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# *Dipolarity and God*

*by*

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## • *A b s t r a c t* •

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is about one God in three divine persons, with one of these three becoming human (without ceasing to be divine) in Jesus of Nazareth. The concept of dipolarity is about the combination of complementary but opposite principles. The most widely recognised examples of this concept are *one-many* and *being-becoming*. But what is not so recognised is that these dipolarities are clearly illustrated in the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity. By contrast, philosophers and theologians throughout history have often attempted to reconcile or synthesise these dipolar 'opposites', or to place one over the other. This quest, enshrined in Neoplatonic philosophy, has influenced the development of the Christian doctrine of God (less so in regard to the particular doctrine of the Trinity just mentioned). Divine 'Oneness' and 'Being' have often been regarded as exclusive of 'many' and 'becoming'. But the theological insight that God the Trinity is a relational and active personal being, may be contrasted with this depiction of God as singular absolute and beyond becoming. From a trinitarian foundation, a theology of God can be developed which expresses both the being-becoming and one-many dipolarities. This means revising elements of traditional Christian theism, especially in regard to understanding the eternal and unchangeable God as also becoming and many (in relation).

## • *A c k n o w l e d g m e n t s* •

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The Reverend Professor Colin Gunton, DD (London), Hon. DD (Aberdeen), D.Phil, M.A., was one of the examiners of this thesis both in 1997 and of the revised thesis in 1999, while at King's College (University of London). His own writings in theology were much appreciated and are referred to a number of times in this thesis. He died suddenly, aged 62, on 6 May 2003.

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# Introduction

It is my intention in this thesis to make a contribution to the Christian understanding of God by showing that the concept of dipolarity explains much about the nature of God as Trinity. This might seem presumptuous following two millennia of Christian doctrinal development, fundamental to which is the understanding that God is Trinity. Have so many theologians missed something? From their understanding that God is somehow both one and three, they have actually encountered the principle of polarity. Yet, frequently a failure to appreciate the nature and significance of dipolarity has led to the doctrine of the Trinity being regarded as enigmatic and for some even irrelevant.

Almost without exception during the last five years, when asked about this 'little pamphlet on God', the question to me has been "what is dipolarity, and what has it to do with God?" If there is no question, there may be a suspicion of doctrinal deviation, for there is no mention of 'dipolarity' in the Bible or any creed. However, this thesis is about a concept already central to Christianity, even if rarely named. It is then my intention in this thesis to explain both its significance and relevance for understanding God.

So what is dipolarity? It is a concept illustrated by the nature of a magnet. The two ends or poles are magnetic opposites (north and south poles), yet both are necessary together for a magnet to be a magnet. Our earliest scientific experiments with magnets likely included observing the opposite properties of attraction and repulsion belonging to the same metal object. I will shortly explain the concept in more detail, with other examples. Put concisely, dipolarity is a concept about completeness in complementary opposites. In this thesis I will follow both physicists and metaphysicians who have attempted to explain features of reality as dipolar in nature.

But from this I am not going to say that God, like a magnet, *is* dipolar, because God is not a singular entity with two polar features. That could be a misunderstanding which arises from reading only the title to this thesis – that

God is two, rather than Trinity. But this would be to turn the *concept* of dipolarity into an ontological description of God ('God is dipolar'). Rather, God is understood using the *concept* of dipolarity when described as 'one God in three persons - Father, Son, and Spirit.' Hence the similarity between the concept of dipolarity and 'trinity'. The term 'trinity' has been used to name the oneness *and* threeness about God, just as the concept of 'dipolarity' has been used to understand seemingly paradoxical features of reality, like magnetism.

In some Process theology, it has been suggested that 'God is dipolar' (e.g. A.N. Whitehead's God-World dipolarity).<sup>1</sup> This ontological description seems to offer an alternative to trinitarian theology, and therefore in my opinion loses reference to the most significant example of dipolarity. In this thesis I will not agree that dipolarity can replace trinitarian theism. Despite this, I will still show appreciation of those Process theologians who have developed a theology of God using the philosophical concept of dipolarity, especially where this offers an alternative to the monism of so-called Classical Theism.

