

AN OFFPRINT FROM

The  
Relationship  
between  
Neoplatonism and  
Christianity

*edited by*

THOMAS FINAN  
and  
VINCENT TWOMEY

WITH A FOREWORD BY JOHN J. O'MEARA

1992



FOUR COURTS PRESS

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Four Courts Press, Kill Lane, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland.  
*In America:* International Specialized Book Services, 5602 NE  
Hassalo St, Portland, OR 97213.

# Origen and Eriugena: Aspects of Christian Gnosis

DERMOT MORAN

In this paper Eriugena's use of Origen will be examined in order to shed light on the influence of the Alexandrian author on the ninth-century Irishman. It will emerge that Origen's influence on Eriugena centres on the account of the resurrection and return of the human being to the divine. As Origen's influence appears mainly in Books IV and V of the *Periphyseon*, all results are provisional until such time as the critical edition of these books has been published.

In order to clear the way for an examination of the points of contact between the Alexandrian philosopher and theologian, Origen (c.185–255 AD), and the ninth-century Irish philosopher, Johannes Eriugena (c.800–877 AD), the exact nature of their historical contact must be examined. First, I should like to comment briefly on some links which have created confusion during the Middle Ages. These confusions relate to the similar-sounding titles: Περὶ ἀρχῶν and Περὶ φύσεων (Latin: *Periphyseon*); and the similar-sounding names: Origen and Eriugena.

## 1. A CONFUSION OF TITLES AND NAMES

Concerning the title, *Periphyseon*, Cappuyns points out that a work of this title was included among the dubious works of Origen by Bardenhewer,<sup>1</sup> who himself is dependent on the *Scholia veterum patrum* of Victor of Capua, which includes a fragment bearing the legend *Victor episcopus Capuae ex libro tertio Origenis ΠΕΡΙ ΦΥΣΕΩΝ* (sic).<sup>2</sup> Cappuyns points out that the manuscript in question is from the 10th century and probably was inspired by a recent work of Eriugena (“inspirée par le souvenir récent de l'ouvrage d'Érigène”)—the *Periphyseon*.<sup>3</sup> The

1 O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 2nd ed., Freiburg im Breisgau, 1914, ii, 184.

2 M. Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*, Louvain, 1933, 185 n.1.

3 Cappuyns, 185 n.1.

question remains, however, whether Eriugena was deliberately evoking the memory of Origen's *Περὶ ἀρχῶν*, by calling his work, *Περὶ φύσεων*. Cappuyns believes that he was, and indeed I believe the supposition to be correct. Eriugena did know the title of Origen's work since he refers to it at *Periphyseon* V 929a as *Περὶ ἀρχῶν* in Greek. This is typical of Eriugena who likes to display a knowledge of the original Greek terms.

During the Middle Ages also the names of Origen and Eriugena came to be continually confused with one another. This confusion, Cappuyns suggests, is the reason why the *Homilia (Vox spiritualis)* of Eriugena was frequently mistaken for a work by Origen; indeed the *Homilia* is collected as an authentic work of Origen in the Paris 1516 edition of his *Opera*. Cappuyns says that the earliest manuscript of the *Homilia*, bearing the name of Origen as author, dates from the 12th century. The manuscript Troyes 890 bears the title *Tractatus Origenis super Iohannem*. Cappuyns concludes that the name "Origen" here is a corruption of "Eriugena". Jauneau, however, in his edition of the *Homilia*, is unconvinced. He argues that it is not a question of mistaking the word "Origen" for "Eriugena" but of mistaking the genitive "Origenis" for "Eriugena" or "Eriugene", which is most unlikely.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the name "Eriugena", which Johannes Scottus used for signing his translations of Dionysius, did not become current until the seventeenth century, whereas the name "Origen" for the authorship of the work dates from the twelfth century. Jauneau concludes that we simply have no idea how the confusion took place, but rules out the attribution of the *Homilia* to Origen as chronologically impossible, given the references to Arians and other later Christian movements in the text. Jauneau feels that since Dionysius the Areopagite is referred to in the text, it may have suited those who wished to argue for the authenticity of Dionysius as a disciple of Paul to have this homily date from the 2nd century AD! As we shall see, the close similarities between Origen and Eriugena on points of doctrine may be the best reason as to why the two authors were confused during the later Middle Ages. Of course, Origen was frequently credited with the authorship of manuscripts on the most diverse themes during the Middle Ages.

## 2. THE INFLUENCE OF ORIGEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES

As Origen had been declared anathema by the Edict of Justinian in 543, and again at the Council of Constantinople in 553,<sup>5</sup> it is frequently

4 E. Jauneau, Jean Scot. Homélie sur le Prologue de Jean, SC 151, Paris, 1969, 56 n.2.

5 The texts of the declarations of 543 and 553 are printed in H. Gorgemanns and H. Karpp, eds., *Origenes, Vier Bücher von den Prinzipien*, Darmstadt, 1976, 822–31.

assumed that Origen did not have much influence on the Latin West during the Middle Ages except through the translations and sympathetic editing of Rufinus (though authorities allow that he did have significantly more influence on the Christian East and especially on Photius, who is particularly significant in terms of the survival of the text of Origen).<sup>6</sup> The real revival of Origen is thought to have come during the period of Italian Humanism, with Pico della Mirandola at the end of the fourteenth, and Erasmus in the fifteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, however, claims that Origen is omnipresent in Christian thought.<sup>8</sup>

If it is true that Aquinas and many of the writers of the high Middle Ages had little time for Origen, this is certainly not accurate for the period leading up to the twelfth century, nor indeed among writers of the Cistercian tradition. St Bernard, Isaac of Stella and Aelred of Rievaulx all admired Origen and made use of the *De principiis* as well as the homilies. Origen was always revered as a great authority in matters of Scripture, as is evidenced by Henri de Lubac in his study of the levels of interpretation in medieval exegesis, which owe an enormous debt to Origen's formulations.<sup>9</sup> Origen is the source for an enormous amount of the medieval interpretations of Old Testament and New Testament events, especially the allegorical interpretations.

The ninth century in particular witnessed a strong interest in Origen. In the words of de Lubac, "un renouveau origénien" took place during the Carolingian renaissance. Alcuin, Sedulius Scottus, Pascasius Radbertus, Hincmar, Gottschalk and Hrabanus Maurus all cited Origen frequently and with an easy familiarity, and did not seem at all perturbed about his questionable orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup> Johannes Scottus

6 See Gustave Bardy, *Recherches sur l'histoire du texte et des versions latines du De principiis d'Origène*, Paris, 1923. Rufinus in his prologue to the *De principiis* refers to the *de principiis vel de principatibus*. Rufinus defended his editing of Origen by claiming that the text had been adulterated. He believed that Origen could not have contradicted himself, so he excised passages which appeared to do so. He also cleared up what he regarded as obscurities in the text. According to Bardy, 120–1, Rufinus had no philosophical training and does not translate technical philosophical terms in a consistent manner. In many cases Rufinus merely presents a synopsis of Origen's views.

7 On Pico's interest see H. Crouzel, "Pic de Mirandole et Origène," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 66 (1965) 81–106. On Erasmus, see A. Godin, *Erasmus lecteur d'Origène*, Geneva, 1982. The *De principiis* was first published in a printed edition in 1512.

8 H. U. von Balthasar, *Origen: Spirit and Fire*, trans. R.J. Daly, Washington, D.C., 1984, 3–5.

9 H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale I*, Paris, 1959, 198–238.

10 Hrabanus Maurus cites Origen's Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans three times in a letter to Hincmar, *Epistola* 44, MGH, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi*, Tom. III, 493–4, concerning the errors of Gottschalk. Sedulius Scottus copies large sections of the same commentary in his own work on St. Paul, *In Rom.*, PL 103, 124d.

Eriugena not only cited a long passage from Origen's *De principiis* but also praised him generally both as the greatest scriptural commentator and as a most subtle investigator into the nature of things. Indeed Eriugena's interest in Origen is remarkable, and has escaped notice only because of the Irishman's more obvious interest in Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocians, and of course Maximus Confessor. Despite the lack of direct contact, Eriugena manages to weave Origen into the list of great Christian authorities who support his position on the outgoing and return of all things.

