

Dermot Moran,

“Time and Eternity in the *Periphyseon*,”

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XXX

DERMOT MORAN

"Time and Eternity in
the Periphyseon"

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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
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JAMES McEVOY
MICHAEL DUNNE



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weniger an als anderen.⁵⁹ Er benutzt das Bild vom Empfangen des Lichtes und führt aus, das göttliche Licht sei in keiner Weise missgünstig, halte sein Licht nicht für sich selbst zurück. Das Licht scheint gleich auf alle – aber einige wenden sich vom Licht ab. Allen wird dieses Licht angeboten, aber – wie in anderen Texten deutlich werden wird – selbst die Seligen erhalten diese Schau jeweils individuell.

Die Voraussetzung, die dieses Argument untermauert, besteht darin, dass ein unendliches Objekt eine unendliche Zahl von Wahrnehmungen dieses Objekts ermöglicht – und eine unendliche Anzahl von Wegen der Rückkehr zu ihm. Eriugena führt den Begriff der Theophanie ein, um für diese Vielgestaltigkeit Platz zu lassen. Die Anschauung der Wahrheit wird den Seligen in verschiedenen Stufen gewährt:

Denn obwohl sie nicht auf dieselbe Weise, sondern im Auf- und Absteigen in einer unendlichen Vielzahl göttlicher Erscheinungen sowohl den Gerechten als auch den Ungerechten erscheinen wird, so wird sie eben doch allen erscheinen ...⁶⁰

Die Unendlichkeit des unfassbaren Gottes – eine Unendlichkeit, der man in der Theophanie begegnet, diese letztlich moralische Unendlichkeit der göttlichen Güte – stellt einen Schlüssel zum Verständnis von Eriugenas Eschatologie einer allgemeinen und einer besonderen Rückkehr zugleich dar.

Schluss

“*Infinitus enim infinite, etiam in purgatissimis mentibus, formatur.*” Dieser Aufsatz hat versucht, sich der Begegnung mit dem unendlichen Gott nach Eriugena Schritt für Schritt anzunähern. Die Darstellung dieser Begegnung fußt auf der Beobachtung, daß es im schöpfungstheologischen Kontext, im Verständnis des Menschen an sich, im Verständnis der Beziehung des Menschen zu Gott, im Kontext einer christologischen Spiritualität sowie in der Eschatologie, der Begriff der Theophanie mit seinen vier Schlüsselmerkmalen ist, der von Eriugena verwendet wird, um eine wiederkehrende Struktur in der Beziehung zum Unendlichen zu erhellen.

59. PP V, PL 122 1012B-C.

60. “*Quamvis enim non eodem modo, sed multipliciter in infinitum divinarum visionum ascensionibus et descensionibus et iustis et iniustus apparebit, omnibus tamen apparebit, ...*”; PP V, PL 122 964A.

CHAPTER 24

TIME AND ETERNITY IN THE *PERIPHYSEON*

DERMOT MORAN

For time is the exact and natural measure of movements and pauses.

Est enim tempus morarum vel motuum certa et naturalis dimensio.

Periphyseon V. 890a

For place and time are counted among all the things that have been created.

Locus siquidem et tempus inter omnia quae creata sunt computantur.

Periphyseon I.468c

In this paper I want to explore Johannes Eriugena's characteristically rich and original treatment of one of the most central themes in the Platonic and Christian traditions, namely, the theme of time and eternity (or timelessness), in his massive cosmological dialogue, *Periphyseon*.¹ Given the elaborate richness of his vision, in evaluating Eriugena's commitment to Christian Platonism, we cannot then simply assume that he is repeating the accounts of time and eternity found, for example, in Plato's *Timaeus* or in Augustine's *Confessiones*. Eriugena is both a Platonist and a Christian, but he holds to both these doctrines in his own inimitable fashion, as a ninth-century author, heir to already ancient traditions.

Despite some rhetorical gestures in the direction of the classical sources, Eriugena draws his views on space and time not so much from Plato and Aristotle as from Christian sources: Augustine, Gregory of

1. The *Periphyseon* (hereafter 'PP') is here cited according to the following editions: I.P. Sheldon-Williams, ed., *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)* Book One (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968), Book Two (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970), Book Three, with John O'Meara (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1981), Book Four, ed. E. Jeaneau (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995). For Book Five I have used the Latin text of *Patologia Latina* (hereafter 'PL') Vol. 122. For the English translation, I use I.P. Sheldon-Williams and J.J. O'Meara, published in J.J. O'Meara, ed., *Eriugena Periphyseon* (Dumbarton Oaks/Montréal: Bellarmin, 1987).

Nyssa and Maximus Confessor. Given the rather limited philosophical sources available to him – the Latin encyclopedists and the Greek and Latin Christian Neoplatonists – Eriugena's grasp of the Neoplatonic system is remarkable. Thus, elaborating on Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* and Ambrose's *De paradiso*, he utilises bold interpretations of Dionysius, the Cappadocians and Maximus, to generate a unique account of the dynamics of universal *natura* which includes both God and the creature. Indeed, Eriugena drives his Christian Platonist mystical spirituality to new and dizzying heights even measured by the likes of Gregory of Nyssa or Dionysius the Areopagite. For Eriugena, philosophy and theology blend into one *gnostica scientia* wherein individual truths are contemplated in a manner intended to integrate them into the highest unity, leading to spiritual breakthrough, enlightenment, even *theosis*. Within that account is nestled a very individualistic and creative approach to time. For Eriugena, time belongs to the self-expression, self-externalisation, self-manifestation or self-creation of the creator God and also to the self-articulation of *nous* into sensibility, which brings about the Fall of human nature. The physical world in its corporeal and sensible form is cradled within the compass of mind, as it were, and a specific kind of injurious temporality is born when mind focuses on *aisthesis* or sense, plunging the mind into darkness and death.