Within traditions of philosophical reflection, many ideas have been developed which have been utilised and sometimes further developed by metaphysicians better known as theologians. St. Paul's dialogue with the Athenians is one early Christian example (Acts 17), the use of the 'logos' term in the prologue to St. John's Gospel is another (John 1). Ideas and terms drawn from 'pagan' philosophy have helped Christians formulate creeds (e.g. the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds), and also helped make their message about God intelligible and plausible to non-Jews.<sup>2</sup> However, alongside the benefits such philosophical concepts and terms brought, there are also examples of departures from orthodoxy when philosophical ideas reshaped Christian theology. With regard to this, Chapter Three will evaluate the influence that Neoplatonic philosophy had in shaping and modifying much early Christian theism.<sup>3</sup> Despite this sometimes negative impact on Christian theology, we continue with dialogue between theology and metaphysical reflection,<sup>4</sup>

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1 Alfred N. Whitehead *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929).

2 W. Pannenberg *Systematic Theology - Volume I* (trans. G.W. Bromiley; Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1991) 72.

3 See also W. Pannenberg 'The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology' in *Basic Questions in Theology - Collected Essays Volume II* (trans. G.H. Kehm; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971) 119-183.

4 W. Pannenberg *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* (trans. Philip Clayton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 6 - "... a theological doctrine of God that lacks metaphysics as its discussion partner falls into either a kerygmatic subjectivism or a thoroughgoing demythologization - and frequently into both at the same time!" Pannenberg, in his *Systematic Theology - Volume I*, criticises theologians during the

believing that a philosophical concept like dipolarity may be appropriately utilised as a tool to articulate God's self-revelation as Trinity without this concept becoming the hermeneutical framework or basis for theological construction and apologetics. This thesis does not presuppose a commitment to the metaphysics of dipolarity, but to the self-revelation of God as Trinity.

Dipolarity is not then to be regarded as the philosophical root for a subsequent doctrine of the Trinity. While the concept of dipolarity, as applied to theism in this thesis, does have antecedents in the concept of dipolarity found in various religious and philosophical traditions, these have not become, as this thesis will show, Trojan horses (to use Karl Barth's analogy) for bringing in the notion of the 'Christian' God as trinity.<sup>5</sup> In fact each 'horse' is seen to collapse before the gates! The chosen methodology for this thesis is not then an *a priori* application of a philosophical concept to theological tradition. But neither is it an approach which takes as its only reference the divine revelation within Christian tradition. So, reference is made in Chapter Two to the concept of dipolarity in the thinking of theologians and philosophers who predate Christianity. But these are evaluated according to what this thesis considers to be the definitive expression of dipolarity in the Christian concept of God as Trinity.

The methodological approach of this thesis may be compared with Colin Gunton's quest for 'transcendentals' in his book *The One, the Three and the Many*.<sup>6</sup> It is from the doctrine of the Trinity that Gunton derives 'transcendentals' such as relationality and substance, also particularity *and* relatedness.<sup>7</sup> While dipolarity (as a concept about concepts) may not be regarded as another transcendental, it is interesting to note that some of those

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last century, particularly Albrecht Ritschl, who have opposed the role of metaphysics in the Christian doctrine of God. cf. *Systematic Theology - Volume I* (trans. G.W. Bromiley; Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1991) 98ff.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics - Vol 1.1: The Doctrine of the Word of God* (trans. G.T. Thomson; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936). Reference here to Barth's analogy cf. p.386.

<sup>6</sup> Gunton refers to Daniel Hardy's understanding of 'transcendentals': 'these are the forms through which being displays itself, through which being is determinate; they constitute an answer to the search for the fundamental features of the cosmos.' cf. Daniel W. Hardy 'Created and Redeemed Sociality' *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community* edited by C.E. Gunton and D.W. Hardy (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989) 21-47, 25. cf. Gunton *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 136. See also the review of Gunton's book in Stephen N. Williams *Revelation and Reconciliation: A Window on Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) especially 166-167.

