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Basil of Caesarea’s Uses of Origen in His Polemic against Astrology

Abstract: Basil of Caesarea, in his polemic against astrology (*Homiliae in hexaemeron* 6,5–7), makes direct, creative uses of Origen’s anti-astrological treatise (*Philocalia* 23). My argument is based on an identical context, namely the interpretation of Gen 1:14b, and five close similarities in content, some verbatim, between Basil’s sermon and Origen’s anti-astrological polemic (and in one case a passage from *De principiis*). These five similarities are on the topics of the definition of genethlialogy, the system of genethlialogy, aspects, the life of the stars, and fatalism. In each instance, Basil uses Origen in a different way. These uses run the gamut from the wholesale adoption of Origen’s definition of genethlialogy to the refutation of Origen’s belief that the stars are alive. Adaptation is necessitated, not only by Basil’s inherent creativity and relative independence from Origen, but by the fact that the rhetorical form of Basil’s treatment is different from Origen’s: whereas Origen offers a commentarial treatment with a systematic question-and-answer structure, Basil’s argument is a rhetorically sophisticated diatribe, which uses sarcasm and mockery to entertain as well as persuade its audience. Basil uses Origen sometimes freely, sometimes verbatim, but always critically, to support his own goals.

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Many early Christian theologians wrote against astrology, but Basil of Caesarea’s attack on it, found in his sixth hexaemeral homily,¹ was for many centuries the most influential within Christianity,² and has continued to arouse theological


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interest. Basil uses conventional arguments against astrology that originated with philosophers, but in several instances, I will show, he makes direct, creative uses of Origen’s anti-astrological treatise. Mark DelCogliano has recently noted that “It is nearly a truism in patristic scholarship that Basil and his fellow Cappadocians were heavily influenced by Origen. But far less often is the precise character of this influence explored and demonstrated.” He makes the focus of his study “the critical, selective, and creative manner in which he used Origen” in his Epiphany sermon. This also is my aim with respect to Basil’s anti-astrological polemic in Homiliae in hexaemeron 6,5–7.

My argument is based on an identical context, namely Gen 1:14b, and five close similarities in content, some verbatim, between Basil’s sermon and Origen’s anti-astrological polemic (and in one instance a passage from De principiis). In each instance, Basil uses Origen in a slightly different way. Adaptation is necessitated, not only by Basil’s inherent creativity and relative independence from Origen, but by the fact that the rhetorical form of Basil’s treatment is different from Origen’s: whereas Origen offers a commentarial treatment with a systematic four-point question-and-answer structure, Basil’s argument is a rhetorically sophisticated diatribe, which uses sarcasm and mockery to entertain as well as persuade its audience.

3 This passage was the object of at least two scholarly studies during the first half of the twentieth century: Yves Courtonne, Saint Basile et l’Hellénisme: étude sur la rencontre de la pensée chrétienne avec la sagesse antique dans l’hexaemeron de Basile le Grand (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1934), 99–110, and David Amand, Fatalisme et liberté dans l’antiquité grecque: recherches sur la survivance de l’argumentation morale antifataliste de Carnéade chez les philosophes grecs et les théologiens chrétiens des quatre premiers siècles (Recueil de Travaux d’Histoire et de Philologie, Série 3,19; Leuven: Bibliothèque de l’Université, 1945), 383–400. In addition, it has received at least two source-critical analyses: Karl Gronau, Poseidonios und die jüdisch-christliche Genesisexegeese (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914), 29–34, and Joseph Bidez, “Le Traité d’Astrologie cité par Saint Basile dans son Hexaéméron,” Antiquité Classique 7 (1938): 19–21. With respect to source criticism, the scholar is now helped by the extensive cross-references to other ancient works found in the most recent critical edition (see note 1).

4 Both Amand, Fatalisme et liberté (see note 3), 399–400, and Riedinger, Heilige Schrift (see note 2), 48 (note 2), identify Origen as being, probably, the immediate source for Basil’s arguments, but without thoroughly justifying their supposition.


