intelligible and the sensible, spirit and matter, remains highly important to Gregory. He notes, furthermore, that Gregory often finds the concern for material and bodily matters 'a hindrance for the anagogical pursuit of the Christian life.'⁶⁸ While Gregory explicitly affirms the resurrection of the body, the eschatological embodiment will take on a form that is radically different from our earthly existence. To sum up, Boersma argues that Gregory's works and his remarks on the role of the human body ought to be read from an 'anagogical' perspective: they are always informed by the final *telos* of

⁶⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 8. Boersma's criticism is directed particularly at certain postmodern readings of Gregory that seek to offer fundamental revisions of earlier interpretations of his works. For a comprehensive overview of these perspectives, see Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)modern*. For sex, gender and embodiment, particularly 163–227.

humankind and the higher eschatological reality of which a Christian will get a foretaste already in this life.

In my view, Boersma's work cannot be dismissed as a lingering echo of the scholarship of Balthasar and Daniélou, despite the fact that he explicitly expresses his admiration of their theological projects and his affinity to *nouvelle théologie*. While he may have one foot in this earlier tradition, his writing is thoroughly informed by newer scholarly currents whose relevance he is willing to acknowledge. Boersma's remarks on Gregory's anagogical focus and the penultimate character of the material world serve as a springboard for my treatment of Gregory's view of pleasure. In this thesis, I will argue that the pursuit of pleasure as the final good entails a failure to recognise the non-final character of the sensible realm, including our own embodiment. If, as Boersma argues, virtue 'as participation in the life of God, means leaving behind the diastemic structures of embodiment', then a life devoted to its opposite, pleasure, entails an existence forever bound to the diastemic character of the sensible creation.⁶⁹

Reading Gregory alongside Ancient Ethics

A work that places Gregory in the ancient trajectory of eudaimonistic ethics must also make explicit how the protagonist is approached as a representative of the Graeco-Roman intellectual world. As I have already noted, Gregory's relationship to ancient philosophy has been the topic of many a scholarly investigation and the conclusions have been varied.⁷⁰ In this section, I will first comment on Gregory's position in the junction of 'biblical' and 'philosophical' material, keeping in mind that the former category cannot be neatly separated from the predominant intellectual currents of the Graeco-Roman world. Then, I

⁶⁹ Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 215.

⁷⁰ To works previously mentioned we can add, among others, the edited volumes H. Dörrie, M. Altenburger, and U. Schramm, eds., *Gregor von Nyssa und die Philosophie: Zweites internationales Kolloquium über Gregor von Nyssa* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Marguerite Harl, ed., *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse: Actes du colloque de Chevetogne (22-26 septembre 1969) organisé par le Centre de recherche sur l'Hellénisme tardif de la Sorbonne* (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

will briefly explain how I view Gregory's relationship to the ancient philosophical schools, including Epicureanism, which found itself at the centre of the ancient debate of pleasure as the good.

To begin, we should note that late antique intellectual life, where ethics was a prime topic, was characterised by eclecticism. Especially outside the institutions of 'school philosophy', the elite members of society would acquire an education that drew on various schools of thought, often summarised or anthologised in school-book form.⁷¹ Furthermore, much of ancient thinking on ethics conformed to certain shared ideals: all espoused a life dedicated to the pursuit of intellectual matters, an avoidance of excessive material attachments, a mastery of one's inner life, and a simple lifestyle, often cited as being 'according to nature'. This ideal was actualised through the discovery of one's true self with the help of philosophical education. Even Epicureans, who were often accused of crass hedonism, favoured a simple, peaceful, and intellectual life with few material desires.

Early Christian discourse on ethics and morality oscillated between reassurances that Christians did not espouse a novel ethical system but adhered to shared traditional values, and attempts to construct boundaries between in-group and out-group by highlighting the higher moral standards of the Christian believers and the difference between 'the Church' and 'the world'.⁷² While Gregory does employ the notion of pleasure to discuss the Church/world boundary, it must be noted that writing to Christian audiences in the 4th century, he has little to say about the explicit relationship between Christian and non-Christian ethics. His aim is to provide guidance within Christian communities rather than to engage in a conversation with other philosophical and religious groups. However, if we examine the salient moral principles that shape Gregory's ideas on a good Christian life, we can see that at least their general lines conform to widely shared ideals of ancient philosophy: there is an emphasis on a life of virtue dedicated to intellectual pursuits, a detachment

⁷¹ Leuenberger-Wenger, *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa*, 7.

⁷² See note 28 in *Ibid.*, 9.

from material goods, an ideal of a life lived 'according to nature', and a general focus on simplicity and self-control. The promotion of virginity as the most virtuous way of life is, of course, distinctively a product of ancient Christian discourse, but, as we shall see, it is not Gregory's primary focus in his rejection of pleasure. Furthermore, the topic itself is largely conceptualised with the traditional language of ancient virtue ethics. Thus, practically speaking, the ideal lifestyle that emerges from Gregory's writings is largely consonant with the recommendations of ancient philosophers.⁷³ Gregory may have been aware that this was the case. Although he will at times use hard words about non-Christian learning, it seems that he considers ethics one of the fields where pagan learning may, in fact, be beneficial to the formation of virtue: In *Vita Moysis*, Gregory states clearly that ἡ ἠθικὴ τε καὶ φυσικὴ φιλοσοφία is one of the branches of pagan knowledge that may assist the soul in its virtuous ascent.⁷⁴

However, Leuenberger-Wenger also observes that Christians faced the unique challenge of embedding and justifying the ancient ideals of a good life within a remarkably different religious tradition that came with a new authoritative literary corpus. Whereas the non-Christian philosophers of late antiquity could draw on centuries of rich philosophical texts, well known popular myths, and other shared narratives of the Graeco-Roman literary culture, Christians had to explain ethical ideals in light of the salvation history narrated in the Bible.⁷⁵ Thus, ancient Christian authors approached the Bible from a double perspective in their quest to negotiate the relationship between ancient philosophy and the Christian faith: On the one hand, the Bible provided authoritative limits to early Christian interpretations of ancient ethical ideals. We can see this especially in Gregory's attempt to offer a corrective to Origen's ethically dualist anthropology where sin is associated with bodiliness in ways that run counter to the biblical teaching on the goodness of the whole creation.⁷⁶ On the other hand, old ethical

⁷³ Concerning the similarity of basic principles, see *Ibid.* See also Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*, 84.

⁷⁴ The same term and opinion occur both in *Vit. Moys.* 2.37 (SC 1, 41) and 2.115 (SC 1, 64).

⁷⁵ Leuenberger-Wenger, *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa*, 8. Analogous syntheses had of course occurred already in the realm of Hellenistic Judaism. See Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*, 89–90.

⁷⁶ See my discussion in Chapter 2.

ideals needed to be justified in light of the Bible. In the course of this thesis we shall see that the key events of God's engagement with the world – creation, fall, the life and death of Christ, and the eschatological fulfilment – provide important avenues for making ethical ideals understandable and meaningful to a Christian audience. Furthermore, both the incarnate Christ and a number of characters both from the Old and the New Testament serve as exemplary figures who demonstrate to Christians what human perfection looks like. In Gregory's teaching on pleasure, Moses and Solomon become particularly important exemplary figures whose lives demonstrate what detachment from matter and adherence to the true good ought to look like.⁷⁷ In sum, we can simultaneously agree with Boersma's observation that 'biblical exposition on any topic must take virtue as its starting-point and aim'⁷⁸, and with Ludlow who notes that 'Gregory sees his advice for the good life as springing from his conceptions of incarnation and salvation.'⁷⁹

Especially at the early stages of scholarship, Gregory's thought was described on heavily Platonist terms, and either lauded for its learnedness or exposed for its supposed un-Christianity or unoriginality. In many of these interpretations, the overarching problem has been the way in which Gregory's works have been read in direct comparison to Plato's dialogues, as if Gregory had the dialogues in front of him and dealt with them more or less like Plato's contemporary. Michel René Barnes has argued that if we are to investigate Gregory's relationship to Platonism, we should look for mediating sources among the Christian writers of the earlier centuries, especially Clement and Origen, who had offered syntheses of Platonism and biblical material long before Gregory.⁸⁰ I think Barnes's words of caution are well warranted, and in the course of this thesis we shall see that, when it comes to the topic of pleasure, Origen and perhaps especially Clement provide a number of fruitful parallels.

⁷⁷ On the latter, see also Leuenberger-Wenger, *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa*, 82.

⁷⁸ Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 214.

⁷⁹ Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)modern*, 135.

⁸⁰ See Barnes, 'The "Platonic" Character of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology'.

In light of these considerations, it should be noted that when I discuss ‘Platonist’ elements of Gregory’s thought, I chiefly have in mind the later eclectic forms of Platonism and their Judaeo-Christian adaptations. When I offer direct parallels to Plato, I do it because he has articulated some fundamental idea that, in my view, has given shape to much of the later discussion, not because I think a straight line can be drawn from Plato to Gregory. It is often difficult to ascertain what Gregory knew of Plato’s original works and in what form Plato’s teachings had reached him since Gregory writes in a synthesising manner and rarely cites his sources by name.⁸¹ We can, on the other hand, confidently assume that he was familiar with the writings of Philo, Clement, and Origen, and, to some extent, with the works of non-Christian Middle and Neoplatonists.⁸² Indeed, we shall see that while Gregory’s discourse on pleasure contains ‘Platonist’ elements, it is not clear whether he was acquainted with Plato’s influential treatments of pleasure in *Republic* and *Philebus*. The most explicit parallels to Plato’s dialogues tend to be short and catchy phrases, which may have been passed down as sayings or short fragments. On the other hand, Gregory shows little knowledge of, or interest in, Plato’s more extensive theoretical discussions of mixed and pure pleasures, which are central to the treatments of pleasure in *Republic* and *Philebus*. We should also keep in mind that the language of Platonism was the language of Greek education.⁸³ Thus, it is not surprising that as an educated member of the Christian elite, Gregory produces texts that are peppered with Platonic concepts and images. We cannot always be sure whether he does this consciously or whether such usage simply reflects his cultural context and the general categories that shape his thought.

Gregory’s supposed links to other ancient philosophies have also been highlighted. Particularly his affinity to Stoicism has been discussed since the

⁸¹ When he does mention an ancient philosopher by name, it is usually to accuse an opponent of adhering to some philosophical idea that is incompatible with the Christian doctrine. Such allusions are very rare in the works that make up the core material of this thesis.

⁸² See the survey in Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa: Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 8–12. Zachhuber largely follows Cherniss in his assessment of Gregory’s direct knowledge of Plato, which has been criticised by Barnes. See my footnote 56 above. On Gregory’s knowledge of Philo, see David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), 243–60.

⁸³ Leuenberger-Wenger, *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa*, 7.

early days of Gregory scholarship.⁸⁴ More recently, Barnes and others have highlighted Aristotelian elements that have been overshadowed by the scholarly interest in Gregory's Platonism.⁸⁵ As regards Gregory's relationship to Stoicism, it seems to me that most scholars take the view that the 'Stoic' elements in Gregory's thought are best understood as fruits of Gregory's engagement with other eclectic thinkers rather than with Stoic sources per se.⁸⁶ Many of the elements that are often associated with Stoic philosophy, such as the ideal of a life according to nature or the notion of the self-sufficiency of virtue, had become philosophical commonplaces well before Gregory's time and integrated, for example, to later forms of Platonism and early Christian thought.⁸⁷ Furthermore, it seems to me that the sharp distinction Gregory makes between the intelligible and the sensible realm is at odds with any far-reaching adoption of Stoic thought, as is the fact that for him the 'eudaimonistic horizon', the actualisation of human happiness, lies in the immaterial reality of the life to come, not in a perfected earthly life.

Especially a work dedicated to ethics must address Gregory's relationship to Aristotle whose *Nicomachean Ethics* is undoubtedly not only the first but also the most influential systematic treatment of ancient ethics. It is an oft-cited view that in late antiquity Aristotle's importance had greatly diminished, to be discovered again in the Middle Ages first by Islamic scholars and later by Christian Europeans. At the same time, even if Aristotle may not be the explicit go-to authority of most late antique writers, his figure does loom in the background. As regards Gregory's ethics, it seems that Aristotle remains an indirect and implicit influence. He is rarely mentioned, but at the same time the shape of almost all ancient thinking on ethics bears the stamp of his thought. Whether Gregory makes direct use of Aristotle or simply adopts views

⁸⁴ For a contested early study, see Karl Gronau, *Poseidonios und die jüdisch-christliche Genesisexegese* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914).

⁸⁵ See Barnes, 'The "Platonic" Character of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology'. The article offers a critical survey of many of the earlier assessments of Gregory's relationship to ancient philosophies.

⁸⁶ This is noted already by Cherniss, though his view is obviously motivated by his overall argument about Gregory's Platonism. For a more recent assessment, see Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 9–10.

⁸⁷ See Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 44; Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 68–72.

transmitted by other authors is difficult to estimate. My view is that the latter explanation is usually more plausible. At any rate, Aristotle's formal definition of pleasure does not have the same weight in Gregory's treatment of the topic as it does, for example, in *De natura hominis* written by Nemesius of Emesa, Gregory's Christian contemporary.⁸⁸

As regards Gregory's place within the hedonist/anti-hedonist debate, it is doubtful that his criticism of pleasure would have been in any way directed at actual Epicureans or even other non-Christian philosophical groups. Unlike Clement who cites Epicureans and Cyrenaics as proponents of the notion that pleasure is the good, Gregory makes no mention of either group in conjunction with hedonism.⁸⁹ While he does occasionally refer to Epicurus by name, the bulk of such remarks occurs in his dogmatic treatises and mainly relates to Epicurean physics and presumed atheism, a common charge in ancient literature that sprung from the Epicurean denial of providence.⁹⁰ No mention is made of Epicurean hedonism despite Gregory's strong opposition to pleasure as the good in general.⁹¹ The closest we can get is a comment in *De anima et resurrectione* where Gregory has Macrina criticise Epicurus and his followers for failing to see the divine power which inhabits and sustains all things.⁹² The passage, which I will cite in its entirety in Chapter 4, has more to do with Epicurean epistemology than ethics, and pleasure is not mentioned at all.

⁸⁸ For Nemesius view of pleasure, see *De natura hominis* 18.

⁸⁹ See, for example, *Strom.* 2.21.127.1–2 (trans. Ferguson, 240): 'Among those who take pleasure (ἡδονῆς) as the first principle we recognize as the most important the Cyrenaics and Epicurus: they state explicitly that the goal (τέλος) is the life of pleasure (τὸ ἡδέως ζῆν), and pleasure is the only ultimate good (τέλειον δὲ ἀγαθὸν μόνον τὴν ἡδονήν).' (See also 2.21.128.1.) Ramelli credits Clement with a 'relatively profound and direct, personal knowledge of Epicurean doctrines' in Ilaria Ramelli, 'The Rejection of the Epicurean Ideal of Pleasure in Late Antique Sources: Not Only Misunderstandings', *Mirabilia*, no. 18 (2014): 10.

⁹⁰ See *Hex.* (PG 44, 80); *Deit. fil.* (PG 46, 561); *Eun.* 2.1.410. Epicurus did not, in fact, espouse a complete non-existence of gods, but believed that the perfect happiness enjoyed by gods precluded any concern for or interference with the human realm. He argued that since happiness entails undisturbance, it requires perfect rest and leisure, which are incompatible with any kind of preoccupation with the world. Thus, he dismissed the idea of a deity who would actively shape the life of the cosmos and the fates of men, i.e. rejected the notion of divine providence. See Epicurus, *Herod.* 76–77, *Men.* 123–124; Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.43–49; and other texts in LS 23

⁹¹ Ramelli notes Gregory's lack of references to Epicurus as a hedonist, but suggests an implicit awareness. She also offers a discussion on Macrina's criticism of Epicurus as a materialist. See, Ramelli, 'The Rejection of the Epicurean Ideal of Pleasure in Late Antique Sources', 16–18.

⁹² *An. et res.* (PG 46, 21B–24A); trans. Silvas, 175.

Rather, it indicates the literary Macrina's opposition to Epicurus's materialism and the Epicurean view that sensation was to be used as the 'criterion' of truth.⁹³ However, the charge Macrina levels against Epicureanism is precisely the same that we shall soon find in many of Gregory's discussions on pleasure: for Gregory, it is the pursuit of pleasure that locks people in the sensible realm and leaves them unaware of the higher intelligible reality. A rejection of Epicurean epistemology is thus implicitly followed by a rejection of Epicurean ethics. Furthermore, I will show that the epistemological question of the truth of sensory impressions is intertwined the ethical question of the goodness of pleasure: when we ask if we can rightly judge as good that which appears good to the senses due to pleasure, we are, of course, simultaneously asking if what the senses convey is true, i.e. whether what appears good to the senses actually is good.

The fact that Gregory never makes an explicit connection between pleasure and Epicurus's teaching gives the impression that pleasure seeking was not the main problem he associated with Epicureanism. We can assume that the lack of explicit references to Epicurus and his followers in Gregory's discussions on pleasure and the good reflects the virtual non-existence of Epicurean groups in the fourth century. During Clement's lifetime in the second century, a pleasure-seeking Epicurean would have still been a stock example of Graeco-Roman philosophy. Among the non-Christian writers, for example the Platonist Maximus of Tyre – roughly Clement's contemporary and another interesting reference point to Gregory's writings – repeatedly attacks the Epicurean hedonists in his *Dissertationes*.⁹⁴ Thus, it is no surprise that Clement, too, makes use of this trope to demonstrate his philosophical learnedness, even if he may not have directly engaged in a debate with Epicureans. Gregory, on the other hand, communicates in a predominantly Christian context to established Christian communities. His words against pleasure as the good are primarily

⁹³ Epicurus was infamous for the maxim according to which 'all sense impressions are true' (see p. 124). Epicurus argued, furthermore, that sensation was to be used as the criterion or 'yardstick' (κανών) in evaluating truth claims. That which could not be directly ascertained by the senses had to be at least in harmony with what was evident. On these points, see Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 4.469–521; DL 10.31–32; Sextus Empiricus *Adv. math.* 211–216.

⁹⁴ For anti-Epicurean polemic, see, in particular, *Diss.* 29–33.

targeted at people who are accused of misunderstanding the goal of the Christian life. For Gregory, a pleasure-seeker is the standard example of a sinner – a sinner who does not belong to some external group, but lurks in the souls of Gregory’s own audiences.⁹⁵

Sources and Structure of the Study

Gregory’s corpus does not contain a single text dedicated explicitly to the topic of pleasure, but relevant remarks and longer discussions occur throughout his career. Thus, I have decided to approach the matter synthetically, drawing broadly on Gregory’s works without a strict focus on genre, chronology, or even the sequence of the moral progress. This approach does justice to the topic of pleasure since, in my view, the main terms and ideas remain fairly consistent throughout the corpus with little variation between genres. Pleasure as the false good is as much a topic of Gregory’s philosophical works as it is of his homilies.

Furthermore, both chronological and audience-based distinctions have proved difficult to make. As regards the former kind, in the final section of this thesis I will offer an explicit critique of the notion that we can see Gregory’s thought evolve from a more dualistic and ‘Platonist’ perspective in his early works to a more holistic and accepting conception of the embodied and material existence.⁹⁶ This view has been frequently accepted and expounded based on Daniélou’s chronology of Gregory’s works, but a closer reading will reveal both that Gregory’s early works are not as hostile to the irrational as they are sometimes claimed to be and, on the other hand, that his late works are not unreservedly positive towards embodiment.⁹⁷ At all points of his career,

⁹⁵ Of course, even for philosophers who wrote before Gregory’s time, the pleasure-seeker was a largely imagined and standardised literary villain evoked for normative and paedagogical purposes.

⁹⁶ Also other scholars have criticised developmental readings of Gregory’s corpus, starting from the problem that the chronology of his works is unclear and often circularly established around a pre-existing notion that his thought develops in certain ways over time. See, for example, Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 7–8.

⁹⁷ Jean Daniélou, ‘La chronologie des oeuvres de Grégoire de Nysse’, in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 7, 1966, 159–69. See my critique of Daniélou and, more importantly, Warren Smith’s and Sarah Coakley’s developmental readings that build on his assumptions in Chapters 8 and 9.

Gregory conceives the material creation both as a positive aid of the Christian life but, ultimately, as a non-final level of reality.

While Leuenberger-Wenger's work on Gregory's ethics makes a distinction between homilies to congregations and treatises and correspondence to more learned and, on her reading, more advanced Christians, I do not find such a separation useful for the present topic. It is certainly true that Gregory speaks to different audiences with different levels of education, some of whom may have been more receptive and proactive towards his ethical teaching. However, it is simply not true that the themes of Gregory's congregational homilies are largely practical and lay down a minimum standard for the Christian life focussing largely on social problems, while the philosophical texts approach the good life from a more ambitious and spiritually profound perspective. The concern about pleasure and virtue pervades both categories, and, as we shall see, for example Gregory's teaching on the practical regulation of bodily needs can easily be read under a 'more philosophical' concern for pleasure as an ephemeral false good. Whereas Philo and Clement of Alexandria espouse two clearly different ideals of the good life for ordinary and advanced believers – moderation of passions for the former and a complete extirpation for the latter – no such distinction exists in Gregory's works.⁹⁸ Furthermore, the criterion on which Leuenberger-Wenger separates Gregory's texts into the two main groups is not clear to me. For example, *On Virginity* and *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* are frequently cited in both sections, while *Homilies on the Beatitudes* is mainly discussed under texts for advanced audiences, presumably because it is built around the notion of spiritual progress.⁹⁹ Furthermore, as Norris points out, even in the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, regarded by Leuenberger-Wenger as a work written to an advanced audience, Gregory notes that he is directing his words to the 'fleshly minded'. Thus, Norris suggests that 'the "way" that his homilies discern as the

⁹⁸ See my discussion on *metriopatheia* in Chapter 2.

⁹⁹ Leuenberger-Wenger, *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa*, 157. Cf. Hilda Graef ("Introduction", in *St Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, The Beatitudes*, Westminster: Newman Press; London: Green, 1954, 6–7) who considers *Beat.* more practical and less allegorical than the 'mystical' works espousing a 'spiritual doctrine' among which she counts both *Virg.* and *Eccl.* While I do not find Graef's classification particularly helpful either, it shows how assessments of the level of spirituality vary within scholarship.

theme of the Song of Songs is not a way reserved for the “advanced” but one that is meant to be trodden by all serious Christians.’¹⁰⁰ This is not to deny that, for Gregory, the Christian life is progressive and consists of stages. I am simply not sure how neatly we can group different works and their presumed audiences under the different stages of the Christian life.

Since, on the one hand, dating Gregory’s works, assessing the level of their content, and determining their audience is challenging and, on the other, I do not believe that such distinctions make a significant difference to the treatment of the present topic, I have chosen to discuss Gregory’s works as a larger whole, organising my analysis around what I perceive to be a distinct discourse on pleasure as the false good. However, since my interest is on Gregory’s ethics, I have primarily focussed on works that are exhortative or paedagogical in nature. Thus, a great deal of my analysis arises from Gregory’s homilies and other texts in which he offers instruction on the principles of the good Christian life, such as *De virginitate*, *De mortuis non esse dolendum*, and *In inscriptiones psalmorum*. In the first chapter I will also draw extensively on Gregory’s anthropological treatises, not least because the internal logic of ancient eudaimonistic ethics dictates that understanding who human beings are is vital for understanding their purpose in life. However, I have largely set aside Gregory’s doctrinal works, most notably *Contra Eunomium*, which do include occasional remarks on pleasure but add little new to works where the topic is discussed in the context of Christian instruction and exhortation.

The only text I have deliberately left entirely outside my analysis is *De instituto Christiano*, which is usually counted among Gregory’s ascetical works. My decision is due to the author’s unusual usage of ἡδονή, the key word of the thesis. I will discuss the details of Gregory’s terminology of pleasure in the first main chapter. For now, I will simply note that in *De instituto Christiano* the author repeatedly discusses a positive ἡδονή which results from the practice of virtue in *this* life in a way that has three peculiarities: first, the word appears

¹⁰⁰ Richard A Norris Jr, ‘Introduction’, in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), xvi–xvii.

without any qualifying positive adjectives which normally accompany Gregory's meagre allusions to positive ἡδονή; second, it occurs frequently in the phrase μεθ' ἡδονῆς ('with pleasure') which is rare in Gregory's corpus, often in reference to various duties and practices that a Christian must carry out as a member of his community¹⁰¹; and third, it is often linked to 'hope' (ἐλπίζ), which Gregory normally considers antithetical to pleasure.¹⁰² This frequent and unrestrained positive usage of ἡδονή without any qualifying adjectives and in connection to willing obedience stands out from the rest of Gregory's corpus. In my view, this offers further grounds to question the already contested authorship of the work.¹⁰³ Hence, I have excluded the work from the core material of this thesis.

The thesis is based on recognised Greek editions of Gregory's works, chiefly the texts found in Brill's *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*. Throughout, I have chosen to make use of existing English translations, but I have frequently modified them, mostly for the sake of terminological coherence (I have, for example, always translated ἡδονή as 'pleasure' and ἀπόλαυσις as 'enjoyment'). Since more often than not such minor modifications have been necessary, I have not mentioned them individually. Thus, the reader is encouraged to consult the source of the English text for the original wording. I have offered my own translation of a longer passage where I have felt that the existing translation has not sufficiently captured the essential point or where an English translation has simply not been available. In such cases, I have often benefitted from the French translations in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series.

In this thesis, I approach Gregory's understanding of pleasure chiefly as a philosophical and theological problem through a close reading of the original

¹⁰¹ The phrase occurs twelve times in Gregory's corpus, out of which five are in *De instituto Christiano* (GNO VIII/1, 67.12; 70.17; 84.17; 85.12; 87.14), while the remaining seven are spread out with no work containing more than a single occurrence. A similar phrase also in 84.8.

¹⁰² See *Inst. Christ.* (GNO VIII/1, 63.13; 67.12; 68.11; 84.8; 84.17).

¹⁰³ See Mariette Canévet, 'Le "De Instituto Christiano" est-il de Grégoire de Nyssa? Problèmes de critique interne', *Revue des Études Grecques* 82, no. 391 (1969): 404–23. Also other scholars have noted that *De instituto Christiano* contains ideas that are not represented elsewhere in Gregory's corpus, and have thus been cautious not to base their conclusions on the work. See, for example, Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 220–21.

sources. I am interested in the concepts and arguments that he puts forth to explain the role of pleasure as a false good, and their connections to the literary tradition of Graeco-Roman ethics. By adopting one approach, I am of course opting out of others. While my topic occasionally overlaps with matters related to wealth and poverty, I have largely left untouched questions related to Gregory's social world, including early Christian practices of philanthropy. Furthermore, while Gregory uses the notion of pleasure to discuss the boundary between the church and the world, I have not been able to comment extensively on Gregory's use of the dichotomy as a rhetorical device or as a means of identity formation.

After the introduction, the thesis is divided into three main parts: in the first part, I will investigate Gregory's notion of pleasure and lay the anthropological groundwork for his ethical considerations. I will briefly survey ancient definitions of pleasure and note Gregory's affinity particularly to the Platonic definition of pleasure as a replenishment and the Stoic notion of pleasure as a passion that comes about as a result of the mind's judgment. In the second chapter, I will turn to the place of pleasure in the human constitution, arguing that pleasure originates in our sensible nature but is crucially shaped by the intelligible nature.

Part II focuses on the broad ethical question of pleasure as the false good and the primary source of sin. Chapter 3 will address the question in the context of Gregory's reading of the fall, while Chapter 4 examines the ways in which pleasure obscures the true good in the life of the postlapsarian human being. I will show how pleasure emerges as a result of a fundamental misunderstanding concerning the structure of the universe and the identity of the true good. In Chapter 5, I will examine how Gregory envisions the appropriate Christian attitude towards bodily needs and material consumption in a framework where the final good rests beyond the cyclical life of the material creation. I will build my analysis around the juxtaposition between pleasure and need, showing how Gregory makes use of this pair to discuss two different attitudes towards embodiment and the material creation. In Chapter 6, I shall approach the issue

of pleasure as a false good from a reversed perspective and show that Gregory's line of thinking also yields the conclusion that pain is not evil.

Despite Gregory's negative attitude towards sensual pleasure, enjoyment appears to play a key role both in his understanding of the paradisiac existence and the eschatological fulfilment. Thus, Part III addresses Gregory's notion of pleasures that belong to the good Christian life, asking what sets them apart from detrimental sensual pleasures. In Chapter 7, I examine Gregory's vocabulary of spiritual pleasure and the sequence in which spiritual enjoyment emerges in the Christian life. In Chapter 8, I introduce ancient notions of intellectual pleasure and then investigate the place of pleasure in Gregory's understanding of the eschatological fulfilment, pointing out his peculiar open-mindedness towards pleasure mixed with pain even at the highest stages of the spiritual life. In Chapter 9, I will ask whether the body has a role to play in spiritual enjoyment and engage critically with Sarah Coakley's recent article on Gregory's notion of the spiritual senses. Finally, Chapter 10 offers a brief reflection on the question whether Gregory, whose view of the eschatological fulfilment makes much of enjoyment and delight, can be classified as a spiritual hedonist.

PART I: THE IDENTITY OF PLEASURE

1. Defining Pleasure: Gregory Among Ancient Authors

To provide the necessary scaffolding for ethical questions related to pleasure, we must first investigate what the phenomenon called 'pleasure' means to Gregory. The purpose of the first two chapters is to gain some insight into how Gregory defines pleasure and where he locates it in the human constitution. In other words, I will address the issue that David Wolfsdorf, one of the most prominent contemporary scholars working on ancient conceptions of pleasure, calls the 'identity question'.¹⁰⁴

I will begin my enquiry by offering a brief outline of Gregory's vocabulary of pleasure and some of the general topics with which pleasure is associated in his works. However, I will also draw attention to the fact that, despite the apparent centrality of pleasure to Gregory's thought, we will be hard pressed to find any formal definitions. The few passages that explicitly state what pleasure is turn out not to be particularly useful for understanding the role of pleasure as it appears elsewhere in Gregory's writings. Therefore, we must approach the topic indirectly and synthetically.

To see where Gregory fits within the ancient discourse on pleasure, I will turn to Wolfsdorf's work and introduce the three most prominent anti-hedonist definitions of pleasure – Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic. These definitions and their later eclectic combinations have shaped most ancient conceptions of pleasure. I will go on to suggest that Gregory draws on all three definitions, but the Platonic and the Stoic conception are particularly important: On the one hand, it is clear that Gregory, like Plato and later Platonists, understands desire as a lack and pleasure as a process of filling. On the other, like the Stoics and Stoic-inspired authors, he views pleasure as a passion that results from a faulty judgment of the mind. Later, in the final part of this thesis, I will also show that the Aristotelian notion of pleasure as an accompaniment of an unimpeded

¹⁰⁴ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 3.

natural activation can help us understand some features of Gregory's (or, rather, the literary Macrina's) view of intellectual pleasure.

Gregory's Terminology of Pleasure

The word ἡδονή ('pleasure') is the most important term that Gregory employs to discuss the topic of pleasure. ἡδονή is, of course, the etymological root of 'hedonism', and by Gregory's time it already had long history as the key term of the ancient philosophical debate concerning the role of pleasure in the good life. Although not frequent, ἡδονή also appears in the New Testament, in which it has a clearly negative significance and is associated with base and sinful desires.¹⁰⁵

Gregory's remarks on ἡδονή are embedded in a variety of contexts. Often, the term turns up in relation to ethics, as part of practical admonitions or philosophical reflections concerning the nature of the good. Anthropological discussions, which may of course overlap with the ethical, are another typical location. Sometimes ἡδονή is discussed extensively, though no one text addresses it as the main topic; other times it is merely included in lists of passions that were a common feature of ancient moral instruction.¹⁰⁶

Gregory associates ἡδονή with irrationality and ignorance¹⁰⁷, transiency¹⁰⁸, excess¹⁰⁹, and animality¹¹⁰. It is antithetical to virtue and, most problematically, obscures the good towards which people should direct their lives.¹¹¹ Key actions that yield ἡδονή include over-eating and drinking, living lavishly, amassing

¹⁰⁵ See *Luke* 8:14, *Titus* 3:3, *James* 4:1–3 (see especially for the futility of pleasure-seeking and pleasure as a mistaken orientation in life), 2 *Peter* 2:13.

¹⁰⁶ E.g. *Cant.* 2 (GNO VI, 59); *Cant.* 8 (GNO VI, 259); *Or. dom.* 5 (GNO VII/2, 67). On lists of virtues and vices, see Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*, 67–69.

¹⁰⁷ *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 107); *Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 350); *Op. hom.* 14 (PG 44, 173D–176A); *Virg.* 4.5 (SC 119, 318); *Virg.* 11.1 (SC 119, 382)

¹⁰⁸ *Beat.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 120); *Eccl.* 2.8 (SC 416, 180); *Vit. Moys.* II.60 (SC 1, 48).

¹⁰⁹ *Eccl.* 3.4 (SC 416, 196–198); *Mort.* (GNO IX, 58–59); *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 54).

¹¹⁰ On pleasure and animality, see e.g. *An. et res.* (PG 46, 60D–61A); *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 107); *Op. hom.* 18 (PG 44, 192B–C). For pleasure as a serpent: *Eccl.* 4.5 (SC 416, 250–252); *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 54).

¹¹¹ Among numerous examples, see: *Beat.* 5 (GNO VII/2, 125); *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 200A–B); *Virg.* 4.5 (SC 119, 318), 8 (SC 119, 362), 11.1 (SC 119, 382).

material possessions, and engaging in sexual relations.¹¹² Although the body clearly plays a role in pleasures of sex, food, comfort, and aesthetic delights, Gregory also talks about pleasures that do not have an obvious bodily component. In *De virginitate*, he notes that while most people fight ‘more shameful pleasures’ (τὰς αἰσχροτέρας τῶν ἡδονῶν) with force, they nonetheless pursue ‘pleasure in honours and love of power’ (τῆν ἡδονὴν ἐν τιμαῖς καὶ φιλαρχίαις).¹¹³ The latter do not pertain to bodily enjoyment, but a mental gratification due to an elevated social status. We shall see, however, that Gregory considers the tendency towards bodily pleasure a fundamentally mistaken direction of human desire and action, which serves as a breeding ground for other, less tangible pleasures.

Despite the markedly negative connotations of the word, Gregory does accept that spiritual things can yield ἡδονή that is appropriate and virtuous. However, this usage is limited and the word is almost always qualified with a positive adjective (e.g. ‘divine’, ‘pure’) to show that the phenomenon discussed is radically different from the usual base connotations of ἡδονή.¹¹⁴ I will return to the notion of positive ἡδονή in the next section of this chapter and offer a more comprehensive analysis of Gregory’s view of positive pleasure in the final part of the thesis.

For Gregory, as undoubtedly in the Greek tradition as a whole, ἡδονή remains the most important and also the most loaded term denoting pleasure. However, also a handful of other words deserve to be mentioned. ἀπόλαυσις (‘enjoyment’) refers both to the act and the outcome of enjoying. In the first sense, ἡδονή can be seen one of the possible objects or outcomes of ἀπόλαυσις. This is the case, for example, in *De anima et resurrectione* where Gregory and Macrina define desire as yearning for the enjoyment of pleasure (πόθον τῆς

¹¹² Among numerous possibilities, see, for example, *Eccl.* 3.4 (SC 416, 194–202); *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 54), 5 (GNO VII/2, 67–68); *Vit. Moys.* 1.63 (SC 1, 26).

¹¹³ *Virg.* 17.1 (SC 119, 454–456).

¹¹⁴ See my discussion on page 249.

καθ' ἡδονὴν ἀπολαύσεως).¹¹⁵ We should note that ἀπόλαυσις is a broader phenomenon than ἡδονή: there can be enjoyment without pleasure but there cannot be pleasure without enjoyment. This is evident in *De virginitate* where Gregory argues that need, not pleasure, must define the limits of enjoyment.¹¹⁶ When Gregory refers to the acceptable enjoyment of earthly things, he nearly always employs the word ἀπόλαυσις for, as we shall soon see, ἡδονή implies pleasure pursued for its own sake, which is never acceptable when it comes to the enjoyment of material goods.¹¹⁷ In the second usage, as an outcome, ἀπόλαυσις becomes largely synonymous with ἡδονή.¹¹⁸ We can find a number of passages where Gregory employs ἀπόλαυσις as a sensual and sinful cognate of ἡδονή.¹¹⁹ He also alludes to the sinful life as ὁ ἀπολαυστικὸς βίος, which he understands as a life devoted to enjoyment, i.e. a hedonistic life.¹²⁰ Finally, ἀπόλαυσις plays an important role as one of Gregory's preferred terms for spiritual enjoyment. I will discuss the specifics of this usage in the final part of the thesis.

In addition to ἡδονή and ἀπόλαυσις, Gregory refers to pleasure-like emotions with such words as τρυφή, χαρά, and εὐφροσύνη. Τρυφή, which is often translated as 'luxury' or 'delicacy', is a frequent term in ancient critiques of excessive desire and lavish living. For Gregory, it carries the same significance, but can also be employed to denote the abundant delight of Paradise and Heaven. Indeed, like Philo, Gregory argues that the Hebrew word 'Eden' can be translated as τρυφή.¹²¹ The words χαρά and εὐφροσύνη, both translatable as 'joy', are Gregory's preferred terms for spiritual enjoyment, often set against the sinful ἡδονή. I will discuss them further in Chapter 7.

¹¹⁵ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 56A). τῆς καθ' ἡδονὴν ἀπολαύσεως can be interpreted both as 'enjoyment according to pleasure' or 'enjoyment for the purpose of pleasure'. Pleasure can thus be seen either as a particular kind of enjoyment or the object of enjoyment.

¹¹⁶ *Virg.* 21.2 (SC 119, 508).

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Gregory on stars in *Cant.* 10 (GNO VI, 295.5).

¹¹⁸ In fact, the LSJ suggests that when intended as a result of enjoying, ἀπόλαυσις, too, can be translated as 'pleasure'. Also the *PGL* lists 'pleasure' as the first meaning of the word, followed by 'enjoyment' and 'fruition'.

¹¹⁹ E.g. *An. et res.* (PG 44, 84B); *Eccl.* 1.9–10 (SC 416, 130–132), 3.9 (SC 416, 220); *Vit. Moys.* II.59 (SC 1, 48).

¹²⁰ *Eccl.* 5.7 (SC 416, 290).

¹²¹ *Op. hom.* 19 (PG 44, 196D). Cf. Philo, *Leg.* 1, XIV.45.

Listing some of the main terms and contexts for Gregory's discussions on pleasure does not tell us very much about how he conceptualises the phenomenon of pleasure. Furthermore, both the words and the typical contexts in which they appear belong to the common stock of ancient philosophy and patristic theology, and, as such, do not help us place Gregory in the field of ancient anti-hedonist discourse. Thus, it is time to identify passages where Gregory drops more telling hints about his conception of pleasure to see how his view relates to some of the classic Greek theories.

Definitions of Pleasure in Ancient Philosophy

To identify the salient features of Gregory's conception of pleasure, it will be useful to familiarise ourselves with the most influential ancient definitions of pleasure. Here, the questions that interest me are those related to formal definitions, i.e. the topic that Wolfsdorf calls the 'identity question' of pleasure. The anthropological location of pleasure and its role in ethical development will be addressed in the later chapters.

The most important anti-hedonist notions of pleasure can roughly be characterised as Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic. In this section, I will introduce the three models and then go on to argue that the Platonic and Stoic conception offer the most useful parallels to Gregory's thought. The Platonic definition states that pleasure entails a process of a replenishment or restoration; the Stoic view emphasises pleasure as one of the four principal passions – alongside pain, desire, and fear – which arises in the mind due to a mistaken judgment. However, it is also important to sum up Aristotle's definition – in many ways a critique of the Platonic view – because it can help us understand some features of Gregory's view of intellectual pleasure, which I shall discuss in the final part of the thesis. We shall see that Gregory's understanding of pleasure does not perfectly match any of these definitions and is, on the whole, less nuanced.

Let us begin with Plato whose dialogues provide the first systematic attempts to address the identity question of pleasure. While pleasure had been discussed in earlier Greek philosophy in ways that influenced later thinkers, no formal definitions had been offered.¹²² Nonetheless, Wolfsdorf suggests that Plato's conception of pleasure has its roots in earlier physiological accounts where 'pleasure is conceived as a state of replenishment of a nutritional deficit of the kind that is depleted.'¹²³ Thus,

[a]mong Plato's various treatments of pleasure [chiefly in *Gorgias*, *Republic*, *Timaeus*, and *Philebus*], we find the following persistent view: pleasure is a replenishment or a restoration to a natural state, where the subject that undergoes the replenishment or restoration is aware of the replenishment or restoration.¹²⁴

What does this entail? In the most basic sense, pleasure is a filling of a lack. This is the approach that Plato takes in *Gorgias* where the pleasures related to quenching hunger and slaking thirst are used as paradigmatic examples of the general nature of pleasure as a filling.¹²⁵ This does not mean that pleasure is primarily a bodily phenomenon. Even if hunger and thirst are physical lacks, the locus of the filling is the appetite, which belongs to the soul.¹²⁶ Moreover, Plato applies the model to all pleasures, not just physical ones. In *Republic*, he argues that the different parts of the soul have their own deficits and replenishments, which constitute the characteristic pleasures of each part.¹²⁷

When Plato states that pleasure entails the restoration of the *natural state*, he means that the organism undergoing pleasure returns to a state that is intrinsically good for it. In the body, this is the state of perfect health; in the soul, it is psychological wellbeing. Restored to the natural state, the entity exists in a state of balance and harmony and can perform its function as intended.¹²⁸ However, not all restorations are replenishments. An entity can be restored to a

¹²² Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 24.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹²⁵ *Gorg.* 494b, 496c–e.

¹²⁶ *Gorg.* 493b.

¹²⁷ *Rep.* 9, 580d.

¹²⁸ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 41–42. See also, in particular, *Phil.* 31b–32d.

state of balance also by removing something excessive or nocive. Indeed, Wolfsdorf argues that Plato develops his theory from mere replenishment in the earlier dialogues (closely modelled after a physical filling) to a more comprehensive notion of restoration in the later and most complete treatments which we find in *Republic* and *Philebus*.¹²⁹ Since pleasure occurs in a process of restoration, it is not surprising that Plato defines it as a 'becoming' (γένεσις).¹³⁰ As such, it is ontologically inferior to true being which is immobile and unchangeable. In the later chapters we shall see that this ontological evaluation of pleasure has significant ethical implications.

Plato's conception of pleasure as a replenishment or a restoration is explicitly criticised and rejected by Aristotle. The latter contends that it is untenable because not all pleasures are preceded by lacks.¹³¹ He also denies that pleasure is a movement arguing that all pleasures are complete at once.¹³² Furthermore, Aristotle argues against Plato that the best, true, and natural pleasures are found in rest.¹³³ Here, he is thinking particularly of pleasures of contemplation which arise in a state of perfect fulfilment. To address these shortcomings of Plato's view, Aristotle redefines pleasure as an ἐνέργεια (*EE* 6) or as a culmination of an ἐνέργεια (*NE* 10).¹³⁴ As Wolfsdorf explains, ἐνέργεια 'is the condition of being in use, deployed, exercised, or at work.'¹³⁵ Thus, his preferred translation is 'activation', though many other translators speak of an 'activity'. Activation occurs when one of our faculties, such as the intellect or sense perception, is exercised.

¹²⁹ See Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 44.

¹³⁰ *Phil.* 53c.

¹³¹ *EE* 6, 1152b–1153a; *NE* 10.3, 1173b. For Aristotle's conception of pleasure, see Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 103–43.

¹³² *NE* 10.4, 1174a–b.

¹³³ *EE* 6, 1154b.

¹³⁴ These two different and partly conflicting views are customarily found in Books 7 and 10 of *Nicomachean Ethics*. However, Book 7 of *Nicomachean Ethics* is, in fact, Book 6 of *Eudemian Ethics*. Following Wolfsdorf, I shall be alluding to these accounts as *EE* 6 and *NE* 10. Wolfsdorf argues that Aristotle develops his view arguing first in *Eudemian Ethics* 6 that pleasure is an activation and then, with more nuance, in *Nicomachean Ethics* 10 that pleasure accompanies or culminates an activation. Thus, on Wolfsdorf's reading, this seeming self-contradiction within *NE* is a sign that earlier material has been incorporated in the work. On these different definitions and possible reasons as to why Aristotle goes on to reject his own view in the same work, see Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 105–6.

¹³⁵ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 115.

More precisely, Aristotle defines pleasure as *an unimpeded* (ἀνεμπόδιστον) *activation of a natural disposition* (ἐνέργειαν τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἕξεως), or as something that ‘completes’ (τελειοῖ) such an activation.¹³⁶ Wolfsdorf argues that here ‘disposition’ is to be understood in a broad sense as a psychic – sense-perceptual, character-related, or intellectual – capacity. The word ‘natural’ is used in the normative sense to denote the goal or endpoint of development.¹³⁷ ‘Unimpeded’ means that the disposition in question is able to perform its characteristic function perfectly without any hindrance, i.e. reach its *telos*. This occurs, for example, when sense perception is not impaired or physically restricted, or when the intellect has been sufficiently honed for contemplation. In these cases, Aristotle says, pleasure will ‘supervene’ (ἐπιγινόμενόν) on the activation.¹³⁸ In other words, a natural pleasure for Aristotle comes about in a state where no lack, change, or generation is present but the entity is activated in its perfect state without impediments.¹³⁹ In his view, some lesser, ‘coincidental’ pleasures may accompany a restoration – as is the case with the pleasures of eating and drinking – but even they are best understood as separate from the restoration itself.¹⁴⁰

The difference between whether pleasure *is* or simply *completes* an activation boils down to the relationship between pleasure and the good. As we have already seen, Aristotle holds that the attainment of the final good will yield happiness. By arguing in *EE* 6 that pleasure itself is an unimpeded activation of some natural disposition, Aristotle makes pleasure synonymous with happiness which he understands as a perfect activation. This does not mean that all pleasures can vie for the place of the highest good, but some can, chiefly the ones related to contemplation which entails the perfect activation of the intellect.¹⁴¹ However, in *NE* 10, Aristotle revises his view and argues that

¹³⁶ Compare *EE* 6, 1153a to *NE* 10, 1174b, 1175a–b. See also Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 119–23, 130–31.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹³⁸ *NE* 10.4, 1174b.

¹³⁹ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 129.

¹⁴⁰ *EE* 6, 1154b; *NE* 10.3, 1173b.

¹⁴¹ *EE* 6, 1153b.

happiness and pleasure are not synonymous. The former is an activation, while the latter accompanies it so closely that it is almost indistinguishable.¹⁴² Either way, the strength of Aristotle's explanation lies in the way in which it can explain how pleasure can result from a perfect state where the subject does not suffer any lack.

Finally, we should turn to the Stoic definition of pleasure, which, as Wolfsdorf remarks, was developed and reshaped by a number of individuals over several centuries, and thus involves even more changes and ambiguities than the Platonic and Aristotelian counterparts.¹⁴³ Here I can only offer a sketch of some general features. The Stoics regard pleasure as one of the four fundamental passions (πάθη), along with pain, desire, and fear.¹⁴⁴ Of these, desire and fear are primary, while pain and pleasure are secondary. Wolfsdorf cites a passage from the Stoic philosopher Arius:

Desire and fear go first. The former is toward the apparent good; the latter is toward the apparent bad. Pleasure and pain follow upon these. Pleasure occurs whenever we obtain what we were desiring or escape from what we were fearing. Pain occurs whenever we do not attain what we were desiring or come upon what we were fearing.¹⁴⁵

What Arius means is that desire and fear are primary because they are directed at the attainment or avoidance of certain things in the future. Pleasure and pain, on the other hand, are secondary because they result from the primary emotions when what has been desired or feared has been attained or avoided in the present. In short, pleasure is a passion that results from the attainment of a present apparent good. We should note the phrase 'apparent good', for we shall see in the later chapters that the notion of pleasure as the apparent good is at the heart of the problem of hedonism, both for Gregory and for representatives of earlier anti-hedonist philosophy. The Stoics are not the only philosophical school to claim that pleasure is linked to the apparent good, but they are the

¹⁴² *NE* 10.5, 1175a-b.

¹⁴³ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 182.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, *DL* 7.110. See also Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 202-203

¹⁴⁵ *SVF* I.211. Cited in Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 202.

ones to incorporate the idea most clearly in their very definition of pleasure. The problem of pleasure as the apparent good will be the main theme of Part II of this thesis.

To understand what the Stoics mean when they label pleasure as one of the primary passions, we must first clarify the meaning of the word 'passion'. It is important to note that the details of Stoic ethics and theory of action are numerous and intricate; thus, I will only comment on the parts that have direct relevance for Gregory's understanding and provide a springboard for an in-depth discussion of passions in the next chapter where I will also return to Stoic concepts. The Old Stoics conceptualise all passions as irrational disturbances in the soul, which are caused by an excessive impulse to which the mind mistakenly gives its assent. Wolfsdorf cautions us not to interpret 'impulse' in the modern English sense of the word, which implies a sudden and spontaneous incitement to action. For the Stoics, an impulse may arise from lengthy deliberation.¹⁴⁶ It is conceived as 'a movement (*phora*) of the *hêgemonikon* [or *dianoia*] toward or away from something.'¹⁴⁷ Simply put, impulses are prompts to action, while assent depends on something being conceived as good, bad, or indifferent. In other words, the person will have the notion that it is good to do X, and thus assent to the assertion that it is fitting to do X and, have an impulse to do X, and, consequently, do X. Whether this chain of cognition and action is rational depends on the truthfulness of the underlying evaluative notion, i.e. whether the thing considered good (or bad or indifferent) actually is such.¹⁴⁸ As Wolfsdorf notes, '[i]t is a condition of passions that they depend upon judgments or assents that something is good or bad.'¹⁴⁹

While all actions result from judgments, it is a key feature of passions that they are a product of *false* judgments. They occur when the mind overvalues the goodness or badness of an object and thus shrinks from it or strives for it without a sound rational basis. This overvaluation is what the Stoics have in

¹⁴⁶ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 189.

¹⁴⁷ Cited in Wolfsdorf (*Ibid.*).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

mind when they argue that a passion entails an *excessive* impulse. Furthermore, an excessive impulse is conceived as a transgression of the bounds of Nature which, for the Stoics, sets the norm of the good life.¹⁵⁰

What, then, is the relevance of these three models to Gregory's conception of pleasure? In the section that follows, I will examine some of Gregory's remarks on ἡδονή and go on to suggest that especially the Platonic conception of pleasure as a replenishment can help us understand his largely implicit notion of pleasure. My focus will be on a passage in *Homily 4 on the Beatitudes*, in which Gregory explicitly cites the metaphor of filling a leaky jar, which Plato presents in his treatment of pleasure in *Gorgias*. I will also offer some evidence indicating that Gregory does not understand pleasure as a result of a simple bodily filling but also as a more abstract replenishment. However, this does not mean that the replenishment model sufficiently accounts for all aspects of Gregory's notion of pleasure. We shall see that also the Stoic view of pleasure as a result of a mistaken judgment of the mind will be helpful in making sense of Gregory's comments on the topic. However, understanding the latter perspective will require a more thorough introduction to Gregory's anthropology. Thus, I will first comment on the relevance of the replenishment model and address the parallels to Stoicism in the following chapter.

Gregory's Definition of Pleasure

For Gregory, pleasure is not an object of philosophical enquiry, but a topic of ascetical exhortation. Thus, there is neither a text that would offer a detailed analysis of the topic of pleasure nor one sentence that would answer the question: 'What is pleasure?' The closest we can get is a rather obscure remark in *In Ecclesiasten*:

[The good person's] pleasure is not that of the body, which is a disposition towards that which is desired, but the one whose name and function is gladness (ἡδονή οὐχ ἡ τοῦ

¹⁵⁰ For passions as excessive and unnatural, see DL 7.110.

σώματος, ὅποια ἢ περὶ τὸ καταθύμιον σχέσις, ἀλλ' ἦς ὄνομά τε καὶ ἔργον ἢ εὐφροσύνη ἐστίν).¹⁵¹

The sentence prompts two immediate observations. First, it is clear that there are, at least implicitly, two kinds of pleasure: that of the good person, which is in fact 'gladness' (εὐφροσύνη), and that of the body. The connection between pleasure and the human body is evident in Gregory's writings. Pleasure is seen as a priority of people who care about their bodies instead of intelligible matters. It operates through the bodily senses, which Gregory elsewhere describes as water channels or windows through which pleasurable impulses inundate and destroy the soul.¹⁵²

When Gregory says that the pleasure of the good person is not the customary pleasure (i.e. pleasure of the body) but 'gladness', he may be interpreted to mean that the good kind of pleasure is actually pleasure only nominally by way of analogy. However, this is not the only possible reading. Despite the predominantly negative value of ἡδονή throughout Gregory's whole corpus, some passages indicate that ἡδονή does have a positive spiritual manifestation. For example, in *De virginitate* and *De anima et resurrectione* we find mentions of 'the divine and undefiled pleasure' (θείας τε καὶ ἀκηράτου ... ἡδονῆς),¹⁵³ 'the divine and blessed pleasure' (θείαν τε καὶ μακαρίαν ἡδονήν),¹⁵⁴ and 'the most beautiful and purest pleasure' (ἡδονήν τὴν καλλίστην καὶ καθαρωτάτην).¹⁵⁵ The most explicit statement concerning the two directions of pleasure comes from Gregory's *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, where he alludes to a 'a double pleasure (διπλῆς ... ἡδονῆς), one that is in the soul and is activated by impassibility and another that is occasioned in the body by passion.'¹⁵⁶ I will briefly discuss the possibility of positive pleasure in the next chapter where I

¹⁵¹ *Eccl.* 5.8 (SC 416, 296). Here, I am offering my own translation because Hall and Moriarty's rendering of ἢ περὶ τὸ καταθύμιον σχέσις is somewhat too vague: '[H]is pleasure is not the body's pleasure, like *the habit of doing as one pleases...*' (Hall & Moriarty, 98). I have partially followed Vinel who translates the phrase as 'une disposition pour ce qui plaît'. Although both translations render τὸ καταθύμιον as that which pleases, I prefer a less redundant translation which does not directly allude to pleasure.

¹⁵² For these metaphors, see *Virg.* 21.1 (SC 119, 504); *Or. dom.* 5 (GNO VII/2, 66–67).

¹⁵³ *Virg.* 5.1 (SC 119, 338.29–30); *An. et res.* (PG 46, 61B).

¹⁵⁴ *Virg.* 5.1 (SC 119, 336.16–17).

¹⁵⁵ *Virg.* 9.2 (SC 119, 368.22–23).

¹⁵⁶ *Cant.* 10 (GNO VI, 313); trans. Norris, 329.

examine Gregory's notion of passions, including his point that affective impulses are morally neutral and can be transformed into vices or virtues. I will return to the topic in Chapter 7 where I offer a more thorough analysis of the vocabulary and characteristics of spiritual enjoyment and pleasure. For now, it is sufficient to note that ἡδονή can also have a positive significance.

The second observation arising from the sentence in *In Ecclesiasten* is that even though the negative, customary sort of pleasure is 'of the body' (τοῦ σώματος), it is subsequently defined as 'a disposition towards that which is desired' (περὶ τὸ καταθύμιον σχέσις). It is therefore too simplistic to characterise pleasure as an exclusively bodily phenomenon that is contrasted with inner spiritual joy. On the contrary, even bodily pleasure appears to have an inner cognitive dimension and entail some form of intentionality. Indeed, Wolfsdorf explains that most Greek authors, regardless of their specific philosophical affiliations, do not conceive pleasure as a mere feeling in the body but as an attitude towards an object.¹⁵⁷ This is what Gregory likely intends with ἡ περὶ τὸ καταθύμιον σχέσις.¹⁵⁸ While the word σχέσις ('attitude', 'disposition', 'relation') is a key term of both Aristotelian and Stoic ontology, the notion of pleasure as σχέσις is not central to earlier ancient writers. Here, it is perhaps best to understand the word as a general description of an intentional relationship between the soul and an external object.

¹⁵⁷ David Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 189. Nemesius of Emesa, Gregory's Christian contemporary, states explicitly in his anthropological treatise *De natura hominis* (18, BT 76) that no pleasure belongs only to the body since pleasure requires sensation, which Nemesius, like Gregory and most other ancient thinkers, understands as a psychic matter.

¹⁵⁸ In its basic Stoic sense, σχέσις denoted a relation that a thing had to something other than itself, which included both social relations and psychological attitudes. Lampe suggests that in patristic use the word can simply refer to a relationship or attachment between persons and things, 'especially of the soul to earthly or heavenly things' (see σχέσις, *PGL*, 1357–58, 8). In Gregory's own works, σχέσις appears frequently in the context of intra-Trinitarian relations. For example, in *Contra Eunomium* the word appears numerous times to denote the relationships between the persons of the Trinity. Consider, for example, Gregory's comment that when the names 'Father' and 'Son' are spoken, everyone is able to recognise the 'proper and natural relationship to each other' (τὴν οἰκείαν αὐτῶν καὶ φυσικὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλα σχέσιν) implied in them, an effect not achieved by other, non-traditional names (*Eun.* I.1.159).

Also the connection between σχέσις and τὸ καταθύμιον seems to be Gregory's own.¹⁵⁹ The same pair of words appears in two other passages in relatively similar contexts. The first one, which also mentions pleasure, occurs in *Homily 8 on the Ecclesiastes*, where Gregory defines affection or love (φίλτρον) as 'the inner disposition towards what is desired, functioning through pleasure and passionate feeling' (ἡ ἐνδιάθετος περὶ τὸ καταθύμιον σχέσις δι' ἡδονῆς καὶ προσπαθείας ἐνεργουμένη).¹⁶⁰ The second instance bears a close resemblance to the first: In *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, Gregory defines love (now, ἀγάπη) as 'the innate disposition for the object of one's desire' (ἡ πρὸς τὸ καταθύμιον ἐνδιάθετος σχέσις).¹⁶¹ In its most basic sense καταθύμιος denotes something that is in one's mind or in one's heart.¹⁶² It is not a technical term but a derivative of θυμός, which can refer to both the soul in general, its thinking part, and the seat of emotions and appetites. Thus, we must look at the context to determine its point of reference. For Gregory, καταθύμιος seems to mean primarily that which is pleasing or desirable, as evidenced by Hall's and Silvas's respective translations ('what is desired', 'the object of one's desire'), and Hall's and Vinel's translations of the passage from *Eccl.* 5 where both render the word with expressions related to pleasing ('as one pleases', 'ce qui plaît').¹⁶³ In *Oratio catechetica*, Gregory discusses people who want to spend their lives 'enjoying what is pleasing' (διὰ τὴν τῶν καταθυμίων ἀπόλαυσιν) and thus falsely judge a life of suffering to be far from the ideal.¹⁶⁴ Since enjoying things that are καταθύμιος is here used as the opposite of suffering, the word clearly refers to a pleasing or desirable quality. Calling pleasure 'a disposition towards that which is pleasing' is, of course, uninformative and redundant. But if τὸ καταθύμιον is taken to mean 'that which is desired', the phrase may be seen as an allusion to the close connection between pleasure and desire. In my view, this is the junction we ought to explore.

¹⁵⁹ The latter word is disproportionately represented in in his corpus compared to earlier sources. The *TLG* lists 66 occurrences before Gregory and 50 in his works alone.

¹⁶⁰ *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 416, 392); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 129. Vinel (SC 416, 392, note 1) argues that Gregory uses the word φίλτρον due to its lack of philosophical connotations, seeking to refer to human love in its broadest definition.

¹⁶¹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 93C); trans. Silvas, 210. Here, Silvas translates σχέσις as 'affection'. I have rendered it as 'disposition' for consistency.

¹⁶² See LSJ, καταθύμιος.

¹⁶³ See my discussion above, esp. footnote 151.

¹⁶⁴ *Or. cat.* 8 (SC 453, 186); my translation.

Saying that pleasure is linked to desire does not tell us very much about the intellectual currents that might inform Gregory's thinking. Most ancient authors made the connection; we have already encountered it in Plato's definition as well as in Arius's Stoic conception. Also Aristotle argues that appetite is concerned with pleasure.¹⁶⁵ The question is, then, how Gregory conceptualises this link. I will suggest that here we can benefit from drawing a parallel to Plato's basic understanding of desire and pleasure as a lack and replenishment. To pursue this line of interpretation, I will first turn to *De anima et resurrectione*, a literary dialogue between Gregory and his older sister Macrina, where the latter gives a definition of desire that also includes pleasure:

Again, if we were to define what desire (ἐπιθυμίαν) is in itself, we shall call it a seeking for what one lacks (τοῦ ἐνδέοντος), or a yearning for the enjoyment of some pleasure (πόθον τῆς καθ' ἡδονὴν ἀπολαύσεως), or a grief (λύπην) when something on which we have set our heart (καταθυμητικῶ) is not in our power, or a disposition towards some pleasure (τινα πρὸς τὸ ἡδὺ σχέσιν) which it is not possible to enjoy (ἀπόλαυσις).¹⁶⁶

Pleasure is mentioned twice in Macrina's definition of desire: she argues that desire (ἐπιθυμία) is a yearning for the enjoyment of pleasure (πόθον τῆς καθ' ἡδονὴν ἀπολαύσεως), or a 'disposition' (σχέσιν) towards some unattainable pleasure. Here, we encounter again the word σχέσις which we have previously seen associated with pleasure and love. The fact that Gregory regards all three as σχέσεις indicates that the word refers quite generally to an affective relationship that the soul has to an external object. If we approach Macrina's definition of desire from the other end, we can say that in a basic sense pleasure occurs as a desire is fulfilled. If, on the other hand, desire fails to attain its target, what follows is grief or pain (λύπη), which Gregory, like most ancient thinkers, regards as the opposite of ἡδονή.

¹⁶⁵ ἢ γὰρ ἐπιθυμία τοῦ ἡδέος ἐστὶν ὄρεξις,' Aristotle argues in *Rhet.* 1370a, in which he still follows the Platonic lack-and-replenishment model of pleasure. Also in *EE* and *NE*, where Aristotle departs from the Platonic conception of pleasure, he still holds that ἐπιθυμία is concerned with pleasure. See, for example, *NE* 1111b and my discussion below.

¹⁶⁶ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 56A); trans. Silvas, 192. Silvas renders σχέσις as 'habituation'. I have used 'disposition' for consistency.

We should also take note of how Macrina alludes to desire as ‘a seeking for what one lacks’ (τοῦ ἐνδέοντος). The conception of desire as a lack is famously articulated in *Symposium* and adopted by later Platonist thinkers.¹⁶⁷ For our present topic, the words of Clement of Alexandria are particularly fitting: ‘Every pleasure has its origin in a desire. Desire is a form of pain, a care which yearns for something it lacks (ἐπιθυμία δὲ λύπη τις καὶ φροντὶς δι’ ἐνδειαν ὀρεγομένη τινός).’¹⁶⁸ Here, Clement not only defines desire as a pain caused by a lack, but also notes the origin of pleasure in desire. We should compare this to Macrina’s definition that I cited above: ‘Again, if we were to define what desire (ἐπιθυμίαν) is in itself, we shall call it a seeking for what one lacks (τοῦ ἐνδέοντος), or a yearning for the enjoyment of some pleasure (πόθον τῆς καθ’ ἡδονὴν ἀπολάσεως)...’ Although Macrina does not explicitly equate the two but separates them with the conjunction ‘or’, I suggest we should read ‘a seeking for what one lacks’ and ‘a yearning for some pleasure’ as descriptions of the same phenomenon. If, as Clement says, every desire ‘yearns for something it lacks’ and pleasure results from desire, we are not far from claiming that pleasure is, in fact, *a filling of a lack*: it occurs as desire grasps what it seeks and the painful lack is gradually alleviated by the pleasurable fulfilment. This is akin to the basic Platonic conception of pleasure as a replenishment.

However, it is important to note that while Clement explicitly argues that every pleasure originates in a desire, Macrina’s definition only states that desire is directed at pleasure. Strictly speaking, the latter is not sufficient for establishing that every pleasure by definition has its origin in a desire. This is the difference between Plato, who accepts such a view, and Aristotle, who rejects it. Aristotle, too, understands ἐπιθυμία as a lack and a pain and argues that it seeks that which is pleasurable.¹⁶⁹ However, for Aristotle, this does not entail that pleasure is by definition a replenishment; the connection between the two is not necessary. As I understand it, for Aristotle appetite, lack, and pleasure are connected only so far as quenching the appetite entails bringing the entity to its

¹⁶⁷ See, in particular, *Symp.* 200e where desiring is defined as seeking what is not at hand and what the subject lacks (ἐνδεής ἐστι).

¹⁶⁸ *Strom.* 3.5.42.1; trans. Ferguson, 281.

¹⁶⁹ See *NE* 1111b (relates to the pleasant and painful), 1118b (replenishment of a lack), 1119a (involves pain).

natural condition and thus enables its perfect activation which, in turn, yields pleasure. The fact that pleasure happens in conjunction with replenishment is accidental; it does not result from the replenishment but from the natural condition to which the entity is restored. We can imagine natural conditions, chiefly contemplation, that yield pleasure without the presence of any appetite/lack simply because a disposition is activated without impediment. But while Macrina's definition of pleasure could allude to the Aristotelian viewpoint, Gregory's other works provide sufficient grounds for supposing that he understands pleasure in the loosely Platonic framework as a replenishment, whereas the Aristotelian definition of perfect activation is never cited and rarely implied. To offer further evidence, I will turn to Gregory's *Homily 4 on the Beatitudes* and draw a point of comparison from *Gorgias*, in which Plato presents an early form of the replenishment theory. I will argue that the dynamic of lack and filling is often found in the background of Gregory's conception of pleasure, both in bodily and psychic matters.

Filling a Leaky Jar in Plato's *Gorgias* and Gregory's *Homily 4 on the Beatitudes*

Within Plato's corpus, *Gorgias* presents a somewhat rudimentary definition of pleasure as a filling, which owes to physiological definitions of pleasure in early Greek philosophy and lacks some of the nuances of Plato's later discussions in *Republic* and *Philebus*. However, it is precisely for this reason that I want to focus on *Gorgias*; Gregory's works show little evidence of the more technical discussions on pleasure as replenishment that occur in later Platonic dialogues. In fact, at the end of this section, I will show that at times Gregory even appears to contradict some key ideas of *Republic* and *Philebus*, which casts doubt on his direct familiarity with these texts. However, as regards *Gorgias*, the parallel is close. In *Homily 4 on the Beatitudes*, Gregory makes use of a phrase that figures prominently in the dialogue of Socrates and Calicles: the insatiable appetite is likened to a 'leaky jar' (τετρημένος πίθος) that requires constant filling in the form of pleasure. Let us first see how Plato employs this image and then turn to Gregory's version.

As Wolfsdorf explains, in *Gorgias* Socrates and his interlocutor Callicles conceptualise first the human life and then the appetitive part of the soul as a jar (πίθος or ἀγγεῖον) or as a set of jars.¹⁷⁰ The discussion comes about as Socrates criticises Callicles for claiming that pleasure is the good and thus the happy life entails an unbridled gratification of one's appetites.¹⁷¹ Instead, he defends a notion of happiness that is based on virtue and self-discipline: a person is happier when he is not at the mercy of his limitless appetites which inevitably lead to the presence of pain in the soul. Socrates alludes to a Pythagorean account according to which the appetitive part of the souls (τοῦτο τῆς ψυχῆς οὗ αἱ ἐπιθυμίαι εἰσί) of fools is undisciplined and like a 'leaky jar' (τετρημένος...πίθος) which is unable to retain anything.¹⁷² Thus, fools lead an insatiable and undisciplined life, (τοῦ ἀπλήστως καὶ ἀκολάστως ἔχοντος βίου) because they are constantly seeking to fill their leaky appetites with new things.¹⁷³ Socrates also brings up a similar story of two men who both have several jars whose contents are difficult to procure. One of them has sound and full containers; after filling them he remains satisfied, stops pouring new things into them, and leaves them be without further thought. But,

[a]s for the other one, he too has resources that can be procured, though with difficulty, but his containers are leaky and rotten (ἀγγεῖα τετρημένα καὶ σαθρά). He's forced to keep on filling them, day and night, or else he suffers extreme pain (λύπας).¹⁷⁴

Yet, Callicles refuses to believe that the first man with self-discipline and intact jars is the happier one. He argues that a person who has filled himself up (πληρωσαμένω) no longer experiences pleasure (ἡδονή), for 'living pleasantly (τὸ ἡδέως ζῆν) consists in this: having as much as possible flow in.' For him, being able to fill one's appetites (ἐπιθυμίας) and derive enjoyment from it

¹⁷⁰ See Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 44–47. My paraphrase of pleasure in *Gorgias* follows Wolfsdorf's account.

¹⁷¹ *Gorg.* 492d–e.

¹⁷² On the Pythagorean origin to which Socrates indirectly alludes, see Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 45–46.

¹⁷³ *Gorg.* 493a–d.

¹⁷⁴ *Gorg.* 493e–494a; trans. Donald J. Zeyl, *Collected Works*, 837.

(χαίροντα) is necessary for a happy life (εὐδαιμόνως ζῆν).¹⁷⁵ Socrates is not convinced. He points out that not all fillings are good and the precondition of any filling is a lack, which manifests itself as pain; hunger, thirst, and all other deficiencies (ἔνδειαν) and appetites (ἐπιθυμίαν) are painful.¹⁷⁶ Thus, a person who is filling his appetites finds himself in a paradoxical situation: he is at once in pain due to the deficiency and experiencing pleasure while filling it. We should note here the close connection between pain and desiring that we have already encountered in Clement.

Hunger and thirst, then, are examples of the way in which appetite and pleasure, pain and enjoyment, are closely intertwined: ‘a thirsty person’ is ‘a person who is in pain (λυπούμενον)’, while ‘drinking is a filling of the deficiency, and is a pleasure (πλήρωσις τε τῆς ἐνδείας καὶ ἡδονή).’ Thus, when a thirsty person drinks, ‘a person who’s in pain simultaneously feels enjoyment (λυπούμενον χαίρειν).’¹⁷⁷ Since a person cannot be doing well and badly at the same time but pleasure and pain are always bound together, pleasure cannot be good and its opposite, pain, cannot be evil, Socrates argues.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, having unbridled appetites cannot be desirable as Callicles claims, for the greater the pleasure, the greater also the pain that accompanies it.

Socrates and Callicles’ dialogue reveals a basic notion of desire as a lack and pleasure as a filling. According to Callicles, pleasure cannot occur in a state of perfect fulfilment since it depends on an active process of filling. Though Plato would disagree with Callicles’ understanding of happiness, the definition of pleasure as a filling is at no point contested by Socrates and reflects Plato’s general view. Furthermore, the dialogue points to the close connection between pleasure and pain. In the subsequent chapters I will show that this problematic link is often cited in ancient literature and, just as in *Gorgias*, used as one of the arguments against the happiness of a life of pleasure.

¹⁷⁵ *Gorg.* 494b–c; trans. Zeyl, 837.

¹⁷⁶ *Gorg.* 496c–d.

¹⁷⁷ *Gorg.* 496e; trans. Zeyl, 840.

¹⁷⁸ *Gorg.* 497a.

In *Gorgias*, hunger and thirst and their respective fillings offer the paradigmatic examples of appetite and pleasure. But even if hunger and thirst can be conceived as physiological deficits, we should note that Plato alludes to filling the appetitive part of the *soul*.¹⁷⁹ In fact, in his later treatments of the topic Plato clearly states that the pleasurable replenishments occur on a psychic level and names specific lacks and fillings that concern the different parts of the soul.¹⁸⁰

Now, it is time to consider Gregory's words in one of his *Homilies on the Beatitudes*:

For he says: *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill*. I think the saying means something like this: None of the things that are coveted in this life for the sake of pleasure (καθ' ἡδονήν) will satisfy those who run after them, but, as Wisdom says somewhere metaphorically, *A cask full of holes is the occupation with the pleasures of sense* (Πίθος τετρημένος ἐστὶν ἢ περὶ τὰς ἡδονὰς ἀσχολία) [*Prov.* 23:27]. For those who are always anxiously busy filling it show that their unending labour is fruitless. All the time they are pouring something into the abyss of desire (τῷ βυθῷ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας), they add pleasure to pleasure (τὸ πρὸς ἡδονήν ἐπεμβάλλοντες), yet never bring desire to its satisfaction (εἰς κόρον δὲ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν οὐκ ἄγοντες).¹⁸¹ Who has known avarice come to an end because the man afflicted with it had got what he wanted? Who has ceased to run after fame because he had attained his heart's desire? But if anyone has indulged to the full what pleases his ears or eyes (ὁ δὲ τὴν ἡδονὴν ἐκπλήσας), his mad craze for the things of the stomach and what comes after the stomach – what has he found to be the result of this enjoyment? Does not every form of pleasure provided by the body (πάσης ἡδονῆς εἶδος τῆς διὰ σώματος ἐκπληρουμένης) vanish almost as soon as it comes, remaining hardly for a moment with those who have caught it?¹⁸²

Above, Gregory conceptualises the futility of pleasure seeking as filling a 'cask full of holes' (or a 'leaky jar'), employing the same phrase πίθος τετρημένος as Plato does in *Gorgias*. Interestingly, Gregory attributes the phrase to 'Wisdom' (Σοφία), which is why the modern-day editor has added a reference to *Proverbs*

¹⁷⁹ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 46.

¹⁸⁰ *Rep.* 9, 585b–587a.

¹⁸¹ Here κόρος must be understood in the neutral sense meaning (complete and lasting) satisfaction.

¹⁸² *Beat.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 119–120); trans. Graef, 127.

23:27. Indeed, in the *Septuagint* version, the verse contains the same pair of words: ‘For a pierced cask is a strange house (πίθος γὰρ τετρημένος ἐστὶν ἀλλότριος οἶκος), and a strange well is narrow.’¹⁸³ Gregory cites the whole verse in his consolatory speech *In Flacillam* where he uses it to describe the cyclical life of the body and its insatiable desires, which confirms that *Proverbs* 23:27 is indeed his reference point for the metaphor of a leaky jar.¹⁸⁴ However, while in the *Septuagint* the verse appears in a context that can be understood as instruction on the proper control of appetites, it does not refer to pleasure seeking as explicitly as Gregory’s account of it implies. In fact, Gregory’s commentary on the filling of unbridled appetites for the sake of pleasure comes much closer to Plato’s account in *Gorgias*. Like Plato, Gregory argues that the filling of a ‘leaky jar’ leads to constant anxiety and dissatisfaction; in other words, pleasure is mixed with pain.

The allusion to the leaky jar occurs also in *De mortuis non esse dolendum*, and other works contain similar images without the exact phrase.¹⁸⁵ In *De mortuis*, Gregory contrasts physical needs with luxurious pleasure seeking, arguing: ‘greed (πλεονεξία) has opened the entrance to insatiable desire (ἀπληστία), which, according to Solomon, is a leaky jar (τετρημένος πίθος), always found lacking and empty by those who pour things into it.’¹⁸⁶ Again, Gregory implies that his reasoning follows a biblical teaching, likely the same passage in *Proverbs* 23:27. And again, in terms of content, the treatment of pleasure and insatiable desire comes much closer to Plato’s *Gorgias* than to the biblical passage. Thus, we have a reason to think that Gregory is not only drawing on biblical material, but is familiar with some version of the Platonic account.

Had Gregory read the dialogue or did he receive the metaphor with its exact Platonic phrasing from later sources? Plato’s phrase πίθος τετρημένος is not

¹⁸³ *Prov.* 23:27, LXX/NETS. Contemporary English translations of the verse, based on the Hebrew text, are rather different and more explicit. The NRSV reads: ‘For a prostitute is a deep pit; an adulteress [an alien woman] is a narrow well.’

¹⁸⁴ *Flacill.* (GNO IX/1, 485).

¹⁸⁵ See especially *Vit. Moys.* II.60 (SC 1, 48) and also *Eccl.* 1.9 (SC 416, 130) where Gregory argues that the limits of our nature set the limits of our enjoyment, and thus an excessive influx of goods does not increase the enjoyment in a soul that is already filled to its natural limit.

¹⁸⁶ *Mort.* (GNO IX, 59); my translation.

particularly popular among later thinkers. However, it occurs both in Porphyry and Iamblichus who would have been well known, if controversial, to a 4th-century Christian intellectual.¹⁸⁷ Iamblichus, in particular, offers a close paraphrase of the two related jar narratives of *Gorgias*. Furthermore, the image is used by Gregory's own brother Basil who cites it to contrast necessity with pleasure in order to determine the limits of the ascetical care of the body.¹⁸⁸ Considering the presence of the phrase in several late antique sources with which Gregory may well have been acquainted, we do not have to assume that it comes directly from *Gorgias*. Furthermore, we must not discount the fact that *πίθος τετρημένος* is also the wording of the biblical passage which is explicitly referenced in Gregory's discussion. Thus, it is possible that he is elaborating on a biblical phrase by using the extra-biblical account of the appetite as a leaky jar which he knows from the learned discourse of his time and which may or may not contain the exact same phrase.

There are further reasons to think that Gregory is drawing mainly on later formulations of the Platonic conception of pleasure as a replenishment. His late work *In Canticum canticorum* provides a particularly illuminating passage, which at once contains a clear trace of Plato's definition of pleasure and calls into question Gregory's awareness of Plato's original treatments on the topic, particularly in the later works *Republic* and *Philebus*. The passage is also interesting because it shows that Gregory does not conceptualise pleasure only as a filling but also as a restoration:

[A] life of peace is the more delectable, once warfare is done with, for being sweetened with tales of troubles past, and good health delights the body's sense organs the more if the organism has been *restored to its natural state* (ἐπανέλθῃ πάλιν ἡ φύσις) after some distasteful illness; and in the same way the good Bridegroom effects intensity and superabundance of joy over good things in the soul that is climbing toward him, not only by showing the Bride her own beauty but also by recalling to her mind the awful

¹⁸⁷ Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 3.27; Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* (Pistelli, 84). Plutarch employs the image of a leaky vessel in an anti-hedonist argument in *Non posse* (1088e), but uses a different Greek phrase (μὴ στέγοντος ἀγγείου).