As with other aspects of his thought, Eriugena's understanding of time and eternity must be approached in terms of his *duplex theoria*, or *multiplex theoria*, his two-fold or many-sided approach to understanding or contemplating the infinite and formless truth which lies beyond all human understanding.² Typically, and displaying his attachment to the legacy of the Pseudo-Dionysian dialectics of affirmations, negations, and superlatives understood as higher negations, Eriugena delights in dwelling on the peculiar paradoxes or complications concerning time and space, which he situates cosmologically in the *exitus and reditus* of the infinite divine nature. Time and space play a crucial part in the dynamics of the divine self-articulation and recollection. As Marta Christiani has emphasised in her study of time and space in Eriugena, Eriugena follows Maximus in emphasising the positive aspects of creation as the concrete manifestation of the divine.³ Since God is a creator who enters into His creation, and is everywhere, outside of Whom there is nothing, He

2. See W. Beierwaltes, "Duplex Theoria. Zu einer Denkform Eriugenas," in W. Beierwaltes, ed. *Begriff und Metapher. Sprachform des Denkens bei Eriugena* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag, 1990), pp. 39–64.

extends into times and places in His *proodos* or *exitus*, and also redeems the times and places of the created order when He gathers them back into Himself in the *reditus*.

But, besides being the self-articulation of the divine nature, time and place also function as the boundaries and limits of the created world and hence mark out the creature from the uncreated Creator: "For place and time are counted among all the things that have been created" (*Locus siquidem et tempus inter omnia quae creata sunt computantur. PP I.468c*). Eriugena takes this from Augustine and Maximus. For Augustine, time commences with the creation of the world, there was no time before it. Being a creature and being temporal are one and the same (see Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* V.12).

In a certain sense, then, Eriugena remains squarely within the common Christian-Stoic-Platonist tradition, which holds that the whole created domain falls under the spell of time and hence of mutability (*mutabilitas*) and corruptibility. According to Augustine, where there is time there is mutability (*De musica* VI.11.29). Time as mutability is essentially connected with finitude and death, with semblance, deception and the shadowy realm of *phantasia*. In fact, the very *telos* of temporal life is death, *thanatos*; the inner core of sensuous life is death. Time, as Augustine had shown with his famous *distentio animi* conjecture in *Confessiones* XI, inevitably involves stretching, dispersion and disintegration, and therefore is the opposite of the kind of integration and attention (*attentio, intentio*) sought for by the contemplative mind.⁴ Eriugena took speaks of the *distentio* of times and places, understood as some kind of scattering from the Primal causes. On the other hand, for him, the essence of human life in its perfection is to be timeless, and, in that sense, to be a true image and likeness of the divine. So the distracting temporal *phantasiae* must be transformed into timeless theophanies of the divine.

Although the theme of overcoming time is important, the consideration of time in terms of mutability cannot be the whole Christian story; since a more positive view of time is required for the unrolling of God's plan for the salvation of humans and the cosmos, for the Incarnation, as Augustine came to realise, and for the history of salvation. Eriugena, too, adopting a somewhat different approach from Augustine, is also trying to

3. M. Christiani, "Lo spazio e il tempo nell'opera dell'Eriugena," *Studi Medievali*, 3a serie, XIV (1973), pp. 39–136, see esp. p. 47.

4. See Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (London: Duckworth, 1987).

reconcile these positive and negative elements of time, but his overall focus is on the transcendent eternity of the Godhead and how the created order can become one with it, and so all time must ultimately drop away.

Both senses of time – time as involving the self-externalisation of God and time as the boundary of the created and specifically the human world – are intimately connected and entwined, in Eriugena's grand scheme. There is, therefore, a deep, and ultimately unreconciled, ambiguity running through Eriugena's philosophy of the physical, visible, temporal world. On the one hand, God creates or manifests Himself in the creature, expressing His own inexpressible nature. Thus, in a justly famous passage in *Periphyseon* Book Three, Eriugena, in the voice of Nutritor, attests that God and nature are *unum et id ipsum* and that there is a dynamic *exitus* or "ineffable descent" (*ineffabilis condescensio*, PP III.678d), whereby God moves from invisible to visible and from the supratemporal to the temporal:

For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God; and God, by manifesting Himself (*se ipsum manifestans*), 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 the infinite finite (*infinitus finitum*) and the uncircumscribed circumscribed and the supratemporal temporal (*supertemporalis temporalem*) and the Creator of all things created in all things... (PP III.678c)

God, then, is supratemporal but makes Himself temporal. Temporality, then, while alien to or other than the divine nature in itself, becomes the very expression of this timeless nature.

Moreover, Eriugena stresses this entrance of the divine into time is not to be thought simply as the Incarnation (*incarnatio et inhumanatio verbi*, PP III.678d) whereby God is made flesh, but as the original *exitus* or *ineffabilis condescensio* of the divine nature, whereby It moves from Its Causes into Its Effects. So in this sense, some version of temporal becoming or succession belongs to the very essence of the divine as Creator. But the kind of succession that belongs to the divine cannot have anything to do with decay or mutability, but has an order and measure given by God, who makes all things according to measure, number and weight. The Primary Causes in God allow for both the infinite and for some kind of multiplication and succession according to divine plan. As Primary Causes, Eriugena even lists "magnitude in itself" (*per se ipsam magnitudo*)

and "eternity in itself" (*per se ipsam aeternitas*, PP II.616c). Furthermore, the causes of all places and times (*causae locorum et temporum*) are in the Primary Causes (PP II.547c). Both eternity and time, then, issue forth from the divine through the Primary Causes into the Effects. There is even a suggestion that Eriugena considers there to be a primary cause of time – just as there is of evil (*primordialis causa totius malitiae*, PP IV.848c), placing him within the sphere of late Neoplatonism which maintained a Platonic form of time.

