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**AN ORIGINAL CHRISTIAN PLATONISM :
ERIUGENA'S RESPONSE TO THE TRADITION**

In keeping with the theme of this FIDEM conference, « Medieval Studies Today and Tomorrow », in this contribution I want to report on the tremendous blossoming of studies in the philosophy of Johannes Scottus Eriugena, witnessed by the growth in critical editions, translations and critical discussions, over not just the past 10 years, but the past 30 years¹. The man known to his contemporaries as Johannes Scottus (c.800 - c.877), and who signed himself 'Eriugena' (on the manuscript of his translation of Dionysius), is without doubt the most genuinely sophisticated philosopher of the Carolingian era, certainly to be ranked above such Carolingians as Alcuin², and indeed, stands as the most important philosopher writing in Latin between Boethius and Anselm. He is also, though this parallel remains to be explored, more or less a contemporary of the Arab Neoplatonist Al-Kindi. Eriugena can also be seen as the most significant intellectual figure to emerge from monastic Ireland, the so-called Island of Saints and Scholars, between the sixth to the ninth century (in comparison with Sedulius Scottus or Columban), although his debt to early Irish culture remains much disputed, even allowing for the fact that he worked, at least in part, with Irish-speaking scholars.

In general terms, Eriugena's thought represents a valiant, even inspired attempt to present a consistent, systematic, Christian Neoplatonist account of God, the universe, and all creation, a version

¹ I would like to thank Professor Dr. Theo Kobusch, Bochum, for inviting me to take part in this panel.

² For a study of Eriugena's Carolingian milieu, see J. MARENBO, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre: Logic, Theology and Philosophy in the Early Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1981.

so authentic that it prompted more than one nineteenth-century scholar to conclude that Eriugena had been in direct contact with the writings of Plotinus or Proclus. Eriugena, quite uniquely for a scholar in Western Europe at that time, had considerable familiarity with the Greek language, although he had no access to classical Greek philosophical works. His inspiration came from the Greek Eastern Christian theological tradition, at that time almost unknown in the Latin West, and which entered the Western tradition largely through the translations and commentaries of Eriugena. Eriugena had a unique ability to identify the underlying intellectual framework, broadly Neoplatonic but also deeply Christian, operated by these writers of the Christian East. Eriugena translated the *Corpus Dionysii*, the revered manuscript of which had been presented to the King of Francia Louis the Pious by the Byzantine Emperor Michael the Stammerer. Eriugena subsequently rendered into Latin Gregory of Nyssa's short treatise *De hominis opificio* (which he called *De imagine*), Maximus Confessor's *Ambigua ad Iohannem*, and *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, and possibly other works.

Drawing especially on what he found in Dionysius the Areopagite, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus Confessor, as well as from his unique interpretations of more familiar authorities of the Latin West (e.g., Cicero, Augustine, Ambrose, Boethius, Martianus Capella), Eriugena developed a highly original cosmology, articulated in his main dialogue, *Periphyseon* (c. 867, also known, less accurately, but more traditionally, as *De divisione naturae*), where the highest principle, the «the immovable self-identical one» (*unum et idipsum immobile*, *Periphyseon* I. 476b), engenders all things and retrieves them back into itself. In a significant and novel departure from traditional Neoplatonism, Eriugena calls this first and highest divine cosmic principle 'nature' (*natura*), which he defines as *universitas rerum*, the 'totality of all things' that are and are not, which includes both God and creation understood as the self-expression of God. By defining 'nature' so as to include both the things which are (*ea quae sunt*) as well as those which are not (*ea quae non sunt*), Eriugena extends late Neoplatonic thought, which emphasised the meontic region beyond the One, to express both the divine darkness and transcendence above being, and the literally incomprehensible and uncircumscribable infinity of the divine nature. This divine nature eternally self-externalises itself into a set of four 'species' or 'divisions' (*divisiones*) or 'forms' (*formae*) which nevertheless retain their unity with their

source by essentially being different manifestations of the same universal principle. Nature has four divisions: nature which creates and is not created (God), nature which creates and is created (the Primordial Causes), nature which is created and does not create (the Created Temporal Effects), and nature which is neither created nor creates (Non-Being). Eriugena understands these four divisions of nature as articulating in a dynamic manner God's nature as the Beginning, Middle and End of all things. The four divisions are necessary to express both the richness of the divine transcendence over and independence of creation, and also the divine immanence in the procession and return of created things, which flow out from God and depend on Him. In the *Periphyseon* Eriugena details this cosmological account whereby the infinite and unknown God, through a process of self-articulation or speaking the divine word, brings forth a procession of creatures which are in themselves mirrors of the deity and will ultimately return to their source in God. Of special significance in this divine and cosmic eternal process of outgoing (*exitus*) and return (*reditus*) is the central and ambiguous role of human nature. Human nature both facilitates and mediates the creation of all things, but also because of its own self-love, human nature is responsible for bringing about the world of mutable temporality and shadowy corporeality, which is the region of death. Only through the restoration of human nature can the rest of nature regain its status in the primordial causes in the divine mind.

