

# St. Basil the Great's Philosophy of Time

## A Historical Perspective

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**ABSTRACT** Basil the Great's theory of time is a fascinating testimony to the metaphysics and philosophy of nature of the fourth century AD. In his treatises Basil sought to tackle such foundational issues of philosophy as God's being, its hypostatic instantiations, and God's creative acts. In order to properly address these issues he had to scrutinize the notion of time, thus turning the discussion of time into one of the key philosophical threads of his treatises. Basil's works unequivocally exhibited his careful approach to and respect for philosophical tradition, along with his innovative brilliance. Moreover, Basil's oeuvre clearly indicates that he was well acquainted with the then current philosophical literature on the subject. This article aims to shed light on various aspects of Basil's theory and its conceptual underpinnings. It endeavors to demonstrate that Basil's theory, at its highest point, cannot be understood apart from its protological and eschatological premises. It also argues that Basil was not merely an eclectic thinker, in that he used various concepts inherited from the late antique philosophical tradition to arrive at a uniquely Christian theological and eschatological synthesis. It concludes with an affirmation of Basil's theory of time as a valuable extension to our understanding of the topic.

**KEYWORDS** Aristotle; Basil of Caesarea; Iamblichus; motion; time

In the fourth century AD, Basil, the bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, introduced his account of time in various treatises on God and creation. Basil's input was arguably influential in that it created a conceptual link between the antecedent Christian tradition and subsequent theoretical speculations.<sup>1</sup> His approach to the topic was determined by two major variables: (1) his theological contest with the Neo-Arians (i.e. Aetius and Eunomius), and (2) his agenda for reinterpreting the creation narrative. These variables by and large determined the parameters of his speculations regarding the issue at hand. In terms of his anti-Arian polemics, the paradoxes of the internal complexity of God's being and of the relation between causally bound entities (i.e. the Father and the Son) within the Godhead were the driving considerations of the discourse. As a result, in order to defend his theological position, in the *Adversus Eunomium* he brought to prominence the notion of time, turning the discussion of this into one of the key philosophical threads of the treatise. The book aimed to offer a set of foundational answers to the issues of God's being and its hypostatic instantiations, focusing predominantly on the notion of the Son's generation. In this treatise Basil exhibited his conceptual underpinnings, implicitly acknowledging his indebtedness to various philosophical authorities: e.g. Chrysippus, Philo, Origen of Alexandria, along with Aristotle, Plotinus, and others. However, he was no mere eclectic thinker, utilizing notions already introduced in other philosophies to defend his own stance. His thought was subtle and his conjectures provided new insights into the subject, even if no uniquely innovative developments took place here. And when it came to his reinterpretation of the creation narrative, Basil showed some quite extraordinary traces of innovative brilliance, and perhaps also of his acquaintance with what would have been the more recent philosophical literature on the subject. Moreover, the *Hexameron's* treatment of the issues surrounding time introduced a new pivotal thread into the development of the philosophy of nature. This article therefore

1. For instance, John F. Callahan has argued that Basil's theory directly influenced Augustine. Despite Panayiotis Tzamalikos' critique of this conjecture, I find Callahan's argument persuasive. See John F. Callahan, "Basil of Caesarea: A New Source for St. Augustine's Theory of Time," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958), doi:10.2307/310871; Panayiotis Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), doi:10.1163/9789047417637. Richard Sorabji's notes also unequivocally point in the same direction. See Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 31, doi:10.5040/9781472598288. Basil's influence on Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa is indeed beyond any doubt. This influence is felt even in the works of John of Damascus.

aims to shed light on various aspects of Basil's theory and its conceptual underpinnings. It endeavors to demonstrate that his theory, at its highest point, cannot be understood apart from its protological and eschatological premises. It also intends to reassess certain modern explanations of Basil's theory, especially Panayotis Tzamalikos' conjecture, which has made Basil's philosophical contribution seem no more than a mere digest of Origen of Alexandria's. While accepting various conclusions from Tzamalikos' book, the present article disagrees on an issue of cardinal importance, which concerns Basil's knowledge of the tradition and the innovative force of his arguments.

#### BASIL'S CONCEPTION OF TIME IN THE *CONTRA EUNOMIUM*

The first instance of Basil's clearly stated theory of time occurred during his theological contest with the prominent Neo-Arian thinkers. The issue at stake during this time was how to properly address matters of *theologia*: i.e. God *qua* God. The Neo-Arian thinkers, following in the footsteps of Arius of Alexandria, aimed to defend a strong version of monotheism. This version considered the issue of the unity of God to allow for anything but absolute unicity.<sup>2</sup> Hence, they ruled out the possibility of any internal differentiation within the Godhead. Moreover, they argued that only an uncreated being is truly eternal and thus divine. They found the sustaining pillar of their theory in the notion of unbegottenness, and argued that it was unequivocally stated in divine utterance that the Father is unbegotten and the Son begotten by the Father. The Son, according to their theory, owed his existence to the Father's will. Hence, there is just one sole entity capable of satisfying the criterion of ungeneratedness. This, according to Aetius and Eunomius, is God the Father, i.e. the unbegotten God. But what about the only-begotten God: i.e. God the Son? They thought of the Son as a thing made, though describing him as the most honorable creature of all. Hence, the Son cannot be truly divine and cannot fully share the honor and glory of the Father in that he cannot receive a share of the Father's being. Their beings are radically different: one unbegotten, the other begotten. Even more significant, they argued, is that a cause is always greater than its effect. Therefore, the Father's being must be greater than the Son's.

Rejecting the possibility of an internally differentiated God, Eunomius

2. See Aetius the Anomean, *Syntagmation*, ed. Lionel R. Wickham, in Lionel R. Wickham, "Journal of Theological Studies," *The Syntagmation of Aetius the Anomean* 19, no. 2 (1968), 540-44, doi:10.1093/jts/XIX.2.532.

also rejected the presence of any kind of order within the Godhead. He was furious at the idea that the Father and the Son could be thought of as sharing the same essence: i.e. as causally separated and conceptually distinct manifestations of, or rather subsistences in, one Godhead. In this respect he demanded that “one ought not to posit order in the case of God since ‘order is secondary to the orderer’”—“καὶ φησι, μὴ χρῆναι λέγειν ἐπὶ Θεοῦ τάξιν, ἐπεὶ περ ἡ τάξις δευτέρα ἐστὶ τοῦ τάττοντος.”<sup>3</sup> The order here indicated the sequence of things following one another in a series of before and after, or prior and posterior.<sup>4</sup> In this context, we may suggest, Eunomius reframed his discourse in such a way as to incorporate classical thought, using Aristotle’s classification of order as the primary means of expressing his own philosophy. Indeed, Aristotle had delineated various meanings of the terms “prior” and “posterior,” arguing that the notion of order involved refers, first and foremost, to time. Hence:

Whenever we use the term “prior” in its proper and primary sense, it is time that we have in our minds. It is thus that we call a thing “older,” “more ancient” than some other thing, signifying that its time has been longer.<sup>5</sup>

3. Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius* 1.20.21–22. Hereafter cited in text as *AE*. Passages of *AE* are cited and quoted according to the edition Basil of Caesarea, *Adversus Eunomium*, in *Contre Eunome*, trans. Bernard Sesboué, ed. Bernard Sesboué, et al., vol. 1–2, Sources chrétiennes 299, 305 (Paris: Cerf, 1982–83). Translations are shown according to the edition Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius*, trans. Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *The Fathers of the Church* 122 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

4. According to Philo, “order is a series of things going on before and following after, in due sequence, a sequence which, though not seen in the finished productions, yet exists in the designs of the contrivers; for only so could these things be fashioned with perfect accuracy, and work without leaving their path or clashing (or being confused) with each other”—“τάξις δ’ ἀκολουθία καὶ εἰρμός ἐστι προηγουμένων τινῶν καὶ ἐπομένων, εἰ καὶ μὴ τοῖς ἀποτελέσμασιν, ἀλλὰ τοι ταῖς τῶν τεκταινομένων ἐπινοίαις; οὕτως γὰρ ἔμελλον ἡκριβώσθαι τε καὶ ἀπλανεῖς εἶναι καὶ ἀσύγχυτοι.” Philo, *De opificio mundi* 28.3–6. Greek text according to the edition Philo of Alexandria, *De opificio mundi*, ed. Leopold Cohn, in *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*, ed. Leopold Cohn, Siegfried Reiter, and Paul Wendland, vol. 1, *De opificio mundi; Legum allegoriarum lib. I–III; De cherubim; De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini; Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat* (Berlin: Reimer, 1896). English translation quoted here and hereafter according to Philo of Alexandria, *On the Creation. Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3*, trans. George Herbert Whitaker and Francis Henry Colson, vol. 1 of the edition *Philo: In Ten Volumes (and Two Supplementary Volumes)*, Loeb Classical Library 226 (London: W. Heinemann / Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929). Hence, the lack of order, according to Philo, leads things to clash and confusion.

