

Healing the Social Leper in Gregory of Nyssa's and Gregory of Nazianzus's "περὶ φιλοπτωχίας"*

Susan R. Holman

American Journal of Archaeology

The history of what constitutes a "cure" in a given society is a history of that society's values: for the rhythm of the cure shows what is acceptable as a plausible way of giving form, and so the hope of resolution to . . . the nebulous and intractable fact of suffering.¹

Introduction

In her study *The Suffering Self*,² Judith Perkins explores the development of a late-antique perception of pain and sickness as it influenced early Christian discourse and social power. Although she includes the poor and destitute in her general dis-

*A shorter version of this paper was presented at the April 1998 New England/Maritimes Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion on "Religions, Medicines, and Healing" and was awarded the AAR Allyn Russell Prize. I would like to thank Robin Jensen, Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Hector Avalos, Ute Possekkel and *HTR*'s outside reader for their comments and suggestions

¹Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *JRomS* 61 (1971) 96

²Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self* (New York: Routledge, 1995) A related study of suffering in the modern world is Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985)

cussion,³ her texts, as the title of her book suggests, focus on the self, that is, on those who regard their own suffering body rather than the body of others. The present paper considers a category of sick body that Perkins does not discuss but which may be very relevant to her study: the case of lepers in the fourth century as it is constructed by those who observed them but did not share their experience. Historically identified by its effect on the skin, leprosy divides self from other by its manifestation on that very part of the human body where self ends and other begins. In biblical tradition, to touch the skin of the leper is to threaten an ancient boundary. Yet, this boundary crossing is precisely what Gregory of Nyssa (Nyssen) and Gregory of Nazianzus (Nazianzen)⁴ advise in their three sermons traditionally titled *περὶ φιλοπτωχίας* (“On the Love of the Poor”).

Gregory of Nazianzus first delivered his homily, also known as *Oratio* 14,⁵ sometime between 365 and 372 CE. Gregory of Nyssa probably wrote his two sermons on the poor between 372 and 382.⁶ Taken together, two of these three “poverty sermons,”⁷ that is, Nazianzen’s *Oratio* 14 and the second of Nyssen’s set, provide one of the most extensive Christian images of the physical disease of leprosy in the fourth century.⁸ These sermons operate within a specific historical setting, that of the rise of institutional Christian philanthropy. In particular, Basil of Caesarea’s organized medical project to care for the destitute sick and lepers several years after a famine in Cappadocia in 368–369 forms an historical background to the sermons.⁹ In *Or.* 43.63, Gregory of Nazianzus says, “Basil’s care was for the sick and the relief of their wounds, and the imitation of Christ, by cleansing leprosy

³Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 8–12

⁴My choice to employ this grammatically correct but slightly unconventional use of genitive names for the Gregories follows Jaroslav Pelikan’s standard practice in his study of the Cappadocians, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), esp. p. 6

⁵In some manuscripts, *περὶ φιλοπτωχίας* is titled *περὶ πτωχοτροφίας*, “On the Feeding of the Poor.” A critical edition is wanting. I use the Greek text *PG* 35 855–910. Unless noted, I follow the English translation by M. F. Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers* (London: Longmans, 1963) 4 43–64.

⁶Gregory of Nyssa *De pauperibus amandis Oratio duo* (ed. Arie van Heck, Leiden: Brill, 1964) 1–37 = *Gregori Nysseni Opera* (Leiden: Brill, 1967) 9 1 (hereafter *GNO*). *De beneficentia*; vulgo *De pauperibus amandis 1* *GNO* 9 1 (1967) 93–108. *In illud: Quatenus uni ex his fecistis mihi fecistis*; vulgo *De pauperibus amandis 2* *GNO* 9.1 (1967) 111–27. All translations are mine.

⁷I will use this phrase to mean specifically these three homilies traditionally titled “On the Love of the Poor.” Gregory of Nazianzus delivered several other sermons concerned with the social effects of involuntary poverty, which will not be discussed here.

⁸Gregory of Nyssa’s first sermon describes destitute poverty in general.

⁹Greg. Naz. *Or.* 43.63. The famine may be significant since acute malnutrition, particularly long-term vitamin deficiencies, often manifest as skin disorders.

not by word but in deed.”¹⁰ While the *περὶ φιλοπρωχίας* sermons do not speak of Basil, they describe lepers and leprosy in a series of remarkably similar observations that strongly suggest a shared discourse and common experience of the needy, who expected the clergy to fulfill the traditional role of patron and to help meet physical needs. Most scholars believe Nazianzen’s sermon antedates Nyssen’s and was perhaps a literary model for it. The younger of the two, Gregory of Nyssa was a skilled rhetor known to build on, and even to overtly borrow from, others’ themes in developing his own theological images.¹¹ The two were close friends and read their works to one another.¹² Jerome describes a meeting in which Gregory of Nyssa read “to Gregory Nazianzen and myself a work against Eunomius.”¹³ It is no surprise that their sermons on an identical social circumstance would read similarly. All three sermons invite the audience¹⁴ to come into physical contact with the suffering, sacred leper in order to effect spiritual healing for those who are physically well.

They make this invitation by addressing the audience’s common fear of contagion. As with the ancient Israelite leper, those who contracted leprosy in the Greek and Roman worlds of late antiquity also faced the threat of social exile, destitution, and lingering self-destruction. Yet, at least in these texts, contagion is not defined in terms of ritual purity and pollution, but in terms of social terror of catching this dreaded sickness. Leprosy was, above all, a social disease. Its manifestations were most notable for their power to exile the afflicted from that religious identity which Greek-speaking Christians, by the fourth century CE, also understood in civic terms; Greek and Roman religion was inseparable from civic life, and the homeless leper would be functionally unable to maintain ordinary

¹⁰Greg Naz *Or* 43.63; ET NPNF².7, 416

¹¹He does this, for example, in his treatise against Eunomius, which continues Basil’s argument against Arianism after Basil’s death. In his sermon against usury, Nyssen openly admits his dependence on Basil’s sermon on the same topic. Nyssen is most infamous for forging three reconciliation letters that successfully (if temporarily) tricked Basil into believing they were from an older bishop with whom Basil had a theological quarrel.

¹²Nazianzen’s *Oratio* 11 is generally believed to be a discourse delivered on the occasion of Nyssen’s ordination in the summer of 372. For the critical edition, see SC 405 (ed. and trans., M-A Calvet-Sebasti, 1995). Reginald Weijenborg has challenged the authenticity of this homily by suggesting that it is a highly ironic and slightly indecent forgery by Maximus the Cynic, writing against Nazianzen; Reginald Weijenborg, “Some Evidence of Unauthenticity for the ‘Discourse XI in Honour of Gregory of Nyssa’ Attributed to Gregory of Nazianzus,” *StPatr* 17 (1982) 1145–48. Calvet-Sebasti finds that Weijenborg’s reasons “ne nous semblent pas convaincantes” (SC 405, 93).

¹³Jerome *De viris illustribus* 128. For Latin see O. Gebhardt and A. Harnack, TU 14 1 (Leipzig Hinrichs’sche, 1896) 54. For Sophronius’s Greek translation see p. 60 in the same volume.

¹⁴While Jean Bernardi, Jean Daniélou, and others assume that these sermons were preached, they also have a long and complex manuscript history, indicating a substantial audience of readers.

household or civic ritual duties. Neither the medical nor the early Christian texts, however, view the leper in terms of ritual impurity. Nor do the Greek and Roman medical texts prescribe religious rites as part of the curative effort. Graeco-Roman culture was satisfied to exile this threatening group to the fringes of social existence. Christian bishops, perhaps discomfited by this uncontained power of threat, sought instead to bring the poor and the lepers back under their active jurisdiction by reaching out and “containing” them within the rhetoric of Christian philanthropy.¹⁵ “Containment” is accomplished by the bishops’ appeal to moral ideals and by their attempt to counter the popular fear of contagion. In this study I examine the medical and theological context of this fear in order better to understand and to set into context the redemptive power that the Cappadocians, and especially Gregory of Nyssa, grant to these contagious lepers.

I begin by exploring the medical perception of this disease entity, particularly the descriptions of “elephantiasis” preserved in Oribasius¹⁶ and Aretaeus,¹⁷ who may provide the earliest clear, clinical picture of modern leprosy, that is, Hansen’s disease.¹⁸ The discussion then turns to an exploration of theories of causation, contagion, and treatment in Greek and Roman medical writings. With this background, one then can begin to consider the context of the leper in the Christian text as body itself, the human person touched by this disease. I suggest that the context of Christian healing, rooted in the medical theory of its time, is intentionally described in terms of “reverse contagion.” The two Gregories, but especially Gregory of Nyssa, use the popular fear of contagion to suggest that the physically ill, exiled lepers, possess a divine sanctity, which may benefit the physically well only by direct contact. Fi-

¹⁵For this view see Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Curti Lectures; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) 71–117. A study of leprosy language as it may have related to ascetic monks has not been done, to my knowledge, and would add an interesting dimension to this topic.

¹⁶Oribasius *Collect. Méd.* 45:27–29. I use the Greek text of Ulco Cats Bussemaker and Charles Daremberg (*Œuvres d’Oribase* [Paris: Impr. National, 1862] 4:59–82).

