

CURSING PROPERLY:
THE TERMINOLOGICAL CONUNDRUM OF THE NICENE ANATHEMA IN
LIGHT OF THE 'ARIAN TRICK'

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ABSTRACT: There is a conveniently common assumption that the Nicene Creed adopted by the ecumenical council held in Nicaea in 325 under the patronage of Emperor Constantine the Great solved the most important debate of the Early Church by confessing the Son to be homoousios, i.e. of the same essence with the Father, thus refusing any Arian interpretation of divine subordination. Whilst this can be accepted as being valid on the level of positive credal intent, on the terminological-linguistic front as well as pertaining to the negative side of doctrinal manifestation (i.e. concerning the text of the Anathema following the Creed) a definitive solution can hardly be argued for. On the contrary: following the acceptance of the Symbolum Nicaenum and of the Anathema (i.e. the curse issued upon those who would uphold Arian formulae) a whole range of terminological-linguistic debates ensued, some of which lasted at least until the council of Constantinople in 381 and as late as the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The die was cast, however, not just by a shrewd reasoning of the heretics, but also by a less apparent 'Arian trick'.

KEYWORDS: ousia, hypostasis, substance, Nicene Creed, terminology

A terminological problem?

The main question that we are concerned with in this paper is the Nicene and post-Nicene interpretation of two Greek key terms: *ousia* and *hypostasis*. Let us quote the relevant text, i.e. the anathema following the Nicene Creed as preserved by Socrates Scholasticus in his *Ecclesiastical history* I, 8:

But the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes those who say about the Son of God that 'there was when he was not' and 'he did not exist before he was begotten' and 'he came to be from the non-existent' or who claim that he is of another hypostasis or essence (ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας), or a creature, or changeable, or alterable. (Socrates 1.8 :1893)

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Before we proceed any further, I would like to explain my preference in translating these two terms into English, even though it might differ from the arguably established standard renderings. For *ousia* I use ‘essence’, whilst I chose to simply transliterate *hypostasis*. My main reasons are: the Greek *ousia* derives from *eimi*, just as the Latin *essentia* comes from *sum, esse, fui*. As we know, *ousia* has often been translated as *substantia* (substance), yet that may create a confusion (as it did in antiquity), because etymologically *hypostasis* can also be referred to as ‘substance’, albeit, sometimes ‘subsistence’ has been used for the latter, yet not universally and not consistently throughout ancient and modern scholarship. Further, as István Bugár rightly observes, since ‘Tertullian’s usage of *substantia* [...] had become, by accident (in the sense of *Umfall*) the Latin equivalent of the Greek *ousia*’ (Bugár 2023: 186), I would like to avoid any such ‘accident’ and try to be etymologically consistent, with the assumed risk to appear *prima facie* anachronistic. The confusion persisted for a long time, since as Ambrose writes ‘we speak, in Greek, of the *ousia*, or in Latin, of the *substantia* of God (*quia nos in Deo aut usian graece aut latine substantiam dicimus*)’ (Ambrose 1962: 19.128; see also Abramowski 1981: 89).

As it is obvious from the quoted *Anathema*, the Nicene Fathers treated the notions of *ousia* and *hypostasis* as synonyms: the Son cannot be said to be of any other essence or hypostasis, than the Father. But is that affirmation truly warranted by the previous and contemporary terminological development? To answer this question, we need to take a brief overview of the philosophical as well as theological history of these two expressions.

Ousia: an essential notion or notional essence?

Whilst the issue in question could easily fill volumes (in fact, it already did), thus exceeding the limits of my present work, I shall rely on the relevant scholarship of M. Richard (1945), G.L. Prestige (1952), C. Stead (1977), L. Abramowski (1981), I. Bugár (2023) and others.

Plato appears to be the first who applied and interpreted *ousia* (deriving from *eimi*, i.e. ‘to exist’, ‘to be’, or ‘to be true’) as not merely a worldly ‘property’ or ‘possession’, but also as ‘the existent (one)’, something which is truly eternal, existing even beyond our changing world of shadows. Upon browsing through some of the most important occurrences in his works, like *Phaedo* 78d, 92d, *Cratylus* 388c, *Theaetetus* 186a, *Sophista* 248c, *Parmenides* 141e–144e etc., one might have the impression that Plato’s *ousia* is reminiscent of what he had borrowed from the Eleatics whilst constructing his concept of the two worlds: the ‘lower’ one of change owed to Heraclitus, the ‘higher’ one to Parmenides and his followers. Nonetheless, the most important theoretician of *ousia* is undoubtedly Aristotle, who made it one of the key phrases

of his philosophy. In the famous passage of his *Categories* 2a, he defines the primary (*prōtai*) and secondary essences (*deuteraí ousiai*):

Essence (*ousia*), in the ultimate, primary and most definite sense of the word, is that which is neither predicable of a subject (*kath' hypokeimenou*) nor present in a subject (*en hypokeimenō*): for instance, the individual man or the individual horse. But the species in which the primarily called essences (*hai prōtōs ousiai legomenai*) reside, are called secondary essences (*deuteraí ousiai*), as these are also the genera (*ta genē*) of these species (*tōn eidōn toutōn*). For example, the individual human is included in the species 'human', and the genus to which the species belongs is 'animal' (*to zōon*); so these – that is to say, the species 'human' and the genus 'animal' – are called secondary essences. (Aristotle 1949: 2a)

Here we have the most concise, yet very influential definition of *ousia*, both as an individual entity and as species or even genus. Furthermore, at the beginning of the second book of his work *On the soul*, Aristotle provides an even more interesting clue:

We call one genus (*genos*) of existent things as essence (*tēn ousian*), and first we define this as matter (*hōs hylēn*), which in itself is not any particular thing; then we describe it as form (*morphēn*) and species (*eidōs*), due to which it is termed some particular thing, and third, a compound of these two. Whilst matter is potentiality (*dynamis*), species (*eidōs*) is actuality (*entelecheia*), yet this is used twofold: once as knowledge (*epistēmē*) and then as contemplation (*to theōrein*). (Aristotle 1961: II, 1, 412a)

István Bugár, who has recently drawn attention upon this Aristotelian passage, where even matter (*hylē*) can be construed as 'essence' (*ousia*), provides us with a crucial observation in our attempt to interpret the later Trinitarian and Christological usages of the term in Early Christian theology:

The most revelatory passage can be found in *De anima*, where – as he [i.e. Aristotle] would put it – he draws from a higher science, i.e. first philosophy, a tenet to be used as a kind of axiom in psychology. Here he is not exercising an *epagōgē* (*inductio*) cutting through the difficulties (*aporiai*) surrounding the concept but takes over a pattern fully established – as he is convinced – by him earlier and, consequently, his views on the correct usage of *ousia* appear in a crystallized, or, with a different metaphor, in a distilled form. Thus, in his introduction – or, better said, *inductio* –, leading to the definition of soul he bases his claims as on a firm ground on his views on the structure of reality. 'Real existent' or 'reality' is primarily the sensible, tangible object, which can be analysed into 'form' or 'species' (*deuterē ousia*, 'secondary reality') and matter ('third reality'). While his 'secondary *ousia*' is a direct heir of Plato's 'real existent', i.e.

