

INSTRVMENTA PATRISTICA ET MEDIAEVALIA

Research on the Inheritance of Early and Medieval Christianity

68

*ERIUGENA AND CREATION*

Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference on Eriugeni  
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Collected and edited by  
Willemien OTTEN & Michael I. ALLEN

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# INSTRVMENTA PATRISTICA ET MEDIAEVALIA

Research on the Inheritance of Early and Medieval Christianity

Founded by Dom Eligius Dekkers (†1998)

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Edouard Jauneau in his office at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, holding the coat of arms of Pope Benedict XVI who has rehabilitated the thought of Johannes Scottus Eriugena.

*Photo by Dr. Suan-See Foo.*



SPES-members of the first hour: Dublin 1970 - Dublin 2000, Royal Irish Academy.  
 From left to right: Pádraig Ó Cléirigh, Edouard Jeauneau, John J. O'Meara, Werner Beierwaltes,  
 Gustavo A. Piemonte, Breandán Ó Ciobháin.  
*Photo by Willemien Otten*

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CHRISTIAN NEOPLATONISM AND THE  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRADITION:  
THE HIDDEN INFLUENCE  
OF JOHN SCOTTUS ERIUGENA

DERMOT MORAN

*For Werner Beierwaltes in gratitude*

In this paper I examine the mostly hidden influence of John Scottus Eriugena in the phenomenological tradition. German Idealist philosophers, broadly speaking, embraced the work of John Scottus Eriugena. The classical phenomenologists (Husserl, Heidegger), however, followed their mentor Franz Brentano in showing a distinct affinity for the Aristotelian tradition with little interest in or sympathy for Christian Neoplatonism. Heidegger, however, developed a strong and life-long interest in Meister Eckhart and gradually it became more generally recognised that Eckhart's conception of the divine stands in opposition to traditional ontotheology. The phenomenological tradition showed very little interest in Eriugena until the groundbreaking work of Werner Beierwaltes and more recently the original interpretations of Jean-Luc Marion. However, there was one significant exception to the neglect of Eriugena in phenomenology and that is the student of Husserl, phenomenologist and Leibniz scholar Dietrich Mahnke (1884-1939) who discusses Eriugena incisively in his *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt. Beiträge zur Genealogie der mathematischen Mystik* (1937). Mahnke's work places Eriugena at the centre of the discovery of the infinity of the divine and of the created universe. Mahnke had a strong influence on Alexandre Koyré, Hans Blumenberg and Karsten Harries, all of whom have been seeking to diagnose the impact of the discovery of infinity on the nature of modernity. Through Mahnke the radical thought of Eriugena entered the phenomenological tradition.

In this paper I shall propose that the phenomenological appropriation of Johannes Scottus Eriugena more or less follows on from and builds on the German Idealist reception of the Irish Christian

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Neoplatonist, with, however, less emphasis on systematicity, rationality and the dialectical unfolding of the divine, and a comparatively greater interest in Eriugena's apophaticism, his radical conception of the transcendence of both the divine and human natures, and his critique of ontotheology by describing God in terms of 'non-being' (*non esse*), 'more than being' (*plus quam esse*), 'other than being', and 'nothingness' (*nihilum*).

As I shall elaborate, there is very little direct discussion of Eriugena in the phenomenological tradition, aside from in the important but neglected work of the German philosopher Dietrich Mahnke (1884-1939), which we shall treat in some detail. I shall therefore have to make a detour through the influence of Meister Eckhart, and also sketch the general influence of Christian Neoplatonism on the classic phenomenologists. Furthermore, phenomenologically informed or oriented philosophers in the recent past, including Werner Beierwaltes,<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Marion,<sup>2</sup> Wayne Hankey, Donald Duclow, Bernard McGinn and myself,<sup>3</sup> have sought to show how Eriugena's extraordinary thought can contribute to our understanding of contemporary themes including the relation between the divine and the human. Marion, for instance, cites Eriugena in his *The Idol and Distance* as saying with regard to

<sup>1</sup> See Werner Beierwaltes, *Platonismus im Christentum* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 1998); idem, *Denken des Einen. Studien zum Neuplatonismus und dessen Wirkungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1985); idem, *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1972); and idem, *Eriugena: Grundzüge seines Denkens* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1994), among many other ground-breaking studies. Without compromising historical accuracy in terms of his careful documentation of sources and influence, Beierwaltes has always sought to show the intellectual interconnections and affinities between metaphysical positions in Neoplatonism and in the German Idealist (Hegel, Schelling) and phenomenological schools (especially Heidegger).

<sup>2</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion's contribution in this volume, "*Veluti ex nihilo in aliquid*. Remarks on Eriugena's Path from *apophysis* to *diuina philosophia*." But see also Wayne J. Hankey, "Misrepresenting Neoplatonism in Contemporary Christian Dionysian Polemic: Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa versus Vladimir Lossky and Jean-Luc Marion," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82.4 (2008): 683-703.

<sup>3</sup> Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, repr. 2004).

our *human* intellect, which in this regard mirrors the divine intellect: "Thus it is both silent and cries out and while it is silent it cries out and while it cries out it is silent; and invisible it is seen, and while it is being seen it is invisible."<sup>4</sup> The phenomenological reception and interpretation of Eriugena continue to have a vital significance and play an important role in Eriugena scholarship, as I shall show in this contribution.