5. Aristotle, *Cat.* 14a.26–29. English translation by Harold Percy Cooke quoted here and hereafter according to the edition Aristotle, *Categories; On Interpretation; Prior Analytics*,

Eunomius' conjecture as regards the order in God consisted in his postulating the temporal aspect to mark off the relationship between the Father and the Son. Hence, he argued, "it is due to order and to superiorities based on time that the one is a first and the other a second" ("τάξει δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἐκ χρόνου πρεσβείοις ὁ μὲν ἔστι πρῶτος, ὁ δὲ δεύτερος," *AE* 1.19.11–12). Why so? Because a non-temporal order delineating priority of cause over effect (i.e. an order expressing a mere causal relation) seemed to leave some space for the notion of unity of a looser kind, one that might have allowed for the existence of an internally differentiated deity. He defined the Father as unbegotten, and juxtaposed this cardinal characteristic of God to the begottenness of the Son, emphatically asserting that what is begotten is always subject to time.

Again, perhaps, Eunomius was referring to Aristotle's theory, having in mind that the notion of generation entails those of time and duration of existence. What is begotten has the potential for nonexistence; thus, its existence must have temporal boundaries. As Aristotle argued, if a thing is generated,

it will have the power of for some time not being; for just as the destructible is that which formerly was but now is not, or has the possibility of not being at some future time, even so the generated is that which at some time past may not have been. But with that which exists for ever, there is not time during which it may not have been, whether finite or infinite.<sup>6</sup>

Taking Aristotle's conception as the sustaining pillar of his own discourse, Eunomius then endeavored to defend his thesis of God the Father's superiority over God the Son, arguing that the Son is inferior since he was generated. Hence, the Son must be subject to time. It would then follow that external limits must be introduced to the being of the Son so as to mark off the duration of his existence. Indeed, Eunomius himself was not concerned with any agenda of setting out such limits. Rather, a mere af-

trans. Harold Percy Cooke and Hugh Tredennick, vol. 1 of the edition of Aristotle's works in 23 volumes, Loeb Classical Library 325 (London: W. Heinemann / Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938). Cf. *Metaph.* 1018b.14–19. Eunomius also seems to include the fourth meaning in his understanding of priority, one that Aristotle rendered in the following way: "whatsoever is better, more honorable, is said to be naturally prior." *Cat.* 14b.4–6.

6. Aristotle, *De caelo* 281b26–30. English translation quoted here and hereafter according to the edition *On the Heavens*, trans. William Keith Chambers Guthrie, vol. 6 of the edition of Aristotle's works in 23 volumes, Loeb Classical Library 338 (London: W. Heinemann / Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939).

firmation of their presence seemed to be his sole concern, as it led him to proclaim the temporal superiority of the Father over the Son, perhaps implicitly juxtaposing the Father's eternity to the Son's temporality.

Eunomius' approach sounded coherent at first. However, one may immediately note that the sentence entails that both the Father and the Son are subject to time. For if one were subject to time and the other not, they could not be ordered as first and second according to time within the same series. Hence, his conjecture may appear fallacious. Whether it was so or not, we may not know definitively, since we do not possess any original treatises of Eunomius, but only some "quotations" (loosely defined) or, rather, paraphrases of his works by his adversaries (in this instance Basil). However, the meaning of the sentence is quite clear, in that in it the notion of time is introduced to show a radical inferiority of the Son due to the fact of His being begotten: i.e. of having come-to-be out of not being, and thus having a potential for not being, one that will eventually cause the Son to cease-to-exist. Hence, certain temporal limits, superimposed onto the existence of the Son, radically separated or distinguished the being of the Son from the being of the Father, whose subsistence has no such limits. Let this conjecture suffice for now. And indeed, Basil did not criticize Eunomius for failing to follow proper rules of inference, at least in this respect. Instead, he noted that the terms "prior" and "posterior" do allow for other meanings, apart from that of temporal succession.

Basil immediately pointed out that "there is an order which is natural and another which comes about by deliberation."<sup>7</sup> What kind of order is natural? Basil's response is that

order is natural when it is a question of the order which is arranged for created beings according to the rationales of their creation, the position of countables, and the relation of causes to their effects.

Φυσική μὲν, ὡς ἡ τῶν κτισμάτων κατὰ τοὺς δημιουργικοὺς λόγους διαταχθεῖσα, καὶ ὡς ἡ τῶν ἀριθμητῶν θέσις, καὶ ὡς ἡ τῶν αἰτίων πρὸς τὰ αἰτιατὰ σχέσις. (AE 1.20.13–15)

With this he juxtaposes an artificial order: one that "comes about by deliberation and art when it is a question of structures that are built, subjects of learning, logical propositions, and such things." (AE 1.20.17–19). He then seems to make reference to Aristotle's second meaning of "prior" and "posterior", according to which

7. "Ἀλλὰ καὶ τάξις ἡ μὲν φυσική τίς ἐστίν, ἡ δὲ κατ' ἐπιτήδευσιν." AE 1.20.12–13.

"prior" may be used, when the order of being is fixed and incapable of being reversed. One is prior, among numbers, to two. For provided, that is, two exists, then it follows that one must exist. The existence of one, on the contrary, does not imply that of two. And the order of being, in consequence, cannot be changed and reversed. Thus of two things we call that one "prior" which precedes in irreversible sequence. (*Cat.* 14a.30–35)

Hence, the preordained position of created beings according to their natural and causal origins, exhibited in the sentence above, was to provide us with some extended horizons in relation to the notion of order. From this, Basil quite reasonably inferred that it would be impossible to confine the notion within the rigid boundaries of any one particular meaning.

This second kind of order, he asserted, is not established by deliberation but happens to naturally accompany things ("ὅτι ἔστι τι τάξεως εἶδος, οὐκ ἐκ τῆς παρ' ἡμῶν θέσεως συνιστάμενον, ἀλλ' αὐτῇ τῇ κατὰ φύσιν ἀκολουθίᾳ συμβαῖνον," *AE* 1.20.23–25). Basil gives the example of fire and the light that emanates from it.<sup>8</sup> Here, the connection between the two cannot be temporal, since no interval or extension separates one from the other. The cause is always prior to its effect. However, the relation of priority and posteriority, according to this meaning of order, is non-temporal. Hence, the ordered series of such a kind is non-temporal. It would then follow that

in these cases we say that the cause is prior and that which comes from it is secondary. We do not separate these things from one another by an interval [διαστήμα], but through reasoning we conceptualize the cause as prior to the effect.<sup>9</sup>

Does this mean that this order, attained through conceptualization, is artificial? Not really, since the underlying reality is not a product of human art or convention but has its roots in nature. He agreed with Eunomius as to the applicability of the fourth meaning of prior and posterior (which, according to Aristotle, ascribes priority to "better" and "more honorable"

8. "So, then, in the case of things in which there is a prior and a secondary, how is it reasonable to deny that there is an order which exists not by our imposing it, but from the natural sequence that exists in them?"—"Πῶς οὖν εὐλογον ἀρνείσθαι τὴν τάξιν, ἐφ' ᾧ ἔστι πρότερον καὶ δεύτερον, οὐ κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν θέσιν, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῆς κατὰ φύσιν αὐτοῖς ἐνυπαρχούσης ἀκολουθίας." *AE* 1.20.29–32.