¹⁸⁸ See especially *Quod rebus mundanis* (PG 31, 545), and also *De ieiunio* (PG 31, 184), *De legendis gentilium libris* 9.

image of wild beasts, so that she may the more exult in her present blessedness as she learns from the contrast what good things have taken the place of those evils.¹⁸⁹

Above, Gregory links pleasure to a restoration to the natural state, both on a social, bodily, and spiritual level. Norris's decision to render ἐπανέλθοι πάλιν ἡ φύσις as 'restored to its natural state' closely resembles Plato's definition of pleasure, even if Plato employs slightly different Greek phrases to denote the process of restoration.¹⁹⁰ Among earlier ancient authors, Galen frequently employs the verb ἐπανέρχομαι (normally in the phrase εἰς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ἐπανέρχομαι) when he explains, on deliberately Platonic terms, how pleasure occurs in the senses.¹⁹¹ In the passage above, the 'natural state' is understood as a state of optimal wellbeing, harmony, and balance. Thus, we can conclude that at least on some occasions Gregory conceives pleasure not only as a concrete replenishment but, more abstractly, as a restoration.

However, despite the shared conception of pleasure as a return to the natural state, the main argument in the passage from *Cant.* 8 is, in fact, in contradiction with some of Plato's most influential treatments of pleasure. Simply put, Gregory argues above that preceding pain makes pleasure greater and sweeter both in bodily and spiritual matters. This is precisely what Plato denies in *Republic* and *Philebus*. While Plato accepts that preceding pain makes pleasure more intense and thus *appears* to make it greater from a subjective point of view, he also contends that properly understood pleasures mixed with pain are not pleasures at all, or at the maximum only shadows of true pleasure. They are simply a popular conception of pleasure, not a sound philosophical definition or the pleasure a virtuous person ought to pursue. Furthermore, Socrates contends that a state of calm does not constitute a pleasure, properly speaking; it is rather a neutral state that feels pleasurable after pain but painful after pleasure ceases.

¹⁸⁹ *Cant.* 8 (GNO VI, 251–252); trans. Norris, 265. Italics mine.

¹⁹⁰ Plato uses derivatives of the verbs ἀνασώζω ('recover'), ἀπειμι ('return') and καθίστημι ('restore'). See, for example, *Phil.* 31d, 32e, 42d; *Tim.* 64d. The 'natural state' is denoted simply with the word φύσις just as in Gregory.

¹⁹¹ See, in particular, Galen's discussion on pleasure in *De symptomatum causis* (Kühn VII, 116–127) where the phrase occurs several times (124.11,17; 125.7; 126.3) and Galen explicitly cites the Platonic origin of this definition of pleasure.

Thus, it cannot be truly either.¹⁹² These statements boil down to Plato's understanding that the greatest and truest pleasures are not the pleasures that appear the most intense due to past pain, but pleasures that entail restorations without any perceptible pain at all. Only such pleasures are true pleasures because they are unmixed with their opposite.

I will return to the notion of 'pure' or 'unmixed' pleasures in the final part of the thesis where we shall see that also Gregory's notion of pure pleasures is somewhat different from Plato's. For now, we can conclude that Gregory's conception of pleasure and past pain in *Cant.* 8 would in Plato's eyes entail a false pleasure and an illusion, certainly not an appropriate analogy for the highest possible enjoyment. This gives us a reason to suspect that Gregory is not directly influenced by Plato's definitions of pleasure in *Philebus* and *Republic*, though he has adopted the Platonic stance of pleasure as a restoration of the natural state. It is possible that he is influenced by *Timaeus*, where Plato discusses pleasure as a return to the natural condition but does less to highlight the falsity of pleasures that are preceded by pain.¹⁹³ Alternatively, Gregory is making use of later sources, such as the Galenic account of sensual pleasure, which cite some but not all elements of Plato's theory.

The appeal of the lack-and-filling model of desire and pleasure may be enhanced by the fact that Gregory is generally keen to conceptualise the human being as a receptacle. Verna Harrison has noted the centrality of receptacle imagery in Gregory's descriptions of human finitude.¹⁹⁴ She points out that in Gregory's

¹⁹² Compare especially to Plato, *Rep.* 9, 583c–586c. On the calm intermediate state as a false pleasure, especially as regards a return to health, see 583c–584a. Interestingly, the passage includes again the metaphor of a leaky jar (586b), but here Plato employs a different wording which does not occur in Gregory. The restoration from sickness is also mentioned as one of the false pleasures in *Phil.* 45a–47b.

¹⁹³ See *Tim.* 64d. Plato does point out that bodies that experience only gradual (i.e. imperceptible) departures from their normal state but intense and substantial replenishments, undergo 'very substantial pleasures' and 'not any pains' (*Tim.* 65a). While this (imperceptible depletion, perceptible replenishment) is the definition of a pure or true pleasure in *Republic* and *Philebus* (see e.g. *Phil.* 51b), in *Timaeus* the emphasis in the wider context (64a–65b) is on the fact that the replenishments need to be intense and perceptible in order to yield pleasure, rather than on a systematic ranking on true and false pleasures.

¹⁹⁴ Verna E.F. Harrison, 'Receptacle Imagery in St Gregory of Nyssa's Anthropology', *Studia Patristica* 22 (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 23–27. Harrison discusses the passage from *Beat.* 4 and the image of a leaky jar, but does not make any connection to *Gorgias*. Furthermore, she notes

writings the image of a receptacle that can be filled or emptied is applied both to the soul and to the body. We should note that although in *Beat.* 4 Gregory laments the transiency of *bodily* pleasures and elsewhere employs hunger and thirst as the paradigmatic examples of lack and fulfilment, the phenomenon he discusses is not only physiological. The lacks he describes occur in *ἐπιθυμία* which belongs to the soul. Furthermore, the passage from *Cant.* 8 above indicates that the restoration can pertain to more abstract matters than just eating and drinking. In fact, when we turn to the topic of pleasure as the false good later in this thesis, we shall see that a lack of beauty is the driving force behind the fallen soul's frantic search for pleasure.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the main ancient definitions of pleasure in the anti-hedonist schools of philosophy and noted that at least Plato's replenishment model has left a trace in Gregory's works. I have chosen to highlight the similarity between Gregory and the Platonist conception because I think it is particularly clear and will help us understand Gregory's account of the soul's search for goodness and beauty, a central theme of this thesis. At the same time, the Platonist model does not explain all features of Gregory's notion of pleasure. If we consider what we have so far set as the premise of this study, the connection between pleasure and sin is obvious. However, we can imagine fillings that occur in the human life that appear at least innocuous or even virtuous. In fact, Plato himself argues that the replenishment model is equally adaptable to the virtuous pleasures of the intellect when our minds are filled with knowledge. Furthermore, we shall see in Chapter 5 that Gregory, like the mainstream of ancient thinkers, does not consider the filling of bodily needs sinful. Thus, we can suggest that while the Platonist model explains under what conditions a pleasurable response will arise in the soul, it does not as such tell

the editor's allusion to *Prov.* 23:27 but, consulting only a contemporary English translation instead of the LXX, dismisses the biblical passage as 'rather different image from the cask full of holes'. See *Ibid.*, 25.

us why Gregory would consider ἡδονή sinful. Something more must be added to this account.

In the subsequent chapters we shall see that ἡδονή becomes sinful when the pleasurable response to the process of filling is judged as good. In other words, we can make a distinction between pleasure as a mere replenishment, pursued in the name of some higher good (chiefly when we eat and drink in order to stay alive for the sake of virtue), and pleasure as a replenishment judged as good in itself. We shall see that Gregory is hesitant to call the former ἡδονή at all and, in the context of the earthly life, reserves the term largely to sinful pleasure which is pursued as an independent goal. In other words, Gregory is not far from the Stoics who defined ἡδονή exclusively as a passion that results from the attainment of a present apparent good. Furthermore, we shall see in the next chapter that Gregory emphasises the role of the mind in pronouncing the judgment that a pleasurable thing is a good thing. In Chapter 5 we will encounter also the idea that passions, and pleasure in particular, are excessive and extend beyond the limits of nature. However, just as the presence of the 'Platonist' model does not have to indicate Gregory's allegiance to Plato or school Platonism, also the 'Stoic' elements can largely be explained by Gregory's knowledge of later eclectic sources. In fact, varying fusions of Platonist and Stoic ethics are characteristic of Judaeo-Christian thinkers of the preceding centuries, such as Philo, Clement and Origen, to whom I will keep returning in the subsequent chapters.

It is more difficult to pinpoint elements that could be traced back to Aristotle's conception of pleasure. However, he becomes particularly relevant when I discuss Gregory's conception of intellectual pleasure in *De anima et resurrectione* in the final part of this thesis. We can also find certain isolated instances where Gregory conceptualises bodily pleasure as an accompaniment of an activity, which I will point out as they become relevant to my discussion. Furthermore, Aristotle remains an important if often implicit authority in Hellenistic and late antique discourse on moral progress, which underpins Gregory's thought. These parallels will be noted as they occur.

2. Locating Pleasure: An Animal Impulse Moderated by Reason

So far I have demonstrated that Gregory understands pleasure as a replenishment, and adumbrated the role of pleasure as a detrimental passion. As we have already seen, both of these definitions connect pleasure to ἐπιθυμία, the passion of desire or the desiring part of the soul. In this second foundational chapter, I will seek to determine pleasure's anthropological location and relationship to other anthropological entities, including desire and the rational faculty. By investigating pleasure from an anthropological perspective, I will lay ground for the ethical focus of the subsequent chapters, for, as Leuenberger-Wenger remarks: "The question about the good life is the question about who the human being is and what constitutes the goal and meaning of his existence."¹⁹⁵ In this chapter I will begin from the first sub-question to move on to the second in the following chapters. My focus will be chiefly on Gregory's two anthropological treatises, *De opificio hominis* and *De anima et resurrectione*.¹⁹⁶ I will also examine a variety of anthropological distinctions in Gregory's discussions on pleasure, which reflect a certain eclecticism that pervades his understanding of human beings. We will find pleasure embedded in threefold models of the soul, cited in the context of soul-body interaction, and counted among the animal drives that undermine the unified mind. While the multiplicity of terms may at first seem incoherent, certain basic principles inform all these models:

First, pleasure belongs among the properties of the human soul that are lower, irrational, and extrinsic to the image of God.

Second, human pleasure, although separate from the mind, will not remain uninfluenced by this higher, rational capacity.

¹⁹⁵ Leuenberger-Wenger, *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa*, 1. My translation.

¹⁹⁶ Many of the concepts I discuss in this chapter are also mapped out by Warren Smith in the first three chapters of *Passion and Paradise*, 21–103.

For reasons I will soon discuss in detail, I will argue that Gregory's conception of pleasure is fundamentally shaped by this twofold ontological and anthropological distinction into the rational and the irrational, the God-like and the animalistic, the intelligible and the sensible. Pleasure is located in the former, but influences and is influenced by the latter. My argument is not only motivated by an attempt to group various anthropological distinctions under a simpler twofold model. More importantly, φύσις, 'nature', is a key term that Gregory himself employs when he explains the origin and workings of pleasure. By focussing on the concept of nature, I am in agreement with scholars who have drawn attention to φύσις as a key term of Gregory's anthropology.¹⁹⁷ My interest, however, is less on the general concept of 'human nature' and more on the two different natures that constitute humanity:¹⁹⁸ the intelligible nature that, for Gregory, is the seat of the image of God, and the sensate bodily nature that humans share with irrational animals. I will show how the tension-laden interaction between the two natures forms the backdrop for Gregory's anthropological discussions on pleasure.

Many previous studies have pointed out that Gregory's primary ontological distinction does not go between the intelligible and the sensible realm like for many other ancient thinkers, but between the uncreated Creator and the creation. While this is undoubtedly the case if we look at Gregory's theological system as a whole, in ethical questions the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible and, correspondingly, the rational and irrational remains highly important.¹⁹⁹ The question is, after all, how humans can become the best and truest versions of themselves, not how they can join the divine rank. Even though God is the ultimate reference point for the virtuous human life, moral progress itself is confined to the created realm. It occurs on an axis between a

¹⁹⁷ See especially Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*.

¹⁹⁸ Whether or not Gregory thinks the two natures constitute one 'human nature' is not clear-cut. As we shall see, 'human nature' can indeed denote the composite nature that consists of the intelligible and the sensible, but at times it only refers to that which separates humans from other embodied creatures, namely the rational mind.

¹⁹⁹ Boersma makes a similar observation concerning the high relevance of spirit-matter distinction in Gregory. See Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 8.

life dedicated to our sensible faculties and a life that is aligned with our intellectual abilities.

Let us now turn to textual evidence to see what Gregory has to say about the two constituent parts of the human nature and their relationship to pleasure. I will begin from *De hominis opificio*, in which Gregory offers his interpretation on the creation of human beings and also sheds light on the place of pleasure in God's creative plan. In this work, two chapters merit particular attention: In Chapter 2, Gregory alludes to a form of *prelapsarian enjoyment* (ἀπόλαυσις) which is man's spiritual calling from the very beginning. In Chapter 18, he turns to the impulse of *pleasure* (ἡδονή), which is given to humans as a *postlapsarian* safeguard.

The Origins of Enjoyment (*Op. hom. 2*)

The first chapter of *De hominis opificio* ends with a lush and vivid description of the beauty and abundance of the newly created earth: 'All the wealth of creation by land and sea was ready, and none was there to share it,' Gregory concludes his account of God's creation that still lacks its crown.²⁰⁰ The passage sets the scene for the creation of the human being. In the chapter that follows, Gregory likens the creation of the world to the making of a royal palace stored with all manner of riches. After the palace is completed, it is time to introduce the king. And thus the human being is created last to be the beholder and master of the wonders of the world, so that 'by his enjoyment he might have knowledge of the Giver (ὡς διὰ μὲν τῆς ἀπολαύσεως τὴν σύνεσιν τοῦ χορηγοῦντος ἔχειν), and by the beauty and majesty he might trace out that power of the Maker which is beyond speech and language.'²⁰¹

After royal metaphors, Gregory moves on to equally lavish language of feasting. He depicts God as a rich and extravagant banquet host who carefully decorates his house and prepares a feast before the arrival of his guest. Man, the guest,

²⁰⁰ *Op. hom. 1* (PG 44, 132 A–C); trans. NPNF, 389–390.

²⁰¹ *Op. hom. 2* (PG 44, 133A); trans. NPNF, 390.

does not have to acquire anything but is simply assigned the task to enjoy all things present (τὴν ἀπόλαυσιν τῶν παρόντων).²⁰² For this twofold enjoyment, he is given a twofold nature, a blend of the divine with the earthly, so that ‘by means of both he may be naturally and properly disposed to each enjoyment (πρὸς ἑκατέραν ἀπόλαυσιν), enjoying (ἀπολαύων) God by means of his more divine nature (διὰ τῆς θειοτέρας φύσεως), and the good things of earth by the sense that is akin to them (διὰ τῆς ὁμογενοῦς αἰσθήσεως).’²⁰³ Banquet as a symbol of divine abundance is particularly interesting because, as is typical of ancient critiques of luxury, it is also one of Gregory’s preferred settings when he attacks the excessive pleasures of the earthly life.²⁰⁴

The account in *De opificio hominis* reveals a striking statement concerning the human being’s original purpose: he was created to enjoy. In fact, like Philo, Gregory interprets the Hebrew name ‘Eden’ itself to mean τρυφή, ‘delicacy’ or ‘luxury’.²⁰⁵ The passage on original enjoyment will provide a contrast to Gregory’s account of the role of pleasure in the Fall and in the postlapsarian reality. For now a couple of further observations will suffice. First, we should note that in the unfallen state no conflict exists between the two kinds of enjoyment. Instead, we find a continuum: the human being is allowed to enjoy all the good things of the earth, so that through them he will gain awareness of their Creator. Second, the prelapsarian enjoyment has an intellectual character; enjoyment increases knowledge, and the sensible is a stepping-stone towards the intelligible. In other words, the sensible realm is an instrument which through enjoyment leads the human being towards the Creator of the whole universe.

Finally, the passage introduces an anthropological distinction that will have significant implications for Gregory’s understanding of pleasure: Just as the universe consists of two kinds of phenomena, sensible and intelligible, so also man has two natures (φύσις) that correspond to them ontologically and

²⁰² *Op. hom.* 2 (PG 44, 133B); trans. NPNF, 390. Compare to Philo, *Opif. mun.* 23, where both enjoyment and banqueting are mentioned.

²⁰³ *Op. hom.* 2 (PG 44, 133B); trans. NPNF, 390.

²⁰⁴ For Philo, see p. 145.

²⁰⁵ *Op. hom.* 19 (PG 44, 196.43–44); cf. Philo, *Leg.* 1, XIV.45.

epistemologically. The ‘more divine nature’ is located in the immaterial mind (νοῦς, διάνοια), the seat of reason (λόγος) which is capable of acquiring knowledge of intelligible things, including God. The sensate nature, on the other hand, is given to humans to learn about the material world. Underlying this distinction is the idea that enjoyment requires an ontological similarity between the subject and the object. The principle is affirmed in *Oratio catechetica* where Gregory explicitly states that participation and, more specifically, enjoyment require an affinity of natures: man who was ‘created to enjoy the good things of God’ (ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν θείων ἀγαθῶν ἀπολαύσει γενόμενον) must have ‘in his nature something akin to that in which he was participating’ (τι συγγενές ἐν τῇ φύσει πρὸς τὸ μετεχόμενον).²⁰⁶ These two parts make up the composite ‘human nature’, though, as we shall soon see, Gregory has a tendency to veer from this unified conception and limit the notion only to the intelligible part.²⁰⁷

While the God-like rational nature is the higher principle and the mark of humans’ true identity, we should note that in *Op. hom. 2* Gregory stresses that the sensate nature was equally part of the original human constitution and had its part to play in the spiritual life. It was only through the senses that humans could become aware of their surroundings and reason towards a higher reality. In fact, elsewhere Gregory contends that if an intelligent creature was to exist in the sensible world, it required a body and its senses as an epistemological aid.²⁰⁸ However, some questions may be raised about the nature of prelapsarian knowledge and enjoyment. Granted, Gregory’s account of the original enjoyment is preceded by a description of the material wonders of the world and he specifically states that the human faculty of sensation was given for a good purpose. At the same time, other passages in *De hominis opificio* and the rest of Gregory’s works indicate that the prelapsarian enjoyment of creation was of a spiritual kind since no physical needs existed amidst the fullness of

²⁰⁶ *Or. cat.*, 5 (SC 453, 164); trans. Srawley, 35. On the affinity of natures as a requirement for participation and seeing, see also *Infant.* (GNO III/2, 79).

²⁰⁷ On the composite human nature, see Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 145–46. Zachhuber cites a passage from *Infant.* (GNO III/2, 77), which highlights the two constituent parts of the human nature and man as ‘the incarnate likeness of the divine transcendent power.’

²⁰⁸ *Op. hom.* 13 (PG 44, 168C). See also *Op. hom.* 8 (PG 44, 145B); *An. et res.* (PG 46, 60C–B), and Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 67–68; Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 165. Cf. Philo, *Opif. mun.* 48.

goods in Paradise, in a human being that was a perfect image of his Creator.²⁰⁹ In *Homilies on the Beatitudes*, Gregory notes that man lived in Paradise, ‘enjoying (κατατρυφᾶν) the things that were growing there’, but immediately goes on to specify that the fruit of those plants was ‘life, knowledge, and things like that’, i.e. the divine goods.²¹⁰ And in *De virginitate* we learn that the first man lived in Paradise ‘looking freely upon the face of God, not yet judging the beautiful (τὸ καλὸν κρίνων) by taste and sight, but only enjoying (κατατρυφῶν) the Lord.’²¹¹ Thus, it is not far-fetched to ask whether the sensible nature had any role to play in the prelapsarian reality at all.

One can, of course, also argue that even the senses belong in some way to the human being’s identity as the image of God. In *De hominis opificio* 5, Gregory compares the human faculty of perception to God who ‘beholds and hears all things.’²¹² This makes Smith conclude that Gregory compares ‘the faculties of perception proper to the nonrational soul’ to the ‘divine power of apprehension’ and, thus, the divine image is not confined to the intellectual faculties but resides in the ‘psychosomatic unity’ of the whole person.²¹³ However, we should note that Gregory is quick to specify that the divine image is not reflected in the multitude of the bodily senses but in ‘the implanted mind itself, which passes through each of the organs of sense and grasps the things beyond.’²¹⁴

In my view Gregory does not resolve this tension. While Chapter 2 of *De hominis opificio* implies that the first humans used their senses to rise from the sensible to the intelligible, in other works Gregory states clearly that humans communed with the divine on an intelligible plane and coming to know God by ascending through creation was not necessary. We shall see, however, that this model of epistemic ascent is crucial for understanding the role of sensation in the postlapsarian reality.²¹⁵ It is perhaps for this reason that Gregory includes it in

²⁰⁹ See *Op. hom.* 19 (PG 44, 196C–D); *Or. cat.* 5 (SC 453, 166–168).

²¹⁰ *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 105); trans. Graef, 113.

²¹¹ *Virg.* 12.4 (SC 119, 418); trans. Callahan, 46.

²¹² *Op. hom.* 5 (PG 44, 137C); trans. NPNF, 391.

²¹³ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 68.

²¹⁴ *Op. hom.* 6 (PG 44, 137D–140A); trans. NPNF, 391–392. On God ‘sensing’ the immaterial *logoi*, see also *Cant.* 9 (GNO VI, 267).

²¹⁵ See my discussion in Chapter 4.

his account of creation as a normative statement concerning the appropriate use of the sensible nature even though the context is decidedly prelapsarian. We should also note that although the prelapsarian relevance of sensation seems meagre, for Gregory the creation of humans as sensate beings has broader cosmic scope. As sensate embodied creatures humans participate in the sensible nature of the rest of the creation. In this way they connect the intelligible and the sensible into a harmonious whole, and bring the whole creation into a communion with the intelligible good.²¹⁶

As Gregory's account of the origin of enjoyment reveals, the embodied and sensate nature was part of humanity from the very beginning. But while Gregory stresses the original harmony between the intelligible and the sensible nature, it is clear that from the very beginning the sensible nature was not only the inferior principle, but also the locus of potential tension in the human constitution. Aligned with the will of God and the rule of the mind, it had the potential to assist the intelligible nature in the pursuit of knowledge and virtue. However, it also contained the makings of pleasure and other passions, as we shall now see.

The Origins of the Passion of Pleasure (*Op. hom. 18*)

To find out how humans became subject to the passion of pleasure, we must read on and turn to chapters 16 and 18 of *De hominis opificio*. In chapter 16 we find Gregory's interpretation of an idea that became widespread in ancient Jewish and Christian readings of *Genesis*: the creation of humanity consisted of two separate stages. This conclusion had first been reached as some early exegetes, most notably Philo and Origen, sought to explain why the opening chapters of *Genesis* seemed to contain two separate creation narratives, including two accounts of the creation of the human being. On their reading, humans were first created in the image of God and only then formed of the dust of the earth. The first act of creation entailed the fashioning of the fundamental

²¹⁶ On the harmony and cosmic scope of the two natures of man, see e.g. *Infant.* (GNO III/2, 77); *Or. cat.* 6 (SC 453, 170–174). See also *An. et res.* (PG 46, 60B).

human nature. The second act, on the other hand, endowed humans with properties that made them suited to material embodied life. For Philo, this two-stage process consisted of the creation of the general human nature, followed by the creation of particular embodied individuals.²¹⁷ More problematic was the interpretation of Origen, arguing that the humans were first created as intelligible beings and fell into bodies as a consequence of sin.²¹⁸

Writing in the fourth century, Gregory was aware of the theological tensions that earlier interpreters had caused by incorporating excessive body–soul dualism into the Christian doctrine. Thus, in *De hominis opificio* he alludes to Origen and rejects his notion of the pre-existence of souls.²¹⁹ Instead, he puts forth the view that the double creation entails the creation of the universal human nature followed by the creation of particular human beings.²²⁰ For Gregory, the evidence for the twofold creation does not lie so much in the presence of two creation stories as in the parallelism that occurs in *Gen. 1:27*:

Thus the creation of our nature is in a sense twofold: one made like to God, one divided according to this distinction: for something like this the passage darkly conveys by its arrangement, where it first says, “God created man, in the image of God created He him,” and then adding to what has been said, “male and female he created them,” – a thing which is alien from our conceptions of God.

While two natures – the Divine and incorporeal nature, and the irrational life of brutes – are separated from each other as extremes, human nature is the mean between them: for in the compound nature of man we may behold a part of each of the natures I have mentioned, – of the Divine, the rational and the intelligent element, which does not admit the distinction of male and female; of the irrational, our bodily form and structure, divided into male and female: for each of these elements is certainly to be

²¹⁷ For the double creation in Philo, see *Opif. mun.* 46; *Leg.* I.12. See also Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 33.

²¹⁸ See *Princ.* 2.9; *Gen.* 1.13. For a recent assessment of the relevant passages and their earlier scholarly interpretations, see Peter W. Martens, ‘Origen’s Doctrine of Pre-Existence and the Opening Chapters of Genesis’, *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum*, no. 16 (2013): 516–49.

²¹⁹ See Gregory’s rejection of the pre-existence of souls in *Op. hom.* 28 (PG 44, 229). Here, Gregory reports that ‘[s]ome of those before our time who have dealt with the question of ‘principles’ (Περὶ τῶν ἀρχῶν) think it right to say that souls have a previous existence as a people in a society of their own...’ (trans. NPNF, 419). This is a likely reference to Origen’s *De principiis*/Περὶ ἀρχῶν, and indeed the phrase is capitalised in the Greek text of PG as in a title.

²²⁰ On Gregory’s understanding of the creation of the human nature, see Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 154–74.

found in all that partakes of human life. That the intellectual element, however, precedes the other, we learn as from one who gives in order an account of the making of man; and we learn also that his community and kindred with the irrational is for man a provision for reproduction. For he says first that “God created man in the image of God” (showing by these words, as the Apostle says, that in such a being there is no male or female): then he adds the peculiar attributes of human nature, “male and female He created them.”²²¹

On Gregory’s view, then, what God created first was the universal and unified human nature, free from physical reproduction and sexual differentiation. The universal human nature of the first creation constituted the true identity of all human beings as the image of God and contained only features that directly reflected the Creator.²²² In *Passion and Paradise*, Smith divides Gregory’s conception of the divine likeness into structural and moral kinds: Structurally, the divine likeness is manifested in the soul’s rational faculties. The pinnacle of being made in the image of God resides in our free will, which Gregory usually conceptualises with the word προαίρεσις (‘choice’).²²³ The human freedom of choice reflects God’s own freedom from necessity and is the prerequisite of virtuous agency: like many ancient writers before him, Gregory emphasises that virtue is a voluntary thing, a product of free choice, which cannot result from any compulsion.²²⁴ As Smith explains,

Nyssen does not describe the will as a faculty separate from the intellect. It is simply a by-product of the soul’s rational nature and therefore a capacity of the soul’s rational faculty. In other words, the soul’s intellectual capacities for reasoning (*logos*), discriminating (*diakrisis*), and contemplation (*theoria* or *dianoia*) enable the soul to have knowledge of both the sensible goods of the material world and the intelligible goods of the divine and heavenly realm. From this knowledge the soul is able to judge the relative merits of these goods and thus determine which goods should be sought above all else and which are of secondary importance.²²⁵

²²¹ *Op. hom.* 16 (PG 44, 181B–D); trans. NPNF, 405.

²²² For a longer discussion, see “The *Imago Dei*” in Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 21–47.

²²³ The term is prominent both in Aristotle and Stoics, frequently employed by later non-Christian Platonists, and adopted by both Clement and Origen in early Christian literature. On the term and its development and uses in antiquity, see John M. Rist, ‘Prohairesis: Proclus, Plotinus et Alii’, in *De Jamblique à Proclus*, ed. Heinrich Dörrie, Entretiens sur l’antiquité classique 21 (Geneva: Vandoeuvres, 1974), 103–17.

²²⁴ *Op. hom.* 16 (PG 44, 184B); trans. NPNF, 405. See also Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 22–23.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

This is the basis of moral agency to which we will return several times as we investigate why human beings tend to give in to the sinful lure of sensual pleasure. Smith also draws attention to *De anima et resurrectione* where Macrina lists intellect, incorporeal nature, weightlessness, and transcendence of spatial limitation as key features that the soul shares with its divine archetype.²²⁶

Since likeness is a crucial condition for knowledge and participation, a structural similarity is required for human beings to be able to take part in God's absolute goodness, which belongs to humans only indirectly. In other words, the soul's structural likeness to God makes possible its moral likeness by enabling its a participation in the divine goods.²²⁷ The moral likeness is made manifest in the soul's perfection which reflects the divine perfection in the fullness of good. Before the fall, the soul partakes in the fullness of divine goods, which endow it with the perfect beauty of its divine archetype. While Gregory is cautious not to provide a full list of the divine goods, they include such things as virtue (ἀρετή), immortality (ἀθανασία), and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) – and, more specifically, purity (καθαρότης), freedom from passion (ἀπάθεια), blessedness (μακαριότης), and alienation from all evil (κακοῦ παντὸς ἀλλοτρίωσις).²²⁸

So far we have looked at the intelligible nature of human beings, which endows them with their fundamental identity as the image of God. What, then, of the second creation? Whereas the first act of creation endows humans with their intelligible nature, in the second act of creation God gives humans the qualities that they share with irrational animals. Thus, God grants the human being his status as the unifier of the whole cosmos and, more importantly, the means to survive in the postlapsarian reality for which God prepares in his foresight. The most crucial characteristic that humans take on in the second act of creation is

²²⁶ Ibid. See *An. et res.* (PG 46, 41B).

²²⁷ Ibid., 27.

²²⁸ *Op. hom.* 4–5 (PG 44, 136D–137B); trans. NPNF, 391. See also the list of goods in *Beat.* VI (GNO VII/2,138).

sexual differentiation which will ensure that the human race can continue even after the fall when immortality through a direct communion with the divine goods is lost.²²⁹ However, sexual reproduction does not occur in isolation from the rest of the animal nature; it is accompanied by all the drives and instincts that support self-preservation in animals. These are what Gregory calls ‘passions’, including fear, anger, desire, and, crucially, pleasure.

The origin of passions is described in Chapter 18 of *De hominis opificio*. Here, Gregory reiterates that passions have nothing to do with the image of God, which is located in the superior, rational nature. They only become a part of humanity in the second act of the twofold creation, for as humans take on the animal nature (φύσις) for reproductive purposes, they also receive a share in the other attributes of that nature.²³⁰ As Gregory explains:

the likeness of man to God (ἡ πρὸς τὸ Θεῖον ὁμοίωσις,) is not found in anger, nor is pleasure (ἡδονῆς) a mark of the superior nature; cowardice also, and boldness, and the desire for gain, and the dislike of loss, and all the like, are far removed from that stamp which indicates Divinity.

These attributes, then, human nature took to itself from the side of the brutes; for those qualities with which brute life was armed for self-preservation, when transferred to human life, became passions (πάθη).²³¹

The passage contains important statements about Gregory’s view of the origin of pleasure: First, the potential for pleasure was given to humans in conjunction with their reproductive ability. Unlike the prelapsarian enjoyment that permeated both the intelligible and the sensible nature, the passion of pleasure was from the very beginning foreign to the divine nature and secondary to the constitution of man. In animals, pleasure is one of the many qualities that aid the self-preservation of the species by ensuring reproduction or protecting the physical life of individuals from dangers and death. As Gregory goes on to

²²⁹ Concerning the universal human nature as the image of God and the addition of the irrational nature as a providential foresight, see also, *Op. hom.*. 22 (PG 44, 204C–205B); trans. NPNF, 411–412.

²³⁰ *Op. hom.* 18 (PG 44, 192A–B).

²³¹ *Op. hom.* 18 (PG 44, 192B–C); trans. NPNF, 408.

explain, the particular function of pleasure is to serve as an incentive to breed. Pain, on the other hand, results from missing anything that tends to pleasure. In humans, then, both are turned into passions disposed towards an irrational, animal-like life. By linking pleasure to bodily survival, Gregory follows a common ancient trajectory which views pleasure as an incentive to self-preservation through needs-satisfaction. In *Letter 116*, Seneca explains the original purpose of pleasure:

Nature has intermingled pleasure (*voluptatem*) with necessary things – not in order that we should seek pleasure, but in order that the addition of pleasure may make the indispensable means of existence attractive to our eyes. Should it claim rights of its own, it is luxury.²³²

Much in the same vein, Clement of Alexandria emphasises that pleasure is a secondary property that accompanies fulfilled needs to motivate and support our survival:

There is not absolute necessity for the passion of pleasure (οὐκ ἀναγκαῖον τὸ τῆς ἡδονῆς πάθος). It follows on certain natural needs (ἐπακολουθήματα δὲ χρεῖαις τισὶ φυσικαῖς) – hunger, thirst, cold, marriage.

At any rate, if it were possible to drink or take food or produce children without pleasure entering in, then it would be shown that there was no other need of it (ἐδείχθη ἂν οὐδεμία ἑτέρα χρεῖα ταύτης). Pleasure is not an activity, not a disposition, certainly not a part of us. It entered our life as a support, just as salt is said to exist to help the digestion of food. But when it is unleashed and dominates the home, it brings desire (ἐπιθυμίαν) into being first, and irrational licence and yearning (ἔφεσιν καὶ ὄρεξιν οὐσαν ἄλογον) for that which satisfies pleasure. This persuaded Epicurus to lay it down that pleasure was the philosopher's goal (τέλος).²³³

I will offer a longer discussion on the links between pleasure and need in Chapter 5. Now it suffices to note that both Seneca and Clement consider pleasure an incentive to needs-satisfaction. For both, the purpose of pleasure is not to entice people for its own sake, but to add appeal to the pursuit of

²³² *Ep.* 116.3 (trans. Gummere, LCL 77, 335). On the Stoic view of pleasure as secondary to self-preservation, see also DL 7.85–86 and my discussion about the cradle argument in Chapter 4.

²³³ *Strom.* 2.20.118.7–119.3; trans. Ferguson, 235–236.

necessities that are crucial for bodily survival. Its role is secondary and entirely contingent upon needs-satisfaction and wellbeing, which in turn serve the highest goal of virtue. While some self-interest is natural and acceptable, self-seeking hedonism will be detrimental. Clement, in particular, seems to think that pleasure is not inherent to human nature; we shall soon see that Gregory holds a similar view.

Three caveats must be added as regards the role of pleasure as an incentive to survival and the role of the sensible nature as a whole. The first point is that although the division of sexes and physical reproduction are given to help humans exist in the postlapsarian world, they are not in themselves sinful, let alone a divine punishment, but a benevolent foresight to ensure the survival and continuity of humankind.²³⁴ Similarly, the passions that accompany them are morally neutral. We shall soon see that their ethical value depends on how the human mind chooses to make use of them. Thus, so far as we are talking about ἡδονή as an accompaniment of procreation kept within the limits of its intended use, we are not referring to sinful pleasure. However, we should also note that, unlike many other ancient authors, Gregory is reluctant to use the word ἡδονή for legitimate pleasure. In his works, ἡδονή is almost always used in reference to pleasure pursued for its own sake, in other words, pleasure pursued as the good. Nonetheless, the mere potential for pleasure added in creation and its appropriate actualisation as an accompaniment of reproduction do not alone entail the presence of sin.

Second, it should be noted that although in *De hominis opificio* Gregory names sexual reproduction as the origin of pleasure, in most of his works ἡδονή does not primarily refer to sexual pleasure at all.²³⁵ Only in *De virginitate* does pleasure have largely sexual connotations, which is obviously due to the purpose of the book as a defence of a life of sexual continence. In *In Canticum*

²³⁴ This at least would be Gregory's explicit view. Implicitly, the creation of the sensible nature may carry undertones of a 'punishment for a sin that has as yet not been committed.' (Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 173.)

²³⁵ A lack of attention on sexual pleasure was typical in Greek philosophical treatments of pleasure. On this topic, see Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 138–39. Generally, Christian writers engaged in more frequent normative discourse on the topic.

canticorum, Gregory calls erotic love ‘the most intense of pleasurable activities’ (τὸ σφοδρότατον τῶν καθ’ ἡδονὴν ἐνεργουμένων)²³⁶, but even here, like in most of Gregory’s corpus, the focus is on the more general aesthetic aspect of pleasure, that is, the sensual appeal that lures humans to pursue pleasure as something truly good and beautiful.

Third, it is important to be clear that Gregory is not arguing that there existed at any point particular humans devoid of sexual differentiation and other secondary characteristics. The two acts of creation are not to be understood as a strict temporal sequence, but as an illustration of what is truly constitutive of humanity as the image of God and what characteristics belong to humans secondarily by virtue of their kinship with other created beings.²³⁷

Gregory’s account in *De hominis opificio* reveals that while enjoyment of the divine goods belonged to the prelapsarian existence, the passion of pleasure is a decidedly postlapsarian phenomenon. Since the passions are activated only after the soul has lost the good of immortality and ended up in a state of cognitive and spiritual disorder, they are quickly turned into vehicles of sin to cripple the mind and overturn the intended hierarchy in the soul. In Gregory’s view, the problem is not only that the passions prevail over the mind and hinder its proper functioning. In addition, they also harness its rational power for destructive purposes. When reason becomes the servant of passions, it nurtures and gradually multiplies passions, producing ‘a plenteous and abundant crop of evils.’²³⁸ In other words, the animal drives combined with the fallen reason give rise to a whole host of passions that are not present in animals. In *De hominis opificio* 18, Gregory concludes:

Thus our love of pleasure took its beginning from our being made like to the irrational animals, and was increased by the transgressions of men, becoming the parent of so

²³⁶ *Cant.* 1 (GNO VI, 27); trans. Norris, 29. This is a common view in ancient literature. See, for example, Plato, *Leg.* 783b; *Rep.* 3, 403a, and also, Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 141–42.

²³⁷ See Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 32–33.

²³⁸ *Op. hom.* 18 (PG 44, 192D–193A); trans. NPNF, 408.

many varieties of sin arising from pleasure as we cannot find among the irrational animals.²³⁹

Here Gregory argues that due to the presence of the mind, humans do not only seek immediate bodily satisfaction like irrational animals, but are able to pursue a wide variety of other pleasures that require the rational abilities to envision their content.²⁴⁰

The twofold human nature has important ethical implications, on which I will expand in the subsequent chapters. Here we can briefly turn to Gregory's *Homily 8 on Ecclesiastes* where he explains that just as the human nature is double, divided into the intelligible and the sensible, human life, too, takes a double form: there is the physical life of the sensing part and the mental and non-physical life of the mind.²⁴¹ From this separation it results that also the definition of the good and non-good (τὸ καλὸν τε καὶ μὴ τοιοῦτον) is different for each part: mental for the mental part (νοητὸν μὲν τῷ νοητῷ), and 'whatever sense desires' (ἢ αἴσθησις βούλεται) for the sensual and bodily part (τῷ δὲ αἰσθητῷ τε καὶ σωματικῷ μέρει).²⁴² The latter is nothing else than pleasure. Like animals, with which humans share their sensible nature, the lower part of the soul is attracted to sensible goods that ensure immediate physical survival. Without the input of the mind, it lacks understanding of deficits that do not arise from the bodily existence, and thus desires and delights in the filling that comes in the form of sensual pleasure.²⁴³ As we shall see in the course of this thesis, the pull of the sensible nature towards pleasure as the good is what leads people to sin both in the Fall and in the postlapsarian reality.

Gregory's favourable account of the original enjoyment and his explanation of the origin of pleasure give very different portrayals of man's twofold nature. In

²³⁹ *Op. hom.* 18 (PG 44, 193A); trans. NPNF, 408. See also Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 94.

²⁴⁰ Gregory shares this view with a number of earlier ancient authors, including Plutarch whose *Bruta animalia ratione uti* includes a famous comical discussion by Gryllus, a man-turned-pig, who insists that the pleasures of animals are fewer in number, more temperate, and thus better contained within the realm of bodily necessity than human pleasures which are derived from a variety of superfluous and unnatural things. See *Bruta animalia ratione uti* 6.989b–8.991d.

²⁴¹ On these two basic orientations of the human life, see also *Inscr.* I.2 (GNO V, 27–28).

²⁴² *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 416, 396); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 130.

²⁴³ On this topic, see also Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 67.

the first passage, the sensible nature is depicted as the harmonious helper of the intellectual nature, though its necessity and uses in the prelapsarian reality remain ambiguous. In the second one, the lower, animal nature is seen as the source of a potential conflict, and its attributes are described as foreign to the divine nature which shapes human identity as the image of God. Indeed, the sensible nature harbours a troubling paradox: On the one hand it was given to ensure the survival of humankind after the fall. On the other, it is the very drives of the sensible nature that lead to sin in the first place, even if Gregory emphasises that the ultimate choice lies with free will of the mind. Thus, it is easy to agree with Zachhuber who suggests that ‘the changes made to human beings [in the second creation] would seem to increase the danger of sinning at least as much as they might prevent its worst consequences.’²⁴⁴ Smith notes the same tension, but ultimately chooses to highlight the positive epistemological relevance Gregory grants to the body and its senses as part of God’s original creative plan.²⁴⁵ However, as I have already pointed out, it is not at all clear what the positive relevance of the animal nature is in the prelapsarian reality where the soul still directly communes with the divine goods through its intellect.

The tension in Gregory’s account of the two natures is further reflected in the way in which Gregory employs the concept of ‘human nature’. Although the beginning of *De hominis opificio* affirms that the human nature is composite and the middle between the intelligible and the sensible nature, later chapters of the treatise see Gregory veer away from a unitive concept of ‘human nature’ towards a more disjunctive emphasis on the two natures. Gregory’s insistence that man’s primary purpose and identity was to be created in the image of God leads him to assert that, properly speaking, the soul consists only of those aspects that reflect the divine.²⁴⁶ Thus, ‘human nature’ becomes largely synonymous with the ‘intelligible nature’. In *De anima et resurrectione*, another anthropological treatise, this view is articulated clearly by Gregory’s sister Macrina who argues that the definition of ‘essence’ (οὐσία) covers only those

²⁴⁴ Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 172.

²⁴⁵ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 31, 39.

²⁴⁶ *Op. hom.* 15 (PG 44, 176–177).

characteristics that are unique to a certain category of beings.²⁴⁷ In the dialogue, Macrina and Gregory operate on a threefold division of the soul, which consists of reason (νοῦς), spirited part (θυμός), and desiring part (ἐπιθυμία). Thus, for Macrina, the human nature comes to denote only reason, while the other two, shared with animals, are labelled as ‘warts’ of reason, external growths that do not belong to the essence of the human soul.²⁴⁸

Ultimately, the narrative of double creation and Macrina’s definition of the human nature serve to explain how humans can at once be subject to passion and made in the image of God who is by definition impassible (ἀπαθής).²⁴⁹ Separating the two natures is an attempt to locate the passions in a part of humanity that does not reflect the image of God but belongs to humans so far as they share in the animal nature. In this way humans can be called ‘the image of God’, while the presence of passions is also acknowledged as stemming from humans themselves, not from God or any other external source. Elsewhere, Gregory explicitly names ἡδονή as one of the passions that have no place in God.²⁵⁰ This is particularly understandable if we recall that Gregory conceptualises pleasure as a filling of a lack and, thus, a generation – a phenomenon that cannot exist in the perfect stability of God who is not only ἀπαθής but also ἀνευδής, without any lack.

However, this view comes with a number of problems: If the human nature only consists of the intelligible part of our soul, what is the role of the passions of in

²⁴⁷ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 52C–53A).

²⁴⁸ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 56C).

²⁴⁹ *Op. hom.* 16 (PG 44, 180C); trans. NPNF, 404. See also, *Beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2, 144). On God’s impassibility and the problem of passions, see also Michel René Barnes, ‘The Polemical Context and Content of Gregory of Nyssa’s Psychology’, *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, no. 4 (1994): 10–11; Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 26. There may, of course, be other motives. Zachhuber holds that by separating the creation of the universal human nature from that of Adam as a particular human being, Gregory seeks to explain how all mankind is the object of God’s creation. However, also Zachhuber subsequently explains that the book of *Genesis* ‘was thought to provide the ultimate answers to the main cosmological problem of the time, that is, how God, being single, simple, uniform, homogeneous, and unchanging could have brought forth a world which, in its very essence, appears to be the exact opposite of him: multiple, multiform, heterogeneous, and changeable.’ (Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*, 147.) Furthermore, Zachhuber notes that in *Op. hom.* 16, which I have discussed here, Gregory introduces the theory of double creation ‘to explain the difference between the original, godlike, and the present, mortal and sinful, states of man’. (Ibid., 163.)

²⁵⁰ See, e.g., *Virg.* 17.2 (SC 119, 456).

the spiritual life? Are they simply cut off or can they be redeemed? And if passions are completely foreign to the human nature as the image of God, why does the Bible seem to talk about people who used their passions for godly purposes? We shall see that while some tension remains, Gregory addresses these issues especially in his dissatisfied response to Macrina in *De anima et resurrectione*. But before we turn to the fate of the passions, let us briefly investigate the place of pleasure in the threefold structure that Gregory and Macrina put forth in the same dialogue, and compare it to another threefold division that occurs in *De hominis opificio* alongside the twofold model of humanity we have already addressed.

Pleasure and Threefold Models of the Soul

While the distinction between the rational and the irrational nature remains the foundation for understanding the origin and function of pleasure, at times Gregory embeds pleasure within models where the human soul is divided in three instead of two. Here, I am thinking of two influential ways of conceptualising the soul and its faculties that could be roughly characterised as ‘Platonist’ and ‘Peripatetic.’ Although earlier scholarship often portrayed Gregory as an heir to the tripartite Platonist model of the soul – consisting of the intellect (λογιστικόν), the spirited part (θυμοειδής) and the appetitive part (ἐπιθυμητικόν) – it has since been noted that his anthropology is much more varied and not always consistent.²⁵¹ The number of parts into which the soul is divided, and whether or not it is appropriate to talk about ‘parts’ at all, has been called into question. The specific nature of these entities, that is whether we should talk about ‘parts’ or ‘faculties’, will have little impact on my analysis. Furthermore, the observation that the threefold division often collapses into two is fully in line with what I am going to argue: ultimately both threefold models fit within the basic distinction between the two natures which remain

²⁵¹ The issue of the ‘tripartite’ soul and its interpretations in Plato, later Platonism, and Gregory are discussed extensively in Barnes, ‘The “Platonic” Character of Gregory of Nyssa’s Psychology’. See also the chapter “Nyssen’s Eclectic Psychology” in Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 48–74. For Plato’s view, see the discussion from *Rep.* 4, 435b onwards, and, for the purposes of the present thesis, *Rep.* 9, 580d–e.

the fundamental anthropological categories in Gregory's discussions on pleasure.

The 'Platonist' threefold model receives the most complete treatment in Gregory's long exposition on the structure of the soul in *De anima et resurrectione*. It informs Gregory and Macrina's discussion on the origin of passions, in which pleasure, too, is mentioned briefly.²⁵² After introducing the tripartite division between νοῦς, θυμός, and ἐπιθυμία, Macrina explains that all passions are related either to the spirited or the appetitive part of the soul. Pain and pleasure, she goes on to say, contain elements of both. This is because pain can result both from languishing spiritedness that fails to take revenge on the offender, and from losing or failing to attain that which is desired. Pleasure, the opposite of pain, is also related to both, as it 'governs both of them equally'.²⁵³ What does Macrina mean by this?

Smith interprets Macrina's comment to mean that the 'immediate reactions either of fear and anger (*thymos*) to painful or unappealing sensations or of desire and longing (*epithymia*) to pleasing sense data are the principal emotions (*pathê*) by which all other emotions are derived.'²⁵⁴ In other words, behind every passion is a reaction to a thing as pleasant or unpleasant. This highlights the role of pleasure and its opposite, pain or distress, as the two fundamental emotions from which all other emotions are derived. However, Smith's interpretation does not explain why pleasure is said to direct both θυμός and ἐπιθυμία: he connects distress to θυμός and pleasure to ἐπιθυμία, although Macrina explains that *both* of these emotions concern both parts of the soul. What, then, is the connection between pleasure and θυμός?

I would argue that what we find here is precisely the distinction between the 'more shameful pleasures' and 'pleasure in honours and love of power' (τῆν ἡδονὴν ἐν τιμαῖς καὶ φιλαρχίαις) that I noted at the beginning of the previous

²⁵² For the whole discussion on θυμός and ἐπιθυμία, see *An. et res.* (PG 46, 48D–56C).

²⁵³ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 56B–C); trans. Silvas, 191–192.

²⁵⁴ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 68. Transliteration in the original text.

chapter.²⁵⁵ While ἐπιθυμία, the lowest part of the soul and as such the closest companion of the body, urges people to seek the fulfilment of bodily drives, the soul also seeks pleasure in ways that are neither bodily nor fully intellectual. In the Greek philosophical tradition, θυμός was often associated with fear and anger, but it was also seen as a seat of passions that were not characterised by withdrawal or aggression but a certain kind of drive and gratification. In Book 9 of Plato's *Republic*, we find Socrates and Glaucon discussing the three parts of the soul. After an attempt to demonstrate that the soul is indeed tripartite, Socrates comes up with one more proof: there seem to exist three kinds of pleasures, each of them peculiar to a certain part of the soul.²⁵⁶ Here, ἐπιθυμητικόν is associated with pleasures of food, drink, sex, and money, whereas θυμοειδής pursues 'control, victory, and high repute' and can thus be called 'victory-loving and honor-loving' (φιλότικον αὐτὸ καὶ φιλότιμον).²⁵⁷ Furthermore, Socrates goes on to note that in ignorant people love of honour paves the way to envy, and love of victory to violence.²⁵⁸ In this way, pleasures of θυμοειδής lead to a number of passions. The characteristic pleasures of ἐπιθυμητικόν and θυμοειδής resemble Gregory's distinction between 'more shameful pleasures' and 'pleasure in honours and love of power'. Thus, we have a good reason to assume that, for him, θυμός is not only associated with distress, but has its characteristic pleasures which give rise to other passions. Gregory articulates something similar in the passage from *Homily 12 on the Song of Songs*, the passage I have cited in the title of this thesis:

For some pleasure or other (ἡδονή τις) is the instigator of all vicious actions that get carried out, and there is no such thing as sin that is disjoined from pleasure (οὐκ ἔστιν εὐρεῖν ἁμαρτίαν ἡδονῆς διεξευγμένην) (whether the passions stem from spiritedness or from desire [ὅσα τε διὰ θυμοῦ καὶ ὅσα δι' ἐπιθυμίας γίνονται πάθη])...²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ *Virg.* 17.1 (SC 119, 454–456).

²⁵⁶ *Rep.* 9, 580d. I will cite here the part that pertains to pleasures of ἐπιθυμία and θυμός, although the dialogue also mentions pleasures of the intellect. Intellectual pleasures will be the topic of the final part of this thesis.

²⁵⁷ *Rep.* 9, 580e–581b. See also *Rep.* 8 where Socrates describes the 'timocratic' ruler who is driven by the love of victory and the love of honour because of the 'predominance of the spirited element' (548c), and later (549a) on calls him 'a lover of ruling and a lover of honour' (φιλάρχος δὲ καὶ φιλότιμος). Note the close resemblance between the latter pair of words and Gregory's wording in *Virg.* 17.1.

²⁵⁸ *Rep.* 9, 586c.

²⁵⁹ *Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 350; Norris, 369).

This passage further highlights the role of pleasure as not just any passion, but a primary passion that is the source of all other passions and vicious actions. In the next chapter, we shall investigate just how pleasure accomplishes this. For now, it suffices to note that here, too, Gregory associates pleasure with both θυμός and ἐπιθυμία, and with all the other passions that originate in them. Thus, we can conclude that pleasure does not only prompt the passions of ἐπιθυμία as Smith suggests; it is also related to the passions of θυμός.

We should note, however, that generally speaking Gregory has little to say about θυμός and its relationship to pleasure. Normally, the three parts of the soul collapse into two, so that the intellect is contrasted with the appetitive part. While the former delights in contemplation, the latter gravitates towards all material pleasures, from pleasures of eating and sex to the aesthetic pleasures of sight and hearing. Essentially, these categories correspond to the basic distinction between the intelligible and the sensible nature.

The second threefold model, which resembles an Aristotelian conception of the soul, is discussed at length in *De hominis opificio* 8 where Gregory uses it to explain the order of creation. Here, the three levels are three different kinds of souls, of which each is characteristic to a certain rank of embodied beings: plants, irrational animals, and humans. Higher souls will comprise all characteristics of the lower souls, with added powers (δυνάμεις) that are the defining feature of their category. In this ranking of faculties, the most basic level is the power of growth and nutrition, which is characteristic of plants. Second comes ‘the power of management according to sense’, in other words sensation and perception, which irrational animals possess in addition to nourishment and growth. The third and perfect manifestation of bodily life is the rational human nature, which ‘both is nourished and endowed with sense, and also partakes of reason (λόγου) and is ordered by mind (νῶν).’²⁶⁰ In other words, humans are partakers of all three levels of the embodied and ensouled existence. Gregory goes on to equate this threefold distinction with the biblical

²⁶⁰ *Op. hom.* 8 (PG 44, 141D–145A); trans. NPNF, 393.

vocabulary of body–soul–spirit (σῶμα–ψυχή–πνεῦμα) and heart–soul–mind (καρδία–ψυχή–διάνοια).²⁶¹

What does this anthropological model have to do with pleasure? The answer follows immediately: Gregory explains that just as Paul recognises a division between the body, the soul and the spirit, he also recognises three possible choices (προαιρέσεως) that direct people’s actions: carnal (σαρκικήν), psychic or ‘natural’ (ψυχικήν), and spiritual (πνευματικήν). The three dispositions are situated on a continuum between vice and virtue, the first being given to vice, the second at a neutral midpoint, and the third sharing in the perfection of the divine life. Of these, it is the carnal people, those governed by the plant-like the nutritive aspect of their soul, who busy themselves ‘with the belly and the pleasures connected with it’ (ἡ περι γαστέρα καὶ τὰς περι ταύτην ἡδυπαθείας). According to Gregory, this is why Paul reproaches the Corinthians for their ‘indulgence in pleasure (τὸ ἀπολαυστικόν) and passion’ by calling them carnal.²⁶²

The passage seems to imply, somewhat puzzlingly, that at least rudimentary pleasures of nutrition are a feature of plants and of the nutritive faculty of the soul, rather than of the higher order of animals who are endowed with sensation. Such a view is not unheard of in ancient philosophy, but we should note that Aristotle himself does not endorse it.²⁶³ Both in *De anima* and in Aristotle’s ethical writings pleasure is associated with the capacity of sense-perception, which plants lack and animals possess. Since a plant lacks both appetite and sense perception, it is neither able to generate a representation of its desired object in order to strive for it, nor have perceptual awareness that would be required for an experience of pleasure.²⁶⁴ Thus, in *Op. hom.* 8 Gregory departs from Aristotle’s conception of the soul even if he simultaneously makes use of the trichotomous soul that is normally associated with Aristotelianism; it is possible that Gregory’s interpretation is inspired by later interpreters of

²⁶¹ *Op. hom.* 8 (PG 44, 145D).

²⁶² *Op. hom.* 8 (PG 44, 148A); trans. NPNF, 394.

²⁶³ On plants and pleasure in antiquity, see Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 43–44.

²⁶⁴ See *Ibid.*, 126. Wolfsdorf cites *EE* 6.12 and *De anima* 414b to substantiate his interpretation.

Aristotle or by other Greek writers who argued that plants can partake in pleasure and pain.²⁶⁵ But more importantly, the connection between pleasure and the plant soul ties together biblical elements which are undoubtedly Gregory's main interest in the passage. In this context, the trichotomous soul reflects the order of creation and connects it to the three governing dispositions – carnal, natural, and spiritual – which Gregory derives from Pauline anthropology. In other words, pleasure is located in the plant soul because this enables Gregory to tie together the ontological hierarchy of all creation and the anthropological hierarchy in the soul, both based on biblical material. Hence, we should not overestimate the relevance of the link between the plant soul and pleasure outside the exegetical concerns that motivate Gregory's analysis in *De hominis opificio* 8.

While the threefold models that Gregory presents in *De hominis opificio* and *De anima et resurrectione* contain similar elements, they are not identical. Whereas the former describes all kinds of embodied living things from plants to humans, the latter focuses only on sensate beings and the relationship between humans and irrational animals. In the first model, the only mention of pleasure occurs in conjunction with the plant-like nutritive soul, while in the second model pleasure is explicitly said to originate in both of the lower parts of the soul, in other words, the parts that humans share with irrational animals. We can ask, furthermore, whether, in their original contexts, the two models even referred to comparable phenomena; Barnes notes that later commentators often confused divisions attributed to the soul as a moral agent and divisions ascribed to it on a biological level. Here, the Platonist definition appears to speak of the former, the Aristotelian of the latter, though we should note that by bringing the Aristotelian souls into contact with Paul's anthropological division, Gregory is implying that the biological distinction has moral repercussions.²⁶⁶

At any rate, Gregory himself does not see any profound contradiction between the two models. This is evidenced by *De anima et resurrectione*, where the

²⁶⁵ See again Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 43.

²⁶⁶ Barnes, 'The "Platonic" Character of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology', 5.

division into plant, animal, and human life forms appears sandwiched between the tripartite 'Platonist' notion of the soul.²⁶⁷ Thus, some scholars have suggested that Gregory unskillfully equates the Aristotelian model with the Platonist one that occurs more frequently in his writings. I would argue that the appearance of the Aristotelian model in *De anima et resurrectione* is not so much due to philosophical confusion as related to Gregory's exegetical concern: also in this work, the threefold distinction is linked to the order of creation in *Genesis*. After explaining how both the nutritive faculty of the plants and the irrational sensate nature of the animals are mixed with the rational part of the soul, Gregory drops the plant motive altogether and proceeds to discuss the animal nature and its relationship to reason in human beings. In this discussion, the animal nature remains the basic concept, which is at times divided into θυμός and ἐπιθυμία.²⁶⁸ Such a practical eclectic approach is not unusual of Gregory who has a tendency to draw on different philosophical traditions guided by his present theological concerns.²⁶⁹

Although the differences and inconsistencies in Gregory's understanding of the soul complicate our project of locating pleasure, underlying both threefold models, and on a larger scale both treatises, is the fundamental division between man's two natures: the rational and the irrational, the intelligible and the sensible, the God-like and the creaturely. Gregory is not the first to move fluidly between twofold and threefold conceptions of the soul. Even Plato who is usually cited as the original proponent of a tripartite notion of the soul, often discusses the soul as a dichotomous entity consisting of the intellect and the appetite. In fact, Plato's ancient commentators frequently associate him with a dichotomous conception of the soul, further enforced by the Aristotelian

²⁶⁷ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 57C–60D).

²⁶⁸ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 60C–65A).

²⁶⁹ This is in line with Barnes's general argument that Gregory's use of psychological models depends on his theological concerns. Barnes argues that the broader purpose of the passage in *De anima* is to safeguard the impassibility of God and that of the human mind as the divine image. See Barnes, 'The Polemical Context and Content of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology', 2, 10–11. Elsewhere Barnes notes that also Philo and Plotinus 'use different psychologies according to the problem at hand.' See Barnes, 'The "Platonic" Character of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology', 24.

division between λόγος and ἄλογος.²⁷⁰ Thus, Barnes, who cautions us against overestimating Gregory's Platonism (at least so far as we are referring to the thought of Plato himself), notes that in many later authors 'Plato's tripartite division of the soul was subsumed under the Aristotelian bipartite division, such that Plato's moral psychology is understood to consist of a bipartite division in which the second part is itself divided into two kinds of irrational psychic causes.'²⁷¹ He also points out that the fact that Gregory divides the human soul into its passionate and animalistic, and passion-free and rational elements does not have to entail any direct dependence on Plato, but is more likely mediated by later authors such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen who espouse a similar view of humanity.²⁷²

Pleasure in the Rational Creature

Since pleasure originates in the irrational parts of the soul, which humans share with animals, it is no surprise that Gregory frequently links pleasure seeking to the life of the brutes.²⁷³ He warns his audience that a person who is ruled by the lower parts of the soul runs a constant risk of being reduced to the level of irrational beasts.²⁷⁴ However, even though pleasure stems from the animal nature, it does not operate in rational souls exactly in the same way as it does in irrational animals. Instead, the presence of the rational mind both aggravates and edifies the soul's tendency towards pleasure.²⁷⁵ I have already alluded to the first possibility by citing the text from *De hominis opificio* in which Gregory notes that as rational beings humans become capable of sins that cannot be found in irrational animals. But just as the irrational parts of the soul can harness the weakened mind to their service and develop passions that irrational animals do not have, the interaction can also be reversed: the crucial difference between humans and animals lies in the way in which the mind can evaluate,

²⁷⁰ Barnes, 'The "Platonic" Character of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology', 4. For the rational and irrational in Aristotle, see, for example, *NE* 1102b.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 20–21.

²⁷³ On this link in anti-hedonist thinkers, see Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 21.

²⁷⁴ See, among others, *An. et res.* (PG 46, 61C–D); *Vit. Moys.* II.301–302 (SC 1, 128).

²⁷⁵ See also Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 94.

control, and redirect the pleasurable impulses that arise in the lower parts of the soul in order to use them for higher ends that are not directly available to the senses but only accessible to the rational faculties.²⁷⁶ For Gregory, this activity of the mind on the lower faculties of the soul is not limited to control and suppression, but entails a transformation of the impulses so that they can be harnessed for the pursuit of higher, virtuous ends.²⁷⁷

Here we should recall the importance of the free will or, as Gregory puts it, 'choice' (προαίρεσις) as the key function that makes humans independent moral agents. Unlike animals, humans are not at the mercy of their irrational soul. Instead, they are free moral agents whose actions are always contingent on the choosing of the mind, even if the mind is clouded by sin and chooses to pursue the wrong ends. It is to this interaction between the irrational impulses and the mind's act of choosing I shall now turn. I will first offer a brief discussion on the ancient ethical ideal of *metriopatheia*, the moderation of emotions, and then examine how Gregory applies this idea to the interaction between the mind and irrational impulses. *De anima et resurrectione* offers the most detailed discussion on the topic. The transformation of passions is a well known feature of Gregory's moral theology, which has received an extensive treatment in Warren Smith's *Passion and Paradise: Human and Divine Emotion in Gregory of Nyssa*.²⁷⁸ The following account will be largely consonant with Smith's analysis, but I will keep my focus on the passion of pleasure and offer a few further perspectives.

Most ancient thinkers accepted the view that human behaviour ought to be directed by the rational interests of the mind. The way in which the mind was to assert its superior position took two primary forms: it was expected either to moderate irrational impulses or extinguish all forms of irrational activity in the soul. The former ideal, *metriopatheia*, was particularly prominent in Aristotle and other Peripatetic philosophers, though similar ideas had appeared already

²⁷⁶ Smith makes this observation in *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁷⁸ See "The Nature of Passions" in *Ibid.*, 75–103.

in Plato's dialogues.²⁷⁹ Simply put, it meant that in order to pursue the good life humans did not have to eradicate their emotions but only moderate them and direct them towards rationally determined virtuous ends. The latter ideal, *apatheia*, was particularly well known from Stoic philosophy. The two ideals resulted from two different conceptions of the place of the irrational in the soul: Since the Stoics believed that the soul was unitary and fully rational, they could not accept any degree of irrationality in its operations: either the soul was functioning rationally as intended or it was distorted by passion. No elevated irrationality existed, since irrationality was foreign to the unified rational nature of human beings.²⁸⁰ In contrast, Platonic and Peripatetic philosophers were more willing to include an element of irrationality, which could be harnessed and honed to serve the rational mind. Thus, there could be various degrees of emotion, reaching from base and irrational to rationally refined.

Both of these concepts became well known and influential far beyond the boundaries of the philosophical schools in which they originated. Many later eclectic Platonists employed both concepts side by side, and their works provide the most natural comparison to Gregory's thought. Generally speaking, Middle Platonists considered *metriopatheia* a more realistic and accessible ideal than the Stoic *apatheia*, though, as Dillon points out, they often misunderstood or at least misrepresented the Stoic ideal.²⁸¹ In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Philo, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen all envisioned the spiritual life as a development from *metriopatheia* towards *apatheia*: the former was the first

²⁷⁹ For a brief summary of the different positions occurring in Plato's dialogues, see John M. Dillon, 'Metriopatheia and Apatheia: Some Reflections on a Controversy in Later Greek Ethics', in *The Golden Chain: Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990), 508. Barnes notes that earlier Gregory scholarship has failed to consider the Aristotelian origin of this doctrine. Barnes, 'The "Platonic" Character of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology', 22.

²⁸⁰ Dillon, 'Metriopatheia and Apatheia: Some Reflections on a Controversy in Later Greek Ethics', 511. So also Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 209–10; Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 33; Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 91.

²⁸¹ Dillon, 'Metriopatheia and Apatheia: Some Reflections on a Controversy in Later Greek Ethics', 511. The importance of *metriopatheia* was emphasised especially in consolation literature where it was seen as a more appropriate response to grief than the somewhat callous *apatheia*. See Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 91.

step in the moral progress, the latter the aim of advanced believers and the culmination of the divine likeness.²⁸²

As regards the two main attitudes towards emotions, Gregory considers *apatheia* one of the key characteristics of God and, consequently, of the divine likeness in human beings;²⁸³ the term *metriopatheia* does not appear in his works at all. However, the contrast between the two ideals is evident for example in *Beat. 2* where Gregory argues that the beatitude's call for meekness does not entail a complete extirpation of passions: 'Hence the Beatitude commands moderation (τὸ μέτριόν) and meekness, but not complete absence of passion (τὸ παντάπασιν ἀπαθές); for the latter is outside the scope of nature, whereas the former can be achieved by virtue.'²⁸⁴ At least in the earthly life, *metriopatheia* suffices as the Christian ideal since a complete extirpation of passions would require humans to transcend their embodied state. However, even where Gregory advocates for *apatheia*, it does not always denote a complete eradication of passions but rather a detachment from the turbulent phenomena of the sensible world and a state in which the passionate impulses have been submitted to the control of the mind but not completely extinguished.²⁸⁵ Knuuttila notes that such usage is not uncommon in later Platonist writers who may criticise the Stoic notion of *apatheia*, but simultaneously emphasise *apatheia* as an important feature of the divine likeness, consisting of a 'turning away from mundane matters without the loss of emotional dispositions.'²⁸⁶

When it comes to the spiritual fulfilment, Gregory's vision oscillates between the two concepts. In *De anima et resurrectione*, where we find an extensive

²⁸² Simo Knuuttila, 'Emotions and the Ancient Pursuit of Christian Perfection', in *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 111–76; Richard Sorabji, 'Christians on Moderation Versus Eradication', in *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 385–99.

²⁸³ On God as ἀπαθές, see, for example *Or. cat.* 18 (SC 453, 220).

²⁸⁴ *Beat. 2* (GNO VII/2, 95–96); trans. Graef, 103.

²⁸⁵ See, for example, *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 50–51), and also Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, 132–33. The same observation concerning Gregory's notion of *apatheia* is made by Leuenberger-Wenger whose analysis of *metriopatheia* and *apatheia* in Gregory is on the whole largely consonant with mine. See Leuenberger-Wenger, *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa*, 313–15.

²⁸⁶ Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, 93.

discussion on the moderation of passions to which I shall soon turn, rational moderation of emotions is the first step in the spiritual progress, but eventually all impulses are eradicated as alien to human nature and the image of God. This is somewhat analogous to the shift from ordinary to advanced spiritual life that we encounter, for example, in Philo and Clement. However, in other works such as *De mortuis* and *In Canticum*, rationally regulated emotion remains the ideal even at the height of the spiritual life. I will return to these differences in Gregory's understanding of the highest stages of the spiritual life at the end of the thesis. For now, we can simply note that the moderation of passions plays a prominent role throughout Gregory's corpus at least as the first step of spiritual training. The concept is present already in *De virginitate*, which is widely considered Gregory's earliest work.²⁸⁷

Let us now turn to one of the most detailed accounts on the place of passions in the spiritual life, which Gregory presents in *De anima et resurrectione*. Earlier in this chapter we have seen that in *De hominis opificio* Gregory emphasises the role of the mind as the seat of the divine likeness, man's fundamental identity, so strongly that he comes to suggest that the very human nature is confined to the mind. This emphasis on the unity of the soul and the mind as the defining point of the human nature pushes the lower parts of the soul into the margins of the human existence and leaves them with no defined role in the spiritual life. However, in *De anima et resurrectione*, Gregory offers a more extensive reflection on the spiritual relevance of the passions. In this work, we are at first presented with a similar view, as Macrina and Gregory begin their dialogue on the nature of passions. Unsatisfied with Macrina's definition of the soul as an exclusively intellectual entity, Gregory asks what we should make of the movements of ἐπιθυμία and θυμός that are neither bodily nor intellectual. He claims that Macrina's argument can only lead to two absurd conclusions: either ἐπιθυμία and θυμός constitute separate souls, leading to a plurality of souls in human beings, or they are completely excluded from the definition of soul.²⁸⁸ Rejecting Macrina's counter-arguments, Gregory goes on to protest that even

²⁸⁷ *Virg.* 18.3 (SC 119, 468–474).

²⁸⁸ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 48C–49B).

though passions originate in the lower parts of the soul shared with animals and can easily pull the soul to the mire of sin, they can also be put to good use. He points out that the Bible provides illuminating examples of people who transformed their passions, such as desire, fear and anger, into vehicles of virtue.²⁸⁹ This remark persuades Macrina to offer a corrective to her earlier argument. Now, she no longer describes the passions as external ‘warts’ of the soul, but as phenomena that lie ‘on the borderland of the soul’, between the sensate creation and the intellectual image of God. In other words, their status is liminal and ambivalent: each passion is ‘capable of inclining to either of two opposites according to its particular nature’, and thus ‘the way it is used determines the outcome whether for the good or its opposite.’²⁹⁰

Human passions, then, can serve different ends. Whereas in animals the irrational parts of the soul exist alone and are only directed towards the sensible, in human beings ‘all that is proper to the irrational nature is mingled (κατεμίχθη) with the intellectual part of the soul.’²⁹¹ Macrina explains that the only way the reasoning power (λογικὴν δύναμιν) can enter bodily life is through being united with the senses, and thus our rational soul is in communion (κοινωνία) with all that accompanies sensation in the irrational animals.²⁹² She goes on to explain that if reason, the intrinsic property of human nature, governed over the extrinsic passions, they would not be active in the service of vice at all:

These are the incidence within us of what are called “passions” (πάθη), which have not been allotted to human life for any bad purpose at all, for the Creator would be the author of vices if compulsions to wrongdoing had been implanted along with our nature. Instead, these movements of the soul (τὰ τοιαῦτα τῆς ψυχῆς κινήματα) become the instruments of virtue or vice according to the way we order our choice (προαίρεσως).²⁹³

²⁸⁹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 57A).

²⁹⁰ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 57B–C); trans. Silvas, 193.

²⁹¹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 60C).

²⁹² *An. et res.* (PG 46, 60D–61A). See also 60B.

²⁹³ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 61A); trans. Silvas, 194.

The passage continues with a list of different passions and their reasoned virtuous uses, concluding: '[A]nd the impulse of desire would sponsor the divine and undefiled pleasure' (τῆς δὲ ἐπιθυμητικῆς ὀρμῆς τὴν θείαν τε καὶ ἀκήρατον ἡμῖν ἡδονὴν προξενούσης).²⁹⁴

Macrina's account highlights the way in which the mind's ability to control and direct the passions leads to a crucial difference between human and animal passions. The mind is not simply a separate entity that sits, as it were, on top of the sensate animal soul and tries to bridle its irrational impulses. On the contrary, as Macrina's vocabulary of 'mingling' and 'communion' implies, the mind imparts its rational qualities to the animal soul. This brings about a twofold transformation of the passions: First, the mind can ensure that drives towards the material world are kept within appropriate limits. Second, the mind can harness the power of passions and direct them towards intelligible ends, which the lower parts of the soul alone would not be able to grasp since such matters extend beyond the realm of the senses.²⁹⁵ This process signifies a return to the original harmony in which the sensible nature was perfectly governed by the mind.²⁹⁶ As regards pleasure, the two-pronged moderation takes the following forms: First, the mind must ensure that the soul takes pleasure only in appropriate material objects, i.e. things used to satisfy inevitable physical needs. Thus, pleasure returns to its original role as a facilitator of self-preservation instead of growing into excessive, violent proportions and becoming a goal in itself. Second, by directing the impulse of desire towards the higher intelligible reality, the mind trains the lower part of the soul to take pleasure in more noble matters than the sensible reality. The latter transformation is highlighted in a passage in *In Canticum canticorum* to which I shall return in the final part of this thesis:

For in the human constitution there is a double pleasure (διπλῆς...ἡδονῆς), one that is in the soul and is activated by impassibility and another that is occasioned in the body by passion, and whichever of the two our choosing (προαίρεσις) shall elect is the one that

²⁹⁴ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 61B); trans. Silvas, 195.

²⁹⁵ See Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 82–83.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

prevails over the other. Thus if one focuses attention on sense perception (αἴσθησιν) and seeks for oneself the pleasure (ἡδονήν) it grafts into the body, one's life is spent without tasting the divine gladness (τῆς θείας εὐφροσύνης), since the better is automatically overshadowed by the worse. But for those whose desire (ἐπιθυμία) flows in the direction of the divine, the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν) stands unshadowed, and judgment flees everything that bewitches the senses (αἴσθησιν).²⁹⁷

The ways in which the mind fails and succeeds in controlling the impulse for pleasure, both as regards the sensible and the intelligible realm, will be the topic of the subsequent chapters of this thesis. Now, I will simply draw attention to some of the basic principles that guide the interaction of the mind and the irrational elements of the soul when a pleasurable stimulus arises and is either accepted or rejected. Let us turn again to *De opificio hominis* where Gregory describes the opposing ways in which disordered and rightly ordered souls respond to pleasurable impulses:

There are cases, however, in which the mind even follows natural impulses (ἐπακολουθεῖ ταῖς φυσικαῖς ὁρμαῖς ὁ νοῦς), and becomes, as it were, their servant. For often the bodily nature (ἡ τοῦ σώματος φύσις) takes the lead by introducing either the sense of that which gives pain (τοῦ λυποῦντος αἴσθησιν) or the desire for that which gives pleasure (τοῦ εὐφραίνοντος ἐπιθυμίαν), so that it may be said to furnish the first beginnings (τὰς πρώτας... ἀρχάς) by producing in us the desire for food, or, generally the impulse towards some pleasant thing (καθ' ἡδονήν τὴν ὁρμήν); while the mind, receiving such an impulse (ἐκδεχόμενον τὰς τοιαύτας ὁρμάς), furnishes the body by its own intelligence with the proper means towards the desired object. Such a condition, indeed, does not occur in all, save in those of a somewhat slavish disposition, who bring the reason into bondage to the impulses of their nature (οἱ δουλώσαντες τὸν λόγον ταῖς ὁρμαῖς τῆς φύσεως) and pay servile homage to the pleasures of sense (τὸ κατὰ τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἡδὺ δουλοπρεπῶς κολακεύουσιν) by allowing them the alliance of their mind; but in the case of more perfect men this does not happen; for the mind takes the lead, and chooses (προαιρούμενος) the expedient course by reason and not by passion (λόγῳ καὶ οὐχὶ πάθει), while their nature (φύσις) follows the tracks of its leader.²⁹⁸

Again, 'nature' (φύσις) serves as the primary concept that Gregory employs to explain the origin of passions. Here it refers only to the bodily nature, which is

²⁹⁷ *Cant.* 10 (GNO VI, 313–314; trans. Norris, 329).

²⁹⁸ *Op. hom.* 14 (PG 44, 173D–176A); trans. NPNF, 403.

contrasted with the mind. In people whose reason is weak, the bodily nature (ἡ τοῦ σώματος φύσις) gains dominion over the mind by introducing a desire towards something pleasurable and prompting the mind to strive for it. If, on the other hand, the mind operates as intended, it does not succumb to pleasurable impulses uncritically, but is able to assess their content rationally and choose to accept or reject them. The dynamic between the mind and the pleasurable impulses arising from the bodily nature through the senses is of utmost importance for Gregory's understanding of pleasure. It captures the ambivalent relationship between man's two natures and forms the core of Gregory's ethics of pleasure.

The passage above provides an important verbal cue that highlights the cognitive aspect of pleasure and helps us place Gregory's theory of passions in its intellectual context. The word ὁρμή, 'impulse', is a prominent term in ancient theories of cognition. It is perhaps best known from Stoic sources – a point to which I shall soon return.²⁹⁹ From the passage above, we learn that Gregory understands ὁρμή as a prompt to a passionate reaction that the bodily nature introduces to the rational mind. Here, Gregory discusses two fundamental kinds of ὁρμή: a painful sensation that, although Gregory does not say it, urges the mind to avoid an object, and a desire for something pleasurable which encourages pursuit. In people who are ruled by their bodily nature, the mind accepts the impulse and lends the body its own intelligence to avoid or pursue the object at hand. This is the moment when an impulse develops into a full-fledged passion, leading people to 'pay servile homage to the pleasures of sense.' Gregory makes a distinction between 'more perfect men' and 'those of a somewhat slavish disposition', saying that the bodily nature dominates only in the latter. Based on this passage alone, it is unclear whether he means that the 'more perfect' are able to moderate their impulses and stop them from developing into harmful passions, or whether such impulses do not arise at all in people who are capable of rational control. However, since he remarks in the

²⁹⁹ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 90.

same treatise that passions may be transformed into virtues, the first scenario is likely intended here.³⁰⁰

The difference between an impulse of passionate action and a full-fledged passion is clearly stated in *De anima et resurrectione*. After Macrina rejects the view that passions must be completely eradicated in the Christian life, the rational moderation of the passionate impulses becomes the focus of her argument: If the mind is able to order its choice correctly and govern the movements that originate in the animal nature, they turn into virtues. If, however, it fails in this task, the ‘impulses are changed into passions (εἰς πάθος αἱ ὀρμαὶ καταστρέφονται), just as we see happens with irrational animals.’³⁰¹

Thus, we can conclude that, for Gregory, impulses are morally neutral prompts to action. They precede passions and do not necessarily develop into such if the mind rejects them or directs them to rationally determined beneficial ends. As such they are akin to what the Stoics called *propathēia*, involuntary morally neutral movements of the soul that only develop into passions if the mind assents to them.³⁰² However, we should also note that in his extensive discussion on Gregory’s understanding of ὀρμή, Smith observes that the distinction Gregory makes between morally neutral ὀρμαί and morally suspect πάθη is not consistent even within *De anima et resurrectione*.³⁰³ In a passage that I have already quoted, it is, in fact, at first the ‘passions’ themselves that are said to have a morally neutral character and can be transformed into virtues.³⁰⁴ Despite the inconsistency in terminology, the idea remains the same: humans can choose which way they respond to the sensory stimuli that arise in the

³⁰⁰ See *Op. hom.* 18 (PG 44, 193B–C).