¹⁷Aretaeus 4:13 (description and discussion of cause) and 8:13 (treatment and cure). I use the Greek text of Carolus Hude, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* 2 (Berlin, 1923) and the English translation by John Moffat, *Aretaeus: Consisting of Eight Books, On the Causes, Symptoms and Cure of Acute and Chronic Diseases, Translated From the Original Greek* (London: W. Richardson, 1786) 273–88, 493–502. I am grateful to Harvard’s Houghton library for access to this text from which I was unable to locate Francis Adams’s more recent English translation (1856). Most scholars date Aretaeus to the first or second century CE, but he may be later since, as Steven Oberhelman argues, Philagrius’s fourth or early fifth-century reference is the first clear testimony to his existence. For research on Aretaeus see esp. Steven M. Oberhelman, “On the Chronology and Pneumatism of Aretaios of Cappadocia,” *ANRW* 2:37:2 (1994) 941–66.

¹⁸Mirko D. Grmek, *Diseases in the Ancient Greek World* (trans. Mireille and Leonard Muellner; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 171.

nally, I suggest that the effectiveness of this argument for reversal depends on a particular Christian view of the human body: the emerging Cappadocian understanding of the incarnation and the theology of mutability. I explore this position as it exists especially in Gregory of Nyssa's *Oratio Catechetica Magna*.

✠ Leprosy in the Medical Texts of Late Antiquity

The Language of Leprosies

"Leprosy" was a term in the ancient world that might refer to any number of skin diseases that impelled the patient to leave home, family, and occupation, and live in exile at or beyond the borders of town or community. The medical texts used several different terms for leprosy. Mirko Grmek traces these from the ancient Vedic term, *kilāsa*,¹⁹ through the Hebrew, to Greek and Latin texts.²⁰ That which might be called "leprosy" was variously termed λέπρα (the word Josephus used to translate the Hebrew *zarā'at*),²¹ or λεύκη;²² or "scabies" (Greek ψώρα; Latin *vitiligo*); or "The Phoenecian Disease," which Galen says "seems to be elephantiasis."²³ While Grmek would like to differentiate between the various diseases that fell under this broad label, the textual focus on often vague symptoms and treatment makes precise differentiation impossible. Insofar as the ancients understood all of these diseases to arise from an imbalance of choleric humors, particularly black bile, they treated them with the same therapies, discussed below. The medical writers also used several different terms for what they themselves viewed as the same disease in its different states. Rufus comments that elephantiasis may also be called σατυρίασις or λεοντίασις, depending on whether the dominant symptom was chronic phallic erection with red cheeks or a bad body odor with ridging forehead.²⁴

¹⁹Grmek, *Diseases in the Ancient Greek World*, 157. One wonders whether this Vedic term is etymologically related to the Syriac *kharsā*, since an anonymous Syriac medical compendium from late antiquity refers several times to "the leprosy that is called *kharsā*," which Budge translates "scabies." Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Syriac Book of Medicines* (1913; reprinted London: Oxford University Press, 1976) 2: 694.

²⁰Grmek, *Diseases in the Ancient Greek World*, 152–209.

²¹Josephus *Ap.* 1.31 (esp. sections 281–82).

²²Herodotus 1.38.

²³Gal *Prorrheticon* 2.43, for Galen's comment see Littré IX, 74, n. 7. for discussion see Grmek, *Diseases in the Ancient Greek World*, 165–67.

²⁴Oribasius *Collect. Méd.* 45.28.2. Aretaeus identifies these same subcategories of the disease in Aretaeus 4.13.8.

Aretaeus of Cappadocia

Aretaeus's lengthy description of elephantiasis illustrates precisely what both Cappadocian bishops and ancient physicians understood as leprosy. Thought to have been a Cappadocian who studied medicine at Alexandria and lived in Rome, Aretaeus's date and life "are as little known and as much disputed as those of Hippocrates."²⁵ He cannot be dated by his citations since he quotes only Hippocrates and Homer. The value of his work depends on whether he was the model for, or plagiarist of, Archigenes (*fl.* 100 CE). The earliest unattested external testimony to Aretaeus is that of Philagrius in the fourth or fifth century CE. The *De simplicibus medicamentis* mentions him, but its attribution to Dioscorides Anazarbeus (70–75 CE), and therefore its date, is also not secure.²⁷ Steven Oberhelman therefore tentatively places Aretaeus in the first rather than the second century CE, but only because he is "not an Eclectic but a complete Pneumatist." Yet, his era and influence remain speculative, and this obscurity itself may suggest that "he never left his homeland of Cappadocia (if that in fact is his country)."²⁸

While there is no evidence that Aretaeus was a Christian, he may have known of early Christian ascetic practices. In his description of melancholy, he refers to those who "hating society, fly into the desert and become superstitiously religious."²⁹ If this statement refers to Christians, and if it is part of Aretaeus's original text,³⁰ it might suggest that he was writing as late as the second or third centuries, when Christians began to be regarded in this way. Whenever he lived, however, Aretaeus certainly preceded the Gregories, and his description of elephantiasis contains many observations that are identical to those in the *περὶ φιλοπτωχίας* sermons. This may indicate that the Cappadocian bishops knew Aretaeus's work (see below), or it may simply be the case that all of these authors are reiterating a standard image or even a standard text on the illness.

Aretaeus regards elephantiasis as a disease in which

all hope vanishes . . . the colour is livid or black, the lower part of the forehead is greatly contracted so as to cover the eyes, as in . . . lions when enraged, hence the malady has obtained the name *λεόντειον*. . . . The . . . prominence of the lips is thick . . . the ears have . . . the

²⁵Oberhelman, "Chronology and Pneumatism of Aretaios," 941.

²⁶Philagrius *Frag. ap. Aetium* 8.47, 11 l.

²⁷Oberhelman, "Chronology and Pneumatism of Aretaios," 946–50

²⁸*Ibid.*, 959

²⁹Aretaeus 3.5; ET Moffat, 116.

³⁰No one else, to my knowledge, has related this reference to early Christianity, but it hardly fits Greek or Roman religious practices. If this text truly predates Christian ascetic practices, might it refer to an Alexandrian familiarity with Josephus's and/or Philo's description of the Essenes?

appearance of . . . an elephant . . . The tumours of the cheeks, chin, fingers and knees are ulcerated, and the ulcers are not only attended with a bad smell but become incurable. . . . The members are lifeless and dead before the patient; the nose, fingers, feet, with the genitals and hands fall off . . . everything is detestable on account of the pain, the body is deprived of nourishment, and there is present ravenous desires . . . they are oppressed with an unusual weight in every limb . . . the disease produces disgust and alienation from everything. . . . Who would not fly or turn his back upon either a son, father or brother labouring under this cruel misfortune, *especially as there is a danger of the disease being communicated?*³¹ Hence many have exposed their nearest and dearest relation in deserts and upon mountains, some supplying their wants for a time, others withholding the necessaries of life and wishing them to die as soon as possible³²

Aretaeus's image of the macabre identifies a fear of contagion as the reason families disowned leprous relatives and friends to subsist in desolation and destitution while the disease (or the environment) progressively destroyed various body parts. These exiles survived by forming alternative communities, which were completely dependent on the charity of the communities that had exiled them. Both Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus describe lepers' begging in terms of theatre: they sing ballads, narrating the true tragedy of their own lives, and they perform in troupes to intentionally augment their gruesome deformities as part of their appeal for alms.³³

It is entirely possible that Gregory of Nazianzus knew Aretaeus's text. His brother, Caesareus, was a physician in Constantinople; José Janini Cuesta has suggested that Gregory may have inherited his brother's medical library after Caesareus's death.³⁴ Aretaeus's description of elephantiasis is also very similar to that of Oribasius, who was physician to the emperor Julian and one of Caesareus's contemporaries at Constantinople. While Aretaeus's lengthy description of leprosy may not be original with him, it is the earliest such image we have, and it encapsulates well the standard physical and social images of the disease in late antiquity.

³¹δέος καὶ ἀμφὶ μεταδόσιος τοῦ κακοῦ, my emphasis.

³²Aretaeus 4.13 10, 15–19, ET Moffat, 280–87.

³³For the development of this idea I am indebted to Michael J. De Vinne, "The Advocacy of Empty Bellies: Episcopal Representations of the Poor in the Late Empire" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1995).

³⁴José Janini Cuesta, *La Antropología y la medicina pastoral de San Gregorio de Nisa* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1946) 31. See also Jean Daniélou, *Le IV^{ème} siècle. Grégoire de Nysse et son milieu* (Paris: Institute Catholique, 1960) 37–38. Although Caesareus was a medical doctor, he also authored at least one theological text, if Photus is correct in attributing to Caesareus a book of two hundred ecclesiastical questions and answers (Phot. *Bibliotheca* 210). I thank Nick Constan for the discussion that led me to Photus.

Disease Etiology and Medical Theories of Causation

Leprosy was understood in antiquity as something causally related to a disordered reality. This disordered reality was explained in terms of cosmic, environmental, and physiological humors, although details were often vague. Gregory of Nyssa mentions a prevailing theory that putrid humors, existing in the air or water, might invade the blood, thereby "causing" disease. Yet, the standard texts reflect little concern for exploring the theories concerning external causes and limit discussion to the causal relationship within the body itself between humoral imbalance and physical symptom. Even this reference to the body being invaded by putrid humors attributes cause to the environment; there is no consideration of interpersonal transmission. "Contagion" is, therefore, a very curious category within this context. What does the word mean to those who use it in these texts? How did this standard view of leprosy as "contagious" relate to the little that is known about causation theory in ancient medicine?

