



Eriugena, Berkeley, and the Idealist Tradition

Edited by Stephen Gersh and
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Whoever says that this reason does not exist must conclude that God has created what he has made without the aid of his reason or else that in creating or before creating, he did not have knowledge of what he was creating, since his creative reason was not in him). That Augustine speaks here of *ratio faciendi* in the singular is explained by the fact that the world, being taken here in a collective sense, requires as such only a single "reason."

39. Cf. Zarb, *Chronologia operum S. Augustini*, 53 and 65–66.

40. Augustine, *Ad Orosium Contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas* 8.9.224–227, ed. Klaus D. Daur, CCSL 49 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), 172.

chapter seven

Spiritualis Incrassatio

Eriugena's Intellectualist Immaterialism: Is It an Idealism?

DERMOT MORAN

*No philosopher of nature doubts that all things are contained in the divine mind.
Magister: Divino animo omnia contineri nullus recte naturas rerum intelligens dubitat.
Eriugena, Periphyseon Book V.925a*

*For among the wise it is maintained that in man is contained the universal creature.
Constat enim inter sapientes, in homine universam creaturam contineri.
Eriugena, Periphyseon IV.755b*

INTERPRETING A MEDIEVAL THINKER IN THE LIGHT OF CURRENT PHILOSOPHY

In this paper I shall argue that radical versions of immaterialism and intellectualism, amounting very definitely to a commitment to idealism, are present in the work of the Irish Christian Neoplatonist Johannes Scottus Eriugena (c.800–c.877), and, specifically, in his wide-ranging, speculative metaphysical cosmology, *Periphyseon* (also known as *De divisione naturae*, *On the Division of*

Nature, c. 862–c. 867).¹ To interpret an ancient or medieval thinker in the light of modern philosophical conceptual constellations requires the exercise of due hermeneutic diligence. Eriugena inherits from the late classical world an outlook that is both Christian and Platonist. Bearing in mind the different senses of the term “idealism,” I want to suggest that his *Periphyseon* proposes certain central doctrines that undoubtedly amount to idealism. It would, however, be anachronistic to seek an account of the *extramental* world in precise Berkeleian or Kantian terms. Instead, Eriugena must be allowed speak for himself. On the other hand, his terms are not ours, and so we must attempt to interpret his statements in terms of our current understanding. Hermeneutics is a two-way street.

As our opening quotation affirms, Eriugena holds that all reality is encompassed by the divine mind: “all things are contained in the divine mind” (PP 5.925a). Not just Dionysius but Ambrose confirm this for Eriugena: all things are in God. Their being is their being cognised by God: “For what else do we mean by all things than the knowledge of them in the Divine Mind?” (*Quid enim aliud omnia sunt, nisi eorum in divino animo scientia*, PP 5.925b). Furthermore, human nature, which is in essence the human mind, is also an idea in the mind of God: “man is a certain notion eternally made in the mind of God” (*homo est notio quaedam intellectualis in mente divina aeternaliter facta*, PP 4.768b).² The human mind is made in the image of the divine mind. In the words of Maximus, translated by Eriugena, God and human nature are paradigms of each other. All created things, then, may be said to be contained not only in the divine mind but also in the human mind, since the human mind is the *officina omnium* (PP 2.530d; 4.755b; 5.893c), the workshop of all things. The human mind too somehow permeates all creation. In a sense, there is no world without the unfolding of the human mind, there is certainly no temporal or spatial order without human participation in the cosmic order.

Furthermore, in the course of his explanation of the origin of the material universe, Eriugena explicitly denies the extramental existence of corporeal matter. Following St. Gregory of Nyssa, he holds that the true essences (*ousiai*) of corporeal things are immaterial and intelligible, and corporeality is simply an appearance produced to the Fallen mind by the concatenation of properties, specifically, quantity, quality, time, and place. Corporeality, then, is a delusion of the Fallen mind, and one which will disappear in the return of all things, when body returns to spirit.

Eriugena is committed to a dynamic conception of the deity as externalising itself into the world and returning back to itself. This overall outlook has

been interpreted by several nineteenth-century German Idealists as prefiguring their own outlook. All nature is a kind of self-expression and self-explication of the divine mind which even in its outgoing and return never departs (except in terms of the human belief about itself and the world, characterised religiously as “the Fall”) from the realm of the divine mind. From Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena emphasises that the corrupting temporal flow and apparent restricting spaces of this world are not part of God’s original design, but are forced on our human world through a kind of self-ignorance. The goal of philosophy is to overcome this self-ignorance and to dwell instead within a “divine ignorance,” one which recognises the infinity and ineffability of the divine and its immediate immanence in all things as the *essentia omnium*.

In explicating the dialectics of the relation between human and divine knowledge (and ignorance), Eriugena even thinks of reality as constituted by communicating minds, both divine and human. Indeed, he envisages the post-resurrection condition as one in which the resurrected humans discourse with the divinity concerning the “principles of visible things” (PP 4.843b). Here he is touching on an important insight, one that would become fully developed in Hegelian idealism, namely, the primacy of self-consciousness and intersubjectivity for the constitution of what is grasped as the objective communal world.

In this paper, I shall argue, then, that Eriugena’s account of the nature of all existence is essentially immaterial. I shall further argue that his ontological ranking of the apparently physical, material, and sensible world as *below* the level of mind and, in a specific sense, *dependent* on mind, and his understanding of all things as both contained in the divine mind, and by extension in the human mind, must be evaluated not only as an original philosophical system, but also as belonging within the family of idealisms in the Western philosophical tradition.

The concept of “idealism” evolved and gathered new meanings in the course of several hundred years, as the Introduction to this volume has sketched. There are several kinds of idealism: *Platonic* or *Neoplatonic* idealism; *immaterialism* or *mind-dependence* of physical objects; *transcendental* idealism, with its a priori correlation of subject and object and its claim that space and time are conditions of sensibility rather than intrinsic properties of mind-external objects; and, finally, *absolute* idealism, with its conception of the cosmos as the self-evolution and coming to self-awareness of absolute spirit. Here, I shall argue that Eriugena’s philosophy must certainly be located within this family of idealisms. But first let us get clearer about

whether we are justified in speaking of varieties of idealism in the history of philosophy.

SHOULD BERKELEIAN IMMATERIALISM
BE THE PROTOTYPE OF IDEALISM IN GENERAL?

Some philosophers have claimed that idealism is a doctrine that ought to be confined to modernity. A. C. Ewing, for instance, claims that "idealism starts with Berkeley," although he does allow that Platonism may be deemed an idealism in a different, weaker sense.³ Bernard Williams and Myles Burnyeat have advanced a stronger thesis, namely, that idealism was not a possible philosophical option in pre-Cartesian antiquity.⁴ In an influential 1982 article, Myles Burnyeat claimed that all classical philosophers have an "inbuilt assumption of realism" and that:

Idealism, whether we mean by that Berkeley's own doctrine that *esse est percipi* or a more vaguely conceived thesis to the effect that everything is in some substantial sense mental or spiritual, is one of the very few major philosophical positions which did not receive its first formulation in antiquity.⁵

Similarly, in a 1981 survey article on Greek philosophy, Bernard Williams asserts that idealism, understood as "the monism of mind, which holds that nothing ultimately exists except minds and their experiences" was not found in the ancient world.⁶ Both philosophers understand idealism as a modern response to the question of the possible non-existence of the external world. As Burnyeat claims:

Greek philosophy does not know the problem of proving in a general way the existence of an external world. That problem is a modern invention. . . .⁷

Burnyeat is in agreement with Kant that idealism is a response to the problem of the existence of the external world, a problem that can be articulated only once the Cartesian dualism of subjectivity and objectivity has been established. Without a developed conception of a world-independent subject

and of objectivity as relative to a subject, idealism could not even have been stated. So the argument goes.