At this point in twenty-first-century philosophy, it is perhaps now more understandable why Johannes Scottus Eriugena was taken up so enthusiastically by the German Idealist tradition in the mid-nineteenth century. The dominance of the Neo-Thomist reading of the history of medieval Christian philosophy (e.g. Étienne Gilson)<sup>5</sup> from the end of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century (more or less until Vatican II) eclipsed and devalued the Christian Neoplatonic mystical tradition of the transcendent and nameless One beyond being in favor of the Neo-Aristotelian tradition with its concern for being, substance, and the debates over essence and existence and over universals. The subsequent decline of Neo-Thomism as an "official" Catholic position, from the 1960s on, and the emergence of doctrinally-independent academic scholarship of the philosophers of the Middle Ages have allowed philosophers to correct this history and to appreciate once again the extraordinary systematic, speculative and enduring contribution of Christian Neoplatonic thinking as exemplified by John Scottus Eriugena, Meister Eckhart, and Nicolas of Cusa.<sup>6</sup>

The German Idealist tradition was drawn to Eriugena because he was regarded as a thinker of reason, freedom, independence

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *L'Idole et la distance. Cinq études* (Paris: Grasset, 1977), trans. Thomas A. Carlson as *The Idol and Distance. Five Studies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. 198, quoting *Periphyseon* III 633C, CCCM 163: 23 ll. 607-09: *Ac per hoc, et silet et clamat, et dum silet clamat et dum clamat silet. Et inuisibilis uidetur, et dum uidetur inuisibilis est. I have used the English translation by I.P. Sheldon-Williams and J.J. O'Meara, Eriugena. Periphyseon (The Division of Nature), Montreal/Washington: Belarmin/Dumbarton Oaks, 1987).*

<sup>5</sup> See Wayne J. Hankey, "From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism: The Fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English-speaking North America," *Dionysius* 16 (1998):157-188.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Donald Duclow, *Masters of Learned Ignorance: Eriugena, Eckhart, Cusanus* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

from authority, as well as exemplifying *system, unity*, and the priority of *self-consciousness* in the understanding of the divine and the human.<sup>7</sup> Eriugena also offered a dynamic account of the interaction between the Creator and creation which seemed to articulate the Hegelian conception of an infinite that expanded to include in itself its opposite, namely, the finite. It is indeed possible to find statements in Eriugena that corroborate these themes, although, naturally, the Idealists interpreted him in terms of their own theological and systematic language and concerns. There are undoubtedly features of Eriugena's thought that invite comparison with central ideas both in Kant and, more especially, in Schelling and Hegel.<sup>8</sup>

Interest in Eriugena was greatly advanced – as Cappuyns himself acknowledges – by the appearance in Germany of Schlüter's edition of the *Periphyseon* (*De divisione naturae*) in 1838.<sup>9</sup> There is, from this point on, a clear and traceable history of the reception of Eriugena in post-Kantian philosophy.<sup>10</sup> For instance, in France in 1843, just over a decade after Hegel's death in 1831, a Frenchman, Saint-René Taillandier (1817-1879), a student at Heidelberg, wrote perhaps the first doctoral dissertation on Eriugena and the scholastic tradition that at one point invokes Friedrich Schlegel's

<sup>7</sup> See Werner Beierwaltes, "Das Problem des absoluten Selbstbewusstseins bei Johannes Scotus Eriugena," in Beierwaltes, *Platonismus in der Philosophie des Mittelalters. Wege der Forschung* 197 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), reprinted from *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 73 (1966): 264-84. See also Brian Stock, "Intelligo me esse: Eriugena's Cogito," in R. Roques, ed., *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie* (Paris: CNRS, 1977), pp. 327-334.

<sup>8</sup> See Werner Beierwaltes, "Zur Wirkungsgeschichte Eriugenas in deutschen Idealismus und danach," in Beierwaltes, *Eriugena. Grundzüge seines Denkens*, pp. 313-330, and idem, "The Revaluation of John Scottus Eriugena in German Idealism," in John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler, eds, *The Mind of Eriugena* (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973), pp. 190-99.

<sup>9</sup> C. B. Schlüter, ed. *Johannis Scoti Erikenae De Divisione Naturae Libri Quinque* (Münster, 1838).

<sup>10</sup> The first modern study appears to be Peder Hjort (1793-1871), *Johann Scotus Eriugena oder von dem Ursprung einer christlichen Philosophie und ihrem heiligen Beruf* (Copenhagen, 1823). Indeed, this study is cited by Hegel himself. Hjort was a Danish philosopher and theologian who studied in Halle, Munich and Rome and was deeply influenced by Schelling.

and Franz Baader's positive assessment of Eriugena as a road not taken in medieval philosophy.<sup>11</sup>

One of Hegel's intellectual sympathizers was the Catholic theologian Franz Anton Staudenmaier (1800-1856), educated at Tübingen, who published his *Johannes Scotus Eriugena und die Wissenschaft seiner Zeit* in 1834 which portrayed Eriugena as a "speculative theologian."<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, the Munich Catholic theologian Johannes Nepomuc Huber (1830-1879) in his *Johannes Scotus Eriugena: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie im Mittelalter* (1861) and the German Protestant theologian Theodor Christlieb (1833-1889), in his *Leben und Lehre des Johannes Scotus Eriugena* (1860),<sup>13</sup> identified Eriugena as a precursor of German Idealism in terms of his understanding of the dialectical unfolding of the divine into the cosmos.<sup>14</sup> Huber had a strong interest in Spinoza and his *Die Philosophie der Kirchenväter* (1859) had already been placed on the Index when his book on Eriugena appeared. Huber appreciates Eriugena as the "father of speculative philosophy,"<sup>15</sup> by which he means the Hegelian Idealist tradition.

<sup>11</sup> See Saint-René Taillandier, *Scot Erigène et la philosophie scolastique* (Strasbourg, 1843), especially pp. 264-65.

<sup>12</sup> Franz Anton Staudenmaier, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena und die Wissenschaft seiner Zeit mit allgemeinen Entwicklungen der Hauptwahrheiten auf dem Gebiete der Philosophie und Religion, und Grundzügen zur einer Geschichte der speculativen Theologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Andreäi, 1834).

