

3. “You Worship What You Do Not Know”

At the middle of the 4th century AD, the discussion on consubstantiality of the Son of God significantly changes because of two new figures: Aetius and Eunomius. They represented a new approach to the problem of Divine generation to such an extent that their contemporaries considered them as a whole new group of theologians, which were called Anomeans or Eunomians. It is worth mentioning here that, if the remarks of R.P.C. Hanson are correct, it is hard to say that in the first half of the 4th century, there was a movement or group that perceived themselves as Arians.²⁹⁸ This time we have a group of the heterodox that can be distinguished by the convictions they shared. However, there are two main issues that they had in common with Arius: they denied consubstantiality of the Son of God, and, what is more important for the subject matter of this work, the central issue of their theology was the problem of how can we know God.

This new theological approach was initiated by Aetius. He was claimed as the first one who attached himself to the Aristotelian philosophy and, as H.A. Wolfson notes, the fight as to the proper use of syllogism began.²⁹⁹ Aetius was also known as the author of the thesis that to know God as unbegotten means to know his οὐσία.³⁰⁰ Although we have the text of Aetius' main work – *Syntagmation*, this work is so schematic and difficult that it is impossible to comprehend the meaning of large parts of the text without references to Eunomius' *Apology*, where most of his thesis was repeated by his disciple.³⁰¹ It is, however, worth having a closer look at this text, as it contains interesting claims on the possibility to know God's essence.

298 Cf. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 123–128.

299 H.A. Wolfson, *Philosophical Implications of Arianism and Apollinarianism*, DOP, vol. 12 (1958), p. 9.

300 R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

301 L.R. Wickham shows the history of the text and its two preserved variants, along with the problems of interpretation of the treatise: *The Syntagmation of Aetius the Anomean*, JTS vol. XIX, Pt. 2, 1968, pp. 533–535.

3.1 “Ingeneracy” as a positive attribute and the essence of God

Although *Syntagmation* is often described as a work full of syllogisms and a kind of an Aristotelian turn in theology, Aristotelianism of Aetius is problematic. L.R. Wickham notes that if we try to see demonstrations which this work contains according to the standard definition of syllogism, none of the claims of Aetius is presented as a deduction from two premises. So we can call those demonstrations “syllogistic” only in a broader sense in which all deductive proofs are syllogistic.³⁰² Moreover, all presented points are not introduced in a fashion where an argument logically follows from the previous one; it resembles rather switching from one issue to another.³⁰³ Nevertheless, he wanted to set his work in a particular fashion, which is based on pure reasoning. It is significant that although Aetius wants the reader to be assured that his work is “based on the mind of the Holy Scripture,”³⁰⁴ he never quotes any passage from the Bible. Therefore, he shared a very optimistic view on the power of human mind, which alone, without the aid of faith, can demonstrate that the Son’s essence is different from the Father’s.

In *Syntagmation*, we find frequent claims on the transcendence of God the Father. He is “superior to any cause” (πάσης αιτίας υπάρχει),³⁰⁵ superior to origination, surpasses every nature, and, therefore, God cannot be even called self-caused. Simultaneously, we have a precise indication of the essence of God. The term “ingenerate” (ἀγεννήτος) plays the central role because it allows to know who God is and it alone properly names His

302 Cf. L.R. Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 534.

303 L.R. Wickham notes: “I am left with the impression that these are arguments bearing upon a particular theme, arguments which the author has devised and used over a number of years and which he has now strung together in a series.” *op. cit.*, p. 535. A.A. Radde-Gallwitz suggests that the work of Aetius was the response to Athanasius’ *De synodis*; therefore, he wanted to gather arguments which would reduce his opponent’s view of ingeneracy to absurdity. A. Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Cesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, Oxford 2009, p. 90.

304 *Synt. Introduction*, Wickham p. 545.

305 *Synt.* 2, p. 540; 3, p. 541 πάσης αιτίας κρείττων υπάρχει; 18, p. 542 ουσία κρείττων ἐστὶ γενέσεως; 30, p. 543 υπεράγει πάσης φύσεως.

essence.³⁰⁶ Aetius treats “ingeneracy” as the very name which is intrinsic to the substance and is revelatory of the essence, which cannot be ascribed to God on the basis of any human observation.³⁰⁷ He boldly and in an explicit way argues that it is not only the concept of a human mind:

“If ingeneracy does not represent the substance (ὑπόστασιν) of the Deity, but the incomparable name is of human imagining (ἐπλνοίας ἐστίν ἀνθρωπίνης τὸ ἀσύγκριτου ὄνομα), the Deity is grateful to those who thought the name up, since through the concept of ingeneracy he has a transcendence of name which he does not bear in essence.”³⁰⁸

The word “ingeneracy” is a privation, as it signifies the one who is not generated, but Aetius does understand this term as negative only in a certain aspect. He argues that if we apply a privation to God’s essence, it would mean that we apply some kind of non-being to it, and he clearly confirms that the terms which we use are intrinsically linked with the essences which we name. Therefore, he claims:

“If ingeneracy is revelatory of privation in respect of God, and ingeneracy were non-entity (μὴ ὄντος), what kind of reasoning would deprive the non-existent of a non-entity? If it signifies reality (ὄν), who would part God in his real being from himself?”³⁰⁹

It seems that Aetius argues that the term “ingeneracy” cannot be predicated of God only in the negative sense, because it would signify something which does not exist (or is non-being) in God. If “ingeneracy” is non-being, there is nothing “ingeneracy” can be applied to. On the other hand, if it designates something real, “ingeneracy” is an intrinsic property and cannot be separated from God – it is who He is. The only possible conclusion is, then, to admit that “ingeneracy” is not a negative property but rather a positive one, and it also cannot negate any positive property, since God cannot lack who He is.

306 *Synt.* 16, p. 542.

307 Cf. DelCogliano’s discussion on his understanding of this name in: M. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–31.

308 *Synt.* 12, pp. 541–542.

309 *Synt.* 19, p. 542. Εἰ στερήσεώς ἐστὶ δηλωτικόν ἐπὶ θεοῦ τὸ ἀγέννητον, μηδὲν δὲ εἶη τὸ ἀγέννητον, ποῖος λόγος ἂν ἀφαιρήσειε τοῦ μὴ ὄντος τὸ μηδέν; εἰ δὲ ὄν σημαίνει, τίς ἂν χωρίσειεν ὄντος θεόν, ὅπερ ἐστὶν αὐτὸν εἶναυτοῦ.

Those explanations confirm that “ingeneracy” is a positive predicate, but what exactly Aetius means by that claim? R. Mortley suggests that in order to understand that we must turn to 4th-century Neoplatonism. He finds similarity of fragment 16 not only to *Cratylus* (as Wickham suggests), but also to Dexippus, who comments on Aristotle’s *Categories*.³¹⁰ There is similarity between Aetius and Dexippus who discuss whether the negation of attributes can reveal substance.³¹¹ However, negation usually does not provide a good definition, because if one wants to define something in a negative way, he can enumerate what this thing is not practically indefinitely. But Dexippus notes that there are some cases when a negative definition can provide a good grasp of the essence, when one can be sure that there are only three options. He gives an example of “indifferent” which can be defined as something that is neither good nor bad.³¹² A. Radde-Gallwitz notes that Aristotle’s definition of the substance is also an example of this kind of a negative approach, but he also observes that it is very unlikely that Aetius knew Dexippus’ commentary, because the latter does not consider using such a definition in theology. Moreover, it seems that Aetius completely misunderstood Dexippus’ argument.³¹³ Therefore, this does not explain how to understand ingeneracy in a positive way, and we must investigate further.