9. "Ὡς οὖν τούτοις γὰρ πρότερον τὸ αἴτιον λέγομεν, δεύτερον δὲ τὸ ἐξ αὐτοῦ· οὐ διαστήματι χωρίζοντες ἀπ' ἀλλήλων ταῦτα, ἀλλὰ τῷ λογισμῷ τοῦ αἰτιατοῦ προεπινοοῦντες τὸ αἴτιον." *AE* 1.20.26–29.

things), clearly affirming the priority of the Father as a more honorable being. However, he strongly disagreed with Eunomius in holding that priority in this context may entail the presence of temporal series.

Indeed, there is a difficulty involved in Basil's conjecture, since that which came into being must have experienced a transformation from not being into being. The Son came into being. Hence, a certain motion (κίνησις or μεταβολή) must have taken place. How is it, then, that the Son is atemporal? Basil's strategy was to retract Origen's notion of eternal begetting.<sup>10</sup> He then argued that although the Son is begotten, the mode of his begetting is not the same as that of all other beings. The relation of generation that characterized the hypostasis of the Son merely exhibited his causal dependence on the being of the Father, one that allows us to conceptualize the cause as being prior to its effect without any interval separating the two. The Son is thus truly eternal.<sup>11</sup>

What Basil had in mind was that the interval or extension is always attached to sensible entities, whereas there is no interval in things eternal. There might, though, be a causal connection between eternal things, with the cause rightly apprehended as logically prior to its effect. Hence, the order of prior and posterior exists among the eternal entities, but there can be no interval separating them. He then rightly blamed Eunomius for fallacious reasoning, arguing that the matter at hand pertains to the relation of causes and effects ("τῶν αἰτίων πρὸς τὰ ἐξ αὐτῶν σχέσιν") and not that of temporal preeminence (*AE* 1.20.36–37).

In so doing, Basil was perhaps following Plotinus, who had asserted that the notion of interval or extension characterizes the mode of subsistence of sensible realities, meaning those that always come in temporal series. He juxtaposed with those ontologically stable entities of the Intellect, these not being subject to time or separated from one another by an interval. Even so, they may be causally ordered. Although Basil did not use the same word to designate interval or extension (in that he used "διάστασις" instead of "διάστημα"), his overall approach suggests that he might well have been acquainted with the Plotinian juxtaposition of temporal and eternal beings. He may also have been influenced by Origen of Alexandria. It is interesting to observe that although the notion of "interval" construed in relation to time arguably made its first appearance in Stoic philosophy,

10. See Origen of Alexandria, *De principiis* 1.2.4, cf. 1.2.11.

11. Basil would argue that the Father "co-existed from eternity [ἐξ ἁϊδίου συνεῖναι] with his image who has radiated light non-temporally" and that their connection "is not only beyond time but also beyond all ages [μὴ χρόνον μόνον, καὶ αἰώνων δὲ πάντων ἐπέκεινα τὴν συνάρειαν ἔχειν]." *AE* 1.20.6–9.



the members of that school, when adopting the concept as a reference point for their theology, did not use it in the sense that invoked a juxtaposition of the eternal with the temporal. Plotinus and Origen of Alexandria, on the other hand, did make use of just such a juxtaposition.

But what is time? According to Eunomius, "time is a certain kind of motion of the celestial bodies" ("Χρόνον τοίνυν εἶναι φησι ποιάν τινα κίνησιν ἀστέρων," *AE* 1.21.3–4). Basil immediately identified the meaning of Eunomius' "motion of the celestial bodies" with the motion of the sun, moon and stars. However, following Philo and Origen, Basil noted certain peculiarities associated with this account. Firstly, he pointed to the fact that, according to the creation narrative, there had been an interval between the creation of the heavens and the Earth (on the first day) and the creation of the stars (on the fourth), as

the great lights and the rest of the stars came to be on the fourth day. . . . Therefore, it seems as if there was no time during the preceding days.

τῇ τετάρτῃ ἡμέρᾳ τοὺς μεγάλους φωστῆρας καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἀστέρας γεγενῆσθαι. . . . Χρόνος οὖν οὐκ ἦν, ὥς ἔοικεν, ἐν ταῖς κατόπιν ἡμέραις.

(*AE* 1.21.9–12)

This means that although the celestial bodies were not yet rotating, the creation kept unfolding itself through God's creative agency in some kind of atemporal way. Indeed, this idea of time-bound creative actions of God (framed within the sequence of the six days of creation) could have jeopardized the entire foundations of *theologia* by making God subject to time. In another treatise, Basil, following the Philonic tradition, would remove this ambiguity by advocating the idea of instantaneous creation. On the other hand, if the idea of the six days of creation is taken at face value, we may infer that the existents that came into being before the fourth day of creation were set in motion at the instant of their creation. Even more, we may assume that their motion was not chaotic, but rather ordered by God according to some preordained pattern. It would then follow that what was created up until the fourth day must have been set in motion, and that this motion could have been measured in some ways, being framed within the schema of before and after (e.g. days and nights). Thus, within the scope of that discussion, Basil's argument concerning the presence of motion and time prior to the creation of the celestial bodies appeared valid. It stated that there was a sort of motion before the creation of the celestial bodies. This, in turn, necessitated the presence of time and the time-bound series between the first and the fourth days of creation, those that were

not tied to the motion of the celestial clock. As Richard Sorabji has rightly noted, the idea of an implicit connection between motion and time was rarely questioned by such philosophers.<sup>12</sup> If there is motion, it should be measured by or accompanied by time. This remains valid for the motion that preceded the creation of the celestial clock. It would then follow that time cannot be the motion of the celestial bodies.

Basil then moved on and gave another scriptural example of Joshua the son of Nun waging war against the Gibeonites (Jo 10:12–14). According to this biblical story, the sun and the moon, the entities responsible for measuring the duration of motion of all other things, remained unmoved, having been constrained by divine command. Was there time then? “What, then, should we call the interval of that day?” — “Τί ἐκεῖνο οὖν τὸ διάστημα τῆς ἡμέρας εἶπωμεν;” (AE 1.21.17). The argument here indicated that, according to Eunomius, once the heavens stopped rotating, there was no time; hence, eternity (αἰών) took its “place,” so to say. However, a small pause in the clock could not turn the world’s process into eternity.

Even more, this contradicts the following fact: namely, that since there was some kind of motion on the part of the contesting parties, time ought to have existed without the celestial clock ticking. It was required to assure the victory of the elect nation over its enemy. Hence, the time-bound series of events must have had a certain duration that can be measured. Otherwise, we risk confusing distinct levels of analysis, by attributing bodily motion to the sphere of intelligible and unextended realities that are subject to eternity. In other words, we must not understand a physical contest of sensible entities as subject to eternity.

We can also interpret the phrase by rendering αἰών as “age.”<sup>13</sup> This can mean any extended period of life that attained its completion. What if an age, so to say, measured the duration of the contest? Basil’s response to this was that it is impossible to apply such a measure (i.e. age) to a short period (i.e. part of the day) without reducing the discourse to nonsense. Thus, “if you designate a small part of the day as an age, is there any excess of folly left to surpass?” — Αἰῶνα δὲ μικρὸν ἡμέρας μέρος προσαγορεύειν

12. Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum*, 70.

13. Aristotle delineated the two meanings of αἰών: “As a matter of fact, this word ‘duration’ (αἰών) possessed a divine significance for the ancients, for the fulfillment which includes the period of life of any creature, outside of which no natural development can fall, has been called its duration (αἰών). On the same principle the fulfillment of the whole heaven, the fulfillment which includes all time and infinity, is ‘duration’ (αἰών)—a name based upon the fact that it is always-duration (ἀεὶ εἶναι, to be everlastingly) immortal and divine.” Aristotle, *De caelo* 279a23–28.