<sup>13</sup> See Theodor Christlieb, *Leben und Lehre des Johannes Scotus Eriugena in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der vorhergehenden und unter Angabe ihrer Berührungspunkte mit der neueren Philosophie und Theologie* (Gotha, 1860). Christlieb studied in the famous "Tübinger Stift", and wrote his doctoral thesis on Eriugena entitled, *Das System des Johannes Scotus Eriugena in seinem Zusammenhang mit dem Neuplatonismus, Pseudodionysius und Maximus Confessor* (1857). His 1860 book is an expansion of his doctoral thesis. Having served for a time in London as a pastor and then on the Bodensee in Germany, Christlieb became professor of theology in Bonn.

<sup>14</sup> See W. Beierwaltes, "Zur Wirkungsgeschichte Eriugenas in deutschen Idealismus und danach," in Beierwaltes, *Eriugena. Grundzüge seines Denkens*, pp. 313-330 and idem, "The Revaluation of John Scottus Eriugena in German Idealism," in John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler, eds, *The Mind of Eriugena*, pp. 190-99.

<sup>15</sup> J. Huber, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie im Mittelalter* (München: Lentner, 1861; reprinted Hildesheim: Olms, 1960), see p. 285.

These early scholars gave a reasonably faithful exposition of Eriugena's views, albeit without the level of historical accuracy which twentieth-century scholarship eventually produced. The twentieth-century Dom Maïeul Cappuyns (1901-1968) was well aware of this Idealist tradition of interpretation of Eriugena, although, of course and not unreasonably, he sought to downplay its significance in his very comprehensive and authoritative study of Eriugena, *Jean Scot Erigène: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (1933), that set the standard for all subsequent scholarly discussion of Eriugena, especially on the known details of his life, the authentication of his genuine manuscripts, and the identification of his sources and influence.<sup>16</sup>

One important source for twentieth-century philosophical interpretations of Eriugena that go beyond the Thomistic reading and indeed point towards the later phenomenological reading is Émile Bréhier's (1876-1952) article, "The Idea of Nothingness and the Problem of the Radical Origin in Greek Neoplatonism" (1919) which was known to Heidegger.<sup>17</sup> Bréhier elsewhere discusses Eriugena in his *History of Philosophy*.<sup>18</sup> Bréhier, a Hegelian idealist who had followed Bergson's lectures on Plotinus,<sup>19</sup> presents Eriugena as a thinker of identity and difference, and of the division of the whole into parts and the dependency of the parts of the whole that is a theme in thinkers from Plotinus to Hegel and Bradley.<sup>20</sup> Crucially, Bréhier emphasizes Eriugena's conception of non-being, which would have a strong influence especially on Heidegger (who corresponded with Bréhier in regard to the Descartes conference

<sup>16</sup> See Maïeul Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (Louvain: Abbé de Mont César, 1933).

<sup>17</sup> É. Bréhier, "L'idée du néant et le problème de l'origine radicale dans le néoplatonisme grec," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 26.4 (1919): 443-475.

<sup>18</sup> E. Bréhier, *Histoire de la philosophie. I. Antiquité et Moyen-Âge* (Paris: PUF, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 1989), pp. 479-487.

<sup>19</sup> On Émile Bréhier, see Wayne Hankey, "French Neoplatonism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," *Animus* 4 (1999): 135-167.

<sup>20</sup> "C'est la pensée simultanée de ces différences et de cette identité qui court à travers l'oeuvre de Jean Scot et, contraignant toujours la pensée à retrouver le tout dans les parties et les parties dans le tout, donne à son style même cette sorte de tension que l'on trouve chez tous les penseurs de même race depuis Plotin jusqu'à Hegel et Bradley," Bréhier, p. 479.

in Paris in 1937), as well as on the French phenomenological tradition.

It is less easy to find a way of connecting the work of Johannes Scottus Eriugena to the very beginnings of the phenomenological tradition as it developed from the Würzburg philosopher Franz Brentano (1838-1917) onwards. Phenomenology, in quite a remarkable manner, initially emerged more or less contemporaneously and hand-in-glove with Neo-Thomism, and initially they were not seen as rival systems. Brentano, who had been a Catholic priest until he resigned over the issue of papal infallibility, was one of the founders of the Neo-Aristotelian revival. In fact, Brentano was the teacher of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl may properly be considered the founder of what became known – already in Husserl's day – as "the phenomenological movement" (*die phänomenologische Bewegung*). Brentano played an enormous role in stimulating both traditions. He regularly lectured on the history of medieval philosophy while at the University of Würzburg,<sup>21</sup> and he was particularly active in the revival of Aristotle, to whom he devoted several monographs.<sup>22</sup>

However, in line with his four-stage theory of the development and decline of philosophy as outlined in his *Die vier Phasen der Philosophie* (1895), Brentano was virulently opposed to Plotinus and Neoplatonic mysticism in general, including the Christian mystics. Brentano regarded mysticism as a weak-minded irrational *Schwärmerei*.<sup>23</sup> Indeed Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), who does briefly mention Eriugena positively at times, comments in his Thomistic philosophy lectures from 1920 that Brentano would fly into a rage at the very mention of Plotinus, and undoubtedly he

<sup>21</sup> His lectures have been published as Franz Brentano, *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Philosophie im christlichen Abendland*, ed. Klaus Hedwig (Hamburg: Meiner, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Franz Brentano, *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles, insbesondere seine Lehre vom Nous Poietikos* (Mainz: Verlag von Franz Kirchheim, 1867). Brentano was generally attracted to Aristotle's empiricism and observational practice.