Besides being part of the divine self-externalisation and self-multiplication, the temporal is also closely connected with the human condition, and specifically with the life of humans *post peccatum*. Of course, human nature as such, in itself, like all *natura*, does not belong to time in its essence, but is essentially timeless, being without beginning or end:

But if anyone is so far from the truth as to say that the nature and substance of this world is sensible and corporeal and extended in space and time, and susceptible to generation and passing away, he is not worth answering, for every intelligent physicist accepts as an axiom that the nature and substance of bodies is itself incorporeal. (PP V.993b)

Time, or certainly the kind of time that involves running-down and decay, enters the world as a consequence of the Fall. Time and space do not belong to the essential nature of things but are 'added on' (*superaddita*) as a result of the Fall, whereby humans became attracted to the sensuous, the visible, the temporal and the corruptible. Eriugena is justly famous for his intellectualisation and spiritualisation of the whole creational and salvific process, for making the whole of our physical, material existence into a metaphor for the life of the mind. Eriugena's intellectualist or idealist orientation privileges all things belonging to mind (*intellectus, nous, mens*) and above the mind.⁵ Mind, its intellectual or contemplative acts (*theoriae*) and its intelligible products, constitute everything that is. The true essence of humanity is to be an eternal and perfect mind contemplating God endlessly, whereas the fallen state makes mind to be enveloped with sense, to be corporeal, local and temporal. Time and

5. Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also idem, "Idealism in Medieval Philosophy: The Case of Johannes Scottus Eriugena," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* Vol. 7 (1999), pp. 53-82.

space are not just elements in the cosmological drama but also express something essential about the nature of human intellection in so far as it becomes complicated by an irrational sensibility. In Book One, time and place are understood, like all the categories, to be definitions of the mind. They belong to the realm of *intellectus* or mind.

Following Maximus, Eriugena holds that our return to the primordial causes consists of bringing body back to mind, and overcoming the dimensions of space and time. The Resurrection involves an overcoming of the spatial and temporal. Furthermore, Christ's Ascension is also proof that the humanity of the Second Person of the Trinity cast off all spatial and temporal characteristics and returned to its timeless and eternal and wholly spiritual nature. Indeed, for Eriugena, in theological terms, the humanity of the Second Person of the Trinity cannot be located in any place or time:

Do not imagine that the Humanity of Christ which after the resurrection was transformed into his Divinity [is] in place. The Divinity of Christ is not in place (*Divinitas Christi in loco non est*): so neither is His Humanity. Be sure that it is the same with time (*Eodem modo sane intellige de tempore*), with quality, with quantity, with circumscribed form. (PP II.539c)

In Book Five Eriugena insists with Maximus that the return involves a falling away of everything local and temporal, including any such aspects of Christ, all of which are transformed into timeless spirit (PP V.993b).

Even given the dynamics of the divine self-expression, in one sense God is never other than eternal and completely transcendent, such that there is a meaningful sense in which there is no outgoing in God. The fourth division of nature expresses this transcendent aspect of the divine nature, which cannot be thought even as Creator. Thus in the Fourth Book of the *Periphyseon* Eriugena declares:

But if you are impatient to know why it is said of the Divine Nature that It neither creates nor is created, I will say a few words here by way of foretaste. The Divine Nature, therefore, for this reason is believed not to be created because It is the Primal Cause of all (*quoniam primitiva omnium causa est*), and there is no principle beyond It (*ultra quam nullum principium est*) from which It can be created. On the other hand, because after the return (*post reditum*)

of the created universe of things visible and invisible into its primordial causes which are contained within the Divine Nature, there is no further creation of nature (*nulla ulterius natura ex ea procreabitur*) from the Divine Nature nor any propagation of sensible or intelligible species; for in It all will be One, just as even now (*nunc et semper*) in their causes they are One and always are so. Therefore we can rightly believe that this nature creates nothing. (PP IV.860b-c)

Approaching God in this transcendent sense, God is unconnected with creation. Temporality, aligned with creation, really belongs to the creature rather than to God. This means that Eriugena must emphasise that God's *exitus* is into a kind of eternal creation, which is distorted into a temporal sensible world by human sin.

I. Eriugena's Handling of His Sources

In a previous study I argued that Eriugena's account of time and space in the physical world, while wonderfully rich and attempting to be systematic is eclectic and hence at times confused.⁶ He tries his best to present a unified cosmology, given the multiplicity of and the conflicting nature of the views of his sources, authorities upon whom he must depend but between whom – prudently – he does not wish to judge. Unfortunately, this tolerance of the many-coloured ways of understanding a text or the cosmos does not lead to an entirely consistent account. In this respect, Eriugena did not entirely surmount the diversity among his sources. What were these sources?

In terms of accounts of time, Eriugena was familiar with Plato's *Timaeus* in the translation of Calcidius, with several of Cicero's works, with Augustine's *Confessions* Book XI, and other works, notably, *De Genesi ad litteram*. He was familiar with the Latin encyclopaedist tradition, including Martianus Capella, Macrobius, and Isidore. He also knew Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae* Book V but does not appear to have drawn on it, since he does not make use of Boethius's rather sophisticated accounts of foreknowledge and future contingents.

6. Dermot Moran, "Time, Space and Matter in the *Periphyseon*: An Examination of Eriugena's Understanding of the Physical World," in F. O'Rourke, ed., *At the Heart of the Real. Philosophical Essays in Honour of Archbishop Desmond Connell* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992), pp. 67-96.