On the other hand, a number of scholars, including Richard Sorabji (instancing Gregory of Nyssa),⁸ Werner Beierwaltes⁹ (citing Proclus and Eriugena), and Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson (Plotinus),¹⁰ have argued convincingly, I believe, that idealism is to be found in the classical world, specifically in the Neoplatonic tradition. In previous studies, I have supported this view that idealism is to be found in the Christian Neoplatonic tradition of the Middle Ages, specifically in Johannes Scottus Eriugena.¹¹ Here I want to explore in greater detail the motivations for Eriugena's immaterialism and intellectualism. This motivation is couched in Christian Neoplatonism. Myles Burnyeat, however, has specifically contested the claim that Neoplatonism might count as an idealism. For him, Neoplatonism is a monism whose first principle—the One (*to hen*)—is very definitely a mind-independent existent. Furthermore, Burnyeat also claims that the Greeks, including the Neoplatonists, could not help thinking of creation as the imposition of form on a pre-existing matter, and hence matter is ineliminable, even for Plotinus. He concludes:

It seems, therefore, that the grand cosmic metaphor of emanation is evidence less of incipient idealism in a modern sense than of the ancients' final inability to relinquish the traditional dualities of mind and object, subject and attribute.¹²

Against Burnyeat, however, I argue that there are distinct and genuine senses in which Neoplatonism can be considered an idealism. Inherited from Plato is the view that the physical cosmos belongs to the realm of time and becoming (*genesis*), of *mutabilitas*, neither wholly non-existent nor completely real, "not completely not being" (*nec omnino non esse*) in Augustine's terms.¹³ This realm is entirely dependent on immaterial and eternal principles, namely the transcendent divine goodness. Furthermore, the higher one ascends through the ranks of the Neoplatonic hierarchy, the more being and the more intelligibility are possessed by the entities until we come to the completely unified realm of self-thinking thought, the realm of *Nous*, beyond which is the unthinkable One.

The real issue for Neoplatonism is whether the One can be construed as a mind or as mind-like. Those who want to deny that Neoplatonism is an idealism will argue that the One, beyond Mind, is not mind, and hence that

all reality is not mind-dependent, as idealism would maintain. In favour of this argument are those texts where Plotinus says explicitly that the One is “before thought” (*pro tou noesai; pro noeseos*, *Enneads* 5.3.10) and does not think (*Enneads* 3.9.9; 5.3.13; 5.4.2). On the other hand, as the highest self-identity, the One has some kind of direct contact with itself (he uses a term from Epicurus, *epibole* at *Enneads* 6.7.3.8–9, setting upon oneself), and a kind of self-intellection, “hyper-thinking” or “supra-Intellection” (*hypernoesis*, *Enneads* 6.8.16; *katanoesis*, *Enneads* 5.4.2). In fact, Burnyeat himself concedes that “[i]t is possible that the One does in some obscure and unfamiliar sense have knowledge of itself.”¹⁴

But, whatever may be true about Plotinus, it is certain that Christian Neoplatonism with its personal God and Trinitarian doctrine, does allow that the One is *at least* Mind; and, to say that it is not Mind is really to say that it is more than Mind. This is clearly Augustine’s position in *De Trinitate*, book 15, where, following John 4:24, God is understood as “spirit” and credited with life and mental perception and understanding:

But the life which God senses and understands all things (*sentit atque intelligit omnia*), and senses with mind (*et sentit mente*) not with body, because God is spirit. God does not sense through a body like animals which have bodies, for he does not consist of body and soul. And thus this simple nature (*simplex illa natura*) senses as it understands, understands as it senses, and its sensing and understanding are identical. (*De Trinitate*, 15.2.7)¹⁵

God is understood as a simple nature, as a One, but as One who also has the highest form of mental perception and self-knowledge, a self-knowledge functioning in a manner such that the unique identity of the One is preserved. There is no doubt, then, that the Christian Neoplatonist’s divine One is a kind of mind if it is anything (and we must always be sensitive to the degree of negativity in all attempts to express the divine nature). Now, having established that Neoplatonism is a kind of idealism, let us turn to what may be the most systematic and coherent Christian Neoplatonism in ancient and medieval thought, namely, that elaborated by Johannes Eriugena in his dialogue *Periphyseon* (c. 867). Here we find a monism where the material principle has been reabsorbed into the One and the One is understood according to the model of a mind coming to know itself.

ERIUGENA:
THE DYNAMICS OF UNIVERSAL NATURE

Eriugena’s *Periphyseon* is a “study of nature” (*physiologia*, PP 4.741c), a sprawling Neoplatonic *summa* of five books in the form of a dialogue between Nutritor and Alumnus on the meaning of *universitas rerum*, that is, everything gathered under “universal nature” (*universalis natura*, PP 2.525b). Eriugena, as cosmologist (*fiscus, sapiens mundi*) but also as *philosophus* and *theologus*, is conducting an “inquiry into natures” (*inquisitio naturarum*, PP 2.608c), guided by “nature, the teacher herself” (*natura ipsa magistra*, PP 2.608d). In this grand theological and cosmological system God and nature are thought together. Nature is understood as the “general name for all things that are and all things that are not” (*Est igitur natura generale nomen, ut diximus, omnium quae sunt et quae non sunt*, PP 1.441a), including “both God and the creature” (*deus et creatura*, PP 2.524d). Eriugena’s challenge is to explain how nature includes both being and non-being, both God and creation. In the course of the dialogue, he gives an account of the nature of the divine One, its cosmic outgoing into created nature and its return into its own hidden depth. Moreover, according to the principle that human nature is made in the *imago et similitudo dei*, all created things are contained in human nature, which itself undergoes a process of outgoing and return to its source in the divine mind.

Eriugena does not simply equate being with God and non-being with creation, as the Augustinian tradition was wont to do. Rather, Eriugena proposes a fourfold division of nature: nature which creates and is not created, nature which creates and is created, nature which is created and does not create, and nature which is neither created nor creates. These divisions (also referred to as “forms” and “species”) express the various aspects of the divine manifestation and also enumerate the stages of the cosmic procession out of and return to God. Everything takes place within nature; at the same time, God is present in all four divisions. The fourfold division of nature is both “from God and in God” (*de deo et in deo*, PP 3.690a). Yet at the same time, God can be understood as a non-being above being, a superessential nothingness dwelling in divine darkness. This insight, inspired primarily by the Greek Neoplatonic tradition and specifically by Dionysius the Areopagite, had a profound impact on Eriugena.

