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JOHANNES SCOTTUS ERIUGENA

Dermot Moran

Johannes (c.800–c.877), known as 'the Irishman' (Scottus), who signed one manuscript with 'Eriugena', was a Christian Neoplatonist philosopher and theologian of great originality, and an influential transmitter of Greek Christian theology, notably through his translation of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Eriugena is the most outstanding philosopher writing in Latin between Boethius and Anselm and the most significant intellectual from early Christian Ireland during an era known for its scholars, many of whom, as Eriugena himself did, became teachers on the European mainland. While Eriugena's work shows traces of his Irish heritage, there is no direct evidence in his writings of the particular form of Christianity that flourished in Ireland at that time.

Eriugena made a number of important contributions to the history of religion in the West. He stands out because of his considerable familiarity with the Greek language, which allowed him direct access to Greek Christian theologians, several hitherto unknown in the Latin West (e.g. Maximus Confessor). Eriugena translated not only the *corpus* of Dionysius, but also Gregory of Nyssa's treatise on human nature *De hominis opificio* (On the creation of man) as well as Maximus Confessor's *Ambigua ad Iohannem* (Difficulties in response to John). In his own treatises, he enthusiastically advocated Dionysius' negative theological approach and generally sided with Eastern Christianity on a number of issues, including on the nature of the processions within the Trinity and on the nature of the resurrection. His dialogue *Periphyseon* (hereafter *Peri.*) offers a major synthesis of Greek and Latin Christian theologies and promotes a consistent Christian Neoplatonic system that was influential in later centuries.

Although lacking direct knowledge of classical Neoplatonism (Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus), Eriugena had enormous sympathy for what he thought was the single Neoplatonic framework underlying the Christian writers of the East and West whom he had read: Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius, Maximus Confessor, from the East, as well as the more familiar authorities of the Latin West (e.g. Augustine, Boethius). Eriugena's theology centres on the notion of an infinite,

incomprehensible, transcendent God – "the immovable self-identical one" (*unum et idipsum immobile*; *Peri*. I.476B)[1] – whose freely willed *theophanies* (divine manifestations) alone can be apprehended by created intellects such as angels and human beings. The One, as highest principle, engenders all things timelessly, allows them to proceed into their genera and species in space and time and then retrieves them back into itself. All things, including human nature, are eternal ideas or causes in the mind of God. Human beings fail to understand their true nature as image of God because they are distracted by created, fleeting temporal appearances (*phantasiai*), which entrap the intellect in the clouded spatiotemporal realm of sense. However, through intellectual contemplation (*theoria, intellectus*) and divine illumination (which is the receiving of a divine self-manifestation, *theophania*), human beings may achieve unification (*henosis*) with God, and the select few will even undergo deification (*deificatio, theosis*). Salvation, or return to the One, involves the corporeal body being resolved into its original incorporeal essence. Both heaven and hell are maintained to be states of mind, not actual places (*loci*). Paradise is nothing other than perfect human nature. Eriugena often quotes Augustine to the effect that God became man (*inhumanatio*) so that human beings can become God (*deificatio*). In this cosmological process, there is a dialectic of outgoing and return, of affirmation and negation.

Part of Eriugena's uniqueness is that he self-consciously adopts the term 'nature' to refer to the whole that consists of both God and the created order. *Natura* is defined as *universitas rerum*, the 'totality of all things' that are (*ea quae sunt*) and are not (*ea quae non sunt*). For Eriugena, the hidden transcendent divine nature does not simply rest in its Oneness but divides or 'externalizes' itself into a set of four 'divisions' (*divisiones*), 'forms' or 'species', which make up distinct levels of the universe: God, the primary causes (or creative ideas in the mind of God), the effects of those causes (the created world of individual entities), and non-being. These four divisions of nature (adapted from similar divisions in Marius Victorinus and Augustine) taken together are to be understood as God, presented as the beginning, middle and end of all things. The four divisions somehow fold back into the divine unity. Creation, then, is a process of divine self-articulation. God (as infinite essence or *ousia*) is understood as having a triadic structure: essence, power, operation (*ousia, dynamis, energeia*). So, in one sense, the entire cosmic drama of expression and return takes place within the Godhead. Human nature, as the image of God, plays a very direct role in the cosmic process of the divine self-manifestation and self-gathering. Eriugena's elevated conception of human nature would subsequently influence Renaissance humanism and its German counterpart.