Writers of the Middle Ages knew that Origen had strayed into heresy and—according to his condemnations—was in error on many major points of Catholic doctrine. These errors were well publicized, yet Origen was also revered as a great scriptural commentator and even cited with approval in official documents of Church councils in the ninth century. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that, if we leave Augustine to one side, Origen is the most important Christian philosopher of the patristic period. Origen's influence on Augustine too is significant; he was the Greek writer whom Augustine knew best.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Origen is cited by Jerome, Isidore, and many other patristic writers. Origen then is an ambiguous figure, the focus of both approbation and blame. Eriugena himself, already in the 850s, had been derogatorily called an Origenist as a result of his treatise *De divina praedestinatione*. Prudentius of Troyes on two occasions refers to the heresy of Origen in connection with Eriugena, accusing the Irishman of Pelagianism, Collyridianism, and of the *amentia Origenis*.<sup>12</sup> Eriugena nevertheless seems oblivious to the intended insult and even goes on to cite Origen as a great authority, championing him against Epiphanius in the *Periphyseon*. As de Lubac points out, a tendency to praise Origen and also to blame him were both equally present in Latin authors from the beginning of Origen's influence in the West. Normally the praise and the blame were portioned out along the lines suggested by Jerome—he praised the apostle and the commentator, not the philosopher or theologian. Eriugena is an exception here in that he specifically praises Origen as an inquirer into things (*inquisitor rerum*), that is, as a natural philosopher or cosmologist, a student of *physis*. Eriugena clearly recognises that Origen had a philosophical system and had insights into the very principles governing nature itself, insights which Eriugena is merely elaborating.

11 According to de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, I 213 n.7, Augustine appears to have known the *De principiis* in the translation of Jerome.

12 Prudentius of Troyes, prefatory letter to Guenilon, dated 851 in PL CXV 1011a, reprinted in M. Brennan, "Materials for the Biography of Johannes Scotus Eriugena," *Studi Medievali*, 3a Serie, XXVII, I (1986) 422, translation, 424.

## 3. ERIUGENA AND ORIGEN: THE POINTS OF CONTACT

Could Eriugena have been familiar with the Greek works of Origen at first hand? Cappuyns in his classic study of Eriugena is confident that, as an Irishman educated in the Irish monastic schools, Eriugena would have had access to Origen in the original.<sup>13</sup> Origen was frequently cited in Irish compilations—Vinnian and Cummian among others—and it is known that Origen was popular among Irish scriptural commentators.<sup>14</sup> If Eriugena's educational formation took place in Ireland, as has been frequently postulated (and without good reasons to the contrary) then it must be assumed that he knew at least some excerpts of Origen. There is considerable evidence for a knowledge of Origen in Ireland in the seventh and eighth centuries. If, on the other hand, Eriugena was educated largely on the European mainland, then his knowledge of Origen would have to be measured against that of the other Carolingian writers, to see if there is a common stock of Origenist texts or citations which were current at the time. Here we may point to the influence of the homilies, the *Commentary on Romans* and the existence of ninth-century copies of Rufinus' translation of *De principiis*.

Summing up the influence of the Fathers on Eriugena, Cappuyns is confident about the role of Origen in Eriugena's formation: "Jean Scot s'inspire avant tout d'Origène, d'Ambroise, de Grégoire de Nysse, du Pseudo-Denys, de Maxime. . . ."<sup>15</sup> Origen takes first place! Again, Cappuyns notes that critics have often placed Eriugena in a common tradition stemming from Origen and Plotinus.<sup>16</sup> Let us briefly re-examine Cappuyns' claim.

Could Eriugena have known the actual Greek texts of Origen? This is most unlikely given our current knowledge of the manuscript tradition. He could, however, have known some of the Latin translations of Rufinus either directly or in other compilations now lost. The manuscript containing Eriugena's translation of the *Ambigua* of Maximus Confessor, Paris Mazarine 561, has on folio 219v, a list which is entitled "Bibli Vulfadi". This is a catalogue of 30 "bibli" or codices belonging to the Carolingian abbot Wulfad, to whom Eriugena refers as his *cooperator in studiis* and to whom the *Periphyseon* is dedicated. Items nine and ten in this list are works of Origen:

9. *Origenis. In epistulis pauli ad romanos*

13 M. Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*, Louvain, 1933, 27–8.

14 *Ibid.*, 28.

15 *Ibid.*, 216.

16 *Ibid.*, 267.

10. *item. in genesi. In exodo.  
in leuitico. in lucam  
in ihesum filium navue. [sic]*

This catalogue makes clear that many of Origen's texts were available to scholars in Carolingian France, and that such works were in Eriugena's circle.<sup>17</sup> De Lubac says that the routes of Origen's influence in the West remain obscure but are nevertheless observable.<sup>18</sup> In fact we may say that there was an Origenist renewal in the 9th century although few manuscripts survive from before the 11th century. Origen's works were known in the libraries of Laon, Reichenau and other areas which Eriugena is known to have frequented. De Lubac tells us that the prior of the Abbey of St. Gall, Harmut († c. 895) copied the *Commentary on the Romans* in the 9th century. These facts lend support to the belief that Eriugena knew a reasonable amount of the Origenian corpus in its Latin translation.

Eriugena, in the *Periphyseon*, explicitly refers by name to only two works by Origen: the *De principiis* and the *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*. His citations are such that it is highly likely that he was familiar with portions of the actual text of these works in the Latin translation of Rufinus.

In the *Periphyseon* Eriugena refers to the Latin translation of Origen's *De principiis* and quotes a passage from it, in fact a rather short section of that work (Book III 6, 2–5). Did Eriugena have direct access to the whole Latin text? The editors of the critical text of the *De principiis* are extremely cautious about the possibility of any direct contact with the text:

The whole of the Middle Ages knew his teaching almost entirely from the general school tradition and from comments of others. Not even for Scottus Eriugena, who cites the *Peri archon* literally, can it be said with certainty that he acquired his knowledge of Origen without mediation.<sup>19</sup>

I think the editors are over-cautious here. Clearly Eriugena had access to a good version of the text—perhaps not the complete work, but very definitely a good excerpt from it.

In his edition of the *Commentarius* Jeauneau suggests that Eriugena's interpretation of the Greek term ἀνωθεν as having a double meaning "from above" (*desursum*) or "anew" (*denuo*), at *Commentarius* III 1, 315a,

17 See M. Cappuyns, "Les 'Bibli Vulfadi' et Jean Scot Erigène," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 33 (1966) 137–9.

18 H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, Vol. 1.1, 1959, 198–304

19 H. Görgemanns and H. Karpp, eds., *Origenes, Vier Bücher von den Prinzipien*, Darmstadt, 1976, 28. My translation.



comes from Origen's *Commentary on Romans* V 8 (PG 14, 1038a–c).<sup>20</sup> Eriugena is commenting on Jesus' words "I say to you no one who is not born anew will see the kingdom of God" (*amen, amen, dico tibi, nisi quis natus fuerit denuo, non potest videre regnum dei*, John 3:3; *Commentarius* 315a). Eriugena comments that in the Greek manuscripts (*in codicibus grecorum*), the word ἄνωθεν is found whereas in the Latin codices *denuo* is used. ἄνωθεν means "from above" (*desursum*); *denuo* means "anew". Eriugena accepts both meanings because for him they convey the notion of two births (*duae nativitates*, 315b)—one terrestrial, the other celestial. Here Eriugena is invoking Augustine's notions of a double nativity as expressed in his *Commentary on John*, tract. XI 6.<sup>21</sup> Man is born again from above in a celestial birth, but he is also born again on earth. In a typical move, he then goes on to invoke the four nativities of Gregory Nazianzen as recounted in the *Ambigua* of Maximus Confessor.<sup>22</sup> This is linked to the cosmic cycle whereby humans are created from nothing by God in the divine image, are divided into sexes through sin, are restored through grace to their spiritual essences and then through grace and nature acting simultaneously they are returned into the eternal life. Eriugena hangs all of this on a single word *denuo* in the Latin text. It is unlikely that he drew the two meanings of ἄνωθεν from his own knowledge of Greek. The meanings are already expressed by Origen (the Greek word appears in the translation of Rufinus) in his *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*:

Quod enim nos latini habemus "denuo", Graeci ἄνωθεν dicunt, qui sermo utrumque significat, et "denuo" et "de superioribus". In hoc ergo loco, quia qui baptizatur a Iesu in spiritu sancto baptizatur, non ita "denuo" dicitur, ut "de superioribus" intelligi conueniat. Nam "denuo" dicimus, cum eadem quae gesta sunt repetuntur. Hic autem non eadem nativitas repetitur vel iteratur sed, terrena hac omissa, de superioribus suscipitur noua nativitas.<sup>23</sup>

It is evident that Eriugena is relying on Origen here, and it would appear that he has direct familiarity with Rufinus' translation which

20 E. Jeuneau, Jean Scot. Commentaire sur l'Évangile de Jean, SC 180, Paris, 1972, 201–3.

21 Augustine, In Iohannis evangelium, XI 6, CCCL 36, 114; PL 35, 1478.

22 The four births are: the creation of man in the image of God; the division of human nature into two sexes after the Fall; the rebirth of humans according to the Spirit; the resurrection of all things into eternal life. Eriugena sees the four births as following this pattern: the first is according to nature, *naturalis*; the second is due to sin, *propter peccatum*; the third is according to grace, *per gratiam*; and the fourth is due to the combination of nature and grace, *secundum naturam simul et gratiam*.

23 PG 14, 1038 b.

itself contains the Greek term. It is most unlikely that he knew anything of the Greek text itself, but again he is able to glean a considerable amount of information about Origen on the basis of very little.

Cappuyns and Jauneau both acknowledge that Eriugena's *Commentarius* carries many echoes of Origen without actually naming him and that Origen stimulated the Irishman to ever more spiritual levels of exegesis. It is highly likely that Eriugena had consulted the ten books of the *Commentary*.<sup>24</sup> Eriugena always prefers the spiritual meaning to the "carnal"; the intelligible to the sensible or historical meaning.

One piece of evidence which might mislead readers into thinking that Eriugena knew something of the Greek text is that he occasionally makes use of Greek terms in his discussion of Origen. We have cited the case of ἄνωθεν. At *Periphyseon* IV 815c Eriugena is aware of Origen's thesis that the Fall is a descent from νοῦς into αἴσθησις and here Eriugena makes use of the Greek terms. He is, however, quoting Ambrose's *De paradiso*, where the Greek terms are to be found in the Latin text, so once again there is no reason to assume he had the Greek text of Origen in mind. Of course Eriugena would have been aware of the strong Origenist influence in Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose and Maximus, and may just be inserting his own knowledge of Greek here, but we may at least raise the suspicion that Eriugena had some exposure to a Greek text of Origen, perhaps cited in another author. Could Eriugena have known the *Philokalia*? There is no direct evidence here, and in fact the number of citations from Origen's *De principiis* are but two (Book III 1 and Book IV 1,1-3), neither of which is ever used by Eriugena. We may tentatively conclude therefore that he had no access to the *Philokalia*.

#### 4. ERIUGENA'S REFERENCES TO ORIGEN

Let us examine Eriugena's references to Origen in more detail. His actual references to Origen are few in number, occurring in the Fourth and Fifth Books of the *Periphyseon*, the books which deal with the return of all things to the One. Origen is referred to as "blessed

24 See Jauneau, *Commentaire*, SC 180, 2, n.36; Jauneau claims that *Commentarius* VI 5. 345b, where Eriugena explains the meaning of *symbola*, echoes Princ. IV 2, 9; *Commentarius* VI 6, 345d which distinguishes between the spiritual readers and the *carnales* who read the letter is reminiscent of Princ. IV 2, 4. See also *Commentaire*, 140 n.16; 281 n.4; 287 n.3. For Origen's influence on Eriugena's exegetical method, see T. Gregory, *Tre Studi*, Florence, 1963, 58-82.

Origen" and as "great Origen", (*magnum Origenem*, V 929a),<sup>25</sup> which de Lubac tells us was a common title for Origen.<sup>26</sup> He is also referred to as *diligentissimus rerum inquisitor*, a term which suggests Eriugena's appreciation of him as metaphysician and seer into the nature of things.

The texts to which Eriugena refers are the *Περὶ ἀρχῶν* (at V 929a) and the *Liber in epistolam ad Romanos* (V 922c), works drawn from both ends of Origen's rich life. It is generally assumed that the *Περὶ ἀρχῶν* is an early work and the *Liber in epistolam ad Romanos* was written when Origen was over sixty. Both had been translated and summarised by Rufinus.

Eriugena refers to the *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans* at *Periphyseon* V 922c in the context of a commentary on the meaning of the Pauline words "ye shall be as gods and sons of Him who is on high."<sup>27</sup> Origen's view is that God will destroy man and refashion him again as a god, and Eriugena uses the opportunity to argue that man's destiny is more than the restoration of its former perfection, since it really involves a self-transcendence which will reunite humans with God in deification. All humans are one with God in the image: "For if the Divinity in Whose Image humanity is created is one and indivisible, it must follow that the latter also is indivisible, and that all men without exception are one in it" (V 922b). It is at this point that Eriugena invokes the "blessed Origen" as one of the Holy Fathers with authority in these matters. Origen holds that all men without exception will be reunited with God in the return, and Eriugena agrees. This doctrine of the restoration of all was condemned in Origen yet Eriugena evokes it as a magnificent authoritative truth.

In *Periphyseon* Book IV Origen is named three times: at IV 815c, 818b-d, and 832d. At IV 815c Eriugena is discussing Ambrose's treatise *De paradiso* and its theory that there are two paradises. Eriugena quotes Ambrose as saying that into paradise God placed not man as made in the image of God (*secundum imaginem Dei*) but man in

25 References to the *Periphyseon* will be given as follows: for Books One, Two and Three the editions are *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, for Books Four and Five, the text in PL 122; the English translation is that of J.P. Sheldon-Williams, edited by J.J. O'Meara, Montreal, 1987.

26 De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, I, Paris, 1959, 241 n.7.

27 Aside from extensive Greek fragments of Origen's *Commentary* which were discovered at Toura (see Jean Scherer, *Le commentaire d'Origène sur Rom. III.5-V.7 d'après les extraits du papyrus No. 88748 du Musée du Caire, Cairo, 1957*), the work is known only in Rufinus' translation; see PG 14, 925c-926a. Actually Origen explicitly rejects the conversion of the Devil in this text, PG 14, 1185b, nevertheless Origen was accused of preaching this doctrine, and indeed Eriugena quotes him on the notion that the Devil is not evil in substance but only in will.

the corporeal bodily sense (*secundum corpus*), because "that which is incorporeal cannot be in a place (*incorporalis non in loco est*)."<sup>28</sup> Eriugena reports that Ambrose says a little later in the text that the spiritual paradise is human nature itself.<sup>29</sup> Eriugena comments, saying that Ambrose is "wholly indebted to Origen, although he does not specifically refer to him", and he goes on to cite a passage (*De paradiso*, II 11) which indeed has the Origenian distinction between αἰσθησις and νοῦς. The passage explains the manner in which the "masculine" νοῦς<sup>30</sup> has been misled by the "feminine" αἰσθησις. In the original text of the *De paradiso* Ambrose refers simply to "one who was before our time" (*ante nos fuit*). Eriugena, on the other hand, identifies this unnamed authority as Origen. This might suggest that Eriugena might have had some independent knowledge of the writings and thought of Origen, as Origen is nowhere named in Ambrose's *De paradiso*. It seems impossible to give absolute assurance, however, that Eriugena had access to any of Origen's own writings on the nature of resurrection and of paradise. Jeauneau, commenting on this passage, says that Ambrose is actually thinking of Philo—though the explanation is also taken up later by Origen.<sup>31</sup> Why does Eriugena assume that the authority is Origen unless he has some independent confirmation that Origen also held such a view? It seems as though we must postulate that Eriugena had access to Origen's homily on Genesis which is listed in the *Bibli Vulfadi*.

It is clear that Eriugena here—as in the *Commentarius*—is associating Origen with a doctrine of two states of man—the earthly and the paradisaical, and sees one as a corruption of the other. Eriugena knows that Origen is the source of the thought that the original human being is a pure spirit, a pure mind.