ERIUGENA'S ENCOUNTER WITH DIONYSIUS

Although Eriugena had access to a fragment of Plato's *Timaeus* in Calcidius' translation, along with the latter's commentary, his sources were almost exclusively Christian. They included not just the Latin Neoplatonic tradition of Ambrose and Augustine, but also (unusually for the time) the Eastern Greek Christian theologies of the Cappadocians, Dionysius, Maximus Confessor, and Epiphanius, some of whose works he personally translated from the original Greek. Eriugena struggled always to construct a consistent philosophical system out of these diverse sources, and operated within a very broad version of the principle of charity—all interpretations which are consistent with the Divine Word are accepted, and there are innumerable such interpretations, as many as there are colours in a "peacock's tail" (*penna pavonis*, PP 4.749c):

For the Holy Spirit Who is the infinite founder (*infinitus conditor*) of Holy Scripture in the minds of the prophets established therein infinite meanings (*infinitos intellectus*), and therefore no commentator's interpretation displaces another's, provided only that what each says is consistent with the Faith and with the Catholic creed, whether he receives it from another or finds it in himself, albeit enlightened by God (*a deo illuminatus*). (PP 3.690b–c)

While emphasising the fundamental agreement between Christian Fathers, Eriugena favoured Greek over Latin versions of theological doctrines. In particular, he esteemed the enigmatic but deeply spiritual writings of that pious forger Dionysius the Areopagite, whom he calls *summus theologus, sanctus Dionysius, magnus Dionysius Areopagita* (PP 3.644a), and *praeclarissimus episcopus Athenarum* (PP 3.644b). While he fully recognises that Dionysius disputes in an "involved and distorted" manner (*more suo perplexe yperbaticeque disputat*, PP 1.509c), is "obscure" (*obstrusus*), and is "difficult" (*difficilis*), nevertheless, for Eriugena, he has unique insight into the mysteries of the divine nature, the "hid divinity" (*occulta divinitas*). The chief characteristic of this theological tradition is its emphasis on God as "above being" to the extent that God may be called a "non-being."

Eriugena was particularly impressed by Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy*, where, in chapter 4 (CH 4.1; PG 3.177d1–2), he read: *to gar einai panton estin he hyper to einai theotes*, which he translates, *Esse enim omnium est super esse divinitas*, "the being of all things is the Divinity above being" (PP 1.443b).¹⁶

This is perhaps Eriugena's favourite phrase from Dionysius.¹⁷ In the manuscripts, it is sometimes rendered, probably by a copyist without knowledge of the Greek original as *esse enim omnium est super esse divinitatis*.¹⁸ Sometimes, instead of invoking the Dionysian formula *super esse divinitas*, Eriugena speaks of the "divine superessentiality" (*divina superessentialitas*, PP 3.634b), or—quoting Dionysius *Divine Names* 1.1–2 (PG 3.588b–c)—of the "superessential and hidden divinity" (*superessentialis et occulta divinitas*, PP 1.510b).

What does it mean to say that the being of all things is the One who is "beyond being" or "beyond essence" (*superessentialis*)? In book 1 of the *Periphyseon* Eriugena comments on the meaning of *superessentialis*:

Nutritor: Did we not say that, strictly speaking, the ineffable nature (*ineffabilis natura*) can be signified by no verb, by no noun, and by no other audible sound, by no signified thing? And to this you agreed. For it is not properly but metaphorically (*Non enim proprie sed translatiue*) that it is called Essence, Truth, Wisdom and other names of this sort. Rather it is called superessential (*superessentialis*), more than truth, more than wisdom. But do not even these (names) seem to be, in a way, proper names (*propria nomina*)? For it is not called Essence properly, yet it is properly called superessential; similarly, if it is not called Truth or Wisdom properly, yet it is properly called more-than-truth and more-than-wisdom. For although among the Latins these names are not usually pronounced under a single accent (*sub uno accentu*) or by a unitary harmony of composition, except the name *superessentialis*, by the Greeks, on the other hand, each is expressed by a single compound. (PP 1.460c–461a)

God then is not essence but "above essence" (*superessentialis*), or even the "essence above essence" (*superessentialis essentia*).

Eriugena regards apparently affirmative designations such as *superessentialis* as actually belonging to negative theology. As Alumnus comes to realise:

For when it is said: "It is superessential," this can be understood by me as nothing else but a negation of essence (*negatio essentiae*). For he who says "It is superessential," openly denies (*aperte negat*) that it is essential, and therefore although the negative is not expressed in the words pronounced, yet the hidden meaning of it is not hidden from those who consider them well. (PP 1.462a–b)

For Eriugena, terms like *superessentialis* compound the two kinds of theology—positive and negative—since they outwardly appear positive but their meaning has the “force of the negative” (*virtus abdicativae*, PP 1.462c). These terms encapsulate the dialectic of seeming to affirm and at the same time denying, and hence participate in the dialectics of knowledge and ignorance.

The main point is that God is not to be understood as being or essence (*essentia*) but as “more than *essentia*” or “beyond essence.” This thought is not foreign to the Latin tradition. As Eriugena recognises, both Augustine and Boethius agree with him in insisting that the Aristotelian categories do not apply *proprie* to God. Moreover, Aristotle—“the shrewdest of the Greeks”—considered the categories not to apply to God but only to the *created* universe:

Aristotle the shrewdest of the Greeks, as they say, in discovering the way of distinguishing natural things (*naturalium rerum*) included the innumerable variety of all things which come after God and are created by Him in ten universal genera which he called the ten categories, that is predicables. For as he holds, nothing can be found in the multitude of created things and in the various motions of minds which cannot be included in one of these genera. (PP 1.463a)

In support of the view that the category of substance does not apply to God, Eriugena cites Augustine *De Trinitate* (5.1.2), that the categories of created things are not relevant to the divine essence. Unsurprisingly, Eriugena reads Aristotle through the eyes of Augustine. God is not *ousia*, but more than *ousia* and the cause of all *ousiai* (PP 1.464a). The categories are not predicated *proprie* but *metaphorice* of God. Yet, in book 5 of *De Trinitate*, Augustine had written:

There is at least no doubt that God is substance, or perhaps a better word would be essence (*substantia, vel, si melius appellatur, essentia*); at any rate what the Greeks call *ousia* . . . And who can more be than he that said to his servant I am who am (Ex. 3:14).¹⁹

Boethius in his *De Trinitate*, chapter 4 (a text with which Eriugena was familiar), was more explicit that God is not substance in the normal sense of the categories:

There are in all ten categories which can be universally predicated of all things, namely, substance, quality, quantity . . . But when anyone turns these to predication of God, all the things that can be predicated (*quae praedicari*) are changed . . . For when we say “God” (*deus*) we seem indeed to denote a substance; but it is such as is supersubstantial (*quae sit ultra substantiam*).²⁰

Eriugena himself accepts the principle that a simple nature does not admit of the notion of substance and accidents (PP 1.524a). God, then, is not *ousia*.

It is clear from what we have seen that Eriugena’s encounter with Dionysius led him to read Augustine in a new light, highlighting Augustine’s commitment to the *via negativa*, that God is better known by not knowing, that His ignorance is true wisdom (*qui melius nesciendo scitur, cuius ignorantia vera est sapientia*, PP 1.510b). Eriugena is quoting Augustine’s *De Ordine* 16.44 (*Deus qui melius scitur nesciendo*).²¹ For both Augustine and Boethius, God is not captured truly by the category of substance. But Eriugena’s reading of the categories is further informed by Maximus Confessor, who sees them as applying only to the created world. Eriugena is clear that whatever is substance is finite and subject to accidents, but that since God has no accidents, God is therefore not a substance:

For that substance which has the first place among the categories is finite and subject to accidents, but that universal essence admits in itself no accident. (PP 2.597a)

At the centre of Eriugena’s philosophy, then, is a conception of God as “beyond being,” “beyond essence.” He even goes further and understands God as “nothingness” (*nihilum*, PP 3.685a), and as the negation of essence (*negatio essentiae*, PP 1.462b):

For when it is said: “It is superessential,” this can be understood by me as nothing other but a negation of essence. (*Nam cum dicitur: Superessentialis est, nil aliud mihi datur intelligi quam negatio essentiae*, PP 1.462b).