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting that Gunton observes, like I do in this thesis, a failure in much theological thinking to hold together both the 'one' and the 'many', and to rather collapse both the many and becoming into Parmenidean oneness and immobility. Yet this monism/immobility, as he illustrates, is overcome in the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers. This gives rise to the 'transcendental' of particularity *and* relatedness. cf. *The One, the Three and the Many* 150.

transcendentals which Gunton identifies are dipolar in character or in relation to each other. However, my point here is that for Gunton the 'transcendentals' are not a philosophical *a priori* for explaining reality, but are themselves derived from a discussion of God as Trinity.

Gunton discusses the concept of analogy to speak of the relationship between the Creator and creation,<sup>8</sup> concluding that for both God and creation there is one ontological dynamic of being and relation, or being in communion.<sup>9</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity again provides an analogy of being/becoming which gives meaning to the structures of the created world. To put this another way, it is the trinitarian generated 'transcendental'<sup>10</sup> which enables Gunton to say that "of both God and the world it must be said that they have their being in relation."<sup>11</sup> If I understand correctly Gunton's meaning of transcendent fundamentals, then this thesis is proposing something similar for the concept of dipolarity. Rather than imposing an *a priori* philosophical category on the being of God,<sup>12</sup> dipolarity is a concept which can be used to order our thinking about God in that God is self-revealed in the Christian tradition as one-many and being-becoming (two dipolarities). So I have referred to Gunton's work at this point to identify a similarity between his methodology and that adopted in this thesis.

My first realisation that the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity offered a solution to previous philosophical theology which tried to reconcile opposites, came with reading Charles N. Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture*.<sup>13</sup> In this work, Cochrane observed the failure of classical culture to reconcile virtue and fortune,<sup>14</sup> also being and becoming.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to this impasse, Cochrane noted that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, for the first time brought

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<sup>8</sup> A full discussion of the nature and meaning of theological language as analogous is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>9</sup> Colin Gunton *The One, the Three and the Many* 141.

<sup>10</sup> Colin Gunton *The One, the Three and the Many* 145.

<sup>11</sup> Colin Gunton *The One, the Three and the Many* 230.

<sup>12</sup> A methodology from which Gunton distances himself. "The error of imposing a priori philosophical categories on the being of God must also be avoided. If there are transcendentals, they have their being in the fact that God has created the world in such a way that it bears the marks of its maker. They are not then the 'forms through which being displays itself', because that might suggest a priority of 'being' over God, but notions which can be predicated of all being by virtue of the fact that God is creator and the world is creation." *The One, the Three and the Many*, 136-137.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Norris Cochrane *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944).

<sup>14</sup> C.N. Cochrane *Christianity and Classical Culture* 99. However, my account of dipolarity in early Greek Philosophy (Chapter Two) contradicts this claim.

<sup>15</sup> C.N. Cochrane *Christianity and Classical Culture* 102.

together order and motion (progress), and "the one and the many," as complementary on the same plane of reality.<sup>16</sup> The Trinity is the first principle, the fundamental *arche*, showing the dipolarities of one-many and being-becoming. As Cochrane said, "in the Trinity, Christian wisdom discovers that for which Classicism had so long vainly sought, viz, the *logos* or explanation of being and motion, in other words, a metaphysic of ordered process."<sup>17</sup>