6 DelCogliano, “Tradition and Polemic” (see note 5), 55.

7 I agree with the description that Amand gives to Basil’s text: “Cet ‘excursus’ . . . n’est autre qu’une violent sortie contre les ‘Chaldéens,’ une diatribe débitée sur un ton persifl eur, une vive semonce corsée de mordantes plaisanteries.” (Armand, Fatalisme et liberté [see note 3], 393). Cf. Riedinger, Heilige Schrift (see note 2), 47: “[Basileios] weist dann mit überlegener Ironie die verstiegenen Ansprüche der Sterndeuter zurück.”
The intellectual context: astrology as a science

Before I begin my argument, I will speak of the broader intellectual context in which Basil’s attack on astrology should be placed, namely, within his view of παιδεία generally. This is clear because he lists astrology (ἀστρονομία) along with geometry, including the study of the five regular “solids” (τῶν στερεῶν),8 and arithmetic as “very laborious vanity” (ἡ πολυάσχολος ματαιότης).9 This is almost the classical quadrivium, music alone excepted. This viewpoint contextualizes Basil’s anti-astrological polemic into the broader relationship between Christianity and Greco-Roman learning. It must be said that what we now call astrology (ἀστρολογία, the study of the stars) and astronomy (ἀστρονομία, the law of the stars),10 prior to the scientific era, were synonymous.11 Nothing in Basil’s diatribe calls into question the science of astrology, understood as the study of the stars and their influence on the universe. When he calls it “vanity,” he does not unequivocally condemn it any more than he does geometry or arithmetic. Such a flat interpretation would fail to appreciate Basil’s rhetoric. Astrology and mathematics are not useless, let alone false, but what good are they—he poses in one of many rhetorical questions—if their practitioners fail to grasp that this universe, which they study diligently, will one day end?12 The relative uselessness of astrology is stated clearly in another sermon, in which Basil distinguishes two kinds of truth: one he calls “the sound understanding of whatever pertains to this life,”13 such

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9 Basilius Caesariensis, Homiliae in hexaemeron 1,3 (6,15–18 A./R.).
10 Frederik H. Cramer mentions an alternate etymology, according to which ἀστρονομία comes from νέμειν, “to assign,” meaning that “an astronomer thus would be a meteorologist who ‘assigned’ (from the Greek νέμω) either individual stars or entire constellations their ‘weather-making’ roles, presumably of course on the basis of accumulated observational data.” (Frederik H. Cramer, Astrology in Roman Law and Politics [Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 37; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1954], 3).
12 Basilius Caesariensis, Homiliae in hexaemeron 1,3 (6,15–7,6 A./R.).
as astrology\textsuperscript{14} and geography,\textsuperscript{15} and the other is “the comprehension of the realities conducive to the blessed life,”\textsuperscript{16} i.e., the doctrine of Scripture. Basil explains that secular knowledge, unlike doctrine, is unnecessary for salvation. Thus these mathematical subjects, while true, have nothing of value to offer the Christian qua believer. In \textit{Homiliae in hexaemeron} 1,3, then, Basil only circumscribes astrology within the same limits as other secular disciplines, without offering the particular critiques of astral prognostication that come in his sixth sermon.

Astrology can also be seen as religion rather than science. Such a view is found within the works of ancient astrologers themselves. For instance, at the beginning of his astrological poem, Manilius says that the first astrologers were devout priests, whose “pure minds were kindled by the very presence of the powerful deity, and the God of heaven brought his servants to a knowledge of heaven and disclosed its secrets to them.”\textsuperscript{17} For this reason some scholars have seen the early Church’s reaction against astrology as being in part a religious rivalry.\textsuperscript{18} It must be borne in mind that, just as ancient astrology and astronomy cannot be hermetically separated, neither can ancient religion, science, and culture.\textsuperscript{19} Otherwise the assimilation or integration of Greek παιδεία into a Christian worldview would have been rather simple. In any case, both Basil and Origen in their arguments treat

