

Against Fate

by

Gregory of Nyssa

Introduction

A reading of this letter which dates from approximately the year 378 ⁽¹⁾ has a certain relevance for today's audience because it defends freedom of the human will against astrological fatalism. Apart from those instances involving superstition, most people in modern societies do not subscribe to the influence of stars and planets over their lives. Despite this fact, modern developments in both science and psychology which abrogate the role of free will compel us to confront the perennial question of freedom versus determinism. One example of the latter point of view is expressed by a noted molecular biologist, Jacques Monod, who claims that "Man...lives on the boundary of an alien world; a world that is deaf to his music, and as indifferent to his hopes as it is to his sufferings and his crimes" ⁽²⁾. In his critique of Monod's opinion, the biologist Rupert Sheldrake has observed that in the course of human history the indeterminate forces of nature which Monod so graphically described have assumed personalized patterns as in the forms of gods and goddesses ⁽³⁾. If, as some scientists maintain, the neo-Darwinian view of evolution depends upon the revelation of eternal forms, we do not have true creativity but the manifestation of patterns. It is precisely this (Platonic) conception of determinism which Gregory of Nyssa seeks to refute in his letter, Against Fate.

Gregory employs this form "as a simple, unelaborated presentation" to a pagan philosopher in Constantinople. This man, who assumes the role of Gregory's antagonist, believes that the position of the stars at a person's birth determines his or her destiny. That is to say, free will is basically irrelevant in our lives. In his opening remarks Gregory gives the example of "the most wise Eusebios" ⁽⁴⁾ who has formerly been influenced by fate yet later "prevailed against infidelity through his great faith." Gregory does not elaborate upon the Christian faith in his letter by employing one of his favorite means, quotations from the Old and New Testaments. In fact, the reader is struck by the paucity of biblical citations in Against Fate. Instead, we have a lengthy epistle which contains both a philosophical and scientific approach to the problem of astrological fatalism. The role of astrology has had a long history dating back before the fourth century and can be traced to Chaldean-Babylonian astronomical speculation ⁽⁵⁾. The Greek speaking world employed such terms for the notion destiny as moira (literally, 'part' or 'portion'), anagke (necessity), and heimarmene (fate) ⁽⁶⁾. Gregory employs the last term in the title to his letter, Kata Heimarmenes. The very use of heimarmene reveals that he is concerned with combatting that particular form of fatalism founded upon the ordered, irrevocable movements of the heavenly bodies which basically form a primitive type of cosmological mechanism ⁽⁷⁾. As Jerome Gaith has observed, these Greek terms are combined with Chaldean-Babylonian astronomy which, in turn, lays at the heart of that particular astrological determinism as articulated by the Stoics ⁽⁸⁾. In Gaith's words, "Il signifie donc la negation pure et simple de la liberte de choix, et, par la, de la responsabilite et de la vie morale." Such determinism presented by astrologers of the fourth century signifies the beginning of that conflict between science which proposes necessity (anagke) and free will which affirms contingency. A reading of Against Fate reveals that Gregory of Nyssa had an awareness with astrology even though he claims ignorance of the subject ("I am neither acquainted with it nor instructed in these matters," J.35.17-19). Despite such protestation, Gregory nevertheless demonstrates considerable knowledge with regard to his opponent's theories on destiny.

The philosopher Plotinos manifests a similar affinity for determinism as we see in his doctrine of

the soul's restoration to its primitive state. This duality explains his view of astrology: the sublunary world (matter and spirit) are under the stars' influence but the soul, influenced by divine impulse, escapes into the world of the stars which, being divine, are exempt from change ⁽⁹⁾. Thus the stars are not the cause of evil since they receive their impulse from the One. Although they cannot produce future events, they can announce them. As a result, each star lacks astrological significance since they all carry out the work assigned to them by the First Principle. Because of this transcendental influence, magic and divinization are legitimate pursuits because they enjoy unity with the One ⁽¹⁰⁾.

The position taken by the philosopher in Gregory's treatise exhibits a vigorous defense of fate primarily based upon Stoic Platonic principles. As we have already observed, the bishop of Nyssa could have strengthened his Christian position by offering more relevant passages from the Bible. Despite this deficiency ⁽¹¹⁾, he nevertheless takes the traditional Christian stand in defense of human free will. Gregory re-enforces his belief by ascribing to the Stoic concept of universal sympathy (sumpatheia) within a Christian context ⁽¹²⁾. We can also see a similar argument from the Stoic point of view in the following passage taken from the pagan philosopher's argument in defense of sumpatheia as applied to destiny:

Rather, since created beings have a unique affinity (sumpatheia) which brings the universe into harmony (suneches) and since everything forms one body where each member is in accord with the other (sumpnoia mia ⁽¹³⁾), the more prominent element above arranges what lies on earth. Against Fate, (J.37.13-20)

We may contrast this passage with a Christian interpretation of Stoic sumpatheia which correlates to God's ordering of the world and human circumstances (oikonomia). Refer to the following two excerpts from Gregory's writings:

If the entire world order is a kind of musical harmony whose artisan and creator is God, as the Apostle says (Heb. 11.10), then man is a microcosm, an imitator of him who made the world. The divine plan for the world sees this image in what is small, for the part is indeed the same as the whole. Similarly, a piece of small, transparent stone reflects like a mirror the entire sun in the same way a small object reflects God's light. Thus I say that in the microcosm, man's nature, all the music of the universe is analogously seen in the whole through the particular inasmuch as the whole is contained in the particular. The structure of our body's organs follows this example, for nature has skillfully constructed it to produce music.

Commentary on the Inscriptions of the Psalms (J.33-34)

The universe contains everything, and its harmony does not admit the dissolution of created beings;

instead, we have concord between them all. Neither is the universe severed from any of its parts; instead, he who truly exists holds all things by his power. God indeed is true existence or absolute goodness; also, any name we ascribe to him points to his unutterable reality.