Eriugena's works exerted only a minor influence in France in the ninth and the early tenth centuries, as his cosmological speculations appear not to have accorded well with the tenor of the age. As a result, apart from the enduring influence of his translations of Dionysius and some of his particular formulations, his philosophical system as such was generally neglected, although a paraphrase of his main work, *Periphyseon*, the *Clavis Physicae*, written by Honorius Augustodunensis, did circulate during the twelfth-century. It is likely that Eriugena did have some influence on the so-called school of St. Victor and it is clear that Hugh of Saint-Victor read him with care but also with some caution. Though fascinating his readers with the details of this story of fall and redemption, Eriugena's understanding of created reality as the self-manifestation of the divine nature was also seen as threatening to shade into some form of pantheism, though Eriugena himself was always careful to stress the absolute transcendence of God and His distinctness from creation while expressing their absolute

unity, a form of dialectical thinking which did not convince the authorities. Through a series of local circumstances, which are still not clear, the *Periphyseon* became associated with the revival of Aristotelian naturalism in Paris and was condemned alongside the writings of David of Dinant and Amaury of Bène in 1210 (where the work is not specifically listed) and in 1225 (where reference is made in the condemnation to *liber periphysis titulatur*)³.

The first printed editions of Eriugena's works appeared in the seventeenth century, but it was not until the nineteenth century that interest in him was revived, especially among followers of Hegel, who saw Eriugena as a forerunner to speculative idealism, a « Proclus of the West » according to Hauréau, or the « Father of Speculative Philosophy » according to Huber. In contrast to this enthusiasm, more sober twentieth-century studies (e.g. Contreni, Marenbon) tend to stress Eriugena's Carolingian background and continuity with Latin authors and especially his heavy reliance on St. Augustine⁴. However, systematic studies of his philosophical thought (Beierwaltes, Schrimpf, Gersh, Steel, Moran) have also tended to portray him as an original and deeply metaphysical, speculative thinker whose work transcends the limitations of his age and mode of expression⁵. Eriugena began to be a focus of interest primarily among historians of philosophy in Germany and France in the nineteenth century (largely through the influence of

³ See *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, ed. H. DENIFLE and A. CHATELAIN (Paris, 1889), Vol. I, p. 70, and G. THÉRY, *Autour du décret de 1210. I. David de Dinant. Etude sur son panthéisme matérialiste*, Paris, Bibliothèque Thomiste, 1925.

⁴ J.J. CONTRENI, *The Cathedral School at Laon from 850 to 930. Its Manuscripts and Masters*, Munich, Arbo-Gesellschaft, 1978; and J. MARENBO, *Early Medieval Philosophy (480-1150). An Introduction*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

⁵ Special mention should be made of the enormous contribution of Werner Beierwaltes who has published a number of significant detailed philosophical assessments of Eriugena. See for instance, W. BEIERWALTES, *Eriugena. Grundzüge seines Denkens*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1994. Beierwaltes describes Eriugena as the conceptually sharpest and yet most fantasmagoric thinker of his age. For his philosophical system, see also D. MORAN, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, J.J. O'MEARA, *Eriugena*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, and S. GERSH, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, Leiden, Brill, 1978. For a recent introduction, see D. CARABINE, *John Scottus Eriugena*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000 (Great Medieval Thinkers series).

Hegel)⁶, and a number of individual studies appeared in the early years of the twentieth century⁷, but the true beginning of the properly academic scholarly study of Eriugena was the publication of Dom. Maïeul Cappuyns' formidable *Jean Scot Erigène : sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* in 1933⁸, while the first critical edition was Cora Lutz's 1939 attempt at the edition of the Latin text of one of Eriugena's commentaries on Martianus Capella's *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*⁹. An indication of the amount of critical material, which has amassed, is given by the bibliographical surveys inaugurated by Mary Brennan and recently updated by Gerd Van Riel¹⁰.

⁶ See, for example, T. CHRISTLIEB, *Leben und Lehre des Johannes Scotus Eriugena in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der vorhergehenden und unter Angabe ihrer Berührungspunkte mit der neueren Philosophie und Theologie*, Gotha, 1860 and SAINT-RENÉ TAILLANDIER, *Scot Erigène et la philosophie scolastique*, Strasbourg, 1843.

⁷ For example, H. BETT, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena: A Study in Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1925; reprint New York: Russell & Russell, 1964.

⁸ M. CAPPUYNS, *Jean Scot Erigène : sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*, Louvain/Paris Abbaye de Mont César, 1933.

⁹ C. LUTZ ed., *Iohannis Scotti Annotationes in Marcianum*, Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1939. This edition is now in need of revision and should be used with care.

¹⁰ M. BRENNAN, *A Guide to Eriugenan Studies. A Survey of Publications 1930-87*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1989, which contains English-language summaries of all the major secondary literature on Eriugena published in the twentieth century up to 1987. This has recently been updated by G. VAN RIEL, « A Bibliographical Survey of Eriugenan Publications 1987-1995 » in *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena. The Bible and Hermeneutics. Proceedings of the Ninth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugena Studies*, ed. G. VAN RIEL, C. STEEL and J. MCEVOY, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 1996, pp. 367-400.