τίνα τῆς ἀνοίας ὑπερβολὴν ἀπολείπει,” (AE 1.21.19–21). His general conclusion was that Eunomius’ argument was faulty. The idea of divine intervention that had suspended the celestial clock but allowed for motion, and thus necessitated the presence of a time-bound series, immediately invalidated Eunomius’ argument because of his erroneous identification of time with the motion of celestial bodies. Time, then, had to be something else.

Basil, then, aimed to subject to scrutiny the implications of Eunomius’ conjecture, which not merely linked time to the motion of the stars but also declared the celestial bodies the creators of time. They move and, according to Eunomius’ conjecture, produce time. It was quite self-explanatory that the strong link between the motion of the celestial bodies and time seemed to necessitate the annihilation of time in the absence of celestial motion. The absence of time, on the other hand, seemed to also suppress the possibility of any kind of motion. Otherwise, how would it be possible to organize motions into successive series? Yet this was proved wrong by the arguments stated above. It thus followed that Eunomius’ theory was false. An implicit premise of Basil’s argument was that if the celestial motion had failed, but some other kind of motion had taken place, we would have to attach time to that motion. Basil, however, exclaimed that this would lead us to assert that

since dung-beetles also move in time, we should define time as a certain kind of movement of dung-beetles. For what he says is no different from this, except for the dignity of the names.

ἐπειδὴ καὶ κἀνθάροι ἐν χρόνῳ κινοῦνται, ὀρισώμεθα τὸν χρόνον εἶναι ποιὰν τινα κἀνθάρων κίνησιν· οὐδὲν γὰρ τούτου τὸ παρ’ αὐτοῦ λεχθὲν διαφέρει, πλὴν τῆς σεμνότητος τῶν ὀνομάτων. (AE 1.21.33–40)

Interestingly enough, this conjecture emerges naturally from Aristotle’s theory. Aristotle defined time as the number of motion in respect of before and after. Hence, time is a (quantitative) characteristic of motion. We may add to this: a characteristic of any kind of motion. Indeed, it appears that, according to Aristotle, motion “gives birth to” time. Any motion has its number (or quantitative aspect). However, time is not “attached” to any particular kind of motion—not even that of celestial bodies. Aristotle considered the motion of the sun and moon to be rather conventional measures (*Phys.* 223b.15–20). A problematic aspect of this conjecture is the absence of any definitive scale of measurement. Its strong point, on the other hand, is that it prevents any identification of time with some particular motion.

According to Eunomius, the motion of the celestial bodies produces time. This can mean that an ordered and continuous motion that does not suffer from any interruptions—it not being subject to natural shifts and twists—provides a stable scale of measurement for time. For instance, time can now be measured by days, hours, etc., these resulting from the rotation of the sun and the moon. It would then follow that ordered motion is the productive cause of time. This introduces an ordered scale for measuring all other kinds of motion, including those that are irregular, discontinuous or impermanent. Thus, we receive this scale from motion and apply it back to motion, now measuring a non-uniform motion of sensible particulars of the sublunar realm against the regular and uniform motion of the celestial bodies. According to this approach, we may conclude that the link between time and measure remains firm. However, it seems that Basil never endorsed this conjecture.

Richard Sorabji saw in Basil's passage a testimony to the nebulousness of the connection between time and measure.<sup>14</sup> The period between the creation of the heavens and the Earth (the first day) and that of the stars (the fourth day) seemed to lack any definitive scale of measurement. Thus, time itself seemed not to be measured by the rotation of the celestial clock. In the absence of regular motion, does time appear irregular? Sorabji argued that this unmeasured time, for Basil and Augustine, would still have been taken to "be a measure with which we could time the movements of a potter's wheel,"<sup>15</sup> or that of the dung-beetles. He concluded his argument by saying that if the "time of the six days of creation also needs no ordinary clock . . . then it is not ordinary time."<sup>16</sup> It would then follow that it is not motion that provides a measuring scale for time, but vice versa. Indeed, we may ask whether this "time" of the six days of creation can be classified as time in the proper sense. What if the entire creation came about instantaneously, and the order of days signified mere logical and causal relations between different aspects of God's action, ascending from simple to complex? In other words, what if there were no measuring pattern to set alongside the series of phases in God's (instantaneous) action? If that is correct, then we may not describe the six days of creation as framed in the schema of temporal sequences qualified by the presence of interval or extension. Still, where the scope of the present discussion is concerned, Basil's argument turns out once again to have been properly constructed.

14. Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum*, 72.

15. "In Chapter 2, I explained how they would allow time to continue, while the heavenly clock stood still (Basil *adv. Eunom.* 1.21; Aug. *Conf.* XI.23)." Ibid., 72, n. 12.

16. Ibid., 72.

Taking into account the possibility of unmeasured time, we may ask what this unmeasured and out-of-the-ordinary time would consist of and how, being itself unmeasured, it could nevertheless measure an equally unmeasured and out-of-the-ordinary motion. We may look to Plotinus' account to clarify the matter at hand. We may first think of Plotinus' juxtaposition between ordered (τεταγμένη), measured (μεμετρημένη) or regular (ὁμαλή) motion and the irregular motion of Plato (ἀνώμαλος)—one that took place before the demiurgic intervention that turned the chaos into a well-ordered body, i.e. the cosmos (*Enn.* 3.7[45].9). We may also invoke Aristotle's notion of "regularity" or "evenness." "Regular" first and foremost signifies continuous and not varying in its pass, speed and direction (Aristotle, *Phys.* 228b20–25). According to Aristotle, "the most uniform [ὁμαλής] movement, the circular movement [of the heavens], is the standard by which in fact we measure other movements and time itself."<sup>17</sup> In other words, the motion of the heavens is, we may say, the most ordered and regular motion. Then this motion imparts its measuring scale to time. However, this scale is merely conventionally chosen. Moreover, it is too approximate to account for both increasingly small and large movements of the universe. Even more, different celestial bodies have different speeds and trajectories. There would then appear many ordered motions and thus many measuring scales.<sup>18</sup> Finally, we need to understand how this ordered time can offer a proper measure for irregular motion—one that is either non-continuous or non-linear, and so on. As Plotinus acutely noted, if time is to be the measure of every motion, one must explain how to "count motion that is disordered and irregular." (Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.7[45].9.5). If time is the measure of all motion, and if all motion has a number (i.e. a quantitative characteristic) attached to it, what would that number or measure be? In other words, Plotinus made a subtle remark seeking to justify the application of an ordered scale to unordered or irregular motion. Indeed, all motions do need to be measurable. The question just introduced is about whether the scale for measuring and

17. *Phys.* 223b19–20, modified translation of Cornford and Wicksteed, cf. Aristotle, *The Physics, Books I–IV*, trans. Philip H. Wicksteed and Francis Macdonald Cornford, revised ed., vol. 4 of the edition of Aristotle's works in 23 volumes, Loeb Classical Library 228 (London: W. Heinemann/Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).

18. Plotinus pointed out that "if it [motion] is to be identified with the interval of ordered motion, it is not of all ordered motion or even of a particular kind of ordered motion, because there are many of them; and there would then be many times all at once." Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.7[45].9.31–34. English translation here and hereafter according to Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. George R. Boys-Stones, et al., ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), doi:10.1017/9780511736490.

the object thus measured must be, or cannot be, isomorphic. Indeed, Basil did not seek to inquire into these issues. However, it is interesting to observe that his theory threw up multiple highly interesting ramifications demanding to be explored.

Another thing to be noted is that Basil seems to unequivocally endorse Plotinus' denial of the possibility of identifying time with motion. As we shall soon see, the very notion of motion was absent from Basil's definition of time. Perhaps he purposely dropped it in order to avoid any possibility of identifying time with (any kind of) motion. Basil emphatically insisted that "all motion is measured by time, whether of the stars, of living creatures, or of anything else that moves."—"ὅ ἅπαντα παραμετρεῖται κίνησις, εἴτε ἀστέρων, εἴτε ζώων, εἴτε οὐτινοσοῦν τῶν κινουμένων" (AE 1.21.30–31). What then gives time its measuring scale? If time is a characteristic of motion, as we have learned from Aristotle and Zeno, among others, it would have to be a regular motion of some sort that provides time with a clear-cut measuring unit. However, time did not appear to be so intricately connected with motion, on Basil's account. At least, not with the ordered motion of the celestial bodies.