Aristotelian causal theory³⁵ may have had some small role in the education of the Graeco-Roman physician, if he also received training in philosophy and rhetoric. However, only one of Galen's three "systems" of medical practice routinely considered causal theory at all.³⁶ According to Galen, his own approach, that of the "Dogmatists" (or "Rationalists"), treated the patient according to theories about the inner workings and constitution of the body beyond what was immediately visible. In contrast, the "Empiricists" made their diagnoses solely by observing measurable, physical symptoms, with no interest in theory. Galen's third group, the "Methodists," focused purely on method, assuming illness arose out of a supposed imbalance between constriction and relaxation.

³⁵For an overview of causation theory see esp. Michael Frede, "The original notion of cause," in Malcolm Schofield, Myles Burnyeat, and Jonathan Barnes, eds., *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 217–49. R. J. Hankinson, "Galen's Theory of Causation," *ANRW* 2.37.2 (1994) 1757–74; and Richard Sorabji, "Causation, Laws and Necessity," in Schofield et al., *Doubt and Dogmatism*, 250–82. Causes were not necessarily related to activities in ancient texts. For Aristotle an idea might be a cause. This view had changed somewhat by the early Christian period, in that the role of an active agent became more dominant in causation theory. Cause is active, for example, in Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.17.82.3 and 8.9.25.5) and the Neoplatonists continued to regard it as active. In terms of disease etiology, however, this theory would merely imply that humors and environmental imbalance might be seen as active agents. The transmission of undesirable properties from one person to another was understood largely in terms of religious purity and pollution, not ordinary pathology.

³⁶Gal. *De sectis*; for text see J. Marquardt, I. Müller, and G. Helmreich, eds., *Claudii Galeni Pergameni scripta minora* (1893; reprinted Leipzig: Teubner, 1967) 3. 12–32. For discussion see Hankinson, "Galen's Theory of Causation," 1759–60.

Galen observed that diseases only affected some, not all, individuals in a given (presumably disordered) environment. He explained this selective process by identifying two operative factors that determine whether or not a person will become ill. The first factor was the “antecedent cause,” a pre-existing environmental or internal trigger that provokes the condition that ultimately causes illness. He believed that everyone in a given environment was equally subject to this antecedent cause. Whether one became ill, however, depended on the second factor: the “standing conditions of the body that render it liable to being so affected.”³⁷ Cause could act only on particular materials and “the type of material, and its resistive power, determine the extent to which the external cause will produce a perceptible effect.”³⁸ In other words, the essential composition of the body predisposes one either to catch or to resist certain diseases. However one interprets Galen’s categories, these divisions had little significance two hundred years later. By that time medical practice was a more eclectic development based on all the traditional sources available, which were often collected into massive compendia like those of Oribasius or Paulus Aegineta. This view of antecedent susceptibility and resistive power also plays a role in the way the Cappadocian bishops discuss leprosy. However, neither “antecedent causes” nor “standing conditions” explain the interpersonal contagion that is understood by all as a critical risk in the physical disease of leprosy.

Fighting Black with Black: Homeopathy as an Agent of Healing

While ancient medical theory does not explain its understanding of interpersonal contagion, it does provide detailed insights into the dynamics of treatment. The dominant image of causal theory related to the inner workings of the body. Thus, both the Cappadocians and the medical writers described cause in terms of humors, if they discussed it at all. They viewed health as the ultimate balance between moisture and dryness, heat and cold, earth, air, fire, and the four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile.³⁹ The humoral approach to medical therapy applied what would now be considered homeopathic remedies: treatments that generally resemble the disease they seek to cure, a type of negation by inoculation. In these remedies, the medicine is a reverse image that bears the appearance of similarity to the disease in order to counteract it. Mirror-image treatment was sometimes combined with cathartic therapies (such as bleeding or milk-based purgatives) intended to release or counter excessive humoral substances. These are the therapies one finds in the treatment of leprosy.

³⁷Hankinson, “Galen’s Theory of Causation,” 1762.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 1763.

³⁹For a brief summary of humoral theory see Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand. Man and Wound in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975) 176–83.

Leprosy was believed to arise out of an imbalance in either “melancholic” or “choleric” humors caused by an excessive internal production of black bile.⁴⁰ Oribasius follows Galen in attributing elephantiasis to black bile and choleric humors (μεγαγχολικόν)⁴¹ and in believing that λέπρα belonged to the same family of diseases and therefore required the same treatment.⁴² This humoral theory of effect was not limited to the Latin and Greek-speaking world. In a Syriac medical commentary on Hippocrates, the author describes how “the thick chymes which are gathered together and increase,” cause disease: “The bile wandereth about in all the skin, even in the disease called elephantiasis. . . . Now this taketh place in two ways: either because the chyme of the black bile is injected into it from another region, or because it is produced in that place itself.”⁴³

Medical antidotes in these texts were often listed in groups according to the diseased humors. The Syriac text, for example, groups together those medications one ought to use in “elephantiasis and leprosy and scabies and tumours, and running sores, and pig-sores, and cancers, and all the sicknesses which are begotten of black bile or crude phlegm which is not distributed.”⁴⁴ If one antidote does not work, the text suggests a wide range of possible alternatives, perhaps chosen according to the patient’s economic resources and the availability of more esoteric ingredients.

Treatment was both external and internal, and the same substance might be used for both. Viper meat was a popular prescription to treat leprosy. Galen, Aretaeus, Oribasius, and Paul of Aegina all recommend viper, either in stew, as broth, or rubbed on the skin. The homeopathy of the viper is trans-membranous: the leper who eats viper meat may be enabled to similarly shed his skin and be healed. Aretaeus tells the story of one such (supposed) transformation.⁴⁵ Philumenus, a second century Alexandrian, refers to the curative powers of both viper and elephant: “among men who live in solitude there are some who eat [vipers] without themselves even being sick. . . . Some say that ivory scrapings

⁴⁰Paulus of Aegina retains this teaching found in Galen and Oribasius in his sixth-century CE description of elephantiasis: “It arises either from the melancholic and feculent part, and, as it were, dregs of the blood, or from yellow bile, both being overheated . . . black bile produces reddish elephantiasis, which is the less malignant variety . . . ulceration of the whole body and falling off of the extremities are produced . . . from yellow bile overheated. . . those already overpowered by the disease must be abandoned.” Paulus Aegineta 4.1; ET Francis Adams, *The Seven Books of Paulus Aegineta* (London: The Sydenham Society, 1844) 2 1. In 4.2 Paulus similarly identifies leprosy as a melancholic disorder rooted in excessive black bile

⁴¹Oribasius *Collect. Méd* 45 27.1

⁴²*Ibid.* 45.27.12

⁴³*The Syriac Book of Medicines*, Fol. 8a–9b, 2.14–15.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, Fol. 23b; ET Budge, 2. 47.

⁴⁵Aretaeus 4.13 19–21.

also are effective against elephantiasis.⁴⁶ Philumenus also believed in treating bad odors and repulsion with the same, and rough or shiny, hard, dark skin lesions with that which resembled them in the animal kingdom; among his medicinal instructions for treating elephantiasis one finds: “grind up five or six of the bugs called millipedes which one finds under barrels, in 3 cyaths of sweet water, and give it to the sick.”⁴⁷

Despite the traditional image of the leper as an “untouchable,” these remedies suggest a certain degree of permitted social interaction, at least until the patient was considered doomed. For example, Philumenus warns those with elephantiasis against sexual activity, claiming that it worsens the symptoms and progression of the disease.⁴⁸ (As proof of this claim, he argues that women and eunuchs rarely suffered from leprosy).⁴⁹ Yet many therapies imply some degree of intimate physical contact: bleeding the patient, preparing and administering purgatives, and rubbing ointments on the affected skin. Both Aretaeus and Philumenus recommend an active regimen of long walks, declamation, and bathing, especially in sea or sulfurous waters. These prescriptions assume an ordered social existence, the economic freedom to travel, and liberty to bathe in waters that other, healthy, individuals may share.

In summary, these texts suggest that the ancient physicians (in contrast to the philosophers) had little practical concern for the question of ultimate particulate or external causes of disease. Although leprosy is viewed as contagious, its causation is discussed chiefly in terms of internal imbalance. The medical advice concerns either treating the symptoms or separating from society the patient whose disease is pronounced incurable. External factors, when they are suggested, are usually treated as forces quite beyond human control. Leprosy was a disease of fate, the consequence of a body susceptible to seasonal imbalance,⁵⁰ perhaps because of an astrological predeliction.⁵¹ In the face of this fatalistic view of external cause, it is surprising to find leprosy identified in medical terms as “contagious” in any way at all.

⁴⁶Oribasius *Collect. Méd.* 45.29.26.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 45 29.29.

⁴⁸πολεμιοτάτης πρὸς τὴν διάθεισιν, in Oribasius *Collect. Méd.* 45 29 79

⁴⁹*Ibid.* The argument to be made here is that sex will make one’s symptoms worse, not that one will transmit the disease to another person, although this fear was perhaps present as well.