Some indirect awareness of Plato's definition of time in the *Timaeus* as the moving image of eternity is evident from an oblique reference at the end of Chapter Nine of his earliest treatise, *De divina praedestinatione*.⁷ Eriugena has been discussing the propriety of applying temporal terms like predestination and foreknowledge to God, given that he is timeless, and for him "nothing is in the future, because he awaits nothing, nothing is past because for him nothing passes" (*Div. praed.* Ch. 9, 5).⁸ Eriugena concludes that temporal predicates apply only improperly to God but may be said of Him in a transferred or metaphorical manner. One can do this on the basis of the rhetorical figure *a contrario* where we use opposites to signal what we mean.

Now since some likeness of eternity is implanted in temporal things (*quoniam aeternitatis quaedam similitudo temporalibus est insita*) – not only because from it they were made but also because that part of the temporal from which these names are taken, that is, human nature, will be transformed into some likeness of the true eternity – how then is it understood from the contrary when from the temporal to the intemporal (*a temporali ad intempore*) some particular signification is transferred? (*Div. praed.* 9, 7)⁹

Here Eriugena sees that temporal things are in some sense a likeness (*similitudo*) of eternity. Of course, Eriugena was familiar with Calcidius's version of Plato's *Timaeus*, but similar views of time are expressed by Augustine who calls time a 'copy' (*imitatio*) or 'trace' (*vestigium*) of eternity (see *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* 13.38; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 9. 7; *aeternitatem imitantia*, *De musica* VI.11.29).

In general, the whole technique of the *De praedestinatione* is to discharge the seemingly temporal commitment of concepts and claims concerning God (such as his foreknowledge and power to predestine) to give them a non-temporal significance. Already in this treatise the whole concept of something happening *before* something else, being given priority, is put into the interpretative mix. In elaborating the relation between time and

7. *Iohannis Scotti De divina praedestinatione liber*, ed. Goulven Madec, CCM 50 (Tumbout: Brepols, 1978), trans. Mary Brennan as *John Scottus Eriugena, Treatise on Divine Predestination*, with an Introduction by Avital Wohlman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998). Hereafter '*Div. praed.*'

8. Eriugena, *Div. praed.*, Madec, op. cit., p. 59; *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Brennan, op. cit., p. 62.

9. *Div. praed.*, Madec, op. cit., p. 61; Brennan, op. cit., p. 63, translation altered.

eternity, Eriugena lays down four meanings of the concept of 'prior' – things can be prior in time (the flower comes before the fruit), in rank or dignity (here the fruit is ranked higher or more valuable than the flower), in origin (the voice comes before the word), and in eternity (God comes before the creature).¹⁰ In terms of accounting for God's supposed foreknowledge, it is only in the sense of the priority of eternity that God might be said to know in advance. Somewhat later in *De praedestinatione*, Chapter Fifteen, Eriugena claims that all genuine truth is not temporal, a view he seems to have taken over from St. Augustine. Truth then is eternal and at odds with the strictly temporal.

In terms of his sources, Eriugena's seeming awareness of – at least in broad outline and without attribution – Aristotle's definition of time as the measure of motion in respect of before and after in the *Physics* is interesting. He invokes a version of it in *Periphyseon* Book Five:

For when there is no motion (*motus*) to be measured by or divided into temporal intervals, how can there be any time? For time is the exact and natural measure of movements and pauses (*Est enim tempus morarum vel motuum certa et naturalis dimensio*). So when the measurable thing passes, the measure must pass also: in what does time consist when motion ceases to be observed? (*PP* V.890a)

It is possible, of course, that Eriugena has in mind a passage from Augustine's *Confessiones* Bk XI.24, where Augustine rejects the view that time is constituted by the movement of a material body. For bodies move in time and it is in time that we measure their movement. Time then, cannot itself be the measure of movement. The same body can move at different speeds and hence the measure of the movement cannot be the same as time.

Another possible source for the view that time consists in some kind of measure is Isidore's *Etymologies*, Book 5b, where Isidore offers explanations of the meanings of minute, hour, and the other divisions of time (day, night, week, Sabbath, etc). In offering his explanation of the shortest measure of time, *momentum*, he says it derived from the motion of the stars.¹¹ Furthermore, in commenting on the seven parts of the

10. See *Div. praed.* Ch. 9, 7, 154–161; Madec, p. 61; Brennan, p. 63.

11. *Isidorus Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri xx*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), Book V.xxix.

night, Isidore explains the middle part, *intempestum*, as being derived from the idea of something not in time or timeless. He adds: "For time cannot be understood in itself, except in relation to human acts" (*Nam tempus per se non intelligitur, nisi per actus humanos, Etym. V. xxxi. 9*), and the middle of the night is a time almost bereft of human movement, and so effectively timeless.

Elsewhere we have discussed Eriugena's more direct use of Aristotle in the *Periphyseon* when he addresses the question whether the Aristotelian categories may be applied to God. His source for the categories is the pseudo-Augustinian *Categoriae decem*, but, for his claim that the categories of place and time are antecedent to the things that are in them, he explicitly refers to Augustine's *De musica* Book Six, and usually also to Maximus Confessor and to his 'Greeks' to whom we shall now turn.

In terms of his beloved Greeks, for whom he several times in the *Periphyseon* expresses a preference, Eriugena may be said to have had a kind of indirect exposure to Plotinus' *Ennead* 3.7 as echoed in the writings of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa. He had some exposure to Origen, and of course his entire outlook depends heavily on Dionysius the Areopagite, but, in terms of his account of time and space, he is most appreciative of Maximus Confessor, especially his *Ambigua*.

