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John Scottus Eriugena (c. AD 815–877) and the Charge of Pantheism:

A Theological and Historical Investigation

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Abstract

To this day, general discussion on the ninth-century Irish scholar John Scottus Eriugena regularly turns to the topic of pantheism, that is, the identification of God with the world. His major theological work, the *Periphyseon*, was condemned in AD 1225, and affirmations of its having a pantheistic outlook have continued into more recent times. The present study grew from a desire to be able to understand the matter with a greater degree of insight, and to present findings which might add to the expanding tradition of Eriugena studies. The object of the dissertation, therefore, is to examine the content of his work for the presence of pantheism, not just with regard to the historical context of its condemnation, but on its own merit.

<p style="text-align:center">Table of Contents</p>

Acknowledgements

Introduction

John Scottus Eriugena's expansive philosophical and theological treatise *Periphyseon* ('On Nature') discusses the *being* of the world (which might be termed 'reality'), and the source and ultimate origin of that being.[1] His view is that all things are connected through an ontological hierarchy, thus the relationship between the Creator and what He creates is a central theme. The treatise is, as Willemien Otten notes, "widely recognized as the most original work in the history of Christian thought between Augustine and Anselm."[2] The legacy of this work has a chequered history: when it first appeared in the ninth century, it appears to have enjoyed a modest readership, which is unsurprising given its extensive reliance on Greek patristic writers who were unfamiliar to scholars in the West. A revival of its study in the twelfth century was followed, however, by a papal condemnation in the thirteenth, and an order that all copies be burned on the grounds that its content amounted to "heresy". Thankfully, the work survived, but the official condemnation hampered its readership and influence until more recent times. The twentieth century witnessed a renewed

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[1] For a history of the title of the work, see I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Title of Eriugena's Periphyseōn," *Studia Patristica* 3 (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des altchristlichen Literatur 78) (1961): 297–302. By the same author, see also his introduction to the translation of the *Periphyseon*: *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae: Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae) Liber Primus*, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, vol VII (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1999, first published 1968), 5–10.The most recent critical edition of the *Periphyseon* is that edited by Édouard Jeauneau for the Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis (CCCM) series: *Iohannis Scottae Eriugenae Periphyseon, Liber Primus; Liber Secundus; Liber Tertius; Liber Quartus; Liber Quintus, editionem novam a suppositiciis quidem additamentis purgatam, ditatam vero appendice in qua vicissitudines operis synoptic exhibentur* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996; 1997, 1999; 2000; 2003), i.e. volumes 161–165 of the CCCM series. This is the edition that will be quoted in this dissertation.

Jeauneau's edition followed on from his editing of the fourth book of the work for the Scriptores Latini Hiberniae series (1995), after which he edited a new critical edition of the complete work for CCCM which displays how the text evolved through the earliest manuscripts (see section 3.1.2). Sheldon-Williams, in his previous edition with an English translation, also attempted to show the differences between the earliest sources through use of differing fonts in his presentation of the text: the convenience of the single narrative is offset by the difficulty in untangling the sources. Both Jeauneau and Sheldon-Williams retain the reference numeration that pertains to the 1865 Migne edition, edited by H.J. Floss: Jacques Paul Migne, ed. *Patrologia Latina,* volume 122 (reprint: Turnhout, Brepols, 1999).

[2] Willemien Otten, "The Dialectic of the Return in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*," *The Harvard Theological Review* 84, no. 4 (October 1991): 399.

scholarly interest in Eriugena, and in 2009 Pope Benedict XVI endorsed and encouraged a reading of his works, and claimed that Eriugena was always orthodox in his intent.[3]

The term 'heresy' (derived from the Greek *haeresis* – 'choice') is used by Pope Honorius III (c. AD 1150–1227) in his condemnation of the *Periphyseon*.[4] The meaning of the term in the thirteenth century is explored by Gordon Leff who determines how a heterodox belief or practice came to be described by the pejorative term 'heresy': the term is a construct, Leff argues, and does not refer to a 'ready-made' doctrinal error.[5] He considers that most heresies, from the twelfth century onwards, did not begin life labelled as such, but rather were heterodox beliefs or practices by Christians, inspired by acceptable sources such as the Bible.[6] The Church constructed as heretical a heterodox belief or practice when its adherents persisted in it, despite an official censure.[7] The stamp of heresy was applied when such practice was branded as dissent, and a challenge to sacerdotal authority. The use of the

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[3] Benedict XVI, Address on John Scottus Erigena to a general audience in St Peter's Square, 10 June 2009. See "Benedict XVI Assesses Eriugena" in Adrian Guiu, ed., *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 454–457.

[4] '*heretice pravitatis*': see section 1.1 of this dissertation. The aspect of choice associated with the term is reflected in Christine Caldwell Ames's discussion around the definition of heresy: "In medieval Latin Christianity, 'heresy' meant a baptized Christian's stubborn adherence to errant belief even after being told that the belief was errant . . . Believing wrongly, but not knowing one's belief was wrong, was not heresy . . . [thus] heresy was selfish individual choice, opposed to selfless obedience to common consensus deriving from apostolic authority." See Christine Caldwell Ames, *Medieval Heresies: Christianity, Judaism and Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 8. The pride associated with heretics is reflected in the third constitution of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215): see section 1.6 of this dissertation.

[5] Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: the Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent c.1250 – c.1450* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967). Leff states that the dates in his title are not rigid, and that his thesis includes much of what happened before them. Ibid., vii.

[6] Ibid., 1–5. M. David Litwa argues that "the category 'heretic' . . . has no place as a category in academic historiography." He writes in the context of the second century, but the remark also has relevance to the thirteenth. See *Found Christianities: Remaking the World of the Second Century CE* (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 8.

[7] See also Caroline Humfress, *Orthodoxy and the Courts in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), who discusses how, in late Roman Christian heresiology, heresies were constructed through argument: see chapter 8 of this volume, 'Defining Heresy and Orthodoxy', 217–242.

term by Pope Honorius thus suggests an association between the theology of the *Periphyseon* and a particular sect, but any such association has been difficult to prove.[8]

The usage of the term 'heresy' also relies on St Augustine (AD 354–430) who alluded to the difficulties of defining it in his preface to *On Heresies*, where he claims that every heresy involves error, while not every error implies heresy; furthermore, he finds it "absolutely impossible, or exceedingly difficult, to comprise in any strict definition what constitutes a heretic."[9] Peter Biller remarks on the evolution of the understanding of heresy from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries: in the eleventh century, a chronicler might produce an "unsystematised description" of a particular heresy, using Augustine's *On Heresies* as a primary resource. Thirteenth-century accounts display an increased capacity to describe and analyse different religious entities, such as Islam, Judaism, Waldensianism and Catharism. By the early fourteenth century these accounts have become systematic and thematic.[10]

The study and influence of pre-Christian Hellenistic philosophy was both an enriching and challenging experience for theologians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.[11] Despite Tertullian's provocation that Athens had nothing to do with Jerusalem, the

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[8] The influence of the *Periphyseon*, and its possible heretical content, is explored in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

[9] See Ligouri G. Müller, *The De Haeresibus of Saint Augustine: A Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1956), 59–61.

[10] Peter Biller and Anne Hudson, eds, *Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1530* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2. For further discussions on the concept of heresy in the Middle Ages, see Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 2nd ed. (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022), ix – xvi; Ian Hunter, John Christian Laursen and Cary J. Nederman, eds, *Heresy in Transition: Transforming Ideas of Heresy in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1–3; Heinrich Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages: 1000–1200* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press), 1–8, especially 5–6, and Lucy J. Sackville, *Heretics and Heresy in the Thirteenth Century: The Textual Representations* (York: York Medieval Press, 2011), 9–10. Sackville (p. 9) points to how a medieval heresy is defined by an authority that sees itself as orthodox, while Fichtenau makes the important point that "the medieval worldview was never as uniform as it might appear from the modern perspective" (p. 1).

[11] The term 'medieval' (from *medium aevum*, or 'Middle Age') is used extensively throughout this dissertation, and follows the general and loosely-defined appellation used to apply to the centuries between the decline of classical culture in the Latin West (and indeed beyond, encompassing modern day Western Europe),

Greek philosophical tradition became embedded in Christian theology, notably in the writings of Origen (c. AD 185 – c. 253), Augustine (AD 354–430), the Cappadocian fathers, and Scottus Eriugena. The Greek study of logic and metaphysics was maintained and revived by Christian scholars in Western Europe in both the early and later Middle Ages. In the scholastic philosophy of the thirteenth century, the Greek metaphysical concepts that had previously been grafted onto Christian theology attracted a new interest with the 'rediscovery' of Aristotle: scholars from this period acted to clarify their theological import, particularly where they were suspected of being connected to erroneous doctrine.

Philosophical ideas and debates in the Middle Ages were not the limited to the milieu of the minority educated classes. These ideas had very real implications for the popular beliefs and religious practice of people from different walks of life, and sometimes gave rise to heretical groups. In the third century, which saw a proliferation of gnostic Christian sects, the monism of Neoplatonism, conscripted to support Christian theology, served to contradict the dualism of numerous gnostic developments;[12] however, in the Neoplatonic (Plotinian) idea that 'creation' was an unwilled emanation of all things from a single source there lurked another form of doctrinal error.[13] The case of Eriugena's contribution to the debate on

ca. AD 500, and what was believed to be its rediscovery during the 'Renaissance' of the late fifteenth century, when the term was first used. The Carolingian period belongs to the 'Early' Middle Ages (prior to ca. 1100), whereas the condemnation of the *Periphyseon* in 1225 belongs to the 'High' Middle Ages (ca. 1100–1300). It must be emphasised that the chronological limits of this period, and its subdivisions, are vague, and there is little consensus among historians regarding their usage. Nevertheless, the term remains a useful one. Similarly, the chronological boundaries of 'Late Antiquity', a term made popular by historian Peter Brown in his book *The World of Late Antiquity: from Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), are vague; Brown suggest boundaries of AD 200 and 700. Ibid., 7.

[12] The gnosticism which is characteristic of various Christian sects in this period is manifest in the emphasis on personal, spiritual knowledge (*gnosis*) over the teachings of a religious authority. Dualism was a common feature of gnostic sects, consisting of the belief that the material world was evil, and the product of a lesser (and evil) deity, contrasting with the spiritual world of the benign God. The term 'gnosticism' is not limited to these features, however; Karen King admits that it can refer to "a vast range of ideas, literary works, individuals, and groups;" see Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 7. For more on the subtleties around the term, see Ibid. 5–19.

[13] The philosophy of Neoplatonism, based on the writings of Plotinus (AD 204–270), teaches that all things ultimately originate in the One. In a singular hierarchy of being, all of reality proceeds from, and returns to, a single principle. This contradicts a dualistic vision of reality. The influence of Neoplatonism on Eriugena is explored in Chapter 5. The nineteenth-century Church historian Auguste Jundt refers to Neoplatonism generally

predestination in the ninth century reveals how an emphasis on logic and reason in an argument on Christian dogma came to be viewed with suspicion by a clergy that preferred to look to Scripture and patristic writings as their foremost authorities.

Eriugena's metaphysical approach was developed on the understanding that it constitutes a fundamental basis for the practice of right religion, which has as its aim a reunification of the human person with God. It is not, therefore, philosophy in the Aristotelian spirit which has knowledge as its end, to be enjoyed for itself.[14] Or rather, the Aristotelian spirit is shared by Eriugena to a point, but where Aristotle rests content at the knowledge he has acquired, to be contemplated with the *telos* of increased human happiness, for Eriugena knowledge is a means to a more meaningful future. Knowledge is not a mere treasure to be contemplated in itself: its purpose is to nurture the human mind as the image of God, to polish the reflection of the Creator in the created, to raise fallen human nature to its previous state of perfection; in short, it is the path to salvation itself.[15] In the introduction to his textbook on grammar, the Carolingian scholar Alcuin (c. AD 735–804) unfolds the discourse between a pupil and a teacher: when asked by the pupil to lead him in the ways of philosophy (the 'teacher of all virtues'), the teacher replies: "it is easy to show you wisdom's

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as the "crowning glory of the edifice of antique philosophy," but asserts that it did not properly enter the Church until the sixth century: *Histoire du Panthéisme Populaire au Moyen Age et au Seizième Siècle* (Paris: Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1875), 3. See also Richard T. Wallis, ed., *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), and Kevin Corrigan and Tuomas Rasinus, eds., *Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[14] Vasilis Politis, following the tenth book of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, offers an interpretation of Aristotle's approach to philosophy: "the search for such knowledge, and the enjoyment and contemplation of it once found, is a central constituent in the happy life, the life worth living for a human being." *Aristotle and the Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 2004), 31.

[15] Agnieszka Kijewska points out that it was Charlemagne who encouraged the practice of theology (specifically, "ancient learning and biblical exegesis") among his scholars as a means to attaining not only wisdom, but salvation. "The Eriugenian Concept of Theology: John the Evangelist as the Model Theologian," in *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics; Proceedings of the Ninth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies*, ed. Gerd van Riel, Carlos Steel and James McEvoy (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 173.

path if only you will pursue it for the sake of God, for the sake of the soul's purity, and to learn the truth, and also for its own sake, but not for human praise and honor."[16]

Eriugena as Theologian

The practice of theology, for Eriugena, is a science prompted by Sacred Scripture and the natural world, which seeks the reasons and causes of visible and invisible things, and ultimately God who is the cause of all things.[17] However, it is more than an intellectual pursuit in both its practice and its final end. Eriugena asserts that the gift of faith through baptism is "the first illumination of the rational soul."[18] The practice of virtue also leads to a corresponding increase in understanding.[19] The theologian's ultimate goal is beyond scientific understanding, since even God does not fully know Himself,[20] but personally it involves a union with God, which is what enables Eriugena's ideal theologian, St John the Evangelist (the 'spiritual eagle'), to fly above things which can be understood by the intellect,

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[16] Richard C. Dales, *The Intellectual Life of the Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 80.

[17] In his Homily on the prologue to the gospel of John, Eriugena asserts that the light of divine knowledge is revealed through Scripture and created natures. *Lux diuinae cognitionis . . . per scripturam uidilicet et creaturam.* See *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenae: Homilia super 'In Principio Erat Verbum'*, ed. Édouard Jeauneau, CCCM 166 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), XI, 11–13 (289c), 21.

[18] Eriugena, *Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem* II, V, ed. Jeanne Barbet, CCCM 31 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), 45, 943–46: *Prima siquidem rationabilis anime ad creatorem suum redeuntis illuminatio est donum fidei, quod, per sacramenta baptismatis, et datur et significatur.* In his *Homilia*, Eriugena emphasises that St Peter enters the tomb (which here he uses as a metaphor for Holy Scripture) before John: faith goes before intellect: see *Homilia*, III, 7–10 (284c–284d), 7. See also Eriugena's Commentary on John's gospel, in which he emphasises baptism as signifying those born of God: *per gratiam uidilicet baptismatis, in quo incipient credentes in Christum ex deo nasci.* See *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenae: Commentarius in Evangelium Iohannis*, ed. Édouard Jeauneau, CCCM 166 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), I, XXII, 13–14 (297c), 48.

[19] See *Commentarius.* I, XXXII, 30–32 (312a), 73: *Unusquisque enim fidelium, qualem in animo habuerit habitudinem per incrementa virtutum, talem de Christo habebit fidem per augmenta intellegentiarum.*

[20] *Periphyseon* IV, 1200–1203 (771b–c), 45: *deus . . . incomprehensibilis est qua a nullo intellectu humano uel angelico comprehendi potest quid sit, nec a se ipso, quia non est quid, quippe superessentialis.*

but also those which surpass the intellect.[21] St John's theological understanding is a gift from God who has drawn the saint into a unity with Himself through deification.[22]

The rational mind moves first towards knowledge, then from knowledge to wisdom, and finally, its highest movement is towards a union with the divine, a movement into the darkness of an incomprehensible and inaccessible light, in which the causes of all things are hidden.[23] From this perspective, philosophy, as a study of the natural world, can be understood as a subset of theology. The created, natural world reveals God, but Scripture provides a more focused creation narrative which Eriugena comments on at length, though in a manner which departs from the historical approach of St Augustine.[24] In Book II of the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena outlines how it is God the Father who creates all natures and causes, in the wisdom of the Word; these natures are divided and distributed by the Holy Spirit.[25] All creatures, he continues, are bestowed with essence, and can be described according to genera and species. Thus his biblical exegesis in the *Periphyseon* is shadowed by the metaphysical

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[21] *Beatus theologus Iohannes non solum quae intelligi ac dici possunt, verum etiam in ea quae superant omnem intellectum . . .* See *Homilia* I, 13–15 (283b–c), 4.

[22] *Homilia* IV, 1–4 (285b), 9: *Iohannem dico theologum . . . deificatus in deum intrat.*

[23] See *Periphyseon* V, 7316–7318 (1021a), 225: *incomprehensibilis et inaccessibilis lucis tenebras, in quibus causae omnium absconditur.* Eriugena adapts the metaphor of light from the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius which adapt Neoplatonic principles to Christian theology in a spirit of religious fervour, and for whom the highest activity of the theologian is the contemplation of God; see Chapter 5.3.

[24] John J. O'Meara outlines how Eriugena differs from Augustine in his approach to hexameral commentary, based on what he terms a "profound psychological difference between their personalities as revealed in their writings." Eriugena, deeply influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius, takes a more "theoretical" and even "mystical" approach. See " 'Magnorum Virorum Quendam Consensum Velimus Machinari': Eriugena's Use of Augustine's De Genesii ad litteram in the Periphyseon," in *Eriugena: Studien zu seinen Quellen. Vorträge des III Internationalen Eriugena-Colloquiums. Freiburg im Breisgau, 27–30 August 1979*, ed. Werner Beierwaltes (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1980), 115. The term 'mystical' is, however, fraught with difficulty: Denys Turner points out how the medieval understanding of mysticism as a "journey into God" has been replaced and complicated by an understanding based on "experientalism." *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

[25] *Periphyseon* II, 1154–1274 (563a–566d), 50–55.

concepts (divisions of nature, Aristotelian categories) introduced in Book I, and his theology is infused with philosophical terms taken from the Neoplatonic tradition.[26]

In particular, however, God is revealed (and thus theology further enabled) in Christ, who descended in order to return to human nature the vision of God which is enjoyed by the celestial essences (*caelestibus essentiis*), the angels whose understanding is enabled by the ineffable grace of eternal light (*ineffabili gratia aeterni luminis*).[27] Christ's mission recalls humanity to its original state, "opening the eyes of the mind, showing his presence in all things to those who are worthy of such a vision."[28]

Condemnation

The *Periphyseon* was officially condemned by Pope Honorious III in AD 1225, and became associated with a heretical movement that originated with the thirteenth-century university scholar Amaury of Bène.[29] This movement, which preached a rigorous immanence of God in the world, was severely dealt with by ecclesiastical and civil authorities in Paris, and ridiculed in contemporary accounts. The proscription of the *Periphyseon* did not prove to be a wholly effective deterrent to the study of Eriugena's work, even if its profile was diminished.[30] Numerous scholars have documented its influence on the later medieval

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[26] Werner Beierwaltes argues that for Eriugena, theology is expressed in philosophical terms, and therefore they are in no sense opposing terms. There is no practice of original philosophy, as such; what is expressed in Scripture as a symbol or image is reflected in Eriugena's philosophical language. " 'Plato Philosophantium de Mundo Maximus:' Zum 'Platonismus' al seiner wesentlichen Quelle für Eriugenas Denken," in *Eriugena: Grundzüge seines Denkens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994), 32. Eriugena's engagement with Neoplatonism is explored in detail by Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

[27] *Periphyseon* III, 2672, 2677 (683d–684a), 92.

[28] *Periphyseon* III, 2678–2682 (684a), 92: *dei uerbum incarnatum descendit . . . oculos mentis aperiens, se ipsum in omnibus his qui digni sunt tali uisione manifestans* (author's translation).

[29] The nature of this association at the time of the condemnation is difficult to determine: Paolo Lucentini argues that the connection is only firmly established in the late thirteenth century owing to the works of Henry of Susa and Martin of Poland; "L'Eresia de Amalrico," in *Eriugena Redivivus*, ed. Werner Beierwaltes, (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987), 190–191. See section 1.9 of this dissertation.

[30] See Stephen Lahey, "Eriugena's Condemnation and His Idealism," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 448. Lucentini attributes the disappearance of Eriugena from scholastic philosophy to the

philosophers Meister Eckhart (c.AD 1260 – c.1328) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464).[31]

Another notable case is the study of Eriugena in modern German philosophy.[32] Natalia

Strok's survey shows that, for the historians of philosophy Johan Jacob Brucker (1696–

1770), Wilhelm Tennemann (1761–1819) and Taddä Rixner (1766–1838), the papal

condemnation of Eriugena was not just a reaction to the threat of non-conformist or heretical

groups such as the Amauricians: their analysis concludes that Eriugena's philosophy was

pantheistic and thus truly heretical.[33] Their interpretations of Eriugena introduced and

coloured his philosophy for Idealists such as Hegel (1770–1831).[34] Both Brucker and

Tennemann find pantheism in Eriugena's union of Neoplatonism with Aristotelian

philosophy, particularly in Alexandrian emanationism.[35]

Strok notes a variable tone with regard to their findings: for Brucker, Eriugena's

philosophy imported pantheism from Pseudo-Dionysius (ca. sixth century AD) and was a

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antipathy towards Aristotelian ideas in the early thirteenth century: "L'Eresia de Amalrico," 174–191. A notable case of the thirteenth-century influence of Eriugena is in the Parisian Abbey of Saint Victor, where Thomas Gallus (ca. 1200–1246), in ca. AD 1233, produced a commentary on the Dionysian corpus which was influenced by Eriugena. See James McEvoy, "John Scottus Eriugena and Thomas Gallus, Commentators on the *Mystical Theology*," in *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and his Time: Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Maynooth and Dublin August 16-20, 2000*, edited by James McEvoy and Michael Dunne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 183–202.

[31] See, for example, Werner Beierwaltes, "Cusanus and Eriugena," *Dionysius* 13 (1989): 114–152, and Kurt Ruh, "Johannes Scotus Eriugena Deutsch," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 117 (1988): 24–31. See also Dermot Moran, "Pantheism from John Scottus Eriugena to Nicholas of Cusa," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXIV, no.1 (Winter 1990): 131–152; idem, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 279–281.

[32] The *Periphyseon* (as '*De Divisione Naturae*') was first printed by Thomas Gale at Oxford in 1681.

[33] Natalia Strok, "Eriugena's Pantheism: Brucker, Tennemann and Rixner's Reading of Periphyseon," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* (June 2016): 105–123. Brucker and Tennemann attended the Lutheran University of Jena. Strok finds their conclusions, in general, to be "slanted and incomplete." Ibid., 114–115. A revision of their analysis is beyond the scope of this study.

[34] For Eriugenian doctrines found in Hegel, see Henry Bett. *Johannes Scotus Erigena: A Study in Mediaeval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 195. Bett's study, while dated, offers some useful insights into Eriugena's thought.

[35] Strok, "Eriugena's Pantheism," 119.

travesty for the Church, deserving every word of Pope Honorius's condemnation. He claims it brought great damage to the Church, and that the roots of this mystical theology continue to threaten theology in his own time.[36] For Tennemann, the grounds for Eriugena's pantheism can be found in the interpretation of *creatio ex nihilo*, because if the *nihilo* is identified as God himself, i.e. a *nihilo* of excellence rather than of privation, and all creation comes from this *nihilo*, then all creation is also identified with God, and God finds only God when confronted with His creation.[37] Yet Tennemann does not pronounce on the fate of Christian belief or morality, and neither does Rixner, whose study of Eriugena's work focuses on the idea of 'theophany'.

Stephen Gersh uses the idea of theophany to explain how a creator and source of being, which is a unity in itself, is found and reflected in the diversity of the cosmos.[38] He argues that the multiplication of the divine nature into diversity is a subjective intellectual act.[39] In working out the difficulties in reconciling expressions of divine immanence with those of divine transcendence, he develops a theory of divine omnipresence in the *Periphyseon* around Eriugena's use of negative and positive statements, and the acceptance of contradictions.[40] The diversity of the sensible world may (for Eriugena) be due to sin, and stand in contrast with the simplicity of God, but God is made manifest in that same world, and one consequence of sin, inversely, is to reveal the perfection of God and produce a beautiful harmony in the world.[41]

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[36] Strok, "Eriugena's Pantheism," 118–119. Brucker considered Eriugena to be a fanatical pantheist.

[37] Ibid., 20–121.

[38] Stephen Gersh, "Omnipresence in Eriugena: Some Reflections on Augustino – Maximian Elements in Periphyseon," in *Eriugena: Studien zu Seinen Quellen,* ed. Werner Beierwaltes, 55–74.

[39] Ibid., 63.

[40] Ibid., especially 64–65.

[41] See also Chapter 3 (3.2.2) for Gersh's elaboration on the concept of theophany.

Hilary Mooney's brief study on the idea of harmony (*harmonia*) as used by Eriugena offers a response to the labelling of his work as pantheistic.[42] Mooney shows how Eriugena's use of the term is indebted to Pseudo-Dionysius, and in particular the eighth and eleventh chapters of the *The Divine Names* where the Areopagite states that the concept of harmony, a divine harmony into which God draws all things, does not compromise individuality. This is reflected in Eriugena's thought: in the ninth chapter of his commentary on Dionysius' *De coelesti hierarchia*, Eriugena asserts that harmony is only possible if the various elements which produce it remain distinct. Mooney concludes therefore that pantheism is not properly indicated when Eriugena speaks of harmony, which extends to his statement that "God will be all things in all things,"[43] and urges a reading of Eriugena which avoids isolated statements and takes greater heed of the general context(s).[44]

Strok provides an excellent summary analysis of the possibility of pantheism in Eriugena's thought, and points to the tension between divine immanence and divine transcendence that runs through the *Periphyseon*.[45] However, the literature on pantheism *per se* in Eriugena's *magnum opus* is lacking; commentators and scholars, for the most part, take

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[42] Hilary Mooney, "Some Observations on the Concept of Harmony in Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita and John Scottus Eriugena," *Studia Patristica* XXIX (1997): 304–309.

[43] *Periphyseon* V, 694–695 (876b), 24: *Erit enim Deus omnia in omnibus*.

[44] This conclusion is also found in Mooney's book *Theophany: The Appearing of God according to the Writings of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*. Beitrage Zur Historischen Theologie 146 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 211. In Eriugena's commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Dionysius, the author emphasises the importance of beauty, and hints that it cannot be present without ontological difference: *si enim Deus equaliter, absque ulla ordinum diuersorum differentia et proprietate et ascensione et descensione uariorum gradum uniuersitatem conditam faceret, nullus fortassis ordo in republica naturarum fieret. Si nullus ordo fieret, nulla harmonia. At si nulla harmonia, nulla sequeretur pulchritudo*. J. Barbet, ed., *Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem*, cap. 9, 138; "if God had made the universe to be created equal, without any differentiation of various orders [of being] . . . there would be no order in the republic of natures. If there were no order, there would be no harmony. And if there were no harmony, there would be no beauty." This translation is from Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600 – 1300)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 102.

[45] Strok's study takes up nine pages, and her conclusion is that a "comprehensive reading" of the text demonstrates that, despite ambiguities, pantheism is not properly found. "Eriugena's Pantheism," 114–115.

a summary view of the matter, and Mooney's astute observation in the study mentioned is all too brief. This present study serves to look at the matter in closer detail, both in relation to the Amaurician heresy, but also considering Eriugena's theology in itself through an examination of the nuances of its metaphysical language. The study asks: to what extent, in Eriugena's theology of the *Periphyseon*, can God be identified with His creation? Is pantheism properly located there, or has there been a series of misinterpretations? The focus of Eriugena studies rightly seeks to understand what he *is* saying rather than what he might not be saying, and the latter is most properly informed by the former. Within the scope of this study lies the context of the work's condemnation, leading to its primary objective which comprises a metaphysical study of the work itself. Beyond its scope is a reception history from its creation to our present time, and any comprehensive study of Eriugena's other works, although they will be referred to where they shed light on a particular topic.

The label of pantheism has stuck with Eriugena for historians of philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as Barthélemy Hauréau (1812–1896).[46] Werner Beierwaltes (1931–2019) points out that ninetheenth-century German idealists, who considered pantheism favourably, found Eriugena's work congenial; he argues that, while the idealists did not properly articulate the Irishman's philosophy, "Eriugena's attempt to consider God at once both absolutely in and above world and man remains ambivalent."[47] According to the Catholic Encyclopedia of 1909, Eriugena's errors were "many and

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[46] See M. Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, Sa Pen*sée (Louvain: Abbaye de Mont César, 1933), 264. The historian of philosophy Frederick Copleston states that what one reads in the *Periphyseon* "may fairly be described as a panentheistic system." See *A History of Medieval Philosophy* (London: Methuen and Co., 1972), 63. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* reflects a diversity of understandings of the term 'panentheism', but maintains that it "generally emphasizes God's presence in the world without losing the distinct identity of either God or the world." https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panentheism/, consulted 11 May 2022.

[47] Werner Beierwaltes, "The Revaluation of John Scottus Eriugena in German Idealism," trans. F. Uehlein, in *The Mind of Eriugena*, ed. J.J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973), 192–194.

serious."[48] The 1913 entry of same encyclopedia for David of Dinant speaks of the "speculative pantheistic mysticism of Johannes Scotus Eriugena" in the development of "incompatible" doctrines in the University of Paris at the turn of the thirteenth century.[49] The development of more recent critical scholarship on Eriugena, however, has been more careful with the label of pantheism.[50] The abolition of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (which included the *Periphyseon*) by Pope Paul VI in 1966 removed the sting of ecclesiastical censure from the work, even though the question of pantheism was left unresolved.

Deirdre Carabine reminds us that to remove the ideas of philosophers such as Eriugena and Dionysius from their original contexts does them an injustice.[51] It is difficult to interpret those ideas in the mindset of the present, or indeed of the thirteenth century, particularly with regard to the tradition of negative theology which safeguards against affirmative definitions of God. In many ways, this is the crux of the problem; misinterpretations can easily arise where caution is lacking. But Eriugena does not make it easy, and can be easily accused of lacking caution himself. This study addresses how his approach and use of language paved the way for a history of varied interpretations. The findings of the study would be complemented by a further study of the reception history of the *Periphyseon*, both from a purely philosophical point of view, and also with regard to ecclesiastical concerns. Each age brings its own perspective to such a work that refreshes its appeal and offers its own particular interpretations.

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[48] William Turner, "John Scotus Eriugena," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05519a.htm, accessed 19 June 2020.

[49] Charles Herbermann, ed., "David of Dinant," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1913), https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04645a.htm, accessed 19 June 2020.

[50] See also mention of Eriugena in A. McIntyre, "Pantheism," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 6, ed. P. Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

[51] Deirdre Carabine, "The Manifestation of God as the Speaking of Creation in Scottus Eriugena," in *Ciphers of Transcendence*, ed. Fran O'Rourke (Kildare, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2019), 110, 115.

Methodology

The methodology of this dissertation is challenging on two fronts. First, it moves between two distinct historical eras: the ninth century in which Eriugena wrote, and the thirteenth century in which the *Periphyseon* was condemned, both removed at some distance from the relevant scholarship of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Secondly, it necessarily combines both the study of history and of systematic theology, and I have endeavoured to treat them distinctly, where possible. This is reflected in the presentation of the chapters: it begins with the historical context of the condemnation, and a brief study of pantheism in the Amaurician heresy, both of which occur in the early thirteenth century. It subsequently moves to the historical context of the ninth century in which Eriugena composed his works. These differing contexts cast light on changing attitudes to texts, and on misinterpretations of those texts. The greater part of the dissertation, from chapters 3 to 6, then closely examines the theology of the *Periphyseon*, its dominant influences and central themes. This double approach aims to determine if and how pantheism may be found in the work.

Chapter 1

The first chapter examines the connection between the Amaurician heresy and Eriugena. Who was Amaury of Bène, and what was the nature of his particular doctrine? Insofar as this doctrine was influenced by the *Periphyseon*, we must look to the beliefs of Amaury and his followers to see how it contradicted orthodox theology, and to examine whether or not this content belongs also to Eriugena. The question must be asked why exactly the *Periphyseon* was condemned. The scholarship of both Catherine Capelle and Paolo Lucentini is relied upon here, and demonstrates the historical difficulties in answering this question.[52] The papal

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[52] Catherine G. Capelle, *Autour du Décret de 1210: III. – Amaury de Bène, Étude sur son Panthéisme Formel*, Bibliothèque Thomiste XVI (Paris: Vrin, 1932); Paolo Lucentini, ed. *Garnerii de Rupeforti Contra Amaurianos*, CCCM 232 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), "L'Eresia de Amalrico" in Werner Beierwaltes ed., *Eriugena Redivivus* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987), 174–191.

decree refers to the banning of the book at the Council of Sens, which suggests a connection with a council held at Sens in AD 1210 where we find the censure of Amaury of Bène, David of Dinant, and the natural philosophy works of Aristotle, but no explicit mention of Eriugena. The condemnation of the *Periphyseon* does not refer to particularities in the text itself, therefore the task remains to determine whether the condemnation is justified in relation to the Amaurician heresy.

Leaning on the works of a number of medieval chroniclers, the various heretical ideas attributed to the Amauricians will be examined. A particular idea of interest is the Amaurician notion that all things are co-essential with God, which the Amauricians understood to mean that all things are an extension of God; they espoused an extreme form of what today is called 'pantheism'.[53] Amaurician doctrine identified God with the universe itself, an idea that some chroniclers, and many writers of the history of theology in the centuries that followed, claimed had been adapted by the heretics from the writings of Eriugena.

Chapter 2

Eriugena's philosophy is pursued in the historical context of Carolingian identity, both political and religious. The protagonists of the Carolingian renaissance looked back to ancient Athens, Rome and Jerusalem in the formation of that identity. Scholars in

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[53] The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* attributes the term 'pantheism' to the Irish "freethinker" John Toland, and as first appearing in 1705, and notes that, while the name was novel, the general idea was not, and had many manifestations through the history of philosophy. "At its most general, pantheism may be understood positively as the view that God is identical with the cosmos, the view that there exists nothing which is outside of God, or else negatively as the rejection of any view that considers God as distinct from the universe." https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pantheism/, consulted 4 March 2020. The usefulness of the term is compromised by how it can be interpreted in slightly different ways. Aquinas, while arguing that God cannot enter into the composition of anything, held that Amaury's error was to consider God as the "formal principle of all things" (*principium formale omnium rerum*), and differentiates this from David of Dinant's error, which was to consider God as a material principal (*principium materiale*), and thus identical with prime matter (see *Summa Theologiae* I, q.3, art. 8): both of these errors can be considered as pantheistic. These errors are discussed in sections 1.2 and 1.3.

Charlemagne's court adopted classical and biblical appellations, with Charlemagne himself bearing the pseudonym 'King David'.[54] The Rome to which they looked back was not classical, pagan Rome, but the Rome of the Christian empire, the empire of Constantine and Theodosius, an empire which had been infused (at least in their imaginations) with Christian culture and in which lived scholars such as Jerome (d. AD 420) and Augustine. For the Carolingians, the Church was "the most majestic institution ever to have appeared in Europe."[55] Religion was at the heart of Carolingian scholarly activity, be it poetry or geometry, and was a *sine qua non* of its most eminent philosopher, Ioannes Scottus ("an Irishman") Eriugena ("born in Ireland").

The Christian outlook of the Carolingians brought the concerns and ambitions of the Church very close to those of political leaders who took an active interest in the numerous theological controversies which marked the period. From a political point of view, theological orthodoxy, from bishops to peasants, was not just desirable in its own right in the nascent Christendom of Western Europe, but was also key to political stability across the empire. The experience of the iconoclast controversy in the East had revealed this imperative in startlingly realistic terms. The stability of the Byzantine Empire was threatened from within by the controversy which had come to a head in the eighth century. Simultaneously, the empire was also threatened from beyond its borders, and protagonists on both sides of the debate felt that their opponents could be responsible for invoking the wrath of God. A theological miscalculation could result in the overrunning of their ancient empire by the Muslim armies gathering to the south and east. Carolingian rulers believed, similarly, that if

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[54] See Johannes Fried, *Charlemagne*, trans. Peter Lewis (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016), 337.

[55] Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. Oxford 2003), 438–439.

the imperial power were to fail in its task, then "God's wrath would be made plain in the decline of the kingdom and in renewed barbarian invasion."[56]

Eriugena served as an educator in the employ of the emperor Charles the Bald (AD 823–877), and he counted numerous bishops and abbots among his past students. The curriculum was loosely based around the seven liberal arts, of which the Irish scholar was a Master. The challenge for Carolingian scholars was to promote civilisation and orthodoxy through education, beginning with those with ecclesiastical duties and powers. Eriugena's interests were not restricted to his students, however: he translated and wrote commentaries on numerous Greek theological works at a time when no other Carolingian scholar showed any propensity in that direction. However, his significant achievements in this area were not built upon by successive generations. The theological outlook of such figures as Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor (ca. AD 580–662) did not take hold in the West; their influence would have to wait until the High Middle Ages. It is perhaps for this particular reason, his unique appreciation for Greek theology, that he is sometimes regarded today as a solitary genius. As Sheldon-Williams imaginatively puts it, it is because of his "falling as a consequence so completely under the spell of the Platonizing theology of the Greeks that all his works were declared anathema; vanishing thereafter into an oblivion fitfully illumined by the lurid glow reflected by the subsequent heresies that were fathered upon him."[57]

Staying with his Carolingian context, however, Chapter 2 also examines the logical tradition which Eriugena inherited through such authorities as Aristotle, Augustine and

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[56] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 440. Brown points out that the Carolingians were the first to promote what he calls the 'myth' of the barbarian invasions in the continental west, which has lasted to this day, i.e. the idea that organised, unified and identifiable tribes crossed the borders of the north in a series of attacks on a peaceful, civilised empire that ultimately brought about its demise. Brown considers the demise of the empire on the continent, rather, as a series of fluctuations of power coupled with the migrations of peoples: "the end of the Roman order in the west was not like the crash of a single mighty building. It is more like the shifting contours of a mudbank in an ever-flowing stream: certain prominent ridges are washed away, other, hitherto mute landscapes gain in eminence." Ibid., 21.

[57] Sheldon-Williams, *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae: Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, Introduction to Book I, vii.

Boethius (c.AD 480–524). Augustine's fusion of Greek logic with Christian doctrine paved the way for future theologians to develop their work through consideration of logical questions and concepts. However, the path was not easy, and here we begin to see some of the difficulties which will beset the metaphysical project, both for Eriugena and for his thirteenth-century reader. An obvious example is how Neoplatonic philosophers such as Porphyry (c.AD 233–309) re-interpreted Aristotle's concept of 'essence' in a novel way, and a great deal hangs upon this concept in the study of the relationship between God and creation. The sources of Eriugena's alleged pantheism begin here.

Chapters 3 and 4

The Greek influence becomes visible in the consideration of Eriugena's principal theological themes as found in the *Periphyseon* and outlined in these chapters. Here they are read through the lens of the accusation of pantheism; these chapters do not follow a pre-formulated argument, but survey Eriugena's principal theological ideas in the work with a view to seeing what his accusers might find heretical. There will be some overlapping of conclusions with regard to each theme, since certain ideas (e.g. that God is 'superessential') will have a significant influence on numerous other themes.

All of Eriugena's main theological discussions in the *Periphyseon* have some contribution to make to the debate on pantheism. First among them is his fourfold division of Nature, where Nature is defined as all that exists, including God and the universe. Willemien Otten considers his all-encompassing *natura* to be his most idiosyncratic theological feature.[58] Eriugena presents these divisions as an intellectual or dialectical exercise, and therefore a product of the mind, which invites further exploration from a pantheist perspective. Chapter 3 shall look at Eriugena's first two divisions of Nature, consisting of

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[58] Otten, "Christianity's Content: (Neo)Platonism in the Middle Ages, Its Theoretical and Theological Appeal," *Numen* 63, no. 2/3 (2016): 246. Otten asserts an "integral cosmological outlook" in the Carolingian era; Ibid., 249.

God and the primordial causes. It also considers two important ideas in his theology: (a) the method of apophatic theology, whereby positive statements about God can only be understood as metaphor; and (b) Eriugena's concept of non-being as the rich potential for all being. Chapter 4 continues with the third and fourth divisions (which include created being as we experience it) and considers the Neoplatonic return of all being to its source. Eriugena's interpretation of the creation narrative in Genesis is followed by a study of the meanings of 'essence' and 'participation' as characteristics of created being, and similarly, 'matter' and 'form'. Of particular interest to Eriugena is man, made in the image and likeness of God; insofar as he inhabits a physical body in a physical world, his state is less-than-ideal. To reclaim his true human dignity, the gift of grace is necessary: however, the ascent into God could possibly suggest a pantheist view if Eriugena's idea of *theosis* can be realised prior to death.

Chapter 5

Here follows an exploration of the Neoplatonic structures that provide the framework for Eriugena's philosophy. Following a brief look at the primary textbook of this tradition, the *Enneads* of Plotinus, it will examine more closely the Procline Neoplatonism of the sixth-century Christian writer Pseudo-Dionysius, whose works were translated by Eriugena; in particular, Dionysius's use of the terms light and darkness, and being and non-being, had a significant bearing on his outlook regarding God's relation to the cosmos. The question is also introduced here whether creation is a *necessary* emanation from the first principle in a Neoplatonic hierarchy, as it was for Plotinus, in which case it cannot be held that God created the world freely. The Christian Neoplatonists, including Eriugena, are challenged with

interpreting their adopted metaphysical system (and when necessary, making changes to it) in a manner compatible with Christian doctrine and Christian sensibilities.[59]

This chapter then examines a key text in the logical tradition, the *Categoriae Decem*, as used by Eriugena. Based on the *Categories* of Aristotle, this fourth-century (AD) Latin paraphrase presents the original text through a Neoplatonic lens, distorting the understandings of Aristotle's '*ousia*' ('substance', or 'essence') to fit with Neoplatonic metaphysics.[60] Eriugena, therefore, inherited an evolved definition of this term, the usage of which, without being qualified by precise language, could possibly lead to a pantheistic view.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 examines Augustine's use of the formula *creatio ex nihilo* in his interpretation of the creation account from Genesis. This leads to an examination of the concept of *nihil* itself, and how Eriugena developed it so that it implied not a privation of being, but its opposite: the potential for all being. If this infinite potential is understood to be God Himself, then the formula takes on a pantheist hue. Eriugena's theology of creation is therefore examined in relation to his Dionysian understanding of non-being, which is incorporated into his five ways of understanding being and its opposite, non-being. What emerges is that Eriugena defines these terms in relation to one another, rather than being understood in any absolute sense. God, he insists early in Book I, transcends opposites wherever they are found, but the

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[59] Eriugena, for example, combines 'creation' with the Neoplatonic principles of 'emanation' and 'participation' in Book I of the *Periphyseon* where he asserts that universal essence is *created*, and that all things participate in it, while the proper substance of any given thing *emanates* (or 'flows') from this essence. Book I, 2758–2764 (506b–c), 89: *ex ipsa essentia, quae una et uniuersalis in omnibus creata est omnibusque communis atque ideo, quia omnium se participantium est, nullius propria dicitur esse singulorum se participantium, quandam propriam substantiam, quae nullius alicuius est nisi ipsius solummodo cuius est, naturali progressione manare*.

[60] The *Categories* had also been translated into Latin by Boethius, who provided a commentary, which may also have been used by Eriugena.

question is asked: can pantheism be understood of Eriugena's theology, even if he attempts to avoid it?

Chapter 7

The concluding chapter returns to statements and ideas in the *Periphyseon* which present the opportunity for a pantheist interpretation of his work. It also takes note of the development of Neoplatonic *reditus* (return) in Book V and the light this casts on the possibility of identifying God with the world. Finally, it turns to Catherine Capelle, author of a 1932 study on Amaury, which attempts to determine the connection between Eriugena and the thirteenth-century heresiarch. The remarks of the French medieval historian of philosophy Étienne Gilson on Amaury and Eriugena also contribute to the conclusions of the study.

Chapter One

The Amaurician Heresy

The Historical Context for the Condemnation of the *Periphyseon*

1.1   The decree of Pope Honorius III in AD 1225

In the year AD 1225, in a decree of Pope Honorius III (r.1216–1227), a thundering condemnation was issued against a certain book known as *perifisis*, copies of which were located "in some monasteries, and other places."[1] Addressed to archbishops, bishops, and all other "labourers for the harvest" (*cultores in agro dominico*), the decree stated that this book served to choke the good seed wherever it was sown. It was therefore ordered that all copies of it be sent to Rome to be burned, and warned that anyone still in possession of a copy, or part thereof, after two weeks of receiving his letter, would be excommunicated. The Pope

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[1] The full text of this condemnation reads: "*Archiepiscopis et episcopis et aliis ecclesiarum prelatis ad quos littere iste pervenerint. Inimicus homo zizania bono semini superseminare non cessat studens salutiferum semen se valeat suffocare. Quare nobis et vobis, qui positi sumus cultores in agro dominico, tota est diligentia satagendum, ut hujusmodi zizania a radice intereant et moriantur in erba, ne, si nostra negligentia coaluerint, eorum pestifero fructu triticum vitietur. Nuper siquidem, sicut nobis significavit venerabilis frater noster . . Parisiensis episcopus, est quidam liber, qui perifisis titulatur, inventus totus scatens vermibus heretice pravitatis. Unde a venerabili fratre nostro archiepiscopo Senonensi et suffrageneis ejus in provinciali concilio congregatis justo est juicio reprobatus. Quia igitur idem liber, sicut accepimus, in nonnullis monasteriis et aliis locis habetur, et nonnulli claustrales et viri scolastici novitatum forte plus quam expediat amatores, se studiosius occupant dicti libri, gloriosum reputantes ignotas proferre sententias, cum apostolus profanes novitates doceat evitare: nos juxta pastoralis sollicitudinis debitum corruptele quam posset ingerere liber hujusmodi occurrere satagentes vobis universis et singulis in virtute Spiritus Sancti districte precipiendo mandamus quatinus librum ipsum sollicite perquiratis, et ubicunque ipsum vel partem ejus inveniri contigerit, ad nos, si secure fieri poterit, sine dilatione mittatis solempniter comburendum, alioquia vos ipsi publice comburatis eundem, subditis vestris singuli expressius injungentes ut quicumque ipsorum habent vel habere possunt in toto vel in parte exemplaria dicti libri, ea vobis non differant resignare, in omnes qui ultra quindecim dies postquam hujusmodi mandatum seu denuntiatio ad notitiam eorum pervenerit librum ipsum totum aut partem scienter retinere presumpserint, excommunicationis sententiam proferendo, ac denuntiando eisdem, quod si aliquo tempore convicti legitime fuerint hujusmodi sententiam incurrisse, notam quoque pravitatis heretice non evadent. Ut autem ab hiis quibus occurrerit possit liber supradictus agnosci, principia et fines partitionem ipsius libri, cum sit per libros quinque distinctus, presenti pagine fecimus annotari. Primus itaque liber sic íncipit: "Sepe mihi cogitanti diligentius quia quantum vires suppetunt inquirenti", etc. Explicit autem sic: "Fige limitem libri, sat enim est in eo complexum". Secundus sic incipit: "Quoniam in superiori libro", etc. Explicit autem sic: "Et jam huic libro finis est imponendus, ut arbitror, atque ita fia". Tertius sic incipit: "In secundo libro", etc. Explicit autem sic: "terminum postulaverat". Quartus sic íncipit: "Prima nostre phisiologie intentio" etc. Explicit autem sic: "Videtur plane et jamdudum finem postulat". Quintus sic íncipit: "Nunc ergo". Explicit autem sic: "Et tenebras recte cognoscentium convortit in lucem". Dat. Laterani x kal. Februarii, anno nono.*" See *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis,* ed. H. Denifle and A. Chatelain (Paris, Delalain, 1881), vol. 1, art. 50, 106–107.

claimed that the book was "teeming with the worms of heretical perversity," and that it had been previously banned by the provincial council of Sens.[2] The decree offers no details of the heresies of which the book is accused, except to refer to them as "impious novelties" (*profanas novetates*). The book's author is not named, but the Pope lists the *incipit* of each of the five main parts of the book: they correspond with those of each of the five books of the *Periphyseon* by the ninth-century Irish writer John Scottus Eriugena.

The reference, in the Pope's decree, to the banning of the work at the council of Sens, likely refers to a council held there in 1223 or 1224; while the acts of this council have been lost, it was Alexander of Hales who mentions in his *Summa Theologiae* that the *Periphyseon* was condemned here on the grounds that Eriugena's 'primordial causes' ('*ideae*') constituted a middle ground between creator and creature.[3] This is our first glimpse at the possible doctrine which was deemed heretical by the Pope. At a previous council of Parisian bishops at Sens in the year 1210, the archbishop Petrus Corbelius (dates unknown) judged certain books to be heretical.[4] The texts of this earlier council (along with that of Pope Honorius in 1225) are found in the Charter of the University of Paris, and they record the condemnation of both the *Quaternuli* by the teacher David of Dinant (c. AD 1160 – c. 1217), and the natural philosophy works of Aristotle (384 BC – 322); these books are proscribed in the context of the excommunication of the recently-deceased philosophy professor Amaury of Bène (d.

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[2] *Quidam liber, qui* perifisis *titulatur, inventus totus scatens vermibus heretice pravitatis.*

[3] See Paolo Lucentini, "L'Eresia de Amalrico," in *Eriugena Redivivus*, ed. Werner Beierwaltes, (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987), 186; and also Alexander of Hales, *Doctoris irrefragabilis Alexandri de Hales Ordinis minorum Summa theologica*, 4vols (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1924–48), II, 1, inq. 1, 52. It is often suggested by scholars that the decree of 1225 refers to the council held in Sens fifteen years previously in 1210, but Lucentini's suggestion of 1223 or 1224 seems more plausible. For the primordial causes see section 3.5.2 of this study. Alexander found the intermediary position of the primordial causes between Creator and creature unnecessary; it is not overtly pantheistic, but the idea that they have a creative dimension (as Eriugena had asserted) is troublesome if God alone is considered sole creator of all things.

[4] *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, art. 11, 70.

c.1207).[5] The body of Amaury was ordered to be disinterred and cast onto unconsecrated ground, and his works were to be banned across the province. Numerous clergymen, named in connection with Amaury's teaching, were to be laicised. The *Quaternuli* of David of Dinant were to be burned before the bishop: anyone caught in possession of these texts would be branded a heretic.[6] The reading, both public and private, of the natural philosophy books of Aristotle was also banned on pain of excommunication.[7]

While it cannot be assumed from this text that the perceived heresy was widespread, the Archbishop was evidently faced with a genuine and serious problem, attested by the burning of books and the casting out of Amaury's body from the Christian graveyard. Who were David of Dinant and Amaury of Bène, and what exactly were the heresies of which they were accused? More importantly for this study, is there any connection between these heresies and Eriugena's *Periphyseon*? This work attracted no condemnation nor spawned any noticeable heresy in its own time, and it is not until 1223 or 1224 that we find it described as heretical. However subsequent chroniclers, and in particular Henry de Susa (c. AD 1200–1271; see section 1.7 below), make a concrete connection between Amaury and Eriugena,

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[5] The text from the council of 1210 reads: "*Corpus magistri Amaurici extrahatur a cimeterio et projiciatur in terram non benedictam, et idem excommunicetur per omnes ecclesias totius provincie. Bernardus, Guillelmus de Arria aurifaber, Stephanus presbyter de Veteri Corbolio, Stephanus presbyter de Cella, Johannes presbyter de Occines, magister Willelmus Pictaviensis, Dudo sacerdos, Dominicus de Triangulo, Odo et Elinans clerici de S. Clodoaldo, isti degradentur penitus seculari curie relinquendi. Urricus presbyter de Lauriaco et Petrus de S. Clodoaldo, modo monachus S. Dionysii, Guarinus presbyter de Corbolio, Stephanus clericus degradentur perpetuo carceri mancipandi. Quaternuli magistri David de Dinant infra natale episcopo Parisiensi afferantur et comburantur, nec libri Aristotelis de naturali philosophia nec comenta legantur Parisius publice vel secreto, et hoc sub pena excommunicantis inhebimus. Apud quem invenientur quaternuli magistri David a natali Domini in antea pro heretico habebitur. De libris theologicis in Romano precipimus, quod episcopis diocesanis tradantur et Credo in Deum et Pater Noster in Romano preter vitas sanctorum, et hoc infra purificationem, quia apud quem invenientur pro heretico habebitur.*" Ibid.

[6] On the origins of David of Dinant, see G. Théry: *Autour du Décret de 1210: I. – David de Dinant, Étude sur son Panthéisme Matérialiste* (Belgium: Kain, 1925), 8–9. This work remains the most extensive study on David. It is most likely that he was from the province of Liége (in present-day Belgium).

[7] In the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the philosophy of Plato had been brought to medieval philosophical discourse escorted by the Fathers of the Church, and endorsed by writers beyond reproach. The writings of Aristotle, on the other hand, arrived from Islamic commentators, which led the crusading Church to treat him with suspicion. Where Plato was close to being a prophet, Aristotle, while a reputable logician, was considered a pagan and sceptical philosopher. See Théry, *David de Dinant*, 108.

asserting that Amaury had found his heretical doctrine in the *Periphyseon*, including that of the primordial causes. A connection between the *Periphyseon* and David of Dinant cannot be assumed, but David espouses a form of pantheism and was condemned alongside Amaury: his case therefore contributes to the historical context of the period. To begin this exploration, the beliefs and influence of David and Amaury can be investigated in turn.

1.2   The pantheism of David of Dinant

The biographical details of David of Dinant are scant. In AD 1206, Pope Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) sent a letter to the chapter of the church in Dinant, in the diocese of Liége, requesting writings of a certain *magister* David. This David is referred to by the Pope as *capellanus noster* ('our chaplain'), which prompts Théry to suggest that he may have served previously as a chaplain in the papal court at Rome, and as a result enjoyed a certain sympathy from the Pope.[8] This theory is upheld by another document, the *Chronique du chanoine anonyme de Laon*, which claimed that David had been an influence on the Pope before being influenced in turn by Amaury and other heretics.[9] This sympathy may also explain why the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 condemns Amaury but not David.[10] From a document ascribed to Albert the Great (c. AD 1200–1280), the *Compilatio de Novo Spiritu,* David fled from France, but the date of his death is unknown.[11]

The Synod of 1210 in Paris ordered that all copies of the *Quaturnuli* of David of Dinant be destroyed. In this it appears to have achieved its goal, as the text has not survived,

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[8] Théry, *David de Dinant*, 10.

[9] Ibid. See *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France* XVIII, ed. Martin Bouquet, Jean Baptiste Haudiquier, Charles Michel Haudiquier, Étienne Housseau, German Poirier, François Clement, Michel Jean Joseph Brial, et al. (Paris: Aux dépens des librairies, 1738), 715.

[10] See section 1.4 below for the Fourth Lateran Council's response to heresy.

[11] Théry, *David de Dinant*, 11. See "Compilatio de novo spiritu," in *Geschichte der deutschen Mystik im Mittelalter* I, ed. Wilhelm Preger (Leipzig: Dorffling und Franke, 1874). 185–186.

although the condemnation was repeated in a letter of Cardinal Robert de Courçon (c. AD 1160/1170–1219) in 1215.[12] What is known of his thought reaches us through the works of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).[13] They refuted David's arguments, not to attack a living heresy, but to defend the works of Aristotle with whom David had been associated in the condemnations of 1210.[14] David's philosophy was understood by Albert and Thomas to have been built on a misrepresentation of Aristotle's works, and the reputation of Aristotle, whom they admired to a great extent, hung in the balance throughout the thirteenth century. David's pantheism, according to Albert, contradicted not only true faith, but true philosophy.[15]

While the connection between David and Amaury is tenuous, David appears as a pantheist of a more extreme kind, since he extends God's essence to include all material things, as well as spiritual, intellectual and eternal being. David considers matter in the ancient sense of *primary matter*, from which all physical things are made, which is not the same as sensible matter, which one can touch. The latter is made possible by the former: the elements of primary matter combine to produce sensible things.[16] Aquinas considers David's position to coincide with the belief of ancient philosophers, in that divine essence extended into the essence of all natural being, and therefore all of reality was an extension of one,

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[12] *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* 1, art. 20, 78. For more on Cardinal de Courçon, see Nicholas Schofield and Gerard Skinner, *The English Cardinals* (Oxford: Family Publications, 2007), 27.

[13] See Théry, *David de Dinant*, 13–15 for a list of references to David in the works of Albert the Great. Théry estimates that Albert's most concentrated refutation of David's pantheism was written in approximately 1248, some thirty-eight years after the Synod of Paris. There are questions around how he came to be acquainted with it; Albert himself claims to have read it "in a book", which may have been a copy that escaped the flames, or a second-hand account of David's doctrine. Ibid., 19–20.

[14] Théry, *David de Dinant*, 21. See also Lucentini, "L'eresia d'Amalrico," 189: Thomas disconnects the thought of Amaury from that of Aristotle.

[15] Théry, *David de Dinant*, 110–113.

[16] See Théry for an elaboration of this distinction. Ibid., 49.

single (divine) substance.[17] This amounts to a profound materialist pantheism, for it proposes that divine essence was itself the prime matter of all corporeal being. Thomas, who considered it impossible that God might enter the composition of anything, either as a formal or material principle, regarded David's teaching to be absurd.[18]

Théry elaborates on the differences between *being* and the *appearance of being* in David's pantheistic philosophy.[19] Matter takes on different appearances (e.g. donkey, man), but for David, God isn't associated with the appearances but with the (primary) matter itself. Thus, human beings are mere appearances of being, rather than being itself: forms, as such, are accidental. But insofar as we are made of matter and of spirit, we are made of divine being. This contrasts with the pantheism of Amaury who associates God not with the primary matter from which corporeal beings are composed, but with the non-material formal identity (i.e. the essence) and distinction of those beings. David's God, however, is not limited to matter: His substance is also intellectual and spiritual.[20] He is the First Cause of all things, as well as their spiritual and material substance.

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[17] Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences II*, dist. 17, q.1, art. 1: *quorumdam antiquorum philosophorum error fuit, quod Deus esset de essentia omnium rerum: ponebant enim omnia esse unum simpliciter, et non differre, nisi forte secundum sensum vel aestimationem, ut Parmenides dixit; et illos etiam antiques philosophos secuti sunt quidam moderni, ut David de Dynando*. R.P. Mandonnet, ed, *S. Thomae Aquinatis Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum*, Tomus II (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929), 412–413. Aquinas's solution to this problem lies in the analogy of being, where the term 'being' is not considered univocally between God and creature: the creature's possession of being displays a likeness with God, but where God is Being itself, the creature always possesses being in a diminished sense, through participation in it. See *Summa Theologiae* I, q.13 art. 5. Eriugena's consideration of the question runs along similar lines, since he considers the 'essence' of created being to be related to, yet always ultimately different from, the *super-essence* of God to whom the categories of Aristotle do not apply. Ontological categories can thus only be spoken metaphorically of God: this approach is summed up by the maxim of Pseudo-Dionysius: "the being of all things is the God who is beyond being." See chapter 5 (5.7 and 5.8) of this dissertation.

[18] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q.3, art. 8: *David de Dinando, qui stultissime posuit Deum esse materiam primam . . . neque est possibile Deum aliquo modo in compositionem alicuius venire, nec sicut principium formale, nec sicut principium materiale*. See *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Summa Theologiae* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1951), 28. Aquinas goes on to explain that the cause will always be prior to the effect, and cannot be identical with it.

[19] Théry, *David de Dinant*, 47–48.

[20] Auguste Jundt suggests that David was familiar with the 'Fons Vitae' of the Neoplatonic Islamic philosopher Avicebron [Solomon ibn Gabirol, c. 1022–1058], for whom all substances, whether spiritual or corporeal, consist of matter: the matter of lower Neoplatonic emanations participates in the matter of higher

For Théry, this material pantheism is not found in Eriugena, and David's sources must lie elsewhere. The Neoplatonic influence extending from Pseudo-Dionysius through Eriugena and into the work of Amaury is not reflected in the thought of David.[21] He appears to us not as a theologian but as a dialectician. Unlike Amaury, his philosophy engenders no religious movement (that we know of), nor does it correspond to the theological developments of Amaury or the apocalyptic thinker Joachim of Fiore regarding the Holy Spirit.[22]

Catherine Kavanagh points out, however, that David's "materialist cosmic unity" could have been considered to be influenced by the writings of Eriugena, were they read "through an Avicennian lens," and this may partly account for the controversy surrounding the *Periphyseon*.[23] The anonymous *Liber de Causis* (dating from the first quarter of the thirteenth century, and originally thought to be by Aristotle) combines Avicenna's (AD 980–1037) writing with texts from the first two books of the *Periphyseon*, although Eriugena is not named. Avicenna's Neoplatonised reading of Aristotle (essentially through a Procline

emanations. *Histoire du Panthéisme Populaire au Moyen Age et au Seizième Siècle* (Paris: Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1875), 19–20. This reflects the influence, in turn, of the idea of the Stoic *logos*.

[21] Théry, *David de Dinant*, 52: ". . . il n'y a aucun rapport entre Scot, Denis et Amaury d'une part et le panthéisme matérialiste de David de Dinant." It is Théry's opinion that David and Amaury have little in common, apart from being condemned in the same text. He speculates that David derives his material pantheism from ancient Greek sources, as found in the *Metaphysics* and first book of *Physics* of Aristotle (Ibid., 83). This influence, furthermore, he claims is generally "inseparable" from twelfth-century heresy in the West (Ibid., 109). Catherine Kavanagh remarks that David's thought is "far closer to Abelard than to Eriugena," and does not reflect Eriugena's Platonic idealism. "The Eriugenian Influence in the *Summa Halensis*: A Synthetic Tradition," in *The Summa Halensis*, ed. Lydia Schumacher (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 122.

[22] The prophecies of the hermit-turned-abbot Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202) were widespread in the first decade of the thirteenth century, particularly among heretical groups. Joachim proposed that the Church had become irredeemably corrupt, and was soon to be subject to the punishment of God. See the Fourth Lateran Council (1.4) below.

[23] Kavanagh, "The Eriugenian Influence in the *Summa Halensis*," 122.

lens) colours Eriugena's accompanying texts to an extent that they could be considered divergent from orthodox Christian theology.[24]

1.3   The pantheism of Amaury of Bène

Amaury of Bène was a charismatic master of philosophy at the University of Paris in the first decade of the thirteenth century where he gathered about him a group of disciples.[25] It is likely that he began his career at Chartres, and moved on to the fledgling university where his teaching of logic progressed to the teaching of theology.[26] The chronicler Guillaume le Breton, by way of introduction to the case of Amaury, comments on the growth of academic study in Paris at this time, and in particular the renewed vigour with which theological questions were debated.[27] Within the faculty of theology at the university, according to Guillaume, a student named Amalricus (Amaury) had gathered about him a group of followers over whom he had a certain authority, and with whom he shared his interpretations

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[24] Kavanagh, "The Eriugenian Influence in the *Summa Halensis*," 127. The ascription of the *Liber de Causis* to Aristotle reveals that scholastic philosophers read his metaphysics in a Neoplatonic context.

[25] The University of Paris grew from the Cathedral school at Notre-Dame in the late twelfth-century. Students were directed to wear robes and tonsure, and were subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction rather than the king's laws. Pope Innocent III studied there until 1182. For more on the University of Paris, see the first chapter of Christophe Charle and Jacques Verger, *Histoire des Universités* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2015).

[26] The chronicle of Guillaume le Breton (c. 1165 – c. 1225) describes Amaury as a clergyman (*studens quidam clericus*), skilled in logic and other arts which he applied to theology, resulting in views that were transgressive; *Gesta Philippi Augusti*, edition Fr. Delaborde (Paris, Société de l'Histoire de France, 1882), Tome I, 230. It is reproduced in Paolo Lucentini, ed., *Garnerii de Rupeforti Contra Amaurianos*, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 232 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 67–69, and also G. C. Capelle, *Autour du Décret de 1210: III. – Amaury de Bène, Étude sur son Panthéisme Formel*, Bibliothèque Thomiste XVI (Paris: Vrin, 1932), 99–100. Guillaume sketches Amaury as a dour figure, while an anonymous chronicler from Laon describes him as a 'wicked character' (*ingenio pessimus*): "Chronica Anonymi Laudunensis Canonici," *Receuil des Historiens de la Gaule et de la France*, t. XVIII (Paris, 1822), 714. See Capelle, op. cit., 98. Both Lucentini and Capelle have reproduced important historical and dogmatic thirteenth-century sources regarding the Amaurician heresy. See also Gary Dickson, "The Burning of the Amalricians," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 40, no. 3 (July 1989): 351; Karl Albert, "Amalrich von Bena und der Mittelalterliche Pantheismus," in *Die Auseinandergesetzung an der Parisien Universität im XII Jahrhundert*, ed. Albert Zimmerman (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2011), 193–212; and Lucentini, "L'Eresia de Amalrico," 174–191.

[27] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos*, 67. Guillaume notes King Philip's support of the scholars. Any appearance of heresy in the University would have damaged its reputation, and that of its ecclesiastical and royal sponsors.

of Scripture. Whether it was stated publicly or privately, Amaury "dared to assert" that, in order to be saved, a Christian must believe himself to be a "member of Christ".[28] In this matter, states the chronicler, he was universally contradicted (*ab omnibus catholicis universaliter*). The Cistercian chronicler Albéric des Trois Fontaines (d. 1241), who followed the account of Guillaume, elaborates (with some conjecture) on the content of this contradiction: Amaury's assertion was held to be a (sin of) presumption, since no-one could know such a thing for certain. Furthermore, the Fathers of the Church did not entertain such a belief as necessary to salvation.[29] Amaury was subsequently summoned to a papal court, which ruled against him. He was compelled, on his return to Paris from Rome, to retract his offensive beliefs, but Guillaume claims that Amaury did not change his views in his heart.[30] Thus brought low, he died in his bed shortly after his return, and was buried next to the monastery of St Martin.[31]

After his death, according to Guillaume, there arose some "poisonous doctrines, new and diabolical errors" which appeared to belittle Christ and the Sacraments of the Church.[32] First among these new ideas was that the Age of the Father, dictated by the law of Moses, had lasted for the period of the Old Testament, and was replaced by the Age of the Son and

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[28] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos*, 67–68. *Unde et in ipsa theologia ausus est constanter asserere, quod quilibet christianus teneatur credere se esse membrum Christi.*

[29] G. H. Pertz, ed., *Chronica Albrici Monachi Trium Fontium*. Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Tome XXIII (Hanover: Hahn, 1874), 890. Capelle's summary version of this chronicle does not contain Albéric's full account of the condemnation of the *Periphyseon*.

[30] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos*, 68. The date of the papal summons is not certain; see Dickson, "The Burning of the Amauricians," 351.

[31] Albéric dates Amaury's death to four years before the burning of the Amauricians, which suggests AD 1206, although most commentators, including Cappuyns, place his death in 1207.

[32] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos*, 68: *Post mortem eius surrexerunt quidam uenenosa eius doctrina infecti . . . et ad euacuandum noui Testamenti sacramenta, nouos et inauditos errores in inuentiones diabolicas confixerunt*. Albéric also highlights the difference between Amaury, to whom we can only ascribe the tenet that he who is to be saved must believe himself a member of Christ, and the Amauricians who, after their founder's death, fabricated 'diabolical' new beliefs. Ibid., 83–84.

the New Testament.[33] These ideas had been formalised by abbot Joachim of Fiore, according to whom the age about to begin in their own time was that of the Holy Spirit, in which the Sacraments of Baptism, Confession and Eucharist were made redundant. For the Amauricians, salvation was made possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.[34] This presence of the Spirit in the individual is depicted as the virtue of charity: those in possession of it were not capable of sin. In the name of charity, continues Guillaume, the sectaries committed all kinds of stupid acts, adultery, and other sins of the flesh, promising impunity to the simple minds they deceived.[35]

On 20 November 1210, ten members of the heretical Amaurician sect were burnt at the stake outside the Saint-Honoré gate in Paris.[36] The priests and clerks among them (their names are given in the decree of Archbishop Corbelius) had been previously stripped of their clerical garments.[37] A number of other clerks were given lengthy prison sentences, while the

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[33] The idea of the 'Age of the Son' is reflected in the Condemnation of the University of Paris: *Filius usque nunc operatus est, sed Spiritus Sanctus ex hoc nunc usque ad mundi consummationem inchoat operari*. Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 89.

[34] While in his lifetime Joachim had enjoyed papal approbation, and was widely regarded as a kind of prophet, his heresies were condemned by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 (see the second constitution, which also condemns Amaurician doctrine generally, thus connecting the two figures: see 'Lateran IV and the emphasis on doctrine' below). The beliefs of the Amauricians corresponded to the Joachimite idea that the age in which they were living was the dawn of the Age of the Holy Spirit; however, the connections between the Parisian sect and the Calabrian abbot are difficult to determine. The division of the three ages existed in the Middle Ages before it was connected with Joachim, and Capelle opines that it is unlikely that Joachim influenced Amaury directly. Nonetheless, ideas circulated freely in this period, and it is possible that some monks or scholars returning from the Crusades, and passing through Calabria, had picked up Joachim's teaching. See Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 81. For more on the nuances of Joachim's system, see Marjorie Reeves, "The Originality and Influence of Joachim of Fiore," *Traditio* 36 (1980): 287–293. See also Frances Andrews, "The Influence of Joachim in the 13th Century," in *A Companion to Joachim of Fiore*, ed. Matthias Riedl (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 190–266.

[35] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos*, 68. Heresiologists often remark upon heretical groups being accused of licentiousness and promiscuity. In the case of the Amauricians, it may find some validation in their denial of the need for the Sacraments.

[36] Guillaume le Breton provides the details of the public execution, and also of how the church authorities in Paris had previously sent Ralph of Namur to infiltrate the sect and provide them with information. The leaders were sent for trial at the court of King Philip, which spared "the women and more simple-minded [sectaries] who had been corrupted" (*mulieribus autem et aliis simplicibus qui per majors corrupti fuerant et decepti*). See Lucentini, *Contra Amaurianos*, 69. An account is also found in Dickson, "The Burning of the Amalricians," 347.

[37] *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, vol. 1, art. 11, 70–71.

women and uneducated laymen were to be spared official punishment. Amaury, too, was condemned, and was excommunicated posthumously. What remained of his body was removed from consecrated ground, and his bones and ashes were "flung on a dung heap."[38] The sect was mortally wounded, and its last leader, the heresiarch Maître Godin, was burned at Amiens two years later.[39]

The writings of Amaury and his followers have not survived: their doctrine is known from the accounts of those who attacked their heresy.[40] One of the earliest accounts is the *Contra Amaurianos* attributed to a former abbot of Clairvaux, Garnier of Rochfort.[41] The document begins by stating the heretical argument that God is everywhere, in every place. The faulty logical reasoning of the heretics is also explained: if God were not everywhere, He would not be all-powerful, and since God is 'forever' (*semper*), He is therefore in time, according to "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be." God is in everything since Saint Paul says: "in Him we move and have our being". God is in all things, the good as well as the bad (*mala sunt in Deo*),[42] since all things are in His essence (*omnia sunt in ejus essentia*).[43] Further to these statements, the transcendence of God is being denied by the

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[38] *ossa et cines eius per sterquilinia sunt dispersa*. It appears likely, though not certain, that his body was burnt after it was exhumed. Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos*, 69.

[39] See also Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (London: Sampston Low, 1888, reprinted 2010 in Cambridge Library Collection), 360.

[40] Alister McGrath's observation is relevant here: "What makes a heresy is not so much its ideas as the way it is characterized and categorized by others." *Heresy*, 82.

[41] See Lucentini's critical edition, *Garnerii de Rupeforti Contra Amaurianos*, CCCM 232 (op. cit.). Garnier (d. c. 1225) was bishop of Langres and a former abbot of Clairvaux. Lucentini dates the composition of the text to AD 1210, and suggests that Garnier was close to those who interrogated the disciples of Amaury. Ibid., IX–XI.

[42] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos* I, 187 (142rb), 10.

[43] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos* I, 208, (142va), 10. Eriugena is quite clear that God is not contained in place or time, but adds that God can be described as the place and time of all things since He is the Cause of all places and times: *Non enim deus locus neque tempus est, attamen locus omnium translatiue dicitur et tempus, quia omnium locorum temporumque causa est*. Jeauneau, ed., *Periphyseon* I, 1122–1124 (468b–c), 39.

heretics if, as chapter IX asserts, God is *omnia in omnibus*.[44] Since God is in all things, the love of God is contained in a stone.[45] Various chroniclers portray the implications of such doctrine on the behaviour of those who subscribed to them.

1.3.1 The dialogue of Caesarius of Heisterbach

The 'dialogue' of the Cistercian chronicler Caesarius of Heisterbach (c. 1180 – c. 1240) gives a detailed account of the case of the Amauricians, whose heresy was "disseminated widely".[46] His account explains why the identification of God with all things was offensive to thirteenth-century religious sensibility. The heretics 'mocked' the reverence for any physical thing which was deemed holier than any other thing: statues, relics, the bones of martyrs, and the Eucharist itself, which was no more holy than ordinary, unconsecrated bread.[47] Furthermore, they denied the resurrection of the body, and the existence of Heaven and Hell as physical places. Given this emphatic rejection of the sacramental nature not only of popular piety, but of dogmatic theological tenets of the Church, it is not surprising that the sect invited the extreme censure which it received.[48]

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[44] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos* IX, 5–6 (147ra), 26. The sectaries use a text from St Paul to support this position. Colossians, 1:16: "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him."

[45] *Caritas Dei est in lapide*. Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos* IX, 112 (148ra), 30.

[46] Joseph Strange, ed., *Caesarii Heisterbacensis Monachi Dialogous miraculorum* XXII. (Edition Strange: Cologne, 1851), 304–307. See the reproduction in Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos*, 79–82, and also Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 101–103.

[47] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos*, 79–80. The Amauricians may have contributed to the emphasis which the first constitution of the Fourth Lateran Council (AD 1215) places on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

[48] Jundt elaborates that the Amauricians had no place for indulgences, prayers for the dead, or the veneration of saints. Since the whole earth was equally blessed by God, there was no extra holy quality about churches or graveyards. *Histoire du Panthéisme Populaire,* 32.

According to Dickson, it was their antinomianism that provoked the greatest outcry, "an outcry still audible in modern scholarship."[49] This was particularly true with respect to the sin of fornication, to which several commentators respond with derision.[50] Drawing on the essential unity of God with man, to the point that a man's decisions can be understood to be God's decisions, the sinner is relieved of all culpability. The Amauricians did not get rid of the idea of sin altogether, but their position that those knowledgeable of their sins had no need to do penance found a strong opposing position in the tenth and twenty-first constitutions of the Fourth Lateran Council which promoted the need for penance and emphasised the need for confession.[51] Consciousness of sin and the corresponding need for penance acknowledged the reality of evil, promoted a fear of Hell (and Purgatory), encouraged church donations, and fuelled the desire for indulgences in those embarking on the Crusades.

1.3.2 The sermon of John the German

The sermon of Johann the German (abbot of St Victor from 1203 to 1229) captures an emotional response to the heresy, and begins by attacking the Amaurician antinomian position that sin, which in itself is nothing, does not deserve punishment by God.[52] John saves his most potent vitriol for the "height of madness, and most daring deceit" (*summa dementia . . . et impudentissimi mendacii*) which is the Amaurician belief that they hold themselves to be God Himself. This "abominable presumption" amounts to the height of

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[49] Dickson, "The Burning of the Amalricians," 359.

[50] Dickson suggests that, while in theory they may have held this position, in reality it is likely that the elderly clerical leaders of the group did not do so to justify regular seduction of the female sectaries. Ibid., 361.

[51] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos*, VI, 20–22.

[52] *Qui periculossisima fraudulentia persuadere nituntur in occult peccatorum impunitatem, asserentes peccatum ita nihil esse ut etiam pro preccato nemo debeat a Deo puniri.* "Sermon de Jean le Teutonique," *Sermones*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS 14525, f. 111. See Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos*, 51–52; Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 90.

human error, and contaminates the endeavours of theologians. He concludes by saying: "The fool hath said in his heart 'There is no God', but the even bigger fool has said 'I *am* God'!"[53]

1.3.3 The chronicle of Martin of Poland

Martin Polonus (d. 1279), in his *Chronicle of Popes and Emperors*, provides a summary of Amaurician doctrine which reads as a suspiciously simplistic account of Augustinian Neoplatonism, combined with a rigorous pantheism and supplemented with distinct Eriugenian ideas.[54] Without naming Eriugena, Martin ascribes all of Amaury's errors to "a book called peri phiseon [*sic*.]" which was "Amaury's book" and is included in those books condemned in Paris.[55] The first item in Martin's list of Amaury's dogmatic assertions is that of "the Ideas which, contained in the mind of God, both create and are created," a definition which corresponds with Eriugena's second division of nature.[56] Augustine and Eriugena overlap in their thinking regarding the Ideas, or Forms, which, while derived from Plato, can be attributed to Plotinus.[57] For Augustine, the "ideas are the principal forms or the fixed and unchangeable reasons of things that have themselves not been formed and consequently are

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[53] The Amauricians' antinomian position was supplemented with claims of intense 'mystical' experience, as a result of the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit. The sources have little detail to add on the nature of this mysticism, be it visions or prophecies, though Caesarius of Heisterbach records how the spy Ralph of Namur feigned spiritual rapture to gain the trust of the sectaries: *magistro Rudolpho . . . vultu elevato se spiritu in coelum raptum simulabat . . .* See Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos*, 81; *Dialogous miraculorum*, 890.