⁵⁰Stephanus of Athens says that all diseases originate in the seasons insofar as these affect body moisture and other properties. Stephanus Atheniensis, in *Hippocrates Aphorismos Commentaria* 3.22 (*Corpus medicorum graecorum* XI 1,3,1, trans. Leendert G. Westerink; Berlin Akademie-Verlag, 1985) 130–31.

⁵¹The Syriac compendium, which Budge dates to the same period as Stephanus’s commentary, reflects a popular belief that lepers were fated by certain astrological predelictions: a man is likely to develop “lepra on his head” if he is born in the beginning of Nisân, any time during Tammûz, or in the middle or the end of the month of Shebât. *The Syriac Book of Medicines*, Fol. 243b; ET Budge, 2. 618–19.

☒ Contagion: Metaphor and the Body in Pagan and Christian Cappadocia

The fear of contagion is a significant subtext in the discourses regarding leprosy found in the writings of Aretaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus. Aretaeus defends social exile precisely because “there is a danger of the disease being communicated (μεταδίδωμι).”⁵² In discussing treatment he warns again: “It is equally dreadful either to live or take food with the patients, as in the case of plague, because the infection is very easily communicated (μεταδίδωμι) through the air.”⁵³

Gregory of Nyssa was familiar with this theory of airborne disease but disagreed with it. He argued, to the contrary, that leprosy was not contagious. There were some in his audience who, he suggests, were avoiding lepers by saying, “these days it is important to avoid the risk of contagion (μετάδοσις).”⁵⁴ Gregory directly challenges this contingent, arguing that,

These words are made-up excuses . . . and they are not true. Certain illnesses, such as the plagues do have an external cause (ἐξωθεν αἰτίας) and can be traced to pestilence (ἐκδιαφθορᾶς) in the air or water, with suspected transmission from the afflicted to those who approach [them]. (Personally [he says], I do not believe it can possibly be passed on from the afflicted to those who are healthy, but that common factors contribute and bring on the illness similarly in everyone)—[but you say] that the sickness is to blame as it goes out from those who have been affected and into the rest. But it is only in the interior that the illness develops, invading the blood by putrid humors which infect it and the infection does not leave the sick person.⁵⁵

This discourse suggests that the concept of contagion was based in a medical understanding of disease in which issues of ritual purity, if discussed at all, would be inseparable from the material nature of body, soul, and society. For many early

⁵²Aretaeus 4 13 19: ET Moffat, 286

⁵³Ibid.; ET Moffat, 493

⁵⁴Greg. Nyss. *De pauperibus amandis* 2; *GNO* 9.1. 124: οὐκ ἀλλὰ μετὰδοσίν τινα καὶ κοινωνίαν τοῦ πάθους διευλαβεῖται.

⁵⁵Ibid.: λόγοι ταῦτα καὶ προφάσεις καὶ πλάσματα καὶ τὸ δ' ἀληθές οὐχ οὕτως ἔχει ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ τινα τῶν νοσημάτων οἷον αἱ λοιμώδεις ἐπιφοραὶ καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα τῆς ἐξωθεν αἰτίας ἠρτημένα, ὅταν ἐκ διαφθορᾶς ἀέρος ἢ ὕδατος γίνηται, ὑποπτα τοῖς πολλοῖς ἐστίν, ὡς ἐκ τῶν προεαλωκότων καὶ πρὸς τοὺς προσεγγίζοντας διαβαίνοντα, (οὐδὲ ἐκεῖ τοῦ πάθους, ὡς οἶμαι, τῷ ὑγιαίνοντι τὴν ἀρρωστίαν ἐκ διαδόσεως ἐμποιοῦντος, ἀλλὰ τῆς κοινῆς ἐπιφορᾶς τὴν ὁμοίότητα τοῦ ἀρρωστήματος ἐπαγούσης) ἔσχεν αἰτίαν ἢ νόσος ὡς ἐκ τῶν προεαλωκότων καὶ εἰς τοὺς λοιποὺς διαβαίνουσα ἐνταῦθα δὲ ἐνδοθεν συνισταμένης τῆς τοῦ τοιοῦτου πάθους κατασκευῆς καὶ τινα τοῦ αἵματος ἐκ τῆς παρεγχύσεως τῶν φθοροποιῶν χυμῶν διαφθορὰν ὑπομένουστος ἐν τῷ κάμνοντι τὸ πάθος περιορίζεται. The parentheses are part of the Greek text.

Christians, ritual purity and health connoted orthodoxy, while pollution and disease were related to heresy. Gregory of Nyssa refers to eye infections when he writes about the Arian beliefs: "If I were to relate all these things, would I not be like those who contract eye disease from frequent contact with those already infected, and myself also seem to be afflicted with the disease of passion for the unimportant?"⁵⁶ Contagion was a common metaphor in arguments over so-called heresies, but these allusions suggest that Gregory of Nyssa also understood literal contagion as something his audience linked to at least two other specific physical diseases: eye diseases and plague. Nyssen's concern with causation, both as it relates to human transmission and as it relates to the Christian's power over cosmic forces (discussed further below), reflects the dominant concerns of the philosopher rather than the typical voice of the physician in his day.

Gregory of Nazianzus argues against contagion in a manner very similar to Gregory of Nyssa, although Nazianzen is not quite so optimistic on the question of contagion:

Come close to them: you will not be harmed, you will not contract (μεταλαμβάνω) their affliction: even though the timid believe this, misled by foolish talk. [Look at] physicians, and the example of those who take care of these sick, of whom not one has fallen into danger through visiting them. But *even should this action be not without danger* (κινδυνεύω), *or the well-founded suspicion of it*, . . . rise above the love of the flesh (φιλοσάρκων). Do not despise your brother . . . [fleeing] as from something terrible, something fearful, to be shunned and disowned. He is your own member (σόν ἔστι μέλος), though this calamity has deformed him.⁵⁷

The cautionary note here suggests that Gregory of Nazianzus *may* have believed that leprosy *might* be contagious. Nonetheless, he appeals to the same images in order to argue that it is probably not and that it does not matter, even if it is. Like Nyssen, Nazianzen exhorts his audience to enter into physical contact with the sick to fulfill the moral mandate of a *phylanthropia* that, in turn, may open one to receive spiritual healing.

The symbolic image of contagion here is consistently rooted in a medical perception of the physical body. Greek and Roman "pagans" alienated incurable lepers with the same vehemence found in the Torah, but the Greeks focus this alienation

⁵⁶Greg. Nyss *Chr. Eunom* 1.4.28, ET Stuart G. Hall. *El 'Contra Eunomium I' en la produccion literaria de Gregorio de Nisa, VI coloquio internacional sobre Gregorio de Nisa* (ed. Lucas F. Mateo-Seco and Juan L. Bastero. Pamplona. Ediciones Universidad de Navarra. S. A., 1988) 39. Basil speaks of this in his Homily on Psalm 1 (PG 29 225B) ἄλλος γὰρ ἄλλω τῆς νόσου μεταδόντες συνοσσοῦσιν ἀλλήλοις

⁵⁷Greg. Naz. *Or.* 14.27; ET Toal, 57; my emphasis. The Greek μεταλαμβάνω has generally the same positive meaning as μεταδίδωμι

on civic identity more than on ritual purity. There are hints that the Greeks occasionally interpreted leprosy-like symptoms as divine punishment,⁵⁸ but many diseases were interpreted as signs of divine disfavor. There is no evidence that lepers were universally banned from all Greek temple precincts, and they even may have sought out Greek temples in their search for healing.⁵⁹ Both Greek and Roman concepts of the *polis* understood civic life as inextricably dependent on divine favor, purity, and ritual balance. Disease was usually treated with ritual therapeutics in addition to whatever medical care the patient could afford, and medical care was commonly understood in sacred terms. Thus, although “contagion” is a medical metaphor that easily lent itself to religious meaning, these Greek medical writers and Christian bishops regarded individual lepers as victims of physical and social misfortune, never (in these texts) as objects of divine disfavor. Nor are they regarded here as ritually impure.

While the lepers in these texts are not “impure,” the image of leprosy is commonly used as an allegorical synonym for impurity. Methodius works from this image in his dialogue, *Sistelius: On Leprosy*.⁶⁰ Despite the literal nature of Gregory of Nyssa’s and Gregory of Nazianzus’s references to lepers, their texts also demonstrate a constant interplay of reality and metaphor in these allusions. There is a rhetorical tendency to talk around the actual subject—perhaps finding it as provocative a sermon topic as cancer and AIDS have been in twentieth-century theological discussion. The disease was repulsive, but the metaphor, at least, was safe, giving the speaker a sense of power over the uncontrollable terror. In *Oratio* 14 Gregory of Nazianzus uses this rhetorical allusion rather than directly identifying the disease as λέπρα: “If there is in you no wound, no bruise, no swelling sores, no leprosy of the soul (λέπρα τῆς ψυχῆς), no touch or a symptom as of ‘something shining’ which however small is still to be submitted to the law, you still stand in need of the healing hand of Christ.”⁶¹ In this extended sermon, with its vehement advocacy of physical aid and Christian compassion for diseased exiles, this is the only instance in which Gregory of Nazianzus actually uses the word λέπρα.