<sup>23</sup> Franz Brentano, *Die vier Phasen der Philosophie* (Stuttgart, J. G. Cotta, 1895; hrsg. Oskar Kraus, Berlin: Felix Meiner, 1926).

would similarly have dismissed Eriugena.<sup>24</sup> Steiner himself generally champions Eriugena as preserving the spirit of "direct spiritual knowledge" against the dead hand of the Latin tradition that has "ossified" the past.<sup>25</sup>

Edmund Husserl initially inherited from his teacher Brentano this suspicion of religious *Schwärmerei* and Hegelianism, although he would later come to have more sympathy for German Idealism by the time he wrote the *Crisis of European Sciences* (1936). Having been trained in mathematics, he was more or less an autodidact in philosophy and generally showed little interest in medieval philosophy, although he does refer to Anselm's argument for the existence of God in his *Logical Investigations* (1900/1901) and he does acknowledge that both the concepts of intentionality and the "intentional inexistence" of the object of a thought have a predecessor in medieval scholastic discussions. In so far as Husserl was interested in the history of philosophy, his focus was on modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant. Descartes was his idol. Werner Beierwaltes, for instance, in *Eriugena. Grundzüge seines Denkens*, draws attention to the fact that Eriugena's discussion of the *cogito* should be brought into a conceptual relation (*Sach-Bezug*) with Husserl's discussion.<sup>26</sup>

Husserl's one time protégé Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was – after Husserl – the next most important figure in the development of phenomenology. In contrast to Husserl, Heidegger had a true scholastic formation and had a strong interest in medieval Christian philosophy. In the summer of 1907, Fr. Conrad Grüber, native of Messkirch and headmaster of the Conradihaus (much later Archbishop of Freiburg), presented the young Gymnasium student, Martin Heidegger, with a copy of Brentano's 1862 study, *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*.<sup>27</sup> This book became

<sup>24</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *The Redemption of Thinking: A Study in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, translated and edited with an Introduction and Epilogue by A. P. Shepherd and Mildred Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1954).

<sup>25</sup> See Rudolf Steiner, *Materialism and the Task of Anthroposophy* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1987), p. 280.

<sup>26</sup> Beierwaltes, *Eriugena. Grundzüge seines Denkens*, p. 248 n.134.

<sup>27</sup> Franz Brentano, *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles* (Freiburg: Herder, 1862), trans. Rolf George as *On the Several Senses of*

Heidegger's "rod and staff" as he put it himself, stimulating him to read further in philosophy, specifically Aristotle.<sup>28</sup> A year later, in 1908, he would borrow the original Greek texts of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* from the school library.<sup>29</sup>

One of Heidegger's theology lecturers, the anti-modernist Tübingen follower of German speculative theology, Carl Braig (1853-1923), an admirer of Staudenmaier, was responsible for deepening Heidegger's understanding of the problem of Being. Braig's book, *On Being* (1896),<sup>30</sup> contained many etymological explanations of Greek metaphysical terms,<sup>31</sup> as well as lengthy extracts from Aristotle, Thomas and Suarez. It even contained the phrase "the Being of beings" central to Heidegger's formulation of his problematic. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger even suggested that phenomenology was actually the same as the kind of thinking practiced by Aristotle (somewhat playing down Husserl's claims to have founded the science).

Perhaps, given these Aristotelian beginnings of phenomenology, it is not surprising that few phenomenologists were interested in the Christian Neoplatonic tradition. Heidegger, however, already around 1912, became very interested in the writings of the

*Being in Aristotle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>28</sup> See Martin Heidegger, "My Way to Phenomenology," in Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger. A Political Life*, trans. Allan Blunden (London: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 51. For Heidegger's biography, see also Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger. Between Good and Evil*, trans. Edward Osers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Carl Braig, *Vom Sein. Abriss der Ontologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1896). For an account of the parallels between this book and Heidegger's thinking, see John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas. An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), pp. 45-57.

<sup>31</sup> Carl Braig, for instance, offers an etymological explanation of the German word *Zeit* back to the Greek word for stretching out (*ἔκνυμι* = I stretch out) which is to be found in Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1957), p. 373; trans. by John Macquarrie and E. Robinson as *Being and Time* (New York/Oxford: Harper and Row/Blackwell, 1962), p. 425, where *Dasein* is thought of in terms of stretching along (*Erstreckung*) between birth and death. Braig had studied in Tübingen under F. X. Linsemann, who had written a study of Meister Eckhart.



Dominican Meister Eckhart of Hochheim.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Heidegger's dissertation director for his first doctorate at Freiburg was the medievalist Artur Schneider (1876-1945), a conservative former student of Clemens Baeumker, who would go on to write quite a well researched two-volume study on John Scottus Eriugena, *Die Erkenntnislehre des Johannes Eriugena* (1921 and 1923), although he had left Freiburg well before the appearance of that work.<sup>33</sup>

Around the time of the Great War (1914-1918) there was a general revival of interest in Meister Eckhart of Hochheim and new editions of Eckhart's writings began to appear. Indeed, already in his Habilitation thesis of 1915 on "Duns Scotus' Doctrine of the Categories and of Meaning," Heidegger promises a future study of Eckhart.<sup>34</sup> He also proposed a lecture course on Eckhart in Freiburg in 1919, which, however, was never given. The interest in Eckhart continued into the 1930s. One of Heidegger's Marburg students, Käte Oltmanns, wrote her doctoral thesis on Eckhart, later published as *Die Philosophie des Meister Eckhart* (1935).<sup>35</sup>

Meister Eckhart was read enthusiastically by both Husserl and Heidegger. For instance, in a conversation with Dorion Cairns, dated 27 June 1932, discussing the topic of the evidence involved in mystical experience, Husserl stated that he could take over whole pages of Meister Eckhart unchanged.<sup>36</sup> Husserl was talking

<sup>32</sup> See Dermot Moran, "Meister Eckhart in 20th-Century Philosophy," in Jeremiah M. Hackett, ed., *A Companion to Meister Eckhart. Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition* Vol. 36 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 669-98.

<sup>33</sup> Artur Schneider, *Die Erkenntnislehre des Johannes Eriugena im Rahmen ihrer metaphysischen und anthropologischen Voraussetzungen nach den Quellen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, Teil I, 1921; Teil II, 1923).