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1. Translations throughout are my own.

The exact place or date of Eriugena's birth and the circumstances of his early life are entirely unknown, but circumstantial evidence and some surviving *testimonia* suggest that he was born in Ireland around or before 800. The first certain historical record (around 850/851) is a letter by Bishop Pardulus of Laon that refers to a certain Irishman named 'Joannes' at the palace of the King of France (*Patrologia Latina* [hereafter *PL*] 121:1052A), who was engaged in a theological controversy. It is this reference that has given rise to the appellation 'Johannes Scottus'. The pen name 'Eriugena', meaning 'Irish born', is used to sign his translation of Dionysius (*PL* 122:1236A), offering further confirmation of his Irish origin. A manuscript of biblical glosses attributed to Eriugena includes several Old Irish terms to explain recondite Latin words, offering more evidence of Eriugena's provenance and attesting to other Irish in his milieu. Indeed, Irish scholars had a considerable presence in the Frankish court and were renowned for their learning. Prudentius, however, refers to Eriugena's "Irish eloquence" (*Celtica eloquentia*; *PL* 115:1194A) in a disparaging manner.

Eriugena appears to have spent his life in the ambience of the court of King Charles and in associated ecclesiastical centres, such as Rheims, Laon, Soissons and Compiègne. It is not known whether Eriugena was cleric or lay. His contemporaries regarded him as an erudite liberal arts master, although some challenged his orthodoxy. Thus, Bishop Florus calls him "academic and learned" (*scholasticus et eruditus*; *PL* 119:103A). The learned Anastasius, the Librarian at the Vatican, who improved Eriugena's translation of Dionysius, could marvel at the fact that this *vir barbarus* from the remote ends of the world knew Greek. Two partial commentaries (*c*.840–*c*.850) on *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, the liberal arts handbook of Martianus Capella, as well as the aforementioned biblical glosses testify to Eriugena's rich and eclectic knowledge of the liberal arts tradition, including Isidore, Cassiodorus and Cicero. One gloss in the *Annotationes in Marcianum* (Annotations on Martianus Capella) attests "no one enters heaven except through philosophy" (*nemo intrat in celum nisi per philosophiam*); and, indeed, in his mature work, Eriugena continues to see 'true philosophy' as leading to reunion with the divine. Eriugena also wrote some interesting poems that show not only his erudition and fascination with Greek but also his political connections. Some poems specifically praise King Charles, including an important poem, *Aulae sidereae* (Starry halls), which appears to celebrate the dedication of Charles' new church in Compiègne on 1 May 875.

It is probable that Eriugena died some time around 877. An apocryphal tale, recounted by William of Malmesbury, records that he was stabbed to death by his students.

Eriugena came to the notice of his contemporaries because of his intervention in a *theological controversy. He was commissioned by Hincmar, the powerful* Archbishop of Rheims, and Pardulus, Bishop of Laon, to rebut a treatise on predestination by Gottschalk of Orbais (*c*.806–868), a priest in Hincmar's jurisdiction. Gottschalk had already been condemned (at synods in Mainz in 848 and in Quierzy in 849) for interpreting Augustine as teaching that God carried out a 'twin predestination' (*gemina praedestinatio*), namely, of the elect to heaven and of the damned to hell. Eriugena's response, *De divina praedestinatione* (On divine predestination; *c*.851; hereafter *De Praed.*), employing rationalistic, dialectical analysis rather than scriptural citation, was a *tour de force* of dialectical argumentation that rejected the doctrine of twofold divine predestination by an appeal to God's unity, transcendence and infinite goodness. It also showed Eriugena's mastery of Augustine whom he quotes against Gottschalk's reading.