Gregory of Nyssa reflects a similar reluctance to speak directly and openly of this ailment as “leprosy” and its victims as “lepers,” although he, like Nazianzen, consistently identifies them with Lazarus, the biblical beggar in Luke 16. Nyssen’s

⁵⁸For example, Aesch. *Choeph.* 279–82

⁵⁹Hector Avalos, personal communication

⁶⁰The text survives only in an abbreviated Slavic translation and some Greek fragments. For discussion see L. G. Patterson, *Methodius of Olympus: Divine Sovereignty, Human Freedom, and Life in Christ* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997) 235–39. Patterson notes that Origen’s allegorical approach clearly influenced this treatise, which consists of a discussion of the prescriptions in Lev 13 and interprets leprosy as sin in the church

⁶¹Greg. Naz. *Or.* 14.37, PG 35.908.

first oration describes to his audience the debauchery of their very own parties, while “myriads of Lazaruses are sitting by the gate, dragging themselves along painfully, some deprived of eyes, the others with amputated feet, some quite literally creep, mutilated in all their members.”⁶²

For Gregory of Nazianzus, leprosy was the “sacred disease” (ἡ ἱερὰ νόσος),⁶³ an appellation ancient medical writers reserved for epilepsy. Nazianzen says, “But above all we must be moved to pity for those who are being destroyed by the sacred disease, whose flesh is consumed even to the bones and marrow.”⁶⁴ In context this Cappadocian reference clearly does not imply epilepsy, and the use of the phrase “sacred disease” seems unprecedented for leprosy. These authors use it instead to evoke the biblical image of the sacred beggar, Lazarus. Nazianzen orders his audience to honor those who have “the sickness that is holy, holding in reverence those who have gained the victory through suffering, lest there be some Job hidden among the sick who, though he may scrape his festering body with a potsherd,⁶⁵ is more to be revered than those who are sound in body; Lazarus gained salvation and found peace in Abraham’s bosom.”⁶⁶ Later Gregory of Nazianzus calls it “this public infirmity” (ἡ κοινὴ ἀσθένεια),⁶⁷ “the most grievous, the most dreaded of all, and, by many, the most readily invoked as a malediction.”⁶⁸ While Gregory of Nyssa also calls leprosy the “sacred disease,”⁶⁹ it is for him a horrible sacrality; these creatures are victims of a grievous or “terrible (χαλεπή) disease.”⁷⁰

Emphasis on the leper’s sanctity and power of mediation with God, as it is related to his suffering, may further contribute to this interpretation of leprosy as “holy.” Leprosy was a disease “apart” and Lazarus its quintessential representative, although the biblical text never states that Lazarus was a leper. Nevertheless, John Chrysostom emphatically asserts the sanctity of this diseased beggar in his sermons on Lazarus and the rich man, delivered in Antioch in 388 or 389: “He lay there, sitting like a gold coin beside the road, but even more valuable. . . . He wiped

⁶²Greg. Nyss. *De pauperibus amandis* 1; *GNO* 9 1,106. προσεδρεύουσι τῷ πυλῶνι μυρίοι Λάζαροι, οἱ μὲν ἠλκωμένοι χαλεπῶς, ἄλλοι τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν ἐκκεκομμένοι, ἕτεροι λώβην στένοντες τῶν ποδῶν, τινὲς δὲ αὐτῶν ἔρποντες παντελῶς καὶ πάντων τῶν μελῶν στέρησιν ὑπομεινάντες

⁶³Greg. Naz. *Or.* 14 6.

⁶⁴*Ibid*; *PG* 35.865; *ET Toal*, 45–46.

⁶⁵Job 2.8. Several centuries later Sophronius of Jerusalem similarly identifies elephantiasis as ἡ ἱερὰ νόσος in his *Miracula Cyri et Joannis* 15 (*PG* 87 3469C)

⁶⁶Greg. Naz. *Or.* 14.34, *PG* 35 904.

⁶⁷*Ibid.* 14 8; *PG* 35.868

⁶⁸*Ibid.* 14.9, *PG* 35.865

⁶⁹Greg. Nyss. *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*, *ET* and note see *NPNF*² 5.462.

⁷⁰Greg. Nyss. *De pauperibus amandis* 2; *GNO* 9.1,113

his soul clean, he put on endurance, he demonstrated patience. His body was lying down but his mind was running forward, his will had grown wings."⁷¹

While neither Gregory explicitly states that the diseased *body* of the leper was "holy" in itself, apart from the biblical referent of Lazarus, their repeated identification of this body as a material manifestation of deity and cosmic image achieves the same purpose. The sick bodies of the destitute poor are imbued with a very particular importance that is somehow rooted precisely in the state of their poverty and is related to their identification with Christ. From its identification as the prototype of all religious pollution, physical leprosy is transformed into sanctity, and its identification with pollution is reserved for "spiritual" leprosy, the diseased soul. The physical leper becomes the essential means by which the spiritual leper may find a mediator to wipe away his own polluting spots of greed and passion. Here the leper, once set apart for his pollution, becomes a symbol of all that is now "set apart" for God. For both Gregories, as with Chrysostom, the ill beggars lying on the ground are holy coins that "bear the image of our Savior."⁷² These "myriads of Lazaruses" are "the beloved of Christ [who embody] the essential commandment."⁷³ To regard these people who share our own nature as unrelated strangers is to tear apart "the unity of the spirit."⁷⁴ They ought to be touched physically, without repulsion, since "the Lord of the angels . . . put on this stinking and unclean flesh, with the soul thus enclosed, in order to effect a total cure of your ills by his touch."⁷⁵ The audience is thus invited to seek this contagion of holiness, which is available only by direct contact with those who possess it, and in this way those who assist these destitute find healing for their own diseases of wealth and greed. The boundary between body and metaphor was as elusive as that between matter and spirit. Physical images were readily translated into spiritual realities by both medical and religious writers.

Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil's Social Relief Programs: Text and Context

Any consideration of the *περὶ φιλοπτωχίας* sermons raises two particular questions. First, what is the nature of the evident relationship between Gregory of Nyssa's and Gregory of Nazianzus's texts? Second, what, if any, relationship do they have

⁷¹Chrys. "Sixth Sermon on Lazarus and the Rich Man/On the Earthquake," in *Saint John Chrysostom: On Wealth and Poverty* (trans Catherine P Roth: Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, 1984) 108.

⁷²Greg Nyss *De pauperibus amandis* 1, *GNO* 9 1, 98; literally "They have put on the face of our Saviour" (τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν τὸ πρόσωπον ἐνεδύσαντο).

⁷³*Ibid.*, *GNO* 9 1, 106· οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ φίλοι, τῶν ἐντολῶν τὸ κεφάλαιον

⁷⁴*Ibid.* 2; *GNO* 9.1, 114· μὴ ἀντιβαίνειν τῇ διατάξει τοῦ Πνεύματος

⁷⁵*Ibid.*; *GNO* 9.1, 115. αὐτὸς ὁ τῶν ἀγγέλων Κύριος, ὁ τῆς οὐρανίας μακαριότητος βασιλεὺς, διὰ σὲ ἄνθρωπος γέγονε καὶ τὸ δυσῶδες τοῦτο καὶ ῥυπαρὸν σαρκίον μετὰ τῆς ἐνδεδεμένης ἐν αὐτῷ ψυχῆς ἑαυτῷ περιέθηκεν, ἵνα τὰ σὰ πάθη διὰ τῆς ἰδίας ἐπαφῆς ἐξιάσῃται

with Basil's well-known relief programs? How do they fit into the time line of Basil's construction of a *πρωχοτροφεῖον*, or hospice, which was used to help both those who were starving and those who were sick with what Gregory of Nazianzus called "leprosy"?

In discussing the possible answers to these questions, I must emphasize that the dominant focus of the present paper is on Gregory of Nyssa. Of the two Gregories it is Gregory of Nyssa who discusses contagion most emphatically, Gregory of Nyssa who argues for the benefits of reverse contagion in terms of cosmic and philosophical images, and Gregory of Nyssa whose view of transcendence and mutability is especially remarkable in the context of his construction of leprosy. His arguments can best be understood when considered in the broader context of Basil's actions and Gregory of Nazianzus's *Oratio* 14, but that which follows the discussion of these two questions applies them primarily to Gregory of Nyssa. What, then, of Gregory of Nazianzus?

Gregory of Nyssa probably wrote his sermons with Nazianzen's *Oratio* 14 in mind or even in hand. Yet, the occasion and, therefore, the date of both sermons is unknown. The texts suggest only that Nazianzen preached during a festival and Nyssen during Lent. Scholars who try to relate *Oratio* 14 to Basil's philanthropic action argue either that Gregory preached it prior to the famine, as early as 365 when Gregory was at home in Nazianzus functioning as a presbyter in his father's church,⁷⁶ or after 372. Those who argue for the later date often suggest that *Oratio* 14 was actually delivered in the context of the completion of Basil's hospice, possibly on the site itself.⁷⁷

Jean Bernardi argues that *Oratio* 14 most logically fits at the beginning rather than the completion of the *Basileias*'s construction. As Gallay justly noted, however, when one compares *Oratio* 14 with *Or.* 43.63, it is remarkable that in *Oratio* 14, "not only does Gregory say not a word of this hospice, but he categorically affirms that one sees the lepers in the street without shelter."⁷⁸ The poor in this text are "spread out before our eyes; . . . we think only of the safety of our own bodies by flying from them. . . . We drive them away. . . . We give them no shelter, no food, no remedies. . . . Are these unfortunate people to remain out under the sky exposed? . . . To lie before our doors, weak and hungry? . . . This is the state of these poor people."⁷⁹

⁷⁶Donald F. Winslow, "Gregory of Nazianzus and Love for the Poor," *ATR* 47 (1965) 348–59, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), following Paul Gallay, *La vie de Saint Grégoire de Nazianze* (Lyon: E. Vitte, 1943).