<sup>34</sup> Heidegger's thesis, *Die Kategorien- und Bedeutungslehre des Duns Scotus*, is reprinted in M. Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1972), pp. 133-350, see esp. p. 344. At this point Heidegger opposes the contrast between 'scholastic' and 'mystic' and talks of the need for a phenomenological account of life. See Otto Pöggeler, "Mystical Elements in Heidegger's Thought and Paul Celan's Poetry," trans. Henry Pickford, in Aris Fioretos, ed., *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 75-109.

<sup>35</sup> Käte Oltmanns, *Meister Eckhart* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1935). Oltmanns articulates Eckhart's thought in deeply Heideggerian terms and the book is barely comprehensible.

<sup>36</sup> Dorion Cairns, *Conversations with Husserl and Fink* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1976), p. 91: LXII Conversation with Husserl, 27/6/1932: "Husserl

about mystical experience and, like his student Gerda Walther, he insisted that every insight has its own form of evidence and justification and must be respected; but that mystical experience is passive whereas science involves "work".

Heidegger himself displayed a life-long interest in Meister Eckhart. In a letter to his wife Elfriede of 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1919, Heidegger says that he has been reading Eckhart in the edition of Ernst Diederichs<sup>37</sup> (he commends the edition but dismisses the editor's introduction as "worthless"). Indeed Werner Beierwaltes points out that Heidegger quotes from Eckhart as early as his trial-lecture (*Probe-Vorlesung*) for his Habilitation in July 1915 (that time is manifold and changes whereas eternity is one, taken from the sermon *Consideravit semiras domus suae*, as found in the Pfeiffer edition).<sup>38</sup> Beierwaltes finds precursors to *Gelassenheit* in Plotinus' ἀφελε πᾶντα ('take away everything') in *Ennead* V.3, 17, 38; the One cannot be known. In this essay "Heideggers Gelassenheit," Eriugena is also briefly mentioned as a possible source of the idea of God as the "place of places" (*locus locorum*). Heidegger's Habilitation thesis defends the possibility of a rapprochement between mysticism and scholastic rationality. Heidegger writes there: "Philosophy as a rationalist construct, detached from life, is powerless; mysticism as an irrational experience is purposeless."<sup>39</sup>

spoke of mysticism. Every genuine evidence has its right. The question is always of the *Tragweite* [range, scope] of any given evidence. This applies also to the particular evidence the mystic has. Whole pages of Meister Eckhart, Husserl said, could be taken over by him unchanged. He doubts however the practical sufficiency of mysticism. The 'awakening' from the mystical experience is likely to be a rude one. On the other hand the insight into the rationality of the world which one gains through true scientific investigation remains through all future experience. The difference is furthermore, one between passive enjoyment and work. The mystic neglects work. Both are necessary. As every evidence has its right, the proper attitude toward religion is tolerance -towards all genuine religion."

<sup>37</sup> Ernst Diederichs, ed., *Meister Eckhart, Reden der Unterscheidung*, Kleine Texte für Vorlesungen und Übungen 117 (Bonn: Marcus, 1913).

<sup>38</sup> See Werner Beierwaltes, "Heideggers *Gelassenheit*," in Beierwaltes, *Fussnoten zu Plato* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> See Thomas O'Meara, "Heidegger and His Origins: Theological Perspectives," *Theological Studies* 47 (1986): 205-226, see especially p. 212. Heidegger's text can be found in Martin Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1972), p. 352: "Philosophie als vom Leben abgelöstes, ratio-

Heidegger continued to engage deeply with Eckhart, for instance, in his 1931 lectures on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* where he writes:

Meister Eckhart – the only one who sought a solution [to the dilemmas about the Neoplatonic *analogia entis*] – says: “God” ‘is’ not at all, because ‘being’ is a finite predicate and absolutely cannot be said of God. (This was admittedly only a beginning which disappeared in Eckhart’s later development, although it remained alive in his thinking in another aspect.)<sup>40</sup>

Heidegger even claims here that German philosophy begins with Eckhart, a claim later given a dangerous and spurious racial interpretation by the National Socialist ideologues. Heidegger himself continues to invoke Eckhart in his lectures and talks during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>41</sup> For instance, in his 1949 short piece *Der Feldweg* (“The Country Path”), he refers to Eckhart as the “old master of reading and of life”: In the unspoken of his speech, as the old Master of Reading and of Living Meister Eckhart said, is God first God.<sup>42</sup> Eckhart is a *Lesemeister und Lebe-meister*, a master hermeneuticist and also a sage.

Undoubtedly Heidegger’s most influential interpretation of Meister Eckhart is to be found in his *Gelassenheit* (1959) which includes two texts: a 1955 talk entitled simply “*Gelassenheit*,” and a “conversation” [*Gespräch*] entitled “Towards an Explication of *Gelassenheit*: From a Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking” [*Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit. Aus einem Feldweggespräch über das Denken*].<sup>43</sup> In fact, this latter text is a truncated excerpt from a much

nalistisches Gebilde ist machtlos, Mystik als irrationalistisches Erleben ist ziellos.”

<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics Theta 1-3: On the Essence and Actuality of Force*, trans. Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), Introduction, §6, 38.

<sup>41</sup> Reiner Schürmann in particular has attempted to document the places where Heidegger speaks of Eckhart.

<sup>42</sup> M. Heidegger, “Der Feldweg,” in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens 1910-1976*, Gesamtausgabe (= ‘GA’) 13 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983), p. 89: “Im ungesprochenen ihrer Sprache ist, wie der alte Lese- und Lebe-meister Eckhardt sagt, Gott erst God.”