Eriugena begins by declaring (following Augustine; *see* Vol. 1, Ch. 18) that true philosophy and true religion are one and the same (*De Praed.* 1.1). He insists that the rules of dialectical disputation be followed and counters Gottschalk's claims by showing them to be counter-sensical. God's nature is one, and so is his predestination. There is a perfectly legitimate sense in which it can be said that God predestines: "There is no doubt that predestination is predicated essentially of God" (3.5). God, being perfectly good and the "willing cause" of all creatures (4.5), wants all human beings to be saved. But God does not predestine souls to damnation; human beings damn themselves through their own free choices. On the basis that contrary effects cannot come from the one cause, Eriugena argues that God cannot predestine both to good and to evil, but only to good. Furthermore, "sin, death, unhappiness are not from God. Therefore God is not the cause of them" (3.3). God cannot predestine to evil since evil is non-being. Following Augustine, to foreknow is not to cause what is foreknown (5.2). Furthermore, not all foreknowledge is predestination. Properly speaking, God, who is outside time and acts all at once (*semel et simul*), cannot be said to *fore*-know or to *pre*-destine (9.6), terms that are transferred from created things (9.7). Eriugena does not fully resolve his claims that predestination both *properly* applies to God and at the same time is attributed *metaphorically*. He does not yet have access to Dionysius' dialectical way of handling divine attribution.

Eriugena's tract was thought by its sponsors to go too far in the opposite direction from Gottschalk. Eriugena was accused of 'Origenism' and 'Pelagianism' by his erstwhile supporter, Bishop Prudentius of Troyes (see his own *De praedestinatione*; *PL* 115:1010c). Ironically, Eriugena himself had placed Gottschalk's heresy of twin predestination somewhere between Pelagianism (which denied the need for grace) and the opposing heresy (which denied human free will). Eriugena's tract was condemned at the councils of Valence (855) and Langres (859), in part

for its overuse of dialectic. The phrase 'Irish porridge' (*pultes scottorum*), used in these official denunciations, recalls Jerome's sneer against Pelagius.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH DIONYSIUS

The predestination controversy made Eriugena unpopular with the French bishops but did not affect his standing with King Charles, whose patronage continued. Around 860, Charles invited Eriugena to translate the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysius) (*Corpus Dionysiacum*), who was supposedly the convert of St Paul mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles 17:34 ("... a few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus ..."). This manuscript had been presented to Charles' father, Louis the Pious, by the Byzantine Emperor Michael the Second in 827. Its author was more likely a late-fifth- or early-sixth-century Christian follower of Proclus (based on the text's language and use of doctrinal formulas from that period). The abbot of the monastery of Saint-Denis, Hilduin, further confused the identity issue when, in his hagiographical life of Dionysius, *Passio sancti Dionysii* (The passion of St Denis), he claimed that Dionysius was not only Bishop of Athens but also the third-century bishop and martyr, St Denis, who was buried in his monastery of Saint-Denis! Eriugena's translation, which drew on Hilduin's earlier attempt (832–5), had a wide circulation through the twelfth century, when it was replaced by the translation of John Sarrazin, who drew on Eriugena's version but had the benefit of other manuscripts.

The importance of Eriugena's discovery and subsequent promotion of Dionysius cannot be overstated. Dionysius' works stood second only to the Gospels and the Letters of Paul in terms of their importance as a source of Christian teaching. Several centuries of Christian apologists (from Justin Martyr to Augustine) had been articulating Christian faith in terms of the intellectual framework of Hellenistic philosophy (primarily Neoplatonic and Stoic), and the discovery of Dionysius' writings finally seemed to provide proof that the synthesis of Greek philosophy and Christian faith was sanctioned by Scripture itself. In fact, later Greek pagan Neoplatonism (from the school of Proclus), with its complex formulations concerning the non-being beyond being and beyond the One, as well as its complex vision of a hierarchically ordered cosmos, had been seamlessly integrated into Christian theology. A new Christian tradition of negative theology had been created and Eriugena was its propagator for the Latin world.

Eriugena enthusiastically adopted Dionysius' negative theology, according to which denials concerning God are 'more true' (*verior*), 'better' (*melior*) and 'more apt' than affirmations. He embraced Dionysius' analysis of the divine names as found in his *Peri theiōn onomatōn* (*De divinis nominibus*; On the divine names). Certain biblical appellations of the divine (God as 'King', 'Life') do not 'literally' (*proprie*) apply to God and must therefore be understood analogically or 'through

metaphor' (*per metaforam, translative*). Such terms are useful for the unin-structed, but, as St Paul put it, to children milk is given and to adults solid food (1 Corinthians 3:2). So, higher than these metaphorical statements are the names and descriptions of the divine that involve negation. Negations are more appro-priate to express the divine transcendence. God is more properly not being, not truth, not goodness and so on. Following Dionysius' *Peri mystikēs theologiās* (*De mystica theologia*; On mystical theology), God is 'beyond being', 'more than being', 'neither one nor oneness', 'beyond assertion and denial' (*Patrologia Graeca* [here-after *PG*] 3:1048A). Eriugena reproduces these formulations in Latin to express paradoxically the nameless transcendent divinity.