At IV 818b Origen is called "the supreme commentator on Scripture" (*summus sanctae Scripturae expositor*) and is reported as saying that paradise was in the third heaven (*in tertio caelo*) of St. Paul and thus was spiritual. Eriugena agrees with Origen. The context is a discussion—deriving from Augustine—as to whether paradise is to be

28 Periphyseon IV 815b. See Ambrose, *De paradiso*, I, 5, CSEL 32.1, 267, translated by J. Savage in *Saint Ambrose. Hexaëmeron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, The Fathers of The Church, Volume 42, New York, 1961, 289.

29 *De paradiso*, II 2–3, 12, in *Saint Ambrose*, op. cit., 293–4.

30 The whole passage has many Gnostic echoes.

31 E. Jeauneau, "La division des sexes chez Grégoire de Nyssa et chez Jean Scot Erigène," in W. Beierwaltes, ed., *Eriugena. Studien zu seinen Quellen*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980, 49 n.84. Jeauneau says the interpretation of Adam and Eve as *nous* and *aisthesis* comes from Philo, *De opificio mundi* 165. It is also found in Origen, *Homily on Genesis* I 15; IV 4; SC 7, 85 and 129; and in *Homily on Exodus*, SC 16, 93 and 268. Jeauneau refers to H. Savon, *Saint Ambroise devant l'exégèse de Philon le Juif*, Paris, 1977.

considered a local place or is to be thought of as a spiritual state.<sup>32</sup> Eriugena says it is not his intention to quarrel with those who believe there are two paradises, "the one spiritual, the other corporeal, answering to the double nature of man" (*propter duplicem hominis naturam*, 818a). His reason is that scriptural accounts may be read in both a "historical" and in a "spiritual" way. For Eriugena the corporeal is a "symbol of the spiritual" (IV 818b). He then invokes Origen:

And we know that Origen, that supreme commentator of Scripture, declares that Paradise is nowhere and nothing else than that which is established, as he says, in the Third Heaven, into which St. Paul was rapt. But if it is in the Third Heaven, then it is certainly spiritual. For the spiritual nature of the Third Heaven into which St. Paul was rapt is not doubted by the best authors in either tongue: for they all agree in calling it intellectual (*illud intellectuale vocantes*).<sup>33</sup>

Here Eriugena uses Origen to clinch an argument between the Latin and the Greek Fathers, and cleverly interposes the authority of St. Paul to finish the discussion. In this section of Book IV Eriugena has been protesting that he does not intend to set the authorities against one another. But in fact he marshals his sources so that Ambrose, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa all agree that paradise is intellectual, and so also does Augustine according to Eriugena's interpretation of passages in the *De civitate Dei* (XIV 11) and in *De vera religione*.<sup>34</sup> The authority who is left out on a limb is Epiphanius, who holds that paradise is corporeal and on earth—in fact, the common view of paradise in medieval times.<sup>35</sup>

Immediately following, at IV 818c, the context is the discussion of the kinds of bodies which humans will have in paradise. Epiphanius is cited as reproving Origen for holding the view that the "tunics of skin" of Genesis 3: 21 signify the mortal bodies put on by humans after the Fall. Origen sees the phrase as a figure (*figura*); Epiphanius thinks that these tunics of skin must be understood literally (*historialiter*, 818c). Eriugena says that most Greek and Latin *auctores* on the other hand follow Origen in his interpretation, and he praises

32 Augustine raises the question in his *De Genesi ad litteram*, Book VIII 1, 1; Eriugena quotes from this text at IV 814b.

33 Periphyseon IV 818b–c, Sheldon-Williams' translation.

34 Periphyseon IV 814b–d. Eriugena is clearly distorting Augustine's words. Augustine is not arguing that there are two paradises—one corporeal and the other spiritual, but rather that paradise must be at least corporeal and spiritual to truly cater for human beings; see B. Stock, *The Philosophical Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, *Studi Medievali*, ser. 3a, 8, 1967, 28–32.

35 See for example Honorius Augustodunensis' *De imagine mundi*.

Origen's "most beautiful and most true" (*pulcherrime atque verissime*) allegory. Eriugena holds with those who say that paradise is a spiritual place with spiritual beings and he is not in sympathy with authors such as Epiphanius who offer the prosaic explanation that the garments of skin were made from sheep's wool, which sheep were found in paradise before the Fall! The reference here is positive: Eriugena is in agreement with Origen, praising it as a very fine and truthful allegory. Summing up at IV 832d, Eriugena says that Ambrose confirms the doctrine of Origen and weakens the theory of Epiphanius (*sensum Origenis approbat, Epiphaniū autem infirmat*):

For Origen maintains that Paradise is in the Third Heaven, which is the intellectual heaven, that is, in man himself as Mind (IV 832d–833a).<sup>36</sup>

Compare Origen's own account of heaven in his first *Homily on Genesis* (which Eriugena does not cite):

For since everything which God was to make would consist of spirit and body, for that reason heaven, that is, all spiritual substance upon which God rests as on a kind of throne or seat, is said to be made "in the beginning" and before everything. But this heaven, that is, the firmament, is corporeal. And therefore, that first heaven indeed, which we said is spiritual, is our mind, which is also itself spirit, that is, our spiritual man which sees and perceives God. But that corporeal heaven, which is called firmament, is our outer man which looks at things in a corporeal way.<sup>37</sup>

Origen believes that heaven is to be understood as the mind (νοῦς) or as the inner spiritual man, taking his terminology from St. Paul, 1 Cor 15: 47. Was Eriugena familiar with Origen's thoughts on the nature of paradise from his reading of Ambrose's *De paradiso*? Or from some other textbook (such as Maximus' *Ambigua* for example), or from reading Origen's *Homily on Genesis* and *De principiis* in the translation of Rufinus?

Origen discusses the nature of the bodies which humans will have after the resurrection of the dead in the *De principiis* II 10, 1–4.<sup>38</sup> Commenting on Paul, 1 Cor 15: 44, Origen argues that most people have too low an understanding of the meaning of the spiritual

36 *Origenis siquidem paradisum, in tertio caelo, quod est intellectuale, hoc est in ipso homine, quantum intellectus est asserit esse.* PL 122, 832d–33a.

37 Homily I in Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, translated by Ronald E. Heine, *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 71, Washington, D.C., 1982, 49.

resurrected body. For Origen it seems absurd that this body will be of flesh and blood, rather it will be changed and transformed.<sup>39</sup> Elsewhere Origen distinguishes between the material body (σῶμα ὑλικόν) and the spiritual body (σῶμα πνευματικόν). Humans progress from one body to the other. In the *De principiis* Origen offers the image of a seed which when sown must die and be transformed in order that the new life emerge. Origen maintains that the body possesses a certain "principle" (*insita ratio*, *De principiis* II 10, 3; λόγος, also in *Contra Celsum*, V 23) or "seminal reason" which is not corrupted and which survives in the new state.<sup>40</sup> In general, Origen refers to the body as the garment of the soul, and sees this as changeable depending on the location of the soul—the soul needs a garment suitable to it. Eriugena makes use of the notion of a seminal reason—drawn partly from Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* and also from Maximus' *Ambigua*.<sup>41</sup> For Eriugena these seminal reasons mediate between the universal primary causes and the individual effects (see for example Book V 887a). Clearly Origen had difficulties expressing the precise nature of this spiritual body and was reproved by Jerome, Methodius and others for misunderstanding the Resurrection. Eriugena, however, holds a view very close to that of Origen. The physical body is transformed into the spiritual body, the whole body is absorbed into the whole soul (V 880a). Following Maximus, Eriugena says that the soul and body will be unified without destroying their individual natures, but he is clearly more comfortable with the idea of a spiritualization of the physical and a dropping away of the carnal, so that human beings will become minds contemplating the divine One. Alumnus, in the dialogue, is unhappy with what he regards as two different explanations being given by Nutritor. On the one hand, it is asserted that humans after the Resurrection will have both souls and spiritual bodies; on the other hand, it is asserted that body will be absorbed into soul, and soul into mind. Alumnus has put his finger on the difference between the Latin and the Greek authors. He cites Ambrose (for

38 Görgemanns and Karpp, 419–431.

39 See also Origen, *Contra Celsum* V 17–19, trans. by H. Chadwick, Cambridge, 1965, 277–279.

40 See H. Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus and the Resurrection of the Body", *Harvard Theological Review* XLI, 1948, 83–102. Origen refers to the seminal principle (λόγος σπέρματος) of the body at *Contra Celsum* VII 32. See Origène. *Contre Celse*, tome IV (Livres VII et VIII), introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par Marcel Borret, SC 150, Paris, 1969, 84–85, esp. 85 n. 3. See also *Contra Celsum* V 23, 5 and *De principiis* II 10, 3. This echoes the Stoic notion, and also is reminiscent of Eriugena's concept of the *ratio seminalis*. See also René Cadiou, *Introduction au système d'Origène*, Paris, 1932, 120.