the Forms meant individually or collectively, his ranking it as secondary has a critical overtone. While he gladly embraces the view suggested by Plato's middle dialogues on the epistemological priority of the Forms, he disagrees on their ontological status. The real and primordial existent is the concrete, individual, and, with a single exception, sensual one, while forms or species are dependent on it. (Bugár 2023: 185-186)

It is useful to connect the above to another paragraph in Aristotle, i.e. *Metaphysics* Z. 10, 1035a, labelled the 'Hylomorphic passage' by one of its analysts, Samuel Meister, whose solution of the Z.10 puzzle (Meister 2020: 19-23) I wholeheartedly recommend for the reader without quoting it extensively:

If then matter (*hylē*), form (*eidos*), and the combination of the two (*to d'ek toutōn*) are distinct, and if both matter and form and their combination are essence (*ousia*), there is one sense in which even matter may be called 'part' of a thing (*meros tinos legetai*); and another in which it is not, but the only parts are those elements of which the account of the form is (*ex hōn ho tou eidous logos*). (Aristotle 1924: 1536a).

The continuity of the Aristotelian interpretation of this term can be followed throughout the history of ancient Greek philosophy, moreover, its reiteration and strengthening comes from Porphyry himself. In his *Introduction to Aristotle's Categories or The five words*, the famous pupil of Plotinus affirms:

Essence (*ousia*) indeed, is itself genus (*genos*), under this is body (*sōma*), under body animated body (*empsychon sōma*), under which is animal (*to zōon*), under animal rational animal (*logikon zōon*), under which is human (*anthrōpos*), under human Socrates, Plato, and humans particularly. Still, of these, essence is the most generic, and that which alone is genus; but human is the most specific, and that which alone is species (*eidos*); yet body is a species of essence, but a genus of animated body, also animated body is a species of body, but a genus of animal; again, animal is a species of animated body, but a genus of rational animal, and rational animal is a species of animal, but a genus of human, and human is a species of rational animal, but is no longer the genus of particular humans, but is species only; and everything prior to individuals (*pan to pro tō atomōn*) being proximately predicated of them, will be species only, and no longer genus also. As then, essence being in the highest place, is most generic (*to genikōtaton*), from there being no genus prior to it, so also human being a species, after which there is no other species, nor any thing capable of division into species, but individuals (*tōn atomōn atomon*), (for Socrates and Plato and this white thing, I call individual), will be species alone, and the last species, and as we say the most specific (*to eidikōtaton*). (Porphyry 1887: 4.1.4)

This is probably the best example how a definition by a renowned authority can not

only survive, but determine the thinking of later generations across long centuries, albeit with minor modifications. One ought to bear in mind, that Porphyry (234?–305? AD) lived in Christian times already, moreover, he was a pupil of Plotinus (ca. 203–269 AD), the prominent founder of Neoplatonism, who arguably began to introduce the notion of *hypostasis* into the vocabulary of philosophy. The ultimate usage of *ousia* was not yet determined or limited to either ‘primary’ or ‘secondary’. As Porphyry’s statement above bears witness, *ousia* could both be considered as ‘most generic’ and ‘most specific’, i.e. it was legitimate to apply it both referring to individuals and genus respectively. For a much deeper understanding of this issue, see Stead’s article, who argues convincingly, that ‘ousia was not always used with a precise sense by the ancient writers’ (Stead 1975: 11), and goes on to identify not less than seven basic notions conveyed by *ousia*, namely:

First, mere existence; second, kind or category, when one uses it to formulate the most general possible questions about the nature of a thing; thirdly, substance, as defined by Aristotle and others – a possible answer to the foregoing questions; fourthly, stuff or matter; fifthly, form or species; sixthly, the definition of a thing; and seventhly, truth. (Stead 1975: 11–12).

Stead’s much wider analysis, which results in him recognising theoretically 28 different possible senses of *ousia* is, of course, a mind-bending exercise, albeit a valid one (Stead 1975: 13). If we were to return the relatively more comfortable, yet not at all simple or universally valid Aristotelian classification, we could argue that both usages, i.e. *ousia* as ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ essence could be applied to God in Christian theology, especially concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. God as an ‘individual’, albeit a timeless and boundless ‘person’ is indeed ‘one’ essence, i.e. *mia ousia* (in this case, as ‘primary essence’, thus a synonym for the Greek *prosōpon* or the Latin *persona*), but can also be viewed as ‘divinity’, which would involve again the application of *mia ousia* in the ‘generic’ sense of ‘secondary essence’.

Nonetheless, following the usage referring to individual entities, an argument could be brought forward for ‘three’ *ousiai* (in this case, again as ‘primary essences’) when speaking about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as ‘members’ of the ‘divine genus’ or, more theologically, divine ‘nature’ (*theia physis*). Whilst the first two usages, i.e. referring to ‘God’ as one ‘person’ (*hen prosōpon*) and as one ‘divinity’ were approved by proto-orthodox and orthodox Christian circles, the application of three different *ousiai*, especially upon the Son (and later, upon the Holy Spirit) was met with increasing resistance. In this context, Hippolytus’ interpretation of *ousia* as the Aristotelian ‘first essence’, moreover his equation between *ousia* and *prosōpon* may appear to be an exception *par excellence* (see below). I am using the term ‘proto-or-

thodox' in the sense coined and applied by the late professor Larry W. Hurtado (Hurtado 2003: 487–495 and 563–587).

The notion of three *ousiai* in Trinitarian doctrine raises the suspicion of subordinationism, including the concept of the Son's adoption (again, Hippolytus appears to be an exception). If we were to seek for a clue in the New Testament, perhaps the most crucial point where adoptionism separates from proto-orthodox and later orthodox thinking is the interpretation of Jesus' baptism. The enunciation: 'this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3:17) can either be seen as the moment in time when the eternal God the Father introduces his also eternal(ly begotten) divine Son to the world, or as the moment when the eternal God adopts the man Jesus to be His son. Irrespective of the use (or unclear use) of philosophical terms, this latter path was taken by the Ebionites, Artemon, Paul of Samosata and Arius.