³⁰¹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 61A–C); trans. Silvas, 194–195.

³⁰² On *propathēia* and their, at times confused, Christian reception see, Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 90–91.

³⁰³ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 92–93. Sorabji notes similar inconsistencies in Origen who also at times refers to the first movements as πάθη. However, whereas Origen appears to do so because he considers the movements themselves suspect, Gregory is, in my view, more consistent in assuming they are not sinful until the mind accepts them. On Origen, see Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 348.

³⁰⁴ ‘These are the incidence within us of what are called “passions” (πάθη λέγεται), which have not been allotted to human life for any bad purpose at all...’ (*An. et res.* 61A–B).

animal nature and are mediated by the senses to the mind. Only after the choice has been made does action follow and moral responsibility take place.

Since Gregory attributes passions to the mind's errant judgment (κρίσις) on an impulse, Smith concludes that his conception of passions resembles classic Stoic thought. Smith argues that Gregory is more closely aligned with Zeno who argued that passions were results of judgments, as opposed to Chrysippus's view that passions themselves were judgments.³⁰⁵ In my view, however, comparing Gregory to the Old Stoics who wrote half a millennium before him and whose views have not been passed down in their entirety is not a particularly fruitful approach.³⁰⁶ Despite some conceptual and terminological similarities we should note, first, that Gregory operates within a very different anthropological framework, and, second, that there are easier ways to explain the occurrence of 'Stoic' terminology in his works.

Let us first consider the anthropological differences: Despite emphasising the unitary character of the soul, Gregory acknowledges the presence of different faculties, some of which are irrational and shared with animals. Thus, he places the rational and irrational beings on a continuum, warning that the former may be easily reduced to the level of the latter. The old Stoics, on the other hand, argued for a radical distinction between the two.³⁰⁷ In their view, the outer similarities between animal and human behaviour were due to completely different cognitive mechanisms. The human soul was defined by the presence of a rational mind, even when it failed to carry out its proper functions. Although the Stoics considered ὁρμή a characteristic principle of animal behaviour, its place in the animal soul was different than in the human soul.³⁰⁸ Despite the overt similarities, human impulses were conceived as originating and operating

³⁰⁵ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 95. On these Stoic views, see, Galen, *PHP*, 5.1.4–5; DL 7.111.

³⁰⁶ Galen's account of the difference between Zeno's and Chrysippus's views may not be reliable as he was generally highly critical of Chrysippus. As Wolfsdorf points out, his report includes clear mistakes, and even if they are set right, we are still left with some ambiguities as to what, exactly, Zeno and Chrysippus intended with their respective definitions and where the differences lie. See Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 192–94.

³⁰⁷ On animal and human cognition in Stoicism, see Julia Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, Reprint edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 89–90.

³⁰⁸ Concerning ὁρμή in animal and human behaviour, see Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, 22. See also Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 191.

within the mind itself. In the unified soul of the Stoics, there was no separate irrational or animal part that would have reacted to its surroundings and transmitted impulses to the mind. We can contrast this with Gregory's account in *De hominis opificio* 14 where the notion of ὁρμή is embedded in a model of twofold humanity that has both rational and irrational elements. On Gregory's view, impulses are external to the rational mind. They are sensory stimuli that originate in the animal nature from which they are 'received' (ἐκδεχόμενον) by the mind.³⁰⁹ In this sense Gregory's model differs from those of the old Stoics who considered impulses internal to the mind itself and attributed wrong actions to a weakness of the mind that held conflicting interests, not to a conflict between rational and irrational elements in the soul.

As a second, related observation, while the Stoics emphasise the mind's ability to reject or accept impulses, we have already seen that they do not accept the view that passions may be directed at good or bad ends; for them, passions by definition signal a failure of the mind. The idea of a transformed or measured emotion is much more central to Peripatetic thinkers, as we have already seen in the discussion on *metriopatheia*.³¹⁰ And third: While some of Gregory's terms were famously employed by the Stoics, many related terms of Stoic ethics are missing from his account of passions. For example, Gregory never employs the term συγκατάθεσις ('assent'), a key word for the Stoics denoting the mind's acceptance of an impulse. At the same time, the term ὁρμή was central to later Platonic and Aristotelian psychologies, which means that its presence in Gregory's works does not have to indicate any dependence on Stoic sources.³¹¹

While the evidence of a connection to explicitly Stoic material is meagre, we can reasonably assume that Gregory had read authors such as Philo, Clement, and Origen who similarly conceived the soul as a mix of rational and irrational elements. Many of them had a two-phase understanding of emotion where a

³⁰⁹ See the citation from *Op. hom.* 14 above. At times Gregory does appear to think that the impulse originates in the rational part. See especially *Or. dom.* 5 (GNO VII/2, 67.2).

³¹⁰ Equally, Barnes criticises earlier thinkers who have uncritically attributed this view to Gregory's Platonism, pointing to its Aristotelian roots. Barnes, 'The "Platonic" Character of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology', 22.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

difference was made between a spontaneous movement arising in the soul and a full-fledged passion accepted by the mind.³¹² Furthermore, like Gregory and unlike the Stoics, they accepted the ideal of *metriopatheia* at least as the initial stage of the correct use of emotions. These later developments are largely ignored by Smith, who compares Gregory's account of the moderation of passions to the 'classical views of passions', that is, to the similar notions held by Plato, Aristotle, and Chrysippus and Zeno.³¹³ Only Seneca is chosen to represent later literature. Thus, Smith goes on to argue – in line with the main thesis of his work – that Gregory does not fully appropriate any of the classical views of passions, but adopts an eclectic combination of ideas to 'serve his soteriological concerns', in such a manner that the ideas are 'radically reshape[d]' according to his theological understanding. Smith notes that Gregory's account of passions 'as both arising from our sensually oriented impulses as well as from mistaken judgments about the Good and the Real reflects both traditions' – the Platonic and the Stoic.³¹⁴ I do not want to contest Smith's main argument that Gregory's use of ancient philosophy is strongly shaped by his theological convictions. However, by comparing Gregory chiefly to the oldest forms of Platonism and Stoicism, Smith overstates the difference between Gregory and other ancient authors.

If we now return to our original topic of pleasure and the mind, we can conclude that the interaction between impulses and the judgment of the mind shows how the intelligible nature enables humans to rise above the animal level by harnessing the animal drives to pursue higher ends. In irrational animals, impulses run their course without intellectual reflection. This means that animal actions can never be directed to virtuous ends and often lead to destructive behaviour:

The activities of desire and pleasure in them [animals] are not directed to any higher realities, and no other impulse observed in them is directed by any reason to the beneficial. So it is with us too, if these impulses are not led by reasoning in the right

³¹² See, for example, Origen, *Princ.* 3.1.3–4. As Sorabji notes, even Origen is not fully consonant with the Stoics in his interpretation of the matter. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 346–51.

³¹³ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 89–94.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

direction and if the passions prevail against the mastery of the mind, the human being is changed from the rational and godlike to the irrational and unthinking, being reduced to the level of an animal by the force of these passions.³¹⁵

However, if the mind operates successfully and rationally, it evaluates the content of the impulses against intelligible principles. This has two important consequences: first, that humans can choose not to fulfil their irrational desires if they are not aligned with what is truly good, and second, that humans – unlike animals – are able to pursue abstract intelligible goals that do not bring immediate physical satisfaction.³¹⁶ While animals, who only know the good of the body, simply act on a pleasurable impulse, the human being is able to view her position from a broader perspective, which takes into account intelligible matters, including representations of past and future circumstances, not simply that which is available to the senses in the present. And even if the mind fails to judge the impulse correctly, it nonetheless makes a conscious choice to pursue what the impulse suggests. This renders the individual an independent moral agent who is responsible for her actions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have showed that Gregory locates pleasure in the bodily nature and counts it among the animal drives that God gives humans to ensure their survival after the fall. Originally, pleasure is given a secondary role as an incentive to procreation. However, it turns into a sinful passion when it is released from its limited role. This occurs when humans fail to understand their identity as intellectual beings whose final good and true enjoyment are located on the intelligible plane.

At the same time, humans can break free from the domination of their animal drives if they gain an understanding of their true nature as intelligible beings and learn to direct their mind's faculty of choice towards that which is truly good. This is why the Christian life takes the form of constant choosing in which

³¹⁵ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 61C–D); trans. Silvas, 195.

³¹⁶ Smith alludes to this briefly in *Passion and Paradise*, 94.

impulses arising from the sensible nature are evaluated and judged as good or bad. Depending on one's intellectual aptitude, impulses can be harnessed for the pursuit of virtue. This view fuses together elements from Stoic ethics where all passions are attributed to the mind's judgment and from the decidedly non-Stoic notion of *metriopatheia* which entails that emotions can be regulated and directed at both good and bad ends. I have noted that such eclectic conceptions of passions had occurred already in earlier Graeco-Roman literature, including Christian sources.

At this point, we have already looked at some passages that suggest that pleasure is not just one among many passions but a primary passion from which others originate. In the next part, I will show how Gregory envisions this fundamental role of pleasure both in the fall and in all subsequent sins. We shall see that the mind's active discernment and judgment are crucial for determining what is truly good and what merely appears to be so. Whereas the next chapter looks at pleasure as a profoundly sinful impulse that must be rejected, Chapter 5 turns to the mind's moderating role in limiting bodily pleasure strictly to its original purpose, an accompaniment of physical needs. Finally, in Chapters 7 and 8 I turn to Gregory's understanding of positive pleasure that arises from objects that the mind has rightly judged as good.

PART II: PLEASURE AS THE FALSE GOOD

3. Pleasure as the False Good in Gregory's Reading of the Fall

Introduction

For some pleasure (ἡδονή τις) or other is the instigator (καθηγεῖται) of all vicious actions that get carried out (πάντων τῶν διὰ κακίας ἐνεργουμένων), and there is no such thing as sin that is disjoined from pleasure (οὐκ ἔστιν εὐρεῖν ἁμαρτίαν ἡδονῆς διεξυγμένην)...³¹⁷

The citation above, taken from *Homily 12 on the Song of Songs*, leaves little doubt about the central role that pleasure plays in Gregory's hamartiology. In this part of the thesis, I will set out to investigate what gives pleasure such a nefarious status as the 'instigator of all vicious actions' and explains its close links to sin. I will approach the primacy of pleasure from both a protological and a psychological perspective: In the first chapter, I will show that pleasure plays a key role in Gregory's interpretation of the very first sin and the fall of humanity. Then, I will demonstrate that pleasure is not just the instigator of all vicious actions at the dawn of humanity, but also in the life of every postlapsarian individual. The remaining two chapters will address specific issues arising from the general notion that pleasure is not the good.

Although the fall provides a paradigmatic example of all sin, it should be noted that by giving primacy to Gregory's reading of the fall and then using it as a lens to analyse other passages where pleasure occurs in a different context, I am not suggesting that Gregory is deliberately constructing a model of sin based on his interpretation of *Genesis 3* which he then applies to other situations. In fact, I will argue precisely the reverse by showing how Gregory reads a pre-existing notion of pleasure as the false good into the account of the fall. However, Gregory's interpretation of the fall captures many of the problems with pleasure

³¹⁷ *Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 350); trans. Norris, 369.

and thus provides a natural starting point for teasing out some of the key features of pleasure as the source of sin.

In the two chapters that follow, I will argue that both in pre and postlapsarian scenarios the primary location of Gregory's critique of pleasure is the fundamental ethical question concerning the identity of the true good (τὸ καλόν/ἀγαθόν). Since the attainment of the good is the goal of the Christian life, it becomes crucial to define what it is and what it is not. In this search for the good, pleasure plays the role of the archvillain. It both motivates a turn away from the good and signals that a person is already headed in the wrong direction. This leads to stark juxtapositions between a life of pleasure and a life of virtue in Gregory's works.

In the course of the two chapters we shall see that pleasure is not only the opposite of the true good, but it achieves its trickery by posing as the true good with the help of its sensual appeal. In other words, pleasure looks good although it is not. This is a widely shared view in ancient philosophy. Jessica Moss, one of the leading contemporary scholars on pleasure as the false good in ancient literature, sums up Plato's position, which underpins Gregory's take on the topic: 'Pleasure is dangerous because it is a deceiver. It leads us astray with false appearances, bewitching and beguiling us, cheating and tricking us. In particular, it deceives us by appearing to be good when it is not.'³¹⁸ This background becomes apparent if we step back and look at the wider context in which the sentence from *Cant.* 12 appears:

Life, then, stands at the midpoint of the divine plantings, while death exists as the result of a falling away from life. Hence we can see why the One who has conveyed this principle to us in enigmas says that the death-dealing tree too—whose fruit, he says, possesses a power mixed together out of opposites (σύμμικτον ἔχειν ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων τὴν δύναμιν)—stands at the center. He has laid it down, in effect, that good and evil are one and the same thing (καλόν τε εἶναι ἅμα καὶ κακόν), and in doing so hinted darkly at the nature of sin (τῆς ἁμαρτίας). For some pleasure (ἡδονή τις) or other is the instigator (καθηγεῖται) of all vicious actions that get carried out (πάντων τῶν διὰ

³¹⁸ Moss, 'Pleasure and Illusion in Plato', 504.

κακίας ἐνεργουμένων), and there is no such thing as sin that is disjoined from pleasure (οὐκ ἔστιν εὐρεῖν ἁμαρτίαν ἡδονῆς διεζυγμένην) (whether the affects (πάθη) stem from spiritedness (διὰ θυμοῦ) or from desire (δι' ἐπιθυμίας)). Hence the fruit is called "good" (καλὸς ὁ καρπὸς ὀνομάζεται) because of an erroneous judgment regarding what is good (κατὰ τὴν ἡμαρτημένην τοῦ καλοῦ κρίσιν), for such it seems (δοκῶν) to people who identify the good with pleasure (τοῖς τὸ καλὸν ἐν ἡδονῇ τιθεμένοις). Later on, however, it occasions sour digestion and is found to be bad (πονηρός), just as Proverbs says: 'For the lips' of vice 'drip honey, which' at the time 'is as smooth as oil in the throat' but later is found to be 'more bitter than gall' for those who are wrongly delighted (τοῖς κακῶς γλυκανθεῖσιν) by it (cf. Prov 5:3–4).³¹⁹

Here we see that Gregory's remark is linked to the events of the fall, which he attributes to a false judgment regarding what is good. The forbidden fruit, says Gregory, appears good to people who 'identify the good with pleasure'; its badness is revealed only when it is too late.

Cant. 12, written at the end of Gregory's career, is only one of the many texts in which he touches on the link between pleasure and the fall. I will begin my investigation from another text, chapters 19 and 20 in *De hominis opificio*, which offer a longer but similar account of pleasure and the fall. Whereas *Cant.* 12 focuses on insubstantiality of evil, a point to which I shall return at the end of my discussion, *De hominis opificio* lays greater emphasis on the topic of pleasure as a false good, which makes it a more fruitful starting point for the present analysis.³²⁰ Furthermore, the latter text can be taken as a deliberate commentary on the fall, as it occurs within a comprehensive exegesis of the opening chapters of *Genesis*.

Pleasure and the Fall in *De hominis opificio* and Related Passages

³¹⁹ *Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 350); trans. Norris, 369–371.

³²⁰ For the problem of evil and Gregory's interpretation of the two trees in *Cant.* 12, see Richard A. Norris, 'Two Trees in the Midst of the Garden (Genesis 2:9b): Gregory of Nyssa and the Puzzle of Human Evil', in *In Dominico Eloquio - In Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert L. Wilken*, ed. Paul M. Blowers, Angela Russell Christman, and David G. Hunter (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 218–41.

And the woman saw that the tree was good for food (καλὸν τὸ ξύλον εἰς βρῶσιν) and that it was pleasing for the eyes to look at (ἀρεστὸν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἰδεῖν) and it was beautiful to contemplate (ὠραῖόν ἐστιν τοῦ κατανοῆσαι), and when she had taken of its fruit she ate, and she also gave some to her husband with her, and they ate.³²¹

The word ἡδονή and its cognates do not appear in the climax of *Genesis 3*. Instead, we encounter a number of visual terms, followed by acts of eating; one could easily think that it is the senses of sight and taste that are at fault here. Yet, crucially, Eve does not only see and taste the tree and its fruit. In addition, she makes an evaluative judgment on what the senses convey: the tree is ‘pleasing’ (ἀρεστὸν), ‘beautiful’ (ὠραῖόν) and, most importantly, ‘good’ (καλόν). To an ancient biblical interpreter, the word καλόν has immediate ethical connotations. One can suggest, as Gregory will, that here Eve is perceiving something sensually pleasing, proclaiming it good, and acting on the basis of her conclusion. Seen in light of ancient ethics, this is nothing other than hedonist behaviour. The weight of the term καλόν in *Genesis 3* is, of course, further increased by the fact that Scripture calls the tree itself the source of γινώσκειν καλὸν καὶ πονηρόν (or, in Gregory’s words, τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ κακοῦ γνῶσις³²²), the knowledge of good and evil.³²³ This poses an exegetical problem that Gregory sets out to solve: what ‘good’ is there about a tree that becomes the source of death?

We can assume that the occurrence of the word καλόν in *Genesis 3* is at least one of the reasons that prompt Gregory to read the passage as an account of pleasure as the false good. Furthermore, Gregory is by no means the first author to suggest that pleasure is the origin of sin. We shall soon see that this idea appears already in Plato and is later applied to the Judaeo-Christian narrative of the fall by such authors as Philo and Clement. I will return to the latter examples at the end of the chapter where it will be easier to assess to what extent Gregory reworks earlier interpretations into his reading of the fall. I will focus especially

³²¹ *Gen. 3:6* (LXX/NETS).

³²² The Septuagint calls the tree τὸ ξύλον τοῦ γινώσκειν καλὸν καὶ πονηρόν, which differs from Gregory’s wording in *De hominis opificio*. The phrase τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ κακοῦ γνῶσις has very few patristic precedents, but generally speaking καλός and κακός are a common pair of opposites in ancient ethics.

³²³ *Gen. 2:17* (LXX).

on Philo who interprets the fall as an allegorical drama between mind (Adam), sensation (Eve), and pleasure (the serpent).³²⁴ However, we shall see that Gregory's reading is not a mere reproduction of Philo's account, but differs from it in form, content, and emphasis. While Philo may have served as an inspiration, the concepts Gregory puts forth in *De hominis opificio* 19 and 20 are directly related to his earlier work *De virginitate*, in which pleasure is presented as the main threat to the ascetic project of virginal life. Thus, after investigating the role of pleasure in *De hominis opificio* and other Gregorian passages on the fall, I will show in the next chapter that the discussion is simply one instance of a much broader discourse on pleasure and the good, which Gregory introduces in *De virginitate* and applies throughout his corpus, both within and independently of the context of the fall. This conceptual framework is in many ways shaped by the broader ancient debate on pleasure and the good.

My analysis of *De opificio hominis* 19 and 20 will loosely follow the order of Gregory's treatment. I will argue that, for Gregory, pleasure is at fault in the fall because it creates the impression that the fruit, which brings about death, is not harmful but good due to its sensually appealing exterior. In his view, a similar combination of a deceptively good appearance and an evil nature brings about all sin. In what follows, I will first investigate the identity of the two trees of Paradise, which Gregory interprets as manifestations of true and false goodness. For Gregory, pleasure, which envelops the fruit of knowledge, is a false good: while it appears good to people who simply trust their senses and do not investigate the nature of things, it turns out to be a sorely lacking good because it is mixed with pain and only offers momentary satisfaction. Drawing on Platonist concepts, Gregory argues that pleasure is not only lacking in goodness, but also alienated from truth and being; it is deceptive and, ultimately, non-existent.

After discussing Gregory's notion of pleasure as a false good, I will show how pleasure creates the impression of goodness by deceiving the mind through the

³²⁴ See my analysis on pleasure in Philo's *Legum allegoriae* and *De opificio mundi* at the end of this chapter.

senses. The active role of the mind is particularly important. First, it enables Gregory to argue that sin is due to ignorance, not to wilful wickedness; the first humans and all subsequent sinners desire what they think is good, but err in their judgment on which objects are truly good. Pleasure, then, is ‘the instigator of all vicious actions’ because it is what makes evil things appear good and disorients the mind and desire. Second, I will demonstrate that by emphasising the conscious act of the mind Gregory can conclude that humans chose their own fall. Evil, then, is not brought about by God, nor is it a part of his original creation. Instead it results from deliberate alienation from the Good in favour of things that are less good, less true, and less existent.

A Tale of Two Trees: True and False Goodness

Let us now see how the discussion on the fall comes about in *De hominis opificio*. In Chapter 19, Gregory rejects the argument that the first humans ate material food in Paradise. This view seems to be in contradiction with the biblical text (*Gen. 2:9*), which argues that God gave the trees of Paradise to Adam and Eve for nourishment. Thus, Gregory notes again the supposed etymology of Eden as ‘delight’ (τρυφή), and argues that the fruit that was worthy of being planted by God and given to the first humans to eat must be understood as something else than ‘transitory and perishable nutriment.’ The biblical passage does not talk about ‘bodily food, or the joy of flesh’ (διὰ σαρκὸς εὐφροσύνην), but about ‘another kind of food’, an analogous nourishment, ‘the enjoyment of which extends to the soul alone’ (ἧς ἡ ἀπόλαυσις ἐπὶ μόνην τὴν ψυχὴν διαβαίνει).³²⁵ We should note how the distinction between two kinds of nourishment, that of soul and that of the body, and between the corresponding categories of *enjoyment*, sets the scene for Gregory’s interpretation of the fall.

³²⁵ *Op. hom.* 19 (PG 44, 196C–D). Similarly, in *Homilies on the Beatitudes* Gregory notes that man lived in Paradise, ‘enjoying (κατατρυφᾶν) the things that were growing there’, but immediately goes on to specify that the fruit (καρπός) of those plants was ‘life, knowledge, and things like that (ζωὴ καὶ γνῶσις καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτά)’, i.e. the divine goods. See, *Beat. 3* (GNO VII/2, 105); trans. Graef, 113.

How should we, then, understand the eating that took place in Paradise? And why did God allow humans to eat from ‘every tree’ but one? These questions lead Gregory to investigate the identity of the two trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which together reveal an important lesson on the nature of the good. As I comment on Gregory’s teaching on the two trees and the concept of goodness, I will draw on Andrew Radde-Gallwitz’s analysis of ‘the good’ and ‘the goods’ in his work on divine simplicity.³²⁶ Radde-Gallwitz identifies three key themes in Gregory’s treatment of the goods: 1) ‘the limitation of the goods by their opposites (and those alone)’ 2) ‘the distinction between true and false goods’ 3) ‘the relation of the goods to divine nature or essence.’ All these topics have bearing on Gregory’s understanding of pleasure as a false good, and all of them are at least implied in *De hominis opificio* 19–20.

On Gregory’s reading, the two trees of Paradise stand for two kinds of goods: The tree of life symbolises the actual good, while the tree of the knowledge of good and evil signifies an ambivalent false good, which appears pleasing on the surface but hides an evil core. Here we come to the ancient distinction between true and apparent good which I touched on in the introduction of this thesis. Gregory explains that the tree of life – ‘given to him that has a healthful hunger’ – includes ‘all good’ (τὸ παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ) and is thus synonymous with ‘every [tree] (ὅ ὄνομά ἐστι τὸ πᾶν)’ from which God permitted Adam and Eve to eat.³²⁷ The statement stems from Gregory’s understanding of the true good as a unity of all goods, among which he elsewhere counts such things as ‘light’, ‘wisdom’, ‘truth’, ‘justice’, and ‘incorruptibility’ and which overlap at least partly with what he otherwise lists as virtues.³²⁸ The origin of goodness is God himself, who unifies all goods in his very being. This does not mean that the names of the goods exhaustively capture God’s essence, but, as Radde-Gallwitz explains, they are simply ‘terms that in some way name the divine substance.’³²⁹ In his work, Radde-Gallwitz shows how the unity of goods links to Gregory’s notion of divine

³²⁶ See section ‘The Goods’ in Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 182–212.

³²⁷ *Op. hom.* 19 (PG 44, 196D–197A).

³²⁸ See, Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 182.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

simplicity: since God's nature is simple, also the goods that belong to his very being must exist in perfect unity. Furthermore, their 'simplicity' entails that they are not tainted by the presence of evil.³³⁰ '[T]he very actual good is in its nature simple and uniform (τὸ ὄντως ἀγαθὸν ἀπλοῦν καὶ μονοειδέες ἐστὶ τῆ φύσει), alien from all duplicity with its opposite,' Gregory writes later in the same treatise.³³¹

In the introduction of this thesis I noted that, for Gregory, Christ is the primary reference point of goodness. In *De hominis opificio* 19, Gregory alludes briefly to *Ps.* 37:4 ('Take delight [κατατρύφῃσον] in the Lord') and *Prov.* 3:18, which calls Wisdom ('the Lord', as Gregory notes) 'a tree of life', to create the impression that Christ himself is the one delight of Paradise. Through his depiction of the tree of life as 'every good' and, implicitly, as Christ, Gregory envisions the prelapsarian state as a participation in the fullness of good in God.³³² As he has already argued, this state does not involve actual eating but entails an intelligible partaking and contemplation of the divine goods. The main agent of this form of knowing is the human mind, the seat of the image of God. In fact, earlier in the treatise Gregory argues that when Scripture talks about the divine resemblance, this is simply a concise way to refer to the participation in the great multitude of divine goods.³³³ For him, then, the prelapsarian human being exists in a perfect *unity of enjoyment*; he delights only in God, mirroring the unity and simplicity of his creator. 'The real good, which is every good' (τὸ ὄντως ἀγαθὸν, ὃ δὴ καὶ πᾶν ἐστὶν ἀγαθόν) is the one (μία) 'permitted delight' (τῆς συγκεχωρημένης τρυφῆς) given for man to partake in Paradise,' Gregory explains.³³⁴

³³⁰ *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 197B). However, this does not mean that God does not have *different* properties. The gist of Gregory's argument is that the divine goods are simple so far as they are perfect goods and not blended with their opposites, and because they are reciprocal: the presence of one entails the presence of all the others. See Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 207–212.

³³¹ *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 200C).

³³² See also *Op. hom.* 16 (PG 44, 184), and a parallel passage which refers to the 'fullness of good' (τὸ πλήρωμα παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ) in *Inscr.* I.8 (GNO V, 58).

³³³ *Op. hom.* 16 (PG 44, 184).

³³⁴ *Op. hom.* 19 (PG 44, 197A). On the simplicity of the prelapsarian existence, Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 218–219. In *De anima et resurrectione* (PG 46, 81B) Gregory employs the same vocabulary noting that the original human life was 'uniform' (μονοειδέες) and fully good without any mixing with the evil.

What, then, of the other tree and its food? Since the tree of life represents every good, it becomes necessary to explain in what sense the opposing tree can nonetheless be said to be the source of the knowledge of *good* and evil (καλοῦ καὶ κακοῦ γνῶσις). The notion of goodness in relation of a tree that will eventually bring about death seems particularly perplexing because Gregory counts among the divine goods immortality and incorruptibility – the very opposites of death. To solve the problem, Gregory suggests that in the Bible the tree is called ‘good’ simply because it *appears* good to the senses, not because it *is* good in its very nature. Also its fruit carries a mix of opposing qualities: a seemingly good exterior and an evil core.³³⁵ A number of phrases show that this seeming goodness is nothing else than pleasure: in the fruit, sin and death are covered with a ‘fair appearance and pleasure’ (εὐχροία τινὶ καὶ ἡδονῇ) and ‘decked with the pleasures of sense’ (δι’ αἰσθήσεως ἡδοναῖς ἐπηνηθισμένον), so that the fruit might be ‘pleasant to see (ὀφθειν τε ἡδέως) and stimulate the desire to taste (τὴν ὄρεξιν πρὸς τὴν γεῦσιν ὑπερεθίσκειν).’ As Gregory sums up at the end of Chapter 20, the fruit ‘appears to be good (καλὸν εἶναι δοκεῖ) in so far as it affects the senses with sweetness (καταγλυκαίνει τὴν αἴσθησιν): but in so far as it destroys him who touches it, it is the worst of all evil (κακοῦ παντὸς ἔσχατον).’³³⁶

The ontological distinction between what a thing *is* and what it *appears to be* is crucial for Gregory’s understanding of the fall. Sin comes into existence when people fail to tell the two apart and rely on mere appearances. And since what appears is the antithesis of what is, we are only a short step from claiming that appearances are non-existent. Indeed, in *Homily 11 on the Song of Songs*, Gregory refers to transitory earthly goods as things which ‘have their being in their seeming’ (ἐν τῷ δοκεῖν ἔχει τὸ εἶναι) and are not what they are esteemed to be.³³⁷ In this homily, his list of deceptive goods includes both bewitching pleasures (ἡ διὰ τῶν ἡδονῶν γοητεία) and a life devoted to enjoyment

³³⁵ *Op. hom.* 19–20 (PG 44, 197B–C).

³³⁶ *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 200D).

³³⁷ Cf. *Vit. Moys.* II.23.9. See also Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 157.

(ἀπολαυστικόν).³³⁸ Their non-existence stems from the transitory quality of material things which, in Gregory's words, perish as soon as they come into being, yet are chased by humans in a state of dream-like delusion. In *Homily 12* of the same collection, Gregory confirms that such unstable existence pertains also to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which is 'rootless and unplanted', having 'no place of its own.'³³⁹

The non-existence of the false goods will be crucial when Gregory discusses the non-substantiality of evil and its alienness to the creation of God. I will return to these remarks at the end of my analysis of *De opificio hominis*. However, even if Gregory contends that appearances do not exist, this does not mean that he considers the sensible world to be entirely illusory. On the contrary, there is a sensible realm that can be known and interacted with, one that has actual epistemic value. At the same time, the sensible world can be described as 'non-existent' because of its low position in the hierarchy of being: its existence is entirely contingent on Being itself and it exists 'less' than the intelligible beings which bear a closer resemblance to their origin.³⁴⁰ This less-than-full existence is reflected in the constant flux that pervades the sensible creation: as Gregory sums up in *In inscriptiones psalmorum*, the changeable is 'always in the process of becoming what it is not, for change is the transition from that stage in which something is to that in which it is not.'³⁴¹ The idea that sensible things are transitory and in a constant process of becoming is a standard Platonist tenet, whose grounds I shall soon investigate.³⁴²

The fact that things grasped by the senses are always on the verge of turning into something they are not is precisely the problem with sensual pleasure. In *De hominis opificio 19*, Gregory uses the concept of mixing to denote this ambiguity. The serpent, says Gregory, counsels the first humans to reach for the

³³⁸ *Cant.* 11 (GNO VI, 315–316); trans. Norris, 333–335.

³³⁹ *Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 349); trans. Norris, 369. See also Norris, 'Two Trees in the Midst of the Garden', 230.

³⁴⁰ It is important to note that even the intelligible beings do not really subsist but derive their existence from the divine Being. See *Vit. Moys.* II.24.

³⁴¹ *Inscr.* II.8 (GNO V, 52); trans. Heine, 109.

³⁴² See, for example, *Phaedo* 78c.

fruit which is ‘blended and mixed (συγκεχυμένον καὶ σύμμικτον) with opposite qualities’, and by doing so prepares an ‘entrance for death.’³⁴³ In the chapter that follows, he compares the mixed fruit with the good tree of life:

[Scripture] speaks of the fruit of the forbidden tree not as a thing absolutely evil (because it is decked with good) (οὔτε ἀπολύτως κακόν, διότι περιήνθισται τῷ καλῷ), nor as a thing purely good (because evil is latent in it) (οὔτε καθαρῶς ἀγαθόν, διότι ὑποκέκρυπται τὸ κακόν), but as compounded of both, and declares that the tasting of it brings death to those who touch it (οὔ τὴν γεῦσιν εἰς θάνατον ἄγειν εἶπε τοὺς ἀψαμένους); almost proclaiming aloud the doctrine that the very actual good is in its nature simple and uniform (τὸ ὄντως ἀγαθὸν ἀπλοῦν καὶ μονοειδές ἐστι τῆ φύσει), alien from all duplicity with its opposite, while evil is many-coloured and fairly adorned (τὸ δὲ κακὸν ποικίλον τε καὶ κατεσχηματισμένον ἐστίν)...³⁴⁴

The juxtapositions that Gregory associates with the true and the false good (simplicity vs. multiplicity, uniformity vs. mixing) are key concepts of Platonist ontology.³⁴⁵ Above, these characteristics seem to allude mainly to the aesthetic and epistemological properties of the fruit, which is a mix of an attractive surface and an evil core. But Gregory is simply using the tangible notion of a fruit to illustrate a much more abstract idea: all false goods are in some ways diminished by the presence of their opposite. Unlike the actual goods, they are not fully good but mixed with vice. One of Gregory’s persistent complaints about pleasure, the chief offender among false goods, is that it is always mixed with pain, its opposite, and can therefore never offer complete satisfaction.³⁴⁶

Gregory’s interpretation reflects the Platonist notion that the embodied existence is characterised by a ‘compresence of opposites’, the presence of opposite qualities in one object.³⁴⁷ This is an argument for both its imperfection and its resulting instability. The compresence of opposites entails that a material object is always only relatively good because despite its good features it also carries something of the opposite. It may be better than some things, but

³⁴³ *Op. hom.* 19 (PG 44, 197B).

³⁴⁴ *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 200B–C); trans. NPNF, 410.

³⁴⁵ See, e.g., *Phaedo* 80a–b. For a pejorative use of the term ποικίλος, see also *Rep.* 8.557c.

³⁴⁶ On the point that false goods are lacking because mixed with their opposites, see Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 190.

³⁴⁷ See *Phaedo* 102b; *Rep.* 5.478c–479d.

also worse than others. It is important to note, furthermore, that the compresence of opposites does not render sensible things only quantitatively less good but also ontologically unstable. They are always prone to dissolving into their constituent components and turning into something else. Thus, sensible things exist less than the unmixed pure forms which exist in the absolute sense. The latter remain always the same regardless of what they are compared to or who does the comparing, never risking to turn into their opposites. This is why Gregory, too, is often keen to make a point that the true good is unmixed with its opposite and thus absolutely good.³⁴⁸

We have already seen that the idea that pleasure is mixed with pain is a common argument against its absolute goodness in Plato and many subsequent authors.³⁴⁹ The link between pain and pleasure can be explained in two ways: First, we should keep in mind the definition of pleasure as a replenishment of a lack and as a product of desire, both of which entail the presence of pain.³⁵⁰ Second, due to the instability of the material world, bodily pleasure, like all material phenomena, is always bound up with its opposite. Consider, for example, the words of Maximus of Tyre, a Platonist philosopher of the late second century:

If indeed it [pleasure] is not subject to change, then I will be happy to indulge in it without interruption, and to have no thought for Virtue, provided you can show me a kind of pleasure that is secure and uncontaminated with pain (ἡδονὴν ἀσφαλῆ καὶ λύπης ἀμυγῆ), a kind of pleasure that does not end in repentance, a kind of pleasure that can be praised. But how will you be able to do that? You cannot, any more than you can

³⁴⁸ For the compresence of opposites in the goods of the sensible world contrasted with the simplicity and absolute goodness of the true good, see, in particular, Gregory's discussion in *Mort.* (GNO IX, 29–31).

³⁴⁹ See *Phaedo* 60b–c. In *Philebus* (31b–52c), Socrates makes a distinction between lesser 'mixed pleasures' (τὰς μειχθείσας ἡδονάς) and higher 'unmixed pleasures' (τὰς ἀμείκτους; see 50e for terminology). The former are disqualified from any association with the true good since they are accompanied by pain, either simultaneously with pleasure or sequentially before and after pleasure. The latter, on the other hand, are purely pleasurable because they are not preceded or followed by pain. These include visual and auditive pleasures, olfactory pleasures and pleasures of learning. Significantly for the present thesis, things that are 'beautiful by themselves' (καλὰ καθ' αὐτὰ πεφυκέναι) yield pleasures unmixed with pain (51c). I will return to these points in the final chapters where I discuss Gregory's notion of spiritual enjoyment. For a scholarly analysis on the mixed pleasures in Plato, see Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 74–102.

³⁵⁰ Recall, for example, Clement's definition of desire as 'some pain' (λύπη τις) in *Strom.* 3.5.42.1.

for pain. Nature decreed that men should never find either of these in a pure and healthy form; everywhere what is pleasant is mixed with what gives pain (ἀναμέμκται πανταχοῦ τὰ λυπηρὰ τοῖς ἡδέσιν), each rolled up with the other. It is inevitable that he who chooses the one should immediately partake of the other as well; since they form a natural pair, each supervenes on the other, taking it in turn to come into being, and alternating their presence. When the soul is tormented by this ebb and flow, how on earth could it get a grip on tranquillity (ἀλυπίας), consorting as it does with ‘goods’ (ἀγαθοῖς) that have no stability?³⁵¹

In Gregory’s works, the mixing of pleasure and pain takes many forms: In *De opificio hominis*, pleasure conceals death as the loss of immortality. In *De virginitate*, the pleasures of marriage are similarly tainted by death and sorrow.³⁵² In a number of other works, Gregory highlights the anxiety that takes hold of people who seek happiness in the mutable phenomena of this world which can only offer brief and fleeting moments of satisfaction.³⁵³ Finally, all bodily pleasures are limited by ‘satiety’ (κόρος), which, for Gregory, does not denote merely ‘having enough’ but has connotations of aversion and disgust which occur as the desired object loses its appeal.³⁵⁴

However, pleasure is not only limited by its opposite. As a phenomenon of the sensible world, it is also limited by various situational factors that are not evil as such but result from the spatio-temporal boundedness of the material creation: time, place, age, and the natural fluctuations of the human body all affect the enjoyment of earthly things.³⁵⁵ Whereas the true good is good for everyone and available and desirable in every situation, the enjoyment offered by earthly things is relative. All people do not enjoy the same things, and even a single individual does not always derive pleasure from the same objects.³⁵⁶ In this regard pleasure and other false goods differ from the true goods, which are

³⁵¹ *Diss.* 30.4; trans. Trapp, 248–249.

³⁵² See my discussion in the next chapter and Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 190–92.

³⁵³ See, for example, *Beat.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 119–120); *Eccl.* 5.7 (SC 416, 292); *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 51–52).

³⁵⁴ See, for example, *Beat.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 120); *Eccl.* 2.8 (SC 416, 180).

³⁵⁵ *Eccl.* 2.8 (SC 416, 180).

³⁵⁶ *Mort.* (GNO IX, 30–31).

limited by their opposites and *only* by their opposites, as Radde-Gallwitz reminds us.

To sum up, pleasure turns out to be a lacking good that is not only diminished by its opposite but rendered unstable by the limits and flux of the sensible world.³⁵⁷ This is one of the recurring problems that Gregory associates with pursuing the sensible things as the final *telos* of the human life. Since the topic is complex, I will return to it in my discussion of pleasure and need in Chapter 5. The instability and non-being of material goods has important epistemological implications. Warren Smith summarises them succinctly in a discussion of Plato's view of ephemeral material beauty:

[S]ince sense perceptions are no more reliable than the fluctuations of the material object perceived, the judgments based on sense perception are equally unreliable. Thus one cannot trust that an object that appears beautiful at one time and under one set of circumstances will appear just as lovely at another time and under other circumstances.³⁵⁸

In other words, sensation is merely a superficial snapshot of how an object appears at a certain time. Thus, it fails to provide lasting insight into the object's true being and its ethical value.

At this point, we should have a basic understanding of the difference between true goodness represented by the tree of life and the false goodness harboured by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But another problematic term remains: 'knowledge' (γνῶσις). Used in a negative context in reference to a thing that is not good in its essence the word presents obvious problems to an ancient Christian thinker who would typically understand it as an allusion to the

³⁵⁷ Gregory appears to distinguish between pleasure that is limited by impassioned pain (i.e. aversion, disgust, fear, or anxiety) and between the human capacity of enjoyment which depends on various natural and situational factors, such as age and time. One is sinful, the other simply a fact of our present earthly life. Of course the points of view converge so far as a thing which can yield enjoyment in one circumstance may be perceived as painful in the other, i.e. a person who is not hungry may not only feel neutral towards food but disgusted if he has to eat, and similarly foods that entice one person may seem not only indifferent but repulsive to another.

³⁵⁸ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 194.

actual truth.³⁵⁹ Thus, Gregory sets out to distinguish different kinds of knowledge from each other and explain which one is mentioned in the biblical text. His two main distinctions appear to be largely motivated by exegetical necessity rather than any consistent usage throughout his corpus.³⁶⁰ First, Gregory claims that by using the term καλοῦ καὶ κακοῦ γνῶσις, Scripture is not talking about actual ‘science’ (ἐπιστήμη), which he most likely understands as knowledge concerning the structure of the universe, but of a different sort of familiarity. Second, he makes a distinction between γνῶσις and διάκρισις, ‘discernment’, and argues that the latter denotes the skill of separating the good from the evil; it is a sign of a ‘more perfect condition’ and ‘exercised senses’ (Heb. 5:14) and belongs to the ‘spiritual man’ (1. Cor. 2:15). It is important to keep in mind that, for Gregory, discerning the good from the evil is one of the mental abilities that belong to the image of God.³⁶¹ The ‘knowledge of good and evil’ is far from such refined, disciplined, and God-like form of knowing. Based on some biblical uses of the verb γινώσκω, Gregory goes on to argue that the γνῶσις offered by the forbidden fruit should not be understood as any kind of skill or acquaintance, but as a mere ‘disposition towards what is agreeable’ (τὴν πρὸς τὸ κεχαρισμένον διάθεσιν), an inclination towards that which pleases the senses. In the most rudimentary sense, knowing is desiring, or, as Gregory states later, the unanticipated experiential realisation of the state of things

³⁵⁹ The high positive value of the term is evident for example in the works of Clement of Alexandria, for whom becoming a ‘gnostic’ is the goal of the Christian life. For Gregory γνῶσις is a broad term that denotes various forms of knowing, ranging from sensory knowledge to spiritual wisdom. However, on most occasions it denotes a positive participation in the truth, even if at times partial and always ultimately limited. See *LG*, ‘γνῶσις.’

³⁶⁰ The *ad hoc* nature of the distinctions becomes obvious if we compare them to other texts where Gregory discusses the definition of γνῶσις and its relationship to ἐπιστήμη and (διά)κρισις. Cf. e.g. *Eccl.* 2.6 (SC 416, 172–174); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 55: ‘This is why he says, my heart saw many things, wisdom and knowledge (σοφίαν καὶ γνῶσιν), not because the knowledge (γνώσεως) of such things came of its own accord, without effort, but because he says, I gave my heart to learn wisdom and knowledge (τοῦ γνῶναι σοφίαν καὶ γνῶσιν), in the sense that he would not have learned them if effort and diligence had not taught the knowledge (γνώσεως) of them; but he says parables and science (ἐπιστήμην) I know (ἔγνω), that is, the grasp of the transcendent which is gained by analogy... ‘And’, he says, ‘the choice of spirit has in my case been this, that I should acquire the fullness of wisdom (πλήθος σοφίας), so that in becoming wise I should not fail to gain knowledge of what is (τῆς τῶν ὄντων γνώσεως), nor miss any opportunity for profitable discovery. For knowledge (γνῶσις) is produced from wisdom (ἐκ...σοφίας), and knowledge (γνῶσις) makes easier the discernment (τοῦ ὑπερέχοντος κρίσιν) of what is beyond us.’

³⁶¹ See, e.g., *An. et res.* (PG 46, 57B).

when desire reaches what has been previously estimated as good.³⁶² In sum, the tree that offers knowledge of the good and evil is a symbol of our attraction towards sensual pleasure falsely judged as good.

The Fall as Deception

‘Ο ὄφις ἠπάτησέν με,’ – ‘The serpent deceived me’ – Eve exclaims in the Septuagint version of *Gen.* 3:13 when God demands an account of her sinful actions. In its original context, this ‘deception’ does not have to entail anything more than the serpent’s lie that Eve and Adam would not die but simply gain God-like powers of knowledge if they ate from the forbidden tree. But for Gregory the words of the serpent are secondary to the looks of the fruit. In *De hominis opificio*, it is the ambiguous fruit that lies at the core of the deceptive ploy which the serpent devises to trick Eve to sin. In this section I will show that in *De hominis opificio* the notion of ἀπάτη (‘deception’) becomes the overarching theme of the whole narrative and refers to intricate sensory trickery which makes evil things appear good.

In *De hominis opificio*, Gregory goes on to recount how the serpent makes use of pleasure as the medium of deception: the reptile covers the fruit with ‘a fair appearance and pleasure (εὐχροία τινὶ καὶ ἡδονῇ), that it might be pleasant to see (ὀφθεῖν τε ἡδέως) and stimulate the desire to taste (τὴν ὄρεξιν πρὸς τὴν γεῦσιν ὑπερεθίσειεν).’³⁶³ The fake goodness of the fruit is, in fact, a necessary precondition for the fall to occur:

[In the fruit] the evil is not exposed in its nakedness, itself appearing in its own proper nature (ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν φύσιν φαινόμενον) – for wickedness would surely fail of its effect were it not painted with goodness (προσκεχρωσμένη καλῶ) to entice to the desire of him whom it deceives – but now the nature of evil is in a manner mixed, keeping destruction like some snare concealed in its depths, and displaying some appearance of good (καλοῦ τινα φαντασίαν³⁶⁴) of its exterior... so, too, the other sins

³⁶² *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 197C–D; 200C).

³⁶³ *Op. hom.* 19 (PG 44, 197B); trans. NPNF, 409.

³⁶⁴ In Moore and Wilson’s English translation (NPNF), φαντασία is rendered as ‘phantom’. I have changed it to ‘appearance’

keep their destruction hidden, and seem at first acceptable (αἰρετὰ παρὰ τὴν πρώτην δοκεῖ), and some deceit (διὰ τινος ἀπάτης) makes them earnestly sought after by unwary men instead of what is good (ἀντ' ἀγαθοῦ).³⁶⁵

The passage alludes to the fact that the fall and all sin come about through a sort of deception (διὰ τινος ἀπάτης), and spells out Gregory's conviction that pure and exposed evil would have failed to bring about the fall. In what follows, I will first show how this deception occurs in an interplay between the senses and the mind, and then examine the rationale behind Gregory's view that 'wickedness would surely fail of its effect were it not painted with goodness.'

In the passage above, Gregory notes that the evil disguised itself, keeping its destruction hidden and displaying 'some appearance of good'. The expression καλοῦ φαντασία is a favourite of Gregory's when he discusses the illusionary appearance of sin.³⁶⁶ It occurs both in conjunction with the events of the fall and in reference to sin as a general phenomenon. In *Oratio catechetica* we read:

Now the good is partly that which is truly such by nature (ἀληθῶς κατὰ τὴν φύσιν), and partly that which is not such but decked out with a certain semblance of good (ἐπηνθισμένον τινὶ καλοῦ φαντασίᾳ). That which adjudicates (κριτήριον) between them is the intellect (νοῦς), seated within us; and herein we run the risk either of gaining that which is really good (τοῦ ὄντως καλοῦ), or being diverted from it by some deceptive appearance (διὰ τινος τῆς κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον ἀπάτης) and so being carried away to the opposite...³⁶⁷

Φαντασία, which can be translated with a number of words from 'appearance' to 'imagination' to 'impression' to 'representation', is a central and often technical term in ancient philosophy. It figures prominently in Aristotle's psychology and ethics where it is connected to pleasure, and is famously used in Stoic theories of cognition.³⁶⁸ Last but not least, φαντασία belongs among the

³⁶⁵ *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 200A–B); trans. NPNF, 410.

³⁶⁶ The pairing is distinctive enough to be identified by *LG*. See, φαντασία, ας, ἡ, A.6.a.

³⁶⁷ *Or. cat.* 21 (SC 453, 242–244); trans. Srawley, 72.

³⁶⁸ For an in-depth analysis of Aristotle's notion of φαντασία and its connections to pleasure as an apparent good, see Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good*. Concerning the differences between the Aristotelian and the Stoic view, see *Ibid.*, 92–99. For the Stoic conception, see also Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 190.

key vocabulary of Epicurean epistemology: various sources report the famous and controversial Epicurean maxim according to which ‘all sense impressions are true.’³⁶⁹ Essentially the statement meant that, in Epicurus’s view, the senses conveyed true and exact impressions of reality. This is why he advocated the use of sensation as a κριτήριο, the standard of truth against which all non-evident concepts should be evaluated.³⁷⁰ Later in this thesis, I will cite passages in which Gregory explicitly rejects the use of sensation as the κριτήριο. In the passage above, he gives the role to the intellect (νοῦς), which forms a judgment on the content of the impression. As Gregory explains, the intellect can, and often will, go wrong in its judgment and accept a mere appearance of goodness as a goal worthy of pursuing. For Epicurus, the potential for wrong judgment had been the very reason why the mind was an insufficient κριτήριο compared to a sensory φαντασία, which, in his view, always conveyed true knowledge about reality. Gregory, of course, does not even consider such a view. For him, the mind remains the correct κριτήριο of truth regardless of its potential shortcomings. The solution is to educate and strengthen the mind, not to dismiss its epistemic primacy.

How does Gregory’s notion of φαντασία relate to the broader tradition? Characteristically, he offers no formal definition, but based on his use of the term, φαντασία denotes a representation conveyed by the senses, which involves some kind of propositional content (e.g. that the fruit is good). Strikingly, the term is almost always negative, and the proposition conveyed by φαντασία turns out to be false. Thus, in Gregory’s works, φαντασία is often related to dreams, deceptive illusions, and mistaken understanding, just as we see in *De hominis opificio* and *Oratio catechetica*.³⁷¹ The negative usage of the word is, in fact, typical of Greek patristic literature.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ Since the phrase has not been preserved in the original form, its exact wording and meaning have been subject to different interpretations. Gisela Striker argues convincingly that what Epicurus held true was indeed closer to a ‘sense impression’, φαντασία, than ‘sensation’ αἴσθησις. See Gisela Striker, ‘Epicurus on the Truth of Sense Impressions’, in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 77–91.

³⁷⁰ On these points, see Lucretius, *Rer. nat.* 4.469–521; *DL* 10.31–32; Sextus Empiricus *Adv. math.* 211–216.

³⁷¹ Gregory makes an occasional positive use of φαντασία to denote our (limited) ability to envision God based on concepts derived from the sensible world, at times using the Stoic term

Gregory's notion of φαντασία includes elements from various ancient schools of thought, but it is not identical to any one of the well-known definitions of the term, even in their later, more eclectic forms.³⁷³ The fact that φαντασία is associated with low-level 'knowledge' that pertains only to superficial sensory appearances connects Gregory to the Platonist tradition.³⁷⁴ For, as Gösta Grönroos explains regarding Plato, '[o]ne who has a *phantasia* about something grasps the mere appearance of the thing. It is formed through sense perception, on the basis of how the thing strikes the person, without considering its real nature.'³⁷⁵ This seems to be Gregory's view, too. Since both Plato and Gregory agree that the senses can only grasp what is apparent and mutable, φαντασία will always convey a partial view of the thing that is being perceived. Plato, too, connects φαντασία to mimicry, deception, and dreams. This does not mean that it is necessarily false, for, as Grönroos notes, it may serve us well in our everyday dealings.³⁷⁶ But at times the appearance of a thing does not correspond to its nature and will lead us to believe something that is not only partial but also false.

The exact phrase καλοῦ φαντασία does not appear in Plato, nor does Plato clearly spell out the relationship between pleasure and φαντασία, although both are associated with the same topics of illusion and deception, and pleasure is in general strongly linked to appearing. However, direct parallels can be found in the later Platonist tradition. Perhaps the closest example comes from Maximus of Tyre, who dismisses pleasure as the good with the common anti-hedonist argument that it is not good in all cases, continuing:

καταληπτική φαντασία. However, typically φαντασία arising directly from our senses is morally and epistemologically questionable. See, *LG*, 'φαντασία, ας, ἡ.'

³⁷² Ware, whose translation of the term as 'imagination' is somewhat misleading, notes the pejorative tone of almost all references to φαντασία in Lampe's *PGL*. See Kallistos Ware, 'The Soul in Greek Christianity', in *From Soul to Self*, ed. James Crabbe (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 61–62.

³⁷³ For one later transformation of the term, see G. Watson, 'Discovering the Imagination: Platonists and Stoics on Phantasia', in *The Question of 'Eclecticism': Studies in Later Greek Philosophy*, ed. John M. Dillon and A. A. Long (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 208–33.

³⁷⁴ For Plato's understanding of the term, see especially *Soph.* 260c, 264a–b; *Theaet.* 152c.

³⁷⁵ Gösta Grönroos, 'Two Kinds of Belief in Plato', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51, no. 1 (January 2013): 1.

³⁷⁶ On φαντασία and its connection to imitation and deception in Plato, see *Ibid.*, 10–13.

I believe that nothing is to be pursued unless it is a good (ὄ τι μὴ ἀγαθόν), but things that are not good (τὸ μὴ ἀγαθόν) are pursued in the place of goods (ἐν χώρᾳ ἀγαθοῦ) due to the appearance of good (ἀγαθοῦ φαντασία) – just as counterfeit coins are acceptable to businessmen not *because* they are counterfeit, but because their similarity to true coin conceals their counterfeit nature. In this latter case assayers use their science to separate (διέκριναν) the fake from the true, but in the case of the distribution of goods, may it not be that reason (λόγος) can fail to separate from real goods (ἀπὸ τῶν ὄντων ἀγαθῶν) those that are not real but apparent (τὰ φαινόμενα μὲν, οὐκ ὄντα δέ), so that we inadvertently, like bad businessmen, store up treasures of counterfeit goods.³⁷⁷

Although Maximus uses a different term for ‘good’, the way in which he employs the phrase is very similar to Gregory’s usage. The idea that it is reason that fails to separate the real goods from the apparent goods is prominent in Gregory, as we shall soon see. On the whole, it seems that the tradition before Gregory prefers the term ἀγαθοῦ φαντασία over καλοῦ φαντασία.³⁷⁸ Philo employs the former pairing as a part of a longer phrase in his definition of pleasure in *De decalogo*:

The presentation to the mind of something which is actually with us and considered to be good (τοῦ παρόντος καὶ νομισθέντος ἀγαθοῦ φαντασία), arouses and awakes the soul when at rest and like a light flashing upon the eyes raises it to a state of great elation (μετέωρον). This sensation of the soul is called pleasure (ἡδονή).³⁷⁹

Philo’s definition appears in a passage where he defines the four generic passions, and thus the context is perhaps more akin to Stoic thought. Indeed, although Plato’s works often touch on the idea that pleasure appears good and

³⁷⁷ *Diss.* 31.2; trans. Trapp, 251. The phrase ἀγαθοῦ φαντασία occurs, among others, in Plutarch’s critique of Epicurean epistemology and ethics in *Adv. Col.* 1122d. Clement employs a similar phrase (φαντασία ἀγαθῶν) in a critique of people who ask for evil things in prayer under the appearance of goodness, though here pleasure receives no mention (*Strom.* 7.7.39.2).

³⁷⁸ Of later writers, for example Philo, Epictetus, and Plutarch all employ the specific pairing of καλοῦ φαντασία, but interestingly the phrase does not have connotations of a negative illusion but refers to an actual presence and consequent impression of something good or beautiful. Perhaps the closest use of καλοῦ φαντασία occurs in Origen’s *De oratione* (20.2.7), where Origen rebukes people who like to pray visibly in synagogues and street corners to be perceived as good and pious individuals. Incidentally, Origen attributes this ‘seeming prayer’ to people who are pleasure-lovers rather than God-lovers. (See *De oratione*, 19–20.) On the whole, his criticism of overtly pious individuals is not unlike Plato’s criticism of sophists in the *Sophist*.

³⁷⁹ *Decal.* 28.143–144 (LCL 320, 78); trans. Colson.

Aristotle develops the explicit connection between pleasure and φαντασία, it is possible that the specific phrase that pleasure conveys a φαντασία of goodness first appears in Stoic sources. Jessica Moss gives an example from Posidonius who claims that ‘pleasure projects a persuasive appearance (φαντασίαν) that it is good.’³⁸⁰

In fact, we should note that also Gregory’s use of φαντασία is in part more closely aligned with the Stoic notion than with Plato’s definition. For Plato, φαντασία refers to an already formed conception, a ‘mixture of perception with opinion’ (σύμμιξις αίσθήσεως καὶ δόξης), which, Grönroos contends, is attained without the involvement of the mind;³⁸¹ for Gregory, φαντασία precedes opinion formation (though the specific word δόξα plays next to no role in his epistemological vocabulary) and is followed by a judgment pronounced by the mind, which either accepts or rejects it. It is merely a suggestive representation conveyed by the senses. This feature is something that Gregory shares with the Stoics, although he does not make use of the relevant Stoic term ‘assent’ (συγκατάθεσις) to highlight the action of the mind.³⁸² But whereas the Stoics emphasise φαντασία as the basis of all cognition, both sensory and abstract, true and false, for Gregory the word denotes a mere false semblance projected to the senses.³⁸³ Furthermore, in his divided soul, φαντασία and κρίσις belong to different parts; for the orthodox Stoics, both occur in the mind.

Gregory’s view that the first humans reach for the fruit because it projects an ‘appearance of good’ indicates that Eve and Adam do not sin because they deliberately choose to be evil. On the contrary, they think they are pursuing the

³⁸⁰ *Frag.* 416.61–62 (in Galen, *PHP*, 5.5.19 [Moss’s reference is for some reason to sections 23–24]): ‘...ἡδονὴ μὲν ὡς ἀγαθόν, ἀλγηδῶν δὲ ὡς κακὸν πιθανὴν προβάλλουσι φαντασίαν.’ See Moss, ‘Pleasure and Illusion in Plato’, 531.

³⁸¹ See *Soph.* 264a–b. Whether Grönroos’s main argument concerning the two different kinds of δόξα (rational and irrational) in Plato is correct, is irrelevant for the present study. Regardless of whether the judgment is formed by the mind or the lower part of the soul, for Plato, φαντασία always involves an opinion and, by implication, a commitment, if only by the lower part of the soul.

³⁸² On the Stoic notion of φαντασία, see, for example, *DL* 7.49–51 and other passages in *LS*, Ch. 39. As Long and Sedley explain (*LS*, 239): ‘An impression is not a belief... To have an impression is simply to entertain an idea, without any implication of commitment to it.’

³⁸³ In neutral descriptions of cognition, he typically speaks of the mind judging an impulse, ὁρμή, or refers to the ‘pictorial’ content conveyed by the senses as εἶδωλα (see, e.g. *Op. hom.* 10, PG 44, 152.40).

good, because the evil looks deceptively similar. According to Gregory, this is true of all sin:

[W]ho would plunge into the unsavoury filth of intemperance (ἀκολασίας), were it not that he whom this bait (δελέατι) hurries into passion thinks pleasure a thing good and acceptable (τὴν ἡδονὴν καλὸν τι καὶ αἰρετὸν ᾤετο)? So, too, the other sins (τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων) keep their destruction hidden, and seem at first acceptable (αἰρετὰ παρὰ τὴν πρώτην δοκεῖ), and some deceit (διὰ τινος ἀπάτης) makes them earnestly sought after by unwary men instead of what is good (ἀντ' ἀγαθοῦ).³⁸⁴

Above, Gregory calls pleasure a 'bait' (δέλεαρ). His choice of words resembles Plato's remark of pleasure as the 'greatest bait of evil' (μέγιστον κακοῦ δέλεαρ), which was widely cited in Graeco-Roman ethics.³⁸⁵ It is likely that these earlier links between pleasure and evil at least partly contribute to Gregory's pleasure-centred understanding of the fall and sin as a whole. In *De vita Moysis*, Gregory echoes Plato more clearly, saying: 'Pleasure is truly like the bait of all evil (πάσης κακίας οἷόν τι δέλεαρ ἢ ἡδονή); when it is thrown out lightly, it draws gluttonous souls to the fish hook (ἄγκιστρον) of destruction.'³⁸⁶ However, the closest parallel is not Plato's *Timaeus*, but Basil's *Asceticon*, where we read: 'For pleasure is the great snare of evil (μέγα τοῦ κακοῦ δέλεαρ) – by means of which we human beings are especially drawn to sin. By it every soul is dragged to death as with a fish-hook (ἄγκιστρον).'³⁸⁷

While the passage in *De vita Moysis* does not refer to the fall directly, in a number of other works Gregory uses the word 'bait' in the context of *Genesis 3* just like he does in *De opificio hominis*: In *Oratio catechetica*, he argues that the 'deception (ἀπάτη) would have proved ineffective, had not the semblance of good (τοῦ καλοῦ φαντασίας) been spread upon the hook of evil like a bait (δελέατος).'³⁸⁸ And in *In inscriptiones psalmorum* he alludes briefly to the events of the fall and notes that the fruit of the 'ambiguous' (ἐπαμφοτερίζοντος) tree, which the Word calls 'good and evil' (here Gregory uses the scriptural form

³⁸⁴ *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 200A–B).

³⁸⁵ *Tim.* 69d.

³⁸⁶ *Vit. Moys.* II.297 (SC 1, 127–128); trans. Malherbe & Ferguson, 131.

³⁸⁷ *Asc. mag.* 17 (PG 31, 964); trans. Silvas, 210.

³⁸⁸ *Or. cat.* 21 (SC 453, 245); trans. Srawley, 72.

καλὸν καὶ πονηρόν), is good because it hides sin in a bait of pleasure (ἡδονῆς δελεάσματι), ‘which the friends of the body go in quest of instead of good (ἦν ἀντὶ καλοῦ μετέρχονται οἱ τοῦ σώματος φίλοι)’, but evil because the goal turns out to be bitter.³⁸⁹ These passages show that Gregory has a stock of terms and concepts that guide his interpretation of the fall: the moral ambiguity of the tree of good and evil knowledge, the notions of ‘impression of good’ and pleasure as a ‘bait’, and the idea that the fall comes about through a deception incited by pleasure.

Judging and Desiring the Good

So far we have seen that the serpent tricks Eve and Adam by covering the fruit with a sensually pleasing exterior. However, although pleasure seeking is characteristic of the ‘friends of the body’ and it is the lower part of the soul that is inclined towards pleasure as the good, the fall is best understood as an *intellectual* failure. For Gregory, the body is not capable of any action without the involvement of the soul, and neither can the lower part of the soul instigate action if its goal is not accepted by the mind. In the previous chapter we saw how this collaboration occurs as an impulse originates in the sensible part of the soul and is then judged by the mind. The same dynamic unfolds when the mind pronounces a judgment on some appearance of goodness conveyed by the senses. And this is where the first humans go wrong, just like all people who lack a sufficient understanding of the nature of the true good. In *De hominis opificio*, Gregory laments the ignorance of οἱ πολλοί – the unenlightened masses who are the standard target of ancient philosophers’ snide remarks, often in the context of hedonism:³⁹⁰

[T]he majority of men (οἱ πολλοί) judge the good to lie in that which gratifies the senses (τὸ καλὸν ἐν τῷ τὰς αἰσθήσεις εὐφραίνοντι κρίνουσι), and there is a certain identity of

³⁸⁹ *Inscr.* II.13 (GNO V, 139); trans. Heine, 182.

³⁹⁰ For οἱ πολλοί, see for example Plato’s *Protagoras* (e.g. 351c) where the popular opinion that pleasure is the good is repeatedly referenced.

name between that which is, and that which appears to be ‘good’ (τίς ἐστὶν ὁμωνυμία τοῦ τε ὄντος καὶ τοῦ δοκοῦντος εἶναι καλοῦ)...³⁹¹

I have already cited a passage from *Oratio catechetica* where Gregory calls the mind a ‘judge’ (κριτήριον) between the good and the evil. Above Gregory employs a related verb, κρίνω, which further highlights that pleasure is not just an unreflected bodily sensation, but it includes a cognitive aspect: an evaluative judgment concerning the goodness of its object. The idea is echoed in the passage from *Homilies on the Song of Songs* with which I opened this chapter: ‘Hence the fruit is called “good” because of an erroneous judgment (κατὰ τὴν ἡμαρτημένην τοῦ καλοῦ κρίσιν) regarding what is good, for such it seems people who identify the good with pleasure.’³⁹² We can argue that here lies the rationale for the persistent negative value that Gregory assigns to ἡδονή and for his reluctance to use ἡδονή to refer to enjoyment in a neutral or positive context: for him, ἡδονή does not denote any pleasure, but more specifically ‘pleasure-judged-as-the good.’³⁹³

As Gregory notes above, there is a nominal relationship between the true good and that which appears to be good: what Scripture calls ‘good’ is not the actual good, but a mere ‘homonym’, which has the same name but a different essence and definition.³⁹⁴ However, even if the relationship between the two is nominal, the way in which they orient certain human faculties is the same:

... for this reason [because of the homonymous connection] that desire which arises towards what is evil, as though towards good (ἢ πρὸς τὸ κακὸν ὡς πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν

³⁹¹ *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 200B).

³⁹² *Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 350); trans. Norris, 369–371.

³⁹³ This is akin to the Stoic notion of pleasure. As Moss observes, the Stoics ‘take the connection between pleasure and apparent goodness farther than Plato ever does, using the idea of apparent goodness to provide an analysis of pleasure. Pleasure is (in part) the appearance-based belief that something is good: someone who possesses some φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν, and assents to the appearance that it is good, experiences pleasure.’ Moss, ‘Pleasure and Illusion in Plato’, 531.

³⁹⁴ We have already seen a similar remark from Gregory’s *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* (8.2 [SC 416, 400]; trans. Hall and Moriarty, 131): ‘[O]f the good things (τῶν ἀγαθῶν) sought among humans, some are really (ὄντως) what the words suggests, and some are falsely so named (τὰ δὲ ψευδώνυμον τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ἔχει).’

γινόμενη ἐπιθυμία), is called by Scripture the 'knowledge of good and evil' (καλοῦ καὶ κακοῦ γνῶσις); 'knowledge,' as we have said, expressing a certain mixed disposition.³⁹⁵

This is an important statement, which explains why Gregory considers deception such a crucial element in leading people to sin. As Gregory states above desire (ἐπιθυμία), which drives the individual to strive for what he or she perceives as good, always behaves in the same way: it arises towards any object that is considered good, regardless of whether the thing judged as good actually *is* such. In the passage above the idea is treated in passing to offer a final definition to the phrase 'knowledge of good and evil', but in one of the *Homilies on the Beatitudes* Gregory discusses the relationship between desire and the good more thoroughly:

It is our aim not that we should be persuaded to desire the things that are good (ἀναπεισθεῖμεν τῶν καλῶν ὀρέγεσθαι); (for to incline towards the good is one of the inherent characteristics of human nature [αὐτομάτως ἔγκειται τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει, τὸ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν ἐπιρρέπῶς ἔχειν]) – but that we should not be mistaken in our judgement as to what is good (μὴ ἀμάρτοιμεν τῆς τοῦ καλοῦ κρίσεως). It is here that our life is most subject to error, that we cannot clearly distinguish (ἀκριβῶς συνιέναι) what is good by nature (τί τὸ φύσει καλόν) and what is supposed as such through deception (τί τὸ δι' ἀπάτης τοιοῦτον ὑπονοούμενον). For if evil was presented to our life in its nakedness (γυμνῇ προέκειτο ἡ κακία τῷ βίῳ), unadorned with some semblance of good (μὴ τινι καλοῦ φαντασίᾳ προσκεχρωσμένη), mankind would surely not fly to it so easily.³⁹⁶

In the passage above, Gregory makes no mention of pleasure, nor is the passage explicitly tied to the events of the fall, but the concepts of deception and the false good remain identical and the passage contains a number of familiar expressions: we encounter again the central notions of καλοῦ κρίσις, ἀπάτη and καλοῦ φαντασία, and the juxtaposition between 'naked' (γυμνή) and 'adorned' (προσκεχρωσμένη) evil, all of which occur in *De hominis opificio*. Above, Gregory affirms that desire is always inherently directed to that which is perceived as the good. As Smith explains drawing on Plato, this is because we recognise a

³⁹⁵ *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 200B).

³⁹⁶ *Beat.* 5 (GNO VII/2, 125); trans. Graef, 131.

lack of good in ourselves and seek to remedy it by reaching for what we suppose to be good things.³⁹⁷ In the famous discussion on love in Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates and Agathon come to agree that a person who desires always desires something he lacks (ένδεές έστιν), and that love is a desire for beauty (κάλλους) which one lacks. And since beautiful things are good things (τὰ δὲ άγαθά καλά), love is also a desire for the good things which one lacks.³⁹⁸ The Platonic view of love and desire undoubtedly underpins Macrina's words on desire in *De anima et resurrectione*:

But with us, our nature is so poor in the beautiful (τὸ πτωχὴν εἶναι τοῦ καλοῦ) that it is always seeking what it lacks (πρὸς τὸ ένδέον), and this appetite for what it misses (καὶ ἡ τοῦ λείποντος ἔφεσις αὕτη) is the very disposition of desire (ἡ ἐπιθυμητικὴ... διάθεσις) in our nature, whether it is led astray by bad decisions from the truly beautiful (δὲ ἀκρισίαν τοῦ ὄντος καλοῦ), or even comes upon it by chance.³⁹⁹

While above Macrina does not mention pleasure explicitly, we should keep in mind that pleasure results from the fulfilment of a lack and is the force that drives us to fulfil our desires. It is nothing else than pleasure that, 'by bad decisions', leads the soul astray from the truly beautiful. Adam and Eve, do not, of course, lack any good in their original created state. This gives their sin a different starting point compared to a person who is born into the fallen world. However, as Gregory alludes, desire can result from a perceived lack of goodness just as well as from a real one, and there is one thing that the first humans do not possess: the fruit of knowledge. Since it looks appealing on the surface, Eve makes the mistaken judgment that it is a missing – and perhaps greater – good, and reaches for it to remedy the lack.

The idea that desire is naturally inclined towards the good and thus humans desire only what they regard as good can be traced back to Socrates' famous maxim: 'No one errs willingly.'⁴⁰⁰ Jessica Moss sums up Plato's position: 'We desire what we think good; but what is pleasant appears to be good, whether or not it is. People who tend to pursue pleasure thus do so because they are deceived by the illusion that pleasure qua pleasure is good – because they fail to

³⁹⁷ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 192.

³⁹⁸ *Symp.* 200a–201c.

³⁹⁹ *An. et res.* 92C; trans. Silvas, 209

⁴⁰⁰ See *Leg.* 5.731c, 9.860d; *Prot.* 345d–e; *Tim.* 86d.

distinguish appearances from reality.⁴⁰¹ Moss argues that the idea that pleasure appears good becomes ‘standard doctrine in later Greek thought.’⁴⁰² Consider, for example, Aristotle’s famous remark in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

In the many (έν τοῖς πολλοῖς), deception (ἡ ἀπάτη) seems to come about on account of pleasure (διὰ τήν ἡδονήν). For while it is not the good, it appears to be (οὐ γάρ οὔσα ἀγαθόν φαίνεται).⁴⁰³

Although in *De hominis opificio* Gregory uses καλόν for good and δοκέω for appearing, Gregory and Aristotle are united on two central points: First, that the ‘the many’ (οἱ πολλοί) mistake pleasure for the good. Second, that pleasure creates this impression by deceptive illusion: it *appears* to be good, but it *is* something else.

Thus, we come to one of the basic tenets of Gregory’s hamartiology: sin is a product of ignorance.⁴⁰⁴ It signals a failure to reflect properly on the impressions conveyed by the senses and distinguish appearances from reality, which leads to a false judgment concerning the identity of the good.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, the inherent inclination of desire towards that which is considered good explains Gregory’s insistence that the evil would have failed if it had showed itself without disguise; Adam and Eve would have never sinned if they had realised the viciousness of their chosen goal. At the end of Chapter 20 of *De hominis opificio*, Gregory concludes:

It was because he saw this that the serpent points out the evil fruit of sin, not showing the evil manifestly (έκ τοῦ προφανοῦς) in its own nature (φύσεως) (for man would not

⁴⁰¹ Moss, ‘Pleasure and Illusion in Plato’, 512. Cf. Smith (*Passion and Paradise*, 157) paraphrasing *De vita Moysis* (II.23.9): ‘In simplest terms, if one is to grow in knowledge of the truth, one must first be able to distinguish between appearance (*ho en tōi dokein monon einai*) and reality, between Being and nonbeing.’ See also *Or. cat.* 40.5.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 531.

⁴⁰³ *NE* 1113a33–b1; trans. Moss in ‘Pleasure and Illusion in Plato’, 503.

⁴⁰⁴ This is also a feature of Plato’s understanding of sin (see, e.g., *Leg.* 863c), which is directly related to the Socratic maxim that no one errs willingly. Many patristic writers understand sin as a result of ignorance concerning the true good. For a contemporaneous example, see Nemesius, *De natura hominis* 17 (BT, 75).

⁴⁰⁵ As Warren Smith notes, ‘Nyssen shares with the Stoics and Aristotle the belief that passion and sin are ultimately the product of errant judgment or mistaken belief.’ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 101.

have been deceived by manifest evil [τῷ προδήλῳ κακῷ]), but giving to what the woman beheld the glamour of a certain beauty (τὸ φαινόμενον ἀγλαΐσας), and conjuring into its taste the spell of a sensual pleasure (τὴν αἴσθησιν ἡδονὴν ἐγγοητεύσας τῇ γεύσει) it appeared to her to speak convincingly: ‘and the woman saw,’ it says, ‘that the tree was good for food (καλὸν τὸ ξύλον εἰς βρῶσιν), and that it was pleasant to the eyes to behold (ἀρεστὸν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἰδεῖν), and fair to see (ὠραῖόν ἐστι τοῦ κατανοῆσαι); and she took of the fruit thereof and did eat,’⁴⁰⁶ and that eating became the mother of death to men. This, then, is that fruit-bearing of mixed character, where the passage clearly expresses the sense in which the tree was called ‘capable of the knowledge of good and evil (καλοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ γνωστόν),’ because, like the evil nature of poisons that are prepared with honey, it appears to be good (καλὸν εἶναι δοκεῖ) in so far as it affects the senses with sweetness (καθὸ μὲν καταγλυκαίνει τὴν αἴσθησιν): but in so far as it destroys him who touches it, it is the worst of all evil.⁴⁰⁷

We can speculate that Eve engages in hedonic calculus of sorts, in which she judges the goodness offered by the fruit to be more significant than the possible adverse effects that result from eating it (in fact, the serpent promises that there will be none [Gen. 3:4–5]). The complex and hidden reality of death is not available to the senses and requires careful intellectual reflection. Therefore it is easily overridden by the instant gratification offered by the fruit, which is readily accessible to the senses.

The straightforward connection between sin and ignorance leaves the impression that Gregory does not accept – or even envision – a motivational conflict in which we would fail to desire what we knew to be good. If we always desire what the rational part of the soul judges as good and, implicitly, seek to attain it, there is no room for Aristotelian *akrasia* or the Pauline dilemma of not doing the good one wants, but the evil one does not want to do (Rom. 7:19).⁴⁰⁸ However, in other texts Gregory seems to imply that such internal conflicts do exist. It will suffice to cite *Homily 2 on Ecclesiastes*, another text dedicated to pleasure and the good, where Gregory examines

⁴⁰⁶ Gen. 3:7 (LXX).

⁴⁰⁷ *Op. hom.* 20 (PG 44, 200C–D).

⁴⁰⁸ See *NE* 7 for Aristotle’s distinction between ἀκολασία (doing the base thing unknowingly) and ἀκρασία (doing the base thing knowingly), and his criticism of Socrates.

how concern for intelligible things (ἡ τῶν νοητῶν ἐπιμέλεια) might overcome the inclinations of the flesh (τῶν τῆς σαρκὸς κινήματων), so that our nature might not be at war with itself (μὴ στασιάζειν πρὸς ἑαυτὴν τὴν φύσιν), with the mind choosing some things and the body pulling towards others (μὲν τῆς διανοίας προαιρουμένης, πρὸς ἕτερα δὲ τῆς σαρκὸς ἀφελκούσης), but instead might make the pride of our flesh submissive to the rational part (τῷ νοητῷ) of the soul...⁴⁰⁹

What should we make of this tension? Since Gregory does not have a notion of a purely rational desire that originates in the mind independently of the appetite (ἐπιθυμία), such dynamic cannot be interpreted as an internal conflict between the higher desires of the mind and the lower desires of the appetite. It also seems unlikely that Gregory would suddenly think that the appetite could initiate action independently of the mind's judgment. For him, there is only one faculty of desire which is directed according to what the mind accepts as the good. If we consider this in light of the distinction Gregory makes in the same work between the good of the intellect (virtue) and the good of the body (sensual pleasure), we can suggest that the sensible part, which is inherently attracted to pleasure, simply proposes to the mind that the pleasurable object is good (with a καλοῦ φαντασία as its medium). However, it remains up to the mind to reject or accept this proposition. If the mind is weak and underdeveloped, it will lay aside its proper objects of choice in favour of the suggestion that pleasure is the good. If it knows better, it will reject the suggestion, refine the appetitive impulses, and redirect them towards intelligible goods.

By emphasising the mind's judgment, Gregory is able to argue that, in a sense, humans chose their own fall. This view is important for two reasons: First, it highlights the role of the free will in the pursuit of virtue and vice. Second, it draws attention to the fact that evil did not exist as part of God's original creation, but originated in the human choice to turn away from the actual good. While Gregory does not tease out these arguments in *De opificio hominis*, both are prominently included in his treatment of sin in *Oratio catechetica*:

⁴⁰⁹ *Eccl.* 2.8 (SC 416, 178); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 57.

The intellect (νοῦς), then, being cheated of its desire for that which is really good (τῆς πρὸς τὸ ὄντως ἀγαθὸν ἐπιθυμίας), was led away to the non-existent (τὸ μὴ ὄν), being persuaded by the guile of the counsellor and discoverer of evil (τῆς κακίας συμβούλου τε καὶ εὐρετοῦ)⁴¹⁰ that that was good (καλὸν) which was contrary to good (τὸ τῷ καλῷ ἐναντίον) [--] [A]nd man by his own decision (ἐκουσίως) involved himself in this misfortune, seeing that through pleasure (δι' ἡδονῆς) he enslaved himself to the enemy of his life.⁴¹¹

Above, the notions of pleasure as the cause of the fall and pleasure-seeking as a product of man's own intellect are embedded within wider doctrinal concerns of the goodness of God and the origin of evil. An equivalent of the Augustinian term 'free will' (lat. *liberum arbitrium*) does not exist in Greek sources. In the passage just cited, Gregory uses the word ἐκουσίως, 'voluntarily', to refer to the deliberate decision made by the first humans. Often προαίρεσις ('choice') is his preferred term, and at times he makes use of the formula ἐφ' ἡμῖν (literally, 'up to us'). The former is a key term to Aristotle who understands it as 'the intersection point between reason and desire which made possible rational and reasonable behaviour.'⁴¹² The latter term, to which I will return in a later discussion on external goods, is often associated with Stoic ethics but employed by a variety of ancient writers from Aristotle to Clement and Origen who, we should note, make use of it much in the same way as Gregory.⁴¹³

By locating the source of sin in the act of choosing, Gregory makes humans accountable for the existence of evil. In the passage just cited, he defends the view that the evil was not created by God and has no independent existence. Only the good exists; evil consists of a privation of good, a turning away from that which is towards that which is not. It is brought about not by God but by man's own free choice to pursue pleasure in the place of the true good. Thus, Gregory is able to safeguard the perfect goodness of God and the contingent

⁴¹⁰ The phrase κακῶν ἐφευρετής occurs in plural in *Rom.* 1:30 in relation idolatry, sexual sin, and depravity of mind which lead to the invention of a number of other evils.