ERIUGENA : EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

Thomas Gale produced the first printed edition of Eriugena's main work, *Periphyseon*, in 1681¹¹, and it remains the case that the only available edition of Eriugena's collected works is that produced by Heinrich Joseph Floss for Migne's *Patrologia Latina* Volume 122¹². A significant turning point in the revival of Eriugena studies was the publication of Inglis Patrick Sheldon-Williams' (1908-1973) edition of the First Book of Eriugena's masterpiece, *Periphyseon* in 1968 in the *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* series of the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, followed soon after by his edition of *Periphyseon* Book Two in 1970, and Book Three, published after Sheldon-Williams' death, in the same series in 1981, seen through the press by John J. O'Meara¹³. Sheldon-Williams had assembled materials for the edition of Books Four and Five and had completed a draft English translation of these books, which was published separately in one volume edited by John J. O'Meara¹⁴. O'Meara and Édouard Jeuneau continued the edition of Sheldon-Williams, bringing out Book Four in the same series in 1995¹⁵. Book Five is still scheduled to appear. However, due to some deficiencies in Sheldon-Williams' manner of editing, and his conception of the manuscript tree, Professor Jeuneau decided to

¹¹ T. GALE, *Joannis Scoti Erigenae De Divisione Naturae Libri Quinque Diu Desiderati. Accedit Appendix ex Ambiguis S. Maximi Graece et Latine*, Oxford, Sheldonian Theatre, 1681.

¹² H.-J. FLOSS ed., *Johannis Scoti Opera quae supersunt Omnia*, in J.-P. MIGNE ed., *Patrologia Latina* CXXII, Paris, 1853, reprinted Turnhout, Brepols.

¹³ I.-P. SHELDON-WILLIAMS, *Iohannis Scoti Eriugena Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)* Volumes I-III, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* VII, IX, and XI, Dublin, Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968 ; 1972 ; 1981.

¹⁴ I.-P. SHELDON-WILLIAMS, and J. J. O'MEARA, *Eriugena. Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)*, Montréal/Paris, Bellarmin, 1987. An earlier partial translation was M. UHLFELDER and J. POTTER, *John the Scot. Periphyseon. On the Division of Nature*, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1976. A French translation of the first three books is by F. BERTIN, *Jean Scot Erigène, 'De la division de la nature' (Periphyseon)*. Introduction, traduction et notes, 2 Vols, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1995.

¹⁵ IOHANNIS SCOTTI ERIUGENAE *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae) Liber Quartus* edited E.A. JEAUNEAU with the assistance of M.A. ZIER, English translation by J.J. O'MEARA and I.P. SHELDON-WILLIAMS, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* XIII, Dublin, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995.

undertake an entirely new edition of the *Periphyseon* for the *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis* series¹⁶. So far three volumes have appeared in this series and two more are in process.

Sheldon-Williams had been criticised for his particular arrangement of the manuscripts of the *Periphyseon*, for his inconsistent use of sigla and other intrusive typographical devices, for various textual misreadings, for misidentifying some of the hand-written glosses, and for confusing Irish and Carolingian hands. Sheldon-Williams made other decisions which have also been challenged: Following the tradition of Gale and Floss, he adopted the title *De divisione naturae* for the whole work, whereas Jeuneau more correctly identifies it as merely the subtitle to Book One. Sheldon-Williams was of the opinion that *Periphyseon* Book One had emerged from an earlier « essay in dialectic » but offered no evidence for this interpretation, which takes an overly restrictive view of the first book of the dialogue. The main weakness of Sheldon-Williams' editing strategy was that it had conflated various versions of the text drawn from several different manuscripts into a single composite script, in a similar manner to the earlier editors, Thomas Gale in 1681 and Floss in 1853. Gale and Floss had published editions, which combined into a single text both the text of the main body of the manuscript and the various marginal annotations in different hands. This composite version disguised the gradual evolution of the text and, as Jeuneau remarks in his introduction to his edition of Book Four: « Today, however, this mixed type of edition is inadequate to the needs of scholarship »¹⁷.

The new edition is based on six manuscripts, including two manuscripts, Paris Bibl. nat. lat. 12965 and Bamberg Phil. 2/2, not used by Sheldon-Williams since they contained only Books Four and Five. Jeuneau has suggested that the extant manuscripts of the *Periphyseon* show four distinct levels of development, that is, four early 'editions'. One special difficulty in editing the *Periphyseon* is that the earliest manuscripts preserve only the first three books whereas the extant

¹⁶ E. JEAUNEAU ed., *Iohannis Scoti seu Eriugena Periphyseon, liber primus, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis* 161, Turnhout, Brepols, 1996, *Periphyseon liber secundus* CCCM 162, Turnhout, Brepols, 1997, *Periphyseon liber tertius* CCCM 163, Turnhout, Brepols, 1999. *Periphyseon* Books Four and Five will appear as CCCM 164 and 165 respectively.

¹⁷ IOHANNIS SCOTTI ERIUGENAE, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae) Liber Quartus*, edited E.A. JEAUNEAU with the assistance of M.A. ZIER, *op.cit.*, p. xxxiii.

manuscripts for Books Four and Five date from the twelfth century. Avranches and Cambridge, both twelfth-century manuscripts, are the sole witnesses for end of Book Four and the whole on Book Five in Stage Two versions, with Avranches noticeably less accurate than Cambridge in several places.

In the last thirty years further critical editions of Eriugena's works have appeared, including Édouard Jeuneau's edition of the Latin text, with French translation, of Eriugena's *Homilia*, or Homily on the Prologue to St. John's Gospel, published in 1969, and his 1972 edition, also with French translation, of the *Commentarius*, Eriugena's incomplete *Commentary on the Gospel of John*¹⁸. Jeanne Barbet has provided a critical Latin edition of Eriugena's Commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius¹⁹. Goulvin Madec has published a critical edition of the Latin text of Eriugena's *De divina praedestinatione* in 1978²⁰. Critical editions of Eriugena's translations of Maximus have also been published alongside editions of Maximus²¹. Translations of Eriugena's works have appeared in German, Spanish, French and Italian, but there is still need to provide translations of his commentaries on Dionysius and Maximus.