Basil identified further problems with Eunomius' definition. He pointed out that time is not "a kind of" or a qualitative characteristic of motion (ποιὰ κίνησις), but rather the amount or quantity of motion (ποσὴ κίνησις). Here he remained faithful to Aristotle and Chrysippus, in that he clearly linked time to the quantity of motion. He then inferred from Eunomius' definition that the parts of time must be days and months and seasons and years. It is not clear how, exactly, Basil arrived at such a conclusion. However, what he was pointing at seems fairly self-explanatory. If we assume that time is a quality of motion, in particular—of the motion of the celestial bodies—it would follow that there might be different kinds of motion of those bodies: say, regular and irregular, ordered and unordered. If that were the case, then Eunomius was perhaps referring to their ordered sequence, and aimed to contrast this with the unordered motion of some celestial bodies. Alternatively, maybe his reference to "a kind of motion" was meant to indicate a sequence ordered and measured by days, nights, etc. Then the whole of time would be made up of parts qualitatively distinguished or assessed according to the quality of motion. Basil, however, noted that these things are measures and not parts of time. Parts of time are past and future, while the measuring units of time are days and nights, etc., in the sense of those that allow us to calculate a certain quantity of motion that has already elapsed or that is yet to happen. So we may say that the battle lasted for two days and nights or forty-

eight hours: its duration can be quantified as being equal to either two or forty-eight units of measure.

This led to Basil's own definition of time: "time is the interval coextensive with the existence of the cosmos."—"Χρόνος δέ ἐστι τὸ συμπαρεκτεινόμενον τῇ συστάσει τοῦ κόσμου διάστημα" (AE 1.21.28–30). He then also tells us that it is on its basis that we say that one thing is quicker or slower than another ("καθὸ λέγομεν ταχύτερον ἢ βραδύτερον ἕτερον ἐτέρου," AE 1.21.31–32). We may compare this definition with some similar definitions of time offered by the Stoics, Philo and Origen.<sup>19</sup> We can see that Basil's definition is largely indebted to Chrysippus, in that it presents time as an interval or extension that is somehow related to the cosmos. We may assume that "being co-extended" or "stretched out side by side" (συμπαρεκτεινόμενον) has a meaning similar to Chrysippus' "accompaniment" (παρακολουθοῦν) of the cosmos. A set of similar definitions featuring like terminology appeared later in Middle-Platonism and Neoplatonism.<sup>20</sup>

19. According to Philo, "[f]or since time is a measured extension determined by the world's movement"—"ἐπεὶ γὰρ διάστημα τῆς τοῦ κόσμου κινήσεως ἐστὶν ὁ χρόνος." Philo, *De opificio* 26.4. And as regards Zeno and Chrysippus, "Zeno speaks of time as 'the interval of movement which holds the measure and standard of swiftness and slowness,' and Chrysippus, amplifying this, defines time as 'interval of movement in the sense in which it is sometimes called measure of swiftness and slowness, or the interval proper to the movement of the cosmos, and it is in time that everything moves and exists.'"—"Ζήνων ἔφησε χρόνον εἶναι κινήσεως διάστημα, τοῦτο δὲ καὶ μέτρον καὶ κριτήριον τάχους τε καὶ βραδύτητος ὅπως ἔχει ἑκάστα. κατὰ τοῦτον δὲ γίνεσθαι τὰ γινόμενα καὶ τὰ περαινόμενα ἅπαντα καὶ τὰ ὄντα εἶναι." Fragment drawn from Stobaeus, *Anthologium* (Ecl.) 1.8.40e (1.8.104.6–11) = Arius Didymus, *Epitom. phys.* fr. 26 Diels. Quoted from Hans von Arnim and Maximilian Adler, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, 4 vols, vol. I, *Zeno et Zenonis discipuli* (1905); vol. II, *Chrysippi fragmenta logica et physica* (1903); vol. III, *Chrysippi fragmenta moralia*, *Fragmenta successorum Chrysippi* (1903); vol. IV, *Quo indices continentur* (1924) (Leipzig; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1903–24), 1.93 (Zeno). Hereafter cited as SVF. In parallel, if possible, I show also fragment numbers according to Anthony A. Long and David N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, *Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary*; vol. 2, *Greek and Latin Texts with Notes and Bibliography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), hereafter cited as L&S. English translation in Samuel Sambursky, *Physics of the Stoics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul/New York: Macmillan, 1959), 100, doi:10.1515/9781400859009. Cf. SVF 2.510 = L&S 51A (Chrysippus): "τῶν δὲ Στωϊκῶν Ζήνων μὲν πάσης ἀπλῶς κινήσεως διάστημα τὸν χρόνον εἶπε" (from Simplicius, *In Cat.* 350.15–16). Also. cf. SVF 2.509.1–5 = L&S 51B.1–5: "Ὁ δὲ Χρύσιππος χρόνον εἶναι κινήσεως διάστημα, καθ' ὃ ποτε λέγεται μέτρον τάχους τε καὶ βραδύτητος· ἢ τὸ παρακολουθοῦν διάστημα τῇ τοῦ κόσμου κινήσει, καὶ κατὰ μὲν τὸν χρόνον κινεῖσθαι τε ἑκάστα καὶ εἶναι," in Stobaeus, *Anthologium* (Ecl.) 1.8.42 (1.8.106.5–9) = Arius Didymus, *Epitom. phys.* fr. 26.20–23.

20. Cf. Panayiotis Tzamalikos, "Origen and the Stoic View of Time," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52, no. 4 (1991): 545, doi:10.2307/2709965. Basil's interval coextensive with the

So what does Basil's definition tell us about time? Time is an interval or extension, but, firstly, what is the significance of the extension or interval that is co-extended with the cosmos? Does this mean that everything in the world is such as to have magnitude or size? Not everything, but all material entities, all things that move, all that is measurable. Indeed, the presence of διάστημα entails that time as extended magnitude is such as to be continuous and divisible—and definitely organized in a serial order. It is interesting to observe that the notion of "motion," which originally featured in Zeno and Chrysippus, was absent from Basil's definition, although it did appear in the adjacent explanatory clause. Perhaps Basil thought of it as implicitly contained in the other terms of the definition? But how? This is particularly puzzling, as Basil's definition made clear his unequivocal indebtedness to Stoicism. As John M. Rist rightly noted, according to Chrysippus, time can only be understood in relation to motion. Thus, "no definition of time without reference to motion . . . is possible."<sup>21</sup> In the absence of motion, what would Basil's definition signify? Basically, the notion of interval, and the notion of something that is stretched out side by side with something, entail one another. Time, then, is an extension that is extended along with the cosmos, which is an extended body. So it follows that it is an extension of the extended. I would suggest that Basil's definition does not make a significant contribution to the subject at hand, but does appear to fit perfectly within the horizons of his ongoing contest with the Arians.

Basil spoke of time as a measure of swiftness and slowness. This explanatory statement was predominantly associated with Stoic definitions of time. It is unclear why Basil opted for its inclusion in his own account. Whatever reason he had for this, the mere fact is telling: apparently, Basil had first-hand knowledge of the Stoics, and not merely an Origenian digest of it. This contradicts Tzamalikos' thesis about Basil developing his theory based on Origenian sources.<sup>22</sup>

To sum up, Basil, in this treatise, aimed to defend his vision of *theologia*. His conception of time was by and large determined by the agenda of demonstrating that the presence of a temporally bound series of what is prior and posterior requires the presence of interval or extension. However, there is no extension, as far as the orders of divine procession or

existence of the cosmos also exhibits similarities with Plotinus' extension (διάστασις) that "accompanies [παρομαρτέω] or runs beside [συνθέω] the movement." Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.7[45].9.43–45.