Commentary on Ecclesiastes (J.406)

Here Gregory has expunged God's care for his creation from the Stoic identification of matter with spirit as well as the potential for astrological determinism which he refutes in his letter. Those persons engaged in such practices as divinizations and prophecies seek a connection or pattern (akolouthia) between heavenly bodies and human events and endeavors. However, they are ignorant of God's plan and strive through their prophecies to discern a connection by means of the stars. In his treatise Concerning the Soul Gregory laments this fact by saying, "It is without reason, oh men, that you afflict yourselves and moan before the necessary sequence (akolouthia) of things. You are ignorant of the goal towards which the universe moves. The wise Artisan directs it in order to be united to the divine nature" (14).

Despite his adherence to the Stoic concept of nature, Gregory does not acquiesce to its proclivity for astrological speculation which, as he shows, is ultimately accountable for immoral behavior because the element of human responsibility has been abrogated. For example, refer to the following passage from Against Fate:

If fate directs the universe, then no other higher principle exists. But if the stars' movement affirms that destiny governs them with coercion, it would be better to attribute this power to the stars instead of an all-powerful force. In this instance either the stars, the firmament's rotation, the movements within it or the revolution within its axis are responsible.

(J.36.22-J.37.2)

This excerpt also discloses Gregory's first argument against destiny. He employs legitimate Stoic insights into the nature of reality (minus its astrological speculations) and demonstrates that movement is an essential component for the created realm:

Once the inferior [light of a star] becomes obscured, the following is supposed to happen: a different form appears when the star's revolution encompasses the one lying behind it so that the greater either immediately overshadows it or makes this star turn aside. The orbit occurs in either a brief or longer temporal interval (tou chronikou diastematos)

according to the revolution's size which bears
a necessary correlation to the speed or slowness
of each circuit. (J.36.6-13)

As Gregory has pointed out in another place ⁽¹⁵⁾, the created realm is subject to one and the same kind of time. He perceives all creation as in a state of movement, that is, from one point in time to another. The most common term for this movement is diastema as found in the above mentioned passage. T. Paul Verghese has observed that diastema may also be used as "a unilateral gap--from the side of the creation. It is a 'standing apart,' a diastasis or an apostasis from the Creator, but the Creation being fully, i.e., with arche, telos and all in between, immediately present to the Creator" ⁽¹⁶⁾. But if fate essentially consists in movement, why, Gregory asks, is not the name of fate given to all the movements pertaining to the created realm? For this argument refer to the following passage:

If fate were a guiding principle, it would not follow but precede the order of creation. In this light fate exists before a person is born although it plays no role in supporting such a birth. It is unclear here whether fate [or birth] comes first since both occur simultaneously...If the stars are responsible for bringing man to birth, human nature would always be the same, and the process of human generation would not occur within an interval of time. (J.40.4-12 & 22-24)

Gregory's second argument against fate's determining power treats the immoral consequences of his opponent's justification. If, as this philosopher maintains, fate dispenses adultery and vice, we have here an obvious proof that it is corrupt and evil:

If anyone who willingly does evil and inflicts injury admits to his behavior, he is indeed miserable. Instead of choosing the good, he has opted for ignominy brought on by pleasure. If he commits these deeds not through choice but by necessity, then some other higher fate has determined the attributes and capacities proper to human nature. (J.48.1-8)

Here Gregory refutes the negation of human moral life which, from the Christian point of view, is an imitation of the divine life. Despite the dangers posed by astrology which submits us to cosmic determinism, the bishop of Nyssa is more concerned with the dangers stemming from Plato and Origen regarding the pre-existence of souls. With this important problem in mind, it is helpful to read Against Fate in conjunction with two major works by Gregory, Dialogue on the Soul and the Resurrection and On the Creation of Man. It does not lie within the scope of this Introduction to outline these two works but to simply draw attention to the fact that they deal with more immediate concerns encountered by Gregory and other Fathers of the Church.

For Gregory free will assumes particular importance because after mankind's fall, it is that one aspect of human nature which has remained essentially intact ⁽¹⁷⁾. Furthermore, free will is the principle means by which we return to God. Gregory takes pains throughout his writings to stress that humankind is free. Instead of being subject to an inexorable, blind power, God's mercy is the directing force. For example, refer to an excerpt from his Commentary on the Song of Songs:

God gave to rational nature the grace of free will
and bestowed on man the power to find what he wants
that the good might be present in our lives, not
coerced and involuntary, but the result of free
choice. (J.55)

It is important to stress the phrase, "that the good might be present in our lives" because for Gregory the good is equivalent to God himself. Furthermore, we have already seen that astrological determinism represents a despair when confronted with cosmic forces; here any identification of these oppressive forces with goodness is simply out of the question:

They [various types of afflictions] all have one
cause, and our capacity for free choice with
regards to life accounts for nothing; rather,
everything is dependent upon fate's power...

all show that necessity (anagke) controls both virtue (arete) and evil. Thus the unchanging nature of fate establishes a person either in a loftier mode of life, poverty or freedom. Against Fate, (J.33.23-J.34.4)

This passage demonstrates Gregory's vigorous attack on the idea of pre-destination which sought to put the blame for unbelief in the world on the decree of God and not on a person's will ⁽¹⁸⁾. As Paulos Mar Gregorios has commented, "For Gregory, if that is what pre-destination means, then it is the chief sign of unbelief itself, to put the blame on God. The idea of pre-destination belongs to Hellenism, not to Christianity" ⁽¹⁹⁾. The bishop of Nyssa cites numerous natural disasters which were attributed to the stars:

If we could demonstrate that part of the earth, not
all of it, is subject to calamities, idle talk
would attribute that it is subject to a certain
conjunction of the stars or the compulsion of fate.
Each part of creation is interconnected, that is,
heaven, earth and the sea. (J.55.13-18)