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Basilius Caesariensis, \textit{Homiliae in Psalms} 14[a],3 (PG 29:256C; trans. 96 D.): πόσοι κινοῦνται τῶν ἀστέρων, καὶ πόσον ἐτέρος τοῦ ἑτέρον προέχει τῇ τάχει—“How many stars move? By how much does one speed ahead of the other?”
\item \textsuperscript{15} Basilius Caesariensis, \textit{Homiliae in Psalms} 14[a],3 (PG 29:256C; trans. 96 D.): πόσοι γὰρ στάδιοι γῆς ἢ θαλάσσης—“For how many miles are there of land or sea?”
\item \textsuperscript{16} Basilius Caesariensis, \textit{Homiliae in Psalms} 14[a],3 (PG 29:256B): τὴν περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων τῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μακάριον βίων φερόντων κατάληψιν.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Cf. Hegedus, \textit{Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology} (see note 18), 12: “It is hard to distinguish between how much of this cosmology [that was assumed in the practice of astrology] was integral to astrology and how much of it reflects aspects of Greco-Roman culture in general.”
\end{enumerate}
astrology as a science, saying nothing of its cultic aspects or astral theologies. They do not denounce it for its association with pagan worship and beliefs, but instead use philosophical arguments against some of its theories and practices.

The theological context: Basil and the Philocalia

An investigation into Basil’s use of Origen is justified by the fact of Basil’s own interest in Origen, which is most noticeable in his study of the anthology of Origen’s writings called the Philocalia. The compilation of this anthology is attributed in its sixth-century preface to Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus. The only extant reference to the work comes from a letter of Gregory, preserved also in the Philocalia itself as its first preface, in which he gives a copy of the anthology to someone named Theodore, in the hope it will serve as a “reminder” of himself “as well as of Saint Basil.”

The traditional attribution of the work to Basil and Gregory has been assumed by many scholars, such as Jean Gribomont, Paul Fedwick, Philip Rousseau, and Anthony Meredith. However, the question of attribution has been much debated. Jeffery Steenson maintains the traditional view in part by citing Socrates’s

\[\text{20} \text{ In sermons, however, Origen associates astrology with demons, e.g., } neque \text{ mathematicorum deceptions et astrorum simulati cursus neque diuinationes subreptiua daemonum fallacia commentatae. (Origenes, } In \text{ librum Iudicum 2,3 [SC 389, 84,87–89 Messié/Neyrand/Borret]).}\]

\[\text{21} \text{ Origenes, } Philocalia 1−20 (SC 302, Harl/de Lange); 21–27 (SC 226, Junod). The former volume omits the texts already printed elsewhere.}\]

\[\text{22} \text{ The bishop of Tyana, Gregory’s new metropolitan, according to the second preface. See Eric Junod, } \text{ Basile de Césarée et Grégoire de Nazianze sont-ils les compilateurs de la Philocalie d’Origène? Réexamen de la Lettre 115 de Grégoire,” in } Mémorial Dom Jean Gribomont (1920–1986) (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 27; Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1988), (349–360) 355.}\]

\[\text{23} \text{ Gregory of Nazianzus, } Epistulae 115 (GCS 53, 88,10 Gallay): υπόμνημα . . . τοῦ ἁγίου Βασίλειου.}\]


\[\text{26} \text{ Philip Rousseau, } Basil \text{ of Caesarea (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 20; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 11.}\]

\[\text{27} \text{ Anthony Meredith, SJ, } \text{ The Cappadocians (Crestwood, N.J.: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 21–22.}\]