God is “not this nor that nor anything” (*nec hoc nec illud nec ullum ille est*, PP 1.510c). Moreover, this “non-being” is the being of all created things. The divine first principle is best understood as a nothingness, which through an act

of self-negation brings itself into being. As we shall see, Eriugena's idealism emerges in his attempt to unpack these claims.

CREATION AS THE SELF-EXPRESSION OF THE TRANSCENDENT DIVINE NOTHINGNESS

The Christian Neoplatonic tradition maintains both the transcendence of the divine and His immanence in creation, but the stress in Eriugena and Dionysius is on God as transcendent of all predication, beyond all that can be said of Him. God "surpasses all essence" (*superat omnem essentiam*), is infinite, and cannot be defined (PP 2.589a–b):

Or how can the infinite be defined by itself in anything or be understood in anything when it knows itself to be above every finite (thing) and every infinite (thing) and beyond finitude and infinity. (PP 2.589b)

Indeed, it is even better for God to know that He is apart (*remotus*) from all things than that He is in all things (PP 2.598a). The attempt to think this unknown and transcendent first principle leads to an extraordinary account both of the immanence of this principle in the world and also of the manner in which human nature emulates the divine both in terms of being and non-being, knowledge and ignorance.

As a Neoplatonist, Eriugena thinks of the transcendent divine One as evolving as both goodness and being. Nothingness first expresses itself as goodness and then as being. Eriugena, following Dionysius, thinks of the Good, which is prior to being, as responsible for the movement from non-being to being:

Therefore if the creator through his goodness brought all things out of nothing so that they might be, the aspect of goodness-in-itself must necessarily precede the aspect of being through itself. For goodness does not come through essence but essence comes through goodness. (*Non enim per essentiam introducta est bonitas sed per bonitatem introducta est essentia*, PP 3.627c–d).

Eriugena cites the typical Neoplatonic slogan to the effect that "all things that are are insofar as they are good" (echoing Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*

1.32.35). If goodness is withdrawn, Eriugena says, then things cannot come to essence (PP 3.628a). Goodness gives rise to essence; it is "the prerogative of the Divine Goodness to call forth from non-existence into existence what it wishes to be made" (PP 2.580c).

Goodness is further linked to the creative function, to self-diffusion, which itself is understood as a speaking of the Word. For Eriugena, the term "goodness" (*bonitas*) comes etymologically from the Greek *buo* meaning "I cry out" (*clamo*, PP 2.580c). God creates through the activity of speaking the Word, the Word contains the eternal "Primary Causes" (*causae primordiales*), which themselves produce the "created effects" in their specific times and places. This outgoing (*proodos, exitus*) goes from the highest genera to the lowest species and individual, culminating in the lowest level of unformed matter (*materia informis*), which is "next to nothing" (*prope nihil*).

With typical Neoplatonic imagery, goodness is compared to a river that flows out from itself everywhere (PP 3.632c), "descending through the natural gradations" (*per naturales descensiones gradusque*, PP 3.630b). The "ineffable fecundity of the divine goodness" (PP 2.611b), in an "inexhaustible diffusion" (*inexhausta diffusio*) and "simple multiplication" (*simplex multiplicatio*, PP 3.632d) extends "from itself in itself to itself" (*a se ipsa in se ipsa ad se ipsam*, PP 3.632d). The superessential divinity creates the "Good-in-itself" (*bonitas per se ipsam*), which in turn brings forth beings into existence (or essence), and hence is generated the whole hierarchy of created beings in their order and rank. According to this cosmic *divisio* we begin with the most general genus and extend to the lowest level or *infima species*. Moreover, Eriugena thinks of the activity of creation as a self-revelation of the divine, what the Greek Christian tradition termed a theophany. Eriugena defines a theophany as a *self-manifestation* of the divine (*theophania, hoc est dei apparitio*, PP 1.446d).

In this creation or self-manifestation Eriugena emphasises the dynamic manner in which the hidden Godhead becomes manifest. Moreover, this creation is modelled on divine self-intellection. Eriugena understands God as a transcendent nothingness or non-being "above all that is and is not," whose first act is his own self-explication or creation, his moving from superessential non-being into manifest being. Thus in *Periphyseon*, book 3, Eriugena repeats the notion that the divine nature *creates* itself:

... the divine nature is seen to be created and to create—for it is created by itself in the primordial causes (*creatur enim a se ipsa in primordialibus causis*), and therefore creates itself (*ac per hoc se ipsum creat*), that is,

allows itself to appear in its theophanies, willing to emerge from the most hidden recesses of its nature in which it is unknown even to itself, that is, it knows itself in nothing (*in nullo se cognoscit*) because it is infinite and supernatural and superessential and beyond everything that can and cannot be understood; but descending into the principles of things and, as it were, creating itself (*ac veluti se ipsam creans*), it begins to know itself in something. (PP 3.689a–b)

Creation is in fact defined as “manifestation in another” (*creatio, hoc est in aliquo manifestatio*, PP 1.455b), which in this case means manifestation of oneself in another. God’s self-creation is his self-externalisation, his overcoming of his own transcendent darkness to become the principle of being and of light. God’s self-creation gives rise to God’s self-knowing, which in turn generates His manifest being. While the divine self-creation is itself not an explicitly idealist thesis, Eriugena, in terms adapted from St. Augustine’s account of self-knowledge, understands the move from non-being to being as a movement of the divine nature into mind. Intellect precedes being. The divine mind *creates* itself in its attempt to come to self-knowledge. But it is not as if the divine is said to exist prior to mind, rather it is non-being before it comes to self-understanding. The divine self-understanding in Eriugena is never a complete self-comprehension but always retains a dimension of divine ignorance and divine darkness: “His ignorance is true wisdom”:

[God] is within none of the things which are contained within nature but know that He transcends them all, and therefore their ignorance is true wisdom, and by not knowing him in the things that are they know Him better above all things that are and are not. (PP 2.598a)

According to Eriugena, not only are humans ignorant of the essence of God, but God too has a kind of divine ignorance, an ignorance of His own infinite nature. God’s infinity is such that He knows that He is but not What He is, that is, His essence is inexhaustible and incomprehensible even to Himself.