Earlier in his treatise Gregory mentions those occasional correct instances of astrological predictions (J.49-50). He uses the example of physicians who "without having recourse to the stars' movements, they can predict the future from certain bodily qualities" (J.49.22-24). However, such predictions are too rare and can be only attributed to the result of accident or chance. As Dom Amand has pointed out, most of these arguments are not original with Gregory but are taken from Carneades of Cyrene, the founder of the Third Academy who was strongly opposed to Stoicism ⁽²⁰⁾. The fatalism of Stoicism derives from the notion of causality and unity of the cosmos (sympatheia). Although human beings may by their free choice contribute to the outcome of events, these gestures participate, so to speak, in God's immanence within creation. Man must eventually conform to this presence and accept the inevitable results with indifference. On the other hand, Gregory offers the

Christian belief that we are unfettered by external causes and can indeed make choices for the good. He says that God may be understood through this perception of the good:

We may perceive the divine nature in every good thought and name manifested in our lives such as light, truth, righteousness, wisdom, incorruptibility and any other good we can comprehend. we recognize the divine nature and its attributes by all those things which are opposite to it, for example, death instead of life, deceit instead of truth and every type of evil inimical to man.

(J.58.15-J.59.1)

After defending God's goodness as opposed to the apathy of determinism, the bishop of Nyssa perceives its influence in terms of deception which, in turn, is controlled by demons:

People rush after this deadly poison thinking it to be good while it contains nothing beneficial.

Thus whenever we encounter anyone with the pretence of knowing the future through deception which is controlled by demons, for example, through divinization, augury, omens, oracles about the dead and genealogies, each one is different and predicts the future in dissimilar ways.

(J.59.9-18).

We have yet another reference about this demonic deception towards the conclusion of his letter which may be contrasted to an excerpt taken from another letter by Gregory, A Letter Concerning the Sorceress:

The influence of fate turns man from God, the source of every good, and makes them hasten after demons.

Therefore, people are easily persuaded not to direct their lives according to God's counsel but by the combination of stars. This depravity makes them hasten after that deception so typical of demons.

Against Fate (J.62.19-J.63.2)

Persons who are pre-occupied with the body and who want knowledge of the future, means by which they hope to escape evil or follow pleasure, are unmindful of God. In their treachery, demons devise many ways [to thwart such unmindfulness]: omens, divinizations, oracles, rites to conjure up

ghosts, ecstasies, possessions, inspirations and many other tricks.

A Letter Concerning the Sorceress (J.103)

These deceptions which "avert us from the authority of God all-powerful" (J.63.10-11) are thus ultimately the reason why mankind, in Gregory's view, has remained subject to astrological determinism. To conclude with the opening words of Gregory's letter, it is only by belief in the living God that we can remove the "great mountain of faithlessness" (J.31.4) and transform it into faith.

The critical text of Against Fate was prepared by John A. McDonough, sj in Gregorii Nysseni Opera, vol. iii (Leiden, 1987), pp.31-63. Reference to the critical edition is designated within the translation by the page number. The letter "M," also followed by a page number, refers to the edition of J.P. Migne in Patrologia Graecia 45 (Paris, 1858), cols. 145-178.

The Text

[**M.145 & J.31**] You certainly recall the occasion when, if I may speak in accord with the Gospel, the great mountain of faithlessness in your midst was recently transformed into faith (cf. Mt 17.20). In his old age the most wise Eusebios pondered over the [**M.148**] necessity of human intention and what seems to be an apparent lack of divine direction with regard to our good. I was astounded at the way this man who had formerly been deceived by unfaithfulness later prevailed against infidelity through his great faith for in the course of our conversation we had discussed the issue of fate [**J.32**]. You have directed me, oh venerable and holy leader, to fully describe the discussion of certain philosophies in the great city of Constantine concerning this subject. Because I have do not have the leisure for composing a lengthy letter, I have kept the subject matter short by maintaining the form of a simple, unelaborated presentation. In this way I may retain the style of a letter without enlarging it into a book.

I have offered several observations about our religion to a certain man trained in pagan philosophy. In this way I strived to win him over from Greek [superstition] to our point of view, for [his belief] hinders many persons from using their own judgment and renders them powerless by subjecting them to necessity. Such superstition is contrary to my opinion. If a Christian subjects himself to fate, he will indeed fall into its trap which is clearly inimical to our position. On the other hand, if a person prevents himself from being governed by fate, it will have no influence at all. Having said this, I believe that we must shun knowledge of Greek [**J.33**] superstition which can captivate and hinder us from following our faith. Since fate is inexorable, people say that everyone is subject to its demand and that they are reduced to its domination. Included are our span of life, differences among people, the choices we make, the various kinds of bodies and their respective qualities. In this way fate maintains in control and bestows servitude, wealth, poverty, corporeal illness, health and a short or lengthy life span (for whether a person lives a short or long time does not depend upon his own impulse; rather, necessity determines the consequence). Whether death be voluntary or forced, its sentence is meted out in different ways, for example, by chance, hanging, a judge's sentence or by treachery. In addition to more general kinds of afflictions we have earthquakes, shipwrecks, floods, fires and other similar disasters. They all have one cause, and our capacity for free choice with regards to life accounts for nothing; rather, everything is dependent upon fate's [**M.149**] power whether it happens to be philosophy, public speaking, agriculture, sailing, marriage

or the single life: all show that necessity controls both virtue and evil. Thus the unchanging [J.34] nature of fate establishes a person either in a loftier mode of life, poverty or freedom. It similarly applies to a grave robber, pirate, a person living profligately or someone characterized by effeminate behavior. No one should think that these examples compel us to accept fate where our capacity to make choices plays no role; rather, they demonstrate that we should depend upon necessity, the source of our impulses, which is imposed upon us against our will and abrogates our free choice.