Aetius continues his explanation in the next argument by trying to define what exactly can we name in God when we speak of Him in a negative way,

310 R. Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, t. II, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

311 *Dexippi in Aristotelis categorias commentarium*, p. 44, 16. ἵνα διὰ τῆς ἀποφάσεως αὐτῶν τὴν κυριωτάτην οὐσίαν δηλώσῃ. The version of the same problem is also commented by Simplicius, *cf.* A. Radde-Gallwitz, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

312 This is an example, which comes from Aristotle *Cat.* 12 a, 20–25. ἐπ’ ἐνίων μὲν οὖν ὀνόματα κεῖται τοῖς ἀνὰ μέσον, οἷον λευκοῦ καὶ μέλανος τὸ φαιὸν καὶ ὤγκρον· ἐπ’ ἐνίων δὲ ὀνόματι μὲν οὐκ εὐπορον τὸ ἀνὰ μέσον ἀποδοῦναι, τῇ δὲ ἑκατέρου τῶν ἄκρων ἀποφάσει τὸ ἀνὰ μέσον ὀρίζεται, οἷον τὸ οὔτε ἀγαθὸν οὔτε κακὸν καὶ οὔτε δίκαιον οὔτε ἄδικον. (Bodéus, p. 55) “In some cases there exist names for the intermediates, as with grey and yellow between white and black; in some, however, it is not easy to find a name for the intermediate, but it is by the negation of each of the extremes that the intermediate is marked off, as with the neither good nor bad and neither just nor unjust.” (tr. Barnes).

313 *Cf.* A.A. Radde-Gallwitz, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

and he does that by interrogating whether ingeneracy may be a condition/possession³¹⁴ (ἔξις) or privation (στέρησις):

“If privations are abstractions of conditions (στέρησις ἔξεων εἰσιν ἀφαίρεσις), ingeneracy in respect of God is either a privation of condition or a condition of privation. If it is a privation of condition, how should what is not present be counted as present to God? If ingeneracy is a condition, a generate essence must have existed first, in order that thus acquiring a condition of being, it may be named ‘ingenerate’. If the generate participated in the ingenerate essence, having undergone the loss of its condition it will have been deprived of generation. Its essence would then be generate and ingeneracy would be a condition.”³¹⁵

The key to understanding this fragment is the meaning of a condition (possession). L.R. Wickham notes that opponents unanimously see here the influence of Aristotle.³¹⁶ In *Categories*, when discussing quality, he described condition (ἔξις) and state (διάθεσις) as the first kind of quality. Those two differ because condition is something which can be easily changed while state is “being more stable and lasts longer,”³¹⁷ and, therefore, the definition is: “It is what are easily changed and quickly changing that we call conditions, e.g. hotness and chill and sickness and health and the like.”³¹⁸ Aetius assumes that ingeneracy is a kind of quality, but we can also see why he uses condition instead of state, which seems to be a more reasonable choice when speaking about God. He wants to put a stress on changeability of God’s essence, since in his eyes, the Orthodox position is nothing else than the application of a change in his essence and it is a condition which changes more easily, so ingeneracy would be a contingent property of God’s essence.

314 There is some confusion here because the term ἔξις has different translations. Wickham translates it as “a condition,” whereas in the fragments of *Categories* of Aristotle quoted below a contradiction between ἔξις and στέρησις is translated as possession and privation. In both cases, the meaning of the word seems to be the same, because it concerns the state of having a certain feature or lacking it.

315 *Synt.* 20, p. 542.

316 L.R. Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 561.

317 *Cat.* 8 b, 27–28. μὲν οὖν εἶδος ποιότητος ἔξις καὶ διάθεσις λεγέσθωσαν. διαφέρει δὲ ἔξις διαθέσεως τῷ μονιμώτερον καὶ πολυχρονιώτερον εἶναι· (Bodéüs, p. 39; tr. Barnes).

318 *Cat.* 8 b, 35–37. διαθέσεις δὲ λέγονται ἃ ἐστὶν εὐκίνητα καὶ ταχὺ μεταβάλλοντα, οἷον θερμότης καὶ κατάψυξις καὶ νόσος καὶ ὑγίεια καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τοιαῦτα· (Bodéüs, p. 40; tr. Barnes).

But the argument starts with a very important “if,” which suggests once again that what Aetius means is that condition be treated as abstract from the essence of God and that is exactly what privation means. He sees two possibilities here: first, ingeneracy could be privation of condition; (στέρησις ἕξωσ) second, it could be a condition of privation (ἕξις στερήσεως). By linking the concepts of privation and condition, Aetius wants to describe two kinds of movement – losing or gaining an attribute. God must either have lost a quality of generacy (positive condition), or must have acquired a negative condition of ingeneracy, which in this case is the absence of this quality. L.R. Wickham explains it with the example of being bald: “baldness is either the lost state of having one’s hair or the state of having lost one’s hair.”³¹⁹ In the first case (privation of condition), we return to the conclusion of the previous argument and God who has lost the condition of being generate, cannot be something He is not. In the second case (condition of privation) arguments are applied to the Father and the Son. If the Father has acquired the condition of ingeneracy, he must have had the condition of generacy first, and then privation of that condition can be acquired, which is absurd. In the case of the Son, if he participated in ingeneracy, he would have lost his condition of being generated and could no longer be called the Son. This is also absurd since the Son cannot have both the generated essence and the condition of ingeneracy.

To understand better these conclusions, we must turn once again to Aristotle’s *Categories*, where he considers classes of oppositions. He says that one thing can oppose another in four ways: as relatives (τὰ πρὸς τι), as contraries (τὰ ἐναντία), as privation and possession (ὡς στέρησις καὶ ἕξις), or as affirmation and negation (ὡς κατάφασις καὶ ἀπόφασις).³²⁰ We can see that Aetius clearly refers to the third kind of opposition between privation and possession (or condition). But why does he classify opposition of ingeneracy and generacy to be the third kind? It cannot be a relative opposition, because in this case, opposition does not mean that they are contrary to one another. Aristotle gives examples of the double and the half, and of

319 L.R. Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 562.

320 *Cat.* 11 b, 17–19 λέγεται δὲ ἕτερον ἑτέρῳ ἀντικεῖσθαι τετραχῶς, ἢ ὡς τὰ πρὸς τι, ἢ ὡς τὰ ἐναντία, ἢ ὡς στέρησις καὶ ἕξις, ἢ ὡς κατάφασις καὶ ἀπόφασις (Bodéüs, p. 53).

the knowledge and the knowable. In both cases, the definition of one thing is possible, thanks to the other; therefore, we say that the double is called what it is because it is the double of something (in this case – the half). Similarly, we say that knowledge is defined because it is the knowledge of something (knowable), and, vice versa, the object of knowledge is something that could be known.³²¹ It is obvious that ingeneracy is not what it is because it is ingeneracy of generacy, as the opposition in the sense of a relation depends on something that the two have in common.³²²

The second case must also be excluded because “things opposed as contraries, however, are never called just what they are, in relation to one another, though they are called contraries of one another.”³²³ Aristotle gives an example of good and bad, where good is not called good of the bad, and this example shows that contraries are not defined because of a third thing between them, as we will see below. Ingeneracy and generacy do not oppose each other in the fourth sense, because this is a contradiction which occurs in predication and, therefore, “for only with them is it necessary always for one to be true and the other one false.”³²⁴

The third kind of opposition may be applied to ingeneracy and generacy because they are the “qualities” of the essence of God, and in this kind, privation and possession (στέρησις καὶ ἕξις) also refer to a third thing. Aristotle gives an example of blindness and sight, which are oppositions in connection with the eye, and says “each of them is spoken of in connection with whatever the possession naturally occurs in.”³²⁵ He also explains that privation occurs when it is entirely absent from the thing which naturally

321 *Cat.* 11 b, 24–33 (Bodéüs, p. 53). Although it is not easy to differentiate between the first and the third kind of opposition, Aristotle extensively explains why the relative one is not the same with the opposition of privation and possession (*Cat.* 12 b, 17–13 a, 36; Bodéüs, pp. 57–60).

322 It is possible that Aetius excludes this possibility in argument 16.

323 *Cat.* 11 b, 33–35 τὰ δὲ ὡς τὰ ἐναντία, αὐτὰ μὲν ἄπερ ἐστὶν οὐδαμῶς πρὸς ἄλληλα λέγεται, ἐναντία μὲντοι ἀλλήλων λέγεται· (Bodéüs, p. 53; tr. Barnes).

324 *Cat.* 13 b, 3–4. ἐπὶ μόνων γὰρ τούτων ἀναγκαῖον αἰεὶ τὸ μὲν ἀληθὲς τὸ δὲ ψευδὸς αὐτῶν εἶναι (Bodéüs, p. 53; tr. Barnes).