testimony that Basil and Gregory studied Origen during their ascetic retreat. Marguerite Harl, however, in the introduction to the critical edition of Philocalia 1–20 correctly regards Gregory’s statement as too ambiguous to establish authorship. Similarly, Éric Junod considers the most natural explanation of Gregory’s choice of words to be that Basil was the previous owner or borrower of the manuscript. John McGuckin hypothesizes that the anthology was “largely a work of Gregory’s, which, typically, he associated with Basil for the sake of friendship and honour.” However, this conclusion seems unlikely in the light of Junod’s analysis. Although they probably did not compile it themselves, Gregory’s use of the word “reminder” shows that Basil had read and benefited from the work (as both Junod and Harl maintain), for, as he says, it is useful to the Christian “philologist.” It can be concluded that the anthology had a positive effect upon Basil’s theological thought, irrespective of the question of authorship. Therefore, there is an antecedent probability that Basil, in attacking astrology, would draw upon Origen’s anti-astrological treatise contained in Philocalia 23. Basil may also have had direct access to Origen’s treatise within its original context of his Genesis commentary, which is not extant. However, since we know from Gregory that Basil had read the Philocalia, it is unnecessary to assume that he possessed the original.

29 Steenson, “Date” (see note 28), 246. Socrates, Historia ecclesiastica 4,26,8 (GCS.NF 1, 260,25–27 Hansen/Širinjan).
31 Junod, “Basile de Césarée et Grégoire de Nazianze” (see note 22), 358.
32 John A. McGuckin, “Patterns of Biblical Exegesis in the Cappadocian Fathers: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa,” in Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice (ed. Steven T. Kimbrough, Jr.; Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), (37–54) 45. This hypothesis serves to alleviate the apparent contradiction between Origen’s hermeneutics and Basil’s. However, Richard Lim’s explanation does this better: Richard Lim, “The Politics of Interpretation in Basil of Caesarea’s ‘Hexaemeron,’ ” VigChr 44 (1990): 351–370.
33 Junod, “Basile de Césarée et Grégoire de Nazianze” (see note 22), 357–358.
34 With respect to the interpretation of φιλολόγοι here, see Junod, “Basile de Césarée et Grégoire de Nazianze” (see note 22), 359. Junod translates it as “aux lettrés.”
The scriptural context: the exegesis of Genesis 1:14b

Besides the similarities in content, it is telling that there is a common scriptural context for Basil’s and Origen’s anti-astrological polemics. Basil’s argument is prompted by his hexaemeral exegesis of Genesis 1 and begins when he reaches v. 14b: “Let [the luminaries] be for signs.” As is his usual procedure in these sermons, he does not immediately attack mistaken interpretations, but first explains what the text, properly interpreted by himself, means. In this case the true meaning of v. 14b is not astrological but meteorological. He proclaims:

If anyone will investigate with ordinary care their [i.e., the luminaries’] signs, he will find that the observations derived through long experience with them are useful. Much information can be obtained about the heavy rains, much about droughts and the blowing of the winds.

A quotation from Matt 16:3a supports this interpretation with scriptural testimony. Then he gives examples of meteorological forecasting of a scientific nature, mixed in with everyday examples, such as the forecasts made by sailors and farmers.

This is the same scriptural context in which Origen treats astrology in his commentary on Genesis: “Let us call to mind how, in examining ‘Let the luminous bodies be for signs,’ we have arrived at these considerations.” For Origen, however, the astrological interpretation is the correct one; it is only a fatalistic understanding of astrology, together with the practice of genethlialogy (see below) that must be rejected. It is probable that Basil has learned of the astrological reading of Gen 1:14b through Origen’s commentary, given Basil’s use of some of

35 See, for instance, his refutations of the uncreatedness of matter (Basilius Caesariensis, *Homiliae in hexaemeron* 2,1–2 [22,1–25,8 A./R.] on Gen 1:2b) and of an allegorical reading of the super-heavenly waters (Basilius Caesariensis, *Homiliae in hexaemeron* 3,8–9 [52,12–55,6 A./R.] on Gen 1:6–8), both of which are preceded by positive interpretations of the controverted text.
37 “It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.”
Origen’s arguments and words in crafting his own attack on astrology. Nevertheless, Basil shows his intellectual independence from Origen by rejecting a link between this text and astrology. Already, then, we see both correspondence and contradiction commingled.

Five correspondences between Origen’s and Basil’s texts

Four times Basil draws directly upon Origen’s text in order to develop his own diatribe. These uses range in scope and significance. I shall begin with Basil’s more direct uses of Origen and then examine his more adaptive ones. In a fifth instance, which I shall examine last, Basil deliberately contradicts Origen, turning his own rhetorical reproach against him.