41 Augustine at *De Genesi ad litteram* VII 22, 32 refers to the *causales rationes* of a thing.

the Latins) as saying that body, soul and mind will mix or pour together like three types of flour (V 880c), though in fact he acknowledges that the verb "mix" (*confundere*) is inappropriate as the result is an inseparable unity (*inseparabilis unitas*, 880c) and not just a mixture or a composition (*non ut aliqua compositio nostrae naturae*).<sup>42</sup> Alumnus cites Gregory of Nyssa's *De imagine* for the view that the soul shall absorb (*consumere*, V 880b) the whole body into itself, and backs this up with quotations from Maximus. Nutritor answers by arguing that the return preserves natural difference while bringing about a complete unification. He attempts to explain this metaphysically by pointing to the difference between essence, power and act (881b), and backs these up with his famous examples of unification without destruction of the parts—voices in a choir (883d), lights forming a single light, eyes all observing the same golden ball on top of a tower (883a), numbers all contained in the number one (881d) and so on. His view is that one thing may be transformed into another without losing the specificity of its own nature and its own eternal attributes. Eriugena is offering his own version of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, the sublation where entities are absorbed and transformed while somehow retaining their natures. Eriugena here has pinpointed a problem with which Origen also struggled in his attempt to explain the nature of the resurrected body. Origen used the Stoic concept of a seminal principle, a seed which is transformed while retaining the essential properties. Eriugena's answer is similar, though his examples are more diverse.

##### 5. ORIGEN'S ΠΕΡΙ ἈΡΧΩΝ IN *PERIPHYSEON* BOOK V

In Book V 929 Eriugena refers again to Origen, again in the context of the nature of the resurrected life. This time reference is made directly to the Περὶ ἀρχῶν, citing Book III 6, 2–5. The citation is accurate. According to Görgemanns and Karpp in their critical edition of the Περὶ ἀρχῶν, Eriugena appears to have used a manuscript of the γ-family which has some distinctive errors but also a good reading: *modus et mensura* for μέτρον.<sup>43</sup> These readings correspond with the manuscript used by Delarue in his printed edition of 1733. Eriugena obviously used a related manuscript. The editors, however, are reserved about Eriugena's actual knowledge of the Περὶ ἀρχῶν and unable to clarify further Eriugena's relationship to the text. The

42 It is noteworthy how Eriugena reads Ambrose as asserting a complete unity and not just a composition of soul and body. Aquinas' later use of matter and form in the compositum of the human self clearly belongs to another age and view of the problem.

43 "... eine sehr gute Lesart", Görgemanns and Karpp, 283, 20.



passage in question deals with the Pauline claim that God will be all in all (*in omnibus omnia esse*).

The context of Eriugena's discussion in Book V is a debate on the nature of the evil attached to demons. At V 927b Alumnus suggests that demons can never be without the evil that attaches to them, such that even when human nature is restored in the return of all things, the demonic natures will retain their evil natures. Nutritor, on the other hand, cites Augustine and Ambrose to the effect that the evil of demons is not eternal. The natures of demons are eternal but these natures, since they have been created by God, are actually good. First Nutritor quotes from Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* XI 20, 27–28, where Augustine argues that all things in so far as they are created are good, and the evil which is produced in some things is not a consequence of the nature of those things but is rather the result of their evil wills.<sup>44</sup> In the divine cosmic order evil cannot unbalance the good, and so limits are set to the efficacy of evil in this life (V 928a). Nutritor supports this passage of Augustine with a quotation from Ambrose's *Commentary on Luke*, which deals with the demons who are sent into a herd of swine. Ambrose argues that the demons were not sent into the swine but went there of their own free wills because "each is the author of his own punishment" (V 928b). Nutritor then quotes Origen in support of Augustine and Ambrose, lest anyone should think that the devil will be destroyed not only in his evil ways but also in his own nature. Origen is quoted on the nature of the end of the world. Origen is commenting on the scriptural phrase "God shall be all in all." Origen interprets this to mean that even in individuals God will be all things (929a):

Let us ask ourselves what is meant by the "all things" which God shall become in all. My own opinion is that this phrase "God is said to be all things in all things", means that even in individuals (*in singulis*) He is in all things. In individuals (*per singulos*) He will be all things in such a way that whatsoever the rational mind, purged from all filthiness of sin and utterly cleansed from the fog of evil, can either feel or understand or think will be God, nor will that mind behold any more anything else but Him, nor cleave to any but Him, and God will be the mode and measure (*modus et mensura*) of every one of its motions. Thus God will be all things. For there will be no more any distinction (*discretio*) between good and evil because evil will be no more: and in him who no longer has contact with evil God is all things: and he who resides evermore in the Good and for whom God is all things no longer

44 La Genèse au sens littéral en douze livres, VIII–XII, traduction par P. Agaësse et A. Solignac, Oeuvres de Saint Augustin 49, Paris, 1972, 270–3.

shall desire to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Therefore if the end shall be brought back to the beginning, and the outcome of all things shall be related to their origin, He shall restore that condition which the rational nature possessed at the time when it had no need to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so that all sense of evil being removed and converted into purity, God alone, Who is One, will become for it all things, not in few or in many instances but in all, for death will be no more, the sting of death will be no more, evil will be no more at all. Then indeed will God be all in all. (V 929a-c).

Eriugena continues the passage of Origen (from *De principiis*, III 6, 3) by treating again of the meaning of the "spiritual body" (*corpus spirituale*) mentioned by Paul. Some think that God will be all in all only if there is no matter or material body which would interpose itself and block the spiritual movement of the return. Origen, to answer this objection, proposes to deal with the notion of a spiritual body.

As far as I can understand it, I think that the quality of the spiritual body is such as to be a fitting abode not only for all hallowed and perfected souls, but also for the whole creature that is to be liberated from the servitude of corruption. It is of this body also that the Apostle says "We have a dwelling not made with hands, being eternal in the heavens, i.e. in the mansions of the blessed." This gives us an indication of the purity and subtlety and glory of that body compared with those which are now, even the most splendid and heavenly, visible and made with hands. But of the other we are told that it is not made with hands, but is eternal in the heavens. Since, then, those which are visible are temporal whereas those which are invisible are eternal, all these bodies which we behold or can behold on earth and in heaven, and which are made with hands and are not eternal, are far excelled by that which is neither visible nor made with hands but eternal (V 929c-d; original: *De principiis*, III 6, 4).

The passage from Origen continues with an account of how God can transform the visible body into the invisible body (930b). In the return of all things, all things will be brought back to unity and there will be no more diversity, so even the devil will be destroyed. However in the next paragraph Origen explains what he means by this unification—not his substance but his evil will shall perish (V 930c-d). Eriugena understands this text to clear up an ambiguity left in the text of Ambrose. Ambrose was unclear as to whether the demons disappeared in substance as well as in their evil will, whereas

Origen makes it clear that only the evil will disappear. To complete his testimony in this regard Eriugena cites Dionysius the Areopagite as another authority to show that even demons are not evil by nature.

Origen's text is most interesting in that all its themes bear directly on Eriugena's own teaching. Origen understands that there will be a return of all things into complete unity, so that diversity will disappear. Furthermore, this return means that the visible, material body will be drawn up into the spiritual body. Matter, which was present at the beginning in order to assist in the creation of things in their diversity, will cease to have a role in the cosmic process. All these themes find support in Eriugena's own account of the return.