## Thesis Outline

**Chapter One** of this thesis affirms that the two polarities, one-many and being-becoming, are most clearly found in the historical development of the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity. The two 'trinitarian' polarities of one-many and being-becoming are then used in **Chapter Two** as the basis for a critique of philosophers and theologians throughout history who have searched for an ultimate principle, often failing to appreciate dipolarity and that principles in dipolar relation to each other cannot be synthesised. **Chapter Three** demonstrates the impact of unification theories (and/or quests for the transcendent One), on Greek, Jewish, and Christian theologies of God. The purpose of this chapter is to show that even though the early Church theologians developed a one-many and order-movement dipolarity in their doctrine of the Trinity, much of their doctrine about the nature and attributes of God remained bound to one pole, i.e. oneness, being. **Chapter Four** attempts a reformulation of the Christian doctrine of God, especially in terms of the being-becoming polarity, in deliberate contrast to 'classical' theism. **Chapter Five** confronts the main obstacle to working out fully a concept of being-becoming, namely the Platonic/Plotinian concept of eternity. When adopted by Christian theologians the 'eternity' concept has precluded the 'becoming' pole in divine reality. This chapter brings us back to the Trinity as dipolar in nature, in which case time is real for God who is being-becoming. The focus then of the last two chapters is on the being-becoming dipolarity. However it should be noted that being is often explained with regard to oneness, and becoming with regard to what is many. The two dipolarities are then very much related.

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<sup>16</sup> C.N. Cochrane *Christianity and Classical Culture* 236-238. So we should not speak of "the one and the many." The One is the Many. cf. Gustav E. Mueller 'The One and the Many' *Philosophical Review* 53 (1944) 46-61.

<sup>17</sup> C.N. Cochrane *Christianity and Classical Culture* 437.

Oneness and being have been historically associated with God as indivisible, singular and static perfection. This is the ontology of Neo-Platonism. Along with this, 'many' and 'becoming', as the second and third chapters of this thesis will show, have often been regarded as less than divine features, entailing division and so instability and movement. So the focus on 'being that becomes' in the last half of the thesis,<sup>18</sup> is an extension of the one-many dipolarity given focus in the first half of the thesis (Chapters one to three).

### What is Dipolarity?

The word 'dipolar' is derived from the Latin *polus* and the Greek *πόλος*, referring to the poles or ends of an axis.<sup>19</sup> The most familiar usage of 'dipolarity' is in explaining the oneness *and* opposition between magnetic poles. The two poles complement or complete one another, and cannot exist without the other (*contraria sunt complementa* - 'opposites are complementary'). This example from physics also demonstrates that opposites attract, and that 'positive' and 'negative' charges stabilise each other (e.g. the atom). There is no electrical 'current' unless both the positive and negative terminals on a battery are connected. Another illustration is that of stereoscopic vision, as given by Joan Crewdson:



Each eye has its own image and these provide contradictory data. When we integrate the two images, we achieve stereoscopic vision, but this does not *replace* the two separate images. We still depend on their existence for seeing stereoscopically, and the new, in-depth image is different from either, yet not just a synthesis of both. By integrating the separate images, we are able to see a new reality, on a new level, with a new qualitative unity that was not present in either of the other images.<sup>20</sup>

There is integration, but not a synthesis which transcends the dipolarity. For there is no perspective or 'depth of field' without *both* eyes open. The above illustration is inadequate in showing the 'two' as polar *opposites*, but it serves to

<sup>18</sup> That is, continuing from the discussion on divine impassibility in chapter three.

<sup>19</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* - Vol. XII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, Second Edition) 11; C.T. Lewis and C. Short *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966 edition) 1393; H.G. Liddell and R. Scott *A Greek-English Lexicon* - Vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925) 1436. While not related etymologically, the Greek *διπλοῦς*, means 'double' or 'two-fold'.

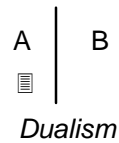
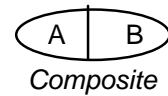
<sup>20</sup> Joan Crewdson in *Christian Doctrine in the Light of Michael Polanyi's Theory of Personal Knowledge: A Personalist Theology* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1994) 131.



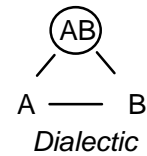
indicate that recognising polarity prevents a collapse or reductionism to an undifferentiated identity.