[54] G. H. Pertz, ed., *Martini Chronicon Pontificum et Imperatorum*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores, Tome XXII (Hanover: Hahn, 1871), 438. See also Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 105.

[55] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 105.

[56] Eriugena's four divisions of Nature, from the beginning of Book I of the *Periphyseon*, are discussed in chapter 3.

[57] Plotinus's development of Platonic Forms are explored in Steven K. Strange, "Plotinus' Account of Participation in *Ennead VI.4–5*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30, no. 4 (October 1992): 479–496. For an introduction to the similarities between Plotinus and Plato, see John Dillon, "Plotinus at Work on Platonism," *Greece and Rome* 39, no. 2 (1992): 189–204. Barthélemy Hauréau refers to Eriugena as "another Proclus, scarcely Christian;" see M. Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène: Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (Louvain: Abbaye de Mont César, 1933), 264.

eternal, always constituted in the same way and contained in the divine intelligence."[58]

Eriugena takes a similar view, but includes the assertion that they are *creative*, and also that

they flow from a higher source; therefore the concepts are not exactly equivalent.[59] Martin

does not elaborate on the point, but appears to suggest that this creative element contradicts

"blessed Augustine's" notion that the eternal and immutable ideas are contained fully in the

mind of God, Who presumably is the only creative force.[60] The creative Platonic Ideas

amount to an abstract philosophical proposal for the Amauricians that is not apparently

connected with the doctrine of pantheism, but it is notable how it coincides with Eriugena.[61]

Martin's list continues with the Amaurician idea that God is essence of all things.[62]

This assertion can be connected to Eriugena, who stated that God is the *omnium essentia*.[63]

The precise meaning of this phrase requires investigation (and will be explored in the central

chapters of this study), but for Martin, the common essence between God and all things,

suggesting an apparent identity with each other, leads him to make the connection between

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[58] Augustine, "Responses to Miscellaneous Questions," in *The Works of Saint Augustine: a Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey and Raymond F. Canning, Vol. 12 (New York, New City Press, 2008), 60.

[59] See chapter 3 (3.5).

[60] *Qui Almericus asseruit ydeas, que sunt in mente divina, et creare et creari, cum secundum beatum Augustinum nichil nisi eternum atque incommutabile sit in mente divina*. Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 105.

[61] Chapter XI of the *Contra Amaurianos* mentions the Platonic Ideas, claiming the Amauricians held them to be co-eternal like prime matter, following Plato and Aristotle, thus contradicting Augustine for whom all things were created from nothing. The eternity of prime matter was typical of ancient Greek thought; there is no mention here of Eriugena, nor any of his theological developments regarding the Ideas. Capelle *Amaury de Bène*, 93. For more on Augustine and *nihil*, see chapter 6.

[62] [*Amalericus*] *dixit enim, Deum esse essenciam omnium et omnia esse Deum*. Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 105.

[63] *Periphyseon* I, 500 (454a), 20. Sheldon-Williams translates this term as "the essence of all things." See *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, trans. I.P. Sheldon-Williams, revised by John J. O'Meara, (Montreal: Bellarmin; Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), I.454a (and also I.516c, I.518a, and III.677c). All English language translations of the *Periphyseon* quoted in this dissertation, unless otherwise stated, are from this edition.

this belief and the impunity of sin, following which the sectaries freely committed all manner of stupid acts.[64]

The connection between Amaury and Eriugena is further suggested by Martin's recording of the belief that, had the first humans not sinned, there would be no division between the sexes, and that human reproduction would have occurred non-physically, "in the manner of the angels."[65] This is also found in Eriugena, who derives the idea from Maximus the Confessor.[66] Martin states that these errors are found in the book *intitulatur peri phiseon*, and the question might be asked whether he was reading a text coming from the Amauricians, or rather reading Eriugena directly.

Catherine Capelle proposes the possibility that Martin considers the *Peri phiseon* he has mentioned to have been written by Amaury (since his chronicle doesn't mention Eriugena), possibly as a collection of quotes and inspirations by Eriugena, but not by Eriugena as such.[67] The trustworthiness of Martin's account is compromised by his report that Amaury was burnt at the stake in Paris, along with his fellow heretics. Neither Martin nor Henry of Susa mention what is considered the only doctrine attributable to Amaury himself, which is that those who would be saved must believe themselves to be members of Christ. There are, therefore, questions regarding his source(s), and some reservation must be exercised in reading his account. The difficulty in separating Amaury from Eriugena may also be explained, Capelle suggests, by a deliberate attempt by the heresiarch to align himself with the Irish theologian, who was favourably regarded at the time Amaury was teaching.

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[64] *Unde sub tali specie pietatis sequaces eius omnem turpitudinem libere commitebant*. Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 105.

[65] *Eo modo quo sancti angeli multiplicati sunt*. Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 105.

[66] *Periphyseon* IV, 2990–3029 (812b–813a), 101–102.

[67] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 15–16.

Martin's account is the source for many later medieval accounts of Amaurician doctrine, which further perpetuates the confusing connection between the Eriugena and Amaury.[68]

The entanglement of Amaury with Eriugena is complicated by the differences between Amaury's theology and the beliefs of his disciples that evolved after his death. Where Martin confuses all three, making no attempt to separate them, Guillaume le Breton distinguishes Amaury's doctrine of being a member of Christ, which he was forced to recant in his lifetime, from the subsequent Amaurician doctrines that appeared after his death. The ultimate source of these later doctrines cannot be verified, be it Eriugena, Amaury or his followers, but there remains a disconnect between the formal pantheism arrived at by the misreading of sources, and the eschatological ideas that reflect Joachimite belief in the Age of the Spirit, and, more extremely, the belief that a series of plagues were imminent.[69] Regarding the metaphysical principles and derided amoral behaviour of the sect, some writers (Martin, Aquinas) treat the former issue, and others (John the German, Caesarius of Heisterbach) address the latter. The Amaurician eschatological ideas are not found in Eriugena, nor did he advocate a relaxing of the moral law.

1.4   Lateran councils and heresy

Amaury's theological departure was not without precedent, for it bore numerous similarities with the thinking behind the heresy of the Cathars. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the rise of numerous heretical movements in Western Europe, of which the Cathars ('the pure'), active in the north of Italy and the Languedoc region of southern France, were the

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[68] Among the chronicles that copy Martin's work are the *Chronicon* of Nicolas Triveth (d. 1328) and the *Vita Innocentii Papae III* of Bernard Gui (d. 1331). See Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 107.

[69] Gary Dickson suggests that the influence of Joachimite ideas became manifest among the Amauricians during the "spiritual crisis" that followed upon the death of Amaury. "Joachism and the Amalricians," *Florensia* I (1987), 41–42.

most significant.[70] The intellectual diversity of the twelfth century, in which these various

heresies arose, was slowly countered by the clarification of dogma. The Crusades to the Holy

Land were followed, beginning in the mid-twelfth century, by internal Crusades against

heretics such as the Cathars. The reasons for waging internal Crusades were complex, and the

ecclesiastical encouragement of them attracted open criticism across Western Europe.[71]

Often, they amounted to little more than a display of power against the Hohenstaufen

emperors (and in particular, Frederick II) with whom the papacy was engaged in a political

power struggle. The Albigensian Crusade, encouraged by the Third Lateran Council, covers

the period from the burning of the Amauricians to the Fourth Lateran Council. While in the

mid-twelfth century Catholics openly debated with Cathars, in the thirteenth century heretics

were to be pursued violently rather than convinced peacefully. It was a tidal change against

heresy and heretics, in which tolerance was replaced by persecution. Texts deemed heretical

were to follow on the path of destruction.

The Church councils of the first millennium were held in the Eastern Empire, before

the schism, through the medium of the Greek language. The dominant issues were ones of

doctrine, while disciplinary matters mattered less.[72] The medieval councils, Lateran I to

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[70] See Carles Gascón Chopo, "From Occitania to Catalonia. Catharism: The Current State of Research," *Medium Aevum,* XIV (2020): 103–131. In recent years, a revision of the 'official' history of Catharism, put forward by R. I. Moore and other scholars, essentially denies that Catharism spread as an organised movement (though it may have ended up like one), and continues to be hotly debated. See R. I. Moore, *The War on Heresy* (London: Profile, 2012). For more on the history of the Cathars, see Michael Costen, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997); Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars: Christian Dualists in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Mark Gregory Pegg: *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[71] Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World: Europe 1100–1350* (London: Mentor, 1961), 141. One of the criticisms was against the collection of crusading taxes, which were often misappropriated. Another was against the possibility (for the rich) of buying oneself out of a crusader's vow.

[72] E. I. Watkin issues a caveat regarding the relationship between Church councils and the daily life of Christians: "The Councils . . . of their nature cannot display the interior life of the Church which they safeguard and serve. They inform us what the church teaches but cannot show us how her children translate the teaching in their prayer and in their life. Those who would know the Church, cannot be content with ecclesiastical history or even dogmatic theology, indispensable though they are. They need ascetic and mystical theology, the lives of saints." *The Church in Council* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1960), 14.

Lateran V, were held in the West, in Latin, and are dominated by disciplinary concerns, and the regulation of clerical life.[73] Norman Tanner points out that the medieval Church was no less theological, but that theological development occurred outside of the councils, notably (in the later Middle Ages) in the universities.[74] However, the issue of heresy has an increasing presence in the councils of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The First Lateran Council (AD 1123) does not mention heresy. The twenty-third article of the Second Lateran Council (1139), convened by Pope Innocent II, condemned unnamed heretics who rejected the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Marriage, and Holy Orders.[75] The heretics targeted were probably the Cathars, who rejected these sacraments.[76] The Cathars had a disregard for physical matter, including the human body, considering it to have been made by a being contrary to God, possibly an evil God, or a rebel angel.[77]

At first glance, this heresy is not completely dissimilar to Eriugena's disregard for physical matter, and for human sexual identity.[78] In his philosophical system, such things are distant from God, since they are not part of man's original creation in God's image, but rather come into being as a result of sin. However, the Amaurician pantheism with which Eriugena would become associated is, in fact, quite *contrary* to the Cathars, since it identifies God with

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[73] For an introduction to the medieval Church councils, see Norman Tanner, *The Councils of the Church: A Short History* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 46–74. In particular, Tanner notes that "Medieval people themselves in Western Christendom were uncertain about the status of their own councils, and the clear weight of opinion was that they were not ecumenical." An ecumenical status was not thought possible without the participation of the Eastern Church. During the Counter-Reformation, Roman Catholic apologists posited all the medieval councils as 'ecumenical', but this title was never conferred authoritatively, and since 1974, these councils have been referred to as "general councils of the West" (*generales synodos in occidentali orbe*). Tanner, *The Councils of the Church*, 48–49.

[74] Ibid., 56.

[75] An English text for the Second Lateran Council can be found at https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum10.htm, consulted on 25 August 2020.

[76] While rejecting priesthood, the only sacrament practised by the Cathars was a laying on of hands, an initiation into the class of the 'Perfect'. See Watkin, *The Church in Council*, 102.

[77] Ibid.

[78] For Eriugena and sexual identity, see 'Amaury and Eriugena: Preliminary Considerations' below.

Nature: in creating nature, God creates Himself. Eriugena shares with the Cathars a disregard for flesh, but is utterly unlike them in his assertion that all things are contained by God.[79] In the theology of the *Periphyseon* there is nothing substantial that is not ultimately contained within the one true God, and, unlike a popular Cathar belief, there certainly isn't any evil spirit (for evil is a form of non-being) that exists apart from God or was not created by God.

The final and most detailed canon of the Third Lateran Council (AD 1179) addresses the treatment of heretical groups, and names the Cathars as foremost among them; the heretical doctrines themselves are not listed. The canon states that the Cathar heresy "has grown so strong that they no longer practise their wickedness in secret, as others do, but proclaim their error publicly and draw the simple and weak to join them."[80] It enjoins the faithful to take up arms against the Cathars, forbids any protection of them on pain of excommunication, and allows princes the right to subject them to slavery. The article also lists other heretics groups who oppress Christians, including the "Brabanters, Aragonese, Navarrese and Basques," but their particular heretical doctrines are not listed.

1.5   The case against the Amauricians

The Amauricians were not nearly as widespread as the Cathars, and there was no call to arms against them, but their heresies were regarded as pernicious and were rapidly dealt with.[81] The University *Chartularium* of AD 1210, in an official condemnation of the Amaurician

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[79] Frances Yates claims that at a synod at Sens the *Periphyseon* was condemned because the Cathars used it. Frances A. Yates, "Ramon Lull and John Scotus Eriugena," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23, no. 1/2 (Jan.–Jun, 1960): 36. See Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène*, 250.

[80] See https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum11.htm (consulted 25 August 2020).

[81] For an account of the trial of the Amauricians, see J.M.M.H. Thijssen, "Master Almaric and the Almaricians: Inquisatorial Procedure and the Suppression of Heresy at the University of Paris," *Speculum* 71, no. 1 (1996): 43–65, esp. 47–59.

sectaries, lists the heresies for which they had been sent to the stake.[82] To some of the heresies on the itemised list it posits the orthodox position standing against them. The main dogmatic position of the heretics, as listed here, focuses on the operation of the Trinity. Where the orthodox theological position holds that the operation of the Trinity is inseparable, the heretical one is that, until Christ's incarnation, the Father operated without the Son or the Spirit.[83] The document also refers to the proposition that all things, insofar as they exist, *are* God.[84] God was present in ordinary bread before any words of consecration were spoken, thus eliminating the need for the sacrament of the Eucharist. Baptism is also something they claimed not to need, and they saw no need for the operation of grace.

The pantheism recorded by the chroniclers of Amauricianism, i.e. the belief that God was everywhere and in everything, poses significant questions for those who accept it. This identity is to be understood on a spiritual or metaphysical level, rather than being a strictly material pantheism (associated with David of Dinant). However, as Capelle points out, a 'phenomenal' distinction between creature and creator still does not avoid a rigorous pantheism.[85] The Amauricians believed that some of the individuals of their group were possessed by the Holy Spirit. Caesarius of Heisterbach suggests that there might have been just seven such 'spiritual' persons.[86] What of the essence of those who are not fully possessed? Does it differ from God's essence in some degree? Or is possession of the Holy Spirit a gift of the enlightened sectaries, while an essential unity with God is maintained by

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[82] *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* I, art. 12, 71–72. This article follows directly from the banning of the works of Amaury. Capelle includes a summary version (*Amaury de Bène*, 89) but some texts included here are not in the summary.

[83] This heretical position on the Trinity is not found in Eriugena. See chapter 3 (3.3) for Eriugena's theology of the Trinity.

[84] Ibid. *Omnia unum, quia quicquid est, est Deus*.

[85] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène* , 33. See also her discussion on the results of the pantheist formula, 35–43.

[86] Ibid., 101.

all things and peoples? Of course, pantheism is implied either way, but it can be at least said that there are varying (and thus problematic) degrees of participation between divine nature and human nature. Perhaps a compromising middle ground was inevitable, given the anthropological consequences of pantheism on the one hand, which leads to an essential unity with God, standing against the fact that those outside the sect did not subscribe to its metaphysical or eschatological beliefs, and therefore lacked the necessary knowledge of salvation. There is no evidence that the sectaries provided answers for such questions.

The Amaurician mingling of divine nature with human nature leads to the difficult question about what happens to human individuality in this process. Does it disappear altogether? The 'spirituals' were not simply possessed with a sanctifying grace; rather, when they spoke, it was the Spirit speaking, and not, for example, Maître Godinus. If it is God speaking and acting in the person, then that person is denied his free will, and so how can he still be called a person? For Capelle, it amounts to a hypostatic union, where the personhood ('personnalité') is absorbed into the divinity, such that all words and actions are those of God.[87] The Amaurician belief in being a member of Christ meant an incarnation of the Spirit within. The 'spiritual' person now serves to express God externally, and sin has become an impossibility, along with regret and guilt for behaviour within this state. The sacraments of the Church are completely unnecessary if Godinus is in God, and God is in Godinus. There is now a reverence due to Godinus, since God is within him.[88] The physical body can be said to

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[87] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 34. This position reflects that of Monothelitism, with regard to the person of Christ, which was debated in the East in the seventh century, and which was opposed by Maximus the Confessor. However, no specific connection can be assumed between Amaury and seventh-century Christological disputes.

[88] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 36.

belong to Godinus, but, in his behaviour towards others, at what point does Godinus end, and God begin? Capelle concludes: "they are decidedly metaphysicians gone mad!"[89]

1.6   Lateran IV and the emphasis on doctrine

An emphasis on articles of faith, and the eradication of heresy, were of primary importance to the Fourth Lateran Council, held in November 1215.[90] The first constitution of the council contains a creed, which Norman Tanner asserts is directed especially against the Cathars.[91] It has a metaphysical character in its use of such terms as 'essence', 'substance', 'consubstantial' and 'nature'. It also concerns the creation of both spiritual and corporeal creatures – angels and humankind – and asserts that the source of evil is within the creatures that God originally created as good.

> We firmly believe and simply confess that there is only one true God, eternal and immeasurable, almighty, unchangeable, incomprehensible and ineffable, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons but one absolutely simple essence, substance or nature. The Father is from none, the Son from the Father alone, and the holy Spirit from both equally, eternally without beginning or end; the Father generating, the Son being born, and the holy Spirit proceeding; consubstantial and coequal, co-omnipotent and coeternal; one principle of all things, creator of all things visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal; who by his almighty power at the beginning of time created from nothing both spiritual and corporeal creatures, that is to say angelic and earthly, and then created human beings composed as it were of both spirit and body in common. The devil and other demons were created by God naturally good, but they became evil by their own doing. Man, however, sinned at the prompting of the devil . . . [92]

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[89] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 37. The question of the impossibility of sin relates to the case of the medieval mystic Marguerite Porete, an associate of the semi-monastic Beghard community, who in 1310 was burnt at the stake for having stated that people inflamed with God could not commit sin. What she likely meant was that people inflamed with God would only desire the good, and as a consequence were not likely to commit sin. A uniting of the human will with God's will would lead to a suppression, but not an abolition, of our sinful nature. See Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200–1350)* (New York, Crossroad, 1998), 244, 436.

[90] See Watkin, *The Church in Council*, 112, 113 for the influence of Innocent III's pontificate, and also p.115 for the preparations for the council.

[91] Tanner, *The Councils of the Church*, 56.

[92] Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Councils* (New York: Sheed and Ward 1990), 230.

The first constitution posits a *populus Christianus* under the umbrella of the Church: "There is indeed one universal Church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved."[93] The unifying dimension of this Church lies in her Sacraments. The emphasis on Sacraments, together with the exclusion from salvation of those who would deny them, meets the position of heretics head on, including groups such as the Amauricians. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is affirmed, as is the necessity of priestly ordination to effect the Sacrament. The reality of sin and need for repentance is also addressed: baptised members of the Church can be restored through "true penitence."

In the second constitution, Father, Son and Spirit are again affirmed as "one essence, one substance and one nature."[94] This constitution challenges the position of Joachim of Fiore, who suggested that the essence of the Trinity, as mentioned by Peter Lombard, constituted in itself a fourth person in the Trinity; the council condemns this as a misinterpretation. It affirms God alone as the "substance, essence or divine nature – which alone is the principle of all things, besides which no other principle can be found." This contradicts the Cathar position that the source of evil being is outside God. The terms 'essence' and 'principle' are not equivalent: the second constitution does not shed light on the more precise meanings of these terms, but it does partially explain what the unity between creature and Creator looks like, and, more specifically, what it does *not* entail. Referring to the phrase "that they may be one just as we are one" (see John 17:21–23), it distinguishes a substantial unity between the persons of the Trinity from the unity of "love in grace" between God and a faithful Christian:

> this word *one* means for the faithful a union of love in grace, and for the divine persons a unity of identity in nature, as the Truth says elsewhere, *You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*, as if he were to say more plainly, *You must be perfect* in the

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[93] Dickson asserts that the idea of a *populus Christianus* is at the heart of Innocent III's ideology. "The Burning of the Amalricians," 354.

[94] Tanner, *Decrees of the Councils*, 231.

perfection of grace, *just as your Father is perfect* in the perfection that is his by nature, each by his own way. For between creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them.[95]

The dissimilarity between creator and creature is emphasised by the assertion that each is perfected in a different way: the persons of the Trinity by a substantial unity of nature with each other, and humankind by something quite different: a perfection of grace.

This second constitution concludes as follows: "We also reject and condemn that most perverse doctrine of the impious Amalric [Amaury], whose mind the father of lies blinded to such an extent that his teaching is to be regarded as mad more than as heretical."[96] Since the perverse doctrine in question is not stated, it can only be a matter of conjecture whether it refers to Amaury's statement that each Christian must believe himself to be a member of Christ, or to the more extreme pantheistic tenets of the Amauricians (or indeed, most likely, to both). What is of considerable interest in this statement is that, at the time of the council, not only was Amaury dead, but the Amaurician sect had been all but exterminated three years previously. It poses the question: was this heresy believed to be defunct (in which case it need not be mentioned by the council), or was it supposed that there remained an underground current of Amaurician heresy (and related source texts), and thus still considered to be a significant threat?

Dickson asserts that any remnants of the Amaurician heresy were pushed deep underground following the burning at the stake of Maître Godin, and that the sect ceased to operate as such.[97] The condemnation of Amaury at the council suggests, however, that it was still perceived as a danger to orthodox belief. Jundt suggests that Lyon was the place of refuge for the secretaries following the executions, where they hoped to gather into their

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[95] Tanner, *Decrees of the Councils*, 232.

[96] Ibid., 233.

[97] According to Dickson, the cremation of Master Godin in 1212 marked "the annihilation of the Amalricians as an organised body of believers," and that isolated cases of similar beliefs were kept private and did not constitute a threat. "The Burning of the Amalricians," 350.

group the Waldensian heretics of this area. He claims the two sects were 'intimately mingled' for a time, compounding the beliefs of the Amauricians with beliefs such as the priesthood extends to everyone, who can consecrate communion and give absolution; marriage can be dissolved upon entering the sect; and the Roman church is the "impure Babylon of the Apocalypse."[98] The pantheism of the Amauricians also impacted on Waldensian beliefs, which, according to Jundt, were recorded by the Dominican inquisitor Étienne de Belleville.[99]

The theology of the Trinity which the second constitution of Lateran IV asserts, and in particular the dissimilarity between Creator and creature, stands against not only Joachim, whose errors are addressed here, but also the Trinitarian and pantheistic doctrines of the Amauricians. The perfection of creatures in grace which the constitution has stated opposes Amaury's doctrine that this perfection lies in a person's belief that they are a member of the body of Christ. The connection with Joachim extends to the Amaurician belief in the incarnation of the Holy Spirit which was becoming a widespread idea at the beginning of the thirteenth century.[100] Amaury's sect, Capelle suggests, grew partly as a response to this idea which is commonly associated with the Joachimite doctrine.[101]

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[98] Jundt, *Histoire du Panthéisme Populaire*, 31. The Waldensians did not begin with a distinctive heretical doctrine, but their insistence on lay preaching and their translation of sacred texts into the vernacular led them to be declared as heretics, and certain of their evolving beliefs coincided with Amaurician beliefs, e.g. that holy objects were not holier than other objects. Like many popular religious movements, they began with a determination to live a holy life according to the teaching and spirit of the gospels. See Heer, *The Medieval World*, 202. For a history of the Waldensians, see Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival, c.1170–c.1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); see also Euan Cameron, *The Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001).

[99] Jundt, *Histoire du Panthéisme Populaire*, 31–33. Dickson suggests as unlikely the idea that the burning in 1220 (at Troyes) of a heretic who claimed to be the Holy Spirit incarnate, and also a case of Waldensianism found at Lyons in 1225, could be supposed to have risen from Amaurician influence. "The Burning of the Amauricians," 350.

[100] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 83.

[101] Dickson, while acknowledging the response of the Amauricians to Joachimite ideas on the Age of the Holy Spirit, does not connect Amaury himself with such ideas, and finds it "implausible that Amalric would have attempted to graft Joachim's dynamic exegetical system of biblical-historical prophecy onto his own static, metaphysical world view of Neoplatonic Christian pantheism." Dickson also alludes to a possible Cistercian connection between Joachim and the opponents of Amauricianism. Joachimite ideas were known to have

It is evident in the third constitution that heresy is widespread, and that there is an urgent need that it be dealt with quickly and forcefully. Heretics are to incur not only the stigma of infamy, but also are subject to having their personal property confiscated, and rights of inheritance denied: "We excommunicate and anathematize every heresy raising itself up against this holy, orthodox and catholic faith which we have expounded above. We condemn all heretics, whatever names they may go under. They have different faces indeed but their tails are tied together inasmuch as they are alike in their pride."[102] Heretics are assumed by the council to be proud because they profess doctrines that contradict the truths of Christian doctrine which they once held: it is thus a wilful rejection of the light of faith; thus Muslims and Jews, who never professed that faith, can be tolerated to a degree which heretics cannot.

E. I. Watkin remarks on the antagonism and suspicion with which heretics have been regarded through history, which particularly holds for the Middle Ages:

> From the outset of Christianity doctrinal error has been attributed to a wicked will. All who accept, still more all who teach a heresy are assumed to do so in bad faith against what they know in their heart to be true. They are therefore wilful enemies of God doomed, unless they recant their errors, to everlasting perdition. This unreasonable assumption, though it may in individual cases be justified, contradicts, generally speaking, the facts of human psychology.[103]

The issue of pride is at the heart of the fourth constitution: the 'pride of the Greeks against the Latins'. There is no attempt to extend an olive branch to Byzantine Christians, whose only rightful path is deemed to be a return to submission to Rome. The Greeks, furthermore,

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infiltrated the Cistercian order to some degree. Garnier of Rochfort, the author of *Contra Amaurianos*, and Caesarius of Heisterbach were both Cistercians, and, according to Dickson, they wrote for a Cistercian audience. The suggestion is that they were aware of heretical ideas common to both Joachim and the Amauricians, and were eager to suppress them. "The Burning of the Amauricians," 357–358, 363.

[102] See https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum12-2.htm.

[103] E.I. Watkin, *The Church in Council*, 9. For reasons of heretical pride (or rather, lack thereof), the second constitution which condemned the heresies of Joachim did not find against him personally, nor his monastery, since it accepted his personal reassurance that he wished only to confess the Catholic faith, having submitted all his writings to the Holy See for censure.

are squarely blamed for the schism.[104] The works of Aristotle were being contested by authorities in the University of Paris at this time (as demonstrated by the censure on his works of natural philosophy in 1210), and this anti-Greek sentiment did not help the cause of Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, which relied heavily on the works of Greek theologians.[105] The Dionysian tradition, however, had deep roots, and survived the condemnation of the *Periphyseon* in 1225 (due largely to the Victorines who did not come under suspicion); it was significant in shaping the theologies of Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa.[106]

1.7   Amaury and Eriugena: preliminary considerations

The burning of the Amauricians, and the proscribing of the *Quaternuli* of David of Dinant, appears to have curtailed these heresies to a large degree. However, the vigour of Pope Honorius's decree fifteen years later condemns a work which obviously enjoyed a wide readership, and one which was later connected to Amaury. Did the heresiarch find his pantheism in the *Periphyseon*, as suggested by Martin of Poland? It can certainly be argued, from quotes lifted from Eriugena's writings, that his philosophy espoused a pantheistic outlook. To understand Eriugena properly, however, focused ideas and quotations must be understood in the light of more general principles. It is worth remarking, therefore, on

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[104] The sack of Constantinople by Western crusaders took place just a few years prior to the council, in 1204. Tanner attempts to defend this constitution by pointing to two underlying factors, which contribute to an understanding of the Church's reaction to heresy in this period: "Many decrees of the council appear aggressive and uncaring, but they should also be seen as the rather clumsy instincts or panic reactions of people who felt threatened, of people who cared for and wished to preserve what was precious to them. They express, too, an underlying sense of guilt: that Christians were to blame for the fact that Christianity wasn't doing better in spreading the faith and converting people." (*The Councils of the Church*, 58).

[105] The fortunes of the natural philosophy works of Aristotle were already beginning to turn in 1231, in a bull by Gregory IX: "Those books on natural philosophy which for a certain reason were prohibited in a provincial council, are not to be used at Paris until they have been examined and purged of all suspicion of error." *Parens Scientiarum* (1231). See English translation at http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/01p/1231-04-03,_SS_Gregorius_VIIII,_Bulla_'Parens_Scientiarum',_EN.pdf (consulted 19 July 2020)

[106] See section 1.9 below.

general as well as specific aspects of Eriugena's work, while considering possible connections with Amaurician doctrine.

There are numerous fundamental principles upon which Eriugena's theology in the *Periphyseon* is built. The work opens with Eriugena's four divisions of nature, which he suggests as a method for differentiating different aspects of *natura*, itself considered as all things that can be thought of, and also all things which lie beyond comprehension. The first and fourth divisions are understood of God alone, contemplated in two ways: the uncreated God creates (the first division), and to God all things shall return and be fulfilled (the fourth division). The second and third divisions comprise the spiritual causes of all things, as created by God (the second division), and the procession of those causes into visible effects (the third division). The four-fold division, considered as a unit, does not appear to be mentioned in the medieval period in connection with the Amaurician heresy, and thus can be overlooked in relation to Amaury.

However, according to the thirteenth-century bishop Henry of Susa (Ostiensis) (c. AD 1200–1271), Eriugena's consideration of the second division (the primordial causes) as *creative* is reflected in Amaurician doctrine. Unlike previous condemnations of Amaury, Henry names Eriugena ("*Johannis Scoti*"), and specifically his '*periphision*,' as the source of Amaury's ideas.[107] He lists three dogmatic errors, the first and most important of which is that "all things are God."[108] The second error he lists as the doctrine of the "ideas" in the mind of God which both create and are created; this is the definition of Eriugena's second division of Nature, i.e. the 'primordial causes'.[109] For Eriugena, as a step in the hierarchy

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[107] *Lectura in Decretali Gregorii I*, 1, 2. This text is reproduced in Capelle, 93–94. Henry lists his source, regarding the role the *Periphyseon* played in the heresies, as Odo of Châteauroux (*Odo episcopus Tusculanus*) (1190–1273), chancellor of the University of Paris from 1238 to 1244. Henry's account exhibits no engagement with Eriugena's writing, nor with the *Contra Amaurianos* of Garnier of Rochfort.

[108] *Primus et summus error est, quod omnia sunt Deus.*

[109] *Secundus est quod primordiales cause que vocantur idee, idest forma sive exemplar, creant et creantur.*

between God and man, the primordial causes both are created and create, but for Henry, only God can create.[110] Henry's account of Eriugena's primordial causes reflects the mention of it by Alexander of Hales (see section 1.1 above), and strengthens the possibility of a connection between Amaury and Eriugena.

A second fundamental principle of Eriugenian theology is the application of apophatic theology, by which God cannot be properly defined by any positive statement about Him, whereas negative statements have a more truthful application. In short, God is always *more than* we can say about Him. Thus, while He is said to be everything, and the essence of everything, and a light for the intellect, more properly speaking He is more-than-everything, beyond everything that can be said or thought, not defined by names or concepts, and dwells in inaccessible light.[111] Positive statements about God (e.g. 'God is Love') will contain some degree of truth, but ultimately, the apophatic lens must be applied to all of Eriugena's theological assertions. The recorded doctrines of the Amauricians make no reference to this theological approach.

There are any number of metaphysical statements in the *Periphyseon* which employ terms such as 'nature' and 'essence'. Read out of context, and without an apophatic awareness, they might be understood to support Amaurician pantheism.[112] Eriugena says that there is nothing beyond the Divine Nature, which contains all things within itself.[113] This idea is not incompatible with a third fundamental principle (and one which encompasses the first

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[110] Dickson accuses Henry, along with Martin of Poland, with the "uncritical mixing" of the philosophies of Eriugena and Amaury: "The Burning of the Amalricians," 353.

[111] *Periphyseon* I, 3440–3444 (522c), 110: *De ineffabili enim quis et quid potest fari? Cuius nec nomen proprium, nec uerbum, nec ulla uox propia inuenitur, nec est nec fieri potest, "qui solus habet immortalitatem et lucem habitat inaccessibilem."* Eriugena quotes from Roman 11.34.

[112] Marie-Domnique Chenu considers Amaury's pantheism to be enabled by a "gross wrenching" of metaphysical terms. See *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, translated by Jerome Taylor and Lester Little (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 77.

[113] *Periphyseon* III, 582–588 (633a), 22.

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two fundamental principles) which is Eriugena's embrace of Neoplatonic philosophy, which posits a single principle as the source of all being, and a theory of existence-through-participation.[114] A Neoplatonic understanding of the universe was widespread among philosophers and theologians in the late antique and medieval periods, without attracting the accusations of heresy of the kind the Amauricians were charged with; the Amaurician distortion of Neoplatonic metaphysics created something very different.

It is possible to read pantheism into some of Eriugena's interpretations of Sacred Scripture.[115] For example, he elaborates on the phrase "for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matt.10:20) as follows: "it is not you who love, who see, who move, but the Spirit of the Father, Who speaks in you the truth about Me and My Father and Himself, He it is Who loves Me and sees Me and My Father and Himself in you, and moves Himself in you that you may desire Me and My Father."[116] It is obvious how such a statement could be seen to support the theories of the Amauricians, and other groups such as the Brethren of the Free Spirit (see 1.8 below).

Eriugena emphasises the connection between knowledge and salvation.[117] He proclaims, at the opening of his *De Praedestinatione*, that "true philosophy is true religion,

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[114] The idea of *participation* and the non-identity it implies will be central to this study. A fundamental conviction of Neoplatonism is that "the finite must ascend to the infinite through intermediaries which only partially capture its essence." Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 17. See also ibid., 48–55, 125.

[115] See 7.8 in the concluding chapter of this study for a review of his seemingly pantheist statements.

[116] *Periphyseon* I, 3431–3435 (522b–c), 109–110: *Non uos estis qui amatis, qui uidetis, qui mouetis, sed spiritus patris, qui loquitur in uobis ueritatem de me et patre meo et se ipso, ipse amat et uidet me et patrem meum et se ipsum in uobis, et mouet se ipsum in uobis ut diligatis me et patrem meum*. Trans. Sheldon-Williams.

[117] Kavanagh makes the interesting point that Neoplatonic philosophy (although she is referring more specifically to the commentary tradition on the Dionysian *corpus*), is "a style of doing philosophy to which monastic life is very suited: the slow process of the *lectio divina* allows the text to release its richness gradually in a way that the more agonistic style of the scholastic *quaestio* forbids." Dionysian theology, she continues, is essentially a hermeneutical exercise; in this tradition, "the goal of all theology and philosophy is contemplation, which is not propositional nor does it assert anything at all, nor does it deny anything: it is 'the cloud of unknowing'." "The Eriugenian Influence in the *Summa Halensis*," 123.

and conversely that true religion is true philosophy."[118] The intellectual approach to religious practice extends to an overlapping of Amaurician and Eriugenian doctrine in the idea that we are finally united with God through intellect and spirit, i.e. through contemplation. The significant difference is that, for the Amauricians, this state was achievable in this life, while for Eriugena, it could only finally be achieved in the return of the person to God, a fundamental step of which was the death of the body. Nonetheless, they share in the sense that the moral life is overlooked in favour of the contemplative one. For the Amauricians, the essential unity of God and man leads to the radical (and arguably absurd) position that the person who knows that God operates in him is incapable of sin, since moral culpability rests with God.[119] Eriugena never approached an amoral or antinomian position, but he developed a theology of evil (derived from Augustine) which denied its substantial existence: it is a non-thing, a vacuum of being. Hell, for Eriugena, does not exist as a corporeal and fiery prison of punishment. Rather, the punishment of hell in the after-life is the purging of an aberrant will in the return of the soul to God.[120] The Amaurician notion of hell is simply that it is ignorance: *Infernus nichil aliud est, quam ignorantia.*[121] Conversely, heaven is the possession of divine knowledge.[122]

The Amaurician emphasis on knowledge as the means to salvation not only impacts dramatically on the moral responsibilities of the sectaries, but also removes the necessity for

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[118] See *Iohannis Scotti De Diuina Praedestinatione Liber*, edited by G. Madec, CCCM 50 (Brepols: Turnhout, 1978), caput 1, 16–18, 5: *Conficitur inde ueram esse philosophiam ueram religionem conuersimque ueram religionem esse ueram philosophiam.* The English translation is from *John Scottus Eriugena: Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 7.

[119] *Qui cognoscit Deum in se omnia operari, peccare non potest.* Lucentini ed., *Contra Amaurianos* II, 4–5 (143ra), 12.

[120] For Eriugena and evil, see *De Praedestinatione* 10.2 where it is asserted that evil in itself, proceeding from a perverse will, is nothing. His theories of hell are found in Ibid., 17.7–17.8, and also the extended treatement of evil in *Periphyseon* V, 2971–3612 (926b–940d), 94–113.

[121] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos* III, 2–3 (144ra), 16.

[122] Ibid. IV, 2 (144va), 18. *Paradisum cognitionem veritatis.*

sacraments. A knowledge of one's sins, according to Chapter VI of the *Contra Amaurianos*, absolves one from the need to do penance for them.[123] If a Jew has a knowledge of truth, there is no need for him to be baptised.[124] The Sacrament of the Eucharist becomes obsolete due to God's being essentially present in all things.[125] An anti-Sacramental stance is not found in Eriugena.

Martin of Poland recorded that the Amauricians accepted the Eriugenian belief (derived from Gregory of Nyssa) in the division of sexes having occurred only after Original Sin.[126] Furthermore, following resurrection this division would be annulled. Capelle questions whether this theory was adopted by the sectaries and applied to the lives of the 'spirituals'.[127] For those who already carried their paradise within, a repression of sexual identity might lead to freedom from family obligations and traditional morality. A theoretical antinomianism does not necessarily imply a licentious lifestyle; Guillaume le Breton, however, claims that they freely committed adultery, and engaged in other pleasures of the flesh, "in the name of love."[128] Eriugena does not deny sexual identity in any way: the unity of the sexes belongs outside the realm of corporeal human life. However, its origins in sin and its annulment in paradise can be understood to undermine its role in human identity.[129]

Similarities between Amaurician and Eriugenian doctrine also appear in the theology of the resurrection of the body. The resurrection of the body was part of Christian dogma and

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[123] Lucentini, ed., *Contra Amaurianos* VI, 2–4 (145rb), 20.

[124] Ibid. V, 3–5 (144vb), 19.

[125] Ibid. XI, 2–3 (151ra), 37; XII, 2–4 (152vb), 43. The Amaurician abolition of sacraments is also mentioned in the chronicle of Guillaume le Breton: in this new age of the Spirit, salvation takes place without the need of any external act (Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 100).

[126] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 105.

[127] Ibid., 40–41.

[128] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 100.

[129] See *Periphyseon* IV, 2204–2229 (795a–b), 76. Man's creation in the image and likeness of God does not involve sexual identity, which is only added after Original Sin.

popular belief since the earliest creeds, and it resonates in the cult of relics which flourished in the later medieval period. It implies a belief that holiness extends to the body (without suggesting that the body is identical with God), and also that that same physical body is preserved in heaven, glorified and immune to decay.[130] For Amaury, Christ did not rise from the dead in his body, but rather in a spiritual sense.[131] Chapter IX of the *Contra Amaurianos* asserts the Amaurician belief that, since the human body is corrupt, and God is essentially in the body (the cause remaining in the effect), it can be understood that God Himself is corruptible.[132] Amaurician doctrine however, as presented by Garnier, is not consistent (and of course, perhaps it is Garnier rather than the Amauricians who is responsible for the inconsistency), for in chapter XI the exterior, corruptible body is contrasted with the interior body, created from an eternal Platonic form.

Eriugena's theology of the resurrection of the body accords with his Neoplatonic outlook: the return of all things to the One involves a discarding of physical matter, which, for Eriugena, only came into existence as a result of the Fall. The human body, made in the image and likeness of God, is in fact a spiritual body, and the resurrection of the body does not involve the corporeal body, which is dissolved into the four elements after death. Further, since the division of sexes came about only after the Fall, and with the beginning of corporeal existence, our spiritual bodies are sexless.[133] For Eriugena, there is nothing lower than

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[130] For medieval beliefs on the resurrection of the body, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); idem, "Death and Resurrection in the Middle Ages: Some Modern Implications," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 142, no. 4 (December 1998): 589–596.

[131] *Contra Amaurianos*, VII: *Christus in carne non resurrexit*.

[132] Ibid., IX: *Deus est causa omnium causarum: manente causa manet effectus, ergo corrupto effectu corrumpitur causa. Sed corpus est corruptibile, et est a Deo. Ergo Deus corruptibilis est.*

[133] The idea of the division of sexes as something which disappears in the Return he claims to get from Maximus the Confessor. Human procreation is bestial, where it was originally planned to be spiritual, and akin to angelic procreation (*Periphyseon* II, 108–10 (532d), 13). Male and female are not divisions proper to man's nature, but rather are a result of disobedience; when Jesus rose from the dead, it was as neither male nor female, though he *appeared* as a man so that his disciples would recognise him (ibid., 382–390 (537b–538a), 19).

corporeal body and nothing more exalted than intellect, and after death each person rises in his spiritual body, returning to the state in which he was created before the Fall.[134]

As a final consideration, Eriugena develops a theology of relationship between the three Persons of the Trinity, and their operation in the world. Amaury's doctrine regarding the Trinity is found in the University condemnation (the Joachimite 'age of the Spirit'), and Chapter X of *Contra Amaurianos* (the incarnation of the Father in Abraham, of the Son in Christ), but such ideas are not found in Eriugena. If Eriugena is to be judged as a heretical influence on Amaury, it is most likely to be through an interpretation of his work as a monistic form of Neoplatonism, where all things, including God, can be said to be one. The single item on the list of the University Charter condemning the Amauricians which most closely resembles this position is the heretical and pantheistic proposition that "all things are one, and all things are God."[135]

In summary, these preliminary considerations suggest that there are some grounds, at first glance, for connecting the theologies of Amaury and Eriugena, notably in the unity of all things. However, in many ways they are also very different, and much of what is recorded as characteristic (in both beliefs and behaviour) of the Amauricians finds no basis in the *Periphyseon*. The connection might thus be described as tenuous.

1.8   The influence of the Amaurician heresy

It can be argued that the heresies of the Amauricians overlap with (and therefore influenced) the beliefs of other heretical groups, such as the Ortliebens. The case can be made quite convincingly in the case of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, which was a general movement (as opposed to a centralised sect) that was first detected in the thirteenth century, appearing

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[134] *Periphyseon* V, 5421–5424 (979b), 166: *Omnes nos qui homines sumus, nemine excepto, in spiritualibus corporibus et integritate naturalium bonorum resurgemus et in antiquitatem primae conditionis nostrae reuertemur.*

[135] *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* I, art. 12, 71: *Omnia unum, quia quicquid est, est Deus.*

across many parts of Western Europe.[136] The theology of this movement, which was indebted to the Cathars, also infiltrated the Béguines and Beghards, and included many aspects of Amaurician belief. What these groups have in common is a striving for religious perfection, and an anti-clerical outlook. There is a general belief that the inner movement of the Spirit is sufficient for redemption, and the blurred lines between God and a spiritual or 'perfect' soul can lead to perceptions of pantheism. This is also frequently accompanied by suggestions of antinomianism. While not always organised, these ideas took hold in those parts of the Holy Roman Empire (in particular, present-day Germany) where anti-Roman sentiment had been fostered in the Investiture controversy of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[137] The influence of Eriugena's writings on the beliefs of broader heresies is possible, but it is difficult to make concrete allegations, particularly if his philosophy was misunderstood.

1.9   The damage to Eriugena's reputation

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Eriugena was primarily regarded as a translator and commentator on Greek patristic texts. In particular, his translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, aided by his commentary and glosses, was the lens through which scholars in the Latin West read the Areopagite.[138] The scant evidence of an Eriugenian tradition in the tenth and eleventh centuries suggests that the *Periphyseon* was largely overlooked at this time; its Greek foundations may have been considered novel, but little attention was paid to

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[136] On the Brethren of the Free Spirit, see Bernard McGinn. *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*. (New York: Crossroad, 2005).

[137] Jundt, *Histoire du Panthéisme Populaire*, 41. Walther von der Vogelweide, perhaps the most well-known of the German medieval *minnesingers* (the German cousins of the French troubadours) expresses the spirit of this movement: while he remained a Catholic and wrote religious poetry, he also wrote political poetry supporting German independence, and attacking the more extreme claims of the Popes. For more on Walther, see Richard Hoppin, *Medieval Music* (London: Norton, 1978), 306–308.

[138] Kavanagh, "The Eriugenian Influence in the *Summa Halensis*," 118.

it, and there are no known accusations of heresy attached to it.[139] The twelfth century saw a growth in interest in his work, and two editions of the *Periphyseon* were produced. A complete edition of the text was prepared by William of Malmesbury (c. AD 1095 – c. 1143), while an abridged version, known as the *Clavis Physicae*, was produced in Regensburg by Honorius Augustodunensis and circulated widely.[140] The papal condemnation itself attests to the popularity of the *Periphyseon*, though it is not easy to ascertain what particular version of it was the most popular. The decree of Pope Honorius III in 1225 officially placed Eriugena's writing outside the realm of orthodoxy, and his later association with Amaury further cemented his association with heresy.

The broad philosophical and metaphysical outlook of Christian theology was shifting at the time of the condemnation of the Amaurician heresy. Earlier medieval philosophy (represented by such figures as Augustine and Eriugena) was characterised by what Henry Bett calls the 'mystical-platonic-patristic' approach, while later medieval philosophy increasingly incorporated an Aristotelian approach, and it is this latter trend that came to dominate Catholic theology.[141] While pantheism is heretical in any Christian philosophy,

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[139] The potential heresies, before his association with Amaury, include Eriugena's apparent denial of transubstantiation from his treatise on the Eucharist (now lost), or the idea that everyone will be saved. For the latter, see Catherine Kavanagh, "Maximus embellished? The Poetry of John Scottus Eriugena," in *The Beauty of God's Presence in the Fathers of the Church: The Proceedings of the Eighth International Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2012*, ed. Janet Elaine Rutherford (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 229.

[140] The *Clavis Physicae* reproduced Eriugena's thought through paraphrasing: the omissions and shortcomings with respect to the original work are discussed by Stephen Gersh, "Honorius Augustodunensis and Eriugena: Remarks on the Method and Content of the *Clavis physicae*," in Beierwaltes, *Eriugena Redivivus*, 162–173. See also Paolo Lucentini, "La Clavis Physicae di Honorius Augustodunensis e la tradizione eriugeniana nel secolo XII," in *Jean Scot Érigène et l'histoire de la philosophie*, ed. René Roques (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1977), 405–414. Following the condemnation of 1225, this work, along with the Eriugena's *Vox Aquilae*, continued to circulate anonymously. See Kavanagh, "The Eriugenian Influence in the *Summa Halensis*," 118. An account of Augustodunensis and the *Clavis Physicae* is also provided in Agnieszka Kijewska, "Eriugena's Influence on the 12th Century," trans. Roman Majeran, in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 353–357.

[141] Henry Bett, *Johannes Scotus Erigena: A Study in Mediaeval Philosophy*, 182. On the convergence of Aristotelian and Platonic influences in the medieval period, see Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, 4–48, 94–98. Chenu is keen to emphasise that the two trends are by no means exclusive.

ancient or modern, it can be more easily be grafted onto a Platonic or Neoplatonic system than onto an Aristotelian one where 'essence' is understood to belong uniquely to a particular thing. Eriugena can be understood as a casualty of the divergence of metaphysical currents: his philosophy, which never seemed properly understood in its own time, fell foul of a second wave of misunderstanding.[142] However, while his work may have gone against the grain of theological trends in the thirteenth and later centuries, such general comparisons are secondary to the study of his unique theological landscape, particularly when one wishes to press a particular accusation.[143]

In the University of Paris statutes of 1215, the ban on the works of David and Amaury is reiterated by the papal legate Robert de Courçon. Once again, however, Eriugena is not named, nor is his work. Auguste Jundt, for whom the *Periphyseon* is "evidently" a source for the heretics, questions this "tacit tolerance":[144] is it a reverence for, or a wish to protect, the reputation of religious authorities from Eriugena's own time who did not condemn him? Or is his name omitted because his status as a theologian was already considerable throughout Christendom, and was associated with a martyr's death?[145] For Lucentini, however, the condemnation of the *Periphyseon* most likely had nothing to do with its connection to the heresy of Amaury, even though both Eriugena and Amaury may have been considered to be

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[142] See Kavanagh, "The Eriugenian Influence in the *Summa Halensis*," for a more complete discussion of how Eriugena's works and ideas suffered from the condemnations.

[143] As an example of this, Bett argues that Eriugena, while a realist, was also (paradoxically) one of the first nominalists, having had an influence on the nominalist tendencies of Heiric of Auxerre and Berengar of Tours. This position is arrived at through a blending of Plato and Aristotle. *Johannes Scotus Erigena: A Study in Mediaeval Philosophy*, 187–188.

[144] Jundt, *Histoire du Panthéisme Populaire*, 23.

[145] Albéric mentions his martyrdom in his chronicle: "De quo Iohanne habetur in historia nova Anglorum, quod martyr estimatus est." *Chronica Albrici Monachi Trium Fontium*, 915. According to William of Malmesbury, Eriugena was stabbed to death by his students: see the second book of his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, online at https://archive.org/details/willelmimalmesb00unkngoog/page/n227/mode/2up, II.122, p. 190.

influenced by Aristotle.[146] The connection with Amaury, Lucentini argues, is established

much later by Henry of Susa, and also Martin of Poland who based his account on Henry's.

Henry, in turn, found this connection in Odo of Chateauroux's writing of approximately

1241, but Lucentini sees no proper basis for it.[147] He points out that Jean Gerson (1363–

1429), a chancellor of the University of Paris, while criticising the heresy of Amaury,

separates his thinking from that of Eriugena. Gerson claims that the connection was a mistake

made by later commentators (possibly Henry and Martin) who misunderstood divine

transcendence and divine immanence in the *Periphyseon*.[148]

Despite the condemnation of the *Periphyseon* and his association with heretical

groups, Eriugena's legacy as a translator and commentator of Greek works, and in particular

of Pseudo-Dionysius, continued into the later medieval period. In his contemporary

chronicle, Albéric des Trois-Fontaines reproduced the papal condemnation of 1225 in full,

and followed with a sympathetic treatment of Eriugena.[149] The author of the *perifisis*, he

comments, is he whom Hugh of Saint Victor (c. 1096–1141), in his *Didascalicon*, described

as "the theologian who wrote about God and the ten categories."[150] Albéric finds it strange

that a work which has been circulating for some three hundred years, and which evaded any

notice in the "recently-celebrated great council" (presumably Lateran IV) should now be

suddenly proscribed. However, he concludes that this condemnation was necessary due to

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[146] Lucentini, "L'Eresia de Amalrico," 191.

[147] Ibid., 190. On the University of Paris's theological condemnations of 1241/4, see Deborah Grice, *Church, Society and University: The Paris Condemnation of 1241/4* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020). Grice discusses the possible influence of Eriugena on some of the condemned theological positions: ibid., 57–61. Henry of Susa's account takes place in the context of the *Periphyseon* having been proscribed by the 'Parisian masters', and among them he credits in particular Bishop Odo of Toulouse (i.e. Chateauroux). See Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 94.

[148] Lucentini, "L'Eresia de Amalrico," 176–179.

[149] Albéric does not mention Eriugena when documenting the case of Amaury.

[150] *Chronica Albrici Monachi Trium Fontium*, 915. Frances Yates comments that the *Didascalicon* of Hugh of Saint Victor (c. 1096–1141) is "saturated" with the influence of Eriugena. "Ramon Lull and John Scotus Eriugena," 36.

"the Albeginses, and other errant theologians" who misunderstood it, and "perverted its meaning to confirm their own heresies."[151] Frances Yates refers to a rumour that the *Periphyseon*, further to its association with the Amauricians, was also a "favourite book" of the Albigenses.[152] The Albigensian crusades were largely abating in 1225, but the extermination of the heresy and its texts continued, and may have contributed to the condemnation.[153]

The Dionysian tradition espoused by Eriugena continued with Robert Grosseteste (c. 1168–1253), the first chancellor of Oxford, who wrote a short tract called *De unica forma omnium* (c. 1226–1229). Grosseteste uses (and sometimes corrects) Eriugena's translation of Pseudo-Dionysius, despite his *Periphyseon* having been banned.[154] The influence of Eriugenian theology is also visible in the writings of Meister Eckhart (AD 1260–1328), whose career, according to Yates, "illustrates how far from clear-cut was the situation about the ban on Scotus."[155] Eckhart served twice as a Master of Theology in the University of Paris; his status as a theologian was thus of the highest order.[156] He had access to the *Periphyseon* (most likely in the *Clavis Physicae*) and possibly Eriugena's Dionysian corpus; like Eriugena, he was also accused of a 'pantheistic' viewpoint.[157] Dermot Moran asserts that

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[151] The full text reads: "*De libello supra dicto testatur Magister Hugo de Sancto Victore in libro Didascalicon, quod Iohannes Scotus scripsit theologiam de decem cathegoriis in Deum. De quo Iohanne habetur in historia nova Anglorum, quod martyr estimatus est; lege supra in anno 878; non est igitur mirum, si libellus hic ante 300 circiter annos editus et magnum concilium nuper celebratum evasit et hoc anno (1225) dampnationem incurrit propter novos Albigenses et falsos theologos, qui verba bene forsitan suo tempore prolata et antiquis simpliciter intellecta, male intelligendo pervertebant et ex eis suam haeresiam confirmabant.*" *Chronica Albrici Monachi Trium Fontium*, 915.

[152] Yates, "Ramon Lull and John Scotus Eriugena," 35.

[153] The fall of Montségur, and the flight of the Cathars south into the Pyrenees, occurred in AD 1244.

[154] *Contra Amaurianos*, IX; see Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 92.

[155] Yates, "Ramon Lull and John Scotus Eriugena," 38.

[156] Cyprian Smith, *The Way of Paradox* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988), 4–9.

[157] The circumstances surrounding the condemnation of some of Eckhart's writings (though not Eckhart himself, since he professed a complete loyalty to the Pope and the doctrines of the Church) as presented by Smith reveal aspects of the process by which such condemnations were applied in the Middle Ages. Pope

his theology offers "a range of doctrines in which Eriugena would be in agreement;" these include the theology of non-being as applied to God, the hiddenness and transcendence of God, and the Neoplatonic idea of creation being a divine self-manifestation.[158]

Albéric's apparent respect for Eriugena and his work was echoed two centuries later by the German cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (AD 1401–1464). Both Cusa and Albéric appear to detach Eriugena's work from the substance of the thirteenth century condemnations. In his *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, Nicholas, passing sentence on the Amaurician heresy, stated that "it happens to men of small intelligence that they fall into error, through not having scrutinized the heights by means of the *docta ignorantia . . .* This is why all such weak eyes must be withdrawn from the intellectual light. They should never be shown such books as those of Saint Denys . . . or the *Perifiseos* of John the Scot."[159] Nicholas of Cusa was one of Eriugena's most fervent disciples in the late medieval period.[160] His theology accords with Eriugena's on many important principles, including the idea that God is the essence of all things, and yet transcends all things. Furthermore, creation was a self-manifestation of God. Nicholas had the benefit of hindsight to see how Neoplatonic, Dionysian theology differed from Aristotelian ontology, and could say: "it is true that God is (absolutely) the form of all

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John XXII, who was himself later condemned for a heresy concerning the Beatific Vision and the Last Judgement, pronounced against Eckhart, though he had not heard his defence, nor read his works (the trial was conducted by Cardinal Jacques Fournier). According to Cyprian Smith, "the legal machinery for assessment and judgement was cumbersome and archaic, centred as it was on a selection of statements or propositions from the accused man's work, quoted without regard to their context." *The Way of Paradox*, 8. The papal bull which condemns certain statements of Eckhart, *In Agro Dominico* (1329) can be found in a translation by Bernard McGinn at https://www.ellopos.net/theology/papal/default.asp? (consulted 18 September 2020).

[158] Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 279. The influence of Eriugena on Eckhart is also explored by Bett, *Johannes Scotus Erigena*, 191.

[159] Nicolas of Cusa, *Opera*, (Basle, 1565), 73: "*Accidit autem hoc viris parvi intellectus, ut in errores incidant, quando altiora sine docta ignorantia perquirunt . . .Unde recte admonent omnes sancti, quod illis debilibus mentis oculis lux intellectualis subtrahatur. Sunt autem illis nequaquam libri sancti Dionysii . . .clavis Philosophiae Theodori, Ioannis Scotigenae Perifiseos . . .et consimiles libri ostendendi.*" See Yates, 37; see also Cappuyns, 251.

[160] For Eriugena's influence on Nicholas's theology, see in particular Werner Beierwaltes, "Cusanus and Eriugena," *Dionysius* 13 (1989): 114–152; see also David Albertson, "Echoes of Eriugena in Renaissance Philosophy," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 401–413.

things . . . but not in such a way that he becomes each thing's individual (or contracted) form."[161] The case of Nicholas demonstrates how the *Periphyseon* not only survived the condemnation of 1225, but continued to exert an influence over significant theologians of the later medieval period.

1.10   Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the condemnation of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* belongs to an age and historical context very different from his own. The reasons for its condemnation by Pope Honorius III are not clear, but following Alexander of Hales, it may have been on account of the creative dimension of Eriugena's primordial causes. From the late thirteenth century the *Periphyseon* became associated with the pantheist and heretical doctrine of the Amauricians, which further damaged its legacy, but concrete connections between Eriugena and Amaury are difficult to establish. Despite the exoneration of his work found in Nicholas of Cusa, Eriugena moves in and out of the shadow of heresy throughout the philosophical history of the medieval and modern periods, and into the twentieth century.

The condemnation of the *Periphyseon* is best understood in its historical context. A proper understanding of his work however, and any judgement on its possible heretical content, must look to the development of his theology in the context of its own time.

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[161] See Moran, "Pantheism in Eriugena and Cusa," 150.

Chapter Two

Carolingian Scholarship: Sources and Methods

The Scholarly Tradition in which the *Periphyseon* was Composed

2.1   Introduction

The thought and works of John Scottus Eriugena are inextricably linked with the intellectual, political and cultural milieu of the Carolingian *renaissance* which saw the consolidation of a European Christendom that was to last for the better part of a thousand years.[1] Charles the Bald (AD 823–877) was perhaps the Carolingian ruler most renowned for this patronage of learning; building on the tradition for scholarship established by Charlemagne (742–814), many scholars gathered at his court to live and work, including the Irish scholars Sedulius Scottus (fl. 840–860), and John Scottus.[2] Scholars were necessary for the education of (above

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[1] The 'Carolingian Renaissance' is not generally regarded as a *renaissance* as such, but the appellation is widespread and testifies to the cultural growth and political changes of the time. Following Charlemagne's adoption of the term *renovatio imperii Romanorum*, Carolingians regarded their time as a *renovatio*. See G.W. Trompf, "The Concept of the Carolingian Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1973): 3–26. For Carolingian self-identity, see Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 1–13. See also McKitterick's *The Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians: 751–987* (London: Routledge, 1983), 16–41. See also Rutger Kramer, *Rethinking Authority in the Carolingian Empire: Ideals and Expectations During the Reign of Louis the Pious (813–828)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

[2] The Irish scholar Dicuil (c. AD 770–827) was active in the court of Louis the Pious (AD 778–840) from 814, and wrote his most famous work in 825, the geography treatise *Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae*. Sedulius Scottus is noteworthy for his contributions to philosophy and scripture. His most influential work was *De Rectoribus Christianis*, a guide for political rulers. An overview of the presence of Irish scholars in Carolingian courts is found in Sven Meeder, "Irish Scholars and Carolingian Learning," in *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe: Identity, Culture and Religion*, ed. Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 179–194. For Dicuil's geography treatise see *Dicuil: Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae*, ed. Ludwig Bieler and James Tierney (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967). See also Ludwig Bieler, "The Text Tradition of Dicuil's *Liber de mensura orbis terrae*," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, 64 (1966): 1–31. For an introduction to Dicuil's writing see Natalia Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book: Geographical Knowledge in the Latin West ca. 400–1000* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 29–30, and also Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 10–13. For a more recent study of Dicuil see Fabio Tutrone, "Lucretius Franco-Hibernicus: Dicuil's Liber de Astronomia and the Carolingian Reception of De Rerum Natura," *Illinois Classical Studies* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 224–252. For Sedulius's political treatise see *Sedulius Scottus, De Rectoribus Christianis 'On Christian Rulers'*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010). See also Michael C. Sloan, *The Harmonious Organ of Sedulius*

all) clergymen, and Eriugena could count many bishops, abbots, teachers and scholars among his pupils, who in turn were responsible for setting up cathedral and monastic schools across the empire.[3] Numerous scholarly disciplines were practiced and taught, among them grammar, logic, poetry, music, and above all, Sacred Scripture; in short, the liberal arts, in various manifestations, were taught as a handmaiden to the most elevated and important form of knowledge: theology.

This chapter considers the intellectual arena of the ninth century in which Eriugena lived and worked. Christian faith and dogma provided the intellectual and moral standard of the *renovatio*, encompassing every field of study, but scholars also considered the logical tradition, and in particular Aristotle, as constituting an important tributary to the river of universal, Christian truth. In the centuries preceding the Carolingian age, the study of logic had introduced important Aristotelian philosophical concepts, including 'substance' and 'essence', to Christian theological debate, important concepts when considering the issue of pantheism. Pantheism presupposes that, when you say God is everything, you mean that the very *substance* of God is also the substance of everything else. 'Substance' as a concept was discussed and elaborated by Carolingian scholars.[4] The most influential figure in the assimilation of the Aristotelian logical tradition was Alcuin of York (c. AD 735–804). Alcuin also played an important role in the promotion of the seven liberal arts: an examination of

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Scottus: Introduction to his Collectaneum in Apostolum and Translation of Its Prologue and Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012).

[3] Eriugena has been sometimes credited with being a 'lone star' scholar, but this idea has lost purchase with more recent studies. Although no personal correspondence survives, he was on close terms with numerous high-ranking and influential ecclesiastical figures, including the leading protagonists of the predestination debate, Hincmar of Reims (AD 806–882) and Pardulus of Laon (d. 857). His Irish contemporaries, including Sedulius Scottus and Martin Hibernienses (819–875), also served as teachers of grammar and, though not philosophers matching Eriugena's output, were important scholars in their own right. For more on his circle of friends, and the influence of contemporary scholars, see John J. Contreni and Pádraig P. Ó Néill, eds., *Glossae Divinae Historiae: The Biblical Glosses of John Scottus Eriugena*, (Firenze: Sismel, 1997), 71–74. Contreni emphasises his collaborative approach to the pursuit of wisdom, cultivating relationships with fellow scholars; see "John Scottus, *Nutritor*, and the Liberal Arts," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 36–41.

[4] For a brief introduction to the term, which will be discussed in more detail in chapters 4 and 5, see https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/substance/

this educational grounding in linguistic and scientific subjects reveals much of the Carolingian intellectual outlook. Finally, the scholarly achievements of this era are enabled and shaped by some important historical developments in the eighth century, and these events will be briefly introduced.

2.2   The Frankish-Papal alliance (AD 751)

Roughly a century before the birth of Charles the Bald, the early Carolingian ruler Charles Martel (AD c. 686–741) established a nascent empire in the early years of his reign through continued military conquest and the formation of alliances which extended the borders of his domain to include Saxony, Thuringia, Bavaria, Burgundy, and Aquitaine.[5] His realm brought a degree of stability to a large area, a necessary precondition to the flourishing of culture.[6] According to Peter Brown, the "combined Frankish aristocracy of Neustria and Austrasia were on the way to becoming the first truly international elite since the Roman senatorial order of the fourth century."[7]

Following Charles Martel's death in AD 741, his son Pippin III (c. 714–768) came to power, and he sought to rightfully replace the Merovingian dynasty as rulers of the empire. However, the last Merovingian king, Childeric III (717–754), was deposed in 751, with the endorsement of Pope Zachary II (r. 741–752). Pippin had recognized that the Pope in Rome could assist him in acquiring the title of King: his blessing would make it acceptable to the

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[5] For a more complete history of the rise of the Pippinid family, see Paul Fouracre, "Frankish Gaul to 814," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History, vol. 2, c.700–c.900*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 85–109. See also Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 410, and Bernard Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 2–5. For a collection of maps and also genealogies of the Pippinid family, see Janet L. Nelson, *King and Emperor: A New Life of Charlemagne* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), xii–xxxv.

[66] For a detailed study of Charles Martel, see Paul Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel* (New York: Routledge, 2000). Although Charles nominated some bishops and abbots, and supported ecclesiastical institutions, this had the primary aim of political influence and effective government; see Yitzhak Hen, *The Royal Patronage of the Liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the Death of Charles the Bald.* Henry Bradshaw Society, Subsidia, 3 (London: Boydell Press, 2001), 38, 43.

[7] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 411.

Frankish bishops and nobility. In 750 he had asked the Pope if it were right to rule without holding the title of King.[8] The Pope assented that it would be best for the proper ruler to also be the King, and sanctioned by this papal authority Pippin became King of the Franks in 751.

Rome also had much to gain from this exchange. The city in the eighth century, with a population of some twenty-five thousand people, was but a shadow of its former glory.[9] Though rich in Christian heritage, politically it had become an outpost of the Byzantine Empire, which itself was increasingly preoccupied with resisting Muslim invasion from the east and south. As a result, Byzantine influence and control was waning: Byzantine gold ceased to circulate, and the general poverty of the city extended to the Popes.[10] Romans were suspected by some in Charlemagne's court of engaging in the slave trade to raise funds.[11] With increasingly distant Greeks to the east, Muslim armies to the south and west, and hostile barbarian tribes to the north, the outlook for the city's occupants was bleak. It was visitors from the north of the Alps who provided a lifeline. Frankish and insular pilgrims, including clergy and nobility, continued to visit the city, and the Carolingian need for the ratification of their rule not only allowed the Pope to exercise his jurisdiction, but also could be turned to his advantage in more material ways.[12] However, it is first necessary to acknowledge the

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[8] See Collins, *Early Mediaeval Europe*, 258. Brown refers to this episode as "the delicate experiment in usurpation" (*The Rise of Western Christendom*, 430). It is recorded in the Royal Frankish Annals, the 'official' history of the Carolingian dynasty; See G.H. Pertz and F. Kurze, eds., *Annales regni Francorum*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum (Hanover: Hahn, 1895), 8–11.See the translation by Dutton in Paul Edward Dutton, ed., *Carolingian Civilisation: A Reader*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 12.

[9] N. Purcell, "The Population of Rome in Late Antiquity: Problems of Classification and Historical Description," in *The Transformations of Vrbs Roma in Late Antiquity,* Supplementary Series 33, ed. W. V. Harris (Portsmouth, Rhode Island: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1999), 135–137.

[10] P. Delogu, "The Papacy, Rome and the Wider World in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries," in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough*, ed. J. M. H. Smith (Brill: Leiden, 2000), 197–200.

[11] In a letter from Pope Hadrian (r. AD 772–795) to Charlemagne in 776, the Pope denies the accusation; H.R. Loyn and John Percival, *The Reign of Charlemagne: Documents on Carolingian Government and Administration* (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), 129.

[12] According to Brown, "a succession of exceptionally gifted popes turned Rome into a theme park of the Christian past." *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 429.

fortunes of the Byzantine Empire at this time, which is key to the formation of the Carolingian Empire.

2.3   The Byzantine Empire in the eighth century

In the face of the advancing Muslim control of the Middle East in the eighth century, the Byzantine Empire was shrinking. Though continuing to see themselves as Roman, and considering the Islamic armies as temporary occupiers of Roman Egypt and Syria, the Byzantines became increasingly isolated from the Latin West. While still a powerful, Roman Empire, and one very much defined by its religion, it became known in the West as the "empire of the Greeks".[13] Peter Brown points to the loss of classical sensibility in Constantinople, however: the statues and imperial buildings of classical Rome struck the ninth-century inhabitants as alien.[14] In its religion, the Byzantine clergy were determined that theology and religious practices would remain uniform, but the orthodox beliefs reflected in traditions of worship came to a head in the Iconoclast controversy.

The defensive demands of the Eastern frontier forced the Byzantines to neglect their Western frontier.[15] While continuing to look after their naval stronghold in Sicily, an effective military presence in the north of Italy could not be maintained, and this area became prey to the Lombards, who captured Ravenna in AD 751. It was precisely for this reason – the shrinking of Byzantine control – that the Popes in Rome sought a new protector, and the Frankish-Papal alliance of 751 came into being. It is the moment in the history of Europe

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[13] For a summary introduction to the changes in the Byzantine Empire prior to and during this period, see John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1–8; and also Averil Cameron, *The Byzantines* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 20–40.

[14] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 386.

[15] On the withdrawal of Byzantine power from Italy, see Michael McCormick, "Byzantium and the West, 700–900," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. McKitterick, 349–380, and also in the same volume T.S. Brown, "Byzantine Italy, c.680–c.876," 320–348.

when the Pope's horizons shift from east to west. Following on Pope Zachary's affirmation of Pippin III's kingship, Pope Stephen II (r. 752–757) crossed the Alps in the winter of 753 in the hope of enlisting Pippin III's help in resisting Aistulf, the King of the Lombards (r. 749–756), who was encroaching on Roman territory and edging closer to the capital. With the withdrawal of Byzantine control, Aistulf evidently felt that there was little standing in his way.[16]

The Pope, newly arrived in Francia, anointed the new King and was assured of Pippin's intervention in Italy. In 756, after two successful campaigns against Aistulf (twice besieging him in Pavia), Pippin returned to Francia with great reward for his efforts, having returned re-conquered lands to the Church in Rome, and subjected the Lombard king to pay an annual tribute to the Franks.[17] Equally significant was the fact that Pippin had himself exercised jurisdiction of a kind in Italy, and gained prestige among his subjects in Francia. His son Charlemagne would be ruler of an empire comprising most of modern Western Europe.

The Frankish-Papal alliance was disliked by the Byzantines from the beginning. At the Second Council of Nicaea in AD 787, Pope Hadrian sent a letter with his envoys that included a glowing reference of Charlemagne, who had "conquered all the West . . . [and] subjected barbarous tribes to the Christian faith."[18] For the Byzantines, this seemed like excessive regard for a barbarian king. Charlemagne in turn was not pleased to have been excluded from the planning for the council. After the Council, the *Acta* were sent to Rome, and onwards to Charlemagne's court in a Latin translation, where it was received with disdain. Since it was not a problem in the West, the Franks regarded the Eastern

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[16] See Paolo Delogu, "Lombard and Carolingian Italy," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. McKitterick, 290–319; see also Collins, *Early Medieval Europe*, 259.

[17] Delogu, "Lombard and Carolingian Italy," 300.

[18] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 405.

preoccupation with images as a trivial matter, and their official response, in the *Libri Carolini* (790), proposed a middle ground, where images were neither smashed nor adored, but were an acceptable part of church furniture.[19] More importantly, the *Libri Carolini* were polemical texts which pitted East against West, not only in the field of theology but also in the matter of ecclesiastical authority. The *Acta* of the Council were disregarded as theologically inaccurate by Charlemagne's advisors. The Byzantines were scolded for not having consulted other Churches (i.e. the West), and Charlemagne convened his own council, at Frankfurt in 790, in which the decrees of the Nicaean Council were rejected.[20] The Franks under Charlemagne saw themselves as living in a "uniquely privileged Christendom", and were legitimate rivals with the empire of the Greeks.[21]

The Carolingian empire owes much of its identity to the history of the Byzantine Empire, with which it came to compare itself, both politically and theologically. The communication between Charlemagne and Constantinople tells us much about the development of Carolingian theology and religious practice. The birth and expansion of the Carolingian empire corresponds with the decline of the Byzantine Empire, a political and religious jurisdiction which was becoming increasingly introspective. The threat of Muslim invasion from the East was their dominant horizon: if God was to help them, they needed to worship in a pleasing and orthodox manner. Their focus on iconoclasm and Muslim invasion,

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[19] More detailed studies are found in Thomas F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); and Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: the sources: an annotated survey*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies 7 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

[20] Rosamond McKitterick and Timothy Blanning, *The Early Middle Ages: Europe 400–1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 189. See also Nelson, *A New Life of Charlemagne*, 302–306. For a more detailed study of the iconoclastic debate, see David Freedberg, "The Structure of Byzantine and European Iconoclasm," in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (University of Birmingham, Centre for Byzantine Studies, 1977), 165–177. For the Council of Frankfurt see also Thomas Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 169–180.

[21] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 406. Hen argues that the promotion of the unity of the Carolingian empire as a *populus Christianus* was advanced further in the reign of Charlemagne's son Louis the Pious (r. 814–840); *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul*, 98.

however, left their western frontier vulnerable, and Italy came under Carolingian control in the late eighth century.

2.4   An emerging Christendom in the West

The Frankish-Papal alliance conferred a religious legitimacy upon the Frankish rulers, and they became interested in all things Roman.[22] This interest had already been inspired by earlier Anglo-Saxon missionaries on the Continent, such as Willibrord (c. 658–739) and Boniface (c. 675–754), who were, in turn, inspired and encouraged by the Popes.[23] The Franks were eager to impose orthodox beliefs and liturgical practices across their realm.[24] Religious orthodoxy went hand-in-hand with political stability: this was one reason why the Frankish rulers were glad to assume the role of promoters of the faith. But of course such a role gave them much more: it gave the Empire itself a deeper historical and religious significance. Not only could their realm now be imaginatively considered a re-birth of the Roman Empire, but by divine appointment it had been conferred with a spiritual and religious heritage such that it could be thought of as a *Holy* Roman Empire.[25]

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[22] See Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, 13, who quotes from a report on the re-anointing of Pippin III by Pope Stephen, taken from the so-called *Clausula de unctione Pippini*, an addendum to a book of miracles by Gregory of Tours. The monarch is described as "most happy, serene, and catholic . . . king of the Franks and patrician of the Romans . . . the most glorious lord . . . by the providence of God and by the intercession of the holy apostles Peter and Paul." See *Sources for the History of Medieval Europe, from the Mid-Eighth to the Mid-Thirteenth Century*, trans. B. Pullan (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), 7–8.

[23] Yitzhak Hen asserts that, since the English Church owed its foundation to papal emissaries, communication with the Pope in important matters of ecclesiastical concern was "a normal course of action" for English missionaries in the early Middle Ages. *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul*, 53.

[24] Hen points out that, although there was a "rhetoric of reform" in Charlemagne's approach to liturgy, neither he nor Louis the Pious succeeded in properly establishing uniform liturgical practices across the empire. While the setting up of schools and *scriptoria* did promote orthodoxy, the era saw the continuation of the liturgical diversity and creativity that had prevailed in Merovingian Gaul; *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul*, 70–89. Around the royal courts meanwhile, liturgy also functioned as the "political machinery of royal propaganda" with respect to Frankish unity and kingship. Ibid., 93.

[25] The term 'Holy Roman Empire' was not used in any official capacity until the thirteenth century. The emergence of the empire is discussed by Peter H. Wilson, *Heart of Europe: A History of the Holy Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2016), 19–31. See also Ildar H. Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c.751–877)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 39–42; 182–188.

The Frankish-Papal alliance of 751 significantly altered the religious and intellectual aims of Carolingian rule.[26] As protectors of the Pope, and as rulers of a Christian empire that had the same Roman inheritance as Byzantium, the Carolingians became champions of the Church, and set about reforming and educating the clergy.[27] They adopted Latin as the language of government, education and law.[28] Charlemagne (c. 747–814), though he himself never learned to write, likened himself to King David in his patronage of the arts: reading, writing, poetry and music enjoyed high esteem in his court.[29]

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[26] For more on the Frankish-papal alliance of AD 751, see Davies, *Europe: A History*, 286–288; see also Janet L. Nelson, "Kingship and Royal Government," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. McKitterick, 422–424.

[27] On the construction of Church identity in this period, see Thomas F.X. Noble, "Carolingian Religion," *Church History* 84, no. 2 (June 2015): 287–307.

[28] Latin was already the vernacular language of many parts of the Frankish realm. However, the Carolingians sought to correct the deterioration of classical Latin, which ultimately lead to a division between the spoken word and written texts. See Rosamund McKitterick, "The Carolingian Renaissance of Culture and Learning," in *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 154.