¹⁸ E. JEAUNEAU ed., *Jean Scot: Homélie sur le Prologue de Jean*, Sources Chrétiennes 151, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1969, and ID., *Jean Scot: Commentaire sur l'Évangile de Jean*, Sources Chrétiennes 180, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1972.

¹⁹ J. BARBET ed., *Iohannis Scoti Eriugena Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem* CCCM XXXI, Turnhout, Brepols, 1975.

²⁰ G. MADEC ed., *Iohannis Scotti de divina praedestinatione*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina L, Turnhout, Brepols, 1978, trans. M. BRENNAN, *Johannes Scottus Eriugena: Treatise on Divine Predestination*, Notre Dame, U. of Notre Dame Press, 1999.

²¹ E. JEAUNEAU ed., *Maximi Confessoris Ambigua ad Iohannem iuxta Iohannis Scotti Eriugena latinam interpretationem*, Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 18, Turnhout/Leuven, Brepols/ Leuven University Press, 1988. C. LAGA and C. STEEL eds, *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium II. Q. LVI-LXV una cum latina interpretatione Iohannis Scotti Eriugena*, Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 22, Turnhout/Leuven, Brepols/ Leuven University Press, 1990.

THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF ERIUGENA STUDIES (SPES)

Another significant advance in Eriugena studies came in 1970 with the foundation of a Society for the Promotion of Eriugena Studies, utilising the happy acronym SPES (hope), which held its first conference at the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin in 1970, organised by John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler, the proceedings of which were published²². The second conference of SPES was held in Laon, France, a place directly associated with Eriugena and whose library still preserves one of his manuscripts, in 1975²³. Werner Beierwaltes organised the third SPES conference in Freiburg in 1979, and also hosted the Fifth conference in 1987 and the Seventh conference in Bad Homburg in 1989²⁴. Guy Allard hosted a conference in Montreal in 1983 and Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten organised the eighth conference of SPES in Chicago in 1991²⁵. The ninth conference was held in Leuven and Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium in July 1995, organised by Carlos Steel and James McEvoy and²⁶, the most recent conference, the tenth, was held in Maynooth, Ireland on 16-20th August 2000 on the theme of « History and Eschatology » organised by James McEvoy, and the proceedings of this conference were published through Leuven University Press²⁷. The Society issues regular news bulletins and will soon develop a web site to keep members informed of developments in Eriugena studies.

²² Proceedings published as L. BIELER and J. O'MEARA eds, *The Mind of Eriugena*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1970.

²³ Proceedings published as R. ROQUES ed., *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie*, Paris, CNRS, 1977.

²⁴ W. BEIERWALTES ed., *Eriugena. Studien zu seinen Quellen*, Heidelberg, Anhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980.

²⁵ B. MCGINN and W. OTTEN eds, *Eriugena: East and West*, Notre Dame, U. of Notre Dame Press, 1994.

²⁶ The proceedings have been published as *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena. The Bible and Hermeneutics. Proceedings of the Ninth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugena Studies*, ed. G. VAN RIEL, C. STEEL and J. MCEVOY, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 1996.

²⁷ The proceedings have been published as *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time. Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugena Studies, Maynooth and Dublin, August 16-20, 2000*, ed. James MCEVOY and Michael DUNNE, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2002.

EVIDENCE OF ERIUGENA'S LIFE AND WRITINGS

Despite the growth in detailed research on all aspects of Eriugena's life and work, surprisingly little new information has been gained about Eriugena's place or date of birth or the circumstances of his early life and educational formation, beyond what was already contained in Cappuyns. On the basis of circumstantial evidence and some surviving *testimonia*, it is conjectured that Eriugena was born in Ireland around 800 or possibly slightly earlier²⁸. His first certain appearance in historical records occurs around 850/1 where mention is made, in a letter of Pardulus of Laon, of a certain Irishman named Johannes at the palace of Charles the Bald («*Scotum illum qui est in palatio regis, joannem nomine*», *Patrologia Latina* CXXI 1052a), who was engaged in a theological controversy with Gottschalk of Fulda. It is also clear that Johannes had been installed for some time at Charles' court, and he was also associated with ecclesiastical centres such as Rheims, Laon, Soissons and Compiègne, although there is no direct evidence that he was a monk or cleric (he refers to his '*frater in Christo*' Wulfad, who later became a bishop, but this appellation does not definitively confirm Eriugena's own church status). In a characteristic flourish, Johannes signed his translation of Dionysius with the pleonasm 'Eriugena' (*Patrologia Latina* CXXII 1236a), probably meaning 'Irish born', in imitation of the Virgilian 'Graiugena' which appears in one of his poems.