Examination of these matters leads me to inquire whether or not we can ascribe fate to God who administers everything by his will. The [philosopher] who charged me with stupidity has said, "You seem to lack knowledge of celestial matters. If you were familiar with the power of fate, you would then know its source and unalterable nature." I am amazed at this and asked to clarify myself, that is, whether our capacity for free choice which appears sovereign and without master in its authority is governed by fate or whether something else is responsible. Once again [the philosopher] says, "When contemplating the heavens' movement, the zodiac's circle which is equally divided [J.35] into twelve parts, you are able to comprehend the power of each star and its particular energy. The union of their qualities produces a composite whether they are united or separated to another star, or the inferior star is subjected to a superior one, or whether the superior eclipses it. For example, we obtain a different result from what has either come together or has been separated as in a triangle with uneven sides or any other geometric shape." This person claims that fate interprets such matters because its unalterable nature is responsible for the union existing among stars. When told of such a novel idea (I am neither acquainted with it nor instructed in these matters), I was expected to know fate's intention as revealed through the stars. I will now clarify myself as follows. Other persons have informed me about the stars' motion with respect to one another, the opposite movement within them according to a fixed circuit [M.152] and their revolution caused by the zodiac's circle [J.36]. As a result, they firmly believe that the stars' light advances and recedes according to their respective orbits, and that the superior light succeeds and hides the inferior light from view. Once the inferior becomes obscured, the following is supposed to happen: a different form appears when the star's revolution encompasses the one lying behind it so that the greater either immediately overshadows it or makes this star turn aside. The orbit occurs in either a brief or longer temporal interval according to the revolution's size which bears a necessary correlation to the speed or slowness of each circuit.

I have remained silent regarding such matters in order to clearly explain the power of destiny, that is, whether we should understand God who rules the entire universe by his strength in terms of fate or in terms of this other power [i.e., the stars] which subjects his authority to its dominion. If fate directs the universe, then no other higher principle exists. But if the stars' movement affirms that destiny governs them with coercion, it would be better to [J.37] attribute this power to the stars instead of an all-powerful force. In this instance either the stars, the firmament's rotation, the movements within it or the revolution within its axis are responsible. Should we concede that the stars do not move by themselves nor by a perpetual circular motion either with respect to each other or an external source but always retain their unchanging form, then fate does not exist. If the stars' revolution begets fate, they are mistakenly considered to govern other things or subject them to its rule; however, only movement can be held responsible.

The philosopher, however, disagrees with this and maintains that our position credits insubstantiality to fate. But since created beings have an affinity which brings the universe into harmony and since everything forms one body where each member is in accord with the other, the more prominent element above arranges that which belongs to the earth. The latter inclines to the superior and by necessity they assume their respective motions, as it is said, through the power [J.38] of each star. Every ingredient used to make a particular kind of medicine by carefully blending them yields a result other than their respective properties due to their equal importance prior to their combination. Similarly, our contemplation of the different properties belonging to the heavenly powers shows that they continuously affect lives [M.153] in different ways due to their

proximity or distance. As a result, persons who diligently ponder such matters can foresee the future with certainty. A skilled physician who dilutes either a hot or torpid medication with something salty or tart is able to predict its quality from the various properties of his mixture. For example, its result, how long its strength lasts, and whether it is harmful or beneficial. In like manner, a person who diligently applies himself to the stars above and considers each one knows their strength by the way in which they are combined. Their influence is not identical with respect to a brief period of time; instead, their movement never remains the same with respect to other stars, and varying degrees of movement from these stars continuously affects their particular motion. In a short period of time [J.39] each star's property influences life by foretelling and influencing [the fate of] every person. Just as a seal impresses its form upon wax, so a person whose life is influenced by the stars' movement conforms to their properties and retains their influence right from the beginning. Having been sealed in such a manner, this influence expands to one's activities because the stars have determined his beginning and continue to motivate him.

When [the philosopher] asks me to continue my argument, I respond by saying that I was simply chattering away and have recounted that brief moment when, as you say, the stars held sway over us. They are the source of everything which influences us; if you maintain that this cause is inanimate and lacks free choice, its lifeless and unsubstantial nature cannot dominate animate beings, a fact revealed by its inability to motivate them. On the other hand, its every counsel, foresight, instruction, prudence and virtuous deed resembles a tyrant or lifeless despot [J.40] without the power of choice which is unstable, ephemeral, indivisible and insubstantial. To what power do you attribute the preservation and order of creation? Cannot you see the absurdity of your position? If fate were a guiding principle, it would not follow but precede the order of creation. In this light fate exists before a person is born although it plays no role in supporting such a birth. It is unclear here whether fate [or birth] comes first since both occur simultaneously. Before birth [M.156] a person naturally grows older and develops (for this is typical of movement), and a star moves and does not rest before we begin to breathe. With regard to any event, we are unable to judge which of the two comes first, that is, the stars' motion or influence upon human nature. If both share the same instant of time or if they coincide, how do they differ so that one is deemed more worthy than the other? If the stars are responsible for bringing man to birth, human nature would always be the same, and the process of human generation would not occur within an interval of time. Furthermore, if these two births are so different, clearly [J.41] human birth does not follow the stars' movement because the latter is always in motion while the former is not. However, no connection exists here because nature has determined it otherwise.

If you argue that time regulates man's destiny, consider its despotic, tyrannical nature which is composed of day and night. Both are divided into very small instances of time or twenty-four hours; as you maintain, each hour is further divided into sixty minutes with each minute composed of sixty seconds. You are told that a more careful observation of such matters reveals that these units are broken down into even further minute divisions. I do not know what else we should call the multitude of these brief moments except gods, despots or tyrants since they compose twenty-one myriads. If one hour contains such a multitude, one twenty-four hour day yields a countless number of individual fates. Since your reasoning affirms the immutability of each one, it follows that all are useful. Neither do you claim that they are ineffective; rather, their effectiveness lies in what they can achieve. Thus all have equal [J.42] value. In as much as divisions exist, each passing hour determines the birth of individual persons by necessity. If everyone had an identical fate, then each person is a king, has a long life, power, happiness, success and is endowed with other blessings. Should anyone lack these attributes, he is judged as incomplete. Neither can you attribute the same power [of fate] to a great or humble person. For example, a person who lives to one hundred years of age in health and happiness is considered fortunate. He is surrounded by children, has a multitude of descendants in whom he delights, sound health, prosperity, [M.157] honors, wealth and anything else life can offer. On the other hand, another person suffocates as soon as he is born. There are also numerous infants born out of wedlock to mistresses and adulterers determined to slay them. What is

their fate, and why does it not provide for them? If you think that you have knowledge of fate's authority, it will appear the same in everyone: one person will not be strong and another will not succeed unless he is in fate's grasp which is manifest through its effects. Life has no inequalities but [J.43] promises happiness to everyone, whereas you claim that all persons are perpetually bound to fate.