<sup>43</sup> Heidegger’s talk was originally published as a pamphlet, entitled *Gelassenheit* (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1959; reprinted Klett-Cotta, 13<sup>th</sup> edition 2004). The trialogue, “Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit aus einem Feldweggespräch über das Denken,” was reprinted in *Aus der Erfahrung des*

longer trialogue written by Heidegger a decade earlier, in 1944-1945, which shows his extensive engagement with Eckhart.<sup>44</sup> In his “Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking,”<sup>45</sup> Heidegger develops the theme of *Gelassenheit* in a systematic and technical manner and Meister Eckhart is explicitly mentioned as one of the old “masters of thought [*bei älteren Meistern des Denkens*]” “from whom much can be learned.”<sup>46</sup> In general, Heidegger makes use of certain central Eckhartian notions, specifically “letting be” (*Gelassenheit*), “detachment” or “releasement” (*Abgeschiedenheit*; Middle High German: *abgescheidenheit*), and the notion of living “without a why” (*ohne Warum*).<sup>47</sup> Heidegger sees in Eckhart someone who broke with onto-theology and can think of God as outside of being, as non-being.

Unfortunately, extreme German Nationalism and National Socialist ideology embraced medieval figures such as Albertus Magnus and Meister Eckhart in order to define a uniquely Teutonic tradition in philosophy. Eckhart was claimed to be a purely “German” thinker. Thus, for instance, the notorious National Socialist ideologue Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946) in his *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (*Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, 1930) glorified Eckhart as exemplifying a truly Nordic sense of “honor and freedom,” which the Jesuitical Roman Church tried to destroy. Thus, he interprets Eckhart’s notion of the spark of the soul as representing “honor and freedom” and “the most inward, the most

*Denkens 1910-1976*, Gesamtausgabe 13 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983), pp. 37-74, while the ‘*Gelassenheit*’ talk has been reprinted in M. Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges 1910-1976*, hrsg. Hermann Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2000), pp. 517-533. An English translation of *Gelassenheit* is to be found as ‘Memorial Address,’ in M. Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 43-57.

<sup>44</sup> The full version has now been published, see M. Heidegger, *Feldweg-Gespräche* (1944/45), Gesamtausgabe 77 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1995) trans. Bret W. Davis as Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, op. cit., p. 27; *Discourse on Thinking*, op. cit., pp. 58-90.

<sup>46</sup> Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*, op. cit., p. 34; *Discourse on Thinking*, op. cit., pp. 61-2.

<sup>47</sup> For a study of these terms in Eckhart, see Erik Alexander Panzig, *Geläzenheit und Abegescheidenheit. Eine Einführung in das theologische Denken des Meister Eckhart* (Leipzig: University Dissertations, 2005).

sensitive and yet the strongest essence of our race and culture."<sup>48</sup> Rosenberg claims:

In the last analysis, honor and freedom are not external qualities but spiritual essences independent of time and space forming the fortress from which the real will and reason undertake their sorties into the world.<sup>49</sup>

Rosenberg goes on to assert:

Meister Eckhart, the Dominican priest, does not shy away from joyfully and openly proclaiming this fundamental creed of every truly Aryan nature. During the course of a long life, he speaks about the light of the soul as being without origin and uncreated, and preaches that god has placed the soul in free self-determination, so that he wishes nothing of it beyond its free will nor expects of it what it does not wish. He goes on to oppose the dogma of conformist faith by declaring that there are three things which prove the nobility of the soul. The first relates to the glory of the creature (of heaven); the second, mighty strength; and third, the fruitfulness of its works. Before each going forth into the world, the soul must have been conscious of its own beauty. The inward work of gaining the kingdom of heaven, however, can only be perfected through freedom.<sup>50</sup>

Meister Eckhart scholarship (and indeed the study of medieval philosophy, including Albert the Great) was damaged in Germany for some time due to this National Socialist espousal of German mysticism as an expression of the true Aryan soul.

Heidegger's old friend from his native village of Messkirch, Fr. Bernhard Welte (1906-1983) also wrote on Eckhart and quoted Eckhart in his graveside address at Heidegger's funeral.<sup>51</sup> Subsequently phenomenologists such as Reiner Schürmann,<sup>52</sup> John D.

<sup>48</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (München: Hoheneichen Verlag, 1930; repr. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1988), trans. James Whisker as *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (Costa Mesa, CA: Noontide Press, 1990), p. 70.

<sup>49</sup> Rosenberg, p. 70.

<sup>50</sup> Rosenberg, pp. 130-31.

<sup>51</sup> Bernhard Welte, *Meister Eckhart. Gedanken zu seinen Gedanken* (Freiburg: Herder, 1979; repr. with a foreword by Alois Haas, 1992). Heidegger's correspondence with Bernhard Welte has been published as *Martin Heidegger, Bernhard Welte. Briefe und Begegnungen* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> See Reiner Schürmann, "Trois penseurs du délaissement: Maître Eckhart, Heidegger, Suzuki," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12 (1974): 455-477; 13 (1975): 43-60.

Caputo,<sup>53</sup> and Michel Henry<sup>54</sup> have all written on Eckhart. More recently Jean Greisch has written on Heidegger and Eckhart on *Gelassenheit*.<sup>55</sup> Meister Eckhart, of course, has been championed by post-Heideggerian critics of ontotheology, including Schürmann but also French scholars such as Alain de Libera and Émile Zum Brunn, as well as American scholars such as John D. Caputo, Donald Duclow,<sup>56</sup> Bernard McGinn, among many others.<sup>57</sup> A number of studies produced by a group of CNRS researchers in Paris argued strongly for Eckhart's radical stance against the prevailing identification of God with being. Thus, in their Preface to the first French translation of Eckhart's *Parisian Questions*, the authors claim boldly that, already in his first Paris sojourn of 1302/1303, and six centuries before Heidegger, Eckhart had established the basic principle of all his subsequent philosophy, namely, that God is not Being but intellect.<sup>58</sup> But this explosion of interest in Eckhart only serves to point out how deep an influence it was in Heidegger's development.