325 *Cat.* 12 a, 26–29. Στέρησις δὲ καὶ ἕξις λέγεται μὲν περὶ ταυτὸν τι, οἷον ἡ ὄψις καὶ ἡ τυφλότης περὶ ὀφθαλμόν· καθόλου δὲ εἰπεῖν, ἐν ᾧ πέφυκεν ἡ ἕξις γίγνεσθαι, περὶ τοῦτο λέγεται ἐκάτερον αὐτῶν (Bodéüs, p. 55; tr. Barnes).

has it, and at the time when it is naturally for that thing to have it.³²⁶ Aristotle's explanations reveal to us why "ingeneracy" is not a negative predicate. When we call someone blind, he is really blind, and although blindness is in him as the lack of sight, it cannot be treated only negatively, because his blindness is not something non-existent in him. We can define blindness because of the absence of sight which is natural, so for this definition to be true, we need a third thing which is the nature of the eye. Similarly, although we define "ingeneracy" as an opposition to "generacy," it cannot be treated as a purely negative attribute. What Aetius seems to mean here is that God is not "ingenerate" because of the lack of "generacy," since He was prior to it. Moreover, "ingeneracy" is natural to God's essence and not something which God can lose.

All those arguments show also that ingeneracy cannot be treated as privation. Since generacy is posterior to ingeneracy, it is rather the opposite – it is generacy which is the privation and loss of condition. Therefore, ingeneracy cannot be understood as merely a kind of quality, but is rather a positive attribute of God, which expresses His essence.³²⁷ Aetius confirms his conclusion in section 24, where he puts a stress on treating ingeneracy as God's essence: "If ingeneracy is privation, privation loss of condition," this would mean that we admit a change in unchangeable God,³²⁸ and in the next section, he also states that ingeneracy cannot be privation in the sense that it is something which does not belong to God.³²⁹ Therefore, it seems that in the end, Aetius is rather inclined to give us a negative answer to the question why "ingeneracy" cannot be understood as a negative predicate,

326 *Ibid.* 12 a, 27–29 (Bodéüs, p. 55).

327 It is clearly stated in the next argument (21, p. 542–543) that treating ingeneracy as quality would mean confusion of the essence and its incidents: "If ingeneracy and generacy are each conditions, the essences are prior to the conditions, and yet the conditions, though secondary to the essences, are none the less qualitatively superior." Ending his argument, Aetius says: "Since the ingenerate nature imports nothing into itself, how can it be a condition and not an essence?"

328 *Synt.* 24, p. 543. Εἰ τὸ ἀγέννητων στέρησις, ἢ δὲ στέρησις ἕξσεως ἀποβολὴ ἐστίν...

329 *Synt.* 25, p. 543. "If ingeneracy shows a privation which does not belong to God, on what grounds do we say he is ingenerate and cannot be generate?" Εἰ τὸ ἀγέννητον δηλοῖ στέρησιν ἣν προσοῦσαν τῷ θεῷ, πῶς αὐτὸν ἀγέννητον εἶναι λέγομεν, γεννητὸν δὲ μὴ εἶναι.

because all possible cases when we treat it in a negative way can be reduced to unacceptable conclusions.

This also seems to be the way how Eunomius understood “ingeneracy.” In his *Liber Apologeticus*, he states that:

“He is not such [unbegotten] by the way of privation; for if privatives are privatives with respect to the inherent properties of something, then they are secondary to their positives. But birth has never been an inherent property of God. He was not first begotten and then deprived of that quality so as to become unbegotten.”³³⁰

Therefore, what Eunomius points out is that in the case of God, “ingeneracy” cannot be a negative condition, because being generated is not an antecedent property of God of which He could be deprived. But what exactly do we know when we admit that ingeneracy is the essence of God? Aetius seems to give an answer to this question in argument 29:

“If the ingenerate substance is indicated along with the essence of the offspring as its cause, since it is precisely the same in respect of all cause it is incomparable essence per se. It does not indicate its unapproachability externally but is per se incomparable and unapproachable since it is also ingenerate.”³³¹

Because of ingeneracy of the Father, he is also incomparable and unapproachable (ἀσύγκριτος καὶ ἀπρόσιτος). The central problem of this passage is the meaning of the term ἀπρόσιτος. Some scholars see here a reference to the first Letter to Timothy (6: 16), where God is “dwelling in light unapproachable,” and, therefore, the term means “incomprehensible” or “unknown.” However, in his commentary, L.R. Wickham notes that such interpretation opposes the claims that were later developed by Eunomius, namely that we can know the essence of God.³³² It is also inconsistent with earlier claims of Aetius himself who so strongly defended the assertion that ingeneracy is the essence of God. It is very hard to argue that we exactly know who the Father is and at the same time claim that he is

330 LA 8, 7–10: ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδὲ κατὰ στέρησιν· εἴ γε τῶν κατὰ φύσιν αἰ στέρησεις εἰσὶ στέρησεις, καὶ ἕξων δεύτεραι. οὔτε δὲ κατὰ φύσιν ἦν τις τῷ θεῷ γένεσις, οὔτε προτέραν ἔχων ταύτην εἶτα στέρηθεις γένομεν ἀγέννητος (Vaggione, p. 42–43).

331 *Synt.* 29, p. 543. Εἰ τῆ τοῦ γεννήματος οὐσία συνεμφαίνεται ὡς αἰτία ἢ ἀγέννητος ὑπόστασις, κατὰ πάσης αἰτίας τὸ ἀπαράλλακτον ἔχουσα, αὐτὸ οὐσία ἐστὶν ἀσύγκριτος, οὐκ ἔζωθεν συνεμφαίνουσα τὸ ἀπρόσιτον, αὐτὸ δὲ ὑπάρχουσα ἀσύγκριτος καὶ ἀπρόσιτος, ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἀγέννητος.

332 Cf. Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 565.

incomprehensible. Therefore, L.R. Wickham's interpretation seems to be sound, when he explains: "ἀπρόσιτος I think, then, means here, 'incomparable/utterly transcendent', and, so far as the knowledge of God is concerned, Aetius and Eunomius held, I believe, (a) that it is false to say that the essence of God is unknown – for this would imply that God is irrational, (b) that God's essence is known as transcendent and unique, (c) that there is no knowledge of God by way of mystical communion with his essence."

Therefore, the knowledge of the essence of the Father does not exactly mean that we know who he is, but rather we know that he is essentially transcendent and unapproachable. Although Aetius claimed that the term "ingeneracy" indicated the essence, the term itself means for us only His absolute transcendence. Such interpretation is also consistent with the next argument, where he puts a stress on the total transcendence of God by saying that He: "surpasses every nature" and that "ingeneracy is not revelatory of essence."³³³

It seems, then, that Aetius attempted to complete the impossible task to reconcile the transcendence of God with the possibility of the knowledge of God's essence. It must be noted that if to know God does not mean to really understand his essence, the term "ingeneracy" ultimately means that we understand His essence as utterly transcendent. But can we say that by such statement we really understand what God is? It seems that we can only accept the name of "ingeneracy" which was revealed to us, and, therefore, all syllogisms in *Syntagmation* can be treated rather as showing the consequences of rejecting this name, which, as Aetius wants to demonstrate, always leads to absurd conclusions.³³⁴

If Aetius really thought that we understood the essence this way, it seems very unconvincing, because in fact "ingeneracy" does not tell us anything new about what God is since it seems to be only a conception of His transcendence. But it is evident that the question of what does it mean to know God becomes the central problem of this phase of the polemic.

333 *Synt.* 30, p. 543. Εἰ ὑπεράγει πόσης φύσεως ὁ παντοκράτωρ, διὰ τὸ ἀγέννητον ὑπεράγει, ὅπερ ἐστὶν αἴτιον τοῖς γεννητοῖς διαμονῆς. εἰ δὲ μὴ ἔστιν οὐσία δηλωηκὸν τὸ ἀγέννητον, πόθεν ἂν ἢ τῶν γεννητῶν φύσις ἕξει τὸ διασῶζεσθαι.