⁷⁷The Benedictine opinions in Migne cite the later date as does Philip Haeuser in *Die Übersetzung der Reden ist entnommen aus Gregor von Nazianz, Reden* (München: Kosel, 1983) 33–68.

⁷⁸Gallay, *La vie de saint Grégoire de Nazianze*, 87, quoted in Jean Bernardi, *La prédication des pères cappadociens: Le prédicateur et son auditoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968) 104.

⁷⁹Greg Naz *Or.* 14 10–17, PG 35 869–77

Yet, certainly this was not the state of these poor people once the *Basileias* was built, at least not in Caesarea. In fact, in *Or.* 43.63 Nazianzen praises Basil precisely for removing these images from the public eye: the public beggar is, thanks to Basil, “no longer before our eyes.”⁸⁰ This statement may reflect different eyes, either as a function of time or of place; most likely *Oratio* 14 was delivered later at some distance away, where no similar institution existed and where Basil’s solution was not pertinent to Gregory’s immediate objectives. Bernard Coulie has argued, in fact, that it seems unlikely that Nazianzen’s homily functioned as part of a direct appeal for Basil’s project, since it does not mention Basil or any project at all.⁸¹ Coulie agrees with Bernardi on a date around 368 for *Oratio* 14, that is, after Basil conceived his idea for the *Basileias* but before the idea formed concretely enough to make an explicit appeal.

Bernardi suggests that Basil and Nazianzen’s concern for the plight of lepers began during the Annesi retreat. This desolate mountain region, where Basil and his friends and family began to practice the ascetic life, might well have harbored lepers living in desolate poverty. Basil spent periods of time at Annesi between 358 and 365. Construction of the *Basileias* began around 369 and was completed by 372. If this argument is correct, however, then *Oratio* 14 should probably also be dated before the famine of 368–369. Epidemic disease is a well-known consequence of famine. Leprosy is not, although skin diseases caused by vitamin deficiencies from starvation might have been mistaken for leprosy in antiquity.

The date of Gregory of Nyssa’s *περὶ φιλοπτωχίας* homilies is equally uncertain. He explicitly delivers them in church (probably during Lent); thus, they are usually dated after his ordination in late 371 or 372.⁸² Jean Daniélou argued for 382, since the opening reference to schoolmasters is one also found in Nyssen’s January 2 sermon of that year.⁸³ It seems to me, however, that Gregory—a “schoolmaster” already in the early 360s, long before he was a priest—might have used this analogy at any time. Nyssen identifies the destitute beggars who were flock-

⁸⁰Ibid. *Or.* 43.63.

⁸¹Bernard Coulie, *Les richesses dans l’œuvre de saint Grégoire de Nazianz. Étude littéraire et historique* (Publications de l’Institut Orientaliste de Louvain 32, Louvain Université Catholique de Louvain, 1985) 171.

⁸²This date is likely only if one assumes that he never preached in church during his years as a rhetor (365?–371) but took the pulpit for the very first time only after being ordained bishop of Nyssa, since the opening of the first oration places it quite securely within a “pulpit” setting rather than that of a rhetorical lecture delivered outside of a church context. I do not know how sure one can be that Gregory was never liturgically permitted to deliver a sermon—for example under Basil at Caesarea or under Gregory, father or son, at Nazianzus—prior to his ordination.

⁸³Jean Daniélou, “La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse.” *RevScRel* 29 (1955) 360–61.

ing into the city as being “for the most part victims of war (αἰχμαλώτων) but there is also no lack of strangers and exiles . . . in addition to these are other *ptochoi*, very ill and bedridden. Let everyone take care of his neighbors.”⁸⁴ Any attempt to date the sermons by the phrase “victims of war” depends on one’s interpretation; it may relate to the Goths who had taken children as hostages in Asia Minor around 377;⁸⁵ Nyssen mentions in 380 that they are still threatening the area around Pontus.⁸⁶

The *Basileias* would certainly have functioned at the time Gregory of Nyssa wrote these sermons, but he, too, fails to mention them. If he preached the sermons in the city of Nyssa, he may possibly allude to it when he says, “Let no one say that some place far away from our life is perfectly sufficient, sending them off to some frontier, supplying them with food. For, a plan of this sort exhibits neither mercy nor sympathy, but is designed, in the guise of good-will, to banish these people utterly from our life.”⁸⁷ The phrase ἐσχατιᾶς ἀποικισθεῖσι most likely refers to a general exile rather than a specific hospice site, but it is possible that Gregory is ironically referring to a tempting practice of bundling the local poor off to Basil’s hospice, nearly one hundred miles away. That which Gregory of Nazianzus praises in *Oratio* 43—that because of Basil’s institution the destitute are now out of sight—is precisely what Gregory of Nyssa condemns.

Certainly it is possible that each Gregory preached his sermon (or its prototype) as the result of this shared awareness of Basil’s social action. However, there is no real evidence in these sermons of either Basil, his hospital, or his feeding programs, although we know that Gregory of Nazianzus was quite familiar with Basil’s activities, because his *Oratio* 43 is our most detailed source for them. Yet, neither of the two Gregories’ texts on poverty contain any reference to a πτωχοτροφείου nor to any existing institutional relief program. The sermons appeal to individual participation in assisting the poor precisely because without it, each Gregory implies, the destitute will starve and die.

There is no question that, despite their silence concerning Basil, these texts took shape against a background in which there was an increasing focus on Christian responses to involuntary, non-ascetic poverty, and a rise in organizational philanthropy. These circumstances did not begin with Basil. Philip Rousseau

⁸⁴Greg. Nyss. *De pauperibus amandis* 1; *GNO* 9 1, 96–97: πλῆθος γὰρ αἰχμαλώτων πρὸς ταῖς θύραις ἐκάστου πρὸς τούτοις ἄλλοι πτωχοὶ πολλοὶ ἀσθενούντες καὶ κατακείμενοι ἐκάστος περιεργαζέσθω τοὺς γείτονας

⁸⁵Bernardi, *La prédication*, 276.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 275, citing *PG* 46 737A and 748B

⁸⁷Greg. Nyss. *De pauperibus amandis* 2; *GNO* 9 1, 119–20 μὴ γὰρ δὴ τοῦτο λεγέτω τις, ὡς ἰκανόν ἐστι πόρρω που τῆς ἡμετέρας ζωῆς ἐπὶ τινος ἐσχατιᾶς ἀποικισθεῖσι τὴν πτωφὴν χορηγεῖν· ἢ γὰρ τοιαύτη γνώμη οὐχὶ ἐλέου τινὰ καὶ συμπαθείας ἐπίδειξιν ἔχει, ἀλλὰ τις εὐπρόσωπός ἐστιν ἐπίνοια τοῦ παντελῶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τῆς ἡμετέρας ἐξορισθῆναι ζωῆς

has suggested that many of Basil's social actions were influenced by his often textually suppressed mentor, Eustathius.⁸⁸ Although Rousseau does not focus on the πτωχοτροφεῖον, this, too, was part of Eustathius's Christian outreach and may have influenced Basil's model. The presence of these other factors strongly suggests that a simplistic subordination of these texts to Basil's social action does not do justice to the broad range of details one finds in the περὶ φιλοπτωχίας sermons. Both Basil and the Gregories were busy constructing solutions within a broad context in which such solutions were part of ongoing Christian dialogue. There is no conflict between Basil's aims and the Gregories' texts. All three men were speaking out of, and seeking to effect, a heightened Christian awareness of public philanthropic possibilities.

There is a difference between the depth of focus with which each of the three men views and depicts the bodies of the poor. Gregory of Nyssa, especially, describes the diseased poor in a way that is far more theologically nuanced than one finds in Basil's strident efforts to join political and ecclesiastical *euergetism* (benefaction) and patronage.⁸⁹ In particular, Basil focuses on a corporate social problem in civic terms, to be "solved" by organizational response. This institutional or societal focus differs significantly from the emphasis, in both Gregories, on individual touch, and from the nuanced language that Gregory of Nyssa chose to use in constructing a new Christian meaning for the diseased social outcast. Gregory of Nazianzus states that Basil cared for lepers, but Basil's own (extant) homilies and letters fail to mention them entirely. Basil is primarily concerned with those still living within society, those who have been uprooted from their rightful patrimony but who still live (victimized) in the community, not as homeless exiles outside it. To understand the ironic Christian resocialization of the leper, one must turn to the Gregories and especially to Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of reverse contagion and redemptive mutability.

⚡ Reverse Contagion in Gregory of Nyssa

The Greek verb that Nyssen used for contagion, μεταδίδωμι, was commonly employed as a positive expression implying sharing or distribution. It is precisely this capacity for sharing that both Gregories describe as the leper's greatest *gift* to their audience. Gregory of Nyssa writes, "The hand is mutilated but it is not insensitive

⁸⁸Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 68–76.