⁴¹¹ *Or. cat.* 21 (SC 453, 244); trans. Srawley, 72.

⁴¹² Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, 241.

⁴¹³ See, for example, *NE* 1113a.10–11 where Aristotle uses both terms defining the object of choice (προαίρεσις) as one of the things that are up to us (ἐφ' ἡμῖν). See also Origen, *Princ.* 3.1.1.4, which belongs to an account that in its entirety resembles Gregory's understanding of passions and sin, and Clement, *Strom.* 1.17.84.4–6.

goodness of the whole creation. Even the free will itself is good, for, as Gregory argues in *Homily 2 on Ecclesiastes*, one of the major texts on the topic, ‘nobody would reckon among good things anything which was constrained by the yoke of necessity.’⁴¹⁴ Evil, then, results from the misuse of God’s good gift, and does not imply the presence of something inherently evil in human beings or in the world.

Judaean-Christian Precedents

In my analysis of *De hominis opificio* 19–20, I have so far focussed on Gregory’s adaptation of Platonist and, to a lesser extent, Stoic thought to the biblical account of the fall. Before closing this chapter, I will show that Gregory is not the first author to attempt such a synthesis. I have already alluded to some parallels between Gregory and earlier Jewish or Christian writers, but a few additional passages will reveal the full extent to which Gregory is working with a fusion of philosophical and biblical material that had been developed long before his literary career. I will proceed in reversed chronology, pointing out a brief passage in Clement of Alexandria and then offering a longer discussion on Philo’s interpretation of the fall.

The passage from Clement is short and the focus is not specifically on the fall. However, its few sentences express a number of familiar concepts:

No one chooses evil *qua* evil (οὐ γὰρ αἰρεῖται τις κακὸν ἢ κακόν). He is led astray by the accompanying pleasure (τῇ δὲ περὶ αὐτὸ ἡδονῇ συναπαγόμενος), supposing it good (ἀγαθὸν ὑπολαβών), and he thinks it right to choose. In these circumstances it rests with us (ἐφ’ ἡμῖν) to deliver ourselves from ignorance and from the choice that is attractive and sinful, and, rather than this, not to assent to those deceptive fantasies (μὴ συγκατατίθεσθαι ταῖς ἀπατηλαῖς ἐκείναις φαντασίαις).⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ *Eccl.* 2.3 (SC 416, 158); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 50. Freedom from necessity is one of the recurring characteristics that Gregory associates with the image of God, and it holds an indisputable place among the divine goods.

⁴¹⁵ *Strom.* 1.17.84.4–6; trans. Ferguson, 87.

This passage from *Stromateis* conveys concisely some of the key ideas that informed Gregory's understanding of the fall: the Socratic maxim 'no one errs willingly', the idea that pleasure is falsely perceived as good, the notion of 'deceptive fantasy' (Clement also employs the related Stoic concept of 'assent', which is only implicitly present in Gregory), and the focus on the active choice of the mind. For Clement, as for Gregory, sin results from ignorance as a deliberate but mistaken act of the mind. And just as opting for sin is our own doing, so is our deliverance from it 'up to us', something that we can achieve by an act of mind. The latter view, expressed with the Stoic formula ἐφ' ἡμῶν is also present in Gregory, as I will go on to show in the following chapter. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to explore all the connections between Clement's and Gregory's respective notions of pleasure and sin, I would argue that even this brief excerpt contains enough conceptual and terminological similarities to suggest a possible source of inspiration for Gregory's work. Elsewhere, Clement, too, suggests in passing that the fall was caused by pleasure and notes the symbolism of the serpent as pleasure.⁴¹⁶

However, for an extensive pleasure-centred reading of the fall we have to turn to Philo of Alexandria, from whom Clement may well have borrowed the serpent allegory. We have to ask to what extent Gregory himself is drawing on Philo's allegorical reading of the fall in *De opificio mundi* and *Legum allegoriae* 1–2, which provide the obvious precedent in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.⁴¹⁷ Here, it is not possible to comment on the many links between Philo's interpretation of the whole creation story and Gregory's corresponding account in *De hominis opificio*.⁴¹⁸ I will limit my focus on three main topics: Philo's account of the fall understood as a drama between the mind, sensation, and pleasure, vocabulary of deception, and references to the good. A proper comparison between Philo and Gregory is complicated by the fact that the extant version of Philo's *Legum allegoriae* ends just before *Gen.* 3:1b–8, in other words, the very verses that concern the fall. While the role of pleasure in the fall

⁴¹⁶ *Prot.* 11.1.

⁴¹⁷ For all three books, I will be referring to the text and translation in *Philo in Ten Volumes, with an English Translation by F. H. Colson*, Vol. 1 (London: Heinemann; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929)

⁴¹⁸ For more comparisons, see Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 251–56.

is obvious from the verses that precede the missing passage, it is impossible to ascertain fully the details of Philo's interpretation.

The relationship between mind and sensation is the defining topic of Philo's *Legum allegoriae*. It is introduced in the opening paragraph of *Leg. 1*, in which heaven and earth are interpreted as analogies of the original ideas of mind and sense-perception; later it is applied to the relationship of Adam (mind) and Eve (sensation).⁴¹⁹ The events of the fall are preceded by Philo's interpretation of the two creation stories, which he famously reads as an account of a twofold creation: The first creation narrative recounts the creation of the perfect, intelligible and undivided idea of humanity, which includes both the idea of the mind and the unactualised potential of sensation. The mind holds a higher ontological status as it derives its being directly from God, whereas the irrational part of the soul, including sensation, speech and the power of generation, is inspired and vivified by the mind that acts like its god.⁴²⁰ In the second creation, the idea of humanity is conjoined with matter and particular human beings – first the man and then the woman – are created. Consequently, the human being who receives and breaks the divine commandment is not the ideal man in the mind of God, but Adam, the 'moulded man' whose 'earthlike mind' is connected to matter. This 'earthly man' is neither virtuous nor wicked, but exists in an intermediate state without any comprehension of good or evil.⁴²¹

At the level of allegory, Philo interprets Adam as the 'earthlike mind' fashioned of clay, Eve as the 'active sense-perception.' He employs the latter term to denote sensation that becomes actualised at the creation of the material world, which is by definition its sole object.⁴²² Originally, the external sensation is intended as the 'helper and ally' for the mind of the moulded man who leads an embodied existence in the Paradise. It 'comes next to it alike in order and in power,' and is created 'with a view to the completeness of the whole soul, and

⁴¹⁹ *Leg. 1*, I.1, IX.21.

⁴²⁰ *Leg. 1*, XIII.39–40.

⁴²¹ *Leg. 1*, XXX.94–95. See also, *Leg. 2*, XVII.65.

⁴²² *Leg. 2*, VIII.24.

with a view to its apprehension of objects presented to it.⁴²³ Thus, an explicit hierarchical model pertains to both gender and cognition. The feminine character of sensation is not limited to its lower status, but it is also reflected in its passive role as an object of action. This, in Philo's view, can be seen in the way in which the senses are in a state of rest unless put into motion by external objects.⁴²⁴

Although the external sense appears to have a useful original purpose, Philo quickly proceeds to discuss its tension-laden relationship with the mind. He interprets Adam's sleep during the creation of Eve to mean that the mind and the external sense can only be active at each other's expense: the mind cannot turn to its proper objects when the external sense is busy enjoying sights, sounds and tastes. When the mind is pulled down to the passions by sensation and becomes absorbed in luxurious associations, it forgets itself and 'is mastered by all that conduces to pleasure.'⁴²⁵

Thus, we can see that although formally the second creation results in a state of moral neutrality, for Philo the material creation is already removed from perfection and encloses the seeds of the fall.⁴²⁶ Sin becomes imminent as soon as the woman is created – in other words, as soon as the mind turns itself towards the material world through external sensation.⁴²⁷ Indeed, for Philo, the woman is markedly the instrument of the fall of the man. Not only is she deceived by the serpent, but simply her appearance arouses a yearning (πόθος) for intercourse and reproduction.⁴²⁸ This desire, in turn, yields bodily pleasure (τῶν σωμάτων ἡδονήν), which, according to Philo, is 'the beginning of wrongs and violation of law, the pleasure for the sake of which men bring on themselves the life of mortality and wretchedness in lieu of that of mortality and bliss.'⁴²⁹

⁴²³ *Leg.* 2, VIII.24; trans. Colson, 241.

⁴²⁴ *Leg.* 2, XI.38–39.

⁴²⁵ *Leg.* 2, VIII.29–30; trans. Colson, 245.

⁴²⁶ *Leg.* 1, XII–XIII.

⁴²⁷ *Leg.* 2, XII.40, 50.

⁴²⁸ *Opif.*, LIII.151–152.

⁴²⁹ *Opif.*, LIII.152; trans. Colson, 121.

While we lack Philo's interpretation of most of *Gen. 3* in *Legum allegoriae*, in *De opificio mundi* Philo describes the exchange between the serpent and the woman. He contends that the woman, who had first hesitated to pick the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, believed the serpent and ate the fruit 'without looking into the suggestion, prompted by a mind devoid of steadfastness and firm foundation.'⁴³⁰ He then concludes that the serpent is the symbol of pleasure, and explains the symbolism by connecting the serpent's physical properties to characteristics of pleasure. By succumbing to pleasure, man, too, becomes serpent-like in his base behaviour.⁴³¹

In *Legum allegoriae*, we only find Philo's interpretation of *Gen. 3:1b*, in which he does discuss the meaning of the serpent. Again, the serpent is the symbol of pleasure, a third being that binds the mind and external sensation to each other.⁴³² Like a serpent, pleasure winds itself around all parts of the irrational soul, resulting in a variety pleasurable sensations for each sense.⁴³³ Ultimately, indulgence in pleasures brings about the death of the soul by vice.⁴³⁴

Like Gregory, Philo thinks that pleasure is a particularly widespread and troublesome passion. He calls it the most mischievous of all the passions (*πάθος*), which is due to its subtle, multi-faceted, and omnipresent nature.⁴³⁵ But even if Philo discusses pleasure as a general phenomenon that applies to all of the senses, he never loses sight of the particular tensions of sexual pleasures, which he describes as the 'most violent of all in their intensity.'⁴³⁶ For him, it is not without importance that pleasure wrecks havoc between a 'male' mind and a 'female' sensation. The reversal of the right ordering of the soul is connected to a reversal of gender hierarchy and the dangers of unbridled sexual desire.

⁴³⁰ *Opif.*, LV.156; trans. Colson, 125.

⁴³¹ *Opif.*, LVI.157-159.

⁴³² *Leg. 2*, XVIII.71-72.

⁴³³ *Leg. 2*, XVIII.75.

⁴³⁴ *Leg. 2*, XVIII.77.

⁴³⁵ *Leg. 2*, XXVI.107.

⁴³⁶ *Leg. 2*, XVIII.74; trans. Colson, 271.

How does Philo's interpretation of mind and sensation relate to Gregory's account? As Warren Smith has noted, Gregory forgoes the gendered reading of *Genesis* 2–3 we find in Philo. Smith attributes the lack of gendered symbolism to Gregory's unitive understanding of the human nature: on Gregory's view, the original human nature was not divided by gender, and even in the postlapsarian reality its properties are shared by men and women alike. Since the intellectual nature is universal and asexual, Smith argues that it would be make little sense to conceive of the intellect as something intrinsically masculine while identifying irrationality and sensuality with the feminine.⁴³⁷ Although Smith's explanation captures an essential difference in tone and focus between the two authors – Gregory is, on the whole, less focussed on sex and gendered implications – he does not sufficiently address the point that also Philo holds an asexual and unitive view of the original humanity. Although Philo contends that man and woman existed as unactualised species (or lower-level genera) in the human genus before the creation of specific gendered individuals, he nonetheless spells out without any ambiguity that the original human nature, the image of God, was indeed asexual, 'neither male nor female.'⁴³⁸ Thus, even though Philo associates the woman with sensation, sex, and sin much more strongly than Gregory does, both espouse the idea that the image of God is ultimately asexual. Therefore, Gregory's unitive notion of human nature does not alone explain his different outlook. Nonetheless, we can certainly argue that Gregory is more consistent in adhering to the implications of this asexual starting point in his interpretation of Christian perfection primarily in terms of a return to the asexual state rather than as a rejection of femininity in favour of more perfect masculinity (though Smith does point out some 'lapses' in his thought⁴³⁹).

Another reason why Gregory does not adopt Philo's gendered allegory may simply be that in *De hominis opificio* he is altogether less concerned with a one-to-one allegorical correspondence between biblical and philosophical elements. Apart from the fruit, which for Gregory is the focal point of the narrative, the

⁴³⁷ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 44–45.

⁴³⁸ *Leg.* 2, IV.13; *Opif.* XXIV.76, XLVI.134.

⁴³⁹ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 45.

biblical elements fade into the background as the passage evolves into a rather abstract discussion on the true and false good. While we can detect the ‘Philonic’ dynamic in which pleasure tempts the mind through sensation, at no point are these inner faculties linked to the main characters of *Gen. 3*. In *De hominis opificio*, Gregory associates pleasure with the properties of the fruit, rather than with the serpent who acts in the background as a mastermind of sorts. An explicit allegory of serpent-as-pleasure does, however, occur in several places in Gregory’s other works, and may well have been inspired by Philo.⁴⁴⁰ But even where the serpent-as-pleasure and Eve appear together in a clear allusion to *Genesis 3*, Eve is never equated with sensation, let alone Adam with the mind.

What, then, of other points of contact? Both Philo and Gregory agree that pleasure prompts people to sin through deceptive trickery. The vocabulary of deception is particularly prominent in a passage from *De opificio mundi* LIX, where Philo begins by referring to pleasure’s ‘wiles and deceptions’ (γοητείας καὶ ἀπάτας), which it introduces to the woman/sensation, and by means of her to the man/mind. Philo accuses pleasure of cheating (φενακίζει) and subjugating the senses with her sorceries (τοῖς φίλτροις), which delight (χαίρουσαι) in its offerings. Next, he lists various things in which each sense takes pleasure. The sight, for example, delights in ‘variegated (ποικιλίαις) colours and shapes.’ The senses then approach the mind, their master, pleading it to accept the gifts of pleasure. This is how reason is ensnared (δελεασθεῖς), and ‘becomes a subject instead of a ruler (ὑπήκοος ἀνθ’ ἡγεμόνος), a slave instead of a master (δοῦλος ἀντὶ δεσπότου), an alien instead of a citizen, and a mortal instead of an immortal (θνητὸς ἀντ’ ἀθανάτου).’⁴⁴¹ Here, pleasure takes on a female role as a courtesan who wants to meet with her lover, the mind, and uses the senses as her panders to get him on her hook (ἀγκιστρεύεται). As Philo continues:

When she has ensnared (δελεάσασα) these [the senses] she easily brings the Mind under her control. To it, dwelling within us, the senses convey the things seen without (τὰ φανέντα), reporting them fully and making them manifest, impressing on it the

⁴⁴⁰ See especially *Eccl.* 4.5 (SC 416, 250–252); *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 54).

⁴⁴¹ *Opif.* LIX.165–166; trans. Colson, 131.

forms (τύπους) of the several objects, and producing in it the corresponding affection. For it resembles wax, and receives the images (φαντασίας) that reach it through the senses (διὰ τῶν αἰσθήσεων), by which it apprehends material substances (τὰ σώματα), being incapable, as I have said before, of doing this by itself.⁴⁴²

A great deal of the vocabulary of deception and unreality which Philo employs in *De opificio mundi* LIX overlaps with the terms Gregory uses in *De hominis opificio* and in the other works which I have discussed above. Gregory, too, makes use of derivatives of γοητεία, ἀπάτη, ποικίλος, δέλεαρ, and ἄγκιστρον. The common source of these terms is of course Plato, but it is probable that Gregory has taken note of the way in which Philo applies them in the context of the fall. The idea that either sensation or pleasure leaves an imprint in the soul also occurs in Gregory, although he does not make use of it in his reading of *Gen.* 3.⁴⁴³ The definition of an appearance (φαντασία) as an impression (τύπος) in the mind is well known from Stoicism.⁴⁴⁴ And as we have already seen, φαντασία is a recurrent term in Gregory's discussions on pleasure as the false good. However, despite the fact that above φαντασία appears in conjunction with a number of terms that refer to deception, for Philo, it is primarily a neutral term that simply describes how sensory knowledge is attained. In *Leg.* 1, he argues that 'the living creature excels the non-living in two respects, in the power of receiving impressions (φαντασία) and in the active impulse (ὄρμηξ) towards the object producing them. The impression (φαντασία) is produced by the drawing nigh of the external object, as it stamps the mind through sense-perception (τυποῦντος νοῦν δι' αἰσθήσεως).'⁴⁴⁵ Although one can argue that sensation itself is a tension-laden topic for Philo, for him φαντασία is a neutral term as the basis of all sensory knowledge, rather than merely the source of unfounded illusions. In this respect, his notion of φαντασία is comes closer to the Stoic usage than Gregory's.

⁴⁴² *Opif.* LIX.166; trans. Colson, 131–133.

⁴⁴³ See, for example, *Beat.* 8 (GNO VII/2, 167).

⁴⁴⁴ See LS 39A. On sensation as an imprint, see also e.g. Plato, *Theaetetus* 192a; Aristotle, *De anima* 424a.

⁴⁴⁵ *Leg.* 1, XI.30; trans. Colson, 167. See also *Leg.* 2, VII.23.

As a further difference, Philo says nothing about pleasure projecting a φαντασία of *goodness*, which lies at the core of Gregory's interpretation. Generally, very little has so far been said about the relationship between pleasure and the good. Philo seems to be more interested in the way in which pleasure gains access to the mind through sensation and disturbs the intended hierarchy between mind and the senses. However, the notion of the good does figure in Philo's interpretation, albeit in a much more limited role. In *De opificio mundi*, Philo describes the first man as 'truly beautiful and good' (καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός), with a perfectly beautiful body due to being made of pure and unmixed earth, living his life in unmixed happiness (ἐν ἀκράτῳ...εὐδαιμονίᾳ).⁴⁴⁶ (All this despite the fact that he elsewhere considers embodiment a product of the second creation removed from perfection.) We can recognise the Platonic juxtaposition between mixing and purity, which is evident also in Gregory's account.

Even more similar is the way in which Philo discusses the permitted trees of Paradise, which he identifies with the different virtues in the soul. In *De opificio mundi*, the tree of life is said to stand for 'reverence toward God, the greatest of the virtues, by means of which the soul attains to immortality.' In the same work, the tree of knowledge of good and evil is presented in a fairly neutral light as a symbol of the virtue of prudence (φρόνησις), which helps us discern opposites from each other.⁴⁴⁷ Also in *Legum allegoriae*, Philo makes a similar connection between Paradise and virtue, and, like Gregory, interprets the word 'Eden' as 'delight' (τρυφή).⁴⁴⁸ Here, the tree of life stands explicitly for 'goodness' (ἀγαθότητα), which Philo calls virtue in the most comprehensive sense.⁴⁴⁹ The rest of the trees symbolise all virtues, for,

[h]e moves the soul of the man to get benefit, not from a single tree or from a single virtue but from all the virtues: for eating is a figure of soul-nourishment: and the soul is nourished by the acquisition of things noble (τῶν καλῶν), and the practice of things rightful (τῶν κατορθωμάτων).⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁶ *Opif.* XLVII.136, L.143.

⁴⁴⁷ *Opif.* LIV.153–154; trans. Colson, 123,

⁴⁴⁸ *Leg.* 1, XIV.45.

⁴⁴⁹ *Leg.* 1, XVIII.59.

⁴⁵⁰ *Leg.* 1, XXXI.97–98; trans. Colson, 211.

This is very similar to Gregory's notion of prelapsarian eating. In Philo's view the trees of Paradise demonstrate that 'what is good is also most fair to be seen and enjoyed' (τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ὀφθῆναι κάλλιστόν ἐστι καὶ ἀπολαυσθῆναι).⁴⁵¹ Although for Philo this is mainly an illustration of virtue being both theoretical and practical, it is also a nod to the idea that the true good is pleasing both aesthetically and ethically. The tree of life as 'goodness' and the trees of Paradise as the fullness of 'goods' resemble Gregory's interpretation, although Philo does not explicitly discuss the relationship between the tree of life and the other trees by evoking the concept of the unity of virtues.

In *Legum allegoriae*, Philo's remarks concerning the tree of knowledge are limited to its location and highlight its ambivalent status. He argues that the forbidden tree, the symbol of wickedness (κακίας), is both in the Paradise and also out of it: it is there in its essence (οὐσία), but not in its power (δυνάμει). This is to say that wickedness is alien to virtue, but at the same time it has left its stamp on the mind, which is in virtue. Thus, it is in the mind alongside virtue, but cannot be part of the mind's partaking of virtue.⁴⁵² This rather convoluted argument highlights the incompatibility of vice and virtue and possibly alludes to the non-existence of evil (though Philo does not shy away from using the word 'essence'), which Gregory addresses in his discussion on the ambiguous location of the tree in *Cant.* 12. However, the other aspects of Gregory's interpretation are not present in Philo's account, and compared to *De hominis opificio*, the tree of knowledge plays a minor role in the extant version of Philo's allegory. In terms of pleasure and sin, he is clearly more interested in the serpent. While Philo attributes the fall to a failure to remember and do what is good (τὰ καλά), in the preserved text of *Legum allegoriae* he says little about what this means in relation to pleasure.⁴⁵³ In *Leg.* 2, we do find Philo enquiring whether passions exist because the earthly man needs them for his survival or because he judges them to be excellent and admirable. He notes: 'But the worthless man will use it as a perfect good, but the man of worth simply as a

⁴⁵¹ *Leg.* 1, XVII.57; trans. Colson, 183.

⁴⁵² *Leg.* 1, XVIII.60–61. See also XXXII.100.

⁴⁵³ *Leg.* 1, XVI.55.

necessity....'⁴⁵⁴ This highlights the idea that pleasure is merely a relative good that the wicked falsely pursue as the good itself.

We can thus conclude that Gregory's and Philo's accounts both turn on the idea of pleasure as the instigator of the fall and make use of the well-known philosophical idea according to which pleasure is a deceiver. It is likely that Gregory was aware of Philo's interpretation and knowingly produced a parallel account; after all, we know that he read Philo. Nonetheless, the details and foci of the two interpretations remain different. On Philo's reading, the biblical story of the fall is an allegory of the hierarchical interrelationship between mind, sensation, and pleasure, and he lays particular emphasis on gender and sexual pleasure. Gregory, on the other hand, presents a much more free-form philosophical investigation into the differences between true and false goods. For him, pleasure is a broad aesthetic and ethical problem, which culminates in Eve's act of judging the fruit as good, rather than in the sexual union between Eve and her husband. Thus, I find little support for Runia's view according to which '[i]t is man's sexuality that is the problem for Gregory, just as it was for Philo.'⁴⁵⁵ What seems to be a problem for Gregory is the general tendency of the sensible part of the human soul to seek enjoyment from the material world. This enjoyment is, however, not limited to or even primarily associated with sexual pleasure. Implicitly, sexuality is of course the root problem in the sense that earlier in the treatise Gregory explains the origin of pleasure as a necessary accompaniment of the postlapsarian human drive for self-preservation. But when Gregory comments on the events of the fall or the general pull towards sin, pleasure is always a broad aesthetic problem, which manifests itself as a multi-faceted drive towards the material creation and its ephemeral goods.

Thus, instead of adopting Philo's literary style, vocabulary, and focus, Gregory offers his own reading of the text. Runia's conclusion that the relationship between Philo and Gregory is one where the latter adopts insights from the former but then transforms them in his characteristic ways seems appropriate

⁴⁵⁴ *Leg. 2*, VI.18.

⁴⁵⁵ Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 255.

in light of my analysis.⁴⁵⁶ In the next chapter, I will show that in *De hominis opificio* Gregory leans first and foremost on a conceptual framework which he had established already at the time of writing his first extant work, *De virginitate*.

Conclusion

My analysis has showed that in *De hominis opificio* 19–20, Gregory interprets the biblical account of the fall as a sensory deception caused by pleasure. On his reading, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil produces a fruit whose sensually pleasing exterior conceals an evil core. For Gregory, the ambiguous character of the fruit as a bearer of good and evil refers to the mixed character of all false goods, which are always tainted by their opposites and ultimately dissolve into nothingness. By using the pleasurable appearance of the fruit, the evil projects an illusionary ‘appearance of good’ to the senses which are naturally inclined towards bodily pleasure. The fall comes about when Eve’s mind fails to probe the fruit’s true nature and simply accepts the appearance as good.

The idea that pleasure brings about the fall by appearing good enables Gregory to attribute the fall to ignorance rather than wilful wickedness. Echoing Socrates’ remarks, Gregory argues that people always desire what they think is good. Thus, sin does not come into existence due to deliberate evil acts, but because people content themselves to superficial appearances and fail to understand which objects are good in their nature. Instead of reflecting on the irreplaceability of the divine goods and the seriousness of breaking God’s commandment, Eve reaches for the fruit which offers instant gratification. This fateful choice signals that her understanding of goodness does not reach beyond what the senses can convey. By judging a sensible object to be good on account of pleasure, Eve turns away from God, the provider of true, intelligible goodness. She exchanges a greater good for a lesser one. For Gregory, sin is best

⁴⁵⁶ Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 261.

understood as an alienation from goodness, which results from human choice, not from God's being or action.

Gregory's interpretation is an early Christian voice in the ancient philosophical discourse on pleasure as the false good. His arguments and vocabulary owe especially to Platonist philosophy, in which the universe is divided into the realm of intelligible and immutable being and ephemeral sensible appearances, which are less true, less good, and less existent than the intelligible goods. Plato, too, highlights the deceptive quality of pleasure and its role in bringing about evil. The convergence of biblical and Platonist hamartiology has precedents for example in Philo and Clement, who similarly attribute the fall to pleasure. The former, in particular, offers ample material for comparison. While Gregory and Philo employ similar concepts, a brief comparison has demonstrated that Gregory makes a creative and transformative use of Philo to advance his own argument concerning pleasure as the false good. In Philo's allegorical reading, this aspect of pleasure remains rather marginal. His interest lies first and foremost on pleasure as the destroyer of prelapsarian hierarchy, both in the human soul and in the realm of sex and gender relations.

While the Greek text of *Gen. 3* does include sensory and affective vocabulary that can direct the exegete towards the interpretation we find in *De hominis opificio* 19–20, it is striking that despite the shared themes of sensation, beauty and enjoyment, very little of Gregory's terminology actually appears in the biblical text itself. In the next chapter, I will argue that Gregory's reading of *De hominis opificio* is based on a much broader ethical discourse on pleasure as the false good.

4. Pleasure as the False Good in the Postlapsarian Reality

The goals pursued by humans for the sake of bodily enjoyment (τῆς σωματικῆς ἀπολαύσεως ἕνεκεν) are pursuits of sinners and distraction of a soul dragged down from the things above to the things below... The one who judges (κρίνων) this as good (τὸ ἀγαθόν) in the face of God does not know that he is fixing the good in what is futile.⁴⁵⁷

The fallen human being finds herself in a moral situation that is radically different from that of Adam and Eve. While Eve only *mistakenly* thought she lacked something good, the fallen soul has been separated from the fullness of good and struggles with the presence of sin. It is truly 'poor in the beautiful', and this poverty leads it to seek what it lacks.⁴⁵⁸ For Gregory, this means that the postlapsarian human is constantly facing a choice between the good and the evil; at all times, two different destinations compete for her desire. Thus, the challenge does not lie merely in adhering to the known good, as it did for Adam and Eve, but in rediscovering and reattaining the good, which has been lost in the fall. This is a complicated process. Due to the presence of sin, the fallen soul faces a number of challenges that actively hinder it from remembering and reaching its intended goal. However, even though the functioning of the human faculties has been compromised in the fall, we can still distinguish the basic pattern of cognition in which the mind seeks to judge what the senses convey, and desire is deployed to remedy whatever lack the mind identifies.

In this chapter, I will turn to the problem of pleasure in the postlapsarian existence. To set the scene, I will examine the disordered state in which the fallen human being finds herself from birth and the role of pleasure as an obstacle on the path of virtue. I will draw attention to the way in which Gregory argues that the order of human development favours a mistaken use of sensation as the criterion for determining the good: the drive for pleasure becomes deeply ingrained in our souls from the moment we are born.

⁴⁵⁷ *Eccl.* 5.8 (SC 416, 296); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 98.

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. *An. et res.* (PG 46, 92C).

Then, I will turn to *De virginitate* in order to show that the vocabulary and concepts found in *De hominis opificio* 19–20 arise from a broader discussion on pleasure as the false good, which Gregory develops at the very beginning of his literary career. I will take this early work as my starting point to analyse how Gregory makes use of the idea in a general ascetical context, outside the immediate concerns of *Genesis* 3. We shall see that the same notions of false goodness, deception, and mixing are at the heart of Gregory's apology of virginity. In my analysis of *De virginitate*, I will also show that Gregory upholds the notion of the self-sufficiency of virtue and the unimportance of external goods in the attainment of human happiness. This ideal was made famous by the Stoics who used it against both Aristotelian and Epicurean conceptions of happiness. However, it was also adopted by numerous eclectic thinkers, such as Plutarch, Philo and Clement, and Gregory follows this trajectory. We shall see that the problem of pleasure as a false good is highly relevant for the notion of the self-sufficiency of virtue, for it is pleasure that attaches people to a number of trivial externalities.

Finally, with *De virginitate* as my starting point, I will examine Gregory's understanding of the relationship between pleasure and sensation, arguing that the main problem with pleasure lies in the way in which it obscures the non-final character of the sensible realm. Gregory's interpretation of the fall has already brought to relief the close and problematic connection between pleasure and sensation. Now, I will go on to show that the problem does not lie in the sensible world itself but in the way in which ignorant human beings turn the offerings of the sensible world into the *telos* of their lives, that is, the final goal towards which all their thoughts, emotions, and actions are directed. Thus, they remain largely unaware of the intelligible reality, which permeates all sensible things but is not accessible to mere sense perception. Due to the mixed, unstable, and penultimate character of the sensible realm, sensation cannot be its own judge. Instead, Gregory emphasises the need to use the mind as the κριτήριον in light of which sensible phenomena are evaluated; what we know of the intelligible should guide our judgment of the sensible.

Through my analysis I hope to show that in the postlapsarian world pleasure plays a major disruptive role: it attaches people to the fleeting sensible phenomena, and by offering a false sense of satisfaction, it diverts human souls further and further away from intellectual enquiry and the true *telos* of the Christian life. The pursuit of bodily pleasure as the good hinders the development of our rational abilities and locks people in the sensible realm, which alone cannot convey the intelligible truths of salvation. Thus, pleasure seeking cannot be understood only as one of our many passionate inclinations, but it comes to denote a fundamentally mistaken direction of life, the life of sin and the opposite of the good Christian life.

Homily 8 on Ecclesiastes: Gregory's Take on the 'Cradle Argument'?

Gregory's *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* offers a rich commentary on the instability of the sensible world and the consequent futility of worldly attachments. It is no surprise that in this series of homilies pleasure is repeatedly cited as the passion that leads to a sinful attachment to ephemeral sensible objects. In the next chapter, I will come back to the topic of transiency which is Gregory's overarching concern in the whole work. For now, I want to draw attention to a single passage that comes about in *Homily 8*, the final homily of the collection, which is one of Gregory's most complete treatments of the problem of pleasure and the good.⁴⁵⁹ As I will show, the homily contains many of the concepts that we can recognise from Gregory's interpretation of the fall: the juxtaposition of both the good and virtue with pleasure, a division between how things appear and what they are by nature, and an emphasis on the activity of the mind and the necessity of intellectual training. However, the homily interests me chiefly because here Gregory discusses the state in which infants are born into the postlapsarian world and offers an explanation for our seemingly intrinsic pull towards pleasure.⁴⁶⁰ We should note that an interest in infant behaviour was

⁴⁵⁹ Here, too, Gregory moves between *κάλον* and *ἀγαθόν* without drawing attention to any potential differences.

⁴⁶⁰ On the whole, Gregory's view of the moral state of infants is ambivalent: On the one hand, he argues that the infant exists in a natural and neutral state untouched by both sin and virtue and unaware of the pleasures of the world that tempt adults everywhere. On the other, he claims

widespread in ancient ethics and used both to justify and criticise conceptions of the final good. It culminated in the so-called Epicurean ‘cradle argument’ and its Stoic critique. I will go on to comment on Gregory’s relationship to this well-known problem.

In order to identify the possible points of contact between Gregory and the ancient debate on infant behaviour and the final human good, it is necessary to recapitulate first the two main positions: Epicurus had called pleasure good on the basis that humans had a ‘natural affinity’ (διὰ τὸ φύσιν ἔχειν οἰκείαν) to it.⁴⁶¹ The word οἰκεῖος is difficult to translate, but it denotes a natural affinity and belonging, and has been rendered, for example, as that which is ‘appropriate’, ‘familiar’, and ‘fitting’. Later Epicurean commentators added that pleasure was the first appropriate thing, the πρῶτον οἰκεῖον, that is, the first thing to which human infants were naturally attracted. On the Epicurean view, this was an indication of the natural primacy of pleasure in the hierarchy of goods.⁴⁶² Of early Christian writers, Clement of Alexandria seems to be well aware of the Epicurean position.⁴⁶³

The Epicurean argument was dismissed by the Stoics, who maintained that an infant should not be used as an example of the final good. For them, the highest human good was not that which appeared first, but that which reflected the distinctive nature of humans as rational beings: virtue. Virtue was neither given at birth nor did it unfold spontaneously, but required conscious intellectual training to be adopted and internalised. Even if the Stoics, too, took interest in

that every person born into the world carries within himself the effects of the fall passed on through procreation and gradually actualised as his life unfolds. See *Infant*. (GNO III/2, 84). Cf. *Beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2, 145).

⁴⁶¹ *Men.* 129.

⁴⁶² On the Epicurean cradle argument, see, for example, Torquatus’s speech in Cicero’s *De finibus* 1.29–30 (trans. Rackham, LCL 40, 33): ‘This [the chief good] Epicurus finds in pleasure... This he sets out to prove as follows: Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This it does as long as it remains unperturbed, at the prompting of Nature’s own unbiased and honest verdict.’ See also DL 10.137, and Cicero’s criticism of the Epicurean argument in *Fin.* 2.32. A scholarly account on the topic can be found in Jacques Brunschwig, ‘The Cradle Argument in Epicureanism and Stoicism’, in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, ed. Malcolm Schofield and Gisela Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 113–44.

⁴⁶³ See, *Strom.* 2.21.128.1; trans. Ferguson, 241: ‘Epicurus and the Cyrenaics say that pleasure is the primary thing appropriate to us’ (τὸ πρῶτον οἰκεῖον φασιν ἡδονὴν εἶναι).

the order of human development, they argued that the infant's *πρῶτον οἰκεῖον* was not pleasure but self-preservation.⁴⁶⁴ A natural concern for one's physical well-being was understood as the first step in the process of *οἰκειώσις* in which the individual gained an increasing understanding and command of the things that were 'appropriate'.⁴⁶⁵ Mere self-preservation would eventually give way to more mature notions of *οἰκεῖος*, reaching its pinnacle in the awareness of human nature as a rational being in a universal community of other rational beings.

With this background in mind, let us see what Gregory has to say about infant behaviour in *Homily 8 on Ecclesiastes*. The text begins as a commentary on *Eccl.* 3:8, which proclaims that there is a 'moment for loving and a moment for hating (*καιρὸς τοῦ φιλεῖν καὶ καιρὸς τοῦ μισῆσαι*).'⁴⁶⁶ Around this verse Gregory builds a long discussion on the proper and timely use of emotions and, ultimately, of all created things. His interpretation seems natural in light of the broader eudaimonistic teaching on emotions where timeliness and the right object are often emphasised.⁴⁶⁶ Gregory proceeds by offering a definition of both love and hate, and then investigating 'what is by nature lovable and what is hateful.' He argues that love is produced by 'the inner disposition towards what is desired, functioning through pleasure and passionate feeling (*ἡ ἐνδιάθετος περὶ τὸ καταθύμιον σχέσις δι' ἡδονῆς καὶ προσπαθείας ἐνεργουμένη*),' whereas hate is an 'aversion from what is unpleasant, and turning away from what is painful (*ἡ πρὸς τὸ ἀηδὲς ἀλλοτριώσις καὶ ἡ τοῦ λυποῦντος ἀποστροφή*).'⁴⁶⁷ In his

⁴⁶⁴ See DL 7.85–6, and generally LS 57.

⁴⁶⁵ For a critical scholarly account of *οἰκειώσις*, see Gisela Striker, 'The Role of *Oikeiōsis* in Stoic Ethics', in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 281–97. Striker, like many others, comments on the difficulty of translating the term. She suggests that it means a 'recognition and appreciation of something as belonging to one', but prefers using the original Greek term. (*Ibid.*, 281.)

⁴⁶⁶ Consider, for example, Aristotle's remark in *NE* 1106b18–23 (trans. Barnes & Kenny, 245): 'For instance, both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them when you should, with reference to what you should, towards the people you should, with the end you should have, and how you should – this is what is both midway and best, and this is characteristic of virtue.' The themes of the primacy of pleasure and pain in infancy and the importance of rightly directed love and hate in the formation of virtue also resemble the discussion on education in Plato's *Laws* 2.653a–c.

⁴⁶⁷ Gregory's definition of love and hatred also resembles Aspasius' account in *In ethica Nichomachea commentaria* (46.19–26; trans. Konstan, 46–47): 'In addition to these, they customarily number as emotions (*πάθη*) love and hate (*τὴν φιλίαν καὶ τὸ μῖσος*)... Loving is

customary fashion, Gregory asserts that both emotions can be used profitably or unprofitably. Depending on their object, life is lived for either good or ill. Whereas the object of love (now, ἡ ἀγάπη) becomes blended (κατακιρνᾶται, συγκραθείμεν) with the soul and results in familiarity (οἰκειούμεθα), hate brings about separation (ἀλλοτριούμεθα). This is true regardless of whether the object is good or bad – akin to Gregory’s remarks on desire in *De hominis opificio*.⁴⁶⁸ The challenge, then, lies in discovering what is by nature lovable and what is hateful, which, of course, correlates with that which is by nature good (τῆ φύσει τῶν ἀγαθῶν) and that which is evil. But, just like in *De hominis opificio*, Gregory thinks correct discernment is difficult:

If only human nature were trained (ἐπαιδεύετο) in this above all things – I mean discrimination between what is good and what is not (τὴν τοῦ καλοῦ λέγω καὶ μὴ τοιούτου διάκρισιν⁴⁶⁹)! The passions would make no headway throughout our lives, if from the outset we recognised the good (τὸ καλὸν ἐγνωρίζομεν). But as it is, making irrational sensation (ἄλογον αἴσθησιν) our criterion of the good (τοῦ καλοῦ κριτήριον) from the beginning, we grow up habituated (συντρεφόμεθα) to our original judgment of reality (τῶν ὄντων κρίσει), and because of it we find it hard to tear ourselves from things judged good by sensation (τῆ αἰσθήσει νομισθέντων εἶναι καλῶν), since we have reinforced in ourselves the attitude towards them, to which we have become habituated.

A thing seems beautiful (καλὸν φαίνεται) to human beings if it gives pleasure (ἡδονήν) to the eyes by its pretty colour (διὰ τῆς εὐχροίας), whether it is made of a lifeless material or is among the living wonders.⁴⁷⁰

referred to pleasure (εἰς τὴν ἡδονήν), for it is a kind of individual attraction (οἰκείωσις) to the thing loved. On the contrary, in hating there is an alienation (ἀλλοτρίωσις), and pain (λύπη) upon seeing and hearing the hated thing, or, in general, upon encountering the hated thing in any way at all.’ The way in which Aspasius couples love/pleasure and hate/pain and employs the terms οἰκείωσις and ἀλλοτρίωσις is similar to Gregory. It is not clear who Aspasius is citing as ‘they’, or if he is simply referring to a widespread definition. The excerpt comes from a passage in which he explains how schools and philosophers other than Aristotle define emotions. He has previously discussed Stoics and Plato, but it seems unlikely he is now returning to Stoic thought specifically, for he has just mentioned they omitted anger from their list of generic emotions, and, after the passage I have cited, mentions anger and gratitude as being ‘also numbered among emotions.’

⁴⁶⁸ *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 416, 390–392); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 129.

⁴⁶⁹ Vinel (SC 416, 393, note 3) notes the connection to *Hom. op.* 20, where, as we have seen, Gregory makes a distinction between γνῶσις and διάκρισις, the latter denoting the ability to distinguish the good from the evil.

⁴⁷⁰ *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 416, 392–394); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 129–130.

After sight, Gregory lists things that are beautiful (καλόν) to other senses, expressing a particularly low opinion on touch, through which ‘unbridled pleasure (ἡ ἀκόλαστος ἡδονή) naturally prevails in the choice of the good (έν τῇ τοῦ καλοῦ ψήφῳ).’⁴⁷¹ The vocabulary is familiar from our discussion of the fall in the previous chapter, but now Gregory offers a further explanation as to why we tend to fail in our discernment of the good: our habituation to pleasure as the good begins already in infancy.

Since therefore the senses are engendered in us as soon as we are born, we become habituated (συντρεφόμεθα) to them from the beginning of our life, and the attachment (πρὸς τὴν ἄλογον ζωὴν ἢ οἰκείωσις) to the irrational life is strong in our sensual power (for all this kind of thing is to be seen also in irrational creatures), and the mind is hampered in its proper activity, being allowed no scope by its infant status, but is somehow cramped by the dominance of less rational sensation (τῇ ἐπικρατήσῃ τῆς ἀλογωτέρας αἰσθήσεως) – for these reasons the haphazard and mistaken use of the loving disposition (τῆς ἀγαπητικῆς διαθέσεως) becomes the source and the pretext for the life of evil (ἀρχὴ καὶ ὑπόθεσις τοῦ κατὰ κακίαν γίνεται βίου).⁴⁷²

The interest in infant behaviour does not have to entail that Gregory is commenting directly on the Epicurean cradle argument. Although he agrees that the infant is innately attracted to pleasure, he implicitly rejects the Epicurean idea that this is an indication of the highest human good. In fact, the whole passage on love and hate in *Eccl.* 8 seems to echo a much earlier discussion on education in Plato’s *Laws*, where the Athenian argues:

I maintain that the earliest sensations that the child feels in infancy are pleasure and pain (ἡδονὴν καὶ λύπην), and this is the route by which virtue and vice first enter the soul... I call ‘education’ the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and affection (ἡδονὴ δὴ καὶ φιλία), pain and hatred (λύπη καὶ μῖσος), that well up in his soul are channelled in the right courses before he can understand the reason why... But there is one element you could isolate in any account you give [on virtue], and this is the correct formation of our feelings of pleasure and pain, which makes us hate what we ought to hate (μισεῖν μὲν ἃ χρὴ μισεῖν) from first to last, and love what we ought to love (στέργειν δὲ ἃ χρὴ στέργειν).⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 416, 394); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 130.

⁴⁷² *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 416, 394–396); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 130.

⁴⁷³ *Leg.* 2.653a–c; trans. Saunders, *Complete Works*, 1344.

The notion of an innate drive to pleasure occurs also in later Platonist thinkers, such as Philo of Alexandria, who argues that since an infant is a product of the pleasure of reproduction, it, too, has an immediate attachment to pleasure and feels distress at pain. However, though Philo recognises the presence of this innate drive, he appears critical of people who praise pleasure and ‘tell us that every living creature hastens after pleasure as its most necessary and essential end, and man above all.’⁴⁷⁴ In other words, the fact that an infant desires pleasure is not a sufficient reason to assume it is the highest good. This is exactly the view that Gregory adopts in *De virginitate*.

For Gregory, the problem with the infant’s early impulse for pleasure lies in the way in which, due to this early start, all humans become gradually ‘habituated’ (συντρεφόμεθα) to their sense-based judgments to the extent that the behaviour becomes engrained and difficult to avoid. The focus on habituation in the formation of a moral disposition – here, a negative one – calls to mind Aristotle, and indeed in *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle makes a very similar observation. Alluding to Plato’s comment in *Laws*, he comments on the importance of learning to delight in and be pained by the right things, saying: ‘[Pleasure] has grown up in us all from our infancy: this is why it is difficult to rub off this phenomenon, engrained (συντέθραπται) as it is in our life.’⁴⁷⁵ We should note that Gregory employs the very same verb (συντρέφω) to discuss the way in which infants are habituated to the sensual life from the very beginning. His choice of word is particularly striking since there does not seem to be any significant trajectory of transmission relaying Aristotle’s words in their original form. A somewhat similar remark can be found in Origen’s *De pascha* where a criticism is levelled at the Hebrews for having grown up ‘nursed by the earth’, habituated (συντραφέντες) to their bodies and the pleasurable transient world.⁴⁷⁶ However, Origen’s account occurs in a much more limited context and is hardly intended as a general comment on human development. Thus, it is possible that Gregory is building either directly on Aristotle or some

⁴⁷⁴ *Opif.* LVII.162; trans. Colson, 129.

⁴⁷⁵ *NE* 1105a (trans. Barnes & Kenny, 241).

⁴⁷⁶ *De pascha* (Witte, 142).

later unknown source which had preserved Aristotle's account of infants' habituation to pleasure.

However, even if the interest in infant behaviour has clear parallels in texts that predate the Epicurean 'cradle argument' and the Stoic response, I think it is plausible that the account in *Eccl.* 8 also echoes this later development. We should note especially that, in addition to the verb συντρέφω, Gregory employs the term οἰκείωσις to refer to the process of innate attraction and habituation.⁴⁷⁷ While the word can allude to any attachment or familiarity completely outside the Stoic/Epicurean debate on the πρῶτον οἰκεῖον, it seems unlikely that Gregory would coincidentally use it with reference to human development and our attraction to pleasure, which is its distinctive context in this well-known ancient debate. Such a coincidence seems particularly improbable if we consider that Gregory seems generally aware of the Stoic notion of οἰκείωσις, as Ilaria Ramelli has demonstrated.⁴⁷⁸

In *Eccl.* 8, Gregory proceeds to anchor his argument in his twofold anthropology, which he uses to explain the conflicting interests of mind and sense. Just as human nature is double, divided into the intelligible and the sensible, human life, too, takes a double form: there is the physical life of the sensing part and the mental and non-physical life of the mind. The notion of a good life is divided accordingly: it is mental for the mental part (νοητὸν μὲν τῷ νοητῷ), and 'whatever sense desires' (ἡ αἴσθησις βούλεται) for the sensual and bodily part (τῷ δὲ αἰσθητῷ τε καὶ σωματικῷ μέρει).⁴⁷⁹ The latter is, of course, synonymous with pleasure. Ideally the interests of the mind rule over those of sensation, but the right relationship is complicated by the fact that sensation has a clear advantage in establishing its power in human beings:

Thus, since sense is part of our nature right from the birth, but the mind waits for a proper age to be reached, to be able to reveal itself gradually in the person, the mind,

⁴⁷⁷ See the citation on p. 156.

⁴⁷⁸ Ilaria Ramelli, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Christianized Form of the Stoic *Oikeiōsis*', in *Three Centuries of Greek Culture under the Roman Empire: Homo Romanus Graeca Oratio*, ed. Francesca Mestre and Pilar Gómez (Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, 2014), 357–80.

⁴⁷⁹ *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 416, 396); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 130.

which develops slowly, is for this reason dominated by the sense, which is complete, and by compulsion grows habituated to the perpetual superiority, so that it submits to sense, judging good or bad according to whatever sense selects or rejects (καλὸν ἢ φαῦλον κρίνων ὅπερ ἂν ἢ προέλῃται ἢ ἀποβάλλῃ ἢ αἴσθησις).⁴⁸⁰

Thus, as Gregory goes on to explain, the discernment of the true good (τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἀγαθοῦ κατανόησις) is hard to achieve because we find ourselves 'prejudiced by sensual criteria' (αἰσθητικοῖς κριτηρίοις) and define the good 'as what is enjoyable and pleasant (ἐν τῷ εὐφραίνοντί τε καὶ ἡδοντι τὸ καλὸν ὀριζόμενοι).' Pleasure, then, blocks the mind's view to virtue like a mist that clouds the eye of the soul:

When sense looks towards pleasure (αἴσθησις πρὸς τὴν ἡδονὴν βλέπει), but the mind is prevented by pleasure from looking towards virtue (νοῦς διὰ τῆς ἡδονῆς πρὸς τὴν ἀρετὴν ὁρᾶν ἐμποδίζεται), that is the beginning of evil (ἡ τῆς κακίας ἀρχή), because when the mind is dominated by sense it too favours the irrational judgment of what is good (τὴν ἄλογον περὶ τοῦ καλοῦ κρίσιν), and if the eye says that goodness lies in attractive appearances (ἐν τῇ εὐχροίᾳ τοῦ φαινομένου τὸ καλὸν εἶναι), the understanding (διάνοια) goes with it; and in the other cases likewise what pleases the sense (τὸ εὐφραῖνον τὴν αἴσθησιν) wins the verdict as good (τὴν τοῦ καλοῦ ψῆφον).⁴⁸¹

It is impossible to miss the connections to *De opificio hominis*, as Gregory calls the rule of sense and the resulting irrational judgment on the good the 'beginning of evil.' Also the words ἔυχροια (which Gregory uses in *De hominis opificio* to refer to the apparent beauty of the forbidden fruit) and τὸ φαινόμενον belong among the standard vocabulary that Gregory uses to discuss the problem of pleasure as the apparent good.

The picture that emerges of Gregory's view of early habituation and the final good may be related to the originally Stoic notion of οἰκείωσις but it is also different from the Stoic position. First of all, Gregory argues that the infant does, in fact, have an innate attachment to pleasure, rather than to mere self-preservation as the Stoics had argued. However, for Gregory, this is not the full

⁴⁸⁰ *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 416, 396); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 130. The same argument appears in *Mort.* (GNO IX, 48).

⁴⁸¹ *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 416, 398); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 131.

account of what is οἰκεῖος for humans but only indicates the natural affinity of the sensible soul, which rules in pre-rational children. Since the true human nature, that which distinguishes us from animals, is rational, that which is truly οἰκεῖος for human beings is a life of virtue and the likeness of God. In fact, throughout Gregory's corpus, this positive usage is more common when the terms οἰκεῖος and οἰκεῖωσις are employed.⁴⁸² The idea that the life of virtue is the highest notion of οἰκεῖωσις is, of course, shared by Gregory and the Stoics alike. But while the monistic Stoic understanding of human beings entails a more linear development from the good of the body towards the good of the mind, Gregory's two-tier anthropology sets the two goods against each other. For him the 'habituation' to pleasure as the first known good is not the first step in a natural progression, but actively hinders the acquisition of a different, intellectual understanding of the good as virtue even as the person grows into adulthood. In other words, since the good of the sensual part and the good of the intellectual part are different, there is also a difference – and a potential conflict – between what is naturally akin to each.⁴⁸³

Gregory concludes the discussion on early habituation by arguing that human beings would have avoided the submission to sensation if only 'it had been possible for the true discernment of the good (τὴν ἀληθῆ περι τοῦ καλοῦ κρίσιν) to be present in us from the beginning, with the mind assessing goodness (τὸ ἀγαθόν) by itself.' While Gregory elsewhere makes the point that goodness predates evil and is thus natural and familiar to human beings, in the postlapsarian reality this original bond has been severed. What remains after

⁴⁸² On Gregory's positive application of the Stoic notion of οἰκεῖωσις, and its spiritual and socio-ethical implications, see Ramelli, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Christianized Form of the Stoic Oikeiōsis'.

⁴⁸³ A somewhat similar (though tripartite, instead of bipartite) fusion between the Stoic notion of οἰκεῖωσις and the Platonic divided soul occurs in Posidonius who also argues that different parts of the human soul have different and parallel notions of οἰκεῖος, which persist through the course of life. As Price explains: 'Posidonius agrees that the affective soul has its own proper (*oikeios*) objects of desire: one of its powers aims at pleasure, the other at mastery and victory; the proper desirables of the animal-like soul are pleasure and mastery over one's neighbour, but of the rational and divine soul wisdom and all that is good and fine. Using the Platonic language of 'parts' but the Stoic language of 'orientation' [sic] (*oikeiōsis*), Galen puts this as follows: "There are these three things towards which we feel a natural orientation, corresponding to each form of the soul's parts: pleasure through the appetitive form, victory through the spirited form, and the fine through the rational form"...' [I have omitted Price's references to primary sources, which can be found in LS 65, M1, N, and P2. See, A. W. Price, *Mental Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1995), 155; Striker, 'The Role of Oikeiōsis in Stoic Ethics', 292.

the fall is our natural inclination towards the good, but due to our sensually dominated existence we will repeat Eve's mistake and seek it in the wrong place. After setting the scene with this brief account of the state in which humans are born into the fallen world, I will turn to *De virginitate* to show how Gregory lays down the problem of pleasure as the false good at the very beginning of his career.

Pleasure and the καλόν in *De virginitate*

'The aim of this discourse is to create in the reader a desire for a life of virtue (ἐπιθυμίαν τῆς κατ'ἀρετὴν ζωῆς),' Gregory opens his early work *De virginitate*.⁴⁸⁴ It is, then, no surprise that the right direction of both desire (ἐπιθυμία) and love (ἔρωσ) emerges as the key topic of the work in which Gregory tries to persuade his reader that a life of virginity is the most secure path towards virtue. In the treatise, Gregory argues that a single-minded focus on the spiritual goods spares the monastic from the many distractions of marriage and ensures that both knowing and desiring are directed exclusively towards that which is truly good (καλόν). While the focus on ἐπιθυμία, ἔρωσ, and sexual ethics makes pleasure an immediately relevant concern, in *De virginitate* Gregory presents a broad definition of virginity, which entails an inner control of all passions and a formation in virtue. Thus, Gregory's remarks on ἡδονή extend beyond the realm of sexual discipline.

In *De virginitate*, ἡδονή is presented as the most pernicious of passions, the opposite of virtue, and the enemy of the good. Its primacy as a passion is both psychological and historical: In the human soul, it is the fundamental passion which all other passions follow. However, Gregory also alludes to its historical priority in Chapter 12, where he argues that pleasure brought about by deception (δι' ἀπάτης) became the beginning of the fall.⁴⁸⁵ This is what we have read in *De hominis opificio*, but in *De virginitate* Gregory does not expound on the topic in the context of *Gen. 3*. However, combined with the extensive

⁴⁸⁴ *Virg.* Prol. 1 (SC 119, 246); trans. Callahan, 6.

⁴⁸⁵ *Virg.* 12.4 (SC 119, 418–420).

discussion on pleasure, which includes similar terms and concepts as *De hominis opificio*, the remark gives us a good reason to suppose that the interpretation of the fall we find in the latter work was already on Gregory's mind when he was writing *De virginitate*.

The Mutual Exclusivity of Pleasure and God

In *De virginitate*, the stark opposition between pleasure and the καλόν is evidenced by Gregory's repeated insistence that a desire for the good and desire for pleasure are mutually exclusive. As Gregory argues, our desiring (ἐπιθυμητικόν) is not by nature such that it could simultaneously serve bodily pleasures (σωματικάς ὑπηρετεῖν ἡδοναῖς) and pursue the spiritual marriage; 'no one can serve two masters,' he remarks in allusion to *Matt. 6:24*.⁴⁸⁶ Gregory conceptualises the mutual exclusivity with a number of physical analogies: it is impossible to use one's hands for two different tasks at once, look into two different directions at the same time, speak two different languages simultaneously, or listen to two different types of discourse.⁴⁸⁷ For him, the life of pleasure and spiritual marriage are two different aims with two different sets of practices. The soul cannot lift its gaze upwards if it is nailed (προσηλωθεῖσα) to the flesh by pleasure and applies its desire to passions.⁴⁸⁸

The notion of pleasure as a 'nail' (ἦλος) comes from *Phaedo*, where it occurs in a discussion that bears many similarities to our present topic in *De virginitate*. In *Phaedo*, Socrates discusses the mutual exclusivity between philosophy and sensual pleasure and argues that the 'greatest and most extreme evil' comes about through pleasure that nails the soul to the body.⁴⁸⁹ Therefore, the lover of knowledge must detach his desires from the deceptive visible reality

⁴⁸⁶ *Virg.* 20.3 (SC 119, 496). *Matt.* 6:24 reads: 'No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'

⁴⁸⁷ *Virg.* 20.2 (SC 119, 494).

⁴⁸⁸ *Virg.* 5 (SC 119, 332–334). See also *An. et res.* (PG 46, 97B).

⁴⁸⁹ *Phaedo* 83c–d. The idea of mutual exclusivity is preserved in later Platonism. Consider, for example, Maximus of Tyre who argues: 'Wisdom and Pleasure have nothing at all in common (οὐδὲν σοφία καὶ ἡδονῆ κοινόν). The lover of Pleasure and the lover of Wisdom are different people (ἄλλος μὲν ὁ φιλήδονος, ἄλλος δὲ ὁ φιλόσοφος)...' (*Diss.* 33.2; trans. Trapp, 262).

apprehended by the senses and focus on the things that are invisible and apprehended by the mind. We shall see that the distinction between what is visible to the senses and what is visible to the mind appears frequently in Gregory's criticisms of pleasure as the good, although for him the dividing line is not one between the body and the soul, but between the sensible and the intelligible part of the soul. Furthermore, both in *Phaedo* and in *De virginitate*, the separation from the sensible world is a preparation for and an anticipation of the afterlife (which the two authors understandably conceptualise in clearly different terms).⁴⁹⁰

It is noteworthy that in *De virginitate* the choice does not lie only between two opposing directions of desire, but also between different types of fulfilment that await at each end. In *De virginitate* Gregory does not shy away from calling the spiritual fulfilment ἡδονή: to be able to lift its eyes towards the 'divine and blessed pleasure' (τὴν θεϊὰν τε καὶ μακαρίαν ἡδονήν), the soul must not turn towards earthly things and participate in pleasures which are permissible in the common life (κατὰ τὴν τοῦ κοινοῦ βίου συγχώρησιν ἡδονῶν).⁴⁹¹ As Gregory states, the 'power of love' (ἔρωτικὴν δύναμιν) must be turned from the bodily things (ἀπὸ τῶν σωματικῶν) towards an intellectual and immaterial contemplation of the Beautiful (ἐπὶ τὴν νοητὴν τε καὶ ἄϋλον τοῦ καλοῦ θεωρίαν).⁴⁹²

The mutual exclusivity of virtue and pleasure does not necessarily entail that also virtue and marriage are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, Gregory approves of marriage as long as desire is well regulated since the act of regulation counts as a virtuous deed in itself, a point to which I will return in the next part of the thesis.⁴⁹³ However, as Gregory points out,

⁴⁹⁰ See the whole discussion in *Phaedo* 82e–84b.

⁴⁹¹ *Virg.* 5 (SC 119, 336). Later in the same chapter (SC 119, 338), Gregory uses a similar phrase 'divine and unmixed pleasure' (τῆς θεϊας τε καὶ ἀκηράτου ... ἡδονῆς). The word ἀκήρατος can be translated both as 'unmixed' and 'undefiled.' Both fit well within Gregory's notion of the true good and the enjoyment it offers. I will analyse the topic further in Chapter 7.

⁴⁹² *Virg.* 5 (SC 119, 336).

⁴⁹³ Clement, for example, argues for self-discipline *within* marriage. See, e.g., *Strom.* 3.6.46.4–5.

there is no small danger that [a weak person], misled by his experience of pleasure (έν τῇ πείρᾳ τῆς ἡδονῆς), may come to think that there is no other good (μηδέν ἕτερον ἀγαθόν) than that achieved through the flesh and, turning his mind completely from the desire for the incorporeal goods (ἀπό τῆς τῶν ἀσωμάτων ἀγαθῶν ἐπιθυμίας), he may become wholly flesh, hunting for the pleasure (ἡδὺ) in these things in every way, so that he becomes a lover of pleasure rather than a lover of God (φιλήδονον αὐτὸν μᾶλλον εἶναι ἢ φιλόθεον) [2 *Tim.* 3:4].⁴⁹⁴

The danger is, then, that if people do not have a proper control of desires and a solid understanding of the good, any exposure to the pleasures of marriage will convince them that no greater good exists beyond pleasure of the flesh. We should keep in mind that although Gregory does not appear particularly focussed on sexuality in his rebuttals of pleasure, in the first part of this thesis we saw him argue that pleasure was given as an incentive to procreate. In its original function, pleasure does not have to imply the presence of sin. However, even if pleasure originally serves as a natural incentive to ensure the continuation of the human race, fallen humans who are inclined towards bodily enjoyment will struggle to keep it within its appropriate limits. Only a person with sufficient knowledge of the true good is able to treat marriage as an institution for procreation instead of an instrument of pleasure. He will make appropriate use of marriage but understand that its pleasures pale in comparison to the true good. Most people, however, lack such insight and will be inclined to pursue pleasure as the good. This is why marriage is often a temptation that turns the spouses into ‘lovers of pleasure’ rather than ‘lovers of God.’

However, even if the institution of marriage is used properly, it will lead to a scattering of desire. This is why Gregory ranks marriage only as the second choice after virginity which enables a single-minded focus on virtue. If the marital union is misused and submitted to the goal of pleasure, the scattering of one’s desire becomes even more problematic. In *De virginitate*, Gregory

⁴⁹⁴ *Virg.* 8 (SC 119, 362); trans. Callahan, 34. While the influence of 2 *Tim.* 3:4 is obvious, similar juxtapositions can be found also in non-Christian sources. See my footnote 489 where Maximus of Tyre makes a distinction between ‘a lover of pleasure’ (φιλήδονος) and ‘a lover of wisdom’ (φιλόσοφος), i.e. a philosopher.

compares desire to water that rises up when it is confined to one small space, but disperses and loses its force when it is directed into a number of small streams. Whereas virtue leads to unity, pleasure tends to fragmentation:

It seems to me that this is also true with the human mind (ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἀνθρώπινος); it flows in all directions, it scatters itself by running towards what is pleasing to the senses (πρὸς τὸ ἀρέσκον ἀεὶ τοῖς αἰσθητηρίοις), and has no worthwhile force for its journey to the really good (τὸ ὄντως ἀγαθόν). But if it were called in from all sides, collected unto itself, brought together, it would move with its natural energy and nothing would prevent it from being borne upwards and fastening itself upon the truth of reality (τῆς ἀληθείας τῶν ὄντων).⁴⁹⁵

Like water, the human soul must rise up towards the heavens rather than busy itself with a number of earthly occupations. Gregory recommends the use of self-constraint (ἐγκρατεία) as the ‘pipe’ that forces desire to rise upwards.⁴⁹⁶ We should read Gregory’s requirement of single-mindedness against his notion of the unity of goods. A person whose faculties are harmoniously aligned towards the one actual Good imitates the unity of her divine goal in her very being. Since the true goods are limited by their opposites, no vice should be allowed to diminish the virtue in the soul of a person who strives for the good. Instead, knowledge, desire, and enjoyment must all be focussed on the virtues, which in their unity point towards the indivisible being of God. This inner simplicity, untainted by any multiplicity of intent, is essentially what Gregory calls ‘purity’, which he biblically considers the precondition of seeing the divine.⁴⁹⁷

The Mixed Pleasures of Marriage

De virginitate itself is a proposal for how the God-centred single-mindedness ought to be achieved. In the treatise, Gregory attempts to convince his reader that virginity is the best way to attain detachment from worldly things and

⁴⁹⁵ *Virg.* 6 (SC 119, 344–346); trans. Callahan, 30.

⁴⁹⁶ *Virg.* 6 (SC 119, 346).

⁴⁹⁷ See, Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 194; Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 218–20. On human purity as a reflection of the divine purity, as separation from pleasure, and as a precondition of approaching God, see, e.g. *Virg.* 21; *An. et. res.* (PG 46, 93B–C).

discover the true good. How does virginity achieve this, and why is marriage less ideal? Here, we should recall the concept of mixed and unmixed goods which we previously discussed in *De hominis opificio*. One of Gregory's main complaints about marriage is that it attaches people to external things that are beyond their control and provoke intense passions in untrained minds.⁴⁹⁸ Marriage can lead to grief when one's spouse or children die, and especially to uncontrolled sexual desires if the mind does not manage them appropriately. Deep down, these passions are motivated by the idea that pleasure is desirable and pain is to be avoided: When bodily desires are gratified, the individual thinks he is happy. But when he fears a loss of the pleasing companionship of his spouse, worries over a child, or grieves the death of a loved one, he becomes distressed by his supposed bad lot in life. In other words, the good things that are conventionally associated with marriage reveal themselves as mixed and imperfect in their goodness. In this way marriage turns into a source of grief and death.⁴⁹⁹ The realisation is troubling:

Can anyone live joyfully (έν εύφροσύνη) when such thoughts are in his mind? Will he believe that his present goods (τοῖς παροῦσιν αὐτῷ χρηστοῖς) will continue forever, or is it not clear from this that he will be at a loss like one in the deceptions of dreams (έν ταῖς τῶν όνειρων άπάταις)? Will he not regard life with distrust and consider alien these appearances (ώς άλλοτρίοις προσέχων τοῖς φαινομένοις), entirely aware (if he reflects upon reality [τινά τῶν όντων έπίσκεψιν]) that none of the things that appear in life (ούδέν τῶν έν τῷ βίῳ φαινομένων) appear as they are (ώς έστι φαίνεται), but that, through deceptive impressions (κατά τās άπατηλās φαντασίας), [life] shows us things as some others, jesting with the hopes of those who gape in expectation and veiling itself in the deceit of appearances (διά τῆς τῶν φαινομένων πλάνης), until suddenly in vicissitudes it is exposed to be something other than the human hope born through deception (διά τῆς άπάτης) of the fools. For what kind of pleasure (ήδονῆς) do the pleasant things of life (τὰ ήδέα τοῦ βίου) seem sufficient to the person who considers these matters? When will the one who understands these things take true pleasure (ήσθήσεται κατά αλήθειαν) and enjoy the goods that seem present to him (δοκοῦσιν αὐτῷ παρεῖναι χρηστοῖς εύφρανθήσεται)? Always troubled by a fear of change, is he not insensitive to the enjoyment of present things (τῶν παρόντων άπόλαυσιν)?⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ On the ills of marriage, see particularly *Virg.* 3.

⁴⁹⁹ *Virg.* 3.3 (SC 119, 280).

⁵⁰⁰ *Virg.* 3.4 (SC 119, 282–284). Here, Callahan's English translation (FOC 58, 15) obscures the key terminology and meaning of the passage, at times offering a clearly mistaken interpretation.

In this passage, filled with vocabulary of appearing and deception, Gregory describes life in the sensible world as a sequence of dream-like appearances which stir up deceptive impressions that make things seem different from what they are.⁵⁰¹ The apparent goods of the present life are eagerly desired and enjoyed by those who lack understanding, until in a sudden turn of events their true nature is revealed. The passage depicts the sensible world as characterised by illusions, distress, ambiguity and change. It conceals the spiritual realm which is the home of truth, goodness, simplicity, and stability. This two-tiered worldview with a discernible Platonist flavour is precisely what we discovered in *De hominis opificio*, as is the sudden shift from ignorance to experiential knowing when things reveal their true nature and it is already too late to make the right choice.

Like *De hominis opificio*, the passage above also highlights the importance of the mind and knowledge in assessing the nature of things. It brings to fore even more clearly the way in which knowledge can be transformative and impact both desire and enjoyment. As the individual's evaluation of the present goods changes, he becomes unable – or at least unwilling – to enjoy them; those who are aware of the pain, death, and disappointments associated with marriage will no longer be able to 'live joyfully' (έν εύφροσύνη). Thus, the person who understands the difference between what is and what merely appears to be will view the short-lived benefits of marriage with distrust. He will no longer be able to enjoy the goods which appear present to him, even to the point of becoming completely desensitised to the enjoyment of present things.

Finally, we must take note of the way in which Gregory talks about attitudes towards 'present goods', first generally (τοις παροῦσιν αὐτῷ χρηστοῖς) and then more specifically with regard to enjoyment (δοκοῦσιν αὐτῷ παρεῖναι

I have based my translation loosely on Callahan's, but diverged from it at several points, using Aubineau's much more precise French (SC 119, 283–285) as my guide.

⁵⁰¹ Aubineau (SC 119, 283) draws attention to the vocabulary of deception in the paragraph and says it suggests the illusory character of the sensible world and its false goods. He names ἀπάτη, ἀπατηλός, πλάνη, φαντασία, and above all τὰ φαινόμενα as the key words of the passage, and notes its close similarity to *Eccl.* 8, which I have discussed above.

χρηστοῖς εὐφρανθήσεται). This is significant if we keep in mind that the well-known ancient definition describes pleasure as a positive emotion arising from the attainment of present goods.⁵⁰² By discussing the attachment to and joy derived from the present, Gregory implies the involvement of pleasure even at the beginning of the passage where he does not use the word ἡδονή explicitly. Later in this chapter, I will show that the present-centred nature of pleasure is one of the factors that make it a lacking substitute for the true good.

Gregory on the Sufficiency of Virtue and the Irrelevance of External Goods

Gregory's discourse in Chapter 3 of *De virginitate* paves way to Chapter 4, in which he addresses an important ethical topic: the sufficiency of virtue and the consequent unimportance of external goods in the pursuit of the good life. Having explained how the goods of the sensible world always fail to satisfy and lead to outright suffering, Gregory reminds his reader that evil is powerless unless a person brings it on himself. Thus, the 'one who perceives the deceitfulness of this life with a pure eye of his soul and rises above the earthly pursuits' can make a conscious decision to refrain from marriage and spare himself from a whole host of evils.⁵⁰³ We have already seen Gregory espousing the view that no evil exists independently of human choice. Now he argues that a person who has let go of all worldly attachments exists in a state of complete freedom and peace, considering virtue his only valuable possession (μόνον τίμιον ἑαυτῷ κτῆμα νομίζωντῆν ἀρετήν). The possession of virtue can never lead to envy, greed, and discord which accompany material possessions, because virtue is not diminished by sharing but available to all according to their ability.⁵⁰⁴ As Gregory states, virtue is 'always full for those who desire it.'⁵⁰⁵ Whereas all earthly goods eventually fade away, in death if not before,

⁵⁰² See Andronicus, *De passionibus* 1 (SVF 3.391): 'Pleasure is an irrational swelling, or a fresh opinion that something good is present (δόξα πρόσφατος ἀγαθοῦ παρουσίας), at which people think it right to be swollen [i.e. elated].' (Trans. LS 65B).

⁵⁰³ *Virg.* 4.1 (SC 119, 302); trans. Callahan, 20.

⁵⁰⁴ In the next chapter of this thesis, we shall see that limitedness is characteristic of all material possession. This results in a zero-sum game in which one person's material gain leads to another's deprivation and suffering.

⁵⁰⁵ *Virg.* 4.1 (SC 119, 304); trans. Callahan, 21.

virtue remains permanently available, grounded in the human soul and ultimately in the eternal being of God.

Gregory's remarks on virtue in *De virginitate* 4 take us right into the heart of the ancient debate on the good life. The question is whether the external goods, such as wealth, health, relationships, honour, or even enjoyment, play any role in human happiness. The two basic positions can be labelled as the Aristotelian and the Stoic.⁵⁰⁶ Aristotle suspected that human beings could not be truly happy if their circumstances were not favourable. Although he emphatically agreed that the highest perfection lay in the practice of virtues, he granted that also external goods, such as wealth, health, and good birth, played their part in the happy life.⁵⁰⁷ The Stoics, on the other hand, held a view known as the 'self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια) of virtue', contending that virtue alone sufficed for a happy life.⁵⁰⁸ Through philosophical training, the individual would learn to shape his or her attitude in such a way that all external circumstances could be met with equal tranquillity and indifference. The Stoics considered bodily health a 'preferred good', a goal which might be understandably and legitimately chosen over its opposite, but which was ultimately indifferent to the virtuous life and, consequently, to the attainment of happiness.⁵⁰⁹ If health was not available, the individual had no reason to be upset; he had been deprived of nothing of any value. This is clearly the view that Gregory espouses when he states that the one who acknowledges virtue as his only precious possession 'will lead a life that is untroubled and peaceful and without dissension (ἄλυπὸν τινα καὶ εἰρηνικὸν καὶ ἄμαχον βιοτεύσει βίον).'⁵¹⁰ Indeed, the Stoic view was adopted by many eclectic late ancient thinkers, such as Plutarch and Philo of Alexandria, and it also became the standard opinion of early Christian

⁵⁰⁶ For this distinction, see also Leuenberger-Wenger, *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa*, 173.

⁵⁰⁷ *NE* 1099a–b.

⁵⁰⁸ For Stoic views on the self-sufficiency of virtue and the insignificance of external factors, see LS chapters 58, 60, 61 ja 64.

⁵⁰⁹ Cicero, *De finibus*, 3.50–54; Seneca, *Ep.* 74.17.

⁵¹⁰ *Virg.* 4.1 (SC 119, 304); trans. Callahan, 21.

writers.⁵¹¹ Thus, we do not have to assume that Gregory's notion of virtue as the only precious possession is directly dependent on Stoic sources.

Typically of ancient texts that downplay the role of the external goods, Gregory proceeds to list a number of states and situations which many people consider honourable or dishonourable: lowly and noble lineage, glory and fame, power over and subjection to others.⁵¹² All these things are evaluated as positive or negative by those who are 'dim-sighted in recognising delusion.' But, argues Gregory, in themselves they are nothing at all.⁵¹³ And here, too, it is pleasure that attaches people to this deceptive unreality:

Wealth, luxury, poverty, want, all the irregularities of life seem something altogether different to the untaught (τοῖς μὲν ἀπαιδευτοῖς πάμπολυ διαφέρειν δοκοῦσιν), since they make pleasure the criterion of such things (ἡδονὴν ποιῶνται τῶν τοιούτων κριτήριον). But to the one who is elevated in thought (τῷ δὲ ὑψηλῷ τὴν διάνοιαν), all things appear to be of equal honor (πάντα ὁμότιμα φαίνεται), and none is more honored than the other, because the course of life is run equally by opposites⁵¹⁴, and there is present in the destiny of each person the power to live well or badly (τὴν πρὸς τὸ εὖ ἢ κακῶς ζῆν δύναμιν), 'with the armor on the right hand and on the left,' as the apostle says, 'in honor and dishonor.'⁵¹⁵

⁵¹¹ As Lilla notes in his analysis of Clement's ethics, the doctrine of the self-sufficiency of virtue occurs also in various non-Stoic writers, such as Antiochus of Ascalon, Plutarch, Maximus of Tyre, Justin, and Philo. See Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 68–72.

⁵¹² Cf., among many possibilities, Cicero, *Tusc.* 5.X.29 (LCL 141, 454), and DL 7.101–105 where Diogenes lists 'life, health, pleasure, beauty, strength, wealth, reputation, noble birth, and their opposites, death, disease, pain, ugliness, weakness, poverty, low repute, ignoble birth and the like' among indifferents (trans. LS 58A–B). While Aubineau (SC 119, 316, note 2) points out the Stoic origin of this theme, Radde-Gallwitz argues that Gregory does not, in fact, approve of the notion of indifferent goods. See my discussion in the footnote below.

⁵¹³ *Virg.* 4.4 (SC 119, 312–316). Radde-Gallwitz argues that since, for Gregory, all things are characterised either by good or its opposite, evil, Gregory at least implicitly rejects the existence of the Stoic middle term, the 'indifferent' (Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 188). While this is ontologically the case, seen from an ethical perspective the goods of the world are not a determining factor in the attainment of the blessed life. Their value depends entirely on how they are used for the attainment of virtue; their goodness is relative. Even God-given good things can be turned into instruments of evil if they are misused. Thus, the goods are 'indifferent' not in their very essence but as instruments of human happiness. All things can be used for good or evil, and none are required for a blessed life.

⁵¹⁴ Here, we encounter again the view that the physical existence consists of alternation of opposites, neither of which is good or evil *per se*. It is the judgment of physical pain and pleasure, poverty and wealth etc. as good or evil that turns them into instruments of passion.

⁵¹⁵ *Virg.* 4.4 (SC 119, 314–316); trans. Callahan, 24.

Above, Gregory argues that all external circumstances are of equal worth and equally suited, or unimportant, for the cultivation of virtue. In all situations – seemingly honourable or dishonourable, pleasant or unpleasant – every individual will have the ‘power to live well or badly’ (εὖ ἢ κακῶς ζῆν). In other words, happiness⁵¹⁶ depends solely on the individual’s inner disposition, which can be rightly attuned to any situation. Gregory’s words allude to the ancient formula of virtue as that which is ‘up to us’ (ἐφ’ ἡμῖν), something that we can and ought to choose, which was particularly popular in Stoic thought.⁵¹⁷ Indeed, elsewhere Gregory explicitly incorporates this phrase in his definitions of virtue.⁵¹⁸ Since external circumstances are accidental and unstable, they are not within our control and should not be our focus in the pursuit of the good life.⁵¹⁹ We can connect Gregory’s view of the external goods to his notion of the free will and his opinion that goods are only diminished by their opposites: Only things that are freely chosen can be labelled as morally praiseworthy or base. It is obvious that we cannot choose our lineage, and even social status depends on a number of unstable external factors. Thus, they do not belong to the realm of moral choice, i.e. they are not virtuous or vicious. And since virtues are only limited by vices, matters like poor social standing do not make a person any less virtuous.

For our present topic, it is particularly noteworthy that physical enjoyment is not only one of the things that do not contribute to happiness, but in the passionate form of pleasure it plays a role in making humans fixate on a number of other externalities.⁵²⁰ Lineage, glory, fame and other external goods are all

⁵¹⁶ In Greek philosophy, the phrase εὖ ζῆν is virtually synonymous with εὐδαιμονία. See, for example, *NE* 1098b, and also *Pol.* 1253b, cited above, where Aristotle expresses his characteristic opinion that ‘living well’ does require certain external goods.