334 Cf. DelCogliano, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

3.2 Worship and knowledge – a puzzling question

In *Syntagmation*, we have observed a specific way of presenting arguments. Throughout the work, we can identify attempts to perform something similar to the Stoic procedure of reduction of non-simple arguments to the series of undemonstrated arguments, which need no proof because they are self-evident. In section 20, we find one of the arguments categorized as undemonstrated: “not first therefore not the second.”³³⁵ Such a way of presenting arguments, almost as they would be answers to the questions which were asked to the author, is very characteristic of the Anomean style.³³⁶ This reflects the missionary manner which was used in attempts to convince Christians that the Anomean doctrine was right. We can observe it also in the question which will be analysed in this fragment of our analysis.

In one of his letters, Basil provides his explanation to Amphilocheus of Iconium, a bishop who apparently struggled with the Anomean, or rather (since the letter itself was written relatively late) the Eunomian missionary activity and wanted to know how to deal with their puzzling questions.³³⁷ The supporters of Eunomius asked their Orthodox opponents: “Do you worship what you know or what you do not know?”³³⁸ There are only two possible answers to such a question, but the goal of the whole argumentation is to reduce these two answers to one. The obvious reply is that “We know what we adore,” and if such an answer is given, another question immediately follows: “What is the substance of what is adored?” Admitting ignorance of the substance causes the claim: “Then you adore what you do not know.”³³⁹ If the opponent’s answer at the beginning is that he does not

335 I think that similarity can be found despite the fact that we do not have the full set of Stoic rules preserved, cf. B. Mates, *Stoic logic*, Berkeley 1961, pp. 77–82.

336 Cf. L.R. Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 536.

337 Amphilocheus was Basil’s relative who had worked as a lawyer and had no experience in theological issues before he became the bishop of Iconium, cf. Kopecek, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

338 *Ep.* 234, 1, 1. Ὁ οἶδας σέβεις, ἢ ὁ ἀγνοεῖς (Courtonne, p. 41; LCL 243, p. 371).

339 *Ep.* 234, 1, 1–6. Ἐὰν ἀποκρινώμεθα ὅτι ὁ οἶδαμεν τοῦτο προσκυνούμεν, ταχεῖα παρ’ αὐτῶν ἢ ἀπάντησις· τί ἡ οὐσία τοῦ προσκυνουμένου; Ἐὰν δὲ ἀγνοεῖν ὁμολογήσωμεν τὴν οὐσίαν, πάλιν ἡμῖν περιτρέψαντες λέγουσιν ὅτι οὐκοῦν ὁ οὐκ οἶδατε προσκυνεῖτε (LCL 243, p. 371).

know what he adores, there is no need to ask any further questions. Therefore, the whole argumentation leads to the admission of ignorance of those who do not know God's essence. This tricky question is called captious by Basil,³⁴⁰ since it both forces the opponent to answer and to admit that he is completely ignorant of God who he worships. A. Radde-Gallwitz notes that it is similar to Meno's paradox, but here "enquire after" is replaced with "worship."³⁴¹ Therefore, if you know who you worship, there is no need for any inquiry, and if you do not know, how can you obtain any knowledge of who to worship, since you do not know.³⁴² So the goal of the question would be to show the absurdity of the claims of the Orthodox. But I think there is more to it than that. Another goal of the question can be seen in the context of the Biblical passages to which it refers.

Despite of all claims that are present in Christian literature from the time of the 2nd century that Christians have the true knowledge of God, this question bring to mind at least two very important passages from the Holy Scriptures. In the dialogue between Jesus and a Samaritan woman, the Saviour says: "You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews."³⁴³ In the second fragment, when speaking at the Areopagus, St Paul says that the Greeks have built an altar and worshiped "an unknown God," while this God is

340 *Ep.* 234, 1, 10 (Courtonne, p. 42, LCL 243, p. 373).

341 *Cf.* A. Radde-Gallwitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 123–124.

342 *Cf. Meno* 80 D-E. "M.: And how will you search for something, Socrates, when you don't know what it is at all? I mean, which of the things you don't know will you take in advance and search for, when you don't know what it is? Or even if you come right up against it, how will you know that it's the unknown thing you're looking for?"

S.: I see what you're getting at, Meno. Do you realize what a controversy you're conjuring up? The claim is that it's impossible for a man to search either for what he knows or for what he doesn't know: he wouldn't be searching for what he knows, since he knows it and that makes the search unnecessary, and he can't search for what he doesn't know either, since he doesn't even know what it is he's going to search for" (tr. R. Waterfield, p. 113).

343 J 4: 22. ὑμεῖς προσκυνεῖτε ὃ οὐκ οἴδατε, ἡμεῖς προσκυνοῦμεν ὃ οἴδαμεν, ὅτι ἡ σωτηρία ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐστίν· (tr. RSVCE). As we will see below, Gregory of Nyssa makes his argument against this question by referring to this passage of the Scripture (CE III, 1, 105–110; GNO II, 39–41).

the one, whom the Christians adore. Therefore, he says: “For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What, therefore, you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”³⁴⁴ Therefore, the goal of the Eunomian paradox would be rather to show that the Orthodox are like the Samaritans or the Greeks who worship an unknown God, whereas those are true Christians who know the object of their adoration. This accusation would have been especially painful in relation to the fragment of the Acts, because of all arguments so strongly confirmed by the Apologists that the Christians are those who really know the truth about God.

But the paradox has one assumption which will be exposed and undermined by the opponents. The Eunomians assume that to know God means to know his essence. If the Orthodox admitted that they know God’s essence, they would immediately argue that it is “ingeneracy,” and this sets the problem of the generation of the Son in the convenient perspective of admitting that His substance must be different from that of the Father. Therefore, the question of what it means to know God becomes once again one of the key issues in demonstrating inferiority of the Son.

3.2.1 The distinction between “that is” and “what is”

Basil’s answer is based on undermining the claim that to know God means to know His essence, since “knowing has many meanings.”³⁴⁵ He enumerates many attributes of God that we know: “the greatness of God, and His power, and His wisdom, and His goodness, and His providence whereby He cares for us, and the justice of His judgment.”³⁴⁶ But the knowledge of the attributes does not allow to know substance, and the conception (έννοία) of God which we have is the combination of our knowledge of attributes

344 Acts 17: 23. διερχόμενος γάρ και ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν εὔρον και βωμὸν ἐν ᾧ ἐπεγεγράπτο, ἀγνώστω θεῷ. ὃ οὖν ἀγνοοῦντες εὐσεβεῖτε, τοῦτο ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν (tr. RSVCE).

345 *Ep.* 234, 1, 5–6 (Courtonne, p. 42; LCL 243, p. 371).

346 *Ep.* 234, 1, 6–9 Καὶ γὰρ τὴν μεγαλειότητα τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰδέναι λέγομεν και τὴν δύναμιν και τὴν σοφίαν και τὴν ἀγαθότητα και τὴν πρόνοιαν ἣ ἐπιμελεῖται ἡμῶν και τὸ δίκαιον αὐτοῦ τῆς κρίσεως, οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν οὐσίαν (Courtonne, p. 42.; LCL 243, p. 373).

(ἀπηριθμησάμεθα). In the following passage, Basil refutes the argument that, since God is simple, all attributes are of his essence. He calls such a statement a sophism, which involves “countless absurdities”³⁴⁷ and asks whether all those attributes are the name of one substance: “And are His awfulness and His benevolence equivalent to each other. His justice and His creative power. His foreknowledge and His requiting, His magnificence and His providence?”³⁴⁸ Since the substance of God is one but names are different and even contrary to each other, they cannot be the names from which we can gain the knowledge of the essence. Basil says more precisely what are all those attributes – they are activities of God:

“But if they say substance is something else, let them not mislead us by citing its simplicity. For they themselves have confessed that substance is one thing and each of what was enumerated was another. ‘Nay, the activities are varied and the substance is simple.’ But we say that from His activities we know our God, but His substance itself we do not profess to approach. For His activities descend to us, but His substance remains inaccessible.”³⁴⁹

At the end of Letter 234, he adds that: “...from the activities is the knowledge, and from the knowledge is the worship,”³⁵⁰ so admitting that one knows the activities is sufficient to confirm that one has the knowledge of who he worships, and this seems to be the core of Basil’s answer. By making a distinction between substance and activities (ἐνέργεια), he tells us that we can know only what the works of God are, because we can see the effects of his activities in the sensual world. Activities cannot give us the knowledge of the essence, but only of the existence of God. This distinction between substance and activity seems to be very important, especially in the context of Eunomius’ theological methodology, which he exposes in his

347 *Ep.* 234, 1, 14 σοφισμὰ ἐστὶ μυρίας τὰς ἀτοπίας ἔχον. (LCL 243, p. 373; Courtonne, p. 42).