As shown by Bugár, the early and divergent uses of *ousia* in Trinitarian context by Hippolytus and Pseudo-Origen (i.e. the author of *Refutatio omnium haeresium*) were influential upon later pre-Nicene developments including Tertullian and Origen. On the one hand, when applied to the divine essence of the Son, Pseudo-Origen's *ousia* 'is used in a way that a kind of divine matter is suggested as opposed to created elements', which corresponds with the Nicene Creed's 'of the essence (*ousia*) of the Father' as well as the equation between *ousia* and *hypostasis* within the Nicene Anathema (Bugár 2023: 191). On the other hand, as attested by his *Contra haeresin Noeti* 7,13 and 14, 2-3 respectively, in the Trinitarian doctrine of Hippolytus, *ousia* is practically equivalent to Aristotle's *prôté ousia*, and, by consequence, a synonym for *prosôpon* (person, countenance) (Bugár 2023: 192-193). Concerning the validity of the latter term, the well argued conclusion of Prestige should be considered here:

There does not seem to be any evidence whatever for the view that the term *prosopon* was ever discredited in orthodox circles at any period of theological development. On the contrary, it provided a convenient non-technical and non-metaphysical expression to describe the permanent and objective forms of Persons in which the godhead is presented alike to human vision and to the divine self-consciousness. (Prestige 1952: 162).

Hypostasis: a mere sediment gaining individuality?

Before turning our attention to Arius and the Nicene problem, it is appropriate to take a glance at the evolution of the arguably even more problematic term, *hypostasis*. Its history in philosophical thinking is much shorter than that of *ousia*, but it is no less adventurous. The expression is a correlative substantive of the verb *hyphistēmi*, i.e. to stand, set or place under. As Prestige had aptly put it,

Broadly speaking, it may be said that the purport of the term is derived in one group of usages from the middle voice of the verb *hyphistēmi*, and in another from the ac-

tive voice. Thus, it may mean either that which underlies, or that which gives support (Prestige 1952: 163).

In classical Greek it was used primarily in the material sense as ‘groundwork’, ‘foundation’ or ‘sediment’. Plato barely uses the term, and never in a philosophical sense. In *Philebus* 19a he applies its Aorist Participle in the sense of ‘undertaking’ the charge of an argument (*tou logou diadochon pantelōs hypostanta*) (Plato 1901: 19a); in *Phaedo* 109c it means ‘sediment’ (*hypostathmē*) (Plato 1900: 109c), whilst in *Laws* 686b it is applied in the negative form to mean ‘irresistible’ power (*anypostaton dynamin*) (Plato 1907: 686b).

In Aristotle we find a few more occurrences, but again, not in noticeably philosophical sense. In his *Eudemian ethics* 1222a the term appears as a comparative adjective describing those ‘more firm or steadfast’ (*hypostatikōterai*) (Aristotle 1884: 1222a); in *History of animals* 551b and 552a it means ‘subsistence’ (Aristotle 1964: 551b, 552a). The notion reoccurs in this and similar senses in his *Parts of animals* 674b, 659a, 671a (Aristotle 1956: 674b etc.) and *Meteorology* 355b, 358ab, 368b, 382b (Aristotle 1919: 355b etc.), but does not go beyond the realm of biology and physics, or better said, natural philosophy. One might argue that for the circle of Plato, Aristotle and most of their followers, the term *hypostasis* would have probably meant e.g. lees, i.e. the deposits of dead yeast as a byproduct of wine fermentation. Or, had they been accustomed to drink coffee, they might have employed *hypostasis* to denote coffee grounds. One may safely conclude that it was not part of classical Greek philosophical vocabulary. It is no wonder that the fifth century church historian, Socrates Scholasticus, who on occasion was keen to show (off with) his classical training, agrees with the assessment of Irenaeus the grammarian of the first century (also known as Minucius Pacatus), that *hypostasis* was in fact, a ‘barbarous notion’:

Irenaeus the grammarian, in his alphabetical [lexicon] *Atticistes*, even calls the term ‘barbarous’ (*barbaron apokalei tēn lexin*); for it is not to be found in any of the ancients. If it occurs anywhere at all, it does not mean what it is taken for at present. In Sophocles’ tragedy *Phoenix*, *hypostasis* signifies ‘betrayal’, whilst by Menander it stands for ‘sauces’; just as if one should call the lees in a cask of wine ‘hypostasis’. (Socrates 1893: 3.7).

The aforementioned grammarian had lived before the two Hellenistic Neo-Platonists, i.e. Plotinus and Porphyry, who were primarily responsible for establishing and disseminating *hypostasis* in philosophical literature. Nonetheless, their Egyptian and Syrian-Phoenician descent respectively may have been implied in Socrates’ positive endorsement of Irenaeus’ verdict, the more so since the church historian enjoyed to

take occasional digs against Prophyry, ‘that enemy of piety’ (see e.g. Socrates 1893: 1.9 quoting the emperor’s letter), and a little anachronism in this respect would be the least problem on his mind. Nevertheless, there is another potential candidate, who, besides being a contemporary of Irenaeus, could also fit the bill of ‘barbarian’ – at least in the eyes of the fastidious Greek grammarian.

Apart from applying the term and its derivatives in the sense of ‘resistance’ (e.g. in *On rewards and punishments – De praemiis et poenis* Philo 1906: 96 and 137), ‘status’ (*On the sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 45 Philo 1896: 45), ‘undergo’ or ‘endure’ (*On the Decalogue* 68 Philo 1902: 68; *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 118 Philo 1915: 118), Philo of Alexandria appears to be one of the first philosophers, who began using *hypostasis* in the sense what may be equated with ‘substance’ or ‘substantial nature’. Whilst it cannot be claimed that *hypostasis* had any prevalence or a defining role in Philo’s philosophical vocabulary, a couple of occurrences in his work *On the eternity of the world* point towards the interpretation of something ‘underlying’ a specific phenomenon or essence. In *De aeternitate mundi* 88 Philo asserts that the firelight (*augē*) ‘does not have a hypostasis by itself (*kath’ heautēn gar hypostasin ouk echei*)’ (Philo 1915: 88), a statement he elaborates upon a few paragraphs later (*ibid.* 92-93) in the following manner:

If the world becomes firelight (*augē ginetai*), then again it changes altogether. Why so? Because it has no hypostasis of its own (*hoti hypostasin idian ouk echei*), but is generated from flame (*gennatai d’ ek phlogos*), and when this is wholly and entirely extinguished in all its parts, it follows of necessity (*anankē*) that the firelight (*tēn augēn*) also must be – not partially, but altogether – extinguished (*mē kata meros all’ athroan anaireisthai*). For what flame (*phlox*) is to nourishment (*pros trophēn*), that also is firelight (*augē*) to flame (*pros phloga*). As therefore the flame is extinguished together (*sunanaireitai*) with the want of nourishment, so also is the firelight with flame (*kai augē phlogi*), so that it is impossible for the world to be capable of regeneration (*amēchanon palingenesian ton kosmon labein*), if there is no seminal logos (*spermatikou logou*) lurking and kindled within it, but if all things are expended and destroyed, some by fire (*hypo pyros*), and some by want (*hyp’ endeias*). From all which it is obvious that the world is for ever uncreated (*agenētos*) and imperishable (*aphthartos*) (Philo 1915: 92-93).