Having completed his Dionysius translation (*c*.862), Eriugena went on to trans-late several other Greek Christian works, including Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio* under the title *De imagine* (On the image), and possibly Epiphanius' *Anchoratus: de fide* (The anchorite: concerning faith) and Maximus Confessor's *Ambigua ad Ioannem* (with commentary) and his *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (Questions in response to Thalassius), both important works of Greek Christian spirituality that offered a more 'Aristotelian' version of several prominent Neoplatonic themes). He also wrote a long commentary on Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy* (*Expositiones in hierarchiam coelestem*), a fragmentary *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (*Commentarius in evangelium Iohannis*) and a sermon (*Homilia in Johannem*) on the Prologue to the Gospel of John, all of which show the influ-ence of the Greek theological tradition.

THE *PERIPHYSEON* (c.867)

Eriugena's main philosophical treatise, *Periphyseon*, also called *De divisione naturae* (On the division of nature), a dialogue between master and pupil, was written some time between 860 and 867. Eriugena himself calls it a *physiologia* ("study of nature"; *Peri*. IV.741C), and indeed one manuscript in the British Library is entitled *Liber phisiologiae Iohannis Scottigenae* (The book on the study of nature of John Scotigena). It is an extensive treatise on cosmology, anthropology and theology.

Nature, as defined at the outset by Eriugena, includes both "God and the crea-ture". The first principle of nature is the infinite God, "the cause of all things that are and that are not" (I.442B). Echoing similar divisions in Augustine (*City of God* 5.9; *PL* 41:151) and Marius Victorinus (*Ad Candidum*; To Candidus), nature is divided into four 'divisions' or 'species' (*Peri*. I.441B–442A): that which creates and is not created (i.e. God); that which creates and is created (i.e. primary causes or Ideas); that which is created and does not create (i.e. temporal effects, created things); that which is neither created nor creates (i.e. non-being, nothingness).

Eriugena's original intention (expressed at *Peri*. III.619D–620B) was to devote one book to each of the four divisions: book 1 deals with the divine nature and the procession or *exitus* of all things from God; book 2 with the primordial causes and book 3 their created effects, including the nature of *ex nihilo* creation and the stages of the creation of the world. The topic of creation requires Eriugena to address issues connected with the biblical account of creation, and thus, in book 3, he embarks on a Hexaemeron. The creation of human nature on the sixth day of creation called for more extensive treatment, and Eriugena altered his plan, devoting a fourth book to this topic, thus relegating the return of all things to God to book 5.

Dialectic is still to the fore. At the outset Eriugena suggests "five ways of inter-preting" (*quinque modi interpretationis*) the way things may be said to be or not to be (I.443C–446A). According to the first mode, whatever is accessible to the senses and the intellect is said to be, whereas whatever, "through the excellence of its nature" (*per excellentiam suae naturae*), transcends our faculties is said not to be. According to this mode, God, because he may be said not to be, is "nothingness through excellence" (*nihil per excellentiam*). The second mode of being and non-being is seen in the "orders and differences of created natures" (I.444A), whereby, if one level of nature is said to be, those orders above or below it are said not to be: "For an affirmation concerning the lower (order) is a negation concerning the higher, and so too a negation concerning the lower (order) is an affirmation concerning the higher" (I.444A).