Eriugena's late Neoplatonic approach to time always combines it with space, and he usually refers in the plural to places and times, *loca et tempora*. From Maximus Confessor, specifically his *Ambigua*, Eriugena accepts that one must treat time and space together as "inseparables" (*inseparabilia*, *PP* V.889a) as those basic conditions that determine the created world of effects. Eriugena quotes Maximus: "every temporal thing is a local thing and conversely every local thing is a temporal thing" (*ut omne temporale locale sit, et conversim omne locale temporale*, *PP* V.889a). Eriugena strongly supports Maximus' view that all creatures are encompassed by time and space against the Augustinian view that some creatures (e.g. angels) exist in time only and not in space. Augustine holds a three-fold division: God is outside time, spiritual creatures to move in time only, while some things move in both time and space (*PP* V.889a; 1000d). In contrast, as he repeats many times, Eriugena follows the Greeks in holding that every created thing partakes of space and time, and are encompassed by space and time, since time and space are referred to by the Greeks as "*hōn aneu*", that without which the rest could not exist (*PP* I. 468c; I.489a; I.507d; V.889d; V. 1001a). In this sense, both time and space express limit, they define the boundaries or perimeters of

the created world, which of course is also the limitation imposed on our fallen, mortal state. Eriugena's stress on the fact that time and space are inseparable and must always be treated together is quite unique. Eriugena also uses this feature to argue that time and space must not be considered separately from the whole of created nature. This would have the effect of making time and space themselves uncreated, whereas, for Eriugena, everything created at least in so far as it has extended into its effects, is temporal and spatial and that temporality and spatiality will be overcome in the return.

It is a notable feature of Eriugena's understanding of the division between time and eternity, then, that, in line with his intellectualism, time is inserted between the layers of *nous* and *aesthesis*. The dynamics of the relation between these faculties forms the major part of Eriugena's account of the generation of the sensible and corruptible world. Time and space are added onto the *exitus* of causes from effects because of the Fall. Eriugena connects time with *aesthesis*, the life of sensibility and embodiment, in contrast with eternity, understood as the life of *nous* or *intellectus*. Here he coheres with the Scriptural equation of the temporal with the visible, and this means that we have to pay particular attention to Eriugena's articulation of temporal notions in his scriptural exegesis. This is, I believe, more fruitful than looking at Eriugena's use of Augustine's or Boethius' discussions of time, where the influence, if influence there is, is difficult to detect and is certainly not explicitly signalled in the text. But first, let us examine in greater detail Eriugena's philosophical discussions of temporality in the *Periphyseon*.

II. The Infinity and Timelessness of the Divine Nature

As with the Neoplatonic tradition generally, Eriugena begins from the standpoint of eternity. The divine nature is eternal and infinite. Nature (including the divine) exists always, perfect, immobile, timeless, motionless, without increase or decrease. As Augustine would put it, God's time, his today is eternity (*Confessiones* XI.13), eternity is a 'never-ending present' (*ibid.*). Eriugena's use of '*nunc et semper*' (*PP* IV.860c) and of his trademark phrase '*semel et simul*' (e.g., *PP* II.571c) neatly sums this up. *Always* and *now* are co-extensive.

But, following Dionysius the Areopagite, Eriugena holds that God is always *more than* what can be said of Him.

For He is more than that which is said or understood of Him, in whatever way anything is either said of Him or understood. (PP I.516b)

Thus God is eternal and 'more than eternal', infinite and more than infinite. Indeed, God is the "infinity of infinities" (*infinitas infinitorum*, PP I.517b), the "infinity of all infinities" (*infinitas omnium infinitatum*, PP II.525a). He is the "formless principle of all forms and species" (*formarum et specierum omnium informe principium*, PP II.525a), "first cause of all" (PP II.525a), the "place of places" (*locus locorum*, PP I.468d), which is itself no place and is 'more than place' (I.468d). Naturally, the word '*locus*' is used in metaphorical fashion (*translative*), because God is not literally in any place or time, but is and is not in all places and times. God *transcends* time and place but is the cause of all places and times (PP I.468c). God is also "more than time" (*plus quam tempus*, I.469a). He is the "opposite of opposites" (*oppositio oppositorum*) and "the contrariness of contraries" (*contrariorum contrarietas*, PP I.517c). God is the beginning and end of all things but is himself without a beginning '*anarchos*' and, as infinite, is literally without an end, *finis*. 'Beginning' and 'end' do not apply to God, "are not proper names of the divine nature" (PP II.528a), but express the relation of God to created things. Whatever is mutable and temporal has beginning and end (PP I. 518b). All created things begin from God and end in God.

Of course, as we have seen, God's creation is also at the same time a self-creation, self-expression, a manifestation of self to self through going out of itself. Or, to put it another way, the creation of the world takes place as an eternal moment within the eternal process of God's self revelation. Eriugena writes that God "brought forth all created things from Himself, as though into an external place" (*veluti extra*, PP V.907d). Note the 'as though' (*veluti*). Similarly, Eriugena is very fond of this '*quasi*' (see PP I.468c). We are in the realm of allegory, simile and metaphor.

For it is possible to say of the eternal creature that it is both within Him 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. (PP V.908a)

God also bounds and includes everything that is and is not. He is the Creator of like and unlike, similar and dissimilar. The created world, though unlike God, is made in the likeness of God, and hence possesses a likeness of eternity.

Although some kind of succession belongs to the fabric of the created order, time in the sense of corruption and mutability enters the world specifically through the human and the Fall, which is characterised as "from spiritual to corporeal things, from eternal to temporal (*de aeternis ad temporalia*), from incorruptible to perishable ..." (PP II.540a). It is in the Fall, then, Eriugena locates the emergence of time in the sense of the kind of change which inevitably leads to decay and death.