Eriugena's contemporaries acknowledged him as a liberal arts master of considerable learning. Florus calls him *scholasticus et eruditus* (PL CXIX 103a) and Anastasius the Vatican librarian marvelled at the fact that this *vir barbarus* from a remote land knew Greek. Evidence of this liberal arts activity appear in the form of two partial commentaries (c. 840-c.850) on *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, the liberal arts handbook of the late Latin author, Martianus Capella, although there is considerable debate about the dating of these works. It is also possible that he wrote a commentary on Priscian. An important recent discovery has been the identification of a set of Biblical glosses, *Glossae Divinae Historiae*, which show Eriugena's

²⁸ These *testimonia* have been collected in M. BRENNAN, «Materials for the Biography of Johannes Scottus Eriugena» in *Studi Medievali*, 3a serie, XXVII, 1 (1986), pp. 413-460.

skill as a *grammaticus*. These *Glossae* include a scattering of Old Irish terms used to explain difficult or recondite Latin words, offering further evidence of Eriugena's provenance and of the presence of Irish students in his audience²⁹. Indeed, as Jauneau and others have shown, Irish scholars had a considerable presence in the Frankish court since the time of Charlemagne, accounting for up to a quarter of the intellectual retinue. Both the *Annotationes in Marcianum* and the *Glossae Divinae Historiae* demonstrate Eriugena's rich and eclectic knowledge of the liberal arts tradition, including Isidore, Cassiodorus, and Cicero. It is likely that it was Eriugena's skill as a dialectician, which led him to be chosen to defend a theological position, which was also the occasion for his first coming to historical notice.

Eriugena was commissioned by Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims and Bishop Pardulus of Laon to refute a treatise by a Saxon monk, Gottschalk (806-68), who interpreted Augustine as teaching a 'twofold predestination' (*gemina praedestinatio*): of the elect to heaven and of the damned to hell. Eriugena's militant response, *On Divine Predestination* (c. 851), rejected any divine predestination to evil by an appeal to God's transcendence and goodness. God, being perfectly good, wants all humans to be saved. God does not predestine souls to damnation; humans damn themselves through their own free choices. Furthermore, God, who is outside time, cannot be said to *fore-know* or to *pre-destine*, since these terms involve temporal predicates. Due to a perceived emphasis on human free-will in the salvific process, Eriugena was accused of 'Origenism' and 'Pelagianism' by Bishop Prudentius of Troyes (see Prudentius, *De praedestinatione*, PL cxv.1010c), alluding, one assumes, to the heresy that human beings can be saved through their own resources rather than by divine grace. Prudentius, an erstwhile admirer of Scottus, acknowledges his «Irish eloquence» (*Celtica eloquentia*, PL CXV 1194a), but dismisses Johannes' treatise as confused reasoning not based on sound knowledge of scripture. *On Divine Predestination* was condemned in Francia at the councils of Valence (855) and Langres (859) in part for its use of logical method (*dialectica*). The phrase «Irish porridge» (*pultes scottorum*) is used in these official denunciations, recalling Jerome's sneer against Pelagius.

²⁹ See *Glossae Divinae Historiae. The Biblical Glosses of John Scottus Eriugena*. Edited with an Introduction by J.J. CONTRENI and P.P. Ó NÉILL, Firenze, Sismel. Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1997.

While purporting merely to interpret Augustinian texts, this early treatise is philosophically significant for its rationalistic, dialectical analysis of key theological concepts and its reliance on argument rather than scriptural citation. For Eriugena, following his mentor Augustine, true philosophy and true religion are one and the same. As one gloss in the earlier *Annotationes in Marcianum* attests: « no one enters heaven except through philosophy » (*nemo intrat in celum nisi per philosophiam*). This remained Eriugena's position in his mature works, even though his conception of philosophy understood it a kind of rational practice of contemplation, which led eventually to unity with the divine in deification (*deificatio, theosis*).

Despite the official condemnations of *De divina praedestinatione*, Eriugena, for reasons which are not clear, continued to have the patronage of Charles the Bald, who, around 860, invited him to translate the writings of the Dionysius the Areopagite. This mysterious Christian author purported to be Dionysius, the first convert of St. Paul at Athens, but since Lorenzo Valla, has been thought more likely to be a sixth-century follower of Proclus. The *Corpus Dionysii* had been given a gift to Charles the Bald's father, Louis the Pious, from the Byzantine Emperor Michael the Stammerer in 827, possibly because of a confusion between Dionysius and the patron saint of France. Hilduin had attempted a translation in 832-5, but Eriugena's version was most successful and, indeed, remained in circulation until the 13th century, as James McEvoy's recent research into the Dionysian tradition has confirmed. Soon after completing his version of Dionysius (c. 862), Eriugena also translated Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*, under the title of *De imagine*, and possibly Epiphanius' *Anchoratus. De Fide*. Eriugena also wrote a long commentary on Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy (Expositiones in hierarchiam coelestem)* and translated and commented on Maximus' *Ambigua ad Ioannem*.

Following his exposure to Dionysius, Eriugena enthusiastically adopted the Areopagite's affirmative and negative theology, according to which denials concerning God are 'more true', 'better' 'more apt', than affirmations, but in fact both affirmations and negations somehow do not oppose each other but harmoniously express the divine nature (*Periphyseon* I.461b-c). Eriugena will argue that all supposed affirmative terms, including such terms as 'supernatural', 'superessential' are really negative in meaning. They are to be and

understood as underscoring the transcendence of the divine nature above all predication.

Eriugena's most original work, his grand dialogue, *Periphyseon*, was probably begun just after he had completed the Dionysius translation and finished around 867. This dialogue, deeply influenced by his reading of Greek Christian authors, is a work of astonishing scope, a veritable *summa* which includes disquisitions on the nature of God, human nature and creation. At the beginning of Book Four Eriugena labels his enterprise a *physiologia*, a « study of nature », and indeed one manuscript of the *Periphyseon* in the British Library in London calls the whole dialogue « *Liber Physiologiae Iohannis Scottigenae* ». The term '*physiologia*' is apt in that the term 'nature' for Eriugena spans the whole cosmological domain, including not just created nature but also the Divine Creator, and the dialectical relation between Creator and created. Nature is to be understood as what is real in the widest sense, the totality of all things that are and are not, as we have already seen.