According to this mode, the affirmation of humanity is the negation of the angelic order, and vice versa (*affirmatio enim hominis negatio est angeli, negatio vero hominis affirmatio est angeli*; I.444B). This mode illustrates Eriugena's original way of combining the traditional Neoplatonic hierarchy of being with a dialectic of affirmation and negation whereby to assert one level is to deny the others. The third mode (I.444C–45B) asserts that *actual* things are, whereas *potential* things still caught up "in the most secret folds of nature" (a favourite phrase) are not. This mode contrasts things that have come into effect with those things that are still contained in their causes. The fourth mode (I.445B–C) is broadly Platonic: those things contemplated by the intellect alone (*ea solummodo quae solo comprehend-untur intellectu*) may be considered to be, whereas things caught up in generation and corruption, matter, place and time do not truly exist. The fifth mode is theo-logical: those sanctified by grace are, whereas sinners who have renounced the divine image are not. According to this complex and original account, attribution of being or non-being is dependent on the mode of approach and care needs to be taken. Thus, when Eriugena calls God 'nothing', he means that God *transcends* all created being and created modes of existence. Matter, on the other hand, is 'nothing through privation' (*nihil per privationem*). The fluidity of Eriugena's onto-logical attributions must always be borne in mind in analysing his theological claims.

God, as uncreated and creating, transcends everything created; he is the *negatio omnium* (III.686D). The Aristotelian categories do not properly apply to God (I.463D). He is not 'literally' (*proprie*) substance or essence, nor describable in

terms of quantity, quality, relation, place or time. He is 'superessentialis' (I.459D). His 'being' is 'beyond being', or as Eriugena puts it, in his version of a Dionysian saying, God's being is the superbeing (of) divinity (*Esse enim omnium est super esse divinitas*), or "the being of all things is the Divinity above being" (I.443B). Sometimes, Eriugena speaks simply of the "divine superessentiality" (*divina super-essentialitas*; III.634B), or, quoting Dionysius' *Divine Names* I.1–2 (*PG* 3:588B–C), of the "superessential and hidden divinity" (*superessentialis et occulta divinitas*; *Peri.* I.510B). God may also be called 'nothingness' (*nihilum*), since His essence is unknown to all created beings, including all the ranks of angels (I.447C). Indeed, Eriugena argues, God's nature is unknown even to Himself, since He is the 'infinity of infinities' and hence beyond all comprehension and circumscription.

Eriugena defines creation as divine self-manifestation (I.455B) whereby the hidden transcendent God manifests Himself in divine outpourings or theophanies (I.446D). The divine self-manifestation is self-creation, that is, the timeless expression of the Word, which is at the same time the creation of all other things, since all things are contained as primary causes in the Word. All things are always already in God but in a way that respects their otherness: "the Creative nature permits nothing outside itself because outside it nothing can be, yet everything which it has created and creates it contains within itself, but in such a way that it itself is other, because it is superessential, than what it creates within itself" (III.675C). Creatures, as fallen, do not yet know that they reside in God. In cosmological terms, however, God and the creature are 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. (III.678C)

Although Eriugena asserts the identity of God and creation, he explicitly rejects the view that God is the 'genus' or 'whole' of which the creatures are 'species' or 'parts'. Only *metaphorically* (*metaforice*) can it be said that God is a 'genus' or a 'whole'. The immanence of God in creation is balanced by God's transcendence above all creation. God is both form of all things and also formless. The creature can never be identified with God.

Periphyseon book 2 discusses the primary causes (*causae primordiales*) or 'divine willings' (*theia thelemata*), a concept that combines the Platonic Forms, Dionysius' divine names and the Stoic–Augustinian notion of eternal reasons (*rationes aeternae*), as well as Maximus' divine willings. These causes are infinite in number and there is no hierarchy or precedence among them; being is not prior to goodness, or vice versa. Each is in its own way a divine theophany. This 'outflowing' (*proodos*; *processio, exitus*) of the causes creates the whole universe from the highest genus to the lowest species and individuals (*atoma*). In his

understanding of this causal procession, Eriugena accepts Neoplatonic principles (drawn from the tradition of Proclus) concerning causation: like produces like; incorporeal causes produce incorporeal effects; causes that are immaterial, intellectual and eternal produce effects that are equally immaterial, intellectual and eternal. Cause and effect are mutually dependent, relative terms (V.910D–912B).