1. The Definition of Genethlialogy

At the beginning of his polemic, Basil attacks genethlialogy (the casting of nativities). In explaining what it is, he gives the impression of relying on astrologers themselves: “I shall use none of my own words, but I shall avail myself of theirs in the proof against them.” This rhetorical move positions Basil as an authority on astrology, well versed in the literature, though in fact his knowledge is rudimentary. His knowledge of genethlialogy comes at least partially from Origen, as seen in Basil’s definition of genethlialogy: “The combination of these moving stars with the stars lying in the Zodiac, when they come together in a certain shape, forecasts certain nativities.” These are almost the exact words of Origen, who wrote: “everything that occurs on the earth is due to the combination of the wandering stars with those in the Zodiac.” The definition is expressed nearly verbatim

(as indicated by my italics). On this preliminary point, being a mere matter of definition, Origen’s words require no alteration, so Basil simply copies them. The only significant difference is that Basil replaces the technical word “wandering” (πλανωμένων) with “moving” (κινουμένων). This change is consistent with his less technical approach, as compared to Origen’s, perhaps symptomatic of the difference between a sermon and a commentary.

2. The System of Genethlialogy

As Basil explains, one of the first principles of genethlialogy is that “within even the smallest and briefest interval . . . there is the greatest difference between nativity and nativity.” This principle is confirmed by the astrologer Manilius, who speaks of “the great differences effected by small moments.” Basil explains how genethlialogy works, with an emphasis on the exacting detail of measurement involved.

To understand his argument, a brief explanation of Greco-Roman astrology is in order. In its essentials, astrology divides the rotating sky into twelve segments of thirty degrees each, called the signs of the Zodiac, most of which are named after animals. A nativity (“horoscope”) is a precise record of the positions occupied by the seven “planets,” i.e., the sun, the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn, and Neptune, at the moment of someone’s birth. It also notes which point of the Zodiac is ascending on the eastern horizon; the ascending Zodiacal star was called the ὡροσκόπος.

Basil understands and explains this system by again using Origen’s words. Basil says:

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44 Basilius Caesariensis, Homiliae in hexaemeron 6,5 (96,19–21 A./R.; trans. 91 W. [adapted]): καὶ παρὰ τὸ μικρότατον καὶ ἀκαριαῖον . . . μεγίστης οὔσης διαφοράς γενέσει πρὸς γένεσιν.
46 For a primer, see Roger Beck, A Brief History of Ancient Astrology (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007), 20–25.
48 To clarify the meaning of the text, I have added the modern astronomical terms in brackets.
The ascending star must be found, and not only in which twelfth [sign of the Zodiac] it is, but also in what portion [degree] of the twelfth, and in which sixtieth [arcminute] into which we have said the portion was divided, or, to secure absolute precision, in which sixtieth [arcsecond] subdivided from the first sixtieths. Further, this minute and unfathomable investigation of time, they say, must be made for each of the planets, so that which position it had with respect to the fixed stars and what figure they formed with each other at the moment of the birth of the child may be ascertained.49

Here is how Origen explains the same thing:

Those who concern themselves with these things say that someone who intends to understand accurately the science of horoscopes must know, not only in which twelfth [sign of the Zodiac] the star in question is found, but also in what portion [degree] of the twelfth and in which sixtieth [arcminute]. More precise astronomers would specify in which sixtieth [arcsecond] of the sixtieth as well. And they say that it is necessary to do this for each of the planets, examining its position with respect to the fixed stars.50

Basil has taken his explanation nearly verbatim from Origen.51 As it is a matter of explanation, no significant alteration of the words is necessary. Explanations other than Origen’s were possible. For instance, the astrologer Manilius divides each sign of the Zodiac, not into thirty degrees, but into twelve “dodecatermories” (δωδεκατημόρια) of two and a half degrees each,52 nor does Basil use the Greek technical names for arcminutes (λέπτα) and arcseconds (δευτερολέπτα), which he probably does not know.53