[29] The Carolingian miniscule script, upon which our modern lowercase script is based, came into being at this time. Derived from both insular and Roman scripts, it promoted legibility across the empire. For good examples see Michelle P. Brown, *A Guide to Western Historical Scripts: from Antiquity to 1600* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). A more complete introduction to Caroline miniscule can be found in Bernhard Bischoff, *Latin Palaeography: Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín and David Ganz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 100–118. It is of interest that in the surviving manuscripts of Martin Hiberniensis (819–875), who may have written a commentary on Martianus Capella, it can be observed that Martin forsook his Irish handwriting to write instead with Carolingian miniscule, demonstrating his long-term commitment to life and education at Laon. See Bernhard Bischoff, "Irische Schreiber im Karolingerreich," in *Jean Scot Érigène et L'Histoire de la Philosophie*, ed. René Roques (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1977), 55. I am grateful to Lea Försterling for her translations from German to English. See also Aidan Breen, "Martinus (Martin) Hiberniensis," in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). The repertoire of Gregorian chant, a Frankish-Roman collaboration, was also largely assembled in Carolingian manuscripts: its promotion reflects the desire of Carolingian rulers to adopt Roman liturgical practices across their domain. Charlemagne's *Admonitio Generalis* of AD 789 reveals that King Pippin, Charlemagne's father, had abolished Gallican chant in favour of Roman chant "for the sake of unanimity with the apostolic see and the peaceful harmony of God's holy church" (ch.80). See the complete English translation of the *Admonitio Generalis* in P. D. King, *Charlemagne: Translated Sources* (Cumbria: P. D. King, 1987), 209–220. For a more detailed history on the development of liturgical chant in the Carolingian period, see David Hiley, *Western Plainchant: a Handbook* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 513–523. For an anthology of Carolingian poetry see Peter Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (London, Duckworth, 1985). See also, by the same author, *Poets and Emperors: Frankish Politics and Carolingian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

2.5   Alcuin and scholarship

The Englishman Alcuin, a close advisor to Charlemagne, came to the Frankish court from the cathedral school at York, first as a visitor, and then settled permanently in AD 793.[30] The school at York, in which Alcuin was pupil-turned-master, was established by the bishop of York, Egbert (d. 766), who had been ordained deacon in Rome, with the assistance of his brother, the Anglo-Saxon king Eadberht (d. 768). On the Continent, the renewed desire for correct Biblical texts, Roman liturgy, and classical education meant that a scholar such as Alcuin could be very useful. Charlemagne invited him to remain at his court; an enthusiastic scholar of ancient literature, Alcuin became an exponent of the liberal arts, and was a significant influence on Carolingian reforms in education.

Alcuin's promotion of scholarship in Charlemagne's court typifies the polymath approach of the Carolingian scholars whom he served: he was well-versed in classical as well as patristic texts, wrote poetry (often eulogizing the Emperor), played a part in reforming the liturgy, and prepared pedagogical texts on logic, rhetoric, grammar and Scripture.[31] Alcuin focuses all aspects of scholarly endeavour to a theological end: the liberal arts and the logic tradition are studied through this lens of Christian faith. In his *Grammatica*, he states: "My dear children: may your youth develop each day along the path of the arts in such a way that an age more mature and a mind more robust will be able to attain the heights of the Holy

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[30] For more detailed studies on Alcuin, see Stephen Allott, *Alcuin of York: His Life and Letters* (Leeds: William Sessions, 1974); and also Douglas Dales, *Alcuin: His Life and Legacy* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2012).

[31] John Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy (480–1150): An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1983), 45–52. See also McKitterick, "The Carolingian Renaissance of Culture and Learning." For Ludwig Bieler, this Carolingian movement had "broadened into Christian humanism": *Ireland: Harbinger of Medieval Europe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 115.

Scriptures. In that way, fully armed, you will become invincible defenders and preachers of the true faith."[32]

The cathedral and monastic schools were served by scholars from near and far, many of whom had studied with Alcuin, or were his acquaintances at court. Their scholarship was strongly connected with pastoral ministry, equipping them with the tools to negotiate theological debate, and promote orthodox Christian belief and practice.[33] A primary feature of Carolingian theology is their reverence for ancient and patristic writings.[34] Scholars from the time of Alcuin to that of Remigius (c. AD 841–908) tended to regard their theological sources as authorities who were not open to contradiction. Principal among these authorities are Holy Scripture and Augustine. It was not within the Carolingian remit to re-think and develop philosophical and theological themes; rather, the context of their scholarly endeavours was like the ambition of their political rulers, an ambition that looked back as much as it looked forward. It was the *re*-establishment of a great empire that drove them, and its greatness, both political and religious, relied heavily on its promotion and conservation of orthodox Christianity. For this reason, the most significant Christian texts, beginning with

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[32] See Avital Wohlman's introduction to Mary Brennan's translation of Eriugena's *De Predestinatione* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), xviii.

[33] The scholars included Alcuin's pupils Fredegisus (d. c. 834) and Candidus (fl. 793–802), the Visigoth Theodulf of Orleans, Peter of Pisa (744–799), the Lombard Paul the Deacon (d. 799), and the Irishmen Dungal (d. 827) and Dicuil.

[34] See *Periphyseon* II, 700–701 (548d), 32: the interpretations of the Holy Fathers are to be acknowledged with piety and veneration. When discussing the meaning of 'darkness over the earth' in Genesis, and observing how Augustine's views differ from St Basil's, Eriugena asserts that "it is not for us to adjudicate between the interpretations of the Holy Fathers, but to acknowledge them with piety and veneration. However, it is not forbidden us to select that which seems after rational consideration to accord the better with the Divine Oracles [Old Testament]." John Marenbon argues that "the distinctively 'scholastic' use of reason on matters of doctrine had not yet replaced an encyclopaedic ideal of learning dominated by authority rather than argument." "Carolingian Thought," in *Aristotelian Logic, Platonism and the Context of Early Medieval Philosophy in the West*, ed. John Marenbon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 171. It must be noted that Scholastic philosophers had a high regard for authority.

Scripture but extending to all great Christian writers of note, were treasured, promoted and discussed.[35]

Included among Carolingian authorities were philosophers and theologians of historical significance such as Jerome (AD c.347–420), Ambrose (AD c.339–c.397) and Boethius (AD c.480–524), but they also looked up to non-Christian sources such as Aristotle and Porphyry (AD c.234–c.305). Where Carolingian scholars such as Eriugena found contradictions, their job was not to deny and discard, but always to reconcile.[36] In philosophy and theology, their thought did not steer towards originality: they could be content in acquiring encyclopaedic knowledge, and often presented their works as re-hashed versions of ancient works.[37] Dermot Moran puts it as follows: "the philosophers of the Carolingian renovation were not like the men of the twelfth century, who saw themselves as dwarfs on the shoulders of giants; rather they were content to remain dwarfs looking up at the height of their ancestors."[38] After centuries of intellectual neglect in the wake of the decline of the Roman Empire, it was necessary to establish the necessary foundations for intellectual

[35] Contreni points to the multiplicity of abilities and source materials available among scholars of the period. Importantly, "neither the Christian heritage nor the antique tradition that Carolingian scholars grappled to understand and to blend were monolithic. Each bore its own internal dissonances and seemed even to contradict each other, thereby making the goal of a unitary culture illusory." Contreni, "The Carolingian Renaissance: Education and Literary Culture," 712, 734.

[36] Eriugena's reverence for his sources, and attempts to synthesise them, produces an interesting solution to the *filioque* problem. While for the Greeks, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (alone), and for the Latins he proceeds from the Father and the Son, Eriugena proposes that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son (*ex patre per filium procedit*). See *Periphyseon* II, 2591–2596 (603a), 107. The example Eriugena gives is that of the cause of brightness from a ray of light. It is fully explored in Book II, 2826–2894 (608b–609d), 114–116. For a useful summary see Rik van Nieuwenhove, *Introduction to Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 60. For the wider controversy, see Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[37] Charlemagne convened the Council of Frankfurt in AD 794 to address the Second Council of Nicaea (787) and the Adoptionist controversy in Spain. The declarations of the council ask: "Why should not statements contained in the writings of the Fathers and confirmed by the tradition of the Church be sufficient for us? The Scripture says that we should not go beyond the limits set by our fathers. Are we wiser than they?" See Philippe Delhaye, *Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), 43. Marenbon argues that Carolingian scholars were "active assimilators [of ancient and patristic ideas], not passive ones"; if not innovators, they were at least able to give new meaning to arguments and motifs which they received from their historical authorities: "Carolingian Thought," 171. Examples of this approach would include the 'Christianising' of the liberal arts, and the application of logic to theological debates.

[38] Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 9.

pursuit – the opening of schools, the promotion of literacy, the building of libraries, the gathering of texts, and the teaching of more fundamental subjects (albeit in small, mostly clerical, circles) – before speculative thought could gather pace. In the later Carolingian period, the tradition of glossary sprang up, often attributed to Eriugena.[39]

2.6 Knowledge and the liberal arts

Knowledge, for scholars of the *renovatio*, was acquired, in the main, through encyclopaedic acquisition: this encyclopaedic method was typified in a popular textbook of the period, Isidore's (c. AD 560–636) *Etymologiae*, and is evident in such works as Hrabanus Maurus's (c. 780–856) *De Universo*, which, in the tradition of Isidore and Pliny the Younger (AD 61– c. 113), draws from authorities in all fields of knowledge.[40] The seeds of scholastic reasoning are to be found in this period but do not reach full maturity until the thirteenth century. The general basis for Carolingian learning, both secular and sacred, was the seven liberal arts, and it was in this field that Eriugena was renowned as a teacher.[41] The arts comprised a widespread, if somewhat loosely-applied, method of education derived from education in the Graeco-Roman world, upon which further expertise knowledge was based (such as poetry or theology).[42] The seven skills – grammar, dialectic (logic), rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry,

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[39] Contreni attributes the development of the commentary tradition to Irish scholars in general. "The Carolingian Renaissance: Education and Literary Culture," 733–734.

[40] Delhaye, *Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 45. See also Marina Smyth, "Isidorean Texts in Medieval Ireland," in *Isidore of Seville and his Reception in the Early Middle Ages: Transforming and Transmitting Knowledge*, ed. Andrew Fear and Jamie Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 111–131.

[41] The seven liberal arts did not constitute the only classification of knowledge. Isidore of Seville subdivided wisdom into three categories: physics, ethics and logic. Physics and logic contained the seven liberal arts between them, while ethics explored the Christian virtues. Isidore's model was also used by Carolingian masters, in accordance with the synthesis of all knowledge derived from the Fathers, but he does not receive the same attention as Martianus Capella.

[42] Marenbon argues that "the scheme of the liberal arts is not, as scholars once believed, a reflection of common educational practice in Late Antiquity. It is, rather, the result of Neoplatonic speculation about knowledge," most fully expounded by Augustine. Drawing on his Neoplatonic influences, Augustine describes in his *De Ordine* how reason ascends to contemplation of divine things through mastery of the liberal arts, and this in turn influenced Alcuin's promotion of them. See Marenbon, "Carolingian Thought," 172.

astronomy, and music – were understood as the necessary basis for the study of literature, effective debate, and the study of the natural world. Theoretically at least, they constituted the necessary preparation for all forms of intellectual endeavour, literary as well as technical, scientific as well as philosophical.

While the study of the arts may have been largely Alcuin's initiative, it complemented the ambitions of Charlemagne who, for both political and religious reasons, was eager to establish an empire-wide orthodox Christian belief and practice. He saw his empire as the successor to ancient Rome, and like his father before him, took an interest in Roman culture and civilisation. The liberal arts were understood to have been important in the education, imagination and literature of Rome's leading scholars and authors. These seven subjects were seen as central to an education befitting an orator or statesman. In time, they had been appropriated by educated Christians.[43] Augustine, while he waited for baptism in Milan, busied himself with the composition of manuals on the arts.[44] The arts were also central to the curriculum in Cassiodorus' (c. AD 485–585) famous sixth-century monastic school.[45]

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[43] Tertullian (c. AD 155–240) may have asked "What has Jerusalem got to do with Athens?", but since the time Christianity had become first the dominant, and subsequently the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christian theology was pushed to come to terms with the Greek philosophy and literature espoused by the education of the privileged classes. This interest in the classical past extended beyond the confines of the old Roman empire. The Venerable Bede (d. c. AD 735) makes reference to a certain churchman who enjoyed pagan literature so much that the Lord visited him in a dream and warned that he was *non Christianus sed Ciceronianus*! D. Hurst, ed., "*In Primam Partem Samuelis*," ii.xiv:2173–79, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 119 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1962), 120.

[44] William Harris Stahl, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, Vol I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 7. For the presence of the liberal arts in Ireland during this period, and in particular the use of figurative language, i.e. metaphor and allegory, see Elizabeth Boyle, "Allegory, the *áes dána* and the Liberal Arts in Medieval Irish Literature," in *Grammatica, Gramadach and Gramadeg: Vernacular Grammar and Grammarians in Medieval Ireland and Wales*, ed. Deborah Hayden and Paul Russell (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2016), 11–34.

[45] Alcuin borrows an idea from the sixth-century *Institutiones* of Cassiodorus which sees a similarity between the seven pillars of Solomon's temple of Wisdom, and the seven liberal arts (see Marenbon, "Carolingian Thought," 172). Augustine had attempted such a synthesis: in his *De Ordine* the faculty of reason, seeking a method to develop itself and grow in the contemplation of the divine, had found such a method in the study of the liberal arts. See *De Ordine* 2.12.35; 2.16.44 in *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Contra Academicos, De Beata Vita, De Ordine*, ed. William M. Green, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 29 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1970), 127; 131. See John J. Contreni, "John Scottus, *Nutritor*, and the Liberal Arts," 31. See also John R. S.

The arts came to be an integral part of Carolingian education; in general terms, Christian education did not divorce itself from classical education, but rather the two traditions were driven together.[46] More than a useful tool, the arts, including language and logic (i.e. grammar and dialectic), were understood by Alcuin and Carolingian scholars to be of divine origin, and paved the way for leading the mind back to God.[47]

The most popular textbook for the liberal arts, among Carolingian scholars, was *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* ('On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury') by the fifth-century North African Martianus Capella, a subscriber to the old ways of polytheistic religion living in the midst of a growing Christianity.[48] This often obscure text – poetical, allegorical, and mythological – was also to be a key text for Eriugena, who built his reputation as a teacher of the liberal arts; his commentary on Capella's text was an important work in his scholarly career, and served as a model for later commentators, in particular that of his

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Mair, "A Manual for Monks: Cassiodorus and the 'ΕΓΚΥΚΛΙΟΣ ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ'," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 31, no. 2 (October 1980): 547–551.

[46] Contreni, "The Carolingian Renaissance: Education and Literary Culture," 728. See also Contreni, "John Scottus, Martin Hiberniensis, The Liberal Arts, and Teaching," in *Insular Latin Studies. Papers on Latin Texts and Manuscripts of the British Isles: 550–1066*, ed. M. Herren (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1981). An obvious example of the fusion of the Christian and classical traditions, in terms of theology and philosophy, is the Christian Neoplatonism of Pseudo-Dionysius which is fundamental to Eriugena's *Periphyseon*.

[47] Elizabeth Boyle points out that there was no distinction between grammar and biblical exegesis in early Irish medieval education. "Allegory, the *áes dána* and the Liberal Arts in Medieval Irish Literature," 13.

[48] The Carolingians were not breaking new ground in adopting Capella's text. Gregory of Tours (AD 538–594), addressing clergymen, referred to Capella as 'our Martianus'. See Stahl, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, 58. Marenbon suggests that Capella's text only gained popularity in the later ninth and tenth centuries. This may explain why some older churchmen were not as receptive to it. See Marenbon, "Carolingian Thought," 173. For a general introduction to the liberal arts in the Middle Ages, see David Wagner, *The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1983). For a reception of the arts in the Carolingian age, including a general introduction, see Stahl, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, vol. 1. A more detailed volume of essays can be found in Sinéad O'Sullivan and Mariken Teeuwen, eds., *Carolingian Scholarship and Martianus Capella: Ninth-Century Commentary Traditions on* De Nuptiis *in Context* (Turnhout, Brepols, 2011). See also Sinéad O'Sullivan, "Martianus Capella and the Carolingians: Some Observations Based on the Glosses on Books I–II from the Oldest Gloss Tradition on *De Nuptiis*," in *Listen, O Isles, unto Me: Studies in Medieval Word and Image in Honour of Jennifer O'Reilly*, ed. Elizabeth Mullins and Diarmuid Scully (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011), 28–38.

student Remigius of Auxerre.[49] The widespread appeal and use of Capella's text in the Carolingian period reveals much of Carolingian intellectual pursuit: a penchant for classical texts, a hunger for imaginative and allegorical works, an interest in ancient, pagan cultures, and an acceptance of the value of texts produced in those same pre-Christian and mythological cultures. Above all, however, their ultimate reverence for the text, as inspired by Alcuin, stems from understanding and placing it within a Christian context. A substitution of the Christian God in place of the mythological gods brings us closer to Eriugena's conceptualisation of the arts.[50] In his commentary on Capella, he follows a "rationalist demythologisation of the allegory" in his quest to distil general scientific knowledge.[51] But the arts themselves constitute an intrinsic path upon which the mind attains wisdom, and belong to the divinely-appointed operation of the soul.[52]

The two pillars on which Carolingian theological debate had come to stand were Scripture and the Church Fathers (in particular, Augustine): any argument which was not based on scriptural and patristic references could be deemed suspect. A tension naturally arose, in particular for bishops, when pre-Christian texts were allowed to assume an authority

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[49] See *Iohannis Scotti Annotationes in Marcianum*, ed. C. E. Lutz (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Medieval Academy, 1939). The origins of this work are complicated, arising as it does from Eriugena's glosses in more than one manuscript: see Contreni, "John Scottus, *Nutritor*, and the Liberal Arts," 52–57. Capella's marriage of the god Mercury to the human Philology can be understood to symbolise the marriage of knowledge with linguistic ability. For the influence of Capella on Eriugena's use of grammar, see Hans Liebeshütz, "The Place of the Martianus Glossae in the Development of Eriugena's Thought," in *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium, Dublin, 14–18 July 1970*, edited by John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973), 49–58. Ilaria Ramelli discusses how themes treated in Eriugena's commentary are also present in his more mature philosophical thought: "Eriugena's Commentary on Martianus in the Framework of his Thought and the Philosophical Debate of his Time," in O'Sullivan and Teeuwen, eds., *Carolingian Scholarship and Martianus Capella: Ninth-Century Commentary Traditions on* De Nuptiis *in Context*, 245–271.

[50] Capella's work overtly manifests 'pantheism' in its other sense, as found in the Pantheon in Rome: that which observes the worship of many and all (mythological) gods in the universe.

[51] Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 44.

[52] *Periphyseon* I, 1875–1896 (486b–486c), 62. The arts are natural to, and inseparable from, the soul. It should be noted, however, that the system of the arts, though promoted by scholars such as Eriugena, did not enjoy equal popularity with bishops and theologians across the empire, including Prudentius of Troyes (d. 861) and Florus of Lyon (d. c.860).

among scholars in cathedral and monastic schools.[53] This tension is apparent in response to Eriugena's treatise on predestination: it was condemned outright by numerous bishops on the grounds of its methodology.[54] Eriugena invoked the authority of reason, and argued from a dialectical standpoint; Prudentius and Florus, however, considered the liberal arts to be human contrivances which drew the investigator away from divine truths. Undeterred, Eriugena upheld his appropriation of the arts in his later work, the *Periphyseon*, and continued to use a dialectical framework for the presentation of his ideas.

2.7   The logical tradition

The growth and practice of philosophical thought in the Carolingian period takes place in the context of Christian faith, the resources of Christian and non-Christian ancient texts available, and contemporary commentaries on those texts.[55] A primary source of inspiration was Book IV of Capella's *De Nuptiis* which advocated for the development of reason and logical thinking. Despite a renewed interest, there is little evidence of the practice of original philosophy *per se*, based on perceptible reality and abstract reasoning, according to the

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[53] Where rhetoric was once chief among the arts in the classical world, and effective oratory the aim of education (and thus rhetoric being the art to which the others acted as servants), it was of little use to life in the monastery. Rhetoric did enjoy some revival, however, particularly among the more influential scholars, due to the practical necessities of having to write formal letters. Contreni notices that stock phrases occur time and again in Carolingian literature as a result of the copying of certain models, in particular the letters of Lupus of Ferrières (c. 805–862). Contreni, "The Carolingian Renaissance: Education and Literary Culture," 736. Conversely, grammar – both linguistic analysis and literary study – was vital to the study of Scripture and patristic texts, culminating in theological and hermeneutic discourse. For a fuller exploration of grammar in the early medieval period, see Catherine Kavanagh, "The Place of the Linguistic Artes [*sic.*] in Eriugena's Theological Method," unpublished PhD thesis (University of Notre Dame, 2002) 1–8, http://search.proquest.com/docview/305525815?pq-origsite=summon.

[54] On the initial reaction to Eriugena's treatise, see Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi, "Eriugena's Intervention in the Debate on Predestination," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 264–266.

[55] See Cristophe Erismann, "Between Greek and Latin: Eriugena on Logic," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 93–95 for an introductory history of the mutual relationship between theology and logic.

modern understanding of the term.[56] Rather, Carolingian scholars sought to reconcile the philosophical thought of scriptural and patristic texts with those from the pre-Christian Greek philosophical tradition. This latter tradition was not perceived, generally speaking, as anti-Christian, but rather simply lacked the fullness of Christian revelation; insofar as it was based on divinely-inspired reason, it was perfectly capable of contributing to the body of universal truth.[57] The achievements of this tradition, particularly with regard to logic and metaphysics, served to elucidate themes of Christian dogma. For Marenbon,

> early medieval philosophy grew out of the fusion of two disciplines which were not themselves philosophy: logic and theology. The tools of logic were summoned to clarify and order Christian dogma; and, far more important, concepts and arguments logical in origin were charged with theological meaning.[58]

Logic, then, as developed by Aristotle, provided not simply the practical tools for argument; rather, these books, and in particular the *Categories*, introduced theories and concepts which themselves provided the most enduring philosophical and theological questions in the early Middle Ages. The fusion of the theological and logical traditions took place through the application of Aristotle's categories of being – and in particular, essence – to both God and nature, and in incorporating the theory of Universals as central to the discussion. Carolingian interest in Aristotelian logic appears in the *Libri Carolini*, Charlemagne's official response to the iconoclast debate which continued to rage in the East.[59]

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[56] Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 111–113. See also John Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre: Logic, Theology and Philosophy in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 4.

[57] The Neoplatonic tradition, as established by Plotinus and Porphyry (c. AD 234–305), is the best example of this: it was originally hostile to Christian philosophy, but many Greek thinkers such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor established a fusion of Neoplatonic thought with Christianity.

[58] Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin*, 4.

[59] See Ann Freeman with Paul Meyvaert, eds., *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum (Libri Carolini)*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Concilia, Bd. 2, Supplementum I (Hannover: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998). See also Marenbon, "Alcuin, the Council of Frankfort and the Beginnings of Medieval Philosophy," in *Aristotelian Logic, Platonism and the Context of Early Medieval Philosophy in the West*, 603.

2.7.1   The *Categoriae Decem*

The revival of the study of logic in the Carolingian period centred on numerous texts, the most important of which was Aristotle's *Categories*: the study of being *qua* being was not Aristotle's own particular invention, but his ten categories of being served as a fundamental part of the history of metaphysical speculation in the West.[60] A Latin summary of the *Categories,* the *Categoriae Decem*, was known in ninth-century scholarly circles; this translation of Aristotle's work, often wrongly attributed to Augustine, became the most widely-read version of the *Categories*, and was to be the fundamental text of the later scholastic metaphysical tradition.[61] The Neoplatonist Porphyry had adapted Aristotelian logic as an important element in the Neoplatonic tradition, establishing Aristotelian influence on early medieval philosophy in the West.[62] Porphyry's *Isagoge*, an introduction to the *Categories*, became a set-text of the Neoplatonic curriculum; however, Aristotle's logic would be re-interpreted in light of a Platonic metaphysical outlook, which has important consequences for Eriugena's use of the categories. Boethius translated the *Isagoge* and also the *De Interpretatione* into Latin to allow for accessible study of Aristotle's (and Porphyry's) logic, and also wrote commentaries on these works.[63] It is Boethius' translations and

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[60] See Vasilis Politis, *Aristotle and the Metaphysics*, 4.

[61] See L. Minio-Paluello, ed., *Categoriae Decem*, Aristoteles Latinus I, 1–5 (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961). See also Marenbon, *Aristotelian Logic, Platonism and the Context of Early Medieval Philosophy in the West*, 4–5. Marenbon refers to Alcuin's school as the pioneers of medieval Aristotelianism: this generation of scholars, in approaching Aristotle, turned first to the encyclopaedic introductions of Cassiodorus and Isidore, and to the *Categoriae Decem*.

[62] See Catherine Kavanagh, "The Eriugenian Influence in the *Summa Halensis*," 128. Although Neoplatonists such as Porphyry adapted the *Categories* to their philosophy, Aristotle's nominalism was at odds with their metaphysical outlook as a whole (since an individual in the Neoplatonic hierarchy of nature derives its being from a higher level of being), and necessarily remained on the periphery.

[63] Marenbon, *Aristotelian Logic, Platonism and the Context of Early Medieval Philosophy in the West*, 4. See also his "Medieval Latin Commentaries, Before c.1150 AD" in this collection. Porphyry's discussion of genera and species leads Boethius to ask questions about whether or not they have a real existence, exposing his own position that he considers them to have an actual existence, whereas elsewhere he had espoused a nominalist position. He dislikes sharp distinctions between Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy, however, and refuses to take sides. See E. K. Rand, *Founders of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard

emphasis on logic in general which allows for it to become an acceptable and necessary part of the Carolingian educational curriculum.

Aristotle's ten categories comprise of one 'substance' category, essence, and nine 'accident' categories which can attach themselves to a particular substance: quantity, quality, relative-to, where, when, being-in-a-position, having, acting, and being-acted-upon.[64] 'Essence' is perhaps the most important and elusive of concepts in Eriugena's metaphysics, and will be a key term in his discussion of the relationship between God and his creation. It also demands to be at the very centre of any medieval discussion on how God can be identified with the created world. Similarly, the position a scholar takes on the question of Universals – generally polarised into two camps, nominalist and realist – will have considerable bearing on his understanding of the being of Nature, in all its hierarchical manifestations.[65] Marenbon's explanation of the connection between the Categories and Universals, and the importance of the outcome, is worth quoting in full:

> The connection between the problem of Universals and that of essence and the Categories is not just an accident of history: it is intrinsic and intellectual. A theory of categories can become the instrument through which a philosopher uses his decision on the status of Universals to shape his entire view of the world. The most fundamental categories of description, such as place, time, quantity and quality, assume the most divergent of functions, as they are treated, on the one hand, as useful, accepted ways of classifying perceptions; or regarded, on the other, as entities eternal and immutable, to be apprehended by the intellect as the result of intensive metaphysical speculation. Of none of Aristotle's Categories is this more true than of the first, essence. When essence is treated as a Universal, separable from, and productive of, those things that are, then every ontological statement becomes charged with a metaphysical weight that can easily be put to the service of theology.[66]

University Press, 1928), 143–146. For more on Boethius's stance on Universals, see Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy*, 36–37.

[64] These ten categories are introduced by Eriugena in Book I of the *Periphyseon* (see *Periphyseon, Liber I*, ed. Jeauneau, 887–915 (463a–c), 32–33). For nuances in the terms that were lost in translation between Aristotle and Eriugena, see Erismann, "Between Greek and Latin: Eriugena on Logic," 99.

[65] The nominalist understanding of Universals considers classes of things as describing similarities between individual members; the members exist first, and the class is merely a contrived concept that groups them together. In the realist approach, the class exists first, and the members take their being from it; the class is thus independent and immaterial, and ultimately more real than its manifestation in individual instances. The realist understanding is not unlike Plato's theory of Forms.

[66] Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin*, 5–6.

This "intrinsic and intellectual" connection was made by Porphyry and Eriugena, and shaped a Neoplatonic worldview that was different from Aristotle's while using the terminology of his categories to describe it.

2.7.2 Alcuin's *De Dialectica* and the Munich Passages

Alcuin's *De Dialectica* (c. 896–897) was an important introduction to the study of logic: it contains no original material, but Alcuin was able to set forth numerous texts and ideas from the canon on logic, and arrange them in a certain order, giving the original texts a certain slant which influenced how they were understood.[67] A good example of this is how language is understood in relation to the categories: are words merely a reflection of how we perceive and think, or do they properly describe the ontological reality of their subjects? Alcuin borrows texts from the most authoritative authors: Boethius, Cassiodorus, and Isidore. Isidore, in his *Etymologiae*, takes the firm position that logic is, essentially, a verbal discipline, and this point of view is referred to in Alcuin's work; Boethius follows Porphyry's idea that words signify, not things, but thoughts.[68] However, in setting forth Isidore's introduction to Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Alcuin manages to steer clear of this verbal and notional emphasis, revealing his own contrary position where words correspond to real things, and this position will be also adopted by Eriugena.[69] Furthermore, Alcuin's discussion of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, a treatise on language and logic, is removed from the general

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[67] Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin*, 30–66. For Alcuin's works, see *Alcuin: Opera omnia*, ed. J. P. Migne, Patrologia Latina (Paris: Venit apud Editorem in Vico Dicto Montrouge, 1863). Alcuin leaned on a tradition going back to Origen who attributed the foundations of true philosophy to Solomon in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Here one finds instruction in moral, natural, and contemplative philosophy. According to Mary Alberi, Alcuin, in his *De Dialectica*, had also claimed a basis for logic in the Gospels and the Song of Songs. Alberi, "'The Better Paths of Wisdom': Alcuin's Monastic 'True Philosophy' and the Worldly Court," *Speculum* 76, no. 4 (October 2001): 898–900.

[68] Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy*, 32.

[69] The exception to the rule for Eriugena is with regard to God, Who can only be described metaphorically: see *Periphyseon* II, ed. Jeauneau, 4–21 (Version II; 523d–524d), 132.

discussion of categories and syllogisms, and placed at the end of the overall work, thereby discouraging the reader from associating language study with logic, and from taking a verbal approach to logic.[70]

In his work on logic, Alcuin focuses extensively on the categories, based on the *Categoriae Decem*. The author of the *Categoriae Decem* describes how the practice of logic, while it does entail a discussion of language, extends beyond it: language describes the things we perceive and the ideas we conceive, but there would be no language without the perception of external reality.[71] Alcuin was thus largely successful in removing language *per se* from the study of logic and metaphysics. He also cements the centrality of the categories by referring to Augustine's *De Trinitate*, in which the author employs the categories to develop an understanding of the Trinity. Alcuin and Augustine state that only the first category, *ousia* or substance, can be correctly applied to God.[72]

A set of writings by Alcuin (the *dicta Albini*) and his student Candidus (the *dicta Candidi*) form part of a collection of otherwise anonymous texts known as the 'Munich Passages.'[73] They demonstrate, among other theological discussions, the application of the Aristotelian Categories to Carolingian theology. One such passage draws heavily on Augustine's *De Trinitate*, and comes to the Neoplatonic ontological conclusion that

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[70] While Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* analyses the various parts of speech and their application to logical statements, his position with regard to the categories is not merely a verbal one: the categories apply to the reality of actual things, and not simply our perception of them.

[71] For more detail on the paraphraser's approach to matters of linguistics, see Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin*, 21.

[72] W. J. Mountain, ed., *Sancti Aurellii Augustini De Trinitate*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, VII.5, 260–261. Eriugena will reject this application of the first category to God, who is *superessential*: *Periphyseon* I, 904–915 (463b–c), 33. See also Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin*, 42–47.

[73] A more detailed description of the authorship of these passages, and the passages themselves, are found in Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin*, 30–43; 152–170. These include arguments on the existence of God (including a portion of text in dialogue format), the nature of the Trinity, an exposition of the Categories of "Augustine", elaborations on the nature of humankind as the image of God, and exercises in syllogistic reasoning. The passages rely heavily on Augustine throughout.

everything which exists derives its being through *participation* in essence and substance.[74]

Both through the liberal arts as expounded by Capella, and also in Carolingian texts on logic, Eriugena was exposed to the Neoplatonic tradition which he would adopt more completely following his translations of Pseudo-Dionysius.

2.7.3 Augustine and Boethius

Apart from the *Categoriae Decem*, the most important text books of the logical tradition in the early medieval West were Augustine's *De Trinitate* and Boethius's *Opuscula Sacra*.[75] Alongside these works, it is most likely that Eriugena was also familiar with the *Isagoge*, and knew at least one of Boethius's commentaries on the Categories. Augustine, in his *De Trinitate*, explored the theme of God's relationship with the categories, and Eriugena makes specific reference to this aspect of the work.[76] Boethius's *Opuscula Sacra* picked up this theme by using the categories to explore the divine Trinity. Thus Boethius's treatise was another key text for the study of dialectic in the early Middle Ages, and contributed to the tradition of discussion around the Aristotelian concepts. The treatment of the subject by Porphyry, Augustine and Boethius was the lens through which Carolingian scholars, including Eriugena, studied it. These authors had differing scopes of vision: Aristotle was not a systematizer to the same extent as those who in later centuries were drawn to his metaphysics. He did not claim that the ten categories amounted to a systematic ordering of all things: this view was pushed forward by Porphyry, in whose hierarchical approach to Nature

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[74] Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin*, 51.

[75] On the *Opuscula Sacra* and Eriugena, see Marenbon, "John Scottus and the *Categoriae Decem*," in *Aristotelian Logic, Platonism and the Context of Early Medieval Philosophy in the West*, 134. E. K. Rand suggests that Eriugena wrote a commentary on the work of Boethius, and that it was Boethius's categories that he had in mind when he wrote the *Periphyseon*. E. K. Rand, *Founders of the Middle Ages*, 150. However, Cappuyns is doubtful of Rand's assertion (*Jean Scot Érigène: Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre, Sa Pensée* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1933), and Marenbon considers a middle ground, that Eriugena may have written a small number of important glosses on the *Opuscula Sacra* which inspired further glosses and commentary by others. See *From the Circle of Alcuin*, 119.

[76] *Periphyseon* I, 903–915 (463b), 33.

the categories comprised ten primary classes of being, into which all genera, species and individuals could be incorporated.[77] Marenbon observes that Eriugena's handling of these sources, interpreted by Porphyry, Augustine and Boethius, reflect and do not resolve the confusions and contradictions surrounding *ousia* which he inherited.

2.7.4 Difficulties with Universals

Does essence belong properly to a subject, or to its class? Few medieval thinkers, if any, can be said to hold a strictly Aristotelian position, nor a strictly Platonic one, on the subject of Universals. Antiquity may have provided them with important metaphysical concepts and questions, but it did not provide clear definitions of those concepts: the terminology itself becomes muddled through the interpretations of so many philosophers, despite the regular "illusion of clarity."[78] Aside from the fact that their original works and theories had become quite distorted through endless re-workings and commentaries, the debate on Universals had never offered satisfactory conclusions which could be widely accepted.

A typical example of this is evident in the work of Boethius. His *Opuscula Sacra* enjoyed a wide diffusion in the ninth century, demonstrating the interest there was in applying logic to doctrinal issues. In his *De Trinitate*, he states that everything owes its being to form.[79] This form is combined with matter to produce an individual thing, except in the case of God, who has no matter: He is pure form. This divine form-without-matter he calls a

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[77] Marenbon, "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'," 80–81. Alcuin and his pupils did not generally gloss or provide commentaries (with the exception of the Bible): they 'lifted' material to compile their own texts. Commentaries on the *Categoriae Decem* and logical glosses are not found in this earlier Carolingian period, but by the late ninth century glossing had become a popular technique. Eriugena's student Heiric of Auxerre produced probably the earliest set of glosses on the *Categoriae decem*.

[78] Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy*, 37.

[79] Boethius, '*De Trinitate*,' in *The Theological Tractates* vol. II, trans. E. K. Rand, H. F. Stewart and S. J. Tester (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 8–10: *forma . . . ex qua esse est*. This edition provides an English translation with the original text.

substantia, and it is its own essence.[80] A man, meanwhile, since he is composed of two separate entities, soul and body, is not his own essence.[81] He is a composite of separate beings. Boethius here dismantles Aristotle's first category as applied to created beings, and goes on to distort it when applied to divine being. In the former case, Boethius claims that man is not his own essence, whereas for Aristotle, *ousia* is defined by the individual being of a perceptible thing (and therefore is necessarily its own *esse*). What applies to man, for Boethius, can be extended to anything in the created world, i.e. we can understand that nothing is entirely itself, since everything is composite. Can it therefore be properly said to have substance? In the case of the divine being, while implying that substance and essence are the same thing in God, he continues to say that God is 'supersubstantial'.[82] The conclusion is that *ousia* cannot be properly predicated of either man or God. The concepts of *ousia*, substance and essence, already clouded in translation, have been further clouded by Boethius's treatment of the topic.

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[80] Boethius, *De Trinitate*, II, 10 (32): *Sed divina substantia sine materia forma est atque ideo unum et est id quod est*. Stewart, Rand and Tester translate *substantia* as 'substance,' *forma* as 'form,' and *esse* as 'essence' but also employ 'essence' for *id quod est* (e.g. II.39), i.e. "that which (it) is".

[81] Ibid., 10 (35–37).

[82] *Ultra substantiam*: see *De Trinitate* IV, 16 (11). Eriugena will follow Boethius in considering God to be 'supersubstantial,' but it will be an evolution of the concept drawing on the consideration of non-being. In *Contra Eutychen* II (see page 84 (37–8) of the same volume), Boethius claims that some substances are universal, and others particular, conferring a 'substantial' reality upon universals: *substantiarum aliae sunt universales, aliae particulares*. The idea of God being *ultra substantiam* was also taken up by Marius Victorinus, who more properly embarks upon the approach of negative theology by insisting that God cannot be included among the things that are: rather, he is above being and non-being. Aristotle's categories can only be applied to perceptible things, and thus cannot be predicated of the divine being. The concept of non-being becomes a central idea for Eriugena, particularly as it is found in abundance among his Greek sources. Alcuin's student Fredegisus also embraced the idea of non-being in his *Epistola de Nihilo et Tenebris*, and his thought found a great deal of resonance in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*. For Marius Victorinus, see P. Henry, P. Hadot, eds., *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum* Latinorum 83 (Salzburg: De Gruyter, 1971). See also Gustavo Piemonte, "L'expression 'quae sunt et quae non sunt': Jean Scot Érigène et Marius Victorinus," in *Jean Scot, Écrivain*, ed. G. H. Allard (Montreal/Paris: Bellarmin/Vrin, 1986), 81–113. For Migne's edition of the *Epistola* of Fredegisus (PL105) see http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/30_10_0834-0834-_Fredegisus_Abbas.html. See also chapter 6 (6.7) of this study.

For Augustine, who took a different view of *ousia*, God can be understood as pure *ousia*, the only example of complete being. All other beings exist by participation in the universal class of being (i.e. *ousia*) and thus it is a short step to considering all things as being of the same *ousia* as God; *ousia* in this sense is understood as the substrate for all being, a *genus generalissimum*.[83] This understanding of *ousia* is also found in *Categoriae Decem*, where the author classified a secondary kind of *ousia* which corresponded to classes and species.[84] This secondary kind follows, rather than precedes, the primary sense of the term. Nonetheless, it is a contrary definition of the term: *ousia*, in this singular, universal sense, is that "outside which nothing may be found or thought of."[85] All created things depend for their existence on the substrate of be-ing that is only fully and properly manifest in God, a substrate that can thus be thought of as synonymous with God. The paraphraser has introduced a non-Aristotelian contradictory sense of *ousia*. If the locus of being is in the individual thing itself, and pertains uniquely to that thing, it is difficult to assert that it can be identical to God. But where the locus of being is always with the divinity, and extends to the particular thing which exists through participation, then it can open a possible pathway to identifying God with the universe.

The secondary understanding of *ousia* as a *genus generalissimum* implies a realist position on the question of Universals, but this inference is not explored in the *Categoriae Decem*. It is Boethius's commentaries on the *Categories* and on Porphyry's *Isagoge* that elaborate on this connection between *ousia* and Universals. Porphyry takes the Platonic view that genera and species are ontologically prior to individuals; Boethius, in his commentary on the *Categories*, takes the Aristotelian view that Universals have no real existence, but as we

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[83] Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin*, 13–14.

[84] L. Minio-Paluello, ed., "*Categoriae Decem*," 134.

[85] *extra quam nec inveniri aliquid nec cogitari potest.* L. Minio-Paluello, ed., "*Categoriae Decem*," 134.

have seen, this position is complicated by his idea that individuals do not own their particular essence, given the composite nature of all created things. In his second commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Boethius, while still denying them a real existence, mentions the usefulness of Universals as a way for the mind to gather individuals into classes or species, and that this class or species is present in all its members.[86]

Following the lack of coherence among ancient and patristic writers, there was no singular understanding of *ousia* or essence in the Carolingian period. Generally speaking, a version which could be considered 'Platonic' understood the being of the conceptual genus (or Form) as more important than the being of an individual manifestation; Aristotle preferred to place the locus of being with the particular individual, and derives a conceptual genus from multiple instances. The attempted reconciliation of the Platonic and Aristotelian senses of the term, as evident in Eriugena, demonstrates the Carolingian inclination to revere all authority, and reconcile conflict where it arises.[87] Any confusion created in this process can be attributed to the reconciler, often conflating sources that had conflicting meanings. Neoplatonists transformed Aristotelian logic from its original meaning so that it could harmonise with their metaphysical view, and also because they considered Aristotle's logic as only applicable to physically perceptible things.[88] Carolingian scholars inherited a metaphysical tradition fraught with multiple understandings and nuances of important concepts which they struggled to reconcile, and Eriugena was no exception. He tried to combine what he knew of the logical tradition with Neoplatonic metaphysics that he had

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[86] See Richard Cross, "Form and Universal in Boethius," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20, no. 3 (2012): 439–458. See also Monika Asztalos, "Boethius as a Transmitter of Greek Logic to the Latin West: The Categories," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 95 (1993): 367–407.

[87] The Carolingians had little access to Plato's writings. Calcidius's translation and commentary on the *Timaeus* was rare, but Plato's ideas of world soul and the pre-existence of souls were present in Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, which the Carolingians found theologically suspect. See I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "Eriugena's Greek Sources," in *The Mind of Eriugena*, ed. J. J. O'Meara and L. Bieler, 146.

[88] Marenbon, "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'," 6.

learnt from the Greeks. Marenbon argues that the result, in Eriugena's case, is vacuous, since John does not use his own hybridised version of *ousia* to posit any solution to epistemological problems.[89]

2.8   Intellectual interaction between East and West

There is little evidence of the development of intellectual influence between East and West (in either direction) during the Carolingian period. In practical terms, travel and commerce had diminished in the West from what it had been during the height of the Roman Empire, and knowledge of Greek was minimal. The contact between East and West was strengthened, however, by the presence of Charlemagne, his armies and his diplomats, in Italy. This is particularly true of Rome where, in the century leading up to Charlemagne's coronation, Byzantine monasticism prevailed, and most popes were originally from the East.[90] The overlapping of cultures would have provided the opportunity for intellectual interaction, but there is no discernible tradition of Byzantine theological influence in the work of Carolingian scholars prior to Eriugena.

Michael McCormick outlines the diplomatic relations between East and West from the time of Charlemagne to that of Charles the Bald, and describes how the ambassadors and their retinues, travelling in both directions, would spend winter with their hosts after the months-long journey.[91] The Byzantine ambassadors enjoyed a prestige in the Frankish courts, which McCormick argues is the context for Eriugena's engagement with their literary

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[89] Marenbon gives a concise presentation of Eriugena's understanding of *ousia* in *Early Medieval Philosophy*, 68–70.

[90] Michael McCormick, "Diplomacy and the Carolingian Encounter with Byzantium down to the Accession of Charles the Bald," in McGinn and Otten, eds., *Eriugena East and West* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 21. McCormick notes that Byzantine monasteries in Rome were in decline during the age of Charles the Bald. He also points out that there was a Frankish convent and monastery in Jerusalem during the Carolingian era. Ibid., 24.

[91] Ibid., 24–34.

culture. Jeauneau points to Eriugena's originality in this enterprise, and suggests he may have learned Greek prior to his Byzantine encounter in the royal court.[92] Charles the Bald and Eriugena evidently share an interest in Byzantine culture, as can be seen in the Byzantine influence in the liturgy at Charles's church at Compiègne, and in some of the poems Eriugena wrote for his patron.[93] But in terms of a concrete intellectual influence, Eriugena appears as occupying a unique role in his incorporation of Eastern theology into his own work. The works of Pseudo-Dionysius, which had been gifted by Byzantine diplomats to Louis the Pious in 827 and translated by Hilduin, abbot of the monastery of St Denis, foster no new tradition of Eastern influence on Western scholars before Eriugena.[94]

2.9   Carolingian theology

The importance of Scripture for patristic writers naturally extends to Carolingian scholars, and was revered more highly than any other authority. The Carolingians had no natural inclination to develop theology further from what they read in their sources: their aim was to rediscover and understand those sources. Carolingian theology is essentially a convergence of exegesis with dogma and philosophy.[95] Exegesis relied on collecting and copying the scriptural commentaries and theological works of patristic authorities. Where theology saw some development was in the varying interpretations of those authorities, and particularly of

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[92] É. Jeauneau, "Jean Scot Érigène et le Grec," in *Études Érigéniennes* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987), 91–93, 123–132.

[93] Ibid., 99.

[94] McCormick notes that, following the gift of the Dionysian corpus, Dionysius appears in Greek hagiography, reflecting the attempt of Hilduin and the royal court to establish the founder of the monastery of St Denis as the disciple mentioned in Acts 17. The episode demonstrates at attempt to foster common ecclesiastical ground between East and West. "Carolingian Encounter with Byzantium," 32.

[95] The centrality of exegesis to Carolingian philosophy is highlighted by Catherine Kavanagh: "that the fundamental activity of any thinker, exegete or philosopher consists in the interpretation of [mostly Scriptural] texts is a commonplace of Carolingian intellectual culture as a whole . . . the ultimate goal of any intellectual endeavour is the interpretation of Scripture." "Eriugena the Exegete: Hermeneutics in a Biblical Context," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 332.

Augustine. The difference in interpretations led to hotly-contested debates when the Carolingians were forced to deal with numerous theological controversies which arose in the period. These include the Adoptionist controversy in Spain, the debate on divine predestination instigated by the monk Gottschalk of Orbais (AD 808–867), and the discussion on the iconoclast controversy in the Byzantine Empire.[96]

The iconoclast debate was important to Charlemagne and his scholars, not only from a political point of view, but also because the Carolingians thought it fitting to have a theological opinion on the matter. The Christological debates of former centuries in the East had been replaced by a crisis over the use of icons in popular worship, a topic which dominated religious debate throughout the empire.[97] This debate had no parallel for the Franks, and highlighted the growing rift in religious practice between East and West, which continued into the thirteenth century. The reception of Eriugena's work in the West was overshadowed by this rift, given his association with Greek theology.

The use of icons had grown from the ground up; through the seventh and eighth centuries Byzantine Christians increasingly associated a saint's presence with his or her image.[98] As veneration around icons grew, they moved from homes and shrines into churches to become a focus for liturgical devotion. The icons had evolved from being aids to prayer to being the locus for a saint's presence on earth, and a channel for grace. Eventually their domination of eastern religious practice was challenged by a succession of emperors (the

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[96] For a fuller exploration of Adoptionism, a Christological debate in which Elipandus of Toledo (AD 717–c. 808) claimed Jesus to be an adopted son of God, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600–1300)* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 29–52.

[97] For an extensive study of Byzantine iconoclasm, see Hans Belting's *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993). The most comprehensive study of the Carolingian response to Byzantine iconoclasm is *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) by Thomas F.X. Noble, who provides a detailed account of the *Libri Carolini* (180–206).

[98] For a history on the evolution of panel painting from pre-Christian art to Christian icons, see Thomas F. Mathews and Norman E. Muller, *The Dawn of Christian Art in Panel Paintings and Icons* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2016). This detailed study on religion (both pagan and Christian) and image production in late antiquity provides a useful context for the subsequent iconoclast controversies.

Iconoclasts or 'icon-smashers') who opposed the veneration of images.[99] Dubious of their

supposed holiness, and uncomfortable with the similarities it bore to pagan idol-worship,

their measures were often severe, sometimes banning images altogether, which was

consistent with Jewish and Islamic approaches to religious art. Far from being a separate

issue to Islamic expansion, the iconoclasm controversies were seen as central to the fate of

the empire. When 'Roman' armies suffered a defeat at the hands of Islamic armies, the

Iconoclasts interpreted this as God meting out punishment for the practice of venerating

idols.[100] Orthodox worship, which pleased God, was paramount to the health and safety of

the empire. The veneration of icons, in the opinion of the Iconoclasts, could be the ruin of the

empire.

There were numerous councils held to resolve the issue, in which the Iconoclasts

often held sway, but the practice of the Iconophiles was deep-rooted.[101] Icons gave a sense of

the immediate presence of Christ, or Mary, or the saints; they offered assistance and

protection in their ordinary, daily lives. Where icons spoke to their hearts, the Iconoclasts

merely argued with their heads. The Byzantine emperors did not think to consult

Charlemagne on the issue, removed as he was geographically, politically, and even from a

religious point of view. Charlemagne nevertheless took his opportunity to proclaim upon the

Second Council of Nicaea, and criticise the Byzantines for not being included in the debate.

Scholars and clergymen at his court were "pleasantly disappointed" at the theologically

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[99] See Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, chapter 2.

[100] The classical past was a distant memory for eighth century Byzantines, but they still considered themselves Roman. See Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 383–404.

[101] Early in the eighth century, Pope Gregory III (r. 731–741) held two synods in Rome condemning the strict measures of the Iconoclast emperor Leo III (r. 717–741). Leo's response was to confiscate papal estates in Sicily and Calabria. Further councils in the East attempted to resolve the matter, in AD 754, 781, and 787. The latter, known as the Second Council of Nicaea, was that to which Charlemagne responded with his *Libri Carolini*. See Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, chapters 2 and 3, especially 54–56.

unreliable *Acta* of the council.[102] Regarding themselves as more reliably and authentically Christian, the Latin scholars proclaimed the issue as trivial, promoting a middle ground where icons, as aids to worship, were basically neutral.[103]

Carolingian scholars and theologians sought to establish a firm history of continuation with the past. Theodulf undermined the Greek position by stating that theirs could only be properly called a 'Council' if it *avoided* new theological terminology; recourse to Patristic teachings was sufficient for a complete theological tableau, and the development of new dogma was to be assumed as both unnecessary and dangerous.[104] Patristic writings were at the heart of Carolingian religious tradition: Carolingians sought to emphasise the authority of the Latin (Western) Church Fathers, and considered themselves responsible for passing on this heritage. They thus developed a tradition to rival that of the East; for Willemien Otten, the creation of tradition (or rather, the creation of the Carolingian place in tradition) is one of the significant achievements of the age.[105] Thomas Noble remarks how the Carolingians often regarded themselves as heirs to the Hebrews, the apostles and the Romans, and in order to deny the Byzantines the same inheritance, the *Libri Carolini* are "stridently anti-

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[102] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 405. See also Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 170–171, for the general Frankish disregard of the Second Council of Nicaea; one Carolingian commentator refers to it as a "pseudosynod." *Ibid.*, 170.

[103] See "The Iconodule Controversy in Francia," trans. C. Davis-Weyer in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilisation: A Reader*, 2nd edition, 95–98. The Carolingians regard an image as a mere imperfect representation of what it depicts; the essence of a saint is not located in his or her image, which can be regarded as false.

[104] Willemien Otten, "Carolingian Theology," in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. G. R. Evans (Cambridge: Blackwell Press, 2001), 70–76.

[105] Otten, "Carolingian Theology," 71, 65–66: "[T]his controversy was ultimately about much more than images. It was ultimately about the authoritative view of the Fathers, as the Carolingians strove to replace the Byzantine church as the natural heirs of the orthodox faith." Peter Brown also emphasises how the imagination of the Western Christians in the eighth century in a sense 'created' the Church Fathers, of which they were proud: Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and, in particular, Augustine. In the East they created their own Fathers, the Cappadocian Fathers. The iconoclasm debate revealed the difference in these diverging traditions, in their Christian imaginations, their attitudes towards saints, and towards Christian art. There was a sense of pride in the Fathers of one's own ('true') tradition; the writings of the Fathers weren't considered to be a thing of the past, but rather constituted a living, working body of truth. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 26.

Byzantine."[106] Catholic orthodoxy was important for unity within the Carolingian empire, but was also paramount to achieve an empire worthy of challenging, or even subsuming, the empire in the East. It also meant the approval of, and unity with, the Pope. For theologians, it meant the strictest conformity with the teachings of the Church Fathers. This conformity became the standard Carolingian method of theological debate, as established by Alcuin: any argument amounted to "a dossier of patristic references."[107] Alcuin, in his tackling of the Adoptionist controversy in Spain, was most keen was to align himself with the Pope.[108] Backed by papal authority, he subsequently challenged Elipandus, Archbishop of Toledo, for spreading Adoptionist views. However, Alcuin also firmly believed in the liberal arts as a firm foundation for all disciplines. According to Otten, "his strength was the teaching of the liberal arts, which he saw as foundational for any sound teaching of the orthodox faith . . . his arguments throughout unfold as a simple case of logic."[109]

The importance of the arts in theology are also evident in Eriugena's input to the debate on predestination.[110] While his treatise, commissioned by Archbishop Hincmar of Reims (r. 845–882), is replete with patristic references, he also laid a heavy emphasis on the arts, and in particular, dialectic. The work boldly opens with his assertion that true philosophy and true religion are the same thing; only through the philosophical activity of the mind can salvation be achieved.[111] Eriugena went further than any other Carolingian scholar

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[106] Thomas F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 8; see also *ibid*. 208–212.

[107] Otten, "Carolingian Theology," 66.

[108] Pope Hadrian I (r. 772–795).

[109] Otten, "Carolingian Theology," 68.

[110] For an extensive study on this controversy, see Matthew Bryan Gillis, *Heresy and Dissent in the Carolingian Empire: The Case of Gottschalk of Orbais* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[111] *Nemo intrat in caelum nisi per philosophiam.* Eriugena, *De Diuina Predestinatione Liber*, ed. Goulven Madec, CCCM 50 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978), 1.1, 5.

in fusing together theology and rationality; this fusion is one of the significant developments of Carolingian theology, though it was not universally accepted in its own time.

Contrary to the double-predestination argument of the monk Gottschalk of Orbais, Eriugena argued that there was only a single predestination, to heaven, but that not everyone would succeed in getting there, through no fault of God's. This work was rejected by bishops on both sides of the argument. Even Hincmar, who had commissioned it, went on to denounce it. The problem they had wasn't with his theological conclusions, but rather his style of argument. Instead of being limited to the customary collection of Scripture quotations and patristic references, Eriugena employed a dialectical style derived from his study of the liberal arts: he sought to arrive at the truth of the matter by following the necessities of reason. Bishop Prudentius of Troyes denounced Eriugena's manner as arrogant, and his argumentative approach as sophistry. Florus of Lyons summed up his arguments as "Irish porridge."[112] Eriugena's work was condemned at the council of Valence in AD 855, and again at Langres in 859. He made no further contribution to the predestination debate, appears to have escaped ecclesiastical punishment, and continued in the employ of Charles the Bald.

Eriugena was also connected with a ninth-century debate on the nature of the Eucharist, which was not so much a controversy as a difference of opinion between two successive abbots at the monastery of Corbie, Ratramnus (d. 868) and Radbertus (785–865). Both men felt that a correct understanding of the Eucharist was essential to the correct practice of faith; by the eighth century, the Eucharist had become the supreme sacrament of the Church. Radbertus (canonized in 1073 by Pope Gregory VII) argued for the presence of

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[112] *pultes scottorum.* See Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Érigène*, 122. Florus describes Eriugena as a garrulous and boastful Irishman who prioritised philosophy over Scripture: see *Flori diaconi, sub nomine ecclesiae Lugdunensis, adversus Joannis Scoti Eriugenae erroneas definitions liber*, PL 119 (Paris: 1852), 101b–102b. The full text of this edition is available online: http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0790-0860,_Florus_Lugdunensis_Diaconus,_Adversus_Joannis_Scoti_Erigenae_Erroneas_Definitiones_Liber,_MLT.pdf, consulted 7 June 2022.

the real, historical body of Jesus in the Eucharist; Charles the Bald commissioned a response from Ratramnus, who expressed a metaphorical presence. Eriugena's contribution has been lost; however, according to Hincmar, he argued that the sacrament was not the true body and the true blood of the Lord, but only a memorial of his body and blood.[113] In Eriugena's ontology, worked out more fully in the *Periphyseon*, physical objects signify incorporeal or spiritual realities.[114] Seen in this light, the Eucharist would not be a mere symbol, but a physical sign of a real presence, which might bring his position closer to a central point between the two protagonists. The matter came to a head some two hundred years later, when a council convened at Vercelli in 1050 sought to counter the sacramental doctrine of Berengar of Tours (c. AD 999–1088) who had denied a Real Presence in the Eucharist. Ratramnus' work, mistakenly attributed to Eriugena, was condemned.[115]

2.10   Eriugena's later works

The hostile reception of Eriugena's treatise on predestination did not result in the withdrawal of royal patronage, and he subsequently translated the works of Pseudo-Dionysius.[116] The introduction to Eriugena's translation reveals the importance of Greek to both him and Charles, and also emphasises Dionysius's identity as a biblical figure, having witnessed the

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[113] See Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology*, 96.

[114] See, for example, *Periphyseon* V, 228–230 (866a), 10: *Nihil enim uisibilium rerum corporaliumque est, ut arbitror, quod non incorporale quid et intelligibile significet.*

[115] The case of Ratramnus is fully explored in Celia Chazelle, "The Eucharist in Early Medieval Europe," in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 205–249. See also J. N. Bakhuizen Van Den Brink, ed., *Ratramnus, De corpore et sanguine Domini: texte original et notice bibliographique*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam and London: North-Holland, 1974).

[116] Much of Eriugena's poetry is dedicated to his patron, and such poems are characterised by Greek inscriptions. One such poem, lauding the emperor, is written entirely in Greek. See *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Carmina*, ed. Michael W. Herren, Scriptores Latinae Hiberniae vol. XII (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1993), 102. Janet Nelson describes Charles as a "philosopher-king" who had ideas of emulating Theodosius or Justinian: *Charles the Bald* (London: Longman, 1992), 17.

solar eclipse on the day of Christ's crucifixion.[117] Eriugena thus plays an important role in introducing Dionysian Neoplatonism to the West.[118] Eriugena's commentary on the Gospel of John, and his Homily on the prologue of this Gospel, reveal the Neoplatonic outlook which he had absorbed from Dionysius. His poetry – and he is a considerable poet – also serves as a vehicle for his theology. But his largest and most significant work, the *Periphyseon*, reveals his most original thought as a theologian.

2.11 Eriugena's influence prior to the condemnation[119]

Eriugena had a significant influence on his own students and fellow Carolingian scholars, including Heiric of Auxerre, Winibertus, Wulfad, Remigius, and the scholars of Saint Gall, but the century following his death saw few advances in learning.[120] The surviving manuscripts of the *Periphyseon* show contemporary glossary and commentary from anonymous sources (and also from Eriugena himself), demonstrating a degree of engagement

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[117] *Opera omnia Joannis Scoti*, ed. H. J. Floss. PL 122: 1031–1036; see a translation of this introduction in Paul Rorem, *Eriugena's Commentary on the Dionysian Celestial Hierarchy* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), 174–177. The poem beginning *Lumine sidereo* (see Herren, *Carmina*, 110) also describes Dionysius's witnessing of the eclipse, his discipleship of Hierotheus, and his blessing by St Paul. See also É. Jeauneau, "Jean Scot Érigène et le Grec," 99: Jeauneau describes how Charles the Bald adopted a 'Byzantine' style of imperial rule in AD 876, which included a pompous attendance at church on Sundays dressed in a full-length dalmatic, and the renaming of a certain town 'Carlopolis'. Yitzhak Hen remarks on some 'experimental' Byzantine elements in the Frankish liturgy during Charles's reign: *The Royal Patronage of the Liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the Death of Charles the Bald*, 138–140.

[118] The importance of Pseudo-Dionysius to the Franks was due to his being mis-identified as St Denis, the first bishop of Paris who was martyred in the third century. See section 5.3.

[119] This study provides the only a brief sketch of Eriugena's influence in the medieval period prior to his condemnation in 1225. For a more detailed exploration see É. Jeauneau, "Le renouveau érigénien du XIIe siècle," in *Eriugena redivivus: zur Wirkungsgeschichte seines Denkens im Mittelalter und im Übergang zur Neuzeit: Vorträge des V. Internationalen Eriugena-Colloquiums, Werner-Reimers-Stiftung Bad Homburg, 26–30 August 1985*, ed. Werner Beierwaltes (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987), and by the same author, "Les écoles de Laon et d'Auxerre au IXe siècle," in *Études Érigéniennes*, 57–84. See also John J. O'Meara, "Eriugena's Immediate Influence," in Werner Beierwaltes, ed., *Eriugena redivivus: zur Wirkungsgeschichte seines Denkens im Mittelalter und im Übergang zur Neuzeit: Vorträge des V. Internationalen Eriugena-Colloquiums, Werner-Reimers-Stiftung Bad Homburg, 26–30 August 1985* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987), 13–25.

[120] See Jeauneau, "Influences érigéniennes dans une homélie d'Héric d'Auxerre," in *The Mind of Eriugena*, edited by John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler, 114–124, for Eriugena's influence on the works of Heiric of Auxerre.

with his writing from fellow Carolingian scholars.[121] The light of Carolingian scholarship waned, however, with the disintegration of the empire, and there is little evidence of an Eriugenian tradition being developed. Moran considers the difficulty of Eriugena's philosophical system as being an important cause for its lack of influence.[122] The case of Berengar of Tours reveals that his name was not forgotten, however. There is evidence of Eriugena's influence over eleventh century thinkers including Gilbert de la Poirée, Fulbert of Chartres, and Abelard, and there is likely an Eriugenian influence in the works of Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), particularly with regard to the philosophy of being and non-being, and the non-being of evil.[123] Paolo Lucentini argues for a significant influence of Eriugena among the masters at Chartres, Laon and St Victor in the twelfth century, based on similarities in theologies influenced by Christian Platonisms.[124] Jeauneau, however, urges a more cautionary approach: while there may be an overlapping of ideas, and an indirect Eriugenian influence, it is not sufficient to confirm an Eriugenian tradition as such at the school in Chartres.[125]

The twelfth-century 'awakening' saw a renewed interest in Eriugena, and his works were read in this pre-scholastic era by, among others, Alain of Lille (c. 1128–c.1202),[126]

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[121] See John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 198–212, for Eriugena's influence on his own time, including a discussion on the scribes who collaborated on revisions of the *Periphyseon*.

[122] Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 269–272. Moran argues that the lack of understanding for his theology led the *Periphyseon* to be erroneously catalogued as a commentary of the *Categories*, and that his philosophy transcended the Latin tradition of his peers to the extent that most could not understand it. Ibid., 92.

[123] Eriugena, in his *De Diuina Predestinatione Liber* (6.3, 7.5), derived his doctrine of the non-being of evil from Augustine (see Chapter 6).

[124] Paolo Lucentini, *Platonismo Medievale: Contributi per la Storia dell'Eriugenismo* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1980), 49–56. This opinion is also found in Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, 29. Chenu opines that the Chartrean interest in the universe inspired an interest in Eriugena.

[125] E. Jeauneau, "Le renouveau érigénien du XIIe siècle," in *Eriugena redivivus*, ed. Werner Beierwaltes, 26–46.

[126] See Cristophe Erismann, "Alain de Lille, la métapyhsique érigénienne et la pluralité de formes," in *Alain de Lille, le docteur universel: Philosophie, théologie, et literature au XIIe siècle: Actes du XIe Colloque*

Suger of Saint-Denis (c. 1081–1151),[127] and William of Malmesbury (c. 1095–1143) who edited the *Periphyseon*.[128] The reception of the *Periphyseon* often accompanied the reading of Eriugena's translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*: the Latin text of the *Corpus* circulating at the University of Paris in the early thirteenth century (and used by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas) was accompanied by excerpts from the *Periphyseon*, although originally they were thought to be a commentary by Maximus the Confessor.[129] The Dionysian tradition was studied in earnest at the Abbey of Saint Victor in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, inspired by Abbot Hugh, who also admired Eriugena as an authority in theology and metaphysics.[130] Eriugena's influence is evident in a commentary on the Dionysian corpus written in 1233 by a theology master from Saint Victor, Thomas Gallus.[131] The supposed

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international de la Société internationale pour l'étude de la philosophie médiévale, Paris, 23–25 Octobre 2003, Rencontres de Philosophie Médiévale 12, ed. Alain Golonnier, Jean-Luc Solère, and Anca Vasiliu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 19–46.

[127] Erwin Panofsky suggests that the metaphysics of light of Dionysius and Eriugena may have influenced Gothic architecture, and in particular the rose window which Suger incorporated into a new abbey church at St Denis. See Introduction to Gerda Panofsky-Soergel, ed., *Abbot Suger: On the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Art Treasures*, trans. Erwin Panofsky, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 36–37; this viewpoint is corroborated by Werner Beierwaltes in "*Negati affirmatio*: Welt als Metapher: zur Grundlegung einer mittelalterlichen Ästhetik durch Johannes Scotus Eriugena," in *Eriugena: Grundzüge seines Denkens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994), 115–118.

[128] William of Malmesbury considered Eriugena's preoccupation with Greek philosophy as suggestive of heresy. See Willelmus Malmesberensis, "*Epistola ad Petrum*: Guillaume de Malmesbury, premier éditeur anglais du *Periphyseon*," in Édouard Jeauneau, *Études Érigéniennes* (Paris, 1987), 511–512. See also Kijewska, "Eriugena's influence on the 12th Century," in Guiu, *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, 349, and Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Érigène: Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*, 257. For a more general introduction to the twelfth century, see *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, edited by Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable with Carol D. Lanham, Medieval Academy of America (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

[129] Agnieszka Kijewska, "Eriugena's Influence on the 12th Century," 357.

[130] Ibid., 363.

[131] This commentary was attributed to Eriugena by Heinrich Floss (in *Patrologia Latina* 122). See James McEvoy, "John Scottus Eriugena and Thomas Gallus, Commentators on the *Mystical Theology*," in *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and his Time: Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Maynooth and Dublin August 16-20, 2000*, 183–184. The case of Gallus's commentary reveals that the *Periphyseon* continued to be read in the years following the condemnation.

author of *Contra Amaurianos* Garnier of Rochefort, similarly, encouraged interest in Eriugena among his fellow Cistercians at Cîteaux.[132]

Despite an association with the Eucharistic controversy of the eleventh century, and falling foul of ecclesiastical censure in his own time, the twelfth century sees a widespread engagement with Eriugena, though perhaps the fullness of his philosophical vision was not widely appreciated. His influence is also detected in the *Liber de Causis*, along with the writings of Proclus (AD c.412–485), Avicenna (AD 980–1037) and Aristotle.[133] His reputation, however, was to take a dramatic downward turn with decree of Pope Honorius in 1225.

2.12   Conclusion

This brief overview of the historical, philosophical, theological, and political context of the Carolingian *renovatio* in which Eriugena lived and worked provides a context for his works which is very different to the thirteenth century in which his *Periphyseon* was condemned. It is noteworthy that his contribution to the controversy on predestination, while rejected by bishops on both sides of the debate, did not lead to any official censorship, and Eriugena continued to work at the royal court under the patronage of Charles the Bald. His use of dialectic in theological methodology, and his emphasis on the authority of reason, was perhaps ahead of its time. The *Periphyseon* attracted less attention among Carolingian bishops and theologians, and was not proscribed by them (that we know of); however, his *magnum opus* enters unchartered waters for Carolingian theology, being based largely on the Neoplatonic philosophy which characterises the theology of Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius

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[132] Kijewska, "Eriugena's Influence on the 12th Century," 373. See also Marie-Dominique Chenu, "Érigène à Cîteaux: experience intérieure et spiritualité objective," in *La philosophie et ses problems: Recueil d'études de doctrine et d'histoire*, ed. Régis Jolivet (Lyon: Emmanuel Vitte, 1960), 100–101.

[133] For examples, see Kavanagh, "The Eriugenian Influence in the *Summa Halensis*," 128–129.

and Maximus the Confessor.[134] His translations of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius expanded his theological horizons and necessitated a development in theological language for the Latin West. This was not a smooth path, being prone to conceptual difficulties and misunderstandings that pushed the boundaries of Western theology in his own time, and also in the thirteenth century. To Eriugena's *magnum opus* we must turn, to examine its principal themes, and to see where the pitfalls of pantheism might lie.

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[134] See also Elizabeth Boyle, "Neoplatonic Thought in Medieval Ireland: The Evidence of *Scela na Esergi*," *Medium Aevum* 78 (2009): 216–230.

Chapter Three

The *Periphyseon* and That which Creates

Eriugena's Understanding of God and the Primordial Causes

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Overview of the *Periphyseon*

The thirteenth-century condemnation of Eriugena's *magnum opus* did not provide the particular details of where exactly its heresy was located. This chapter, and that which follows, will examine the principal theological themes of this work; in doing so, they will attempt to identify some of the areas in which the author might be charged with identifying God with the world, whether in general ideas or in particular quotes. They thus comprise a survey for the would-be prosecutor of Eriugena's philosophical and theological outlook. His theological horizons are shaped by his Carolingian context, but he occupies a unique position in the West through his appropriation of Greek influences. In particular, his adoption of Neoplatonic metaphysical principles and the logic tradition determine his views on how the world is created.

The *Periphyseon*, also known by its Latin name, the *De Divisione Naturae*, dates from approximately the mid to late 860s,[1] after the Irish scholar had considerably widened his philosophical scope through his translations of the Greek Fathers Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor and Gregory of Nyssa.[2] The writings of the Greeks are more than

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[1] Medieval texts often defy attempts to locate a final edition or even a single author, and Eriugena's *Periphyseon* is no exception: the manuscript evidence shows a work that evolved, guided by the author, but was also glossed and commented upon by readers and copyists, including *frater* Wulfad, to whom the book is dedicated. On the evolution of the text, see Édouard Jeauneau, "Le *Periphyseon*: Son titre, son plan, ses remaniements," *Les Études philosophiques* 104, no. 1 (2013): 13–28. The original Greek name was translated to Latin for the early printed version by Thomas Gale in the seventeenth century. See I.P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Title of Eriugena's *Periphyseōn*," *Studia Patristica* 3 (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des altchristlichen Literatur 78) (1961): 297–302.

just influential in the genesis of the work: their theological and Neoplatonic outlook form the basis for Eriugena's four-fold division of nature around which the five books are constructed.[3] While the four divisions are Eriugena's 'creation', they constitute a mental construction of observable reality which follows the Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophies inherent in the works that he had translated.[4] The four divisions are: 1. that which is not created and creates; 2. that which is created and creates; 3. that which is created and does not create; and 4. that which is neither created nor creates.[5]

Eriugena points out that his four divisions of nature are aspects of a unity.[6] Werner Beierwaltes clarifies this unity by stating that God is Cause and Principle of all that exists in such a way that does not deny His transcendence: He is excluded from all things which are

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[2] A more detailed discussion on when exactly Eriugena wrote the *Periphyseon* is provided by Sheldon-Williams in his introduction to Book I of his own edition; it is unlikely it was started before AD 864. *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Periphyseon (liber primus)*, ed. I.P.Sheldon-Williams, 7. The works of Pseudo-Dionysius, believed to have been *The Divine Names*, *The Mystic Theology*, *The Heavenly Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and some *Epistles*, were granted to emperor Louis the Pious by the Byzantine emperor Michael the Stammerer in AD 827, and though previously translated, at least in part, by Hilduin, the abbot of St Denis, its lack of quality hindered its dissemination. See Henry Bett, *Johannes Scotus Erigena*, 5–6. While Eriugena's translations of Pseudo-Dionysius and also the *Ambigua* of Maximus were made at the behest of his patron Charles the Bald, his subsequent translations of Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio* (referred to by Eriugena as *De Imagine*), the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* of Maximus, and the *Ancoratus* of Epiphanius required no such request to be made. See Sheldon-Williams, *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Periphyseon Liber Primus*, 4.

[3] Originally Eriugena may have planned to have four books, one for each division of nature: this four-fold structure provides the framework for the work as a whole. His detailed study of the creation account of Genesis in Book IV however, which pertains to the third division of nature, led to the necessity for a fifth book.

[4] The four divisions are not to be understood as Plotinian *hyperstases*.

[5] *Periphyseon* I, ed. Jeauneau, 19–22 (441b), 3–4. In his first stage of Nature-that-proceeds, Maximus the Confessor divides Nature between created and uncreated. For Maximus's influence on Eriugena's schema of procession and return, see E. Jeauneau, "La division des sexes chez Grégoire de Nysse et chez Jean Scot Érigène," in Werner Beierwaltes, ed., *Eriugena: Studien zu seinen Quellen. Vorträge des III Internationalen Eriugena-Colloquiums. Freiburg im Breisgau, 27–30 August 1979* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980), 51–53.

[6] *Periphyseon* II, 109–124 (528b), 7. Bett remarks that "any such attempt to reduce the universe to one, and to conceive of God as all in all, must at least look pantheistic; it must seem at first sight to abolish evil, to imperil personality, and to volatilise the world." *Johannes Scotus Erigena*, 89. Hilary Mooney argues that when Eriugena argues that God is 'all in all,' he means it not in terms of a pantheistic ontology, but as a theophany: *Theophany: The Appearing of God according to the Writings of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, 59. See section 3.2.2 below.

categorically comprehensible.[7] Consisting of two pairs of opposites, the first and fourth

divisions refer to God, and the second and third to created being.[8] God has two divisions,

because he is regarded from two different angles: firstly, as the equivalent of the Neoplatonic

One, He is the uncreated Creator from whom all things emanate; secondly, as One no longer

creating, he is the One to Whom all things return.[9] The third division refers to the natural

world, the physical and sensible universe to which we belong. The second division, that

which is created and also creates, is essentially a Platonic construct which relocates the locus

of being of sensible things to a non-physical realm beyond the sensible world. It implies a

two-tier model of created being in which the third division is relegated to a mere shadow of

the second; being, properly speaking, belongs to the second division, whereas what belongs

to the third division, like the images in Plato's cave, are mere reflections or phantasies,

ephemeral shadows of permanent Platonic forms.[10]

While the Greek theologians opened up new horizons for Eriugena, his feet were

firmly planted in the Latin tradition, and the *Periphyseon* reflects the significant influence of

Augustine and Ambrose, Jerome and Boethius. Ambrose's sympathies with Eastern theology,

for example in considering the Paradise of Genesis to have been a spiritual rather than an

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[7] Beierwaltes, "*Negati affirmatio* or the World as Metaphor: A Foundation for Medieval Aesthetics from the Writings of John Scotus Eriugena," trans. Margaret von Maltzahn, *Dionysius* I (December 1977): 140–141.

[8] See *Periphyseon* I, 22 (441b), 4: by 'not created' in the fourth division, Eriugena does not imply non-existent, but rather existent but not created from outside itself, i.e. God; *quarta nec creat nec creatur*.

[9] For an introduction to Neoplatonism in the works of Eriugena, see Werner Beierwaltes, "Einheit und Dreiheit," in *Eriugena: Grundzüge Seines Denkens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994), 204–265, esp. 204–218; for an English translation see "Unity and Trinity in East and West," trans. Douglas Hedley, in *Eriugena East and West: Papers of the Eighth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 209–231. See also Michael Harrington, "Eriugena and the Neoplatonic Tradition," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 64–92, and F.X. Martin and J.A. Johnson, eds., *From Augustine to Eriugena: Essays on Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honor of John O'Meara* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991).

[10] Eriugena's infrequent and often inaccurate references to Plato demonstrate his unfamiliarity with primary sources; Calcidius's *Commentary on the Timeaus* was the only text he is thought to have had access to. See J. J. O'Meara and L. Bieler, eds., *The Mind of Eriugena* (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973), 1–15.

earthly place,[11] make many of his writings attractive to Eriugena. The *Periphyseon* then, in keeping with the tradition of the theological literature of its time, is saturated with patristic quotations, though goes beyond the Carolingian tradition by referring to authors from both East and West. Eriugena is at all times eager to consolidate these two traditions, which serves to emphasise a singular path to Truth, paved with faith and reason, in which his own system is also validated.