21. John M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 280.

22. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time*, 225–32.



generation are concerned. Those were presented as causally determined orders of what is prior and posterior that lack any interval. Extension seemed to entail the presence of successive series of moving things, or of their parts that come-to-be and cease-to-exist. The presence of extension and interval also entailed the possibility of a serial order and, perhaps, of some temporal intermediaries between things ordered into successive series. None of this is true of divine orders. Hence, there is no extension in the being of the Father and of the Son. Moreover, no interval can separate the Father from the Son so that we could conceive of the Son's generation as framed within the schema of temporal succession of what is prior and posterior in time. Basil's overall approach to the subject betrayed the influence of Origen and Plotinus, in that it juxtaposed the divine being that is subject to eternity (and thus lacking any interval or extension) with the sensible being, subject to time-bound series marked off by the presence of an interval. However, Basil's definition of time clearly exposed his indebtedness to Chrysippus. Did he receive this Stoic definition from the subsequent tradition, perhaps from Origen of Alexandria? Indeed, we may also legitimately think of Basil as being influenced by Origen. His definition of time and the role of διάστημα in distinguishing the unextended existence of God from an existence of created realities marked off by the presence of temporal extension and successive series of before and after in time could have been indebted to Origen. Nevertheless, certain elements of Basil's discourse suggest that he might have had first-hand knowledge of Stoicism and other schools. Moreover, as of today, I have not been able to locate such key parts of Basil's argument as that involving the dung-beetles within the Origenian oeuvre.

#### BASIL'S CONCEPTION OF TIME IN THE *HEXAMERON*

A different approach to the matter at hand was offered by Basil when it came to his agenda for reinterpreting the creation narrative. Here, Basil seemed to radically change his approach and rearticulate his theory of time. He seemed to drop the previously featured definition of time. The notion of extension, in the form in which it appeared in the *Adversus Eunomium*, seemed no longer a viable option. In the *Hexameron*, interval or extension was delineated as the measure of days and not as the essential element of time and its definition. It is interesting to observe in this context that, as Tzamalikos has acutely pointed out, the common usage of the word διάστημα referred to periods of time, "and never suggested that time itself was an extension."<sup>23</sup> It was the Stoics who defined time as διάστημα.

Then this Stoic invention traveled across history and was featured in the treatises of various illustrious philosophers. Basil seemed to endorse it at first. However, soon after, he appeared to revert back to a more conventional way of relating the term to periods. Hence, time in Basil's thought from now on ceased to appear as an interval co-extended with the world. In general, the entire thread associated with the Stoic treatment of time seemed to fade away.

Moreover, Basil's critical reevaluation of the creation narrative moved his intellectual cursor in the direction of favoring the idea of instantaneous creation. Hence, the key argument involving a temporal series prior to the fourth day of creation was invalidated. Neither did the *Hexameron* feature the argument from the motion of dung-beetles. Meanwhile, the argument pertaining to the pause in the celestial clock seemed to remain somewhere in the background of Basil's thought, without being explicitly mentioned or used. At this point, Basil would offer a more subtle argument concerning the imperfection of the celestial clock associated with the solstices. In this context we also encounter a clear juxtaposition of the two types or modes or phases of time, one associated with the eschatological notion of "one day," representing time firmly fixed in the state of "moving repose," so to say, and another one following the pattern of created things—those in a state of constant flux. This new discourse was framed in the terms of Basil's protological and eschatological concerns. In this treatise he considered time as something that determined the fate of unredeemed creatures: i.e. as passing away forever.<sup>24</sup> However, an eschatological hope necessitated a different perspective on things to come and on the possibility of redemption. This, in turn, required the existence of perpetual and absolutely regular motion and time. An eschatological vision of the redeemed world that is no longer subject to corruption, experienced within liturgical settings, called for the possibility of motion and time that may last forever. The vision of perpetual and everlasting motion of the transfigured world also required a time that, contrary to the common perception of it as being responsible for or leading towards destruction, would instead be able to extend the duration of existence of things (that are subject to time) to an infinitely extended series. Hence, a commanding role was played in Basil's discourse by a conception of time as assuring an infinite series, not limited by finite temporal boundaries.

23. Tzamalikos, "Origen and the Stoic View of Time," 537.

24. Perhaps Aristotle's conception of time, presented in the *Physics* (as being responsible for the destruction of existents), was at the back of Basil's mind.

Basil commenced his speculations in this regard by juxtaposing the order of divine and intellectual beings with that of sensible realities, arguing that things of the former kind are firmly established in a state of eternal repose. They are ordered according to a divine plan, but this order is atemporal. It merely indicates the arrangement of causes and effects. In this context, he spoke about intellectual and invisible natures and argued that "all the orderly arrangement of pure intelligences . . . are beyond the reach of our mind."<sup>25</sup> We cannot even discover their names. All we know is that "they fill [complete] the essence [συνπληροῖ τὴν οὐσίαν] of this invisible world" (*Hexaem.* 1.5.11–12). Hence, they are the essential completers of this world. It is not clear to me what he meant by this. However, the language of essential completers (συνπληρωτικά τῆς οὐσίας) at the time was predominantly associated with Neoplatonism.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the language of the Academy came to the forefront of Basil's discourse. The former order is exclusively subject to eternity. Things of the latter kind, on the other hand, are in a state of becoming, constantly moving and changing their characteristics. They are thus ordered in temporal series. They constantly come-to-be and cease-to-exist. They are subject to time. But the notion of time here seemed to bifurcate, presenting us with a juxtaposition of unredeemed time that leads to destruction with redeemed time that assures perpetuity and life lasting forever.

In the *Hexameron*, Basil pursued an eschatological approach, arguing that since the world was made, it will eventually come to an end. He also told us that the meaning of all creation is determined by eschatological concerns. Consequently, the notions of time and history came into play. What kind of characteristics do the things of this sensible world exhibit? Basil's answer was that "that which was begun in time is condemned to come to an end in time."<sup>27</sup> Thus, "if there has been a beginning do not

25. Basil, *Hexameron* 1.5.9–10. Greek text and citations according to the edition Basil of Caesarea, *Hexameron*, ed. Stanislas Giet, in *Homélies sur l'Hexaéméron*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., Sources chrétiennes 26 bis (Paris: Cerf, 1968). Hereafter cited as *Hexaem.* English translation in Basil of Caesarea, *Letters and Select Works*, trans. Blomfield Jackson, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, ed. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff, vol. 8 (Oxford: Parker, 1895).

26. We encounter this appellation and its cognates as part and parcel of late antique philosophical jargon. It was mainly but not exclusively used—we find this same appellation in the works of Alexander of Aphrodisias—by Neoplatonists, making its appearance in the treatises of Plotinus, Dexippus, Ammonius, Proclus, Simplicius, and Philoponus, amongst others. This language of essential completers then came to be employed in Christian quarters, making its appearance in the works of Basil the Great and Cyril of Alexandria, among others.

doubt of the end.<sup>28</sup> Basil then aimed to spell out certain features of time. Following Aristotle, he exclaimed: “is not this the nature of time, where the past is no more, the future does not exist, and the present escapes before being recognized?”<sup>29</sup> It would follow then that parts of time do not exist. Hence, *time* has only a tenuous existence. But it is not unreal. Basil never went in the direction of inferring the unreality of time from the paradox of the non-existence of its parts.

It is interesting to observe that Basil, as a consequence, arrived at a conclusion about the mode of subsistence of the universe that was contrary to that of Aristotle, arguing that “a whole, of which the parts are subject to corruption and change, must of necessity end by itself submitting to the fate of its parts”—“ὅτι οὐ τὰ μέρη φθοραῖς καὶ ἀλλοιωσέσιν ὑπόκειται, τούτου καὶ τὸ ὅλον ἀνάγκη ποτὲ τὰ αὐτὰ παθήματα τοῖς οἰκείοις μέρεσιν ὑποστῆναι.”<sup>30</sup> Hence, the universe must pass-away at a certain point in the distant future. This point will signify the completion of the history of the universe and its reconstitution (ἀποκατάστασις). The same is true of all sensible things subject to time. Basil’s main conjecture was that the nature of a creature which lives in time is “condemned to grow or to perish without rest and without certain stability.”<sup>31</sup> A lack of ontological stability is the main characteristic of things that belong to this sensible order of unredeemed existents.