If fate is supposed to govern everything, it permeates them thoroughly. However, persons vary enormously; they differ according to dignity, wealth, age, bodily composition and anything else characterized as fortunate or miserable. Therefore destiny is clearly not responsible for such inequality. But if we believe that fate engenders a long life, it brings an early death in the guise of infirmity. As a result, fate is responsible for afflicting one person with illness and bestowing health upon another. Since shortness of life is opposite to a lengthy one, fate must champion one or the other. Nobody can espouse both health and illness; rather, if destiny favors one, the other must also exist. Misery simply consists in the absence of happiness. Because many persons endure a miserable life, weakness appears greater than the power of fate. How can such an all-powerful, unalterable force be impotent when its ineffective authority is supposed to dominate our lives? The afflictions endured by so many people clearly refutes this position.

You say, however, that fate wills one thing for one person and something else for another; it thus determines the future for both lives. [J.44] In light of this you suggest a difference with regard to choice. For example, consider two individuals with the same human nature. Neither has chosen good or evil, but one was born earlier; they are similar in nature although one has preceded the other. Both lives are not identical; one is a prosperous, rich monarch cloaked in royal purple from birth, while the other is poor or enveloped by destitution. What wrong which inflicts such ignominy can we attribute to either an earlier or later birth determined not by fate but by nature? What defense [M.160] can you offer for fate? What role does justice, religion or devotion play? Do you say that destiny is unconcerned with these, not to mention virtue and good deeds? If you disagree, the opposite is true because estrangement from the good clearly reveals an alliance with evil. Do you maintain that fate is neither responsible [for good or evil]?

You also say that fate is lifeless, lacks purpose and cannot perceive good or evil since it is devoid of soul, choice and [J.45] substance. If you attest that fate's insubstantial nature both directs and prevails over created beings endowed with free choice, even though it lacks life, soul, the capacity for making choices and virtue, is it not true that they also lack existence? How can you chatter on about the reality of destiny? Fate is lifeless, lacks form and is not God. How can we perceive God when virtue and justice are absent? Since fate lacks these qualities, what is it? You claim that destiny is a continuous movement of time whether it pertains to the movement of rivers, stars or men. Such brief segments of time do not refer to ships, travels by men nor the stars' movement. All types of movement have one measure of time whether or not it is from one place to another. If fate does not cause temporal interruptions with regard to the flow of rivers, motion of ships or our wanderings, how can the stars' movement be responsible for them? How can you claim that observation of the stars enables us to perceive the influence of fate upon an hour or [J.46] fraction of an hour? Why does not each person have his own particular omen? I will now restate my position. Some persons firmly believe that fate causes good or evil. If stars set events in motion and bring men to birth, they are indeed responsible. However, it is clear that we cannot attribute birth to this source. The origin of a river's flow and human birth is not constant with regards to the transient nature of time; instead they are marked by intervals. On the other hand, neither can an interval of time nor our senses know the origin of their fate which the flow of time effects by the stars' continuous motion. What, then, is destiny? It is either a single general entity or many small segments of time which we [M.161] cannot apprehend. Do you claim that the stars move? We answer by mentioning a flowing river which is always continuous in time, not outside it. However, we cannot ascertain the origin of the stars' movement. What temporal origin do you offer with regard to them since they are eternal? Neither can we ascribe a reverse motion because water naturally [J.47] flows from a higher to a lower level. Although you concede that fate makes rivers

flow, we do not acknowledge that fate is responsible for the stars' movement.

But you recognize the influence of [the constellations] Aries, Taurus or the planets. If anyone happens to be born under their influence whether under one star or with others clustered in a circle, their conjunction is supposed to affect a person's life at a particular time. How ridiculous! You say that Taurus is servile because it [a bull] is under the yoke and that Aries [a ram] represents profit gained from wool. If a person is either born or dies under one of these signs, fate naturally ascribes their properties to him. What should we make of this? Tell me, does a bull freely become docile or does a ram submit to shearing? Do the heavenly powers, heat from the planet Mars or any other celestial body frustrate and paralyze a person either through his own consent or [J.48] against his will? If anyone who willingly does evil and inflicts injury admits to his behavior, he is indeed miserable. Instead of choosing the good, he has opted for ignominy brought on by pleasure. If he commits these deeds not through choice but by necessity, then some other higher fate has determined the attributes and capacities proper to human nature. Thus we must seek other more excellent stars with a distinctive movement connected with fate's obsessive character such as a servile Taurus, a harmful Aries, a headless Crab [Cancer] or some other obscure influence. If these manifestations appear to us under the guise of destiny, we will concoct yet another source with a more compelling demand, and so on. As a result, we end up with a countless number of fates, causes and necessities.