Where the method of Eriugena's *De Praedestinatione* was characterised by his confidence in reason as a supreme authority in theology, and by polemical attacks on those who would disagree with him in their interpretations of Augustine, the theology of the *Periphyseon* is imbued with Dionysian Neoplatonism.[12] This system has a particular articulation of the dogmas of Christian faith, and those who would adhere to both need to exercise flexibility in clothing one with the other. It is in this exercise of patching together a philosophical system with a theological one, in the context of his four divisions of nature, that Eriugena finds the room to exercise some originality as a theologian.

The *Periphyseon* opens with a metaphysical vision – the four divisions of Nature – followed by a discussion on Aristotle's categories: from the perspective of Carolingian theology, to introduce and organise the text within this framework is a bold move.[13] His reading of Scripture from a Neoplatonic perspective might not be welcome from those who would take a less metaphysical approach to exegesis. In Book IV, for example, he

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[11] *Periphyseon* IV, 3935–3937 (833a), 129.

[12] Bett contrasts this mysticism and Platonism with the rationalist approach of later scholastic philosophy; *Johannes Scotus Erigena*, 182.

[13] Hilary Mooney comments on Eriugena's deliberate use of the verb 'to create': this theologically-charged term reflects "his identity as an interpreter of the Bible." *Theophany: The Appearing of God according to the Writings of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, 49–50. She argues that the four-fold division of nature and five modes of being and non-being are important parameters for any discussion of God: "the four divisions of nature, coined as they are in terms of creation, make explicit the basic relationship between the world and God. The world is created by an uncreated God. The world and the *causae primordiales* are first and foremost created realities; that means that they are realities which are from, and are dependent on, a free, fashioning other." Ibid., 52–53.

reaarranges the sequence of events in the creation story so that man is created *before* the natural world. The tradition of allegorical interpretation stretching back to Origen gives him the space to assert his position.[14]

The plurality of (sometimes conflicting) patristic authorities across such a broad scope of study often prevents Eriugena from being too rigid with what he proposes, and a gentler tone than that found in the *De Diuina Predestinatione Liber* prevails. He is not afraid to prefer one source over another, but lest he should stray from the fold of theological orthodoxy, he defers authority to his sources, and judgment to the reader.[15] This approach is enabled by the open-minded, speculative dialogue between Nutritor and Alumnus. Alumnus effectively represents the Latin philosopher, and Nutritor one illuminated by Eastern thought. They never shy from difficult theological questions: Alumnus will challenge Nutritor from different angles on controversial topics, and will often insist that Nutritor repeatedly defend his position until he is satisfied.[16] It might be said that the scholastic tradition owes a great debt to the work of Eriugena: the seeds of *disputatio* are to be found in the dialogue format of the *Periphyseon* which both harkens back to Plato and looks forward to Aquinas. But where

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[14] Eriugena's interpretation of Genesis is introduced in Chapter 4. Since, for Eriugena, a correct application of reason has its roots in divine Wisdom, Scripture and metaphysics derive from, and return to, the same ultimate truths. The marriage of Revelation with an ontological study of Nature through the use of dialectic is therefore not only harmonious, but necessary. For Catherine Kavanagh, "it is somewhat unsympathetic to Eriugena . . . to see the highlighting of the Platonic metaphysical structure which he sees at work throughout Scripture as discarding the particularity of *sacra historia*, to be replaced by generalized impersonal philosophical entities; for Eriugena, this is not a replacement, but a synthesis, which synthetic tendency is characteristic of medieval exegesis as a whole." "Eriugena the Exegete: Hermeneutics in a Biblical Context," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 336. For a more comprehensive survey on Origen's influence on Eriugena, see Édouard Jeauneau, "From Origen's *Periarchon* to Eriugena's *Periphyseon*," in *Eriugena and Creation: Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference on Eriugenian Studies, held in honor of Édouard Jeauneau, Chicago, 9-12 November* 2011, ed. Willemien Otten and Michael I. Allen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 139–182.

[15] In Book IV, in comparing the understanding of paradise of Gregory of Nyssa with the conflicting interpretation of Epiphanius, Nutritor refuses to take one side over the other, such a judgement being beyond his station: *neque enim duos paradises esse, unum quidem corporalem, alterum uero spiritualem negamus, nec affirmamus. Sanctorum autem partum solummodo sententias inter nos conferimus. Qui autem magis sequendi sunt, non est nostrum iudicare*. Book IV, 3191–3196 (816d), 107.

[16] For the influence of the dialogue format on the structure of Eriugena's philosophical arguments, see Elizabeth Kendig, "La forme dialogique dans le *Periphyseon*: Recréer l'esprit," *Les Études philosophiques* 104, no. 1 (2013): 13–28.

Aquinas engages rigourously with both sides of an argument, Eriugena's interlocutors are essentially on the same side, teasing out the correct interpretations of patristic thought between them.[17]

There is abundant material in the dialogue to both support and deny a pantheist interpretation. When shown side by side, it can often be said that Eriugena is inconsistent to the point of contradicting himself. It is a feature of his philosophy that what can initially appear as contradictions are permissible: they amount to contemplations of the same thing but from different angles. Thus God can be said to be the genus of all things, and also not to be the genus of all things.[18] This feature is also evident at the beginning of Book I, in his discussion on being and non-being: a thing can both be and not be at the same time, depending on how it is intellectually apprehended. His claim that divine nature does not contain opposites,[19] and therefore is above both being and non-being,[20] does not quite clarify the debate, both sides of which will here be presented according to various philosophical and theological headings that are explored in the course of the five books, beginning with the first division, that which creates and is not created.

3.1.2 A note on the critical edition

The most recent critical edition of the *Periphyseon* transparently demonstrates the difficulty which the editor Édouard Jeauneau had in producing any 'definitive' version of the text.

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[17] The prosaic and logical discipline of later scholastic dialogue can differ considerably from Eriugena's writing which can sometimes strike the reader as more akin to epic poetry. The comparative dryness of the former is commented on by Saint-René Taillander in his doctoral dissertation "Scot Erigène et la philosophie scolastique" (Strasbourg, 1843), 264–265: "Fréderic Schlegel regrettait pour la scolastique qu'elle ne se fût pas attachée à suivre de plus près les enseignements de Jean Scot. Sur les traces de ce penseur libre et fécond, elle eû pu, disait-il, éviter la sécheresse et les subtilités où elle est allée se perdre." See Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 84.

[18] *Periphyseon* II, 4–7 (523d, Version I/II), 132.

[19] *Periphyseon* I, 732–753 (459b–d), 27–28.

[20] *Periphyseon* II, 1505–1515 (574a–b), 65–66.

From the outset the text was in a constant state of evolution, being amended and corrected by both Eriugena and others, resulting in numerous ninth-century manuscripts, each of which presents a different version.[21] Jeauneau's edition allows the reader to follow the genesis of the text in these manuscripts, each of which builds on a previous version, through his presentation of the text of each manuscript side by side. Following Sheldon-Williams, Jeauneau asserts that none of the versions can be considered singularly authoritative (and some corrections of later versions are not always helpful), but nevertheless offers what he considers to be the best version of the text.[22] Unless otherwise indicated, I will quote from Jeauneau's 'best' version, though sometimes it is helpful to follow the corrections of the various manuscripts.

3.2   Divine Nature in the *Periphyseon*

3.2.1   The practice of apophatic theology

God is One, the Beginning, Middle and End of all things, the Cause to which all things return.[23] As transcendent and superessential,

> God Himself is beyond both her own nature [i.e. that of the soul] and that of all things, absolutely distinct from everything which can either be said or understood and everything which cannot be said or understood . . . and denies that He is anything of the things that are or of the things that are not and affirms that all things that are predicated of Him are predicated of Him not literally but metaphorically.[24]

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[21] See Jeauneau, ed., *Iohannis Scottae Eriugenae Periphyseon, Liber Primus* CCCM 161 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), XXVI. Jeauneau presents five manuscript versions, and discusses how the copyist for Version II is also a zealous editor, but does not always act with the authority of the original author. However some of the corrections in this version are in a hand thought to be Eriugena's own, and the editor helpfully reflects this in his presentation through use of straight *versus* italics typeface.

[22] Ibid., XXVII.

[23] Book I, 416–417 (452a), 17. The remainder of this chapter focuses on this one work, and therefore instead of referring to '*Periphyseon* I', I shall simply refer to 'Book I', etc.

[24] Book II, 1507–1513 (574a–b), 65–66: *omnium rerum naturam ipsum deum omnino absolutum ab omnibus quae et dici et intelligi possunt . . . et omnia quae de ipso praedicantur non proprie sed traslatiue de eo praedicari approbans*. Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 178.

A fundamental feature of Eriugena's mental discipline, derived from its prevalence in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, is the distinction between *cataphatic* and *apophatic* theology.[25] The cataphatic approach describes statements that offer an affirmative description of divine nature; the apophatic approach denies that such descriptions are properly predicated of God. These two positions are not opposites, but rather exist in perfect harmony with each other when applied to the divine nature;[26] what we affirm of God we also deny, but properly speaking, following Pseudo-Dionysius, God is beyond both the affirmation and the denial.[27]

The two non-created divisions of nature pertain to God, but they are not forms of God, but rather of our own thought.[28] Nothing said of God belongs properly to Him, but rather is produced by the human mind; it is met, however, by what God allows to be understood of him, which Eriugena defines as *theophany*.[29] Divine 'attributes' such as

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[25] For a brief history of the apophatic approach among early Neoplatonic Christian theology, see A. H. Armstrong, "Apophatic-Kataphatic Tensions in Religious Thought from the Third to the Sixth Century A.D.: a Background for Augustine and Eriugena," in *From Augustine to Eriugena: Essays on Neoplatonism and Christianity in Honor of John O'Meara*, edited by F.X. Martin and J. A. Richmond (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 12–21. For apophaticism in Pseudo-Dionysius, see for example the opening chapter of *The Divine Names*, in Colm Lubheid, trans., *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 49–58. In the fifth chapter of the same work, the author writes of God: "He is not. He will not be. He did not come to be." Ibid., 98. Lubheid's translation uses the Greek text of the Migne edition, but with some changes according to the critical edition by Beate Suchla: *Corpus Dionysiacum*, 2 vols, ed. Beate Suchla (vol. 1), Günter Heil, and Adolf M. Ritter (vol. 2) (Patristische Texte und Studien 33, 36. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990–1991).

[26] Book I, 823–827 (461b–c), 30–31. Guilio d'Onofrio refers to them as "complementary instruments of investigation, one ordered to rational description, as far as possible, the other to the intuitive removal of every conceptual definition of the divine nature." "The *Concordia* of Augustine and Dionysius: Toward a Hermeneutic of the Disagreement of Patristic sources in John the Scot's *Periphyseon*," trans. B. McGinn, in *Eriugena: East and West*, ed. Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1994), 127.

[27] See *Mystical Theology*, 1.2, in Lubheid, trans., *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 136. For Beierwaltes, the inherent apophaticism of Eriugena's metaphysical approach "establishes the absolute difference of the divine origin over and against all being." "*Negati affirmatio* or the World as Metaphor: A Foundation for Medieval Aesthetics from the Writings of John Scotus Eriugena," trans. Margaret von Maltzahn, *Dionysius* I (December 1977): 133.

[28] See 'Difficulties with Universals' in Chapter 2 (2.7.4).

[29] The notion of theophany, which runs through the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, is also found in Augustine, whom Eriugena quotes: "The Father's Wisdom . . . comes into being in our souls by some ineffable condescension of compassion and attaches to itself our intellect so that in some ineffable manner a kind of composite wisdom, as it were, is formed out of its descending upon us and dwelling in us." See Book I, 308–314 (449b–c), 13: *sapientia Patris . . . fit in animabus nostris quadam ineffabili suae misericordiae*

Goodness, Essence and Truth are applied metaphorically from the creature to the creator;[30] their application is useful, though limited, since ultimately they cannot be properly affirmed.[31] Due to his emphasis on apophatic theology, what we deny in describing God is more important than what we affirm.[32] What we affirm is metaphorical, but what we deny is literal.[33] What we affirm, though it cannot be ascribed properly to God, nevertheless is not void of truth, or the direction of truth. But divine names and descriptions are transferences from the creature to the Creator, and not the other way around.

Eriugena unfolds his thinking through reason and dialectic, but in approaching the mysteries of God (and the creation that reveals Him), he reaches the bounds of human reason, logic and language. When divine nature is described in a certain way, Eriugena will demand that such a description be viewed apophatically. Thus, he is happy to expound his thought using the metaphors of cataphatic theology, particularly in regard to God being manifest in created things, insofar as something of the divine nature is glimpsed through it. Properly speaking, however, this description must ultimately be denied, not just because our intellects are incapable of knowing God properly, nor because the description has been applied from the creature to the Creator, and He is beyond what we can think or say, but because the being, essence and substance of God are always beyond being, essence and substance as applied to

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condescensione, ac sibi adiungit nostrum intellectum ut ineffabili quodam modo quaedam quasi composite fiat sapientia ex ipso descendente ad nos et in nobis habitante. Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 34.

[30] Book I, 702–705 (458c), 27.

[31] See Book I, 3271–3290 (518b–519a), 105: Cataphatic theology is, for Eriugena, particularly useful for the instruction of simple minds (*ad simplicium animorum instructionem*) in order to present and adapt His ineffable Essence to our human way of thinking. We use metaphors, such as 'God hears, loves, sees' etc., but they cannot apply literally. All these verbs are one and the same in Him, who is a true, eternal and indissoluble simplicity in Himself (*est uera et aeterna et insolubilis per se ipsam simplicitas*).

[32] Denys Turner refers to this manner of speaking in Pseudo-Dionysius as a 'self-subverting' utterance: "the utterance which first says something and then, in the same image, denies it." *The Darkness of God*, 21. Turner describes apophaticism as "the name of that theology which is done against the background of human ignorance of the nature of God." Ibid., 19.

[33] Book I, 2938–2939 (510c), 95.

created things, for the divine nature is *superessential*.[34] Eriugena's theology reaches its zenith in denying all those attributes which are regularly applied to God. For example, he employs a 'universal essence' (*uniuersali essentia*) which is applied to all being, both divine and created.[35] We can thus say that 'God is Essence', but it is more true to say that 'God is Non-Essence'; Eriugena, following Pseudo-Dionysius, prefers to say that God is more-than-essence, or 'super-essential'. Therefore, all things known by sense, reason or intellect can be predicated of God because He is the Creator of them all, but a more pure consideration concludes that He is none of the things that are predicated of Him.[36]

The cataphatic/apophatic divide puts us on our guard regarding what is said properly of God's presence and God's essence in relation to the created world. Eriugena's theological approach allows for apparent contradictions and the reconciliation of opposites, and therefore a pantheist position may be more difficult to ascribe. This difficulty also follows his five ways of considering being and non-being, in which, under a certain consideration, a thing may be said to be, while from a different perspective the same thing can be said not to be.[37] Beierwaltes insists that an awareness of the metaphorical nature of Eriugena's theo-ontological assertions must always be maintained; due to the insufficiency of language, the otherness of God, while manifest to some degree in comprehensible things, always remains as other.[38]

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[34] Book III, 2324 (675d), 81. See also Book II, 4514–4519 (589c–d, Version I/II), 394: God is unnameable, and above every name. A good example of this in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius is in the fifth chapter of the *Mystical Theology*, where the author affirms the Cause of all things to be imperceptible, and beyond conceptualisation; it is not light, nor substance, nor truth, nor life, nor wisdom; it is beyond being and non-being, beyond assertion and denial. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 141.

[35] Book II, 2343–2344 (597a), 98. This interpretation of essence reflects the *Categoriae Decem*'s secondary understanding of *ousia* as a substrate for all being

[36] Book I, 1614–1618 (480a–b), 54.

[37] See "Eriugena's five ways of considering being and non-being" in Chapter 6.

[38] Beierwaltes, "Language and Object," trans. O'Meara, in *Jean Scot Écrivain*, ed. Guy-H. Allard (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1986), 219–220.

3.2.2 The meaning of 'theophany'

The universe reflects and manifests its Creator in a manner which Eriugena, following Pseudo-Dionysius, refers to as 'theophany'.[39] It does so necessarily, since God is its sole creator, bringing it forth *ex nihilo*. The intellect, however, whether human or angelic, is not capable of properly knowing God as he is.[40] God is revealed only partially, in a kind of apparition which is graspable by the intellect.[41] Eriugena's apophatic approach marries with his understanding of theophany since the latter, while revelation in itself, by definition is only partial.[42] Eriugena draws on Maximus and Gregory of Nyssa in his understanding of theophany.[43] Gregory asserts that the human intellect cannot properly comprehend a thing in itself; Maximus asserts that a theophany is manifest through the grace and condescension of God.[44]

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[39] See also the Homily on the prologue to the Gospel of John, where Eriugena urges the reader to learn to know the Creator from the things which He creates: *disce factorem ex his quae in ipso et per ipsum facta sunt. Homilia* X, 12–13 (288d), 19.

[40] *Periphyseon* I, 171–173 (446b), 9: *Causam igitur omnium rerum, quae omnem intellectum exsuperat, nulli creatae naturae secundum Apostolum cognitam fieri ratio sinit*.

[41] Book I, 179–182 (446c), 9: *theophanias . . . hoc est comprehensibiles intellectuali naturae quasdam diuinas apparitions, non autem ipsas rationes, id est principalia exempla*. Beierwaltes states that when one speaks of the unspeakable (i.e. God) a theophany is directly implied, since the subjective dialectical operation of a simultaneous approach and distance is automatically employed. The whole world is therefore a theophany, which is an appearance of that which does not appear in itself but in the medium of otherness. See "Duplex Theoria," in *Eriugena: Grundzüge Seines Denkens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994), 82–83.

[42] While the entirety of creation can be considered a theophany, Eriugena customarily refers to the term in the plural, indicating particular instances of what God reveals of Himself in Nature. For a more detailed discussion of the term, see Mooney, *Theophany: The Appearing of God according to the Writings of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, in particular 9–16 and 55–59.

[43] See Book I, 252–411 (448b–451c), 11–17. For Eriugena's reliance on Maximus's concept of theophany, see also Eric D. Perl "Metaphysics and Christology in Maximus Confessor and Eriugena," in *Eriugena East and West*, ed. Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 253–254 and 262–266. See also Jeauneau, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor in the works of John Scottus Eriugena," in *Études Érigéniennes* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987), 181–185.

[44] Book I, 303–306 (449b), 13.

The concept of theophany resists a pantheistic interpretation of creation, since it implies that God cannot be properly seen or manifest in creation.[45] Deirdre Carabine speaks of Eriugena's idea of creation as a "speaking of the thought that exists eternally in the Word . . . [that] is the simultaneous revelation and concealment of God."[46] By going out of Himself and revealing Himself, God paradoxically hides Himself; it is logically necessary, for Eriugena, that creation *both* reveals and obscures God. As Carabine explains, this is a result of creation being 'other' than God: "God's self-revelation is the deepest concealment because it is a displacement of God into otherness, into what is both God and not-God."[47]

Hilary Mooney points out that, for Eriugena, a theophany is framed by the individual who experiences it: each theophany is moulded to the intellect that apprehends it, and therefore there are an almost infinite number.[48] This applies both to earthly and heavenly existence, and since it is personal, it is also related to virtue in the individual. Eriugena finds these ideas in the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius: the highest angels (cherubim and seraphim) receive the "primal theophanies and perfections," with lesser theophanies being experienced by lower ranks of angels.[49] Indeed, it is the angels themselves who reveal and mediate the deity to the human intellect. The Areopagite speaks generally of the application of metaphor in Scripture, since no intellect can properly comprehend the God who transcends all manifestation.[50] Considering God as a ray of light, he explains that "this divine ray . . . [is] concealed in a variety of sacred veils which the Providence of the Father adapts to our nature

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[45] See Willemien Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 81: Otten argues that even in bold assertions regarding God, the divine nature is not properly predicated; rather, the true divine nature remains "reverently untouched."

[46] Deirdre Carabine, "The Manifestation of God as the Speaking of Creation," 111.

[47] Carabine, "The Manifestation of God as the Speaking of Creation," 114.

[48] Mooney, *Theophany*, 56.

[49] *Celestial Hierarchy*, 7.1. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 161.

[50] *Celestial Hierarchy*, 2.3, Ibid., 149.

as human beings."[51]   He understands theophany, then, as a revelation initiated by the heavenly powers, where the formless God is manifested in forms.[52]

Stephen Gersh argues that the notion of theophany reflects how God, who is a simple unity, can be found in diversity. Each theophany is subjective, and therefore different, while God is simple.[53] God's presence in and to the world should not be understood objectively in terms of genus and species, or whole and part, but rather subjectively, according to an intelligible contemplation of the universe.[54] A theophany is a divine condescension manifest in a diverse world, but from God's point of view, the multiple (and almost infinite) theophanies are one and the same.[55] This can be seen regarding Eriugena's primordial causes of all things, which are themselves a theophany: the multiplicity of these causes is in the mind who contemplates them, while in themselves they can be understood as a unity. Their plurality stems from their visible effects. Futhermore, Gersh maintains that theophany will characterise the intellect's contemplation of God even after the general resurrection, when a hierarchy of the elect is maintained.

3.2.3   The categories and God

Eriugena provides an analysis of the ten Aristotelian categories – essence, quantity, quality, relative-to, where, when, being-in-a-position, having, acting, and being-acted-upon – as applied to God.[56] In short, none of the ten apply, except metaphorically. This reflects

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[51] *Celestial Hierarchy*, 1.2, 146.

[52] Ibid., 4.3, 157.

[53] Stephen Gersh, "Omnipresence in Eriugena: Some Reflections on Augustino – Maximian Elements in Periphyseon," in *Eriugena: Studien zu Seinen Quellen,* ed. Werner Beierwaltes, 61.

[54] See Book II, 1–3 (523d), 3: *Quoniam insuperiore libro de uniuersalis naturae uniuersali diuisione non quasi generis in formas seu totius in partes, sed intelligibili quadam uniuersitatis contemplatione. . .*

[55] Gersh, "Omnipresence in Eriugena," 67–70.

[56] *Periphyseon* II, 2027–2200, (588b–593c), 86–93.

Augustine's position on the application of Aristotle's categories to God: when it comes to theology, to the study of the divine nature, the relevance of the categories is wholly extinguished.[57] The Divine Nature is beyond understanding in its essence and power, and is infinite throughout all things.[58] Being infinite, it cannot be contained by place or time, and (following the lead of St Gregory), neither does God create in time, but intellects from cause to effect without the interval of time.[59] Other accidents commonly ascribed to the divine nature can be passed off as metaphorical, or by another understanding. For example, the Son sits at the right hand of the Father, but this statement is spiritual rather than spatially relevant.[60]

In defending his position that none of the categories apply to God, Eriugena argues first that divine nature is simple, and cannot contain opposites.[61] Opposites, of course, exist, and are created by God, as are all things to which the categories apply.[62] Indeed, everything

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[57] Book I, 903–905 (463b), 33: *ut ait sanctus pater Augustinus in libris de trinitate, dum ad theologiam (hoc est ad diuinae essentiae inuestigationem) peruenitur, kategoriarum uirtus omnino extinguitur*. Eriugena follows Augustine except in one important respect: Augustine claims that God can properly be called essence. See *De Trinitate* VII.5.

[58] Book II, 2196–2200 (593b–c), 93: *[Deus] incapabile enim secundum essentiam, et inintelligibile secundum uirtutem, et secundum operationem incircumscriptum . . . et simpliciter dicendum ac uerius per omnia infinitum.*

[59] Book IV, 2969–2975 (812a), 100. Time, following Augustine's concept, begins with the material universe, and along with place is a necessary accident of all sensible being (see Book I, 1743–1746 (483b), 58). The universe, however, does not contain the locus of created being which exists, rather, in its primordial causes (see 'The Second Division of Nature' below), created outside of time. One of Eriugena's favourite phrases describes things which have yet to appear (e.g. a person yet to be born), things which lie 'in the secret folds of nature' (*in secretissimis naturae sinibus*), but things have 'already' been created and exist in their primordial causes; this idea he claims to have also found in Augustine: Book III, 881–889 (640a), 32–33. 'Place' for Eriugena signifies not a geographical location, but what defines the limit of a particular created thing. It applies necessarily to all things, except God Who is infinite.

[60] Book II, 4704–4720 (592b–c, Version I/II), 406: *Ad dextra patris sedere filius dicitur . . . situs iste mysticus est, non corporeus, non localis, sed spiritualis*. Jeauneau expresses uncertainty that this phrase was written by Eriugena.

[61] Book I, 735–736 (459b–c), 28.

[62] See Book I, 2953–2959 (510d–511a), 95: God created things like himself, and things unlike himself. Everything has an opposite, but, using the example that vice is a shadow of virtue rather than a substantial opposite, these opposites do not pertain to divine nature. See also Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, 1.2: the divinity is beyond denials, assertions and opposites. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 136.

which exists, both substance and accident, has an opposite. Applied to any corporeal thing, all of its accidents can be reversed: if cold, it could also be warm; if brightly-coloured, it could also be darkly-coloured; if here, it could also be there. God therefore must transcend all physical things if his Nature is not to contain opposites.[63] To a thing's substance or *ousia*, also, there exists the opposite of non-substance, or non-being. God must therefore transcend *ousia*, since it has an opposite: he is beyond both being and non-being; he is more-than-substance, and more-than-essence. While containing and creating all being and essence, God is Himself superessential, which is beyond human thought and language.[64] The many attributes often predicated of God cannot be applied to him either, since to Goodness there exists the opposite of Wickedness, to Truth, Falsity, etc. Eriugena's apophatic approach denies their proper predication of God, and since everything in perceptible creation contains an opposite, this argument stands firmly against a pantheistic interpretation of his work.

3.2.4   Divine simplicity

Lacking in opposites, and therefore having a nature that is beyond all positive and negative statements, God is an absolute simplicity, eternal and immutable.[65] As a fundamental tenet of Eriugena's theology, this simplicity unites all (cataphatic) attributes of God and also applies

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[63] The most difficult hurdle for Eriugena to jump proves to be the two categories of *agere* and *pati*: acting and suffering . The summary approach is that God's simplicity cannot allow for accident, therefore accidents do not properly belong to him. However, this is not easily reconciled with Scriptural portrayals of divine nature, particularly when interacting with human figures, and the questions might be asked: does God love? Is He loved in return? Eriugena does not shy from the discussion, coming to the conclusion that God is revealed most of all in Scripture (Book I, 2925–3006 (510b–512b), 94–96), but that nothing can be properly predicated of God, including such things from the Old Testament as light, sun, breath and anger. The incomprehensible God rises above every essence, substance, and accident, above every motion, activity and passivity: *Qui omnem essentiam, substantiam, omneque accidens, omnemque motum actionemque et passionem, et quodcunque de talibus dicitur et intelligitur . . . superascendit*. Book I, 3025–3029 (512c–d), 97.

[64] See also Book I, 785–786 (460c), 29: by no verb or noun, or any sound, can the ineffable Nature be known.

[65] Book I, 3271–3291 (518b–519a), 105.

to the verbs which are commonly employed to describe His interaction with the world. Thus, for God, His Being is His Loving, and His Goodness is His Truth. His Willing, His Making and His Knowing are inseparable, though the human intellect attempts to understand them by using different words. This has far-reaching consequences with regard to creation: God does not will to create first, followed by a making, and finally a knowing through observation of what it is He has made. Rather, they are all aspects of a 'simple' divine being.[66] The world is known, willed, and made at the same time, though outside of the accidental category of time. Further, this act of creation is inseparable from His very being.[67] Since accidents cannot be a part of divine nature, the creation of the world is not an accident, but rather is a necessary part of God: God's act of making is therefore co-essential with God.[68]

The world owes its existence completely to God, but if, for Eriugena, its creation is not accidental, then it must in some way be part of his very being.[69] The world is eternal, but not co-eternal with God; i.e. while eternal with God, God precedes it as its cause. Where the Word of God may not precede all things in a temporal sense, it does, however, of necessity, precede them as a cause,[70] just as sound, speech and word precede a spoken word, not temporally, but causally. It is in this sense that God can be said, in a phrase often repeated by

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[66] See Book I, 3243–3248 (517c–518a), 104: all motion and time, as accidents, belong to creation and not to God, therefore He cannot have existed *before* creation.

[67] Book I, 3255–3256 (518a), 104: *Non ergo aliud est deo esse et aliud facere, sed ei esse id ipsum est et facere*. The 'making' (as a condition, or category) is in the thing that is made.

[68] Book I, 3248 (518a), 104: *Coaeternum igitur est deo suum facere et coessentiale*.

[69] This reflects the Proclean Neoplatonism which Eriugena absorbed from Pseudo-Dionysius (see section 5.2 of this study): for Plotinus and Proclus, the emanation of all things, originating with the One, was a necessary emanation: therefore creatures necessarily exist. In his study on divine predestination, Eriugena attempts to reconcile this necessity with his belief in a God who creates freely through divine will. Since, for Eriugena, divine simplicity implies no distinction between God's being and His will, the existence of creatures emanating from God can be also be understood as a manifestation of divine will. It is not a well-developed argument, but Eriugena points out that what is understood as necessary in human understanding does not imply a necessity for God. He maintains firmly that all necessity is excluded from divine will. See chapter 2 of Madec, *Iohannis Scotti De Diuina Praedestinatione Liber*, 9–18.

[70] Book II, 981–985 (556c), 42.

Eriugena, to be 'made' in the world: He exists 'before' the world as its Cause, but is manifest in the effects of the eternal world.[71] Nothing is added to God in His being made in the world, but rather, He is made visible to human intellects in the things He has created.[72] Therefore His being made in the world is, in a sense, a figure of speech (*figurate quadam locutione*): He is made in creation because He is the essence of its being.[73] Eriugena has affirmed that God is the Essence of all things, which can of course justify an accusation of pantheism. However, where he has presented God as the necessary ontological foundation of all things, he continues that God's 'being made' is a development of the human belief and understanding of God, which sees God in all that He has made.[74] In this case, 'being made' is equivalent to 'being revealed through the correct application of human reason'.

As the Creator of all being, there is nothing that exists outside of God.[75] But from the statement that God is made in all things, Eriugena goes one step further by claiming that God is the essence of all things: has he made the divine nature indistinguishable from created nature? There are many instances where Eriugena appears to posit this position.

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[71] Since divine willing is the same as divine knowing and divine being, the being of something is its knowledge in the mind of God, and its wish to be created in the mind of God (see section 4.4 of this study). This is how we can say that God is created in all things, since it is a manifestation of His will, knowledge and being. However, where created, He is created by Himself, and not by any cause outside of Himself (*a nullo creari nesciat*: Book I, 522 (454c), 21). In this way divine essence is created in those things made by it. See Book I, 489–510 (I.453c–454b), 20.

[72] This argument is strengthened by the fact that divine essence, though incomprehensible in itself, when it is joined to an intellectual creature, is seen alone in it, permeating it entirely. It surpasses every nature which participates in it. The Divine Essence appears in other things, but not in Itself. Book I, 340–347 (450b), 14–15.

[73] Book I, 3186–3190 (516c), 102: *fieri deus dicitur, figurate quadam locutione dici manifestum est. Fieri siquidem aestimatur in creaturis suis uniuersaliter, dum in eis non solum intelligitur esse, since quo esse non possunt, sed etiam eorum essential sit.*

[74] Book I, 3191–3195 (516c), 102: *Dicitur etiam in animabus fidelium fiere, dum aut per fidem et uirtutem in eis concipitur, aut per fidem quodam modo inchoat intelligi. Nil enim aliud est fides, ut opinor, nisi principium quoddam, ex quo cognitio creatoris in natura rationabili fieri incipit.*

[75] Book I, 724–727 (459b), 27; Ibid., 3218–3219 (517a–b), 103: *Aliud praetor eum et extra eum esse non crediderim; in ipso enim omnia sunt et extra ipsum nihil est*. As the circumference of all things, God cannot move beyond Himself, but only from Himself towards Himself. Therefore Eriugena denies a further two categories, for properly speaking there is neither rest nor motion in God. Book I, 463–464 (453a), 19.

3.2.5 Divine superessentiality

Since God cannot be defined in any way, and since he cannot have an opposite (i.e. as being is to non-being), He is beyond being and beyond essence. The essence of creatures participates in the divine essence, but cannot encompass it. Eriugena repeats Dionysius's statement that 'the being of all things is the divinity beyond being', asserting that created nature is not wholly other than divine nature, and that there is nothing that exists outside of God.[76] A creature cannot draw its essence from anywhere other than God. On the other hand, Eriugena also denies the identity of divine nature with human nature: one has essence, and the other is beyond essence. Everything which God creates is contained within God, but since God is superessential, He is different, and He is other.[77] God is beyond both being and non-being so that God does not contain opposites in Himself, though he can create them from within his divine essence:

A: I see that within God there is nothing but Himself and the nature created by Him.
N: Then you see in God that which is not God?
A: I do; but it is created from God.[78]

Eriugena's approach is inherited directly from Dionysius, for whom God is

by virtue of his superessential power the substantiating cause and Creator of all that exists, of existence, of subsistence, of substance, of essence, of nature . . . [yet] He neither was nor shall be nor has become nor becomes nor shall become, nor indeed is; but He Himself is the being for the things that exist, and he is not only the things that exist but the very being of things that exist.[79]

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[76] From the fourth chapter of Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy*. See Book I, 3190 (516c), 102, and Book V, 1995–2003 (903c), 62.

[77] Book III, 2322–2324 (675c–d), 81: *totum uero quod creauit et creat intra se ipsam continere, ita tame nut aliud sit ipsa quia superessentialis est, et aliud quod in se creat*.

[78] Book III, 2339–2342 (676a), 81: *A: Intra deum nihil aliud esse sentio, praeter se ipsum et ab ipso conditam creaturam. N: In deo ergo uides, quod deus non est. A: Video, ex deo tamen creatum*. Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 302.

[79] Book III, 2596–2598; 2606–2609 (682a–b), 90: *[Deus] totius esse secundum uirtutem supessentialem est substituens causa, et creator existentis, subsistentiae, substantiae, essentiae, naturae . . . Et neque erat, neque erit, neque factus est, neque fit, neque fiet. Magis autem neque est, sed ipse est esse existentibus; et non existential solum, sed ipsum esse existentium ex anteaeternaliter existente*. Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 309.

Created essence(s) emerge from God's superessence, but He does not cease to be prior to the being of all things, and beyond the essence of all things. From the point of view of created things, they emerge from God, receive their being from God, are contained in the existence of God, and ultimately return to God. From a pure consideration of God's nature, however, He cannot be identified in a proper way with those things He has created.

3.2.6 The transcendence of God eludes comprehension

The transcendence of God, in Eriugena's theology, has been inspired by Dionysius, for whom Providence and Goodness proceed and overflow from God, Who is unparticipating: it is a generous outpouring of the transcendent Cause of all things, a Cause which, being superessential and supernatural, remains beyond all the things it creates (II.617c).[80] Quoting St Paul, Eriugena maintains that God abides in inaccessible light,[81] and is known to no intellect as to what He is:[82]

> Thou art not found in Thy superessential nature in which Thou transcendest and exceedest every understanding that desires to comprehend Thee and to ascend unto Thee. . . Thou eludest them [i.e. those that seek God] by the infinite and incomprehensible transcendence of Thine essence.[83]

Eriugena's transcendent Cause of causes can be understood ontologically as something that cannot be contained in an effect, just as a multi-dimensional object can in no way be contained in its shadow. The shadow exists by participation, and cannot exist without the

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[80] *On the Divine Names*, chapter 11; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans., Lubheid, 122. See also Jeauneau, "Le Caché et l'Obscur," in *Études Érigéniennes*, 221–242. Jeauneau points out that Eriugena uses the word *arcanum* when referring to God in His transcendence, and *mysterium* when referring to vestiges of God in the world. Ibid., 229.

[81] 1 Timothy 6:16; Book III, 2128–2129 (671a), 75.

[82] Book III, 2042 (668c), 71: *a nullo intellectu cognoscitur quid sit*.

[83] Book V, 6836–6841 (1010d), 211: *Non inueniris autem in tua superessentialitate, qua transis et exsuperas omnem intellectum uolentem et ascendentem comprehendere te . . . transis ab eis incomprehensibili excelsitudine et infinitate essentiae tuae*. Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 700–701.

being of the object, but the object remains unaffected by the shadow, even if the shadow remains eternally.[84]

3.2.7 Divine ignorance

The transcendence of God is demonstrated further by God's inability to fully know His own self. Eriugena discusses three modes of God's ignorance, prompted by a question raised by Alumnus: if God can define himself, then He is limited, but if He is unable to define himself, then He is ignorant. How can we be permitted to say that God is ignorant? Nutritor replies that ignorance can in fact be a form of wisdom, and proceeds to illuminate that God does not know that he subsists in physical effects.[85] Since He is transcendent, and an incomprehensible infinity, He cannot recognise himself in physical things, even though, as their Creator, they participate in His essence:

> In none of the things which are comprehended by the philosophers within the ten genera of things, nor in any of those things which a closer inquiry discovers outside them, whether they exist as substance or as accident, nor in any of those that cannot be discovered in any substance or accident, whether they exist in the hidden reasons or in possibilities or in impossibilities, does God understand that He subsists; for He knows that He is none of them, but understands the He excels them all by His ineffable essential Power and More-than-Power, and by His incomprehensible Infinity.[86]

God is unknowable, even by God, in the things He has created. Eriugena's presentation of the compelling argument that shows how ignorance is wisdom is worth quoting in full:

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[84] This sense of existence through participation is outlined in Book I, 3261–3264 (518a–b), 104, where a creature's existence is due to its participation in God who alone truly is: *Nihil enim eorum quae sunt per se ipsum uere est; quodcunque autem in eo uere intelligitur participatione ipsius unius qui solus per se ipsum uere est accipit.*

[85] Book II, 2324–2336 (596c–d), 98. Beierwaltes explores the question of whether God's thought can be anything other than God himself: "Absolutes Selbstbewusstsein: Divina ignorantia summa ac vera est sapientia," in *Eriugena: Grundzüge Seines Denkens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994), 180–203.

[86] Book II, 2327–2336 (596c–d), 98: *Ac per hoc uniuersaliter dicendum quod in nullo eorum quae intra decem genera rerum a philosophis comprehenduntur, neque eorum quae extra illa diligentior inquisition inuenit, siue secundum substantiam siue secundum accidens sint, neque eorum quae in nulla substantia uel accidenti possunt inueniri, siue in rationibus occultis siue in possibilitatibus siue in impossibilitatibus sint, deus intelligit se subsistere quoniam se cognoscit nullum eorum esse, dum omnia ineffabili essentiali sua uirtute et plus quam uirtute et incomprehensibili sua infinitate intelligit se excellere.* Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 205.

For as those who pursue their investigations along the right path of reasoning are able to understand that He is within none of the things which are contained within nature, but know that He transcends them all, and therefore their ignorance is true wisdom, and by not knowing Him in the things that are they know Him the better above all things that are and are not: so also it is not unreasonably said of God Himself that to the extent that He does not understand Himself to subsist in the things which He has made, to that extent does He understand that He transcends them all, and therefore His ignorance is true understanding; and to the extent that He does not know Himself to be comprehended in the things that are, to that extent does He know Himself to be exalted above them all, and so by not knowing Himself He is the better known by Himself. For it is better that He should know that He is apart from all things than that He should know that He is set in the number of all things.[87]

God cannot know Himself in creation because creation cannot contain Him; this unknowing, itself a form of knowing and wisdom, extends to man who contemplates God.

3.2.8   What happens to essence in Neoplatonic return

God is not to be identified with His creation on the grounds of the strict hierarchy of being in which He is the One in the Neoplatonic structure of nature. Even if they share the same essence, created nature is contained within divine nature, and not the other way around.[88] According to the Neoplatonism of Maximus, the return involves a spiritualising of all physical things.[89] But Maximus goes on to say that, when our return to God is complete, we are made of everything that God is excepting similitude of essence.[90] After the return of

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[87] Book II, 2374–2386 (597d–598a), 99: *Sicut enim qui recto ratiocinandi itinere inuestigant in nullo eorum quae in natura rerum continentur ipsum intelligere possunt, sed supra omnia sublimatum cognoscunt, ac per hoc eorum ignorantia uera est sapientia, et nesciendo eum in his quae sunt melius eum sciunt super omnia quae sunt et quae non sunt, ita etiam de se ipso non irrationabiliter dicitur: In quantum se ipsum in his quae fecit non intelligit subsistere, in tantum intelligit se super omnia esse, ac per hoc ipsius ignorantia uera est intelligentia; et in quantum se nescit in his quae sunt comprehendi, in tantum se scit ultra omnia exaltari, atque ideo nesciendo se ipsum a se ipso melius scitur. Melius enim est se scire ab omnibus remotum esse, quam si sciret in numero omnium se constitui*. Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 206.

[88] In Book II, 3208 (617b), 126, Eriugena speaks of the unparticipating God (*deo non participante*).

[89] For Eriugena's general exposition of emanation and return as found in Maximus, see Book II, 215–334 (532a–536b), 12–17. The paradigm of Neoplatonic return, for Maximus, is Christ, who in his resurrection begins the process of return. Earth is united to heaven through Christ's ascension, and human nature – both body and soul – rise to a spiritual realm. See Book II, 452–464 (540b–d), 22.

[90] Book II, 318–319 (536a), 16: *factus omne si quid est deus praeter similitudinem essentiam*.

humanity to God, which remains incomplete in this life, man will not possess the essence of God. Eriugena maintains a hierarchy in the *domus dei* after the return of all things, where at the heavenly banquet, every creature will have its place, with some higher and some lower. Unlike purely natural things, human nature will rise beyond natural virtue into the presence of God.[91]

Eriugena appears to take a step further than Dionysius and Maximus in uniting God to His creation. For him, essence is shared between Creator and creature: the first Cause distributes essence to all things, and thus is itself diffused through all things.[92] For Gersh, Maximus follows Pseudo-Dionysius in the idea that "creation consists of a self-multiplication of the divine essence."[93] But the Cause itself remains divided ontologically from creation, and this division can be understood from Eriugena's five modes of being and non-being, which are found very near the beginning of Book I. In particular, the second mode of non-being describes how, in his hierarchical ontological scheme, if something is said to be, then a thing or creature on an ontological level above it or below it is said not to be. Since God is the Cause, and creation is not the cause (of itself), God can be understood to occupy a different ontological level from creation; if one is said to be, then the other is said not to be. But Eriugena asserts that this mode only applies to created being, and not to God, for God is beyond both being and non-being. The result is that the divide between Creator and creature, though they share the same essence, is deepened. Gersh also articulates a fundamental

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[91] Book V, 7078–7082 (1016a), 218: *Implebitur domus dei, in qua unusquisque ordine sibi congruo constituitur, alii inferius, alii superius, alii in sublimitate naturae, alii super omnem naturalem uirtutem circa ipsum deum. Ac sic cena illa manga ordinabitur et celebrabitur.*

[92] Book II, 1920–1924 (585c), 81.

[93] Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 187.

conviction of Neoplatonism which is that "the finite must ascend to the infinite through intermediaries which only partially capture its essence."[94]

3.3   Eriugena and the Trinity[95]

3.3.1   Trinity as theophany

Through the application of Eriugena's apophatic theology, anything predicated of the Trinity must be understood as metaphor, for it is not fully graspable by the intellect.[96] The three Substances of one Essence he terms as Unbegotten, Begotten and Proceeding (*gignens, genitus, procedens*).[97] When discussing the creation account of Genesis, he offers the interpretation of 'God' as Father, 'beginning' as Son, and 'the Spirit of God that hovered over the waters' as the Holy Spirit.[98] Thus, where he finds it written that "In the beginning,

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[94] Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 17.

[95] Eriugena's exposition of the Trinity is found in Book I, 575–673 (455c–458a), 23–26. See also his exposition of the Trinity in his *Homilia*: he distinguishes between the superessential unity (*unitam superessentialitatem*) and supersubstantial difference (*distinctam supersubstantialitatem*) between Father and Son. *Homilia* I, 18–19 (283c), 5. Robert Crouse points out that the substitution of a Trinitarian God for 'the One' is the most significant departure of Christian Neoplatonism from its pagan predecessors; see "*Primordiales Causae* in Eriugena's Interpretation of Genesis," in J. McEvoy, C. Steel and G. Van Riel, eds., *Iohannes Scotus Eriugena, The Bible and Hermeneutics: Proceedings of the Ninth International colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies Held at Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve June 7–10, 1995* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 214. For a more detailed exploration of Eriugena's trinitarian theology, see Beierwaltes, "Einheit und Dreiheit," in *Grundzüge seines Denkens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994), 204–256.

[96] See Book II, 3308–3317 (572d), 322: The soul cannot know God in any substance or essence, but while the soul cannot see or properly describe God, in her highest activity (intellect) she circles about the undefinable God.

[97] Book II, 2810–2814 (607d–608a), 113–114. Eriugena's solution to the *filioque* question, following John of Damascus, is to posit that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son, the Love uniting both, the Gift of both: *Est enim Spiritus amborum, quoniam ex patre per filium procedit. Et est donum utriusque, quoniam ex patre per filium donatur, et est amor utriusque, patrem et filium coniungens.* See Book II, 2591 – 2594 (603a), 107. See also Bett, *Johannes Scotus Erigena*, 108.

[98] Book IV, 1826–1830 (786a–b), 65. Beierwaltes argues that the trinitarian theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, while the most significant influence on that of Eriugena, is itself underdeveloped, since it is modelled on a combination of the One and the *Nous* of Proclus. Conversely, Eriugena does not suppress any distinction between the Three Persons. See "Unity and Trinity in East and West," trans. Douglas Hedley, in McGinn and Otten, eds., *Eriugena East and West*, 212–224.

God made heaven and earth," it can mean that God created heaven and earth in the Word.[99]

Trinitarian metaphors are therefore *theophanies*, partially revealing (insofar as our intellects can understand) different aspects of God.[100] The terms 'Father,' 'Son' and 'Spirit' are names of relation, not substance,[101] and can denote different properties or operations of divine nature, such as existence (Father), wisdom (Son), and life (Spirit).[102]

3.3.2   The image as trinitarian

Since man is made in the image of God, knowledge of the Divine Nature starts with a knowledge of the image, and Eriugena holds that the image has a trinitarian nature.[103] He considers mind (*animum*), reason (*rationem*) and sense (*sensum*) to be the three motions of the soul.[104] In the first, she contemplates God; in the second, she acknowledges God as the Cause of all things; and the third constitutes the operation of the five senses. None of these operations pertain properly to the physical world, for the senses belonged to the spiritual

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[99] Eriugena also offers here an alternative interpretation, in which God is Father, what is said is the Son (Word), and what God saw implies the Spirit. These interpretations reflect the difficulty in translating the word 'logos' from the Septuagint, a word whose richness finds no Latin equivalent.

[100] Eriugena provides the example of the cause of brightness from a ray of light as a means of understanding how the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. See Book II, 2830–2894 (608b–609d).

[101] Book I, 654–665 (457c–d), 25.

[102] Book I, 572–575 (455c), 22–23.

[103] In this he follows Augustine, for whom the soul is composed of memory, understanding and will.

[104] Book II, 1469–1471 (572c), 63–64. *Tres uniuersales motus animae sunt, quorum primus est secundum animum, secundus secundum rationem, tertius secundum sensum.*O'Meara translates *animus* here as both 'mind' and 'soul': the passage makes little sense if there is at least some differentiation. The two concepts are very similar, if not synonymous; for Eriugena, intellect, which is not confined to the corporeal body, is the highest part of man. In Book I he also borrows from Dionysius the Greek threefold division of man, considered as immortal and immutable aspects of the soul: Essence (*ousia*), Power (*dunamis*) and Operation (*energeia*). This reflects the Trinity's creative act: the essence of the Father creates through the power of the Son, and the world unfolds through the operation of the Holy Spirit. For a discussion of Eriugena's concept of soul, see Catherine Kavanagh, "The Nature of the Soul according to Eriugena," in Maha el-Kaisy and John Dillon, eds., *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul: Reflections on Platonic Psychology in the Monotheistic Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 77–92.

body before the Fall as the means by which the soul perceives what is outside of it.[105] Any search for God and for an understanding of the nature of God does not start with the visible universe: it starts with the spiritual nature of man. The sensible universe, emanating from the effects of sin, is removed to a distance from God.[106]

3.4   Eriugena's concept of non-being

3.4.1   Non-being in the privative sense

Eriugena's understanding of non-being is important when considering the ontological relationship between God and His creation. God creates from nothing, but what does nothingness mean in the *Periphyseon*? The five modes of being and non-being outlined in Book I demonstrate five ways in which non-being is considered as an opposite to being.[107] Drawing on Pseudo-Dionysius and the Byzantine tradition, God always abides beyond being as we are capable of experiencing it, and therefore can be considered as 'non-being', though properly speaking, God, in whose nature there can be no opposites, transcends both being and non-being. Eriugena acknowledges those (i.e. Augustine) who interpret 'nothing', i.e. that from which God made all things, in the privative sense,[108] but prefers to think of it as an infinite richness containing the possibility of all being.[109] In his philosophical system, he

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[105] Book II, 1487–1504 (573b–574a), 64–65.

[106] Book II, 1414–1436 (571a–c), 61–62. The distance between the sensible universe and God excludes the possibility of a material pantheism, such as that of David of Dinant. However, Amaury's formal pantheism remains a possibility.

[107] The five modes are explored more fully in chapter 6.

[108] Book III, 2712–2720 (684c–685a), 93.

[109] The only aspect in which Eriugena retains the notion of privation is when it is applied to evil. All being and non-being is good in itself. Evil is not an opposite to good, but a lack of it: the harmony of creation consists in the things that exist, whether as substance or accident, and the things which don't exist, whether through deprivation of being, or transcendence of being. At the return of all things, evil (as a lack of being) will cease to be, while beauty will return into its Cause. See Book V, 4718–4777 (964b–965c), 146–147. Occasionally Eriugena uses the term 'nothing' (*nil*) in an Augustinian sense, such as at Book II, 1107–1109

declares that there is no place for the privative sense of nothing, and that only those of limited understanding believe that all things were made from a privative nothing.[110] Eriugena's understanding of *nihil* diverges from that of Augustine, for whom the privative *nihil* contrasts with the Supreme Being which is God. Peter Dronke argues that, since for Eriugena the *nihil* represents the unfathomable and inaccessible clarity of divine goodness, therefore when God creates *ex nihilo*, He creates from the primordial causes.[111]

3.4.2 The rich non-being of the void

Before the creation of light in Genesis, the earth was a 'formless void', which for Eriugena signifies the infinite possibility of being, the 'perfection of primordial nature' (*primordialis naturae perfectionem*) which was created before things were extended into the sensible world of place and time.[112] However, there is a sense in which the void can be understood (or at least imagined) in the universe of space and time: according to Eriugena, the term 'void' (*uacuum*) is a Latin translation of the term 'ether,' (*ΚΟΥΦΟC*) which describes the space from the moon to the stars of the outermost sphere.[113] Rather than being pure emptiness, it is, rather, pure spirit, containing no corporeal heaviness: it is a place of everlasting light.[114] Eriugena is indicating that God is closer to this place than any other place closer to earth, that

(561a): *Mundus enim iste totus nouus dicitur, quia aeternus non est, ideoque nil est. Peribit enim cum omnibus quae in eo sunt.*

[110] Book III, 2483–2487 (679b–c), 86: *Proinde nullus locus conceditur nihilo illi (hoc est priuationi totius habitudinis atque essentiae), de quo omnia putantur ab his qui minus intelligunt facta fuisse, nescientes quid eo nomine sancta significat theologia.*

[111] "Pour Jean Scot, *nihil* est la clarté insondable et inaccessible de la bonté divine." See Peter Dronke, "Theologia Veluti Quaedam Poetria: Quelques Observations sur la Fonction des Images Poétiques chez Jean Scot," in René Roques, ed., *Jean Scot Érigène et l'Histoire de la Philosophie: Actes des Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, no. 561* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1977), 249.

[112] Book II, 716–722 (549b), 32.

[113] Book II, 728–729 (549c), 32–33.

[114] Book II, 730–733 (549c), 33.

He is present in the silence and in the formlessness. The darkness of the void before the creation of light is not an absence of Divine light; rather, it is as an excess of Divine light.

3.4.3 Defining non-being

Eriugena defines 'nothing' in Book III as follows:

> By that name is signified the ineffable and incomprehensible and inaccessible brilliance of the Divine Good which is unknown to all intellects whether human or angelic – for it is superessential and supernatural –, which while it is contemplated in itself neither is nor was nor shall be, for it is understood to be in none of the things that exist because it surpasses all things, but when, by a certain ineffable descent into the things that are, it is beheld by the mind's eye, it alone is found to be in all things, and it is and was and shall be.[115]

If nothing alone is found in all things (*ipsa sola inuenitur in omnibus*), it can be understood that all things in their entirety stem from nothing. It shares with God both transcendence of understanding and of essence, but is also inseparable from all created things: that which is beyond all essence (since it is nothing) is also known in all essence (since all things are created from it).[116] In this vein, theology refers to the 'inaccessible brilliance' (*inaccessibilis claritas*) of the celestial powers as 'darkness'.[117] Strict definitions of created nature are not possible when at the heart of their being is a transcendent, unknowable and infinitely rich nothingness which is beyond all essence (and in all essence). It is even more difficult in the case of divine nature: where God alone is the source of all being, He cannot be described as Being, since He is beyond Being; where God dwells in inaccessible light, God is Darkness. Again, Divine darkness is not an absence, but an excess of light.

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[115] Book III, 2541–2549 (680d–681a), 88: *Ineffabilem et incomprehensibilem diuinae bonitatis inaccessibilemque claritatem omnibus intellectibus siue humanis siue angelicis incognitam – superessentialis est enim et supernaturalis – eo nomine significatam crediderim, quae, dum per se ipsam cogitatur, neque est, neque erat, neque erit. In nullo enim intelligitur existentium, quia superat omnia. Dum uero per condescensionem quandam ineffabilem in ea quae sunt mentis obtutibus inspicitur, ipsa sola inuenitur in omnibus esse, et est, et erat, et erit.* Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 307–308.

[116] Book III, 2552–2553 (681a), 88: *quae proprie super omnem essentiam existimatur, proprie quoque in omni essentia cognoscitur.*

[117] Book III, 2559 (681b), 89.

3.4.4 The negation of all essences

If God is beyond Being, then theophanies cannot *be* God, even if God is revealed through them. They may inspire the mind to contemplate the divine, but they remain as pointers rather than containers. In Book V, Eriugena's theology is presented in a prayer:

> Thou art found in thy Theophanies in which Thou appearest in the minds of those who understand Thee after a manifold mode, as in a number of mirrors, in the way in which Thou permittest to be known not what Thou art, but what Thou art not: not what Thou art, but that Thou art.[118]

However, even if essence cannot be known or seen or fully understood, human reason can acknowledge that it belongs to an object which it contemplates: thus, one could say that the essence of one tree is equal and comparable to the essence of another tree. But this cannot apply to God, since the infinite God (and there is only one God in the ontological hierarchy) is beyond our intellectual grasp, and can most properly be described as the negation of all essences (*negatione omnium essentiarum*).[119]

3.4.5 The Being of all being

The negation of all essences is also the Essence of all things:

> The Divine Goodness, regarded as above all things, is said not to be, and to be absolutely nothing, but in all things it both is and is said to be, because it is the Essence of the whole universe and its substance and its genus and its species and its quantity and its quality and the bond between all things and its position and habit and place and time and

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[118] Book V, 6833–6836 (1010c–d), 211: *Semper inueniris quidem in tuis theophaniis, in quibus multipliciter, ueluti in quibusdam speculis, occurris mentibus intelligentium te eo modo quo te sinis intelligi, non quid es, sed quid non es et quia es*. Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 700.

[119] See Book III, 2569–2575 (681c), 89. Eriugena describes Nothing as the Divine Goodness which proceeds from the negation of all essences into the affirmation of the essence of the universe; it descends from itself into itself, a movement from nothing into something, from non-essentiality into essentiality, from formlessness into innumerable forms and species: *Diuina igitur bonitas, quae propterea nihilum dicitur quoniam ultra omnia quae sunt et quae non sunt in nulla essential inuenitur, ex negation omnium essentiarum in affirmationem totius uniuersitatis essentiae a se ipsa in se ipsam descendit, ueluti ex nihilo in aliquid, ex inessentialitate in essentialitatem, ex informitate in formas innumerabiles et species*.

action and passion and everything whatsoever that can be understood by whatever sort of intellect.[120]

We can conclude that Essence is a form of Nothing, since Divine Goodness is both the Essence of the universe and the negation of all essences. While we can define the individuals in the sensible world as a 'something', they have nothing as their very being. 'Nothing' is not the privative opposite of 'something', but is its potential, and contains its very essence.[121]

Dronke argues that *nihil*, *umbra* and *tenebrae* are enigmatic terms in Eriugena's writing, and points to a transformation of the understanding of *creatio ex nihilo* to something very different from Augustine.[122] Non-being and God can appear very similar in Eriugena's thought. 'Nothing' is an infinite richness, and so is God. The created individual is finite, and is not equivalent in this sense, but its essence is nothing, which could be said to be equivalent. The matter from which the corporeal individual is produced is included among those things which are created in their primordial causes,[123] and therefore participates in God rather than coming from a different place other than God. In the case of Augustine, this matter was the privation of all essence and form, and thus could be considered an opposite to divine essence, but Eriugena expands upon the privative dimension, creating a closer relationship between created nature and divine nature.

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[120] Book III, 2584–2590 (681d–682a), 90: *Proinde diuina bonitas super omnia considerata dicitur non esse, et omnino nihil esse; in omnibus uero et est et dicitur esse, quoniam totius uniuersitatis essentia est, et substantia, et genus, et species, et quantitas, et qualitas, et omnium copula, et situs, et habitus, et locus, et tempus, et actio, et passio, et omne quodcunque in omni creatura et circa omnem creaturam a qualicunque intellectu potest intelligi.* Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 308–309.

[121] In a discussion on light and shadow, Dronke points out that while Eriugena often uses the term 'shadow' (*umbra*) in a negative sense, such as a metaphor for ignorance, he also uses an alternative sense, such as Christ's casting his shadow across the Old Testament; this shadow has a divine source. The primordial causes, so deep as to elude comprehension, are characterised by shadow: they are the *tenebrae super abyssum* at the beginning of the book of Genesis. 'Let there be light' signifies their emergence from the shadows into comprehensible forms: "La condition de l'ombre est plus exaltée que la manifestation lumineuse qui en éname." "Theologia Veluti Quaedam Poetria," 249–250.

[122] "Une transformation d'une originalité étonnante." See "Theologia Veluti Quaedam Poetria," 249, 252.

[123] Book II, 664–669 (548a), 30.

3.5 The Second Division of Nature

3.5.1 Genus and species

The second book of the *Periphyseon* begins with an important disclaimer, as if prompted by a difficulty raised in a proof-reading of the first book, one in which a misreading could lead the reader dangerously astray. God is not a genus of the creature nor the creature a species of God; similarly, God is not the whole of the creature nor the creature a part of God.[124] However, in a *metaphorical* sense (*metaforice*) God is said to be part and whole, genus and species, since everything which is from Him can be predicated of Him.[125] This is further evidence of an approach which doesn't allow for literal definitions to be taken out of context.

For Eriugena, genus and species are realities: a thing-in-itself participates in its species and genus to determine its essential characteristics. But to a degree, they can also be considered as mental constructs. In Eriugena's philosophy, one can say that God is genus and species, and then follow it up by saying that He is nothing of the sort: it depends on how one is approaching it. In so far as He confers being, He is a genus of being; in so far as He transcends being, He is not being at all. This is made evident at the opening of Book III where the author discusses the relation of the primordial causes to each other. At first, he insists that they have no order in themselves, but, rather like numbers in the Monad, exist as a simple singularity, and there is no separating them.[126] This is followed immediately with the belief that goodness nevertheless precedes essence, since everything made by God must be

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[124] Book II, 4–12 (Version II, 523d), 132: *non enim deus genus est creaturae et creatura species dei, sicut creatura non est genus dei neque deus species creaturae . . .* Note that this text appears in an early revision of the original text (Jeauneau's Version II).

[125] Book II, 17–21 (524d), 132: *metaforiceque deus dicatur et genus et totum et species et pars. Omne enim quod in ipso et ex ipso est pie ac rationabiliter de eo praedicari potest.*

[126] Book III, 211–256 (624a–625a), 9–11.

good.[127] Further, goodness is a kind of genus of essence, essence a genus of life, and life a kind of genus of reason.[128] In the mind of he who contemplates, it is perfectly legitimate to connect and organise concepts in this way, in the interests of understanding Nature, despite such arrangements of genus and species being technically impossible, where one must, properly speaking, assume a unity.[129] It is legitimate because of the participation visible in the *effects* of the causes: reason participates in life (though not all life exercises reason), life in essence, and essence in goodness. This chain of participation gives rise to a categorisation according to genus and species, generated in the mind of the one who contemplates.

The definition of the creature is in the mind of he who defines it. The human mind, however, cannot know God nor contain Him in any way, and not even God can fully know God, since this would contradict the infinity of the divine.[130] Therefore God can neither be properly seen nor known through the visible universe. However, since all things ultimately come from and return to God, the mind understands that the material universe must reflect His being in some respect, however dimly. In Eriugena's Neoplatonic mindset, all things exist through participation in higher levels of being, which ultimately exist through participation in the highest level of being, Being Itself. Therefore the being of God, from Whom being in general is derived (remembering that God, in Eriugena's negative theology, is beyond Being and Non-being) is diffused through the whole diversity of nature. The mind perceives this diversity and organises everything in it according to genus and species; the essence of each body exists through participation in the divine essence which is thus

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[127] Book III, 381–385 (627d), 15.

[128] Book III, 429 (629a), 17.

[129] Book III, 449–455 (629a–b), 17.

[130] Book III, 60–73 (620c–d), 4–5. Stephen Gersh refers to the unknowability of God, even by God, as a result of the first Aristotelian category not applying to Him. *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 268–269.

ultimately responsible for everything, every genus and every species.[131] Therefore God can be understood to *be* every genus and species, and it is here that confusion arises.[132]

God is ultimately the *being* of everything, and yet, Eriugena insists, is neither genus nor species, but can only be described as such metaphorically. The solution to this philosophical difficulty lies in a consideration of a hierarchy in which the lower levels of being exist within the higher, but one certainly cannot say that the higher exists within the lower, in the same way that the leaf is part of the tree, as long as it remains attached to it, and therefore when one speaks of 'the tree', the leaf is included; however, the tree is not the leaf, nor cannot be contained in the leaf, nor can it be fully known simply by knowing the leaf. Eriugena will place God at a further remove, however, than this metaphor suggests, for God is *above* being, and is *beyond* essence. Therefore the creature is not part of God as the leaf is part of the tree. For the human mind, He is thus completely unknowable in Himself, whatever we might say about His effects in the observable genus and species of earthly bodies. The universe is finite, and has bounds; God is infinite, and has no bounds.[133]

Eriugena, it appears, has noticed the possible misreading of his own work, and it is an understandable confusion: if God is the genus of all things, then all things might be thought of as God; in other words, the term 'all things' could be a real manifestation of the term 'God' in the sense that the form of a thing is God Himself. It is possible that Eriugena thought this to be an unlikely interpretation, so much so that he had originally overlooked the

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[131] Book III, 149–152 (622c), 8.

[132] Gersh argues that Christian Neoplatonists hold the human mind to be responsible for God being conceived as manifold. This lies behind Eriugena's four divisions of nature: he regards reality as being divided through intellectual contemplation, rather than in the thing in itself. In a revision of Book II, this is stated to be the case, that the first and fourth divisions are not found in God but rather in our contemplation of God, and thus are forms not of God but of our reason. The second and third divisions are products both of contemplation and the reality of creation: Book II, 237–266, (527d–528a), 146–148. For Gersh, this strongly suggests an idealistic position; *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 271–273. Note also how the essence of all things is equated with the understanding of them in Book II, 1054 – 1055 (559a–b), 45: *Intellectus enim omnium essentia omnium est.*

[133] Book III, 60–64 (620c), 4–5.

possibility of it arising, but once alerted to it, he begins Book II with the important disclaimer in order to avert such an misunderstanding which, for a Neoplatonist who regarded God as beyond being and non-being, would be disastrous. This is corroborated by a description of God, at the beginning of Book III, as He who participates in nothing, while all principles and causes subsist through participation in Him.[134] All bodies in the visible universe are derived from corresponding principles, i.e. their causes, in the second division of nature; God, however, has no principle, and subsists uniquely in Himself.

The fourfold division of Nature could be said to place God at a distance from the world owing to the middle ground of the second division between God and sensible being. But does this middle ground compromise God's intentionality in creation? Eriugena says that God created the primordial causes, and they in turn created the world. So God does not appear to directly touch the physical world. God's creative operation within the four divisions requires further exploration in order to determine if and how God can be identified with the world.

3.5.2 Principles and causes

Eriugena's four divisions of Nature can become two if we separate them into uncreated nature and created nature.[135] The former is God, but the latter is not confined to the visible world around us; rather, it is divided between that world and the causes or principles of that world. The 'causes' of being, akin to Plato's forms, comprise Eriugena's second division of nature: the being of any created thing resides primarily in its cause or principle, and the

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[134] Book III, 20–22 (619c), 3.

[135] See Book I, 19–22 (441b–442a), 3–4: the four divisions are: that which creates and is not created, that which creates and is created, that which is created and does not create, and that which is neither created nor creates.

effects of this cause are visible in the physical world about us.[136] This manner of considering being, particular to Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy, narrows the focus of any charges of pantheism, because for Eriugena, the locus of being was not in the physical effects of a thing, but rather in its cause.[137] 'Being', in Eriugena's writing, denotes primarily a non-physical existence, and the visible world of effects is a mere shadow of this spiritual being. All things in the universe, animal, vegetable and mineral, constitute the visible effects of their non-visible principles which exist beyond the physical universe.[138] The causes contain the being and the essence of a thing. If God is to be identified with the world through a sharing of the same essence, then that essence, insofar as it pertains to created natures, is located in the principles and causes of things, rather than in the visible effects.

The extent to which created things contain the essence of God may be explored by considering the essential relationship between God and the causes, accompanied by a determination of the essential relationship between the causes and their effects. In the first place, Eriugena maintains that the causes are not emptied into their effects, but remain always as causes. There is, therefore, a permanence to the being of causes, contrasted by the

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[136] The idea of the primordial causes, considered as Platonic forms, or ideas in the mind of God, is a commonplace in both Eastern and Western metaphysics: see Catherine Kavanagh, "The Eriugenian Influence in the *Summa Halensis*," 131. Kavanagh reflects on how the place of the primordial causes in the Western metaphysics of the thirteenth century was losing ground; Alexander of Hales found the primordial causes 'redundant'.The concept of eternal *primordiales causae* is found in Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*: see Goulven Madec, "Observations sur le dossier augustinien du Periphyseon," in *Eriugena: Studien zu seinen Quellen*, ed. Beierwaltes, 80. It is principally from Pseudo-Dionysius, however, that Eriugena derives his working definition of the primordial causes. The Areopagite refers to them as 'exemplars' in the fifth chapter of *The Divine Names*: "we give the name of 'exemplar' to those principles which pre-exist as a unity in God and which produce the essences of things." See *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 102. See also *The Celestial Hierarchy* 2.4, where Lubheid presents them as "immaterial archetypes"; Ibid., 152.

[137] Book II, 626–627 (546b), 29: *nil propinquius est ad uere esse quam causae creatae creatarum rerum*. There is nothing closer to true being than the created cause of a created thing, but the cause is not identical with God, for its being is received through participation.

[138] See Book V, 228–230 (866a), 10: there is no visible or corporeal thing which does not signify something incorporeal and intelligible.

transitory nature of the visible world.[139] While the causes generate the effects, they are not affected or changed in any way by those effects; they simultaneously proceed into their effects while not departing from the Cause in which they are created.[140] The Wisdom of God is, by this understanding, safe-guarded from the spatiotemporal phenomena of the physical world, by being found in the permanence and non-intelligibility of the causes which is not affected by the procession of the effects.

The contrast between the permanence of the causes and the finitude of their effects is further strengthened by Eriugena's belief that the causes are eternal. Book III contains a lengthy exposition on how the world is eternal with God.[141] Put simply, God's will is eternal, and if God willed the world into existence, then the world is eternal with God, and everything in it.[142] God does not will in time; therefore he does not create in time.[143] Time belongs to the world of temporal effects, whereas God and His causes are eternal. Eriugena makes it clear, however, that the world is not eternal in the same way in which God is eternal, and therefore while the world may exist both forever in a temporal sense, and eternally with God in a

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[139] See Book V, 2230–2242 (909c), 70: causes will abide forever, while effects will have no permanency of their own. This contrast is summarized in Eriugena's fourth mode of being and non-being, in which the intellectual concept of a thing (its cause) is affirmed as being, whereas a thing's generation in time and space, subject to change and decay, is considered non-being. See Book I, 131–136 (445b–c).

[140] Book II, 815–820 (552a), 36. Eriugena depicts the remaining as darkness, and the procession into effects as light.

[141] Book III, 809–2285 (638c–674d), 29–80.

[142] The eternity of created being is referred to in Eriugena's modes of being and non-being. The non-being from which the world is drawn forth is in eternity, where it can be said to always be (mode 4). The causes always existed in God eternally, beyond anything known to the intellect: see Book III, 1908–1914 (665a–b), 66–67. In his *Homilia*, Eriugena states that the begetting of the Word from the Father is simultaneously the creation of the causes of all things: *Nam ipsius [uerbum] ex patre generatio ipsa est causarum omnium conditio omniumque quae ex causis in genera et species procedunt operatio et effectus*. See *Homilia* VII, 5–7 (287a), 13.

[143] See Book III, 2293–2298 (675a), 80: God does not need to wait to make something, as if it were a future event, for all things are present to Him. All that He wills, makes and sees is within Himself, therefore everything is coeternal with Him, since His will is united with His essence. See also III, 2375–2378 (677a), 83: God sees creatures in an eternal present; since His seeing is His willing, they are therefore eternal, but in their causes, rather than in their effects.

super-temporal sense, it will always be preceded by God as cause. Eriugena rejects the idea of a world that exists eternally alongside God (i.e. outside of God), a doctrine for which Augustine condemned the Manichaeans, since it posited an independent (and presumably evil) existence separate from God. In the Bible, the world had a beginning, but it did not begin in time; rather, according to both Augustine and Eriugena, time comes into existence with it. Time belongs to a physical universe of effects, the effects of created being that exists a-temporally in an eternal world of causes. The Word precedes all things (i.e. the primordial causes) causally, but not temporally.[144]

The primordial causes, seen as an intermediary between the creative act of God and the visible world, cannot be understood as creative principles acting independently of God. They are created eternally in the unity of the Divine Word, in accordance with divine will, and do not compromise the intentionality of God with respect to His creation. All things created through the causes manifest the will of the creative Trinity. The Father creates all things; the primordial causes come eternally into being in the Word, and the Spirit distributes the causes into their effects.[145] Robert Crouse asserts that Eriugena "goes far beyond any of his predecessors in working out the doctrine of causes in explicit relation to the tri-personal activity of God, and it is in that matter that the argument of the *Periphyseon* is most original and fruitful."[146] In his *Homilia*, Eriugena couples the creation of the causes with the eternal

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[144] See Book II, 1118–1126 (561c), 48: The Maker precedes what He makes; the causes are eternal, but not co-eternal, with the Son. *Coaeterna quidem, quia nunquam fuit filius sine primordialibus naturarum causis in se factis. Quae tamen causae non omnino ei in quo factae sunt coaeternae sunt. Non enim factori facta coaeterna esse possunt. Praecedit enim factor ea quae facit.* The causes cannot be co-eternal because, unlike their creator, they receive their being from outside of themselves.

[145] Book II, 1259–1264 (566a), 54: *Theologia . . . Patri enim dat omnia facere. Verbo dat omnes in ipso uniuersaliter, essentialiter, simpliciter primordiales rerm causas aeternaliter fieri. Spiritui dat ipsas primordiales causas in uerbo factas in effectus suos foecundatas distribuere.*

[146] "*Primordiales Causae* in Eriugena's Interpretation of Genesis," in McEvoy, Steel and Van Riel, eds., *Iohannes Scotus Eriugena, The Bible and Hermeneutics*, 215. The creation and procession of primordial causes are thus a manifestation and revelation of the divine, and therefore they are theophanies. Ibid., 216. Crouse argues that Eriugena, in his understanding of the causes, found no great distinction between his Latin and Greek sources.

generation of the Word from the Father; however, as Cause, the Son precedes all that is made through Him, and is greater than them.[147]

It may be legitimately asked whether or not Eriugena's four divisions are really collapsible, so that nothing remains except the first, which is God alone. For if the causes abide forever, and God permanently transcends all being, then how can the second division be reconciled with the first? By the Neoplatonic creed, all things are returned into their source, but in Eriugena's case, if souls abide forever, and causes abide forever, can they be intellectually conceived as identical with the One who transcends being and non-being? And if not, they are not fully equal to God, and God retains a degree of separation. Eriugena's solution is the analogy of the ray of light: the ray is fully permeated by brightness, and can appear as brightness alone, just as in souls returning closer to God, only God can be seen.[148]

3.5.3 God is made in all things

God makes all things and God is made in all things.[149] Whatever proceeds visibly into the corporeal world existed eternally in God as a cause, and is not created as new at its appearance. Its appearance is a procession from a cause into its effects, a procession from a cause that has existed eternally. Eternal, created being exists by participation in God, and from God it derives its essence and its being. Through its appearing as effect, it reveals its maker as a theophany. Therefore can Eriugena say that it *is* God, because all things are contained in God eternally, and nothing can exist outside of God. So if something is 'made', it, too, is God; when something new appears, it cannot be something genuinely new.[150] If it

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[147] *Homilia* VII, 5–6 (287a), 13: *Nam ipsius ex patre generatio ipsa est causarum omnium conditio*.

[148] Book II, 2844–2854 (608c–609a), 115.

[149] Book III, 2633–2635 (683a), 91: . . . *deum omnium factorum esse et in omnibus factum*.

[150] See Book III, 589–598 (633a–b), 22. Everything that appears, i.e. that is both understood and sensed, is none other but the apparition of what is not apparent, the manifestation of the hidden, the affirmation

were genuinely new, and God is being 'made', then something new of God is being created, and God is being added to, and the created thing adds to the being of God. This notion cannot be permitted, for God, since he is infinite, cannot be added to. Rather, He is, in an indirect way, manifest visibly as a theophany when it is said that He is 'made'.

The visible effects of this world, while contained within God, are pushed to a distance from the essence of God by the inserting of the eternal primordial causes between God and His visible creation. The effects are not the essence of any visible thing, but merely its accidental qualities. If something appears, it is the procession of effects from their eternal cause. But since all things derive their being ultimately from God, God is, in a sense, made visible – 'made' – in those effects. Since God is superessential, however, essences cannot contain Him, and much less can He be contained by the effects. If pantheism is understood to signify the identification of God with corporeal nature, and Eriugena's locus of being is very much in the second division, then the label cannot apply. His second division of nature places God at a remove from the sensible world, but since divine nature is super-essential, this places God beyond the second division also.

3.6   Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed the main theological themes pertaining to Eriugena's first two divisions of Nature, i.e. God, and the causes of all things; together they constitute being-that-creates. Divine nature and divine simplicity contrast with the multiplicity inherent in the Aristotelian categories which, for Eriugena, do not apply to God. Pantheism has not been properly found here, since Eriugena's apophatic method prevents anything being properly

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of what has been negated, the understanding of the incomprehensible, the body of the incorporeal, the essence of the superessential, and the form of the formless. *Omne enim quod intelligitur et sentitur nihil aliud est nisi non apparentis apparitio, occulti manifestatio, negati affirmatio, incomprehensibilis comprehensio . . . incorporalis corpus, superessentialis essentia, informis forma*. True being, then, belongs to the cause, rather than its apparition as effect.

predicated of God, much less an identity with the created world. Further, Eriugena has asserted that the definitions of things are in the mind that defines them, which undermines the proper relevance of ontological assertions. The examination of the second division continues in the following chapter, extending to how the 'causes' in this division relate to the effects of the third division, that which is created but does not create (i.e. the visible world).

Early in Book I, Eriugena introduces his five modes of being and non-being, but these modes remain undeveloped, and play no major part in the unfolding of the remainder of the work; for the purposes of this chapter, it was sufficient to note that God transcends both being and non-being. However, given that the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* had become a commonplace of hexameral commentary in the Carolingian era, Eriugena's understanding of this term needs to be explored in terms of his five modes. Under Greek influence, he will go on to take a daring stance by positing an alternative understanding of 'non-being' which reverses Augustine's privative understanding of the term. This presents the possibility that the world was created not out of nothing, but out of God himself, and therefore invites a further suggestion of pantheism. This will be the subject of chapter 6.