<sup>53</sup> See John D. Caputo, "Meister Eckhart and the Later Heidegger, Part I," *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12 (1974): 479-94 and his "Meister Eckhart and the Later Heidegger, Part II," *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* 13 (1975): 61-80. See also his *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986, repr. 1990).

<sup>54</sup> Michel Henry, *L'Essence de la manifestation* (Paris: PUF, 1963), trans. Girard Etzkorn, *The Essence of Manifestation* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), especially §§ 38, 39 and 40.

<sup>55</sup> See Jean Greisch, "La contrée de la sérénité et l'horizon de l'espérance," in Richard Kearney, ed., *Heidegger et la question de Dieu* (Paris: Grasset, 1980) and idem, "Warum denn das Warum? Heidegger und Meister Eckhart: Von der Phänomenologie zum Ereignisdenken," in N. Fischer and F. W. v. Herrmann, eds., *Heidegger und die christliche Tradition. Annäherung an ein schwieriges Thema* (Hamburg, 2007), pp. 129-147.

<sup>56</sup> Donald F. Duclow, *Masters of Learned Ignorance: Eriugena, Eckhart, Cusanus* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>57</sup> See especially E. Zum Brunn, and A. de Libera, *Maître Eckhart. Méta-physique du Verbe et théologie négative* (Paris: Beauchesne 1984); and E. Zum Brunn, Z. Kaluza, A. de Libera, P. Vignaux, and E. Wéber, *Maître Eckhart à Paris. Une critique médiévale de l'ontothéologie. Les Questions parisiennes n° 1 et n° 2 d'Eckhart*, Études, textes et traductions, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études Section des Sciences religieuses, vol. 86 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984).

<sup>58</sup> Émile Zum Brunn, Z. Kaluza, A. de Libera a.o., *Maître Eckhart à Paris. Une critique médiévale de l'ontothéologie*, p. 7.



Edmund Husserl's student and one time assistant Edith Stein (1891-1942) spoke of being attracted to Husserl because of his *realism* about essences, and she was unhappy with his idealist turn as expressed in his *Ideas I* (1913). Stein became an excellent phenomenologist focusing especially on empathy and the conception of the person. She later converted from Judaism to Catholicism and became a Carmelite nun who was murdered by the National Socialists in Auschwitz concentration camp in 1942. Stein wrote a number of works attempting to link Husserl's account of being and essence with that of St. Thomas. In fact, Edith Stein had converted to Catholicism after a night spent reading St. Theresa of Avila in 1921. Despite her own closeness to mystical Christianity, and indeed her late interest in Pseudo-Dionysius and his *Mystical Theology*, she did not show interest in Eriugena or the Christian Neoplatonic tradition.<sup>59</sup>

In 1929, for the *Festschrift* for Husserl's birthday, Stein contributed an essay, "An Attempt to Contrast Husserl's Phenomenology and the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas." This had originally been written in the form of a dialogue between these two thinkers: "What is Philosophy? A Conversation between Edmund Husserl and Thomas Aquinas."<sup>60</sup> Stein developed further the relation between phenomenology and Thomistic metaphysics in her posthumously published *Endliches und ewiges Sein (Finite and Eternal Being)*, 1950) but she found herself moving more towards Augustine and Plato, as she acknowledges in the Author's Preface of 1936.<sup>61</sup> Edith Stein is more interested in the *analogia entis*, and

<sup>59</sup> See Nicholas Madden, "Edith Stein on the Symbolic Theology of Dionysius the Areopagite," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 71 (2006): 29-45. Edith Stein wrote a late essay on Dionysius around 1940-1941 which she planned to publish in *The Thomist*: "Ways to Know God: The 'Symbolic Theology' of Dionysius the Areopagite and its Objective Presuppositions," in E. Stein, *Knowledge and Faith*, trans. Walter Redmond, *The Collected Works of Edith Stein VIII* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2000), pp. 83-134. This essay was eventually translated into English by Rudolf Allers and published as "Ways to Know God: The 'Symbolic Theology' of Dionysius the Areopagite and its Factual Presuppositions," *The Thomist* (July 1946): 379-420.

<sup>60</sup> Both versions have now been published as "Husserl and Aquinas: A Comparison," in Edith Stein, *Knowledge and Faith*, pp. 1-63.

<sup>61</sup> Edith Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein: Versuch eines Aufstiegs zum Sinn des Seins*, Edith Stein Werke Band II (Freiburg: Herder, 1950), trans. Kurt F.

in the relation of act and potency and form and matter. The Polish born but German educated Jesuit theologian Eric Przywara (1889-1972), an exact contemporary of Heidegger, who wrote on the analogy of being, influenced Stein in this regard. Przywara was a friend of Husserl's, as well as a friend and spiritual confidant of Edith Stein.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, despite her instinctive Thomism, Stein has many statements (coming via Augustine) that could show an overall conformity with Eriugena's outlook, if not direct knowledge:

...the being of the I is deficient and by itself is null and void (*nichtig*). It is empty unless it is filled with content, and it receives this content from those realms – the "external" and the "internal" world – which lie "beyond" its own sphere. Its life comes out of one darkness and moves into another darkness. There are lacunae in it that cannot be filled, and it is sustained only from moment to moment. And thus we see that while the being of the I is separated from the divine being by an infinite distance, it nevertheless – owing to the fact that it is an I, i.e. a person – bears a closer resemblance to the divine being than anything else that lies within the reach of our experience. If we remove from this being of the I everything that is non-being, that will make it possible for us to conceive – albeit it only analogically – of divine being.<sup>63</sup>

Stein thinks of God as an infinite plenitude, which also has immediate and full knowledge of itself. Stein writes

God's "I am" is an eternally living presence, without beginning and without end, without any voids and without any darkness. This divine ego life has all its plenitude in itself and from itself.<sup>64</sup>

Reinhardt as *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2002), see especially p. xxxi, where Stein acknowledges that she began with Aristotle and Thomas but is now following the lead of Plato, Augustine and Duns Scotus.