We have now briefly surveyed the textual links between Origen and Eriugena, it is now time to examine the doctrinal links and resemblances.

#### 6. ORIGEN AND ERIUGENA: DOCTRINAL SIMILARITIES

How are we to interpret Origen? A third-century writer whose view of Christianity was undoubtedly deeply affected by the martyrdom of Christians, an exegete who struggled, in Daniélou's view, to catechize the world and especially to fight against heresy ("il n'a jamais voulu être autre chose que le défenseur de la foi contre les hérétiques"), he was according to Daniélou "one of the most perfect incarnations of Christianity for his time."<sup>45</sup> Second-century pagan thought had in general become eclectic and syncretistic—drawing on the East, on the legend of Isis and Osiris, on the astrological and solar cults.<sup>46</sup> Origen, however, was an intellectual, ridiculing these practices. He was more at home in the intellectual world of the ancient Greek philosophers, yet he understood this world through Christian eyes. He was not a convert like Augustine but, according to Eusebius, was born into a staunchly Christian family.<sup>47</sup> For him, everything became intelligible through the Christian vision. In fact he rarely refers to philosophers—except in the *De principiis* and in the late work *Contra Celsum*, where he explicitly wants to marshal pagan wisdom against the pagans.

Origen's attitude to the practice of philosophy is complex and has been a matter of controversy. It is clear that he is not interested in philosophy for its own sake. According to Eusebius, Origen studied the philosophers in order better to be able to understand the minds of the pagans and win them over to Christ. According to Gregory

45 "Toute sa vie, il restera tendu vers le martyre. Et par là, il est une des plus parfaites incarnations du christianisme de son temps," Daniélou, *Origène*, Paris, 1948, 22.

46 Daniélou, 35.

47 Eusebius, *HE*, VI 2, 2–15.

Thaumatargus, Origen urged the study of all philosophical systems but commitment to none because to God and the prophets alone should one adhere.<sup>48</sup> He was anti-Aristotelian and indeed frequently anti-Stoic (although he also borrowed from the Stoics in regard to the seminal reason and the concept of spirit, πνεῦμα, for example). His sympathy is with Plato but it is an admiration with room for criticism.

The Christianity of the Fathers had found a philosophical friend in the writings of Plato. By Origen's day, however, Christianity for the intellectuals had developed a cosmological system of its own, largely borrowed from Middle Platonism. It taught a complete account of the origin and end of the world. Since this system was at many points in agreement with Platonism, Plato was acceptable as a flawed forerunner of Christianity. Whether coming from Plato or Paul (2 Cor 4: 17–18) all Christian Platonists were committed to the view that, as Origen says, "sensible things are temporal and visible, while intelligible things are eternal and invisible."<sup>49</sup> The wise want to contemplate intelligible things. If Origen is to be understood as a Platonist it is as a Pauline Platonist, and we can be absolutely sure that he took his direction from the interpretation of Scripture more than from the Dialogues and the Letters of Plato. Of course Scripture itself is interpreted in a Platonic fashion, seeking an intelligible meaning behind the literal "carnal" meaning, so it is rather simplistic to contrast Plato with Scripture as some writers have done.<sup>50</sup>

Origen makes his position on Plato clear in *Contra Celsum* VI 2.<sup>51</sup> Origen defends the rough style of the Gospels against the overt literariness of Plato's Dialogues, on the grounds that more are persuaded by this practical style than by the style of Plato which is for the few, the sophisticates. Moreover, in agreement with Plato, the true message is not so much in words as in the spark from the heart. For Origen, however, this is carried by spirit and by divine grace which the philosophers lack. Socrates and Plato degrade their message by popular worship of the pagan gods: "Although they had been shown the invisible things of God and the ideas from the creation of the world and the sensible universe, from which they ascend to the intelligible world, and although they finely perceived His eternal power and divinity, nevertheless they became vain in their reasonings; and their senseless heart wallows in darkness and ignorance where

48 Daniélou, 32.

49 *Contra Celsum* VI 20, trans. Chadwick, 333.

50 It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine Origen's complex methods of interpreting Scripture. It is clear however that he had enormous influence on Eriugena in this regard.

51 Chadwick, 316.

the worship of God is concerned" (*Contra Celsum* VI 4).<sup>52</sup> The wise—the pagan philosophers—were in error and therefore God chose the "foolish" to convey his message. Because of Celsus' support for Plato and the Greeks against the Christians, Origen, the Platonist, is cast in the peculiar position of pointing out that Jesus is greater than Plato, while nevertheless defending Plato as a forerunner to the wisdom of Jesus. Origen argued that Plato was inspired by the Old Testament, following traditional Jewish apologetics in claiming that Moses was earlier than either Plato or Homer (*Contra Celsum* VI 7).<sup>53</sup> At VI 19 Origen says that Plato learned from Jews—a theme to be found in Josephus, but also in Justin and Clement.<sup>54</sup> Against Celsus Origen claims that Christians too are exhorted to study dialectic (VI 7). To some, Origen says, it is correct to preach the Gospel and nothing more; others are to be encouraged in their understanding with questions and answers and rational arguments (VI 10).<sup>55</sup>

There seems to be such a complete gap between the world of Origen and that of Eriugena that it seems pointless to attempt a comparison between the two. Origen is writing to defend Christianity against the polemics of Celsus and others. Eriugena is writing within the assumptions of the Christian Carolingian Empire. Nevertheless, there is continuity between these two Christian gnostics. Eriugena also admires Plato (at III 724b he credits Plato as the only philosopher in antiquity to have inferred the existence of God from creation) but is not above criticizing him (at III 732d and IV 762c he criticizes the Platonic understanding of angelic spirits), and says he does not want to be considered a member of the Platonic sect. Eriugena also sees faith as primary, but knows that the inquiring mind of the few will demand higher explanations. For these people proper dialectical argument is necessary.

It has been said both of the *Περὶ ἀρχῶν* and of the *Περὶ φύσεως* that they are the first Christian *Summae*, and in a sense this is true. However, in the manner of Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* and other patristic cosmological texts, they do not state dogmas but rather offer hypotheses and speculations about what is likely to be true. Frequently both Origen and Eriugena give a choice of opinions and leave the decision to the reader (e.g. *De principiis* III 6, 9). All theories which are compatible with the multiple meanings of Scripture are acceptable.

Origen's own thought is more generally known through the condemnations of specific doctrines. It is charged that Origen taught the

52 Chadwick, 318.

53 Chadwick, 320.

54 Chadwick, 332.

55 Chadwick, 324.

pre-existence of the human soul, and the pre-existence of the soul of Christ in God before the Virgin Birth, that the Son of God, the Logos, is all things in all things (a man to humans, a seraph to seraphim), and that all things were equal in Him, that the sun, stars and other heavenly bodies were intelligences and living souls, that Christ was crucified to save not only humans but also demons, that God was not totally omnipotent but that he had created only as much as he could control, that the creation was equally eternal with God, that all things, including the devils, would return to God, and that the bodies of the resurrected are spherical in shape! All these doctrines contravened articles of Catholic teaching, even leaving aside the set of problems connected with the Trinity and Origen's espousal of a hierarchy within the Godhead. Eriugena could not have been unaware of this man's reputation as a heretic, though he never alludes to it. In fact Eriugena has a clear sympathy for most of the positions which drew Origen into controversy. Eriugena too accepts that humans are originally one with God (though he is more subtle about the actual temporal nature of this existence).<sup>56</sup> Eriugena accepts that humans are one with the Logos, that the Logos contains all things and therefore that all things will be saved in the Logos. Eriugena also accepts that in God there was no pre-ordained ontological distinction between human beings, but that these were created by human disobedience and the errant will.<sup>57</sup> Eriugena sees creation as an outgoing from and return to God which takes place timelessly, but which, through the distortion wrought on the cosmological process by the Fall, takes on a temporary/temporal dimension. The goal of humans is unity with the divine, and this unity is in one sense already achieved, since God possesses all things in himself in a timeless manner.