Chapter Four

The *Periphyseon* and That which is Created

From Cause to Effect: Eriugena's Understanding of Essence and
Participation in the Appearing of Created Nature

4.1   Introduction

This chapter will continue the survey of the most important aspects of Eriugena's theology,

beginning with his commentary on the opening chapter of Genesis in which his second and

third divisions of nature coincide.[1] It will examine how an incorporeal cause proceeds to its

visible effect and, for the purposes of finding pantheism (if it is to be found), will attempt to

determine where exactly a thing's essence (*οὐσία*) is located. For Eriugena, God is capable of

creating things dissimilar to Himself, and is not apparent in visible, temporal effects. The

study of the third division extends to human nature which, made in the image and likeness of

God, deserves careful consideration. In Eriugena's theology, the visible world was made

through humankind; his understanding of the Fall, and of Paradise as ideal human nature, will

also be considered here. Sin and evil separate man from God, while the gift of grace implies a

reunification which corresponds with Neoplatonic return. The degree of that return, i.e. the

extent of the reunification, will have ramifications for this study.

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[1] For a general introduction to the hexameral commentary in the patristic period, see Peter C. Boutenoff, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008). Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* is known to Eriugena as *Exameron*. Eriugena's chief sources for Book IV are this work, along with the *De Hominis Opificio* of Gregory of Nyssa (known to Eriugena as *De Imagine*), and Ambrose's *De paradiso*. Eriugena devotes a considerable part of his *Periphyseon* to hexameral commentary, weaving it through Books II to IV, and also the beginning of Book V. For an introduction to his exegetical method, see Catherine Kavanagh, "Eriugena the Exegete: Hermeneutics in a Biblical Context," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 326–345. Kavanagh provides a survey of studies on Eriugena's exegesis (326–329); in particular, see J. McEvoy, C. Steel and G. Van Riel, eds., *Iohannes Scotus Eriugena, The Bible and Hermeneutics: Proceedings of the Ninth International colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies Held at Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve June 7–10, 1995* (Leuven: 1996). See also Bernard McGinn, "The *Periphyseon* as Hexaemeral Commentary," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 154–188 (and especially 166–171).

4.2 Hexameron: the creation narrative

4.2.1 Let there be light

For Eriugena, the creation of the heavens and the earth in Genesis denotes the creation of the primordial causes which exist eternally with God; the visible world subsequently proceeds as effect from the darkness of non-being into the light of being.[2] The light signifies the perceptibility of the effects, for the causes themselves are veiled by darkness, owing to the incomprehensibility of their nature.[3] The night wherein dwell the causes yields to the day of the effects. According to Eriugena therefore, Genesis describes a two-fold creation: first, the eternal causes created by God, and second, the manifestation of effects in the material world. The manifestation and appearance of the physical universe as we experience it is the effect of the universe as it exists eternally in its cause.

4.2.2 *Fiat* vs *facta est*

Eriugena states that whenever in Genesis it says 'Let there be X', X refers to the establishment of a primordial cause; the phrase 'and so it was' refers to the procession from cause to effect.[4] The appearance of each created thing in the third division of nature can thus, as I.P. Sheldon-Williams points out, be recorded twice: the first, by *fiat* or another jussive subjunctive, signifying the creation of its particular cause, and the second, *facta est* or *fecit*,

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[2] Book III, 3033–3034 (692b), 105: *dicimus creatione lucis processionem primordialem causarum in suos effectus significari*. For the origins of the idea of the primordial causes, see Robert Crouse, "*Primordiales Causae* in Eriugena's Interpretation of Genesis," 210–216. The causes have a Platonic and Neoplatonic history, including Augustine's seminal reasons which exist eternally in the uncreated Word (in *De Genesi ad litteram*). Crouse argues that Eriugena employed a degree of originality in their use, and that the creation and procession of primordial causes in Eriugena are a manifestation and revelation of the divine, and therefore they are theophanies.

[3] Book III, 3034–3036 (692b), 105.

[4] Book III, 3217–3225 (696c–697a), 111.

to refer to its procession into effect.[5] It implies a certain arbitrariness to the universe: the *fiat*

belongs to the direct creative process of God, but the *facta est* is removed by a slight

distance, a secondary process, contained within the causes which already exist. Each thing

appears in its particular genus and species as a procession from the eternal reason(s) in which

it subsists as an essence in the Word of God.[6]

4.2.3   Cause and effect created simultaneously

While the effects proceed from the causes, at no time did the causes exist without the effects.

Eriugena asserts that the whole physical world was established simultaneously, both in its

effects and in its causes. The six days of creation were not, for Eriugena, intervals of time:

the number six is an intelligible division rather than a temporal one, and the primordial

causes were created and proceeded into their effects in a simultaneous "downrush" (*impetu*).[7]

Alumnus asks the question: why, if he is first, is man created last? Nutritor replies

that this demonstrates his superiority over other creatures.[8] Rather than understanding man to

have been brought forward from the genus of animals, Eriugena holds that the genus of

animals was brought forth in man.[9] In a sense, he has reversed the order of the six days of

creation. There is darkness in the beginning, but he does not interpret it as an empty thing, as

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[5] See Introduction to *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Periphyseon, Liber IV*, ed. I.P. Sheldon-Williams and Édouard Jeauneau (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1999), 13.

[6] Book III, 3321–3322 (699b), 115.

[7] Book III, 3324–3326 (699b), 115: . . . *causis conditarum rerum deque primo earum impetu simul in primam mundi huius constitutionem intelligitur*. Jeauneau comments on how the procession and return of all things - the "*thème majeur*" of the *Periphyseon*, is an expression "*par excellence*" of Neoplatonic thought. "La division des sexes chez Grégoire de Nysse et chez Jean Scot Érigène," 53.

[8] Book IV, 1644–1648 (782a), 59.

[9] Book IV, 1310–1313 (774b), 49. In this idea Eriugena is indebted to Maximus. Man is the *officina omnium*, the anchor of all being in the universe, owing to Christ's humanity. See Adrian Guiu, "Eriugena Reads Maximus Confessor," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 299–309. Guiu argues that this idea is fundamental to Eriugena's outlook. See also Willemien Otten, "The Dialectic of the Return in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*," in *The Harvard Theological Review* 84, no. 4 (October 1991): 414–415.

Augustine did. Behind the brightness of creation lies the incomprehensible and infinite darkness from which all being arises, itself not a negation but an infinite richness, dark because it can be known by no intellect. The darkness of the first day of creation represents transcendence.[10] The light (ironically) comes about as a result of sin; it is produced simultaneously for, following Maximus, Adam never had blessed vision, but was always blinded by sin.[11]

4.2.4 Paradise as human nature

In the biblical narrative, Adam and Eve sin in the garden of Eden *after* it has been created, whereas for Eriugena, creation (i.e. the procession of effects) necessarily happens after sin. This requires Eriugena to provide an allegorical interpretation in which the six days of creation all refer to man: following Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose and Origen, Paradise is found in human nature itself: it is human nature without the contamination of sin.[12] The planted trees signify virtues, the beasts and cattle are various bodily passions, and the birds are empty thoughts that hover about the soul.[13] To support this interpretation, Eriugena is forced to re-arrange some of the chronological order of the Scripture to suit his purpose, particularly where he insists that some part of the creation of man – i.e. when they were

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[10] Book III, 3064–3068 (693a), 106.

[11] Book IV, 3061–3068 (813d–814a), 103.

[12] Book IV, 3379–3933 (831c–832d), 128–129. McGinn proposes an eschatological reading of Eriugena's hexameral commentary, rather than the usual protological one. Therefore Paradise more properly describes what *will be* following the Return of all things: this condition never *was*, since creation, for Eriugena, is instantaneous. "The Periphyseon as Hexaemeral Commentary," 184.

[13] Book IV, 3891–3897 (832a), 128. Where the beasts in the narrative represent passions of the body, the beasts which we observe in nature were named by Adam, and Eriugena uses this to signify that they were conceptualised by him, and so they were created through him. Every irrationality, and every irrational species, is created by the human mind, even if, having fallen from its original condition, it cannot properly understand what has been created through it. See Book IV, 1080–1130 (768b–769d), 40–42.

formed from the clay – must have taken place after the Fall.[14] The entire physical world of effects is a step removed from God's ideal or original spiritual creation.

Eriugena's interpretation of Paradise as being the state of human nature before the Fall requires that he further explain the various episodes of the narrative in accordance with it. Adam's sleep represents the mind's turning away from eternal things and God, to look instead towards temporal and carnal things.[15] It is during the sleep that the woman is formed: sexual division is thus a direct result of sin.[16] This is woman in a literal sense, although the woman who gave the fruit (Gen 3:6) was, in fact, a figurative expression of the exterior senses, entranced and deceived by the phantasies (*phantasiis*) of carnal things; the 'man' signifies the mind which, corrupted by the senses, becomes separated from the contemplation of truth.[17]

4.2.5 The four elements

Eriugena interprets the 'firmament between the waters' as the simple elements – earth, air, fire and water – located between the immutable causes and the mutability of bodies.[18] The 'waters beneath the heavens' signifies the instability of matter: the fluid quality of water identifies those things that are subject to change and decay.[19] 'Dry land', conversely, refers to

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[14] Book IV, 3961–3968 (833b–c), 130.

[15] Book IV, 4061–4065 (835c), 133.

[16] Book IV, 4081–4090 (836a–b), 134; also Book IV, 2395–2396 (799a), 81. Eriugena contrasts Adam, in whom, as a universal man, all men sinned, with Christ, who redeemed all men. Adam's side was pierced and woman formed after he had sinned; with Christ's side was pierced after the redemptive act of death and resurrection, and in whom there is neither male nor female. Book IV, 4106–4127 (836c–837a), 135–136. This comparison is borrowed from Augustine: *"Sicut enim in Adam omnes moriuntur, ita et in Christo omnes uiuificantur . . . moritur Christus, et fit ecclesia. Dormienti Adam fit Eua de latere"*. Book IV, 4115–4118 (836c–d), 135.

[17] Book IV 4926–4931 (854d), 160: *mulierem uidelicet figurate exteriorem sensum appellans, rerum sensibilium phantasiis delectatum atque deceptum, uiri autem appellatione animum significans, qui sensui corporeo illicite consentiens corrumpitur, hoc est, a contemplatione intimae ueritatis segregatur.*

[18] Book III, 3210–3213 (696c), 111.

[19] Book III, 3448–3452 (702a), 119.

the stability of substantial forms.[20] The corruptibility and multiplicity of mutable bodies conceals the stability and permanence of their substantial forms.[21] Where the elements lie between the causes and physical bodies, it is strictly speaking a mixture of the properties of the elements (heat, coldness, moisture and dryness) that form mutable bodies, rather than a mixture of the elements themselves. This can be understood to imply that there is no real substance in the material building blocks of corporeal things. Instead the substance remains in its form, while clothing itself corporally with the qualities of the elements.

4.3   From cause to effect

Eriugena's concept of the term 'Nature' includes not only the created universe but also its Creator.[22] It is an all-inclusive term to signify everything that is and everything that is not. God can be associated with the uncreated divisions, but to what degree is God present in the created and visible universe? Eriugena regards the Divinity who is beyond being as the being of all things, yet also denies His presence in the divisions of the created universe.[23] The third division of Nature exists through participation in the second, which in turn exists through participation in the first.[24] Every created good is good solely through participation in the Supreme Good. Therefore every created thing takes its being from its cause, and reflects the First Cause, however dimly. It is in this sense that these effects can be predicated (metaphorically) of God.

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[20] Book III, 3486–3488 (702d–703a), 120: *de forma autem substantiali semperque permanenti*.

[21] Book III, 3469–3474 (702c), 120. Eriugena takes this idea from Gregory of Nyssa. See Michael Harrington, "Eriugena and the Neoplatonic Tradition," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 67–69.

[22] Book III, 77–79 (621a), 5. The use of a single term to cover both God and His creation is not necessarily an attempt by Eriugena to imply pantheism, but simply describes all that can be spoken of.

[23] Book III, 74–75 (621a), 5: *In diuisionibus uniuersitatis conditae nullo modo [deum] posuerim*.

[24] Book III, 83–93 (621a–b), 5–6.

Eriugena's ontology is permeated by a tension based on the varying degrees of divine presence in each division of nature.[25] While everything exists through God, and nothing exists outside of God, God cannot be confined to the things he has created, even if they are eternal with him, but rather is always beyond being and beyond essence.[26] Although God is transcendent, the attributes which are habitually predicated of God are not without truth due to the chain of participation. Essence and goodness, for example, exist first as Divine Essence and Divine Goodness. Everything else after that which has essence, or is good, participates not directly in Divine Essence or Divine Goodness, however, but in the corresponding created primordial cause, which, according to Eriugena, is 'essence-in-itself' and 'goodness-in-itself'. Therefore the essence and existence of all created things exist, and have their being, through participation in the causes, and not through direct participation in God.[27]

The intellectual ordering of the primordial causes is based not on how they are in themselves, but on how they are perceived by the mind.[28] The entire number of them exists in a singularity, a simple and indivisible One, just as all numbers exist 'singularly' in the

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[25] Eriugena's ontological exploration reflects Augustine's considerations of being and non-being in the *Confessions*: *Et inspexi caetera intra te, et uidi nec omnino esse, nec omnino non esse; nec omnino esse, quia non sunt quod tu es, nec omnino non esse, quia a te sunt*. Book III, 1145–1148 (646b), 41. Cf. *Confessions* VII.11. In this passage and what precedes it, Augustine considers the God who is, and compares Him with all other being. Only God's being is fully real, while all other being draws its reality from God who brings it into being. Insofar as it is not God, however, it is not fully real.

[26] Book III, 112–123 (621d–622a), 6–7: *Et dum haec de ea et praedicantur et intelliguntur, hoc est dum in diuisionibus uniuersitatum primum locum obtineat, nemo tamen est pie credentium et ueritatem intelligentium, qui non continuo absque ulla cunctatione exclamet causam totius uniuersitatis conditae creatricem supernaturalem esse, et superessentialem, et super omnem uitam et sapientiam et uirtutem, et super omnia quae dicuntur et intelliguntur et omni sensu percipiuntur, dum sit horum omnium principium causale, et medium implens essentiale, et finis consummans omnemque motum stabilitans quietumque faciens, et ambitus omnia quae sunt et quae non sunt circumscribens*.

[27] Book III, 140–142 (622b–c), 7. Stephen Gersh comments on how pagan Neoplatonists such as Proclus held certain 'self-constituting' principles to return not to a prior cause, but to themselves. These principles, however, are found only in an eternal, spiritual realm, and transcend temporal things; Gersh emphasises that such principles "must not be found in something else." Tracing this doctrine in Eriugena, he observes that only God is self-determined, but that the soul is self-moved and enjoys an unmediated connection with God. "*Per Se Ipsum*: The Problem of Immediate and Mediate Causation in Eriugena and his Neoplatonic Predecessors," in *Jean Scot Erigène et l'Histoire de la Philosophie*, ed. René Roques (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1977), 368–374.

[28] For a list of primordial causes, see Book III, 149–195 (622c–623c), 8–9.

Monad.[29] Therefore they can all be considered at once, and no one is superior to another. It cannot be said that, for example, goodness precedes essence, or the other way around, for in order to be good, a thing must first exist, and yet at the same time, all things owe their existence to the goodness of God which precedes them.

Through the second division, wherein created things truly and eternally exist, Eriugena has added a degree of separation between the being of corporeal nature and the being of God. Insofar as a thing is, however, its being is derived from God's being.[30] True being, which exists wholly in itself and not by degrees through participation, belongs to Divine Nature alone, outside of which there is nothing. The Divine Nature encompasses all things, and therefore the being of all things is (derived from) the being of God.[31] If there is nothing outside of God, and there is nothing within God and Nature that is not God Himself, then, taken by itself, this statement could be construed as pantheistic. It would be relevant to ask: *how much* being or essence proceeds from God, and is contained within corporeal nature?

The unity and simplicity of divine being contrasts with the multiplicity and variety of corporeal nature. The very multiplicity of spatiotemporal phenonema demonstrates a discontinuity with divine simplicity, for it is replete with opposites and differences. The sameness between divine being and the visible world is accounted for by all things being contained in God, and sharing in His essence. The difference lies in the world's being a succession of apparitions of the causes in the second division, reflections and manifestations of essence, but not essence-in-itself. The four divisions are related, therefore, not by identity,

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[29] Book III, 214–236 (624a–624c), 9–10. Robert Crouse observes that for both Augustine and Eriugena, the "causal reasons" are established "as a perfect unity in the divine thinking and willing, and create diversity as they proceed into their effects." See "*Primordiales Causae* in Eriugena's Interpretation of Genesis," 214.

[30] Book III, 561–562 (632b–c), 21*: ex fonte totum flumen principaliter manat*.

[31] Book III, 582–585 (633a), 22. *Et extra se non cognouit omnia, quia extra eam nihil est, sed intra se*.

but rather by Neoplatonic participation, whereby lower ranks of being participate in the essence of higher ranks; the higher contain the lower, and true being and essence is diffused from the top down. Importantly, the lower ranks can in no way contain or comprehend the higher ranks, or share in the fullness of their being. Eriugena explains their common essence through participation:

> We ought not to understand God and the creature as two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same. For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God; and God, by manifesting Himself, in a marvellous and ineffable manner creates Himself in the creature, the invisible making Himself visible and the incomprehensible comprehensible and the hidden revealed . . . and the superessential essential and the supernatural natural . . . and the accident-free subject to accident and the infinite finite . . . and the Creator of all things created in all things, and eternal He begins to be . . . and becomes in all things all things.[32]

Eriugena asserts that the creature is *in* God (*in deo est subsistens*), rather than *being* God *per se*. Being superessential, God cannot be completely manifest in visible nature, for the corporeal world can only be a reflection of the essential. Therefore all things, in their totality, are in Him, but He is not complete in all things. The superessential is channelled into the essential; the essential takes its being from the superessential.

The essence and being that connect created being with non-created being enables Eriugena to predicate all four divisions of God. The Divine Nature is created by descending into the principles of things,[33] and further into their effects, the third division, which are created but do not create. Corporeal bodies contain "the last trace of Divine Nature", although owing to the distraction of mutable, earthly things, it is not easily discerned, even by the wise.[34] Eriugena asserts that very few minds have the ability to recognise God in earthly

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[32] Book III, 2443–2455 (678c–678d), 85: *Proinde non duo a se ipsis distantia debemus intelligere deum et creaturam, sed unum et id ipsum. Nam et creatura in deo est subsistens, et deus in creatura mirabili et ineffabili modo creatur, se ipsum manifestans inuisibilis uisibilem se faciens, et incomprehensibilis comprehensibilem, et occultus apertum . . . et superessentialis essentialem, et supernaturalis naturalem . . . et accidentibus liber accidentibus subiectum et accidens, et infinitus finitum . . . et factor omnium factus in omnibus, et aeternus coepit esse . . . et fit in omnibus omnia.* Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 305.

[33] Book III, 2905 (689b), 100.

[34] Book III, 2917–2926 (689c–689d), 100–101: *extremum diuinae naturae vestigium.* O'Meara's translation.

effects: such a level of contemplation requires a detachment from less spiritual concerns, and the practice of virtue and reason. As they present themselves visibly to the casual observer, God's presence is not immediately evident in the physical bodies of the world; to know God in these effects is to look *beyond* the merely physical, and to understand that the true locus of their being is in their incorporeal causes. An effect, a visible thing, can be contemplated in itself, but also as a theophany. The process of God becoming visible in the corporeal world is summed up by Eriugena as follows:

> Descending first from the superessentiality of His Nature, in which He is said not to be, He is created by Himself in the primordial causes and becomes the beginning of all essence, of all life . . . then, descending from the primordial causes which occupy a kind of intermediate position between God and the creature, that is, between that ineffable superessentiality which surpasses all understanding and the substantially manifest nature which is visible to pure minds, He is made in their effects and is openly revealed in His theophanies; then He proceeds through the manifold forms of the effects to the lowest order of the whole of nature, in which bodies are contained; and thus going forth into all things in order He makes all things and is made all in all things.[35]

What becomes evident here is a hierarchy of participation: God descends from His own supernatural and superessential nature to the primordial causes where He is manifest in essence and being; from this level He descends again into the effects and the lowest order of all, the visible world. Though He is manifest at this lowest level, He does not cease to be, in Himself, above all things, not just the effects but their causes: it is only by descending into the causes that He *becomes* the beginning of all essence. Eriugena here locates the origin of essence at the level of the primordial causes.

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[35] Book III, 2639–2651 (683a–b), 91: *Proinde ex superessentialitate suae naturae, in qua dicitur non esse, primum descendens in primordialibus causis a se ipso creatur; et fit principium omnis essentiae, omnis uitae . . . Deinde ex primordialibus causis, quae medietatem quandam inter deum et creaturam obtinent (hoc est inter illam ineffabilem superessentialitatem super omnem intellectum et manifestam substantialiter naturam puris animis conspicuam), descendens in effectibus ipsarum fit, et manifeste in theophaniis suis aperitur. Deinde per multiplices effectuum formas usque ad extremum totius naturae ordinem, quo corpora continentur, procedit. Ac sic ordinate in omnia proueniens facit omnia, et fit in omnibus omnia.* Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 310.

Included in corporeal bodies are human corporeal bodies, and Eriugena clearly points out that, while all things are restored in Christ,[36] corporeal bodies do not fully participate in the resurrection because they are not in themselves fully real: as a collection of accidents, they are only shadows of the real.[37] Corporeal bodies return to the causes of physical elements, but do not participate in the resurrection as such. Thus it is that both the general (e.g. limbs) and particular (e.g. height, sex) aspects of the body will not participate in the resurrection of the soul, but will return to their causes. Initially, at death, corporeal bodies return to dust, and are abandoned by the soul, of whatever kind (rational/irrational) it is. However, the body, which has returned to the four elements, will, at the general return, be changed into an incorruptible spirituality, and be reunited with its soul by "a kind of mysterious harmony."[38]

Rather than finding God in the physical world, Eriugena asserts that the corporeal body does not have true being in itself, and will not take part of the resurrection as a corporeal body. In Book II he states that the physical body is not part of our image and likeness of God;[39] rather, it comes into being after sin. By extension, therefore, can we surmise the physical world, which is created through man as the *officina omnium*, to be likewise, i.e. coming into being after sin, though not having, like humankind, the image and likeness of God? The corporeal body, he stresses, does not belong to our intelligible essence (*intelligibilis nostrae essentiae*) which manifests the image of God.[40] The essence of humanity is the dwelling place of God's image.

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[36] Book V, 2418–2420 (913c). 76.

[37] Book V, 2450–2455 (914b), 77.

[38] Book V, 2519 (915c), 79: *mirabili quadam armonia*.

[39] Book II, 1410–1413 (571a), 61.

[40] Book II, 1417–1420 (571a–b), 61–62.

4.4   Eriugena and essence

4.4.1   Defining essence

For Eriugena, essence, as such, is unknowable and indefinable.[41] From all we can observe about a thing, i.e. all of its accidental qualities, where and when it is, how big or small it is, its colour and condition, species and genus, we can gather only that it is, but by no means can it be defined, since it transcends all substantial definition.[42] This characteristic permeates all discussions of essence, and clouds both the assertions and denials of pantheism. However, an exploration of Eriugena's discussions around essence throw light on his understanding of God's ontological relationship with the world, and the sameness and difference between different things. All being derives its essence from God, and every intellectual creature is formed of essence and essential difference.[43] Two important points must be borne in mind at the outset: first, that essence, being and substance are located in the primordial causes, rather than in corporeal bodies, which are a collection of accidents; secondly, if created being is comprised of both essence and essential difference, then they will display degrees of sameness/likeness, and conversely degrees of difference.

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[41] Book I, 1911–1912 (487a), 63; Book II, 1971–1973 (586d), 83. Essence as unknowable is derived from Gregory, according to whom it is not possible to obtain a precise definition of 'substance'. See Book IV, 1225–1227 (772a), 45–46: *Omnium siquidem quae sunt substantia nullo modo diffiniri potest quid sit, teste Gregorio theologo*. Eriugena also refers to Gregory when describing his first mode of being and non-being, in which being is posited as that which can be apprehended by the intellect, while non-being pertains to those things which elude sense and intellect because of the excellence of their nature. Essence, along with God and the reasons of things (what might be termed the *quiddities* of things), are included as non-being, for according to Gregory, no substance or essence of any creature can be comprehended by the intellect. The incomprehensibility of God, in Himself, extends to the creature which He creates, and which exists in Him. The essence of the creature therefore remains beyond the reach of the intellect. The intellect apprehends *that* it is, but not *what* it is. Book I, 61–73 (443b–c), 5.

[42] Book IV, 1236–1242 (772b), 46: *superat omnem substantialem diffinitionem*.

[43] Book II, 685–690 (548b–c), 31: *Nil enim est aliud omnium essentia, nisi omnium in diuina sapientia cognitio. "In ipso enim uiuimus et mouemur et sumus."*

4.4.2 Essence as knowledge

Essence begins with divine knowledge, the Divine Wisdom of the God in whom we live, move, and have our being.[44] Eriugena refers to a Dionysian definition of essence – *cognitio eorum quae sunt quae ea quae sunt est*[45] – and paraphrases it as *essentia enim animae nostrae est intellectus, qui uniuersitati humanae naturae praesidet*.[46] The superessential divinity 'intellects' the essence of the human person. God, being infinite, cannot properly be defined by himself, and it is impossible, for Eriugena, that the Essence of Father, Son or Spirit be grasped by the human intellect.[47] The knowledge of the creature however, which is the essence of the creature, is defined by God.

If the definition of the human person is a concept in the mind of God, then the definitions of creatures 'below' the person (e.g. animals) can be considered to be concepts in the human mind, whose intellect is capable of encompassing them (while unable to encompass himself, or anything higher than himself). In this manner, Eriugena explains that every creature is created in the person: the concept is greater than the thing, because rational nature is always preferred to irrational nature, since it is closer to God. Therefore the very substance of the thing is in the concept. The concepts of things are contained in man: in him they are universally created.[48] Beierwaltes explains how the names of things, given by Adam,

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[44] Book II, 1058–1062 (559b), 45.

[45] Book II, 1061–1062 (559b), 45. O'Meara translates this as: "the knowledge of the things that are is the things that are."

[46] Book II, 1393–1394 (570a), 61. Eriugena extends knowledge-as-essence to include human knowledge, but in a secondary sense. In the creative wisdom, knowledge is the cause and essence of creation, while human knowledge, as an effect to this cause, can be considered a 'secondary essence': *cognitio uero creatae sapientiae secunda essentia et superioris notitiae effectus subsistit*; Book IV, 1516–1518 (779a), 55. There is a slight confusion between a capacity or power (intellect) and its operation (knowledge). In considering the trinitarian nature of the human being as *imago Dei*, Eriugena states that intellect is our essence, and that *nous* and *ousia* do not differ in reality, but only in name. Book II, 1389–1392 (570a), 60.

[47] Book II, 1999–2002 (587c), 85.

[48] Book IV, 1299–1301 (774a), 48: *si res ipsae in notionibus suis uerius quam in se ipsis subsistunt, notitiae autem earum homini naturaliter insunt, in homine igitur uniuersaliter creatae sunt.* See also Book I,

are a complete and authentic representation of the object; however, this idealism is tempered by a disclaimer: essence, or the centre of a thing's quiddity, cannot be known, and therefore thinking cannot fully encompass being.[49]

The essence of a sensible thing is not properly contained in the human mind, but rather, through its primordial cause, in divine wisdom. Insofar as human knowledge participates in divine knowledge, the sensible effect of a created thing subsists in human knowledge. It is in this sense that humankind can be considered a co-creator of the sensible world, and Eriugena regards a created thing as having a 'secondary essence' in the human mind.[50] But Beierwaltes points out that when the ungraspable hiddenness of essence is translated into language, there always remains a distance, and a difference, between language and what it describes.[51] Essence can be approached by thought and language, but its hidden otherness is always maintained.[52]

4.4.3   God as essence

Eriugena understands essence in a singular sense that is equivalent to 'being' and derived from divine superessence, a universal essence which allows extension of itself to infinity.[53] It extends into individual essences (i.e. substances), which take on accidentals, but before

1841–1842 (485b–c), 61, where he asserts that the definitions of things are nowhere but in the rational soul: *diffinitiones corporum rerumque ratione carentium non alibi nisi in anima rationabili sunt.*

[49] Beierwaltes, "Language and Object," trans. O'Meara, in *Jean Scot Écrivain*, 212–213.

[50] Book IV, 1518–1522; 1534–1535 (779a–c), 55: *Et quod diximus de prima et causali essentia in creatricis sapientiae notione constituta, deque secunda et effectiua, quae in anima humana subsistere non incongrue asseritur, de omnibus similiter quae circa essentiam totius creaturae dinoscuntur incunctanter intelligendum est . . . in diuino intellectu omnia causaliter, in humana uero cognition effectualiter subsistant.*

[51] Beierwaltes, "Duplex Theoria," in *Eriugena: Grundzüge seines Denkens*, 82.

[52] Ibid., 82–83.

[53] Book II, 2343–2344 (597a), 98.The divisions and subdivisions of essence are not manifest in quantity. A large body does not have more *ousia* than a small one. A body constitutes not a quantity of *ousia*, but a quantum: Book I, 2168 – 2169 (493a), 71. (I.493a). Eriugena found the universal understanding of essence in Maximus's *Ambigua*, VI: see Catherine Kavanagh, "The Influence of Maximus the Confessor on Eriugena's Treatment of Aristotle's Categories," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (2005): 575.

extension it is simple and allows of no accident.[54] Eriugena refers to the Dionysian description of God as the superessential divinity Who is the being of all things,[55] and holds the position that only divine nature exists as an essence in itself. It alone is the essence of all things, and is created in all things.[56] This equation of divine being with the essence of all created things is perhaps the strongest argument in favour of a pantheistic interpretation of Eriugena's thought. Even if essence is unknowable in itself, the equation may stand. It is validated elsewhere in Eriugena's own poetic language: *dabitur omnia ubique deum esse, et totum in toto, et factorem et factum, et uidentem et uisum, et tempus et locum; et essentia omnium et substantia et accidens et, ut simpliciter dicam, omne quod uere est et non est*. In the same breath, however, Eriugena continues to describe God as *superessentialis in essentiis, supersubstantialis in substantiis, super omnem creaturam creator:*[57] though all things have their being in God, He is not contained in them, but transcends them in essence and substance.[58] Eriugena claims that everything which the creative nature of God (*creatricem quidem naturam*) creates is contained within itself, yet in such a way that it is to

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[54] Book II, 2344–2349 (597a), 98.

[55] Book I, 61 (443b), 5.

[56] Book I, 499–500 (454a), 20: *creatur autem que nihil essentialiter est praeter ipsam, est enim omnium essentia*. The art of Dialectic demonstrates the division of all things and return of all things to the *ousia* from which all created things issue forth (*ipsam OYCIA ex qua egressa et perueniat*): Book V, 360–364 (869a), 14.

[57] Book III, 2406–2408 (677c–d), 83.

[58] Panentheism, which like pantheism is a word of modern coinage, considers God to be in the world without being identical to it, and is used by the twentieth-century historian of philosophy Frederick Copleston in relation to the *Periphyseon*. *A History of Medieval Philosophy* (London: Methuen and Co., 1972), 63.The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* describes *panentheism* as a term which considers "God and the world to be inter-related with the world being in God and God being in the world. It offers an increasingly popular alternative to both traditional theism and pantheism. Panentheism seeks to avoid either isolating God from the world as traditional theism often does or identifying God with the world as pantheism does." See https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panentheism/ (accessed 16 October 2019)

be considered as other, since the creative nature is superessential, while the created nature is essential.[59]

The essence of all things is derived directly from their *participation* in God, which implies sameness and difference simultaneously.[60] Eriugena refers to Dionysius who states that, in bringing forth the essences of all things, God calls all beings into communion with Himself, according to the differences in their being.[61] Dionysius, for whom God is the being of all things, borrows in turn from Hierotheus, who qualifies the assertion with the addition of transcendence: *Omnium causa . . . neque pars neque totum est et totum et pars, ut omne et partem et totum in semet ipsa coambiens et supereminens et excellens.*[62] Therefore the essence of God, for Hierotheus, is the Essence that is separated from all created essence, since it transcends them and is uncontaminated by them.[63] Hierotheus in this passage speaks

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[59] Book III, 2321–2325 (675c–d), 81: *Creatricem quidem naturam nihil extra se sinere, quia extra eam nihil potest esse, totum uero quod creauit et creat intra se ipsam continere, ita tamen ut aliud sit ipsa quia superessentialis est, et aliud quod in se creat. Nam se ipsam creare non tibi uerisimile uidetur.* In support of the argument that God's superessence is other than essence as found in the natural world, Eriugena has inferred that, rather than being essence itself, God is the *beginning* of essence, and that this beginning only comes about in the unfolding of Neoplatonic descent. Furthermore, this operation is a form of being contrasted with the non-being of God, who descends from His superessentiality in which He is considered as non-being, and is created by Himself in the primordial causes of all life, and is thus the beginning of all essence: *Proinde ex superessentialitate suae naturae, in qua dicitur non esse, primum descendens in primorialibus causis a se ipso creatur; et fit principium omnis essentiae, omnis uitae.* Book III, 2639–2641 (683a), 91.

[60] Stephen Gersh states that it is a fundamental conviction of Neoplatonism is that "the finite must ascend to the infinite through intermediaries which only partially capture its essence." (*From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 17.) However, he also argues that Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus Confessor represent an evolution of the world view from one where God (or the Demiurge) relates to man through a series of intermediate causes into one where there is a "direct rapport." See "*Per Se Ipsum*: The Problem of Immediate and Mediate Causation in Eriugena and His Neoplatonic Predecessors," in *Jean Scot Erigène et l'Histoire de la Philosophie*, ed.René Roques (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1977), 368.

[61] Book III, 1050–1053 (644a), 38.

[62] Book III, 1104–1107 (645b), 40. The elusive figure of Hierotheus is mentioned by Pseudo-Dionysius as "most holy," as his "famous teacher," and as the author of a work entitled *Elements of Theology*: See *Divine Names*, trans. Lubheid, 2.9. 2.10 (p.65), and also 3.2 (p.69). Ben Schomakers suggests that Hierotheus may be modelled on Proclus: "An unknown Elements of Theology? On Proclus as the model for the Hierotheus in the Dionysian Corpus," in Danielle Layne and David D. Butorac, eds., *Proclus and his Legacy* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 183–198.

[63] Book III, 1111–1113 (645b–c), 40: *essentia totius essentiae incontaminata supergrediens et superessentialiter omni essentia remota.*

of God as 'whole and part', and yet his concept of participation sees God's essence surpassing every other essence 'without contamination', claiming that this involves a separation. God is wholly untouched by the beings and essences that exist in Him. Hierotheus demonstrates that God can be the being of all things, and yet be untouched by all things, maintaining His transcendence over all created things.

4.4.4   On being, non-being and essence

Eriugena's list of primordial causes includes *bonitas*, *essentia*, *uita*, *ratio*, *intelligentia*, *sapientia*, *uirtus*, *beatitudo*, *ueritas* and *aeternitas*.[64] This particular order, generated by a contemplation of the causes, is arbitrary, and belongs to the mind of the one who contemplates them.[65] Eriugena places goodness before essence to make the point that everything that God brings into existence is intrinsically good, and that there is no essence without goodness.[66] Eriugena makes a subtle but important point about the 'earth-bound' nature of essence: he has previously asserted that God is superessential, but goodness, if it precedes essence, permeates not only the things that are, but also the things that are not, which he considers to be better than the things that are. The further a thing transcends essence, the more excellent it is, and the more it approaches God, the superessential Good; conversely, the more a thing participates in essence, the further is it removed from the superessential Good.[67] This would imply that essence(s) come into being with the second division of nature; essence originates in God, but begins properly only with Neoplatonic

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[64] Book III, 124–196 (622a–623c), 7–9.

[65] Book III, 236–238 (624c), 10. In themselves the first causes are one and simple, and are only distinguished in their effects.

[66] Book III, 381–385 (627d), 15. Eriugena will later define goodness as a kind of genus of essence (*bonitas ueluti quoddam genus est essentiae*): Book III, 422–423 (628d), 16.

[67] Book III, 399–404 (628b), 16: *Non solum quae sunt, bona sunt; uerum etiam quae non sunt, bona dicuntur. Eoque amplius meliora dicuntur quae non sunt, quam quae sunt. Nam in quantum per excellentiam superant essentiam, in tantum superessentiali bono, deo uidelicet, appropinquant; in quantum autem essentiam participant, in tantum a superessentiali bono elongantur.*

descent. 'Essence', therefore, is here equivalent to 'created being', which can be apprehended by the intellect or the senses, even though a precise definition is unattainable. Non-being, that which because of its 'excessive excellence' and its 'indivisible unity and simplicity' cannot be apprehended by the intellect, is superior to being and closer to God.[68]

4.5   Created nature and participation

Created nature does not exist in itself; rather, it exists by participation in the Nature which alone truly exists.[69] Participation is the derivation of essence from a superior essence in the ontological hierarchy.[70] The Neoplatonic idea of existence by participation can support the pantheist view, but not in a complete sense, for even if all created things share the same essence, they possess it only in a borrowed sense, whereas God, and God alone, possesses it in a true sense, since only God can be said to truly be. In God's case, it is more properly called 'superessence'; the term 'essence', beginning properly in the primordial causes, indicates, for Eriugena, created nature, bestowed as gift upon the creature.[71] Created essence is one and universal, and common to all things as a genus in which all substances participate, but cannot be said to belong to all things in an absolute sense. It belongs to all that participate in it, but is not the specific property of any created thing.[72]

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[68] Book III, 404–407 (628b), 16.

[69] See Book I, 3261–3264 (518a–b), 104: *Nihil enim eorum quae sunt per se ipsum uere est; quodcunque autem in eo uere intelligitur participatione ipsius unius qui solus per se ipsum uere est accipit.* Hilary Mooney reflects on Eriugena's tenet that since only God truly exists, and the creature exists by participation, there is nothing in the creature except God: "This is however a far cry from pantheism. It is rather the affirmation of a way of viewing the God-world relationship, one in which the radical dependence of the world on God is emphasised." *Theophany*, 88.

[70] Book III, 552–560 (632a), 21.

[71] Book II, 1251–1254 (565c), 54. As essences are created, so also will there be an end to them: see Book III, 1206–1208 (647c), 43.

[72] Book I, 2757–2761 (506b–c), 89.

Participation implies a relationship of containment: the thing occupying a higher level of being is always greater than what proceeds from it, even if they share a universal essence.[73] God exists in Himself; the creature subsists in God, and depends entirely on him for its existence. Essence, however, also binds all things, both divine and created, in a bond of unity, since essence in its totality is contained within superessence. Participation thus implies a unity of essence, since one thing exists entirely within another. The universe proceeds by divine multiplication into genera and species, but they have been divided, and will ultimately return, to the one Cause of all things, *unum indiuiduum atque immutabile*, in which they will eternally remain.[74] Nutritor thus declares that since all things receive their being by participation in the Creator, they have no independent existence of their own:

> But suppose you join the creature to the Creator so as to understand that there is nothing in the former save Him who alone truly is – for nothing apart from Him is truly called essential since all things that are are nothing else, in so far as they are, but the participation in Him who alone subsists from and through Himself.[75]

It can be concluded that the creature cannot be said to be truly essential in itself. The universe can be thus reduced to an indivisible unity, a singular essence derived from its Cause.[76]

4.6   Eriugena's consideration of matter

The locus of being is in the causes of things, rather than their effects, but how exactly does Eriugena consider those effects to relate to cause and essence? How much divine essence is contained within corporeal matter? In Book I, Eriugena establishes that neither God nor

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[73] Essence in itself is whole in each of its form and species, and is not more extensive in a general genus than in a specific species; *OYCIA non est maior in omnibus hominibus quam in uno homine*. See Book I, 2132–2133 (492a), 70.

[74] Book II, 76–81 (526d–527a), 6.

[75] Book II, 109–113 (528b), 7: *Quid si creaturam creatori adiunxeris, ita ut nil aliud in ea intelligas nisi ipsum qui solus uere est? Nil enim extra ipsum uere essentia dicitur, quie omnia quae ab eo sunt nil aliud sunt in quantum sunt nisi participatio ipsius qui a se ipso solus per se ipsum subsistit*. Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 127.

[76] Book II, 117–119 (528b), 7: *Vniuersitas itaque quae deo et creatura continetur prius in quattuor ueluti formas diuisa iterum ad unum indiuiduum, principium quippe causamque finemque reuocatur*.

matter can be defined.[77] Before joining with form and species, matter is incorporeal and unintelligible, and thus only perceptible by the intellect. Eriugena considers it to have been created so that things which otherwise cannot be grasped by the senses might become apparent.[78] Material bodies appear when form, species and essence proceed through formless matter and the union of the four elements; a material body is thus 'an intercourse of incorporeal things' (*incorporalium coitu*).[79] Ultimately they resolve (or dissolve) back into their incorporeal causes, while the four elements of matter – earth, air, fire and water – resolve into their own particular causes.[80] Eriugena provides a metaphor of the shadow: light and a material body create a shadow, but neither is changed into that shadow. In the same way, *ousia* is not a material body, nor changed into a material body, but the body does reflect *ousia*, as qualified by form and species.[81]

Eriugena applies the ten Aristotelian categories to sensible being, but both *ousia* and accidents, considered in themselves, are incorporeal.[82] The real bodies they form are also

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[77] Book I, 2464–2466 (499d), 80. Eriugena quotes Plato as saying that matter is the 'mutability of mutable things' (a formula which Eriugena notes is repeated by Augustine), and is receptive of all forms: Book I, 2505–2506 (500d), 81. Sheldon-Williams notes that this is not a quote from the *Timeaus* (to which Eriugena had access via the *Commentary* of Calcidius) but rather "a précis of Plato's theory that there is an indeterminate something in which becoming takes place. . . a matrix which underlies all things. . . The term 'matter' is, of course, not Platonic but Aristotelian" (*Periphyseon Liber I*, note 171, 240). See also Augustine, *Confessions*, XII.5.

[78] Book I, 2471–2473 (500a), 80.

[79] Book I, 2529 (501b), 82. The four elements, of themselves incorporeal, lie between the causes and material bodies, and all material things are composed of their relative properties: cold, heat, dryness and humidity; see Book II, 2640–2654 (604a–b), 109. When Eriugena speaks of 'body' he means an incorporeal body which subsists in the primordial causes. Physical, sensible bodies must always be qualified as such.

[80] The elements are thus not synonymous with material bodies; rather, their properties join with incorporeal essence and form to form those bodies. See Book I, 477b–477c, for Eriugena's reliance on Gregory of Nyssa regarding how the properties of elements contribute to the formation of the world.

[81] Book I, 2531–2543 (501b–c), 82. On the immaterial constitution of material things, see Bett, *Johannes Scotus Erigena*, 46: "A point, in which lines begin and end, is neither a line nor a part of a line, but the end of lines. The space (locus) of a point is not a space perceived by the senses, but a space understood by the intellect. So a point is incorporeal, and the beginning of lines; a line is incorporeal and the beginning of surfaces; a surface is incorporeal and the beginning of solidity, and solidity is the perfection of matter."

[82] Book I, 1561–1562 (478d–479a), 52. Eriugena has borrowed here from Boethius, for whom all accidents: quantities, qualities, places, dispositions, etc., are immutable classes in themselves, only undergoing

incorporeal: Eriugena has taken the properties normally associated with physical things and reserved them for non-physical things, displacing *ousia* away from the material world and placing it in the primordial causes. Simple and incorruptible in themselves, when mixed with matter and the properties of the elements, the causes produce something composite and corruptible. Being physically corruptible, the matter is dissoluble, while the *ousia* and accidents of the object, its species and genera, will remain without change.[83] As such, essence cannot be properly located in matter. The shadow can reflect the object, but it does not contain the object in any way, nor is the object influenced by it. This theory of matter, and specifically the lack of *ousia* in material bodies, Eriugena has borrowed from Gregory of Nyssa who asserts that where *ousia* is incorruptible, material bodies are corruptible, and therefore they cannot be the same thing.[84]

Since not all material bodies are the same, e.g. each person possesses their own physically unique body, *ousia*, as common essence cannot be part of that material body: since it is common to all, it is proper to none.[85] Essence does not permit of length, breadth, or corruptibility: it is simple and universal, and all things receive it as a *quantum*. This distinguishes it in kind from material things which partake of matter as a *quantity*. Eriugena makes implicit use of the principle of non-contradiction: if a thing is *ousia*, then it is not a material body: *ousia* is diffused into genera and species, while a material body is separated as a whole into its parts. Though it is shared by different genera, species and individuals, *ousia*

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variation when combined with a material body. For Eriugena, essence is present in all of the categories, for they cannot exist without it, and this determines that all the categories are interrelated. See Book I, 1095–1096 (468a), 38. See also Catherine Kavanagh, "The Influence of Maximus the Confessor on Eriugena's Treatment of Aristotle's Categories," 571–575, for Eriugena's treatment of the categories in how God relates to creation.

[83] Book I, 1587–1595 (497c), 53.

[84] Book I, 1587–1595 (497c), 53.

[85] Book I, 2085–2095 (491a–b), 68.

remains singular and indivisible, and cannot be separated, and thus cannot be located in the visible world.[86]

4.7　The mind's perception of form

The practice of dialectic for Eriugena, of understanding individual things according to the application of genus, species, and Aristotle's categories, corresponds to the reality of things, and is not a mere construct of language.[87] Nevertheless, Eriugena also differentiates between the actual universe and the one we perceive. The forms of all the things we see are essentially a mental construct, an idealist 'creation', and are not necessarily there of themselves, but we need to see them in our quest for understanding the nature of the universe.[88] However, our perceptions are not unrelated to reality: if divinely inspired, they ought to 'read God into' the universe, since the intellect which forms them is made in the image of God. This idealistic approach implies that not only the appearance of something, but also its form and definition, are a product of the mind. This approach could have a bearing on the pantheist argument, if the locus of a thing's *ousia* is in the intellect that apprehends it. However, the very being of the universe and everything cannot be completely a product of the intellect, since to everything Eriugena assigns a cause in the second division of nature, and an essence that is beyond the full understanding of the human intellect. Dermot Moran argues that Eriugena

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[86] Book I, 2152–2155 (492c), 70: *tota enim simul et semper in suius subdiuisionibus aeternaliter et incommutabiliter subsistit omnesque subdiuisiones sui simul ac semper in se ipsa unum inseparabile sunt.*

[87] Eriugena acknowledges that dialectic, which studies the procession of being from its source, has a divine origin: see chapter 5 (5.4). See also Catherine Kavanagh "The Influence of Maximus the Confessor on Eriugena's Treatment of Aristotle's Categories," 575–580, for Eriugena's understanding of the Scriptural basis for a dialectical structure of reality.

[88] In an early revision of the text, the following text is added: *Vniuersalem uero naturam formas habere propterea dicimus, quoniam ex ea nostra intelligentia quodam modo formatur dum de ipsa tractare nititur; nam per se ipsam uniuersa natura non ubique formas recipit. Eam siquidem deo et creatura contineri non incongrue dicimus, ac per hoc in quantum creatrix est nullam formam accipit in se ipsa, foratae uero a se naturae multiformitatem praestat.* See Book II, 70–81 (525b–c, Version II), 136. All corporeal matter in the world must have form, but for Eriugena those forms do not always correspond with the mind's definition of them.

vacillates between realist and idealist positions at different times, but however much a sensible thing is the product of the intellect, its essence will be found in its non-sensible cause.[89]

4.8   The natural world

4.8.1   Study of nature in general

To approach the truth about the natural world, Eriugena asserts, one must begin with God. There are those who begin by pondering corporeal and visible things, and then force God into it as a secondary consideration. From such a starting point, it would seem as folly that God would create himself in the basest forms and species of the visible world.[90] The philosopher needs to begin with the spiritual, not the worldly; abstract thought must begin and end with an incorporeal God, and the corporeal world must find a place in relation to God. The locus of being is incorporeal, and in true Platonic and Pauline fashion, what we see is a dim reflection of true reality and being.[91] Beginning with God, in Whom are created all things that are in heaven and in earth, whether visible or invisible (Col 1:16), Eriugena adopts the Augustinian position that the entire world is good, and evil is understood as having no substantial being of its own.

Eriugena's fourfold division of nature can be understood of God.[92] Being uncreated, God is identical with both the first and fourth divisions. Eriugena goes on to find God manifest in the other two also, since in the second division the Divine Nature descends into

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[89] Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 82: "Eriugena is committed to a realistic theory of universals. For him, genera and species are two ontological grades of reality and not just two logical categories."

[90] Book III, 2688–2693 (684a–b), 93.

[91] 1 Cor 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

[92] Book III, 2877–2896 (688c–689a), 99.

the causes, and then descends further into their effects (the third division) which are created but do not create. In the effects, divine nature is 'created',[93] that is, it appears as a theophany. The infinite, supernatural and superessential God is 'created' in the lowest effects, and derives from the hidden depths of His own nature something which was unknown even to Himself.[94] The corporeal bodies of the third division contain, as we have seen, the last vestige of the Divine Nature, although it is only barely discernible by the wise.[95] Thus at one and the same time the four divisions of nature are predicated of God, and yet not only does he not know the effects until they appear, but we find only this last trace of divine nature in the natural world, concealed by mutable things, phantasies and distractions, i.e. things which, while logically must belong to God, nevertheless are opposite in their transient, ephemeral and mutable nature.

Eriugena thus presents Nature and God as the same thing, yet God is not directly visible in the third division, the sensible universe. As they present themselves visibly to the casual observer, God's presence is not immediately evident in the physical bodies of the world; to see and know God in these effects implies an ability to look beyond the merely physical, and to appreciate that the true locus of their being is incorporeal. God is thus present in the natural world, but not discerned through the prevalence of things that appear dissimilar to God; it is predominantly a question of the mentality of the observer.[96] Eriugena has asserted that essence and being reside in the causes of things, not their effects, which

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[93] Book III, 2913–2914 (689c), 100.

[94] Book III, 2900–2906 (689b), 99–100. See also Book II, 2320–2324 (596b–c): Though containing the invisible reasons of things within Himself, God does not know their effects until they appear.

[95] See section 4.3 above.

[96] Plotinus separates the One from Being, but concedes that "in the realm of Being, the trace of the One establishes reality; existence is a trace of the One." See *The Enneads*, V.5, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin, 1991) 397.

leads Moran to conclude that, for Eriugena, "spatiotemporal reality is understood as immaterial, mind dependent, and lacking in independent existence."[97]

4.8.2 Substance of true being *vs* its corruption

The idea of the lack of independent existence of the material world is found in numerous places in the *Periphyseon*. Corruptible, perishable bodies occupy the last place in Nature; next to nothing, they cannot be the cause of something else.[98] As the lowest part of Nature, they constitute but a shadow of being, and cannot be properly described by the names usually employed for ontological study, since substances, genera and species lie outside the sphere of corporeal nature.[99] Even the elements, whose properties are mixed to form material bodies, cannot themselves be reached by the senses.[100] This extends to all material bodies, even those perceived to have divine-like qualities, for even those corporeal things referred to commonly as 'celestial' or 'ethereal', though they may seem spiritual or imperishable, will end in decay.[101] When Abraham saw God in the stars, it was not in the stars themselves, but in the true being of the cause(s) which the stars reflected.

Material bodies, while not true being, have the traces of true being. Eriugena sees three divisions of created nature: corporeal, spiritual, and something in between.[102] If God is wholly spirit, He cannot be identified with the corporeal. Eriugena does not permit of exclusively corporeal bodies, however, since all sensible matter is married to form. Where there is no form, i.e. formless matter, Eriugena regards this matter to be incorporeal, and

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[97] Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 81.

[98] Book II, 2736–2738 (606b), 111.

[99] Book III, 3913–3922 (713c–d), 135.

[100] Book III, 3419–3420 (701b), 118.

[101] Book III, 3426–3430 (701b–c), 118.

[102] Book III, 3151–3157 (695a), 109.

therefore matter becomes sensible when allied with form. The vestiges of being, and the trace of God, are found both in the form which is applied to matter (which may be termed the soul), but also in the elements which, considered in themselves, are incorporeal. Observing the created world,

> when its lowest parts from the top down are regarded, that is, all those bodies composed of the universal elements, especially the earthly and the watery, which are susceptible both to coming into being and passing away, nothing is found in them but what is altogether body and bodily. But anyone who should observe the nature of the simple elements will discover, clearer than light, a certain proportionate mediation whereby they are neither altogether body . . . nor altogether without corporeal nature.[103]

The traces of God can be seen in the created forms of all things, the division of genera and species, and particularly in the intelligence of humankind, but not in the purely physical dimension of material bodies.

4.8.3   God not apparent in the effects

The First Cause is capable of creating things dissimilar to Himself. Such things display, not a negation, but an unlikeness; therefore, things that are mutable and composite are unlike Him.[104] Eriugena distinguishes between such bodies, extended in time, coming into being and passing away, from the reasons of things which are eternal and fixed. The mutability of corporeal bodies, their generation and dissolution, stand contrary to the causes which reflect the constancy and immutability of God.[105] Proceeding as the result of sin, the sensible world carries with it a certain ignobility which must surely be understood as non-identical with God: if man were to abandon God, Eriugena states, he would quit his exalted nature and fall

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[103] Book III, 3164–3173 (695b–c), 109: *Dum uero extremae ipsius deorsum uersus inspiciuntur partes, hoc est omnia ista corpora ex catholicis elementis composita, maxime etiam terrena et aquatica, quae et generationi et corruptioni obnoxia sunt, nil aliud in eis inuenitur praeter corpus omnino et corporeum. At si quis simplicium elementorum naturam intueatur, luce clarius quandam proportionabilem medietatem inueniet, qua nec omnino corpus sunt . . . nec omnino corporeae naturae expertia.* Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 324–325.

[104] Book III, 763–771 (637b–c), 28.

[105] See also II, 1562–1567 (576a), 68: the unknown God is remote from every created nature.

down into the world, and be ignobly counted among its parts.[106] Eriugena proposes that, while all things are contained within God, the sensible world is not to be properly understood as similar to the divine:

> Without Him there is nothing, He brought forth all created things from Himself, as though into an external place. For it is possible to say of the eternal creature that it is both within and without Him: for the Causes and principles of nature are said to be within Him because of their likeness to Him and their simplicity: but the effects of those Causes and principles are considered to be outside Him owing to their unlikeness to Him: for they are variable in place and time, and are differentiated into genera and species by properties and accidents. Therefore they are said to lie outside the simplicity of the Divine Wisdom.[107]

In short, the Divine Wisdom is characterised by simplicity, whereas the visible world, in its manifold variety, is not.

4.8.4 The beauty of corruptible being

The corruptible dimension of material bodies may not contain the essence of God, but in Eriugena's Neoplatonic system, there is no other source of being outside of God: outside God there is nothing. This contrasts with the dualistic belief of the Manichaeans, against whom Augustine argued strongly.[108] All being, and all non-being, is contained by the one God. Whatever appears as contrary to the divine is nonetheless encompassed by God. An opposite, Eriugena argues, is not a substantial opposite; rather, it is contained in the thing itself as a shortcoming. Evil has no substance, but is a shortcoming of what is good.[109] Not only are

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[106] Book IV, 1672–1675 (782c), 60: *inter partes eius ignobiliter deputatus*.

[107] Book V, 2157–2165 (907d–908a), 68: *Et cum extra ipsum nihil sit, de se ipso ueluti extra creaturas conditas produxit. Nam et intra ipsum et extra ipsum uniuersam creaturam dicimus esse ea ratione, ut intra ipsum dicantur causae rerum et rationes propter similitudinem earum et simplicitatem, extra ipsum uero effectus causarum et rationum propter quandam dissimilitudinem. Locis enim et temporibus uariantur, generibus et speciebus, proprietatibus et accidentibus discernuntur, ideoque ueluti extra simplicatem diuinae sapientiae dicuntur esse*. Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 579–580.

[108] See Augustine, *Confessions*, Book III.

[109] See Book V, 2660–2661 (919a), 83, where evil is described as a forgetfulness (*oblivio*) of the natural good. See also *De Praedestinatione* 10.3, where Eriugena asserts that God neither made evil (and therefore it is nothing), nor knows evil; rather, it is a shortcoming of the good in a perverse will. This is echoed in Book IV, 4409–4410 (843a), 144: the cause of evil is not found in nature; rather, it is an abuse of nature.

there no substantial opposites, but similar and dissimilar together produce beauty and harmony, whether in the sensible world as it pursues its course, or in the causes to which all things will return and rest.[110] Any evil which is perceived in the human soul does not stand outside the compass of God, for anything contrived by the irrational human impulse is also circumscribed by divine providence: all such things add to the perfection and beauty of Nature, both presently and in the fullness of time.[111]

4.8.5 Is God in the natural world? Here *vs* There

Nothing is created that is not created by God. John the Evangelist declared that all things were made *through* the Word of God.[112] Eriugena interprets this to mean not only that all things are eternal in the Word, but that they also *are* the Word Itself,[113] which cannot be considered a wholly logical extension of the biblical text. Eriugena repeats that God is made in creation, and that we ought not to understand God and the creature as two separate and distinct things, but rather as one and the same.[114] But due to Eriugena's apophatic approach,

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[110] Book V, 4877–4881 (967c), 150. Beierwaltes describes the dissimilarity of created things in musical terms, as harmony and polyphony. "*Negati affirmatio*: Welt als Metapher: zur Grundlegung einer mittelalterlichen Ästhetik durch Johannes Scotus Eriugena," in *Jean Scot Érigène et l'Histoire de la Philosophie*, *Actes des Colloques Internationaux du CNRS*, 561, ed. René Roques (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1977), 272.

[111] Book V, 4765–4778 (965b–c), 147. Evil, although not created by or known to God, can be encompassed, suffered and triumphed over within God's Providence. What lies outside and contrary to Nature can be sustained since they will ultimately pose no threat to the unity and beauty of Nature. See Book V, 4117–4121 (951c), 127.

[112] Book III, 919–920 (641a), 34. *Omnia . . . per ipsum facta sunt*.

[113] Book III, 916–917 (641a), 34: *datur intelligi omnia in uerbo dei non solum aeterna, uerum etiam ipsum uerbum esse*. There is a similarity between the *uerbum* and the Stoic *logos* which may reflect the Stoic influence on Maximus and Gregory, but the corporeal ontology of the Stoics is opposed to Eriugena's Dionysian Neoplatonism; if Eriugena is to be accused of pantheism, it will be a formal rather than a material pantheism.

[114] Book III, 2443–2444 (678c), 85: *Proinde non duo a se ipsis distantia debemus intelligere deum et creaturam, sed unum et id ipsum*. Divine nature is that which, in the sensible world, makes itself out of itself, not needing any other matter which is not itself. See Book III, 2461–2464 (678d–679a), 85: *Et de se ipsa se ipsam facit; non enim indeiget alterius materiae, quae ipsa non sit, in qua se ipsam facit. Alioqui impotens uideretur et in se ipso imperfectussi aliunde acciperet apparitionis et perfectionis suae auxilium.*

the assertion that all things *are* the Word still does not amount to identity. God is genus and species and whole and part, yet he is neither genus nor species nor whole nor part; these distinctions belong to God metaphorically, and cannot be predicated properly.

> [God is] the Beginning, Middle and End of every universe; and although those things are predicated and understood of Him, that is, although He occupies the first place in the divisions of universes, yet there is no one of those who devoutly believe and understand the truth who would not persistently and without any hesitation declare that the creative Cause of the whole universe is beyond nature and beyond being and beyond all life and wisdom and power and beyond all things which are said and understood and perceived by any sense.[115]

Simultaneously, then, is God in the world and beyond the world; He creates all things out of Himself, yet is contained by none of them; He shares their essence, yet is Himself beyond essence.

4.8.6   The natural world is established through man

The natural world cannot be properly understood without humankind. It is Original Sin that results in the causes proceeding into their effects; the natural world is thus, in a sense, unnatural, a reflection of being, rather than being-itself. The person stands between God and the world; it is man's current lack of completeness, his less-than-perfect status, that is reflected in the ontological dependence of the effects on their causes. Following Maximus in his regard for man as the *officina omnium*, Eriugena sees all things in the world as established and contained in man.[116] In the return of all things to God, the material bodies of all creatures will be dissolved, yet their eternal substance will return through man: the restoration of

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[115] Book III, 111–119 (621d–622a), 6–7: *quoniam omnis uniuersitatis principium est et medium et finis. Et dum haec de ea et praedicantur et intelliguntur, hoc est dum in diuisionibus uniuersitatum primum locum obtineat, nemo tamen est pie credentium et ueritatem intelligentium, qui non continuo absque ulla cunctatione exclamet causam totius uniuersitatis conditae creatricem supernaturalem esse, et superessentialem, et super omnem uitam et sapientiam et uirtutem, et super omnia quae dicuntur et intlliguntur et omni sensu percipiuntur.* Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 236.

[116] Book V, 1517–1520 (893b–c), 49: *In quo (uidilicet homine) omnis creatura uisibilis et inuisibilis condita est. Ideoque officina omnium dicitur, quoniam in eo omnia quae post deum sunt continentur.* Alumnus finds these ideas to be of great difficulty, since they exceed simple doctrine: see Book IV,1300–1307 (774b), 48–49.

human nature is simultaneously the restoration of all things (i.e. the intelligible world) contained in that nature.[117] In the search for pantheism, it must follow that if God is found substantially in His creation, then He is first found substantially in the person.

4.9   Human nature

4.9.1   The person as animal and also transcending animal

The (Eriugenian) idea that the world exists through humanity has much to contribute to the pantheist argument: it demonstrates how the existence of the natural world, rather than emanating directly from God, is channelled through the human will and the human mind. This alters the chain of being, re-positioning the cause of the intelligible world to something that is not, in itself (owing to sin), fully divine.

The opening of Book IV establishes man both as animal and not-animal. Man shares in the physical body and senses of animals, and in their irrational appetites;[118] yet, because of his higher nature, his reason and intellect, his contemplation of eternal and divine things, he can be considered as other from the birds, fish, and beasts of the fields. Man, argues Nutritor, is in all animals, and all animals are in him; and yet he is transcendent.[119] The argument proceeds along the grounds that, in his animal likeness, he is created like all animals in the genus of that name, but in his difference, he is created in the image and likeness of God. Man alone in the material world is created in God's image, and God willed to create every creature in man so that, just as God (the *principale exemplum*) transcends all things through the excellence of His essence, so His image transcends created things through his dignity and

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[117] Book V, 1868–1873 (900d–901a), 59: *Et quoniam cuncta sensibilia et intelligibilia in humanae naturae plenitudine condita sunt, num rationi resistit, si totum mundum cum omnibus suis partibus tempore restitutionis ipsius naturae, in quo totus continetur, generali quadam resurrectionis specie resurrecturum deliberemus?*

[118] Book IV, 415–424 (752b–c), 17.

[119] Book IV, 427–429 (752c), 17: *Videsne igitur hominem in omnibus animalibus, et omnia in homine, et super omnia hominem?*

grace.[120] God therefore, in His divine essence, is transcendent over man, who in turn is transcendent over the created world. Just as man is separate from the animals through his faculties of intellect and reason (a difference of kind rather than degree), so God transcends the human person.

4.9.2   God is made in man

As the image of God, man is created in the second division of nature; as God is incorporeal, so is man. It is not in respect of the human body that the likeness is created, but rather it is the highest part of man, i.e. the intellect and reason, that manifests the image.[121] In the sense that God's image is not corporeal, it is easier to say that God is 'made' in the person than in the rest of the visible world.[122] According to Maximus, when human nature is united with God, it is said to *be* God. It does not lose its own nature, but when it participates in the divinity (*diuinitatis participationem*), God radiates through it to such an extent that only He appears to be in it.[123] As the divinity permeates the soul, the soul ultimately will shed those things that stand at odds with the simplicity of God. For Gregory of Nyssa, the bodies of the saints shall be changed into reason, their reason into intellect, and their intellect into God.[124]

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[120] Book IV, 892–895 (764a), 33–34: *Quia ad imaginem et similitudinem suam uoluit eum facere, ut quemadmodum principale exemplum superat omnia essentia excellentia, ita imago eius superaret omnia creationis dignitate et gratia*.

[121] Book IV, 1855–1858 (786d), 66: *Et primum quidem unanimiter perhibent hominem, in quantum corpus est, ad imaginem dei non esse factum; deus quippe incorporeus est, nihilque corporalitatis ei inest uel accidit*. Jeauneau asserts that only the human being, and not angels, reflect the three-fold structure of the Trinity. The angel has intellect and reason, but the human adds to these the faculty of knowledge through the senses. "Le Cogito érigénien" *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion* 50 (1995): 109.

[122] Hilary Mooney suggest that since the term 'God is made' was used by patristic authorities, including Pseudo-Dionysius, therefore Eriugena was obliged to use it. *Theophany: The Appearing of God according to the Writings of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, 63. Werner Beierwaltes, speaking generally of the idea that God is made in the world, says that "to say that God creates himself through that which is created . . . means that he realizes himself as the creative principle of the other." "*Negati affirmatio* or the World as Metaphor," 140.

[123] Book I, 331–336 (450a), 14. Eriugena continues this passage to provide another example in this regard: when iron is heated to a liquid: it looks like fire, though it is still iron.

[124] Book I, 372–375 (451a), 15.

Despite this appearance of identity however, the two natures are not to be confused, but are to be distinguished as Creator and creature: *si autem deus ex nullo, creatura uero ex deo, erit unum ex altero, et non sunt aequalia.*[125] As the Cause of causes, God appears in the effects of things, since an effect reflects its cause, and thus God is 'made' in his effects.[126] If things predicated of God may be logically predicated of His image also, of God they are predicated essentially, of the image by participation.[127] As a result of sin, a distance intervenes between God and His image, and Eriugena suggests that the imitation is so far removed from its archetype that it is no longer an image but "something other" (*aliud aliquid*).[128]

4.9.3   The natural human body is incorporeal

The corruptible and mortal body, in all its accidental and unique corporeal features, is external to the human nature made in the image of God.[129] That is to say, in a unique and material body which we encounter in the street, the material part of it, unshared by another body, is corruptible and outside of the image, while insofar as this material takes the form of a human body, it reflects the body in the primordial causes, which Eriugena would consider to be the true human body, created before the material world emanated as a result of the Fall. This true human body remains in its causes and is unknown to the corporeal senses;[130] it is contrasted with the corporeal one which is the result of sin and which looks to the cause in

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[125] Book III, 2825–2827 (687c), 97.

[126] Book III, 2828–2830 (687c), 97: *Si autem creatura est effectus, et nil aliud est effectus nisi causa facta, sequitur deum causam in effectibus suis fieri.*

[127] Book IV, 1482–1484 (778a–b), 54.

[128] Book IV, 2168–2173 (794a–b), 75.

[129] Book IV, 2420–2422 (799c–d), 82.

[130] Book IV, 728–738 (760a–b), 28. Eriugena continues: *Omne siquidem quod naturaliter in homine est creatum, necessario aeternaliter manet integrum atque incorruptum.*

which it will be restored. Eriugena considers the body and its senses, before the Fall (or following the Return of all things), to be spiritual, immaterial and incorruptible.

The notion of a spiritual body is one of Eriugena's more puzzling doctrines, particularly as he insists that there are not two bodies, but one: the corporeal one, added on account of transgression, is not regarded as a true body, but rather a corruptible garment of the true body. For Eriugena, a thing is not properly 'true' unless it exists eternally.[131] It will, in time, be removed from the soul, while the spiritual body will eternally cling to it. The corporeal body can be understood as a shadow of the spiritual body, lacking in the latter's fullness of being, essence, goodness and sinlessness. In effect, this denigration of the material body implies a denigration of the material world that shares its qualities, and contrasts with Augustine's idea that man had a material body before the Fall.[132] Without sin, Augustine understands the physical body not to be corruptible or subject to death; Eriugena proposes that without sin, the physical body does not exist at all. In two of his greatest authorities, Augustine and Gregory, Eriugena has found opposing beliefs in the origins of the material human body, and he presents the thinking of both patristic writers to be considered by the reader. For Gregory (whom Eriugena follows), the material body was added to human nature from an exterior place owing to the sin that would be committed in future.[133]

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[131] Book IV, 2564–2565 (803a), 87: *Non enim uerum est quod semper non manet.* See also Book IV. 2501–2517 (801c–802a), 85: Whatever is mutable and variable does not exist within the body's true nature.

[132] See, for example, Book IV, 2572–2574 (803b), 87. This is one of Eriugena's most significant departures from Augustine's hexameral exegesis. See McGinn, "The Periphyseon as Hexaemeral Commentary," 183. On Eriugena's use of Augustine in his creation account, and on where the two writers differ, see John J. O'Meara, " 'Magnorum Virorum Quendam Consensum Velimus Machinari': Eriugena's Use of Augustine's De Genesii ad litteram in the Periphyseon," in W. Beierwaltes, ed., *Eriugena: Studien zu seinen Quellen. Vorträge des III Internationalen Eriugena-Colloquiums. Freiburg im Breisgau, 27–30 August 1979* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1980), 113–116.

[133] Book IV, 2645–2649 (804d), 89: *Et quid, si in hac ueluti contruersia magnorum uirorum quondam consensum uelimus machinari, dicentes illud corpus, quod Gregorius dicit diuina praescientia propter futurum peccatum homini supermachinatum exteriusque adiectum . . .*

Created eternally by God, the original, incorruptible human body, lying in the secret folds of human nature, is immortal. Everything mortal, on the other hand, is either created by us or permitted to be made on account of our sin.[134] God permits the creation of the human body, but really it is the sinning human being who has caused it to exist. If we 'create' our own corruptible bodies, their non-identity with God appears as a foregone conclusion.

4.9.4 Sex and image

For Augustine, male and female were created in the image of God, before the Fall;[135] their earthly bodies were not the result of sin. This accords with the Yahwist creation narrative of Genesis before the Fall: "God made man in his image, in the image of God made He him, male and female created He them" (Gen 1:27). Eriugena adopts the opposing position that sexual division is not part of the image. He asserts that God created man in his image first, and subsequently added the sexual difference, following Gregory who believes that this difference is alien to man's proper nature.[136] Lending weight to this side of the discussion is St Paul, since he declared that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female.[137] Sexual division, according to Eriugena, is a further result of sin, without which there would be no male or female.[138] Without sin, the species would have propagated in 'the angelic fashion'

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[134] Book II, 1878–1883 (584a–b), 80. See also Book V, 3143–3149 (930a): according to Origen, the bodies we have on earth are not eternal.

[135] Book IV, 2666–2673 (805b), 90.

[136] For a more in-depth study of the influence of Gregory on Eriugena with respect to sexual difference, see Jeauneau, "La division des sexes chez Grégoire de Nysse et chez Jean Scot Érigène," in Werner Beierwaltes, ed., *Eriugena: Studien zu seinen Quellen.* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980). Jeauneau notes that, while Eriugena has no ambition to improve upon Gregory's ideas on sexual difference, he also adopts ideas from the Alexandrian tradition of Philo and Origen (via the writings of St Ambrose) in which 'male' represents *νοῦς* ("l'esprit") and 'female' represents *αἴσθησις* ("la sensibilité"). Ibid., 46, 49–50.

[137] Book IV, 2210–2211 (795a), 76; Galatians 3:28: for the baptized, there is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.

[138] Book IV, 2395–2401 (799a–b), 81–82: *Et si homo non peccaret, in geminum sexum simplicitatis suae diuisionem non pateretur. Quae diuisio omnino diuinae naturae imaginis et similitudinis expers est, et*

(i.e. purely intellectually), whereas after sin a different propagation method was superimposed upon human nature. This view of sexual difference, borrowed from Gregory and Maximus, could be considered a further step in the ontological devaluing of material bodies, and a step away from pantheism.[139]

4.10 Grace

4.10.1 Grace as true human nature and well-being

Eriugena distinguishes between gifts of nature and gifts of grace,[140] espousing an Augustinian understanding of grace, in that it is bestowed freely as a gift from God, cannot be earned, and yet is necessary to approach God: *Nulli siquidem conditae substantiae naturaliter inest uirtus, per quam posit et terminus naturae suae superare ipsumque deum immediate per se ipsum attingere. Hoc enim solius est gratiae, nullius uero uirtutis naturae.*[141] Graced-being, equivalent to well-being, lies between 'natural' being and eternal being.[142] Bestowed on men and angels, and marked by a love for God and a contemplation of

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nullo modo esset, si homo non peccaret, sicut nullo modo erit post restaurationem naturae in pristinum statum, qui post catholicam resurrectionem cunctorum hominum manifestabitur.

[139] In his discussion of sexual difference, Eriugena is respectful of divergent opinions – for example in Book V (914b) – of those who do not agree with his idea that, in the return, sexual difference is not retained. For sexual division in Maximus, see Édouard Jeauneau, ed., *Maximi Confessoris Ambigua ad Iohannem iuxta Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae latinam interpretationem*, Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988), Ambigua 37, 179–87.

[140] Book V, 4105–4112 (951b–c), 127.

[141] Book II, 1574–1577 (576b), 68–69. In his *Homilia*, Eriugena suggests that grace is synonymous with the Holy Spirit who distributes those same gifts of grace. *Homilia*, XXIII, 16–17 (296b), 42: *Potest etiam plenitudo gratiae Christi de spiritu sancto intelligi.* In his *Commentary* on the Gospel of John he emphasises that grace is not only salvific, but raises humanity to the status of children of God: *dedit eis per sublimitatem suae gratiae filios dei fieri*; See *Commentarius* I, 14–15 (297b), 47.

[142] Book V, 2008–2009 (904a), 63.

the truth, the contribution of grace enables the recipient to exceed their natural limits, acting 'superessentially' and independently of nature.[143]

This understanding of grace, where it is deemed necessary to enable the human being to return to his/her true nature, implies that God has to act in the world in order to save it. Such an action would not be necessary if the world constituted an identity with God. The causes come from God, but they are not God. The gifts of grace are distinguished from the gifts of nature, which they exceed superessentially. At the stage of visible nature, the lowest level of the hierarchy, creatures continue to participate in divine being, but it takes an interventive step on God's behalf, namely grace, in cooperation with the creature's natural tendency to resurrect (instilled as a gift of divine goodness), to save it from perishing. This process of the bestowal of grace, and the fact that it is necessary for salvation, shows how man, through his own sin, exists at a distance from God, and needs saving through God's will and bestowal of grace in order to be restored to God. The sensible world, existing through man, will also be in need of this grace in order to be saved.

The well-being of graced existence is first mentioned early in the *Periphyseon* as the fifth mode of being and non-being:[144] only those things in the state of grace are said to be, while those not in the state of grace are said not to be.[145] It is necessary for man's conversion (or reversion) into spirit; without it, he abandons those intellectual operations concerned with the knowledge and contemplation of the Creator.[146] According to Maximus, there is good and

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[143] Book V, 2018–2027 (904a–b), 63.

[144] Book I, 137–153 (445c–d), 8.

[145] In the case of rational things, they are moved, in accordance with their original nature, by being, but in accordance with their knowledge they are moved towards their end by well-being: see Book I, 3132–3135 (515b), 100. God gives being as a natural gift, and well-being as a grace. So there is a difference in its 'being' from what it *is* to the fullness of what it can *become*. In this interplay between being and non-being, things both are and are not. God remains above this interplay, not confined to being or even to non-being.

[146] Book IV, 565–588 (755d–756b), 22.

evil in everything, but grace offers a gift of discernment.[147] The conversion to spirit also indicates a denigration of the material, to which end Eriugena gives the example of the rapture of St Paul: he did not know if it was bodily rapture or spiritual rapture, the point being that grace produces an out-of-body experience.[148]

4.10.2   No vision of God without grace

Without divine illumination, sight of God becomes impossible.[149] God, through the bestowal of grace, acts as the Cause of human inquiry into His own existence. However, with or without grace the sinner can see the sensible world around him. The implication of this subtle point is that, in its natural state, and without the gift of grace on behalf of the observer, God is not to be seen in the natural world. By extension, however, it might be understood that, if God is not seen, then the world is not being perceived as it truly is. The shortcomings of the sinner need grace to restore true knowledge of his surroundings; however, grace bestows more than knowledge: it allows the recipient to share in divine life. Eriugena sees graced human nature as a gift from God which enables the recipient to partake in the life and creativity of divine nature. God's nature is divine in itself, not through a gift of grace, but through His very essence.[150] The Amauricians had denied the need for grace, owing to God's ubiquitous presence, but Eriugena has stressed that unless it is gifted, the person does not partake in divine life.

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[147] Book IV, 4381–4402 (842c–843a), 143–144.

[148] Book II, 2290–2298 (595d–596a), 96.