One conceptual thread that permeates the treatise presented time as having been created by God in a fashion analogous to other things of this world.<sup>32</sup> This time is thus such as to have the same characteristics as other sensible realities. But what are they? It seems that things in this world are always impermanent. They are in a state of flux. Basil then gave some further qualifications of time and spoke of it as “forever pressing on and passing away and never stopping in its course”—“ἐπειγομένη ἀεὶ, καὶ παρὰρρέουσα, καὶ μηδαμῶς παυομένη τοῦ δρόμου” (*Hexaem.* 1.5.22–23). He

27. *Hexaem.* 1.3.20–21: “τὰ ἀπὸ χρόνου ἀρξάμενα πᾶσα ἀνάγκη καὶ ἐν χρόνῳ συντελεσθῆναι.”

28. *Hexaem.* 1.3.21–22: “Εἰ ἀρχὴν ἔχει χρονικὴν, μὴ ἀμφιβάλλης περὶ τοῦ τέλους.”

29. *Hexaem.* 1.5.23–25: “Ἡ οὐχὶ τοιοῦτος ὁ χρόνος, οὗ τὸ μὲν παρελθὸν ἡφανίσθη, τὸ δὲ μέλλον οὐπω πάρεστι, τὸ δὲ παρὸν πρὶν γνωσθῆναι διαδιδράσκει τὴν αἴσθησιν;”

30. *Hexaem.* 1.3.30–32. This clearly contradicts the leitmotif of *De caelo*, where the universe is presented as eternal and indestructible.

31. “Τοιαύτη δέ τις καὶ τῶν γινομένων ἢ φύσις, ἢ αὐξανομένη πάντως, ἢ φθίνουσα, τὸ δὲ ἰδρυμένον καὶ στάσιμον οὐκ ἐπίδηλον ἔχουσα.” *Hexaem.* 1.5.26–28.

32. “Thus was created, of a nature analogous to that of this world and the animals and plants which live thereon, the succession of time.”—“Συμφυγῆς ἅρα τῷ κόσμῳ, καὶ τοῖς ἐν αὐτῷ ζώοις τε καὶ φυτοῖς, ἢ χρόνου διεξοδος ἐπέστη.” *Hexaem.* 1.5.20–22.

argued that time and the bodies in time always follow a sort of current (ρεύματι) and are constantly "carried away by the motion which leads them to birth and death"—"καὶ τῇ πρὸς γένεσιν ἢ φθορὰν ἀγούσῃ κινήσει συνεχομένοις" (*Hexaem.* 1.5.30). They are always subject to change and mutation. We can see that all things of this world lack ontological stability ("καὶ στάσιμον οὐκ ἐπίδηλον ἔχουσα," *Hexaem.* 1.5.27–28). Time possesses similar or identical characteristics to things of this world. Hence, time should also be ontologically unstable, incomplete, and imperfect. Basil was determined to present time in this context as subject to motion. Hence, this kind of time seems to itself move along similar lines to other moving things of this world. He spoke of the "movement of time." If we think of time as a quantifiable aspect of motion (e.g. as the number of motion or the quantity of motion or its duration), we may not immediately apprehend it as itself moving, unless incidentally. Hence, this kind of time does not apparently exhibit any features similar to those we may encounter in Aristotle or the Stoics. This line of argument in Basil's discourse should have had different philosophical underpinnings.

Basil's main conjecture regarding time and things in time was, in this context, that they constantly tend to slip into non-existence. Furthermore, this world of ours, taken as such, seems to lack any definitive features, in the sense of measure, size, shape, etc. It is ordered, but the principle of order does not seem to be intrinsic to the things ordered. It must reside elsewhere. We may go back to Aristotle's idea of ordered and regular time: one that is tied to the motion of the celestial bodies. This motion and the time that measures this kind of motion seemed to provide quite a precise and regular scale of measurement. However, according to Basil, this is simply not the case. The idea of precision or absolute regularity does not belong to this sensible universe. And the ordered motion of the stars is itself imperfect: we can see various signs of this.

In order to illustrate this imperfection, Basil gave the example of the solstices, implying that the celestial clock is imperfect as it does not remain constant right through the year. Solstices seem to extend the boundaries of the day. Hence, the celestial clock and its measuring capacity merely approximate to perfection. The idea of the imperfection of the physical clock, expressed through the example of the solstices, was quite clear, and drew attention to the nature of the time that measures motion in the cosmos. What is more, this kind of time can fail due to divine interventions, as was indicated above. Basil did not use the argument of the suspended celestial clock in this context. However, it remained implicit in the conversation. In general, the argument from the solstices appeared

more subtle than both that of the unmeasured time resulting in the gap between the first and the fourth days of creation and that of the suspended motion of the celestial clock. The imprecision of the measure imposed was a sign of its imperfection. Hence, the time that measures the motion of the sensible universe has an intrinsic deficiency. This deficiency is made manifest by the fact of a certain inherent irregularity of the celestial clock.

Such a world—ours, with its distinctive characteristics, including time—apparently led Basil to conclude that the occurrences of this sensible world do not provide us with a proper analogy of creation. God's creative power is not isomorphic with the powers of this world that cause things to come-to-be and cease-to-exist. He thus clearly articulated his commitment to the idea of instantaneous creation, ruling out the possibility of God's actions being quantified in respect of before and after, and refusing to think of it in a fashion that would make God's acts appear structured just like the things of this world. By pursuing this argument, he betrayed his indebtedness to Philo and Origen.

In order to elucidate the notion of creation and exhibit the features associated with the origins of time and things in time, Basil introduced the notion of "beginning." He went back to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Δ.1 in order to reexamine this notion. He clearly distinguished between the various meanings of the word "beginning." "The beginning," he told us, can mean the following: (1) the first movement; (2) the essential and first part from which a thing proceeds, such as the foundation of a house; (3) artistic skills as the principle for the work of artists; (4) the final cause (the good) that initiates all actions. Basil was indeed concerned with the first and primary meaning of the word. He then argued that whenever we attempt to lay hold on the beginning of this world, we must ascend into the past in order to discover the first day and the first movement of time. Speaking of the beginning, Basil pointed out that:

[p]erhaps these words "in the beginning God created" signify a rapid [ἀκκραιός] and instantaneous [ἄχρονος, "non-durational"] moment of creation. The beginning, in effect, is indivisible [ἀμερής] and unextended [ἀδιάστατος]. (*Hexaem.* 1.6.19–20)

He then proceeded to say that if we assume that the beginning is itself a time, we will have to submit it to the division of time, which must have its own beginning, middle and end. This must necessarily lead us to an imputing of parts to the beginning. However, he exclaimed: "it is ridiculous to imagine a beginning of a beginning" (*Hexaem.* 1.6.25–26). He further

noted that this procedure will necessarily lead to an infinite regress as the beginning will be extended and infinitely divisible. In order to resolve this aporia, Basil arrived at the idea of instantaneity:

Thus then, if it is said, "In the beginning God created," it is to teach us that at the will of God the world arose instantaneously [*ἁχρόνως*], and it is to convey this meaning more clearly that other interpreters have said: "God made summarily," that is to say all at once and in a moment.

(*Hexaem.* 1.6.32–33)

Indeed, we can see in this context that the idea of a temporal series prior to the fourth day of creation was removed, as Basil himself at this point advocated the idea of instantaneous creation—one that embraced all six days of creation. In the context of instantaneous creation, it would not make sense to speak of time (either before the creation of the sun and moon or after it), as only causal and logical relations are expressed in the creation narrative, without it being descriptive of a time-bound series. Hence, the act of creation itself was atemporal. Basil also insisted that the phrase "In the beginning God created" was meant to indicate that the world is not self-constituted or eternal. There was no time before the creation. It was God who brought time into being out of not being. Basil spoke of God as "casting about in His mind" to bring time and things that are in time into being.