Nor is polarity to be confused with a continuum which plots gradations between two infinite and therefore undefinable extremes. Rather, the one is manifest in two, without a reduction to an ultimate unitary principle, or being stretched into the extremes of a continuum.

With dipolarity, oneness is found in the combination of opposites. This is not a  $1 + 1 = 2$  formula, such that two discrete elements remain (dualism; δύο), a collection or aggregation of elements.<sup>21</sup> The christological controversies of the fifth century Church illustrate this. The orthodox argued that Christ is 'fully human, fully divine', not a composition of half human - half divine. The relation between the two could not be reduced by mathematical formula, since the two together were said to be true of the one person. Instead, the relation between the 'divine' and 'human' was described in terms of reciprocal relation and interpenetration (*communicatio idiomatum*, περιχώρησις).<sup>22</sup> This relationship between poles is further explored in Louis Norris' "calculus for polarity" (Appendix One).



Dipolarity recognises a unity or holism in many other 'opposites'. For example, in the one - many, and being - becoming. It is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate the value of these dipolar concepts for understanding theological truth, and in particular the doctrine of God.



<sup>21</sup> For this reason the terms 'dyadism' or 'binarity' are inadequate, even though Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) may have used them in a dipolar way. For example, in explaining binarity he says, "Imagine two objects which are not merely *thought* as two, but of which something is true such that neither could be removed without destroying the fact supposed true of the other." cf. C. Hartshorne & P. Weiss (eds.) *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce - Vol. II Elements of Logic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932) 44; and *Vol 1 - Principles of Philosophy* (1931) 249. Peirce later came to emphasise reality as continuous (synechism) cf. C. Hartshorne & P. Weiss *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce Vol VI - Scientific Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935) 117ff., 343. Charles Hartshorne criticises Peirce for falling back confusedly into monopolarity, with talk about *ens necessarium*. cf. 'The Dipolar Conception of Deity' *The Review of Metaphysics* 21.2 (1967) 273-289, 280.

<sup>22</sup> The principle of *communicatio idiomatum* was expounded by Cyril of Alexandria in his argument with Nestorius. However, the concept remained paradoxical since the Logos was considered unable to suffer. The term περιχώρησις was used later to describe the interchange or reciprocation between the two natures of Christ, by Maximus the Confessor (580-662 AD). John of Damascus (675-749 AD) extended the meaning to include 'interpenetration' or 'coinherence' of the two natures, and the three persons of the Trinity. cf. G.W.H. Lampe (ed.) *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) 1077; L. Prestige ΠΕΡΙΧΩΡΕΩ and ΠΕΡΙΧΩΡΗΣΙΣ in the Fathers' *The Journal of Theological Studies* Vol. 29, No. 115 (1928) 242-252; Aloys Grillmeier *Christ in Christian Tradition: Volume One - From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)* (trans. John Bowden; London: Mowbrays, 1975 - second revised edition).

A distinction must be made between dipolarity and dialectic. Dialectic is an approach to truth (whether that truth is dipolar or not) by debating or reasoning (διαλογίζομαι) from two or more angles by making a distinction (διακρίνω). The two concepts (i.e. 'dipolarity' and 'dialectic') are however frequently related, since the dialectical form of argument sometimes reflects a dipolar truth. The debating skill of the dialectician (τεχνή διαλεκτική) was first developed by Socrates, but its use was employed primarily for arriving at a unitary principle, thus removing the ambiguities and tensions of dipolarity.<sup>23</sup> The history of philosophy provides many examples, some of the most influential in recent times being Immanuel Kant, Georg W. F. Hegel (a synthesis of thesis-antithesis), and Karl Marx.<sup>24</sup>