[149] Book II, 3129–3130 (615c), 123: *Nam sine illumination intueri deitatem impossibilium est.*

[150] Book II, 2400–2404 (598c), 100: *diuina natura deus est excellentia essentiae, humana uero deus est diuinae gratiae largitate, et quod illa creatrix sit et a nullo creata, ista uero ab illa creata est, et ea quae suae naturae infra se adhaerent creat, corpus hoc mortale dico post peccatum animae adiunctum, quod etiam imago imaginis uocatur.*

4.10.3 Return *via* grace

The resurrection and return of man is effected by the co-operation of both nature and grace.[151] The return of things into the causes in which they participate is universally applied to all things in their subsisting substance; however, there is a special grace specially reserved for the 'superessential deification' (*theosis*) of the elect, which brings those who receive it into God himself.[152] Only *some* existents receive this particular grace, and there is a clear distinction between those who do, and those who do not.[153] Those who do not partake of this deifying grace are not taken into God, and all created, sensible being excluding angels and humankind, are thus, in a certain sense, outside of God, unless elevated by a gift that is not in its own nature.

4.11   Conclusion

This chapter has completed the survey of Eriugena's principal theological themes with a view to detecting where pantheism might lie, or be assumed to lie. It has found that there are many instances of the suggestion of pantheism, occurring under multiple theological headings, particularly with regard to Eriugena's second division of nature. The most problematic aspect of his theology is found in his use of Greek metaphysical terms, in particular 'essence' (*οὐσία*), and a fuller exploration of how he uses these terms is required. This usage relates directly to Eriugena's understanding of the operation of Neoplatonic procession and return in his four-fold system, and the ontology of cause-and-effect. A closer look at Dionysian Neoplatonic metaphysics is therefore also required, along with an examination of how

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[151] Book V, 1959–1960 (902d), 61.

[152] Book V, 2062–2069 (905a–b), 64.

[153] Ibid. Jeauneau discusses general return versus special return in detail in his "Le thème du retour": see *Études Érigéniennes* (Paris: Augustinian Studies, 1987), 367–394. The general return manifests the saving work of Christ (375).

Eriugena defines and employs ontological terms (i.e. the Aristotelian categories); this will be the subject of chapter 5.

Chapter Five

Pseudo-Dionysius and Aristotle's Categories

Eriugena's Use of Neoplatonic Concepts and how they can be Misinterpreted

5.1   Introduction

This chapter seeks to place into context Eriugena's use of the term 'essence'.[1] If God and the world are identical, presumably the essence of God is identical to the essence of created being; it is therefore necessary to understand what Eriugena means when he employs this concept. The development of his ontological study of creation draws on numerous Greek, Neoplatonic, patristic and Carolingian sources which diverge in their understanding and usage of metaphysical terms: it is thus not a straightforward task to find precise and consistent definitions. Confronted with ambiguous statements which may at times seem to support a pantheistic interpretation, and at times to deny it, the reader is frequently pushed to ask 'what did he really mean?' This question can be expanded from any particular statement to his general philosophical (and ontological) method.

Two dominant currents of metaphysical outlook can be gleaned from the high medieval period: the first is Platonic and patristic, which might be termed Augustinian Neoplatonism.[2] The second, which gains ground in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and merges with the first, is characterised by the revival of Aristotle (enabled by Latin

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[1] *Essentia / ousia*. John Marenbon explains how Boethius shaped the theological importance of the term 'essence' in the early medieval period: "in his Opuscula Sacra, Boethius did more than merely use logical techniques to clarify doctrinal distinctions. In his discussion, logical terms are loaded with metaphysical and theological implications. A correct understanding of the concept of essence and its ramifications is tantamount, Boethius appears to suggest, to a knowledge of the relationship between God and his creation." Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the school of Auxerre* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1.

[2] This useful description is employed by Henry Bett, *Johannes Scotus Erigena*, 182.

translations of his works) and the development of scholastic schools of philosophy.[3] Eriugena understands created being as ultimately derived from the being of God, an emanation that is a necessary part of His fertility. For Aquinas, there is no such necessity: rather, created being is a non-necessary act of divine will.[4] A necessary world does not posit pantheism *per se*, but a univocal understanding of universal essence, in which God is immanent throughout His creation, and in which the universal is always prior to the particular, can more easily lead to this position than one in which being, or essence, belongs primarily to the freely-created individual creature. The basic tenets of these two philosophical positions must be examined in turn through a brief investigation of their origins. The most significant influence on Eriugena's metaphysical outlook, particularly with regard to being and non-being, is Pseudo-Dionysius whose works he translated. Before examining the Dionysian influence, some general facets of the assimilation of Neoplatonic ideas into Christian thought can be considered.

5.2   God in the Neoplatonic tradition

The philosophy developed by Plotinus, Porphyry and Proclus, for whom the material world had corrupted the human soul by alienating it from its more real spiritual and intellective existence, found resonance with Christian philosophers, including Clement, Origen, Augustine and the Cappadocian Fathers.[5] For the original Neoplatonists, redemption was achieved through the ascent of the human mind, away from the material world and multiplicity, towards the spiritual world and unity. The *Enneads* of Plotinus propose three

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[3] See Jan Aertsen, "Aquinas's philosophy in its historical setting," in Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 20–24.

[4] Bett, *Johannes Scotus Erigena*, 182–185. See also John F. Wippel, "Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, 114.

[5] For a comprehensive study of religious thought in Neoplatonic writings, see the collection of essays by Andrew Smith in *Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus: Philosophy and Religion in Neoplatonism* (Surrey: Ashgate Variorum, 2011).

hypostases in Nature (understood here as the totality of everything) in descending order: the One, the Intellectual-Principle ('*Nous*'), and the Soul. Reality emanates from these hypostases, but Plotinus states, as a matter of principle, that beings emanating from a higher source are distinct from that source (*Enneads*, V.4.2). Plotinus asserts the source of all being as the second hypostasis, itself derived from the One in a manner which is automatic and unwilled, a necessary overflowing of goodness.[6] The One does not participate in this order of Being, but always remains transcendent:[7] "This Absolute is none of the things of which it is the source – its nature is that nothing can be affirmed of it – not existence, not essence, not life – since it is That which transcends all these."[8] Therefore, if there is a unity of being in the thought of Plotinus, its locus is in the second hypostasis, and does not extend to the One.

Subsequent disciples of the philosophy of Plotinus, including Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus, allowed for a closer alliance with Christianity. More than a harmonious co-existence, it opened the door to a coalescence of philosophy with devout worship. Porphyry's God, according to John Hunt, was "everywhere, and yet nowhere; all being, and yet no being; called by no name, and yet the eternal source of all beings that have names; outside of whom there is neither thought nor idea, nor existence."[9] However, the meeting of Neoplatonism

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[6] See also Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 21.

[7] Regarding the important question of how the Intellectual-Principle comes into existence from the One, Plotinus employs the metaphor of sunlight, the projection of which (overlooking modern scientific observations of energy transference) in no way affects the sun itself; the sun is not conscious of what its light might affect: "It must be a circumradiation – produced from the Supreme but from the Supreme unfaltering – and may be compared to the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that unchanging substance." Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen McKenna (London: Penguin, 1991), V.1.6. This metaphor is further explored in V.3.12: "The entire intellectual order may be figured as a kind of light with the One in repose at its summit as its King: but this manifestation is not cast out from it . . . the One shines eternally, resting [i.e. the light] upon the Intellectual Realm; this [latter], not identical with its source, is yet not severed from it nor or so remote a nature as to be less than Real-Being."

[8] *The Enneads*, III.8.10; see also V.1.3. It is an oft-repeated phrase in *The Enneads* V and VI that the One is not a "thing among things." See V.1.7, V.1.10 (the transcendence of the One) and V.3.11. In V.2.1, he repeats this assertion, but also states that the One *is* all things "in a transcendental sense". In V.5.5 he concedes that a thing in Nature, insofar as it is established in reality, bears a trace of the One. In the sixth Ennead, he will maintain that the Authentic (i.e. the One) is present to all Being, while remaining distinct (VI.4.3).

[9] John Hunt, *Pantheism and Christianity*, (London: Isbister, 1884), 96. Cristophe Erismann regards Porphyry's syncretic incorporation of Aristotelian categories into Neoplatonic metaphysics as his most

with monistic religion, where the singular God is understood in terms of Plotinus's first hypostasis, sees a blurring of the distinction between the One and the material world, particularly with regard to Christianity which has a divine Incarnation at the heart of its dogma. A God who freely and intentionally creates a world and takes an interest in it appears to be slightly at odds with the One, an abstract principle which remains distinct and indifferent to that world, yet from which the world is a necessary emanation. On the one hand, transcendent divinity expressed by Christian Neoplatonists is derived from Plotinus, and Plato before him; the metaphysical tenets of both philosophers were regarded as consistent with Christian theology.[10] But coupled with this they had to allow for a God who joined with man and walked the earth. Oliver Davies articulates the difficulty thus: "The challenge [to Christian Neoplatonists] . . . is fundamentally to set a vigorous metaphysics of the One in the context of the Christian revelation, which in the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation professes multiplicity precisely at the level of the Godhead."[11] Eriugena did

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important legacy, and this is explored in more detail below; "The Logic of Being: Eriugena's Dialectical Ontology," *Vivarium* 45, no. 2/3 (2007): 203–18, 204. See http://www.jstor.org/stable/41963783.

[10] Gersh discusses how Christian Neoplatonists transformed the triad-of-principles of Being, Life and Intellect into attributes of a single God; the tradition variably understands God as transcending this triad, but also as coinciding with it. *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 154–155.

[11] Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin, 1994), xxi. While Davies' remark was made in relation to his commentary on a much later Christian Neoplatonist, Meister Eckhart (c. AD 1260–1327), it also applies to early medieval Neoplatonists. Charges of pantheism were also levelled against Eckhart: see articles 12, 13, 14, 20 and 21 of the Bull *In Agro Dominico* of 1329, in B. McGinn and E. Colledge, trans., *Meister Eckhart. The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defence* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 77–81. Davies points out that what prevents pantheism in Eckhart's philosophy is the idea that all properties exist in a mixed state within individual created beings, whereas those same properties exist fully and perfectly in God (op. cit., xxiv). Thus a man may be 'good': this goodness is identical to God's goodness, but the man can only possess it imperfectly, in so far as (*inquantum*) he is good, whereas in God, and God alone, is goodness found perfectly, in unity with all other such properties. While the goodness remains in God, the man possesses it by an imperfect participation. In the man, all such properties exist in a mixed state, while in God they are not mixed, but constitute a unity. This thinking is in accord with Aquinas, for whom existence is also imperfect within any created being: God possesses absolutely what the creature possesses by diminished participation (*Summa contra Gentiles*, I.29.5). For Nicholas of Cusa, all things other than God exist as 'contracted': the creation process begins with possibility but proceeds into actuality – the proceeding from genus to species and species to individual, so as to be a particular thing – via contraction. However, this concept does not exist in Eriugena. Davies also asserts that Eckhart considers the divine image in the soul not as a substance, but as a *potentiality*, through which the soul can enjoy a cognitive unity with God (op. cit., xxvi). This is made possible because the human soul is essentially intellect, just as God is Intellect, following the Neoplatonic precedent.

not need to grapple with this challenge head on, since his Neoplatonic influences do not come directly from Plotinus or his pre-Christian followers, whom he had most probably never read.[12] Rather, it is in his reading and translation of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor that he absorbed the Neoplatonic ideas which found their expression in his *Periphyseon* and other works.[13] Eriugena's understanding of being, non-being and participation have their source in Pseudo-Dionysius, therefore we must look closer at his influence to determine if pantheism can be regarded as a feature of his thought.

5.3　The influence of Pseudo-Dionysius

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite was most likely a Syrian monk writing in the early sixth century.[14] Due to a case of mistaken identity, his writings were accorded a particular reverence when they were gifted to the court of Louis the Pious by Byzantine ambassadors in the AD 820s. A translation of the manuscript was instigated by Abbot Hilduin, of the Abbey of Saint Denis, who may have continued to propagate the Greek legend that the author was Dionysius the Areopagite, the disciple of Saint Paul mentioned in Acts 17.[15] The writings of

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[12] Eriugena's acquaintance with the ideas of Plotinus and Porphyry come through his reading of Augustine. See Harrington, "Eriugena and the Neoplatonic Tradition," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 64.

[13] While the literature is extensive, see in particular E. Jeauneau, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor in the works of John Scottus Eriugena," in Ute-Renate Blumenthal, ed., *Carolingian Essays* (Washington DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1983), 137–150. For a more general introduction to Maximus and Gregory, see Daniel Haynes, ed., *A Saint for East and West: Maximus the Confessor's Contribution to Eastern and Western Christian Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2019), and Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[14] For Pseudo-Dionysius, see I.P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Pseudo-Dionysius," in *The Cambridge History of Late Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 457–472. For the Dionysian tradition from Eriugena to the twelfth century, see Dominique Poirel, "Le 'chant dionysien' du IXe au XIIe siècle," in *Les Historiens et le Latin Medieval*, ed. M. Goullet and M. Parisse (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2001), 151–176. See also See Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Lubheid, 21–22. See also Introduction to J. Barbet, ed., *Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem Iohannis Scoti Eriugenae*, CCCM 31 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), IX–XI, and Introduction to E. Jeauneau, ed., *Iohannis Scottae Eriugenae Periphyseon Liber Primus,* V–XXVIII.

[15] Numerous modern scholars have questioned the efficacy of Hilduin's translation, particularly in light of the fact that its themes did not appear to influence Carolingian theology in subsequent years. Paul Rorem suggests that, despite a satisfactory version from Hilduin, Eriugena instigated a fresh translation motivated by

so significant a religious figure were important for the Frankish rulers, and a generation later under the patronage of Charles the Bald, Eriugena completed his own translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, produced commentaries on *The Celestial Hierarchy*, and makes manifest the first appearance of a Dionysian tradition in the Latin West.[16] His mature philosophy is built around Neoplatonic structures including the procession and return of created being; Dionysian negative theology also emphasises the transcendence of God.[17] Knowledge of Greek was uncommon in the Carolingian world, and Eriugena needed to develop new terms to translate novel philosophical concepts; the papal librarian Anastasius marvelled at the ability of the Frankish scholar to perform his task.[18]

5.3.1 The first Cause is beyond knowing

For Pseudo-Dionysius, the unknowable God (and First Cause for all existent being) corresponds to the One of Plotinus, beyond being and non-being, beyond assertion and denial, and beyond conceptualisation. All created things bear traces of their unknowable cause, but He is unknowable in Himself, and is not affected by his creation, the multiform,

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his own "independent and creative energies": "The Early Latin Dionysius: Eriugena and Hugh of St Victor," *Modern Theology* 24, no. 4 (October 2008): 602.

[16] Rorem, "The Early Latin Dionysius," 602. Eriugena's translation of the Dionysian corpus, and his commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, as well as the commentary by Hugh of Saint Victor (AD 1096–1141) on the same text (and influenced by Eriugena), continued to circulate freely in the later Middle Ages, despite the condemnation of the *Periphyseon*. Eriugena provided the platform for the Dionysian tradition which continued to exert an influence over this period: "The early Latin transmission of the Areopagite was a thin tributary of two main authors, the first under later suspicion and the second never deeply Dionysian [Hugh of Saint Victor], yet through them flowed a translation, two commentaries, and a model for reading diligently the first of the Fathers, especially for spiritual guidance." (Rorem, op.cit., 611–612).

[17] Stephen Gersh points out that one of the most significant developments in Christian Neoplatonism was the suppression of the term 'emanation': the imagery and descriptive terms for emanation in pre-Christian Neoplatonism included 'bubbling over' and 'flowing forth', and suggests something automatic and unwilled, compromising God's intention to create. A hierarchical view of reality, including the process of procession and return, was maintained however. For Maximus the Confessor, "a created thing participates in God, but does not flow forth" (*Ambigua* 7, 1080c). To account for the Incarnation, metaphors of emanation are often replaced with metaphors of 'blending' or 'mixing'. *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 18–22, 284.

[18] See Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène*, 154–157. Eriugena's translation came to the notice of the papal court in AD 861.

unstable natural world as we experience it: "[the divinity] remains inherently stable and . . . is forever one with its own unchanging identity."[19] Perhaps Dionysius's most oft-repeated statement regarding the first Cause is that "the being of all things is the divinity above being," and this definition is repeated by Eriugena.[20] For his part, Aquinas does not accept a pantheistical interpretation of it, for it clearly separates divine nature from created being, the former being *above* the latter.[21] What Dionysius meant, Thomas argues, is that all things bear a certain *likeness* of the divine being. To emphasise the distinction, he points to another Dionysian text: "God neither touches nor is in any way mingled with other things, as a point touches a line or the figure of a seal touches wax."[22]

Dionysius is a strong exponent of the apophatic approach, the *via negativa*, which always maintains the transcendence of God above all that can be spoken or thought of Him.[23] There is no fixed doctrine for the *via negativa* in the Christian tradition, and this general

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[19] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, 1.3. See *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 146.

[20] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, IV.1; *Periphyseon*, Book I, 61 (443b), 5.

[21] *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1.26.10. Aquinas is arguing here against those who would derive from this definition the idea that God is "the formal being of all things." This formal being is equivalent to Aquinas's notion of *esse commune*, a term which he employs in the context of Neoplatonic metaphysics that differentiates the being of God from all other being: . . . *Alia existentia dependent ab esse communi, non autem Deus, sed magis esse commune dependet a Deo…Omnia existentia continentur sub ipso esse communi, non autem Deus, sed magis esse commune continetur sub eius virtute, quia virtus divina plus extenditur quam ipsum esse creatum…Omnia alia existentia participant eo quod est esse, non autem Deus, sed magis ipsum esse creatum est quaedam participatio Dei et similitude Ipsius* [Other existing things depend on *esse commune*, but God does not, rather *esse commune* depends on God … Other existing things are contained under *esse commune*, but not God, rather *esse commune* is contained under God's power, because the divine power extends to more than created being itself…Other existing things participate in that which is *esse*, but not God, rather created *esse* itself is a kind of participation and likeness of God Himself]. Aquinas, *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1950), Cap. 5, lect. 2, n. 660. I am grateful to Dr Gaven Kerr for this translation.

[22] See Pseudo-Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, II.5. In the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysius states that "God is in no way like the things that have being and we have no knowledge at all of his incomprehensible and ineffable transcendence and invisibility" (2.3, see *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 150). From this it can be understood that, where Thomas proposes participation-by-likeness, Dionysius denies even a likeness. However, Dionysius has affirmed a continuity-of-being from the divinity, where for Thomas it is not possible for God to enter into the composition of anything, either as a formal or a material principle. Thus, qualifying Dionysius, he posits God as the being of all things in the sense that He is their efficient and exemplar cause, but not as being their essence. See *Summa Theologica*, I, q.3, art.8.

[23] On the reciprocal relationship between positive and negative theology in Dionysius, see Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 48.

concept is not easily drawn around the dialectical structures of individual theologians. But it establishes that nothing can be said about God with logical certainty, since all assertions are figurative. God, for Eriugena (following Dionysius), is beyond being and non-being: when speaking of God one proceeds by a kind of *unknowing*, or ignorance, and employs the use of metaphor and figurative expressions. The being of all created things pertains to a process of coming from and returning to God, Eriugena's *exitus* and *reditus*; the chain of being ultimately belongs to and returns to its unknowable First Cause. Dionysius places God beyond all categories of human understanding in the *Mystical Theology*, thus the first Cause cannot be properly spoken of, and is neither being nor non-being; "it does not live, nor is it life . . . it is not a substance . . . it is neither knowledge nor truth . . . it is beyond assertion and denial."[24]

5.3.2   Darkness as an excess of light

The *Celestial Hierarchy* of Dionysius, while deeply philosophical, is imbued with the language of religious fervour and the metaphor of light.[25] Light characterises a power that spreads from a divine source: Jesus is the "Light of the Father" who illuminates human understanding.[26] The human intellect cannot perceive the light directly, but only through theophany: "this divine ray . . . [is] concealed in a variety of sacred veils which the Providence of the Father adapts to our nature as human beings."[27] However, the Areopagite, in *The Mystical Theology*, posits a darkness which is beyond the light as an excess of light.

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[24] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 5. *The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 141.

[25] For Eriugena's commentary on this work, see J. Barbet, ed., *Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem*. Etienne Gilson refers to the importance of the theme of illumination to medieval thinkers, particularly with regard to the theology of creation; another important Scripture reference was Ephesians 5:13: "All that is made manifest is light." *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 120. Pelikan argues that Dionysius prioritises spirituality over dogma. "The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality," 18–19, 21.

[26] *The Celestial Hierarchy*, 1.2, trans. Lubheid, 146.

[27] Ibid., 146.

The ascent of Moses to the contemplation of God sees him first experience pure rays of light, but subsequently he goes beyond these and experiences the "truly mysterious darkness of unknowing."[28] For Dionysius, this is a "darkness beyond intellect," and a "darkness so far above light."[29] Darkness is not the opposite of light, rather, it is more than light.[30]

In Book III of the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena presents light as superior to darkness, especially in the context of the creation narrative: thus, following Augustine, the creation of angels is marked by a movement from formlessness (darkness) into form.[31] But he immediately follows this idea with an alternative understanding, following Pseudo-Dionysius, where darkness precedes light since the former characterises the profound incomprehensibility of the primordial causes, whereas light characterises a procession into visible effects. Behind the brightness of creation lies the incomprehensible and infinite darkness from which all being arises, itself not a negation but an infinite richness, dark because it can be known by no intellect. The light also marks *theophaniae*, where God allows something of himself to be revealed according to the limitations of the one who perceives.[32] Darkness is therefore not inferior, but marks the transcendence of the incomprehensible principles, a secret wisdom not grasped by the intellect.[33] The procession from darkness to

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[28] *The Mystical Theology*, 1.3, trans. Lubheid, 136–137.

[29] Ibid., 138–139.

[30] This understanding stands in contrast to Augustine's position that darkness is no more than the absence of light. *Sancti Augustini: Confessionum Libri XIII*, ed. Lucas Verheijen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina XXVII (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), XII.3, 217.

[31] Book III, 3008–3013 (691c–d), 104.

[32] Book III, 3047–3055 (692c–d), 105–106.

[33] Book III, 3058–3060 (692d), 106: *Diuisio quippe lucis a tenebris est discretion rerum per formas ac species apparentium a principiis suis, in quibus omnem superant intellectum*. Eriugena refers to the light of divine knowledge (*lux diuinae cognitionis*) in his *Homilia*, and states that angels participate fully in the divine light. See *Homilia XI, 11 (289c), 21; XIX, 3–5(294a), 34. He also reflects on the evangelist's reference to Christ as the light of the world, "the light that shines in the darkness." (Jn 1:5) But he proceeds to posit divine light as a darkness that surpasses all understanding. See *Homilia XIII, 34–36 (291b), 26: *Cuius lux per excellentiam tenebrae nominatur, quoniam a nulla creatura quid uel qualis sit comprehenditur*.

light is not characteristic of creation in itself, but of the appearance of effects from their causes.

The metaphor of light in the thought of both Dionysius and Eriugena serves as a good example of how a thing may be predicated of God, but properly speaking He is beyond predication. The metaphor may characterise divine illumination, but ultimately the goal of the intellect is the darkness beyond light. Light can be predicated of God, but more properly speaking, God is darkness, the darkness that is beyond light, for the intellect cannot comprehend Him. More properly again, God, being beyond conceptualisation, is beyond both light and darkness. This use of metaphor is particularly important when we consider God as the being of all things, and as essence itself.

5.3.3. God as essence and beyond essence

The opening chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy* introduces the themes of emanation and return, and the unity of all things in God:

> "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights" . . . Inspired by the Father, each procession of the Light spreads itself generously towards us, and, in its power to unify, it stirs us by lifting us up. It returns us back to the oneness and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us in. For, as the sacred Word says, "from him and to him are all things."[34]

In his Commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Eriugena reiterates that the procession of all things is mirrored by a restoration of all things to the simple unity of the Father. He proceeds to explain that this procession and return is the key to understanding the nature of all being:

> *Hoc autem dico, quoniam fere tota beati Dionysii per omnes hos libros intentio est de infinita numerositate multiplicationis subsistentis per se summi boni in omnia, que per seipsa nec essent, nec bona subsisterent, nisi participatione ipsius per se essentie bonitatisque essent et bona essent, deque ipsius multiformis numerositatis iterum*

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[34] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, 1.1; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 145. The scriptural quotes are from the Letter of James (1:17) and St Paul's Letter to the Romans (11:36) respectively.

> *reductione redituque in ipsum summum bonum, in quo numerositas infinita finem ponit et unum est.*[35]

Eriugena establishes here the key metaphysical structures of Dionysian thought: procession, return, and participation. The infinite plurality of the created world is contrasted with the oneness from which it proceeds and to which it returns. The term 'goodness' (*bonitas*) is applied here in a singular sense, and can be found anywhere; similarly, 'essence' (*essentia*) is also a singular term when it comes to all being. Essence appears here as a Universal, like Goodness or Justice, that dissipates into lower manifestations of being, rather than a unique and individual essence of a particular being. Eriugena describes God as Essence Himself: while he often portrays God as a *superessence*, nonetheless the essence(s) of the universe are understood to be intimately connected with divine essence.

While all essence may have divine provenance, Eriugena asserts that God himself remains above essence. Early in Book I of the *Periphyseon*, he expands on how nothing can be properly predicated of God, and that all titles and descriptions are metaphorical: *Essentia igitur dicitur deus, sed proprie essentia non est.*[36] Eriugena's solution, following Dionysius, is to employ the *plus quam* ('more-than') prefix: beyond both being and non-being, and beyond essence, God is best described as 'More-than-essence'.[37] This term allows for the affirmative sense, but simultaneously enforces the negative sense. God, therefore, is *superessential*.

Eriugena has referred to nothingness as an ineffable, incomprehensible and inaccessible brilliance of Divine Goodness which surpasses the human intellect.[38] His

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[35] *Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem Iohannis Scoti Eriugenae*, ed. J. Barbet, Cap. I, 205–212 (PL 131), 6.

[36] Book I, 748 (459d), 28. Eriugena makes this comment in the context of a discussion on opposites, and the principle that anything which has an opposite cannot be properly predicated of God. Since being is opposed to non-being, God can properly be identified with neither.

[37] *plus quam essentiam*: Book I, 869–884 (462c–d), 32.

[38] Book III (680d).

understanding of non-being as something infinitely rich mirrors Dionysius's understanding of darkness. Dionysius also refers to the Divinity as a 'nothing': "[God] proceeds to everything while yet remaining within himself. He is at rest and astir, is neither resting nor stirring . . . He is in nothing. He is no thing. The categories of eternity and time do not apply to him."[39] Where darkness and nothingness characterise an infinite richness that lies beyond the intellect, conversely light represents a manifestation of God which *can* be grasped by the intellect (i.e. theophany).

5.3.4 The unity maintained in procession, return and participation

Eriugena's idea of procession (*exitus*) portrays the infinite diversity of created being, but ultimately this diversity is restored to a unity in God. Eriugena points to the necessity for this unity: it is because nothing can exist outside of the highest good, subsisting in itself. If we understand this highest good as God, who alone subsists in Himself and is the Creator of the universe, then anything not ultimately derived from this highest good originates from something other than God, which restricts the infinite reach and power of God, and therefore cannot be. Rather, for Dionysius and Eriugena, there is a single hierarchy of being, accommodating the infinite plurality of the created world, outside of which there is nothing. It is in this sense that the infinite plurality can be understood to be 'one'.

From the point of view of the creature, procession is experienced as a *participation* in the higher being, the One who is essence and goodness in himself.[40] The creature only has essence and goodness in so far as it is derived from the essence and goodness of God. God is understood as the totality of all being; for this reason, all goodness is from Him, and there is

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[39] *Divine Names*, 5.10. *The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 103.

[40] *Periphyseon* Book III, 135–140 (622b), 7. Eriugena attributes this directly to his reading of *The Divine Names*.

no goodness outside of Him.[41] Essence is presented here as something which the divine being

is, rather than as something it *has*: essence is thus universal rather than particular. The

creature *has* essence, through participation in being; the term thus appears synonymous with

existence itself, which in Neoplatonic understanding is always derived from a higher level of

being.[42] If all essence is (ultimately) divine essence, then nothing is completely separated

from the divine, and the divine permeates all things, while acknowledging that participating

creatures are not identical to their source. The Dionysian God, as Hunt suggests, is to be

known by no name, and all names:

> He is above the heaven and all being, yet he is in the sun, the moon, the stars, the water,
> the wind and the fire. He is the dew and the vapours. He is all that is and yet nothing of it
> all . . . The divinity of Jesus Christ . . . keeps all in harmony without being either all or a
> part; and yet it is all and every part . . . it penetrates all substances, without defiling.[43]

Pseudo-Dionysius expands his idea of participation in the fifth chapter of the *Divine*

Names. For all created being, to exist means in the first place to participate in Being. Since all

being originates with God, He can be considered as Being Itself, or "He who is."[44] Created

being also participates in Goodness, Life, Wisdom etc., but even though these qualities

originate with God, and can be sometimes predicated of Him, participation does not amount

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[41] According to Christian Wildberg, "the [original, non-Christian] Neoplatonists insisted that there is nothing on the lower ontological levels within the chains of causality that is not somehow prefigured on the corresponding higher levels. In general, no property emerges unless it is already in some way preformed and pre-existent in its cause." This philosophical tenet implies that all being emerges from a single source, an "absolute Unity," outside of which there is no being. "Neoplatonism," at https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/neoplatonism/ (2016). Consulted 14 August 2020.

[42] See also Lucas Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 71–73, for Proclus's understanding of participation: the original and the copy (i.e. what participates in the original) are not comparable as 'peers', but rather constitute a primary and a derivative. The latter, as inferior, can in no way contain the superior.

[43] Hunt, *Pantheism and Christianity*, 121. On the God of Dionysius, Denys Turner argues that "God is the cause of all things and so the names of God may be, indeed *must* be, derived from all the things caused. Anything that God has brought about provides a potential source of imagery for the description of God, so that only that which names a respect in which something is evil cannot serve as a name of God." *The Darkness of God*, 23.

[44] *Divine Names*, 5.5, trans. Lubheid, 99.

to an identity, or a sharing in the Godhead itself.[45] The Godhead remains separate, and participation does not imply a mutually dependent relationship; rather, created being participates, while the divinity does not participate.[46] Dionysius asserts a "nonparticipation of the creative Godhead . . . [which] is not on the same plane as whatever participates in it."[47]

The procession of divine essence into the multiplicity of creation is also qualified by Dionysius who asserts that the divinity itself is not subject to change, but abides eternally and unchanged within Itself.[48] This qualification protects his portrayal of divine nature from the idea that the creation of the world can somehow impact on God's being. Dionysius again shows that participation is a one-way process: the creature shares in the essence of God (i.e. exists through the existence of God), but God remains transcendent and does not descend into the creature.[49] Thus all existence is divine existence, but the creature, as participant, is not

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[45] *Divine Names*, 5.2, 5.3, trans. Lubheid, 97–98. Dionysius does not consider the properties of Life, Wisdom etc. as separate entities, but as unified in God. Further, each creature participates to a greater or lesser extent according to its nature; therefore, angels participate more in Goodness than sensible things, and are thus closer to God.

[46] This reflects Proclus's position, that while a created thing returns to its cause owing to similarity, it initially proceeds from the cause owing to dissimilarity. *The Elements of Theology* trans. Dodds, props. 30 and 32, 34–37.

[47] *Divine Names*, 2.5, trans. Lubheid, 63.

[48] *The Celestial Hierarchy*, 1.2, trans. Lubheid, 146: "this ray never abandons its own proper nature, or its own interior unity . . . it remains inherently stable and it is forever one with its own unchanging identity." Dionysius understands the multiplicity of being as radiating from God who is divinely simple. Eriugena elaborates on this passage to exclude the possibility of the ray being found properly in time or place: *ipse radius nullo loco, nullo uel tempore, propria et singulari sua unitate, id est simplicitate, relinquitur*. See *Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem*, ed. Barbet, Cap. I, 329–331 (PL 134), 9–10. Eriugena reinforced the indivisible unity of God in his earlier work, *De Diuina Predestinatione Liber*. His argument in this work is built on the indivisible simplicity of God, in whom there is one divine operation, one divine wisdom, one divine substance, and one divine will (see *De Diuina Predestinatione Liber*, ed. Madec, 2.6, 16–18). He drew this idea from Augustine, for whom the 'operations' of God, such as divine wisdom and divine happiness, are inseparable. The various names of God, including Father, Son and Spirit, are relative, or even metaphorical, rather than substantial (*De Diuina Predestinatione Liber*, 2.2, 11–13). Thus, divine essence is not separate from divine operation. See Gillian Rosemary Evans, ed., *St Augustine: City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 2003), 8.6.

[49] Aquinas navigates this difficulty by asserting that a creature's existence does not properly belong to itself, but only to God: "all things other than God are not identical with their *esse* [being], but participate in *esse*. It is necessary therefore that all things which are distinguished by reason of diverse participation in *esse* so as to exist more or less perfectly be caused by one first being, which exists most perfectly;" *Summa Theologica* Ia.44.I. On this subject, Meister Eckhart will say that created being, of itself, is pure or absolute nothing; it only exists because Absolute Being has communicated itself to it. See Burkhard Mojsisch and Orrin F. Summerell, "Meister Eckhart," at https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/meister-eckhart/ (2011) consulted 14 August 2020,

part of God, the unparticipated source. Nevertheless, the nuances around the term 'essence' will need to be clarified if the system is to avoid being understood as pantheistic.

5.4   Eriugena and dialectic

For Eriugena, man was created for a spiritual existence, an existence that is interrupted by the Fall;[50] the appearance of the physical universe is a direct consequence of Original Sin. Before the Fall, man had a body as well as a soul, but it was a spiritual body; it was also a sexless body.[51] Eriugena posits the idea that the physical world about us is a mere reflection of something much more real, which in turn exists purely by participation in God, Who alone can be called True Existence.[52]

The study of Being and existence in the created world, for Eriugena, a master of the liberal arts, proceeds through the application of *dialectic*. Augustine acknowledged the divine origin of dialectic, present in the created order of all things; thus it is not a human invention,

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especially no. 5, 'Univocal Causality.' Stephen Gersh asserts that while God is transcendent, the world reveals Him as theophany. It is through the appearance of the sensible world, with all its imperfections, that the glory of God is revealed. "Omnipresence in Eriugena," 71–72.

[50] For Eriugena, there is no time lapse between God's creation of humankind and the Fall; time properly belongs to the physical universe. See *Periphyseon* IV, 4183–4185 (838b): *nullum spatium temporis inter conditionem ipsius et lapsum diuina tradit historia*.

[51] See *Periphyseon* Book IV, 3431–3443 (822b–c), 114–115 for Eriugena's explanation of how paradise is an analogy for ideal human nature; the Tree of Life in the garden he understands as Christ, dwelling in the human soul. Eriugena credits Origen as a source for the idea that paradise is a spiritual entity, in Man as intellectual: see *Periphyseon* IV, 3935–3937 (833a), 129. Eriugena's ideas were often confused with Origen's, not least because in the later Middle Ages, the *Vox Spiritualis* was sometimes attributed to Origen; see Jeauneau, *Jean Scot: Homélie sur le Prologue de Jean* (Paris: Sources Chrétiennes, 1969), 151–160. See also Catherine Kavanagh, "The Nature of the Soul according to Eriugena," in el-Kaisy and Dillon, eds., *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul*, 86–89, for how body and soul are inseparable in Eriugena's concept of humanity.

[52] Eriugena's second division of nature gives the sense of bridging a large ontological gap between a transcendent God and the sensible world.

nor is it an explicit form of divine revelation.[53] This understanding applies to all of the liberal

arts, which reflect the divine order of creation:[54]

> *Ars illa, quae diuidit genera in species, et species in genera resoluit, quaeque ΔΙΑΛΕΚΤΙΚΗ dicitur, non ab humanis machinationibus sit facta, sed in natura rerum ab auctore omnium atrium, quae uere artes sunt, condita, et a sapientibus inuenta, et ad utilitatem sollertis rerum indagis usitata.*[55]

For Eriugena, as for Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius and Plotinus, the study of dialectic is the

study of the procession of created being from a single Principle: individuals can be

understood as "the numerical multiplication of a unique and common specific essence."[56]

Eriugena identifies Neoplatonic *processio* with dialectical *divisio*.[57] The mental organisation

of the world into genera and species, and the arrangement of the Aristotelian categories with

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[53] R. P. H. Green, ed. and trans., *Augustine: De doctrina Christiana II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), XXXII.

[54] Eriugena's concept of dialectic follows Alcuin's, who, in a letter to Charlemagne, emphasised the divine origins of the arts: "For the philosophers were not the creators of these arts but the discoverers. For the Creator of all things has made the arts in the natures according to his will. But the wisest men in the world discovered these arts in the natures of things, as you can easily understand in the case of the sun and the moon and the stars." (*Nam philosophi non fuerunt conditores harum artium, sed inventores. Nam Creator omnium rerum condidit eas in naturas sicut voluit. Illi vero, qui sapientiores erant in mundo, inventores erant harum artium in naturis rerum, sicut de sole et luna et stellis facile potes intelligere.*) *Epistula* 83, PL 100, 271D–272A. See Willemien Otten, "The Dialectic of the Return in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*," *The Harvard Theological Review* 84, no. 4 (October 1991): 406. Alcuin's influence on the development of Carolingian logic is explored by Schrimpf, *Das Werk Des Johannes Scottus Eriugena Im Rahmen Des Wissenschaftsverständnisses Seiner Zeit. Eine Hinführung Zu Periphyseon* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1982), 23–35.

[55] Book IV, 284–288 (749a), 12. "That art which concerns itself with the division of genera into species and the resolution of species into genera, which is called *διαλεκτική* did not arise from human contrivances, but was first implanted in nature by the originator of all the arts that are properly so called, and was later discovered therein by the sages who make use of it in their subtle investigations of reality." (O'Meara's translation).

[56] Christophe Erismann, "The Logic of Being: Eriugena's Dialectical Ontology," 207–208.

[57] Eriugena found this Neoplatonic method in Maximus' *Ambigua*, which reflects Porphyry's ontological ladder from the *genus generalissimum* to the *species specialissimae*. It is reflected in Eriugena's earlier commentary on Martianus Capella, the *Annotationes in Marcianum*: *Sursum est generalissimum genus quod a Grecis* οὐσία, *a nobis essentia vocatur, ultra quod nullus potest ascendere. Est enim quaedam essential quae compraehendit omnem naturam cuius participatione subsistit omne quod est, et ideo dicitur generalissimum genus. Descendit autem per divisiones per genera per species usque ad specialissimam speciem quae a Grecis* ἄτομος *dicitur, hoc est individuum, ut est unus homo vel unus bos. Annotationes in Marcianum*, ed. Cora Lutz (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1939), 84: 10–17. See Erismann's translation: "At the top, there is the most general genus called *ousia* by the Greeks, and essence by us, above which it is impossible to go. For it is an essence which embraces all nature; everything which is, subsists through participating in it, and for this reason, it is called the most general genus. It descends through divisions, through genera and species, until [it reaches] the most special species, which is called *atomos* by the Greeks, that is, the individual: for instance, one man or one ox." "The Logic of Being," 208, 215.

respect to individuals, thus corresponds with the reality of things. Dialectic mirrors what is

actually present in reality, and thus corresponds to truth:[58]

> Does not that art which the Greeks call 'Dialectic' and which is defined as the science of good disputation, concern itself with οὐσία as its proper principle, from which every division and every multiplication of those things which that art discusses takes its origin, descending through the most general genera and the genera of intermediate generality as far as the most special forms and species, and again perpetually returning according to the rules of synthesis by the same steps by which it descended until it reaches that same οὐσία from which it issued forth, does not cease to return to it, in which it yearns to rest forever, and in the neighbourhood of which it seeks to operate by an activity wholly or largely intelligible?[59]

The principle subject of Eriugenian dialectic is essence (*ousia*), considered in the singular or

common sense, for every substance flows down from this general essence.[60]

5.5   Eriugena and the Categories of Aristotle

Any work in Western philosophy which has a substantial metaphysical basis will be regarded

in the light of the most influential work in the subject, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*; this holds true

for the *Periphyseon*. Book I of Eriugena's *magnum opus* considers Aristotle's ten categories

of being, and in what sense they can be predicated of God, if at all.[61] In this enterprise

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[58] Section 4.7 of this study treats of how the mind's perception of form, for Eriugena, does not always align with what exists in reality. See also Catherine Kavanagh, "The Influence of Maximus the Confessor on Eriugena's Treatment of Aristotle's Categories," 568: formal abstract knowledge is not pursued by Eriugena: the art of dialectic "exists because of the reality, and they both exist as a unity in the Logos prior to their existing materially and separately." This approach is found in the influence of Stoicism on Neoplatonism. Kavanagh also discusses the influence of Ciceronian topical theory in the first book of the *Periphyseon*, as mediated by Boethius. Ibid. 577–580; by the same author see also "Eriugenian Developments of Ciceronian Topical Theory," in *Medieval and Renaissance Humanism: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reform*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 115, ed. Stephen Gersh and Bert Roest (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1–30.

[59] *Periphyseon* V, 360–370 (868d–869a), 14: *Nonne ars illa, quae a graecis dicitur dialectica et diffinitur bene disputandi scientia, primo omnium circa OYCIAN ueluti circa proprium sui principium uersatur, ex qua omnis diuisio et multiplicatio eorum de quibus ars ipsa disputant inchoat, per genera generalissima mediaque genera usque ad formas et species specialissimas descendens, et iterum complicationis regulis per eosdem gradus per quos degreditur donec ad ipsam OYCIAN ex qua egressa est perueniat, non desinit redire, in eamque semper appetit quiescere, et circa eam uel solum uel maxime intelligibili motu conuolui?* Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 532.

[60] *Periphyseon* II, 2690–269 (605a–b), 110: *Omnis substantia a generali essentia defluit*. O'Meara (p.215) translates this as "every substance flows down from general being."

[61] See section 2.7.1 of this study: Aristotle's *Categories* were transmitted to Carolingian scholars in a Latin paraphrase (or summary) wrongly attributed to Augustine, known as the *Categoriae Decem*. A more authentic version of Aristotle's *Categories* based on the lemmata of Boethius's commentary had some degree of circulation, but Marenbon argues that is more likely that Eriugena based his knowledge on Aristotelian themes

Eriugena outlines his Neoplatonic theological system using the framework of some key metaphysical concepts, including essence, Universals, time, and place.[62] The pseudo-Augustinian *Categoriae Decem* was most probably the text that equipped him with knowledge of, and elaborations upon, the categories, along with a work which was most likely in his possession, Porphyry's *Isagoge*, an introduction to the categories, translated into Latin by Boethius, who also provided two commentaries.[63] A basic understanding of Aristotelian metaphysics is also important for this study because the ancient Greek master was being rediscovered in the University of Paris in the late twelfth century (via Islamic sources), shortly before the condemnation of Pope Honorius III.

Aristotle's first category is that of *ousia* − the individual object itself, and the remaining nine categories consist of the 'accidents': quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, having, doing, and being-affected − descriptions of the being and state of the object. He did not claim that they represented a complete metaphysical system with regard to the being of all things.[64] At the very outset of his quest, Aristotle is asking a question which might be defined as the primary question of Western metaphysics: what is *being in itself* (being *qua* being)? Vasilis Politis offers the insight that, although Aristotle reflects on what it

in the *Categoriae Decem*, which was far more popular. See John Marenbon, "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'" in *Aristotelian Logic, Platonism and the Context of Early Medieval Philosophy in the West* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 117–134, and in particular 119. Eriugena was almost certainly aware that the work was a paraphrase, but, trusting in Augustine, was content that the work did no injustice to the original. See also Sheldon-Williams, "The Pseudo-Dionysius," note 153, 238–9.

[62] Eriugena's primordial causes are not to be confused with Platonic Universals. Eriugena's concept describes the causes of the instantiated beings which derive from them, rather than simply being a class of that kind of being. The classes of things can be organized into a hierarchy, but the primordial causes are not ordered. Above order and number, they are created and subsist directly within the Word of God: *ipsae per seipsas omnium quae sunt primordiales rationes uniformiter et incommutabiliter in Verbo Dei, in quo factae sunt, unum et id ipsum ultra omnes ordines omnemque numerum aeternaliter substitunt* (*Periphyseon* III, 319–322 (626b), 13).

[63] While the paraphrase does not represent Aristotle's thought as accurately as the original, Paige Hochschild argues that the pivotal doctrine of *essence* remains faithful to the original. "*Ousia* in the Categoriae Decem and the Periphyseon of John Scottus Eriugena," in *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Rev'd Dr Robert D. Crouse*, ed. Willemien Otten, Walter Hannam, and Michael Treschow (Boston: Brill, 2007), 214.

[64] Marenbon, "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'," 120.

is to ask this question in considering the possibility of metaphysics as a subject, he is emphatically not asking a question about how we think or speak. Such a philosophical approach, in which human consciousness and language form the basis of the search for meaning, is many centuries away.[65] The question concerns what it is for something to be, the existence of things with which we are familiar from our ordinary experience. First and foremost these are sensible things: objects in the house, animals, or the planets. The ontological study of these things will lead to broader considerations of the universe, of space and time, and perhaps the consideration of things we can't see or grasp; but that is a secondary phase of exploration.

Aristotle's very starting point is different from Eriugena's. For Aristotle, the metaphysical analysis of any given thing begins and ends with that thing.[66] Eriugena does not share that view regarding the things of ordinary experience: he is constantly withdrawing from them to find the truth behind them, to place such things in the context of greater, non-physical realities, and thus he more firmly belongs to the Platonic tradition. However, he does presume the existence of created being *per se*, as reflected in the ontological structure of his four divisions of Nature. But his focus is the *ordering* of being in Nature, rather than Aristotle's primary focus which is on the being of an object in itself. Eriugena prefers to consider Existence in a more general sense, and how it is manifest in the particular.

There is another sense in which Aristotle and Eriugena differ in their starting points. Aristotle is asking the question: 'what does it mean for something to be?' He is concerned with being as observed in a particular object. What does it mean that this object *is*? It

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[65] Politis may be thinking of post-Cartesian philosophy, but Eriugena's dialectical method relates thinking to being. Language is referred to here as something which influences how we think; early medieval philosophers used etymology extensively as a means to understanding concepts, names and places. Politis, *Aristotle and the Metaphysics*, 1–2. Aristotle addressed the integration of thought and language with metaphysics in his *De Interpretatione*,

[66] Aristotle considers being to be analogous in the application of his categories: substance (the first category, and the thing-considered-in-itself) is the primary analogate, and accident (the remaining nine categories which describe the condition, position etc of the thing) the secondary analogate.

searches for the essence of an object's being; it is the study of "being *qua* being."[67] Eriugena's key question might be understood as 'what is there?' He is looking through the particular to the general causes behind it. This question demands a different kind of answer, one which must address the existence of all being, which is what Eriugena terms as 'Nature'. Aristotle's most fundamental science begins with the observation of sensible data.[68] The study of the being of a given object can lead to more general explanations about the being of all objects. Eriugena begins with the assumption of more abstract principles: God is the primary reality, and the description of all being necessitates a dialectical adventure which aims at aligning human reason with the mind of God. Eriugena's ordering of Nature begins with the ultimate cause(s) of being, but Aristotle's will not necessarily.[69]

Aristotle and Eriugena have a similarity in the ordering of their works. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* follows on from his *Physics*.[70] Eriugena's study of Nature, of the things which are and the things which are not, leads naturally into a conversation about being, non-being, and the relationship between them in the context of universal Being, but it does not begin as an ontological study of sensible being. Rather, it begins with a dialectical structure (the four divisions) encompassing all being: Moran regards it "as a kind of idealism and as a deconstruction of the metaphysics of substance."[71] However it quickly makes necessary reference to the subject of metaphysics, leading to explorations of the *Categoriae Decem*, one of the few works of Greek philosophy (even as paraphrase) widely circulating among Carolingian scholars. Eriugena incorporates the Aristotelian categories into his own system,

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[67] Politis, *Aristotle and the Metaphysics*, 3.

[68] Ibid., 4.

[69] Aristotle considers the first cause of all being towards the end (Book N) of his *Metaphysics*.

[70] Politis, *Aristotle and the Metaphysics*, 2. It was Aristotle's editor who placed his work in this context, and who gave birth to the term 'metaphysics'; the study of the things of the natural world, graspable by the senses, seemed to lead naturally into the study of being in itself.

[71] Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 114.

thus broadening it from the Dionysian basis which was his primary inspiration, but he also introduced distortions which muddled his attempts to reconcile two very different metaphysical approaches.

5.6   Being through participation

For Aristotle, a thing is said to be, first and foremost, in virtue of itself, without regard in the first instance to a universal concept which might define it, while for Plato, it exists only insofar as it manifests (imperfectly) that ontologically prior universal concept.[72] Eriugena's approach is shaped by his Platonic and Neoplatonic heritage.[73] His description of God, the first division of Nature, that which creates and is not created, begins with God through Whom all things are made, for Whom all things strive, and in Whose essence all things participate: *ipsum enim omnia appetunt. Est igitur principium et medium et finis: principium quidem, quia ex se sunt omnia quae essentiam participant.*[74] Thus Eriugena's metaphysical approach is, at a foundational level, different from Aristotle's, because an essence cannot be understood by itself: it only exists by participation in something else.[75] An individual essence cannot be considered in isolation, but only exists as an extension of (or emanation from) another essence. This is spoken plainly by Eriugena, both in terms of *being* and *essence*: *Ipse*

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[72] The two are not mutually exclusive, but can be distorted when mixed, which is a central idea to this study. For an introduction to how Neoplatonism incorporated elements of Aristotelian metaphysics, see Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 27–32.

[73] For further discussion on Plato's influence, see Beierwaltes, "Plato Philosophantium de Mundo Maximus: Zum Platonismus al seiner wesentlichen Quelle für Eriugenas Denken" in *Eriugena: Grundzüge seines Denkens*, 32–51.

[74] *Periphyseon*, Book I, 408–410 (451d), 17.

[75] For more on participation in Eriugena's Christian Neoplatonic sources see Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 48–55. Gersh explains how effects are both united and separated from their causes, and discusses unresolved difficulties that continue within the tradition.

nanque omnium essentia est, qui solus uere est . . . "Esse enim", inquit [Dionysius] "omnium est super esse diuinitas".[76]

While Eriugena's philosophy coheres more easily with Plato's, neither do the two coincide, for the Irish scholar more properly subscribes to the Neoplatonic structure of created being which produces a greater sense of urgency: while a particular subject may manifest a Platonic form, there is just one universal essence which binds all things together. Every subject, which possesses it only incompletely, strives towards the fullness of it and seeks reunification as a matter of course. From his explanation of the first division as the Beginning, Eriugena continues: *Medium autem [est deus], quia in ipso et per ipsum subsistunt atque mouentur; finis uero, quia ad ipsum mouentur quietem motus sui suaeque perfectionis stabilitatem quaerentia.*[77] This position reflects the Plotinian participation of soul from the fifth Ennead: "Soul is a thing which can have no permanence except by attachment, by living in that order [i.e. the 'Intellectual Realm']; the very nature of an image is that as a secondary it shall have its being in something else, if at all it exist apart from its original" (V.3.8).

5.7   The Categories in the *Periphyseon*

Porphyry and Pseudo-Augustine provide the lens for Eriugena's understanding of Aristotle's categories.[78] Porphyry, however, in an important development, presented them as a complete classification of all genera, species and individuals. Genera and species are not just logical categories, but are ontological degrees of reality: "the ten categories are no longer considered as a way of classifying predicates, but become *a complete classification of things*"

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[76] *Periphyseon*, Book I, 59–61 (443b), 5. See also Book I, 454a: 502–503 (454a), 20: *omne quod dicitur existere non in se ipso existit sed participatione uere existentis naturae existit*.

[77] Book I, 410–412 (451d–452a), 17.

[78] See also Catherine Kavanagh, "The Influence of Maximus the Confessor on Eriugena's Treatment of Aristotle's Categories".

(Erismann's emphasis).[79] Porphyry's interpretation of the categories offers Eriugena the straightforward opening disclaimer that God cannot be included in the categories, for to do so would be to make him a genus.[80] Eriugena introduces the ten categories as applicable to the multitude of created things, with the exception of that nature which can be neither spoken of nor understood: anything predicated of God is done so metaphorically.[81] Furthermore, when it comes to applying the categories to Divine Nature, which he initially does in the context of a discussion on the nature of the Trinity, Eriugena's Nutritor claims that there is no one (i.e. no authority) who is capable of speaking clearly on the matter; rather, it is primarily a matter for faith:

> in such a matter as this either one should keep wholly silent and resign oneself to the simplicity of the Orthodox Faith, for it surpasses every intellect, as it is written: 'Thou, Who alone has immortality and dwellest in inaccessible light'; or, if one has begun to discuss it, one will have to show in many ways and by many arguments what is likely to be the truth, making use of the two branches of theology, the affirmative, which by the Greeks is called *καταφατική*, and the negative, which is named *ἀποφατική*.[82]

Thus we can speak of Divine Essence, but insofar as 'essence' is an Aristotelian category, what we say cannot properly be predicated of God, for that would make God a genus, and God cannot be either genus or species or accident, and therefore no category can properly signify God. The apophatic approach safeguards the truth of God which is above our

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[79] Erismann, "The Logic of Being: Eriugena's Dialectical Ontology," 214. Eriugena demonstrates that he interprets the categories according to Porphyry, for he considers the categories to be ten universal genera, beyond which nothing can be found. See Book I, 887–893 (463a), 32. Erismann claims that "in Eriugenas work, Porphyry's project of integrating the categories into Neoplatonic metaphysics reaches its fulfilment." Op.cit., 218.

[80] Book I, 916–920 (463c), 33. According to Erismann, Aristotle's categories, as the division into genera and species, really only apply to the third division of nature: God is not a category, and neither are the primordial causes. "The Logic of Being," 206. Aristotle also argued in the *Metaphysics* (Book B, III) that being itself could not be a genus, for then there would be nothing outside of it to differentiate it.

[81] Book I, 891–908 (463a–b), 33–34.

[82] Book I, 675–682 (458a), 26: *Aut enim de huiusmodi causa per omnia tacendum est et simplicitati orthodoxae fidei commitendum, nam exsuperat omnem intellectum, sicut scriptum est: "Qui solus habes immortalitatem et lucem habitas inaccessibilem". Aut si quis de ea disputare coeperit, necessario multis modis multisque argumentationibus uerisimile suadebit, duabus principalibus theologiae partibus utens, affirmatiua quidem, quae a graecis ΚΑΤΑΦΑΤΙΚΗ dicitur, et abnegatiua, quae ΑΠΟΦΑΤΙΚΗ uocatur.* Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 45.

understanding; thus, where God is called 'Essence', it is more true to say that God is 'not Essence'. Eriugena insists that anything which has an opposite cannot be properly predicated of God, so how can we speak of Divine Essence? How is he to reconcile the apophatic with the cataphatic?[83]

The harmony between the two seemingly opposite theological approaches is achieved (as we have seen) through transcending the assertions of both. Cataphatic theology provides a useful metaphor of meaning with regard to divine nature, but it is necessary to comprehend that it entails a transference of meaning from the creature to the Creator.[84] The metaphor is a form of clothing placed about a nature which we cannot fully grasp. The apophatic statement always affirms that incomprehensibility, the ineffable light wherein God dwells, but doesn't completely deny the proposition: rather, it denies that it can properly be said of God. Therefore the two can be understood together as: "It is not this, but it can be called after this."[85] God is wisdom and God is not-wisdom: these statements are harmonised by saying that 'God is more-than-wisdom'. God is Essence and God is not Essence: God is superessential. This theological position is a form of non-knowing which Eriugena associates with divine wisdom itself.[86]

5.8   The accident categories

As creator of all things, and therefore all categories, the categories are contained within God, but cannot be applied to Him, for He is always more than any category that we might attempt

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[83] In *De Praedestinatione*, the premise of God not containing opposites was a principal argument against Gottschalk's theology of double predestination: how could God wish two opposing destinies for humanity? His thinking is echoed in the *Periphyseon*, where opposites which come into being simultaneously cannot be contained in the essence of God, since it would mean that He would be in discord with Himself, and oppose the simplicity of his nature. See Book I, 732–737 (459b–c), 27–28.

[84] Book I, 831–833 (461c), 31.

[85] Book I, 842–843 (461d), 31: *Hoc non est, quamuis ex hoc appalari potest*.

[86] Book II, 2196–2204 (593b–c), 93.

to predicate of Him. The Divine Substance is not composed of parts nor divisible into separate parts, therefore physical characteristics such as quantity and situation are not applicable. Similarly with quality, God is always more than any quality or description we might think of, such as a virtue which might commonly be applied to God. Eriugena uses the example of the quality of goodness: it may be useful as a metaphor but God will always be *more-than-goodness* and thus beyond the full grasp of our thought or language.[87] As Eriugena proceeds through a detailed analysis of the categories and their inability to be predicated of God, he reaches the conclusion that if something *can* be predicated of God, by definition it cannot be an Aristotelian category. To permit one of the categories to be said of God would contradict the validity of apophatic theological understanding.[88]

Eriugena's close examination of the category of relation is a good example of this conclusion: 'relation' says nothing of substance, but within the Trinity, 'Father' is said in relation to 'Son', and vice versa.[89] Eriugena denies the validity of the predication: he considers that the term 'father', considered in human understanding, implies a multiplication by generation, a corporeal condition that follows from the sin of Adam. Conversely, the term 'father', when used to describe a relation within the Trinity, attempts to describe something similar to, but ultimately different from, the human meaning. Rather, it leads us to contemplate the ineffable fertility of the Divine Goodness. Therefore the term 'relation' can only be used metaphorically; to use it concretely would imply that it is not one of the ten categories.

The category of 'situation' is also shown, in a straightforward manner, to be inapplicable to God: Eriugena understands this term equivalent to 'posture', and since God is

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[87] Book I, 952–968 (464c–465a), 34.

[88] Book I, 969–994 (465a–465c), 35.

[89] Book I, 981–994 (465b–c), 35.

not physical, he cannot be regarded to have a posture of any kind, and thus the category cannot be predicated of him. However all things, including opposites, are contained within Him; what is more, all things come to rest in him, and Eriugena likens this to a posture. Therefore the category can be predicated of him metaphorically.

The category of 'condition' is one which Eriugena sees as belonging to all the categories: thus 'quantity' can be great or small, and variations in quality are related to each other according to condition. Each accident (or category excluding essence) has a condition, and attaches itself to an individuated essence. In Aristotelian terms, the nine accident categories are always applied to a particular substance, but though they are attached to that particular thing, they can be considered separately from essence (which is considered as participating in a more universal essence), and participate in *genera* of their own.

The substantial nature of these accident categories is further diminished by Eriugena's belief that their condition is based on the position (itself an accident category) of the observer: *Non enim haec nomina ex natura rerum proueniunt sed ex respectu quodam intuentis eas per partes. Sursum siquidem et deorsum in uniuerso non est, atque ideo neque superior neque inferior neque media in uniuerso sunt.*[90] Thus, for example, if something is 'over there' (with respect to the category of position), it is because the observer (being 'over here') sees it as 'over there', rather than because it is over there in itself. A genus does not have a concept of its own greatness: this quality is brought to it by an observer who compares it with something else. This places the categories at a further remove from essence, or rather, relocates the locus of the nine categories to the relation between the observer and the observed.[91]

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[90] Book I, 1058–1061 (467a), 37.

[91] Eriugena's has a somewhat confusing description of the relation of essence to accident (see Book I, 1239–1288 (471b–472b), 42–44). Some accidents enclose essence, while others are outside it, but the boundaries are vague. He later makes reference to the *de Aritmetica* of Boethius, which posits an Aristotelian

5.9   Defining *ousia*

Eriugena posits an important metaphysical principle, derived from Gregory, that no essence or substance is comprehensible in itself.[92] This incomprehensibility extends to all creatures that are made by, and exist in, God; their essential being is perceived only through its accompanying accidents. Essence, therefore, can only be detected through a consideration of its accidental qualities. The closest definition that Eriugena permits for 'essence' in human beings is that it is equivalent to intellect, since man is not other than his intellect, and his highest capacity is the contemplation of truth.[93] Eriugena does not equate form with essence or substance:[94] *ousia* constitutes an incorruptible simplicity, whereas matter, of which material bodies are composed, is corruptible, and the forms to which bodies conform do not constitute simplicity. The essential being or essence of all things is derived from the being of God. Creatures obtain their be-ing through participation in God, since they exist in Him.

The primary locus for *ousia*, according to Aristotle, was located in the thing itself. The individual subject was not only the starting point, but also the fulcrum and focus for the study of being. Such a view strikes a resonant chord with a modern, scientific view of the world that does not consider more abstract levels of being beyond the subject being analysed. For early medieval Neoplatonists, however, the study of Aristotle's individual *ousia*, (variously translated as 'substance', or 'essence', or 'being-ness') can only take place in the context of where that particular being was derived from; the study must satisfy a hierarchical

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version of primary being: wisdom is the understanding of the truth of the things which are and have possession of their own immutable substance. He also asserts that accidents, immutable in themselves, undergo variation when combined with a body, i.e. they become visible through *participation* with a body; see Book I, 2403–2415 (498c), 78. For Boethius, God transcends accident and substance, and for this reason God's essence, as pure Form, cannot become the substrate of anything (*De Trinitate*, II).

[92] Book I, 61–73 (443b–c), 5.

[93] Book IV, 1589–1591 (780c), 57: *Non enim aliud sumus, aliud noster intellectus. Vera siquidem ac summa nostra essentia est intellectus, contemplatione ueritatis specificatus*.

[94] Book I, 2082–2095 (491a–b), 68.

world view, one in which the being of an individual thing leads to the important definition(s) of its being in relation to the hierarchy of all things. This latter definition is a general one, found widely in the early medieval tradition, which, following Porphyry, regards *ousia* as common to all things, and confers being in terms of genera and species; it is a *genus generalissimum*.[95] It shifts the locus of *ousia* away from the individual subject; however, Aristotle did consider the genus of a thing to have a form of reality to it also.

5.10   'Platonized *ousia*'

Eriugena posits a particular kind of substance that belongs uniquely to a particular thing, but it is derived from the common essence that is present in all things:

> *ex ipsa essentia, quae una et uniuersalis in omnibus creata est omnibusque communis atque ideo, quia omnium se participantium est, nullius propria dicitur esse singulorum se participantium, quandam propriam substantiam, quae nullius alicuius est nisi ipsius solummodo cuius est, naturali progressione manare.*[96]

The particular essence, operation and power of this substance are determined by its ability to participate in universal essence, operation and power. This particular ability is itself an accident, acting on the mutability of an unstable substance.[97] When perceived in individuals, the trinity of essence, operation and power can be considered as accidents of universal essence, operation and power. Eriugena fits Aristotle's first category into a Neoplatonic hierarchy but in such a way that proper (individual) substances can themselves be considered accidents of the universal entities of essence, operation and power.

This common essence reflects the 'secondary *ousia*' outlined in the *Categoriae Decem*, a class of thing to which a subject belongs; it is being, but as the class of a thing is

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[95] This term is Porphyry's. Marenbon, "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'," 123.

[96] Book I, 2758–2763 (506b–c), 89.

[97] Book I, 2784 (507a), 89.

one step removed from primary *ousia*, which is the actual thing.[98] Aristotle's individual being is ontologically prior to the class to which it belongs. The class of a thing cannot be discussed unless we have actual instances of the class before our eyes; we cannot discuss the class 'human' unless we have seen an actual human being, and preferably more than one. However, the secondary *ousia* is a purer kind of *ousia*: the individual manifests imperfectly (limited by the various accidents) what the genus possesses more purely. If *ousia* actually exists in the genus, separately from the individual, then the genus is no longer a mere logical category. Marenbon refers to this secondary *ousia* as 'Platonized *ousia*', and it can be thought of generally as a substrate to which accidents, including matter and form, are attached.[99] In this approach, *ousia* and each of the ten categories constitute the universal genera posited by Porphyry: ten classes in which every existing subject participates.[100] This *ousia* can be considered a Universal class which is participated in by all individual *ousiai*.[101] If a class is considered to have *ousia*, then this too is by participation in a higher class. By this understanding of the term, the concept of *ousia* has moved away considerably from Aristotle's. Platonized *ousia* participates in universal *ousia*; Aristotle reverses that ontological order: his *ousia* is found primarily in the individual substance, from which classes can be conceptualized.[102]

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[98] *Categoriae Decem*, ed. L. Minio-Paluello, Aristoteles Latinus I, 1–5 (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961); for *ousia*, see sections 5–8 and 27–70, pp. 134–135, 139–149. This alternative description of *ousia* contributes to the "confusion and contradiction" among Eriugena's sources: Marenbon, "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'," 121.

[99] Marenbon, "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'," 122–123. While more in keeping with Platonic metaphysics, it is not to be thought that this concept is actually Plato's.

[100] See *Categoriae Decem*, ed. Mino-Paluello, 134: *ousia* is to be understood as all things ("*omne quidquid est comprehendens*") beyond which nothing can be found or thought ("*extra quam nec inveniri aliquid nec cogitari potest*")

[101] Plato thought of Universals primarily not as types of things (e.g. 'men') but as qualifying attributes (e.g. 'Good', 'Beautiful', 'Tall').

[102] The Platonized notion of *ousia*, as something which embraces and sustains all things, is found in the writings of Augustine, for whom only God can be said to have pure and total *ousia*; all other things exist possessing it only partially. See e.g. Augustine, *De Trinitate* V, 2.3: God, called οὐσία by the Greeks, can be

Regarded side by side, the two differing concepts of *ousia* outlined above − the Aristotelian and the Platonized − are irreconcilable. Either the being of something is located primarily in the Universal in which it participates, or it is located in the individual subject. Eriugena's *Periphyseon* does not escape the difficulties inherited from Porphyry's treatment of the categories. For all his skill and philosophical acuity, Marenbon argues that Eriugena fails to improve upon his sources, and perpetuates the complications and contradictions; he does not improve upon his sources in any original manner, nor does he eliminate the inherited obscurities in an attempt to offer the reader an improved understanding.[103] Hochschild charges Eriugena with a conflation of the two senses of *ousia* that are found in the *Categoriae Decem*.[104]

5.11   A quantum of *ousia*

Eriugena has provided a further qualification of *ousia*, as introduced in the previous chapter. While individual beings partake in *ousia*-as-substrate, and take their being from the ultimate being which is God, this being is not quantifiable in the particular thing. *Ousia* is whole in each of its forms and species, and is not greater in a general genus than it is in a particular species; to take Eriugena's example, *ousia* is not greater in all men than in one man.[105] He denies that quantity is a feature of *ousia* as it is found in an individual thing; rather, he refers to it as a 'quantum'. This quantum of *ousia* cannot be modified, divided, added to or destroyed. While pertaining to the individual, it is nonetheless not unique to it: although proceeding into individuals in particular genera and species, it is yet indivisible in its own

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called a substance or essence, but is unchangeable. Therefore the name of essence most truly belongs to Him. See also Marenbon, "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'," 123. However, Augustine also insists in the *Confessions* (e.g. XII.17, 28) that the substance of God is not the substance of created being.

[103] Marenbon, "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'," 133.

[104] Hochschild, "*Ousia* in the Categoriae Decem and the Periphyseon of John Scottus Eriugena," 217.

[105] Book I, 2127–2137 (492a–492b), 69–70.

nature. It subsists in these things as a whole, eternal and immutable, with the result that these individuals are inseparably unified in and through it.[106]

A charge of pantheism, based on the interpretation of *ousia* in Eriugena's work, can look to his affirmation of the identity of an individual with its class: a subject (Cicero), and what is said of the subject ("he is a man"), are in no way separated.[107] Individual *ousiai* for Eriugena, then, will belong to, and also be identical with, the universal class of *ousia*. In Porphyry's Neoplatonic hierarchy of being, all things that exist participate in *ousia* as in a *genus generalissimum*, and nothing in the universe can be excluded from the hierarchy. Individual beings will be members of more specific classes, e.g. man or horse, but *ousia* is located pre-eminently in the hierarchy itself, rather than in the instantiated beings at the foot of it, who exist by sharing in it. Eriugena understands *ousia*, as we have seen, as a quantum, not a quantity. Therefore either beings have it, and participate in it, or they do not: it cannot be divided or multiplied. Therefore the essence of the hierarchy is the same throughout; the essence of the higher levels is ultimately the same as the essence instantiated in a being at a lower level.

For Eriugena, there are no individual essences as such; essence, as being, is common to each and all individual things. He differentiates this essence from the substances that pertain uniquely to individuals. But the substantial form of any individual is the same as that of another individual in the same species, equally whole through equal participation.[108] While

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[106] Book I, 2150–2155 (492c), 70: *OYCIA, quamuis sola ratione in genera sua speciesque numerosque diuidatur, sua tamen naturali uirtute indiuidua permanet ac nullo actu seu operatione uisibili segregatur; tota enim simul et semper in suis subdiuisionibus aeternaliter et incommutabiliter subsistit omnesque subdiuisiones sui simul ac semper in se ipsa unum inseparabile sunt.*

[107] This is Eriugena's example: Book I, 1228–1232 (471a), 42. For Erismann, Eriugena's treatment of universals "implies not separation but immanence, and a complete instantiation of the universal in each individual." "The Logic of Being," 216.

[108] Book III, 3486–3501 (703a–b), 120–121. With regard to human nature, see Book V, 3687–3741 (942c–943c), 115–117: Human nature is distributed to all men, to each of whom it belongs wholly and equally. No one human being is more human than another. For Erismann, "this rejection of variation in substantiality is

an individual's essence is common with other members of the species, its only unique

possession is its body: Eriugena, Erismann writes, reduces individuality to "a bundle of

universal accidents."[109]

> N. How does it seem to you? Is not *οὐσία* wholly and properly contained within the most general genera and in the more general genera as well as in the genera themselves and in their species and again in those most special species which are called atoms, that is, individuals?

> A. - I see that there nothing else in which *οὐσία* can be naturally present except in the genera and species which extend from the highest down to the lowest, that is from the most general to the most special, that is, the individuals, and up in turn from the individuals to the most general genera. For universal *οὐσία* subsists in these as if in its natural parts.[110]

According to Marenbon, Eriugena's concept of *ousia* is philosophically redundant: it explains

nothing![111] It can be regarded as a poetic exploration rather than a logical one, as Eriugena is

inconsistent with definitions of terms, and fails to reconcile the wisdom of the ancients.

Rather than apply the first category to God, Eriugena seems to apply God to the first

category: thus it becomes unknowable, beyond description, allowing of multiple viewpoints

which may appear contradictory.

   In summary, Eriugena's understanding of *ousia* lies between the Aristotelian and the

Platonized version, but generally is closer to the latter. Where he is closest to Aristotle is in

his use of the term *substantia*, which he identifies as the first of the categories which is

subject to accidents, and more importantly, as something which belongs uniquely to its

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probably inspired by the Aristotelian thesis according to which substance does not admit of a more and a less (*Categories* 3b33–4a9; *Isagoge* 9: 16–23)"; "The Logic of Being," 216.

[109] Erismann, "The Logic of Being," 216.

[110] Book I, 1295–1305 (472c), 44–45:
N. Quid tibi uidetur? Num OYCIA in generibus generalissimis et in generibus generalioribus, in ipsis quoque generibus eorumque speciebus, atque iterum specialissimis speciebus, quae atoma (id est indiuidu) dicuntur, uniuersaliter proprieque continetur?
A. Nil aliud esse uideo, in quo naturaliter inesse OYCIA possit, nisi in generibus et speciebus a summon usque deorsum descendentibus, hoc est a generalissimis usque ad specialissima (id est indiuidua) seu reciprocatim sursum uersus ab indiuiduis ad generalissima: in his enim ueluti naturalibus partibus uniuersalis OYCIA subsistit.
Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 62.

[111] In describing the epistemological function of *ousia* in the *Periphyseon*, Marenbon regards it as "an epistemologically redundant concept." "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'," 124–125.

particular corresponding body. Conversely, his use of the term *ousia* corresponds to that which is created one and universal in all things: it belongs to everything which participates in it. Universal essence in this sense is not separate from the things which participate in it. Being singular and universal, it is thus only a step away to say that the very essence of God is the same as the essence found in a stone, unless God can transcend this general sense of *ousia*. Being singular and universal, it would also be confusing to speak of *ousiai* rather than the general *ousia*, but Eriugena does use the plural, since the general *ousia* is manifested in the multiple instantiations, *ousiai*.

5.12 Conclusion

The metaphysical outlooks of Eriugena and Aristotle differ considerably, and indeed can be considered jarring; with regard to their use of certain key concepts they cannot sit well together without a muddling of concepts. Here it was discussed that Eriugena and Aristotle have different starting places: a failure to grasp the differences in their outlook can lead to differing and startling interpretations, particularly for thirteenth-century readers in the West for whom Aristotle was an enigmatic figure. His own ontological method, as expressed in the ten categories, had been altered and reconceptualised by philosophers from the Neoplatonic tradition; the thirteenth century saw an untangling of his original meanings from what had been added, but it was not an easy task. Therefore there was confusion around ontological terms, not least the term essence, or *ousia*, which for Aristotle belonged particularly and properly to an individual object, but which for Neoplatonists came to signify a *genus generalissimum*.

The Neoplatonic structure of reality itself, as described in the *Enneads* of Plotinus, reveals a fundamental distinction between the being of the universe and the separate being of the One, or of God. Furthermore, the proceeding of being through emanation implies a distinction between higher and lower entities in the hierarchy. However, in the Christian

appropriation of this structure, Pseudo-Dionysius understood universals such as goodness to radiate from the Father, drawing the divine being closer to created nature. This was offset by the application (for both Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena) of an apophatic theological understanding whereby no description of God could be said to belong to Him in a proper sense. For Dionysius, who has a critical influence on Eriugena's thinking, any concept which the intellect applies to God is only partially applicable. God is not only beyond comprehension, but does not participate in created natures which participate in being, life, goodness, etc.: His nature remains stable in itself. Being and light may be predicated of God, but Dionysius more properly characterises the divinity by the darkness and non-being which are beyond light and being.

God's creative act was interpreted by Augustine as a *creatio ex nihilo*. Eriugena, through his particular understanding of nothingness as a potentiality for all being, placed this term in a new light, introducing another area which also demands to be investigated for the purposes of this study. This investigation will be the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter Six

Non-Being in Augustine and Eriugena

Eriugena's Understanding of the Substance of the World

in Light of Augustine's *Creatio ex Nihilo*

6.1   Introduction

Out of what, according to Eriugena, did God make the world? Is the world an extension of Himself, and therefore basically equivalent in substance and essence? This is Amaury of Bène's version of events, which the authorities at the University of Paris considered dangerous. If Amaury's pantheism entails a non-physical identity of essence, David of Dinant's version is more radical still, suggesting an identity of physical substance, such that God and prime matter are the same thing. Aquinas dismissed this material pantheism as "the height of foolishness".[1] What is the place of prime matter in Eriugena's theology, and can it be considered an extension of divine substance? And to what extent can God's essence and the essence(s) of His creation appear as the same thing?

This chapter will examine Eriugena's views on the creation of the world. It will do so in the light of his philosophy of substance, and his ideas concerning being and its opposite, non-being. An examination of being and non-being is not arbitrary, but is suggested by Eriugena himself who, considering the totality of Nature, proposes five different ways of considering being and non-being early in the first book of the *Periphyseon*. The definitions and interplay of being and non-being in Eriugena's writings can illuminate a discussion on whether the created world, as he envisions it, can be considered pantheistic.

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[1] *Summa Theologiae* I, q.3, art. 8. Aquinas's original term is *stultissimus*.

In the Carolingian world, the most developed theology of creation was found in Augustine, who at various points in his career had added to a literature of commentary on the Hexameron.[2] A particular feature of his hexameral writings is the concept of nothing, or non-being, as expressed in the formula *creatio ex nihilo*. This formula had a lasting influence on the theology of creation in the West, and is particularly evident in Eriugena's early treatise on predestination.[3] It continues, to an extent, through Eriugena's more mature work, where his working concept of *nihil* also reflects his absorption of the Greek Neoplatonists. It is necessary, therefore, to examine Eriugena's theology of creation with regard to the *creatio ex nihilo* as employed by Augustine, to see where that theology is aligned with Augustine, and also if, where and how it diverges. Where *creatio ex nihilo* means that God needed nothing to create the world, with the emphasis being on God's not needing anything beyond himself in the act of creating, Eriugena focuses on the *nihil* itself and explores the meaning of nothingness. He shifts the emphasis in *creatio ex nihilo* to the nothingness from which the world was created, resulting in a redefining of the word in a contradictory sense, a move which accords with his Neoplatonic outlook.[4]

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[2] Augustine's commentaries on the creation narrative extend over many years and include On Genesis against the Manichees (*De Genesi contra Manichaeos*), On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book (*De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*), books eleven to thirteen of the *Confessions*, the twelve books of On Genesis Literally Interpreted (*De Genesi ad litteram*) and book eleven of The City of God (*De Civitate Dei*). These works were all written between AD 388 and *circa* 420. See Roland J. Teske, Introduction to *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, Vol. 84: St Augustine on Genesis* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 3–4.