⁵¹⁷ See also my discussion earlier on page 136, where I note that the usage of the formula is not limited to Stoicism.

⁵¹⁸ Consider, for example, *Homily 4 on Ecclesiastes*, where Gregory notes in the negative: ‘That which is not up to us (ἐφ’ ἡμῖν οὐκ ἔστιν) would not be defined as virtue or vice.’ (*Eccl.* 4.4, SC 416, 316.) Similarly, in *Beat.* 5, we read: ‘Hence nothing good enters into us from outside, but it is up to us (ἐφ’ ἡμῖν) to bring forth the good as if from some inner chamber.’

⁵¹⁹ *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 58).

⁵²⁰ We should note again that the Stoics made a conceptual distinction between pleasure as a passion and pleasure as an inevitable bodily sensation that occurs as the by-product of certain activities, i.e. the opposite of physical pain. It is crucial to note that only the latter counts as an indifferent good; the former is, of course, a vice. (On this point, see, for example, the editors’ comment in *LS*, vol. 1, 421.)

evaluated and, consequently, pursued or avoided on the basis of the pleasure they provide. As Gregory notes above, ‘the untaught’ make pleasure the κριτήριο, the standard that guides their judgment of honourable and dishonourable things. In other words, they are hedonists, for using pleasure as the ethical κριτήριο was precisely what Epicurus was known to have endorsed and what non-hedonists rejected.⁵²¹ Gregory goes on to compare the untaught hedonists with ‘the one who has purified his mind and rightly examined the truth of reality (τῶν ὄντων ἀλήθειαν)’. This exemplary individual is able to see things for what they are worth. Thus, he will neither be ‘spoiled by pleasures’ (ὑπὸ τῶν ἡδέων θρυπτόμενος) nor ‘cast down by austerity’ (ὑπὸ τῶν ἀσθηρῶν ταπεινούμενος). Instead, he will proceed like travellers who, as Gregory recounts, remain unaffected by what they encounter on the way and avoid both attachment and resignation: ‘Pleasure does not delay them, nor does the unpleasant impede them (οὔτε τὸ ἡδὺ παρακατέσχευεν οὔτε τὸ ἀηδὲς ἐνεπόδισεν),’ he explains. Free of worldly attachments, the exemplary Christian will hurry on without distraction to his goal (σκοπὸν), keeping his eyes fixed on heaven.⁵²² The ‘thick-witted one’, on the other hand,

looks downwards and hands his soul over to pleasures of the body (τὰ ἡδέα τοῦ σώματος), as cattle to pasture, living only for the stomach and the organs nearby (τοῖς μετὰ γαστέρα), being alienated from the life of God and a stranger to the promise of the covenants considering nothing else to be good than pleasing the body (οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἀγαθὸν εἶναι νομίζων ἢ τὸ ἡσθηῖναι διὰ τοῦ σώματος).⁵²³

The transition from the pleasures of social status to a sanctioning of that which pleases the body is abrupt, but for Gregory the connection is clear: bodily pleasure is the root and breeding ground of all other vices. The one who makes

⁵²¹ Diogenes Laertius reports Epicurus saying that ‘sensations, preconceptions and feelings (τὰ πάθη) are the criteria of truth (κριτήρια τῆς ἀληθείας)’ (DL 10.31; trans. LS 17A). Of these, the last, ‘feelings’, were understood to refer to pleasure and pain. While sensation was the primary epistemological criterion for attaining knowledge of the physical nature of things, pleasure was the (related) ethical criterion for assessing moral value. See also DL 10.34; Cicero, *Fin.* 1.22–23, and the editors’ note in LS, vol. 1, 90.

⁵²² *Virg.* 4.4 (SC 119, 316–318); trans. Callahan, 24.

⁵²³ *Virg.* 4.5 (SC 119, 318); trans. Callahan, 24.

bodily pleasure into his good becomes an ‘inventor of evils’,⁵²⁴ among which Gregory lists such passions as greed, love of power, and desire for empty glory.⁵²⁵ In other words, an obsession with bodily pleasure as the good is simply the first link in the chain of misjudged goods; deep down, all evils are motivated by the pleasure they offer. This shows that Gregory’s pleasure is not the instigator of all evil only historically but also psychologically.

The Two Ways of Seeing the World

The examples from *De virginitate* have already revealed the prominence of the topic of pleasure in Gregory’s thinking about the good life and its opposite. However, my claim that the reading of the fall in *De hominis opificio* is, in fact, a direct application of Gregory’s earlier thought to the text of *Genesis* requires further qualification. The most complete parallel to *De hominis opificio* can be found in Chapter 11 of *De virginitate*, in which Gregory discusses the search for the real beauty (τὸ ὄντως καλόν), ‘the only thing that is worth desiring’ (τὸ μόνον ἐπιθυμίας ἄξιον).⁵²⁶ A closer reading reveals a remarkable similarity in the terms and concepts Gregory uses in the two texts. Furthermore, the text is significant because it clarifies possible ambiguities related to the value of the sensible realm. In *Virg.* 11, Gregory states unequivocally that sensation and sensible objects can play a positive epistemic role if they are used rationally and their non-final role is recognised. However, those who do not know about the intelligible reality which underlies the sensible creation will treat the sensible world as the pinnacle of existence. For them, pleasure remains the only known good and the final goal of all of their actions.

Let us now see what Gregory has to say about the epistemic role of the senses. Although much of *De virginitate* highlights the precarity of the sensible realm, in

⁵²⁴ The phrase κακῶν ἐφευρετής occurs in plural in *Rom.* 1:30 in relation idolatry, sexual sin, and depravity of mind which lead to the invention of a number of other evils.

⁵²⁵ *Virg.* 4.5 (SC 119, 318–320).

⁵²⁶ *Virg.* 11.4 (SC 119, 388). Here I have followed Aubineau and Callahan who both translate καλόν as beauty. The translation is natural in light of the many visual metaphors and comparisons to physical beauty which appear in the text. However, the reader should keep in mind the continuity in Greek terminology between the ‘good’ of *De hominis opificio* and the ‘beautiful’ of *De virginitate*.

Chapter 11 Gregory starts his discussion by conceding that reason can approach the invisible *only* through that which is familiar to the senses. As embodied beings, humans begin to approach the divine via an embodied form of knowing. However, Gregory's concession is not unqualified, for he also highlights the 'weakness' of sensory knowledge, alluding to its limited scope and liability to error.⁵²⁷ Indeed, the epistemic yield of sensation depends entirely on the inner preparedness of the knower: Gregory compares people who look at things superficially and thoughtlessly with a person who does not look with eyes only (μὴ μόνους ὀφθαλμοῖς) and stop at appearances (οὐ μέχρι τῶν φαινομένων στήσεται), but uses thought and reason (διάνοια, λόγος) to examine all the qualities of the object separately and as a whole. The two ways of looking lead to two different outcomes:

Accordingly, in the seeking of the beautiful (ἐν τῇ τοῦ καλοῦ ζητήσει), the person whose thought is incomplete, when he sees something on which is spread the appearance of some beauty (κάλλους τινὸς ... φαντασία), will think that the thing itself is beautiful by of its own nature (καλὸν εἶναι τῇ ἑαυτοῦ φύσει), this very thing which attracts his sensation through pleasure (τὴν αἴσθησιν αὐτοῦ δι' ἡδονῆς ἐπισπάσεται), and he will be concerned with nothing beyond this. But the one who has purified the eye of his soul⁵²⁸ (ὁ δὲ κεκαθαμένος τὸν τῆς ψυχῆς ὀφθαλμόν) and is able to look at such things, puts aside the matter which lies under the form of beauty (τοῦ καλοῦ ἰδέα), and uses what he sees as a kind of pedestal for the contemplation of the intelligible beauty (πρὸς τὴν τοῦ νοητοῦ θεωρίαν κάλλους). By a participation in this beauty, the other beautiful things come into being and are identified.⁵²⁹

The passage describes two different ways of using the senses and interacting with the sensible world. The first is to stop one's enquiry at the level of sensible appearances, assuming that things which appeal to the senses through pleasure are good in their very nature. This is exactly what Eve does in *De hominis*

⁵²⁷ *Virg.* 11.1 (SC 119, 380).

⁵²⁸ It is not surprising that Gregory's frequent references to 'the eye of the soul' have resulted in many a scholarly conversation on his notion of 'spiritual sensation.' I will return to this important and ambiguous topic in Chapter 9, where I present material on spiritual pleasure in Gregory's works. It seems to me that at least in *De virginitate* spiritual sensation has less to do with a transfigured, spiritualised bodily sensibility, and more with an increasing involvement of the intellect in the epistemic process. In *Virg.* 11, the mind first directs the process of perception through the senses, and then abstracts an increasingly intelligible idea of the form that lies underneath.

⁵²⁹ *Virg.* 11.1 (SC 119, 382); trans. Callahan, 38–39.

opificio. Strikingly, also the passage above contains the key concept καλοῦ φαντασία (here, κάλλους τινὸς φαντασία), which Gregory uses in his customary manner to explain the false appearance of beauty that pleasure projects to the senses. The second way, which bears similarities to Diotima’s speech on the love of beauty in *Symposium*, consists of an intellectual investigation, in which the beauty of the sensible world is used as a stepping stone to grasp the intelligible form of beauty (τοῦ καλοῦ ἰδέα) that lies beyond it.⁵³⁰ By observing different beautiful things and enquiring about what they have in common, the soul gains an increasingly refined understanding of the idea of beauty that pervades and sustains all that is beautiful. This is something else than using sensation as the κριτήριον of truth against which all derived ideas are to be checked; Gregory rejects the latter practice explicitly later in the same chapter, referring to a ‘misconception of beauty, because the senses have become the criterion’ (ἡ αἴσθησις κριτήριον γίνεται).⁵³¹

Since most humans are not aware of the shortcomings of their postlapsarian condition and do not actively seek to restore their fallen faculties, Gregory laments that a correct understanding of beauty and, more broadly, reality is unattainable to the majority of men. The connections to the wrong judgment of the ‘many’ in *De hominis opificio* are obvious:

It seems to me difficult for the majority of men (τῶν πλείστων), who live in such dullness of thought (παχύτητι τῆς διανοίας), to cut through the matter with reasoning (τῷ λόγῳ) and separate it from the contemplated beauty (ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐπιθεωρουμένου κάλλους), and to come to know the nature of beauty itself (τοῦ καλοῦ τὴν φύσιν). And if anyone should want to determine exactly the cause of the misconceptions and fallacious assumptions, I think he would not find any other but that our senses have not been trained to discern precisely the good from that which is not it (ἢ τὸ μὴ ἀκριβῶς ἡμῶν «γεγυμνάσθαι τὰ αἰσθητήρια πρὸς τὴν τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ μὴ τοιοῦτου διάκρισιν»; cf.

⁵³⁰ The method of moving from particular beautiful objects towards more general notions of beauty and finally to the entirely intelligible form of Beauty is how Diotima explains the use of love in the service of knowledge in Plato’s *Symposium* (210–212b). Gregory describes the ascent through the sensible towards the intelligible in a number of works. See, for example, *Eccl.* 1.6 (SC 416, 120).

⁵³¹ *Virg.* 11.5 (SC 119, 394).

Heb. 5:14). This is why people have veered away from the pursuit of the really good (περὶ τὸ ὄντως ἀγαθὸν σπουδῆς)...⁵³²

Here, Gregory diagnoses that the problem lies in the dysfunctional intellect and untrained senses, which do not probe through matter to gain knowledge of the nature of the actual beauty. We should note the reference to *Heb.* 5:14, which appeared in a similar context in *De opificio hominis*. Again, the notion of ‘trained senses’ alludes to the epistemic potential of sensation if used correctly. And here, too, the failure to do so is attributed to faulty use of the intellect, not to the body itself. Much like in his earlier discussion on the external goods, Gregory goes on to describe various things with which people have substituted the real good and beauty: while some turn to a love of the flesh or lifeless material things, others seek beauty in honour, glory, and power, even certain kinds of arts and knowledge (Gregory does not specify what the latter include). The lowest group consists of people who ‘make their palate and their stomach the criteria of the good (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ποιοῦνται κριτήρια).’⁵³³ Regretting their behaviour, Gregory writes:

If they had deserted their material thoughts (ὕλικῶν νοημάτων) and the attachments to appearances (περὶ τὰ φαινόμενα προσπαθειῶν), and sought after the simple, immaterial, and formless nature of the beautiful (τὴν ἀπλῆν τε καὶ ἄϋλον καὶ ἀσχημάτιστον τοῦ καλοῦ φύσιν), they would not have been led astray in their choice of the desirable (ἀίρεσιν τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν), nor would they have been swept away by these deceptions (ὑπὸ ταῖς τοιαύταις ἀπάταις) to such an extent that, although they have seen the ephemeral quality of pleasure in these things (τὸ πρόσκαιρον τῆς ἐν τούτοις ἡδονῆς), they have not been led to a disdain for them.⁵³⁴

Here we see that wrong thoughts concerning the beautiful lead to the wrong choice of the desirable, as desire is motivated by mere appearances. Again, Gregory uses the word ‘deception’ (ἀπάτη) to describe how the error comes about. We also find another description of the ‘simple’ good, which in *De opificio hominis* was contrasted with the ‘mixed’ fruit. Gregory concludes that although people who fix their desires on appearances gain no lasting satisfaction, due to

⁵³² *Virg.* 11.2 (SC 119, 382); trans. Callahan, 39, with significant modifications.

⁵³³ *Virg.* 11.2 (SC 119, 384); trans. Callahan, 39.

⁵³⁴ *Virg.* 11.2 (SC 119, 384); trans. Callahan, 39.

their ignorance and misunderstanding of the good they are not able to renounce their chosen objects.

If we sum up our findings from Chapter 11, we can find a number of terms and concepts that connect *De virginitate* to Gregory's reading of the fall in *De hominis opificio*: the καλοῦ φαντασία/κάλλους φαντασία projected by pleasure, a distinction between how things appear and how they are in their nature, the right and wrong use of the senses, a notion of sin as a pursuit of a false good due to deception (ἀπάτη), the majority of people who pursue pleasure instead of the true good, and the biblical reference to *Heb.* 5:14 and the 'trained senses'. Furthermore, we have seen that in the preceding chapters of *De virginitate*, Gregory highlights the fundamental role of pleasure among the passions and even makes a passing connection between pleasure and the fall. Thus, we can conclude that at a very early point of his career Gregory has established a particular way to talk about the good and, importantly for this thesis, sensual pleasure as its elemental substitute.

An analysis of pleasure in *De virginitate* has also shed some light on the role of sensation and the sensible world in the pursuit of the good. As we have seen, the work alludes to two ways of relating to the sensible world: The first involves 'incomplete', 'dull', and 'material' thought, untrained senses, a limited vision that clings to appearances and does not cut beyond matter, and the use of pleasure and sensation as a κριτήριον to determine what is good. The second is achieved with a purified 'eye of the soul', uses the sensible world as a pedestal to ascend to contemplation (θεωρία), cuts through matter with reason to discover the idea or nature of beauty, and is capable of proper discernment between the good and evil. To attain a complete picture of the difference between the correct and the detrimental use of the senses, it is necessary to reflect briefly on Gregory's view of sense perception and its epistemic role. Here, we must return to *De hominis opificio* and also draw on *De anima et resurrectione*, Gregory's two anthropological treatises. A full account of Gregory's theory of sensation is, of course, beyond the scope of this study, but the close connection between pleasure and sensation makes it vital to understand what the senses are

intended to do and where pleasure disrupts their functioning. I will first comment on their necessity and then highlight their limits and potential for misuse, arguing that for Gregory sensory knowledge is crucial but non-final. In his view, the senses must always be guided by the rational thought of the mind and ultimately set aside in favour of a higher intellectual participation.

What is Sensation Worth?

Gregory's attitude towards bodily sensation is markedly ambiguous: On the one hand, Gregory regards sensation as the main commonality between humans and animals, and calls the senses an entrance for death because they let in impressions of the surrounding world so that the soul is carried away with desire for pleasing objects.⁵³⁵ Even when the senses function as intended, their grasp is limited to the sensible world. The only good they can grasp is the good of the body: 'For all power and activity of the senses has life under the sun as its limit, and the sensual nature cannot reach what is beyond it and comprehend the good things which lie above,' Gregory writes in *In Ecclesiastes*.⁵³⁶

On the other hand, Gregory admires the bodily senses as a sign of God's or Nature's skilled craftsmanship.⁵³⁷ A particularly high opinion is expressed in *De hominis opificio* 5 where Gregory contends that the human 'power of apprehension of things by means of sight and hearing' does in some way mirror the Deity who 'beholds and hears all things.'⁵³⁸ However, this statement does not remain without qualification. Gregory is quick to note that it would be mistaken to think that the Deity related to the creation by means of different

⁵³⁵ *Or. dom.* 5 (GNO VII/2, 66–67).

⁵³⁶ *Eccl.* 4.5 (SC 416, 256); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 84.

⁵³⁷ See, for example, *Op. hom.* 30. In the same chapter, Gregory expresses a view that although the senses are not required for living – that is humans can survive without them – the are required for living well (εὖ ζῆν). We have already seen that this term is normally synonymous with *eudaimonia*, which Gregory understands as a life of virtue. Therefore it is startling that here Gregory conceives 'living well' as participation in the pleasures of life (τῶν κατὰ τὴν ζωὴν ἡδέων τὴν μετουσίαν) and shows no sign of being morally alarmed by the implications of his statement. Since the whole chapter is an investigation of the human body on medical terms, I would argue that here Gregory discusses the 'good life' from an exclusively physical perspective, as distinct from mere staying alive. Thus, we should not read his comment as a broader ethical prescription.

⁵³⁸ *Op. hom.* 5 (PG 44, 137C); trans. NPNF, 391.

faculties. No such diversity can be conceived in the simplicity of the Godhead. Moreover, even the human capacity of perception is ultimately one and unified because it is one and the same faculty, namely the mind itself, that operates through the different senses.⁵³⁹ While sight, hearing and the other senses do have a reference point in God, it is not the multitude of senses but the unity of perception that reflects the image of God.

Gregory's emphasis on the mind as a unifying principle reveals a key aspect of his theory of perception, on which we have already touched in his account of the fall: for him, human sensation is a distinctly intellectual matter, though mediated through the body. In *De anima et resurrectione*, Macrina discusses the relationship between the body and the soul, noting that the soul gives life and movement to the body by infusing its organs of sense with an intellectual power.⁵⁴⁰ Without the involvement of the soul, there can be no perception:

What could our hand have taught us by itself, if thought did not lead the tactile sense to knowledge of the subject before it? How could the ear apart from the mind, or the eye, or the nostril, or any other organ of sense, have helped us discern what we are looking for, if each of these existed all by itself.

But it is the truest of all statements that one of pagan education is recalled to have expressed so well: that it is the mind that sees and the mind that hears (τὸν νοῦν εἶναι τὸν ὁρῶντα, καὶ νοῦν τὸν ἀκούοντα).⁵⁴¹

Citing an ancient saying known also to other early Christian writers, Macrina names the intellect (νοῦς) as the agent of perception.⁵⁴² She gives as an example the sun which appears small to the eye but is revealed in its true size through astronomical observation and calculation,⁵⁴³ and geometric proofs which proceed from sensible shapes towards that which transcends the senses:

⁵³⁹ *Op. hom.* 6 (PG 44, 137D–140A); trans. NPNF. 391–392. See also *Op. hom.* 10.

⁵⁴⁰ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 29B).

⁵⁴¹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 32A); trans. Silvas, 179.

⁵⁴² Clement of Alexandria attributes a similar saying to Epicharmus, a Greek dramatist and philosopher who is thought to have been born around 540 BC: 'Mind sees, mind hears (νοῦς ὁρᾷ καὶ νοῦς ἀκούει), all else is dumb and blind' (*Strom.* 2.5.24.4; trans. Ferguson, 174).

⁵⁴³ Cf. Aristotle, *De anima* 428b3–4.

Do you see then what the sense of sight teaches you? Yet it would never have provided such insight (θεωρίαν) by itself, if there were not something gazing through the eyes and using the data of the senses (τοῖς κατ' αἴσθησιν γινωσκομένοις) as guides of a kind to penetrate from what appears (διὰ τῶν φαινομένων) to what does not appear (ἐπὶ τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα).⁵⁴⁴

It could perhaps be said that it is the body that senses and the mind that perceives. Even though the sensitive soul connects the human being to other sensate creatures, the ability to apply the reasoning power of the mind to the sensation of the body belongs only to the human being as the image of God and makes her stand above irrational animals. It is the mind's task to make sense of 'raw sensory data', arrange it into different categories and meaningful patterns, and accept or reject it. '[T]he mind is supreme, and sense ministers to it (ἐπικρατεῖ μὲν ὁ νοῦς, ὑπηρετεῖ δὲ ἡ αἴσθησις),' Gregory notes in *De hominis opificio*.⁵⁴⁵ For him, this is the right ordering of sense perception.

De hominis opificio also makes plain Gregory's view that the mind acts as the agent of perception by inferring different intelligible ideas (λόγος, or as in *De virginitate*, ἰδέα) from the material object. Among these, Gregory lists colour, weight, quantity, and a certain quality of touch.⁵⁴⁶ Although the intelligible principles are separate from matter, Gregory argues that a material body results from their mutual concurrence.⁵⁴⁷ By giving shape to matter, they enable the mind to perceive and understand objects that appear to the senses. Only then is it possible to talk about actual *knowledge*.

It seems reasonable to think that even in the postlapsarian state most humans can to some extent use their minds to grasp some of the basic principles that underlie the sensible world; otherwise they could not make any sense of their surroundings. But while all physical perception is permeated by intellectual activity, perception of the spiritual reality is a yet more intellectual, immaterial and refined capability. This is the intellectual vision, which Gregory, along with

⁵⁴⁴ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 33C); trans. Silvas, 180–181.

⁵⁴⁵ *Op. hom.* 13 (PG 44, 169A); trans. NPNF, 401.

⁵⁴⁶ *Op. hom.* 24 (PG 44, 213A).

⁵⁴⁷ *Op. hom.* 24 (PG 44, 213A–B); *An. et res.* (PG 46, 124C).

many others calls θεωρία (usually translated as ‘contemplation’). And here the difference between the correct and incorrect use of sense perception becomes significant. We have already seen Gregory argue that fallen human beings have clouded the ‘eye of the mind’ and become unable to perceive the spiritual reality that underlies the sensible world. While they can recognise certain qualities in individual objects, they fail to grasp the big picture and penetrate beyond sensible appearances. This is precisely the criticism that Macrina levels at Epicurus in *De anima et resurrectione*:

To him the nature of things that exist (τῆς τῶν ὄντων φύσεως) is limited to the phenomenal (τὸ φαινόμενον). He made our senses (αἴσθησιν) the only measure (μέτρον) by which things are to be comprehended (τῆς τοῦ παντός καταλήψεως). He shut down completely the sensing capacities of the soul (τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς αἰσθητήρια) and was incapable of contemplating anything intellectual and bodiless (οὐδὲν τῶν νοητῶν τε καὶ ἀσωμάτων). – – Truly, all things in the universe perceived by the senses are like earthen walls which for that very reason barricade smaller souls from the contemplation of intellectual realities (πρὸς τὴν τῶν νοητῶν θεωρίαν). Such a one can only see the earth, and water, and air, and fire.⁵⁴⁸ But where each of these things comes from, in what it has its existence, and by what it is governed, he is unable to discern because of his smallness of soul (μικροψυχίας). Anyone who sees a garment will reason (ἀνελογίσαστο) to the weaver, and from a ship one comes to a conception (ἐνενόησεν) of the shipwright, and again on seeing a building the hand of the builder comes to the mind (ὄψει τῆ διανοίᾳ) of the one beholding it. But these small souls gaze upon the world and their eyes are dimmed (ἀμβλυποῦσιν) to the one who is declared through all these things.⁵⁴⁹

As the passage illustrates, there is a difference between applying the mind’s reasoning power to make a basic rational judgment concerning a perceptible object, and grasping the *spiritual* principle that sustains it. It is one thing to perceive the colour, dimensions, or the efficient cause of an object, but another to come to understand the divine power in which it originates.⁵⁵⁰ The former qualities are accessible to the senses and directly present at the moment of observation, while the latter require careful comparing of different properties

⁵⁴⁸ That is, the four elements that make up all material things.

⁵⁴⁹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 21B–24A); trans. Silvas, 175.

⁵⁵⁰ On this point, see also *Infant.* (GNO III/2, 70–71).

and a deeper insight into the nature of cosmos. Even though Macrina does not criticise Epicurus explicitly for hedonism, it is clear that the only good that can be accessed with the presumed Epicurean epistemology is limited to the material world. Furthermore, the epistemic attitude which Macrina ascribes to Epicurus is similar to the one that Gregory associates with pleasure seeking in his discussion on beauty in *De virginitate*. Thus, the criticism of Epicurus as a small-souled empiricist and materialist may well imply a criticism of Epicurus as a hedonist.

On Gregory's epistemic continuum, the senses have a crucial but limited role. They are the starting point of all postlapsarian knowledge without which nothing can be known and, paradoxically, they lead us to understand that there is a reality that eludes the grasp of the senses.⁵⁵¹ In the Christian narrative, the incarnation of Christ is of course the supreme manifestation of this dynamic, and the same is true of the church as the body of Christ in which the beauty of individual members points towards Christ, the true Beauty.⁵⁵² However, for Gregory, sensory knowledge is always partial and even concepts that are derived from a careful examination and evaluation of various sensory phenomena will ultimately fall short due to the profoundly different character of the intelligible reality they seek to describe. Thus, there comes a point when the concepts derived from the sensible world must be set aside. The bodily senses cannot grasp the intelligible reality because they can only make sense of things which, like them, are material, dimensional, and limited. The intelligible reality, on the other hand, has none of these characteristics. In fact, Gregory usually defines the intelligible by means of negation, as that which is *not* perceptible. It lacks limits, weight, form, surface, colour, size, dimensions, location and all other things that characterise and help us make sense of matter.⁵⁵³ Thus, it can only be understood partially through negation, 'by the exclusion of what is discoverable by the senses.'⁵⁵⁴ This is why it is faith, not

⁵⁵¹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 28C).

⁵⁵² See especially *Cant.* 13 (GNO VI, 381–387).

⁵⁵³ For descriptions of the intelligible as that which is not sensible, see, for example, *An. et res.* (PG 46, 40C); *Cant.* 6 (GNO VI, 173–174).

⁵⁵⁴ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 41B).

knowledge, that ultimately provides the assurance of the goods that do not appear to the senses.⁵⁵⁵

Thus, in appropriate sensory knowing the sensible world is submitted to the scrutiny of the mind, which sets the standard for how the sensible objects ought to be examined and evaluated. Since the phenomena of the sensible world are fleeting and exist only in a derived sense, they should not be evaluated on the basis of how they appear (i.e. by using sensation as the κριτήριον), but in light of unchanging intelligible principles (by using the mind as the κριτήριον). '[S]ensation is not a sound criterion for the good (οὐκ ἀσφαλὲς τοῦ καλοῦ κριτήριον εἶναι τὴν αἴσθησιν),' Gregory warns in *Eccl.* 5.⁵⁵⁶ We can learn something about the divine goods by observing the sensible world and, at the same time, we must reject sensual pleasure as the final good, knowing that the blessed life rests on something that the senses cannot perceive.

The way in which Gregory describes proper sensory knowing implies that even if the sensible realm is the gateway to all knowledge, the abstraction from the sensible to the intelligible appears to require some kind of *a priori* knowledge about how the sensible is to be used and interpreted as a means for reaching the intelligible. Without external guidance, the sensible realm will not convey its own 'user instructions'; if we do not know that it conceals a higher reality, we will pursue its offerings as our final good. This presents an obvious problem: how can our fallen minds have the prerequisite insight at the beginning of the spiritual journey before we gain a proper first-hand understanding of what lies beyond the sensible world? Or, in Radde-Gallwitz's formulation: 'how will one recognise God if one does not already know him?'⁵⁵⁷ After identifying the problem in Gregory, Radde-Gallwitz traces it back to Plato's *Meno* and notes its central place in ancient epistemology.⁵⁵⁸ He reminds us that humans are not entirely bereft of knowledge of God so far as they are naturally inclined to love the good, which has its reference point in God. In other words, the soul is aware

⁵⁵⁵ See *Eun.* II.93.

⁵⁵⁶ *Eccl.* 5 (GNO V, 354); my translation.

⁵⁵⁷ Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 196.

⁵⁵⁸ See especially *Meno* 80d, and also *Phaedo* 73–77c.

that it is lacking in good, manifested in desire that constantly seeks fulfilment, but it has to learn what the missing good entails. Thus, we ‘don’t *learn* to love the good. But we do “learn God” by learning how to speak appropriately about goodness and by coming to desire the true good.’⁵⁵⁹ This is what we have seen Gregory argue, but how is the right criterion attained? Radde-Gallwitz suggests that the key lies in self-knowledge, and goes on to cite Gregory’s *Homily 2 on the Song of Songs*:

Our greatest safeguard is not to be ignorant of oneself and not to suppose that one is looking at oneself when in fact one is viewing something else, something that hangs about the outer edges of oneself. This is the affliction of those who do not seriously appraise themselves (οἱ ἑαυτῶν ἀνεπίσκεπτοι). They see in themselves strength or beauty or glory or power or abundance of riches or pride or dignity or bodily size or good looks or some other such thing, and they take it for themselves. For this reason they are unreliable keepers of themselves. With their interest fixed on what is alien (τὸ ἀλλότριον), they allow what is their own (τὸ ἴδιον) to go unprotected. For how shall anyone guard what he has no knowledge of (ὃ μὴ ἐπίσταται)? So the most secure watch over the good things within us (τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν ἀγαθῶν) is not to be ignorant of ourselves (τὸ ἑαυτοῦς μὴ ἀγνοῆσαι) and for each to know (τὸ γινῶναι) what he is and to distinguish (διακρίνειν) clearly between himself and the things around his edges, so that he may not end up keeping guard over what is alien rather than over himself.⁵⁶⁰

Above, characteristically of ancient eudaimonistic ethics, Gregory links together self-knowledge and the good life: the education that trains us to judge things based on their essence rather than their appearance begins from our own being. In *In Canticum*, Gregory notes that in our fallen state what is proper to us by nature is overruled by what is proper to human communities by habit. As an individual grows up, her tendency to pursue virtue is obscured both due to the order of human development, in which the pull of sensation is strong from birth whereas the mind develops later, and by the customs and values of human society, which lacks a collective awareness of its true goal. However, neither our identity nor our final goal lies in the fleeting goods of the material creation. By distancing ourselves from worldly values and turning our gaze inwards, we

⁵⁵⁹ Radde-Gallwitz, *Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 196.

⁵⁶⁰ *Cant.* 2 (GNO VI, 63–64); trans. Norris, 71. Radde-Gallwitz cites the passage in Musurillo’s translation. *Ibid.*, 193.

come to understand our true identity as the image of God, our affinity to the intelligible world, and our natural predisposition to virtue.⁵⁶¹

Locked in the Present, Losing Hope: The Main Problem With Pleasure

Our investigation of appropriate sensory knowing has resulted in a conclusion that is consonant with Hans Boersma's main argument in *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*: the sensible realm is intended as an aid of the progress in virtue, but it is instrumental and non-final. Understanding the penultimate character of the material world is a prerequisite of the good Christian life, which entails an ascent towards the intelligible realm actualised through the gradual rediscovery of the divine likeness of the soul. From this perspective, we can begin to understand why pleasure is not only one of the passions, but becomes a total antithesis of the good life: by attaching humans to the sensible world, it makes them lose sight of their true *telos*. Gregory articulates the issue with remarkable clarity at the beginning of *In inscriptiones psalmsorum* where he discusses the notion of blessedness as the goal of the virtuous life. It is crucial, he says, to know not only what the good life is like, but also to be able to distinguish (διακρίναι) the good life from the one that deserves reproach 'by observing each with its peculiar characteristics.' The fundamental distinction between the good and the evil life goes between sense perception and intellectual perception (αἴσθησίν τε καὶ διάνοιαν) 'so far as the joy (εὐφροσύνην) that people receive from them is concerned.'⁵⁶² With a concern on Christian teaching, Gregory writes:

On the one hand there is the joy of evil which delights our sense-perception (ἡδυσούσης τὴν αἴσθησιν), and on the other, that of virtue which brings joy to our soul (τὴν ψυχὴν εὐφραινούσης). It would be consistent with these [characteristics] to lead the

⁵⁶¹ In *Mort.* (GNO IX, 40–41), Gregory suggests that an awareness of one's true self is attained by turning one's gaze inwards, away from the external world and towards Christ. By looking at its divine model, the soul will realise it has been made in its image and discover its identity as the image of God. Since God is immaterial, invisible, intelligible and incorporeal, the soul will realise that as the bearer of the image of God it is also such. On knowing oneself and God, see also *An. et. res.* (PG 46, 29A, 91C–92A).

⁵⁶² *Inscr.* 1.2 (GNO V, 27); trans. Heine, 85. For the two spheres of life and the corresponding twofold joy, see also *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 109).

intellectual perception (διάνοιαν) of hearers away from what is inferior and to associate it with what is better by means of praise and censure, the censure of the wicked life (τοῦ πονηροῦ βίου) producing hatred towards evil (τὸ μῖσος πρὸς τὴν κακίαν), and the praise of those things that are good (τῶν ἀγαθῶν) attracting the desire (ἐπιθυμίαν) to what is holy...

But when these matters have been elucidated in this way, then it is difficult to accept naturally anything which is alien so far as pleasure is concerned (πᾶν τὸ πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἀλλοτρίως ἔχον) (and by pleasure I mean that which is dear to the body (τὴν τοῦ σώματος φίλην), for the joy of the soul (τῆς ψυχῆς εὐφροσύνη), which differs greatly, is remote from irrational and abject enjoyment (ἧς ἀλόγου τε καὶ ἀνδραποδώδους ἡδυπαθείας)). And when we have grasped the distinguishing mark (σημεῖον) of each of the lives in advance, that is, the virtuous life and the evil life (τοῦ ἐν ἀρετῇ τε καὶ κακίᾳ), we recognize that our faculties that belong to the flesh (τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς αἰσθητήρια) are gratified (κολακεύεται) by means of evil, but virtue brings joy which belongs to the soul (ψυχῆς εὐφροσύνη) to those who have lived a good life (τοῖς κατορθώσασιν)...⁵⁶³

The passage contains a number of important points, some of which I will treat more thoroughly in the final chapter of this thesis. First of all, there are two different goals which a person can pursue in her life: good and evil. The former is lived according to virtue, the latter according to the flesh. The instrument of the former is intellectual perception, that of the latter sense perception. One is holy and intellectual, the other abject and irrational. Crucially, Gregory conceives enjoyment as an accompaniment and a distinguishing mark of the life lived: If a person leads a good life, he finds joy in virtue. If he pursues the evil, he takes pleasure in bodily enjoyment. This echoes the Aristotelian view that the actions in which one takes pleasure and pain are an indicator (here, too, σημεῖον) of one's ethical disposition.⁵⁶⁴ The virtuous person will find virtuous actions pleasurable and vicious actions painful, while a vicious person will have the opposite reactions.

Second, Gregory draws attention to the fact that the key role of the Christian *paideia* is to provide knowledge of the two goals and to encourage people to

⁵⁶³ *Inscr.* I.2 (GNO V, 27–28); trans. Heine, 85–86.

⁵⁶⁴ *NE* 1104b.

strive for good things and avoid what is evil. If we push the ‘*Meno* paradox’ further and enquire what engenders the realisation that the fallen soul must turn its gaze inwards and seek the good of the mind, we realise that the provision of this formative knowledge is the task of Christian education, which proclaims the truths of the Gospel and instils the practice of virtue.⁵⁶⁵ A fallen soul with a distorted will requires an external impulse to understand its own depravity and begin the introspection that is required for understanding one’s place in the universe.⁵⁶⁶ It is noteworthy that this education entails a realignment of emotions based on the knowledge attained: humans must learn to rejoice in the good instead of the evil. I will return to this affective transformation in Chapter 7. For now it is sufficient to point out that in *In inscriptiones*, Gregory goes on to identify a transformative sequence in the soul which is achieved through Christian education: right knowledge leads to rightly ordered desire, which in turn leads to enjoyment in the right things. Why does this happen? In *In inscriptiones* Gregory answers that since only known things can be desired – a point implicitly made also in *De hominis opificio* – we must first know the good in order to long for it. And since ‘longing is the road to pleasure’, no pleasure in the good can be taken without rightly directed desire. Thus, a Christian cannot enjoy good things before he has attained knowledge of them and directed her desire towards them; knowledge is the precondition for desire, which, in turn, is the necessary condition for enjoyment.⁵⁶⁷ This point is of course related to Gregory’s view that sin is caused by ignorance regarding the good because it is a product of desire which always seeks that which is – truly or falsely – deemed as the good.

The distinction between the two *τέλεια* in *In inscriptiones* helps us articulate a point that has been implicitly present already in the other works: It is not the sensible world itself that is evil, but a life *devoted to* the sensible world. Sin

⁵⁶⁵ On the role of Christian education in correcting the mind’s errant judgments, see also Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 98.

⁵⁶⁶ Gregory states explicitly that human desire is misaligned due to the fall, which separates it from the will of God, and cannot find its right direction without divine help. We will easily turn to evil on our own, but need God’s help to actualise our impulses for the good. See *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 46–48).

⁵⁶⁷ *Inscr.* 1.2 (GNO V, 28).

comes about when the good of the flesh is chosen as the final goal of one's life, a choice marked by the enjoyment taken in sensual pleasure: '[T]he distinguishing mark of the specific character of the pursuits is revealed by the joy which occurs in us from them,' Gregory writes later in the same treatise.⁵⁶⁸ Here, the sensible world, our body, and our material surroundings – given to us simply as a stepping stone towards a higher goal – become an end in themselves, while the true end remains unknown. People latch on to the material world although its offerings are mixed and fleeting, unaware that something better awaits beyond it. In Gregory's view, such people suffer a double loss: they will not only miss the true goal of their lives, but also lose the satisfaction they were seeking from the sensible world as their illusionary enjoyment changes into nothingness.⁵⁶⁹

It is also important to note that, for Gregory, pleasure is not only a result and a signal of a lack of knowledge; it also perpetuates it. Pleasure and ignorance form a vicious cycle, for once pleasure is experienced in the soul it further weakens the rational capacity. As is the case with virtue, one is gradually transformed in the likeness of the object one seeks.⁵⁷⁰ Therefore, Gregory talks about people who 'do not know the good things (οὐδεμία τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐστι γνῶσις) of which our nature has been deprived, and who therefore spend their present life in the pursuit of pleasure (τούτοις καθ' ἡδονὴν τῆς παρούσης ζωῆς ἢ διαγωγῆς).'⁵⁷¹ He continues to lament that 'people who enjoy present things (τοῖς παροῦσιν ἡδεδεσθαι), do not look for better ones (τὰ βελτίω).'⁵⁷² Gregory's words bring to mind C. S. Lewis famous remark (notably in a juxtaposition between utility-driven modern-day Christians and the 'great Christians of old'):

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go

⁵⁶⁸ *Inscr.* I.4 (GNO V, 34).

⁵⁶⁹ *Cant.* 2 (GNO VI, 64).

⁵⁷⁰ See, e. g., *Virg.* 8 (SC 119, 362), cited above.

⁵⁷¹ *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 107); trans. Graef, 114.

⁵⁷² *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 107); trans. Graef, 114. See also *Virg.* 12.3.

on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.⁵⁷³

Of the fathers, Lewis's essay mentions only Augustine, but above he might as well be paraphrasing Gregory of Nyssa.

Finally, we should note that while the criticism that pleasure limits people's focus to present sensible goods was widely shared in antiquity, it has some unique implications in light of the Christian worldview. Since the Christian salvation narrative is suspended on a historical continuum, time is not only a sign of fallen creation but also an instrument God uses to realise his plan of salvation. Thus, for a Christian thinker like Gregory, perfection is located not only in the invisible, but in a *future* invisible reality of the eschaton. One of the crucial differences between grasping, say, colour or size, and the spiritual operation of the purified eye of the soul is the way in which the latter can capture ideas that are not part of one's immediate surroundings. Intellectual perception is capable of extending into the future and evaluating present things in light of invisible realities which are not currently at hand. This ability is, of course, crucial for the formation of faith and hope, which adhere to something that is not directly available to the senses and will be fulfilled in the future.⁵⁷⁴ For Gregory, then, hope in particular is the ultimate antithesis of pleasure. Warren Smith notes the opposition between a life of hope and a life limited to the enjoyment of material goods in Gregory's *De anima et resurrectione*. He also draws attention to its anti-hedonist implications:

Without mentioning the Epicureans by name, Macrina tells Gregory to dismiss the pagan views of the soul which are ultimately antithetical to the pursuit of virtue. By

⁵⁷³ C. S. Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory', *Theology* 43, no. 257 (1 November 1941): 263. A partly overlapping passage from the same work is cited in Judith L. Kovacs, 'Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa on the Beatitudes', in *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on the Beatitudes: An English Version with Contemporary and Supporting Studies: Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14-18 September 1998)*, ed. Hubertus R. Drobner and Alberto Viciano (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 329.

⁵⁷⁴ For Gregory, faith is the 'substance of things hoped for' and as such superior to knowledge belongs to the realm of the mind and operates on concepts derived from the creation. Thus, faith is able to assure us of the certainty of that which is not presently seen (*Eun.* II.93; cf. *Heb.* 11:1). See Martin Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 74.

eliminating any possibility of life beyond death and the enjoyment of goods other than the immediate one, the pagans necessarily promote a *carpe diem* hedonism.⁵⁷⁵

It is noteworthy that although *An. et. res.* 17B does not refer to Epicurus explicitly, his name comes up soon in the passage I have already cited (21B), which continues the discussion. The same juxtaposition between pleasure and hope is highlighted in *De vita Mosis*:

Because man finds himself between these two who have contrary purposes (σκοπόν) for him, it is in his power (δι' ἑαυτοῦ) to make the one prevail over the other. While the good angel by rational demonstration shows the goods of virtue (τὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀγαθὰ) which are seen in hope (δι' ἐλπίδος) by those who live aright, his opponent shows the material pleasures (τὰς ὑλώδεις ἡδονάς) in which there is no hope of future goods (ἀφ' ὧν ἐλπίς μὲν ἀγαθῶν οὐδεμία), but which are present (παρόν), visible, can be partaken of, and enslave the senses of those who do not exercise their intellect (τὰς αἰσθήσεις τῶν ἀνοήτων).⁵⁷⁶

As Smith goes on to observe, hope enables people to sacrifice the certain goods of the present life for the much less concrete goods of the life to come by relativizing the importance of what is presently available. By doing so, it motivates the soul's detachment from the sensible world which would otherwise seem like a senseless act. This makes hope a precondition of virtue.⁵⁷⁷ Smith argues that the close connection between hope and virtue differs radically from the negative view of hope espoused by many Stoic thinkers who regarded it as a failure to conform to one's present circumstances and predetermined fate.⁵⁷⁸ However, a reworking of hope into the Stoic system of positive emotions occurs already in Philo, who calls hope 'some anticipatory emotion, a joy before joy' (προπάθειά τις, χαρὰ πρὸ χαρᾶς,) and a 'joy before joy, gladness before gladness' (τινὰ χαίρειν πρὸ χαρᾶς καὶ εὐφραίνεσθαι πρὸ

⁵⁷⁵ J. Warren Smith, 'Macrina, Tamer of Horses and Healer of Souls: Grief and the Therapy of Hope in Gregory of Nyssa's *De Anima et Resurrectione*', *Journal of Theological Studies*, no. 52 (2001): 53. Smith's direct reference is to *An. et. res.* (PG 44, 17B). See also 20A, 92A–B, and 93A.

⁵⁷⁶ *Vit. Moys.* II.45–46 (SC 1, 44); trans. Malherbe & Ferguson, 64. For other related passages in *De vita Mosis*, see Smith, 'Macrina, Tamer of Horses', 54–55.

⁵⁷⁷ Smith, 'Macrina, Tamer of Horses', 53.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

εὐφροσύνης).⁵⁷⁹ Although Gregory does not spell out the particulars of the relationship between hope and joy, he, too, connects the two by arguing that the joy (εὐφροσύνη) of the life to come is 'presented to our hope (κατ' ἐλπίδας ἡμῶν προκειμένω).'⁵⁸⁰ I will return to the notion of hope as an anticipation of joy in Chapter 7 in which I investigate the varieties of intellectual pleasure. There, I intend to show that although Gregory's view of hope diverges from the Stoic system of *eupatheiai*, the link between hope and delight in anticipated future goods has ample philosophical precedents.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Gregory's reading of the fall in *De hominis opificio* is built on a broad ethical discourse on pleasure and the good. The idea that pleasure drives people to sin by projecting a deceptive appearance of the good is the primary way in which Gregory explains sin not only in *De hominis opificio* 19–20, but throughout his corpus. However, the starting point of the postlapsarian human is different from that of Adam and Eve: Whereas the first humans existed in a state of moral neutrality and enjoyed all good things without any mixing with the evil, the fallen human being no longer single-mindedly partakes in the fullness of good. Instead, her life is a mix of two possible inclinations: good and evil.

The juxtaposition which Gregory creates between pleasure and the good is embedded in this sharp distinction between two ways of life and two different *telea* towards which the human being can orient his faculties. The good life is the life according to virtue, which is achieved through an understanding of the intelligible principles that underlie the whole creation and a gradual transformation in the likeness of the immaterial goods. We saw that in *De virginitate* Gregory subscribes to the notion of the sufficiency of virtue and

⁵⁷⁹ *QG* (frag.) I.79; *Mut.* 161. Philo's usage of the Stoic term προπάθειά, which normally indicates a preliminary movement that precedes a (negative) passion, is unusual. It is possible that he employs the term in a non-technical sense simply to denote a lesser emotion that precedes the full emotion.

⁵⁸⁰ *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 109).

argues that bodily and external goods are ultimately irrelevant for the good life. While all material things are given by God and as such contingently good, they can all be equally transformed into instruments of virtue. Hence, no one set of external circumstances is required for human happiness. The bad life, on the other hand, is the life according to flesh, which is limited to the lacking goods of the sensible world with no awareness of the reality that exists beyond them. While postlapsarian humans still pursue what they consider good, they struggle to determine what is truly good because the pull towards the evil life of sensual gratification is ingrained in them from the moment of their birth.

What makes pleasure crucial for Gregory's exploration of these two inclinations and the two corresponding spheres of life, the intelligible and the sensible, is the way in which it both motivates the choice of evil by projecting a false appearance of goodness and signals that the wrong choice has taken place. Gregory makes an emphatic point that the human faculties cannot at once pursue both goals: one can either love God and rejoice in the hope of the things to come, or love pleasure and gratify one's bodily senses. Any overlap between the two orientations is impossible simply because a person who knows the true good will not even desire sensual pleasure, since human beings always desire what they judge as good.

Indeed, my analysis has demonstrated that acquisition of knowledge greatly impacts the way in which humans evaluate the pleasures of the present life. Throughout his corpus, Gregory contends that those who lack knowledge will continue in the footsteps of Adam and Eve and judge the good simply based on how it appears to the senses. However, those who know that the human *telos* lies beyond the sensible realm are capable of judging the present reality in light of what is known of the final good. On several occasions, Gregory alludes to the opposition between pleasure and hope, which he views as antithetical to each other. Whereas pleasure drives people to seek satisfaction in the present visible goods, hope reveals to the 'eyes of the soul' the future invisible goods in the life to come and offers a promise of a more perfect joy.

An enquiry into Gregory's understanding of sense perception has revealed that he blames pleasure for distorting the intended relationship between the mind and the sensible world. This is, of course, akin to Philo's view which I examined in the previous chapter, but again Gregory largely ignores any gendered or markedly allegorical interpretations. I have argued that the most detrimental effect of pleasure is the way in which it obscures the non-final role of the senses and the sensible world by convincing the mind that no good exists beyond that which is available to the senses. People who accept pleasure as the good will simply stop their search and fail to train their senses to lift the mind into the intelligible world. Thus, the sensible goods and the enjoyment in the flesh become a final end instead of a mere instrument.⁵⁸¹ This results in an increasing ignorance of and alienation from the true good, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, is the mark of sin.

⁵⁸¹ Here I am in full agreement with Daniélou, who states after analysing some of the same passages I have cited in this chapter: '[L]a vie sensible est bonne et a un sens, non pas en elle-même, mais uniquement comme instrument: elle est un moyen pour aller à Dieu. Ainsi le mal est de s'arrêter au visible.' Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 141.

5. Need and Pleasure as Competing and Conflicting *skopoi*

Use [what this world offers], do not abuse it (χρηῆσαι, μὴ παραχρήση): this is what Paul has taught you. Dedicate yourself to measured enjoyment (ἀπολαύσει μεμετρομένη); do not intoxicate yourself with pleasures (μὴ βακχεύσης ταῖς ἡδοναῖς).⁵⁸²

So far we have seen that Gregory condemns the life of pleasure because it revolves around the fleeting phenomena of the sensible world and thus distracts humans from their true goal in the intelligible realm. However, even though the final goal of the human life is intelligible and immaterial, it cannot be fully actualised until the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of their earthly bodies. In this world, Christians, like all human beings, are still bound by the spatio-temporal limitations of their physical existence. Even a Christian must eat, drink, and go about her daily business tending to her physical body surrounded by material objects. Therefore, a question arises: how should the Christian relate to her material surroundings and bodily fluctuations without falling into the trap of pleasure seeking? What is the right way of interacting with the physical creation if we take into account that it is not the ultimate level of being?

Since Gregory considers external goods insignificant for the attainment of the good life, one might imagine that he allows for complete negligence of bodily wellbeing. While this might theoretically be the extreme conclusion of the self-sufficiency of virtue, we shall see that he never explicitly adopts such an extreme position but endorses a more moderate form of asceticism in which the bodily needs are fulfilled. By doing so, he joins the mainstream of ancient thought where needs serve as the standard for bodily care and material consumption. In this chapter, I will show that Gregory addresses the issue of inevitable material consumption with a juxtaposition between need (χρεία) and

⁵⁸² *Benef.* (GNO IX, 104); my translation. Leuenberger-Wenger cites the passage in her brief discussion on the norms of food consumption in Gregory. While she notes the distinction between measured and excessive enjoyment, her focus is on socially determined food norms and fasting. (Leuenberger-Wenger, *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa*, 128–29.) She returns to the topic at the end of the chapter noting Gregory’s focus on rationally measured consumption and touching briefly on the juxtaposition with pleasure. While her observations are largely in line with mine and based on some of the same texts, they are much more limited in their scope. (Ibid., 134–37.)

pleasure (ἡδονή), which he presents as two conflicting goals that shape people's attitude towards the transient material world. A Christian who understands the ephemeral quality of the physical creation will deliberately make only limited use of it for the satisfaction of physical needs and seek unlimited satisfaction from higher, immaterial goods. Just as bodily knowing is the first step towards a higher intelligible reality, so also material consumption is simply a means to preserve life so that the soul may strive for its final goal, the divine likeness. On the other hand, a person who has failed to grasp the penultimate character of matter will turn it into the object of his unlimited desires and find himself frustrated time and again in his search for permanent satisfaction from an impermanent reality.

The discussion in this chapter will take the following form: I will first offer a few general comments on 'need' as an ancient notion. Since the scope of this thesis will not allow me to discuss the ancient tradition extensively, I will focus on Clement of Alexandria's adoption of the ancient needs-discourse, because it sets an influential Christian precedent and one of the closest parallels to Gregory's discussion on the topic. I will propose that the salient points of such discourse are the notions of need as a limited desire and as a legitimate product of nature.

After a brief overview of physical needs in ancient literature, I will go on to show how Gregory makes use of the notion of need as a limited desire and a product of nature, drawing, in particular, on two homilies where the question of bodily needs receives a substantial treatment. Only after we understand Gregory's affirmation of need and his positive advice on relating to the material world, can we properly address the juxtaposition between need and pleasure. In the final sections of the chapter, I will first offer relevant textual examples and explain how pleasure and need are related in Gregory's thought. I will examine the differences between needs-satisfaction and pleasure-seeking as two basic attitudes towards the material world. I will, however, conclude the chapter by noting their similarities: both need and pleasure are products of the transient material world and reflect the endless cyclical change of the sensible nature. Thus, *neither* pleasure *nor* needs-satisfaction suffices as a substitute for the true,

unchanging, and immaterial good. The crucial difference between the two is, then, that whereas a pleasure-lover still attempts to pursue sensual enjoyment as the final goal, a person who simply seeks to have her needs fulfilled has understood the instrumental and temporal quality of the material creation and the satisfaction it can offer.

Needs as Limited and Natural Desires in Graeco-Roman Ethics

In ancient literature, need and bodily necessities are rarely cited as an independent ethical locus, but they play a key part in discussions on wealth and poverty, regulation of passions, and the debate on the value of external goods. Furthermore, for early Christian writers the scene of the Last Judgment in *Matt.* 25 places the notion of bodily needs on the foreground of early Christian accounts of philanthropy, justice, and personal salvation.⁵⁸³ Considering that many ancient thinkers regarded external goods as insignificant or only marginally relevant for happiness, they produced a great deal of writings instructing how one should relate to this reality that was only of secondary importance. However, since philosophical works were a product of elite groups, it is hardly surprising that management of wealth and the correct attitude towards material goods were constant concerns of the ancient writers. Although the authors disagreed on the overall importance of material goods in the good life, there was an overwhelming consensus that need and necessity – often conceptualised with the one word *χρεία* – should define the relationship between humans and their material environment. For the anti-hedonists, need limited man’s concern for the material world, allowing him to focus his efforts on the pursuit of the true intelligible good. For Epicurus and his followers, a need-based lifestyle guaranteed that an individual would continue to live happily even if he suddenly found himself in modest circumstances, and offered pleasure that was much more satisfying than the frenzied pursuit of unlimited desires which always came mixed with pain and anxiety.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸³ For these perspectives, see Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁸⁴ Epicurus, *Men.* 130–131; *Vat.* 33, 59.

In modern-day discourse, the question of legitimate and superfluous consumption is often conceptualised with the juxtaposition between 'needs' and 'wants'. However, a needs/wants distinction would have been ill fitting in the Graeco-Roman ethical framework. While the difference between physiologically determined and legitimate needs, and unfounded individual whims was frequently cited in ancient philosophy, it was not conceptualised in terms of 'needs' and 'wants' simply because for the ancient writers needs *were* desires, or at least they manifested themselves as such.⁵⁸⁵ Instead of a dichotomy, there was a continuum.

Many ancient thinkers regarded physical needs as 'necessary' and/or 'natural' desires.⁵⁸⁶ The notion of naturalness was both descriptive and normative: it alluded to the fact that needs were an authentic and unavoidable part of the human constitution and, more importantly, endowed them with moral legitimacy.⁵⁸⁷ Nature, understood as a cosmic principle that unfolded in the lives of individual beings, was famously the key ethical guideline of the Stoics who argued that a life according to nature was synonymous with the virtuous life. However, the idea became widespread in ancient ethics and was employed even by thinkers such as Plutarch who were vocal critics of Stoicism.⁵⁸⁸ Natural desires were conceived of as limited deficits that had a real basis in the human constitution and could be satisfied with simple means. They were contrasted with unnatural desires, luxuries (τρυφή), which were a product of human

⁵⁸⁵ The idea that both universal needs and individual wants were considered desires should not be confused with the modern economic notion of 'preferences' that has blurred the difference between 'needs' and 'wants' by grouping them under one category of subjective desire and divesting need of its ethical primacy. Unlike most modern-day economic theorists who in principle consider all preferences equally valid, ancient thinkers made an emphatic point that some desires were better founded, more legitimate, and more beneficial than others. The fact that both needs and whims were considered desires did not make them indistinguishable or equally important.

⁵⁸⁶ See, among others, Plato, *Rep.* 8, 558d-559d; Aristotle, *NE* 1118b; Epicurus, *Men.* 127; Seneca, *Ep.* 16.8-9; Plutarch, *Bruta animalia* 6, 989b-c; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 2.1.16.4.

⁵⁸⁷ Annas notes that the ethical relevance of nature has often been associated with later Hellenistic ethics rather than Aristotle's thought, while Aristotle's view of nature has been considered weaker and less significant as an ethical norm. However, as Annas points out, both Aristotle's *Politics* (1256b-1258a) and his ethical works indicate that Aristotle regarded nature not only as an inherent restriction and starting point of human activity ('mere nature'), but also as a positive standard of ethical development. See Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 142-58.

⁵⁸⁸ For nature, need, and excess see, e.g., *De esu carnum* 997b.

imagination and did not correspond to real deficits. Thus, while natural desires had a clear beginning and an end and could be satisfied with a fixed amount of resources, unnatural desires were as innumerable and endless as the whims of the individual, giving rise to insatiable greed.⁵⁸⁹ Indeed, limitedness vs. limitlessness was understood as a key criterion for determining whether a desire was natural or not.⁵⁹⁰ At times the distinction between the needs of nature and artificial luxuries was projected onto mythical accounts of an original human community where the first humans led a need-based, abundant, and harmonious lifestyle, only later corrupted by the invention of luxury.⁵⁹¹

The notion of needs as limited and natural desires was widely accepted by early Judaeo-Christian writers. In the works of Philo, need as a demand of nature sets the ethical standard both for the ascetic community of the *therapeutae* described in *De vita contemplativa* and for the Jewish people as a whole.⁵⁹² The notion of *χρεία* is also central to Clement's moral teaching particularly in *Paedagogus*, and it provides the norm of bodily care and philanthropy in Basil of Caesarea's monastic writings and in his sermons to non-monastic audiences.⁵⁹³ Here, it will suffice to turn briefly to Clement's view of the topic, for it shows well how the standard of need was applied in early Christian literature and provides a particularly close precursor to Gregory's thought.

Of the earlier authors Clement is perhaps the one to form the most explicit contrast between *ἡδονή* and *χρεία*, which we will soon encounter in Gregory. This is because Clement, too, pays a lot of attention to the aim of people's actions and the correct use of material objects. Addressing various situations that an upper-class Christian might face in his daily life, Clement frequently comments on nourishment, clothing, housing, and sexual relations. For Clement,

⁵⁸⁹ See, for example, Seneca, *Ep.* 16.8–9; Plutarch, *De cupiditate divitiarum* 524e–f.

⁵⁹⁰ Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 66. See also, for example, Aristotle's distinction between natural and unnatural wealth-getting in *Pol.* 1256b–1257b.

⁵⁹¹ On the authenticity of need and its role as a standard for harmonious community life, and on the breakdown of harmony due to the invention of luxury, see, e.g., Plato, *Rep.* 2, 369b–372d; Seneca, *Ep.* 90.

⁵⁹² See, for example, *Contempl.* IV.37–39 (LCL 363, 135–137).

⁵⁹³ For Basil, see *Asc. mag.* 20 (PG 31, 969–976); *Homilia dicta in Lacisis* (PG 31, 1440–1441).

χρεία is a broad term that denotes ‘need’, ‘use’, and ‘utility’. It refers to a bodily deficit and the goods required to replenish it, and generally to the appropriate use of objects. Thus, it pertains to a variety of objects such as food, clothes, agricultural tools, flowers, and ointments.⁵⁹⁴ All of them have been created for a particular purpose and should be used only to fulfil their intended purpose, not for luxury and pleasure.

In *Paedagogus*, Clement explains that the correct use of food and drink is to quench hunger and thirst, that is, to repair a deficit.⁵⁹⁵ According to the ‘Instructor’, Christ himself, people should eat to live, not live to eat, for ‘[e]ating is not our main occupation, nor is pleasure our goal (οὔτε σκοπὸς ἡδονή).’⁵⁹⁶ The simplest fare will suffice for this purpose. Like the earlier writers, Clement advises that cheap and readily available things are better than expensive, and reassures his audience that the indispensable ‘first necessities’ have been freely provided by God.⁵⁹⁷ Although he suggests that advanced Christians may be able to exercise enough self-restraint to make use of luxurious objects with the same indifference as simple ones,⁵⁹⁸ the main advice of *Paedagogus* is to renounce superfluties altogether and limit oneself to simple things that fulfil their function: ‘Expensiveness should not be the measure in objects whose purpose is usefulness (ᾧν μέτρον ἡ χρεία, μὴ ἡ πολυτέλεια γινέσθω),’ Clement counsels.⁵⁹⁹ Although here χρεία is contrasted with expensiveness, later in the same chapter Clement compares it with pleasure as he seeks to explain the difference between medically beneficial and luxurious use of ointments. Telling people to ignore the bait of perfume (τῆς εὐωδίας δέλεαρ), Clement urges his audience to assign no place for pleasure ‘not connected with a necessity of life’ (πρὸς οὐδεμίαν συμπεπλεγμένη λυσιτελῆ τῷ βίῳ χρείαν), but instead select ‘what is useful’ (τὸ χρειώδες).⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁴ All these are mentioned in Book 2 of *Paedagogus*.

⁵⁹⁵ *Paed.* 2.10 bis. 103.2.

⁵⁹⁶ *Paed.* 2.1.1.4; trans. Wood, 94, with modifications.

⁵⁹⁷ *Paed.* 2.3.38.4–5, 2.12.119.3.

⁵⁹⁸ *Paed.* 2.12.121.1.

⁵⁹⁹ *Paed.* 2.3.37.1–2; trans. Wood, 126.

⁶⁰⁰ *Paed.* 2.8.67.2–68.1; trans. Wood, 151. Concerning the lack of utility in pleasure, see also 2.8.68.4.

Clement's insistence on need and utility-based actions must be seen within his wider ethical emphasis on *metriopatheia*.⁶⁰¹ In *Stromateis*, he makes a distinction between the spiritually advanced life of complete *apatheia*, which mimics God's own life, and *metriopatheia*, which is attainable for the ordinary Christian.⁶⁰² The ethos of *Paedagogus* is clearly the latter: '[W]hatever things are natural (φυσικά) to men we must not eradicate from them, but rather impose on them limits and suitable times.'⁶⁰³

Whereas some non-Christian writers base the normativity of need on mythical accounts of the first human communities, Clement anchors it in the perfect humanity of Christ. By partaking in food and drink, Christ showed that needs were a legitimate and inevitable part of the human existence. At the same time, he also set an example as to *how* needs ought to be satisfied. Clement points out that even the 'Lord of the universe' did not require luxuries, but ate from a simple bowl and drank from the Samaritan woman's clay bucket, 'making use his aim (σκοπόν γὰρ τὴν χρείαν ἐτίθετο)'.⁶⁰⁴ However, ultimately Clement seems to think that Christ only *appeared* to have needs. Whereas in *Paedagogus* the figure of Christ serves as the perfect example of a person who does not desire anything beyond his needs, in *Stromateis* Clement presents an entirely impassible Christ, claiming that it would be ludicrous to suppose that Christ's body would have required 'necessary aids' for its preservation. In Clement's view, the body of Christ was held together by 'holy energy', but he ate to prove his true humanity. Advanced Christians, in Clement's words 'gnostics', must however eat and drink to sustain their bodies, but they are able to do it completely rationally.⁶⁰⁵ They are capable of distinguishing rational desire (ὄρεξις) from irrational lust (ἐπιθυμία), assigning the latter to 'pleasures and licentiousness (ἡδοναῖς καὶ ἀκολασίᾳ)', the former to the 'necessities of nature'

⁶⁰¹ Lilla writes: 'The πάθη, in this ethical stage, are not completely eradicated but kept by the Logos within certain limits, which are also the *limits of nature*. [Cites *Strom.* 2.109.1] No expression suits such ethical views better than the term μετριοπάθεια, which both Clement and Philo employ for this purpose.' (Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 99. Emphasis mine.)

⁶⁰² *Strom.* 6.9.74. Concerning *metriopatheia* and *apatheia* in Clement, see, for example, *Ibid.*, 99–106; Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, 117–20.

⁶⁰³ *Paed.* 2.5.46.1–2.

⁶⁰⁴ *Paed.* 2.3.38.1–2; my translation.

⁶⁰⁵ *Strom.* 6.9.71.

(κατὰ φύσιν ἀναγκαίωv).⁶⁰⁶ In other words, for an impassible person, needs-satisfaction is a conscious and rational decision, not an abrupt whim.

Even a brief introduction reveals that, despite differences in context and focus, ancient thinkers shared certain basic convictions about physical needs. First of all, they accepted needs as an inevitable and thus acceptable part of the human existence. Furthermore, they regarded need as a limit that reason imposed on the acquisitive drive and contrasted it with uncontrollable desires. Clement also makes the point that limited and unlimited desires are directed at different ends (σκοποί): If desiring is consciously aimed at needs-satisfaction, it will end when the deficit has been replenished and self-sufficiency restored. But if the person sets his goal hedonistically at pleasure, his desires will multiply endlessly and never find satisfaction. Another recurring feature in the sources is the link between need, nature and limit. In Graeco-Roman ethics, limitedness and limitlessness are presented as crucial criteria that can help the individual to determine whether his desires are natural or not. Although Nature demands that needs be satisfied, its demand is ultimately easy to bear and requires little time and effort. A life according to need ensures bodily wellbeing and social harmony, and frees people to focus primarily on higher concerns.

Needs as Limited and Natural Desires in Gregory of Nyssa

The ancient ideal of physical needs as the limit of bodily care and material consumption runs through Gregory's corpus. Practically speaking, it seems unlikely that an extreme emphasis on physical denial would have won him many fans in front of a mixed crowd of churchgoers. However, even in the monastic context of *De virginitate* Gregory opposes strict encratism which harbours the danger of spiritual pride, and argues for moderate asceticism in which the bodily necessities are provided. While he occasionally mentions exceptional individuals, such as Moses, who may at times be so dedicated to contemplation that they appear to transcend the limits of their embodied

⁶⁰⁶ *Strom.* 4.18.117.5. This is based on the Stoic distinction between ὀρεξις as a neutral and rational category of desire and the passion ἐπιθυμία as its excessive and irrational manifestation.

existence, such passages describe *brief* moments of exceptional holiness, glimpses into the reality of resurrection, rather than an overall ascetic programme for this world.⁶⁰⁷ In this life, a Christian, too, must eat, drink, and seek shelter to stay alive. In this section I will first examine Gregory's conception of need as a deficit arising from the bodily nature, and then turn to two homilies to show how need functions as an ethical norm.

For Gregory, physical neediness is a strictly postlapsarian matter. Whereas some non-Christian authors would long for a mythical Golden Age when humans shared everything and only took what was required to satisfy their bodily needs, Gregory makes it clear that the paradisiac existence was free from physical deficits and material consumption.⁶⁰⁸ Instead, the prelapsarian humans were sustained by the divine gift of immortality. All this changes in the fall as humans become subject to death and decay and are cast away from the abundance of Paradise to support themselves with their own labour. Without the divine gifts of immortality and incorruptibility, humans are subjected to the changeable cyclical life of their own bodies. In the previous chapters I have already discussed Gregory's view according to which God added various animal-like qualities to the sensible part of human nature to ensure the survival of the human race after the loss of immortality. Need can thus be understood both as a cyclical deficit occurring in the body, and as a life-preserving desire to have that deficit remedied. It is a sign of a new vulnerability, but also a safeguard against extinction.

Like many ancient authors, Gregory locates need in 'nature' and endows the concept with the traditional double meaning of cosmic order and individual essence. Put simply, need is a manifestation of the cyclical order of Nature, which is actualised in the particular instance of human nature. In Chapter 2, I pointed out that at times Gregory is so anxious to emphasise the fundamental identity of humans as intelligible beings that he reserves the term 'human nature' only for the intellectual faculties. But in the case of needs and nature we

⁶⁰⁷ *Vit. Moys.* 1.58, 60 (SC 1, 25).

⁶⁰⁸ *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 105); *Op. hom.* 19 (PG 44, 196C-D).

see something of the opposite: when Gregory refers to ‘nature’ without any specific qualifications, he is not talking about all aspects that make humans human, but specifically about the corporeal part which connects them to the whole material creation. Where needs are concerned, being human becomes largely synonymous with being corporeal, as opposed to God and the angels who are by nature incorporeal and, importantly, ἀνευδεεῖς, without any lack. In one of his *Homilies on the Beatitudes*, Gregory writes about ‘the neediness of a nature that is not self-sufficient in regard to its sustenance, but whose deficiency has to be filled up by the abundance of the irrational creatures’ (τὸ πενιχρὸν τῆς φύσεως, τὸ μὴ εἶναι αὐτὴν αὐτάρκη δι’ ἑαυτῆς πρὸς τὴν ἰδίαν σύστασιν, εἰ μὴ τῇ περιουσίᾳ τῶν ἀλόγων τὸ ἐνδέον ἀναπληρώσειεν).⁶⁰⁹ Here we encounter ‘human nature’ in its earthly postlapsarian condition, not in its original and ideal state.⁶¹⁰ Left without the supernatural gift of incorruptibility, human nature is needy and dependent on other creatures for its survival.

The occurrence of needs can be directly explained by the characteristics of the corporeal nature. First of all, needs result from the mutability that characterises all created beings. Gregory understands change as a part of the ‘diastema’, the radical ontological difference that separates spatio-temporally limited creatures from the infinite, immutable, and non-spatial Creator.⁶¹¹ But while the created *intelligible* nature, such as an angel or the human intellect, is characterised by a linear movement towards good or evil actualised through the free will, the corporeal nature is inherently prone to cyclical change, which begins and ceases in a continuous pattern.⁶¹² In creation, the latter can be seen in the way in which the sun rises and sets day after day and the sea receives a constant inflow of waters but does not increase. ‘[A]ll things are shown to have same cycles in every period of time, without any variation at all by way of change into anything

⁶⁰⁹ *Beat. 2* (GNO VII/2, 97); trans. Graef, 104.

⁶¹⁰ See note 101 in Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, trans., *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 155.

⁶¹¹ For a survey of this central notion, see Scot Douglass, ‘Diastêma’, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Secco and Giulio Maspero, trans. Seth Cherney, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 227–28.

⁶¹² These two kinds of change are discussed in Jean Daniélou, ‘Changement’, in *L’être et le temps chez Grégoire de Nysse* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 95–115.

new,' Gregory writes in *Homily 1 on Ecclesiastes*.⁶¹³ These cycles are due to the instability of matter which is characterised by the alternation of opposites, as we already saw in Chapter 3. The circular movement of the material universe pertains also to human bodies, which share in the same corporeal nature as all physical beings. The correspondence between the cosmic nature and the human nature is reminiscent of Stoic philosophy in which the purpose of the human life is to seek harmony with the flux of Nature. However, for Gregory it is not the whole human nature, but specifically the corporeal part that harmonises with the visible universe. In human beings the cycle of Nature is primarily manifested in the passing of generations as human lives begin and end in an unchanging pattern.⁶¹⁴ But humanity undergoes fluctuations also on a smaller scale: bodily needs and functions occur in a similar cyclical fashion. Gregory's consolatory discourses convey this cycle particularly well:

Therefore, the life of our body entails a double activity of filling and emptying (πλήρωσις τε καὶ κένωσις), on the one hand, through food and drink, and on the other, through the inhalation and exhalation of air, without which the life of flesh cannot maintain its nature. For the human being ceases to live whenever the succession of these opposites no longer troubles his nature.⁶¹⁵

Do we not go round the mill of life like beasts toiling in the mill with covered eyes, always passing through the same things and turning again towards them? Shall I tell you about this cyclical course? Appetite, satiety, sleeping, waking, emptying, filling: always the latter after the former, and the former after the latter, and again the latter, and we never cease to go round the circle until we get out of the mill.⁶¹⁶

The purpose of these works is to portray the bodily life as a futile cycle of becoming and ceasing in order to show that its loss does not adversely affect the happiness of the soul. In *De mortuis*, Gregory explains that Christians should not worry about the change and decay they observe in themselves but focus on the spiritual fulfilment that awaits them after death. But even if their transient lives

⁶¹³ *Eccl.* 1.7 (SC 416, 122); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 38.

⁶¹⁴ *Eccl.* 1.8 (SC 416, 126).

⁶¹⁵ *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 31); my translation. The futility of the cycle of life, including the burden of bodily functions, is a common theme in ancient reflections on death. Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 24.26.

⁶¹⁶ *Flacill.* (GNO IX/1, 485); my translation.

are secondary to their spiritual purpose, Gregory is anxious to emphasise that change is something one should accept as natural – be it in death, or simply in the fluctuation of daily needs. In a subsequent passage, which includes a resounding affirmation of the bodily needs, Gregory highlights the goodness of the body and notes that passions are not caused by the nature of the flesh such.⁶¹⁷ As we have already seen, virtue can be limited and undermined only by its opposite, and Gregory is emphatic that bodily filling and emptying are neither good nor bad.⁶¹⁸ Human needs arise as the body ‘moves in accordance with its own nature’, directing its impulses (ὀρμαῖς) towards things that enable it to conserve its cohesion. As we shall see, it is only the choice (προαίρεσις) to gratify such impulses beyond what is necessary that perverts the natural course of the bodily life.⁶¹⁹

Thus, even though the impermanence of all physical pursuits makes Gregory lament the futility of human life, he also accepts the circularity as an inherent, ‘natural’ property of all corporeal beings that should neither be completely ignored nor dwelled on. ‘The debt caused by your nature (τὸ τῆς φύσεως ὀφλημα) is small; you owe food to your flesh – a trivial thing and easily procured, if you consider what is needed (πρὸς τὴν χρεῖαν βλέπεις),’ Gregory writes in *Homily 4 on the Lord’s Prayer*.⁶²⁰ This view reflects the ancient idea that, as demands of nature, physical needs are minor and easy to bear and thus serve as a safeguard against excess. In the same homily, Gregory argues that needy humans can attain the same level of purity as angels who do not have bodily needs. A human who ‘gives service to nature’ (πρὸς τὴν τῆς φύσεως ὑπηρεσίαν βλέπων) and does not let his desires extend beyond necessity (ἔξω τοῦ ἀναγκαίου), is not far below the angelic state, but imitates their need of nothing by being content with little.’⁶²¹ In other words, it is not necessary to become ontologically angel-like, but to become an equal of angels in status and worth, while fulfilling the characteristic demands of human nature. However,

⁶¹⁷ *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 58).

⁶¹⁸ *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 31–32).

⁶¹⁹ *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 58).

⁶²⁰ *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 51–52); trans. Graef, 64.

⁶²¹ *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 51); trans. Graef, 63.

any desiring that exceeds the limit of necessity is useless and cannot be justified by appealing to nature:

People, let yourselves no longer be distracted by vain desires (περὶ τὰ μάταια ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις); stop heaping toil upon toil for yourselves. The debt caused by your nature (τὸ τῆς φύσεως ὄφλημα) is small; you owe food to your flesh – a trivial thing and easily procured, if you consider what is needed (πρὸς τὴν χρείαν βλέπεις). Why do you lay yourselves under so much tribute? Why do you submit to the yoke of paying so many fines? Mining silver, digging gold, and searching for transparent stones – for no other purpose save that your stomach, this perpetual tax collector, may live daintily through all this. Yet its only debt is bread which fills up the deficiency of the body (ὁ ἀναπληρῶν τὸ ἐνδέον τῷ σώματι). [--] Ask for bread because life needs it, and you owe it to the body because of your nature (τούτου σε ὀφειλέτην ἐποίησεν ἡ φύσις τῷ σώματι).⁶²²

Using economic metaphors, Gregory contrasts the minor debt of nature with the heavy yoke of useless luxuries.⁶²³ The passage conveys a common ancient idea that striving for luxury not only leads to excess, but also turns life into a frantic and burdensome strife.

Homily 4 on the Lord's Prayer reveals that, despite Gregory's general admiration of the angelic life, disembodied angels cannot and must not be fully imitated by humans who lead an embodied life. The standard for bodily care and material consumption must be found elsewhere. It is no surprise that here the incarnated Christ serves as the primary example of the perfect embodied life. The normative role of Christ is particularly evident in *Homily 4 on the Beatitudes*, which comments on the verse 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.' In the homily, Gregory offers an interpretation of *Matt.* 4:3 where Satan tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread. Commenting on Jesus' fasting, Gregory notes:

He who had everything in common with us except sin, and who shared all our sufferings, did not think hunger a sin. Therefore He did not refuse Himself to undergo this experience, but accepted nature's appetitive impulse (τὴν ὀρεκτικὴν τῆς φύσεως ὀρμήν) for food. Having remained forty days without food, He afterwards was hungry;

⁶²² *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 51–52); trans. Graef, 64 (with modifications).

⁶²³ For the stomach as a tax collector, see also *Flacill.* (GNO IX/1, 485). Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 21.11.

for when He desired it, He allowed nature (τῆ φύσει) to act in its normal way. But when the father of temptations realized that He, too, was affected by hunger, he advised Him to meet the desire with stones. Now this means to pervert the desire from natural food into things outside nature (τοῦτο δέ ἐστὶ τὸ παρατρέψαι τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἐκ τῆς κατὰ φύσιν τροφῆς ἐπὶ τὰ ἕξω τῆς φύσεως).⁶²⁴

Above, Gregory inserts the ancient ideal of ‘life according to nature’ into a distinctively Christian framework by connecting it to the doctrine of Christ’s perfect human nature. By using Christ’s human nature as an example, Gregory is able to argue conclusively that hunger cannot be sinful. The normative role of nature is further highlighted when Gregory argues that the Tempter’s request to turn stones into bread was an attempt to ‘pervert the desire for natural food into things outside nature.’⁶²⁵ While in this passage Christ’s human nature remains the main reference point for what is ‘natural’, the phrases ‘natural food’ and ‘things outside nature’ can be interpreted as stemming from a broader concept of nature that pertains to the whole order of being.

From the biblical account of Christ’s temptation, Gregory extracts a general moral teaching. He argues that people should not make stones into bread, that is, let their desire grow beyond the necessary limits of need (ἐκβαίνῃ τοὺς ἀναγκαίους ὄρους τῆς χρείας ἢ ὄρεξις) and beyond the limits of nature (ἐπὶ τὰ ἕξω τῆς φύσεως). He rebukes people for procuring expensive dishes and luxurious dining implements that go ‘beyond the necessities of life’ (ἕξω τῶν ἀναγκαίων τῆ ζωῆ), having no relation to the ‘needs of nature’ (πρὸς τὴν τῆς

⁶²⁴ *Beat.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 114); Graef, 121.