I chose to translate *augē* – which can mean ‘the light of the sun’, ‘ray’, ‘beam’ or even ‘gleam’ – with ‘firelight’, mostly to distinguish it from *phōs*, which is also ‘light’, but this is the term used in all Greek translations of Genesis 1:3, and as spiritual light, has its own essence for Philo as well, as opposed to *augē*, which, in his view, lacks it. See e.g. his description of the creation of ‘incorporeal essences’ in *De opificio mundi* 29:

Then he created the incorporeal essence (*asōmaton ousian*) of water and of spirit (*pneumatōs* = wind/spirit), and above all, [the essence] of light (*phōtos*), the seventh thing made; this again was incorporeal, and perceptible to the mind as a model of the sun (*kai noēton hēliou paradeigma*) and of all the light-bearing stars (*phōsphora astra*), which are destined to stand together in heaven (Philo: 1915: 29).

Based on the above we may note that although *hypostasis* was not a key term in Philo's philosophy, the manner in which he employed it repeatedly in *De aeternitate mundi* points toward some synonymity with *ousia* (used abundantly in his oeuvre). He did not necessarily use *hypostasis* as the equivalent of *ousia* either in the 'first' or 'second' Aristotelian sense, but perhaps understood it to show that something may or may not exist 'on its own'. The firelight (*augē*) neither 'having a hypostasis by itself' (*kath' heautēn gar hypostasin ouk echei*), nor 'a hypostasis of its own' (*hoti hypostasin idian ouk echei*) suggests that 'it cannot exist or subsist' without the fire and the flame. Could this mean that in Philo's mind *hypostasis* may have attained the idea of 'individual existence', which is not dependent on anything or anyone else of higher rank? The scant occurrences do not permit us to draw definite conclusions, nonetheless, these two examples can be seen as at least not contradicting the later developing Neo-Nicene interpretation of one *ousia*, and more importantly, three *hypostases* of the three *prosōpa* of the Holy Trinity. But let us not get ahead of ourselves.

If we proceed chronologically, some books of the New Testament are almost contemporary, or at least belong to the same century with Philo, who died around 40 AD. The expression *ousia* occurs in it twice, in the parable of the lost son, both in the sense of 'wealth' (Luke 15: 12-13). It appears multiple times in the form of *exousia*, i.e. power (which could derive from the divine 'essence'? – see e.g. Matthew 9:6, where Jesus claims to have an undeniably divine *exousia* to forgive sins as 'Son of Man'), and *parousia*, often in the sense of 'coming', i.e. returning or 'being there' of 'the Son of Man' or 'the Lord' (Matthew 24:27, 1Corinthians 15:23, 1Thessalonians 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, James 5:7-8, 2Peter 3:4, 1John 2:25 etc.). The other expression, *hypostasis* occurs three times in the New Testament in the sense of 'confidence' (2 Corinthians 9:4, 11:17; Hebrews 3:14), once in the sense of 'reality' or 'assurance' (Hebrews 11:1) and only once with a meaning which the Early Church arguably began to assign to it:

[The Son] is the radiance of God's glory (*apaugasma tēs doxēs*) and the exact imprint of His hypostasis (*charactēr tēs hypostaseōs autou*), and he sustains all things by the power of his word (*tō rhēmati tēs dýnameōs autou*). When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand (*en dexia*) of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he had inherited (*keklēronomēken*) is more excellent (*diaphorōteron*) than theirs. (Hebrews 1:3-4).

The introduction of *hypostasis* in Christian theology, more precisely: in the teaching about God's being (which was Trinitarian doctrine and pneumatology, usually labelled *theologia* by the ancient Fathers, whilst the teaching on salvation and the incarnation was *oikonomia*), is largely due to the above passage. Origen's famous assertion in *De principiis* I.2.1, far from being the first instance, is still one of the most commonly referred ones:

If, then, it is once rightly recognised that the only-begotten Son of God is His wisdom hypostatically existing (*substantialiter subsistentem*), I know not whether our curiosity ought to advance beyond this, or entertain any suspicion that his ὑπόστασις, that is, his substance (*id est substantia eius*) contains anything of a bodily nature, since everything that is corporeal is marked either by form (*habitu*), or colour, or magnitude. (Origen 1978: I.2.1).

One might argue that even if this passage of the famous Alexandrian survived in a Latin translation, *hypostasis* was preserved in Greek letters within the Latin text, thus the Origenian equation between *hypostasis* and *substantia* is, at least verbally, acknowledged here, through the mediation and, most likely, the interpretation of Rufinus. Further, the Crouzel-Simonetti critical apparatus mentions the presence of *subsistentia* in some codices as well, thus confirming the traditional awareness of the confusion created by translating both *ousia* and *hypostasis* with 'substantia' in the Nicene and post-Nicene Latin theological literature. Of course, this case is not as simple as it looks, nonetheless, the quality of the Son as God's Wisdom having his own *hypostasis*, i.e. 'personhood' for Origen can hardly be brought into question, especially if one takes Origen's entire second chapter *On Christ* into account. Moreover, the passage above including the terms used should also be seen through the clear anti-Modalist and anti-Valentinian intent of the author, which certainly reinforces Origen's *hypostasis* nearing the idea of *prosōpon* or *persona*. See Crouzel's and Simonetti's notes on these issues in *Sources Chrétiennes* 253: 33.

It is also important to note that even if Origen was not a direct pupil of Ammonius Sakkas, and most likely not a teacher of Ammonius' other famous pupil, Plotinus, as Theodoret claims (Theodoret 1958: 6.60), he nonetheless was quite well versed in classical Greek philosophy including its old and new technical terms. What we experience in the first half of the third century is not only the parallel introduction of *hypostasis* in secular philosophy (arguably by Plotinus) and in Christian theology (mostly by Origen), but also some attempts to find its proper place in the stock of already established or still flexible notions. Without lengthening this subject, the mere fact that Origen was Plotinus' senior by 20 years, a one-sided influence of the Neo-Platonist philosopher upon Origen concerning the proper meaning and application of this relatively new term is hardly tenable. Nonetheless, since both had been

students of Ammonius in one way or another, the use of *hypostasis* by the famous porter (if he indeed was one) as their common source of notions and their meanings is conceivable, albeit unprovable.

We can come across traces of Origen's attempt to position *hypostasis* among the multiplying theological terms of his time. In this respect, his Trinitarian idea of the one *ousia* (essence) and three *hypostases* expressed in his *Commentary on John* 2.10.74 was of fundamental significance:

The Holy Spirit has no other essence of His own (*ousian tina idian... heteran*) beyond the Father and the Son. [...] We consider, therefore, that there are three hypostases (*treis hypostaseis*): the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and also believe nothing else to be unbegotten (*agennēton*) but the Father. (Origen 1966: II.10.74–75).