A distinction may also be made between dipolarity and paradox. There is a completeness in the combination of opposites in a polar structure, whereas 'paradox' tends to leave us with a contradiction. This is especially so according to Søren Kierkegaard, who deliberately opposed the idealism of Hegel by emphasising the paradoxical and unresolvable nature of reality.<sup>25</sup> However dipolarity is neither synthesis (Hegel) nor antithesis/paradox (Kierkegaard). Polarity is not mere contradiction. So this thesis will not consider the logical contradictories of 'being' and 'non-being' as a polarity. Non-being has no part in being. Neither can 'good' and 'evil' be polar opposites. There is no wholism, or mutual contribution to each other. These opposites do not involve and complete each other.<sup>26</sup> So John Buckham uses the term *contrapletion* for polarity:

In contrast to contradiction, contrariety and correlation - in the first of which one of the terms of the dyad eliminates the other, in the second opposes the other, and in the third is subordinate to the other - here [i.e. contrapletion] the two *fulfill* each other.<sup>27</sup>

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23 Plato, and Neoplatonists after him, regarded opposites as merging in a truth which absorbs and denies their differences. Aristotle regarded opposites in relation to a third principle, which functions as the 'mean' or defining agent. cf. *Physics* 1.5, 6 - *Aristotle's Physics, Books I and II*, translated with Introduction and Notes, by W. Charlton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) 10-15.

24 Howard Williams *Hegel, Heraclitus and Marx's Dialectic* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989) ix - x.

25 We have a choice of either/or, rather than Hegel's "mediation." cf. R. Bretall (ed.) *A Kierkegaard Anthology* (New York: The Modern Library, 1936) 19ff., 130. Kierkegaard does however believe that paradoxes, which result from the conjunction of eternity and time, are eliminated in the subjective 'moment' of faith. cf. p.218ff. and other sections from the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the "Philosophical Fragments"*.

26 These logical contractions, mistaken for 'polarities', are discussed by Louis W. Norris in his reply to A.J. Bahm's article on Polarity (1949). cf. "Existence and its Polarities" - Revision and Supplement' *The Journal of Philosophy* 47 (1950) 96-99.

27 John W. Buckham 'Duality and Dialectic' *The Monist* 46 (1936) 175-189, 183. Buckham had earlier illustrated this concept in his article 'Immanence - Transcendence' *Journal of Philosophy* 28:8 (1931)

This thesis agrees with F.F. Centore, that "any Christian philosopher today worth his or her salt must have a philosophy of being which can simultaneously account for both change and permanence, flux and fixity, existence and essence, and so on, within Being."<sup>28</sup> Aristotle said much the same thing when defining nature (φύσις). It is "the substance of things which have a principle of motion in themselves qua what they are."<sup>29</sup> It is the purpose of this thesis to restore the polarities of one-many and being-becoming to their fundamental place in the Christian doctrine of God.

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204-211: "Logically considered, the concept "*immanence*" is incomplete and impotent without its polar concept "transcendence"... Immanence - transcendence, that is, belongs to the class of polar relationship which may be termed *contrapletion*, in which one contraplete requires the other as its antithesis, in order to fulfil its meaning, as e.g. above-below, light-darkness, whole-part, subject-object, human-divine, finite-infinite, etc." (207). See also Nels F.S. Ferré 'Beyond Substance and Process' *Theology Today* 24 (1967) 160-171, 169-170.

28 F.F. Centore 'Classical Christian Philosophy and Temporality: Correcting a Misunderstanding' *Monist* 75 (1992) 393-405.

29 *Metaphysics* Δ 1015a, cf. *Aristotle's Metaphysics* - translated with Commentaries and Glossary by Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell: Peripatetic Press) 78. Martin Heidegger made the same observation in regard to the concept of *physis* (φύσις) in the earliest Greek philosophy: "*Physis* means the power that emerges and the enduring realm under its sway. This power of emerging and enduring includes 'becoming' as well as 'being' in the restricted sense of inert duration." cf. M. Heidegger *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (trans. R. Manheim; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 14. The Latin translation, *natura* (later to be focused in the substance-oriented ontology of Aristotle), loses this dipolar meaning (p.13). cf. John Macquarrie *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1966) 205f.