The original plan of the author, expressed at *Periphyseon* III.619d-620b, was to devote one book to each of the four divisions: Book One would deal with the divine nature and the procession or *exitus* of all things from God, Book Two would treat of the Primordial Causes and Book Three their Created Effects, including the nature of *ex nihilo* creation and the stages of the creation of the world. Book Four would deal with the return of all things to God such that God would be 'all in all'. The topic of creation requires Eriugena to address issues connected with the Biblical account of creation, and thus, in Book Three, he embarks on his own version of a *Hexaemeron*. The momentous event of the emergence of human nature on the Sixth Day of creation requires extended treatment, and Eriugena is forced to devote a fourth book to this topic, thus relegating the return of all things to God to a fifth book. Eriugena was thus revising his conception of the dialogue as he wrote. This change in the planned structure of the dialogue is significant because it helps identify the different stages of composition of the text.

A fragmentary *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John (Commentarius in Evangelium Iohannis)* and a sermon (*Homilia in Johannem*) on the Prologue to St John's Gospel were also written probably in the late 860s or 870s sometime after the *Periphyseon* since they appear to make ready use of the concepts developed there. It has also been conjectured that he may have written commentaries on other gospels but this remains unproven. A number of interesting poems survive which show

the breath of Eriugena's learning but also portray him as a courtier quite well versed in political affairs. Some poems are written specifically in praise of the king, including an important poem, *Aulae sidereae* («Starry Halls») which appears to celebrate the dedication of Charles the Bald's new church in Compiègne on 1 May 875. The poems show Eriugena's fascination with Greek, indeed some poems are written entirely in Greek. It is probable that Eriugena died sometime around 877. An apocryphal tale, dating from the twelfth century, records that Eriugena was stabbed to death by his students.

ERIOGENA'S HAUPTWERK - PERIPHYSEON

Although there has been scholarly interest in all aspects of Eriugena's *oeuvre*, nevertheless, the *Periphyseon* attracts the most critical scrutiny. This is clearly because the *Periphyseon* is such a remarkable and many-faceted work, astonishing both in its extraordinary scope and complexity, distinguished by the originality of its conception, the depth of its philosophical and theological speculation, and, not least, by the brilliance of its literary execution. This dialogue was popular through the twelfth century, but it attracted theological censure both during the Middle Ages and later. In the seventeenth century, soon after the appearance of Thomas Gale's printed edition, the *Periphyseon* was included in the first edition of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, and remained there until the Index itself was shelved in the 1960s.

Periphyseon Book One examines the first division of nature : God. According to Eriugena, here following Dionysius, God is not 'literally' (*proprie*) understood as a substance or essence. He does not possess quantity, quality, or relations. God is not circumscribed by any of the Aristotelian categories. He is not in place and time, but transcends all, dwelling in inaccessible darkness. He is «beyond being» and may even be described as «non being» or as «nothing», a term which Eriugena thinks has Biblical sanction. God's nature is so transcendent and infinite that it escapes definition and circumscription. We do not know what God is (*quid est*). But similarly, God does not know what He is, and thus, remarkably, Eriugena concludes that God is unknowable even to Himself, this ignorance being a sign of His infinite

richness rather than expressing a limitation on His nature. God knows only that He is (*quia est*), not what He is.

God radiates outwards from His transcendent darkness into the manifest light of creation. In this eternal outpouring, God at once eternally creates Himself and all other things. God's self-creation is a form of self-manifestation (*Periphyseon* I.455b), that is, God manifests Himself in an infinite series of revelations or theophanies (*theophania, hoc est dei apparitio, Periphyseon* I.446d). This self-creation is understood by Eriugena as a self-expression, a speaking of the Word (*clamor dei*) which at the same time brings about the creation of all other things, since all things are contained in the Word. The Word enfolds in itself the Ideas or Primary Causes (*causae primordiales*) of all things. Eriugena's understanding of these *causae* draws on Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*, Dionysius' discussion of the divine rays, and Maximus' notion of «divine willings» (*theia thelemata*), or divine ideas which function as the eternal causes of all created things. The number of these causes is infinite and none has priority over the other, e.g., Being is not prior to Goodness, or vice-versa. Each cause is a divine theophany and each is contained in God as the Word of God. These Primordial Causes may be contemplated either in their cause or source who is God, or in their created manifestations in this world, a point Eriugena took from Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* II.vi.12. *Periphyseon* Book Two discusses these Primary Causes located in the mind of the God, but, since they are causes, their very nature is to flow out from themselves, bringing about their Effects and so Book Three looks at the created effects. Eriugena's notion of the *duplex theoria* required to understand the causes either in their divine source or in their created effects is crucial for understanding his dialectical approach to the practice of philosophy.