This undisputedly Origenian passage is yet another excellent proof that Arius was mostly grasping at straws in his repeated attempts to depict his formulae as consonant with former authorities, including Origen. In his *Scholia in Matthaëum*, albeit of uncertain attribution, the great commentator speaks more plainly about the implications of this usage of terms, reaching the point of asserting even the Nicene shibboleth:

There is one Saviour and one salvation. There is one living Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. [God] is one not by amalgamation of the three (*sunaloiphē tōn triōn*), but by one essence (*ousia mia*); three hypostases, perfect in all, correspondingly (*treis de hypostaseis teleiai en pasi, kai katallēloi*). The Father has begotten according to nature (*kata physin egennēsen ho Patēr*): therefore a coessential [Son] was begotten (*dioper homoousion egennēthē*). (Origen 1857: 17.309).

In the first of her most influential studies Ilaria Ramelli argued conclusively for Origen having been 'the main inspirer of the Nicene-Cappadocian line' (Ramelli 2011), and in the second, 50 pages long study, by a painstakingly thoroughgoing analysis, she masterfully proved her most important thesis, as follows:

Origen's thought represented a novel and fundamental theorization with respect to the communality of *ousia* and the individuality of *hypostaseis*, conceived as individual substances, in the Trinity. He influenced not only subsequent Trinitarian theology, but perhaps even 'pagan' Neoplatonism. (Ramelli 2012: 303).

Without lengthening our discussion of Origen's crucial influence, we recommend the reader to take in Ramelli's aforementioned articles, whilst we shall be content to mention only some of the most important points pertaining to the famous Alexan-

drian. In *Contra Celsum* 8.12 he clearly argues for distinct hypostases of the Father and the Son:

Being two realities by hypostasis (*onta duo tē hypostasei pragmata*), but one in concord (*homonoia*), harmony (*sumfōnia*) and sameness of will (*tautotēti tou boulēmatos*) (Origen 1969: 8.12).

This is wholly consonant with another unquestionably Origenian statement from his *Commentary on Matthew* 17.14, where he refutes those who ‘confuse (*suncheontes*) the notion (*ennoian*) of “Father” and “Son”, and grant the Father and Son to be one in hypostasis, but distinguish the one underlying (*to hypokeimenon*) in concept (*tē epinoia*) and names (*tois onomasi*) only.’ (Origen 1935: 17.14).

The evidence gathered here at some length (and by Ramelli one may find a lot more) is rather conclusive: concerning Trinitarian doctrine Origen was definitely moving in the direction to apply *ousia* and *hypostasis* in corresponding, yet distinguishable Aristotelian senses. To put it simply, Origen’s Trinitarian use of *ousia* became Aristotle’s ‘secondary ousia’, whilst his *hypostasis* took over the function of the Aristotelian ‘first ousia’. Thus, *ousia* for Origen became a synonym for *physis*, and hypostasis a synonym for *prosōpon*. Athanasius may not have been so diligent in following this usage, yet his primary concern, i.e. to preserve the full divinity of the Son and Word, remained unshaken, and, as we shall argue, that was indeed the main point of the entire Arian controversy, superseding any terminological considerations. As he exclaims referring to Hebrews 1:3:

For when did anyone see light without radiance (*phōs chōris tou apaugasmatos*)? Or who dares to say that the exact imprint can be different from the hypostasis (*allotrion einai ton charaktēra tēs hypostaseōs*)? (Athanasius 1857: 26.216).

The Son’s begetting: from the Father’s essence or from his will?

When Athanasius tries to grasp the *begetting* from the Father’s *essence* – an even more refined and certainly less vulnerable idea than Origen’s notion of *begetting* from the Father’s *will* – the bishop of Alexandria uses the formula, which made it into the Nicene Creed itself: ‘for if he did not beget from his essence (*ei gar mē ek tēs ousias egennēsen*), then neither is he Father according to essence (*oude Patēr esti kat’ ousian*).’ (Athanasius 1857: 28.1180). This is a crucial point. Origen’s arguably weaker, albeit, in his time unchallenged concept in *De principiis* IV.4.1 was the following:

Thus we do not say, as the heretics suppose, that some part of God’s substance was converted into the Son (*partem aliquam substantiae Dei in Filium versam*), or that the Son was procreated by the Father out of non-existent [things] (*aut ex nullis substantibus Filium procreatum a Patre*), that is, beyond His own substance (*id est, extra sub-*

stantiam suam), so that there was once when He [the Son] was not (*ut fuerit aliquando quando non fuerit*); but, setting aside all corporeal notions (*omni sensu corporeo*), we say that the Word and Wisdom was begotten out of the invisible and incorporeal God (*ex invisibili et incorporeo Deo Verbum et Sapientiam genitam*) without any bodily passion, just as the will proceeds from the mind (*velut si voluntas procedat e mente*). Nor will it appear absurd, since He is called the Son of love (*Filius charitatis*), for Him to be considered likewise the Son of [the Father's] will (*si hoc modo etiam voluntatis putetur*). (Origen 1980: IV.4.1).

Origen's heritage was utilised by Athanasius to assert the Son's divinity, and by Arius to diminish it, respectively. The 'begetting' from the Father's essence (*ousia*), preferred by Athanasius, led to the famous term of 'coessential' (*homouousios*), since a birth from the essence excludes the concept of creation. Being begotten from 'the will' (Greek *thelēma*, Latin *voluntas*), however, weakens the sameness of essence and may permit the notion of 'creation', since the act of creating someone or something is preceded by a voluntary decision. The employment of this arguably weaker Origenian concept of divine begetting to mean 'creation' as well as the canny twisting of some of his formulae, moreover, an unwarranted, yet surprising equation of two well distinguished Origenian terms (*ousia* and *hypostasis*) by the reckless Alexandrian presbyter is what I came to label 'the Arian trick'.

Why worship Christ as Lord and God?

In order to establish my next point, I would like to go back to the very roots of Christianity and the role played by the person of Christ in this whole story. The central message of Christian mission as manifested in the New Testament was based on two major pillars: Jesus and the resurrection, i.e. the clear path to eternal life with a loving God. These two elements were present even in the most divergent speeches recorded by Luke: on the one hand, in front of a Jerusalem crowd on Pentecost, Peter started with Old Testament references and built his case from there (Acts 2:14–32). On the other hand, Paul in Athens, speaking to Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on the Areopagus, dropped any reference to the Old Testament and hit a mostly cosmogonic-philosophical tone, and by making use of Greek mythological as well as poetic examples by referring to Epimenides and two Stoic philosopher-poets, Cleanthes and Aratus, arrived at the same conclusion (Acts 17:22–31).