The primary causes produce their effects timelessly. The effects, for Eriugena, are also originally timeless and incorruptible, but, as they proceed from their essences through their genera, species and individuals (in a kind of ontological descent through the tree of Porphyry), they become located spatially and temporally but not yet in a corporeal sense. Eriugena seems to postulate two kinds of time: an unchanging time (a reason or *ratio* in the divine mind; V.906A) and a corrupting time. Since place and time are definitions that locate things, and since definitions are in the mind, place and time are therefore in the mind (*in mente*; I.485B). The sensible, corporeal, spatiotemporal appearances of things are produced by the qualities or 'circumstances' of place, time, position and so on, which surround the incorporeal, eternal essence. Following on from Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena thinks that corporeality and division into sexes are a consequence of the Fall. Indeed, the entire spatiotemporal world (including corporeal human bodies) is a consequence of the Fall. For Eriugena, God, foreseeing that human beings would fall, created a body and a corporeal world for them. But this corporeal body is not essential to human nature, and in the return of all things to God the corporeal body will be transformed into the spiritual body (*spirituale corpus*). The corporeal world will return to its incorporeal essence, and place understood as extension will return back into its cause or reason as a definition in the mind (V.889D).

Book 3 discusses in great detail the meaning of 'creation from nothing' (*creatio ex nihilo*). The term 'nothing' has two meanings: it can mean 'nothing through privation' (*nihil per privationem*), or 'nothing on account of excellence' (*nihil per excellentiam*). The lowest rung in the hierarchy of being, unformed matter, is 'almost nothing' (*prope nihil*), or 'nothing through privation'. Since there is nothing outside God (the transcendent nothingness), 'creation from nothing' does not mean creation from some principle outside God; rather, it means creation out of God himself (*a se*). All creation comes from God and remains within him.

Books 4 and 5 discuss the return (*epistrophe, reditus, reversio*) of all things to God and the role of human nature in the cosmic process, drawing heavily on Maximus Confessor and Gregory of Nyssa. It is natural for effects to return to their causes (since they are only effects because of their dependency on their causes). Corporeal things will return to their incorporeal causes, the temporal to the eternal, the finite will be absorbed in the infinite. As part of this general return, the human mind will achieve reunification with the divine, and then the corporeal, temporal, material world will become essentially incorporeal, timeless and intellectual. Human nature will return to its 'Idea' (*notion*) in the mind of God. 'Paradise' is the scriptural name for this perfect human nature in the

mind of God. Human beings who refuse to abandon their 'circumstances' remain trapped in their own fantasies, and it is to this mental state that the scriptural term 'hell' applies. Aside from the general return of all things to God, Eriugena claims there is a special return whereby the elect achieve 'deification' (*deificatio, theosis*), merging with God completely, as lights blend into the one light, as voices blend in the choir, as a droplet of water merges with the stream. God shall be all in all (*omnia in omnibus*; V.935c).

Eriugena's theological anthropology is a radical working out of the meaning of being made in the image and likeness of God (*in imaginem et similitudinem dei*). Interpreting Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* (On the literal meaning of Genesis), as well as Ambrose's *De paradiso* (On paradise) and Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*, Eriugena argues that paradise is entirely spiritual. He further claims that human nature did not spent time in paradise before the Fall. The entire account refers to what would have been the case had human nature not already sinned. Eriugena follows Gregory of Nyssa's view that sexual difference is a result of the Fall. The Fall is the fall from intellect into sense: *intellectus* distracted by the voluptuousness of sensibility (*aesthesis*). Sexual difference is an external addition: "Man is better than sex" (*homo melior est quam sexus*; *Peri.* II.534A). For Eriugena, human being is neither male nor female: just as "in Christ there is neither male nor female" (IV.795A).

Just as God may be said to be or not to be (*Deus est*; *deus not est*), so too human nature may be said to be animal or not animal. Following Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena also denies that human nature is a 'microcosm'. Rather, human nature is "a certain intellectual concept formed eternally (*aeternaliter facta*) in the divine mind" (IV.768B). For Eriugena, human nature uniquely mirrors transcendent divine nature. Only of human nature can it be said that it is made in the image and likeness of God. Not even the angels are accorded that honour. Perfect human nature would have possessed the fullest knowledge of its creator, of itself and of everything else had it not sinned (IV.778c). Just as God knows *that* he is but not *what* he is, since he is uncircumscribable, so too human nature knows *that* it is but not *what* it is. Human self-ignorance mirrors the divine self-ignorance and is a mark of the infinite and transcendent nature of the human as of the divine. Human nature, without the Fall, would have ruled the universe (IV.782c). Similarly, perfect human nature would have enjoyed omniscience and other attributes enjoyed by God. 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 (IV.759A–B).