God’s self-creation is one with the creation of all things other than God. All creatures are divine manifestations, theophanies: “every visible and invisible creature can be called a theophany, that is a divine apparition” (PP 3.681a, see also 1.446d). Creation as a whole and the actual being of all things is a product of the *willings* of the divine mind (*theia thelemata, divinae voluntates*, PP 2.529b). These willings are divine apparitions or theophanies. God’s being

is thus the essence of all things. The true nature of all things is their immaterial essence in the divine nature. Reality is the self-manifestation of the divine thought. God shall be “all in all” (I Cor. 15:28, *Deus erit omnia in omnibus*). This diffusion and self-multiplication of the transcendent divine goodness takes the form of a cyclical movement out from itself into natures and essences and then back to itself. In the first three books Eriugena concentrates on the movement outwards the *exitus*, which is precisely a movement from the infinite, unknown, hidden, transcendent, atemporal, purely spiritual into the finite, immanent, temporal, the material world:

For everything that is understood and sensed is nothing else but (*nihil aliud est*) the apparition of what is not apparent, the manifestation of the hidden, the affirmation of the negated, the comprehension of the incomprehensible, the utterance of the unutterable, the access to the inaccessible, the understanding of the unintelligible, the body of the bodiless, the essence of the superessential, the form of the formless, the measure of the measureless, the number of the unnumbered, the weight of the weightless, the materialisation of the spiritual (*spiritualis incrassatio*), the visibility of the invisible, the place of the placeless, the time of the timeless, the definition of the infinite, the circumscription of the uncircumscribed . . . (PP 3.633a–b)²²

The emphasis in this movement is on the transcendent principle being rethought as immanent in the world. Whereas Augustine, as we have seen, had characterised God as spirit (*spiritus*) in his *De Trinitate*, with His own self-knowledge and self-intellection, Eriugena emphasises in addition that this spirit must also transform itself into its opposite, into matter. The divine darkness becomes light, the superessential becomes essence, the spiritual becomes material (*spiritualis incrassatio*).²³

Nature’s dynamic cosmic movement of descent from and return to the One is contained in allegorical terms in the Christian story of Creation-Fall-Redemption given in Genesis. Humans originally were “one with the One” and in their Fallen state their aim is again to be reunited with God, even to the extent of deification or *theosis*, a notion rare in Latin books, as Eriugena recognises (PP 5.1015c), although he believes it is implied by St. Ambrose. In a magnificent prayer in book 3, Eriugena calls on God who has given nature also to bestow grace in order to rescue mortals from ignorance and errors. He further beseeches God to “shatter the clouds of empty phantasies (*nubes*

vanarum phantasiarum) which prevent the glance of the mind (*acies mentis*)” from beholding God and to lead mortals to their home in God, the highest superessential God, *summum bonum superessentiale* (PP 3.650b). Goodness then, while above being, must be understood as shot through with intellection, since goodness is understood as the possession of good will, and its willings are the things that are created. To understand goodness as giving rise to being is already to see mind at the heart of the cosmic process.

THE DIALECTICS OF THE DIVINE UNFOLDING

The divine nature unfolds itself in a process of coming to self-intellection and self-understanding. This unfolding of the benevolent willing of the divine is understood in dialectical terms. Eriugena wants to think of God and creation as linked through a kind of ontological *dialectic*, by which Eriugena means the art of dividing (*divisio*) a genus into species and finally individuals, and of re-collecting individuals back into their species and their genera. *Natura* is the *summum genus*, Maximus Confessor's *genikotaton genos*, which he translates as *generalissimum genus*.²⁴ The supreme genus is a reality as are the various intermediate genera and the ranks of species and the individuals within each species. Moreover, Eriugena finds scriptural support for the idea that all nature is elaborated dialectically from genus through species into individuals in the Vulgate (instead of the usual Septuagint) version of Genesis 1:24 which he quotes in book 4, 748d.²⁵

And see how the Sacred Text declares for us the natural sequence of events: “Let the earth bring forth the living soul in its genus.” Genus is mentioned first because all species are contained in it and achieve their unity in it, and it is divided into them, and achieves its multiplicity by division into the general forms and differentiated species, a process which is also revealed in the words: “Cattle and reptiles and beasts of the field after their species (*secundum species suas*).” (PP 4.748d–749a)

Eriugena is explicit that this dialectic is not just a logical procedure in the mind but belongs to the nature of things, *natura rerum*:

From this we may see that that art which concerns itself with the divisions of genera into species and the resolution of species into genera,

which is called dialectic [*dialectike*] did not arise from human contrivances [*non ab humanis machinationibus*], but was first implanted in nature [*sed in natura rerum*] by the originator of all the arts that are properly so called and was later discovered there by the sages who make use of it in their subtle investigation of reality. (PP 4.749a)

Nature differentiates itself dialectically into its species and individuals. As Werner Beierwaltes has commented:

It is Eriugena's conviction that dialectic is not primarily a human project, rather it is grounded in Being itself. Being is thus determined as possessing a dialectical structure, which is adequately translatable into dialectic as a method.²⁶

But it is a specific kind of dialectic, one which weaves together elements of the Aristotelian categorial and logical tradition with the affirmative and negative modalities of speaking about the divine of Pseudo-Dionysius and the rather strange Neoplatonic Aristotelianism of Maximus Confessor.

Not only is the cosmic process dialectical but Eriugena extends this dialectic into the divine nature itself. The Godhead expresses itself as Trinity without losing its oneness (PP 3.687d). It is also understood as the ontological triad of *ousia*, *dynamis*, and *energeia*, as found in Maximus. But the end result is an account of the divine mind coming to being and to self-knowledge and then transcending its manifest nature in its hidden divine darkness. While the hidden, mystical aspect of the divine cannot be given a name, there is no doubt that the self-manifestation of creation, the dialectical self-unfolding of the divine is such that the whole cosmos is an expression of divine mind and divine will. We shall now examine some of idealist elements of this account of the cosmic unfolding of the divine nature, beginning with the explanation of corporeality and materiality.

THE CHRISTIAN REJECTION OF MATERIALISM

As we saw at the outset, the most prominent features of Christian Neoplatonism are its opposition to materialism and its commitment to an intellectual principle governing the cosmos. Materialism, usually of the Stoic or Atomist kind, was generally regarded as the antithesis of a theist approach. Christians

opposed a material first principle. In order to consider the kind of materialism available to early Christian theologians, let us begin with the classic account found in Augustine's *Confessions*, one of the most influential texts of Christian philosophy.

As we know from the *Confessions*, Augustine was both attracted to the life of philosophy (through the lost *Hortensius* of Cicero) and at the same time rather unimpressed by one of the chief philosophical works available to him, namely, Aristotle's *Categories*, which came highly recommended by his teachers. In book 4 he writes:

When I was only about twenty years of age Aristotle's book on the "Ten Categories" (*quas appellant decem categorias*) came into my hands. Whenever my teacher at Carthage and others who were reputed to be scholars mentioned this book, their cheeks would swell with self-importance, so that the title alone was enough to make me stand agape, as though I were poised over some wonderful divine mystery. (*Confessions* 4.16.28)²⁷

It is clear that Augustine was less than impressed by this work that he managed to struggle through on his own. For him, the book had a simple message: everything that is falls under one of the ten categories and the chief category is *substantia*. God too could be understood under the category of substance:

. . . I thought that everything that existed could be reduced to these ten categories, and I therefore attempted to understand you, my God, in all your wonderful simplicity, in these same terms, as though you too were substance, and greatness and beauty were your attributes in the same way that a body has attributes by which it is defined. (*Confessions* 4.16.29)²⁸

Augustine clearly could only think of substance as some kind of material principle. At this stage, Augustine conceived of God as a "bright unbounded body" (*corpus lucidum et immensum*, *Confessions* 4.16.31)²⁹ and of himself as a "morsel from that body" (*et ego frustum de illo corpore*). For Augustine, then, Aristotle is partly responsible for the corporeal or material view of God as somehow extended in space and possessing attributes like any other body. Augustine thus followed Stoic tradition in thinking of Aristotle as a materialist.