Jesus as a divine figure became established in the Christ-hymn (Philippians 2:5–11), but also by Stephen's final prayer: 'Lord Jesus (*Kyrie Iēsou*), receive my spirit'. We have already argued this latter case elsewhere, so no further elaboration is necessary (Pásztori-Kupán 2024: 168–170). The quite absurd statement of the angel in Bethlehem, who claimed that the newborn baby who is 'the Redeemer', i.e. Yeshua is also

‘Lord’. i.e. YHWH as well as Christ, i.e. the Messiah (Luke 2: 11-12) came just as naturally for Early Christians as it was a blasphemous paradox for all those who rejected to worship a convicted and crucified blasphemer.

The image of the fish, the Greek *Ichthus* was not merely a secret sign or a keyword, but one of the earliest and strongest creeds of the first followers of Jesus, well before they were even labelled ‘Christians’ by outsiders. This creed is a sign, included in the first ending of John’s gospel, the account of Jesus’ ‘signs’ (*sēmeia*): it begins with one (the wedding at Cana in the second chapter) and ends with one (the sign given to Thomas in Chapter 20). All of Jesus’ deeds, sayings, parables, healings, actions and teachings are ‘signs’ for his followers – never with the intent to impress a wider audience. After the very last one, the author concludes:

And truly Jesus did many other signs also (*kai alla sēmeia*) in the presence of His disciples (*enōpion tōn mathētōn*), which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe (*hina pisteuēte*) that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (*hoti Iēsous estin o Christos ho huios tou Theou*), and that believing you may have life (*zōēn echēte*) in His name (*en tō onomati autou*). (John 20: 30-31)

This ‘*hoti Iēsous estin o Christos ho huios tou Theou*’ is as close to *Ichthus* as it gets. ‘Jesus Christ’ is not a name, but a statement, where ‘Jesus’ is the subject and ‘Christ’ is the predicate: ‘Jesus is the Christ’, human and divine. As the years, decades and centuries of persecution went by, it was no longer just a mere sign, but a creed, in fact: a *symbolon*. It contains the ‘one name under heaven’ which is irreplaceable if one wants to be saved (see Acts 4:12); just like the *symbolon* of the ancestors. Without lengthening all the Biblical and Early Christian examples, I simply propose that what the entire story or, more theologically, the entire salvation history boils down to is the preservation of the divinity and humanity of the bearer of this name: the Word, the Son incarnate, known to us as Jesus the Christ. This is what the *symbolon* requires from those who identify with and recognise each other through it: even at the cost of being labelled blasphemers, worshippers of a blasphemer, polytheists, atheists, irreligious, enemies of humankind, followers of a new and mischievous superstition etc. As the author of the fourth gospel concludes: there is life in His name only. Of course, that Stephen prays *directly* to Him: ‘Lord Jesus (*Kyrie Iēsou*), receive my spirit!’ – however abhorrent it may sound to a contemporary onlooker or even to a modern analyst. There is no other way: because ‘there is no other name under heaven’. Period.

A most interesting aspect of this development, of this continued Early Christian clinging to the Saviour’s name and divine rank, is that it is repeatedly attested even by their enemies and critics. After all, they were the ones who began calling these Jesus-followers ‘Christ-likes’, *Christianoi* in and around Antioch, because they appar-

ently never ceased to talk about, refer to, remember, quote and worship Christ. And these 'followers of the way' (Acts 9:2) proudly accepted the nickname, which may or may not have been intended as a compliment. These outsiders may have labelled them 'Christ-likes', because they thought these Jesus-followers were a nuisance, repeating their nonsensical beliefs in this 'returning' Christ as a broken record. It did not make the slightest difference. Moreover, those who despised, persecuted and criticised them, similarly attested to the fact that the Christians worshipped Christ as a God. In his *Letter 96* to Emperor Trajan, Pliny the Younger observed in 111 AD, that the Christians 'were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a God (*carmenque Christo quasi deo dicere secum invicem*)' (Pliny 1828: 10.96). Lucian of Samosata confirms this in the second century when he writes in *The death of Peregrinus* 13:

These poor devils (*hoi kakodaimones*) [...] have persuaded themselves (*pepeikasi gar autous*) that they will be wholly immortal (*to men holon athanatoi esesthai*) and will live forever (*kai biōsesthai ton aei chronon*), [...] so that they deny the gods of Greece (*theous men tous hellēnikous aparnēsōntai*), and worship that crucified sophist himself (*ton de aneskolopismenon ekeinon sophistēn auton proskunwsin*).

I refrain from discussing or elaborating similar themes which had been so masterfully and exhaustively dealt with by Larry W. Hurtado in his magnum opus (Hurtado 2003). It is quite obvious that one of the most objectionable custom of Early Christians in the eyes of their non-Christian contemporaries was their 'obstinacy' by which they refused to worship the Greek and Roman, or better said, 'official' gods, reserving this adulation only to their 'Christ'. This was the main reason why, to make sure that those accused were no longer Christians, Pliny ordered them to utter a curse upon Christ (*maledicere Christo*), since he knew that true Christians will never do such a thing (*quorum nihil cogi posse dicuntur qui sunt re vera Christiani, dimittendos putavi*). (Pliny 1828: 10.96).

Thus, the preservation and defence of Jesus' divinity epitomised one's Christian faith: those who suffered and even died 'for the name of Jesus', died most emphatically 'in Christ', who gave them eternal life through his divine power. Anyone, who during the centuries of persecution were to question the Son's divinity and/or his humanity, inescapably questioned the steadfastness, perseverance, martyrdom and ultimate sacrifice of all those 'of whom the world was not worthy' (Hebrews 11: 38). It hardly mattered whether he/she did it by denying some gospel truth about Christ (e.g. his virgin birth or his eternal existence as the Word) or by employing some semi-philosophical or entirely philosophical term in the sense which might diminish the Son's divinity or his full human nature: the result was always the same, irrespective of his

wealth (see Marcion and his donation to the Roman church), his ecclesiastical status or even political connections (see Paul of Samosata). The Church and its theologians reacted to the challenge: sometimes with consistent and adequate terminology, sometimes not, but they never compromised on the basic message of the ancient *symbolon*, for which so many had died. The episode of the *Shepherd* of Hermas and other similar examples of lurking subordinationism were the odd, and subsequently corrected exception – not the rule.

The Arian trick

Arius was neither a major, nor a particularly original challenger of this Early Christian tradition: what he came to propagate was not entirely new – especially if one had paid enough attention to the Ebionites, to Artemon, Paul of Samosata, and to any other theologian, who interpreted the baptism of Christ as a mere adoption of an illustrious prophet from Galilee. I am reluctant to include Lucian of Antioch here: first, because he died in peace with the Church, and second, because the true or bigger source of his predicament was probably due to have been the student of Paul of Samosata and a post-mortem venerated teacher of Arius and his sympathizers, who had passed away before the ardent Lybian stepped into the limelight in Alexandria. Being sandwiched between Paul of Samosata and Arius is not a great prospect, perhaps regardless of one's own conviction and actions. It is nonetheless unjust for a single expression – *sylloukianista* – to be the final nail in Lucian's coffin.