49 Basilius Caesariensis, Homiliae in hexaemeron 6,5 (97,18–26 A./R.; trans. 92 W. [adapted]). ἀνάγκη γὰρ εὑρεθῆναι τὸν ὡροσκοποῦντα ἀστέρα οὐ μόνον κατὰ πόστου δωδεκατημορίου ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ ποιαμοίρας τοῦ δωδεκατημορίου, καὶ ἐν πόστῳ ἑξηκοστῳ, εἰς ᾧ ἔφαμεν διαιρεῖσθαι τὴν μοίραν, ἦ, ἵνα τὸ ἀκριβές εὑρεθῇ, ἐν πόστῳ ἑξηκοστῳ τῶν ὑποδιαίρεσεως ἀπὸ τῶν πρῶτων ἑξηκοστῶν. καὶ ταύτην τὴν ὡς προς ἅπαντα καταλαμβάνειν εἶναι ἵνα τὸ ἀκριβὲς ἔνσι κατὰ πόστου τῶν πλανητῶν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι ποιεῖσθαι λέγουσι, ὥστε εὑρεθῇναι ποταπὴν εἶχον σχέσιν πρὸς τοὺς ἀπλανεῖς, καὶ ποταπὸν ἴνα τὸ σχῆμα αὐτῶν πρὸς ἅπαντας ἄνθρωπους. ἐν τῇ τότε γενέσει τοῦ τικτομένου.

50 Origenes, Philocalia 23,17 (188,5–12 J.; trans. 99 T. [adapted]): Φασὶ τοίνυν οἱ περὶ ταῦτα δεινοὶ τὸν μέλλοντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν γενεθλιωσιαν ἀκριβῶς καταλαμβάνειν δεῖν εἰδεναι οὐ μόνον τὸ κατὰ πόστου δωδεκατημορίου ἐστίν ὁ καλούμενος ἀστήρ, ἀλλὰ κατὰ ποιας μοίρας τοῦ δωδεκατημορίου καὶ κατὰ πόσων ἑξηκοστῶν. οἱ δὲ ἀκριβέστεροι καὶ κατὰ ποιας ἑξηκοστῶν τοῦ ἑξηκοστοῦ, καὶ τούτῳ φασὶ δεῖν ποιεῖν ἐφ’ ἐκάστου τῶν πλανωμένων, ἐξετάζοντα τὴν σχέσιν τῆς τῆς ἀπλανεις.

51 Gronau, Poseidonios (see note 3), 33–34, in his source-critical study, notes Basil’s verbatim (“wörtlich”) use of Origen but without specifying which passages he means.

52 Manilius, Astronomica 2 (51,693–699 G.). Basil refers to the signs themselves as δωδεκατημορία, i.e., twelfthths. Homiliae in hexaemeron 6,6 (98,16 A./R.).

53 Hegedus, Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology (see note 18), 31.
Basil uses Origen’s explanation for the same purpose Origen does: to refute genethlialogy. However, while Origen simply states the impossibility of noting the time of someone’s birth with sufficient exactitude, Basil, with great rhetorical flourish, emphasizes the significance of the smallest interval of time by personifying the “swarm of seconds” (ἑξηκοστῶν ομήνος) that fly by between the birth of a child and the announcement of that birth to the astrologer waiting outside. Basil copies Origen as far as the facts are concerned, but also supplements the argument, thereby making it his own. He is not just a plagiarist.