Eriugena's account of nature as inclusive of God and creation has been accused of being pantheist, but in fact he wants to preserve both the immanence and the transcendence of the divine. Every statement of divine immanence in creation must be balanced by the recognition of the divine transcendence. There is also the theological worry that Eriugena downplays the significance of the actual Jesus,

the crucifixion and so on. But Eriugena in fact makes Christ central to the whole cosmic plan. As Word, he is the manifestation of the divine; he is also "the perfect human" (*vir autem perfectus est Christus*; IV.743B). Christ as the divine idea of human nature is the centrepiece of the entire cosmic procession and return. Christ is actually what all human beings can be and will be, and that is precisely the promise of salvation for Eriugena (II.545A).

For Eriugena, a true image is identical to its exemplar in all respects 'except number' or 'subject' (IV.778A). Neither divine nor human nature 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 creator and humankind is created, but since creation is self-manifestation, that amounts to saying that God manifests himself fully as human nature. Sometimes Eriugena, quoting Maximus Confessor (e.g. V.879c–880A), says that humankind is by grace (*per gratiam*) what God is by nature. On the other hand, all nature is a theophany; nature is the outpouring of grace. Every gift (*donum*) is a given (*datum*), and vice versa. The creation of human nature is both the free outpouring of the divine will and the self-expression of the divine nature. Human nature stands closer to God than any other creature (including the angels, who are not made in the image and likeness of God).

Humanity as a whole in its resurrected and perfected state will be truly illuminated and merged with the divine. 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, and 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 humanity that 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 that has God and humanity mutually contemplating themselves and each other, in an endless, eternal play of theophanies.

Eriugena places extraordinary emphasis on the infinity and boundlessness of both God and human nature. The divine causes are infinite in number and so are the theophanies under which God may be viewed. Human progress to Godhead proceeds infinitely. Holy Scripture too has infinite richness (*Sacrae scripturae interpretatio infinita est*; II.560A), its interpretations are as innumerable as the colours in a peacock's tail (IV.749c). Human capacity for perfection and self-transcendence is also endless (a theme that will reappear in Renaissance humanism).

ERIUGENA'S INFLUENCE

Eriugena's *Periphyseon* had immediate influence in France, notably at the schools of Laon, Auxerre and Corbie. It was very popular in the twelfth century (among Hugh

of Saint-Victor, Alan of Lille, and Suger of Saint-Denis, and others) when circulated in the 'edition' of William of Malmsebury and the paraphrase of Honorius Augustodunensis. Eriugena's translations of Dionysius circulated widely during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as did his *Homily on the Prologue to John* (often attributed to Origen). In the thirteenth century, the *Periphyseon* was somewhat unfairly associated with the doctrines of two Paris theologians, David of Dinant and Amaury of Bène, and was condemned in 1210 and 1225. According to Thomas Aquinas (*Summa theologiae* I.3.8; *Summa contra Gentiles* I.17, I.26), Amaury of Bène was condemned for asserting that God was the formal principle of all things, an accusation of pantheism, which recalled Eriugena's statement that God is the "form of all things" (*forma omnium*). David of Dinant (*floruit* 1210), on the other hand, was supposed to have identified God with prime matter, calling God the *materia omnium*. It is likely that Eriugena's discussion of God and matter as 'nothing' and as transcending sense and intellect according to the first mode of being and non-being contributed to this accusation. Eriugena was also, again unfairly, linked with certain views on the Eucharist associated with Berengar of Tours. In the later Middle Ages both Meister Eckhart of Hochheim (*c.*1260–*c.*1328) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) were sympathetic to Eriugena and familiar with his *Periphyseon*. When Thomas Gale produced the first printed edition of Eriugena's works in 1687, it was soon listed in the first edition of the *Index librorum prohibitorum* (Index of prohibited books), and remained there until the index itself was abolished. Hegel and his followers revived Eriugena as the forefather of German idealism, and process theologians also acknowledged his dynamic conception of the divine. New critical editions of Eriugena's works have spurred a revival of interest in him among those interested in the tradition of negative theology.

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