[3] An expression of the term – God making all things from nothing – is also found in Scripture (2 Macc. 7:28). Studies which further explore Augustine's influence on Eriugena include Brian Stock, "In Search of Eriugena's Augustine," and John J. O'Meara, "'Magnorum Virorum Quendam Consensum Velimus Machinari' (804B): Eriugena's Use of Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* in the Periphyseon," both of which are found in *Eriugena: Studien zu seinen Quellen*, ed. Werner Beierwaltes. Vorträge des III Interationalen Eriugena-Colloquiums (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980). See also Robert D. Crouse, "Augustinian Platonism in Early Medieval Theology," in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. Joanne McWilliam (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), 109–120.

[4] For a discussion on how Eriugena re-defines nothingness, see Bernard McGinn, "The Periphyseon as Hexaemeral Commentary," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 175–177.

6.2 Augustine and *creatio ex nihilo*

6.2.1 A Christian doctrine

Theophilus of Antioch (d. c. AD 185) promoted the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*: the general tenet of his argument was to counter the philosophical idea (which had been a commonplace for centuries) that prime matter, from which all things were made, was eternal and uncreated.[5] If, for Christians, God is the creator of all things, then there is no room in the world for anything which has not been created by God.[6] Even if God were the sole agent in creating the world from prime matter, a prime matter that existed eternally alongside (and independently of) God would contradict His omnipotence and His infinity, and therefore must be an impossibility. Furthermore, the greatness of God's act of creation is diminished if His raw material was already to hand, for even humans can make things with pre-existent material. For Theophilus, only God was eternal, and he created the world from nothing.

Augustine employed the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* in his crusade against the Manicheans who had posited a dark force in the world, opposite to, and independent of, God. Augustine was eager to argue that nothing could exist independently of God, an idea which ran contrary to the Manichean doctrine of a dualistic cosmos. Earlier in his life, he had espoused these same Manichean views, and in believing that a good God could not create an evil nature, he supposed that there were two infinite but adverse masses, the evil one lesser,

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[5] Gavin Hyman, "Augustine on the 'Nihil': An Interrogation," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 37. The attribution to Theophilus of Antioch is also found in Gerhard May, *Creatio ex nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994). See also Tarsicius van Bavel, "The Creator and the Integrity of Creation in the Fathers of the Church, Especially in Saint Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 21 (1990): 4–6 for early uses of the term *creatio ex nihilo*.

[6] Plato's Demiurge in the *Timaeus* represents the classic example of a Creator working with formless matter; see in particular article twenty-one which describes a primitive chaos before the creation of the world: the four elementary constituents of the material world – earth, air, fire and water – existed in a disorganised state, without proportion or measure. *Plato: Timaeus*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin, 1965), 72.

and the good one greater.[7] In order to overcome the concept of the infinite, antagonistic mass of evil, co-eternal with God, the concept of *nihil* was used to replace it, a total vacuum of being and existence.[8]

The privative nothingness portrayed by Augustine's *nihil* implies the existence of something (although it is nothing) from which God is absent. The *nihil*, as an absence of being, presents a dimension of otherness in the world, something not identified with God, who is the fullness of being. God's presence is not the only presence in the created world: the (partial) absence of God is also a feature of created being. Thus not only, as *creatio ex nihilo* implies, did God need nothing (save his own power) to create the world, but nothingness itself is also a feature of it. The *nihil* implies an otherness from which God can fabricate the substance of created being which is *unlike* Himself; by extension it prevents a pantheistic understanding of the cosmos. At the same time, the *nihil* denies anything existing independently of God, which was its function in Augustine's argument with the Manicheans. Thus the idea of the *nihil* is extremely useful, for it replaces the substantive nature of evil without destroying the reality of it (or its effects).

Evil can now be understood as a deficiency of being rather than an independent and substantive being-in-itself.[9] The *nihil* dispenses with the need for an independent, evil

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[7] "*Et quia deum bonum nullam malam naturam creasse qualiscumque me pietas credere cogebat, constituebam ex aduerso sibi duas moles, utramque infinitam, sed malam angustius, bonam grandius.*" *Sancti Augustini: Confessionum Libri XIII*, ed. Lucas Verheijen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina XXVII (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), V.10 (20), 68.

[8] A good example of Augustine's use of *nihil* as nothingness or void occurs in *Confessionum Libri XIII,* XII.8, (Ibid., 220): *Tu enim, domine, fecisti mundum de materia informi, quam fecisti de nulla re paene nullam rem, unde faceres magna, quae miramur.* The following translation is taken from Augustine: *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 285: "For you, O Lord, made the world from formless matter, which you created out of nothing. This matter was itself almost nothing, but from it you made all the mighty things which are so wonderful to us." From (or in) this vacuum God brought into existence something that wasn't there before (though there was no 'there' as such, since time and space are also brought into being through a creative act), which follows from *creatio ex nihilo*. But Augustine here asserts that a dimension of nothingness remains part of what it is brought into being, and he contrasts it with what is mighty; the ultimate contrast would be with the fullness of being, God himself.

[9] For Augustine, the evil inherent in sin is produced in the moment of sinning, rather than being something substantial that causes the sin. By willing less than the good, the will introduces the 'something' that

substance, eternal and uncreated by God, which denied God's omnipotence and omnipresence in the universe.[10] The Manichean power of evil was associated with material matter: by doing away with the substance of this evil, Augustine arrives at the worldview that everything that really exists is created and sustained by God, and therefore is inherently good; evil, therefore, has no substance, since substance is good in itself.[11] From God's point of view, as Augustine understands it, what is contrary or external to God has no real existence; there is nothing outside of creation which can challenge it, or in any way corrupt the divine order inherent in it.[12]

6.2.2 Created being originates in nothing

Darkness, Augustine insists, is but the absence of light.[13] In his philosophy of creation, the *nihil*, as absence, replaces anything which might exist independently of God. Eriugena's adopted version of Neoplatonic emanation, which begins with a singularity – the One, whom Christian Neoplatonists take to be God – also makes it impossible for anything to exist independently of God. Augustine's *creatio ex nihilo*, however, operates differently from

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is evil. It is not a substance, but rather the lack of a substance, the lack of complete goodness. In his *City of God*, he states: *et inueniet uoluntatem malam non ex eo esse incipere quod natura est, se ex eo quod de nihilo facta natura est. Nam si natura causa est uoluntatis malae, quid aliud cogimur dicere, nisi a bono fieri malum et bonum esse causam mali.* See *Sancti Augustini De Civitate Dei*, XII.6, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, XLVII, XLVIII (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), 361–362. This is translated in *The Fathers of the Church* Vol. 14, trans. Gerard G. Walsh SJ and Grace Monahan OSU (The Catholic University of America Press: Washington D.C., 1952), 257, as "the evil arises not from the fact that the man is a nature, but from the fact that the nature was made out of nothing. For, if a nature is the cause of an evil will, then we are compelled to say that evil springs from good and that good is the cause of evil." Earlier in the same work (XI.9) Augustine states that *mali enim nulla natura est; sed amissio boni, malum nomen accipit.*

[10] For Aristotle, as for the ancient Greeks, a thing cannot be generated out of nothing or disappear back into nothing, hence the need for an eternal prime matter. See Vasilis Politis, *Aristotle and the Metaphysics*, 57.

[11] See *Confessionum Libri XIII*, ed. Verheijen, VII.12, 104: *Ergo quaecumque sunt, bona sunt, malumque illud, quod quaerebam unde esset, non est substantia, quia, si substantia esset, bonum esset.*

[12] Ibid., VII.13, 105: *Et tibi omnino non est malum, non solum tibi sed nec uniuersae creaturae tuae, quia extra te non est aliquid, quod inrumpat et corrumpat ordinem, quem imposuisti ei.*

[13] *lucis absentia*. Ibid., XII.3, 216. For Pseudo-Dionysius, as we have seen (*The Mystical Theology*, 1.3, trans. Lubheid, 136–139), darkness is an infinite richness beyond light which characterises the unknowability of the causes before they proceed into their effects.

Neoplatonic emanation: the latter is a 'top-down' process, in which each created thing flows out from, and participates in, a higher being. Each thing depends on a higher thing for its existence, from which it flows. Augustine's God creates directly from nothing: his application of *creatio ex nihilo*, while not necessarily incompatible with Neoplatonic emanation, implies that God needs nothing when drawing things into existence, and created being comes to occupy a space where there was nothing (not even space) before. The origin of any thing's existence can only be divine, since there is nothing separate from God involved in the process. But he also places emphasis on nothingness itself as an entity, to which earthly things are close:

> *Et aliud praeter te non erat, unde faceres ea, deus, una trinitas et trina unitas: et ideo de nihilo fecisti caelum et terram . . . Te eras et aliud nihil, unde fecisti caelum et terram, duo quaedam, unum prope te, alterum prope nihil, unum, quo superior tu esse, alterum, quo inferius nihil esset.*[14]

Augustine contrasts the fullness of being in God with the nothingness from which created being is drawn. The earth is described as being "little more than nothing" (*quo inferius nihil esset*), and therefore close to being a non-entity; its inclination towards nothingness is due to the 'stuff' of which it is made (i.e. formless matter), which is itself not divine:

> *Fecisti omnia, non de te similitudinem tuam formam omnium, sed de nihilo dissimilitudinem informem, quae formaretur per similitudinem tuam recurrens in te unum pro captu ordinato, quantum cuique rerum in suo genere datum est, et fierent omnia bona ualde, siue maneant circa te, siue gradatim remotiore distantia per tempora et locos pulchras uariationes faciant aut patiantur.*[15]

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[14] *Confessionum Libri XIII*, XII.7, 219–220. Pine-Coffin (284–285) translates this passage as: "But besides yourself, O God, who are Trinity in Unity, Unity in Trinity, there was nothing from which you could make heaven and earth. Therefore you must have created them from nothing . . . You were, and besides You nothing was. From nothing, then, you created heaven and earth, distinct from one another, the one close to yourself, the other close to being nothing; the one surpassed only by yourself, the other little more than nothing."

[15] *Confessionum Libri XIII*, XII.28, 237–238. Pine Coffin (305) translates as follows: "You made the world, not by creating it from your own substance in your own likeness, which is the form of all things, but by creating from nothing formless matter utterly unlike yourself. . . this matter was to receive form in your likeness. . . All things were thus to be good, whether they remain close to you or, at difference degrees of distance from you in time and place, undergo, or themselves cause, all the wonderful variations which take place in the world." The point is also made in XII.11: *omnes naturas atque substantias, quae non sunt quod tu es et tamen sunt, tu fecisti*. See *Confessionum Libri XIII*, 221.

Contrary to the substance of created being, which is not to be confused with divine substance, Augustine states that it is form rather than matter that constitutes a likeness of God, and that it is form that is inherently good. Matter retains an element of nothingness: the substance of the world is not the substance of God.[16]

Augustine's intermediate step of formless matter, which he inherited from Greek philosophy but also finds consistent with Scripture, conceptually separates the form of created being from its substance. The substance is drawn from formless matter: God created this matter from nothing, and as something unlike himself. There was neither body nor spirit at this stage in the process, which would indicate an absence of essence, and yet it is not complete nothingness, but rather matter without colour, shape, or feature.[17]

6.2.3   Augustine's formless matter

The twelfth book of the *Confessions* explores the subject of formless matter and its relation to nothing in considerable detail. Formless matter appears to occupy a middle ground between being and non-being.[18] Having no form, it is not subject to time.[19] For Augustine, the starting point and most important text of reference on the subject of formless matter is the opening verse of the book of Genesis:

> In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep . . . (Gen 1:1–2)

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[16] Since Augustine has said that form constitutes a *likeness* to God, rather than an identity with God, Augustine's position cannot be considered equivalent to Amaury's.

[17] "*Nonne tu, domine, docuisti me, quod, priusquam istam informem materiam formares atque distingueres, non erat aliquid, non color, non figura, non corpus, non spiritus? Non tamen omnino nihil: erat quaedam informitas sine ulla specie.*" *Confessionum Libri XIII*, XII.3, 218.

[18] Ibid., XII.8, 220: prime matter is described as "utter formlessness" (*omnino informe*) and "next-to-nothing" (*prope nihil*). In XII.5 it is established that formless matter is not perceived by the senses.

[19] Ibid., XII.9, 221. The creation of formless matter is not considered as part of the days of creation. Formless matter, for Augustine, does not precede created being (i.e. the fusion of matter and form) temporally. It is a necessary component of created being, upon which form is imprinted, but it has no temporal priority or independent existence of its own. This contrasts with Plato's primitive chaos, where the four qualities of earth, air, fire and water existed before the Demiurge ordered the universe. *Plato: Timaeus*, art. 21; op.cit., 72.

In the Book of Wisdom, however, God created the earth out of formless matter.[20] Can 'void' and 'matter' be coterminous? Augustine navigates this difficulty by steering a middle course, and dividing the creative process into two steps: God created formless matter from nothing, and then created the world from the formless matter. Therefore he can say that *et ideo deus rectissime creditor omnia de nihilo fecisse, quia etiamsi omnia formata de ista material facta sunt, haec ipsa material tamen de omnino nihilo facta est*.[21] There was no external power or substance to assist in the creative process: all that exists owes its existence to God, and there is nothing that exists which was not brought into being by God.[22]

Augustine retains the concept of prime or formless matter as employed by ancient Greek philosophy, but he strips it of its co-eternity with (and independence from) God. God created the world by mixing form(s) with a prime matter which He establishes from nothing. He gives this matter a certain ontological priority before all created things, since it is the substance of all created things, but this priority is not a temporal one; time only enters the equation when there is form, which is mixed with prime matter by the Creator.[23] He explains:

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[20] Wisdom of Solomon 11:17.

[21] Augustine, *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*, I: VI.10 (online edition: clt.brepolis.net.may.idm.oclc.org/Ilta/pages/Toc.aspx, consulted 26 September 2022). This passage is translated by Teske as "we correctly believe that God made all things from nothing. For, though all formed things were made from this matter, this matter itself was still made from absolutely nothing." *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 84, 57–58.

[22] Ibid: *Omnipotens autem deus nulla re adiuuandus erat, quam ipse non fecerat, ut quod uolebat efficeret. Si enim ad eas res quas facere uolebat, adiuuabat eum aliqua res quam ipse non fecerat, non erat omnipotens: quod sacrilegum est credere*. Teske translates this passage as: "Almighty God did not have to be helped by anything that he had not made so that he could make what he wanted. For if something that he had not made helped him to make those things he wanted to make, he was not almighty, and that is sacrilegious to believe." *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 84, 58. While unformed matter is generally regarded as the substrate for physical being, Augustine indicates in the *Confessions* (XII.13) that the unformed matter from which all things are made is the substance both of heaven and earth, and understands this heaven as an "intellectual heaven" (*caelum intellectuale*). He shares the Neoplatonic view of creation which sees the physical world as the final part of creation/emanation, ontologically preceded by spirit (Ibid., XII.11). This accords with the assertion of the Nicene creed (AD 325; the *Confessions* date from 397) that God made all things visible and invisible.

[23] By considering the place of formless matter in an ontological hierarchy, and through his insistence that it was created 'before' the introduction of Time (*Confessions*, XII.12), it is possible, after all, to reconcile Augustine's understanding of formless matter with the Greek belief in its eternity. The ontological priority of prime matter before the created world is preceded by the ontological priority of God over prime matter, which

> *Sic est prior materies quam id, quod ex ea fit, non ideo prior, quia ipsa efficit, cum potius fiat, nec prior interuallo temporis . . . materiam rerum primo factam et appellatam caelum et terram, quia inde facta sunt caelum et terra, nec tempore primo factam, quia formae rerum exerunt tempora.*[24]

Without form, order, and mutability, there is no movement of time with regard to prime matter *per se*. However, in so far as it was not completely nothing, prime matter naturally had its being from Him from whom everything that exists to any degree derives its being.[25] Augustine here implies that divine presence is found in formless matter, though essence and form, which more properly contain divine likeness, are not.

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he created from nothing. However, since by Augustine's reasoning the creation of prime matter 'precedes' time, since prime matter is timeless, it *can* exist eternally with God. An ontological priority, rather than a temporal one, frames the assertion that God made the earth and the sea by giving visible form to the formless matter which was created before the first day: *fecisti tertio die dando speciem uisibilem informi materiae, quam fecisti ante omnem diem. Confessionum Libri XIII*, ed. Verheijen, XII.8, 220.This statement on its own however, can easily lead to a misinterpretation of prime matter as essentially the same as the four elements in Plato's primeval chaos.

[24] Augustine, *Confessionum Libri XIII,* XII.29, 238–239. Pine-Coffin (306–307) translates this passage as: "Matter precedes what is made from it, though neither in the sense that it makes anything, because its role is passive rather than active, nor in the sense that it precedes it in time . . . the matter of things was made first and was called heaven and earth because heaven and earth were made from it. But this does not mean that it was made first in terms of time, because there is time only where there is form." In *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Augustine also makes the point as follows: *Non quia informis material formatis rebus tempore prior est, cum sit utrumque simul concreatum, et unde factum est, et quod factum est*. It is re-emphasised thus: *Non itaque temporali, sed causali ordine prius facta est informis formabilisque materies, et spiritalis et corporalis, de qua fieret, quod faciendum esset, cum et ipsa, priusquam instituta est, non fuisset . . .* See *Sancti Aureli Augustini, De Genesi ad Litteram Libri Duodecim*, ed. Joseph Zycha, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Vol. 28, Pars I (Vienna: Academiae Litterarum Caesareae, 1894), I.15, 21 and V.13, 146. A translation by John Hammond reads: "But we must not suppose that unformed matter is prior in time to things that are formed; both the thing made and the matter from which it was made were created together . . . It is not in the order of time but in the order of causality that matter unformed and formable, both spiritual and corporeal, came first in creation. It was the substratum of what was to be made, although it did not exist before it was created." *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* No. 41 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 36, 154.

[25] *Confessionum Libri XIII*, XII.15, 227: *hoc paene nihil in quantum non omnino nihil erat, ab illo utique erat, a quo est quidquid est, quod utcumque aliquid est*. In XII.29 Augustine uses the example of the song as an analogy for how God creates form from formless matter. The material (or matter) of the song is sound, yet before the song is sung, there is nothing, except for the potential for sound, i.e. the scientific possibilities for sound, which include the possible creation of sound waves, a medium for them in which to travel (e.g. air), and the function of hearing with which to receive those sounds. This material (sound) must precede the song (and the possibility for any song). Further, it is the singer who makes the song, rather than the sound. But the possibility of sound is not something which, for the purposes of this example, Augustine understands as one which changes with time. The song exists *in* time, the possibility for sound is *outside* time. Thus the possibility for sound ontologically precedes the song, but does not necessarily precede it in time: it may appear simultaneously, though of course it cannot follow it. The song, having form, takes precedence over sound. So the formless is first in ontological priority, but last in order of value. It is in this sense also, denying the inclusion of the concept of time, that formless matter is preceded by the eternity of the Creator. It may exist co-eternally with Him, for time is not relevant here. But He is ontologically prior to it. Ibid., 239.

6.2.4 The mutability of created being

Augustine observes the dynamic, material world of shifting forms and recognises that all created being contains the quality of mutability which enables things to begin to be what they have not been.[26] God, by contrast, is immutable, a quality which separates Him from His creation; Augustine infers that this difference is based in a difference of substance.[27] The quality of mutability is properly located (or exercised) in the fusion of matter and form. In the process of a thing's transformation into another thing, prime matter enables the transition: in this intermediate stage between one thing and another, where a thing has no form but continues to have some kind of existence, prime matter represents that continued existence.[28]

Augustine's understanding of the quality of mutability resembles one of Eriugena's definitions of non-being (the third mode) where actual being is said to be, whereas potential being is said not to be: *Et haec quid est? Numquid animus? Numquid corpus? . . . Si dici posset "nihil aliquid" et "est non est", hoc eam eam dicerem; et tamen iam utcumque erat, ut species caperet istas uisibiles et compositas*.[29] Prime matter, through its contribution to the mutation of things, can be thought of as the substance of something which he considers has not yet come into being, but cannot be considered a complete absence.

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[26] *Confessionum Libri XIII*, XII.6, 219: *incipiunt esse quod non erant*. In discussing the quality of mutability, Augustine starts with the observation of material things which can change form, rather than considering prime matter itself in an abstract sense (since it cannot be observed).

[27] In *Confessions*, XII.17, Augustine states that heaven and earth were made, not from God's own substance which alone is immutable, but from nothing. Ibid., 228.

[28] Ibid., XII.6, 219.

[29] Ibid., XII.6, 219. Pine-Coffin's translation (284) reads: "But what is it? Is it soul or body? . . . If it did not sound nonsensical, I should say that it was nothing and yet something, or that *it was and yet was not* [my emphasis]. Whatever it is, it must have been there first, able to be the vehicle for all the composite forms which we can see in the world."

6.3   Conceptualising absolutely nothing

The *nihil* is a powerful concept: it is absolute non-being, the opposite and antithesis of being. In Augustine's anti-Manichaean argument, the *nihil* accounts for all that is evil in the world while not attributing that evil to God *per se*. But if opposing the dualistic world principle of the Manichaeans ushers in the idea that everything that exists stems ultimately from the being of God, do we include 'nothing' under this umbrella? Did God 'create' the *nihil*? If Augustine's viewpoint is that nothing can exist independently of God, then can the *nihil* be located within the spectrum of an ontological hierarchy, albeit at the furthest extreme? And if it can be located here, has it thereby lost its potency? For Gavin Hyman, the term *nihil*, as Augustine uses it, has been 'theologically domesticated';[30] God has overcome the *nihil*, even if it retains its threat to drag being(s) down into it.

A theologically domesticated *nihil*, considered as a "controlled absence," deflates its power, and the power of evil, as an opposing force to goodness and being.[31] The presence of evil is therefore (and paradoxically) an absence. The moral quest for goodness, pursued through the practice of virtue on man's part, and the bestowal of grace on God's, is in fact a striving towards the fullness of being. However, for Augustine the *nihil* is posited as, and always remains, a considerable force, even (or indeed, particularly) when conceived as an absence, and remains an inherent quality of all created things. It is not eradicated or negated by God: created being always retains a tendency towards it, demanding that God not only creates but continuously conserves all things in being. For Augustine, the power of the all-embracing God sustains all things: were this power to be withdrawn, all beings would

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[30] Hyman, "Augusine and the 'Nihil'," 42. Hyman's study searches for Augustine's true understanding of the *nihil* through the interplay of presence and absence in his writings, including where a thing explicitly affirmed is elsewhere implicitly denied, and vice versa. This provides some context to Eriugena's development of the term.

[31] Ibid., 42. See also Ibid., 48: "the created world does not embody God's triumph over the 'nihil' but rather God's connivance with it."

perish.[32] If God turns his back on the world, the *nihil* is re-established; God, who is Being itself, must continuously maintain His creation to preserve created being in existence.

There is a sense, then, that God colluded with nothingness in the creation of the world; the *nihil* is woven into its very fabric.[33] God does not enjoy a complete ontological triumph over the *nihil*, for the world is not a fullness of presence, but rather a mixture of presence and absence, of being and non-being, of goodness and evil. The *nihil* is a necessary component in the universe, because owing to its 'presence', no created thing can possess the fullness of being which is God's alone. For a created thing in the created world, neither the complete non-being of the *nihil*, nor the fullness of being belonging to God alone, is possible. The *nihil* is an otherness (although not independently other) that makes the substance of created being different from God. As creator and conserver, God is present to every created thing, but not in such a way that He can be identified with it. God's presence can be understood to cast the shadow of the *nihil* in the world, since the fullness of His being is not fully reflected in the created thing. God himself does not partake in the *nihil*, nor is He in any way contaminated by it; it is only the created world that suffers from its 'presence'. Pantheism, in a pure sense, becomes an impossibility.

The Plotinian Neoplatonic theory of being assumes that everything emanates from the top down, from absolute being to the very least things that exist. This system does not posit nothingness, nor a void, as such. For Augustine, there is nothing inherent in us, from the 'stuff' we are made of, that brings us to the fullness of being; rather, the nothingness from which we are created continues to exercise a gravity back towards it, which is kept at bay by

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[32] Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, ed. Zycha, IV:12, 108: *creatoris namque potentia et omnipotentis atque omnitenentis uirtus causa subsistendi est omni creaturae: quae uirtus ab eis, quae create sunt, regendis si aliquando cessaret, simul et illorum cessaret species omnisque natura concideret.*

[33] Rather than acting as a challenge to God's authority over the universe by being located outside of his sovereignty, Hyman notes that the *nihil* actually serves to characterise the Christian God in a positive way. Standing in contrast to the void, He becomes a "fortress of identity, personality, [and] individuation." "Augusine and the 'Nihil'," 47.

the conserving act of God. In Neoplatonic theology, all being proceeds from the fullness of being, and returns to it: it is therefore oriented towards the fullness of being. At first glance, pantheism becomes more plausible in this system than in *creatio ex nihilo*, particularly if God is called 'the fullness of being'. The Dionysian-Neoplatonist influence is a dominant force in Eriugena's metaphysical framework for the totality of being, which he calls Nature. In his theology of creation, his understanding of *nihil* will shift away from Augustine's use of the term.

6.4 The *nihil* inherited by Eriugena

Augustine has presented *nihil* as meaning literally nothing. It is reinforced in a comment on the prologue to St John's Gospel, where he encourages the reader to pay no heed to "delirious men" who consider the term 'nothing' to be understood as 'something'.[34] Being nothing, the *nihil* cannot be grasped in any way: such would be like trying to see darkness or hear silence; we have knowledge of such things, but there can be no sensation, only the privation of sensation.[35] For Pseudo-Dionysius, the term 'non-being' does not imply a privative nothingness. God, the source of all being, is the non-being beyond all being.[36] Just as Dionysius considers darkness to be an excess of light, so non-being is not a void of being, but a nothingness that lies beyond being. Being is born from non-being, and ultimately reabsorbed by it. Nothingness cannot be considered a vacuum in itself, but is what lies beyond being from the point of view of the human intellect. Eriugena, through the course of his writings, refers to both concepts of nothingness.

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[34] Augustine, *De Natura Boni Contra Manichaeos*, 25: *Neque enim audienda sunt deliramente hominum, qui nihil hoc loco aliquid intellegendum putant*. See online edition: clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/Toc.aspx, consulted 28 September 2022.

[35] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XII.7, 362.

[36] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, chapter 5.10.

6.5   Eriugena's non-being in *De Praedestinatione*

Eriugena employs an Augustinian sense of *nihil* consistently in his only surviving work that engaged directly with contemporary theological debate, the relatively early treatise *De Praedestinatione* (c. AD 851). This work sought to counter the claims of the monk Gottscalc who had argued that God acted with a double-predestination: in other words, some people He predestined to heaven, and the remainder He predestined to hell.[37] Eriugena replied that there was only a single predestination, to heaven, but that not everyone would succeed in getting there, through no fault of God's. He asserts that God cannot know sin, because it is nothing, a 'non-thing'; it is contrary to God's being, and unknown to him. He neither made evil, nor prepared it to be made: *sicut deus mali auctor non est, ita nec praescius mali nec praedestinans est*.[38] Eriugena is describing evil here in the privative sense. He refers to Augustine's example of beauty, which, when it loses its bloom, does not posit the existence of ugliness: no substance is added or taken away, just as when a person gets tired, it is a simple lack in energy.[39] Thus sin, too, is a non-substantial corruption of the good, and an opposite to perfection and happiness.[40]

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[37] The subsequent history of this doctrine appears to ignore the contribution of Eriugena's study, which can be largely attributed to its rejection by bishops in his own time, and to the shadow of heresy that attached itself to his theology generally following the events of the early thirteenth century. Double predestination featured in Calvin's theology: in his *Institutes of Christian Religion*, he states that "by predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death." John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, III.3. See http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.iv.iii.xxii.html (consulted 19 February 2021). In more recent times, Pope John Paul II asserted the Catholic position that salvation is offered to all people, including non-Christians. Grace enables every person to be saved through their free cooperation. See *Redemptoris Missio* 1.10.

[38] Eriugena, *De Diuina Praedestinatione Liber*, ed. Goulven Madec, 10.3, 64. See the translation by Mary Brennan: "just as God is not the author of evil, so has he not foreknowledge of evil nor does he predestine it." *John Scottus Eriugena: Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 67.

[39] *De Diuina Praedestinatione Liber*, 10.3, 64.

[40] See also *Periphyseon* IV, 3372–3375 (821a), 112–113: the desire for sin is an incomplete (and misguided) desire for the good, since a person can only wish for the good. No-one would fall into sin's "filthy swamp" unless they mistakenly understood it to be something good: *Quis forsitan in foetidam paludem*

Leading from the standpoint of sin being a non-substantial corruption of the good, and making reference to Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, Eriugena urges: *nemo quaerat efficientem causam malae uoluntatis; non est enim efficiens sed defectio*.[41] Although evil appears here as a void, he also claims that there is another kind of evil, which is good in itself, which is the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his followers.[42] This accords with Augustine's belief in the existence of a physical hell. But if Eriugena has asserted that God cannot know evil, for it is a non-thing, surely then, by the same reasoning, God does not apply a substantial punishment for a sin which is based in nothingness? This is the conclusion reached in the *De Praedestinatione*; indeed, it is a recurring theme throughout the work that God does not apply punishment to sinners. What, then, of the fires of hell? Eriugena's position is that God permits punishment to happen, but the punishment begins with the sinner.[43] It belongs to the servant and not the master. Hell is generated by the damned themselves. The wages of sin are death, and death is caused by the sinner, not God.[44] Fire, in

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intemperantiae perderetur, nisi delectation bonum atque eximium quodammodo aestimaret eam qui tali illecebra ad passionem attrahitur?

[41] *De Diuina Praedestinatione Liber*, 10.4, 65. In the *City of God*, XII.6, Augustine claims there is no efficient cause for a bad will: *Huius porro malae uoluntatis causa efficiens si quaeratur, nihil inuenitur. Quid est enim quod facit uoluntatem malam, cum ipsa faciat opus malum? Ac per hoc mala uoluntas efficiens est operis mali, malae autem uoluntatis efficiens nihil est*. See *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Episcopi De Civitate Dei Libri XXII*, ed. Emanuel Hoffman, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 40 (Reprint. London and New York: Johnson, 1962), 573–574. Teske translates this passage as: "If one seeks for the efficient cause of their evil will, none is to be found. For, what can make the will bad when it is the will itself which makes an action bad? Thus an evil will is the efficient cause of a bad action, but there is no efficient cause of an evil will." *The Fathers of the Church* Vol. 14, 254. See also XII.9, where Augustine denies an essential cause to an evil will. Evil is a weakening of the good in the nature of things; it is not made, but rather, is an 'unmaking' in the will, and a desertion from God. *De Civitate Dei Libri XXII*, ed. Hoffman, XII.VIIII, 579.

[42] Eriugena, *De Diuina Praedestinatione Liber*, ed. Madec, 10.2, 63. "*illud malorum genus . . . cum naturaliter sit bonum.*"

[43] There is an elaboration, in the *Periphyseon*, on the punishment for sin in the context of God's allowing evil to exist: just as beauty is manifest by comparison with ugliness, and similarly light with darkness, and virtue with vice, so God's glory is made visible by comparison with what is base, and the joy of people of goodwill contrasts with the sadness of those who have gone astray. Book V, 4223–4228 (954a), 131.

[44] Eriugena, *De Diuina Praedestinatione Liber*, 3.7, 5.3, 16.6, 17.8.

so far as it is substantial, is good, but to those with a partially-corrupted will, it becomes a source of punishment.

6.6   Eriugena and Creation

6.6.1   The place of evil and the *nihil*

The presence of the *nihil* in Eriugena's theology is visible through its close connection with evil, which for Eriugena comprises that which denies a fullness of being, implying, as it did for Augustine, that God cannot be fully present in this material world (though He can be fully present *to* it). Eriugena understands the presence of the *nihil* (although it is an absence) in teleological terms, as a contrast to the fullness of being which thus allows God, through a contrast of opposites, to be made known. The world was created from nothing in order to glorify the might and magnitude of Divine Goodness;[45] this is the bigger reason for permitting the absence of the fullness of being: it demonstrates the glory of God and His creation.[46] Therefore Divine Providence has reason to allow that to exist which detracts from the fullness of being, and causes suffering in humans. However, is this nothingness, which constitutes evil and from which the world is created, identical with Augustine's *nihil*? It must be determined whether, in Eriugena's view, the substance of the world, drawn from nothing, can in any way be understood as the substance of God.

6.6.2   Defining 'substance'

Eriugena's discussion of substance begins with Gregory of Nyssa; Eriugena takes from him the idea that there can be no precise understanding of the term, since it transcends human

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[45] *Periphyseon* V, 4126–4128 (951d), 128.

[46] Book V, 4223–4235b (954a), 131.

understanding.[47] Alumnus asks the question: where is the actual location of this substance? Does it descend into the world or does it remain in its cause?[48] The question reveals that Eriugena employs a different working concept of the term 'substance' to that used by Augustine. Alumnus has posed two alternatives, but both regard substance as originating in the causes, rather than being drawn from any form of nothingness. In a 'top-down' hierarchy of being, substances are created, and subsist, in the primordial causes, rather than being drawn from unformed matter, which, according to Augustine, is next to a privative nothing. Augustine has made clear that the substance of the created world is unlike that of God himself. Eriugena's seemingly radical departure from Augustine is cemented in the answer given by Nutritor:

> *credamus etiam ipsas (substantias dico) in suis causis semper et incommutabiliter permanere et ab eis nunquam nusquam nullo modo recedere? [sic.] Vt enim ipsae causae primordiales non deserunt sapientiam, sic ipsae substantiae non deserunt causas, sed in eis semper subsistunt; et quemadmodum causae extra substantias nesciunt esse, ita substantiae extra causas non possunt fluere.*[49]

The most detailed and illuminating example of this understanding of substance is in Eriugena's description of the human body, which, prior to the Fall, was a spiritual body only.[50] For Augustine, the physical body existed (in Adam and Eve) before the Fall, in an

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[47] Book I, 61–64 (443b), 5; Book IV, 1225–1231 (772a–b), 46–47.

[48] Book V, 1148–1166 (885d–886a), 38.

[49] Book V, 1183–1189. (886b–c), 39. "The substances ever and immutably abide in their Causes, and never in any manner fall away from them into any other place; but that, just as the Primordial Causes do not separate themselves from Wisdom, so neither do the substances separate themselves from the Causes, but subsist in them forever . . . as the Causes cannot exist apart from the substances, so the substances cannot flow forth from the Causes." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 553.

[50] The notion of a spiritual body reflects Origen's position that the resurrected body is not of the flesh. Origen took this meaning from his interpretation of Saint Paul, for whom "the flesh and the blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God neither can the corruption inherit the incorruption" (I Cor 15:50): "Certainly, if they believe the Apostle who says that the body, when it has risen in a state of glory and force and incorruption, has then being rendered spiritual, then it seems illogical and contrary to what Paul means if one says that in this state too the resurrected body interweaves with the passions of the flesh and of the blood." Origen, *On First Principles*, ed. and trans. H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1978), 380, II.10.3. See also Antonia S. Kakavelaki: "The Resurrected Body, Will It Be of Flesh, or Spiritual?" *Scrinium Journal of Patrology and Critical Hagiography* (2015): 229, https://brill.com/view/journals/scri/11/1/article-p225_20.xml?language=en&body=fullHtml-39138, consulted 23 February 2021.

uncorrupted state. Eriugena, however, claims that the physical body comes into existence only after (and as a result of) the first sin.[51] Even after the Fall, in its current state, Eriugena understands the human body proper not as the body known to the corporeal senses but rather that which already belonged to our uncorrupted nature and to which the mortal body will be restored.[52] Eriugena does not attach the notion of substance to the material, mortal body: there are not two bodies, but one.[53] The corporeal body is not regarded as a true body in itself, but rather as a corruptible garment of the true body: what does not last forever is not properly true.[54]

Eriugena has defined substance as something which remains in its cause, and does not flow forth. But although they are inseparable, he has not defined them as the same thing: the one abides within the other. However, one might still ask if this substance can be equated with divine substance. Clarity is provided by considering the broader Dionysian context: whatever substance may be, and wherever it is to be found, God cannot be thought of as substantial in any proper sense; rather, He is beyond substance, and can be considered therefore as more-than-substance.

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[51] Eriugena (Book IV, 2572–2584 (803b), 87) acknowledges Augustine's position on the creation of the earthly body; without sin, it would not have been corruptible or subject to death. But he also puts forward the contrary position of Gregory, for whom anything mutable in man, i.e. his corporeal body, is something additional to the true person; this body will be removed from the soul in time, and what remains is the image of God. From this, Eriugena concludes that the physical body was not part of man's original creation (IV, 2446–2517 (800b–802a), 83–85), and was added after the Fall. He attempts a reconciliation between Gregory's position and Augustine's by suggesting that God gave the body to the man *before* he sinned (and thus in an uncorrupted state), knowing in advance that he would sin (IV, 2805–2830 (807d–808c), 94–95.

[52] Book IV, 734–738 (760b), 28. The spiritual, immortal, immaterial and incorruptible body which existed before the Fall extends to the exterior senses, which, though they use bodily instruments, belong "properly and naturally" (*proprie et naturaliter*) to the soul (IV, 1715–1721 (783c), 61); see also V, 829–832 (879a), 28, and V, 1208–1210 (887a), 39: *ex incorporalibus enim et intelligilibus corporalia et sensibilia originem ducunt*.

[53] Book IV, 2559–2560 (803a), 86.

[54] Book IV, 2564–2565 (803a), 87.

6.6.3   A denial of true substance in the world

Eriugena's disregard for physical matter, and the sensible universe about us, is derived from their being neither true nor substantial in any proper sense. The assertion that substances remain in their causes and do not abide in their effects implies a critical compromise of God's presence in the physical world. From a Dionysian perspective, the physical world is twice-removed from God, since substance lies beyond corporality, and God is beyond substance. In all of creation, it is the human person who is most God-like, being made in His image and likeness; but the corporeal human body, for Eriugena, is only an extension of the true human body. Not only does he deny the corporeal body any divine substance, but denies it any true substance of its own.[55] There is no corporality in the substance of God, therefore it is not in respect of his earthly body that man is created in God's image; the divine image is only manifest in the highest part of the person, i.e. the intellect and reason.[56]

If the creation of the world is a Neoplatonic emanation, then it is mirrored by the reverse process, i.e. the Return of all things to their causes or principles. Eriugena's discussion of the Return in the fifth book of the *Periphyseon* claims that this process does not involve any transformation of substance, but only a change in appearance, such as when a solid turns to a liquid: it appears to change, but this alteration is consistent with the nature of the substance, which is itself unchanged.[57] Therefore any change is found in the qualities and accidents of substances, rather than the substances themselves. The visible world is shaped

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[55] Paige Hochschild sums up Eriugena's approach to matter: "He concludes that matter is nothing considered in itself. It is ultimately potency, intelligible only indirectly as a principle of thought, just as the four elements in classical and early medieval natural philosophy are ultimately reducible to non-sensible principles, indescribable in themselves in their fineness and purity. Matter, Eriugena says, can be defined by negation only." "*Ousia* in the *Categoriae Decem* and the *Periphyseon* of John Scottus Eriugena," 220; see Book I, 1964–1969 (488b), 86: *materia corporis . . . nulla certa ratione diffinitur nisi per negationem*.

[56] Book IV, 1821–1871 (786a–787a), 64–66. See also 2419–2422 (799c–d), 82: *ista corpora corruptibilia et mortalia . . . extrinsecus humanae naturae ad imaginem dei factae [sunt]*. Our corruptible bodies are external to our human nature which is made in the image of God.

[57] Book V, 1125–1136, (885b–c), 37.

and compacted by the qualities of substances, qualities which always remain attached to their substances.[58] The Return does not entail a return of substances, since they are immutable, but rather a return of the mutable quantities and qualities of their accidents.[59]

Accidental qualities, as physical matter, partake in the Return, even though they are not properly said to be substantial. All accidents return to their causes; corporality is not discarded, but returns to its own particular causes in the four elements.[60] Eriugena also makes the point that the earthly body which was added to the spiritual body following the Fall was also taken on by Christ the Redeemer, and therefore shall be changed into spirit, when "death is swallowed up in victory."[61] The physical, while not fully substantial, is redeemable through Christ.

Eriugena rejects the potential annihilation of being in response to the Scripture statement that "heaven and earth shall pass away" (Mt 24:35). When asked if they shall pass into nothing, Alumnus replies that such cannot be admitted where the term 'nothing' signifies the absence and deprivation of all things which are and which are not.[62] It appears, for Eriugena, that there is no annihilation of created being: all being has partaken in a process of emanation, participates in a higher Being, and shares in the Return of all things. It might be asked: is there any place for the *nihil* in his philosophy? If he accepts that, for Augustine, formless matter is created from nothing, what does he himself propose as the origin of that same matter, if a privative nothingness does not feature in the created world?

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[58] Book V, 1193–1205 (886c–d), 39.

[59] Book V, 1138–1143 (885c), 37: *reditum . . . non substantiarum, quae immutabliter et insolubiliter in se permanent, sed qualitatum et quantitatum aliorumque accidentium, quae per se et mutabilia sunt et transitoria, locis temporibusque subiecta, generationibus et corruptionibus obnoxia*.

[60] Book V, 1148–1155 (885d), 38.

[61] Book V, 1103–1109 (844d), 36: *quando absorbebitur mors in victoriam*.

[62] Book V, 1227–1230 (887b), 40.

6.6.4 Eriugena's formless matter

In the beginning, God created heaven and earth; respectively, the primordial causes, and sensible things.[63] Following Augustine, Eriugena employs the concept of formless matter in the process of the emergence of sensible things.[64] He adopts Augustine's position that formless matter is next to nothing, the privation of essence and form; from the causes of things come their essence, form, and perfection, while from the formlessness of things comes the privation of essence and form.[65] In his definition of formlessness, he implies the idea of a privative *nihil* which is opposed to the fullness of being. He describes formlessness as a certain motion that departs from absolute non-being (*omnino non esse*), seeking rest in what truly exists.[66] The concept of non-being which he presents here is one in which nothingness lies at the extreme end of an ontological hierarchy: it eludes (in Eriugena's case) any singular definition or location. Formlessness is a privation of being, and is presented initially by Eriugena as something opposed to the essence and form found in the primordial causes, which are themselves oriented towards the One and Supreme Principle that created them.[67]

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[63] Book II, 585–614 (545c–546b), 28–29.

[64] Book III, 737–738 (636d), 27: *Qui enim fecit mundum de materia informi, ipse fecit informem materiem de omnino nihilo* (the one who made the world from unformed matter made unformed matter from nothing at all). Eriugena criticises the 'pagan philosophers' who held that unformed matter subsisted separately and coeternally with God: Ibid., 744–748 (637a), 27–28. Hyman opines that the nothing from which God created the world can also be understood along the lines of Platonic *hyle*, i.e. material 'stuff'. "Augustine and the 'Nihil'," 40.

[65] Book II, 624–631 (546c–546d), 29: *Non enim, ut arbitror, te potest latere alias esse rerum infomitates et alias rerum causas. Nam si esse et non esse sibi inuicem e contrario opponuntur, et nil propinquius est ad uere ese quam causae creatae creatarum rerum nilque uicinius ad non uere ese quam informis materia – est enim, ut ait Augustinus, "informe propre nihil" – num tibi uidetur parua distantia inter id quod uerae essentiae est propinquum et id quod uerae essentiae privationi, quae nihil dicitur, proximum?* See also Book III, 655–657 (635a), 24: the name 'nothing' implies the negation and absence of all essence or substance, that is, of all things created in nature. *Eo igitur nomine, quod est nihilum, negation atque absentia totius essentia uel substantiae, immo etiam cunctorum quae in natura rerum create sun insinuator.*

[66] Book II, 643–645 (547b), 30: *Nil enim est aliud rerum informitas, nisi motus quidam non esse omnino deserens et statum suum in eo quod uere est appetens.*

[67] Book II, 631–638 (547a), 30: The primordial causes are far removed from the formlessness things.

However, the Neoplatonic system of emanation and return, to which Eriugena subscribes, and which proposes that all created being participates in a higher being, forces him to clarify his understanding of Augustine with respect to this system. In what at first glance appears to be a U-turn, he states that the primordial causes, as created being, are themselves drawn from formlessness, and eternally contemplate their form which is above them, and by which they are formed, since in themselves they are formless.[68] The created causes have defied formlessness in their creation, and thus can be said to oppose it, but nevertheless tend towards it without the eternal creative act of God. For Eriugena, formlessness is not only located in the substance of the primordial causes, but also is created by them. It is part of Eriugena's hierarchy of being.[69]

In Jeauneau's Version II, a clarification is added to the original Reims manuscript in which formlessness can be considered a cause in itself:

> *Nam informem materiem eiusque informitatem causam quandam rerum esse dicimus. In ea siquidem inchoant quamuis informiter (id est adhuc imperfecte) ac prope nihil esse, non tamen penitus nihil esse intelliguntur, sed inchoamenturm quodam modo esse, formamque et perfectionem appetere.*[70]

As a *cause* (or kind of cause), formless matter originates in the fullness of being (i.e. God), just like any created thing. Thus Eriugena (or his editor) has proposed what looks like a delicate ontological positioning of formless matter: while there is nothing closer to non-being than formless matter, there is nothing closer to true being than the primordial causes from

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[68] Book II, 654–656 (II.547c), 30: *suam formam superiorem se semper inuentur, ut semper ab ea formari non disinant. Nam per se ipsas informes sunt*. In Book III, 1110–1114 (645b), 40. Eriugena refers to Pseudo-Dionysius, where the Cause of all things is described as that which produces forms in the formless, while in itself it is above form: *forma formificans in informibus tanquam forma principalis, informis in ipsis formis tanquam superformis.*

[69] See Book II, 658–669 (547d – 548a), 30: the primordial causes are created by the Creator, before all the things that are created through them. Therefore unformed matter is included in those things that are created after and through the primordial causes.

[70] Book II, 286–290 (Version II, 546c), 29. "For we say that formless matter and its formlessness are a kind of cause of things. For in it they have their beginning, although formlessly, that is to say, imperfectly as yet, and are understood to be almost nothing, yet not to be entirely nothing, but to be in some fashion a beginning and to seek form and perfection." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 147.

which it flows. As cause, formless matter can be understood as a blank canvas upon which are painted the forms of creation; far from being next to a void, it constitutes instead the rich potential for all forms.

While Eriugena initially stated that formlessness was far removed from the causes,[71] the contrast between them is palliated if we say that, for Eriugena, it can be more properly understood that formlessness is opposed to Form (rather than the causes), and he has asserted that Form is located *above* the primordial causes, rather than within them. Furthermore, despite his idea that it can be considered a cause in itself, he subsequently locates formless matter, *qua* matter, at one step removed from the primordial causes, and counted among things which are created *after* and through those causes. Despite this inconsistency, whether it is a cause or follows a cause, formless matter does not originate in an utter void, contrary to being, but in a chain of being connected with God.

Eriugena, following his patristic sources, accepts that formless matter is being alluded to in the term 'void and waste' from the creation narrative (Gen 1:2). He explores the contrasting differences of opinion between Saints Basil and Augustine over the interpretation of this term, but considers himself unfit to adjudicate between them. His own allegorical interpretation is that the term represents a perfection of primordial being before the particular forms of creation emerged. Void and waste, therefore, signify the immutable perfection of the primordial nature which was created eternally in the Word, rather than the mutable imperfection of the sensible world that extends into time and space.[72] The figurative term 'void and waste' is applied to the primordial causes of visible things owing to the ineffable subtlety (*subtitlitate ineffabilique*) of their intelligible nature before they flowed forth into the

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[71] Book II, 632–633 (547a), 30.

[72] Book II, 716–722 (549b), 32: *haec enim uocabula, inane dico et uacuum, plus primordialis naturae ante omnia in uerbo conditae plenissimam immutabiliemque significant perfectionem, quam mutabilem imperfectamque huius mundi sensibilis informem adhuc processionnem, locis temporibusque dispersam, perque generationem esse inchoantem, diuersisque sensibilis creaturae numeris formari appententem.*

genera and species of visible things.[73] This interpretation, reflecting the Dionysian idea of darkness as an excess of light, reinforces the idea that formless matter is drawn from the perfection of being rather than from a privative non-being.

6.7   Non-being in the Western tradition

The confusion arising from connecting formless matter with the perfection of being is at least partially explained by Eriugena's understanding, or rather multiple understandings, of the term 'non-being'. The Latin tradition in the early medieval period tended to think of non-being in a privative sense; *nihil* was *omnino nihil*, a total absence of being. Augustine carefully distinguishes God from His creation, so that the world is made *by* God, but not *out of* God.[74] In his *De Diuina Predestinatione*, Eriugena had made Augustine's privative *nihil* an important part of his argument surrounding the substance of evil, or rather, the lack of such substance, but in the *Periphyseon* a different sense of non-being comes to the fore, which he attempts to describe with words such as 'perfection', 'subtlety' and 'simplicity'. These descriptions accord with a metaphysical vision in which the gravity experienced by all being is upwards, a return to the causes and to the source of being. There is no longer a sense in which created being is pulled towards a nothingness which lies in the direction opposite to that fullness of being. Eriugena's understanding of non-being has shifted towards that of Gregory of Nyssa, for whom the *nihil* out of which this world is created can be identified

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[73] Book II, 744–749 (549d), 33.

[74] Augustine, *De natura boni contra Manicheos*, 26: *quia ergo deus omnia, quae non de se genuit, sed per uerbum suum fecit . . . hoc est de nihilo fecit*. See also *Periphyseon* IV, 101–110 (772d–773a), 47: Eriugena quotes a passage from the *City of God* which affirms that all things exist through the action of God. In the *Confessions* Augustine asserts that God made all natures and substances, that are not what God is, yet are: *omnes naturas atque substantias, quae non sunt quod tu es et tamen sunt, tu fecisti. Confessionum libri XIII*, XII.11, 221.

with God: a non-being above essence.[75] *Nihil per privationem* has been replaced by *nihil per excellentiam.*

The consideration of non-being was topical among Carolingian scholars, one of whom, Fredegisus of Tours (d. c. AD 834), in his *epistola de nihil et tenebris*, argued that the term 'nothing' must actually stand for *something*: since all created things arise from *nihil*, the term must signify something very great.[76] He stops short, however, of equating non-being with God. The topic had received attention from the fourth-century Roman general and Christian convert Marius Victorinus who, under the influence of Plato, Aristotle and Porphyry, understood four separate categories of non-being:

- transcendent non-being;

- yet-to-be-realised potential;

- *difference* from another being;

- negation.[77]

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[75] *Periphyseon* III, 2626–2632 (682d), 91. Deirdre Carabine asserts that "the nothingness from which all things are created has to be God's self because there can be nothing co-eternal or co-existing with God." Therefore she interprets Eriugena's *creatio ex nihilo* as "creation *ex Deo.*" "The Manifestation of God as the Speaking of Creation," 114. Beierwaltes shares this position, and describes *creatio de nihilo* [sic.] as a transition from the unity of what is beyond being into the difference of created being; "Negati Affirmatio: Welt als Metapher. Zur Grundlegung einer mittelalterlichen Ästhetik," in *Eriugena: Grundzüge Seines Denkens*, ed. Beierwaltes (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994), 128–129.

[76] This view is also found in Boethius, *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 1.16–17: *quoniam etiam ipsum nihil aliquid significat, sed non naturam.* For further discussion on Fredegisus see Marcia L. Colish, "Carolingian Debates over *Nihil* and *Tenebrae*: A Study in Theological Method," *Speculum* 59 (1984): 757–795. Colish presents Fredegisus's argument as "a defective application of grammar to theological discourse" (p. 768), since Fredigus understands that any and every noun signifies an existent *aliquid*. Thus he either ignores or misunderstands his most prominent authorities, Augustine and Boethius, for both of whom the term *nihil* indicated a conceptual reality, but not a *natura* in itself (pp. 770, 786). See also John Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin*, 62–66. Marenbon suggests the possibility (since the concept of nothingness had also been broached by Alcuin) that it was a subject of insular origin in the West.

[77] Marius Victorinus, *De Generatione Divini Verbi ad Candidum Arianum*. See Migne's *Patrologia Latina* online edition at http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0362-0372,_Victorinus_Afrus,_De_Generatione_Divini_Verbi._ad_Candidum_Arianum,_MLT.pdf consulted 7 June 2022, 1021c–1022a.

The four categories proposed by Victorinus appear similar to Eriugena's own multiple ways of considering the relationship between being and non-being, based on a Dionysian understanding of non-being as transcendent.

6.8   Eriugena's five ways of considering being and non-being

At the beginning of Book One, Eriugena outlines his five modes (*modi*) that draw on the multiplicity of his sources and constitute ways of considering the division between being and non being: *ea quae sunt et ea quae non sunt*:[78]

First mode: Being is that which is graspable either by the senses or the intellect; non-being is that which, because of its excellence, is not. Among the things that can be understood as *nihil per excellentiam* are God, matter, substance and essence.[79] Substances and essences are considered as non-being here because, following Gregory of Nyssa, they lie beyond the comprehension of the human intellect. The inclusion of matter in this list (*materiaque*) occurs in a ninth-century revision.[80] In explaining this mode, Eriugena explicitly denies a privative sense of non-being as being included in his consideration of the term. The void is excluded from his ontology:

> *Nam quod penitus non est nec esse potest nec prae eminentia suae existentiae intellectum exsuperat, quomodo in rerum diuisionibus recipi ualeat non uideo, nisi forte quie dixerit rerum quae sunt absentias et priuationes non omnino nihil esse, sed earum quarum*

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[78] *Periphyseon* I, 46 (443a), 4. Eriugena considers the division between being and non-being as the first and most fundamental division in Nature.

[79] See also Book V, 1722–1724 (897d), 55: the whole world will return into Him, who according the the superessentiality of his nature, is called non-being: *totus mundus . . . in ipsum enim, qui propter superessentialitatem suae naturae nihil dicitur, reuersurus est*. Moran poetically elucidates Eriugena's concept of non-being as "the infinite richness of God before He manifests Himself, or the infinite richness of the Word before it is spoken, or the infinite power of the Cause before it acts, or the infinite being of the mind before thought." *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 239.

[80] Jeauneau's Version IV: Book I, 102–103 (443b), 119–121. Sheldon-Williams points out that Aristotelian prime matter also eludes sense and intellect, as *nec quid nec quantum nec quale*; however, this is not due to the excellence of its nature, but rather to what it lacks. *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Periphyseon (liber primus)*, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, note 14, 223.

priuationes seu absentiae seu oppositiones sunt mirabilis quadam naturali uirtute contineri, ut quodam modo sint.[81]

Second mode: If something is said to be, then a thing or creature on an ontological level above it or below it is said not to be. Connecting this mode with the first, Eriugena also explains that, for a rational being on a lower level, every being above it can be said (from its own perspective) not to be, since it is beyond its grasp.[82]

Third mode: Actual being is said to be, whereas potential being is said not to be. God established all human beings in the beginning, at the same time, but brings them into the visible world at different times.[83] In this mode, being is manifest in those things which are visible in their effects. Eriugena uses the term *in secretissimis naturae sinibus* ("in the most secret folds of nature") for potential being, i.e. that which has been created but has not yet appeared.[84]

Fourth mode: This Platonic and idealist mode is opposite to the third.[85] The being of a thing is its intellectual concept (or its form, or exemplar), whereas a thing's generation in time and space, subject to change and decay, is considered non-being.

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[81] Book I, 77–83 (443c–443d), 5–6: "For how can that which absolutely is not, and cannot be, and which does not surpass the intellect because of the pre-eminence of its existence, be included in the division of things? Unless perhaps someone should say that the absences and privations of things that exist are themselves not altogether nothing, but are implied by some strange natural virtue of those things of which they are the privations and absences and oppositions, so as to have some kind of existence." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 27.

[82] This implies a difference between the second mode and Neoplatonic hierarchy. In the latter, each level fully contains the level below it, but for Eriugena in this instance, the affirmation of a lower level *negates* a higher level. Also, whether a level *is*, or *is not*, depends on your perspective. So it can both be and not be at the same time.

[83] Book I, 119–125 (445a), 7.

[84] Book I, 112 (444d), 7. Being in the third mode is similar to being in the first, except it needs to be present: a future man, by mode 1, *is*, since he graspable by senses, but by mode 3 he is categorised as non-being.

[85] Eriugena associates this sense of being with the *philosophi* (Book I, 131 (445b), 7). Augustine was not completely committed to the Platonic view, but considered spiritual things to be higher than material ones, and eternal things higher than changing things. See, for example, *Confessions* XII.2, where the earth pales in comparison with heaven.

Fifth mode: This mode applies only to human nature: being is lost through sin, and restored through grace. Being and non-being correspond to perfect nature and present (i.e. fallen) nature respectively.[86] Through sin the divine image is renounced, and lost is that in which human nature is most properly substantiated.

The five modes all depend on perspective.[87] In one mode, a thing is, and in another, it is not. Being and non-being swirl around each other in a dance of relation and mutual definitions. At any given moment, one man's understanding of being is another man's understanding of non-being, and Eriugena, following a fruitful dialectical exploration, can approve both understandings. It is a position that challenges the ontological solidity of Western metaphysics, and of Aristotle's concept of *ousia*, but it does not deny being *per se*: rather, it relocates its source in another place, in the subjective play of the divine and human minds.[88]

6.9   All things come from God, and all things *are* God

A critical conclusion from Eriugena's meontology is that the non-being from which all being emerges has not only been understood by him as a cause, but also has been identified with God himself. This idea is expanded in the third book:

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[86] In Book IV, 667–677 (758b), 25, Eriugena asserts that contradictory statements normally reserved for God, which are both true (e.g. "God is truth", "God is not-truth"), also apply to human nature alone among the creation, since it was made in God's image and likeness.

[87] Mooney asserts that the distinction between the things which are and the things which are not, in Eriugena, is an epistemological disinction, i.e. it is determined by the comprehension of the (human) observer. *Theophany: The Appearing of God according to the Writings of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, 45–47.

[88] The Idealist tradition stemming from Eriugena is also found, in the later medieval period, in Meister Eckhart who had an acquaintance with his *Periphyseon* and possibly also his homilies and the *Corpus Dionysii*. Cyprian Smith explains how the preacher Eckhart captures the spiritual vision of this Idealism, which results in how a person who "dwells in God" begins to see and think as God does: "Instead of standing within the created world, looking in it for signs of a God who is outside it, we stand within God, and it is the world which now appears outside. When we stand within the world, God appears as totally transcendent and 'other'. When we stand within God, however, it is the world which appears as 'other', but not by any means transcendent; on the contrary, *we* are greater than *it*." Cyprian Smith, *The Way of Paradox: Spiritual Life as taught by Meister Eckhart* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1987), 65.

Summae siquidem ac trinae soliusque uerae bonitatis in se ipsa immutabilis motus et simplex multiplicatio et inexhausta a se ipsa in se ipsa ad se ipsam diffusio causa omnium, immo omnia sunt. Si enim intellectus omnium est omnia et ipsa sola intelligit omnia, ipsa igitur sola est omnia, quoniam sola gnostica uirtus est ipsa quae, priusquam essent omnia, cognouit omnia. Et extra se non cognouit omnia, quia extra eam nihil est, sed intra se. Ambit enim omnia et nihil intra se est, in quantum uere est, nisi ipsa, quia sola uere est. Caetera enim, quae dicuntur esse, ipsius theophaniae sunt, que etiam in ipsa uere subsistunt. Deus est itaque omne quod uere est, quoniam ipse facit omnia, et fit in omnibus, ut ait sanctus Dionysius Ariopagita.[89]

This statement precludes the possibility of anything existing independently of God, since God is all things, and encompasses both being and non-being; outside God there is nothing.[90] If this statement also appears to posit a pantheistic world, on closer scrutiny he is simply articulating the Dionysian maxim that the divinity is the being of all things. In so far as a thing exists, it is exclusively divine existence in which it participates, because outside of God nothing exists, and nothing can exist.

A pantheistic reading of this text can be avoided because the concept of the immutable and simple God is contrasted with the concept of 'all (multiform and mutable) things', even if he asserts that the being of one is the being of the other, since this can be understood as being-by-participation. Eriugena has said that God encircles and possesses all things, but he does not phrase that in the reverse order, i.e. that all things possess and encircle

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[89] Book III, 577–588 (632d–633a), 22. "For the motion of the supreme and threefold and only true Goodness, which in Itself is immutable, and the multiplication of its simplicity, and Its unexhausted diffusion from Itself in Itself back to Itself, is the cause of all things, indeed *is* all things. For if the understanding of all things is all things and It alone understands all things, then It alone is all things; for that alone is the gnostic power which knows all things before they are, and does not know all things outside Itself because outside It there is nothing, but It possesses all things within Itself. For It encircles all things and there is nothing within It but what, in so far as it is, is not Itself, for It alone truly is . . . Therefore God *is* everything that truly is because He Himself makes all things and is made in all things, as St Dionysius the Areopagite says." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 249–250.

[90] Eriugena has asserted here that God knows non-being, but also uses nothingness in the privative sense: outside God there is nothing. In Book III, 18–24 (619c), 3, Eriugena adopts Augustine's position that nothing exists independently of God: He is the principle of all things that exist, beyond which there is nothing. This is reflected in Book V, 4729–4740 (964c), 146: everything that is and everything that is not is bounded by creation; nothing can stray beyond the bounds of divine power nor divine laws. A possible exception to this understanding is found in Book IV, 575–577 (756a), 22, where he speaks of the allure of corruptible things which tend towards non-being; this statement suggests an Augustinian interpretation of non-being. In Book V, 6915–1918 (1012c), 23, he asserts that anyone who does not participate in divine light to some degree is totally deprived of participation, and is not included in the nature of things. Although a hypothetical scenario, a privative nothingness, from which God is fully absent, is again invoked.

God. Not only would such an interpretation deny the transcendence of God (a transcendence which, following Pseudo-Dionysius, is repeatedly asserted as a primary tenet of Eriugena's theology) but also it would contradict the cause-and-effect nature of Eriugena's system. The cause contains and encompasses the effect: this structure is not ontologically reversible.[91] Therefore when the statement is read in the context of his understanding of Neoplatonic emanation, a more nuanced meaning emerges. For Eriugena, the God who is in all things transcends all things: this is captured in a text borrowed from Dionysius:

> *Prouidentia perfectissima est ipse essendi et bene essendi omnia causalis, et in omnia procedit, et in omni fit, et continent omnia. Et iterum ipse in sese per excellentiam nullum in nullo per nullum est, sed exaltatur omnibus ipse in se ipso similiter et aeternaliter existens, et stans, et manens, et semper secundum eadem et sic habens, et nullo modo extra se ipsum factus, neque propria grauitate et incommutabili mansione et bonitate relictus.[92]*

Eriugena emphasises that God cannot be properly located in the world, but in Himself always transcends His creation.

6.10   Can pantheism be understood of Eriugena's theology?

Since the physical world, for Eriugena, has no substance in the proper sense, but rather is an accidental garment of the real (spiritual) world, the charge of material pantheism can certainly not be laid at his door. If the charge is to stick, it must be understood of a non-physical pantheism, where the substance of all things, i.e. their essence, can be identified

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[91] See also Book II, 295–301 (547a), 29: *Causa siquidem, si uere causa est, omnia perfectissime quorum causa est in se ipsa praeambit, effectusque suos, priusquam in aliquot appareant, in se ipsa perficit. Et dum in genera formasque uisibiles per generationem erumpunt, perfectionem suam in ea non deserunt, sed plene et immutabiliter permanent, nulliusque alterius perfectionis indigent, nisi ipsius in qua semel et simul et semper subsistunt.* "For the cause, if it be truly cause, most perfectly pre-encompasses in itself all things of which it is the cause, and perfects in itself its effects before they become manifest in anything, and when they break forth through generation into genera and visible species they do not abandon their perfection in it but fully and immutably abide in it, and need no other perfection than it alone in which they subsist all at once and eternally." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 147. See also Book III, 570–576 (632c–632d), 21: God possesses all things within himself, and 18–20 (619c), 3: God is the one Cause of all causes.

[92] Book III, 1085–1092 (644d–645a), 39. See O'Meara's translation: "A perfect providence is the cause of being and of the well-being of all and proceeds into all things and comes into being in all things and contains all things, and yet because of its pre-eminent self-identity it is not anything in anything through anything, but transcends all things, being and staying and remaining both identically and eternally itself in itself, and always self-identical and keeping itself so and in no way becoming separate from itself or separated from its proper base and immutable abode and goodness." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 264.

with God. Eriugena's difficulties in handling the term 'essence' have muddled the understanding of the relation of God with the world: by reconciling two conflicting philosophical positions has he come to occupy an unsatisfactory and untenable middle ground? And if God is identified with non-being, does *creatio ex nihilo* imply, for Eriugena, a pantheistic universe?

6.10.1 The four divisions of Nature

A response to these questions begins by returning to Eriugena's four divisions of Nature. The inclusion of God in the four divisions is not in itself a pantheistic assertion, since Eriugena defines Nature as both the created world and that which (or He Who) created it.[93] At the beginning of Book II he conflates the first and fourth divisions as pertaining to God alone, contrasting this with the created natures of the second and third divisions;[94] therefore what is not created, i.e. non-being, is equivalent to God. However, having established this contrast, Eriugena proceeds to further unite all four divisions: he unites God with his creation through the reasoning that all things subsist through participation in Him who alone truly exists. Subsequently, having used the divisions to both contrast and unite God with the created world, he asserts that the divisions do not actually exist in Nature, but in the mind that contemplates it.[95]

As mental projections, the four divisions allow Eriugena a certain freedom in his theological speculation, since they are self-consciously derived from an intellect that cannot claim any proper knowledge of God, but contemplates Him in various different ways – *duplex theoria* – that are sometimes mutually irreconcilable. Eriugena can start down the road

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[93] The divine nature cannot be included in the divisions of the created world since it escapes comprehension even by itself (Book III, 60–63 (620c), 5). The universe does not extend to infinity, being made up of number and species and parts, but the divine nature does extend to infinity (Book III, 49–51 (620b), 4).

[94] Book II, 96–97 (527b), 6.

[95] Book II, 34–37 (527d), 7.

of contemplation of the truth, but knows that he can never reach the end of it, therefore conflicting statements are permissible. In contrast to the rigours of Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction, Eriugena can be quite content with useful but contrasting definitions, acknowledging that neither properly applies to God.[96] Therefore, while God is made in all things,

> *Non eam ueluti primam partem uel speciem debemus intelligere, se ab ea omnem diuisionem et partitionem inchoare . . . et dum haec de ea et praedicantur et intelliguntur . . . nemo tame nest pie credentium et ueritatem intelligentium, qui non continuo absque ulla cunctatione exclamet causam totius uniuersitatis conditae creatricem supernaturalem esse, et superessentialem, et super omnem uitam et sapientiam et uirtutem, et super omnia quae dicuntur et intelliguntur et omni sensu percipiuntur.*[97]

This apophatic approach also applies to his second division of Nature, the primordial causes, which both are created and create. A created thing participates in goodness-in-itself, a primordial cause, which in turn participates in God.[98] And so with essence, life, reason, intellect, wisdom, power, blessedness, truth, eternity, magnitude, love, peace, unity and perfection, and so on: they extend *ad infinitum*.[99] But although Eriugena regularly positions goodness above essence, and essence above life, the sequence in fact is not constituted in the causes themselves, but in the mind which conceptualises them; in themselves, they are one, and they are simple (*unum sunt et simplices*), and one cannot properly distinguish them in a hierarchy.[100] Number and plurality effectively appear when the causes are multiplied into

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[96] Book I, 838–848 (461d–462a), 31.

[97] Book III, 109–119 (621d–622a), 6–7. See O'Meara's translation: "we ought to regard Him not as the first part or species but as that from which every division and partition originates . . . and although those things are predicated and understood of Him . . . yet there is no one of those who devoutly believe and understand the truth who would not persistently and without any hesitation declare that the creative Cause of the whole universe is beyond nature and beyond being and beyond all life and wisdom and power and beyond all things which are said and understood and perceived by any sense." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 236.

[98] Book III, 135–140 (622b), 7.

[99] Book III, 133–210 (622b–623d), 7–9.

[100] Book III, 211–219 (624a), 9. Eriugena gives the example of the Monad, in which numbers are not distinguished from one another: they are one and simple, but all numbers are drawn from it. He also gives the example of the centre point of the circle: every radius that can be drawn out to the circle in any direction begins in a single point. He summarises that the ordering of the primordial causes is found in the judgement of the

their effects; while remaining in the causes, all things are "one, simple and simultaneous" (*unum sunt et simul et simliciter sunt*).[101] Pantheism is again suggested here: it depends on how the causes relate to God.

6.10.2 How God relates to the causes

Eriugena's primordial causes diverge from the Intellectual Principle of Plotinus in the matter of participation. For Plotinus, the One remained separate from the Intellectual Principle and the world that emanated from it; for Eriugena, all things participate in God either directly (*immediate*) or indirectly (*per medietates*).[102] It is the causes themselves, the first order of the created universe, that participate directly in God. Therefore created being in the universe can be thought of as participating indirectly in God, who Himself remains transcendent, above the goodness and essence, the being and non-being of the primordial causes. God descends through the primordial causes, which mediate in a way between God and the creature, into all creatures, goes forth into all creatures, and is made in all creatures.[103] Being and non-being flow together from the one principle of all things (*ab uno omnium principio confluere*) *via* the primordial causes.[104] Prime matter is used for corporeal beings to flow from their causes, but must itself originate in the Principle of all things, and flow forth from the primordial causes.

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mind which contemplates them. Ibid., 236–237 (624c), 10: *Ordo itaque primordialium causarum iuxta contemplantis animi arbitrium constituitur*.

[101] Book III, 250 (624d), 11. Eriugena asserts that when causes proceed into effects, they acquire plurality and multiply to infinity, but when considered as existing in the one Cause of all things, they are a simple and indivisible unity: Book III, 227–236 (624b–624c), 10.

[102] Book III, 475–481 (630a), 18.

[103] Book III, 2644–2645 (683a), 91: *Deinde ex primordialibus causis, quae medietatem quandam inter deum et creaturam*.

[104] Book III, 798 (638b), 29.

Everything in Eriugena's system, including prime matter and non-being, ultimately proceeds from and participates in God. There is no room for a void, or a substance properly other than God. Everything is created from God; therefore in the formula *creatio ex nihilo*, 'nothing' must also refer back to God. Logically, for Eriugena, there is one source of essence, being, life, goodness etc. in the universe, although He Himself is above all these things.[105] Everything that exists participates to some degree in these things, which is to participate in Him. So everything that exists can be said to manifest God, because there is nothing apart from God, who is the source of all things.[106] The universe unfolds from God, and everything is contained in God.

6.10.3   Participation as the distribution of divine gifts

For Eriugena, then, participation does not mean the taking of some part, but the distribution of divine gifts and graces, from the highest to the lowest.[107] In explaining the presence of God in the world, Eriugena uses the example of the intellect, which, made in the image and likeness of God, is a type of theophany.[108] The fruits of the intellect are visible in word and deed, but the intellect itself remains ever hidden and at a certain distance. The intellect is diffused into its fruits, just as God, who makes all things, acts by an ineffable diffusion and thus is made in all things and is all things.[109] If one grasps the word of another, in a sense one grasps at the other's intellect from which that word proceeded. But one does not grasp the

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[105] Eriugena also finds in Maximus the Confessor the idea that God, as true being, is the being of all things that exist: Book III, 2134–2143 (671b), 75. It amounts to a very literal interpretation of Acts 17:28: "In Him we live and move and have our being."

[106] Book III, 561–562 (632a–b): the whole river first flows from its source (*ex fonte totum flumen principaliter manat*).

[107] Book III, 520–523 (631a), 19: *Est igitur participatio non cuiusdam partis assumptio, sed diuinarum dationum et donationum a summo usque deorsum per superiores ordines inferioribus distributio*.

[108] Book III, 589–625 (633a–634a), 22–23.

[109] Book III, 630–637 (634a–b), 23.

intellect-in-itself which is ineffable and hidden. Therefore while God subsists as one, as perfect and more-than-perfect, and separate from all things, He extends himself into all things, and that very extension is all things.[110]

When Eriugena claims that the substance and essence of all things are an effusion of Divine Wisdom which is understood to be in them naturally,[111] we are not to understand that the Divine Wisdom is properly said to be located in the substance and essence of created being. But as the *source* of all being, Eriugena can go on to say that the Wisdom of God is made in all that it makes,

> quid aliud restat nisi ut intelligamus sapientiam dei patris, de qua talia praedicantur, et causam creatricem omnium esse, et in omnibus quae creat creari et fieri . . . in omnibus enim quodcunque uere intelligitur esse, nil aliud est nisi sapientiae creatricis multiplex uirtus, quae in omnibus subsistit.[112]

If you take away this creative Wisdom, all things are reduced to a privative nothing. Eriugena clarifies this statement by referring to Augustine, for whom all things within God are not altogether being, nor altogether not being, but take their being from God.[113] A creature, considered in itself, is nothing, but when considered as subsisting, it does so through participation in the creative Truth.[114] It is by virtue of this Truth, he concludes, that things are

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[110] Book III, 1012–1014 (643b), 37: *dum in se ipso unum perfectum et plus quam perfectum et ab omnibus segregatum subsistit, extendit se in omnia, et ipsa extension est omnia*.

[111] Book III, 1069 (644c), 39: *sapientiae diuinae fusio*.

[112] Book III, 1134–1139 (646b), 41. "For what else is there for it but that we should understand that the Wisdom of God the Father of which such things are predicated is both the creative Cause of all things and is created and made in all that it creates . . . For in all things whatever is rightly understood to be is nothing else but the manifold power of the creative Wisdom which subsists in all things." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 266. Alumnus is horrified with the idea that all things are God: *Nam si est . . . deus itaque omnia est et omnia deus! Quod monstrosum aestimabitur etiam his qui putantur esse sapientes*. Book III, 1333–1337 (650c–d), 47. Nutritor responds using arithmetic as an example. The number three is not properly located in three cows, just as a piece of art and the model it uses cannot be the same thing. More properly, it is located in the eternal Monad, a unity and source of all numbers, their beginning, middle and end. Numbers are eternal in the Monad, but 'made' in their multiplications.

[113] Book III, 1145–1150 (646b), 41.

[114] Ibid., 1148–1150: *omnem creaturam omnino per se consideratam nihil esse, quicquid autem in ea intelligitur subsistere ex participatione creatricis ueritatis subsistit*. Eriugena continues to follow Augustine on this point. See the concluding chapter for further reflections on participation, and in particular on Amaury's flawed understanding of the term.

prevented from falling into the nothingness to which they tend. Eriugena has returned here to an Augustinian sense of *creatio ex nihilo*, but even when considered as emanating from a rich non-being, he posits that the subsistence of a created thing implies participation which in turn implies non-identity.

6.11 The eternity of created being

The first mode of understanding non-being, as outlined above, is that which is not perceptible to the intellect or to the senses, due to its excellence. Eriugena asserts the eternity of created nature within God, which is more properly understood through this understanding of non-being. The created world is eternal in God, for He willed it, and His will is eternal, and His will does not precede that which He wills to be made.[115] Therefore, before the created world proceeded into being, God could behold his creation; He saw it as cause prior to its proceeding as effect: God saw nothing before He made the creature except Himself and a nature which is eternal in Him and coeternal with Him.[116] Therefore God and his creation, though the latter be contained in the former, are in some sense separate. A nature may be eternal in God, but it is not God. Therefore a creature can be understood in two ways: first, it is eternal in the Divine Knowledge, in which all things remain truly and substantially, and second, it can be considered in its subsequent temporal condition.[117] God is prior to whatever participates in Him, and to the participation in itself: God is prior to the world, even if it exists eternally.

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[115] Book III, 2294 (675a), 80: *Non enim in eo praecedit uelle id quod uult fieri*.

[116] Book III, 133–135 (676c), 82: *nil aliud praecessit creaturam quod deus uideret, antequam faceret creaturam, nisi aut ipse aut aeterna in se et coaeterna sibi creatura.*

[117] Book III, 2379–2382 (677a), 83: *Duplexque de creatura dabitur intellectus: Vnus quidem considerat aeternitatem ipsius in diuina cognitione, in qua omnia uere et substantialiter permanent, alter temporalem conditionem ipsius ueluti postmodum in se ipsa.*

6.12   The non-necessity of created being

Extending from his discussion on the eternity of the created world, Eriugena has touched on the subject of divine will. He asserts that all things are made by God's will, and that He wills the universe into existence. All created things can thus be considered as an extension of His will, and are termed 'divine volitions' (*uoluntates*), a term which precludes the idea that the universe might be a *necessary* extension of God. God only knows things because He has willed them first, and he can see His own volitions: it is through His volitions that He knows the things that exist.[118] God's will, for Eriugena, is beyond human inspection: not even the angels attempt to divine it. God's divine providence, power and act, His will to create things, and His reason for creating things, permeate the entire universe, down to the smallest detail, and the human intellect cannot fathom these things which are hidden and cannot be investigated.[119]

The creation of everything through the free will of God is balanced, however, by Eriugena's assertion that nothing in God is an accident, and this includes His creation of the world: *Uniuersitatis conditionem non esse deo secundum accidens, sed secundum quandam ineffabilem rationem, qua causitiua in causa sua semper subsitunt.*[120] Therefore all created things are willed into existence by God, and yet they are non-accidental. There is a theological paradox here, since that which is freely willed is also non-accidental, but Eriugena does not proceed to explore the paradox, nor investigate further the operation of the will of God in his emanationist view of creation. There is a sense that, having addressed and

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[118] Book III, 2216–2217 (673b), 77: *igitur ut suas uoluntates deus cognoscit ea quae sunt*.