⁸⁹For a limited study of Basil's method in addressing the problem of usury, see my chapter, "'You speculate on the misery of the poor': Usury as Civic Injustice in Basil of Caesarea's Second Homily on Psalm 14," in Keith Hopwood, ed., *Organized Crime in Antiquity* (London: Duckworth/Classical Press of Wales, 1999, forthcoming).

to help (συμαχία). The foot is gangrenous but always able to run to God. The eye is missing, but it discerns invisible goodness, nonetheless, to the enlightenment of the soul. . . . If we want to be received by them [the lepers] in the eternal dwellings, let us receive them now.”⁹⁰ On a material level, Gregory is recommending redemptive almsgiving, but it is an almsgiving that functions, like the therapeutic massage, by personal interaction with the sick body.

Although Gregory of Nyssa argues that leprosy is exclusively internal and not contagious, he deliberately uses the image of contagion to argue for spiritual healing based on a type of “reverse contagion.” That is, he suggests that goodness and salvation are also contagious. This contagion of holiness may be “caught” through direct contact with lepers, those channels of divine sanctity who are “always able to run to God.” The persons who assist them may receive healing of their own “diseases” of wealth and greed. In this way, the church needs contact with lepers in order to cure spiritual diseases. Yet, lepers also need contact with the healthy to relieve their own very physical suffering.

Gregory depicts this contagion as both limited and necessary. Just as healthy skin does not self-destruct over a pimple, he says, but rather “the healthy parts act together to resorb the place of infection,” so also, he exhorts, his audience must surround the sick and support their restoration. To support his argument that lepers cannot transmit their illness to those who are physically well, he gives what he considers to be incontrovertible proof: “Is there indeed anyone among the strong whose health deteriorates by association with the sick, even if they are in extremely close contact while providing medical care? No, this does not happen. Indeed, the opposite is more likely, I say: that illness cannot even be transmitted (μηδὲ . . . μεταβαίνειν) from the sick to those who are healthy.”⁹¹ Perhaps with his sister Macrina or even Basil’s medical hospice in mind, he says, “How often we see people who have devoted their lives to [care for] the sick from their youth to their old age, without their health being in the least affected. . . . Nothing happens to them. . . . In thus preparing for the kingdom of heaven, there is no [danger of] harm to the body of the one who serves.”⁹²

⁹⁰Greg. Nyss. *De pauperibus amandis* 2; *GNO* 9.1, 122–23· ἡ χεὶρ ἠκρωτηρίασται, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀσθενεὶ πρὸς συμαχίαν· ὁ ποὺς ἠκρεῖωται, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν οὐ καλύεται τρέχειν· ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς ἐξερρῦθαι, ἀλλὰ βλέπει διὰ τῆς ψυχῆς τὰ ἀγαθὰ τὰ ἀθέατα εἰ δεχθῆναι παρ’ αὐτῶν εἰς τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς, ὡν αὐτοῦ ἐν ταῖς ἡμετέραις καταδεξώμεθα

⁹¹*Ibid*; *GNO* 9.1, 124 μή τις ἀπὸ τῶν εὐεκτούντων τοῖς ἀρρωστοῦσι κοινωνία τῆς κρείττονος ἕξεως γίνεται, κὰν σφόδρα λιπαρῶς τῇ θεραπείᾳ προσμένωσιν; οὐκ ἔστι ταῦτα. οὕτως οὖν εἰκὸς καὶ τὸ ἔμπαλιν μηδὲ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀσθενούντων πρὸς τοὺς εὐεκτούντας μεταβαίνειν τὸ πάθος

⁹²*Ibid*; *GNO* 9.1, 124–25: πόσους γὰρ ἔστιν ἰδεῖν ἐκ νεότητος καὶ μέχρι γήρωσ ταῖς θεραπείαις τούτων ἀποσχολάζοντας καὶ οὐδὲν τι τῆς κατὰ φύσιν εὐεξίας τοῦ σώματος διὰ τῆς

The contagion of holiness necessarily works in two directions. Gregory of Nyssa exhorts his spiritually ill audience, “If we wish to heal the wounds by which our sins have afflicted us, heal today the ulcers which break down their flesh.”⁹³ As angels do not shrink from touching human flesh, he says, and as Christ took on “putrid” flesh, so the putrid flesh of the leper is in direct contact with the divine power, like Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom. Once there is no more weaving to be done on the corruptible and terrestrial body, Gregory asserts, this ooze, blood, pus, and bile of the πτωχοί will yield to the manifest interior beauty of the soul.⁹⁴

☞ The Leper’s Body: A Permeable Membrane in the Mutable Cosmos

While both Nyssen and Nazianzen make use of similar images of the suffering leper, Nyssen’s theological understanding of the created world lends itself especially to a discussion of contagion as an aspect of theological healing that is consonant with the medical understanding of disease as an environmental and cosmic imbalance within a universal whole. Nyssen’s depiction of the leper as a sacred physical representation of divinity and cosmos may be understood best within the broader Christian discussion at this time of physical mutability in the context of redemption. The rest of this study will explore this relationship. I suggest that Nyssen’s theology of the incarnation as rooted in a necessarily mutable body, particularly in the succinct argument found in his later treatise *Oratio catechetica magna*, or “Great Catechetical Oration,” helps to explain his positive affirmation of reverse contagion in the *περὶ φιλοπτωχίας* sermons. While a full exploration of his theology concerning mutability is well beyond the limits of the present study, the discussion below explores this issue as it relates particularly to the diseased social leper.

Gregory of Nyssa is sometimes called the “mystic” of the three Cappadocians. This “mysticism” relates to his philosophical understanding of deity, reality, and cosmos. Two dominant elements in his mystical theology include his argument that evil has no independent existence and his repeated attempts to explain the mysterious nature of knowing God. Because these so-called “mystical” tendencies seem to render a “New Age” tone to his cosmology, Gregory’s understanding of healing

τοιαύτης σπουδῆς ἀμαυρώσαντας; ὥστε βασιλείαν οὐρανῶν δι’ αὐτῆς ἐτοιμάζεσθαι, ζημία δὲ πρόσεστιν οὐδεμία τῷ σώματι τοῦ θεραπεύοντος

⁹³Ibid., *GNO* 9 1, 123: εἰ θεραπευθῆναι τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν τὰ τραύματα, τοῦτο καὶ αὐτοὶ τοῖς σώμασι τῶν κεκακωμένων ποιήσωμεν

⁹⁴Ibid.: *GNO* 9 1, 122 the text here is a paraphrase of Gregory’s comment, ἀλλ’ ὅταν ἐλευθερωθῇ τῆς πρὸς τὸ φθαρτὸν τε καὶ γήινου συμπλοκῆς ἢ ψυχῆ, τότε τῷ ἰδίῳ κάλλει ἐνωραίζεται

as a reciprocal and global consequence of positive contagion may sound modern. However, this unity of the image is not “pantheism” or “monism” in a modern sense but rather reflects Gregory’s understanding of the body and the universe as he reworked Platonic philosophy into his Christian view of incarnation.⁹⁵ In his sermons on the love of the poor, Nyssen defines deification in terms of the Platonic primordial image, especially as it relates to direct contact with the leper: “Mercy and good deeds are works God loves, they divinize those who practice them and impress them into the likeness of goodness, that they might become the image of the Primordial Being, incomposite [or pure], which surpasses all intelligence.”⁹⁶

Gregory of Nyssa’s view of incarnation and transcendence is built on his understanding of mutability, the capacity of a substance, usually human flesh, to undergo material change. This concept, especially as found in his *Great Catechetical Oration*, is particularly relevant to his revisionist view of contagion in spiritual healing. Here he explains the mystical mingling of deity with body, his view of the Christian incarnation as something special, and its effect, which he asserts depends entirely on Christ’s ability to undergo physical change:

For who is so simple-minded as not to believe, when he considers the universe, that the Divine Being is in every thing, clothing Himself with it, embracing it, and residing in it? If, then, all things are in Him and He in all things, why are they ashamed of the plan of our religion which teaches that God came to be in man, seeing that we believe that not even now is He outside man? For if the manner in which God is present in us is not the same as it was in that case,⁹⁷ yet it is none the less admitted that now, as then, He is equally in us. Now He is commingled with us, in that He maintains nature in existence. Then [i.e., in Christ] He mingled Himself with our nature in order that by this mingling with the Divine Being our nature might become

⁹⁵The classic study on the philosophical influences on Nyssen’s thought is Harold Fredrik Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (University of California Publications in Classical Philology 11.1, 1930, reprinted New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1971) 1–92. For a thorough but necessarily limited study of Nyssen’s view of the human person see Robin Darling Young, “Gregory of Nyssa’s Use of Theology and Science in Constructing Theological Anthropology,” *Pro Ecclesia* 2 (1993) 345–63. For a more extensive discussion of Gregory’s “abandonment” of Platonic dualism for a Christian view of body and spirit see Alden A. Mosshammer, “The Created and Uncreated in Gregory of Nyssa *Contra Eunomium* 1, 105–113,” in Mateo Seco and Bastero, eds., *El Contra Eunomium I en la Produccion Literaria*, 353–79.

⁹⁶Greg. Nyss. *De pauperibus amandis* 1, *GNO* 9.1, 103. ἐνσηψασα τέλος ἔχει τὸν ἀφεδρῶνα ἐλεος, δε καὶ εὐποία Θεῶ. τε εἰσι πράγματα φίλα καὶ, ὡπερ ἀν ἐνοικησῶσιν ἀνθρώπῳ, θεοῦσιν αὐτῶν καὶ πρὸς μίμησιν ἀπορροῦσι τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἵν ὑπαρξῆ εἰκῶν τῆς πρώτης καὶ ἀκρηάτου καὶ πάντα νοῦν ὑπερβαίνουσης οὐσίας.