⁶²⁵ Mateo-Seco notes Gregory’s emphasis on nature, asking if we are dealing with a ‘strange exegesis’ or ‘Gregory’s concern to ensure that Christian asceticism is always conforming to the nature of things and is particularly respectful of the organic equilibrium of the human person’. He concludes that Gregory’s repeated emphasis on the goodness of bodily hunger and the evil of going against the nature seem to indicate that the focus on nature and bodily balance is more than ‘a simple rhetorical ploy’. However, although Mateo-Seco notes the importance of bodily balance in ancient medical theories, he does not investigate the matter further or make a connection to non-Christian ascetic ideals in which adhering to nature was seen as the right measure of bodily care. See Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco, ‘Gregory of Nyssa, De Beatitudinibus, Oratio IV: “Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness, for They Shall Be Satisfied” (Mt 5,6)’, in *Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on the Beatitudes: An English Version with Contemporary and Supporting Studies: Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14-18 September 1998)*, ed. Hubertus R. Drobner and Alberto Viciano (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 154.

φύσεως χρείαν).⁶²⁶ Further in the same text Gregory creates several rhetorical contrasts between nature's simple desires and the selfish and excessive acts of a person who does not heed its requests:

Then nature desires bread, or something else to eat. If, therefore, someone took gold instead of bread into his mouth, would he meet the need?⁶²⁷

While nature seeks one thing, he is busy trying to find another.⁶²⁸

Nature says – in fact by being hungry it almost cries out – that it is now needing food... But you do not listen to nature; you do not give it what it is seeking.⁶²⁹

Nature wants to drink – but you prepare costly tripods, tankards, mixing bowls, jars, and a thousand other things which have nothing to do with the need in question.⁶³⁰

Here, nature's reasonable voice serves as a corrective to the individual's excessive desires. It is the voice of the redeemed human nature revealed in Christ. The purifying role of the incarnated Christ is highlighted soon afterwards as Gregory compares Christ to people who filter wine, arguing that he 'scrutinizes and distinguishes what is foreign to nature by His subtle and most perfect contemplation.' Hunger, says Gregory, is needed to preserve life; Christ sifts out and casts away only the superfluous things that have been mixed with the actual need, not the need itself.⁶³¹

To sum up, in Gregory's works physical need emerges as a cyclical but legitimate desire that is inherent to the embodied human condition. As is generally true of Gregory's notion of desire and passions, the underlying impulse is not to be quenched but moderated and redirected. Needs belong to the make-up of human nature, a combination of an immaterial soul with a material body; therefore, the standard of purity is not set by disembodied

⁶²⁶ *Beat. 4* (GNO VII/2, 114–115); Graef, 121–122.

⁶²⁷ *Beat. 4* (GNO VII/2, 115); Graef, 122.

⁶²⁸ *Beat. 4* (GNO VII/2, 115); Graef, 122.

⁶²⁹ *Beat. 4* (GNO VII/2, 115); Graef, 122.

⁶³⁰ *Beat. 4* (GNO VII/2, 115); Graef, 122–123.

⁶³¹ *Beat. 4* (GNO VII/2, 116); Graef, 123.

angels, but by the incarnated Christ who reveals the human nature in its true, purified form.

While Gregory retains the Graeco-Roman notion of need as a natural and limited desire, in contrast to many other ancient authors he does not distinguish between two *kinds* of desires. For him, there is only one desire, interchangeably denoted with ἐπιθυμία or ὄρεξις, which originates in the sensible part of the human nature. In the next section of this chapter I will show that for Gregory the difference between appropriate and sinful desiring is determined by the *extent* and *direction* of this one desire: will it stay within the appropriate limit of need or cross over in pursuit of pleasure?

Juxtaposition of Need (χρεία) and Pleasure (ἡδονή)

In the previous chapters, we have seen how pleasure replaces the final good primarily in our attempts to perceive and understand what is truly good and, simply, what truly is. Now, I will show that that this epistemological concern finds a parallel in a more practical problem of consumption. Just as in perceiving material things humans should understand that they are simply looking at the first stepping stone in the pursuit of virtue, so also all material consumption ought to be informed by the penultimate character of matter and our present embodiment: food, drink, clothes, and houses are not things to be enjoyed in themselves but only lower goods that ensure our survival so that we can strive for the higher intelligible Good. They are instruments, not final ends.

In what follows, I will introduce a number of passages in which Gregory juxtaposes ‘need’ (χρεία) and ‘pleasure’ (ἡδονή) as two conflicting goals (σκοποί) that motivate material consumption. The pairing is sufficiently recurrent and distinctive that we can assume it is intentional and somewhat technical. In this context, χρεία does not only denote a physical lack but becomes a marker of aim and intent, that of having one’s needs satisfied. Consequently, the legitimacy of material desires and the potential enjoyment that follows are determined by the aim of the act: What are people hoping to

attain when they eat, seek shelter, or otherwise make use of the material world? Are they simply satisfying their bodily needs or hedonistically pursuing pleasure as a goal in itself? The idea is succinctly summarised in Chapter 21 of *De virginitate*:

To ensure that our body will remain calm to the highest degree and not be muddled by passions born of satiety (ἐκ τοῦ κόρου παθημάτων), we must take care that it is not pleasure but need (οὐ τὴν ἡδονήν, ἀλλὰ τὴν...χρείαν) that in each case defines the measure of the self-disciplined life (τῆς ἐγκρατεστεύρας διαγωγῆς μέτρον) and the limit of enjoyment (ὄρον τῆς ἀπολαύσεως).⁶³²

Above, Gregory sets need (χρεία) and pleasure (ἡδονή) against each other, arguing that the former ought to be both the measure of the self-disciplined life and the limit of enjoyment. The word for enjoyment, ἀπόλαυσις, can be understood both as the partaking of a good and as the pleasurable affective response that follows. In short, Gregory rejects a hedonistic lifestyle in which bodily pleasure is pursued as an independent, final goal, but allows enjoyment as a by-product of needs-satisfaction. In the passage above, the words 'limit' (ὄρος) and 'measure' (μέτρον) highlight the restricted nature of legitimate enjoyment. 'Satiety' (κόρος), on the other hand, results from enjoyment taken to extreme. I will return to this term in the course of my analysis. Suffice it to say that in Greek literature the word carries connotations of greed and excess, and can here be seen as the counterpart of limited enjoyment.⁶³³

The passage from *Virg.* 21 touches on the idea that needs-satisfaction may inadvertently bring enjoyment and one should master the right attitude towards any enjoyment that may ensue: it is to be treated as a simple by-product of needs-satisfaction, not as a driving force and an end in itself. We should also recall that Gregory explains the origin of pleasure in terms of needs and self-preservation. Pleasure motivates us to fulfil our needs and thus ensures our bodily survival. Furthermore, Gregory conceptualises pleasure as a

⁶³² *Virg.* 21.2 (SC 119, 508). I am offering my own translation following Aubineau (SC 119, 509) as Callahan's translation (FOC 58, 65) largely misses Gregory's point.

⁶³³ See, James J. Helm, "'Koros': From Satisfaction to Greed", *The Classical World* 87, no. 1 (1993): 5–11. Helm shows that the meaning of the term changed already in classical antiquity so that it no longer signified a positive state of 'having enough', but had connotations of excess and greed.

replenishment of a lack, using hunger and thirst as paradigmatic examples. Thus, it is no surprise that the filling of a bodily lack will yield a pleasurable response. However, while other ancient authors are happy to refer to secondary pleasure as ἡδονή, above Gregory makes a terminological distinction between spontaneous ‘enjoyment’, a sensation in the body, and the passion of ‘pleasure’ which springs from the conclusion that the bodily filling is good and ought to be pursued for its own sake.

The view that needs-satisfaction yields limited and legitimate pleasure is widely shared by ancient authors. In Chapter 1, I cited Seneca’s and Clement of Alexandria’s views on the topic.⁶³⁴ However, Gregory makes less of enjoyment as a legitimate by-product of needs-satisfaction than many other ancient authors. It is only a later editor of *De virginitate* who, in the paragraphs that follow, elaborates on Gregory’s own remark and spells out the ancient connection between pleasure and need by noting that ‘the pleasant is often mingled with need.’ Like the majority of ancient authors, the editor espouses the view that the mere fact that enjoyment accompanies need is no reason to repel the need, as long as one does not let pleasure lead the way. He instructs that one should simply always choose that which is useful and look down on that which delights the senses.⁶³⁵

Most of Gregory’s own remarks on need and pleasure do not centre on legitimate enjoyment that overlaps with needs-satisfaction, but on intentional and illicit pleasure-seeking that perverts and exceeds physical needs. In *De mortuis non esse dolendum* Gregory affirms again the legitimacy of bodily needs, stating that a rational examination of need will help the individual accept the deficits caused by nature calmly and ‘make the end of need the limit of desire’ (ὄρον τῆς ὀρέξεως τὸν σκοπὸν τῆς χρείας ποιούμενος).⁶³⁶ We should take note of how Gregory connects the terms χρεία and σκοπός (‘aim’, ‘goal’), for we shall

⁶³⁴ At the level of terminology, it should of course be noted that while Seneca and Clement refer to secondary enjoyment as ἡδονή, Gregory prefers ἀπόλαυσις. As I have demonstrated earlier, in his thought ἡδονή denotes enjoyment for its own sake and is thus a negative term so far as it pertains to the earthly realm.

⁶³⁵ *Virg.* 21.2.1’-6’ (SC 119, 508).

⁶³⁶ *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 58).

soon see that he uses the word σκοπός also in conjunction with ἡδονή. Here ‘the end of need’ – in other words the goal of needs-satisfaction – is understood as a mark at which desire should be aimed, a limit that keeps it within right proportions. Desire, however, is not Gregory’s only concern. The warning that follows makes it clear that the fundamental conflict is between pleasure and needs-satisfaction:

However, the one who becomes a servant of pleasures, makes a road of passions out of necessary needs (ὁ δὲ τῶν ἡδονῶν ὑπηρέτης ὁδοὺς παθημάτων τὰς ἀναγκαίης χρείας ἐποίησεν): instead of nourishment, he seeks delicacy, instead of clothing, he prefers ornaments, instead of the need for shelter, extravagance, instead of procreation of children, he looks at unlawful and forbidden pleasures.⁶³⁷

Above Gregory takes his audience to the boundary between need and pleasure. If the individual lets his desires grow beyond need, the acquisition of material goods can no longer be justified by the natural demands of the body. Instead, pleasure becomes the driving force of consumption, an end in itself. By arguing that a servant of pleasures makes ‘a road of passions out of necessary needs,’ Gregory implies that need and pleasure are not simply two opposing aims; there is a dangerous continuity between them. A deed that begins as a legitimate act of needs-fulfilment can quickly grow into pleasure seeking if the individual does not consciously set a limit to his desires.

The fluidity between need and pleasure becomes literal in one of the *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* in which Gregory compares pleasure to water that flows from one source into many channels by mixing itself into the ‘needs of life’ (τῶν τοῦ βίου χρείαις).⁶³⁸ Starting from housing, Gregory gives detailed examples of how pleasure infiltrates basic human needs: due to their weakness, human beings require a house which in its basic form simply serves to protect them from heat and cold. But, Gregory laments,

⁶³⁷ *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 58–59); my translation.

⁶³⁸ *Eccl.* 3.4 (SC 416, 196).

pleasure forces the person to go beyond the bounds of need (παρελθεῖν τοὺς ὄρους τῆς χρείας ἢ ἡδονῆ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐβιάσατο). For when he is not providing necessities for the body, but concerns himself with things to please and delight the eyes, he is almost disappointed that has not brought the sky itself inside the house, and cannot build the very beams of the sun into his roof.⁶³⁹

Once the limits of need are left behind, the whole universe will be coveted as a source of pleasure. Gregory goes on to list various exotic and extravagant luxuries that pleasure-driven people use to embellish their houses. He sketches caricatures of licentious individuals whose feet luxuriate in the brilliance of their shiny floors and eyes fornicate on forbidden things represented in works of art. This, for Gregory, is not required by the ‘needs of life’, but by ‘desire, which extends through useless things to invent what is not opportune.’⁶⁴⁰

Finally, Gregory contrasts the luxurious pleasure-driven lifestyle with the appropriate care of the corporeal nature (τοῦ σώματος τοῦ ἰδίου φύσιν) practised by people who are more concerned with the beauty of their souls than with the material world. As we can by now anticipate, need serves as the crucial guideline. Gregory instructs that one should tend to the flesh so much that it is not deprived of anything necessary (μὴ στερῆσαι τῶν ἀναγκαίων τινός).⁶⁴¹ Here, housing, clothing, and nourishment constitute the basic needs that one must fulfil. Aware that people may seek to justify their excessive spending by appealing to need, Gregory contends that needs must be fulfilled with simple things that are easily accessible, not with luxuries and delicacies. The focus on simplicity and accessibility is a common feature of ancient recommendations for bodily care. By providing the body only with simple necessities and dedicating his life to the care of the soul, the virtuous person ‘enlarges God’s doing’. But the one who focusses on enlarging his own doing (*Eccl.* 2:4) – that is, the dwelling of flesh – will not limit it with need, but make it as extensive as his futile desires (οὐ ταῖς χρείαις ὀριζόμενον, ἀλλὰ ταῖς ματαίαις ἐπιθυμίαις συμπλατυνόμενον).⁶⁴²

⁶³⁹ *Eccl.* 3.4 (SC 416, 198); Hall & Moriarty, 63.

⁶⁴⁰ *Eccl.* 3.4 (SC 416, 200); Hall & Moriarty, 64.

⁶⁴¹ *Eccl.* 3.5 (SC 416, 206).

⁶⁴² *Eccl.* 3.5 (SC 416, 208); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 67.

In the next homily of the same collection, we find Gregory describing a drunken feast in which music and ornately dressed servants stimulate pleasures of hearing and sight. To protect his listeners, Gregory says it is best to refrain from giving too much detail about the situation in which man has made pleasure the end (σκοπὸν – τὴν ἡδονὴν ποιούμενος) of all his actions and surpassed need (χρεῖαν) with vanities.⁶⁴³ Nonetheless, he elaborates on the topic of pleasure and sensation, introducing a metaphor that undoubtedly arises from the imagery of the Fall: pleasure is likened to a serpent that slithers into a joint in a wall and pulls in its whole tail behind it.⁶⁴⁴ Gregory argues that while Nature (ἡ φύσις) requires humans to have a house, pleasure uses the need of housing to slip into the joint in the soul, turning need into extravagance. First it seeks to make the house beautiful, then it moves on to vineyards, pools, and gardens. As its tail it drags along a whole host of other vices, which are impossible to pull out once the serpent has made its way in because its scales resist any movement. Therefore one should not let the head – pleasure – enter at all.⁶⁴⁵

For Gregory, the slithering serpent is an apt symbol of the way in which pleasure gradually creeps into all aspects of life, appropriating God-given things for selfish enjoyment. Houses, money, food, plants, clothes – anything can be divorced from its original beneficial purpose and turned into a vehicle of pleasure. Gregory explains how pleasure seeking perverts natural processes by creating hybrid fruits and plants that bloom outside their normal season. Even the natural elements, earth, air, and water, are not spared from the pleasure-lover who harnesses them to provide bodily comfort and visual delight at his estate, which has evolved from a simple shelter to a place of luxurious leisure.⁶⁴⁶

Two general developments can be noted in Gregory's colourful description of increasing hedonism: First, that which is freely given by God to all is turned into private property for the sake of private pleasure. Second, there is a movement

⁶⁴³ *Eccl.* 4.4 (SC 416, 250).

⁶⁴⁴ Compare this to Gregory's own reading of the fall and Philo's explicit allegory between the serpent and pleasure. See my discussion in Chapter 3.

⁶⁴⁵ *Eccl.* 4.5 (SC 416, 250–252).

⁶⁴⁶ *Eccl.* 3.9 (SC 416, 220).

away from the natural towards the artificial.⁶⁴⁷ The cosmic order is violated as the focus shifts to the individual's myopic interests. For Gregory, the pinnacle of this development is the deplorable practice of slavery, which he views as the appropriation of other human beings as one's personal possession and a source of pleasure. In slavery, the pleasure-driven urge to possess is mixed with pride and thus culminates in a desire to possess one's own kind. Just as the pleasure-seeker has made himself the master of other created objects, he now seeks to supplant God as the master of human beings themselves.⁶⁴⁸

The symbol of serpent, this time explicitly in the context of the Fall, appears also in the previously cited *Homily 4 on the Lord's Prayer*. Echoing the metaphor of pleasure as water divided into different channels, Gregory states that while the 'passion of pleasure is but one animal', 'the many various forms of pleasure which are intermingled with the human life through the senses are the scales surrounding the serpent, speckled by various passion-provoking incidents.'⁶⁴⁹ He warns:

Do not give access to the reptile [of pleasure] creeping into the inner chamber, for its whole trail enters with it immediately. Abide by your need (μείνον ἐπὶ τῆς χρείας); let the repletion of deficiency (τοῦ ἐνδέοντος πλήρωσις) by what is obtainable be the limit (ὄρος) of your care for your livelihood. If with you, too, Eve's counsellor converses about what is pleasing to sight and sweet to taste, you will seek over and above your own bread this or that flavour, making it more tasty by all manner of seasonings. And through these things you will lead desire beyond the limit of necessities (ἔξω τῶν ἀναγκαίων ὄρων τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἄγοις), and presently you will see the reptile clandestinely creeping towards greediness (πλεονεξίαν). For having once crept from the necessary food towards delicacies, it will proceed to what is pleasant to the eyes, seeking shining dishes and attractive servants.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁷ The idea that luxury is artificial is widely held in ancient literature and stems from the conviction that luxury violates the principles of Nature. This point is evident, for example, in Seneca's *Epistle 90* (see especially 7–19), which, on the whole, provides an interesting parallel to Gregory's account of increasing luxury in *In Ecclesiasten*.

⁶⁴⁸ *Eccl.* 4.1 (SC 416, 224–232).

⁶⁴⁹ *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 53); trans. Graef, 65.

⁶⁵⁰ *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 54); trans. Graef, 66.

Here, the theme of pleasure and the Fall grows into a spiritual metaphor applicable to the life of every Christian. Giving access to the serpent of pleasure is juxtaposed with abiding by one's need, which Gregory defines as a repletion of a deficiency. The familiar notion of 'limit' is also present in the passage: Filling up a deficiency should be the *limit* that one sets for bodily care. And, conversely, giving in to pleasure will lead to a life 'beyond the limit of necessities', which sets off uncontrolled desire and leads to greed. The image that Gregory evokes is, again, that of single desire (ἐπιθυμία) that trespasses the limits of need aiming for pleasure. The passage continues with a flamboyant list of objects towards which the serpent of pleasure continues to creep after exchanging need for luxury: 'silver couches, soft divans, and transparent, gold-embroidered veils, magnificent chairs and tripods, washing vessels, mixing bowls, drinking horns, wine coolers and pitchers; water stoups, candlesticks, censers and similar things.'⁶⁵¹ Such lists, which paint a scene of almost suffocating abundance, appear frequently in Graeco-Roman critiques of luxury.⁶⁵² 'And all this serves only to increase the desire for more (διὰ τούτων γὰρ ἡ ἐπιθυμίατῆς πλεονεξίας εἰσέρχεται),' Gregory concludes.⁶⁵³ Once desire has been released from the limits of need, it grows without end, never finding permanent satisfaction.

It is not surprising that the sumptuous objects that Gregory lists all belong to the context of feasting. In Graeco-Roman critiques of luxury, banquets were widely condemned as events that not only threatened the moral integrity of the individual but also witnessed to private greed contrary to public well-being.⁶⁵⁴ Incidentally, Gregory is headed in this very direction. He argues that the reason why desire for luxurious objects only results in more desire is that one must gain an income that is sufficient for procuring all the goods. In other words, a person is not simply desiring the object, he is also desiring the means to acquire

⁶⁵¹ *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 54); trans. Graef, 66.

⁶⁵² Gregory's list can be compared to Clement's in *Paed.* 2.3.35.3. See also *De vita contemplativa* 7 (esp. 49–50; LCL 363, 140–142) where Philo criticises extravagant banquets and contrasts them with the measured feasts of the contemplatives. For more comparisons in the Stoic-Cynic tradition, see Leuenberger-Wenger, *Ethik und christliche Identität bei Gregor von Nyssa*, 81.

⁶⁵³ *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 54); trans. Graef, 66.

⁶⁵⁴ Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, 72–73.

it, be it in terms of money, land, or manpower: ‘And so someone must weep, his neighbour must sorrow, many who are deprived of their property must be miserable, in order that their tears may contribute to enhance the ostentatious display of his table,’ Gregory laments.⁶⁵⁵ Gregory’s remark illustrates how pleasure seeking drives people to greed, which in turn brings about social problems, putting a strain on relationships and undermining a just distribution of goods. In the world of the homily, and perhaps in Gregory’s social world more broadly, the distribution of goods is a zero-sum game, in which one person’s exceeding the limits of his need makes it difficult for another to fulfil his own.⁶⁵⁶ Thus, pleasure not only transgresses the limits of the individual’s need but threatens the wellbeing of the whole community.

Finally, *Or. dom.* 4 addresses the issue of need and legitimate enjoyment with which I opened my analysis at the beginning in this section. Having described how greed leads to injustice, Gregory notes that all this can be avoided if people let life be limited (περιορίζε) by easily obtainable bread. For this simple bread one may seek a seasoning provided by Nature (φυσέως) itself.⁶⁵⁷ Although Gregory moves primarily on a figurative level contending that such seasoning is the good conscience that people get when they eat bread that has been produced justly, there is also a secondary, physical level: ‘But if you want to take pleasure also in the physical sense of taste (εἰ δὲ καὶ τὴν κατὰ τὸν λαϊμὸν αἴσθησιν ἠδεσθαι θέλοις), let the lack be your seasoning (ὄψον σοι γενέσθω ἢ ἔνδεια); do not add to satiety with satiety (ὁ μὴ ἐπιβαλεῖν κόρον τῷ κόρῳ), nor dull your appetite with intoxication (μηδὲ ἀπαμβλύνειν τῇ κραιπάλῃ τὴν ὄρεξιν).’⁶⁵⁸ Gregory’s words echo a common ancient trope of hunger as the best seasoning.⁶⁵⁹ Although his tone is ascetical, he clearly acknowledges that physical enjoyment can be acceptable as long as it accompanies a genuine lack

⁶⁵⁵ *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 54); trans. Graef, 66.

⁶⁵⁶ Cf. Basil, *Hom.* 6.7 (*Destruam horrea mea*; trans. Schroeder, 69): ‘For if we all took only what was necessary to satisfy our own needs, giving the rest to those who lack, no one would be rich, no one would be poor, and no one would be in need.’

⁶⁵⁷ *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 54).

⁶⁵⁸ *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 54); trans. Graef, 67.

⁶⁵⁹ See Cicero’s famous remark in *De finibus* (2.90; trans. Rackham, LCL 40, 181–183): ‘I will listen to Socrates, who holds pleasure of no account, when he says that the best sauce for food is hunger and the best flavouring for drink thirst.’ See also, for example, Seneca, *Ep.* 123.2, and Basil, *De ieiunio* 1 (PG 31, 176) which offers many interesting parallels to the present discussion.

and is not extended to the point of satiety. The term 'satiety' has already appeared in some of our readings as the opposite of healthy enjoyment. Next, I will take a look at this term and investigate what happens if warnings are not heeded and pleasure is taken to extreme. The notion of 'satiety' will also shed more light on why Gregory considers pleasure a sorely lacking substitute for the true good.

Satiety, Transiency, and the Diastemic Gap

A person who does not respect the limits of need will eventually come to realise that the satisfaction offered by pleasure is short-lived. Just as epistemologically a pleasure seeker will never find a way to the greater spiritual truths, so also her seemingly limitless enjoyment will be revealed sorely lacking compared to the enjoyment provided by the divine goods. Regardless of how reckless and boundless it may appear in the moral sense, sensual pleasure, too, is bound by the inherent limits of the created order: all earthly pleasures will eventually wither in satiety (κόρος).

The term κόρος has already appeared in several passages that I have quoted in this thesis, which speaks to the significant role that the notion of satiety plays in Gregory's ethical thought and his understanding of the spiritual progress.⁶⁶⁰ Broadly speaking, 'satiety' denotes the point at which desire has fully obtained its object and the pleasurable sensation fades away. In other words, it follows from pleasure seeking taken to its very extreme. Since pleasure results from a replenishment of a lack, real or imagined, no pleasure can occur once the lack has been remedied. Thus, in the spiritual life κόρος refers to a state in which the soul is saturated with earthly concerns to the point of having no capacity for spiritual matters, or to a boredom of sorts that results when the soul thinks it

⁶⁶⁰ See, among others, Marguerite Harl, 'Recherches sur l'origénisme d'Origène: la 'satiété (koros) de la contemplation comme motif de la chute des âmes', *Studia Patristica* 8, no. 2 (1966): 373–405; Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 104–25.

has had enough of God.⁶⁶¹ In the physical realm κόρος indicates the numbness that occurs when an object no longer appears desirable.

I have already cited *Homily 4 on the Beatitudes* in which Gregory defends the legitimacy of hunger based on the example of Christ. The general aim of the homily is to argue that a healthy appetite (ὄρεξις) is beneficial not only physically but also spiritually. Thus, Gregory offers a critique of satiety, conceived as a lack of appetite, labelling it as a symptom of illness and a threat to wellbeing:

But as for those who waste their lives in absurd lusts (ἀτόποις ἐπιθυμίαις), even if their soul should constantly be occupied with licentiousness, yet it will not always be able to enjoy it (οὐκ ἀεὶ τὸ ἡδεσθαι πάρεστιν). For satiety (κόρος) stops the greed of the glutton, and the drinker's pleasure (ἡ τοῦ πίνοντος ἡδονή) is quenched at the same time as his thirst. And so it is with other things. They all require some time to rekindle the desire for the delights (τὴν τοῦ ἡδύνοντος ὄρεξιν), which has been withered by pleasure and fullness (ἀπὸ τῆς ἡδονῆς καὶ τῆς πλησμονῆς).⁶⁶²

For Gregory, satiety does not equal calm contentment but has connotations of aversion, even disgust. It is the point at which pleasure becomes dull or sickening and desire dissipates. But why do we reach satiety at all? Why does pleasure wither? Gregory suggests an answer in one of his *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* in which he compares the stable enjoyment offered by the true good to fleeting bodily pleasure:

For things pursued in the flesh, however much they entice the sense to what is at hand (πρὸς τὸ παρὸν δελεάζει τὴν αἴσθησιν), gratify only for an instant (ἐν ἀκαρεῖ τὸ εὐφραῖνον ἔχει); for there is no bodily activity which can give lasting pleasure (οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐπ' οὐδενὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ σώματι γινομένων διαρκῶς ἡσθηναί). The pleasure of drinking (ἡ τοῦ πίνειν ἡδονή) comes to an end in satiety (τῷ κόρῳ), and likewise, after eating food, fullness quenches the appetite (ἡ πλησμονὴ τὴν ὄρεξιν ἔσβεσε); and in the same way every other desire fades in the participation of what is desired (τῇ τοῦ

⁶⁶¹ For Gregory, the latter is a purely hypothetical state, because a desire for the divine will never lead to satiety.

⁶⁶² *Beat. 4* (GNO VII/2, 120); trans. Graef 127.

ἐπιθυμητοῦ μετουσίᾳ); and even if it returns, it fades again. No sensual delight (οὐδὲν – τῶν τῆ ἀίσθήσει τερπνῶν) lasts for ever, nor stays the same.⁶⁶³

Above, Gregory attributes the transiency of pleasure to the involvement of the body: no bodily activity can give lasting pleasure. This is where the notion of *diastema* becomes indispensable for interpreting Gregory's thought. As a material object, the body is limited both by its physical dimensions and its temporal changeable nature.⁶⁶⁴ It can neither accommodate an unlimited amount of food and drink, nor conserve the pleasurable state forever. The latter aspect is even more fundamental than the former. Although the physical body is a tangible limitation that sets humans apart from both angels and God, it is the temporary existence that brings about the fluctuations and changes that occur in the body. Suspended in time, the human body operates in a cyclical fashion with desires arising, withering, and then requiring 'some time' to be rekindled, as Gregory notes in *Beat.* 4. While overeating and drinking are the standard examples of satiety, the same phenomenon occurs when a precious item loses its novelty or a lover his appeal. This prompts people to search for new sources of pleasure, which again turn out to be short-lived.

Gregory's notion of satiety is thus implicitly underpinned by the notion of pleasure as a replenishment: pleasure requires a deficit and once the deficit is filled, no pleasure can occur. In *In Ecclesiasten*, Gregory compares human nature to the sea, which does not grow without limit despite the numerous streams that flow into it: 'enjoyment cannot exceed the amount fixed by nature (τὸ μέτρον τῆς φύσεως),' Gregory asserts, wondering why people nonetheless keep amassing possessions.⁶⁶⁵ Our bodily nature is a limited receptacle that does not allow for an unlimited inflow of goods that would be required for infinite pleasure.

⁶⁶³ *Eccl.* 2.8 (SC 416, 180); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 58.

⁶⁶⁴ 'En effet, pour Grégoire, l'esprit créé est toujours enfermé dans des limites. C'est en effet la condition de la créature. Ces limites sont ce qu'il appelle l'espace, le διάστημα.' Daniélou, 'Changement', 109.

⁶⁶⁵ *Eccl.* 1.9 (SC 416, 130); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 41.

However, also the Aristotelian notion of activity or activation can help us understand why pleasure withers. In *In Ecclesiasten*, Gregory compares sensual pleasures to writing on water and children's sand creations, both of which disappear as soon as the activity comes to an end.⁶⁶⁶ In the same way, the enjoyment of pleasure is contingent upon activity; once the activity ceases, nothing remains. Here, Gregory approximates not only the Aristotelian conception of pleasure as an accompaniment of an activity, but also Aristotle's classic argument against infinite pleasure: since no activity can last forever, all pleasures must also come to an end.⁶⁶⁷ Gregory shares this view when it comes to earthly pleasures, but in the final part of the thesis we shall see that the spiritual realm opens an avenue for infinite activity and, consequently, infinite pleasure.

For Gregory, then, satiety reveals the true face of bodily pleasure. Despite our frantic pursuit of material goods, the pleasure they yield is always bound to dissipate and turn into frustration because our bodily nature is at once a limited vessel and a leaky jar.⁶⁶⁸ It can only accommodate a certain amount of goods; then it requires a period of rest during which the pleasure attained will disappear without leaving a trace. Thus, a pleasure seeker finds herself trapped in a frustrating cycle of filling and emptying which fails to bring permanent satisfaction. In short, pleasure taken to extreme results in pain.

In Gregory's works, the volatility of pleasure is usually evoked to set the stage for a discussion about the lasting satisfaction offered by the true good. Whereas no material thing can offer pleasure to all people and at all times, the true good is good for every person, and at every time; it can never be made less attractive by satiety. When it comes to the actual good – the life of virtue and the restoration of the divine likeness – Gregory firmly rejects that one could have, so to speak, too much of a good thing. It is not possible to be 'sickened' by virtue

⁶⁶⁶ *Eccl.* 1.9 (SC 416, 132); 4.5 (SC 416, 258).

⁶⁶⁷ *NE* 1175a4–6.

⁶⁶⁸ See again the image of the leaky jar in *Beat.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 119–120) where Gregory describes the short-lived satisfaction offered by bodily pleasure and the anxious pursuit of ever new goods to yield new pleasure.

or the divine.⁶⁶⁹ I will come back to this idea in the final part of this thesis where I examine Gregory's understanding of positive, spiritual enjoyment.

It is clear, then, that the volatile and fleeting ἡδονή is a sorely lacking good. But is need fundamentally different from pleasure? Does it not, too, arise from the temporal changeable body that is liable to fluctuation and deficit? Before the close of this chapter, it is necessary to offer a few remarks on the relationship between physical needs and the good.

Need and the Good

In this final section, I will reflect on the relationship between need and the good and, more specifically, on the role that need plays in the attainment of the final *telos* of the human life. I will show that what ultimately separates need and pleasure is not their outward character; both are tied to the impermanence of the sensible nature, and consequently neither can substitute the true good, which is rooted in the immutability of God. I will, instead, suggest that the fundamental difference between need and pleasure lies in the different attitudes they foster towards the material creation: For a pleasure-seeker, the cyclical life of the body and the ever-changing material creation are matters of primary concern. But a person who knows to limit her desires to need will attend to them simply as a subordinate goal. This requires knowledge of the transitory nature of the sensible creation and a solid practice of the virtue of temperance.

Let us first see what Gregory has to say about the relationship between need and the good. In *De mortuis non esse dolendum*, Gregory investigates the nature of the good to convince his audience that physical death does not lead to any deprivation of goodness. Using the standard turn of phrase, he defines the good as something that is good in itself, for every person, and at every time.⁶⁷⁰ Conversely, something that is not good for every person, every time, and in itself

⁶⁶⁹ See, for example, *Beat.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 111); *Eccl.* 2.8 (SC 416, 182); *Mort.* (GNO IX, 29–30).

⁶⁷⁰ *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 30). See also, for example, *Eccl.* 2.8 (SC 416, 180–182); *Op. hom.* (PG 44, 184C).

cannot be the true good. Then Gregory asks whether the physical life can be called good on these conditions. ‘The life of our body consists at once of both filling and emptying’, he notes. As we have already seen, the cycle of filling and emptying is a common image that Gregory uses to discuss the bodily life. In *De mortuis* he notes that the body takes in food and drink; it inhales and exhales, sleeps and wakes. Since the actual good is unmixed and unchangeable, it follows that none of the phenomena of the sensible existence qualify as good in the proper sense of the term. As creations of the Good, they all contain reflections of goodness but fall short of its fullness. And if only filling *or* emptying were good, it would result that its opposite would have to be bad. This does not seem to be the case since both are needed to sustain the bodily life. Based on this logic, Gregory makes an emphatic point that any kind of filling or emptying of the body cannot be equated with the good: It is desirable neither in its entirety, nor always, nor in every form. Filling up on harmful foods is clearly detrimental, but even an excess of healthy foods can be fatal. ‘The filling (πλήρωσις) is therefore neither good for everyone nor in every way, but its utility (χρήσιμον) depends on its relation (πρός τι), timing (ποτε), quantity (ποσόν), and quality (ποιόν),’ Gregory concludes.⁶⁷¹

Gregory is driving towards the conclusion that we should not fear the loss of physical life, but realise that it frees us from the pressure of opposing activities and brings us closer to the good. But what is of particular interest to the present discussion is that here Gregory does not seem to distinguish clearly between need and pleasure, although the distinction receives ample attention later in the same work. Rather, he is discussing the cyclical nature of bodily life, which is the shared foundation of need and pleasure. In fact, his observations are applicable to both: people’s bodies do not always require filling (need), and when they are being filled, it should not be done excessively (pleasure). The point is that no act of filling, be it for pleasure *or* need, can be a substitute for the good.

We can thus suggest that needs-satisfaction is a legitimate goal and an inevitable part of the earthly life, but its role is instrumental and subjected to

⁶⁷¹ *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 32–33); my translation.

the true good. In Chapter 4 we saw that, for Gregory, external goods play no role in the good life; virtue alone suffices, and the good or the bad life are both attainable regardless of external conditions.⁶⁷² Elsewhere Gregory explains that securing ‘necessities’ ensures a sufficient level of physical well-being, so that the person can give most of his attention to the care of the soul.⁶⁷³ The ultimate purpose of human life is to grow in virtue to restore the divine likeness. This is primarily an inner intellectual process, one of learning to make correct conscious choices, and does not require a particular set of external circumstances.

Furthermore, if we keep in mind that for Gregory the final *telos* of human life is blessedness, which he understands as the restoration of the divine likeness, it is even clearer that the role of need must be secondary. At the beginning of this chapter I noted that while Gregory regards need as a legitimate part of human existence, he also considers it a vulnerability and a passion. God, on the other hand, is completely self-sufficient and free of all passion and lack. Thus neediness can play no part in the divine likeness. And since the restoration of the divine likeness is also the restoration of the prelapsarian state, Gregory will have us return to the life of inexhaustible abundance with no need of material nourishment, untouched by mortality which has caused the cyclical life of our bodies. As Smith rightly observes, material needs, legitimate as they are, are the final hurdle that prevents humans from directing their attention fully towards the divine. Only the abolition of needs in resurrection will make it possible for God to become ‘all in all’.⁶⁷⁴

Fortunately, we do not have to content ourselves with mere inferred conclusions. Gregory states his view explicitly in *Or. dom.* 4 where he tells his audience not to worry about their future sustenance but to ask only for bread ‘this day’, for,

⁶⁷² *Virg.* 4.4 (SC 119, 317).

⁶⁷³ *Eccl.* 3.5 (SC 416, 207–209).

⁶⁷⁴ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 220–21.

[t]he life of the body (ἡ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα ζωὴ) belongs only to the present, but that which lies beyond us and is apprehended by hope belongs to the soul. Yet men in their folly are quite wrong about the use of either; they would extend their physical lives by hope, and draw the life of the soul towards enjoyment of the present (πρὸς τὴν τῶν παρόντων ἀπόλαυσιν). [--] Let us therefore learn from the counsel under consideration what one must ask for today, and what for later. Bread is for our need today (τῆς σημερινῆς χρείας); the Kingdom belongs to the beatitude for which we hope (τῆς ἐπιζομένης μακαριότητος) (Ὁ ἄρτος τῆς σημερινῆς χρείας ἐστίν, ἡ βασιλεία τῆς ἐπιζομένης μακαριότητος). By bread He means all our bodily requirements (πᾶσαν τὴν σωματικὴν περιλαμβάνει χρεῖαν). If we ask for this, the man who prays will clearly understand (δῆλον ἔσται τῇ διανοίᾳ) that he is asking for something transitory (ἐφήμερόν); but if we ask for something of the good things of the soul (τι τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀγαθῶν) it will be clear that the petition concerns the everlasting realities, for which He commands us to be most concerned in our prayers. Thus the first necessity is put in its right place by the greater one (ὡς τῷ μείζονι καὶ τῆς πρώτης συγκατορθουμένης χρείας).⁶⁷⁵

The text leaves no doubt that both pleasure and need are phenomena of the present life. But whereas the former makes people obsessed with the present, the latter helps them put the earthly life into the right perspective. As Gregory notes above, a person who prays for the daily bread ‘will *clearly understand* that he is asking for something transitory.’ The ideal of needs-satisfaction carries the implication that the individual grasps the transitory character of his need and does not even attempt to search final satisfaction from limited bodily things; lasting happiness awaits in the Kingdom, not in the goods of the earthly life. What matters is thus not only needs-satisfaction as such, but understanding the character of need and, consequently, the nature of the sensible creation.

We can now see that needs-fulfilment and a simple lifestyle are not virtuous acts unless they are consciously chosen. Need is an inevitable fact of nature, which does not merit praise or rebuke; what counts is the individual’s inner disposition. This view conforms to a widely accepted principle that what is

⁶⁷⁵ *Or. dom.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 58); Graef 69–70. See also *Op. hom.* 18 (PG 44, 196A–B); *Mort.* (GNO IX, 35).

natural is virtuous only if it is pursued intentionally.⁶⁷⁶ Classically, the key virtue that helps us draw a line between appropriate and excessive desire and limit our consumption to what is necessary is σωφροσύνη, temperance, which receives a lot of attention also in Gregory's writings.⁶⁷⁷ In Greek literature, this virtue is commonly depicted as an antidote to sensual pleasure.⁶⁷⁸ Gregory defines σωφροσύνη as the 'well-ordered management of all movements of the soul with wisdom and good sense' (ἡ πάντων τῶν ψυχικῶν κινήματων μετὰ σοφίας καὶ φρονήσεως εὐτακτος οἰκονομία).⁶⁷⁹ Further in the same chapter, he argues that 'true temperance' helps people to choose 'that which is pure and beneficial' (τὸ καθαρὸν τε καὶ ὠφέλιμον) among all pursuits and reject all that is useless (τὸ ἄχρηστον).⁶⁸⁰ Although here Gregory's main focus is on the utility of immaterial things, another passage in the same work confirms that temperance serves to distinguish the useful from the superfluous also on a physical level. In fact, it is the very virtue that helps people heed the boundary between need and pleasure. In *Virg.* 21, Gregory discusses the dangers of pleasure and then suggests temperance as a remedy. The passage below comes right after he has laid down the principle that need, not pleasure, must determine the limit of enjoyment⁶⁸¹:

We see farmers skilfully separating (διακρίνοντας) the chaff from the wheat, so that each of them is put aside for a special use, the one for the use of human beings and the other for fuel or the nourishing of irrational animals (τῶν ἀλόγων). Therefore, the cultivator of temperance (τῆς σωφροσύνης) distinguishes the need from the pleasure (διακρίνων τῆς ἡδονῆς τὴν χρεῖαν) like the wheat from the chaff: the one he will throw aside for the less intelligent (τοῖς ἀλογωτέροις), 'whose end is to be burnt,' as the

⁶⁷⁶ 'Nature does not grant virtue; becoming virtuous is an art,' Seneca writes in *Ep.* 90.44. For other examples, see *Ep.* 123.16; 124.7. For the Stoic view more broadly, see LS, chapters 58, 63 and 64. The same view on the relationship between nature and virtue appears also in Clement (*Strom.* 7.3.19.). See also Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 66–67. Lilla lists passages where the idea appears in Clement, and refers to a number of Middle and Neo-Platonist authors who endorse it.

⁶⁷⁷ On the notion of σωφροσύνη, see Helen North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966). Concerning Gregory, see especially pp. 345–353.

⁶⁷⁸ On the opposition between pleasure and σωφροσύνη, see for example Aristotle in *NE* 1117b–1119b. For later definitions of σωφροσύνη as a regulator of desires and pleasures, see also Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, 78–79.

⁶⁷⁹ *Virg.* 18.4 (SC 119, 474); my translation.

⁶⁸⁰ *Virg.* 18.5 (SC 119, 478)

⁶⁸¹ I am assuming that the latter half of 21.2 is an addition by a later editor, as has been suggested by contemporary commentators.

apostle says [*Heb.* 6:8], but he will thankfully partake of what is necessary according to his need (τῆς δὲ χρείας αὐτῆς τὸ ἐνδέον εὐχαριστῶν μεταλήψεται).⁶⁸²

With the help of the agricultural metaphor of wheat and chaff, Gregory shows how temperance helps its 'labourer' distinguish need from pleasure. While need is discerned as a suitable goal, pleasure is left to the 'irrational', which here denotes both animals and the people who by implication resemble them. By helping people separate need from pleasure, the virtue of temperance also establishes the right attitude towards the transient and cyclical bodiliness of human beings. And unlike cyclically occurring needs, temperance and other virtues are stable dispositions etched in one's mind, which are always available even if they are not actualised at every moment.⁶⁸³

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have showed that for Gregory of Nyssa needs-satisfaction is the guideline that shapes the correct Christian attitude towards material goods. By adopting need as an ethical principle, Gregory follows the mainstream of Graeco-Roman ethics and retains the key principles of ancient needs-discourse: need is understood as a limited desire and a product of nature. In his works, these principles are often evoked in a distinctively Christian context. Thus, the topic of need is brought into conversation with biblical exegesis and doctrinal questions of Christology and angelology. A striking feature of Gregory's discussions on material consumption is the way in which he juxtaposes needs-satisfaction and pleasure-seeking as two conflicting goals that determine one's attitude towards the sensible creation. While he is by no means the only ancient author to do so, the repeated contrast between need and pleasure is particularly pronounced in his works due to his general preoccupation with pleasure as the instigator and motivator of sinful actions. Gregory is not only interested in the extent of luxurious desires, but asks the more fundamental, teleological question about what such desires seek to attain.

⁶⁸² *Virg.* 21.3 (SC 119, 510); trans. Callahan, 66.

⁶⁸³ *Beat.* 4 (GNO VII/2, 120–121).

Gregory's notion of need and pleasure brings to the fore the ontological underpinnings of his ethical thought. For Gregory, 'nature' which gives rise to needs is markedly the bodily nature, in other words the sensible creation, which is radically different from the immaterial and immutable God. The cyclical processes of the bodily nature do not offer a reliable ground for the Christian life. Not only do they differ from the immutable God himself, but also from the life of virtue, which is best understood as a never-ending linear progression towards the good.⁶⁸⁴ However, we should avoid Daniélou's suggestion, which simply labels cyclical movement as 'bad' and pits it against the 'good' linear movement in virtue.⁶⁸⁵ For Gregory, cyclical movement is inherent to the bodily nature; it becomes evil only if it is approached as the final level of reality and the foundation of human actions.

In Gregory's thought, the Graeco-Roman notion of need as limited desire acquires a further significance: It is not immoral to be greedy only because greed leads to licentious behaviour and deprives other people from material goods. But on a deeper, ontological level, the attempt to find unlimited satisfaction from limited objects is a denial of their very being. Thus, need serves as a corrective, entailing a rational acknowledgement of the boundedness of the creation. Here, virtue does not lie simply in needs-satisfaction itself, but in the *conscious* and *reasoned* act of needs-satisfaction, guided by the virtue of temperance. Even if a sinner does not acknowledge the limitedness of creation, a frenetic pursuit of created pleasure can never lead to permanent satisfaction due to the diastemic character of created beings. All desire directed at creaturely objects will eventually wither, and all pleasure experienced in and through the body will fade in satiety.

It is thus vital to understand that while needs-satisfaction is preferable to pleasure-seeking, it is not good in and by itself. Gregory's works contain an implicit hierarchy in which need, such as hunger, is presented as preferable to

⁶⁸⁴ See, for example, *Or. cat.* 21 (SC 453, 240–242).

⁶⁸⁵ Cf. Daniélou, 'Changement', 112.

pleasure, but at the same time as a mere reflection of a higher, spiritual desiring.⁶⁸⁶ In the earthly realm, desire must be kept within the bounds of need; its primary object lies in spiritual things, most importantly the attainment of virtue. As long as people live in the material world, these two aspects are allowed to coexist. There is no requirement to sublimate the natural physical hunger to a mere spiritual desire, as long as the primacy of the latter is recognised. The only hunger remaining in the *eschaton* will be the virtuous 'hunger and thirst for justice' of *Beat. 4*, which is partly analogous with physical hunger and certainly driven by a similar appetitive impulse. However, it is also radically different in ways which I will analyse in the final part of this thesis.

⁶⁸⁶ Cf. Clement, *Strom.* 7.7.49.

6. Beneficial Pain

[A]s sin entered through pleasure, it is exterminated by the opposite.⁶⁸⁷

After illustrating how pleasure leads people to judge the good solely on the basis of bodily sensation, I want to make a final point to show that Gregory's argument works also in the reverse: something that is perceived as unpleasant and painful can, in fact, reveal its goodness on a closer inspection. Beneficial pain is a vast and complex topic in ascetic literature, and here I can only address it briefly. However, the idea is part and parcel with Gregory's rejection of pleasure as the good and thus merits some attention. I will begin from a doctrinal reflection in *Oratio catechetica*, and then show that the statement that pain is not evil has major implications for the ascetical life: in Gregory's view, pain can be beneficial for the formation of virtue. My focus will be on three kinds of pain: first, the sensation of physical pain (derivatives of ἄλγος, sometimes πόνος, and rarely λύπη); second, the quasi-athletic toil required for the development of virtue (πόνος); and finally, the spiritual equivalent of distress (λύπη). In all three categories, knowledge of the true good will determine the right direction of our emotions: pain felt in relation to the good – caused by our striving for it or our separation from it – is appropriately felt pain. At the same time, knowledge of the true good will change how we evaluate pain in this life, just as it does for pleasure.

The notion that pain is not evil occurs as a general ethical and doctrinal statement in *Oratio catechetica* where Gregory argues that the labelling of pleasure as good and pain as evil can lead to unsound conceptions of God. I have already cited the long discussion on the nature of good and the origin of evil that appears in this treatise. In the same context, Gregory also warns that when people who 'in their definition of good (ἀγαθόν)... look to the pleasure of bodily enjoyment (τὸ ἡδὺ τῆς σωματικῆς ἀπολαύσεως)' observe the painful sensation (ἀλγεινὴν τινα αἴσθησιν) that accompanies the sufferings and ailments of the

⁶⁸⁷ *Beat.* 8 (GNO VII/2, 167); trans. Graef, 172.

body, they will conclude that the ‘creation of man is the work of an evil God’.⁶⁸⁸

To this Gregory objects:

But to call God the creator of evil (κακῶν ποιητὴν τὸν Θεὸν ὀνομάζειν) because of the bodily pains (σωματικὰς ἀλγηδόνας) which of necessity result from the unstable character of man’s nature or to imagine that He is in no way the creator of man, so as to avoid conceiving of Him as the author of those experiences which give us pain (τῶν ἀλγυνόντων), is a proof of the extreme short-sightedness (μικροψυχίας) of those who distinguish good and evil by the senses (τῇ αἰσθήσει τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ κακὸν διακρινόντων), and do not know that that alone is in its own nature good (τῇ φύσει μόνον ἐστὶν ἀγαθόν), which is not embraced by sense-perception (αἴσθησις), and that that alone is evil which consists of the alienation from the true good (ἡ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἀλλοτριώσις). To judge good and its opposite (τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ μὴ καλὸν κρίνειν) based on pains and pleasures (πόνους δὲ καὶ ἡδοναῖς) is a characteristic of the irrational nature (τῆς ἀλόγου φύσεως), seeing that in such beings the power to perceive what is truly good (τοῦ ἀληθῶς καλοῦ ἡ κατανόησις) has no place, as they are destitute of mind and understanding (νοῦ καὶ διανοίας).⁶⁸⁹

The pain that Gregory addresses here is not so much a passion of the soul as simply the inevitable suffering that accompanies our physical existence due to the instability of our material bodies. People who rely on their senses and judge pleasure to be the good will inevitably come to the conclusion that its opposite, pain, must be evil. Thus, they will conclude that God, the creator of the suffering body, must be evil, too. Gregory rejects this view and reminds his audience that only the intelligible good is truly good and only alienation from it is evil. Nothing else can limit the good, as we have seen Radde-Gallwitz point out. Thus, physical pain is simply one of the secondary factors that do not, as such, play any part in the attainment of or diversion from the good life.

Physical pain can, however, be transformed into an instrument of virtue if it is borne for the attainment of good things. This perspective is particularly clear in Gregory’s *Homily 8 on the Beatitudes*, which centres on the verse: ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ Here we should keep in mind that Gregory interprets the Beatitudes in

⁶⁸⁸ *Or. cat.* 7 (SC 453, 184); tras. Srawley, 44.

⁶⁸⁹ *Or. cat.* 8 (SC 453, 198); trans. Srawley, 50.

the eudaimonistic framework as proclamations about the nature of happiness or blessedness (μακαριότης). Thus, the purpose of *Homily 8* is to explain how happiness and goodness can be hidden within the outwardly painful acts of persecution.⁶⁹⁰ In *Beat. 8*, Gregory defines persecution both as actual martyrdom and as ascetic struggle against the evil. While in the case of martyrs the happiness that follows pain awaits in the life to come, for other exemplary people, ‘that which had seemed harmful becomes the cause of happiness (εὐκληρίας) even in this life.’⁶⁹¹ Gregory admits, however, that seeing happiness hidden in the current reality of pain is not without challenges:

[T]he fact that the persecution the tyrants inflict on the faithful brings much sensible pain (κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν τὸ ἀλγεινὸν), makes it difficult for the more carnally-minded to accept the hope of the Kingdom that is to be realized through these pains (διὰ τῶν ἀλγεινῶν). But the Lord, who looks down upon the infirmity of our nature, tells the weak beforehand what is to be the goal of the struggle (τῆς ἀγωνίας τὸ πέρας), so that they may more easily overcome the transitory feelings of pain (τὴν πρόσκαιρον τῶν ἀλγεινῶν αἴσθησιν).⁶⁹²

Here, Gregory shows that the evaluation of the present reality of pain is altered by an awareness of the goal of the struggle. The passage is followed by a rather grotesque description of the pains of Stephen who ‘rejoices (χαίρει) when he is stoned from all sides’, as ‘his body eagerly receives the showers of fast-falling stones like a pleasant dew (δρόσον ἠδεῖαν).’ Typically of ancient accounts of martyrdom and asceticism, Gregory depicts Stephen as an athlete engaging in a contest under the protection of the divine Judge.⁶⁹³ In his outward struggles Stephen is consoled by the hope embedded in the Beatitude and a vision of the Divine. We should note how here, too, hope, a positive anticipation of future

⁶⁹⁰ In his exposition of *Beat. 8*, Wilken notes that the beatitude presents a particular problem since in the Greek moral tradition the good life could not be divorced from faring well. This is true, of course, of Aristotle, whom Wilken goes on to cite. See Wilken, ‘Gregory of Nyssa, De Beatitudinibus, Oratio VIII: “Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted For Righteousness’ Sake, for Theirs Is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 5,10)’, 253. However, by focussing solely on Aristotle, Wilken creates all too wide a gap between Gregory and the Greek tradition. In fact, Gregory’s notion of the ‘athletic’ endurance of the persecuted bears many similarities to the Cynic-Stoic notion of πόνοσ. These philosophical schools argued, furthermore, that bodily and external goods played no part in the good life.

⁶⁹¹ *Beat. 8* (GNO VII/2,

⁶⁹² *Beat. 8* (GNO VII/2, 165); trans. Graef, 169–170.

⁶⁹³ See athletic imagery also earlier in *Beat. 8* (GNO VII/2, 163.24–164.9).

invisible things, is cited as the opposite of instant sensory evaluation of the present situation.⁶⁹⁴ For Gregory, the account of Stephen's martyrdom shows that pain is not only to be endured, but to the rightly disposed it will be transformed into – or at least accompanied by – a higher pleasure which anticipates the future joy. I will investigate this affective transformation further in the final part of the thesis. The connection between martyrdom and anti-hedonism is not unique to Gregory. One precedent can be found in Clement of Alexandria, who argues that a martyr simply chooses a future pleasure through his present pain. The observation that pain leads to good things is, for Clement, a sign that pain cannot be evil. Furthermore, the fact that we choose some pains and pleasures and avoid others makes it plain that neither pain nor pleasure is good or evil as such.⁶⁹⁵

Gregory continues by arguing that a life-long habituation to pleasant realities makes it hard for humans to bear pain, and thus persecutors can easily use pain as a deterrent to force people off the virtuous path:

For it is not easy, in fact, perhaps quite impossible, to prefer the invisible Good (τὸ μὴ φαινόμενον ἀγαθόν) to the visible pleasant things of this life (κατὰ τὴν ζωὴν ταύτην ἡδέων τὸ... τῶν φαινομένων), so as easily to choose things like being driven from one's home or separated from wife and children, brothers, parents and friends, and all the pleasant things of life (πάντων τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον ἡδέων), unless the Lord Himself helps him to attain to this Good (πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθόν), because he has been called according to His purpose ... Now the soul is in some way attached to the pleasant things of life (πρὸς τὰ ἡδέα τοῦ βίου) through the senses of the body (διὰ τῶν σωματικῶν αἰσθήσεων). Through the eyes it delights in material beauty (τῇ εὐχροίᾳ τῆς ὕλης), through the ears it inclines to melodious sounds, and so it is also affected by smell, taste, and touch, as nature has disposed to be proper to each. Hence, as it is attached to the pleasant things of life (τὰ ἡδέα τοῦ βίου) through the sensible faculty (τῇ αἰσθητικῇ δυνάμει) like a nail⁶⁹⁶ (ἥλω), it is hard to turn away from them.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁴ *Beat.* 8 (GNO VII/2, 165–166); trans. Graef, 170. Similar ideas regarding the virtuous endurance of pain and the hope of the future life occur in many early Christian texts on martyrdom, such as Origen's *Exhortatio ad martyrium*.

⁶⁹⁵ *Strom.* 4.5.

⁶⁹⁶ See p. 162.

⁶⁹⁷ *Beat.* 8 (GNO VII/2, 166); trans. Graef, 170–171.

The passage highlights the fact that the notion of virtuous pain is an intrinsic feature of the problem of hedonism and the wider discussion on pleasure and the good. The pleasure-seeker does not only seek sensory gratification, but he also shrinks from pain even if it would serve a beneficial purpose. The only way to resist pain is to familiarise oneself with the promises of the Gospel and hold on to them at the moment of struggle; the Word breaks the 'fetters of habit' and overrides bodily sensation as the criterion of the good.⁶⁹⁸ In the final part of this thesis I will show that the reevaluation and reorientation of both pain and pleasure begins as a mere intellectual acceptance of facts, which only gradually leads to a corresponding affective transformation, as previously painful things are sweetened and pleasurable things become repulsive.

To sum up, the encouragement to persist through pain does not entail that pain is good, but simply that it can and should be tolerated for the attainment of good. The blessing of the beatitude is, then, that it helps one to achieve 'so great a good by means of apparent suffering.'⁶⁹⁹ Pain assists in the actualisation of the higher good particularly so far as it acts as an antidote against pleasure. Pleasure made the entrance for sin, but its opposite will drive sin away since two opposite emotions cannot coexist in the same individual.⁷⁰⁰ Thus, Gregory argues, the 'piercing sensation of pain' wipes out all imprints that pleasure has stamped on the soul.⁷⁰¹

By the time of Gregory's theological career, becoming a martyr was of course an unlikely occurrence. Dying for one's faith had been gradually transformed into 'white martyrdom', the ascetical dying to the world and the self. It is no surprise, then, that for Gregory the suffering of the persecuted can be transposed on a merely spiritual level: it provides a model that every Christian can appropriate in the ascetic struggle. Just as a martyr undergoes physical pain for his faith and salvation, all Christians must be ready to accept discomfort for the sake of the good. Whereas the martyr is chased by an actual persecutor, the ascetic is

⁶⁹⁸ *Beat. 8* (GNO VII/2, 167).

⁶⁹⁹ *Beat. 8* (GNO VII/2, 169); trans. Graef, 174.

⁷⁰⁰ *Beat. 8* (GNO VII/2, 167). Cf. *Phaedo* 60b.

⁷⁰¹ *Beat. 8* (GNO VII/2, 168); trans. Graef, 172.

chased by the evil and sin. This perspective is present in *Beat.* 8, which is clearly intended as spiritual instruction for a wider audience, not simply as an exhortation to martyrdom. Gregory's other works provide further perspectives on the pains of the ascetic struggle. In *In inscriptiones psalmorum*, we find precisely the same framework of athleticism, contest, and training, with the hope of future victory which is not present to the senses. But here Gregory is referencing the ascetic life rather than the pains of martyrdom. He presents life as a stadium where 'evil contends against the wrestlers with all sorts of deceitful tricks.' Thus, Word, 'the good trainer of souls' encourages the contestants to look at the end (εἰς τὸ τέλος βλέποντες) – victory – to help them 'lighten the labour (πόνον) in the contests by the hope (ἐλπίδι) of attaining crowns.' Gregory argues that passions (πάθη) result from the attacks of evil, which can only be resisted through careful preparation by exercise (διὰ μελέτης).⁷⁰² In other words, steadfast endurance of pain in the struggle against the evil is a prerequisite for attaining *apatheia* and, finally, the rewards of the life to come. As Gregory writes later in the same treatise, 'what is now disbelieved, that there is a participation in what is superior by those who have willingly suffered ill because of their labours for virtue (τῆς ἀρετῆς πόνων), will then be made manifest by experience.'⁷⁰³

The concept of toil or effort (πόνος) required for the formation of virtue, is common in Cynic and Stoic ascetic literature, and it is also a favourite of Philo.⁷⁰⁴ Christian precedents can be found, among others, in Clement and Origen, and similar notions occur also in the New Testament.⁷⁰⁵ For the ancient

⁷⁰² *Inscr.* II.2 (GNO V, 72–73); tans. Heine, 127–128. See also *Inscr.* II.13 (GNO V, 142) for similar imagery.

⁷⁰³ *Inscr.* II.15 (GNO V, 166); trans. Heine, 205. On the necessity of πόνος in overcoming pleasure and achieving virtue, see also e.g. *Infant.* (GNO III/2, 75).

⁷⁰⁴ For the ascetic importance of πόνος in Cynicism, see for example the account on Diogenes of Sinope in DL 6.2.70–71, where pleasure is mentioned as a hindrance to a proper appreciation of the pain of πόνος, which, for its part, leads to disregard for pleasure. For πόνος in Philo, see, e.g. *Congr.* 164–167, and 174 for οἱ πολλοί who lack wisdom and fail to recognise the blessing in suffering; *Leg.* 3, 135–137; *Sacr.* 39–42.

⁷⁰⁵ Clement's account of the life of the gnostic bears many similarities to Gregory's depiction of toil. For Clement, the gnostic is the 'true athlete' who engages in a contest arranged by God, is crowned for victory over the passions, and obtains the prize of immortality (*Strom.* 7.3.17.5–18.1). Further in the same chapter, Clement argues that the gnostic undergoes toils and trials, not like some philosophers who simply wait for them to cease in order to return to the pleasant life, but with a conviction of the hopes of future, which is inspired by knowledge. By doing so, he

thinkers, πόνος has a noble character and resembles the pains of athletic practice.⁷⁰⁶ Thus it fits seamlessly in the semantic field of asceticism, which itself has connotations of athletic training. πόνος differs from mere physical pain, although in Greek usage – Gregory included – the term can denote both.⁷⁰⁷

For Gregory, πόνος does not only accompany the battle with the passions which arise from the sensible world and the endurance of difficult circumstances. It can also denote the strenuous intellectual activity which is required for the formation of knowledge. This aspect is highlighted in *Homily 2 on Ecclesiastes* where Gregory comments on *Eccl.* 1:18⁷⁰⁸ and argues for the necessity of effort (πόνος) in obtaining wisdom and knowledge.⁷⁰⁹ This is not how most modern people would interpret the Ecclesiastic idea that knowledge increases sorrow. For us, the crux is not on the pains of attaining knowledge, but on the way in which knowledge reveals the sad state of ourselves and the world in which we live. However, even if Gregory does not highlight this kind of sorrow in his interpretation of *Eccl.* 1:18, it does belong to his taxonomy of beneficial pain. Let us now turn to this third and final kind of virtuous agony.

The wholesome pain of πόνος should be conceptually separated from the passion of λύπη, the negative counterpart of pleasure, which is also often translated as ‘pain’ but would be better understood as ‘distress’.⁷¹⁰ In its sinful

despises not only pain but also pleasure (*Strom.* 7.11.63.2). On toils and tribulations as a part of the virtuous life, see also Origen, *De oratione* 19; *Fr. Luc.* 232. For biblical examples, see 1 *Cor.* 9:24–26; *Phil.* 2:16; *Heb.* 12:1, 11.

⁷⁰⁶ For illuminating non-Christian parallels, see, for example, Cicero, *Tusc.* 2, and Seneca, *De providentia*. Cicero treats the topic at length and offers a critique of the Epicurean notion that pain is evil. Seneca explains why good men have to endure adversities, arguing that even difficult circumstances are ultimately providential because they can be made into instruments of virtue. Both works espouse the ideals of manliness, athleticism, and military life, and provide examples of physical and mental toil.

⁷⁰⁷ In Latin usage, there is a clearer distinction between *labor* (toil) and *dolor* (pain). Cicero explains the difference in *Tusc.* 2.15 (LCL 141, 182; trans. King): ‘There is some difference between toil and pain; they are certainly closely related, but there is a difference: toil is a mental or physical execution of work or duty of more than usual severity; pain on the other hand is disagreeable movement in the body, repugnant to the feelings. To these two things our Greek friends, whose language is richer than ours, apply a single term [πόνος].’

⁷⁰⁸ ‘For in a great quantity of wisdom is a great quantity of knowledge, and those who increase knowledge will increase suffering (ἀλγημα).’ (LXX/NETS.)

⁷⁰⁹ *Eccl.* 2.6.27 (SC 416, 173); see also *Eccl.* 2.6.11.

⁷¹⁰ However, at times the two appear side by side in Gregory’s works. See, for example, *Inscr.* II.13 (GNO V, 142.21).

form, the passion of λύπη, like its opposite ἡδονή, results from distorted desire. As Macrina relates, distress follows when desire fails to attain what it seeks.⁷¹¹ However, it is also possible to identify a notion of positive λύπη in Gregory's framework of spiritualised passions. This 'pain' can perhaps be best described as positive mental distress.

Seen from within Gregory's theological anthropology, it is not surprising that a positive equivalent of λύπη exists; he does after all argue consistently that all things created by God – including human impulses – are good if used correctly.⁷¹² Since this is true of ἐπιθυμία, it is also true of all passions that are related to desiring. But what makes Gregory's view particularly striking is the fact that the Stoic system of bad and good emotions – widespread in late antiquity – regards λύπη as the only one of the four generic passions that does not have a positive equivalent.⁷¹³ The rationale behind the Stoic lack of positive distress is that there is no room for any aversion or perceived present lack in the mind that has attained *apatheia* and can turn any circumstance into an instrument of virtuous action. As Rowan Williams observes, 'grief, notoriously, was the one of the four basic affects in Stoic thought hardest to understand in a morally constructive sense.'⁷¹⁴ Williams contrasts this with Gregory's *De anima et resurrectione*, in which Macrina 'brings the pain of human loss within the pedagogy of the spirit.' On Williams's interpretation, the positive role of λύπη of bereavement is to teach us otherwise inaccessible truths about the nature of the soul.⁷¹⁵ He argues that grief highlights our fixation on other human beings by bringing about distress when they are taken away from us. Thus, argues

⁷¹¹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 56B). In Macrina's view, distress is not only a passion of *epithumia* but also of *thumos*. In the latter case, it results from frustrated anger that fails to take revenge. The latter aspect is, however, much less prominent in Gregory's writings.

⁷¹² As we have seen, the idea is widespread in Gregory's corpus. See, for example, *An. et res.* (PG 46, 61A–D); *Eccl.* 8.2 (SC 426, 390–392); *Virg.* 18.3 (SC 119, 468–474).

⁷¹³ For a list of Stoic *eupatheiai*, see DL 7.116 (cited in LS 65F).

⁷¹⁴ Rowan Williams, 'Macrina's Deathbed Revisited: Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion', in *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity: Essays in Tribute to George Christopher Stead*, ed. Lionel R. Wickham, Caroline B. Bammel, and Erica C. D. Hunter, *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 231.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Williams, λύπη teaches us that we ought to ‘see the other as more than merely the object of my attachment.’⁷¹⁶

Smith and Boersma have argued convincingly that Williams’s interpretation of the positive role of grief of bereavement is difficult to justify based on Gregory’s general view of death and passions.⁷¹⁷ However, both suggest that there exists a spiritual equivalent of λύπη; Williams is simply seeking it in the wrong place. In Gregory’s works, spiritual λύπη is a product of repentance and separation from God. Although such a notion of beneficial distress is foreign to the Stoic notion of good emotions, it does have precedents in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In *De anima*, Gregory alludes to Paul’s words in 2 *Cor.* 7:10⁷¹⁸, in which repentance is cited as the fruit of ‘godly grief’ (κατὰ θεὸν λύπη).⁷¹⁹ Philo offers another parallel which also centres on repentance.⁷²⁰ Since Smith treats Gregory’s understanding of spiritual λύπη in his article *Macrina, Tamer of Horses*, it is sufficient to draw attention to a few central points.⁷²¹

Similarly to πόνος, an orientation towards the good gives λύπη a spiritual legitimacy. Whereas the earthly λύπη is caused by the lack of some *perceived* good, its spiritual counterpart signals the lack of the true good. As Smith rightly observes, ‘godly grief is the fruit, not of errant judgement, but of right judgement. The grief of repentance is a form of ἐπιθυμία in that it is sorrow at

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., 243.

⁷¹⁷ See, Smith, ‘Macrina, Tamer of Horses’; Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 128–45. Gregory’s *De mortuis*, where right and wrong grief are discussed explicitly in the context of mourning, states explicitly that the spiritually beneficial grief is not that which is felt at the loss of human life but the one felt for the loss of divine goods once possessed (see *Mort.*, GNO IX, 66–68).

⁷¹⁸ ‘For godly grief (κατὰ θεὸν λύπη) produces a repentance (μετάνοιαν) that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief (τοῦ κόσμου λύπη) produces death.’

⁷¹⁹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 57A).

⁷²⁰ For sorrow and groaning in repentance, see Philo, *Leg.* 3, LXXV.211. The convergence of the Stoic theory of emotions and the biblical references to Jesus’ grief is the topic of Gitte Buch-Hansen, ‘The Emotional Jesus: Anti-Stoicism in the Fourth Gospel?’, in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, ed. Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Ismo Dunderberg (Peabody, Mass.: Baker Academic, 2010), 93–114. The article examines ways in which the Stoic notion of λύπη was appropriated and reworked by early Jewish and Christian authors, such as the author of the Fourth Gospel, Philo, and Origen. On Origen, see also Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, 124–25. For an exploration of spiritual grief in Syriac and Byzantine authors, see Hannah Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief: Tears of Contrition in the Writings of the Early Syrian and Byzantine Fathers* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004).

⁷²¹ Smith, ‘Macrina, Tamer of Horses’, 58–60.

not being able to enjoy that which one rightly and genuinely desires.⁷²² The emotion is best described in *Homily 3 on the Beatitudes* on the verse ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted’ (*Matt.* 5:4). Gregory explains that the verse speaks of no ordinary mourning, quoting again Paul who makes a distinction between the sorrow of the world and that brought about by God (2 *Cor.* 7:10). The latter, which produces repentance, occurs as the ‘soul bewails its wicked life because it feels its bad effects’ in light of the upcoming Judgment. Like πόνος, this sorrowful realisation acts as a ‘pungent medicine’ against pleasures of sense.⁷²³

But, Gregory emphasises, mourning for sin is not the whole meaning of the blessed distress. For him, this must be the case since even exemplary believers, whom he considers sinless, can be called blessed on account of their mourning. Therefore Gregory suggests that we must look for another, more profound definition.⁷²⁴ First, he reminds his reader of the general definition of mourning as a ‘sorrowful disposition of the soul which arises from being deprived of some of the things that one desires (σκυθρωπή διάθεσις τῆς ψυχῆς, ἐπὶ στερήσει τινὸς τῶν καταθυμίων⁷²⁵ συνισταμέν), a sorrow which finds not place in people who spend their life in happiness (ἐν εὐθυμίᾳ),’⁷²⁶ and as some ‘painful sensation caused by the privation of what is pleasant (αἴσθησις τις ἀλγεινῆ τῆς τῶν εὐφραϊνόντων στερήσεως).’⁷²⁷ Using the ‘evident’ definition as a ‘guide to ‘what is unknown’, Gregory goes on to claim that ‘no one will grieve for the loss of things unknown to him.’ Therefore, he argues, to understand the meaning of blessed mourning, we must first know what the true good is. Only then can we

⁷²² *Ibid.*, 59. Since Macrina describes grief also as frustrated θυμός, Smith suggests that the positive equivalent of thymic grief may be a ‘self-directed anger of repentance, which despises one’s own sin.’

⁷²³ *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 100–101); trans. Graef, 108.

⁷²⁴ *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 101–102); trans. Graef, 108–109.

⁷²⁵ Gregory employs again the word καταθύμιος (lit. ‘something that is on one’s mind’) which occurs also in his definition of pleasure (see Chapter 1.) Graef translates the plural as ‘things that are pleasant’, probably due to a similar definition that follows later in the same paragraph (GNO VII/2, 103.6–7).

⁷²⁶ *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 102); trans. Graef, 110. Cf. *An. et res.* (PG 46, 56B).

⁷²⁷ *Beat.* 3 (GNO VII/2, 103); trans. Graef, 110. The fact that Gregory defines λύπη first as a ‘disposition’ and then as a ‘sensation’ reflects a similar ambivalence between an inner attitude and a mere bodily feeling as we have already seen with ἡδονή.

grieve over what we are missing.⁷²⁸ These comments point again to the necessity of knowledge in inciting and directing desire and the subsequent emotions of grief and pleasure. Just as we can delight only in things that are known to us, so also only that which is known can make us feel its absence:

If a man has been able to perceive the true good (τὸ ἀληθῶς ἀγαθόν), and then realizes the poverty of human nature, he will certainly think the soul in a plight (ἐν συμφορᾷ). For he will consider that the present life is spent in mourning (πένθος ποιούμενος), because it is removed from this true good (τῷ ἀγαθῷ). Therefore I would say that the Word does not call blessed the sorrow itself (οὐ τὴν λύπην μοι δοκεῖ μακαρίζειν ὁ Λόγος), but rather the realization of the good (τὴν εἶδησιν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ) that produces this emotion of sorrow (λύπης πάθος), which is due to the fact that what we seek (τὸ ζητούμενον) is absent from our life.⁷²⁹

As with physical pain, Gregory highlights that the emotion itself is not ‘blessed’; its blessedness is contingent upon the good towards which it leads the soul. Knowing the good does not, of course, entail that we know what it is in its very essence. The mere awe of its great imperceptibility and incomprehensibility, combined with an awareness that we once were able to share in all goods found in this great Good that transcends all thought, should lead to sorrow over our current separation and corruptible, passion-ridden life.⁷³⁰

The knowledge of our previous blessed state and our current alienation not only leads to grief but also alters one’s evaluation of the present goods. Gregory claims that it is impossible to know the real good and not to shed tears over our present situation and consider all involvement with pleasure misery. We have already seen a similar remark in *De virginitate* regarding the joys of the world. Thus, the function of spiritual distress is to bring about the realisation that the worldly goods pale in comparison to the true good. As such, distress plays an important role in inspiring detachment from the fleeting goods of this life. Only animals and the animal-like people who ‘do not know the good things of which

⁷²⁸ *Beat. 3* (GNO VII/2, 103); trans. Graef, 110.

⁷²⁹ *Beat. 3* (GNO VII/2, 103–104); trans. Graef, 111.

⁷³⁰ *Beat. 3* (GNO VII/2, 104).

our nature has been deprived' will be content to spend their present life in pursuit of pleasure.⁷³¹

To borrow a modern term, mourning is like spiritual 'separation anxiety' which indicates our distance from the Creator and our original status as partakers of the good. But, as Gregory states again, mourning is not blessed for its own sake, for it alone does not guarantee happiness and has no value independently of the consolation promised by the second half of the beatitude. What makes mourning blessed is the result that follows from it: it prompts people to search for God and ultimately brings comfort and joy in the life to come.

At the end of the homily, Gregory indicates that the fall did not only bring about a mix of good and evil, but also a mix of joy and sorrow. Since both are now part of the human existence, Gregory argues that 'we should think it blessed to reserve our share of joy for the truly good things in eternal life, and to fulfil the duty of sorrow in this short and transitory life.'⁷³² To partake in the joy of the life to come, we must tolerate its opposite in this life. This applies to both grief and physical pain.⁷³³ And conversely, since delight in the sensible things is a sign that one's life is headed in the direction of the evil, no joy in the good will await the person who unrepentantly dedicates his life to the enjoyment of the present.⁷³⁴ The grief of this life will eventually find comfort, but no such promise is given to those who will be separated from the good in the life to come.

To sum up our findings, Gregory defends a view that a knowledge of the true good will help people to re-evaluate the notion that pain is evil. In fact, both the pleasures and the pains of this life appear relatively minor when seen from an eschatological perspective. Furthermore, both reveal themselves to be something else than conventionally expected: pleasure becomes tainted with pain, whereas pain becomes an instrument for the good. For this reason,

⁷³¹ *Beat. 3* (GNO VII/2, 104; trans. Graef, 107. The right moments for joy and grief are also extensively discussed in *Eccl.* 6.9–10 (SC 416, 330–336) with similar conclusions. For the indispensable role of reason in evaluating past and future hedonic states, see Warren, *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*, 26.

⁷³² *Beat. 3* (GNO VII/2, 109); trans. Graef, 116.

⁷³³ For a similar statement concerning physical pain, see *An. et res.* (PG 46, 84A).

⁷³⁴ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 81D–84A).

Gregory argues that neither pains nor pleasures should be judged based on how they appear in the present. As Gregory says in *In inscriptions*, one must be able to contemplate both the potentiality and the actuality of all things, just like God does.⁷³⁵ Thus, the basis of one's judgment must be the future end, not the present situation available to the senses:

The means of judging these matters is on the basis of their ends, not on the basis of what is currently at hand (ἐκ τῶν ἐσχάτων, οὐκ ἐκ τῶν παρόντων ἢ τούτων γίνεται κρίσις). For by that eye of the soul which is capable of contemplation and discernment (τῷ γὰρ ἐποπτικῷ τε καὶ διορατικῷ τῆς ψυχῆς ὀφθαλμῷ) he has understood what has been stored up for the good through hope (δι' ἐλπίδος) as though it were present (ὡς παρόν), and has passed over in his soul everything which appears to the senses (παρελθὼν τῇ ψυχῇ πᾶν τι φαινόμενον). When he enters the heavenly shrines he upbraids the lack of judgment (ἀκρισία) of those who basely pervert the discernment of what is good to our (τοῦ καλοῦ κρίσιν) physical members capable of sensation (τοῖς αἰσθητικοῖς μορίοις).⁷³⁶

Furthermore, the rejection of pain as evil enables Gregory to strengthen the argument that virtue alone suffices for human happiness. The prosperity of the evildoers is not a sign that they have chosen a better lot than the righteous person who fares badly in this life. '[G]ood fortune in this life... does not occur for people in relation to the worth of their choices,' Gregory states with no hesitation. For him, only virtue merits praise, whereas vice is to be despised regardless of the enjoyment it yields.⁷³⁷ Thus, Gregory can conclude that material rewards are not God's gift to those who lead a godly life, neither do struggles signal disfavour; God, unlike the fallen human, does not judge goodness based on sense perception.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁵ *Inscr.* I.6 (GNO V, 40); trans. Heine, 98.

⁷³⁶ *Inscr.* I.6 (GNO V, 41); trans. Heine, 99.

⁷³⁷ *Inscr.* I.6 (GNO V, 40–41); trans. Heine, 98.

⁷³⁸ *Inscr.* II.3 (GNO V, 78); trans. Heine, 131.

PART III: PLEASURES OF THE GOOD LIFE

7. General Remarks on Virtuous Pleasure

Various passages in the course of this thesis have already alluded to the possibility of spiritual pleasure. We have seen how Gregory appeals to the hope of future enjoyment in the eschaton to change his audience's perspective on earthly pleasures and motivate them to renounce a comfortable, pleasure-driven lifestyle in their present circumstances. In this chapter I will turn to Gregory's view of spiritual pleasure asking what it entails and how it avoids the pitfalls that Gregory associates with earthly enjoyment.