Subsequent to his early encounter with Aristotle, Augustine discovered the Manichees, who also were materialists or corporealists, although they admitted two primary substances, what Augustine calls "the theory of two substances," *opinio duarum substantiarum* (*Confessions* 7.14).³⁰ Augustine confirms that, even after his adolescence, he still held that God was an immense corporeal substance:

I could imagine no other substance except such as is normally seen by the eye. But I did not think of you my God in the shape of a human body (*in figura corporis humani*), for I had rejected this idea ever since I had first begun to study philosophy. . . . My heart cried out violently against all my phantasms (*clamabat violenter cor meum adversus omnia phantasmata mea*). . . . I could not free myself from the thought that you were some kind of bodily substance extended in space (*corporeum tamen aliquid cogitare cogere per spatial locorum sive infusum mundo sive etiam extra mundum per infinita diffusum*), either permeating the world or diffused in infinity beyond it. This substance I thought of as something not subject to decay or harm or variation (*in corruptibile et inviolabile et incommutabile*) and therefore better than any that might suffer corruption or damage or change.

. . . So I thought of you, O Life of my life, as a great being with dimensions extending everywhere, throughout infinite space, permeating the whole mass of the world and reaching in all directions beyond it without limit, so that the earth and the sky and all creation were full of you and their limits were within you, while you had no limits at all. (*Confessions* 7.1)³¹

Augustine clearly had an understanding of God as changeless and incorruptible, but he still envisaged his omnipresence as literal presence at all points in space. Augustine, then, held that God was the most immense corporeal spirit pervading everything.³²

Augustine's anti-materialist enlightenment came through reading the *libri Platoniorum* (*Confessions* 7.9). He realised that the light of the world was not a physical or material light and that God was truly infinite "but not in the way I had supposed" (*Confessions* 7.14):

I saw that all finite things were in you, not as though you were a place that contained them, but in a different manner (*sed aliter*). (*Confessions* 7.15.21)³³

Augustine's problem, he came to realise, was that he could not shake off the carnal way of viewing things. In his famous phrase: "The weight I carried was the habit of the flesh" (*et pondus hoc consuetude carnalis*; *Confessions* 7.17.23).³⁴ He regards himself as held down by lower things and hence unable to conceive of the true transcendence of God.

This whole story is well known, but I have dwelt on it because it emphasises the manner in which even a great classical mind like Augustine could have such difficulty conceiving the immateriality and transcendence of God. He lays the blame squarely at the feet of Aristotle and credits the Platonists with restoring his vision of true being. The point, in short, is that to conceive God as substance is to be drawn into materialism and pantheism.

ERIOGENA'S IMMATERIALIST COSMOLOGY

Eriugena was impressed both by Augustine's anti-materialism and by his intellectualism, the view that intellectual things are higher than intelligible things, a view articulated in Eriugena's favourite Augustinian text, *De Genesi ad litteram*.³⁵ Eriugena too warns against "false thinking and materialist opinions" (PP 5.1018b) and against the "error of the pagan philosophers" who maintained that matter was coeternal with God (PP 3.637a). Following the Augustinian tradition, he holds that all things are created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) and that considered in themselves without reference to their origin, they are pure nothing (*omnino nihil*). Their entire reality is a gift (*donum*) of the divine nature. Moreover, for Eriugena, *ex nihilo* means *ex Deo*. To be made from nothing really means to come directly from the divine. In line with a general Christian Platonism, things are traceable back to their being in God. God is the sole source of all things and all things are really identical with their immaterial eternal ideas in God's mind. Their being in God is not other than their being *God*, since God is simple and contains no divisions or distinctions.

In keeping with this thoroughgoing account of the immanence of all things in the divine, Eriugena maintains that apparently corporeal physical objects are essentially incorporeal. The essence (*ousia*) of all things is immaterial and eternal and in God, and "physicality" is simply the commingling or concourse (*concursum, confluum, coitus*) of qualities themselves immaterial which cluster round the immaterial essence, but which have the appearance of materiality and corporeality to the mind not enlightened by philosophy.

Eriugena, following late antique thought, but specifically Maximus Confessor, conceives of the physical world as bounded by the categories as given in the Aristotelian tradition.³⁶ Just as the human corporeal body is really a concatenation of accidents, all other corporeal things are similarly produced by a commingling of quantity, quality, and the other accidents, gathered around the original unseen essence (PP 1.495d–6a). Furthermore, Eriugena says *ousia* or substance is unknowable in itself and is known by its *circumstantiae* (PP 1.471b34), *circumstantes* (PP 1.471c7), or *periocai, periokhai*. These are not strictly speaking accidents, because they are "outside" (*extrinsecus*) the essence, and yet they cannot exist apart from it.

Not only is *ousia* unknowable in itself but, at PP 1.478c, Eriugena says that none of the categories is accessible to sense. *Ousia* itself transcends the senses and the other categories are either in or around *ousia* so that they in themselves also are not known to the senses. The argument is simple: if *ousia* is incorporeal, then its accidents must also be incorporeal since they inhere in it or stand around it:

You are aware, I think, of the fact that none of the aforesaid ten categories which Aristotle defined, when thought of by itself, that is, in its own nature, in the light of reason, is accessible to the bodily senses. For *ousia* is incorporeal and the object of no sense, while the other nine categories are about it or within it. But if the former is incorporeal, surely it must be apparent to you that everything which is either attached to it or subsists in it (*omnia quae aut ei adhaerent aut in ea subsistunt*) and cannot exist apart from it is incorporeal? Therefore all the categories are incorporeal when considered in themselves. (PP 1.478c)

Eriugena is radically reinterpreting the Aristotelian categories: they are immaterial and non-sensible and, moreover, all things contained in them, are also immaterial and non-sensible. He goes on to explain that some of these categories "commingle" with one another (the term he uses is *coitus*) to produce the effect of corporeality.

Some of them, however, by a certain marvellous commingling with one another (*earum tamen <quaedam> inter se mirabili quodam coitu*), as Gregory says, produce visible matter, while some appear in nothing (*in nullo apparent*) and remain for ever incorporeal. For *ousia* and relation, place, time, action, passion are not reached by any bodily sense, while

quantity and quality, situation and condition, when they come together and constitute matter, as we said just now, are normally perceived by bodily sense. (PP 1.479a)

Eriugena, then, sees not just human bodies but all material bodies as made up of a congruence (*concursum, confluxus, coitus*) of accidents.³⁷ Materiality is understood in terms of accidents clustering around a primary accident, quantity, but the key idea is not that matter is quantity, *res extensa*, but that it is sensuously grasped, it appears as sensible. Here Eriugena is drawing on Gregory of Nyssa, who, in his *Peri Kataskeues Anthropou* (*De hominis opificio*, known to Eriugena as *De imagine*), chapter 24, argued for the immateriality of bodies.³⁸ When we think of a body, according to Gregory, we can formulate different ideas about it—that it is two cubits long, heavy, etc. These ideas can be separated from the body itself and from each other. When they are all removed no subject of predication, no *hypokeimenon*, is left.³⁹ Each of the qualities on its own is grasped as an intellectual “idea” which is incorporeal (we can for example distinguish the idea of colour from the idea of weight). For Gregory, these qualities are ideas independent of one another and independent of any substratum; it is only when they are thought together that we get the further idea of materiality. When all the ideas are withdrawn, the idea of body itself dissolves. Presumably Gregory inherited this concept from Plotinus who, in *Enneads* 6.3.8, argued that sensible substances are a mere “conglomeration” (*sumphoresis*) of matter and qualities.⁴⁰ Matter is understood not as a real principle but as “a shadow upon a shadow, a picture and an appearance.”⁴¹ Matter is appearance to sensibility. Plotinus in this passage is an immaterialist, but, more importantly, the Christians who read him were able to import this theory into their systems without leaving any residue of matter as a kind of second principle, as in Plato’s indefinite dyad.