In order to understand these positions we must understand Origen's world-view, as expressed in the *De principiis*. Origen has an undeveloped cosmology which gathers together much that is current in Middle Platonism while foreshadowing the developments of Plotinus and the later Christian Neoplatonists such as Ambrose or Gregory of Nyssa. Let us briefly examine his overall system of the world.

In the beginning (to be understood as origin in a timeless sense) all beings coincided with the Deity and were absorbed in its contemplation. This Deity is beyond understanding and is strictly speaking

56 Eriugena argues that human souls would have been in God had they not sinned. Sin therefore is the first ontological reality for humans, not some ideal state in heaven.

57 Contrary to the Gnostics, Marcion, Basilides and others, who maintained the existence of a cosmic hierarchy of beings before the Fall, both Origen and Eriugena see this hierarchy as a product of the Fall.

incomprehensible and unmeasurable (*incomprehensibilis atque inae-*  
*timabilis*, *Princ.*, I 1, 5). Origen sees God as inexpressible and ulti-  
mately unknowable, in a manner which will later be more radically  
expressed by Plotinus and Dionysius. Nevertheless, this Deity is also  
described in Platonic terms as beyond being, *epekeina tês ousias*. In *De*  
*principiis* I,1 Origen describes God as beyond being, and in I 1, 5 he  
calls him by the Greek terms *Monas* (μονάς) and *Henas* (ένάς, I 1, 6).  
God is without a body. God is pure mind (*mens*, I 1, 5), a simple  
intellectual nature (*intellectualis natura simplex*, I 1, 6) and also spirit  
(πνεῦμα, *spiritus*) and the source from which every intellectual nature  
has its beginning (*mens ac fons ex quo initium totius intellectualis naturae*  
*vel mentis est*).<sup>58</sup> This God is pure Light, in comparison with which the  
sun and the stars are merely participated lights. God's light is so  
brilliant as to dazzle the unreformed mind. As the highest principle,  
its influence spreads furthest, down to the level of unformed matter.

From the One the Son "descends" in a timeless manner which leaves  
it always a second principle, even if it is the seed and source of all  
things.<sup>59</sup> Whereas the Father is oneness itself, the Son is a one which  
includes the many (similar to the *Hen-Panta* of Plotinus). According to  
Origen, the Father gives all things existence, the Son (*Logos*) gives them  
their participation in reason, the Spirit gives them spiritual life. Origen  
does indeed have a hierarchy within this Trinity which attracted much  
theological criticism that need not detain us here.

All things are contained in the *Logos*. Eriugena understands this to  
mean both that the *Logos*-principle is the causal source of all indi-  
vidual things (hence containing the *causae primordiales*) and that the  
*Logos* as Christ actually knows all things completely in his own mind.  
Origen, while not so explicit, would be in agreement. His *Logos* has an  
eternal intellect which exists prior to the Incarnation (IV 4, 5), a  
point which was declared anathema by Justinian (Anathema 4) and  
the Council of Constantinople (Anathema 7). In its pre-existent life  
the Son burns with love, and is so absorbed in it that there is no  
separation (as iron is absorbed in the fire, *De princ.* II 6). In the *Contra*  
*Celsum* (VI 64) Origen speaks of the Son as the being of beings and  
the idea of ideas whereas the Father is above being.<sup>60</sup>

58 Origen's careful efforts to remove the corporeal dimension from God will later  
be repeated by Augustine in the Confessions.

59 The exact nature of the Son's generation from the Father in Origen is  
controversial. The Son remains one with the Father, possessing the same *ousia*,  
nevertheless the Father produces the Son by an act of genesis. See H. Crouzel,  
Origen, 174-5 on the confusion in the meaning of the terms *gignomai* and  
*gennaô*. Origen was misinterpreted as saying that the Son is created. Augustine  
also occasionally slips into speaking of the Son as *factus*, meaning "begotten".

60 Chadwick, 380.

In the Logos are the concepts of both minds and objects: intellects (*noeroi*) and the intelligibles (*noêtoi*). These are the principles of all things. We do not hear Origen speak of these intelligibles in Platonic terms as ideas. Nevertheless these principles function in a manner very similar to Eriugena's *primordiales causae*. Eriugena also makes a distinction between *intellectuales* and *intelligibiles* which is traceable back to Origen. In the original creation all things belong to the intelligible order, if they have bodies then these bodies are drawn from spiritual matter.

The divine being, at least according to the *Περὶ ἀρχῶν*, is not omnipotent but creates the best world it can, namely, a limited, finite world, a world over which it is capable of exercising control. On the other hand, in another passage of the *Περὶ ἀρχῶν* which Eriugena quotes, Origen speaks of omnipotence as being capable of doing everything. It seems probable that Origen had not thought out the consequences of the concept of omnipotence and did not give it the explicit contours which Boethius will later clearly define. He was however much more concerned to allow free will to all rational creatures. The divine mind created all intellectual beings with an absolute freedom of will, and it is this freedom of will which leads to the divergence between created beings. In this sense Daniélou is right to say that Origen's main theme is the contrast between divine Providence and human free-will; the only reason there is multiplicity is because of free-will. There would have been no diversity of beings were it not for their freely chosen paths. God did not make all things different and unequal, this they chose for themselves. Some beings created by God chose to remain in the One—these are the Son, the angels, seraphim, thrones and other intelligences. In the *De principiis* Origen says these unfallen angelic beings remained in the beginning and will remain at the end (I 6.2). Others chose their own world—the Fall of angels and humans. The variety of the present world is a measure of the differences between different Falls (a view which Eriugena will also express though not in such explicit terms). The devils have sunk very low and are at the opposite end of the order (*ordo*) from God, nevertheless because they exist they are good, and in their return they will gradually be purified over a long time until they are made one with the One. What caused the original Fall? Origen is as unclear on this as is Augustine, but he does suggest that a certain *satietas* (*koros*) or surfeit of contemplation led the spiritual intelligences to depart (*Περὶ ἀρχῶν* I 3, 8 and I 4, 1). The Fall is explained as a kind of "cooling off" of love, where the word *psykhê* (*ψυχή*) is said to be etymologically related to the Greek verb for cooling, *psykhesthai* (*ψύχεσθαι*, II 8.3), an etymology which is found also in Plato and Aristotle.<sup>61</sup>



Whatever the reasons for the Fall, it occurred in progressive degrees, and similarly the return must also take place in several stages. Origen does not rule out the possibility that even the blessed angels may yet fall, or that the saved might again slip down the ranks (I 3, 8). There is therefore some textual support for the accusation levelled against Origen that he held a theory of successive redemptions and possibly successive reincarnations. Indeed in the *Contra Celsum* Origen spends a lot of time discussing the Stoic theory of the procession of conflagrations and rebirths of the cosmos. In the *Περὶ ἀρχῶν* he discusses the question in Book II 3, 5 and argues that while Christ did not intervene in previous ages (*aiôn, saeculum*), St. Paul has clearly indicated that there are other ages to come. Did the Fall take place in time or in a pre-temporal order? Is the act of "emanation" of the Word identical with both the creation and the Fall? Origen's answer to these questions is very similar to that of Eriugena. There is no temporal separation between creation and Fall, they seem to be parallel moments of the divine process.

From St. Paul and from the Platonic inheritance Origen recognizes that there are two ontological orders—the temporal order (*temporalia et visibilia*) and the eternal (*aeterna et invisibilia*, I 6, 4). All temporal things are made up of form and matter, and Origen holds that the forms or qualities of each thing may pass away or be supplanted by other forms but the underlying substance (*οὐσία*) is unchanged and indeed is the guarantee that the thing continues to exist at all.

All things other than God require matter. Origen gives some details of the nature of this *materia* in *Contra Celsum* IV 56–58. In *De principiis* I 6, 4 Origen goes further and claims that only God is without matter and that all other things—the eternal intelligences and the temporal things contain matter. In *Contra Celsum* IV 57 Origen says that there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. Matter in itself of course is invisible and has no qualities, hence for Origen it can be a substrate for both the intellectual and the corporeal worlds. That Origen was most concerned with the nature of matter is evident from his remark at *De principiis* IV 4, 5 that he is writing the work "for the benefit of those who set themselves to examine the grounds for belief in our religion, and also for those who stir up heretical arguments against us and are constantly bringing forward the term "matter", the meaning of which even they themselves have not yet succeeded in understanding."<sup>62</sup> Origen is aware of—and vigorously opposed to—the materialism of the Stoics. He notes that the term *matter* appears rarely

61 Butterworth, 124; Górgemanns and Karpp, 392; see Plato, *Cratylus* 399e; Aristotle, *De anima*, I 2, 405b 29.

62 Origen on First Principles, trans. G. W. Butterworth, New York, 1966, 331.

in Scripture (*Princ.* IV 4, 6) and then not with the technical meaning the philosophers give it. Unformed matter is created, even if it is that which underlies all other created things. Origen argues that the four elements and all things come to be out of this prime matter which supports change.