3. Aspects

The third reliance upon Origen occurs when Basil describes the interactions that the planets have upon one another; in technical terms they are said to form “aspects” (ἐπίβλεψις, ἐπιβλέπειν) with one another, though Basil uses the verb ὁρᾶν instead, which is also found in astrological literature. As Basil describes it, depending upon the angles of their positions, the planets can become either “beneficent” (ἀγαθοποιός) or “maleficent” (κακοποιός) in the effects they have upon those born under their influence. Compared to Origen, he is vague about the details, noting only that it is “of the greatest importance” (μεγίστην τε ἐχει δύναμιν) whether the newborn child “is seen” (ἐφορᾶσθαι) by a beneficent or maleficent planet. Basil makes an argument out of the way the planets are said to become good or evil depending upon their aspects, a notion he considers “senseless” (ἀλογον). By viewing planets thus astrologers assign goodness and evil, not to free human acts, but to the natures of the celestial bodies. This is blasphemous, for according to Genesis 1, God made nothing evil. Either that, Basil says, or they will assert that the planets become good and evil by their own choices. Such a
proposition is “more than madness” (μανίας ἐπέκεινα) since the celestial bodies are not alive.\textsuperscript{61} The theory of aspects, then, is either blasphemous or insane.

In this explanation Basil again follows Origen, who explains the theory of aspects in order to note the impossibility of astrologers taking into account all the factors that determine the significance of a nativity.\textsuperscript{62} The wording is different, the closest verbal similarity being between Basil’s ὑπὸ τοῦδε ὁρᾶται and Origen’s τὸ ἐπιβλέπεσθαι αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ κρείττονος,\textsuperscript{63} where ὁρᾶν and ἐπιβλέπειν are technically synonymous, as noted above. Nevertheless, the close correspondence of meaning is apparent, especially in the light of the parallels to Origen already noted.\textsuperscript{64}

The overall theses and presentations of the arguments are different: Basil presents the theory as either stupid or blasphemous, whereas Origen uses it as another argument for impracticability.\textsuperscript{65} Basil has simplified Origen’s argument and taken it in a slightly different direction, though for the same general purpose of exposing the falsehoods of astrology.

4. Fatalism

The final problem with astrology, with which Basil ends his diatribe, is that its fatalistic outlook undermines morality by removing responsibility for good and evil acts from their human actors and placing it on the heavens.\textsuperscript{66} This is a familiar argument, made by pagan philosophers before him.\textsuperscript{67} Basil echoes Origen in decrying astrological fatalism as contrary to Christian hope in the judgment of

\textsuperscript{61} Basilius Caesariensis, Homiliae in hexaemeron 6,7 (100,1 A./R.); cf. Homilia in Psalmos 48,8 (PG 29:449C).
\textsuperscript{62} Origenes, Philocalia 23,18 (192,9–20 J.). As to the great variety of astrological variables, Beck, Brief History (see note 46), 77 says: “As always in astrology, the variables are so numerous that a loophole can always be found to reconcile an outcome to a horoscope after the event.”
\textsuperscript{63} Basilius Caesariensis, Homiliae in hexaemeron 6,7 (100,5 A./R.); Origenes, Philocalia 23,18 (192,15–16 J.).
\textsuperscript{64} More than justifying the mere “cf.” supplied by Basil’s editors in their cross-reference. Basilius Caesariensis, Homiliae in hexaemeron 6,7 (100,4–7 A./R.).
\textsuperscript{65} Origen also avoids Basil’s mistake of saying that the planets change their natures; their good and ill effects are merely “impaired” (ἀμαυρουμένου) by certain aspects (Origenes, Philocalia 23,18 [192,14–15 J.]).
\textsuperscript{66} Basilius Caesariensis, Homiliae in hexaemeron 6,7 (100,17–101,8 A./R.).
\textsuperscript{67} See Amand, Fatalisme et liberté (see note 3), 62–68, and Hegedus, Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology (see note 18), 113–124.
God. Basil proclaims, with the help of a chiasm: “The great hopes of us Christians will vanish completely since neither justice will be honored nor sin condemned, because nothing is done by men [and women] through their free will.”

Origen said at the beginning of his astrological discourse: “If things are as they say, the judgment of God that is preached vanishes.” For Origen, this set the theme of his entire discourse; Basil saves it for the end as a kind of climax. Thus Basil’s version of the argument does not have the same rhetorical prominence as Origen’s.