This outflowing (*exitus*) creates the whole universe from the highest genus to the lowest species. In this causal procession like produces like ; incorporeal causes produce incorporeal effects. All created things are essentially incorporeal, immaterial, intellectual, and eternal. God creates out of Himself and all creation remains within Him. In Book Three Eriugena emphasises God's presence in and transcendence above His creation. Because all things originate from God through His will, and because all things are sustained by God's power (and hence all things, in the Neoplatonic sense, «remain in» God), God and the creature can in a certain sense be said to be one and the same : «It

follows that we ought not to understand God and the creature as two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same. For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God ; and God, by manifesting himself, in a marvellous and ineffable manner creates himself in the creature... » (*Periphyseon* III.678c).

Furthermore, all things are contained in the divine Word, and since human nature is made in the image of God, all things may be said to be contained in human being, which is the *officina omnium* (II.530d). In a sense then the whole universe is contained in human nature, and had human nature not fallen, all things would retain their purely incorporeal natures. The whole spatio-temporal world and our corporeal bodies, including the division into sexes are a consequence of the Fall (*propter peccatum*, IV.896b), a 'superaddition' (*superaddita*) onto the purely mental and immaterial. This physical world may be understood to be created by God anticipating that human beings would fall, or as a consequence of the human fall itself. Either way, this apparent corporeal world is not as substantial as it appears, but in fact depends on the interaction of human *nous* and *aesthesis*. Place and time are definitions, which locate things, and since definitions are in the mind, then place and time are in the mind (I.485b). The sensible, corporeal spatio-temporal appearance of things is produced by the qualities or 'circumstances' of place, time, position, and so on, which surround the incorporeal essence. The reform of nature from its material to its incorporeal status then is dependent on the reform of human nature, a reform made possibly by Christ's *inhumanatio*.

Books Four and Five discuss the return (*reditus*) of all things to God, a return which centres around the absorption of all things into human nature and then the reintegration of human and divine nature. Corporeal things will return to their incorporeal causes, the temporal to the eternal. The human mind will achieve reunification with the divine. Human nature will return to its Idea in the mind of God, and thus perfected human nature will become paradise. Humans who refuse to let go of the 'circumstances' will remain trapped in their own phantasies, and this, rather than any place (*locus*), constitutes hell. The elect achieve a special deification (*theosis*) whereby they will merge with God completely, as lights blend into the one light.

Eriugena's treatise on human nature in Book Four, amounting more or less to a *tractatus de homine*, is pivotal for the whole scheme of *exitus* and *reditus*, and his ambitious anthropology has been the focus

of considerable philosophical interest. Eriugena ranges widely, treating of the creation of man, the Fall and the consequent division of the sexes, the meaning of human nature as made in the image and likeness of God (*in imaginem et similitudinem dei*), the nature of paradise to which perfected human nature will return, the nature of the devil and of evil will. Eriugena's philosophical account of man as a *medium* between animal and angel, a *medietas* between the earthly and the intelligible worlds, is thoroughly infused by his efforts to make sense of Holy Scripture. In Book Four, Eriugena's radical Scriptural exegesis supports original philosophical claims about human nature, giving the book the appearance of a Biblical commentary, combined with an elegant display of philosophical dialectic, e.g., to highlight the contradictions inherent in human nature : Man is an animal and man is not an animal ; man is spiritual and not spiritual. For Eriugena, these apparent contradictions are really indications of man's exalted status.

Eriugena draws heavily on Augustine's commentaries on Genesis, especially *De Genesi ad litteram*, Ambrose's *De Paradiso* and Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*. But Eriugena is never a slavish follower – he departs from Augustine on several points, including on the question of the purely spiritual nature of paradise, whether Adam's body was animal or spiritual, and whether humans *ante peccatum* ever actually spent time in paradise. Eriugena adopts Gregory of Nyssa's view that sexual difference is a result of the Fall, that the real Fall is the fall from intellect into sense, intellect distracted by the voluptuousness of sense. So, sexual difference really makes no difference for humans, or as Eriugena boldly puts it : « Man is better than sex » (*homo melior est quam sexus*, *Periphyseon* II. 534a). Furthermore, Eriugena believes this agrees with Scripture : « in Christ there is neither male nor female » (*Periphyseon* IV.795a).

As we have seen, Eriugena's account of the transcendent nature of God means that we can legitimately apply contradictory predicates to Him. But Eriugena also applies this interpretative principle to discussions of human nature, so that we may apply contradictory predicates to human nature, developing a totally new anthropology – negative anthropology. For Eriugena, 'rational animal' does not adequately define human nature. Man is an animal but it is more correct to say man is not an animal. Following Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena also denies that human nature a microcosm made up of all parts of the world. Humanity is a mirror of all things, the definition of humanity as

« a certain intellectual concept formed eternally in the divine mind » (IV.768b) is one which applies to all other things too. Eriugena feels he has articulated the universality and comprehensive nature of humanity in this extra-ordinary definition.

Book Four fully explores the manner in which human nature mirrors transcendent divine nature. Only man is made in God's image – not even the angels are accorded that honour, so in a sense man is greater than the angels. Perfect human nature would have possessed the fullest knowledge of its Creator, of itself, and of everything else, had it not sinned (IV.778c). This mirroring of God in man occurs especially in the cognitive domain. God knows that He is but not what He is. Similarly, man knows that he is although from this he cannot grasp what his essence or nature is. Human self-ignorance is an exact mirror of the divine self-ignorance.