I have been given a full report on these matters. Meanwhile, the philosopher whose bizarre position I am refuting interjects, "Why are you challenging the reality of fate? Why do you not imitate those who discern the truth through numbers and who accurately predict the hour of a person's birth, [J.49] development, age, character, disposition, the dangers he experiences, marriage, children, reputation, or his lack of children, infirmities, disgrace, short life and poverty? Since we can precisely foresee these events and testify to the fulfillment of truth, why do you not believe [M.164] in the fate's necessity?" After having inquired about the cause of these predictions, I sought to know whether fate is irrational and accidental or has purpose so that its consequences may lie within the realm of probability. [My adversary] responds in the affirmative. Since the stars are responsible for our corporeal frame at birth, anyone who carefully observes the heavens knows in advance his constitution yet cannot discern his life span, let alone whether he will be healthy or ill. I say to my detractors that I am unaware of the fate which supposedly belongs to Galen, Hippocrates or other similar persons. Without having recourse to the stars' movements, they can predict the future from certain bodily qualities. Such individuals can anticipate the advent of death when the eyes are sunken, the temples contract and the brow becomes shrivelled. Yet some persons claim that for many afflicted with ill health and those who are not yet expected [J.50] to pass away, medicine unravels the thread of fate. In the same way Plato recounts that Herodicus the gymnastic teacher could never recuperate his health through bodily exercise due to a mortal affliction. Instead, it delayed his death. Thus [Herodicus] lived a long life by holding death at bay even though his training could not put off death. This example maintains that fate is permanent unless a certain expertise can liberate us from necessity.

But this argument does not confound the predictions made regarding fate because persons who accurately foretell the heaven's movement by close observation retain an element of both certainty and doubt about death. I respond that an argument based upon necessity is indeed false: one outcome is possible while the other is not. Although these predictions are fascinating, they are certainly not based upon necessity.

I would like to know upon what foundation [the philosopher's] trust in fate rests. He says, "How many times have you heard me and now inquire about these matters? Each star has certain properties whose constant motion generates an infinite variety of attributes from their combinations. Therefore fate determines [J.51] a person's life at the hour of birth by the formation of stars, [M.165] and this order remains constant throughout life." But what about wars, earthquakes, the destruction of cities, numerous shipwrecks with loss of both crew and cargo, floods, fires, earthquakes and other forms of total destruction? With these in mind, how can anyone insist upon fate? Both our lives and those

of our ancestors have abundant afflictions. For example, the flood at Noah's time, the holocaust of Sodom, the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, the slaughter of alien tribes, the natural, innumerable deaths among the Israelites which occurred in a short period of time, the one-hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians who suddenly perished, the many calamities of the Medes and Greeks suffered in wars at sea and on land, and other misfortunes recounted by history. Let us now continue because our own age has [J.52] enough disasters. Who is unfamiliar with the great metropolis of Bithynia, distinguished among cities, which was ignorant of broad, spacious Thrace? War, earthquakes and fire suddenly destroyed it. Many perished in a single instant: children, infants, those in middle and old age, the free and slaves, victors and vanquished, wealthy and poor, the strong and weak. All their homes have become tombs. Where are those combinations of stars which determine the lives of different individuals? Were all these persons born under the same conjunction, and did [the sign of] Cancer determine the same fate for everyone? The infinite diversity of life spans and classes of people attests that they were not all born at the same time. Both the time of each person's birth and death is different, a fact which reveals the absurdity and inconsistency of fate.

"But," says [the philosopher], "fate plays an important role in the launching of ships, the origin of cities and peoples since it directs the consequence of these endeavors." Therefore, who gives birth [lit., Ilithyia, the goddess of childbirth] to shipping? Who [J.53] begets cities? How did various races originate? Woodcutters hew timber, the merchant sells it, the sailor obtains revenue from the sale and the profit is divided from all this labor. One person cuts the wood into planks while another makes a ship's keel. Yet another person prepares the hull and someone else fashions its prow. Wood is also used for the mast and yard-arm. Some craftsmen weave rope from thread while others construct the ship's rudder. Workers also labor on the deck, sails, adorn the ship with paintings, apply pitch to its frame and form the hold. Each workman does not toil at the same time; rather, one does his work now while another does it at a later time. In this way the finished product is brought [M.168] to completion. How, then, does fate guide these craftsmen in their occupation? What directs the sale, cutting and handling of wood, the use of iron or fastening of bolts? Once this construction which progresses at different intervals is completed, how can you determine the time when fate brings death to the sailors? What do you say about fate which is supposed to control cities? How does it [J.54] guide colonization, the choice of location, shape of towns, or whether to construct its buildings with iron, stone or wood? What is the origin of this city's foundation? What do you say about the people who have become exhausted by war? What fate dooms their beginning or reduces them to a ignominious servitude? How did Hannibal, Caesar or Alexander of Macedonia mete out the same fate to their adversaries when they inflicted everyone with the same kind necessity by their evil deeds? The argument which rests upon the coincidence of fate with a star as responsible for a city's destruction by earthquakes is not convincing. Who does not know that such movements within the earth occur in both inhabited and uninhabited places? If anyone either sees the mountain of the Sagaris located in the territory of Bithynia or hears about it from others, he will discover the truth about its height which looms over those passing under it. The same holds true for the unstable region of the Paphlagonians [J.55] which must often be abandoned because earthquakes under these inhabited places. Must we mention Cyprus, Pisidas and Achivos, let alone many other locations? However, we take note of them because they all suffer from earthquakes. Should anyone be in these areas, he would suffer the consequences, but if not, he would escape calamity. What is the compulsion of destiny which brings misfortune to both inhabited and uninhabited areas?

If we could demonstrate that part of the earth, not all of it, is subject to calamities, idle talk would attribute that it is subject to a certain conjunction of the stars or the compulsion of fate. Each part of creation is interconnected, that is, heaven, earth and the sea. Moses said that [Gn 1.9 & 14] the earth was made before the rotating stars; how, then, [M.169] can their movement influence certain parts of it? But if the earth and stars were created at the same time, they have no compatibility which causes disturbances [of the earth] in certain places. Fate is not responsible; other [J.56] reasons

exist for these disasters. Whenever the earth rumbles and related calamities ensue, ruin comes to populated areas. What do person say who revere fate and claim that the stars' movement causes tragedy? What is responsible for the death of an infant, child, adolescent, grown man, father, elder, well-born person, aristocrat, hireling or captive? All do not differ with respect to their time of birth nor do the evils they endure make any distinction. Who does not know that incest with one's daughter, marriage to one's sister or violation of one's mother are examples of outrageous behavior? If fate triggers such acts, our actions manifest them. Since the Persians alone are guilty of such outrageous behavior, it clearly follows that destiny and fate seems determined by each person's free will.