The fact that pleasure can be both sinful and virtuous should not surprise us. Pleasure is, after all, the fulfilment of desire, and Gregory is famous for his understanding of twofold desire which, depending on the mind's choosing, can be directed towards either good or evil ends. In Chapter 4 we saw that Gregory envisions the earthly life as a choice between the good and evil, where each goal is both motivated and marked by the kind of joy that accompanies it: a life in the flesh is bound up with sensual pleasure, whereas the life of virtue yields an intellectual joy, which is able to transcend one's present circumstances. Furthermore, particularly *Homilies on the Song of Songs* show with numerous examples that delight and enjoyment figure prominently in Gregory's spiritual vision. It is a work in which the passion of erotic love, 'the most intense of pleasurable activities' (τὸ σφοδρότατον τῶν καθ' ἡδονὴν ἐνεργουμένων), 'is set as a figure at the very fore of the guidance that the teachings give.'⁷³⁹ Such a focus inevitably leads to situations in which Gregory must clarify the dangers of reading the *Song* as an exaltation of corporeal pleasure and, at the same time, explain in what way sensual pleasure can serve as an image of the soul's intimacy with God. In fact, this is the work where Gregory most explicitly discusses the possibility of spiritual ἡδονή.

⁷³⁹ *Cant.* 1 (GNO VI, 27); trans. Norris, 29.

The scope of this part is twofold: My main aim is to investigate how Gregory envisions the phenomenon of spiritual pleasure⁷⁴⁰ at different stages of the spiritual progress and offer some remarks on how his view fits within the ancient discourse on intellectual pleasures. I will particularly draw attention to certain problems later Platonist thinkers faced when they sought to transpose Plato's conception of pleasure onto the intellectual plane and show how Gregory grapples with the same issues. I will argue that while most ancient authors carefully construct a notion of intellectual pleasure that is free from all mixing with pain, Gregory departs from this trajectory by presenting an account of the eschatological fulfilment and spiritual enjoyment in which desire persists even after the soul is united to its final good. The presence of desire implies that lack and pain belong even to the blessed life of the eschaton.

As my secondary perspective, I will turn to recent Gregory of Nyssa scholarship, particularly the works of J. Warren Smith and Sarah Coakley who have both presented a 'developmental' account of Gregory's notion of spiritual perfection, arguing for Gregory's increasing openness to the relevance of the bodily nature in the course of his literary career.⁷⁴¹ Both of these accounts are highly relevant for the topic of the present chapter: Smith, who discusses Gregory's vision of spiritual fulfilment in *Passion and Paradise*, rightly identifies enjoyment as a key component of Gregory's spiritual vision. Coakley, on the other hand, offers a reappraisal of Gregory's notion of the 'spiritual senses', which is of course closely linked to the mode of spiritual enjoyment. Although Smith and Coakley pinpoint different watershed works (*In Canticum* and *De anima*, respectively), both argue that, in the course of his career, Gregory moves from an intellectualist notion of spiritual perfection towards a more holistic – even bodily – conception. For Smith, this entails the inclusion of ἐπιθυμία in the final

⁷⁴⁰ In this chapter, I will for variety's sake freely alter between the terms 'spiritual' and 'intellectual' to denote enjoyment which occurs entirely in the mind and is drawn from intelligible objects. I will also at times refer to this enjoyment as 'pleasure', keeping in mind its differences from the passion of pleasure and Gregory's own reservations to use the term for spiritual delight.

⁷⁴¹ Smith's and Coakley's interpretations rest on Jean Daniélou's much earlier chronology in which he divides Gregory's works into earlier and later based on increasing positivity towards the body and the earthly existence. I will return to some of Daniélou's claims in my discussion on Smith and Coakley. See Daniélou, 'La chronologie'.

formulation of Gregory's notion of *epektasis*, for Coakley, 'a developing and systematic account of how ordinary perception and the gross physical senses are capable of a progressive transformation *in this life* into spiritual senses.'⁷⁴² In this part, then, I will question the assumptions that underpin these developmental readings, arguing that Gregory is at once more and less 'holistic' than Smith's and Coakley's accounts would let us believe: on the one hand, 'the younger Gregory' is more inclusive of the lower faculties of the soul than Smith's account implies; on the other hand, seen against Gregory's epistemological understanding of bodily perception, I do not find it plausible that 'the older Gregory' would have conceived spiritual sensation in terms of transformed *bodily* senses. Instead, I will suggest that we should look for continuity between bodily and spiritual sensation and, consequently, bodily and spiritual enjoyment in the functioning of the mind. However, before assessing the plausibility of Smith's and Coakley's readings, I want to highlight some peculiarities in Gregory's vocabulary of spiritual pleasure and then explain how spiritual enjoyment emerges in the course of the Christian life.

Gregory's Vocabulary of Spiritual Pleasure

In my introduction to Gregory's terminology of pleasure, I pointed out Gregory's reluctance to call spiritual pleasure ἡδονή. While the spiritual equivalent of pleasure appears frequently in his works, he prefers such words as 'joy' (εὐφροσύνη, χαρά), 'delight' (τρυφή), or simply 'enjoyment' (ἀπόλαυσις). Of these, εὐφροσύνη, 'joy', is the most common term Gregory employs in the context of spiritual enjoyment. We have already encountered it in one of the previous chapters where Gregory contrasted it with ἡδονή, and this juxtaposition is common in Gregory's works.⁷⁴³ χαρά, which also denotes 'joy' or 'delight', is famously one of the Stoic *eupatheiai* and constitutes the positive

⁷⁴² Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa', 42.

⁷⁴³ See *Inscr.* I.2 (GNO V, 27–28) and my discussion on p. 186. In *Mort.* (GNO XI/1, 55.11–12), Gregory sets against each other the notions of ὕλική ἡδονή and ψυχική εὐφροσύνη.

equivalent of the passion of pleasure in the Stoic system of emotions.⁷⁴⁴ The word is also widely used in the New Testament to denote a spiritual joy which stems from the knowledge of God and a life of virtue.⁷⁴⁵ It is, then, not surprising that it occurs especially in passages that contain biblical citations and exegesis, as an echo of the biblical text.⁷⁴⁶ At times, *εὐφροσύνη* and *χαρά* occur side by side.⁷⁴⁷ It seems to me that this is mainly a literary device Gregory uses for emphasis rather than a reference to two distinct categories of spiritual enjoyment. *Τρυφή*, for its part, highlights the opulent and abundant quality of spiritual enjoyment and a return to the Paradisiac state in the eschatological fulfilment.⁷⁴⁸ As we have already seen, it is frequently a negative term in Graeco-Roman literature where it carries the meaning of irrational and excessive desiring. However, also a positive usage exists.⁷⁴⁹ *ἀπόλαυσις* is a general term for enjoyment, which Gregory employs frequently both positively and negatively to denote the partaking of something pleasurable.⁷⁵⁰ None of these words are marked off to denote spiritual pleasure exclusively, but they are clearly Gregory's terms of choice when he discusses enjoyment as a positive, intellectual matter.

Gregory's desire to avoid the term *ἡδονή* is understandable and by no means unique. *ἡδονή* is the loaded term of ancient discourse on hedonism, and in Gregory's works it not only refers to the passion of sensual pleasure but also

⁷⁴⁴ For a list of *eupatheiai*, see DL 7.116 (cited in LS 65F). In the passage, Diogenes lists 'delight' (*τέρψις*), 'sociability' (*εὐφροσύνη*), and 'cheerfulness' (*εὐθυμία*) as subcategories of the primary good emotion of *χαρά*. See also Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 210–12.

⁷⁴⁵ See among numerous examples: *Acts* 13:52; *Rom.* 14:17; *Gal.* 5:22; *Phil.* 1:25; 1 *Thess.* 1:6; *Heb.* 10:34, 12:2, 11.

⁷⁴⁶ Ample examples of *χαρά* in Gregory's biblical citations can be found in section 6 of 'χαρά' in *LG*, vol. 9, 614–615.

⁷⁴⁷ See, for example, *Virg.* 12.3 (SC 119, 414.34).

⁷⁴⁸ The term is particularly prominent in Gregory's homilies on the *Song of Songs* (e.g. *Cant.* 3, GNO VI, 97, which includes a number of different terms that allude to positive enjoyment; *Cant.* 9, GNO VI, 283.1; *Cant.* 10, GNO VI, 306.10–12.) See also, for example, *Eccl.* 2 (GNO V, 313.14–15), and the notion of *ἡ νοερά τρυφή* in *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 36.6). Furthermore, we should recall the Hellenistic Jewish and Christian reading of 'Eden' as *τρυφή*. In *Op. hom.* (PG 44, 196D) Gregory argues: *τρυφή δὲ ἡ Ἐδέμ ἐρμηνεύεται*. See also the notion of *ἡ τοῦ παραδείσου τρυφή* in *Cant.* 2 (GNO VI, 58).

⁷⁴⁹ See, for example, the combination of verbs *ἐνευφραίνονται καὶ τρυφῶσιν*, which alludes to the contemplative feasting of the *therapeutae* in Philo's *De vita contemplativa* (*Contempl.* 35, LCL 363, 132).

⁷⁵⁰ See, among many examples, *Eccl.* 2.8 (GNO V, 313–314; SC 416, 182) and *An. et res.* (PG 46, 89C), which I discuss below.

carries the connotation of ‘pleasure-as-the-good’. As I will go on to show, spiritual enjoyment is neither a matter of the body and its senses nor pursued as the final good. The desire to avoid the base connotations of ἡδονή by employing a different term for its intellectual counterpart is evident also in other ancient writers. Here, the Stoics offer probably the strictest demarcation between ἡδονή, a passion caused by some assumed present good, and χαρά, a purely rational ‘good emotion’ which can be found in the dispassionate soul of the sage.⁷⁵¹ However, even Plato, who is generally happy to use the word ἡδονή for the more noble intellectual matters, notes in *Timaeus* that a musical harmony gives ἡδονή to the fools and εὐφροσύνη to the wise who are able to see it as an expression of the divine harmony.⁷⁵² The difference is between mere sensual pleasure and a more refined appreciation of the true beauty that underlies the sensible phenomenon. In *Protagoras*, Plato has Prodicus articulate a similar semantic distinction:

And then, too, we, your audience would be most cheered (εὐφραινόμεθα), but not pleased (οὐχ ἡδοίμεσθα), for to be cheered (εὐφραίνεσθαι) is to learn something, to participate in some intellectual activity (φρονήσεως), and is a mental state (διανοίᾳ); but to be pleased (ἡδεσθαι) has to do with eating or experiencing some other pleasure in one’s body (ἢ ἄλλο ἡδὺ πάσχοντα αὐτῷ τῷ σώματι).⁷⁵³

Later, Aristotle relates a somewhat different version of Prodicus’s distinction reporting that the latter divides pleasures into joy (χαρά), delight (τέρψις), and good cheer (εὐφροσύνη).⁷⁵⁴ In the fifth century CE, Hermias of Alexandria echoes Aristotle’s report and supplements it with more information on the different categories: τέρψις is pleasure of fine things through the ears, χαρά is pleasure of the soul, and εὐφροσύνη is pleasure through the eyes.⁷⁵⁵ A reluctance to call spiritual enjoyment ἡδονή is visible also in other later

⁷⁵¹ See footnote 2 above.

⁷⁵² *Tim.* 80b.

⁷⁵³ *Prot.* 337c; trans. Lombardo & Bell, *Complete Works*, 769. Wolfsdorf argues that the distinction is actually Plato’s own rather than Prodicus’s on the basis that it appears also in *Timaeus* where no mention is made of Prodicus. See Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 11–12.

⁷⁵⁴ *Top.* 112b. Wolfsdorf argues that Aristotle is likely to provide a more faithful report of Prodicus’s original distinctions (*Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 12).

⁷⁵⁵ *Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus* 238.22–239.2; cited in Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 12.

Platonists, including Clement of Alexandria, who again forms a probable link between Gregory and the Greek philosophical tradition.⁷⁵⁶ The later Platonist avoidance of ἡδονή for the highest forms of enjoyment can also at times be explained by the fact that Plato's ἡδονή operates by definition on a lack-and-replenishment basis, which many Neoplatonist writers deem inappropriate for describing the perfect satisfaction attained in contemplation. In other words, if there is enjoyment that does not stem from the lack-and-replenishment dynamic, it cannot be called ἡδονή. I will return to this issue later as I discuss the characteristics of spiritual enjoyment in Gregory and a selection of ancient thinkers.

The specific distinctions that different ancient thinkers make between pleasure and its more noble equivalents do not need to concern us here. It is sufficient to conclude that there is a general tendency to separate higher pleasures from lower ones, which is often reflected in the nomenclature. David Wolfsdorf calls these pleasures 'refined pleasures', as opposed to the 'base pleasures' that relate to material things and drives.⁷⁵⁷ These higher pleasures are either derived from a purely intellectual activity or entail a more sophisticated and knowledgeable appreciation of a material phenomenon and its underlying principles.

Gregory's works do not convey a clear taxonomy of spiritual enjoyment. Instead, he uses different terms more or less interchangeably and the distinctions he makes in one passage do not necessarily apply in another. At any rate, it is clear that Gregory is wary of the sinful and sensual connotations of ἡδονή and prefers other terms when he discusses spiritual enjoyment. However, there are occasions where ἡδονή itself comes to denote pleasure derived from the good life. Although the most explicit discussion of the two directions of ἡδονή occurs in *In Canticum canticorum*, the notion is not foreign to Gregory's earlier thought. In *De mortuis non esse dolendum*, an early work to which I will return in due course, Gregory argues that pleasure is at times beastly and irrational

⁷⁵⁶ Clement attributes 'pleasure' (ἡδονή) to the Gentiles, 'wrangling' (ἔρις) to the heretics, 'joy' (χαρά) to the Church, and 'delight' (εὐφροσύνη) to the true Gnostic, arguing that these are all different things (*Strom.* 7.16.101.3).

⁷⁵⁷ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 12.

(κτηνωῶδες καὶ ἄλογον) and at times pure and immaterial (καθαρόν τε καὶ ἄϋλον).⁷⁵⁸ Here, Gregory appears to take the double character of ἡδονή for granted since he uses it as the more familiar example to argue that also pain can be directed towards both vice and virtue. Similarly, in *De anima et resurrectione* Macrina and Gregory conclude that when reason rules in the soul and the passionate impulses are turned towards virtue, the impulse of desire (ἐπιθυμητικῆς ὀρμῆς) will procure a ‘divine and undefiled pleasure’ (θείαν τε καὶ ἀκήρατον... ἡδονήν).⁷⁵⁹ I have already alluded to a passage in *De virginitate*, which speaks of a ‘divine and undefiled pleasure’ (θείας τε καὶ ἀκηράτου... ἡδονῆς), and in the same work Gregory refers to ‘the most beautiful and the purest pleasure’ (ἡδονὴν τὴν καλλίστην καὶ καθαρωτάτην), which will eventually ease the ascetic struggle of the individual who has let go of worldly pleasures.⁷⁶⁰ Similar phrases are scattered throughout Gregory’s corpus.⁷⁶¹ It is striking that in the spiritual context the word ἡδονή is almost always accompanied by a qualifying adjective: ‘pure’, ‘undefiled’ or ‘divine’. These markers make it clear that we are not discussing just any pleasure but something that is quite different from sensual enjoyment.

The words ‘undefiled’ and ‘pure’ pleasure call to mind Plato’s famous notion of ‘pure pleasures’ to which I will soon return.⁷⁶² While it is probable that Gregory’s terminology owes to the Platonist tradition, later in this chapter I will suggest that we must understand Gregory’s notion of ‘undefiled pleasure’ in a somewhat different sense. For now, it is sufficient to explain briefly what Gregory intends with the term ‘undefiled’ or ‘pure’. The word alludes to an important characteristic of spiritual pleasure that sets it in sharp contrast with earthly sensual pleasure: the perpetual and stable enjoyment offered by that which is essentially good. A number of passages would suit to illustrate this feature that is perhaps the most important of all in Gregory’s theory of

⁷⁵⁸ *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 67).

⁷⁵⁹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 61B).

⁷⁶⁰ *Virg.* 5.1 (SC 119, 338.29–30); *Virg.* 9.2 (SC 119, 368.22–23).

⁷⁶¹ *Inscr.* (GNO V, 28.25; 30.15). See also the phrase τὴν θείαν τε καὶ μακαρίαν ἡδονήν in *Virg.* 5.1 (SC 119, 336.16–17).

⁷⁶² While the adjective καθαρός which occurs in *De virginitate* and *De mortuis* is precisely what Plato uses for his ‘pure pleasures’, ἀκήρατος ἡδονή appears to be Gregory’s own term and indeed the one he uses more frequently.

intellectual pleasure as it presents a solution to the problem of satiety that burdens earthly pleasure seeking. For now it will suffice to cite a passage from *De mortuis*, which anticipates many points made in *In Canticum*. The passage describes the condition of the soul after the resurrection when it no longer has any material needs but is sustained by the apprehension of the divine nature (ἡ τῆς θείας φύσεως κατανόησις):

The enjoyment (ἀπόλαυσις) of these things does not undergo changes like the enjoyment of this life which enters and is done away depending on possession or deprivation of goods, but it is always full and its fullness is never circumscribed by satiety (κόρω). For the spiritual delight (ἡ νοερὰ τρυφή) is weightless and insatiable (ἀπλήρωτος), always exceeding (ἐπιπλημμυροῦσα, lit. 'overflowing') the desires (ἐπιθυμίας) of the partakers without satiety (ἀκορέστως). For this reason this life is blessed (μακαρία) and undefiled (ἀκήρατος), no longer led astray by the pleasures of sense (τῶν αἰσθητηρίων ἡδοναῖς) in the judgment of the good (τοῦ καλοῦ κρίσιν).⁷⁶³

Here, Gregory describes a stable enjoyment, which will always exceed the desires of the contemplative and thus never wither in satiety. This, for him, leads to a 'blessed' and 'undefiled' life, which he contrasts with earthly pleasure seeking based on a mistaken judgment of the good. As Lampe notes, the term ἀκήρατος refers in patristic literature to both God's uncompounded essence and unfading goods.⁷⁶⁴ Here, the two meanings converge, as it is the simple, unmixed being of God that secures the unfading enjoyment of the divine goods. This stands in stark contrast to earthly pleasures which are derived from the mixed phenomena of the created realm and thus ebb and flow without stability.

Gregory's notion of insatiable enjoyment has roots in the earlier patristic tradition. While Origen's famous account of insatiable desiring in *De principiis* does not directly allude to pleasure, Clement addresses the topic more directly in a passage that links to many themes of Plato's *Republic*:⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶³ *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 36); my translation.

⁷⁶⁴ 'ἀκήρατος', *PGL*, 63.

⁷⁶⁵ For Origen, see *Princ.* 1.3.8.

It is an admirable thing indeed for a man to depend upon divine food in contemplation of the truth, and to be filled with the vision of that which really is, which is inexhaustible (τῆς τοῦ ὄντως ὄντος ἀπληρώτου ἐμπίμπλασθαι θείας), tasting pleasure that is enduring and abiding and pure (τῆς βεβαίου καὶ μονίμου καὶ καθαρᾶς γευομένου ἡδονῆς).⁷⁶⁶

In the passage that follows, Clement contrasts pure pleasure with the irrational, temporary and futile pleasures of the world, employing the Platonic metaphor of cattle who look downwards on the earth.⁷⁶⁷ Despite using the Platonic term ‘pure pleasure’, Clement does not allude to Plato’s technical definition of the term, to which I shall soon turn. Instead, the defining factor of a pure pleasure appears to be the lasting satisfaction, the inexhaustible vision, offered by that which truly is. This is, I argue, also what Gregory intends with similar terms.

Once we have noted Gregory’s general avoidance of the word ἡδονή in spiritual matters, we can better appreciate the directness and unambiguity of his statement concerning pleasure in *Homily 10 on the Song of Songs*:

For in the human constitution there is a double pleasure (διπλῆς...ἡδονῆς), one that is in the soul and is activated by impassibility and another that is occasioned in the body by passion, and whichever of the two our choosing (προαίρεσις) shall elect is the one that prevails over the other. Thus if one focuses attention on sense perception (αἴσθησις) and seeks for oneself the pleasure (ἡδονήν) it grafts into the body, one’s life is spent without tasting the divine gladness (τῆς θείας εὐφροσύνης), since the better is automatically overshadowed by the worse. But for those whose desire (ἐπιθυμία) flows in the direction of the divine, the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν) stands unshadowed, and judgment flees everything that bewitches the senses (αἴσθησις). Hence it is that the soul, when its only delight (εὐφραίνηται) lies in contemplation of what is real (τοῦ ὄντος), wakens to none of the pleasurable stirrings of the senses (οὐδὲν...τῶν ἐνεργουμένων καθ’ ἡδονήν δι’ αἰσθήσεως). It has put to sleep every corporeal notion, and wakened by the divine, it embraces the revelation of God by pure and naked thought.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁶ *Paed.* 2.1.9.3–4; trans. Wood, 101. See also *Strom.* 6.9 and Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 388.

⁷⁶⁷ *Paed.* 2.1.9.3–4. The whole passage is probably a paraphrase of *Rep.* 586, which includes both the cattle metaphor and a contrast between sure and pure pleasures and the unstable pleasures of the sensible world (Plato employs an almost identical phrase βεβαίου τε καὶ καθαρᾶς ἡδονῆς [586a]). Plato also alludes to insatiability (ἀπληστίαν [586b]) but it does not refer to insatiable contemplation but to the vicious cycle of sensual pleasure.

⁷⁶⁸ *Cant.* 10 (GNO VI, 313–314; trans. Norris, 329–331).

Although here, too, Gregory eventually veers towards equating spiritual pleasure with *ἐυφροσύνη*, it is clear that he understands the term as a subcategory of *ἡδονή*. The passage reveals some important characteristics of intellectual pleasure, which shed light on how it differs from the false good of sensual pleasure and remind us of Gregory's discourse on pleasure and the good. The discussion comes about in a context where Gregory highlights the importance of closing the bodily senses and detaching oneself from the world. It is the senses of the soul that act both as the receptors and mediators of spiritual pleasure. Thus, as 'judgment flees everything that bewitches the senses', spiritual pleasure is divested from the potential conflict between essence and appearance that burdens bodily sensation and leads to the dangerous pursuit of bodily pleasure as the good. The most important feature of the pleasure of the soul is the way in which it is oriented towards that which is truly good, which now 'stands unshadowed.' Here, things are experienced in their reality: the source of delight is the very thing that the mind rightly judges to be the good.⁷⁶⁹

The Emergence of Spiritual Enjoyment

Both Plato and Aristotle argue that learning to take pleasure and feel pain at correct matters is the purpose of education. As the mind learns new truths and puts them in practice by directing desire to strive for its appropriate objects, also the matters in which one takes pleasure undergo a shift.⁷⁷⁰ Thus, one's moral character determines what one derives pleasure from and, conversely, what one takes pleasure in is an indicator of one's moral status, as we have already seen Gregory argue in *In inscriptiones*. Aristotle, in particular, highlights that one has to have a certain disposition to have certain pleasures; only then can the disposition be activated without impediment and the supervenient pleasure occur. Thus, only a just person can take pleasure in justice and, generally speaking, only a virtuous person can delight in virtue.⁷⁷¹

⁷⁶⁹ The same point is made in *Mort.* (GNO IX/1, 36).

⁷⁷⁰ See Plato, *Leg.* 2.653a-c; Aristotle, *NE* 1172a

⁷⁷¹ *NE* 1173b, 1176a.

In Chapter 6, I traced the implications that the education of desire has for our understanding of pain. I have also already showed how right knowledge enables us to evaluate the worth of sensual pleasure and thus helps us detach ourselves from what previously appeared good and beautiful. However, the positive aspect of this transformation remains to be discussed: How do we learn not only to shun material delights but also to take pleasure in that which is truly pleasurable, the Good itself? And how does spiritual pleasure unfold throughout our progress towards the divine?

In this section I will trace the development of spiritual pleasure beginning from the early stages of conversion to the intimate loving union between the soul and God, which in Gregory's view belongs only to the most advanced Christians. We can detect at least three kinds of spiritual pleasures in Gregory: pleasure that results from the practice of virtue, anticipatory glimpses of eschatological enjoyment, and finally the pleasures of the eschatological union. While we can observe a shift from the realm of moral virtue to that of contemplation, Gregory does not draw a clear line of demarcation between the two. However, most of Gregory's language of spiritual enjoyment pertains to the advanced stages of the spiritual life and especially to the eschatological union; therefore I will dedicate a longer discussion to the spiritual fulfilment as Gregory presents it in two works, *De anima et resurrectione* and *In Canticum canticorum*. But first, let us see where spiritual enjoyment enters the life of a Christian.

The most interesting description of the beginnings and necessary conditions of spiritual enjoyment occurs in *In inscriptiones psalmorum*, which offers a progressive account of spiritual maturation.⁷⁷² In *In inscriptiones*, Gregory envisions the spiritual progress as a separation from the evil, an increasing blessedness achieved through meditation on things that are 'sublime and more divine', and finally the likeness of God in those who are perfected through the

⁷⁷² This overall purpose is similar to *De Beatidinibus*, *De vita Moysis* and *In Canticum canticorum*, although the stages of the spiritual progress do not always overlap seamlessly and the main focuses of the works vary. See Heine's 'Introduction' in *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, 71–79, for a comparison with the latter two works.

previous stages.⁷⁷³ In this sequence, a shift from sensual pleasure to spiritual joy plays a major part: as the soul renounces the evil, sensual pleasures are left behind and on the subsequent stages the soul rejoices in ever greater discoveries of the divine things.⁷⁷⁴

How does one leave behind one's previous life and its joys and come to an understanding of the greater and lasting joy offered by intelligible things? The idea that right knowledge and right desire are prerequisites of right enjoyment is important for understanding how this can happen: In the ascetic life, the first step is to acquire knowledge of what is truly good by familiarising oneself with the biblical story of God's on-going involvement with the world, which culminates in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Once basic knowledge of this fundamental reality is made available, it becomes possible to direct one's desire towards it.⁷⁷⁵ The appeal of virtue is not intuitive to someone who is habituated to seeking satisfaction from the sensible world. This is why Gregory emphasises the difficulty of detachment and argues that the reorientation of desire results in hard lessons of virtue for the beginners.⁷⁷⁶ Initially, it is simply the knowledge of the goodness of the Good and a firm resolve to pursue the worthy goal that sustain the ascetic effort; a deeper change of sensibilities follows only once desire is fully detached from worldly distractions.

While Gregory is generally wary of any pleasure generated by the sensible world, *In inscriptiones psalmorum* contains an unusual suggestion as to how the human inclination towards sensual pleasure can be transformed into a vehicle of spiritual growth. Here, Gregory contends that the singing of psalms can be used as a sweetening that eases the bitter struggle of beginners.⁷⁷⁷ Since these people still partially hold on to sensual pleasure as their criterion of goodness, they are naturally drawn to singing, which is now harnessed for the attainment

⁷⁷³ See the summary in Heine, 'Introduction' in *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, 52–54.

⁷⁷⁴ *Inscr.* I.2 (GNO V, 27–28).

⁷⁷⁵ See my discussion on this transformative sequence on p. 187.

⁷⁷⁶ *Inscr.* I.2 (GNO V, 28). See also Macrina's account of the pains of purification in *An. et res.* (PG 46, 100B–101A).

⁷⁷⁷ *Inscr.* I.2 (GNO V, 29).

of a higher good. The idea that a sensible phenomenon can direct a fledgling Christian soul towards the intelligible realm is, of course, entirely in line with what we have already seen Gregory argue about the role of the sensible creation in general. However, Gregory's works describe few instances where physical enjoyment serves as a concrete vehicle of spiritual maturation rather than simply points towards a higher reality as an analogical (but different) sign. The latter connection forms the basis of Gregory's allegorical exegesis the *Song of Songs* and his theory of contemplation, but – compared to many later Byzantine and Syriac writers – he has little to say about sensible things as tangible sacramental mediators of the divine sweetness. This is perhaps due to the fact that he is generally apprehensive about pleasure that arises from the sensible realm, even if it serves a higher purpose. Nonetheless, even a passing suggestion on the sweetening of spiritual things through the intuitively attractive sensual pleasure provides an interesting link in the transformation of pleasure.

For Gregory, then, spiritual enjoyment is a product of the ascetic struggle that begins to emerge as desire is detached from worldly distractions. Since it is difficult to leave behind the pleasures of the world, Gregory encourages his reader by promising that the redirection of desire will eventually turn into a habit (συνήθεια), which, he argues, 'produces pleasure (ἡδονήν) through steadfastness in what appears the most difficult.'⁷⁷⁸ This new pleasure is 'the most beautiful and the purest pleasure' (ἡδονήν τὴν καλλίστην καὶ καθαρωτάτην) available, much greater than the earthly pleasures left behind. In other words, spiritual enjoyment is the fruit of virtue, which Gregory classically understands as a deeply ingrained disposition acquired through habitual action. In his *Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, Gregory argues that 'the perpetual joy in good things' (ἐπὶ τοῖς καλοῖς εὐφροσύνη) is 'the child of good deeds' (ἐκ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἔργων γεννᾶται).⁷⁷⁹ Here, too, we can detect a sequence in which the spiritual life gradually evolves from obedience and renunciation to love and enjoyment.

⁷⁷⁸ *Virg.* 9.3 (SC 119, 368); trans. Callahan, 36. This idea can be traced back to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1370a) where we find the view that habit (ἔθος) produces pleasure and, conversely, actions are experienced as painful necessities as long as the habit has not been formed.

⁷⁷⁹ *Eccl.* 8 (SC 416, 432); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 143.

For Gregory, the extent and intensity of spiritual enjoyment increases as the soul pursues the divine goods first in this life and then in the life to come. As Warren Smith has pointed out, the line between the two is not always clear.⁷⁸⁰ I will soon turn to the mutually enforcing dynamic between desire and enjoyment that Gregory associates with an intimate relationship between the soul and God. First, however, I want to draw attention to one sort of enjoyment that most definitely belongs to the life before resurrection, namely anticipatory joy and its close connection to hope.

We have already discussed the importance of joy and hope when we examined Gregory's notion of beneficial suffering sweetened by the hope of future goods. In the case of Stephen, which we looked at in Chapter 6, it seems that Gregory envisions some form of *direct participation* in the life to come as the soul is temporarily afforded a foretaste of perfection. However, a joy in future things can also take a less tangible form. As philosopher James Warren notes in *The Pleasures of Reason*, one of the key differences between humans and animals is our ability to derive pleasure from mere thought, either by remembering past pleasures or anticipating future ones. Our 'ability to look forward and backward to our future and past experiences allows us to generate further affective responses in the present.'⁷⁸¹ As Warren explains, the human ability to reflect on one's past and future hedonic state not only enables us to compare our present state to what was or will be, which leads to an evaluation of our current moral status and perhaps to a reassessment of what we hold pleasant and painful; but we are also able to improve our present state by 'reliving' or 'pre-living' a pleasure.⁷⁸² In *Beat. 4*, the same homily that contains the metaphor of a leaky jar, Gregory states clearly how the mind's ability to move between the past, present, and future ensures that intellectual pleasure is available and durable at all times:

The desire of virtue is followed by the possession of what is desired; and the interior goodness brings at the same time unceasing joy (ἀπαυστοι τὴν εὐφροσύνην) to the

⁷⁸⁰ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 214.

⁷⁸¹ Warren, *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*, 7.

⁷⁸² Warren, *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*, 8.

soul. For such is the nature of this wonderful thing that it not only delights in the present while one is enjoying it (μὴ ἐν τῷ παρόντι μόνον καταγλυκαίνειν τὸν ἀπολαύοντα), but brings actual joy (εὐφροσύνην) at every instant of time. For if a man has lived rightly, he finds joy (εὐφραίνει) in the memory (μνήμη) of the past as well as in the virtuous conduct of the present (ἐν τῷ παρόντι ζωῆ) and the expectation of the future reward (τῆς ἀντιδόσεως προσδοκία). This, I suppose, is none other than again virtue itself, which is both the work and the reward of those who have accomplished it.⁷⁸³

The idea that humans can experience joy in the present simply by thinking of future enjoyment sheds light on the close connection between hope and joy. We should recall Gregory's remark in *Beat. 3* according to which joy (εὐφροσύνη) of the life to come is 'presented to our hope (κατ' ἐλπίδας ἡμῖν προκειμένω).'⁷⁸⁴ As I have already noted, Warren Smith argues that here Gregory presents a departure from the Stoic system of emotions in which hope is seen as a detrimental passion that hinders the acceptance of the present reality and predetermined future.⁷⁸⁵ However, as James Warren demonstrates in his work on intellectual pleasures in antiquity, the juxtaposition between present sensual pleasure, on the one hand, and hope and future enjoyment, on the other, is by no means a uniquely Gregorian characteristic. Many ancient thinkers consider hope the opposite of sensual pleasure not only because hope enables people to fix their gaze on that which is not currently present to the senses, but also because hope *itself* is understood as a kind of pleasure or joy derived from future goods rather than present ones.⁷⁸⁶ For Plato and others, the moral value of hope and the pleasure it yields depends on the rationality of the underlying belief, which in turn depends on the moral and intellectual maturity of the individual. Hope can be a virtuous disposition that yields good pleasure, but it can also be based on a false belief and thus entail a false joy.⁷⁸⁷ In fact, we should note that even if hope is granted a particularly elevated status as a Christian

⁷⁸³ *Beat. 4* (GNO VII/2, 121); trans Graef, 128.

⁷⁸⁴ *Beat. 3* (GNO VII/2, 109).

⁷⁸⁵ Smith, 'Macrina, Tamer of Horses', 56–57.

⁷⁸⁶ For pleasures afforded by hope and recollection, see, for example, Plato, *Phil.* 32b onwards; Aristotle, *NE* 1173c; *Rhet.* 1370b. See also Warren's discussion on pleasures of anticipation in Plato in *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*, 129–56.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 129–40. We should especially note that, in Plato's view, the hopes of the good and pious people will turn out to be true, while those of the wicked will be false (*Phil.* 40a–d).

virtue, Gregory, too, is aware of the possibility of misguided hope that springs from a false expectation.⁷⁸⁸

To sum up, for many ancient thinkers hope is not merely a herald of joy but an actual joy because the soul is able to take delight in its hopeful thought already before the enjoyable content becomes tangibly present. This is likely what Philo means by calling hope ‘some anticipatory emotion, a joy before joy’ (προπάθειά τις, χαρὰ πρὸ χαρᾶς,) and a ‘joy before joy, gladness before gladness’ (τινὰ χαίρειν πρὸ χαρᾶς καὶ εὐφραίνεσθαι πρὸ εὐφροσύνης).⁷⁸⁹ Although Gregory does not explicitly label hope as a joy, something of this sort can be inferred from the very end of the *Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, where Gregory writes:

Keeping the commandments gives joy now through hope (διὰ τῆς ἐλπίδος εὐφραίνει) to the one who promotes good deeds, but hereafter the enjoyment of good things (ἡ ἀπόλαυσις τῶν ἀγαθῶν) when hopes are fulfilled holds out everlasting joy (ἄϊδιον... τὴν εὐφροσύνην) to the worthy...⁷⁹⁰

In the third homily on the *Song of Songs*, Gregory explains that Christ manifests himself in every person according to the ability of the recipient and likens him to a grape cluster that gradually matures from a blossom to a ripe fruit. As it blossoms, the grape is still not ripe for becoming wine, but it anticipates good things and

delights (εὐφραίνει) smell rather than taste and gives pleasure (ἡδύων) to the soul’s senses with the fragrances of hope (τοῖς ἀτμοῖς τῆς ἐλπίδος); for those who wait with eager patience there comes the trustworthy and unambiguous enjoyment (ἀπόλαυσις) of the grace that is hoped for.⁷⁹¹

In the passage above, Gregory conceptualises the soul’s progress as a transition from the smell of anticipation to the taste of fulfilment. It is clear that both of these stages yield enjoyment. Eventually, the delight of anticipation conveyed

⁷⁸⁸ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 92B).

⁷⁸⁹ *QG* (frag.) I.79; *Mut.* 161.

⁷⁹⁰ *Eccl.* 8 (SC 416, 432); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 143.

⁷⁹¹ *Cant.* 3 (GNO VI, 97); trans. Norris, 107.

by hope turns into 'trustworthy and unambiguous enjoyment', as the soul no longer senses Christ from a distance but 'consumes' him directly. It is to this delight of the spiritual fulfilment I shall now turn.

8. Enjoyment in the Eschatological Union

As we have already seen, in the course of the spiritual progress desire turns more and more fully towards the divine, leading to increasing spiritual enjoyment. However, even a virtuous human being will inevitably be distracted by matters that are not God as long as she continues her earthly existence: there will be needs to fulfil and bodily weaknesses to grapple with. It is only in the eschaton that the soul enters into a full communion with God, free from all external distractions. This is the state towards which Gregory points in all of his works as he persuades his audience to leave behind worldly pleasures in the present to gain a greater joy in the life to come. Here, the hopeful joy in future goods turns into ‘trustworthy and unambiguous enjoyment’ as the soul attains the final good and the divine Beloved becomes the centre of its existence.

Many ancient thinkers held the view that the attainment of the final good offered delight that surpassed all other forms of enjoyment. However, as Gerd Van Riel points out in his work *Pleasure and the Good Life*, ancient philosophers – Platonists in particular – struggled to explain how an *actualised* union could be said to yield anything like pleasure.⁷⁹² Here we should keep in mind that Plato defined pleasure as a replenishment of a lack. Thus, a problem ensued: how could the spiritual fulfilment yield any pleasure if pleasure was by definition characterised by a lack and no lack existed once the soul had reached its goal. Plato himself did not encounter this problem, because he believed that the soul was forever in a constant state of becoming. But later Platonists, such as Plotinus and Proclus, did believe in the possibility of actualised perfection. Thus, as Van Riel’s study demonstrates, they had to relinquish Plato’s lack-and-replenishment model and conceptualise the highest form of enjoyment in a different way. Van Riel suggests that the solution to this problem was found in Aristotle’s theory of pleasure, which did not posit the presence of a lack but argued that pleasure accompanied a perfect activity.

⁷⁹² This development and its ambiguities are traced in Van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*.

I will shortly return to Plato and the later Platonists. For now, I simply want to point out the Platonist difficulty since, in my view, it can illuminate the way – or the ways – in which Gregory conceptualises the place of pleasure and enjoyment in the eschatological union. We have already seen that Gregory, too, operates in a roughly Platonic framework where pleasure is conceptualised as a filling and as a fulfilment of a desire which, in turn, is understood as a lack. Furthermore, the notion of ‘pure’ or ‘undefiled’ pleasure suggests that Gregory’s understanding of intellectual pleasure was at least indirectly influenced by Platonist terminology. Thus, the Platonists’ problem of pleasure in a state of fulfilment looms in the background as Gregory discusses enjoyment in the eschatological union.

Of all topics related to Gregory’s understanding of pleasure, eschatological enjoyment has probably received the most thorough scholarly treatment. Thus, in this section I will make use of Warren Smith’s existing analysis where the author presents two different models of spiritual fulfilment in which enjoyment plays a key role.⁷⁹³ In the opening paragraphs of his investigation, Smith introduces the two models in the following manner:

What will be the difference in the way the perfected saint experiences God now and how she will experience him in the eschaton? How will this different experience of God change the character of the saint’s love?

Two strikingly different answers to these questions come in the different accounts of epectasy in *On the Soul and Resurrection* and in *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Life of Moses*. In the earlier view of epectasy from *On the Soul and Resurrection* the eschaton brings the purification of the soul through the transformation of passionate desire, or *erôs*, into a pure and passionless love, *agapê*. The key to this transformation is the change in our experience of God summed up in Paul’s declaration that God shall be “all in all.” The later view of epectasy contained in *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Life of Moses* grounds the transformation of desire in the ontological divide between the finite creature who loves and the eternal and infinite one who is the eternal object of the creature’s love. The result is that in these later works, far from asserting that the

⁷⁹³ See, “When God Shall Be All and in All”: *Erôs* and *Agapê* in the Eschaton in Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 183–227.

erotic desire is eliminated, Nyssen insists that the soul's love of God is always a form of *erôs*.⁷⁹⁴

Although Smith's focus is on love, the prominent role of enjoyment emerges in his analysis: In *De anima et resurrectione*, Macrina envisions a state of spiritual fulfilment in which desire has reached its goal and only enjoyment without any lack remains. In *In Canticum*, on the other hand, desire and enjoyment increase continuously side by side as divine mysteries are revealed and enjoyed but an infinite number remains yet to be discovered.

Fusing the key arguments of Van Riel's and Smith's analyses, I will go on to suggest that Gregory's two models of enjoyment in the eschatological union turn on the concept of 'lack' and, implicitly, the Platonist notion of pleasure as a replenishment. In *De anima*, Gregory envisions an actualised spiritual fulfilment, which is not far from what we find in Plotinus and Proclus. Since the soul lacks nothing, Gregory cannot employ the notion of pleasure as a replenishment to describe spiritual enjoyment. Instead, he presents an alternative model, which is not without Aristotelian undertones. In *Canticum*, on the other hand, Gregory presents a more radical interpretation of the soul's union with God: here enjoyment and desire grow eternally side by side as the soul grasps new aspects of its Beloved, yet realises it will never grasp him entirely. Since Gregory includes desire in the pinnacle of the spiritual life, the pursuit of the Beloved can be easily understood as a perpetual sequence of lack and fulfilment. Thus, Gregory is able to build his notion of spiritual pleasure after the lack-and-replenishment model with much greater ease than his pagan Neoplatonist counterparts. However, I will also argue that Gregory's understanding of spiritual pleasure in *In Canticum* contains features which represent a clear departure from the standard Platonic understanding of the most noble pleasures.

I will close my investigation with a comment about an underlying assumption that informs Smith's reading of the two works and their respective models of

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., 184.

spiritual enjoyment. As we can see from the passage above, on Smith's reading *De anima et resurrectione* presents an *early* vision of perfection whereas *In Canticum canticorum* puts forth a *later* mature view. I will challenge this interpretation by showing that Smith's focus on the two works – the works which undoubtedly say the most about the role of enjoyment in the eschaton – leaves out material which complicates the idea of a neat chronological development.

Plato and Aristotle on Intellectual Pleasure: From Lack and Replenishment to Perfect Activity

Before discussing the place that Gregory gives to enjoyment at the highest stages of the spiritual life, I will turn my attention to the earlier philosophical tradition to highlight a few peculiarities that have characterised ancient notions of positive pleasure. Above all, we must gain a basic understanding of Plato's conception of 'pure pleasures' and the difficulties this notion caused to some of the later Platonists.⁷⁹⁵ Although Plato rejects pleasure as the highest good, at the end of *Philebus*, his most important dialogue on pleasure, Socrates and Protarchus come to the conclusion that a good human life is a mix of the truest form of knowledge with the truest form of pleasure, though the latter holds a much lower status than the former. The relevance of pleasure is mainly explained by Socrates' view that no one would pursue knowledge if it did not yield enjoyment.

What are these 'true pleasures' that are granted a status as a component of the good life? We have already touched on the discussion on pleasure and the good in *Philebus*, including Socrates' notion that most 'pleasures' pursued by common people are in fact *false* pleasures because they are mixed with pain. False pleasures are products of false opinion and should be avoided. As I demonstrated in Part II, this concern about 'mixed pleasures' is evident also in

⁷⁹⁵ In addition to Van Riel's work, my summary has benefited from the chapter 'Plato on the Pleasures and Pains of Knowing' in Warren, *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*, 21–51.

Gregory's works; different manifestations of pain, such as anxiety, repulsion, and sorrow, accompany most occasions of pleasure seeking. But, argues Socrates, there are also pleasures which are correctly judged as such. Simply put, these pleasures, which Socrates calls alternately pure (καθαράς), unmixed (ἀμείκτους), or true (ἀληθεῖς), are pleasures *unmixed* with pain.

In *Philebus*, Socrates formulates the following definition of pure pleasures: the pleasures that actually merit their name are 'based on imperceptible and painless lacks (τὰς ἐνδείας ἀναισθήτους ἔχοντα καὶ ἀλύπους), while their fulfilments are perceptible and pleasant (τὰς πληρώσεις αἰσθητὰς καὶ ἡδείας).'⁷⁹⁶ Here, we should note that while the pure pleasures do not involve any perceptible pain, Socrates nonetheless assumes that they follow a lack-and-replenishment dynamic, which is Plato's standard way of conceptualising pleasure. In other words, there is an underlying *imperceptible* lack, which leads to a perceptible and fully pleasurable filling.

For Socrates, this class of pleasures does not pertain exclusively to high intellectual matters. Most smells and sounds will yield true pleasure, as do pure colours and geometric shapes. However, we should note that even these pleasures of the perceptible world are truly pleasant because 'they are not beautiful in a relative sense (οὐκ εἶναι πρὸς τι καλὰ), as others are, but are by their very nature forever beautiful by themselves (ἀεὶ καλὰ καθ' αὐτὰ πεφυκέναι).'⁷⁹⁷ The close proximity to the form of beauty separates a geometric shape and a pure musical note from the multiform appearance of a living being. Whereas the pursuit of false pleasures is at the same time a pursuit of lesser forms of beauty – leading to the notorious problem of pleasure as the false good – pure pleasures are derived from Beauty itself or at least from things that share a closer kinship with it.

Next, Socrates adds to true pleasures the sort that is the most relevant for our present enquiry: pleasures of learning. In Socrates' view, the pleasures of

⁷⁹⁶ *Phil.* 51b; trans. Frede, *Collected Works*, 440.

⁷⁹⁷ *Phil.* 51c; trans. Frede, 441.

learning are true so far as ‘there is no such thing as hunger for learning connected with them, nor any pains that have their source in a hunger of learning.’⁷⁹⁸ Furthermore, if people lose the filling they have attained through learning by forgetting the learned content, they do not experience any pain either. In other words, pain neither precedes nor follows learning.⁷⁹⁹ This definition raises an obvious question: are not Plato’s dialogues themselves a prime example of the fact that learning does not come easily but requires conscious effort and comes with many troubling realisations? Furthermore, forgetting could surely be conceived as a source of annoyance.⁸⁰⁰ In fact, Plato is by no means dismissive of the pains related to learning. Here, Socrates aims for a narrow definition that does not apply to the masses but only to a small number of people.⁸⁰¹ It is conceivable that we can obtain knowledge without striving for it and thus spontaneously enjoy the pleasure of learning that accompanies it. As regards forgetting, Socrates argues that it is not the loss of knowledge itself but our reflection on this loss that causes pain.⁸⁰²

In *Philebus*, Socrates contends that the pure and simple (καθαρόν τε καὶ εἰλικρινές) pleasures are greater than those that are violent, multiform, enormous, and reckless (τὸ σφόδρα τε καὶ τὸ πολὺ καὶ τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ ἴταμόν).⁸⁰³ Even if the pleasures of the latter kind may seem particularly significant since they are unlimited and can strike with a great force, even the smallest pleasure of the pure kind will be ‘pleasanter, truer, and more beautiful’ (ἡδίων καὶ ἀληθεστέρα καὶ καλλίων) than a seemingly larger quantity of the impure kind.⁸⁰⁴ In other words, when it comes to the value of pleasure, what matters is its quality, not the quantity or intensity.

⁷⁹⁸ *Phil.* 51e–52a; trans. Frede, 441.

⁷⁹⁹ *Phil.* 52a.

⁸⁰⁰ On these problems that are also partly addressed in the dialogue itself, see Warren, *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*, 23–29.

⁸⁰¹ *Phil.* 52b.

⁸⁰² *Phil.* 52a–b.

⁸⁰³ *Phil.* 52d; trans. Frede, 442. Frede (*Collected Works*, 442, note 18) reads the last adjective on Plato’s list as ἴκανον (‘sufficient’) and transposes it after the positive adjectives. However, since the adjective follows a list of negative words, it has also been read as ἴταμόν (‘reckless’), which fits the context without transposition. The correct reading does not make any difference for the present enquiry.

⁸⁰⁴ *Phil.* 53c.

Finally, Socrates concludes that the pleasures that belong to the good life are the previously discussed pure pleasures, pleasures of health, and those that allow for the development of virtue – that is, pleasures that can be appropriately moderated by reason. Violent and intense pleasures, i.e. unbridled pleasures of the lower parts of the soul, do not belong to the good life because they disturb the appropriate hierarchy of the soul, submitting reason to the irrational parts.⁸⁰⁵ Although pleasure remains for Socrates a generation, a constant process of becoming, and thus cannot vie for the place of the highest good, the best kinds of pleasures are nonetheless the ones that most clearly resemble or result from good things.

Book IX of *Republic* contains another significant discussion on the different categories of pleasure which partly overlap with the distinction Socrates makes in *Philebus*. Here, Socrates identifies three kinds of pleasures which correspond to the three parts of the soul and also to three different kinds of rule: The lowest part of the soul draws pleasure from money and profit, the spirited part pursues control, victory and honour, while the highest part loves learning and philosophy. Based on the part that rules in each individual, people can be divided into three groups: profit-loving, victory-loving, and philosophic. All of these groups have their own pleasures derived from what they love, and each of them would claim their pleasures to be the highest. Thus, Socrates sets out to enquire which of the groups actually enjoys the most pleasant life.⁸⁰⁶

Socrates argues that the philosopher is the soundest judge of which pleasures are the most pleasant since, despite enjoying the pleasures of learning in his present life, he alone has tasted all the other pleasures in childhood before his ability to reason was fully developed. Furthermore, rational argument, the instrument of judging, is the instrument of the philosopher, whereas the other two groups are ruled by the lower parts of the soul. Thus, Socrates contends that the pleasures of learning form the highest category, followed by pleasures of honour and finally those of profit. Only the first category includes pleasures

⁸⁰⁵ *Phil.* 63d.

⁸⁰⁶ *Rep.* IX, 580d–582a.

that are entirely true (παναληθής) and pure (καθαρά); the latter two are, as Socrates argues, mere 'shadow-paintings.'⁸⁰⁷ Like in *Philebus*, the distinguishing characteristic that sets apart the true and pure pleasures is the absence of pain.

In *Republic*, Plato offers a more detailed discussion on how the lack-and-replenishment model applies to pleasures of learning. Here, Socrates argues that just as hunger and thirst are empty states (κενώσεις) of the body, ignorance is an empty state of the soul. Thus, intellectual pleasures result from the replenishment (πλήρωσις) of this lack with true belief (δόξης τε ἀληθοῦς), knowledge (ἐπιστήμης), understanding (νοῦ), and 'in sum, with all of virtue (πάσης ἀρετῆς).'⁸⁰⁸ In Socrates' view, this intellectual filling and the following pleasure are truer and more substantial than any bodily filling. The former pertains, after all, to things that are always the same, immortal, and true. Since the filling itself is greater and truer than mere material filling of the body, Socrates argues that also the pleasure that follows must be greater and truer than any material pleasure, even if pleasure as such belongs to the realm of becoming. Those who do not lead a virtuous life will only content themselves with bringing their bodies again and again to the neutral state, that is, restore them from a state of pain to a relative balance, but will never have a share in the 'stable or pure pleasure' (βεβαίου τε καὶ καθαρᾶς ἡδονῆς) of the intellect.⁸⁰⁹

The fact that Plato uses the notion of pleasure-as-replenishment to conceptualise pleasures of the good life has caused a number of difficulties to later interpreters. One of the main challenges is pointed out by Gerd Van Riel, who draws attention to later Platonist thinkers who envision the beatific union as a state of *rest*. The question then becomes whether a state of attained fulfilment can be said to yield anything like pleasure if pleasure implies the presence of a lack and is, furthermore, by definition a *process* that belongs to the realm of becoming.⁸¹⁰ This presents a problem to Neoplatonist thinkers who conceptualise the pinnacle of the contemplative life as an actualised union with

⁸⁰⁷ *Rep.* IX, 582a–583b.

⁸⁰⁸ *Rep.* IX, 585b–c.

⁸⁰⁹ *Rep.* IX, 585d–586b.

⁸¹⁰ Van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 118.

the supreme being itself, a state which, as Van Riel notes, ‘cannot be subject to a process of becoming and movement.’⁸¹¹ Van Riel argues that although Plotinus, Proclus and Damascius overtly express their loyalty to Plato and accept Plato’s definition of pleasure so far as bodily matters are concerned, the lack-and-replenishment model proves insufficient for describing enjoyment derived from intellectual perfection. To explain how attained fulfilment can yield pleasure, the later Platonists turn to Aristotle.⁸¹²

As I noted in the opening chapter of this thesis, for Aristotle pleasure results from unimpeded natural activity. In other words, when an activity is performed perfectly according to nature, pleasure follows suit. In his ethical works, Aristotle examines different sorts of pleasures and explicitly criticises Plato’s notion of pleasure as a replenishment and as a process.⁸¹³ In his view, the purest pleasures are not characterised by imperceptible lacks but accompany the perfect activity of the highest human faculty: contemplation. When the intellect contemplates God, humans fulfil their nature in the best possible way and thus derive the best possible pleasure from the activity.⁸¹⁴ In Aristotle’s view, perfect contemplation is an *attainable* goal and continues to yield pleasure even after it has been reached as the soul persists in the activity of contemplation. In fact, he remarks that the continued possession of knowledge is likely to yield greater pleasure than merely the pursuit of it.⁸¹⁵ Whereas for Plato, the highest pleasures are the ones that do not involve pain, for Aristotle the value of pleasure depends on the value of the activity that it accompanies.⁸¹⁶

Thus, as Van Riel shows, Aristotle’s view of pleasure is better suited to describe pleasure that is derived from attained perfection where no lack is present and no change occurs.⁸¹⁷ This is why it becomes the preferred model of spiritual enjoyment for a number of later Platonists despite the fact that they overtly

⁸¹¹ Ibid., 115.

⁸¹² Ibid., 3–4.

⁸¹³ See *NE* 10.3, 1173b7–20; *EE* 6, 1152b–1153a.

⁸¹⁴ *NE* 10.7, 1177a12–27.

⁸¹⁵ *NE* 10.7, 1177a26–27.

⁸¹⁶ Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 134.

⁸¹⁷ See Van Riel’s discussion of Plotinus and Proclus in Van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 94–133.

emphasise their loyalty to Plato.⁸¹⁸ While Van Riel focuses on Neoplatonist philosophers, we can see a similar awareness of the potential pitfalls of the Platonic definition and a preference for the Aristotelian model for example in Gregory's Christian contemporary Nemesius of Emesa who argues explicitly that the replenishment model is only suited to describe bodily pleasures related to hunger and thirst; pleasures of contemplation do not arise from a deficit or involve any change, and are thus best understood in the Aristotelian framework.⁸¹⁹

Another related criticism of intellectual pleasure as replenishment has been that it is not clear whether it is knowing or the *acquisition* of knowledge that yields pleasure. The difficulty arises again from Plato's notion of pleasure as filling a lack: if ignorance is a lack and knowledge yields pleasure by filling it, it is unclear how the continued possession of knowledge alone can be said to be pleasurable. Even if we assume that the philosopher continues to discover new things after he has become a qualified ruler by discovering essential moral truths, James Warren notes that there is no guarantee of 'an infinitely large number of Forms to learn such that a philosopher will never run out of potential new sources of the pleasures of intellectual discovery.'⁸²⁰ Scholars like Warren have both attempted to resolve the tension and simply noted that Plato's explanation is unsatisfactory. The specifics of Plato's shortcomings and their potential solutions do not concern us here. But we should keep this tension in mind for we shall see that Gregory will bypass the problem (of which he may not be aware) by positing precisely what Plato does not: an infinite number of fresh discoveries that yield pleasure in the spiritual realm.

Spiritual Enjoyment in Gregory of Nyssa: Two Models

It is difficult to ascertain what Gregory of Nyssa knew about the earlier philosophical definitions of the more noble pleasures. In fact, some passages in

⁸¹⁸ On this overt loyalty, see, for example, *Ibid.*, 177.

⁸¹⁹ *De natura hominis* 18 (BT, 78–79).

⁸²⁰ Warren, *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*, 45.

In Canticum would seem to indicate that he was not aware of the specifics of Plato's discussion of true and false pleasures.⁸²¹ However, it is clear that Gregory, too, grapples with the notions of pain, lack, and becoming that inform the general Platonist discourse on pleasure. We can see this in his frequent complaints about the insufficiency of bodily pleasure which is always mixed with pain and leads to a frustrating cycle of lack and replenishment. The same notions of pain, lack, and becoming also play a role in Gregory's discussions on the highest forms of spiritual enjoyment. In this section, I will show that the two different models of spiritual perfection which Warren Smith identifies in *Passion and Paradise* offer two different conceptions of spiritual pleasure: In *De anima et resurrectione*, Macrina describes a beatific union in which no lack is present and thus the enjoyment gleaned must be understood differently from the lack-and-replenishment model that characterises bodily pleasure. In *In Canticum*, on the other hand, Gregory presents a different vision of spiritual perfection in which both desire and pleasure persist and increase side by side in the eschatological fulfilment. This means that he also leaves the door open for the possibility of lack – even pain – at the highest level of spiritual perfection.

Spiritual Enjoyment in De anima et resurrectione: Perfect Activity and Filling without Lack

Let us first turn to the understanding of spiritual perfection which Gregory attributes to Macrina in *De anima et resurrectione*. We have already discussed the long passage on the place of passions in the human constitution, in which Macrina argued that the lower parts of the soul and their product, the passions, exist on the margins of the soul and do not reflect the image of God which is located in the mind. However, it also became apparent that in their current state humans cannot attain intellectual perfection unless they make use of the lower parts of the soul and submit their passions to the control of the mind, which directs the impulses towards the good. This is where we encounter the first

⁸²¹ See especially *Cant.* 8 (GNO VI, 251–252; trans. Norris, 265) and my discussion on pages 64–65. Other patristic writers from the same period demonstrate a more explicit awareness of Plato's notion of mixed pleasures. See especially Nemesius, *De natura hominis* 18 (BT, 77).

comment on the possibility of spiritual pleasure as Macrina concedes to Gregory's remark that the impulses for passions can be put to good use if they are governed by reason. One of the examples of redirected impulses is the 'impulse of desire' (ἐπιθυμητικῆς ὀρμῆς) which, according to Macrina, will sponsor 'the divine and undefiled pleasure' (τὴν θείαν τε καὶ ἀκήρατον...ἡδονήν).⁸²² As we have already seen, the qualifiers 'divine and undefiled' are common in Gregory's allusions to spiritual ἡδονή. Since 'undefiled pleasure' results from a conscious pursuit of the good, it seems likely that the soul acutely feels the lack of God, which results in active and perceptible desiring. Thus, 'undefiled pleasure' cannot be read as a full synonym of Plato's 'pure pleasure.' It is more likely, as I have already suggested, that Gregory considers the divine pleasure undefiled because its object is the one and pure God who can offer enjoyment which is not tainted by anything external.

What Macrina describes is in many ways analogical to the 'double pleasure' of *In Canticum*, an impulse which can be turned either towards the good or the evil depending on the mind's judgment. However, we soon find out that for Macrina this is not the highest form of spiritual enjoyment. As the dialogue progresses, she argues that although irrational impulses can be put to good use, eventually all irrational movements are removed from the soul in the process of purification, which restores the soul to its original state. Here, the Platonist notion of desire and pleasure as lack and replenishment becomes central to Macrina's argument and is found insufficient as a description of the eschatological union. Desire, as Macrina has previously explained, results from seeking what one lacks or yearning for the enjoyment of some pleasure (ἔφρουν... τοῦ ἐνδέοντος ἢ πόθον τῆς καθ' ἡδονὴν ἀπολαύσεως).⁸²³ Now she presents the other central definition of desire as an appetite for what is missing which seeks to remedy the lack of beauty in the human nature.⁸²⁴ In other words, desiring is by definition lacking, and the lack of beauty is the driving

⁸²² *An. et res.* (PG 46, 61C); trans. Silvas, 195. I do not see any necessity to follow Silvas and translate the participle προξενούσης in the conditional ('would sponsor'), which makes the sentence sound rather hypothetical despite the fact that Macrina and Gregory are clearly discussing something they consider possible and attainable.

⁸²³ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 56A).

⁸²⁴ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 92C); trans. Silvas, 209.

force behind our yearning for God. This has important implications for the fate of desire in the eschatological union.

Like many other thinkers such as the Neoplatonists discussed by Van Riel and Clement and Nemesius in the patristic tradition, Macrina goes on to argue that once the soul is purified, united to God and restored to the divine likeness, it no longer lacks anything.⁸²⁵ In the eschatological union, the soul attains the likeness of God who encompasses all goods and ‘has no need of anything that can be regarded as good (μηδενὸς ἐνδεῶς ἔχουσα τῶν πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν νοουμένων).’⁸²⁶ Since God who possesses all goods lacks nothing, the soul that attains the divine likeness by regaining possession of the divine goods is also without lack. And since the soul finds itself completely surrounded and permeated by the Beautiful, it no longer needs desire whose main task is to lead it towards beauty to remedy a lack. When the soul’s faculties are fully directed towards God, evil, which Gregory conceives as a separation from the good, vanishes and God becomes ‘all in all’ (1 *Cor.* 15:28).⁸²⁷ The soul is not only free from sin, but it also rids itself of all worldly necessities that are not-God and impede a single-minded focus on the divine during the earthly existence even if the person is advanced in virtue. The elimination of all lack results in the complete extirpation of desire:

[S]ince there is no desire (ἐπιθυμία) in that nature [of which the soul attains a likeness] because there is no lack of the good (τινος τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἔνδειαν) in it, it would follow that the soul also becomes free of any lack (ἐν τῷ ἀνευδεεῖ) and hence expels from itself the movement and disposition of desire (τὴν ἐπιθυμητικὴν κίνησιν τε καὶ διάθεσιν), for this arises only in the absence of something yearned for (μὴ παρῆ τὸ ποθούμενον).⁸²⁸

However, it is striking that despite the demise of desire Macrina’s vision of spiritual fulfilment is markedly focussed on enjoyment. In *De anima et resurrectione*, she argues that in this radically new situation ‘enjoyment

⁸²⁵ Clement argues that when the soul is united to God, no lack exists and thus desire gives way to love (*Strom.* 6.9.73.3–74.1), offering a close parallel to Macrina’s view.

⁸²⁶ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 92C); trans. Silvas, 209–210.

⁸²⁷ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 104A).

⁸²⁸ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 96A); trans. Silvas, 211.

succeeds desire' (τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἐκδέξεται ἢ ἀπόλαυσις), and its power (ἐξουσία τῆς ἀπολαύσεως) turns desire into an idle and stale thing of the past. This, for her, should not be conceived as a loss but as a rediscovery of the true identity of the soul.⁸²⁹ As the soul attains the true Beauty and is transformed into its likeness, it also puts aside both memory and hope, focussing entirely on the enjoyment of good things (τὴν ἀπόλαυσιν τῶν ἀγαθῶν)⁸³⁰. The hope of future enjoyment which has inspired the soul during the earlier stages of the spiritual progress becomes redundant when the thing hoped for is at hand. Neither is there any need for the grief and regret which previously have resulted from remembering the original blessed state of humanity and the separation caused by subsequent evil-doing, for the soul is now restored to a full communion with the divine. Even faith becomes redundant because it is no longer required to sustain the hope for that which one cannot see.⁸³¹ What remains is a loving disposition (ἀγαπητικῆς διαθέσεως) which is naturally attached to the Beautiful. There is a perfect correspondence between the simple and immaterial Good (ἀπλοῦν τε καὶ ἄϋλον ἀγαθόν) which is alone really loveable and pleasant (τὸ μόνον τοῖόν τι ἀγαπητὸν καὶ ἐράσμιον) and the simple and uniform (ἀπλῆ καὶ μονοειδής) soul which is fully focussed on loving the true Good.⁸³²

We should note how Gregory refrains from using the term ἡδονή in Macrina's description of the eschatological union, and instead systematically employs the word ἀπόλαυσις to denote the highest state of spiritual enjoyment. As we have seen, disuse of ἡδονή is not atypical, but the complete absence of the word is likely further explained by the fact that earlier in the same work Macrina explicitly associates it with ἐπιθυμία.⁸³³ In other words, in *De anima et resurrectione*, the 'divine and undefiled' ἡδονή and spiritual ἀπόλαυσις are not fully synonymous. While the former is present at an earlier stage when the impulses of the lower parts of the soul are first directed towards the Good, the latter denotes a higher form of enjoyment without lack, which comes about after the extirpation of ἐπιθυμία when the soul is fully united with the Good. A similar

⁸²⁹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 89C).

⁸³⁰ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 93B).

⁸³¹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 96B).

⁸³² *An. et res.* (PG 46, 93C).

⁸³³ See again *An. et res.* (PG 46, 56A) and my discussion above.

development occurs in Plotinus and Proclus who, as Van Riel notes, formally accept Plato's definition of pleasure (ἡδονή) as a replenishment and, to safeguard its viability, apply different terms (εὐπάθεια, εὐφροσύνη) to intellectual enjoyment that does not follow the same pattern.⁸³⁴

While it is easy to grasp the meaning of the 'divine and undefiled *pleasure*' so long as the soul is chasing beauty, it is legitimate to ask how the very pinnacle of the spiritual life can yield any enjoyment if desire and all passions springing from ἐπιθυμία are extinguished. How can we talk about enjoyment that continues after desire has reached its goal? Simply put, Gregory and Macrina now face the same challenge that the later Platonists grappled with: the lack-and-replenishment cannot account for the lasting enjoyment that is derived from stable and permanent satisfaction. We should keep in mind that even Plato's pure pleasures result from an underlying lack although the lack is imperceptible and not felt as pain. However, I have already shown that Macrina makes an explicit claim that there simply is no lack in the soul that has attained the source of all goods. Yet the soul is said to exist in endless enjoyment of all goods. What is this enjoyment like? And what ensures the soul's continued attraction to the good if it is not propelled on by desire?

I have already cited Smith who notes that in Macrina's conception of the eschatological union desire gives way to dispassionate *love* (ἀγάπη) which ensures the soul's continued attachment to God. Love is, on the one hand, a natural response to beauty, and on the other, the defining characteristic of the divine life itself, which, in Macrina's view, justifies its primacy among human emotions:

For the life of the sublime nature is love, since the beautiful is wholly lovable to those who recognize it (τὸ καλὸν ἀγαπητὸν πάντως ἐστὶ τοῖς γινώσκουσι), and the divine recognizes itself (γινώσκει δὲ αὐτὸ τὸ θεῖον). But then knowledge becomes love (γνώσις ἀγάπη γίνεται), because that which is recognized is beautiful by nature (τὸ καλὸν ἐστὶ τῇ φύσει τὸ γινωσκόμενον).⁸³⁵

⁸³⁴ Van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 133.

⁸³⁵ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 96C); trans. Silvas, 211.

In other words, Macrina understands the divine life as a perpetual act of self-contemplation, self-recognition, and self-loving. Unlike the human love for the false goods of the world, divine love operates without satiety because the truly beautiful could only be limited by its opposite which the infinite divine nature does not admit. There is only beauty which, due to the boundless nature of God, offers potential for endless recognition and love. In a corresponding manner, also in the soul the process of coming to know the Beautiful will inevitably result in love that does not wither in satiety.⁸³⁶ Smith explains that the lack of satiety is due to two factors: first, that the divine beauty is infinite, and, second, that it is essentially and perfectly beautiful. Since the divine beauty is infinite, it offers the soul an opportunity of infinite love. There are always new appealing things that the soul is yet to discover. And since the divine beauty is essential and perfect, it never turns into its opposite. Instead, it offers a lasting experience of pure love, unlike the imperfect mixed goods of this world.⁸³⁷ While Macrina does not explicitly articulate how enjoyment is related to love, we should keep in mind that love and pleasure generally share a close connection. In *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* Gregory comments on the importance of rightly directed love and argues that love is actualised through pleasure.⁸³⁸ In the eschaton, then, the soul and God love each other with pure love, actualised through enjoyment.

Thus, we can conclude that although the soul finds a complete satisfaction in God, this does not mean that it remains entirely static. A number of times Macrina refers to the 'activity of love' (ἀγάπην ἐνεργείας) which characterises the divine life itself and in which the soul participates in the eschatological union.⁸³⁹ While it would be exaggerated to claim that here Gregory is deliberately applying an Aristotelian model of contemplation and its corresponding pleasures to bypass the problems of Plato's definition, the language of activity certainly lends itself well to Aristotelian interpretations: here we find the soul engaging in the most appropriate and perfect activity,

⁸³⁶ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 97A).

⁸³⁷ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 186.

⁸³⁸ See my discussion in Chapter 4.

⁸³⁹ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 93C, 97A).

which is accompanied by the highest possible enjoyment. Whereas Aristotle contends that constant pleasure is impossible because no human activity can continue indefinitely, in *De anima et resurrectione* this problem is surmounted by the activity of love, which continues endlessly since it is based on the infinite being and the infinite self-loving of God.⁸⁴⁰

We should note, however, that in spite of rejecting any notion of lack, Gregory does not entirely forego the imagery of filling. The viability of eternal action in God and God's own eternal self-loving do not as such explain what ensures that the soul does not reach its natural limits and become satiated by the divine goods. It is easy to accept that as an infinite being God can engage in perpetual self-contemplation, but it is less obvious how a created and thus limited being can do the same. Thus, it becomes necessary to discuss the soul's 'dimensions' and its capacity for the infinite, despite the fact that the soul is of course not confined by spatio-temporal limitations in the same way as the material body: Macrina argues that the soul avoids satiety by continuously expanding its limits. Although the soul is limited as a created being, it grows indefinitely to accommodate the beauty it discovers. In an implicit reference to the metaphor of a leaky vessel, Macrina envisions a mode of spiritual filling which seeks to set right the problems that accompany material fillings, especially the impermanence of satisfaction:

Indeed, rational nature was brought into generation for this purpose, that the riches of the divine goodness (τὸν πλοῦτον τῶν θείων ἀγαθῶν) should not lie idle. The wisdom that sustains the universe fashioned certain vessels (ἀγγεῖά) as it were, receptacles with free wills consisting of souls (προαιρετικὰ τῶν ψυχῶν δοχεῖα), for this very purpose: that there would be some capacities able to receive his blessings, capacities that are ever being enlarged by the addition of that which is poured into them (τὸ ἀεὶ τῆ προσθήκῃ τοῦ εἰσχεομένου μείζον γινόμενον).

For such is the participation in the divine good (ἡ τοῦ θείου ἀγαθοῦ μετουσία): it renders one in whom it comes about greater and more capacious (μείζονα καὶ δεκτικώτερον), since it allows into the recipient an addition of power and magnitude, so that the one being nourished always increases and never ceases to increase

⁸⁴⁰ For Aristotle, see *NE* 1175a4–6.

(αὔξεσθαι τὸν τρεφόμενον, καὶ μὴ λήγειν ποτὲ τῆς αὐξήσεως). The fountain of the good wells up unfailingly and the nature of the partaker (ἡ τοῦ μετέχοντος φύσις) makes of the entire inflow an addition to its own proportions, since nothing it receives is superfluous and useless (μηδὲν τοῦ λαμβανομένου περιττωματικόν τε εἶναι καὶ ἄχρηστον). It becomes at the same time more attractive of the better and more able to contain it (πολυχωρητοτέρα), each aspect growing along with the other, both the power which is nourished by the abundance of the good so that it grows greater, and the nourishing supply which matches the growth of those incremental powers. It is therefore likely that those in whom there is no limit to retard the increase will ascend to such a magnitude (ὄρος οὐδεὶς ἐπικόπτει τὴν αὕξησιν).⁸⁴¹

Above, Macrina depicts the human soul as an expanding vessel that grows infinitely to make room for the divine riches. Here, the soul is not the leaky jar of earthly pleasure seeking, but retains what it receives and expands to accommodate any new addition. We should note how Gregory's depiction of the soul – or more specifically the rational nature – as a secure and expanding receptacle differs from his view of the bodily nature, which has fixed limits and cannot grow indefinitely to accommodate a constant influx of goods.⁸⁴² However, the logic of utility and right proportion underpins even the ever-expanding spiritual filling: the soul's ability to grow without limit is due to the fact that nothing it receives is 'superfluous or useless'. Whereas bodily utility is by definition limited, intellectual utility has no bounds.

Since Macrina has already emphatically stated that the soul united to God suffers no lack, the inflow of blessings does not fill a pre-existing deficit. To use a rough modern analogy, the soul is less like a half-empty jar and more like a water balloon with unlimited capacity; it expands at the very moment of being filled. The only 'lack' we can conceive exists so far as the soul acquires something it did not possess before. This is inevitable since due to divine infinity there are always goods that remain outside the current grasp of the soul. However, as Van Riel notes in his analysis of the last Neoplatonist philosopher Damascius, the idea of lack as mere absence is rather different from Plato's original model of a concrete – if at times unperceived – deficit and

⁸⁴¹ *An. et. res.* (PG 46, 105A–C); trans. Silvas, 216–217.

⁸⁴² See especially the analogy between the bodily nature and the sea in *Eccl.* 1.9 (SC 416, 130).

replenishment. For Damascius, argues Van Riel, the highest, true pleasure ‘does not imply the repletion of a lack; it implies, rather, a gift of something that was not previously present, and that, accordingly, did not cause any lack.’⁸⁴³ This is not a replenishment that restores the soul to its natural condition, but rather a gift from the divine realm – a realm belongs to a higher order than the natural state of the soul.

Spiritual Enjoyment in In Canticum canticorum: Retaining Desire, Introducing Pain

No other work in Gregory’s corpus is as rife with images of spiritual enjoyment as the *Homilies on the Song of Songs* where Gregory uses the biblical love story to illustrate the soul’s evolving relationship with God. Smith begins his analysis by showing that also in *In Canticum* enjoyment plays a role even before the actualisation of the eschatological union as a foretaste of the life to come. I have already discussed his remarks on hope and anticipatory enjoyment. As Smith notes, Gregory’s depiction of anticipatory enjoyment is not in conflict with the comparable account of *De anima et resurrectione*.⁸⁴⁴ In both, desire and enjoyment increase side by side as desire anticipates its fulfilment. The conflict concerns only Gregory’s vision of the eschatological union when the soul has been purified and fully united to God. Whereas Macrina argues that desire will eventually be extinguished when the soul reaches its goal, in *In Canticum* Gregory defends a more dynamic vision: here, ἀπόλαυσις drives ἐπιθυμία to strive for ever greater goods.

At the beginning of the work Gregory argues that the words of the *Song of Songs* and the perfection they describe are comprehensible only to those who have relinquished every corporeal disposition and reached freedom from passions, which is here understood as a state where the bodily impulses are fully submitted to the control of the mind and do not pull the soul into opposing directions. Instead, they exist in harmony with the mind, fully directed towards the divine. At the beginning of *In Canticum*, Gregory explains how the biblical

⁸⁴³ Van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life*, 171.

⁸⁴⁴ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 208.

text applies the language of love, ‘pure and undefiled’ (καθαράς τε καὶ ἀμολύντους), to

that Good that transcends all understanding, that Good that alone is truly pleasant and desirable and lovable (ὁ μόνον ἐστὶν ὡς ἀληθῶς γλυκὺ τε καὶ ἐπιθυμητὸν καὶ ἐράσιμον) and whose enjoyment (ἡ ἀπόλαυσις) is the ever-available opportunity of a yet nobler desiring (μειζονος ἐπιθυμίας) because by participation in good things (τῇ μετουσίᾳ τῶν ἀγαθῶν) it stretches and expands our longing (τὸν πόθον συνεπιτείνουσα).⁸⁴⁵

Here we see again that spiritual pleasure is enjoyment derived from that which is truly pleasant and rightly judged as good. But in the passage above Gregory presents another characteristic that he associates with spiritual enjoyment in *In Canticum*, which clearly diverges from the view presented by Macrina in *De anima*: the desire for the Good is not extinguished but *expanded* by enjoyment. The more the soul delights in God, the more its desire grows beyond what it is presently enjoying. In *In Canticum*, spiritual perfection does not entail the extirpation of the lower parts of the soul. Instead, they remain active but are fully controlled by the mind. As Gregory notes, there is ‘one mind in both parts’, that is, both in flesh and spirit.⁸⁴⁶

The same dynamic between desire and enjoyment is described several times in the homilies. Later in *Homily 1*, Gregory writes about Moses as the bride who, through his first encounter with God,

became more intensely desirous of such kisses after these theophanies, praying to see the Object of his yearning as if he had never glimpsed him. In the same way, all of the others in whom the divine yearning was deeply lodged never ceased from desire; everything that came to them from God for the enjoyment of the Object of yearning they made into the material and fuel for a more ardent desire. And just as now the soul that is joined to God is not satiated by her enjoyment of him (ἀκορέστως ἔχει τῆς ἀπολαύσεως), so too the more abundantly she is filled up with his beauty, the more vehemently her longings abound.⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴⁵ *Cant.* 1 (GNO VI, 31); trans. Norris, 33. Smith cites the passage in a slightly different translation in *Passion and Paradise*, 208.

⁸⁴⁶ *Cant.* 1 (GNO VI, 30).

⁸⁴⁷ *Cant.* 1 (GNO VI, 31–32); trans. Norris, 33.

In a similar fashion, Gregory alludes to prophets who poured the divine honey down their throats and became 'sweetness', which was consumed by other people to their benefit. This enjoyment (ἀπόλαυσις) caused by the divine honey through the prophets 'did not check desire (ἐπιθυμίαν) through satiety (τῷ κόρῳ); rather did it nourish longing (πόθον) by affording a taste of what desire seeks (διὰ τῆς τῶν ἐπιθυμουμένων μετουσίας).'⁸⁴⁸

What all of these passages describe is desire which is not satiated but increased by the enjoyment of its divine object. The more the soul grasps of God, the more it longs to grasp. Unlike bodily desire which is bound to wither in satiety, spiritual desire grows infinitely alongside enjoyment and takes on new, more intense forms. This view shares with *De anima et resurrectione* the notion that the infinity and stability of the true good lead to infinite and stable enjoyment without ceasing. However, the difference is that here ἐπιθυμία and ἔρως are not eventually sublimated and replaced by ἀγάπη, but drive the exploration of the divine in eternity. The enjoyment is stable in the sense that it lasts eternally without intervals of rest, but it is also dynamic so far as it grows progressively greater.

Nonetheless, Smith notes that also in *In Canticum* the mode in which we enjoy the divine in the eschatological union is in some ways *different* from the foretaste that is given to us on earth. Despite the continuity between the anticipatory enjoyment in this life and the eschatological fulfilment in the life to come, Gregory highlights that in the eschaton we will comprehend the form of ineffable beauty through a different mode of enjoyment (ἄλλος τρόπος τῆς ἀπολαύσεως) which has not yet entered the human heart. What was previously known indirectly through 'the workings of things that appear' (διὰ τῆς τῶν φαινομένων ἐνεργείας) will then be grasped in a more immediate and certain manner as the heaven and earth pass away, though, as Smith remarks, this does not mean that God is ever fully grasped.⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁸ *Cant.* 14 (GNO VI, 425); trans. Norris, 451.