348 *Ep.* 234, 1, 16–19 Καὶ ἰσοδυναμεῖ ἀλλήλοις τὸ φοβερὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ φιλόνηρον καὶ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ δημιουργικόν, τὸ προγνωστικόν καὶ τὸ ἀνταποδοτικόν, τὸ μεγαλεῖον καὶ τὸ προνοητικόν (Courtonne, p. 42; LCL 243, p. 373).

349 *Ep.* 234, 1, 27–31 Ἄλλ’ αἱ μὲν ἐνέργεια ποικίλαι, ἡ δὲ οὐσία ἀπλή. Ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐκ μὲν τῶν ἐνεργειῶν γνωρίζειν λέγομεν τὸν Θεὸν ἡμῶν, τῇ δὲ οὐσίᾳ αὐτῇ προσεγγίζειν οὐχ ὑπισχνούμεθα. Αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐνέργεια αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς καταβαίνουσιν, ἡ δὲ οὐσία αὐτοῦ μένει ἀπρόσιτος (Courtonne, p. 42; LCL 243, p. 373).

350 *Ep.* 234, 3, 12–13. Οὐκοῦν ἀπὸ μὲν τῶν ἐνεργειῶν ἡ γνῶσις, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς γνώσεως ἡ προσκύνησις (Courtonne, p. 43; LCL 243, p. 377).

Liber apologetics, but it will be discussed fully in the next chapter of this book. Here, I would like to focus on Basil's approach to the knowledge of the existence of God and its consequences.

Basil repeats three times that we can know that God exists, but two of those texts present a problem in the context of knowing the essence:³⁵¹

“But I do know that He exists, but what His substance is I consider beyond understanding.” (Ἐγὼ δὲ ὅτι μὲν ἔστιν οἶδα, τί δὲ ἡ οὐσία ὑπὲρ διάνοιαν τίθεμαι.)³⁵²

“Knowledge of His divine substance, then, is the perception of His incomprehensibility; and that is to be worshipped which is comprehended, not as to what its substance is, but as to that its substance exists.” (Εἰδησις ἄρα τῆς θείας οὐσίας ἢ αἴσθησις αὐτοῦ τῆς ἀκαταληψίας, καὶ σεπτὸν οὐ τὸ καταληφθὲν τίς ἡ οὐσία, ἀλλ’ ὅτι ἔστιν ἡ οὐσία.)³⁵³

In those passages, Basil makes a distinction between ὅτι ἔστιν οὐσία – that substance exists, and τι/τίς οὐσία – what substance is. Looking for the source of this distinction, we turn to Aristotle's *Posterior analytics*, where at the beginning of the second book, he enumerates the objects of inquiry to characterize the order of demonstration, which passes from the knowledge of the fact to the knowledge of the essence. Those objects are the fact (τὸ ὄν), the reason why (τὸ διότι), if it is (εἰ ἔστι), and what it is (τί ἔστιν).³⁵⁴ There is a lot of uncertainty in the understanding of this passage,³⁵⁵ but it is clear that Aristotle wants to explain the mode of investigation, which leads from the fact or the recognition that something exists to the essence of things. Throughout *Posterior Analytics*, he maintains that the perception of the fact ought to precede the answer to the question “what it is.” This distinction also corresponds to the distinction between perception and thought, and the knowledge of the fact and the knowledge of the reason why.³⁵⁶ But the

351 The third one (2, 10–12) will be commented below.

352 *Ep.* 234, 2, 8–9 (Courtonne, p. 43; LCL 243, p. 375).

353 *Ep.* 234, 2, 12–14 (Courtonne, p. 43; LCL 243, p. 375).

354 *Anal. Post.* II, 1, 89 b, 23–25. Τὰ ζητούμενά ἐστιν ἴσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν ὅσα περ ἐπιστάμεθα. ζητοῦμεν δὲ τέτταρα, τὸ ὄν, τὸ διότι, εἰ ἔστι, τί ἔστιν. (tr. Barnes).

355 The most difficult question is the distinction between τὸ ὄν and εἰ ἔστι since both concern the existence of the object. See J. Barnes commentary in: Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, Oxford 2002, pp. 203–204.

356 Cf. O. Harari, *Knowledge and Demonstration. Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*, Springer 2004, p. 130.

perception of the fact is not equated with experience, it is rather a perceptual understanding which differs from experience as having universal validity, since it grasps typical features of particular instances. In the passages where Aristotle explains this kind of perception, he uses the term αἴσθησις as an apprehension of the universal.³⁵⁷ This, however, is not sufficient to have the knowledge of the reason why, that is the understanding of the essence. O. Harari underlines that perceptual understanding “is not considered full-fledged knowledge since perceptual understanding does not capture the essence of the object, according to its conceptual characterizations.”³⁵⁸ The conceptual understanding, on the contrary, is the full apprehension of an object which really exists, because it is the explanation of its essence.

Aristotle’s explanation of the demonstrative procedure is very similar to Basil’s claims about the knowledge of the possibility of knowing God. The two terms of Basil’s explanation (ὅτι ἔστιν οὐσία – that substance exists and τι/τις οὐσία – what substance is) correspond to the first and the fourth term from *Posterior Analytics* (the fact – τὸ ὅτι and what it is – τί ἐστίν). If he, indeed, evokes the demonstrative procedure presented by Aristotle, his explanation means that we cannot execute this demonstration in the case of God. We can only confirm that God is, but we can never pass to what He is. What is interesting, the perception of the existence of God can be made only on the basis of God’s activities, which “descend to us.” In *Posterior Analytics*, the first phase of the procedure can be understood as admittance of the fact which occurs on the basis of certain properties of the investigated thing, just like the eclipse which is the attribute of the moon.³⁵⁹ It is possible that we have a similar mode of ὅτι ἔστιν in Basil’s explanation.

There is yet another thing which can be understood better in the context of Aristotle’s text. This is the expression of Basil’s³⁶⁰ that we can have the ἡ αἴσθησις αὐτοῦ τῆς ἀκαταληψίας (the perception of His incomprehensibility).

357 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 131.

358 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

359 See the commentary of W.D. Ross in: *Aristotle’s Prior and Posterior Analytics*, Oxford 1957, p. 610. In the 5th century, Aristotle’s commentary was ascribed to Philoponus (the authorship is currently questioned) and the first part of the demonstrative procedure is understood this way, cf. 337, 18–32 (Philoponus, *On Aristotle Posterior Analytics 2*; tr. O. Goldin, Bloomsbury 2014, p. 19).

360 *Ep.* 234, 2, 12–13 (Courtonne, p. 43; LCL 243, p. 375).

Is it possible that Basil says that incomprehensibility can be the object of sensual perception? As we have seen above, in the context of the presented demonstrative procedure, Aristotle uses the term αἴσθησις as perceptual understanding, which has universal validity. If we understand Basil's expression this way, we can understand the perception of incomprehensibility as a kind of the universal grasp of the characteristic feature of God. The use of this term also escapes the suggestion that incomprehensibility can be the object of conceptual understanding, which is the grasp of essence. Therefore, if Basil indeed meant to use this term in Aristotle's sense, he was very precise in saying that we can grasp incomprehensibility in a universal manner, but it is a kind of perception, not comprehension. In other words, we can see with some certainty that comprehension of God is impossible.