It cannot be said that the stars' movement exerts an influence in such examples as [J.57] marrying one's own mother, the murder of guests or cannibalism. If this opinion of untrained persons who fail to observe nature because certain parts of the earth are supposed to be under the stars' control (if terrestrial elements are older than the heavens, the situation should be the other way around), we add the following argument to their erroneous opinion: the Jewish people spread out over every part of the earth and mingled with its inhabitants whether to the east, south, north or around the Mediterranean. How did the Jews suffer no harm from these peoples since they were uninfluenced by the stars whose infinite connections supposedly control our birth and afflict the rest of our lives with disgrace?

He [the philosopher] responds by saying that we cannot understand the stars' grip upon many nations as ordained by laws. It is difficult to show that prediction of the future remains unchanged as pertaining to each person's destiny. How can anyone truly reveal the number of years meted out to a person and predict the outcome of his life? This is only possible if he believes in an [J.58] eternal force and claims to have clear knowledge about the future through observing a certain number of signs.

It is better for me to either remain silent or to furnish an occasion of ridicule for those untrained in our beliefs. But other persons [M.172] of shallow understanding mock us, and I wish that I could briefly reveal their position. Countless examples show that human nature has certain aggressive qualities opposed to what is good. However, it is unnecessary at present to enumerate them all. We may perceive the divine nature in every good thought and name manifested in our lives such as light, truth, righteousness, wisdom, incorruptibility and any other good we can comprehend. We can recognize the divine nature and its attributes by all those things which are opposite to it, for example, death instead of life, deceit instead of truth and every type of evil inimical [J.59] to man. Anyone who embraces these becomes a abomination. Persons who often commit evil deeds offer a deadly cure since it is disguised with honey which cannot be tasted. Similarly, that corruptible nature within the soul seduces a person by assuming a good form and veils deception under the guise of a cure. People rush after this deadly poison thinking it to be good while it contains nothing beneficial. Thus whenever we encounter anyone with the pretense of knowing the future through deception which is controlled by demons, for example, through divinization, augury, omens, oracles about the dead and genealogies, each one is different and predicts the future in dissimilar ways. Therefore inspecting a liver or observing birds in flight to foresee the future do not promise their outcome by fate's compulsion. We claim that all these examples have one cause and assume one form (I mean demonic deception) since a prediction does not come true at [J.60] a given time if indeed it does occur. Thus the power of fate is demonstrated since every divinization is usually substantiated through some sort of prediction. Dreams form one kind of fate while another comes from bodily palpitations; yet another arises from augury, omens or symbols. If none thwarts prophecy and is not fate, then any number of genealogies cannot make a prediction. This gives us sufficient reason to believe that fate does not apply to such divinizations. There is nothing accurate and certain about their predictions. But should [M.173] they fail, persons who perform them offer excuses and invent reasons, for example, a sign was not appropriate due to the time. Generally [J.61] their predictions are ambiguous and they vacillate between them. In this way, any event turns into a prophesy. Often whatever is extraordinary and unusual is understood as foretelling the hour of

one's birth. A person who makes these predictions refuses to be disappointed by unusual events because they are tainted by evil. Our memory of history testifies to this. Valens was a Roman emperor and impostor moved to rebel against its authority. He hastened to gain legitimacy for his reckless act through genealogies, but his venture ended when the chief magistrates became aware of it through the magnitude of this calamity. Valens' support from genealogies became known to many people when they realized the extent of this misfortune, not its advantage.

I decline to say that these fraudulent predictions are related to fate; rather, they and many similar notions are the invention of demons. For the gulping of water, [J.62] tasting of certain foods and breathing through the mouth for obtaining a prediction can induce mental derangement. If a woman engages in such practices, her stomach swells and her mental turmoil is soothed. All divinizations are deceptive: forecast of the future from a liver, fire and the flight of birds cannot make predictions by fate. Instead, all are forms of demonic possession.

In conclusion, I think that examples above are not true divinations because they are refuted by numerous contradictions. If anyone shows that fate prefigures a future event, each one strikes us as being some form of prediction. Every case is erroneous because their fulfillment appears true yet is the result of demonic deception which stamps them. The influence of fate turns man from God, the source of every good [J.63], and makes them hasten after demons. Therefore, people are easily persuaded not to direct their lives according to God's counsel but by the combination of stars. This depravity makes them hasten after that deception so typical of demons. If the demons rejoice at a person who rejects God, their duplicity makes them revolt. Clearly their influence causes error, for it is thought to lie in such deceitful methods which avert us from the authority of God all-powerful.

The End

1. "Die Entstehungszeit der Schrift ist nicht genau zu bestimmen. Zu Beginn wird die Bekehrung eines Eusebios als vor kurzem geschehen erwähnt; um wen es sich handelt, ist trotz der angeblichen Bedeutung dieses Mannes nicht bekannt. Der Adressat des Briefes ist nicht genannt; aus der Anrede o timia moi kai hiera kephale ist nichts zu entnehmen. Die Angabe, das das Gespräch in Konstantinopel stattgefunden hat, last an nicht allzu frühe Abfassungszeit denken. Im Gespräch werden die Vernichtung Nikomediens durch ein Erdbeben mit anschließendem Feuer sowie die Verwüstung Thrakiens erwähnt; das Erdbeben ereignete sich 358, mit der Verwüstung Thrakiens wird die Plunderung durch die Goten 377 gemeint sein. Später wird von Kaiser Valens so gesprochen, das sein Tod vorausgesetzt zu seine scheint. Das wurde auf 378 führen. Vielleicht ist das Werk nicht viel später entstanden." Der Dialog in der Frühchristlichen Literatur by Bernd Reiner Voss (Munich, 1970, p.183.