5. The Life of the Stars

Basil’s statement that believing the stars are alive is “more than madness” (μανίας ἐπέκεινα) bears another intriguing connection to Origen, but in a negative way. In De principiis Origen argues that the stars are alive: “Since the stars move with such great order and plan that their course at no time seems to be hindered at all, how is it not beyond all stupidity to say that such great order, with so much discipline and observance of plan, is finished or completed by irrational things?”

Basil contradicts Origen and says about the belief that the stars are alive exactly what Origen says about the belief that they are irrational, namely, that it is utterly foolish. It is unfortunate for us that this passage from Origen is not included in the Philocalia, because we lack the Greek words that Rufinus translates as ultra omnem stoliditatem. They may have been μανίας ἐπέκεινα. Given the similarity of the expressions about the same topic, even if those were not the exact Greek words, it is probable that Basil deliberately reverses and contradicts Origen’s opinion. Thus Basil displays his critical, discerning attitude toward Origen by including a subtle repudiation even in the midst of his use of Origen’s anti-astrological polemic.
DelCogliano has noted a similar instance of Basil’s rejection of Origen, also on the topic of astrology, namely when Basil denies that the new star seen by the Magi at Christ’s birth was a comet, as Origen had argued.\textsuperscript{72} In DelCogliano’s words: “This is one of the rare cases in which Basil completely jettisons the tradition and fundamentally disagrees with Origen.”\textsuperscript{73} That Basil twice contradicts Origen on the subject of stars indicates that he is particularly troubled by Origen’s views on the subject. It is noteworthy that in both instances the contradiction appears in the midst of heavy borrowing from Origen on that very subject. Later in Christian history Origen becomes associated with heterodox astral views. Theophilus claims that Origen said that Christ’s foreknowledge was based in astrology.\textsuperscript{74} In the sixth century the emperor Justinian condemns Origenism, including the proposition that the stars are rational beings.\textsuperscript{75} Apparently, Basil is on the forefront of such anxiety about Origen’s opinions about stars, though obviously he does not condemn him as a heretic and even still uses some of those opinions.

**Conclusion**

In composing his own work against astrology, Basil uses Origen’s arguments against astrology in various ways. My analysis shows that Basil’s diatribe against astrology draws much of its astrological information and argumentation from Origen’s treatment, though Basil himself never mentions Origen and always fits his source to suit his own rhetorical goals. Thus my study confirms DelCogliano’s recent conclusions with respect to a different homily.\textsuperscript{76} DelCogliano categorizes Basil’s use of Origen into seven distinct categories, four or five of which may be considered applicable here: “wholesale adoption” (1. the definition of genethlialogy), “supplementation” (2. the system of genethlialogy), “redeployment” (3. aspects), and “refutation” (5. the life of the stars).\textsuperscript{77} Basil’s use of Origen’s argument about fatalism (4.) does not fit neatly into DelCogliano’s categories, though perhaps we could use his phrase “adoption with tweaking.” Here Basil takes the overall

\textsuperscript{72} DelCogliano, “Tradition and Polemic” (see note 5), 52 (notes 94, 95).
\textsuperscript{73} DelCogliano, “Tradition and Polemic” (see note 5), 53.
\textsuperscript{75} Justinianus, *Edictum contra Origenem* 23,6 (ACO 3, 213,27–28 Schwartz); *Concilium Constantinopolitanum II, Canones XV contra Origenem siue Origenistas* 3 (ACO 4,1 248,14–16 Schwartz/Straub).
\textsuperscript{76} DelCogliano, “Tradition and Polemic” (see note 5), 30–55.
\textsuperscript{77} DelCogliano, “Tradition and Polemic” (see note 5), 55.
theme of Origen’s attack, with which he began his whole discourse, and uses it as a discrete argument to conclude his own polemic. There is also the identical contexts of the arguments (Gen 1:14b), a category not relevant in DelCogliano’s analysis. However one wishes to categorize the specific uses, the general conclusion is that Basil uses Origen sometimes freely, sometimes verbatim, but always critically to support his own goals. This conclusion invites further study of Basil’s precise uses of Origen in other works, along the same or similar lines.