The *scandalum oecumenicum* which ensued after Arius' ideas became known was largely due to their timing also. It was the end of state persecution for the Christians: the *symbolon* still existed, but nobody had to suffer or die for it anymore. Does this mean that its uncompromising basic truth was now open for discussion? Arius certainly appeared to think so, and he adopted an interesting strategy: first, to paint his ideas as an integral part and natural continuation of the earlier tradition (*inter alia*, by adopting and astutely adjusting some Origenian slogans), and second, by creating a terminological confusion (e.g. equating *ousia* with *hypostasis*), which had fundamentally been solved by Origen, but in a manner which could not serve Arius' new proposals. Arius was ultimately unsuccessful in rewinding the clock, yet he still managed to cause a headache for some illustrious theologians for quite a few decades.

The carefully veiled doctrinal attempt to depict the eternal begetting of the Son as 'creation', and consequently, to uphold a subordinationist Trinitarian doctrine as a valid theological tradition is obvious throughout Arius' *Letter to Alexander of Alexandria*, especially in the sections where he 'plays Origen':

This God had begotten an only-begotten Son before the times and the ages, [...] he begot him not in appearance, but in truth (*gennēsanta de ou dokēsei, alla alētheia*);

and that he caused him to subsist by his own will (*hypostēsanta idiō thelēmati*), unalterable and unchangeable; perfect creature of God (*ktisma tou theou teleion*), but not as one of the creatures; offspring (*gennēma*), but not as one of the offsprings. Neither as Valentinus taught that the offspring (*gennēma*) of the Father was an issue (*probolē*), nor as Manicheus introduced the [notion of] offspring as a coessential portion of the Father (*meros homoousion tou patros to gennēma eisēgēsato*) [...], but, as we say, by the will of God (*thelēmati tou theou*), created (*ktisthenta*) before times and before ages (Athanasius 1940: 16.2-3).

Origen's idea of the Son's birth from the Father's will is present, yet neither in the above quoted section from *De principiis* IV.4.1, nor elsewhere in his surviving works did Origen equal the notion of 'the Son of will' (*Filius voluntatis*) with the Son being 'created' (*ktisthenta*), which Arius undoubtedly – and cunningly – does. This typically Arian deduction is not the same as likening the Son's begetting to 'the will proceeding from the mind' (*velut si voluntas procedat e mente*). Athanasius was wise to abandon this idea of the Son's begetting from the Father's will (*thelēma*), and replace it with the begetting from his essence (*ousia*), which precludes any subordinationist interpretation. We shall return to the notion of the Son not being a 'coessential portion of the Father' a little later.

The concept of a 'created creator' is again alien from Origen, even if that 'creature' were to be seen as being 'perfect' (*teleion*). Arius, however, goes even further, when he distances himself from certain heretics he even mentions by name: Valentinus, Mani(chaeus), Sabellius and Hieracas (Athanasius 1940: 16.3). The condemnation of these four appears to be all right, yet he does not keep an equal distance from the other, Adoptionist extreme. That list would obviously include Ebionitism, Artemon, and, by all means, Paul of Samosata. The very fact that their names do not appear in this list speaks volumes.

But perhaps the most subtle way of 'sounding like Origen' on Arius' part is when he rejects the idea of the Son being a *probolē*, an 'issue' or some sort of 'emanation' ('blowout?') of the Father. As *De principiis* IV.4.1 bears witness, Origen firmly rejected any such idea of 'ejection':

As God the Father is both invisible and inseparable from the Son, the Son is not generated from Him by 'ejection' (*non per prolationem*) as some suppose. For if the Son were an 'ejection' of the Father (the term 'ejection' being used to signify such a generation as that of animals or humans usually is), then, of necessity, both He who 'ejected' (*protulit*) and He who was 'ejected' (*prolatus est*) are corporeal (*corpus est*). (Origen 1980: IV.4.1).

At first sight Arius appears to agree with Origen in discarding any *probolē* (Latin *prolatio*) of the Son, yet diverges from the great Alexandrian by connecting this refusal by necessity to the Son's *creation*. Similarly, at the end of his letter to bishop Alexander he returns to Origen's above denial of God being corporeal, but connects it again to something, which Origen most emphatically did not hold:

Inasmuch as [the Son] has his being (*to einai*), and the glories (*tas doxas*), and to live (*to zēn*) from God, and all things are handed unto him (*paredōthē*), according to this God is his origin (*archē autou estin ho theos*). For he is above him (*archei gar autou*), as being his God and before Him (*pro autou ōn*). But if the terms 'from Him,' and 'from the womb,' and 'I came forth from the Father, and I am come' (Romans 11:36; Psalm 110:3; John 16:28), were understood by some to mean as a coessential part of him (*hōs meros autou homoousiou*) or as an ejection (*hōs probolē*), then, according to them, the Father is compounded (*synthetos*) and divisible (*diairetos*) and changeable (*treptos*) and body (*sōma*), and, as far as their belief goes, the bodiless God undergoes the circumstances of a body (*ta akoulutha sōmati paschōn ho asōmatos theos*). (Athanasius 1940: 16.5).

This is the second time in this letter where Arius uses the term 'coessential' (*homoousios*) in a negative sense, and on both occasions tries to bind it together with a partly Origenian idea: the Father did not 'eject' the Son (which is correct according also to Origen) 'as some coessential part of him.' This latter proposal is most emphatically not Origenian, who did not theorise about the 'partitioning' of God's *ousia*, on the contrary: he held that since God had begotten according to his nature, therefore he had begotten a Son coessential to him (Origen 1857: 17.309), not 'partly coessential'. Arius' other pseudo-Origenian claims, e.g. that the Son 'was not before His generation' (*ouk ēn pro tou gennēthēnai*) are aptly discarded by Origen's above quoted statement (*De principiis* IV.4.1).

Before we turn to the last trick of Arius, his philosophical concerns ought to be mentioned. Apart from invoking the Aristotelian concept of '*ta pros ti*' against those who would hold the equality of the Son with the Father, thus 'introducing two unbegotten beginnings (*duo agennētous archas eisēgoumenoi*)' (Athanasius 1940: 16.4), Arius reveals that the major obstacle in his mind in considering the Son equal to the Father is primarily philosophical, not theological. We have at least three supporting arguments for this. First, if we consider Aristotle's definition of '*ta pros ti*' (roughly: things toward something) in *Categories* 6a:36-37, we find Arius' first problem:

Things are called 'relative' if *as such* they are said to be of something else or to be

somehow referred to something else. So, for instance, the greater, *as such*, is said to be of something else, for it is said to be greater than something. (Aristotle 1949: 6a:36-37)

From among the two compared elements, the '*ta*' (= those things) are never the same as '*ti*' (= this thing), to which I had '*ta*' compared to. If we were to apply this principle to the relationship between the Son and the Father, then, according to the Aristotelian system of relations, it becomes impossible to speak of their identity or equality, since we have compared or related one of them (the Son) to the other (the Father). This, then, is one of the philosophical grounds for Arius' doctrine of Trinitarian subordination.