This account will be taken up by Basil and Gregory of Nyssa who themselves will inspire Eriugena's theory that corporeal things are really a commingling of immaterial qualities and *materia informis*. At *Princ.* II 1, 4 Origen claims that the qualities of the four elements (heat, cold, dryness, moistness) together with *hylê* or *materia* ("which matter has an existence in its own right apart from these qualities we have mentioned") produce the different kinds of bodies.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand the true substances of things can be seen with the intellect alone (IV 4, 6). Origen is casual about the relation between matter (*materia, hylê*) and substance (*substantia, hypostasis*), in fact the two terms are somewhat interchangeable in his system. In their true reality they are permanent, invisible and grasped only by the intellect. Eriugena will argue similarly that the fourth level of created nature (unformed matter, or non-being) may also be understood as the infinite Divinity which is above all limitation, beyond all being and non-being. Hence God and prime matter are in a way interchangeable. Eriugena discusses the nature of matter in *Periphyseon* Book III. For Eriugena God's creation of the world from matter is actually creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*) which in turn is his creation from himself (*ex Deo*).

Origen is not always consistent in distinguishing *materia* from *corpus*, but he allows that there can be bodies (*corpora*) which are invisible and eternal. He does refer to the invisibles (*invisibilia*) as actually bodiless (*asômata, De principiis* I, preface 8). Concerning the world soul, Origen is ambiguous; he says that the world is held together as the parts of a body are held together by a soul. The world then is held together "as by one soul" (*quasi ab una anima, De princ.* II 1, 3).

All things exist in their diversity due to free will. How does the temporal world come about? For Origen each substance (*ousia*; Rufinus: *substantia*) is eternal and immutable, merely the forms and qualities change. The substance of even the Devil then has eternal existence. Eriugena develops a more sophisticated version of this same theory. As we have seen, Eriugena argues that substances remain eternally, but their qualities may be transformed. Qualities are arranged around the substance and allow it to present itself corporeally in space and time. On the other hand, Eriugena makes

63 Butterworth, 79.

use of Gregory of Nyssa's denial of the actual corporeality of created things in order to argue that all substances are really incorporeal, invisible, eternal entities which are contained in the divine mind (*in mente divina aeternaliter facta*).<sup>64</sup>

Origen, following Paul, 1 Thess 5: 23, divides humans into three aspects in the *De principiis*—man is composed of body, soul and spirit (*sōma*, σῶμα, *psykhē*, ψυχή and *pneuma*, πνεῦμα). This πνεῦμα Origen tells us is not the divine πνεῦμα or Holy Spirit but a part (μέρος) of the human composition (σύστασις). It is noteworthy that Origen calls the spiritual man *pneumatikos* (πνευματικός) and not *gnōstikos* (γνωστικός) unlike Clement. The threefold division takes account of human earthly life and also the heavenly life. It is the spirit which gives life according to Origen. Origen is clearly working with a notion of spirit as something over and above the life of the soul, a principle which leads the soul back to its origin as it were. In the background are complicated Gnostic discussions of the spirit, as well as the countervailing Stoic notions of spirit. Interpreters of Origen have diverged on the question as to whether the πνεῦμα is to be identified with the intellect (νοῦς) and whether these terms represent the unfallen aspect of the soul in its pre-existent nature. The soul is enlivened by the spirit and the souls of the damned are bereft of πνεῦμα. In the pre-existent condition the human soul was pure spirit, pure intellect (νοῦς, *mens*). *Nous* according to Origen is our principal substance (*proëgoumenē hypostasis*, προηγούμενη ὑπόστασις, *In Johann.* xx 22). The πνεῦμα is quite different from the ψυχή, according to Dupuis, whereas many commentators see the two as identical, referring to the unfallen aspect of the soul.<sup>65</sup> Dupuis argues that the spirit is what leads the intellect to prayer, and perfects the intellect.<sup>66</sup> In any event Rufinus in his translation tends to use *spiritus* and *anima* interchangeably, and so the distinction is lost in the Latin version. Eriugena too will refer to human nature as *intellectus vel animus vel spiritus*.

Due to its free will, the intellect moves away from God and becomes soul and then body. This lower element is added after the Fall, a view which strongly influenced Gregory of Nyssa. Following a phrase found in Paul (Rom 8:6) the soul "sets its mind on the flesh" (*to phronēma tēs sarkos*) and develops its *sensus carnalis*. Using these terms

64 See Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1989, *passim*.

65 J. Dupuis, *L'Esprit de l'homme. Étude sur l'anthropologie religieuse d'Origène*, Paris, 1967, 65. E. De Faye in his *Origène: sa vie, son œuvre, sa pensée*, Paris, 1923–8, iii, 175–6, sees ψυχή and πνεῦμα as identical; see also M. J. Denis, *De la philosophie d'Origène*, Paris, 1884, 236–7; also H. Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène*, Paris, 1956, 130–1.

66 Dupuis, 72–5.

Origen distinguishes between the carnal and the spiritual sides of human nature. One aspect that is different from Eriugena is the account Origen gives of the role of the πνεῦμα. In the return the evil spirits are restored but lose their πνεῦμα. Eriugena gives a different version, making use of the notion of *phantasia*. For Eriugena the returning souls are limited in their return by their attachment to their *phantasiae* (φαντασίαι). Unless these *phantasiae* can be abandoned or transformed into *theophaniae* then the souls will not return *completely* into God, though they *will* return to God. Eriugena distinguishes between a general return of all beings to God and the special return of the elect into God, becoming one with Him in deification (Θέωσις).

Eriugena too has an eternal created world of primary causes which are truly intellectual and spiritual which through the consequences of the Fall put on materiality and corporeality when they enter into the effects. The human order and the order of the Logos were originally one and not separate, but gradually humans chose to receive bodily *phantasiae* rather than attend to the divine *theophaniae*. As a result the intellect (νοῦς) was ensnared by sense (αἴσθησις) and there occurred the Fall into the body. Eriugena is of two minds as to the origin of the body. On the one hand it was created by God because he foresaw that man would sin, on the other hand it is a phantastic cloak which covers the incorporeal sexless essence of human nature as long as we dwell in the temporal world. Once sight is restored to us the body becomes a spiritual essence and we are resolved into *theōriai*. All things will be restored together, but only the few will receive *theōsis*. When the end of the world arrives, God shall be all in all, but there will still be room for spiritual advance and perfection. Where Eriugena is more sophisticated than Origen is in the claim that human beings have in fact never been in paradise at any time, rather they would have been there had they not fallen. This treats of the entire story as a metaphor for the positing of an ideal human nature which serves as a goal for all human beings rather than as a definite origin from which human nature came.

It is absolutely clear that Eriugena is following in the footsteps of Origen as the great cosmologist (*physiologus, inquisitor rerum*). It was Origen's fate that his own work was deflected through controversy and through translation, until its influence was at once subterranean and omnipresent. Origen and Eriugena have a similar view of the human ascent towards the contemplation of and unification with God, they both accept progressive enlightenment in the afterlife as one of the aspects of the growth of wisdom in the soul, and the unravelling of the mystery of the meaning of the divine vision. They both accept that hell and the Devil will finally be returned to the One.

They both emphasize the role of human free will not only as the motive force of the Fall but also as the source of human material corporeality. It is free will that creates the hierarchy of this world, as different souls cling to their own phantasies.

In this paper, we have attempted to chart the actual course of Eriugena's knowledge and use of Origen's texts, but we have also briefly sketched themes which are similar in both authors. Perhaps this may be treated as a first step towards reappraising the impact of Origen on Eriugena.