Just as God is infinite and unbounded, human nature is indefinable and incomprehensible and open to infinite possibility and perfectibility (V.919c). God's transcendence and immanence are reflected in human transcendence and immanence with regard to its world. Eriugena's dialectical thinking always stresses the close parallels between human and divine nature :

For just as God is both beyond all things and in all things – for He Who only truly is, is the essence of all things, and while He is whole in all things He does not cease to be whole beyond all things, whole in the world, whole around the world, whole in the sensible creature, whole in the intelligible creature, whole creating the universe, whole created in the universe, whole in the whole of the universe and whole in its parts, since He is both the whole and the part, just as He is neither the whole nor the part – in the same way human nature in its own world (in its own subsistence) in its own universe and in its invisible and visible parts is whole in itself, and whole in its whole, and whole in its parts, and its parts are whole in themselves and whole in the whole (*Periphyseon* IV.759a-b).

Eriugena concludes that human nature is « wholly in the wholeness of the whole created nature (*in universitate totius conditae naturae tota est*), seeing that in it every creature is fashioned, and in it all are linked together (*in ipsa copulata*), and into it all shall return, and through it must all be saved » (*Periphyseon* IV.760A).

Eriugena's exaltation of human nature has been criticised as leading to pantheism – collapsing the difference between God and man. But

one may also point to Eriugena's stress on the unique nature of Christ as the perfection of human nature (*vir autem perfectus est Christus, Periphyseon* IV. 743b), and Christ is also one in substance with God. Eriugena recognises that Christ is unique and that the individual is not collapsed in the universal. Humans will always be different from God in that they have been created and God is Creator. However, I believe a case can still be made for saying that Eriugena really intends his perfected human nature to possess divine attributes in a genuine way. The argument turns on an answer to the following question : To what extent is man made in the image and likeness of God? Eriugena has two answers : an image is not an image unless it is identical to its exemplar in all respects except number or subject (*excepta subiecti ratione, Periphyseon* IV.778a). From this we may conclude that man differs from God *in subiecto*, that is there is solely a difference in number. But difference in number does not mean that God and man stand apart from each other as two identical billiard balls would occupy different places. Neither God nor man is in space or time, both are incorporeal and hence numerical difference, or difference in subject, can only have the Neoplatonic meaning that the first will always differ from what comes after the first. God is first, and hence man comes after. But 'after' (*post*) here has no temporal meaning, as Eriugena emphasises (*Periphyseon* IV.808a). A second answer he gives is that God is creator and man is created, but since creation is self-manifestation, that amounts to saying no more than that God manifests himself fully in man. He sometimes qualifies this by saying, quoting Maximus Confessor (e.g. V.879c-880a), that man is by grace what God is by nature, but elsewhere, especially in the concept of theophany, he fuses the notion of nature with that of grace, all natures are theophanies, that is, produced by grace. God is the source of both *dona* and *data*, indeed both are revelations of the divine nature. Indeed there are many places where Eriugena cites texts (e.g. Maximus) to suggest that God and man mirror, each other. One is at the heart of the other. Similarly human nature and the angelic nature are mutually mirroring. This notion of the intertwining and merging of minds is at the very core of Eriugena's mysticism and of his understanding of the relation between human divine natures and their coming together in the person of Christ. Christ is actually what all human beings can be and will be, that is precisely the promise of salvation for Eriugena. Consider the following passage from Book Two :

For if Christ Who understands of all things, (Who) indeed is the understanding of all things, really unified all that He assumed, who doubts then that what first took place in the Head and principal Exemplar of the whole of human nature will eventually happen in the whole. (*Periphyseon* II.545a)

This clearly implies that humanity as a whole, that is, resurrected human nature in its perfected state, will be truly illuminated and merged with the divine, for human nature itself in its very essence is the *intellectus omnium*. Furthermore, the use of the future tense here is somewhat misleading, since time itself is a function of our fallen state and the perfected state is timeless so there is a sense in which perfected human nature already is one with God and always has been one with God. Eriugena, then, has a dialectical understanding of the relation of God and man which can be viewed as orthodox from one point of view, but which is always transgressing the boundaries of orthodoxy in the direction of a view which has God and man mutually contemplating themselves and each other, in an endless, eternal play of theophanies. Thus, a kind of mystical humanism is celebrated in *Periphyseon* Book Four, a humanism best understood through Eriugena's account of the dialectic of self-knowledge and ignorance. Eriugena celebrates the lack of limit and inherent transcendence not just of human nature but also of the whole of nature. Nature as a whole is an infinite series of theophanies. This, I believe, is Eriugena's most significant contribution to Christian philosophy.

Modern philosophical commentators recognise in Eriugena a strongly intellectualist and rationalist philosopher, struggling to make sense of scriptural revelation in terms consistent with the evidence of reason. Thus, in the *Periphyseon* IV.781c-d, Eriugena makes the bold claim that one need only introduce the « opinions of the holy Fathers » where « the gravest necessity requires that human reason be supported for the sake of those who, being untrained in it, are more amenable to authority than reason ». Eriugena is clear that right reason (*vera ratio*) is self-justifying and that authority is only for the instruction of lesser minds where reason does not rule. Similarly, Eriugena is untroubled by conflict between authorities, and specifically between Greek and Latin authors. For him the variations of interpretation are again infinitely diverse avenues to the one truth. Indeed, Eriugena anticipates many modern philosophical positions ; he is humanist, idealist, Renaissance magus, process theologian, all *avant la lettre*. We look forward to

future scholarly studies, which will unearth the nature of Eriugena's influence on Ramon Lull, Nicholas of Cusa, and other writers of the Renaissance and modern periods.