The second philosophical hindrance is perhaps the notion of 'boundless' (*apeiron*) of the Milesian Anaximander, who, as quoted by Aristotle in *Physics* 203b, claimed that everything which exists is either principle/inception (*archē*) or derives from a principle/inception (*ex archēs*). 'But the boundless has no principle, since that would also be its limit' (*tou de apeirou ouk estin archē, eiē gar an autou peras*) (Aristotle 1950: 203b). The beginning or inception, i.e., the *archē* is therefore also boundless (*apeiron*). Added to this is its eternal nature, and the fact that the infinite principle is the cause of all things. This concept of God, as understood by Anaximander and Aristotle, strongly shapes Arius' strictly monotheistic view of God. There can be only one beginning, only one infinite, only one cause: and for him this is not the divine essence (*ousia*), but the *hypostasis* of the Father.

The third philosophical obstacle lies in Arius' statement, in which he reproaches those who defend the Son's coessentiality with the Father for 'introducing two unbegotten beginnings' through the improper use of the Aristotelian '*ta pros ti*'. The beginning, i.e., the *archē*, is, however, infinite. This brings us to the teachings of the Eleatic school, and particularly those of Melissus (5th century BCE), whose ideas, this time as an explanation of Aristotle's *Physics*, are summarized by Simplicius:

That which exists (*to on*) does not come into being, but is eternally. [...] Thus, it has always existed and will exist forever (*aei ara ēn te kai esthai*). [...] And that which has neither beginning (*mēte archēn*), nor end (*mēte teleutēn*), is boundless (*apeiron*). [...] If boundless, then it is one (*hen*). For if there were two boundless (things) in existence, then they could not be boundless (*apeira*), but rather would have each other as their boundaries. Yet that which exists is boundless: thus, there are no other existent things. Therefore, that which exists is one (*hen ara to on*). (Simplicius 1882: 9.103).

The 'one eternal and infinite being' referred to in the concluding clause of the above quotation constitutes the third and probably the strongest philosophical reason why Arius has to reject the idea of the Son's coessentiality: 'God, being the cause

of all things (*aitios tōn pantōn*), is without beginning and altogether sole (*anarchos monōtatos*)' (Athanasius 1940: 16.4). For him, any equality between the Father and the Son inevitably implies two beginnings, two infinities, and two eternities, not one: and this, according to the systems of both Melissus and Aristotle, is a philosophical impossibility. The Alexandrian presbyter, who concludes that the three *hypostases* correspond to, or rather: must mean three *ousiai*, cannot accept that the One is, in this case, the sole divine essence. From this perspective, therefore, one need not speak of two or three beginnings, two or three infinities, but truly of only one. The error lies not only in his incorrect application of Origen's concept, but also in the fact that his opponents never spoke of the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Aristotelian context of '*ta pros ti*'.

We have arrived at the final Arian trick, i.e. the equation between *ousia* and *hypostasis*:

For the Father did not, in giving to Him [i.e. to the Son] the inheritance of all things, deprive Himself of what He has in Himself as unbegotten; for He is the fountain of all things (*pēgē pantōn*). Thus there are three hypostases (*hōste treis eisin hypostaseis*). (Athanasius 1940: 16.4).

The reason why I came to label it as a 'trick' rather than a simple error is because this equivalence is not a guileless misreading or misinterpretation of the Origenian heritage, but the *sine qua non* of Trinitarian subordination. Without it, the Son (and the Holy Spirit) can be of the same *ousia* as the Father (understood in the Origenian sense of Aristotle's 'second essence') and have his own personal *hypostasis* (understood again in the Origenian sense of Aristotle's 'first essence'). Neither 'division of essence', nor any 'alteration' of the eternal divine existence, nor the submission of the Father to anything 'corporeal' would be necessary. This apparently – but only apparently – minor terminological correction could practically pull the rug from under Arius' feet, whose system of thought and the ensuing terminological confusion was captured suitably by Socrates Scholasticus:

If the Father had begotten (*egennēse*) the Son, then the one begotten has a beginning of existence (*archēn hyparxeōs*). From this it is clear, that there was when the Son did not exist (*ēn hote ouk ēn ho hyios*). Thence it necessarily follows (*akolouthēi te ex anankēs*), that his *hypostasis* belongs to the non-existent (*ex ouk ontōn echein auton tēn hypostasin*). (Socrates 1893: 1.5).

The Son's hypostasis, which by the apparently inexorable necessity of Aristotelian logic, must have its origin in the 'non-existent' things, thus cannot be the same as

the Father's. And since *hypostasis* is the same as *ousia* – at least according to Arius – the Son cannot be *homoousios* with the Father. This terminological confusion contributed extensively to the perpetuation of the Nicene conundrum. The Fathers present at the council may or may not have recognised the trap. For the Latins, especially for Hosius of Cordoba, who presided over the Council, both expressions could well mean simply 'substantia', thus the differentiation between *ousia* and *hypostasis* may have had, *prima facie*, appeared as hair splitting. This is also substantiated by the formula of Sardica (343 AD), preserved by Theodoret, which refers to the 'Catholic and apostolic tradition, faith and creed', that 'there is one *hypostasis*, which the heretics themselves call *ousia*, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Theodoret 1954: 2.8).

Consequently, it appeared easier to condemn anyone who said that the Son was essentially/substantially different from the Father. By accepting the formula 'who claim that he is of another hypostasis or essence', the Fathers tacitly accepted and subscribed to Arius' misleading equation of the terms, or more harshly: fell into the trap. This small section of the *Nicene Anathema* should, however, be read in Greek, yet understood in Latin: the intention was correct (which meant the safeguarding of the Son's undiminished divinity, as the tradition required), yet the mode of expression left quite a bit to be desired. The Fathers cursed solemnly, but not quite properly: some work of terminological distinction by the Cappadocians, including Gregory of Nyssa's famous metaphor of the rainbow, became necessary. And it is perhaps not at all accidental, that two of those, who helped the establishment of Neo-Nicene terminology (or better said: the re-establishment of Origen's usage), i.e. Basil of Caesarea and Gregory Nazianzen were themselves the editors of Origen's *Philocalia*, and thus thoroughly immersed in the language and formulae of their illustrious forerunner.

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