Changes in the material world of time and place are accounted for by the primordial causes (PP II.547c), which have their own location in the *Verbum*. The pure nature of all things in their primordial causes must be contrasted with the "mutable and imperfect and as yet formless procession of this sensible world" (PP II.549b). Eriugena believes that there is a twofold or two-level procession of all things from their one universal essence. There is a kind of spiritual multiplication or division of things into their genera and species that takes place on an intellectual level or even on the domain of the infinite and eternal and to which Eriugena vaguely links the Holy Spirit and which he refers to as the "distribution of all the causes" (*omnium causarum distributio*, PP II.563b); and on the other hand, there is a multiplication of things in terms of their individualisation in space and time and individual corporeal bodies (PP II.578a) and that is based on human act and indeed the human fall into sense according to this passage added to the text of Rheims 875:

For the Creator made our souls and bodies all at once (*semel et simul*) in paradise – by bodies I mean celestial (and) spiritual bodies such as they will be after the resurrection. For it must not be doubted that the puffed up, mortal, and corruptible bodies with which we are now encumbered take their origin not from nature but from sin. (PP II.571c-d)

The essence of sensible things will live forever as it is beyond time and space, but all things which are brought about in time and space will perish (PP V.867b). Eriugena frequently quotes the Psalms 102.25: "The heavens are the works of Thy hands; they shall perish (*peribunt*)" (PP V.890d-891a; see also PP II.561a). It is clear then that all created things

must return to their Causes and in so doing lose their spatial and temporal accretions until they become pure principles within the divine mind.

III. The Nature of Paradise as Timeless Human Nature

As is well known, a central plank of Eriugena's Scriptural interpretation in the *Periphyseon* is his insistence that the notion of Paradise is not to be understood literally as a place, but is to be equated with human nature itself (PP IV.840a). The paradise of Scripture really means perfect human nature. Christ returned to paradise, that is to the perfection of his nature, but in a sense never left it (PP V.894d). When the risen Christ revealed himself to his disciples, he had not left paradise but was still there. And the disciples who saw him were in paradise in their souls even if their bodies were not in paradise (PP V.895a). On Eriugena's account, following Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil stands for the outer visible aspects of things ("the nature of visible things," *uisibilium rerum natura*, PP IV.843a), "the visible creature (*creatura visibilis*) which man followed when he abandoned his Creator" (PP IV.842b). This visible creature is comprehended in a spiritual way (*spiritualiter*) provides wisdom and knowledge, but it also has within it a 'deadly knowledge' (PP IV.843a):

For the outward appearance of material things (*materialium superficialis rerum*), although it is in its nature beautiful, gives occasion of death (*occasionem mortis*) to the senses of those who incautiously and lustfully consider it. For God created the visible creature for this purpose, that through it, as likewise through the invisible, His glory might abound, and that He might be known – not as what He is, but that He is – to be the One Creator of the whole creature, visible and invisible. And for that reason God forbade human nature to take pleasure (*delectari*) in knowing the visible creature until it had attained the perfection of wisdom (*ad perfectionem sapientiae*), in which having achieved deification (*deificata*) it might reason together with God (*cum deo disputare*) concerning the principles of visible things. (PP IV.843b)

On the other hand, there is the suggestion that God created the material and spatio-temporal world knowing humans would fall. Eriugena suggests that the every corporeal creature is a kind of *vestigium* of the divine nature (PP III.699c), but it can only be seen as such by someone like Moses ascending to the height of contemplation.

For to exceedingly few is it given, only to those genuinely removed from the worldly preoccupations and purged by virtue and knowledge, to God in his visible creatures, as the Patriarch Abraham knew, from the revolution of the stars, guided by natural law ... PP III.689d.

However, despite the fact that some mortals have achieved this deified vision of the sensible world in this life, the pure contemplation of visible things is best left until deification has been achieved. This is because the visible world bears within it has the possibility of being considered just in its appearance, in its apparent sensuousness, in *phantasia*. This leads to what Eriugena calls "improper use of the sense knowledge of sensible matter" (*cognitione sensibilis materiae per corporeos sensus*, PP IV.844b).

Humans ought to have attended to the Cause of all rather than being fascinated by the visible effects. While the knowledge of visible things is good and proper once it is based on the prior knowledge and recognition of the Creator, the knowledge of the world for its own sake is delusory and will lead to death. The delight in the irrational sensuous passions of the soul brings about "the death of the soul" (*mors animae*), of which "the death of the body" (*mors corporis*) is just a shadow (PP IV.849b). Eriugena also draws on Augustine's observation that the knowledge of visible things was intended for man when the time was right but humans overhastily rushed to avail themselves of it "before the time was ripe" (*immature tempore*, PP IV.843d). Essentially, the mature time will be 'after' the return, when there is no earthly time, as it were, when enjoyment of the garden of sensuous delights for their own sake will be appropriate. Of course, this temporal way of describing the eternal state of blessedness is always under the 'quasi', the *as if*.

The mind and the senses on their own cannot be blamed for the Fall as they are both 'creatures of God' (PP IV.848c) and each has a proper function. The proper function of the senses is to furnish *phantasiae* by which the mind is able to think of intelligible things:

For it is to this end that corporeal sense is established in man, that by means of phantasies (*per mediatem phantasiarum*) it might become the intermediary (*intemuntius*) between the sensibles and the intelligibles. (PP IV.851b)

But in fact, there is a manner in which corporeal sense has within it a trait which can be exploited in the opposite direction:

But carnal delight arises outside of Divine creation (*extra diuinam conditionem*) from the irrational passions of the human soul, and therefore comes under the severity of the Divine sentence, because it supervenes from outside on the nature which was created by God. (*quia extra naturae a deo factae superuenit*, PP IV.848c.)