⁹⁷That is, the case of Christ, here assuming the uniqueness of Christ’s incarnation.

divine, being delivered from death and set free from the tyranny of the adversary. For His return from death becomes to this race of mortals the beginning of the return to the immortal life.⁹⁸

For Nyssen, mutability is a means to redemption. Once the body's mutable elements are understood as distinct from evil, sin, and passion, divine incarnation is a morally acceptable possibility. To the constructed opponents in his treatise, those who could not tolerate the idea that the deity could have mingled with the polluting functions of conception, birth, physical change in growth, and death, Gregory retorts, "there is nothing disgraceful in what is free from moral evil."⁹⁹ That is, there is no vice inherent in the vulnerability nor liminality of creation.

Gregory argues this most directly in chapter 28, where he explicitly defends the positive value of the human body as it relates to the birth process, particularly that of Christ's incarnation. Within this argument Gregory treats the reproductive organs as part of God's design to overcome death. His argument for sexual function may also be applied to his view of the body as a whole:

The whole structure of the human body is of equal value in all its parts, and . . . nothing in it which contributes to the maintenance of life can be accused of being dishonorable or evil. For the whole equipment of the organism of the body has been designed with one end in view, and that end is to preserve humanity in existence. . . . What is there, then, unworthy of God in the contents of our religion, if God mingled himself with human life by those means which nature employs to fight against death?¹⁰⁰

Here Gregory argues that, while they might indeed be capable of evil uses, bodily functions perse cannot transmit the impurity or vice that would alienate them from deity. To his age, which instinctively found certain body functions "unspiritual," Gregory was emphatic that neither physical change nor contact with body products presented any moral barrier to the divine incarnation or to participation in it.

He builds this argument further in his chapter on the eucharist. Here the subject is not change associated with sexual functions but rather the mutability of digestion, an essential aspect not only for theology, but also for medicine as it treated the humoral imbalances with agents intended to effect physical change.

Gregory's discussion of eucharist as it is found in the *Oratio catechetica magna* is based in his position that body and soul, which are both wounded and in need of redemption, experience healing through different routes. Salvation is "ef-

⁹⁸Greg. Nyss *Oratio catechetica magna* 25. ET J. H. Srawley. *The Catechetical Orations of St. Gregory of Nyssa* (London: SPCK, 1917) 79–80.

⁹⁹Greg. Nyss. *Oratio catechetica magna* 9; ET Srawley, 53.

¹⁰⁰Ibid. 28, ET Srawley, 86–87.

fected in the soul by being blended with Him by faith. But the body comes into fellowship with its Savior and is blended with Him in a different way."¹⁰¹ The spiritual significance of food, that is, the eucharistic bread and wine, lay precisely in their relationship to the digestive process at its most literal level:¹⁰²

The constitution of our body has nothing that we can recognize of its own to maintain itself by, but continues by means of the force introduced into it, [that is] nourishment. . . . Man finds his chief sustenance in bread [and in] water often sweetened with wine. . . . By passing into me those elements become body and blood, . . . so in [Christ's] case too, the Body which was the receptacle of deity, receiving the nourishment of bread was, in some sense identical with it . . . seeing that the nourishment was changed into the nature of the Body.¹⁰³

In Gregory's system, the efficacy and power of the eucharist depended precisely on an element of mutability: the power of Christ's body to become bread, a power possible by the very basic physical function of digestion, helped somewhat here by Gregory's skill at rhetorical imagery. Because food maintains the constitution of the body and because bread is the chief food of the human body, so then bread may be viewed as potentially identical with body. For Gregory this is not simply a metaphor; it is the reality on which the salvation of the body absolutely depends. Mutability, the power of deity incarnate to take on the form of bread in order to enter the human body of its recipients, thus becomes a necessary agent of divine activity. The "contagion of holiness" depends on a particulate body.

In summary, physical changes, that is, alteration in heat and body fluids brought about by such things as sex, childbirth, lactation, vomiting, excesses of any kind, and even ordinary growth, were traditionally perceived as potential threats that might upset the balance of the embodied soul. Any disorder might lead to disease; death and putrefaction were the ultimate proofs of mutability. All three Cappadocians wrote extensively against the neo-Arian dialogue of the day, which regarded Christ's participation in this mutable flesh as evidence that he was dissimilar to the eternal Father. In the *Great Catechetical Oration*, Nyssen takes exceptional care to counter this neo-Arian view, especially in his discussion of the eucharist, by distinguishing between that which is mutable and that which is sinful. By arguing that participation in a dynamic of change need not imply participation in evil, Gregory of Nyssa defends the position that Christ could indeed experience

¹⁰¹Ibid 37, ET Srawley, 107

¹⁰²This discussion is reminiscent of Clement of Alexandria's description of the conversion of breast milk into blood and its theological implications in his *Paed* 1.6

¹⁰³Greg. Nyss *Oratio catechetica magna* 37, ET Srawley, 109–10 I am indebted to Robert J. Daly, S J., for first directing me to this text

physical change and still share equal divinity with the Father. Without this positive theological understanding of physical change, I suggest, Gregory would probably not have used the leper's diseased body quite so graphically in constructing a positive understanding of contagion, even as a mystical or spiritual metaphor. Theories regarding wounds and contagion would be meaningless in his sermons on the poor if they did not fundamentally assume the positive potential of incarnate change. This theory of mutability as essential to Christ's redemptive power readily lends itself to all other physical manifestations of the sacred realm. The leper's body becomes a healing agent in homeopathic spiritual therapy that is able to absorb the spiritual diseases of the rich who lay their hands on him to help and to transmit redemptive healing in return.

Conclusion

Leprosy in Graeco-Roman antiquity was understood as disease demanding social exile from normal family and civic life, but without the dominant dialectic of purity and pollution found in Israelite proscriptions. The diseases of leprosy were medically explained as humoral overproduction of black bile that began as a dark fire in the internal organs and burned the body to its ultimate destruction. The widespread fear of contagion, however this was understood, maintained the social alienation of this "suffering other." Although the medical treatment of leprosy sometimes included the administration of opposites (such as milk for its whiteness and bleeding to release the dark humors), most therapy appears to have been concerned predominantly with a homeopathic matching as a method for effecting cure.

The Cappadocians were keenly interested in medical theory, and their treatises against neo-Arianism focus on the relationship between the divine nature of Christ and his profoundly physical body. The way in which this dynamic might affect the Cappadocian understanding of the destitute poor has not been previously studied. In this paper I have examined it in relation to the leper and contagion in the *περὶ φιλοπρωχίας* sermons, and to Gregory of Nyssa's views in particular.

It is impossible to consider Nyssen's sermons without also considering Nazianzen's very similar depiction of leprosy and contagion, since it is likely that the younger Gregory (Nyssen) imitated his friend's text to some degree. Both Gregories argued for physical contact with the sick to effect spiritual healing. Nazianzen is less certain than Nyssen that the disease of leprosy is not contagious. He says less about the human body. His sermon addresses a wider range of social and religious objections to relieving poverty. In general, Gregory of Nazianzus points "through" the poor to the body of Christ and to the church, while Gregory of Nyssa regards all bodies in the context of cosmic harmony. Although these differences are not in any way contradictory in these texts, they influence the relative emphasis

each author places on touch and contagion, regardless of clearly similar social contexts. Unless Nazianzen's sermon is quite early, both authors wrote against the general background of Basil's Christian hospice care for the poor and sick. There is no evidence, however, that these sermons were a direct consequence of Basil's activities, nor that they were ever preached in his presence or in his philanthropic institution.

There is no conflict in these texts between ancient medicine and early Christian doctrine. Gregory of Nyssa's and Gregory of Nazianzus's advice, to make direct contact with the leper as a means of transmitting physical healing and of "catching" their holiness, speaks from their traditional understanding of homeopathic healing. Thus, the extended image of reverse contagion, although focused on spiritual ideals and a Christian appropriation of philanthropic patronage, is best understood against the medical and philosophical perceptions of Graeco-Roman late antiquity, as these perceptions relate to cosmic and internal causation and the risk of contagion.

Gregory of Nyssa's argument for the contagion of holiness from others' suffering, based on a human touch that ministers to the physical needs of the leper and gains spiritual blessing in return, proposes an act that effects Platonic and Christian deification. Unlike the Greek philosophers, however, Gregory centers his arguments in the sick body itself. He does this precisely on account of his positive view of creation and mutability as a necessary factor in Christ's incarnation. By taking the lepers' flesh in hand, those who minister to them participate in the divine immanence of creation that proceeds from the incarnate Son's essential sharing in both deity and cosmos. By enacting a positive, reverse contagion, the boundary between "self" and "other" does not disappear but becomes a permeable membrane. The rich can attain redemption only by participating in good works that literally get "under the skin" of the poor leper in the form of food, warmth, and healing ointments. The leper's sanctity, in turn, hangs on the divine harmony between an eternal God and the choice of that deity to assume incarnation and mutability. Gregory's sermon on leprosy weaves together scriptural, philosophical and physiological images of therapy to argue for the redemptive unity of both society and cosmos, and for a return to the divine primordial image, which begins with the healing touch.



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.