2. Chance and Necessity (London, 1972), p.160.

3. "In this conception (the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution), the creative role of chance, of that which is indeterminate, is expressed in its interplay with necessity, that which is determinate. Here again, it is illuminating to see what happens when these abstract principles are personified. Just as nature becomes the Great Mother, they too come to life in the form of goddesses...This ancient image is parallel in neo-Darwinian thinking in a curious literal matter. The 'thread of life' which determines an organism's genetic destiny consists of the helical DNA molecules arranged in threadlike chromosomes." The Presence of the Past (New York, 1988), p.312.

4. Gregory could be referring to Bishop Eusebios as referred by Theodoret in his Ecclesiastical History. "An de Eusebio episcopo Samosateno loquitur? cf. Theodoret Hist. Eccl. ex. Gr. II 31, 5 p.171." (Footnote to verses 5-6 in McDonough's critical text, page 31).

5. Mircea Eliade describes two fundamental perceptions of time: cyclical and linear. The former may be traced to Chaldean influence which ascribes to the periodic regeneration of history. The latter perceives time as governed by the unique event of Christ's birth, death and resurrection. Cf. The Myth of the Eternal Return (New York, 1954), pp.141-47.

6. See the study by Dom David Armand de Mendieta, "Fatalisme et Liberte dans l'Antiquite grecque, ch. ix. Gregoire de Nysse" (Louvain, Univ. Bibliothèques, Recueil de Travaux d'Histoire et de Philologie, 1945, 3,19), pp.405-439.
7. The Stoic system is essentially materialistic opposed to Aristotle's dualism and offers a particular kind of cosmic determination. In his Treatise of Providence Chrysippus explains astrological determinism as integral to the relationship between celestial and terrestrial things. He defines heimarmene as the natural disposition of things as a whole in virtue of which they are eternally connected. Nature is thus one and the same, and everything forms an immutable, identical chain.
8. La Conception der la Liberte chez Gregoire de Nysse (Paris, 1953), p.88.
9. Enneads, II, book 2, chapters 9 and 10.
10. Ibid, book 3, chapter 7.
11. "Bien mieux, la defense de la fatalite est faite avec tant de force, de precision et de comprehension, que la refutation de Gregoire parait inferieure a l'expose." La Liberte chez Gregoire de Nysse, p.92.
12. Reinhard Hubner has remarked that Gregory of Nyssa has borrowed this term, along with other similar ones, from Stoicism: "Sumphuia, sumpatheia, sumpnoia, taxis kai harmonia, to suneches im Weltenleib, die stoischen Termini fur die bezeichneten Sachverhalte, sind die Begriffe, die auch in Gregors Ausfuehrungen uber den Leib des Kosmos immer wiederkehren. Mit ihnen beschreibt er auch die umfassende Einheit des Leibes Christi, die wiederhergestellte Gemeinschaft der ganzen geschaffenen Natur." Die Einheit des Leibes Christi bei Gregor von Nyssa (Leiden, 1974), p.153.
13. Jean Danielou has noted with regard to this passage: "Mais dans son propre systeme, Gregoire reprend comme nous l'avons vu, la doctrine stoicienne de la sumpnoia, en la degageant de son contexte moniste. Il la reconnait a des niveaux divers. Le premier est celui de l'univers materiel. C'est en ce sens qu'il employait le mot dans le texte que nous avons cite. La sumpnoia designe ici chez lui le theme essentiel de sa cosmologie, a savoir la conspiration des diverse parties de l'univers par le fait que les deux principes a partir de quoi le monde materiel est constitue, le mouvement (kinesis) et le repos (stasis) se trouvent presents partout, mais dans une combinaison inegale." L'Etre et le Temps chez Gregoire de Nysse (Leiden, 1970), p.55.
14. PG.45.105A.
15. "Indeed, whatever belongs to time, extension, or interval (diastema) is determined by smallness and greatness. Time is the measure of conception...Time is not restricted by one measure (for each stage of growth is not the same because persons differ from one another), while everything subject to measure has the same all-encompassing time." Commentary on Ecclesiastes, J.377.
16. "Diastema and Diastasis in Gregory of Nyssa": Gregor von Nyssa und Die Philosophie (Leiden, 1976) p.253. Verghese continues, "Gregory's view of the relation between God and the world is fundamentally different from that of Plotinus or others of the so-called Neoplatonic School, that it is not correct to class Gregory among Neoplatonists or Christian Platonists. There is no theory of emanation in Gregory, no ontological continuity between the One and the Many. The relationship is by the will of the One, a concept basically unacceptable to Neoplatonists" (p.257).
17. Refer to the remarks of Roger Leys on this important point: "Le libre arbitre a une importance toute particuliere parmi les autres aspects de l'image parce qu'apres la chute, tandis que ceux-ci doivent etre lentement recouvres, lui reste intact, comme la condition d'un retour a Dieu qui soit digne de Lui...La liberte apparait ainsi comme le point d'attache de l'image dans la nature de l'homme (au sens occidental): il dependra d'elle que l'image surnaturelle vienne, ou non, s'ancrer dans l'ame." L'Image de Dieu chez Gregoire de Nysse (Paris, 1951), p.73.
18. Freedom of choice takes on a personal quality when a Christian is faced with choosing between good and evil: "[Christ's] words teach us that blessedness consists in observance of the

commandments and this rejection effects condemnation. Let us love the blessing and avoid condemnation. We should make haste and not subject ourselves to such a dire sentence by choosing [the curse]" As You Did It To One Of These You Did It To Me (De Beneficia), J.113.

19. Cosmic Man: The Divine Presence (New York, 1988), p.142.

20. Op. cit. p.431.