Basil's discourse seemed to make a subtle distinction between two phases of creation: one referring to God's intelligible design of the entire outline of things, the other addressing its instantaneous instantiation. The act of creation thus contained a preexisting order of things. Moreover, it carried in itself a set of logical relations between different parts of creation, made manifest in an ascending series passing from less complex to more complex stages. For instance, the introduction of light and days logically precedes and conditions the introduction of humanity. In this context, the idea that the act of creation established time and framed a preexisting order of things within an extended temporal series is important. However, Basil reasoned, we should not make a leap from the atemporal to the temporal. There appears to be an unbridgeable gap between the two. So, how could that be explained? Moreover, he sought to find a perfect measure for time. In order to make sense of these things, Basil introduced another conception of time, explained through the notion of "one day" (Gen 1:5).

Following Philo, Basil keenly observed that the writer of the sacred text did not designate the day that commenced the history of the world as the

“first day.” Rather, he called it “one day.” Basil, taking into account this appellation, made a semantic distinction between “the first day” of creation and “one day” (ἡμέρα μία). He proposed that it was “one day” that initiated the series and set out an interval and duration of time. Indeed, a common convention of modern languages is to translate the expression as “first day.” However, this convention is misleading in many ways. Although “one day” was apparently followed by ἡμέρα δευτέρα, τρίτη, etc. (i.e. those that comprise a sequence), according to Basil, “one day” by no means functions as a member of the series. He argued that the beginning is called “one day” because Scripture wished to determine “the measure of day and night, and to combine the time that they contain” (*Hexaem.* 2.8.32–33).

“One day” represents the measure of time and its most foundational unit. This time, however, is not the same as the time of the world. Basil characterized it as unique (μοναχός), and not shared with or communicated to others (ἀκοινωνήτος).<sup>33</sup> In another place he called it “without successor” (ἀδιάδοχος) and “without end” (ἀτελεύτητος). Basil’s way of articulating its characteristics was, first and foremost, by using the alpha privative. Hence, it is not this or that. It is something that is totally apart from what we normally think of when we contemplate the notion of “days.” Acutely, Basil noted in this regard that it is not a member of a series of days.

Basil also argued that the “beginning of time is not yet time and not even the least particle of it”—“ἡ τοῦ χρόνου ἀρχὴ οὐπω χρόνος, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ μέρος αὐτοῦ τὸ ἐλάχιστον” (*Hexaem.* 1.6.21–23). This beginning is indivisible (ἀμερές) and instantaneous, or without interval and unextended (ἀδιάστατον). As such it retains its connection with eternity. “One day” constituted this “beginning of time.” That which is unextended and indivisible must be intelligible or intellectual (i.e. opposed to the sensible). Thus, Basil continued, “whether you call it day, or whether you call it eternity, you express the same idea”—“Ὡστε καὶ ἡμέραν εἶπης, καὶ αἰῶνα, τὴν αὐτὴν ἐρεῖς ἔννοιαν” (*Hexaem.* 2.8.70–71). Again, we can also render “αἰών” as “age” in this context. Then the meaning of the sentence would be that “one day” represents an age. It would then signify an extended period of life that attained its completion. Hence, it would necessarily be succeeded by other ages. “One day” would not then be unique and without successor. Even more to the point, such a day would not be unextended.

33. *Hexaem.* 2.8.56–57: “Τοῦ γὰρ μοναχοῦ ἀκοινωνήτου πρὸς ἕτερον ἢ τὸν χαρακτῆρα δεικνύουσα.”



It would then follow that the proper meaning of “αἰών” in this context is eternity. Basil then drew some ramifications from this by arguing that:

If Scripture speaks to us of many ages, saying everywhere, age of age, and ages of ages, we do not see it enumerate them as first, second, and third. It follows that we are hereby shown not so much limits [πέρατα], ends and succession of ages [διαδοχὰς αἰώνων], as distinctions between various states and modes of action. (*Hexaem.* 2.8, 58–64)

It would then follow that, when we speak of eternity and eternal things, we must not frame them within an ordered and temporally-bound series. They simply do not exhibit any isomorphism with temporal things such as would allow us to construct an argument analogically.

Now that which is subject to eternity is intelligible. What do we make of this? There appears to be a time isomorphic with moving things (exhibiting the same characteristics as them: i.e. being itself in motion and being subject to flux), and another time which exhibits some features of eternity. Basil, consequently, juxtaposed a seemingly regular but imperfect time tied to the motion of the Sun with the time of which Scripture spoke. This latter time establishes a precise length or extension (διάστημα) of days. It clearly marks off their interval by confining the length of one day (and night) within the boundaries of twenty-four hours. It does provide us with a perfect measure of days and weeks. He pointed out, however, that “in reality [i.e. that of sensible particulars] a day is the time that the heavens starting from one point take to return there” (*Hexaem.* 2.8.42–43). Hence, a time that orders and measures the extension of this sensible world is linked to the motion of the celestial bodies. But this motion is quasi-regular. It entails the possibility of variations and interruptions. How, then, does a time submerged in the reality of moving things remain relatively stable? Why does it not fail to provide a relatively stable order and measure of days? In order to address this question Basil argued that we must believe in a mysterious reason for this:

God who made the nature of time measured it out and determined it by intervals of days; and, wishing to give it a week as a measure, he ordered the week to revolve from period to period upon itself, to count the movement of time. (*Hexaem.* 2.8.43–44)

God, according to Basil, created an unextended and unique unit of intellectual time. It represents a perfect (unit of) measure and ordering

principle of the world. It can hold moving things together by ordering their motion and measuring its duration. It does not allow the world's motion to fail.

Basil also introduced another thread, saying that "one day" perfectly mimics eternity as it always reverts back upon itself. Its cyclical motion is thus everlasting. Here he seemed to invoke Aristotle's discussion of different types of motion, clearly accentuating the uniqueness and primacy of circular motion. However, it seems that everlastingness belongs to redeemed creatures subject to the eschatological reality of "one day." This "eternal" time, or an intellectual measure of everlasting subsistence of redeemed creatures, points towards the eighth day of creation, unknown to Scripture. It (or rather its manifestations) is experienced within a liturgical setting. However, "one day" does not itself seem to move so as to revert back upon itself, being unextended and indivisible, unless some sort of intellectual motion is entailed by the sentence.

Taking into account what has been said so far, it is very tempting to inquire into the possibility that Basil's theory could resolve the paradoxes of time. How did Basil handle the paradoxes of the non-existence of time and the constantly changing instant? The truth is that the resolution of these paradoxes was not on his agenda. However, certain conceptual threads clearly indicate that Basil was well aware of them. Finally, we may also attempt to uncover the conceptual underpinnings of Basil's theory. Where was he coming from with this newly introduced theory of time? Was it similar to some other conceptual threads found elsewhere in the philosophical literature? What immediately comes to mind is the following: Basil's juxtaposition of the two types or phases of time reminds us of some threads in late antique philosophy of nature. In particular, Basil's contemporary in Apamea, Iamblichus, also distinguished between the two types or phases of time, using a similar designation to delineate the nature of a time submerged in the realm of sensible particulars, and speaking of this phase of time as flowing and shifting. He also used similar designations to indicate the nature or mode of subsistence of the other phase of time: e.g. "ἡμέρες," "μόναχ χρόνου," "ἀδιάστατος."<sup>34</sup>

In general, what we encounter are certain definitive marks of Basil's acquaintance with post-Plotinian Neoplatonism. Some particular philosophical jargon, together with various conceptual threads, clearly testify

34. Samuel Sambursky and Shlomo Pines, *The Concept of Time in Late Neoplatonism: Texts with Translation, Introduction, and Notes*, Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities 2.8 (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Section of Humanities, 1971), 107.

to his knowledge of late antique philosophical authorities. However, he was no mere eclectic thinker. He employed various conceptions inherited from the late antique philosophical tradition to arrive at a unique Christian theological and eschatological synthesis. His arguments introduced in this way were then heavily utilized by the subsequent tradition. Here we may note especially Augustine's and John of Damascus' indebtedness to Basil's seminal thinking. Of course, there remain many details associated with Basil's theory of time yet to be explored. What is clear to me, though, is that this theory represents a valuable extension to our understanding of that topic.

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