IDEALISM AND IMMATERIALISM

Augustinian Christianity was indebted to Neoplatonism for clarifying the immateriality of divinity. But idealism is a richer outlook than immaterialism; it also implies a certain *intellectualism*, the recognition that the mind both transcends and encompasses material nature, by understanding it, and is even somehow responsible for it in a casual sense. This intellectualism is explicit

in Augustine’s view that spiritual things are better than material things, that the eternal is to be preferred to the temporal, and so on. In its more extreme form, as in Eriugena, it is the view that matter is somehow extruded from mind, that matter is, in Eriugena’s memorable phrase, a “thickening of the spirit” (*spiritualis incrassatio*, PP 3.633b).

Eriugena’s theological cosmology emphasises the identity between the source and the effect. The Godhead is unmanifest and manifest, uncreated and created, hidden in the highest darkness but created in all things as those things themselves. Eriugena concludes:

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 (*sed unum et id ipsum*). For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God; and God, by manifesting Himself, in a marvellous and ineffable manner creates Himself in the creature, the invisible making itself visible, and the incomprehensible comprehensible and the hidden revealed and the unknown known and being without form and species formed and specific and the superessential essential and the supernatural natural and the simple composite and the accident-free subject to accident and the infinite finite and the uncircumscribed circumscribed and the supratemporal temporal, and the Creator of all things created in all things and the maker of all things made in all things. (PP 3.678c ff.)

The whole world, then, is in a sense divine. It too is eternal, infinite, and immaterial. It is only because of human transgression that it takes on the appearance of corporeality, spatiality, and temporality, and all other limitations, including the presence of death.

To conclude, Eriugena’s Neoplatonic system of nature is a dialectical interplay of hiddenness and manifestation, nothingness and being, mind unknown to itself coming to self-knowledge as infinite knowing and unknowing. The divine spirit permeates everything and the essence of everything is immaterial and incorporeal. As we have seen, Eriugena is certainly the greatest *immaterialist* of Western philosophy prior to Berkeley (although his immaterialism is drawn from Gregory of Nyssa). Moreover, he offers a highly intellectualist account of the nature of all things as contained in the divine mind, and by extension, due to the *imago dei* doctrine, in the human mind. For Eriugena, all things are identical with the knowledge of them in the divine mind (PP 5.925b). Here he is quoting Dionysius’ *Divine Names*,

chapter 7: "In knowing itself the divine mind knows all material things in an immaterial mode" (*Semel igitur divina sapientia cognoscens cognoscit omnia immaterialiter materialia*, PP 5.925c). Moreover, by extension, the prelapsarian human mind knows the essences of all things, the essences that are in the mind of God and contained explicitly in the mind of Christ, the perfect man. The knowledge of all things, which constitutes the being of all things, is lodged in perfect human nature. Moreover, this nature is mind. Our highest faculty is our true substance, namely mind. This mind has a "memory of eternal things" (PP 4.755c). It is only by the freedom of his will that man is an animal (PP 4.755d), and, in the return, there is an absorption of body into soul and soul into mind.

This anthropocentric account of mind (both divine and human) as the *locus omnium*, constitutes an idealism, but one which differs from post-Cartesian idealism in that it is motivated not so much by *epistemological* consideration of sceptical arguments concerning the existence of the external world, but by *theological* consideration of the consequences of trying to think through both the nature of the infinite, transcendent divine goodness and the act and result of the divine creation.

Finally, Eriugena's thinking of the relationship between God and creation has idealist colourings on several levels. He bears witness to a conviction, which later reappears in German absolute idealism (Schelling, Fichte, Hegel, Feuerbach), but which derives from the theology of the Word (*verbum*) in the prologue to the Gospel of John, that the process of divine creation may be thought of also as a process of the divine self-knowledge. God comes to know Himself as creator in the act of creating which is an act of willing. Creation is a self-manifestation of the divine. Furthermore, since human nature is the pinnacle of creation, which both gathers all creation within itself, and also is the image and likeness of the divine, the process of human self-knowledge is at the same time the awakening of knowledge of the divine. In a sense, too, as Werner Beierwaltes has articulated in several studies, the mind's road to God is also the journey of God within God, *itinerarium dei in deum*, as it were. Eriugena's conception of the divine is that of a transcendent non-being whose first act is to come to consciousness of itself and who in so doing manifests itself as being. Just as thoughts in human minds are unknown in themselves but become known through being put into words, so the divine mind does not know itself until it manifests itself in the Word, and the Word is identical with the Father. This is the *clamor dei*, the speaking of the word, and this word not only runs through all things but is the essence of all things.

Similarly, the whole sensible universe is itself the expression of the human mind, which, participating in the self-explication of the divine, somehow deviates to achieve its own self-understanding or self-misunderstanding as a corporeal, mortal being. It is the overcoming of this self-knowledge through a participation in the divine ignorance that leads the sensible world back to its eternal source in the divine mind. While "idealism" may be too limited a term to encapsulate the full richness and complexity of his system, nevertheless, I want to conclude by affirming that Eriugena's philosophy of infinite nature is *at least* an idealism.

NOTES

1. The *Periphyseon* (hereafter PP) is cited according to the following editions: I. P. Sheldon-Williams, ed., *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)* Book 1 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968); Book 2 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970); Book 3, with John O'Meara (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1981); Book 4, ed. É. Jeuneau (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1995). An edition of Book 5 is in preparation by É. Jeuneau. Meanwhile, I have used the Latin text of *Patrologia Latina* (hereafter PL) vol. 122. The English translation is by I. P. Sheldon-Williams and J. J. O'Meara, published in J. J. O'Meara, ed., *Eriugena: Periphyseon* (Dumbarton Oaks/Montréal: Bellarmin, 1987).

2. See Dermot Moran, "Officina omnium or notio quaedam intellectualis in mente divina aeternaliter facta: The Problem of the Definition of Man in the Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena," in *L'Homme et son univers au Moyen Age*, 2 vols., ed. C. Wenin (Louvain-la-Neuve: Editions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1986), 1:195–204.

3. A. C. Ewing, ed., *The Idealist Tradition from Berkeley to Blanshard* (Glencoe: Ill.: The Free Press, 1957), 4.

4. Myles Burnyeat, "Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed," *Philosophical Review* 91 (1982), 3–40, reprinted in Godfrey Vesey, ed., *Idealism: Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 19–50. Hereafter cited in the version printed in Vesey.

5. Burnyeat, "Idealism," 19.

6. Bernard Williams, "Philosophy," in *The Legacy of Greece: A New Appraisal*, ed. M. I. Finley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 204–5. Burnyeat acknowledges Williams' influence in "Idealism," 19n1.