3.2.2 Faith and understanding

Another problem of Basil's answer to Amphilocheus is the question of how to understand faith and its relation to understanding. Having admitted that one can know that God exists, but His essence is beyond understanding, he asks:

“How then am I saved? Through faith. And it is faith enough to know that God is, not what He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”³⁶¹

Basil uses here the same distinction between “that is” (ὅτι ἐστίν) and “what is” (τί ἐστι) in the context of the knowledge sufficient to have faith. He refers to Hebrews 11:6, where the belief in the existence of God is presented as needed to approach God and receive the reward.³⁶² Basil returns to the problem of faith and after quoting the Gospel (9:28), he says:

“Thus worship follows faith, and faith is strengthened by power. But if you say that he who believes also understands, from what he believes, from this also he understands; or even the reverse, from what he understands, from this also he

361 *Ep.* 234, 2, 10–12. Πῶς οὖν σώζομαι; Διὰ τῆς πίστεως. Πίστις δὲ αὐτάρκης εἰδέναι ὅτι ἐστὶν ὁ Θεός, οὐχὶ τί ἐστι, καὶ τοῖς ἐκζητοῦσιν αὐτὸν μισθαποδότῃ γίνεται (Courtonne, p. 43; LCL 243, p. 375).

362 This is actually a paraphrase of the original text, and it also resembles other fragments of the Holy Scripture, *cf.* A. Radde-Gallwitz, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

believes. But we understand God from His power. Therefore we believe in Him whom we understand, and we worship Him in whom we believe.”³⁶³

The interpretation of Hebrews 11:6 has led to a conclusion that worship follows faith, but why in the next phrase does Basil contrast it with the statement that it is the understanding that follows faith, and why it is put in the manner of a discussion, since it starts with “if you say”? This actually is but another paraphrase of the Biblical text of Isaiah 7:9, which in the Septuagint version claims: *μη πιστεύσητε, οὐδὲ μη συνιῆτε* (if you believe not, neither will you understand).³⁶⁴ Therefore, Basil evokes here another fragment of the Holy Scripture, which seems to contradict the one that has been quoted previously. It is evident that this fragment supports the Eunomian position that the knowledge of the essence is necessary since understanding is the outcome of faith. Basil tries somehow to combine worship with understanding in the last sentence of this passage, but since such explanation is not sufficient, he continues the topic in the next letter by asking what is first: knowledge or faith.³⁶⁵ Although it could seem confusing, the answer is clear:

“Generally, in the sciences, faith goes before knowledge, but in our own teaching, even if someone says that knowledge must exist before faith, we do not disagree - knowledge, however, commensurate with human comprehension.”³⁶⁶

In the sciences (*ἐπὶ τῶν μαθημάτων*), belief must go before knowledge, because at the beginning of the process of gaining knowledge one must accept

363 *Ep.* 234, 3, 15–21. Οὕτως ἡ μὲν προσκύνησις τῇ πίστει ἀκολουθεῖ, ἡ δὲ πίστις ἀπὸ δυνάμεως βεβαιοῦται. Εἰ δὲ λέγεις τὸν πιστευόντα καὶ γινώσκειν, ἀφ’ ὧν πιστεύει ἀπὸ τούτων καὶ γινώσκει· ἢ καὶ ἀνάπαλιν ἀφ’ ὧν γινώσκει ἀπὸ τούτων καὶ πιστεύει. Γινώσκομεν δὲ ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως τὸν Θεόν. Ὡστε πιστεύομεν μὲν τῷ γνωσθέντι, προσκυνοῦμεν δὲ τῷ πιστευθέντι (Courtonne, pp. 43–44; LCL 243, p. 377).

364 Verse is translated this way only in *Septuagint*. In *Vulgate*, it has a different meaning: *nisi credideritis, non permanebitis* (if you believe not, you will not stand firm at all).

365 Courtonne notes that the letters to Amphilochus 233–236 had been probably a single memorandum which was later divided according to the questions and answers (Courtonne, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 39).

366 *Ep.* 235, 1, 12–14 Ἡμεῖς δὲ λέγομεν ὅτι καθόλου μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν μαθημάτων πίστις γνώσεως προηγείται· ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ καθ’ ἡμᾶς λόγου, κἂν λέγῃ τις προκατάρχειν τὴν γνῶσιν τῆς πίστεως, οὐ διαφερόμεθα (γνῶσιν μέντοι τὴν τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ καταλήγει σύμμετρον) (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 44; LCL 243, pp. 377–379).

the truth which he acquired, he must be convinced that it is true. Basil does not speak here about faith in the sense of believing in the truth about God which comes from the Scripture. He rather describes the general mode of acquiring knowledge which is present in all investigations. So this is rather a belief, than faith. To understand, for example, the Pythagorean Theorem, one must have heard about it and accept the formula as true. He must be convinced that it is true what he has heard to start the process of demonstration which leads to understanding. The difference is that at the beginning one accepts it as true because of the authority of someone else, and in the end, when one has understood the theorem, one accepts the truth by the authority of one's own reason. We can see that Basil presents here the process of demonstration similar to the above-presented passage from "that is" to "what is," from the partial or imperfect admittance of the truth to the perfect grasp of the essence of the thing, which can be shown by demonstration. Such description of the process of learning goes deep in the ancient tradition. We can find its traces in the famous allegory of the cave from Plato's *Republic*. The first step on the way of going out of the cave, the moment of philosophical conversion, is turning away from the shadows to the perception of the sensual things itself. This is the moment "when one was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his neck around, walk, and look up toward the light..."³⁶⁷ Turning towards true sensual objects is described as turning from εικασία to πίστις, and belief is necessary to start upon the road which finally leads to the true knowledge of the ideas (νόησις) – the objects in sunlight outside of the cave.

Plato's famous allegory was a lesson which was developed by its readers and interpreters, but we also have the testimony that it was known and well understood by the Church Fathers. Probably the best example is Augustine, who frequently referred to the fragment of Isaiah 7:9.³⁶⁸ It can be clearly seen in the fragment of *De quantitate animae*, where Augustine explains

367 *Resp.* 514 A-516 C (tr. C.D.C. Reeve, Cambridge 2004, p. 207).

368 In case of St Augustine, the faith is also very often treated as religious one, while he frequently uses *credere* in meaning of natural belief necessary to obtain *intelligere* – understanding. Cf. T. Stępień, *Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis – Belief as a Form of Natural Cognition in Writings of St Augustine's*, Studia Pelplińskie vol. XLIX (2016), pp. 287–300.

to Evodius how can we obtain the knowledge in geometry. He makes a distinction between trusting the word of another and trusting our own reason. For some persons, it suffices to accept someone else's word because it saves time and effort. But the long road of reading and learning, which goes through many sophisms and "swamp or errors," finally leads to the situation when one has the right and certain reason, free from falsehood and confirmed in truth.³⁶⁹ The difficult road to the true knowledge is very much similar here to the painful process of going out of the cave from the *Republic*. This also resembles what Basil means by referring to grammar:

"For in the sciences one must first take it on faith that the letter spoken is alpha, and later, having learned the characters and their pronunciations, grasp also the exact notion (κατανόησιν) of the force of such letter."³⁷⁰

369 Augustinus, *De quantitate animae* I, 7, 12. "To trust the word of another is one thing; to trust our own reason is a different thing (*Aliud est enim cum auctoritati credimus, aliud cum rationi*); to take something on authority is a great timesaver and involves no toil. If this way has any attraction for you, you may read in the extensive writings of great and good men what they thought should be said about these subjects as a safe and easy guide for the unlearned; and these men aimed at securing the confidence of persons whose minds, being either too slow or too occupied, could find no other safe road to truth. Such persons, whose number is very great, if they wish to grasp the truth by reason, are easily taken in by sophisms that land them in the swamp of error from which they never or only with difficulty succeed in emerging and extricating themselves. For these, then, it is a decided advantage to trust a most reliable authority (*excellētissimae auctoritati credere*) and to shape their conduct according to it. If you think that such a way is safer, I shall not only offer no resistance, but shall thoroughly approve. But, if you cannot bridle your eager conviction of coming to the truth by reason (*persuasisti ratione pervenire ad veritatem*), you must be prepared for long, hard, and circuitous riding, pursuing the path where reason beckons – that reason alone which is worthy of the name, that is, right reason (*vera ratio*). Not only is it right, but it is also sure (*certa*) and free from every semblance of falsehood, if man can ever attain to that state where no false argument or specious pretext can make him betray the truth" (Trape, vol. III/2, pp. 31–32; tr. J.J. MacMahon, pp. 71–72).