This irrational carnal delight for the external leads to the soul becoming trapped in space and time, categories that it possesses within itself but which take on the appearance of external forms. Eriugena here is influenced by the Neoplatonic – and Augustinian – notion that *delectatio* in the sensuous and temporal drags down the soul: *Delectatio quippe quasi pondus est animae*, Augustine, *De musica* VI.11.29).

IV. Time and Eternity in Scripture

Eriugena believes his philosophical understanding of time and space is bolstered by Scripture that is also suspicious of the temporal and carnal. While he is conscious of the temporal nature of the scriptural narrative, he tends to subvert it radically. He wholeheartedly endorses the Pauline injunction to understand scripture spiritually and not carnally, to be an adult and not a child in understanding it. To understand the Scriptures correctly, these ‘sacred oracles’ or divine words must be purged of “every carnal sense and superstition” (*omni que carnali sensu ac superstitione purgata*) and must be understood it rightly according to the spirit, *spiritualiter* (*bene uero et spiritualiter intellecta*, PP IV.839a–b). Thus for example he says in *Periphyseon* Book Three commenting on Basil’s simpler account of creation:

For on no account ought we to neglect or reject the interpretations of the Holy Fathers, especially as we are not unaware that very often they put their arguments in simple terms (*simpliciter*) to suit the understanding of their hearers when it is not capable of grasping the profundities of the natural reasons upon which the spiritual meaning is based (*ad profundissimos spiritualis virtutis naturalium rationum percipiendos intellectus praeuidentes*, PP III.708b).

But, in characteristic fashion, he takes this further, and while playing lip-service to the importance of the literal, always moves beyond it to the higher truth of the spiritual or contemplative or truly theological meaning of the text, the interpretation which brings the divine into view.¹² Note that in the passage quoted above he sees spiritual meanings

as based on ‘natural reasons’. There is a strong sense that Scripture masks the theoretical account of nature. Thus Eriugena injuncts readers of the Scriptures to abandon the carnal sense and “at once turn to the spiritual meaning which is taught by truth, for that is the one and only way of penetrating the approaches to the mystical writings” (PP V.862a).

Although Eriugena does, following Maximus, credit the importance of *physike theoria*, the understanding of nature in so far as it evidences the existence and activity of God, nevertheless his actual account of the nature of the physical world puts the whole notion of a ‘physical’ or ‘historical’ fact under considerable strain, and Eriugena is always reaching for a higher concept of nature. Eriugena is always straining towards a higher, more intellectual, more contemplative understanding, one which seeks to enter into the mind of divine or universal nature. The road into this darkness is through the careful denials of more ‘carnal’ approaches to the world. In terms of temporality, this means that Eriugena, following Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana*, does not take temporal assertions in the Scriptures literally. Often when ‘day’ is referred, it can refer, following the rhetorical figure of synecdoche, to any period of time or indeed to eternity. In general, although Eriugena emphasises that the “truth of made things” (*veritas rerum factarum*) is to be understood as consisting both of historical facts and spiritual signs (*et historialiter facta et spiritualiter intellecta*, PP IV.818a), he clearly prefers the spiritual signs. In fact, the whole notion of what it is for something to be understood ‘historialiter’ is less than clear in Eriugena. For him, the ‘historical’ level is a level of exegesis, a level of understanding, and does not seem to carry very strongly the notions of fact or historical occurrence in their modern sense. Certainly ‘facts’ of a temporal kind do not figure largely in Eriugena’s understanding of the nature of things. There are almost no literal facts, except perhaps the death of Christ on the cross, which Eriugena emphasises did not take place in *phantasia*. Eriugena does assert that “divine history does not lie” (*diuina non mendax ... historia*, PP V.935d) and elsewhere in the *Homilia* and *Commentarius*, as Bernard McGinn has pointed out,¹³ does point out the need to do justice to the

12. Carlos Steel shows that Eriugena prefers the spiritual to the literal meaning of Genesis, see his essay, “The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,” in *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena. The Bible and Hermeneutics*, ed. Gerd Van Riel, Carlos Steel and James McEvoy (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), p. 244.

13. Bernard McGinn, “The Originality of Eriugena’s Spiritual Exegesis,” in *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena. The Bible and Hermeneutics*, ed. Gerd Van Riel, Carlos Steel and James McEvoy, op. cit., p. 62.

littera. While Eriugena, drawing on Maximus, does very minimally attest to the literal as the basic meaning (like the earth, see Eriugena, *Hom.* XIV. 270–272), in fact, he really dissolves the literal meaning altogether.

In line with his adoption of Dionysian negative theology, literal assertions of a theological kind are reduced to denials in terms of their literalness. What appears to be asserted literally is actually said *translative, metaforice, per metaphoram*. Only when these apparent literal assertions are negated are they said truly, properly, *vere, proprie*. In this negative theological context, what constitutes a theological ‘fact’ is difficult to say. Thus, the true mode of relations between the members of the Trinity is neither as the Latins hold nor as the Greeks assert, but is actually a rich dialectical interrelation to which both Latin and Greek partially assent. There is no real tension between alternative understandings of Scripture since it is not the case that one is literally right and the other literally false. They are all (within the limits set down by *recte ratio*) possible metaphorical interpretations.

Thus, the Scriptures set out a story that appears to take place in a place or set of places and over a period of time, but which in fact point to and reveal essential truths about an order which is entirely divorced from location and temporality. In this light Eriugena lays down some principles of scriptural exegesis:

In this connection we ought to study well the text of the Divine words (*diuinorum uerborum textum*) which, because of the sluggishness of our wits and the carnal senses which subject us, corrupted by our original sin, to this spatio-temporal existence (*locis temporibusque succumbimus*), has set out – as though taking place in space and time, but in a marvellous order full of mystical meaning (*mysticorum sensuum plenissimo*) – things which occurred simultaneously and which are not divided by any intervals of time. (*quae simul facta sunt absque temporalium morularum interstitiis*, PP IV. 848a–b)

Édouard Jeuneau,¹⁴ in the notes to his edition of Book Four, points out at this point that this principle of Scriptural interpretation, which probably derives from Origen’s *De principiis* IV, iii, 1 (PG 11, 378b), actually repeats a Neoplatonic way of approaching myths mentioned in

14. *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)* Book Four, ed. E. Jeuneau, op. cit., p. 335 n290.

