

Gregory of Nyssa and the Medical Art
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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to show how therapy became a fundamental theological metaphor in Gregory of Nyssa's writings. I will first argue that Gregory was committed to a Galenic conception of medical τέχνη, which he knew through personal study. On this conception, medicine is a productive art whose success is contingent on the physician's understanding of anatomy, pathology, pharmacology, and any other related science, as well as the physician's close observation of the patient's symptoms. I will show that this conception—extended to cover diseases of soul as well as body—forms the background to Gregory's *Canonical Letter*, which aims to root the practice of penitential therapy in a scientific understanding of the soul's three parts or powers. Having argued that the goal of this letter is to offer a τεχνική μέθοδος akin to medicine's θεραπευτική μέθοδος, I will show that this conception of the medical art informs various other works by Gregory, including the *Catechetical Oration*. My claim there is that Gregory thought of catechetical instruction in particular and of dialectical argument in general as practices of the therapeutic art aimed at producing 'health' in the soul of real or imagined interlocutors.