370 *Ep.* 235, 1, 5–9. 'Ἐπὶ μὲν γὰρ τῶν μαθημάτων πιστεῦσαι δεῖ πρῶτον ὅτι ἄλφα λέγεται καὶ, μαθόντα τοὺς χαρακτῆρας καὶ τὴν ἐκφώνησιν, ὕστερον λαβεῖν καὶ τὴν ἀκριβῆ κατανόησιν τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ στοιχείου (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 44; LCL 243, p. 379).

For Basil, just like for Augustine, this is the description of the process of learning, but this procedure taken from sciences (μαθημάτων) is different from the way in which we acquire the knowledge of God, where knowledge also could precede faith. Referring to the Romans 1:20, he says that first thing which we have is the notion of the existence of God (ἡ ἔννοια ἢ περὶ τοῦ ὅτι ἐστὶ) which we can have from his works. Those are invisible things (τὰ ἀόρατα), which are manifested in the creation of the world. Since we know that God is Creator, we also accept him as our Lord, which leads to worship. Therefore, at the end of the passage, he gives the order of these acts:

1. Knowledge of the existence of God.
2. Faith follows that knowledge (accepting that He is our Lord).
3. Worship follows faith.³⁷¹

It is worth reminding what Basil said in the previous fragment: that knowledge can be situated before faith in this process, but it must be “commensurate with human comprehension” (ἀνθρωπίνῃ καταλήψει σύμμετρον). This measure of comprehension expands only to the limit of knowing that God does exist; what is above, it lies beyond human intellect.

After the full description of the ways in which we can obtain the knowledge of God, Basil comes back to the meaning of the word “knowledge” which has many significations (πολύσημόν ἐστι). The main objection is that Eunomians thought up the paradox which relies on understanding knowledge only in one universal (καθόλου) way.³⁷² But a thing may be known in different aspects with respect to (κατὰ): number, size, power, manner of subsistence, time of generation, and substance.³⁷³ Basil also shows that such

371 *Ep.* 235, 1, 5–9. Ἐν δὲ τῇ περὶ Θεοῦ πίστει ἡγεῖται μὲν ἡ ἔννοια ἢ περὶ τοῦ ὅτι ἐστὶ Θεός, ταύτην δὲ ἐκ τῶν δημιουργημάτων συναγομεν. Σοφὸν γὰρ καὶ δυνατὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ πάντα αὐτοῦ τὰ ἀόρατα ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου κτίσεως νοοῦντες ἐπιγινώσκομεν. Οὕτω δὴ καὶ Δεσπότην ἑαυτῶν αὐτὸν κατα δεχόμεθα. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ παντὸς μὲν τοῦ κόσμου δημιουργὸς ὁ Θεός, μέρος δὲ κόσμου ἡμεῖς, καὶ ἡμῶν ἄρα δημιουργὸς ὁ Θεός. Ταύτη τῇ γνώσει ἢ πίστις ἀκολουθεῖ καὶ τοιαύτη πίστει ἢ προσκύνησις (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 44; LCL 243, p. 379).

372 *Ep.* 235, 2, 1–5 (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 45; LCL 243, p. 379).

373 *Ep.* 235, 2, 5–9. τὸ δὲ κατὰ μέγεθος, τὸ δὲ κατὰ δύναμιν, τὸ δὲ κατὰ τὸν τρόπον τῆς ὑπάρξεως, τὸ δὲ κατὰ τὸν χρόνον τῆς γεννήσεως, τὸ δὲ κατ’ οὐσίαν (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 45; LCL 243, p. 379).

various meanings of the term “knowledge” are used in the Holy Scripture, but Eunomians “pushing all those things aside, reduce knowledge to one significance, the contemplation of the very substance of God.”³⁷⁴ The examples of two paradoxes of knowing the sand, and knowing Timothy, show that such a distinction of the various aspects of knowing is present in our cognition of sensual objects, and one may claim that one both knows and is ignorant of a thing in different aspects. Therefore, the final answer given by Basil is that we must know what can be known about God, but we must not go further claiming that we know what cannot be known:

“But our position is that we confess that we know what is knowable about God, and yet to “know” anything, on the other hand that escapes our comprehension is impossible.”³⁷⁵

3.3 You are like the Samaritans...

Since the letters commented above were probably a single letter in the form of a memorandum (ὑπομνηστικόν), which was circulated among the Orthodox, we can assume that Gregory of Nyssa knew its content. But in the third book of *Contra Eunomium*, which he wrote after Basil’s death, he felt that it was necessary to comment on the same paradox of worshiping the unknown. Perhaps, Eunomians were still active at that time, or perhaps he thought that some additions must be made to Basil’s position. After a long comment on the passage from Proverbs 8,22, which was the Biblical basis for Eunomius’ argument concerning the created nature of the Son,³⁷⁶ he discusses the misunderstanding of being only-begotten and offspring by his opponent.³⁷⁷ Then, Gregory begins a long passage on incomprehensibility of God, which is a side path of his demonstration, since coming back to the discussion of the meaning of the term “offspring,” he says: “The argument,

374 *Ep.* 235, 3, 23–25. Οἱ δὲ πάντα ταῦτα παρωσάμενοι ἐπὶ ἓν σημαινόμενον τὴν γνῶσιν ἔλκουσι, τὴν θεωρίαν αὐτῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ τῆς οὐσίας (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 46; LCL 243, pp. 383–385).

375 *Ep.* 235, 2, 13–15. Ἀλλ’ ἡμεῖς εἰδέναι μὲν ὁμολογοῦμεν τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἰδέναι δὲ τι πάλιν ὃ ἐκφεύγει ἡμῶν τὴν κατάληψιν (Courtonne, vol. 3, p. 45; LCL 243, p. 381).

376 CE III, 1, 4–65 (GNO II, 4–27).

377 CE III, 1, 66–102 (GNO II, 27–38).

however, has gone beyond what was intended, by following the continual sequence of conclusions.”³⁷⁸

In this fragment, Gregory unwinds an extensive argument with much more radical claims on incomprehensibility of God than we have observed in the answer given by Basil. He starts with the statement that there is no interpretation (ἐρμηνείαν), outline (ὕπογραφήν), or explanation (ἐξήγησιν) of the essence of God, and he can only affirm that “it is not possible to grasp what is in its infinite nature (ἀόριστον φύσιν) in any concept (ἐπινοία).”³⁷⁹ Referring to Psalm (144/145:3,5), he says that since the things about God are endless, His essence is even more infinite and, therefore, it cannot be limited in any way.³⁸⁰ By means of nouns and verbs, we grasp the meaning of an object, and it is a kind of an enclosure and limitation. Therefore, there is no name that can grasp the incomprehensible (ἀπερίληπτον) and no word to announce the inexpressible (ἀνεκφώνητον). Naming is impossible when we speak of an object that is infinite by nature and, therefore, “Divinity is greater and higher than names can signify.”³⁸¹ Infinity and lack of any limitation is crucial here because it is the core of Gregory’s counterarguments in the next passages.

These claims on the incomprehensibility and inexpressibility of the essence of God are an introduction to presenting an objection to Eunomians, which ridicules the ignorance of the Orthodox by saying: “*You worship you know not what*, if we do not know the essence of what we worship.”³⁸² In

378 CE III, 1, 111. Ἄλλὰ γὰρ ἐπὶ πλέον παρηγέχθη τῶν προκειμένων ὁ λόγος, τοῖς αἰεὶ κατὰ τὸ ἀκόλουθον ἐφευρισκομένοις ἐπόμενος (GNO II, 41, 20–23; tr. Hall, p. 64).

379 CE III, 1, 103. ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι τὸ ἀόριστον κατὰ τὴν φύσιν ἐπινοία τινὶ ῥημάτων διαληφθῆναι (GNO II, 38, 19–21; tr. Hall, p. 63).

380 CE III, 1, 104. εἰ δὲ τὰ περὶ αὐτὸν ἀπεράτωτα, πολὺ μᾶλλον αὐτὸς ἐκεῖνος κατ’ οὐσίαν ὃ τι ποτὲ καὶ ἔστιν οὐδενὶ ὄρω κατ’ οὐδὲν μέρος διαλαμβάνεται (GNO II, 38, 24–26).