Plotinus *Ennead* III, 5, 9. Myths divide into temporal parts things which should be understood in a different manner. According to Plotinus (here quoted in Stephen McKenna’s translation): “for myths, if they are to serve their purpose, must necessarily import time-distinctions into their subject and will often present as separate Powers which exist in unity but differ in rank and faculty ... The truth is conveyed in the only manner possible; it is left to our good sense to bring all together again”.¹⁵

At many points in the dialogue, Eriugena elaborates on the timelessness of the truth of Scripture in contrast to its temporally extended mode of presentation in the text. Scriptural writers play around with time, presenting one event as if it either preceded or succeeded another event. Thus Eriugena writes:

I am not unaware that Holy Scripture very frequently makes use of that figure of speech which is called by the Greeks *hystero proteron* and by the Latins *praeposterum*, or anticipation (*anticipatio*), the equivalent of the Greek *prolepsis*; Matthew the Evangelist uses it when he describes the Passion and the Resurrection of the Lord. For he writes of the events which took place at the moment of the Resurrection (*hora resurrectionis*) as though they occurred at the time of the Passion. (PP IV.837a–b)

In this passage events that took place earlier are presented as taking place later, invoking a figure of speech already invoked, as Jeuneau points out, by Prosper of Aquitaine in his comment on verse 23 of Psalm 104 (PL 51, 299d).¹⁶ But it is not just the case that Scriptural writers reverse the normal meanings of words and use ‘after’ (*post*) when they mean ‘before’, Eriugena actually seems to suggest that the whole concept of ‘before’ and ‘after’ is relative and not necessarily a feature of the truth of the matter at all. Thus Scripture in fact records no temporal interval (*nullum spatium temporis*) between the creation and fall of Lucifer (PP IV.838b), or, for that matter, between the creation and birth of Cain (PP IV.809b). Temporal intervals do not accord with the truth of nature from the divine point of view, which is also the spiritual point of view.

15. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen McKenna, rev. B. S. Page (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), p. 200.

16. *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)* Book Four, ed. E. Jeuneau, op. cit., p. 332 n272.

Again in the *Periphyseon* Book IV 834c, when referring to the distinctions between different kinds of priority (first discussed in *De divina praedestinatione*), Eriugena does so by a grammatical contrast the perfect with the pluperfect tense of the verb. Here Eriugena invokes only two senses of priority: the priority is said not to be in time but in dignity and blessedness. There are two creations of man and one is prior to the second, but this priority is not to be understood in a temporal sense (*temporaliter*), but rather in terms of dignity. Earlier, Eriugena had also noticed the use of the perfect and pluperfect in relation to the account of man in paradise in Scripture. Eriugena is insistent that the first humans did not spend any time at all in Paradise:

Therefore that praise of the life of man in Paradise must refer rather to the life that would have been his if he had remained obedient than to its happening which only began and in which he did not continue. ... I should rather think that he was using the preterite for the future than that he meant that man had continued for a space of time (*temporalis spatium*) in the blessedness of Paradise before the Fall. (PP IV. 809b).

According to Eriugena, himself invoking the authority of Augustine's *Hexaemeron* (*De Genesi ad litteram*), Scripture frequently uses the preterite to express the future. However, again, it is equally clear that the future does not necessarily mean the future in any normal sense. It is almost as if, bearing out the way in which Eriugena approaches the book of nature using material drawn from the book of Scripture, Eriugena sees time as somehow expressed by grammatical tense and by rhetorical figure. It is a kind of ornamentation of the text, a way of putting things rather than the way things really are.

The true way of understanding or contemplating, such as was given to Adam, is not localised or temporalised, but, as Eriugena says at *Periphyseon* IV.835a, was by "an observation of the mind alone (which excels every corruptible sense, and all place and all time)" (*ultra omnem sensum corruptibilem, ultra omnem locum et omne tempus ...*). Human understanding really does have a kind of access to the eternal way of understanding, *sub specie aeternitatis* and the danger of literal readings of Scriptural texts is exactly the same as the dangers involved in the sensuous appreciation of nature individualised into times and spaces. The mind will become trapped in literalness, in sensuality, and this itself is the devil, this itself is the betrayer of human nature.

V. Conclusion

I have tried to sketch here the complex manner in which Eriugena combines his philosophical understanding (drawn from Platonic and Aristotelian sources) of the space and time as part of the procession and *exitus* of the divine nature, as the absolute marks of creation, as the boundaries of the physical world imposed by the fallen human understanding, with the message of Scripture concerning the passing away of all places and times in contrast to the abiding nature of eternal truth. What is significant is how far Eriugena will go to marry his *grammatical* interpretation of temporal verbs referring to historical events or stages in Scripture with his *philosophical* critique of temporal predicates in God, to more or less elide entirely the temporal and historical understanding, and to promote the true *theoria* which leads to *theosis* and to timelessness. There remains, however, an unresolved tension between time as part of the divine process and time as a consequence of the Fall. Eriugena himself, of course, feels that these accounts do not contradict but can be accommodated within *duplex theoria*. Finally, his discussion of time and space as frameworks of the mind, which are absent from the true *nous*, both of human nature and of God, again confirms his idealism.