7. Burnyeat, "Idealism," 32–33.

8. Richard Sorabji, "Gregory of Nyssa: The Origins of Idealism," in *Time, Creation and Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. R. Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1983), 287–96.
9. Werner Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen: Studien zur neplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1985). See also idem, "Die Wiederentdeckung des Eriugena im Deutschen Idealismus," in *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1972), 188–201, and idem, "Zur Wirkungsgeschichte Eriugenas im deutschen Idealismus und danach: Eine kurze, unsystematische Nachlese," in *Eriugena: Grundzüge seines Denkens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994), 313–30.
10. Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson, "Cognition and Its Object," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 217–49, esp. 245–49. But see Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London: Routledge, 1994), 227n3, who maintains that Plotinus is not an idealist.
11. See Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, reprint 2004) and idem, "Idealism in Medieval Philosophy: The Case of Johannes Scottus Eriugena," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999): 53–82.
12. Burnyeat, "Idealism," 31.
13. Augustine, *Confessions* 7.11, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1961), 147.
14. Burnyeat, "Idealism," 31.
15. St. Augustine, *La Trinité*, Oeuvres de saint Augustin, Deuxième série, vol. 16, ed. P. Agaësse and J. Moingt (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1955), 436; St. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (Brooklyn, N.Y.: New City Press, 1991), 400.
16. See also PP 1.516c; 3.644b; 5.903c, PL 122, 1046b–c; see also Iohannes Scottus Eriugena, *Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem*, PL 122, 169a; Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 31, ed. J. Barbet (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975).
17. Maximus Confessor also comments on Dionysius' phrase in *Ambigua ad Iohannem* 1.13, Patrologia Graeca 91, 1225d, a passage well known to Eriugena, who translated the *Ambigua*.
18. See Iohannes Scottus Eriugena, *Homélie sur le Prologue de Jean*, Sources Chrétiennes 151 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1969), appendix 2, 323–26. The Greek definite article "hē" before "theotēs" cannot be rendered in Latin. In *Expositiones* Eriugena gives another version: *esse omnium est divinitas quae plus est quam esse*. Elsewhere he renders *hē huper to einai theotēs* as *superessentialis divinitas* (*Hom.* 289b): *esse omnium est superessentialis divinitas*. *Superessentialis* is of course the translation for Dionysius' *hyperousiodes*. These various renderings have led Dondaine to remark on the care Eriugena took to improve his translations to get the exact import of Dionysius' theology.
19. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 5.1.3, trans. Edmund Hill, *The Trinity*, The Works of St. Augustine Vol. 5 (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), 190. Translation modified.
20. Boethius, *Tractates, De Consolatione Philosophiae*, trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1918), 16–18.
21. S. Augustine, *De Ordine*, in *Dialogues philosophiques*, vol. 4 of *Oposcules*, Oeuvres de saint Augustin, Première série, ed. R. Jolivet (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1948), 438.
22. Nicholas of Cusa recognised the potency of this phrase *nihil aliud*, such that he uses it as the name of God Himself in his *De li non aliud*. See Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-Other: A Translation and Appraisal of De Li Non Aliud* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1983). Eriugena, on the other hand, is content with the name *Nihilum* which he thinks is a common scriptural designation for God.
23. The term *incrassatio*, meaning a "thickening" or "coarsening" is post-classical and is found in Tertullian and in Augustine's *Confessions*.
24. Maximus, *Ambigua ad Iohannem* 6.1387–99, Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 18, p. 92; Patrologia Graeca 91, 1177b–c.
25. See É. Jeuneau's notes in *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon*, 4, 283n21.
26. W. Beierwaltes, "Sprache und Sache: Reflexionen zu Eriugenas Einschätzung von Leistung und Funktion der Sprache," in *Eriugena: Grundzüge seines Denkens*: "Es ist Eriugenas Überzeugung, daß Dialektik nicht primär ein menschlicher Entwurf ist, sondern daß sie im Sein selbst gründet. Sein ist also von einer dialectischen Structur bestimmt, die in die Dialektik als Methode adäquat übersetzbar ist" (69).
27. Augustine, *Confessions*, 3 vols., ed. James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 1:43; *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1961), 87.
28. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Pine-Coffin, 88.
29. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Pine-Coffin, 89.
30. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Pine-Coffin, 149.
31. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Pine-Coffin, 133–34.
32. Note that this view also led Augustine directly into pantheism: the whole world was to be thought of as literally encompassed by and permeated by God.
33. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Pine-Coffin, 150.
34. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Pine-Coffin, 151.
35. The first Augustinian text Eriugena quotes in *Periphyseon* is from this work and refers to the manner in which angelic intellects were created first in order of excellence rather than in order of time; therefore, the angelic intellect contemplates the primordial causes (PP 1.446a).
36. For an account of Eriugena's conception of the physical world, see Dermot Moran, "Time, Space and Matter in the *Periphyseon*: An Examination of Eriugena's Understanding of the Physical World," in *At the Heart of the Real. Philosophical Essays in Honour of Archbishop Desmond Connell*, ed. F. O'Rourke (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992), 67–96.
37. The terms he gives to this congruence are varied: *concurus* (PP 1.498b23, 1.503a4), *contemeratus coitus* (PP 1.498b26–7), *armonia* (1.501b9), *confluxus* (3.713c19),

conventus (3.714a31), *synodus* (3.714a33). The most generally occurring terms are *concursum* and *coitus* (e.g. PP 3.712b7). Eriugena is committed to the view that all nature acts harmoniously, so this coming together of qualities to form bodies is not chaotic or disordered.

38. Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, PL 44, 212d, trans. W. Moore and H. A. Wilson in *Gregory of Nyssa: Selected Works and Letters*, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, rep. 1972), 387–427. For Eriugena's version, see M. Cappuyens, "Le *De imagine* de Grégoire de Nysse traduit par Jean Scot Erigène," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 32 (1965): 205–62, and Philip Levine, "Two Early Latin Versions of St. Gregory of Nyssa's *Peri kataskeuēs anthropou*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958): 473–92. *Peri Kataskeuēs Anthropou*, written in 379 to supplement his brother Basil's *Hexaemeron*, gives an account of the creation of man on the Sixth Day. It was translated into Latin four times between the sixth and the sixteenth centuries, the earliest translation being that of Dionysius Exiguus, who entitled it *De conditione hominis*. A new edition of Gregory of Nyssa's text is in preparation by Carlos Steel of the University of Leuven. A similar idealistic passage is to be found in Gregory's *De anima et eius resurrectione*, which however appears to have been unknown to Eriugena.

39. R. Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion: Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel* (London: Duckworth, 1988), 53.

40. But for a critical assessment of Gregory that downplays the influence of Plotinus, see John Rist, "On the Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa," *Hermathena* 169 (Winter 2000): 129–52.

41. See R. Sorabji, "Bodies as Bundles of Properties," in *Matter, Space and Motion*, 51. See Plotinus *Enneads* 6.3.8, 19–37. The term *sumphoresis* itself comes from Epicurus.

chapter eight

Eriugena's Fourfold Contemplation

Idealism and Arithmetic

STEPHEN GERSH

Since the fourfold division of Nature has always been the most noticeable doctrine in Iohannes Scottus Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, and has even occasioned the bestowal upon the work of that title by which it has frequently been known (*De Divisione Naturae*) one is hesitant to thematize it yet again. However, in considering the celebrated division specifically from the viewpoint of Eriugena's putative "Idealism," it is perhaps possible to generate some new insights. Let us recall the teaching briefly. Eriugena maintains that Nature is divisible into four species: first, that which creates and is not created (*quae creat et non creatur*)—corresponding to God as beginning of all things; second, that which is created and creates (*quae et creatur et creat*)—equivalent to the primordial causes; third, that which is created and does not create (*quae creatur et non creat*)—equivalent to the effects of the primordial causes; and fourth, that which does not create and is not created (*quae nec creat nec creatur*)—corresponding to God as end of all things. This fourfold division represents the conceptual armature of Eriugena's systematic and narrative account of reality. It is summarized at the beginning of book 1, which deals with the first species; enumerated again at the beginning of book 2, which is devoted