381 CE III, 1, 105. κρεῖττόν ἐστι καὶ ὑψηλότερον τῆς ὀνομαστικῆς σημασίας τὸ θεῖον (GNO II, 39, 4–5; tr. S.G. Hall, p. 63).

382 CE III, 1, 105. Ὑμεῖς προσκυνεῖτε ὃ οὐκ οἴδατε, εἰ τὴν οὐσίαν τοῦ προσκυνουμένου οὐκ οἴδαμεν (GNO II, 39, 13–14; tr. Hall, p. 63). In his translation, Hall constantly refers to οὐσία as “being,” or in this case “essential being,” but since the whole argument concerns the knowledge of the essence, I changed “being” to “substance” in my quotations.

this case, the accusation is not put forth in the form of a question but rather in the form of a statement, which is the conclusion of the paradox, and it confirms that its goal was to reduce two possible answers to the claim that the Orthodox do not know what they worship. It is also noticeable that in this passage, Gregory does not quote Eunomius, because this paradox does not appear in *Liber apologeticus*, and it is unlikely that it was present in the lost fragments of *Apologia apologiae*.

In his answer, Gregory first argues that since the Orthodox know what can be known of God, they do know what they worship. He evokes the fragment of Romans 11:33 saying that according to Paul not only the judgments of God are impossible to trace, but also the paths of knowledge are inaccessible. He explains:

“It was this, we suppose, the Apostle intended to indicate when he said that the ways which lead to the incomprehensible are ‘past finding out’, meaning by this expression that this knowledge is inaccessible to human thinking, and that none has yet set his mind upon such an intellectual journey, or indicated any trace or sign of an approach to apprehending the incomprehensible.”³⁸³

The only lesson that could be learned from Paul’s words is that the essence of God is beyond any human concept and knowledge. This fragment could be read as a comment on Basil’s words that the only knowledge that we can have of God is His incomprehensibility, and for Gregory, the knowledge of incomprehensibility is sufficient to claim that “We know what we worship”:

“For this reason we affirm in our own selves the ridiculed doctrine, confessing ourselves not up to the knowledge which exceeds knowledge, and we say that we truly worship what we know.”³⁸⁴

383 CE III, 1, 107. τοῦτο γὰρ ἠγοῦμεθα τὸν ἀπόστολον σημάσαι βουλόμενον ἀνεξιχνιάστους εἰπεῖν τὰς ὁδοὺς αἱ πρὸς τὸ ἀκατάληπτον φέρουσι, δεικνύντα διὰ τῆς λέξεως ὅτι ἀνεπίβατός ἐστι λογισμοῖς ἀνθρωπίνους ἢ γνῶσιν ἐκεῖνη, καὶ οὐπω τις ἐπέστησεν ἑαυτοῦ τὴν διάνοιαν τῇ τοιαύτῃ τοῦ λόγου πορείᾳ, οὔτε τι ἴχνος οὔτε σημεῖον καταληπτικῆς ἐφόδου τοῖς ἀλήπτοις ἐνεσημάνατο (GNO II, 40, 1–8; tr. Hall, p. 63).

384 CE III, 1, 108. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο βεβαιοῦμεν ἐν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς τὸ καταχλευαζόμενον δόγμα, ὁμολογοῦντες ἐλάττους εἶναι κατὰ τὴν γνῶσιν τῶν ὑπερβαιόντων τὴν γνῶσιν, καὶ προσκυνεῖν φαμεν ἀληθῶς ὅπερ οἶδαμεν (GNO II, 40, 16–20; tr. Hall, p. 64).

Gregory, like Basil, confirms that we know the things about God, that is in this case His glory and height and from that we can only deduce His unimaginable greatness,³⁸⁵ while Basil rather thought that the outcome of cognition through attributes is God's existence. Gregory of Nyssa wants to say that Eunomians only think that they know what they worship, while they are truly ignoramuses who do not want to admit their ignorance. Therefore, the truth and worship are on the Orthodox side, and Gregory turns their own argument against them by making an exegesis of the passage from John 4:22. The Samaritans were accused by the Lord of worshipping what they do not know because they imagined God as being tied to a certain place, and residing physically on the mountain on which they had their cult:

“The Samaritans, thinking that the Divinity was contained in some local limits, were rebuked by the words they heard: <You worship what you do not know, and the worship directed at God becomes unprofitable for you, for a god who is held to reside in a particular place is not God.>”³⁸⁶

Therefore, Gregory calls Eunomians “modern Samaritans” (νέους Σαμαρείτας), who by using the word “unbegottenness” as referring to the essence of God and enclosing it in a human concept, put a limit to it, or rather “restrict the divine substance to a sort of locality.” Therefore, Eunomians, while claiming the knowledge, are ignorant because they do not know that “the infinity of God surpasses every verbal connotation or definition.”³⁸⁷ While the Samaritans were wrong in limiting the presence of God to one place, “new Samaritans” are wrong in limiting the essence of God to one concept of human intellect.³⁸⁸

385 CE III, 1, 109 (GNO II, 40, 21–22).

386 CE III, 1, 110. ὡς γὰρ τοπικῆ τι περιγραφῆ τὸ θεῖον περιέχεσθαι Σαμαρεῖται νομιζόντες ἐπετιμήθησαν δι’ ὧν ἤκουσαν ὅτι Προσκυνεῖτε ὃ οὐκ οἴδατε, καὶ ἀνόνητος γίνεται ὑμῖν ἡ λατρεία ἢ πρὸς θεὸν βλέπουσα, θεὸς γὰρ τόπω τι καθιδρῦσθαι νομιζόμενος θεὸς οὐκ ἔστιν (GNO II, 41, 8–12; tr. Hall, p. 64).

387 CE III, 1, 110 οὕτως ἂν εἶη κυρίως καὶ πρὸς τοὺς νέους Σαμαρείτας εἰπεῖν ὅτι τῷ ὀνόματι τῆς ἀγεννησίας οἷόν τι τόπω περιελήφθαι τὴν θεῖαν οὐσίαν ὑπονοοῦντες Προσκυνεῖτε ὃ οὐκ οἴδατε (GNO II, 41, 13–16; tr. Hall, p. 64).

388 Cf. Ch. M. Stang, *Negative Theology from Gregory of Nyssa to Dionysius the Areopagite*, in: *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. J.M. Lang, Oxford 2013, p. 169.

In their attempts to answer the sophism or paradox of Eunomians, both Basil and Gregory try to specify what kind of the knowledge of God is sufficient for the Orthodox to claim that they know the one who they worship. Those answers were coined in specific circumstances of Anomean claims that “ingeneracy” is the term which expresses and fully describes the essence of God. However, those claims were not made merely to investigate what knowledge of God human intellect can have. They were used as a tool to demonstrate that the Son of God has a different – created – essence. Although Eunomians claimed that, thanks to “ingeneracy” we can know the essence of God, they were very unclear in their explanation what exactly is the essence of God expressed by this positive feature named with a negative term. Therefore, while claiming the knowledge of the essence, they could not formulate this knowledge, since they realized that the knowledge of God cannot be explained in the mode similar to other “more comprehensible” objects. It seems that Aetius realized that human cognition has its limits, but as the analysis of *Syntagmation* has shown, he extended those limits to the unclear grasp of the essence as “ingeneracy.”

In the answers given by Basil and Gregory, we can see a conviction that Eunomian claims are not only improper as leading to wrong conclusion about the nature of the Son of God, but they deemed their position as simply unsustainable and wrong. The substance of God must remain unknown since human intellect is unable to make any concept of it. However, we can also see certain gradation of the arguments in the answers of Cappadocians. Basil in a more technical way expresses that we can understand that the substance of God exists (καταληψίας ὅτι ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία), and thus we can have a kind of the perception of incomprehensibility (ἡ αἴσθησις αὐτοῦ τῆς ἀκαταληψίας). So, the knowledge of God, which is sufficient to worship, is the recognition of the existence of God that man gains from His works. Gregory goes further by saying that the attributes of God inform us rather about Him being totally beyond our understanding, and, therefore, to know God means simply to recognize His total incomprehensibility.