[119] Book III, 2038–2039 (668c), 71: *naturales rationes occultas et ininuestigabiles*. See also III, 2177–2182 (672c), 76: the reason for the creation of the universe surpasses every intellect, and is known only to the Word in Whom it is established.

[120] Book III, 852–855 (639b), 31. "The creation of the universe is not in God as accident but is in accordance with a certain mysterious reason on account of which caused things subsist always in their cause." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 257.

included both the free will of God and the non-accidental nature of creation in his theological system, he is unable to successfully reconcile them.

6.13   The function of non-being in Eriugena's theology

The five modes of considering being and non-being have revealed that, for Eriugena, non-being is not considered as a privation; if the world is created from nothing, then it as a very 'substantial' or potent nothing. Non-being exceeds being ontologically as its yet-to-be-realised potential. If 'nothing' is a cause, it will be better than the things of which it is the cause,[121] just as Dionysius considered darkness to be an excess of light. Corporeal bodies cannot come from a privative nothing: they come from the qualities and quantities of the four elements, which themselves subsist in the causes.[122] The nothingness of prime matter is therefore prior to the something it serves to make manifest.[123] The nothingness from which the world was made, being eternally subsistent in the primordial causes, constitutes a rich potential for all being.[124]

Non-being also exceeds being in terms of its goodness:

Non solum quae sunt, bona sunt; uerum etiam quae non sunt, bona dicuntur. Eoque amplius meliora dicuntur quae non sunt, quam quae sunt. Nam in quantum per excellentiam superant essentiam, in tantum superessentiali bono, deo uidelicet,

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[121] Book III, 1844–1845 (663c), 64: *non nihil erit nihil, sed erit causa. At si fuerit causa, melior erit his quorum causa est.*

[122] Book III, 1853–1855 (663d), 65.

[123] Eriugena claims (without an actual example) that this interpretation has a basis in Scripture: *Negatio enim uerbi per excellentiam naturae, non autem per priuationem substantiae in theologia reperitur*: Book III, 1845 (663c), 64. He is most likely referring to a general reflection of the *via negativa* in Scripture. See also Book III, 2716–2718 (684d–685a), 93: *In theologicis siquidem regulis ad inuestigandam diuinae naturae sublimitatem et incomprehensibilitatem plus negationis quam affirmationis uirtus ualet. Quam si quis intentus inspexerit, non mirabitur eo uocabulo, quod est nihilum, saepe in scripturis ipsum deum uocari.*

[124] Book III, 1884–1886 (664c), 66: *Et in ordine primordialum causarum connumerabitur quod nihil putabatur, et de quo omnia facta creduntur.* See also Gustavo Piemonte, "Notas sobre la *Creatio de Nihilo* en Juan Escoto Eriugena," *Sapientia* 23 (1968): 44, 50. Piemonte equates *creatio* with procession of an effect from its cause. In the formula of Genesis, it points to 'and so it was' (*facta sunt*), rather than the 'let there be ...' (*fieri*).

appropinquant; in quantum autem essentiam participant, in tantum a superessentiali bono elongantur.[125]

Despite all things being co-essential with God, Eriugena has separated God from the essence of created being; the more one participates in the latter, the more they are distinguished from the former. This observation is in accord with Eriugena's definition for God as a *superessential* goodness or being.

Eriugena's system can accommodate Augustine's sense of *creatio ex nihilo*, that God needed nothing from which to create the universe, but both the substance and essence of being, and also the non-being from which it is made, must ultimately flow from God. External to God is a privative nothing, therefore all matter and causes in His creation originate in His wisdom. Internal to God is His will through which all things come to be.[126] There is no place for a void, a privative nothingness, in Eriugena's philosophy.[127] God encompasses everything, while transcending everything.

6.14   God as non-being

When asked by Alumnus to explain the term *nihil*, Nutritor responds that it signifies the *ineffabilem et incomprehensibilem diuinae bonitatis inaccessibilemque claritatem omnibus intellectibus siue humanis siue angelicus incognitam – superessentialis est enim et supernaturalis . . . in nullo enim intelligitur existentium, quia superat omnia.*[128] The term

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[125] Book III, 399–404 (628b), 16. See O'Meara's translation: "Not only are the things that are good, but the things that are not are said to be better than the things that are. For the further they transcend essence by reason of their excellence, the nearer they approach the Superessential Good, namely God, whereas the more they participate in essence the further they are separated from the Superessential Good." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 244.

[126] Book III, 1898–1902 (664d–665a), 66.

[127] See also III, 1903 (665a), 66: *Proinde non datur locus nihilo nec extra nec intra deum.*

[128] Book III, 2541–2546 (680d), 88. "The ineffable and incomprehensible and inaccessible brilliance of the Divine Goodness which is unknown to all intellects whether human or angelic – for it is superessential and supernatural . . . it surpasses all things . . . [and is] incomprehensible by reason of its transcendence." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 307. The non-being of God is asserted by Pseudo-Dionysius in his *Mystical Theology* (chap. 5) and also in the *Divine Names* (chap. 5): see *The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 98, 141.

'nothing' is extensive in Eriugena's system: it is his fourth division of Nature, but he has also come very close to identifying it with God; this identification holds if the "brilliance of Divine Goodness" and God are equivalent. Both this brilliance, and the first mode of non-being, exceed the limits of the intellect, and in this sense they are equivalent.[129] This non-being precedes all things, and flows from God into all things. He continues:

> *Diuina igitur bonitas, quae propterea nihilum dicitur quoniam ultra omnia quae sunt et quae non sunt in nulla essentia inuenitur, ex negatione omnium essentiarum in affirmationem totius uniuversitatis essentiae a se ipsa in se ipsam descendit, ueluti ex nihilo in aliquid, ex inessentialitate in essentialitatem, ex informitate in formas innumerabiles et species.*[130]

As the singular source of all things, God can be considered genus and species and whole and part, and yet He is none of these things.[131] Anything visible or invisible which can be described as a 'what' or 'how much' or 'of what sort' cannot be properly predicated of God. Eriugena explains divine superessentiality as 'nothing', not in a privative sense, but in the sense of 'more than being'.[132] It is in this sense that non-being predicated of God, and the nothing from which He creates the world is none other than Himself.

There is an evident inconsistency in this predication, considering Eriugena's definition of God as superessential, beyond both being and non-being. But from the point of view of a defence against the charge of pantheism, it might be noted that Eriugena's non-being is greater than being, and also that, insofar as non-being is an opposite to being, God

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[129] Piemonte refers to Eriugena's understanding of the *nihil* as "the excellence of divine superessentiality" (author's translation), and also points to how his use of the term is subject to open contradictions. "Notas sobre la *Creatio de Nihilo* en Juan Escoto Eriugena," 42.

[130] Book III, 2569–2575 (681b–c), 89. "The Divine Goodness . . . is called "Nothing" for the reason that, beyond all things that are and that are not, it is found in no essence, descends from the negation of all essences into the affirmation of the essence of the whole universe; from itself into itself, as though from nothing into something, from non-essentiality into essentiality, from formlessness into innumerable forms and species." *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 308.

[131] Book III, 97–101 (621c), 6. See also Book II (590b–591b), 88–90: God is not found in anything, for He transcends every finite and infinite substance; no finite or infinite quantity or quality can therefore describe Him. See also Book III, 641–644 (634b), 24: the Cause of all things cannot be understood by any essence.

[132] Book III, 633–637 (634a–b), 23.

transcends both since in Him there can be no opposites. Anything which has an opposite cannot be properly predicated of God, since there is nothing opposed to Him.[133]

6.16 Conclusion

The *creatio ex nihilo* formula was authoritative for Eriugena, owing primarily to its use by Augustine. Eriugena focuses on the *nihil* within the formula and, owing to the demands of the Neoplatonic idea of procession, transforms it into the rich potential for all being, in which sense it is greater than being. He has thus redefined the term to mean that all being proceeds from an infinite potential for being, which is his non-being. Augustine's formless matter also finds a place in Eriugena's creation account, but insofar as it is related to non-being, Eriugena emphasises its potential for all forms, rather than considering it as Augustine's next-to-nothing.

Where Eriugena's non-being is equivalent to God, and creation is considered to be a manifestation of God, the question of pantheism must be seriously considered. It can be refuted on two counts: first, Eriugena asserts God to be beyond both being and non-being, and beyond all opposition. Both God and non-being lie beyond the confines of the logic of human thought and language; from a certain angle they can be considered equivalent, but cannot properly be defined as such. Secondly, the order of participation inherent in Eriugena's metaphysical system holds that the participant is not equal to that in which it participates. Participation implies not the taking of a part of something, but the receiving of a gift. Creation is not 'part' of God, therefore; rather, it is a gift from God which in itself manifests God as theophany.

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[133] Book I, 735–736 (459b–c), 28.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

Deus est omne quod uere est[1]

Deus solus habet immortalitatem et lucem habitat inaccessibilem[2]

7.1   Introduction

This final chapter revisits some of the key philosophical considerations from previous chapters to cast light on the question of whether or not Eriugena can be considered a 'pantheist'. It will also compare Eriugena's doctrine with that of Amaury of Bène, for the condemnation of the *Periphyseon* in AD 1225 can only be properly understood in its historical context. The pantheistic teachings of Amaury, the heterodox teachings of figures such as Joachim of Fiore, and the recent history of Cathar and other heresies, led Church authorities in Rome to take action against the seeds of heresy. Eriugena's work evidently enjoyed a degree of popularity to warrant the attention of the pope, but in the three hundred years since it had been written, the philosophical backdrop against which it was read – and it is a profoundly philosophical work – had shifted.[3] In particular, the rediscovery of Aristotle at the University of Paris in the late twelfth century introduced a metaphysical framework that was out of joint with Eriugena's Neoplatonic system. The definitions of metaphysical terms in common usage became blurred to the point of presenting a danger to theological understanding. The case of Amaury demonstrates precisely how that danger could become

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[1] *Periphyseon* III, 586–587 (633a), 22.

[2] Book V, 4693–4694 (963c), 145.

[3] Willemien Otten suggests, however, that the work was not widely read, nor that it "exercised traceable influence on the history of thought, whether philosophical or theological." "Suspended between Cosmology and Anthropology: *Natura*'s Bond in Eriugena's Periphyseon," in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 189.

manifest in doctrinal error. The understanding of the condemnation of the *Periphyseon* begins in the historical context of the early thirteenth century, and not in the work itself.

The official denouncing of the *Periphyseon* resulted in its loss of influence, pushing Eriugena to the fringes of philosophical and theological pursuit not only in the later medieval period, but up until more recent times. This study has sought to re-examine the justification for this long-term relegation, not through a reception history, but primarily by examining the work on its own merits. It has asked the question: is pantheism a genuine feature of Eriugena's thought, and of the theology presented in the pages of his most significant work?

Eriugena and his ninth-century contemporaries, through the patronage of the Carolingian emperors who placed renewed value on learning, produced works of theology, poetry, geometry, and computistics, among other disciplines. Carolingian scholarship is not noted for its originality: while the era was marked by numerous theological controversies, the drive for political stability was mirrored by a desire for theological orthodoxy based on Scripture and patristic sources. The *Periphyseon* continuously re-presents these sources; even when they are conflicting with each other, or with Eriugena's standpoint, he yields to their authority.[4] The most creative aspect of the work, his four divisions of nature, is something he admits to being a mental construct, and a collapsible one at that. Therefore, if Eriugena's theological outlook is pantheistic, it is possible, and even likely, that he found it in his sources, and did not introduce it as a novel concept. As in the case of Amaury, Eriugena may have misinterpreted a significant source as pantheistic.

The marriage of philosophy and Christian dogma had long been a feature of Christian scholarship: in the Western tradition, Ambrose, Boethius and Augustine, in particular, are renowned for playing an important role in this regard. Through his translations of Greek

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[4] Etienne Gilson claims that, in the case of Eriugena, "no man has more constantly resorted to theological authorities in order to justify his own positions." *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 114.

258

texts, Eriugena's more mature work became predominantly influenced by the Neoplatonic theology of numerous Greek patristic theologians, including Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and, most importantly, Pseudo-Dionysius. The metaphysical language used by these writers is evident in the second constitution of the Fourth Lateran Council which affirms each of the three Persons of the Trinity as "substance, essence or divine nature – which alone is the principle of all things, besides which no other principle can be found."[5] The numerous concepts presented here need to be clearly defined as used by Eriugena, lest he be misunderstood: it is possible that a reader of his work, or indeed the author of it, could unintentionally (or intentionally) be left with a pantheistic interpretation of the world.

7.2   Eriugena's lack of precise language

The era of Carolingian scholarship to which Eriugena belonged was characterised by a heavy reliance on patristic authority and encyclopaedic learning; the use of rigorous logical argument in theological speculation is less developed than it is in the later scholastic period, following the rediscovery of Aristotle, which demanded that more care be taken with philosophical and theological terminology. Late medieval thinkers who are regarded as belonging to the same Neoplatonic tradition as Eriugena, such as Cusa and Eckhart, perhaps having learned from Eriugena's lack of precision, developed their own terms in order to defend their views in a scholastic context.[6] Eriugena did not have the benefit of their more rigorous logical culture, leaving his work open to interpretation, and to misinterpretation. Rather than basing his writings on any original argument, he attempted to synthesise differing ancient philosophical traditions, with questionable success.

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[5] https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum12-2.htm, accessed 25 August 2020.

[6] For example, Cusa's use of the term *contractio* ('contraction') to demonstrate how God can be present in the world without the implication of pantheism: *solus enim Deus est absolutus, omnia alia contracta*. See Paolo Rotta, ed., *Nicolai Cusani: De Docta Ignorantia* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1913), 101. This edition is available online at https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-rbsc_klibansky_nicolai-cusani-de-docta_B765N53D61913-20860/page/100/mode/2up.

Marenbon points to a very obvious instance of this confusion, which is Eriugena's treatment of the term *ousia*:

> Eriugena wishes to regard *ousia* both as a property – the property which a thing must have in order to exist – but also as a sort of a thing (as a man or a dog is a sort of a thing), though a sort of thing which every existing thing must be. He becomes so confused, I suggest, because he is combining elements from various traditions into a system which, because of its logical incoherence, cannot be regarded as philosophical system. Eriugena could not have known that, for the ancient Neoplatonists, Aristotelian logic was a distinct area of study from Platonic metaphysics and was thought to be applicable only to the world perceived by the senses.[7]

The *Periphyseon* can be considered a work of towering intellectual achievement, an ambitious project incorporating original concepts (such as the four divisions of nature, and the concept of Nature itself as including both God and His creation), a project whose aim was "to think through the reality of everything,"[8] but as Marenbon observes, it is "not so much . . . a set of rigorous philosophical arguments . . . as . . . a theophany, a manifestation of the divine."[9]

The rigours of scholastic philosophy were jolted by the re-introduction of Aristotle, and the spread of misinterpretations and heresies (particularly in the context of wider heretical movements), such as in the case of Amaury, stimulated the theological projects of such thinkers as Aquinas. Eriugena's theology, pre-dating this context, was shaped by Scriptural and patristic authority which he aimed to distil, interpret and transmit onwards in a manner that was fully loyal to the integrity of the original. Where contradiction was found among his sources, he was happy to accept it; the apophatic approach of the Dionysian tradition accepted the limitations of human thought and language.[10] In turn, this permitted

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[7] John Marenbon, "John Scottus and the 'Categoriae Decem'," 6.

[8] Williemien Otten, "Suspended between Cosmology and Anthropology," 191.

[9] John Marenbon, "Philosophy in the Early Latin Middle Ages (c. 700 – c. 1100)," 375.

[10] Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to a general audience in St Peter's Square on 10 June 2009, stated that Eriugena's theological enterprise endeavoured "to express the expressible of the inexpressible God," and also that he was very aware of "the absolute inadequacy of the terms in which we speak of these things." See "Benedict XVI Assesses Eriugena," appendix to *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 456–7.

bold and even contradictory statements to be uttered regarding God, on the understanding that they were metaphorical, since the mysteries they endeavoured to explain transcended the human intellect. Thus God and the creature could be understood as one and the same,[11] but not in an absolute sense. A scholastic logician is likely to find logical inconsistencies in Eriugena, but a Carolingian reader might find, rather, an excessive emphasis on reason, particularly in the general tenor of the debate between Nutritor and Alumnus.

Catherine Capelle, in her 1932 study of Amaury of Bène, finds Eriugena culpable of an imprecise doctrine. If there are contradictions in his texts, we must attribute them to the numerous different aspects with which he considers reality: it might be the aspect of divine transcendence, or the aspect of the creature's inability to exist independently.[12] Beierwaltes argues that Eriugena was constantly aware of the fundamental inconsistencies of language, and that his grasp of reality accommodates paradoxical statements because, to his particular way of thinking, they are understood with a double perspective (*duplex theoria*); a singular way of understanding metaphysical statements can lead the mind astray.[13] But even with the *duplex theoria* employed by Eriugena, through his use of metaphysical language he is still capable of veering into a pantheist position. Such language is a staple of the Neoplatonic philosophy in which Eriugena was embedded, and which serves as a starting place for an exploration of how they are applied.

7.3   Is pantheism consistent with Neoplatonism?

The fundamental text for Neoplatonism, the *Enneads* of Plotinus, states that the presence of the Supreme Being, which may be detected everywhere, can nevertheless not be found, in any complete sense, in what is external to it. Thus, while "all that exists desires and aspires

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[11] Book III, 2443–2444 (678c), 85.

[12] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 61.

[13] Beierwaltes, "Duplex Theoria," *Eriugena: Grundzüge Seines Denkens*, 83.

towards the Supreme by a compulsion of nature," at the same time Plotinus asserts that "philosophy must guard against attaching to the Supreme what is later and lower."[14] This separation of the Supreme Being from what is external to it is also found in Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena, and all intelligible being, spiritual or corporeal, may be considered as external to God. The Platonic tradition (which influenced Neoplatonism) denigrated the body, casting it off for salvation. But Christian Neoplatonists such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena could cast off the physical, accidental qualities while retaining a spiritual body, so that their system accords with biblical teaching which sees bodies, in some state or (uncorrupted) form, being ultimately reunited with their respective souls.[15] However the substance of these spiritual bodies, even after a reunificiation with God, remain as individual substances.

7.4   Substance and the Dionysian *via negativa*

Pantheism presupposes that, when you say God is everything, you mean the very substance of God is also the substance of everything else. The separate versions of pantheism of Amaury and David of Dinant demonstrate very clearly how definitions of substance can differ: the former is based on essence, while the latter is a material pantheism. When the *via negativa* meets a cataphatic philosophical tradition, an incompatibility is introduced regarding descriptions for God, or a First Mover. The former tradition insists that human reasoning and human language cannot approach a definition: the Infinite God is beyond human knowing and human description. In denials rather than assertions, in a conflation of

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[14] *The Enneads* V.5.11, 13, trans. MacKenna, 402–405.

[15] This was an important development in the synthesis of Christian thought with ancient Greek philosophy, a synthesis which also characterises scholastic medieval theology. For more on this synthesis, see Richard N. Bosley and Martin Tweedale, *Basic Issues in Medieval Philosophy* (Toronto: Broadview, 1997), xvi. Echoing Henry Bett, the authors refer to two separate movements of influence of Greek philosophy on Christian theology: the first being that of the Platonist and Neoplatonist tradition in the early medieval period, through such figures as Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, and the second that of the Aristotelian tradition through translations from the Islamic tradition in the later medieval period.

opposites, and in ignorance rather than in knowing, is the deity approached. The Aristotelian position prefers more concrete definition in its claims, such as in its use of the principle of non-contradiction, a principle which is ill-prepared to accept such a convergence of opposites, or to accept that its assertions are merely figurative. If one applies Aristotelian thinking to isolated statements from the Christian Neoplatonic tradition, pantheism can easily jump off the page.

God, for those in the Dionysian tradition, is beyond all being and non-being, beyond assertion and denial; pantheism, however, requires a cataphatic statement about God and the world, which the Dionysian tradition resists. Furthermore, God cannot be a substance, because one cannot have a substance without accidents, and God is not in the accident. Contrary to substance, God is the 'negation of all things'.[16] The Dionysian tradition remains faithful to Plotinus who considered the Supreme Being to be uncontained by the substance of the world. Eriugena's Platonic disregard for physical matter, and the visible universe about us, stems from his belief that it is neither true nor substantial in any proper sense.

The transcendence of God is also demonstrated by Eriugena in the context of opposites. Everything that exists in the world, including goodness and beauty, has an opposite, and these opposites come into being at the same time.[17] Anything which has an opposite, however, cannot be predicated of God, since there is nothing opposed to Him;[18] where being is said to be opposed to non-being, God cannot be properly said to be either, but is more properly described as above both, being superessential.[19] God can be said to be good, but more properly speaking, He is more than good, or above good. This exploration of

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[16] Book III, 2798 (686d), 96.

[17] Book I, 715–717 (459a), 27.

[18] Book I, 735–737 (459b–c), 28.

[19] Book I, 749–750 (459d), 28.

opposites is connected to a discussion in Book III where Eriugena describes how God creates not only things in his likeness, but things which are dissimilar to him.[20] This dissimilarity extends to all things opposed to what is eternal, immutable, immortal, rational and intellectual. The beauty of the world only comes to light when like and unlike are mixed in harmony, and bright colours are set against dark colours. The harmony of music, similarly, depends on setting like against unlike. Considering the world as composed of divine similarities and dissimilarities precludes its identification with the divinity, which has no opposite. By extension, a pantheistic interpretation is critically compromised.[21]

God is not confined by any substance for Dionysius. But the nature of substance regarding the created world is further complicated by Eriugena in his adoption of an idealist approach, by which all irrational being beneath (rational) man is created through man as *concept*, for the knowledge of a thing is greater than a thing itself. Rational nature is preferred to irrational nature, since it is closer to God; irrational creatures have their substance in their concepts, concepts which are naturally present to man, and therefore Eriugena concludes that in man they are universally created.[22] All things will return through man, for they are naturally related to him. This challenging proposition regarding substance (which Alumnus admits to finding obscure) renders it difficult to identify the substance of

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[20] Book III, 763–771 (637b–c), 28.

[21] See Moran, "Pantheism from John Scottus Eriugena to Nicholas of Cusa," 142–143 for an elaboration of Cusa's approach to the idea of opposites. Cusa could argue against the subscribers to Aristotelian logic that they remained constrained by the principle of non-contradiction, and the irreconcilable identities upon which it insisted. For Cusa, logic is superseded by an ability to reconcile opposites, to accommodate the vision of multiple modes of being which may, logically, be contradictory: "[Cusa's] concept of the coincidence of contraries is not meant to abolish the law of non-contradiction, rather it is the recognition of the possibility of opposites coming into a non-contradictory, non-oppositional relationship." The logic of contradictories is therefore "secondary, derivative." Eriugena did not have the benefit of Cusa's clarity regarding the differences between the *via negativa* and the constraints of Aristotelian logic, but very much in the spirit of Cusa, he refers to God as the *oppositio oppositorum* (Book I, 3230–3231 (517c), 103).

[22] Book IV, 1286–1302 (773d–774a), 48. This idea is adopted from Maximus; see also Plotinus, *Enneads*, III.8.3: all Nature is derived from the contemplation of a contemplating being.

God with the substance of created being: the latter can be contained in the mind of man, while the former cannot.

The confusion that arises with Eriugena's treatment of *ousia* enables the possible reading of pantheism into Eriugena's work. The shifting definition of the term, between the Aristotelian and 'Platonized' understandings, is a particular aspect of his work: the reader must always bear in mind that Eriugena's theology is characterised by the Dionysian *via negativa*, and that when it comes to statements about God, including with regard to substance and essence, they always fall short, for God can never be properly contained by human thought or language. Capelle regards Eriugenian *ousia* through a Dionysian lens, referring to it as the "diffusion of divine goodness" spreading into and beyond the primordial causes.[23] Therefore Eriugena's *essentia* is in fact a Thomistic *esse*: it speaks primarily of the act of being, or of existence itself. Thus to say that "God is the essence of creatures" means (for Eriugena) "God is the being of creatures", in the sense that they cannot draw their existence from anywhere other than God.[24]

7.5   Participation and form in relation to God

Eriugena adopts the Dionysian theory of existence-through-participation: every created thing takes its being from something higher in an ontological hierarchy, at the top of which, albeit in a separated sense (since He is self-subsisting), is God, so ultimately all things take their being from God.[25] Following the Dionysian maxim that 'the being of all things is the Divinity

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[23] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 58. See also the fourth chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy*: "the transcendent Deity has out of goodness established the existence of everything and brought it into being." *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 156.

[24] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 60. In his *Homilia*, Eriugena states that God creates all things and contains all things, and there is nothing outside of God which can bestow being. For nothing is coeternal, consubstantial or co-essential with God. *Homilia* VIII, 10–19 (287c–d), 15–16.

[25] The perfection of Dionysius's celestial hierarchy is in its being "an image of the beauty of God," but God transcends the image; see the third chapter of the *Celestial Hierarchy* (*Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 154–155). See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.3.2: all things exist and are good

Who is above being,'[26] he states that God is the essence of all things, and also that He is everything that truly exists because He Himself makes all things.[27] For Eriugena, essence or quiddity, whether divine or human, is undefinable, which makes definitive statements of identity difficult, but not impossible. When he says that all being participates in the essence of God, he means it in a singular sense of *ousia*; this does not amount to formal identity, but to a participation in existence itself.[28]

The Dionysian model of participation follows a hierarchy: angels participate more than men, who in turn participate more than irrational creatures, each according to the limits of their being.[29] Eriugena has an exalted sense of the humankind as image and likeness, but God subsists in and through Himself, whereas His image does not. Things predicated of God can also be predicated of the image, but only of God are they said properly, while of the image they are said *via* participation.[30] Following Boethius, the One always remains absolutely as One; it produces multiplicity without itself dividing or exteriorising.[31]

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through participation, according to the limits of their particular form. The first good, i.e. God, however, is not a participated good. *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Timothy McDermott, vol. 2 (London: Blackfriars, 1964), 27.

[26] Aquinas clarifies the meaning of Dionysius, such that God is the efficient and 'exemplar' cause of all things, but not their essence or form, where form extends substantially into the created nature. Therefore God does not share a substance with created things. *Summa Theologica* I.3.8, ed. McDermott, 47.

[27] Book I, 500 (454a), 20: *est enim omnium essentia*; and Book III, 586–587 (633a), 22: *Deus est itaque omne quod uere est, quoniam ipse facit omnia*.

[28] Gilson makes the observation that Eriugena writes in Latin, but thinks in Greek: his use of the word *participatio* does not so much mean "to take a part of something", or "to share being in common with", but rather, following the Greek notion of *metousia*, "to have being after." Thus the term "signifies the hierarchical distribution of the graces and of the natures which enter the structure of the universe." *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 121.

[29] *Celestial Hierarchy*, IV.

[30] Book IV, 1482–1484 (778a–b), 54: *omnia quae de deo praedicantur, de imagine eius praedicari posse, sed de deo essentialiate, de imagine uero participatione*. See also Book III, 21–22 (619c), 3: God Himself does not participate in anything. Capelle considers Aquinas's use of the term 'principle' as "that from which something proceeds, in some manner", or something which gives existence to something else (*Amaury de Bène*, 43). Joseph Koterski's account of participation in Aquinas's philosophy reveals an affinity with Eriugena in that it is the taking part of existence itself: "In the basic sense of participation, all beings *participate* in existence, that is, they share in being and its transcendental properties, more perfectly or less so, since they are caused by the one first being, which is being perfectly. Participation – taking a part, having a limited share of something else which is wholly that – expresses for Thomas the nonidentity of that which is with its being."

Capelle opines that, while the problem of participation is not resolved in the Middle Ages, Amaury gives the participation formula a completely different sense to that which Eriugena gave it. For Amaury, participation amounts to a fundamental identity between God and creation: any given thing is God Himself, and therefore God can be located in it.[32] Amaurician dialectic, as presented in *Contra Amaurianos*, demonstrates a systematic metaphysical failure to understand diversity of being. Capelle insists that Eriugena, on the other hand, never forgets the distinction between Creator and created, between what participates and what is participated in; ultimately this implies a radical difference between the finite creature and the infinite Creator.

God, for Eriugena, is the *forma omnium*, yet is also, in Himself, a Being without limit or form.[33] Aquinas states that the Amauricians held God to be the 'formal principle of all things' (*Deum esse principium formale omnium rerum*), meaning that God enters into the composition of created nature.[34] Amaury's radical departure, holding God to be the Form of all things, was to remove the distinction between the thing which makes and the thing

Joseph W. Koterski, "The Doctrine of Participation in Thomistic Metaphysics," 193. See https://maritain.nd.edu/ama/Hudson/Hudson18.pdf (consulted 9 July 2021).

[31] Book III, 1491–1512 (655a–655c), 53–54. Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson remarks how this idea is found in the fourth and fifth chapters of the sixth *Ennead*, which "emphasise that while causing the visible universe, the intelligible realm remains an undiminished whole . . . [providing] a philosophical foundation for the view that may be called 'the transcendence of the divine.' These treatises also contain the most explicit statement and use of the doctrine of "reception according to the capacity of the recipient", which was to resonate throughout the Middle Ages." "Plotinus' Ontology in *Ennead* VI.4 and 5," *Hermathena*, no. 157, Neoplatonica: Studies in the Neoplatonic Tradition, Proceedings of the Dublin Conference on Neoplatonism (Winter 1994): 87.

[32] "C'est l'identité foncière du Créateur et du créé . . . donc ce quelque chose est Dieu même; par conséquent Dieu existe dans le créé." Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 26.

[33] Book I, 2476 (500a), 80. James McEvoy points out that the term *forma omnium* is found in Augustine, and was defended (as applied to God) by Robert Grosseteste in his letter *De unica forma omnium*; McEvoy dated this letter to soon after the condemnation of 1225. "John Scottus Eriugena and Robert Grosseteste: An Ambiguous Influence," in Werner Beierwaltes, ed., *Eriugena Redivivus*, 194–195. See also Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* I.26.9: God is not the formal being of any thing.

[34] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.3, art.8. Thomas contrasts this position with that of Dionysius, who insists (see *The Divine Names*, 2.11, trans. Lubheid, 66–67) that there is no mixing of God and created things, and no contact between them; God cannot be 'touched'. See also Plotinus, *Enneads* III.8.10, where it is asserted that the One is not manifold, but rather is the principle of manifold life: "Certainly this Absolute is none of the things of which it is the source – its nature is that nothing can be affirmed of it – not existence, not essence, not life – since it is That which transcends all these."

made.[35] Eriugena's phrase *omnia sunt in Deo* (all things are in God), referring to the universal causality of God, is thus very far from the parallel term in Amaury's doctrine: *omnia sunt Deus*. But none of the medieval commentators thoroughly compare Eriugena's doctrine with Amaury's. For Eriugena, if God is 'seen' in the forms of the universe, it is not God properly speaking, but a theophany. The forms of all created things originate in God and partially reveal Him, but as a Formless Principle, God cannot properly enter into the composition of anything.

7.6   Theophanies and the intellect

Eriugena defines theophany as an *apparitio dei*.[36] It is the manner in which God reveals Himself to the human intellect through visible forms that are not, in themselves, God. Eriugena proposes that the intellects of angels contain theophanies regarding the reasons of all things, which are beyond the human intellect.[37] Whether human or angelic, the theophany is in the intellect, rather than external to it; it is a comprehensibility, rather than a thing-in-itself.[38] And yet when Eriugena uses the term 'God', he may in fact be referring to such a comprehensibility, rather than God Himself:

> If the Cause of all things is inaccessible to all things that are created by it, then there can be no doubt but that the reasons of all things, which exist [in it] eternally and without change, are completely inaccessible to all things of which they are the reasons. And yet anyone who might say that in the intellects of the angels there are certain theophanies of those reasons, that is to say, certain divine manifestations which are comprehensible to the intellectual nature, but which are not the reasons, i.e. the primary exemplars, themselves, will not, I think, stray from the truth . . . for it is not only the divine essence that is indicated by the word 'God', but also that mode by which God reveals Himself in

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[35] For Capelle, Amaury's God, as a formal principle of things, gives a thing being through the direct communication of His [Thomistic] essence, without transcending its nature. Therefore it is a unity of substance (Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 45–46).

[36] Book I, 191 (446d), 9.

[37] See Mooney, *Theophany*, 55–56.

[38] Eriugena's position is that after the return of all things, the human intellect is limited: God will not be seen by the just in Himself, as He is, but through apparitions and phantasies, according to the height of contemplation attained by he who sees. See Book V, 3835–3852 (945c–d), 119–120.

a certain way to the intellectual and rational creature including humankind, according to the capacity of each.[39]

It is another example of the loose application of language: Eriugena's use of the word 'God' does not necessarily refer to God Himself in his Essence, but rather can refer to God as He is revealed to, and insufficiently contained in, our limited understanding. If one keeps this flexible definition in mind when approaching Eriugena's statements about God, what can appear as logical contradictions may suddenly evaporate as such. When he claims that God is in all things as whole and part, he can simultaneously claim that He is neither whole nor part.[40] Hilary Mooney, in her study of theophany, rejects a pantheistic context for Eriugena's work: where God is said to be 'made' (in creatures), she understands this as 'made manifest'.[41] In Book I (I.451a) Eriugena quotes Gregory the Theologian when he says that *corpora sanctorum in rationem, ratio in intellectum, intellectus in deum, ac per hoc tota illorum natura in ipsum deum mutabitur*; Sheldon-Williams translates this literally as "shall be changed into Very God"[42] but Mooney, employing the metaphor of sunlight that Eriugena uses at I.520c–521b, suggests that *mutabitur* can be translated as "will let shine through."[43]

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[39] Book I, 174–190 (446b–446d), 9: *At si causa omnium ab omnibus quae ab ea creata sunt remota est, absque ulla dubitatione rationes omnium rerum, quae aeternaliter atque incommutabiliter inea sunt, ab omnibus quorum rationes sunt penitus remotae sunt. In angelicis uero intellectibus earum rationum theophanias quasdam esse, hoc est comprehensibiles intellectuali naturae quasdam diuinas apparitiones, non autem ipsas rationes, id est principalia exempla, quisquis dixerit non, ut arbitror, a ueritate errabit . . . non enim essentia diuina deus solummodo dicitur, sed etiam modus ille, quo se quodammodo intellectuali et rationali creaturae prout est capacitas uniuscuiusque ostendit.* Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 30–31.

[40] For example in Book IV, 700–708 (759b), 26–27. Eriugena's idea of theophanies follows Dionysius closely, who outlines an understanding of theophany in his *Celestial Hierarchy*: "Someone might claim that God has appeared himself and without intermediaries to some of the saints. But in fact it should be realized that scripture has clearly shown that 'no one has ever seen' or ever will see the being of God in all its hiddenness. Of course God has appeared to certain pious men in ways which were in keeping with his divinity. He has come in certain sacred visions fashioned to suit the beholders. This kind of vision, that is to say, where the formless God is represented in forms, is rightly described by theological discourse as a theophany." *Celestial Hierarchy*, trans. Lubheid, 157.

[41] Mooney, *Theophany*, 63.

[42] Sheldon-Williams, trans., *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae: Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae), Liber Primus* (The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968, reprint 1999), 57.

[43] Mooney, *Theophany*, 59.

7.7　Scripture and the possibility of pantheism

Christian philosophers can find numerous Scriptural texts that support the closeness of God with His creation.[44] Dionysius claims that the transcendent Cause possesses the names of all things.[45] Eriugena regularly refers to the one Cause of all things from whom, in whom, and through whom all things are made.[46] This follows St Paul's statement that "from him and through him and to him are all things"[47] and also John 1:3: "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."[48] St Paul's statement that "God may be all in all," lies behind Eriugena's statement that *unum deum omnia in omnibus esse*.[49] Dermot Moran refers to how theologians also made use of the "pseudo-scriptural" statement that God is "the beginning, middle and end of all things."[50] The interpretation of such passages, Moran suggests, may not always have followed a strict logic:

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[44] This is particularly true of St Paul, e.g. Colossians 1:16-17: "in [Christ] all things in heaven and on earth were created . . . and in him all things hold together," and 1 Corinthians 15:28: "God may be all in all."

[45] *The Divine Names*, 1.7. *The Complete Works*, trans. Lubheid, 56.

[46] For example Book I, 2469–2474 (500a), 80; Book II, 859–861 (553a–b), 37; Book III, 207–208 (623d), 9; Book V, 461 (871a), 17.

[47] Romans 11.36.

[48] St Paul is referring specifically to 'God', while St John is referring to 'the Word,' which he identifies with God.

[49] Book III, 2312 (675c), 80. It is tempting to gloss over the fact that what St Paul has said in the future or conditional tense, Eriugena has uttered in the present tense: it could be argued that it is simply a question of timing, and doesn't alter the essential relationship between God and creation. However from a Neoplatonic perspective, it can be argued that St Paul's statement ties in with the general Return of all things to God, which has not yet happened as long as the universe is in existence. Thus Eriugena's statement, if considered properly in the present tense, could be considered pantheistic, but if regarding God generally as the Beginning and End of all things, is not necessarily so. In discussing the relation of God to the world in the Dionysian *corpus*, Clarence Rolt explains that created being wells up and passes away, emanating from God and returning to God, but not identical with God while detectable in the world: "particular existences remain within the Super-Essence, until the moment of their temporal creation." At this moment, while they are not separated from God, God acts "at a distance . . . both immanent in the world as its Principle of Being and outside it as transcending all categories of Being . . . [therefore] Finite creatures though filled (according to their measure) with Its Presence, yet must, in so far as they are finite, look up to It as That which is Other than themselves." *Dionysius the Areopagite: On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology* (London: SPCK, 1920), 9–10. Eriugena also refers to Origen's interpretation of St Paul's text: it signifies the passing of evil at the end of the world: *Non enim iam ultra mali bonique descretio, quia nusquam malum . . . Tunc uere deus omnia in omnibus erit*. Book V, 3109–3121 (929b–c), 98–99.

[50] Moran, "Pantheism from John Scottus Eriugena to Nicholas of Cusa," 133.

Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa will frequently say that God is in all things and that all things are God. The phrase can, of course, be interpreted purely devotionally to mean that God is omnipresent and that all things depend totally for their being on God. . . But Eriugena was accused of teaching the identity of the created world with God, which does not give any room for the divine transcendence. This of course, is only one side of Eriugena's doctrine; his Dionysian negative theology also asserted the absolute transcendence of God.[51]

Bearing in mind the devotional interpretation of scriptural texts which reflect on the ontological relationship between the world and its maker, it is now appropriate to re-visit and re-assess some of Eriugena's ideas which seem to most strongly suggest a pantheistic world view.

7.8   Eriugena's 'pantheist' statements

A great number of statements from the *Periphyseon* invite the charge of pantheism; some of the best examples can be considered in turn.

> *N. Quid si creaturam creatori adiunxeris, ita ut nil aliud in ea intelligas nisi ipsum qui solus uere est? Nil enim extra ipsum uere essentiale dicitur, quia omnia quae ab eo sunt nil aliud sunt in quntum sunt nisi participatio ipsius qui a se ipso solus per se ipsum subsistit . . . Vniuersitas itaque quae deo et creatura continetur prius in quattuor ueluti formas diuisa iterum ad unum indiuiduum, principium quippe causamque finemque reuocatur.*[52]

Eriugena's convergence of his own four divisions of Nature into a singularity may suggest a pantheist position, yet he is not saying more than that all things exist through participation in something else, with the exception of God alone, who is existence itself (i.e. Who alone truly is), and from which all other existence flows. If one applies the universal, 'Platonized' understanding of *ousia*, then the statement amounts to the assertion that all being originates

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[51] Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 88. Capelle (*Amaury de Bène*, 26) argues that the unity of being at the end of time, after all things have returned to rest in God, is brought forward into the present by Amaury of Bène.

[52] Book II, 109–119 (528b), 7. O'Meara's translation: "But suppose you join the creature to the Creator so as to understand that there is nothing in the former save Him who alone truly is – for nothing apart from Him is truly called essential since all things that are are nothing else, in so far as they are, but the participation in Him who alone subsists from and through Himself. . . So the universe . . . is reduced again to an indivisible One, being Principle as well as Cause and End."

in the being of God, or rather, that all being participates in the class of being which is itself derived from God.

For Sebastian Weiner, the ontology of the *Periphyseon* is *negative*, because, as Marenbon explains, "if the text is read literally, it insists that the essence of every created thing is identical with the divine essence, and so, no more than God himself, can it be defined or comprehended."[53] The incomprehensibility of divine essence does not preclude its being identified with a (similarly incomprehensible) created essence. However, if essence is understood as substance in an Aristotelian sense then it is defined by its form. For Eriugena, God is beyond form; in his understanding of essence as existence rather than form, his text does not approach formal pantheism.

The unity of being throughout the universe is referred to in Book I of the *Periphyseon*, where Eriugena states that God does not admit of number in any way, and since *non ergo aliud est deo esse et aliud facere, sed ei esse id ipsum est et facere*, when He is said to create something, this simply means that God is in all things: *Cum ergo audimus deum omnia facere, nil aliud debemus intelligere quam deum in omnibus esse, hoc est essentiam omnium subsistere. Ipse enim solus per se uere est, et omne quod uere in his quae sunt dicitur esse ipse solus est.*[54] The making or creating of anything is to extend a share in existence that belongs to God first, since existence cannot come through any other channel. Again we are offered an understanding of essence as a singular *ousia* that runs through all things, derived from that which alone truly exists by itself. In Book III, following Dionysius,

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[53] Marenbon, "Philosophy in the Early Latin Middle Ages," 374. Marenbon is referring to the work by Sebastian Weiner: *Eriugenas Negative Ontologie* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2007).

[54] Book I, 3255–3261 (518a), 104. O'Meara's translation: "it is not one thing for God to be and another to make, but for Him being is the same as making . . . He is the Essence of all things. For only He truly exists by Himself, and He alone is everything which in the things that are is truly said to be."

he qualifies a creature's participation in this divine essence as being in accordance with its formal capacity, a participation which can never be total.[55]

The singularity of being finds its most complete statement in Book III. For the beauty of the writing as much as its meaning, this statement is worth quoting in full:

> *N. De simplicitate diuinae naturae . . . omnia uere ac proprie intra eam intelliguntur esse – nil enim extra eam subsistit . . . proinde non duo a se ipsis distantia debemus intelligere deum et creaturam, sed unum et id ipsum. Nam et creatura in deo est subsistens, et deus in creatura mirabilis et ineffabili modo creatur, se ipsum manifestans, usibilis uisibilem se faciens, et incomprehensibilis comprehensibilem, et occultus apertum, et incognitus cognitum, et forma ac specie carens formosum ac speciosum, et superessentialis essentialem, et supernaturalis naturalem, et simplex compositum, et accidentibus liber accidentibus subiectum et accidens, et infinitus finitum, et incircumscriptus circumscriptum, et supertemporalis temporalem, et superlocalis locale, et omnia creans in omnibus creatum, et factor omnium factus in omnibus, et aeternus coepit esse, et immobilis mouetur in omnia et fit in omnibus omnia . . . et de se ipsa se ipsam facit; non enim indiget alterius materiae, quae ipsa non sit, in qua se ipsam facit. Alioqui impotens uideretur et in se ipso imperfectus, si aliunde acciperet apparitionis et perfectionis suae auxilium. A se igitur ipso deus accipit theophaniarum suarum (hoc est diuinarum apparitionum) occasiones, quoniam ex ipso et per ipsum et in ipso et ad ipsum sun omnia. Ac per hoc, et ipsa materies, de qua legitur mundum fecisse, ab ipso et in ipso est; et ipse in ea est, quantum intelligitur ea esse.*[56]

The creature is inseparable from God in its participation of being or essence; therefore its very existence is a manifestation of God. But furthermore, God is made visible and comprehensible in the creature not only through its existence, but also in its particular and unique form; this cannot be understood as a proper vision of God, but only an aspect of the

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[55] Book III, 1044–1059 (644a–b), 38.

[56] Book III, 2436–2469 (678b–679a), 85. Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 305: "Concerning the Divine Nature . . . all things are truly and properly understood to be within it – for nothing subsists outside it . . . it follows that we ought not to understand God and the creature as two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same. For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God; and God, by manifesting Himself, in a marvellous and ineffable manner creates Himself in the creature, the invisible making Himself visible and the incomprehensible comprehensible and the hidden revealed and the unknown known and being without form and species formed and specific and the superessential essential and the supernatural natural and the simple composite and the accident-free subject to accident and the infinite finite and the uncircumscribed circumscribed and the supratemporal temporal and the Creator of all things created in all things and the Maker of all things made in all things, and eternal He begins to be, and immobile He moves into all things and becomes in all things all things. . . . out of itself it makes itself, for it does not require some other matter which is not itself in which to make itself. Otherwise it would seem to be impotent and imperfect in itself if it were to receive from some other source an aid to its manifestation and perfection. So it is from Himself that God takes the occasions of His theophanies, that is, of the divine apparitions, since all things are from Him and through Him and in Him and for Him. And therefore even the matter from which it is read that He made the world is from Him and in Him, and He is in it in so far as it is understood to have being."

divine which can be contained or understood by the human intellect, with its deficiencies of vision and understanding.[57]

This text presents a paradigm of the coincidence of opposites. God is described as infinite, incomprehensible, superessential, supratemporal, uncircumscribed, and without form or species, and yet, since all things exist through participation in universal essence, God is made manifest and even visible in them, but not in any complete way. The text only makes sense if infinite existence is diffused in a partial and limited manner, for then what is beyond a creature can be found within it. A divine apparition enables the one who sees it to experience something of God, beginning with existence in itself; but God-in-Himself remains transcendent, beyond being and non-being. The presence of the infinite in a finite world is possible, as light penetrates air, or fire penetrates liquid iron. A glimpse of the incomprehensible in concrete things is possible; but not in any total sense that amounts to identity.

Divine essence, understood as existence-in-itself, unites all things, and it is in this sense that Eriugena unites the creature to God. Nothing can exist outside of God; to posit the existence of something outside of God would deny his infinity and omnipotence.[58] Therefore all things are contained within God, subsist in God, and have no other ultimate origin. God is existence itself, from which all other created existences are drawn; thus the created world cannot be separated from God in any way. The alternative, for Eriugena, is essentially a Manichaean or dualist position where something exists apart from God, and is a separate creative force in the universe. Eriugena's text may seem pantheistic, but his application of the

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[57] See Willemien Otten's summary explanation: "humans will only see theophanies, never God himself." "Christianity's Content: (Neo)Platonism in the Middle Ages, Its Theoretical and Theological Appeal," *Numen* 63, no. 2/3 (2016): 260.

[58] See also Book V, 4729–4739 (964c), 146: *Omne enim quod est et quod non est creatore ambitur et creatura . . . diuina uirtute credimus et intelligimus administrari, extra quam omne quod est et quod non est egredi non potest.* O'Meara's translation: "everything that is and everything that is not is bounded by the Creator and His creation . . . [God is the] Divine Power beyond Whose bounds it is impossible for anything that is or for anything that is not to stray."

concept of theophany denies God's presence in any complete sense. All created things are from Him, through Him, in Him and for Him, because their existence is drawn from God, and therefore he can say that God is the essence of all things, and that *Deus est itaque omne quod uere est, quoniam ipse facit omnia, et fit in omnibus, ut ait sanctus Dionysius Ariopagita.*[59]

7.9   Sin: the incompleteness of man

The reality of sin is peculiar to man and is only possible where there is free will, a free will which posits a non-identity of the human intellect with God. This non-identity extends to the whole visible world, since it is through sin that it comes into being. For Eriugena, the diversity of the visible world begins with man who, through the sin of his disobedience, was divided into male and female. Following Original Sin, the human corporeal body, along with the physical nature of the created world, proceeds from its spiritual causes which God had created through the second division.[60] A revised version of the text states that diversity among men themselves, in their appearance, ethnic origins, behaviours and beliefs, does not proceed from nature, but is a defect resulting from sin.[61] Although created in the image and likeness of God, Eriugena states that it is not in respect of the human body that the likeness is created,[62] but rather it is the highest part of man, i.e. the intellect and reason, that manifests

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[59] Book III, 586–588 (633a), 22. Beierwaltes asserts that when God creates Himself in the world, he can be understood to be manifesting Himself as cause and principle of all that exists. It is in this sense that he is 'all in all', but this does not deny His transcendence from all that exists; He is excluded from all that is categorically comprehensible, and is excluded from all things which have being. "*Negati affirmatio* or the World as Metaphor" trans. Margaret von Maltzahn, *Dionysius* I (December 1977): 141–142.

[60] Gilson offers the following with regard to this Eriugenian doctrine: "Although the multiplication of the world of bodies is a consequence of original sin, we should not imagine that the sensible world is a place of penitence where man has to expiate his crime. God has created it by an act of compassion, and as a place where sensible things would lead fallen man back to the intelligible realities from which he voluntarily separated himself. Even here, Christian optimism does not lose its rights." *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 124.

[61] Book IV, 605–624 (533a–b), 166.

[62] Book IV, 1855–1858 (786d), 66.

the image. The body and the world, with sin as the cause for their physical condition, do not manifest image or likeness.

In his *De Praedestinatione*, Eriugena asserted that God does not know sin; although He can foresee sin, the sins of man are in no way attributable to Him.[63] Sin moves *against* nature, and therefore the consequences of sin may also be considered as unnatural to a degree.[64] It is not nature that sins, but rather an irrational will which moves against rational nature.[65] The effects of sin have produced something unnatural, something that has suffered a loss of dignity, an effect that applies to the world as well as to man: *Se uero [homo] creatorem deserendo ex dignitate suae naturae in eum caderet, inter partes eius ignobiliter deputatus, diuina iustitia correctus, suae praeuaricationis poenas lueret*.[66] Man's very physical existence is ignoble compared to his original, spiritual nature; his spiritual and natural body is distinct from the corporeal body which was added as a penalty for his transgression.[67] Such a body will be removed from the soul in time, and what will remain is the image of God.

God, however, must be reflected in the spatio-temporal world, since He is the only source of being; it therefore cannot be bad in itself. Evil is not substantial, not a thing-in-itself; rather, it is the absence of the fullness of goodness.[68] But this absence characterises the

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[63] *De Diuina Praedestinatione Liber*, 5.2, 10.3.

[64] See Book IV, 2780–2788 (807b–c), 93: Since God is outside time and can foresee sin, Eriugena argues that God created the consequences of sin before man had sinned. See also Book IV, 2969–2975 (812a), 100: following Gregory, there are no necessary time intervals between cause and effect, and God can intellect all things at once.

[65] Book IV, 745–747 (760c), 28: *non ipsa natura peccauerit, sed peruersa uoluntas, quae contra naturam rationabilem irrationabilter mouetur*.

[66] Book IV, 1672–1675 (782c), 60. O'Meara's translation (p. 431): "if [man] were to abandon his Creator and fall down into the world from the lofty station of his nature, he would then lose his rank and be ignobly counted among its parts, and be himself corrected by the Divine Justice and pay the penalty for his sin."

[67] Book IV, 2468–2470 (800d–801a), 84.

[68] Book IV, 229–231 (747c), 10

physical world which results from sin, and therefore cannot be identical with God. Evil, disguising itself as good, can confuse the man who is marked by ignorance.[69] In particular, his mortal and corruptible body, prone to carnal desires, traps him in a blindness and unhappiness which hinders his progress. The sensible world is also the arena in which the man can strive to recover, with the help of grace, from the ignominy of his sin and grow in the knowledge of himself and of his Creator.[70] But man remains connected to his true, ideal humanity; his dignity, insofar as he is created as human, remains, despite his temporary ignorance and ignoble status, and one man alone can be considered as greater than the whole visible world due to the dignity of his rational nature.[71] The eternal dignity of the human person can be contrasted with his half-lit journey through the sensible world; for the proper restoration of his knowledge and dignity he must wait for the return of all things to God.

7.10   The return of all things and the continuation of non-identity

The physical world, insofar as it is physical, will perish; all things will return into their causes, created by God who alone is immortal.[72] All created things have within them an innate potency for resurrection, which essentially signifies a return to a more perfect, spiritual state. Christ redeems not only humankind, but all things; and since the sensible world came into being through sin, therefore it must pass away on being redeemed.

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[69] Book IV, 3638–3640 (826c), 120.

[70] Book IV, 1442–1445 (777b), 53: loss of knowledge is a direct result of sin.

[71] Book IV, 1761–1763 (784c), 63. Eriugena refers here to Augustine, for whom the soul of a worm is greater than the sun that illuminates the world.

[72] As we have seen, Eriugena's idea is that physical matter will return to the four elements, which in turn will return to their own causes. The human body, which has also returned to the four elements, will, at the general return, be changed into an incorruptible spirituality, and be reunited with its soul by 'a mysterious harmony'. See Book V, 2519 (915c), 79. The physical garments of any thing, which he calls 'accidents', come not from the cause of that thing (since they do not belong its proper nature), but from an external source, i.e. the four elements. See Book III, 1935–1940 (665d), 67.

Following this movement of return, Eriugena maintains an order and hierarchy in which created being is not identified with God. At the end of Book V he outlines a three-fold return, with some creatures participating in God more than others.[73] In the first instance, all things return into their causes; secondly, all of human nature returns to God; and thirdly, he refers to the particular *deificationis gloriam* which belongs to the saints alone.[74] This structure resists a pantheistic interpretation, except in the case of the saints, for whom their bodies shall be changed into soul, soul into mind, and mind into God.[75] But even here, Eriugena points out that, although the saint is always seeking union with God, God will always be greater since ultimately God is infinite and incomprehensible, even to Himself.[76]

The sensible world is the result of Original Sin; so, too, the darkness of the human intellect, and as long as man remains in the world, and in a corporeal body, he shall remain in a world of ignorance and distractions. This anthropological position can be contrasted with that of the Cathars or the Amauricians, whose 'spiritual' or 'perfect' members were considered to be sinless, while still occupying their mortal bodies. For Eriugena, it is only

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[73] Book V, 7270–7334 (1020a–1021b), 224–225.

[74] Book V, 5424–5429 (979b–c), 166.

[75] Book V, 5793–5795 (987b–c), 178.

[76] Book V, 2585–2590 (917b), 81; Book II, 2380–2386 (598a), 99. The distinction which remains between God and the creature following the return of all things is also mentioned in Book I; when iron is melted by fire, it appears as fire to the senses, but by reason we know that its nature, as iron, is preserved: *Nam cum ferrum conflatum in igne in liquorem soluitur, nihil de natura eius remanere sensibus uidetur sed totum in igneam qualitatem uertitur, sola uero ratione suam naturam quamuis liquefactam seruare cognoscitur. Sicut ergo totus aer lux, totumque ferrum liquefactum, ut diximus, igneum, immo etiam ignis apparet, manentibus tamen eorum substantiis, ita sano intellectu accipiendum quia post finem huius mundi omnis natura siue corporea siue incorporea solus deus esse uidebitur, naturae integritate permanente, ut et deus, qui per se ipsum incomprehensibilis est, in creatura quodam modo comprehendatur, ipsa uero creatura ineffabili miraculo in deum uertatur.* Book I, 378–390 (451a–b), 16. "For when iron is melted in a fire and reduced to a liquid, nothing of its nature appears to the senses to remain, but all is changed into the quality of fire, and it is by reason alone that it is known to preserve its own nature, though reduced to a liquid state. So just as the air appears wholly as light, and iron when melted appears to take on wholly the quality of fire, as we have said, and in fact to be fire, although their substances persist: so the sound intellect must hold that after the end of this world every nature, whether corporeal or incorporeal, will seem to be only God, while preserving the integrity of its nature, so that even God, Who in Himself is incomprehensible, is after a certain mode comprehended in the creature, while the creature itself by an ineffable miracle is changed into God". Trans. O'Meara, 36. A more thorough exploration of Christian Neoplatonic metaphors of mixture is found in Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 193–203.

when man is purged of this current state and returns to his cause that he returns to a more natural state, and in the case of the elect they are glorified beyond their nature through grace and changed into God himself.[77] Eriugena's assertion that a grace-ful person, having left the physical world behind, shall become God Himself, is a radical one. The assertion might provide the basis for Amaury's beliefs surrounding the holiest members of his community, although Eriugena was speaking in a future or conditional sense, whereas Amaury changes this sense by bringing it into the present. However, Eriugena's assertion also implies that, not only is it a future and conditional event, but that it pertains to humanity alone. By logical extension, the present, visible world, considered in its primordial causes, is not identified with God Himself. This conditional unity with God is framed by Eriugena's reference to a quote from Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy*: God calls all beings into communion with Himself, each to the extent of their own particular limits.[78] The form of any created being possesses a limited capacity, and therefore is unequal with God who alone is infinite.

For Eriugena, Christ redeems us from sin by taking us out of this world; for the Amauricians, the body of Christ can be manifest fully in the world of the present, making sacraments redundant. For Eriugena, there is a natural gravity in all things to move back towards their causes which are not part of this physical world; for the Amauricians, the natural gravity appears to move in the opposite direction, dragging God out his heaven to be present in the world. Amaury, according to the chroniclers, stated that a man needed to *believe* himself to be a member of Christ in order for God's spirit to live within him; Eriugena emphasises the need for grace, bestowed by God, in order for us to rise beyond the natural limits of our physical bodies. Eriugena speaks of a special grace that is reserved for

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[77] Book III, 1949–1952 (666a), 68: *et in his qui boni sunt donis gratiae ornata, aeternae beatitudinis contemplationibus ultra omnem naturam et suam glorificata, inque ipsum deum conuersa, deusque non natura sed gratia facta.*

[78] Book II, 1050–1053 (644a), 38.

the superessential deification of the elect (*donum uero in deification electorum superessentiali accipere debemus*) bringing some of the things that are beyond all existents into God Himself;[79] it is possible that the Amauricians understood this phrase to apply to members of their group, that they thus could be identified with God in the present.[80]

7.11   The gift of grace and deification

Eriugena has described how created human nature exists at a distance from God, through its sinfulness, but also by its formal limitations. By itself, it cannot approach God, much less be identified with him, while curtailed by its own natural limits. Divinely-bestowed grace counter-acts the ignorance brought about through sin. The human intellect cannot contemplate God, Who is remote from every created nature, without this gift which enables it to surpass its natural ability.[81] Thus man can ascend above himself so as to adhere to his Creator.[82] The gifts of grace are not naturally contained within human nature; the intellect's rise to God is a transcendence that proceeds both superessentially and independently of its cause.[83] Unity with God, however one understands that phrase, can be understood for human nature, therefore, as a gift, rather than belonging to created nature in the first place. But Eriugena asserts limits to deification: Christ alone, among humans, ascends into a proper union with the deity. All others, including the elect, come after Christ, and do not attain properly to this union: *In quam unitatem solus ille suam humanitatem subuexit, caeteros*

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[79] Book V, 2055–2065 (905a–b), 64.

[80] Eriugena claims in this same passage that grace brings about a unity with God, but it is not clear if he is speaking eschatalogically, or with reference to the present time.

[81] Book II, 1566–1567 (576a), 68.

[82] Book II, 1570–1572 (576a–b), 68.

[83] Book V, 2024–2027 (904b), 63. *Huc accedit quod donum gratiae neque intra terminos conditae naturae continetur neque secundum naturalem uirtutem operatur, sed superessentialiter et ultra omnes creatas naturales rationes effectus suos peragit.*

autem, quos deificat sola participatione deitatis, unumquemque secundum altitudinem propriae contemplationis, post se constituit.[84]

7.12   Capelle's consideration of the influence of Eriugena on Amaury

Catherine Capelle, in her study of 1932, seeks for the influences, in both philosophical writings and also in spiritual movements of the age, that led to the profound pantheism of the Amauricians. She points to a latent but widespread spiritual movement that considered a particular coming of the Holy Spirit to be imminent, according to the idea of the three ages.[85] The Amaurician heresy, she opines, developed in the context of this movement which is generally associated with the Italian abbot Joachim of Fiore, whose beliefs were condemned by the Fourth Lateran Council. By the early thirteenth century, Gary Dickson asserts, "the orthodox economy of salvation had moved away from Romanesque transcendence – with its stress upon the divine majesty – towards Gothic immanence and a corresponding emphasis upon divine proximity, and Amalrician pantheism took this spiritual tendency to its uttermost limits."[86] Such pantheism led to an antinomianism that denied the ecclesiastical culture of sacraments and penance, and caused an outcry among commentators.[87]

Amaurician pantheism, however, was not simply a development of popular religious belief: it was a metaphysical and dogmatic pantheism driven by university-trained clerics and intellectuals. In her search for what may have influenced the development of this position, Capelle looks at some of the principal figures of the twelfth-century school at Chartres,

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[84] Book V, 2331–2334 (911c), 73. "He alone has brought His humanity into this union, for the others whom He deifies He sets beneath Himself in a mere participation in the Deity each according to the height attained by his contemplative power." Trans. O'Meara, 584.

[85] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 83.

[86] Dickson, "The Burning of the Amalricians," 367.

[87] This culture was developed further by Innocent III who, in the twenty-first constitution of the Fourth Lateran Council, mandated confession at least once a year for the lay faithful.

including Bernard de Chartres (d. c. 1124), Gilbert de la Porrée (d. 1154), and Thierry of Chartres (d. c. 1150), all of whom discussed the relationship of God with the world in metaphysical terms.[88] Under the influence of Plato and Neoplatonic philosophers, they espoused realism, but she does not find pantheism in any strict sense.[89] The philosopher who came closest to providing an influence, Capelle suggests, was Guillaume de Champeaux (c. 1070–1121), who included Abélard (1079–1142) and Peter Lombard (c. 1096–1160) among his students.

For Guillaume, the Universal is the essential base of things, and a genus provides the essence for all of its individuals. Therefore the individuals of a single genus are accidents of a single substance, and similarly, a genus is merely the accident of a still-more-general substance, the universal substance that is God.[90] According to Odon de Cambrai (d. 1113), a student of Guillaume's, there must also be a substantial unity of souls. Consequently, the Universal is found, essentially and identically, everywhere and in everything, just as the soul is always in each part of the body. However, Capelle refers to an 1867 study of Guillaume by L'abbé Michaud, who argued that "the realists, with Saint Anselm [of Laon, a teacher of Guillaume], knew that the divine substance could have nothing in common with other substances . . . whose infinite essence is neither universal, nor individual, since it is not communicated to other substances, and doesn't participate in other substances."[91] Exaggerated realism, Capelle adds, leads only leads to Platonism, and not to pantheism. Pantheist dogma, she argues, is not found in the Platonic and Neoplatonic outlook of *les Chartrains*. Amaury's belief, rather, is an original doctrine supported by a misreading of

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[88] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 70–75.

[89] Ibid., 86.

[90] This study of Guillaume is provided by Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 77–79.

[91] L'abbé Michaud, *Guillaume de Champeaux*, Paris, 1867 (2nd edition), 217. See Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 79; translations are by the author.

various philosophical texts. Eriugena and the school at Chartres furnished Amaury with an abundance of texts, and he made the worst of them. She argues that blaming Eriugena for Amaurician doctrine cannot be justified: "Eriugena's doctrine, as a whole, appears to stand against the notion of his being a pantheist . . . by contrast, however, what we know of the doctrine of Amaury of Bène reveals pantheism in the precise meaning of the term."[92] In a matter of some conjecture, she also suggests that numerous works may have carried the title 'Periphyseon':[93] Amaury himself may have used the title for his own writings. However, whether or not there was confusion over what exactly was being condemned, the description of the work proscribed by Pope Honorius points quite clearly to Eriugena.

What the Amauricians appear to have held in agreement with Eriugena is his denial of the resurrection of the visible human body,[94] and the understanding that the division of sexes applies only to the corporeal body, not the spiritual body.[95] Furthermore, like Eriugena, they denied the existence of a physical heaven or hell: these are spiritual states.[96] But where Eriugena's doctrines accord with the Neoplatonic tradition, Amaurician doctrine takes a giant leap by locating God within time and place, using what Capelle considers to be absurd reasoning to show how the distinction between God and creature is irrational: Scripture says that "God is in this place," and if God is in a certain place, and God is eternal, then the place

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[92] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 23: "l'ensemble de la doctrine de l'Érigène paraît, en effet, s'opposer à faire de lui un panthéiste . . . au contraire, tout ce que nous savons d'Amaury de Bène révèle du panthéisme au sens précis du mot."

[93] Ibid., 23.

[94] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 37. This description of Amaurician doctrine follows the account of Caesarius of Heisterbach.

[95] Ibid., 67.

[96] See Book V, 5860–5866 (989a), 180, where Eriugena asserts that the deprivation of Christ is the sole torment of the rational creature: *Hinc apertissime conficitur nihil aliud appetendum, nisi gaudium de ueritate, quae est Christus, et nihil aliud fugiendum, nisi eius absentiam, quae est una ac sola causa totius aeternae trititae. Tolle a me Christum, nullum bonum mihi remanebit, nullum tormentum me terret. Eius siquidem priuatio et absentia totius rationabilis creaturae tormentum est, et nullum aliud.*

itself is coeternal with God; but since nothing is eternal except God, then this place is God.[97] As formal principle, each creature is an incarnation of God.[98] This reasoning demonstrates no engagement with Eriugena's understanding of the world as a theophany.

For the Amauricians, the 'spiritual' members of their sect were united with the Holy Spirit in a particular way.[99] This unity is not a simple co-habitation, such as through a sanctifying grace, but rather the substitution of a divine person in place of the 'spiritual'.[100] It is effectively a hypostatic union: the man is absorbed into the divinity, so that it is always God who acts in him. The 'spiritual' serves to express divine thoughts and actions. Eriugena never suggests such a thing: the perfection of man, and unity with God, can only follow the return of all things, and even then he retains his particular substance. While subject to the material world and the material human body, man can certainly rise to a degree, through the gift of grace and the practice of contemplation, but Eriugena's God transcends all essence, and therefore cannot properly said to be (merely) essential, as a person is essential.

Capelle concludes that Amaury did not carefully read the *Periphyseon*, though he commented upon it and cited it without the necessary education to properly understand it. He may have borrowed its formulas; however "the formal content of similar (or sometimes even identical) expressions differs among the two authors."[101] Thus, she claims, it is false to hold that the *Periphyseon* is a source for the Amaurician heresy. She also rules out any influence from Plato (through Calcidius's commentary on the *Timaeus*), and also the ninth-century

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[97] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 27.

[98] Ibid., 29.

[99] Ibid., 34. Caesarius of Heisterbach reports that there might have been just seven such 'spiritual' persons.

[100] Ibid., 34 and 40: A further consequence is that free will must be denied, if it is God who acts in the man, and divine mercy and justice no longer apply. God cannot punish a man for doing what He has done Himself.

[101] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 67.

Liber de Causis, and notes that pantheism is not found in these works.[102] Amaury's formal pantheism was his sole property.[103] For Eriugena, created things are in God without losing their character as creatures, while the First Being remains inaccessible in Himself; for Amaury, God and creation are integrated in an immediate way, leading to the divinisation of created things.

7.13 Étienne Gilson: Amaury's pantheism is alien to Eriugena

The twentieth-century historian of philosophy Étienne Gilson, commenting on the case of Amaury (as an Introduction to Capelle's study), states that to make a pantheist of Eriugena is to go against, if not everything which he actually said, at least everything which he really thought. Gilson asserts that no one more than Eriugena has written on the significant distance between God and creature, and the mere thought of pantheism would fill Eriugena with horror:[104] "Amaury of Bène is himself the source of his own doctrine. His pantheism is not found in the school of Chartres, nor in the works of Eriugena, but is drawn from his own reflections on the nature of God, and how the world relates to God."[105] Gilson points to the opening of Book II of the *Periphyseon* as proof that the charge of pantheism cannot be applied to Eriugena.

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[102] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 68–69. Capelle also contradicts the suggestion that there may have been an influence from Islamic philosophy.

[103] Ibid., 81.

[104] Ibid., 6. "Faire de Scot Erigène ou de Thierry de Chartres des panthéistes, donc aussi des ancêtres d'Amaury de Bène, c'est aller, sinon contre tout ce qu'ils ont eu parfois l'air de dire, du moins contre tout ce qu'ils ont réellement pensé."

[105] Ibid., 5–6. "La conclusion qui s'en déage est, qu'en somme, Amaury de Bène est à lui-même sa propre source. Son panthéisme ne se retrouve ni chez les Chartrains, ni chez Scot Erigène, mais est issu de ses propres réflexions sur la nature de Dieu et des relations du monde à Dieu."

At the beginning of Book II (in Jeauneau's Version II, the revision of the Reims manuscript), the apophatic theological approach is explicitly reinforced; it is as if someone has pointed out to the author that his descriptions of God in Book I can be misinterpreted.[106]

> *Non enim deus genus est creaturae et creatura species dei, sicut creatura non est genus dei neque deus species creaturae. Eadem ratio est in toto et partibus: deus siquidem non est totum creaturae neque creatura pars dei*.[107]

The text directly denies that God can be found in, or identified with, the genus and species of created being; the world is not a part of God. It continues on to assert, however, that in a *metaphorical* sense such things are predicated of Him:

> *metaforiceque deus dicatur et genus et totum et species et pars. Omne enim quod in ipso et ex ipso est pie ac rationabiliter de eo praedicari potest*.[108]

Discussions and descriptions of God, for Eriugena, can never approach proper and positive assertions regarding his nature; since He is not defined by (or restricted to) any form, He is unknowable and ungraspable by any intellect.[109] But this does not hinder him from making statements about God: he appears to take for granted the apophatic mindset of his reader, and proceeds fearlessly in a theological speculation that makes use of positive statemtents regarding the nature of the divinity.

For Eriugena, human language and logic are severely restricted, since our ignorance allows for a very limited understanding of God. But rather than proceeding with caution as a result of this state, he appears liberated by it in his theological assertions. It has been argued, however, that Eriugena lacked precision and technical language in his use of analogy and logic; according to Gilson, this is particularly true with regard to the predication of being. As

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[106] The handwriting of the following quote is that of *i²*, and therefore probably not Eriugena's hand. Whether or not this reviser acted under Eriugena's direction cannot be ascertained.

[107] Book II, 4–10 (Version II, 523d), 132. Cf. *Periphyseon*, trans. O'Meara, 123.

[108] Book II, 17–21 (Version II, 524d), 132. The Eckhart commentator Oliver Davies states that all of Eckhart's theological figures and concepts serve as metaphors rather than calculated propositions. This is because God always infinitely transcends what we can say or think about Him. Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings*, xxxiv.

[109] Book II, 39–53 (Version II, 525a), 134.

a consequence of this fault, Eriugena placed in circulation a number of formulae which, though plurivocal in their spirit, can be read as univocal.[110] From a devotional point of view, all things can be predicated of God, but from a metaphysical point of view which considers form and essence, it can only be said *metaphorically* that God is both the whole and the parts of the universe.[111]

Gilson concludes that those who consider Eriugena to be a pantheist prove only one thing: that they have not read his works.[112] Anything of his which has passed into Amaury's doctrine has lost its original meaning and taken on a new one. He laments Eriugena's inability to effectively communicate analogies, and points to a loose application of terminology.[113] If there are inconsistencies and even contradictions in his texts, they can be attributed (repeating an important conclusion of Capelle's) to the numerous different aspects with which he considers reality, whether it be the aspect of divine transcendence, or the aspect of the creature's inability to exist independently.

7.14   The condemnation revisited

The chronicler Albéric des Trois Fontaines, in recording the condemnation of the *Periphyseon* by Pope Honorius, considers it a strange thing that the work had avoided condemnation throughout its three hundred-year history. It had attracted no notice at the recent great council (presumably Lateran IV). He concludes that it incurred damnation on

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[110] Capelle, *Amaury de Bène*, 7.

[111] Ibid., 9. Following Eckhart, Gilson suggests that you can construct the idea of monism from fragments of the writings of Thomas Aquinas, even though Saint Thomas never considered such a thing. "Le monisme d'Amaury est le bâtard de l'érigénisme et de la dialectique."

[112] Ibid., 6–7.

[113] Gilson also explores Eriugena's philosophy in his *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, where he states that "the bluntness of some of [Eriugena's] formulas is mainly responsible for the misrepresentation of his thought by several of his historians" (115). He sums up Eriugena's legacy with the idea that "no one, after him, has ever dared to take up as a whole a doctrine so little suited to the sober teachings of the Latin tradition" (128).

account of false theologians and "new Albigenses" who confirmed their own heresies through a misunderstanding of Eriugena's text.[114]

The author of this study has nothing to add to, or subtract from, the value of the official censorship of Eriugena through the decree of Pope Honorius III. It can, of course, be fairly argued that the Pope was right to ban the *Periphyseon* because, in the wrong hands, among metaphysicians under the influence of a misinterpretation of Aristotle taking quotes out of context, Eriugena's work could be misinterpreted in a way which would lead to a pantheistic and heretical understanding of the world. The case of the Amauricians precisely manifested this danger: their misreading of Eriugena led to an extreme interpretation which the author of the *Periphyseon* would most likely have found appalling. It should also be remembered that, given that Pope Honorius did not mention the particular doctrine for which it was being banned, the *Periphyseon* may have been proscribed for reasons other than pantheism, for example the creative dimension to Eriugena's second division of Nature. Paulo Lucentini argued that the banning of the *Periphyseon* may not have been connected directly with the Amaurician heresy. Nevertheless, it is sad for posterity that the *Periphyseon* became associated with heretical doctrine, although it is noteworthy that the author himself was not condemned.[115]

In a most welcome development, Eriugena was exonerated by Pope Benedict XVI, and his theology recommended to theologians.[116] Pope Benedict declared that, although his

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[114] *Non est igitur mirum, si libellus hic, ante 300 circiter editus, et magnum concilium nuper celebratum evasit et hoc anno dampnationem incurrit propter novos Albigenses et falsos theologos, qui verba forsitan suo tempore prolata et antiquis simpliciter intellecta, male intelligendo pervertebant et ex eis suam haeresim confirmabant*. Albéric des Trois Fontaines, "Chronica Albrici Monachi Trium Fontium," 890.

[115] The *Periphyseon* was placed on the Vatican's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* following Thomas Gale's printed edition in 1681. It remained there until the *Index* itself was abolished in 1966 by Pope Paul VI.

[116] Benedict XVI, Address on John Scottus Erigena to a general audience in St Peter's Square, 10 June 2009. See "Benedict XVI Assesses Eriugena", appendix to *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Guiu, 454–457. Benedict refers to the *Periphyseon* and also the *Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem* when he states that Eriugena "continues to develop stimulating theological and spiritual reflections, which could suggest an interesting furthering of knowledge also to contemporary theologians."

works sometimes appeared to manifest "a pantheistic vision," in fact "his personal subjective intentions were always orthodox."[117] In particular, the Pope highlights the inseparable bond between faith and theology in Eriugena's works, and the Irishman's maxim that true religion is true philosophy. Reviewing Eriugena's reading of Scripture, he notes that the hermeneutical exercise "consists in cultivating constant readiness for conversion. Indeed, to acquire an in-depth vision of the text it is necessary to progress at the same time in conversion of the heart and in the conceptual analysis of the biblical passage."[118]

The condemnation of the *Periphyseon* ought to be understood in the context of the dangers of thirteenth-century heretical movements, against which Church authorities in Paris and Rome acted to hinder their spread and development. This study has endeavoured to find a pantheistic vision in the content of the work, considered in itself as speculative theology, but has not found such a vision. It also determines that the tenuous link between the Amaurician heresy and the work of Eriugena reflects poorly and erroneously on the latter, and that the proper source of that heresy can be regarded to originate more properly with Amaury himself. The Amauricians espoused a form of heresy which the author of the *Periphyseon* had repeatedly rejected, i.e. that God can be 'whole and part' of the physical world.

Studies in Eriugena's theology have gained pace in more recent times, but there is still ground to be made up in the wider acceptance of it. In the Church's eagerness to combat the heresies of the thirteenth century, Eriugena emerged on the wrong side: his work was tarred with the same brush as the Amauricians, resulting in the rejection of a theological work that might otherwise have had a much more significant influence on later medieval philosophy. Remarkable for the poetry of its language, the boldness of its speculative reasoning, the synthesis of its sources, and the scope of its vision, the *Periphyseon* was

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[117] "Benedict XVI Assesses Eriugena," 455.

[118] Ibid., 456.

pushed to the periphery of the philosophical canon where it remained, for the best part of a thousand years, to languish in relative obscurity.

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