⁸⁴⁹ *Cant.* 11 (GNO VI, 336). See also Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 211. Following McCambley's translation (p. 208), Smith reads Gregory to say that in the eschatological fulfilment God's

The model which Gregory presents in *In Canticum* is in many ways highly compatible with his general notion of *epektasis*, the eternal progress of the soul in the infinite God. Since ἐπιθυμία is fuelled by a lack and the infinite and radically Other God can never be fully grasped, it is logical that human desiring continues even in the eschaton. There will always be more to love and enjoy. But if we consider Gregory's view in light of the ancient tradition, we encounter a peculiar difficulty: if spiritual enjoyment is driven by ἐπιθυμία, which Gregory conceptualises as a lack that causes pain, does this not mean that spiritual pleasure, like its bodily counterpart, is also inevitably tainted by pain? By accepting ἐπιθυμία into the pinnacle of the spiritual life, Gregory does justice to his notion of divine infinity. However, by doing so he also implies the presence of lack even in a soul that is relatively fulfilled, and thus opens the door for the possibility of pain, which ought to play no role in the unmixed divine reality and is foreign to the Platonist notion of highest pleasures. Does Gregory address this problem?

Let us begin by noting that Gregory does not only implicitly suggest the presence of pain by including desire at the highest stages of the spiritual progress, but refers explicitly to a soul that is lacking and hurting even as it enters into a communion with the divine. In *Homily 6*, Gregory describes the moment at which the soul is united to God, using phrases which state in no uncertain terms that he is referring to a fully actualised union, not to pre-eschatological longing.⁸⁵⁰ As the soul is 'in the One who is the object of desire' and receives 'the object of desire within itself', it appears to have attained the highest good. But the union comes with a troubling realisation: the soul now understands that it has not grasped the Good completely and 'bewails the fact that she is needy for the Good (ένδεῖς οὖσα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ). As one who does not

beauty is 'comprehended' through a 'different form of enjoyment', i.e. enjoyment itself becomes the primary mode of knowing. However, in light of the Greek text itself and Norris's more literal translation, Gregory does not appear to suggest such an explicit conclusion on the epistemic role of enjoyment. The parallel structure reads simply that the ineffable Blessedness 'shall be apprehended in another fashion, and the mode of its fruition will be different' (ἀλλ' ἐτέρως καταληφθήσεται πάντως τὸ εἶδος τῆς ἀφράστου μακαριότητος καὶ ἄλλος τρόπος τῆς ἀπολαύσεως; *Cant.* 11 (GNO VI, 336.15–17; trans. Norris, 355).

⁸⁵⁰ 'God comes into the soul, and correspondingly the soul is brought into God. For she says, "My beloved is mine, and I am his."' (*Cant.* 6, GNO VI, 179; trans. Norris, 191).

yet have what is present to her desire, she is perplexed and dissatisfied.⁸⁵¹ The lack and dissatisfaction felt by the soul *after* entering into a union with God could not be more explicitly worded.

Furthermore, Gregory does not limit himself to imagery of lack and need, but also conceptualises the soul's longing for God as a pain and wound. In the fourth homily, he makes ample use of the bride's remark 'I am wounded by love'. On his reading, these words are spoken by the soul as it finds itself being pierced by Christ the arrow, which leaves behind a 'happy blow and a sweet wound' (καλοῦ τραύματος καὶ γλυκείας πληγῆς) or, simply, a 'sweet wound' (γλυκείας πληγῆς) or.⁸⁵² After being pierced by the arrow of love, the soul itself becomes an arrow both in the sense that it is dispatched further into the divine and that it takes on the role of instructor who makes other souls long for the same good goal. As the virgins plead the bride:

Make known to us the One we seek. Teach us by what tokens the invisible One is detected, so that we may acquaint him with the arrow of love with which your heart is wounded (τέτρωσαι) in its core, increasing your desire (πόθον) by its sweet pain (διὰ τῆς γλυκείας ὀδύνης).⁸⁵³

The passage makes evident the intimate connection between pain and desiring, and depicts the advanced spiritual state as bittersweet love sickness, which is characterised by intense longing for the Beloved.

This, however, is not the whole story. Two fundamental realisations will radically transform the reality of sweet pain and the dissatisfaction the soul feels when it first realises it cannot grasp the Good to which it has been united. First, Gregory will insist that the 'sweet pain' should not, in fact, be interpreted in the sense of suffering. And when it comes to the initial neediness felt by the bridal soul, she will soon understand that there is no reason to feel hopeless:

⁸⁵¹ *Cant.* 6 (GNO VI, 179); trans. Norris, 191.

⁸⁵² *Cant.* 4 (GNO VI, 128); trans. Norris, 141 with my addition; *Cant.* 6 (GNO VI, 177); trans. Norris, 189.

⁸⁵³ *Cant.* 13 (GNO VI, 380), trans. Norris, 401. Here, Norris has rendered μέσην...τὴν καρδίαν as 'heart... in its heart', but I have translated μέσην as 'core' to avoid repetition.

she is not separated from the Bridegroom as much as being dispatched by him into a greater experience of love. Let us examine in more detail what Gregory instructs on these two points.

A thorough look at the metaphors of striking and wounding reveals that Gregory makes a clear and conscious distinction between the pain caused by the wound of love and suffering understood in the everyday sense. Commenting on the ‘sweet and happy wound’ caused by the Bridegroom’s arrow, Gregory notes that as soon as the arrow hits the bride, archery is changed into ‘joy of marriage’.⁸⁵⁴ The arrow binds the soul to Christ, so that from then on the soul is ‘being dispatched, not separated from the archer, so as at once to be borne by the flight and to be at rest in the hands of the archer.’⁸⁵⁵ Although a connection between desiring and pain is still present, this is a different sort of pain, a source of joy. The idea is reminiscent of the sweetened pain of the martyrs who find joy in their hope of future goods.⁸⁵⁶ But whereas the martyrs’ sweetened pain consists of physical suffering sweetened by divine hope, here both the pain and the joy originate in God and occur to the soul. The desirable quality of the pain is highlighted by the fact that Gregory depicts the wound of love as something that the bride’s less advanced entourage is keen to possess, and also repeatedly refers to it as a source of boasting.⁸⁵⁷ Furthermore, the expression ‘sweet and happy wound’ undoubtedly carries an apophatic intent by combining concepts that together result in a puzzling paradox. This is, of course, a way to describe – or refrain from describing – the reality that is beyond created concepts, and to highlight its difference to the created realm.

The culmination of spiritual pain occurs in *Homily 12* where Gregory interprets the verse in which the watchmen of the city discover the bride who is looking for her Beloved, strike her and wound her, and take away her veil. For Gregory, this dramatic scene of violence and unveiling represents the moment at which the soul comes to know God directly but is faced with the troubling revelation

⁸⁵⁴ *Cant.* 4 (GNO VI, 128); trans. Norris, 141.

⁸⁵⁵ *Cant.* 4 (GNO VI, 129); trans. Norris, 143.

⁸⁵⁶ See Chapter 6.

⁸⁵⁷ On boasting about the wound, see *Cant.* 4 (GNO VI, 128), *Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 365), and *Cant.* 13 (GNO VI, 383).

that even at the height of intimacy she can never possess the divine Beloved completely. Despite abundant metaphors of pain and violence, Gregory states explicitly that the verses do not allude to any earthly notion of suffering. While he admits that the expressions ‘will seem to be suited more to one who is bewailing her lot’ and indicate ‘something repellent’ by suggesting suffering (ἀλγημα), he is quick to specify that they are, in fact, ‘the utterances of a person who is glorying in things of the greatest beauty.’⁸⁵⁸ The bride, he says, ‘is not occasioned any suffering (όδύνην) by the blow she receives but glories in the freedom of access accorded her by the removal of the curtain, which is here called a veil.’⁸⁵⁹ The blow, which the bride receives when her veil is removed and she encounters her Beloved directly, is instructive: it is vital for the soul to understand that even at the moment of the intimate union with the Bridegroom she will never be able to possess him in totality. Furthermore, Gregory is clear that the soul is ultimately not left in a state of dissatisfaction and hopelessness caused by lack and frustrated desire, even if the divine Beloved remains perpetually ungraspable. The final word on the soul’s fate follows in a passage that is worth citing in its entirety:

For the soul that goes out at his word, seeking the One who is not found and calling upon the One whom words cannot attain, is taught by the watchmen that she is in love with the Unattainable and is directing herself toward the Incomprehensible (τοῦ ἀνεφίκτου ἐρᾶ καὶ τοῦ ἀκαταλήπτου ἐφίεται). At their hands she is, in a certain sense, struck and wounded (πλήσσεται καὶ τραυματίζεται) by the hopelessness of what she yearns for, judging that her desire for the good (τοῦ καλοῦ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν) is imperfect and falls short of its fruition (ἀτελεῖ τε καὶ ἀναπόλαυστον). But the veil of her grief (λύπης) is removed when she learns that the true fruition of what she yearns for (ἡ ἀληθῆς τοῦ ποθουμένου ἀπόλαυσις) is ever to make progress in seeking (τὸ ἀεὶ προκόπτειν ἐν τῷ ζητεῖν) and never to halt on the upward path, since her fulfilled desire ever generates a further desire for what is beyond her (τῆς πάντοτε πληρουμένης ἐπιθυμίας ἐτέραν ἐπιθυμίαν τοῦ ὑπερκειμένου γεννώσης). As, then, the veil of hopelessness is lifted and she sees the infinite and unlimited beauty of her Beloved (τὸ ἀόριστόν τε καὶ ἀπερίγραπτον τοῦ ἀγαπωμένου κάλλος), a beauty that for all the eternity of the ages is ever and again discovered to be greater, she is pulled by a yet more intense yearning (ἐν σφοδροτέρῳ τείνεται πόθῳ), and through the daughters

⁸⁵⁸ *Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 359); trans. Norris, 379.

⁸⁵⁹ *Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 369); trans. Norris, 389.

of Jerusalem she discloses the state of her heart to her Beloved: how in the sting of faith she has received in herself God's chosen arrow (cf. Isa 49:2) and has been struck in the heart by receiving love's shot in her vital part.⁸⁶⁰

Above, Gregory describes the soul's transformation as she is first 'struck and wounded' by the apparent hopelessness of her pursuit but then has the 'veil of her grief' lifted and understands that her truest fruition (or enjoyment, ἀπόλαυσις) lies in the never-ending pursuit itself. As Gregory recounts, this realisation results in the removal of all hopelessness and brings about an intensified yearning for the Beloved. Nonetheless, the end of the passage seems to indicate that wound of love is not erased. In fact, a later passage in *Homily 13* even suggests that the 'wound of love' is received only after the removal of the veil, in other words, after the soul communes with God directly:

She, then, who has put the veil off from her eyes sees the unspeakable beauty (κάλλος) of the Bridegroom with a pure eye (καθαρῶ τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ) and in this way is wounded (τρωθεῖσα) by the incorporeal and fiery arrow of love, for agapê when intensified is called love (ἐπιτεταμένη γὰρ ἀγάπη ὁ ἔρωσ λέγεται).⁸⁶¹

What comes about is a desiring that still implies the presence of pain – a radically different 'sweet pain' – but is divested of hopelessness and grief, the side effects of earthly desire that fails to attain its goal. The crucial epiphany that accompanies the lifting of the veil is that it is different to desire the divine and desire a created object. Here, the object of love is infinite and knows no bounds, and as such it can never be fully grasped. At the same time, the soul already rests in what it desires, and what has been attained will never be taken away; the Beloved is at once secure and elusive. Thus, the enjoyment does not result from any final capture of the object of love, but from an infinite succession of novel manifestations of the Beloved. As the soul reaches what it has previously desired, it will be met with a new revelation to entice its desire. In fact, in the homilies on the *Song*, both novelty and surprise are cited as

⁸⁶⁰ *Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 369–370); trans. Norris, 389.

⁸⁶¹ *Cant.* 13 (GNO VI, 383); trans. Norris, 403.

important elements of *epektasis* that ensure the soul's continued attraction to and, thus, insatiable enjoyment of the divine.⁸⁶²

In *Passion and Paradise*, Smith offers an apt conclusion as to whether or not the soul suffers a lack:

[T]he soul never lacks the goods of the divine nature that are ubiquitous, accessible, and without defect. In such a context, the soul, even if it cannot experience all of God's goodness at once, cannot be said to experience the poverty and want (save in comparison with the divine nature itself) that breeds the *frustrated longing* of *erôs*. Even if one were to view the soul's eschatological state as lacking in the boundless goods that the soul in some sense desires to have, the desire of which Nyssen speaks in the homilies on the Song of Songs is free from the futile striving and disappointment.⁸⁶³

This, argues Smith, is what ultimately makes Gregory's notion of a peaceful, hopeful, and confident *erôs* radically different from its pagan (Platonic) equivalent, which is always bound to the realm of flux and all the frustrations it entails. Even though also the movement of the eschatological *erôs* is a 'form of creaturely becoming', it is a perfect form of becoming which does not originate in the unsteady flux of the sensible realm, but arises from the defining characteristic of creaturely existence as opposed to the unchanging being of God.⁸⁶⁴ However, as Smith explains, since the resurrected becoming occurs entirely in the presence of God, God's perfectly good, stable, and ever-present being grants it a special certainty and continuity, which prevents it from withering in satiety. There is no risk that the source of divine enjoyment will suddenly turn into its opposite and frustrate the soul's search. In other words, the resurrected becoming does not entail an alternation of good and evil, but simply an increasing intimacy with the ever-present perfect good. According to Smith, this movement is best described as an ascent that takes place 'fully within' God, rather than as a 'striving toward' him.⁸⁶⁵ However, so far as God is God and humans are created beings, God will remain the Other even after

⁸⁶² See, especially, *Cant.* 11 (GNO VI, 338); trans. Norris, 339.

⁸⁶³ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 221–22.

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 219–20.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 222.

becoming 'all in all'. Thus, there will always be an ontological gap which separates the soul from its divine Beloved, enabling *erôs* to flourish.⁸⁶⁶ As Smith shows, the true enjoyment of the soul lies 'in the realization that the goods of God will never grow old but will continue to excite the soul and eternally arouse desire for more – – She now sees that God's infinite and therefore incomprehensible nature is not the cause of despair or frustration of unsatisfied desire, but is the very hope of our eternal enjoyment of God.'⁸⁶⁷

To sum up our findings, in *De anima et resurrectione* Macrina and Gregory explicitly deny the presence of any lack, pain, or striving in the eschatological union. In *In Canticum*, on the other hand, Gregory is happy to include desire and pain even at the pinnacle of spiritual perfection, though he underscores that the pain must not be understood in the conventional sense. As Smith notes, these two different perspectives cannot be fully reconciled. Nonetheless, we can ask if the state of the soul in the two works is all that different. We should recall that even in *De anima* Macrina conceptualises the soul's journey in God as a type of filling, even if the soul is at all times fully satisfied and suffers no lack. I have suggested that this filling is best understood as a gift from a supernatural order. It is important to highlight that even in *In Canticum* Gregory argues explicitly that the perfected soul suffers no *natural* lack. He states with clarity that the soul does not lack anything either in Paradise or after being purified and united to God; the latter state is, of course, a restoration of the former.⁸⁶⁸ There is, however, a *supernatural* lack, which Gregory notes for example in *Homily 11* where he says: 'Human poverty lacks the capacity to receive within itself the infinite and uncircumscribed Nature.'⁸⁶⁹ The key difference between *De anima* and *In Canticum* lies, then, in the way in which Gregory discusses the continuing supernatural acquisition of divine goods once the soul has been united to God. In the former, the goods are conveyed as gratuitous gifts without conscious pursuit. In the latter, they are attained in a process that is a combination of

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid., 213–14.

⁸⁶⁸ For Paradise, see *Cant.* 2 (GNO VI, 54). In *Cant.* 11 (GNO VI, 325; trans. Norris, 345), Gregory notes that once the soul draws close to Truth and is filled by it, it possesses 'the dove's perfection' and becomes 'full, lacking nothing (*ἀνελλιπῆ*), of innocence and purity'.

⁸⁶⁹ *Cant.* 11 (GNO VI, 337); trans. Norris, 355.

active striving and God's surprising action which surpasses the soul's expectation. Despite the differences, both of these models highlight the absence of satiety and an unending progress as key components of the soul's relationship with God.

The eschatological vision of *In Canticum* may seem to fly in the face of Gregory's preoccupation with the unmixed and unified Good. If lack and pain can accompany the enjoyment of divine things, one can ask whether this higher sort of enjoyment is any more pure than sensual pleasure whose mixed nature is a major diminishing factor that disqualifies it as the true good. But here we must keep in mind that Gregory applies the criterion of unity chiefly to the Good itself, while the enjoyment derived from the Good is a secondary matter. The sweet pain of the eschatological union is not caused by any alteration in the Good itself or the presence of something non-good in the soul. The soul already rests fully in the goodness of God whose being does not allow any presence of the opposite. Thus, the pain and longing are not caused by separation from the Good but by the infinity of the Good itself. Since everything, including the human will, is fully in the good, there is no risk of slipping into its opposite. Our only options are goodness and more goodness. While the enjoyment offered by the Good is certainly not unmixed in the Platonic sense, it is nonetheless pure and lasting: It is entirely derived from the Good and never withers in satiety due to the infinity and stability of the divine nature. Furthermore, it lacks the frantic and desperate quality of earthly pleasure seeking because the soul can rest in the confidence that what has been attained will not be lost.

In other words, Gregory is not bothered by the presence of pain because it is not caused by any mixing with evil. If enjoyment itself were accepted as the good, the presence of pain would be a problem. However, the Good does not lie in the enjoyment itself; enjoyment is merely a by-product of attaining the likeness of God, which is rooted in the stability of the divine being. Since pleasure is not good and pain is not evil, both of them can continue to exist even at the highest stages of the spiritual life, as long as we assume that the impulses of ἐπιθυμία are never fully eradicated.

By accepting desire and its companions, lack and pain, into the spiritual fulfilment, Gregory is able to apply the model of lack and replenishment to his conception of spiritual enjoyment much more confidently than the non-Christian Neoplatonists or even Macrina in *De anima et resurrectione*. The Neoplatonists would, of course, dismiss Gregory's solution altogether as the eluding perfection implies that the soul is in a constant process of becoming, a state that Platonists consider lower than being. But, as Smith and others have noted, for Gregory becoming is not antithetical to human perfection but intrinsic of a being that has been created from nothing. This coming-to-be characterises its existence even in the eschaton and serves as a vehicle of perfection and perpetual self-transcendence. It is becoming that forever separates the human being from God's absolute being.

The model of spiritual enjoyment put forth in *In Canticum* also has certain advantages over Plato's own conception of intellectual pleasure. First, by asserting that intellectual enjoyment can be preceded by a perceptible lack, Gregory is able to create a much broader notion of intellectual enjoyment than Plato does with his notoriously limited definition of pure pleasure. And by assuming the infinity of divine goods, Gregory can accept at once that it is the act of coming to know rather than the continued possession of knowledge that yields pleasure, and that intellectual pleasure can offer never-ending satisfaction. Gregory does not explicitly state whether the pleasure lies in possession or acquisition, but the alternation of desire and enjoyment combined with the focus on novelty and surprise points towards the latter emphasis.

From De anima to In Canticum: The Problems of a Developmental Reading

So far, I have mainly built on Smith's insightful account of the two kinds of spiritual enjoyment. However, before closing my analysis of spiritual enjoyment in *De anima* and *In Canticum*, I will briefly question a key principle that informs Smith's reading of the two works: his account rests on the assumption that the two works and their respective models of spiritual perfection manifest a linear

maturation of Gregory's thought, particularly as regards the notion of *epektasis*. In Smith's view, the works demonstrate

a noticeable shift in his thinking about the role of desire and the nature of the soul's enjoyment of the God with whom it is united. Whereas *On the Soul and Resurrection* dispenses with the erotic model of participation when describing the soul's eschatological movement to God, his homilies on the Song of Songs, while retaining the language of *apolausis* to describe the soul's beatific communion with God, view enjoyment as the beginning of desire, rather than its end.⁸⁷⁰

Further, Smith argues that in *In Canticum* Gregory makes 'two necessary corrections' to *De anima*, which challenge the view that a progressive journey into God can be made without desire.⁸⁷¹ First, 'Nyssen in the later works recognizes that there is not intellectual movement that is not accompanied or driven by desire,' Smith argues. 'The soul experiences God with the intellect and the affections together. The intellect is capable of receiving greater revelations of God because the appetites predispose the intellect to study and contemplate more earnestly.'⁸⁷² The second correction is, according to Smith, the way in which Gregory introduces the erotic to his account of *epektasis* in *In Canticum*, whose subject matter is, of course, particularly suitable for this purpose.⁸⁷³

This linear reading is attractive and in harmony with Daniélou's influential suggestion that Gregory's attitude towards the human body and, by implication, the irrational parts of the soul acquires a more positive tone in his mature works.⁸⁷⁴ In Chapter 9, I will turn to an article on Gregory's notion of the spiritual senses where Sarah Coakley presents a similar account. However, certain passages in Gregory's corpus complicate Smith's developmental reading. In what follows, I will draw on two works, *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* and *In mortuis non esse dolendum*, to demonstrate that the mutually enforcing model of desire and enjoyment is present in Gregory's works at a much earlier stage than Smith's analysis would indicate.

⁸⁷⁰ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 202.

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁸⁷² *Ibid.*

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁴ Daniélou, 'La chronologie', 161, 167.

The first passage to flag occurs in *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* just after Gregory has explained the problem of satiety and the impermanence of bodily pleasure.⁸⁷⁵ Now he contrasts the fleeting bodily enjoyment with the lasting enjoyment offered by the true good:

But I, he says, sought the true Good (τὸ ἀγαθόν), which is equally good (ἐπ' ἴσης ἀγαθόν ἐστίν) at any age and at every time of life, and of which satiety is not expected, nor fullness found (οὐ κόρος οὐκ ἐλπίζεται καὶ πλησμονὴ οὐχ εὐρίσκεται). Appetite for it and partaking of it are exactly matched (συμπαρατείνεται τῇ μετουσίᾳ ἢ ὄρεξις), and longing flourishes together with enjoyment (συνακμάζει τῇ ἀπολαύσει ὁ πόθος), and is not limited by the attainment of what is desired (τοῦ ἐπιθυμητοῦ); the more it delights in the Good (ἐντρυφᾷ τῷ ἀγαθῷ), the more desire flames up with delight (ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῇ τρυφῇ συνεκκαίεται); the delight matches the desire (ἡ τρυφή τῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ συνεπιτείνεται), and at each stage of life it is always a lovely thing (καλόν) to those who partake of it. Amid the changes of age and time the Good alters not at all; when our eyes are closed and when they are open, when we are happy and when we are sorrowful, by day and by night, on land and on the sea, active and at rest, ruling and serving – for every person alive it is equally absolutely good (ἐπ' ἴσης ἀγαθόν) since the accidents inflicted on one by chance make it neither worse nor better, nor smaller nor larger.

This, as I understand it, is the Good that truly is (τὸ ὄντως ὄν ἀγαθόν), the thing Solomon sought to see, which people will do under the sun throughout all the number of days of their life. This seems to me to be none other than the work of faith (τὸ τῆς πίστεως ἔργον), the performance of which is common to all, available on equal terms to those who wish for it, lasting in full strength continuously throughout life.⁸⁷⁶

Above, Gregory describes the interrelationship between desire and enjoyment exactly in the same way as in *Homilies on the Song of Songs*: when the soul enjoys that which is truly good, delight ignites desire instead of seeing it dwindle in satiety, and the ontological stability and fullness of the true good ensures that it is desirable and enjoyable for all people at all times. Furthermore, Gregory lays emphasis on the way in which the true Good is independent of all situational factors; the external circumstances of one's life do not affect its goodness in any way.

⁸⁷⁵ See Chapter 5.

⁸⁷⁶ *Eccl.* 2.8 (GNO V, 313–314; SC 416, 182); trans. Hall & Moriarty, 58.

When was *In Ecclesiasten* written and how does its dating compare to *De anima et resurrectione* and *In Canticum*? A survey of various proposed dates suggests that the *terminus post quem* for *De anima et resurrectione* is Macrina's death in 379 and most likely the work was written during the first half of the 380s.⁸⁷⁷ *In Canticum* is generally accepted to be a late work written after 390. Following Daniélou, Smith dates the homilies between 391 and 394.⁸⁷⁸ Gregory's *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* clearly predate those on the *Song of Songs*. Most scholars place *In Ecclesiasten* before the Council of Constantinople and the death of Meletius in 381, with 379–380 as a possible bracket.⁸⁷⁹ While the exact time of writing is impossible to ascertain, none of the surveyed commentators suggest a significantly later date. It appears, then, that the homilies were written around the same time or even earlier than *De anima et resurrectione*. At any rate, the vision of spiritual enjoyment they espouse cannot be labelled as a 'late' view.

Thus, the passage from *In Ecclesiasten* shows that Gregory held the notion of the mutually enforcing cycle of spiritual desire and spiritual delight already at a relatively early point of his career. This calls into question Smith's interpretation of an 'early' and a 'late' model. However, it is possible to argue that in the passage above Gregory does not talk specifically about the climax of the spiritual life in the eschaton but merely about a lower state in which *epithumia* is still active. Smith's focus is, after all, on the fate of desire and the nature of enjoyment in the eschatological fulfilment when God becomes 'all in all', a state which Gregory describes as different from our relationship to God during the earthly life. In the Solomonic trilogy, *Ecclesiastes* precedes *Canticum canticorum* and prepares the soul for the union with the divine by detaching it from the pleasures of this world.⁸⁸⁰ Indeed, in *Eccl. 2*, Gregory is clearly describing how humans can relate to God in the midst of the different phases, circumstances, and turmoils of this life. The text is interesting for the very

⁸⁷⁷ Pierre Maraval, 'Chronology of Works', in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, trans. Seth Cherney, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 156.

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 158. Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 203; Daniélou, 'La chronologie', 168.

⁸⁷⁹ Maraval, 'Chronology of Works', 158.

⁸⁸⁰ See Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 203.

reason that it shows how Gregory envisions the possibility of endless divine enjoyment already in this life.

Nonetheless, I do not think my argument is easily dismissed. First of all, Smith, too, agrees that the soul's communion with God after the resurrection mirrors the soul's progress towards God in this life; the journey that begins on the earth continues in the kingdom of God.⁸⁸¹ Thus, if the cycle of desire and delight eventually gave way to a higher fulfilment consisting only of enjoyment, one would think that Gregory had noted this limitation when he discusses the enjoyment derived from the true Good in the present life. However, such remarks are entirely absent from the passage and Gregory's description of the spiritual delight is laudatory, a noble counter-example to the fleeting and unsatisfying pursuit of earthly pleasure.

Thankfully, we do not have to argue only from silence. It is possible to find at least one early text where the eschaton is explicitly described with desire-centred terms. The passage occurs in Gregory's consolatory discourse *De mortuis non esse dolendum* where he examines the fate of bodily existence after the resurrection. The work is dated around 379–380; many consider it a (possibly younger) contemporary of *De hominis opificio* and *De anima et resurrectione*, while Daniélou proposes an even earlier date.⁸⁸² If *In Ecclesiasten* may refer to the earthly existence, here the context is unequivocally eschatological. Gregory notes that after death purifies us from all the passions which may hold our attention in this life (the list includes ἡδοναί), appetite (ὄρεξις) turns towards that which alone is attractive, desirable and lovable (τὸ μόνον ὀρεκτόν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμητὸν καὶ ἐράσμιον),

without extinguishing completely the impulses (ὀρμάς) for such things [passions] which reside naturally (φυσικῶς) in us, but refashioning them towards the immaterial participation of goods (πρὸς τὴν ἄϋλον τῶν ἀγαθῶν μετουσίαν). For there is the never-ending love of the true beauty (ὁ ἔρωσ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ κάλλους ὁ ἄπαυστος), there also the praiseworthy greed for the treasures of wisdom (ἐπαινετὴ τῶν τῆς σοφίας

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., 210.

⁸⁸² Maraval, 'Chronology of Works', 161; Daniélou, 'La chronologie', 160.

θησαυρῶν πλεονεξία), the beautiful and good love of glory (ἡ καλή τε καὶ ἀγαθὴ φιλοδοξία) set right in the communion of the kingdom of God, and the beautiful passion of insatiability (τὸ καλὸν πάθος τῆς ἀπληστίας), whose yearning (πόθον) towards the good (ἀγαθὸν) will never be cut short by satiety of lofty realities (κόρω τῶν ὑπερκειμένων).⁸⁸³

The passage is part of Gregory's defence of the goodness of the body, explaining how the natural impulses which originate in the sensible part will eventually be directed towards our one heavenly goal. This, to Gregory, is a sign that the workings of the body and the lower faculties of the soul do not have to be extinguished but simply remodelled in such a manner that they are entirely directed towards and reflective of the Good. This is what Macrina argues in *De anima*, but in *De mortuis* Gregory is referring to the afterlife. The passage speaks clearly about the activity of desire in the life to come. Although here ὄρεξις is Gregory's term of choice, we saw in the previous chapter that Gregory employs it as a synonym of ἐπιθυμία. Furthermore, the words ἐπιθυμητὸν καὶ ἐράσιμον and, later, ἔρωσ reveal that here Gregory is placing a form of desiring and grasping love at the very pinnacle of the spiritual life, just as he does in *In Canticum*. Above, Gregory does not discuss enjoyment explicitly, but I have already shown that earlier in the same work he affirms the existence of spiritual ἡδονή.⁸⁸⁴ Furthermore, the notion of κόρος, cited in the text, is generally tightly bound up with pleasure, and similarly the idea of insatiability always implies continued enjoyment. Thus, we have good grounds to assume that the presence of insatiable desire also implies the presence of infinite enjoyment.

The examples from *In Ecclesiasten* and *De mortuis* signal that we should treat with caution a neat developmental account of spiritual enjoyment proceeding from an 'early' view in *De anima* to a 'late' view in *In Canticum*. Here I can only raise a concern about such an interpretation; another investigation would be necessary to explain why *De mortuis* and *In Ecclesiasten* espouse a different view of perfection than *De anima*, despite the fact that the works belong to the same phase of Gregory's career. Provided that the works are dated with some

⁸⁸³ *Mort.* (GNO IX, 61); trans. Toiviainen.

⁸⁸⁴ See p. 249.

accuracy, perhaps further study is required to ascertain the extent to which the character of Macrina espouses Gregory's own views.⁸⁸⁵ We should keep in mind that throughout the work Macrina appears reluctant to accept the notion that the passionate impulses can be transformed into impulses for the good, despite the fact that Gregory himself expresses this idea already at the very beginning of his career in *De virginitate*. Thus, it is possible that the literary Macrina is, for Gregory, if not a faithful reflection of the historical Macrina, then at least an instrument for experimenting with different lines of thought.

⁸⁸⁵ Barnes suggests that *De anima et resurrectione* 'is best understood not as an example of Gregory's own thought, but as his reception of a traditional, ascetical anthropology' reflected in the character of Macrina. He notes, furthermore: 'I understand *On the Soul and Resurrection* to be Gregory's restatement of a moral anthropology that he has received – and with which he is not altogether comfortable, as his comments make clear.' See Barnes, 'The Polemical Context and Content of Gregory of Nyssa's Psychology', 4, including footnote 10.

9. Spiritual Pleasure and Spiritual Sensation: Is the Body Involved?

In my account of the higher pleasures, I have approached the topic of spiritual enjoyment fully assuming that it is an intelligible phenomenon that occurs in the human soul. At the beginning of my investigation, the passage on double pleasure in *Homily 10 on the Song of Songs* offered a clear indication that one of the key differences between bodily and spiritual pleasure is the involvement of the bodily senses: in the former, the senses are used as a ‘criterion’ of goodness, which leads to a misguided attachment to transitory appearances, while in the latter they remain fully closed as the mind explores and evaluates a higher, interior reality. Furthermore, in Chapter 4 we saw how the human mind ascends through creation towards the Creator in a process that entails an increasing abstraction of immaterial principles while the material universe – the initial stepping stone – is gradually left behind.

However, this seemingly straightforward reading is complicated by the most recent analysis of Gregory’s notion of the spiritual senses presented by Sarah Coakley in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (2011), which is the first comprehensive attempt to recount the history of the spiritual senses in Christian theology. Here, it is not possible to offer a full critique of Coakley’s interpretation, let alone a complete discussion on Gregory’s notion of spiritual sensation. A brief engagement with the article is nonetheless necessary, because Coakley’s main argument directly undermines my suggestion that spiritual pleasure is experienced in the soul without the involvement of the bodily senses. Let us, therefore, turn to her account.

The gist of Coakley’s argument can be summarised as follows: Towards the end of his career, Gregory departs from his earlier ‘Platonic’, ‘Origenistic’ and ‘disjunctive’ approach to the spiritual senses which presents the bodily and the spiritual senses as two separate sets of faculties. Instead, he crafts ‘a developing and systematic account of how ordinary perception and the gross physical senses are capable of a progressive transformation in this life into spiritual

senses via a purgative process of "death" and regeneration.'⁸⁸⁶ Coakley attributes the development to a process of maturation, even an outright change of mind, 'about the ways in which bodily transformation could be possible – through the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ.'⁸⁸⁷ We can already notice a similarity to Smith's account of desire in the eschaton and, ultimately, Daniélou's argument that Gregory's mature works present a more optimistic view of the human body.⁸⁸⁸

In the relatively brief analysis that follows, Coakley sets out to answer two questions: 'how does the transfiguration of the bodily sense occur, according to Gregory?' and 'how are we to explicate the continuum in Gregory between fallen sensuality and redeemed sensuality?'⁸⁸⁹ In other words, Coakley envisions a transformative process in which the *bodily* senses are purified and made into receptacles of the divine presence. This, for her, is what Gregory talks about in his later works when he refers to the 'senses of the soul' (τὰ αἰσθητήρια τῆς ψυχῆς and similar expressions).

It is also important to note that Coakley intends her article as a reassessment of earlier accounts of Gregory's understanding of the spiritual senses. The main target of her criticism is Daniélou's *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, in which Daniélou presents the bodily and the spiritual senses as merely analogous and separate sets of faculties.⁸⁹⁰ Coakley finds Daniélou's account fundamentally shaped by *nouvelle théologie* and the post-Enlightenment tradition of Jesuit spiritual direction. She argues that both intellectual trajectories present the spiritual senses as a "purely intellectual imitation" of the bodily senses specially capable of "perceiving the presence of God".⁸⁹¹ As a result, Daniélou ends up with a vogueish 'modern' reading of the spiritual senses that fails to do justice to Gregory's integrative and holistic understanding of spiritual sensation, which,

⁸⁸⁶ Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa', 42.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid., 51.

⁸⁸⁸ Daniélou, 'La chronologie', 161, 167.

⁸⁸⁹ Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa', 44.

⁸⁹⁰ See the section entitled 'Les sens spirituels' in Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, 235–66.

⁸⁹¹ Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa', 40. The citations within Coakley's writing are from A. Poulain, *Des grâces d'oraison*, 10th ed. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1922), 124.

claims Coakley, first surfaces in Gregory and Macrina's dialogue in *De anima et resurrectione* and is fully developed in *In Canticum*.⁸⁹²

Coakley's critique stands out even within contemporary Gregory of Nyssa scholarship. Two years after the publication of her article, Boersma comments on Gregory's notion of spiritual sensation arguing that 'Gregory regards the various bodily sensations that he finds described in the Song not as literal descriptions of physical pleasure but instead as references to spiritual perception. A spiritual transposition is required to interpret properly the biblical allusions to physical perception and to the pleasure that it yields.'⁸⁹³ Boersma's comment makes it clear that an investigation of Gregory's notion of pleasure, and especially spiritual pleasure, is not complete without a discussion of his understanding of spiritual sensation. Furthermore, Boersma is right to point out that, for Gregory, spiritual sensation is inherently a *moral* question.⁸⁹⁴ The use of the spiritual senses entails a transposition of sensation from physical to spiritual, which is achieved through bodily renunciation and the mortification of the physical senses.⁸⁹⁵ Boersma does not engage with Coakley's article and takes for granted the exclusion of the body from spiritual sensation. This is, of course, in line with his analogical view of embodiment and general aim to challenge the inflated spiritual relevance of the body in much of contemporary Gregory scholarship. However, since Boersma represents the traditional view (and is, incidentally, a scholar of *nouvelle théologie*), it is necessary to investigate whether this view stands the challenge of Coakley's reassessment.

What are we to make of Coakley's interpretation in light of the pivotal passage on double pleasure in which Gregory appears to argue that spiritual pleasure occurs without the involvement of the bodily senses, and that this is, in fact, the safeguard which ascertains that our judgment is free from fleeting appearances and ready to grasp that which is truly, essentially good? In this section I will suggest that Coakley is, on the whole, mistaken to argue that the bodily senses are involved in spiritual sensation and, by implication, in spiritual pleasure. The

⁸⁹² Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa', 40.

⁸⁹³ Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 94.

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁸⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

privileged role that Coakley grants to the bodily senses over the discursive mind cannot be sufficiently backed up with actual passages from *De anima* and *In Canticum*; the opposite view, however, finds ample support. Especially if we read Gregory's epistemological and 'mystical' accounts side by side – as Coakley rightly suggests we ought to do – it is clear that sensation remains for Gregory a crucial but limited epistemic tool. The senses are useful only so far as they are subjected to the intellect; there is no mention of the positive non-rational use of the physical senses that Coakley adumbrates in her article. In my view, the merit of Coakley's interpretation – vis à vis Daniélou's earlier account – lies in drawing attention to the continuity that binds together bodily and spiritual sensation. Building on my discussion on sense perception in Chapter 4, I will argue, however, that this continuity is to be traced through the involvement of the mind rather than through the body.

Furthermore, I will again question the broad assumption (which incidentally has its roots in Daniélou's scholarship, an irony Coakley does not fail to note⁸⁹⁶) that Gregory's later works, especially *In Canticum*, present a radically more holistic and bodily worldview than his earlier works. I think Coakley is far too quick to brush off significant passages in *In Canticum* which state in no uncertain terms a two-tier worldview where the intelligible is placed above the sensible. The appearance of what Coakley labels as a 'disjunctive' approach to reality is by no means uncharacteristic of the late stage of Gregory's career or simply an occasional strategic return to 'Origen's more disjunctive rhetoric to make a special point of ethical caution.'⁸⁹⁷ On the contrary, the notion of two levels of reality, which Gregory explicitly extends to two kinds of sensation and two kinds of pleasure, is fundamental to Gregory's hermeneutic in *In Canticum*: it is both the basis of the allegorical reading of Scripture and of the soul's progress towards the divine.⁸⁹⁸

⁸⁹⁶ Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa', 51.

⁸⁹⁷ See footnote 21 in *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸⁹⁸ On the importance of the clear distinction between the intelligible and the sensible for Gregory's notion of the spiritual senses and his view of salvation on the whole, see also Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 96–98.

To substantiate my critique, I will first turn to some textual evidence that supports my view that the ‘senses of the soul’ are, indeed, properties of the soul rather than spiritualised faculties of the body. The most significant passage occurs, in fact, just before Gregory’s allusion to ‘double pleasure’ in *Homily 10 on the Song of Songs*. We have already seen that one of the characteristics Gregory associates with the pleasure of the soul is the fact that it is based on a judgment that ‘flees everything that bewitches the senses’ and belongs to a soul that ‘wakens to none of the pleasurable stirrings of the senses.’⁸⁹⁹ However, these remarks follow a longer discussion in which Gregory plainly states the importance of putting the senses to sleep. Puzzlingly, Coakley argues that it is precisely in *Homily 10* that Gregory adumbrates a path ‘in which the working *with* outer sense is precisely the means of its transformation and purification’ – a point, she argues, Daniélou fails to appreciate.⁹⁰⁰ In Coakley’s view, Daniélou

does not spell out how sensation (αἴσθησις) in the ordinary, physiological sense can become ‘spiritual sensation’. Implicitly, it seems, he has left that topic of ordinary physiological sensation or perception to some sort of *philosophical* analysis in Gregory, whereas what he is discussing under the rubric of ‘the spiritual senses’ is what he calls ‘la vie spirituelle’.⁹⁰¹

But does *Homily 10* give grounds to such a view? This is what Gregory has to say about the purification of the senses just before the allusion to double pleasure:

Sleep is an image of death, for in death every perceptive activity of bodies (πᾶσα αἰσθητικὴ τῶν σωμάτων ἐνέργεια) is dissolved. There is no activity of seeing, or of hearing, or of smelling or tasting, or of touching in the season of sleep...

For the truth is that insofar as only the intellect (μόνος ὁ νοῦς) in itself is alive, without any distraction from the organs of sense perception (οὐδενὶ τῶν αἰσθητηρίων παρενοχλούμενος), the bodily nature becomes inactive, as in slumber or profound sleep, and it is truly possible to say that through disuse the capacity to see all those shameful objects that regularly trouble childish eyes is put to sleep... When vision of the truly good leads us to look beyond all such things, the bodily eye (ὁ τοῦ σώματος ὀφθαλμὸς) is inactive, for then the more perfect soul (τῆς τελειότερας ψυχῆς), which

⁸⁹⁹ *Cant. 10* (GNO VI, 314); trans. Norris, 329–331.

⁹⁰⁰ Coakley, ‘Gregory of Nyssa’, 42.

⁹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

uses its understanding (τῆ διανοίᾳ) to look only on matters that are beyond seeing (τὰ τῶν ὀρατῶν ὑπερκείμενα), is not drawn to any of the things to which eye directs its attention. In the same way too the faculty of hearing becomes a dead thing and goes out of operation when the soul occupies itself with things beyond speech (πρὸς τὰ ὑπὲρ λόγον).

As to the more bestial (κτηνωδεστέρας) of the senses, they are hardly worth mentioning. Long since, like some graveyard stench attached to the soul, they have been put away: the sense of smell, scenting out odors; and the sense of taste, bound to the belly's service; and the sense of touch as well, the blind and servile organ that nature, we may think, created only for the sake of the blind. When all these are as it were bound in sleep by disuse (δι' ἀπραξίας), then the working of the heart is pure (καθαρὰ τῆς καρδίας ἐστὶν ἡ ἐνέργεια), and its discourse is focused on what is above it (πρὸς τὸ ἄνω), untroubled and unaccompanied by the noise that stems from the stirrings of sense perception (ἀπεριήχητος μένων ἐκ τῆς αἰσθητικῆς κινήσεως καὶ ἀθόλωτος).⁹⁰²

In the passage above, Gregory states clearly, even sternly, that the bodily senses have to be put to sleep in order for the soul to look at matters that are 'beyond seeing', outside the sensible realm. The instrument of the soul's contemplation is its 'understanding' (διάνοια), which Gregory regards as a property of the intellect. We should note that here, too, the 'vision of the truly good' is contrasted with the futile pursuits of the senses, which connects the passage to the major theme of pleasure and the καλόν and suggests that he operates here on the same key assumptions as he does in his earlier works.

Two minor points also need to be made: First, the passage shows that here, too, Gregory adheres to the traditional hierarchy of the senses, beginning from vision and finishing with a markedly low opinion of touch. Second, the disuse of the senses is seen as a precondition for the pure working of the heart, which implies that the heart is not located in or equated with the human body but is rather a synonym for the soul.⁹⁰³ Both of these observations run counter to Coakley's claim that Gregory's vision and intellect-centred language is in the later works transformed into a more holistic parlance giving a greater emphasis

⁹⁰² *Cant.* 10 (GNO VI, 311–313); trans. Norris, 327–329.

⁹⁰³ See also *Cant.* 9 (GNO VI, 282) where Gregory moves fluidly between 'hearts' and 'souls'.

to the 'heart' as the location of spiritual sensation and touch, taste, and smell over vision which is obscured by the divine darkness.⁹⁰⁴

Why would Coakley conclude that such a forceful passage on the necessity of extinguishing sensation is a mere prelude which heralds the purification of the bodily senses so that they become capable of grasping the divine? We can only assume that Coakley is building on a pre-existing assumption that the 'senses of the soul', to which the passage alludes after the bodily senses have been closed off, are indeed the bodily senses transformed, for nothing in the homily itself seems to warrant such a conclusion. Instead, Gregory spells out clearly that the closing of the physical senses is final and a necessary precondition for approaching the divine with the powers of the intellect.

Can Coakley's point of view be explained by other passages in *In Canticum* or perhaps in *De anima et resurrectione*, which she considers the watershed work in Gregory's understanding of spiritual sensation? In my view, it seems highly improbable that Gregory's strong opinion on the necessity of closing the senses in *Homily 10* could be held simultaneously with the opposite view that would make the bodily senses the privileged receptacle of the divine presence. We can, however, find several remarks that state in no ambiguous terms the disengagement of the bodily senses at the higher stages of the spiritual life. Let us turn to this further evidence.

The topic is prominent already in the opening homily of *In Canticum*. This is the text in which Gregory also presents his notion of double sensation, which Coakley dismisses as atypical of Gregory at this later stage of his career.⁹⁰⁵ In

⁹⁰⁴ Concerning the hierarchy of the senses, see Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa', 50–51. For the language of the 'heart', see *Ibid.*, 45, 50. The superiority of sight is confirmed also in *Cant. 7* where Gregory enquires: '[W]hich among our members is worthy of greater honor than the eyes... Their location above the other sense organs manifests the fact that their usefulness to us for the conduct of life is of the greatest worth.' (GNO 216–217; trans. Norris, 227–229). Soon after, he refers to the church as the body of Christ arguing, tellingly, that all those who were chosen to be leaders played the role of eyes, gazing upon 'nothing material and corporeal' (GNO VI, 217–219; trans. Norris, 229–231).

⁹⁰⁵ '...only very occasionally does he still utilize the rhetorical disjunction between bodily and divine sense with which he would have been familiar from the dominant strands in Origen's treatment. One such example does come in the first homily, as we noted above, when Gregory,

Cant. 1, Gregory places the *Song of Songs* among the other Solomonic works, *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes*. Alluding to the latter, he explains that Wisdom herself ‘disparages the human tendency to dwell on the appearances of things (τὰ φαινόμενα)’ and

points our soul’s motion of desire toward the invisible Beauty (ἐπὶ τὸ ἀόρατον κάλλος) that is *beyond anything grasped by the senses* (ὑπερτίθησι παντὸς τοῦ δι’ αἰσθήσεως), and having in this way purified the heart of its bent toward appearances (περὶ τὰ φαινόμενα), she then, in the *Song of Songs*, initiates *the mind* (τὴν διάνοιαν) into the innermost divine sanctuary.⁹⁰⁶

The concepts that Gregory employs in the passage are already familiar from the discourse on the καλόν that I analysed in Part II. Here, too, the true Beauty is contrasted with ‘appearances’, and the right direction of desire from the latter towards the former becomes a precondition for attaining a purified heart. And just like in *Homily 10* above, the ‘heart’ itself seems to have little to do with the physical body, but is rather associated with the correct functioning of the mind (again, διάνοια). For Gregory, the purificatory work is initiated in the book of *Ecclesiastes* and its fruits are collected in *Canticum canticorum*. It seems unlikely that the key assumptions on the structure of reality and the spiritual life would vary significantly between Gregory’s homilies on the two works. Indeed, the familiar discourse on the true beauty, which binds the works together, is one clear sign that this is not likely the case.

Against this background, Gregory introduces his notion of twofold perception:

We also learn, in an incidental way, another truth through the philosophical wisdom of this book, that there is in us a dual activity of perception (διπλῆ τίς ἐστὶν ἐν ἡμῖν ἡ αἴσθησις), the one bodily, the other more divine... For there is a certain *analogy* (ἀναλογία γάρ τίς) between the sense organs of the body and the operations of the soul. For both wine and milk are discerned by the sense of taste, but when they are intelligible things, the power of the soul that grasps them is a *fully intellectual power*

following Origen, is exegeting Proverbs 2:5 and remarks, apparently to make a deliberate disjunction: “perception within us is twofold – bodily and divine”. Coakley, ‘Gregory of Nyssa’, 44.

⁹⁰⁶ *Cant. 1* (GNO VI, 22); trans. Norris, 23. Emphases mine.

(νοητὴ πάντως ... τῆς ψυχῆς ἐστὶ δύναμις). And a kiss comes through the sense of touch, for in a kiss lips touch each other. There is also, though, a "touch" that *belongs to the soul* (τῆς ψυχῆς), one that makes contact with the Word and is actuated by an *incorporeal and intelligible* touching (διὰ τινος ἀσωμάτου καὶ νοητῆς ἐπαφήσεως)... In the same way, too, the scent of the divine perfumes is not a scent in the nostrils but pertains to a certain *intelligible and immaterial faculty* (τινος νοητῆς καὶ ἀύλου δυνάμεως) that inhales the sweet smell of Christ by sucking in the Spirit.⁹⁰⁷

Here, Gregory presents the senses of the body and those of the soul as two different sets of faculties and allocates the latter to a wholly incorporeal and intelligible level of being.⁹⁰⁸ Since the passage does not fit with Coakley's main thesis of transformed bodily senses, she labels it as an isolated return to an older framework which Gregory, in her view, had largely outgrown.⁹⁰⁹ However, her dismissal is too hasty if we consider the prominent place in which the passage appears in the wider work. It is here that Gregory explains the correct way of interpreting the *Song of Songs* as a whole, and gives a foretaste of the lessons that the book will offer to the rightly-disposed reader. The notion of two kinds of sensation is intimately bound up with the two levels of meaning, literal and allegorical (though Gregory cares little about nomenclature), which are conveyed by the biblical text. Both in the biblical text and in the world around us material objects can point us towards a deeper, immaterial reality. And, as Gregory, explains above, this underlying meaning is grasped by a 'fully intellectual power.'

⁹⁰⁷ *Cant.* 1 (GNO VI, 34); trans. Norris, 35–37. Emphases mine.

⁹⁰⁸ A somewhat similar remark occurs in Homily 8 (GNO VI, 257–258; trans. Norris, 271–273) where Gregory argues that 'the soul's work of seeing is twofold' (διπλῆς γὰρ οὐσίας τῆ ψυχῆ τῆς ὀπτικῆς ἐνεργείας). Now, he distinguishes between an 'operation that sees the truth' and 'another that is led astray by attending to things that amount to nothing.' Here the focus is on Trinitarian theology and abstract notions of divinity which is either correctly perceived as 'One' or wrongly divided into many natures. Neither of these perceptions belongs to the body as such (though seeing things that are unreal is Gregory's common complaint about bodily perception), but the act of seeing is firmly located in the soul and bears the usual meanings of intellectual contemplation and understanding. Although the wrong way of seeing God is also located in the soul, it is important to note that the distortion ultimately comes from a false association between God and the material world. Those who do not see the truth with their pure eye are confused by fantasies which stem from seeing 'many things' and 'material imaginings', wasting their time on 'things that have no reality.' In other words, the failure to perceive God in his unity results from a confusion between the multiplicity of the created material order and the unity of the uncreated intelligible being of God.

⁹⁰⁹ Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa', 43–44.

Furthermore, the homilies contain a number of other passages which indicate, against Coakley, that the anthropological hierarchy between the soul and the body is not reversed, even if God remains beyond the grasp of the mind.⁹¹⁰ These include discussions in which Gregory equates our true being with the immaterial properties of the soul, much like he does in his earlier anthropological works, *De hominis opificio* and *De anima et resurrectione*.⁹¹¹ On the whole, *In Canticum* rests on much of the same ontological and epistemological assumptions that inform Gregory's understanding of the true good which I discussed in Part II. Although Gregory's tone is perhaps less forceful, even in this late work he characterises material things as transient and illusory: they 'flow away with time' and 'have their being in their seeming' (φύσει ἐν τῷ δοκεῖν ἔχει τὸ εἶναι). With this he contrasts the vision of the eye of the soul that grasps the 'true and substantive realities.'⁹¹² Even though the soul is initially guided towards the invisible 'by way of what appears' (διὰ τῶν φαινομένων), in the darkness 'everything that appears and is comprehended (τοῦ φαινομένου τε καὶ καταλαμβανομένου παντός) has been left outside, only the invisible and the incomprehensible (τὸ ἀόρατόν τε καὶ ἀκατάληπτον) remain for the soul's contemplation.'⁹¹³ The pair 'appears and is comprehended' implies that God transcends both the sensible and the intelligible realm.

Thus, although God ultimately remains beyond the mind's grasp, it does not follow that the senses take over its position as the point of connection with the divine presence. We should keep in mind that the reason why the mind fails to grasp the divine is the very fact that it operates on concepts that are abstracted from the sensible realm which is radically different from God's intelligible uncreated being. In *In Canticum*, Gregory describes the intelligible by means of

⁹¹⁰ See for example: the soul is 'elevated over the bulk of the body' (*Cant.* 2, GNO VI, 52); 'one who no longer gazes upon flesh and blood... puts to death the deeds of the body, and becomes wholly spiritual throughout' (*Cant.* 3, GNO VI, 105–106); one must 'fight against flesh and blood' (*Cant.* 6, GNO VI, 192); the body as a 'slave' which trembles before the intellect, its 'lord' (*Cant.* 10, GNO VI, 298).

⁹¹¹ See *Cant.* 9 (GNO VI, 276–277), and also *Cant.* 2 (GNO VI, 66), where Gregory identifies λόγος as that which is 'proper to human nature'.

⁹¹² *Cant.* 11 (GNO VI, 316–317); trans. Norris, 335. Other passages that display a dual understanding of reality include *Cant.* 11 (GNO VI, 333–334) where Gregory argues that the human soul stands 'on the borderline' of two realms, incorporeal and material, and ought to focus all its powers on the former.

⁹¹³ *Cant.* 11 (GNO VI, 322–323); trans. Norris, 341.

negation, in other words, as that which is *not* perceptible and does not belong to the realm of the senses:

The nature of things that exist is divided, at the highest level of generality, into two kinds: On the one hand, there is that which is perceptible and material (αἰσθητὸν καὶ ὕλῳδες); on the other, that which is intelligible and nonmaterial (νοητὸν τε καὶ ἄϋλον). Hence we reckon something to fall into the category of the perceptible to the extent that it is grasped by sense perception (τῇ αἰσθήσει καταλαμβάνεται), but we reckon as intelligible that which falls beyond the observation of the senses (τὸ ὑπερπίπτον τὴν αἰσθητικὴν κατανόησιν).⁹¹⁴

Although soul and God are radically different from each other due to the ontological gulf that separates creation from the Creator, as a spiritual entity the soul nonetheless resembles its divine archetype. It is finite so far as it belongs to a finite human being and its existence has a temporal beginning, but, as Gregory goes on to say in *Homily 6*, it is not subject to the various notions of boundedness that confine the material body.⁹¹⁵ Due to this likeness, it is also fit to perceive the intelligible *logoi* that shape the whole creation. This immaterial mode of perception mirrors the way in which God himself knows his creation, for, as Gregory remarks, ‘even if the Lord “smelled” this or that one of the aforementioned spices as a “sweet smell,” he judged each of them to be acceptable because of the principle (λόγον) manifested in what was done, and not because of the superficial and perceptible appearance of what was done (κατὰ τὸ πρόχειρόν τε καὶ σωματικὸν εἶδος τῶν γινομένων).’⁹¹⁶

It seems, then, that the concept of sense perception is by definition linked to various notions of boundedness, including space, time, materiality, dimensionality and the like. For Gregory, both the body and the sensible creation are inherently bound to these parameters. Even as the spiritual life

⁹¹⁴ *Cant. 6* (GNO VI, 173); trans. Norris, 185. See also *An. et res.* (PG 46, 40C) where the definition of the intelligible by negation and exclusion as that which is *not* sensible is articulated even more clearly. Also Boersma turns briefly to the former passage to highlight the sharp disjunction between the sensible and the intelligible in Gregory’s notion of spiritual senses. See Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 96.

⁹¹⁵ See *Cant. 6* (GNO VI, 173–174.)

⁹¹⁶ *Cant. 9* (GNO VI, 267); trans. Norris, 283. Cf. *Op. hom. 5–6* (PG 44, 137C–140A). τῶν γινομένων can also be translated as ‘things that come into being’ in reference to the process of becoming that is lesser than the state of being which gives stability to the immaterial λόγοι.

progresses, the divide between the material and the intelligible retains its fundamental character; there is little talk about transformed matter or transfigured physicality – at least not in this life. As a consequence, it becomes difficult to accept that the divine presence would be accessible to the bodily senses even as our discursive mind exhausts its capacity.

If we consider the matter from the perspective of spiritual pleasure, we should call to mind that, for Gregory, boundedness is precisely the reason why bodily pleasure cannot offer lasting satisfaction.⁹¹⁷ Due to its spatio-temporal limitations, the human body is not able to accommodate limitless enjoyment: its fixed physical dimensions hinder a limitless addition of enjoyable substance and its existence in time leads to a cyclical fluctuation desire and fulfilment. Since spiritual enjoyment is set apart from its bodily counterpart precisely by the fact that it offers unadulterated satisfaction that never turns into satiety, as limited entities the body and its senses are unfit to serve as its receptacle.

This is not to say that Gregory does not employ a wide variety of bodily language in *In Canticum*. Neither is his attitude towards the body damningly negative – but this is not the case even in his early works. However, it seems to me that evidence for a clear and unambiguous reappraisal of the body remains meagre. Most of the bodily language is firmly transposed onto a spiritual plane, and its widespread presence in *In Canticum* is explained by the contents of the biblical text that provides the ‘metaphorical stock’ for Gregory’s interpretation. It is evident that the bodily images are meant to be read as allusions to an intelligible reality. Furthermore, a clear two-tier understanding of the sensible and the intelligible order is far too widespread in the work to warrant Coakley’s conclusion that Gregory works ‘Origenistic’ and ‘Platonic’ material into his exegesis only sporadically ‘to make a special point of ethical caution’, let alone merely ‘out of *pietas*’.⁹¹⁸ On the contrary, the notion of two levels of reality – which Gregory explicitly extends to two kinds of sensation and two kinds of pleasure – is fundamental to Gregory’s hermeneutic in *In Canticum*: it is both the basis of the allegorical reading of Scripture and of the soul’s progress towards

⁹¹⁷ See, again, *Eccl.* 2.8 (SC 416, 180) and my discussion in Chapter 5.

⁹¹⁸ Coakley, ‘Gregory of Nyssa’, 43.

the divine.⁹¹⁹

What, then, of *De anima et resurrectione*? This text – which Daniélou in his influential chronology dates at least a decade before *In Canticum* – marks, for Coakley, the moment when Gregory begins to break free from the disjunctive Origenistic tradition of the spiritual senses, which he has previously ‘fairly unthinkingly replicated in his own writings.’⁹²⁰ In support of her argument, Coakley cites the passage in which Macrina rebukes Epicurus for closing the ‘senses of the soul’ and failing to ‘look at any of the bodiless things which are known by the intellect.’⁹²¹ Initially, Coakley simply suggests that the passage refers to the transformative capacity of the bodily senses which can be used to grasp a deeper reality or left inactivated due to sin, laziness, and ignorance. This remark on the transformative potential of sensation is sound, and, indeed, the greatest merit of Coakley’s interpretation lies in her focus on the *continuity* that binds together bodily and spiritual sensation. However, Coakley presses the point further, asking how we can know that Macrina’s words refer to the ‘transfigured workings of ordinary perception’ rather than the Origenistic model of the spiritual senses as ‘utterly separate sets of cognitive faculties parallel to, and infinitely better than, the bodily ones.’⁹²² Coakley’s question signals that even after presenting the passage from *De anima*, she remains conscious of the elusive character of her evidence and the novelty of her interpretation.⁹²³ Nonetheless, she finds support for her own view from two further points voiced by Macrina: First, that ‘by the very operation of our senses we are led to conceive of that reality and intelligence which surpasses the senses.’⁹²⁴ And, second, that ‘the rational power cannot enter into the bodily life

⁹¹⁹ The passages that display a dual understanding of reality, one that we can recognise from Gregory’s earlier works, are too many to be treated properly here. See, for example, Cant. 11 (GNO VI, 333–334) where Gregory argues that the human soul stands ‘on the borderline’ of two kinds of reality, incorporeal and material, and ought to focus all its powers on the former.

⁹²⁰ Coakley, ‘Gregory of Nyssa’, 45.

⁹²¹ Ibid., 48.; *An. et res.* (PG 46, 21B–C). Here, Coakley cites the work in Roth’s translation. See Catharine P. Roth, trans., *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, Popular Patristics Series 12 (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002).

⁹²² Coakley, ‘Gregory of Nyssa’, 48.

⁹²³ Ibid., 49.

⁹²⁴ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 28C).

otherwise than by entering through perception.'⁹²⁵

Coakley is right to argue that these phrases speak of the indispensable role that bodily perception plays in our coming-to-know the world; perception is, as she says, a bridge between the soul and the body. But what she fails to appreciate is that this is merely the first step and that, all along, it is the mind that remains the primary agent of knowing. Perhaps the most problematic feature of Coakley's reading of *De anima et resurrectione* is the curious omission of the passage in which Macrina embraces the ancient notion that it is, in fact, the mind, not the body, that sees and hears.⁹²⁶ This comment follows shortly after the first passage that Coakley above cites as support for her own argument, which highlights the selectivity of her reading. I have already cited the passage on the seeing and hearing mind in Chapter 4 and noted that it confirms the view that, for Gregory, even ordinary perception is a profoundly intellectual matter. Yes, the senses form the crucial channel through which we come to know the world; but without the mind that perceives the world through the senses we will not be able to form any coherent ideas from the sensory data. Thus, what Epicurus fails to do is to apply the power of the mind to deduce a greater truth from the sensible appearances. This epistemic process will, of course, entail a purification of the senses so far as they no longer seek their own good in bodily pleasure but assist the mind in its higher pursuits. But this does not mean that the senses are recreated as the privileged epistemic tool. While they do assist in the mind's ascent, their epistemic powers are limited to the material world and their utility depends on the acuity of the knower's intellect. As the spiritual life progresses, this knowing begins to shift from the sensible towards the intelligible plane, and the material world conveyed by the senses is replaced by immaterial principles that have been derived by the mind.

It seems to me, then, that Coakley's reading of *De anima* rests on two separate points which do not sufficiently converge to justify her view: On the one hand, there exists the discourse on the senses of the soul and the importance of using the bodily senses in the service of the mind. On the other, Gregory seems to lay

⁹²⁵ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 60C-D); Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa', 48-49.

⁹²⁶ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 29C-32A).

increasing weight on the transformed physicality of the Resurrection body. However, the conjuncture of the two topics is largely Coakley's own. We should note that Gregory never alludes to any actual transformation of the physical senses while discussing the Resurrection body, let alone discusses a transformation that could happen already in this life. This does not have to be due to outright hostility towards physical sensation but rather to Gregory's understanding that the senses merely play a preliminary role in knowing the divine and are unnecessary when God is known directly in the life to come. While the 'perfection of bodies' undeniably features in Gregory's conception of the Resurrection in *De anima*, he cautions against speculation as to what this transformed reality might be like. The fate of the physical senses is only implicitly discussed in this context, and the conclusions remain ambiguous: On the one hand, Macrina seems to think that the Resurrection body will have a set of senses to retain its identity as a body.⁹²⁷ On the other hand, she also states that in the Resurrection the human being will shed the characteristics which are shared with irrational animals; this would also imply material sensuality.⁹²⁸ It is therefore unclear how Gregory's notion of the Resurrection body could offer any substantial framework for 'a developing and systematic account of how ordinary perception and the gross physical senses are capable of a progressive transformation *in this life* into spiritual senses...', which Coakley seeks to delineate.⁹²⁹

In my view, then, Gregory's discussion on the epistemological role of the senses in *De anima* and *In Canticum* can be fully explained in light of the framework which I laid out in Chapter 4 of this thesis and which remains rather consistent throughout his corpus – as does, indeed, his treatment of pleasure as the false good to which he alludes also in *In Canticum*. Consider, for example, this familiar-sounding excerpt from *Homily 4*:

"From this point, nothing else seems lovely to me, but I have turned away from all things that were thought noble before. My judgment of what is noble no longer errs so

⁹²⁷ See Gregory's question on the fate of the bodily organs, including the senses, in *An. et res.* 144C–145A, and Macrina's (deliberately vague) counter-argument that follows.

⁹²⁸ *An. et res.* (PG 46, 148B).

⁹²⁹ Coakley, 'Gregory of Nyssa', 42.

as to deem anything lovely besides you: not human approval, not glory, not celebrity, not worldly power. For these things are tinged with a show of nobility for those whose attention is *focused on sense perception*, but they are not what they are reckoned to be. For how should something be noble when it lacks entire reality? That which is honored in this world, after all, has its being only in the heads of the people who make the judgment, but you are truly beautiful – not only beautiful, but the very essence of the Beautiful, existing forever as such...”⁹³⁰

If the soul is to rise above the world of appearances and grasp the intelligible good instead of the sensible, it will ultimately have to leave behind the world of the senses. This entails that the highest forms of spiritual pleasure, which belong to the very pinnacle of the spiritual life, are not grasped by the senses but by the faculties of the mind. Also Boersma ties the matter of spiritual sensation to the larger question of the nature of the good, concluding: “To regard the bodily senses themselves as ultimate would be, according to St. Gregory at least, to misconstrue the nature of the good and the beautiful.”⁹³¹

If there is – as there seems to be – a certain continuity between physical sensation and spiritual sensation, I would suggest we look for the unifying and overarching principle in the intellectual component of the human person: it is the mind that perceives and gradually progresses from the immediate causes behind perceptible objects to the spiritual *logoi*, which are both present in and different from the material creation. Although Coakley may well be right in stating that Gregory’s attitude towards the body grows increasingly positive and integral with time, the idea of perceptive continuity through the mind is present already in his early works, such as *De virginitate* where Gregory calls physical sensation a pedestal which lifts the mind towards the spiritual reality. Thus there may, in fact, be more continuity in the development of Gregory’s theology of sensation than Coakley’s analysis seems to suggest.

Finally, we can ask whether Coakley’s broader theological mission to recover the importance of the body in the Christian ascetical theology is the implicit force behind her physical interpretation of Gregory’s notion of the spiritual

⁹³⁰ *Cant.* 4 (GNO VI, 106–107); trans. Norris, 119. Emphasis mine.

⁹³¹ Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa*, 100.

senses.⁹³² As such, her reading is just as intertwined with the concerns of contemporary theology as the earlier interpretation which she, partly for a good reason, seeks to challenge.

⁹³² Here we must mention especially Coakley's recent work *The New Asceticism*, which makes use of Gregory's view of the body as a corrective to modern-day ideas on embodiment and sexuality. See Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2016).

10. Afterword: Is Gregory of Nyssa a Spiritual Hedonist?

The central place of enjoyment in Gregory's vision of the spiritual fulfilment raises an obvious question: can we say that, despite hostility towards bodily pleasure, Gregory is nonetheless a spiritual hedonist? Smith ponders this in *Passion and Paradise*, offering the following answer:

Nyssen's aesthetic language and the corresponding language of aroused desire has an erotic element from which one could mistakenly assume that he urges on the struggling Christian with a spiritually hedonistic vision of heaven. Yet one must remember that, although Nyssen uses an erotic motive to describe the dynamic motivating the soul's ascent to God, the divine beauty that affords the soul maximal blessedness corresponds with God's *agapê*. Because the goods that constitute God's *aretê* are intelligible goods, the wonder that excites the soul's desire corresponds to an intellectual fascination manifest in its contemplative questioning and experiencing of the divine.⁹³³

While Smith identifies the correct problem, his implicit definition of 'hedonism' means that he does not really answer the question whether Gregory of Nyssa is a hedonist, conventionally understood. In its most basic definition, 'hedonism' denotes an ethical framework in which pleasure is regarded as the highest good which is pursued for its own sake and for which all other things are pursued. To my mind, Smith does not enquire whether Gregory considers pleasure the highest good, but whether his vision of heaven is erotic, perhaps to the point of arousing the human body. Smith rescues Gregory from what he considers hedonism by appealing to the fact that the eschatological fulfilment stems from intelligible goods which lead to an intellectual fascination. In other words, Smith defines pleasure on narrow quasi-sexual terms and dismisses the charge of hedonism by noting the exclusively intellectual character of the spiritual fulfilment. We can challenge this point by noting that a 'hedonist' does not have to espouse *bodily* pleasure as the highest good. We have already seen that pleasure can be intellectual, and even Epicurus, a notorious hedonist, would agree that pleasure of the soul was the highest form of pleasure. And, as we have seen, in Gregory's spiritual vision there exists a form of ἡδονή, which

⁹³³ Smith, *Passion and Paradise*, 139.

belongs to the very pinnacle of the spiritual life. Thus, to find out whether Gregory is a hedonist, we must ask whether this ἡδονή is synonymous with the highest good.

Before tracing my line of thought, I will simply offer as my answer that even by these standards Gregory is *not* a hedonist. At the same time, his thought does contain some hedonist elements. The reason why Gregory is not a hedonist is not the fact that his spiritual vision is exclusively intellectual; we have already seen that intellectual pleasure exists. However, it seems that in Gregory's understanding of intellectual enjoyment, enjoyment is something that *accompanies* the good rather than *is* the good. For Gregory, the human *telos* consists of formation in virtue and finally the never-ending exploration of the divine goods. At no point is enjoyment cited as one of these goods. Instead, it is the 'cherry on the top', an added benefit and a sign that said goods have been attained. Not all enjoyment is good, and the divine goods themselves are to be sought even if they do not yield enjoyment, as is the case at the earlier stages of the spiritual life. Indeed, as we have seen, virtue will often be a source of both bodily and mental struggle, but this does not make it any less good. Whereas an Epicurean hedonist would argue that virtue is good so long as it yields pleasure, Gregory – like most ancient authors – reverses the hierarchy and submits enjoyment to virtue. Thus, enjoyment is not good without qualification, but only in conjunction with the goods upon which it follows.

This does not, of course, eliminate the problem that even if Gregory does not explicitly hold that spiritual pleasure is the good, the divine goods may be sought chiefly for the enjoyment they provide. Gregory would probably reject this kind of approach as a misunderstanding which would prevent the individual from reaching the higher levels of the spiritual life where spiritual enjoyment occurs.⁹³⁴ However, it is clear that his sermons and treatises paint a

⁹³⁴ Gregory seems to assert something of this sort in the first homily on the *Song of Songs* (GNO VI, 16) where he explores different reasons why people may pursue the virtuous path. Here, Gregory mentions the hope of rewards as a possible motivation for the pursuit of virtue. This, however, is a much less noble disposition than a genuine love of virtue for its own sake, for, as Gregory argues, it is better to pursue the Giver of all things rather than something that merely comes from the Giver. The same idea is evident also *Vit. Moys.* 2.320.

vision of heaven in which the blessed life is also the most pleasant life. His audiences would have surely found this appealing, and it is unlikely that the effect is accidental. As a teacher and rhetorician, Gregory seeks to direct the emotions of his audience by using the promise of the immense future joy as an inspiration for renouncing the limited goods of the material world. The hope that he promises in his works must be ignited in the souls of his hearers. Thus, we can suggest that while Gregory does not subscribe to full-blown ethical hedonism, his writings do nonetheless imply the presence of a more limited motivational hedonism.

A further, related hedonistic element lies in the manner in which Gregory encourages his audience to act in a way that maximises the overall enjoyment in their lives. We have already looked at a passage from *Homilies on the Beatitudes* in which Gregory argues that since grief and joy are both part of human existence, it is better to choose the griefs of the present life and the joys of the life to come than vice versa. This is the way to attain a more lasting and abundant joy overall. Of course, Gregory will not talk about ‘maximising joy’ but living a life of virtue. Nonetheless, a greater overall yield of joy is clearly one of his arguments for the life of virtue. This is where Eve fails when she exchanges the fullness of good for the only thing she thinks she is missing, the seemingly beautiful fruit of knowledge of good and evil. A number of ancient thinkers, from Plato to Epicurus, recommend appropriate ‘hedonic calculus’ in which a person must weigh present goods against future goods and determine what choice yields the most pleasure all things considered.⁹³⁵

In summary, I do agree with Smith that Gregory is not a spiritual hedonist, but for different reasons. For Gregory, spiritual pleasure or enjoyment is not the highest good in itself, but it accompanies the highest good, which should be pursued even if it does not presently yield any enjoyment. At the same time, Gregory’s delightful depictions of the *eschaton* are hardly intended only as literary flourishes or words of praise. On the contrary, they serve a rhetorical

⁹³⁵ See Warren, *The Pleasures of Reason in Plato, Aristotle, and the Hellenistic Hedonists*, 104–28, 175–86.

and paedagogical role by inspiring the audience to strive for the goods promised by the Gospels. Therefore, we can conclude that Gregory makes use of motivational hedonism, if only in the name of the greater goods of immortality and incorruptibility. And finally, an awareness of the future delight ought to inform the choices that a person makes in her present situation; the smaller joys of this life are to be renounced for greater ones in the life to come.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to find out why Gregory of Nyssa considers pleasure such a dangerous enemy of the Christian life that he even goes so far as to call pleasure 'the instigator of all vicious actions.' At the same time, I wanted to clarify how this detrimental pleasure differs from our original and final state of blessedness where Gregory grants enjoyment a central role. My investigation of Gregory's notion of pleasure both in the fall and the postlapsarian existence has revealed that the role of pleasure as a primary passion can be accounted for in four interlinked ways:

- 1) Historically, pleasure is, for Gregory, the instigator of the events of the fall.
- 2) Anthropologically, pleasure is given to humans as an incentive to procreate and with this function all other passions are added to the human constitution.
- 3) Psychologically, it is our drive for pleasure that motivates all impassionate behaviour and leads to a sinful attachment to a number of external goods.
- 4) From a broad ethical perspective, a life of pleasure does not allude simply to one passion but entails a fundamentally mistaken attitude towards the whole universe and, as such, becomes a synonym of the life of sin, the opposite of the good Christian life.

Pleasure seeking, then, is symptomatic of a moral and epistemological attitude that falsely approaches the non-final realm of sensation as the only and final level of reality. By obscuring what is good, pleasure obscures the true goal of the human life and leads to a precarious existence that is at once deprived of the truth and bereft of lasting satisfaction.

In this thesis, I have showed that Gregory highlights the role of human choice in the attainment of the life of virtue by conceptualising our worldly existence as a two-way street: At one end, lies an intellectually informed attitude that understands that the material world is simply the first step in the ascent towards the divine. At the other end, lies pleasure, the false alternative. Since humans can only choose what they know, right knowledge becomes the

prerequisite of right choice, right desire, and right enjoyment. At the same time, ignorance of the purpose of the human life and the higher spiritual principles that underpin it leads to an uncritical attachment to the only good available to the senses: pleasure. At the level of rhetoric, this binary model is evidenced and enforced by the way in which Gregory repeatedly contrasts the life of virtue with the life of pleasure.

For Gregory, the volatility of pleasure stands in stark contrast with the stability of the true being, anchored in the divine nature. At times, he is willing to label the whole sensible creation as unreal and futile. This, however, does not mean that the creation is useless; it is useless only when taken at face value as the only and final level of reality. Without an awareness of the presence of the Creator, the creation appears as a fruitless cycle of becoming and ceasing, which does not allow for the linear progress that is constitutive of the spiritual life. It grabs hold of the person, but then returns him to his starting point.

By drawing attention to the ephemeral quality of sensual pleasure and, more broadly, to pleasure seeking as a failure to recognise the non-final character of the sensible realm, I have agreed with and built on Hans Boersma's critique of the recent trend in Gregory of Nyssa scholarship which highlights Gregory's strikingly positive attitude towards embodiment and the sensible realm. While Boersma investigates the topic chiefly from the positive angle of virtue formation, I have showed how the same principle informs Gregory's thinking on sin: Sin comes about when we fail to recognise that the final good does not lie in that which is accessible to the senses, in other words, pleasure. Thus, pleasure seeking indicates that a person lives in a state of ignorance, alienated from the fullness of good in God. In my view, Gregory's discourse on pleasure shows in clear terms that the goods of the sensible realm are only intended as instruments and that our final communion with the divine occurs on the intelligible plane. The spatio-temporally limited objects of the sensible realm, including the human body, simply cannot offer, accommodate, or access the limitless spiritual enjoyment provided by the infinite God. The non-finality of the sensible realm forms the very core of Gregory's thinking of pleasure:

enjoyment of the material goods is acceptable as a byproduct but never as a goal in itself.

In this thesis, I have approached Gregory's notion of pleasure within the framework of ancient eudaimonistic ethics and, in particular, the ancient debate on pleasure as the good. I have showed that, especially as regards the norms of the life on earth, Gregory follows general trends of ancient ethics: instead of advocating a complete withdrawal and renunciation, Gregory defends an ideal of rational moderation and a level of physical care that ensures the health of the body but enables the individual to direct most of her efforts towards interior and intelligible matters. At various points, Gregory echoes notable topics in ancient ethics, such as the self-sufficiency of virtue, an interest in infant behaviour, nature as a norm, and the notion that no one errs willingly. In my view, this is neither a sign of Gregory's deliberate affiliation with any one of the ancient schools of philosophy, nor an indication that he is a particularly unoriginal thinker. As we have already seen, despite underlying metaphysical differences, ancient authors were reasonably like-minded about the lifestyle that constituted a good human life. I have provided ample examples to show that these concerns were evident already in earlier Christian ethics, such as the writings of Clement of Alexandria whose reception in Cappadocian theology remains largely uncharted.

Gregory's originality is perhaps best showcased by his conception of spiritual pleasure, which is profoundly shaped by his theological commitment to the creation/Creator divide and the notion of infinite progress. For him the difference between limited and unlimited pleasure is intertwined with the difference between the limited creation and its unlimited Creator. In my analysis, I showed that Gregory differs from many of the late ancient thinkers who, like him, conceptualise pleasure as a replenishment of a lack but, unlike him, adopt a different definition when it comes to contemplative pleasure, which, in their view, cannot include any notion of lack or pain.

By highlighting the centrality of pleasure in Gregory's notion of the sinful life, this study also contributes to the scholarly discussion on early Christian hamartiology. My investigation has cast light both on Gregory's notion of sin as an intellectual failure and on the points of contact between ancient anti-hedonist discourse and early Christian hamartiology. So far, the scholarship on the late 4th and early 5th-century notions of sin has tended to focus heavily on the writings of Augustine. It is my hope that this thesis can open up a further perspective by examining one instance of the Cappadocian contribution to the development of Christian hamartiology.

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