<sup>62</sup> See Thomas F. O'Meara, O.P., *Erich Przywara, S.J. His Theology and His World* (Notre Dame University of Notre Dame Press, 2002). Erich Przywara's major work is *Analogia Entis. Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, which originally appeared in 1935 and has been translated by John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, MN: Eerdmans, 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being Finite and Eternal Being*, p. 344.

<sup>64</sup> Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt at an Ascent to the Meaning of Being Finite and Eternal Being*, p. 344.

This of course, is quite in tune with Eriugena and the Dionysian tradition generally, to which Edith Stein was already turning in the 1930s. But the treatment of human being and its inner voids is interesting and surely carries Augustinian echoes.

In contrast to the significant attention paid to Meister Eckhart, few phenomenologists have addressed themselves directly to Eriugena or discussed his texts. His influence has been in the main subterranean, vicariously through Eckhart, as we have seen. Occasionally, philosophers have drawn parallels between what Eriugena has said and aspects of the phenomenological approach, especially to the nature of human finitude, transcendence and the experience of non-being. Thus the former Dominican priest Reiner Schürmann (1941-1993), who became a highly regarded professor at the New School for Social Research in New York, and an influential commentator and interpreter of the work of Eckhart,<sup>65</sup> also wrote and lectured on John Scottus Eriugena,<sup>66</sup> and in the current climate John D. Caputo and Donald Duclow especially have been interested in the phenomenological import of Eriugena's work.<sup>67</sup> The main themes that link Eriugena to the phenomenologists are: finitude and infinity, the nature and limits of human knowledge, the immanence and transcendence of human nature, the meaning of being and nothingness, saying and unsaying,<sup>68</sup> and, of course, belonging to the very meaning of phenomenology, the nature of appearing or manifestation, the nature of givenness, donation and

<sup>65</sup> See Reiner Schürmann, *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy*, translation and commentary by Reiner Schürmann, foreword by David Appelbaum (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne, 2001). Schürmann was himself influenced by Fr. Bernhard Welte, who lectured on Eckhart at Freiburg, was close to Heidegger and gave the graveside oration on his death, see Bernhard Welte, *Meister Eckhart. Gedanken zu seinen Gedanken*.

<sup>66</sup> In the 1970s, I attended Professor Schürmann's lectures in the New School on Johannes Scottus Eriugena on nature. I do not know if these lectures were ever published or are preserved in some form. I can recall a conversation with Prof. Schürmann where he expressed his deep interest in Eriugena and he was familiar with the recently published works of René Roques and others.

<sup>67</sup> See Donald F. Duclow, *Masters of Learned Ignorance: Eriugena, Eckhart, Cusanus* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

the gift (on which Jean-Luc Marion has written) and what Wayne Hankey calls the "complex noetics of human subjectivity." As Husserl's student Dietrich Mahnke, to whom I shall return, summarizes Eriugena, "the world is the manifestation of God" (*Die Welt ist die Erscheinung Gottes*).<sup>69</sup> The phenomenological approach also recognizes a close interrelationship between the appearing of Being and the nature of human existence, and this is clearly a central theme of Christian Neoplatonists in general and of Eriugena, Eckhart and Cusanus in particular.

As far as I have been able to determine, none of the major phenomenologists (by which I mean Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty) ever spoke directly of Eriugena. The Eriugenian influence on this phenomenological tradition, therefore, is mostly indirect, primarily through Meister Eckhart, as we have seen, and to a lesser extent, through Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464). The early phenomenologists did, however, display an interest in mysticism, in religious conversion, and in the idea of the experience of something that breaks through finite living. There was, in the early decades of the twentieth century, a strong interest in the mystical and irrational. Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy* (1917)<sup>70</sup> was a major influence promulgating the idea that the experience of the divine was primarily the experience of a "terrifying and captivating mystery" (*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*). Otto corresponded with Husserl, and Heidegger commented on his work.

One of Husserl's women students, Gerda Walther (1897-1977), recalls in her autobiographical *Towards the Other Shore. From Marxism and Atheism to Christianity*<sup>71</sup> that she had begun studying in Munich with the phenomenologist Alexander Pfänder (1870-1941) who eventually recommended her to study with Husserl. In fact, Walther initially took classes with Edith Stein, who acted as Husserl's teaching assistant, preparing the new students in phenomenology before they attended the master's advanced semi-

<sup>69</sup> See below, n. 105.

<sup>70</sup> Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige - Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (1917), trans. John W. Harvey as *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>71</sup> Gerda Walther, *Zum anderen Ufer. Vom Marxismus und Atheismus zum Christentum [Towards the Other Shore. From Marxism and Atheism to Christianity]* (Remagen: Otto Reichl Verlag, 1960).

nars. Walther, a committed feminist, went on to have a life-long interest in religious experience and mysticism, including in such phenomena as telepathy, automatic writing, and séances (it was after all the 1920s and similar interests can be found in William Butler Yeats, for example). Walther wrote a phenomenological study of mystical experience, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, in 1923<sup>72</sup> (reprinted in an expanded version after the Second World War in 1955, which was reviewed favorably by Henri Corbin), which gives a detailed account of the nature of mystical experience including a chapter on various phenomena, from seeing auras to "telepathic communication with other humans."<sup>73</sup> For instance, she writes about spiritual force and distinguishes telepathy from empathy.<sup>74</sup> In fact, Heidegger, who also aspired to write on the phenomenology of mysticism, was very dismissive of Walther's work when it appeared in 1923 because it moved phenomenology in the direction of irrationalism, which he despised. He associated her with Steiner, anthroposophy, and the Stefan George circle and proclaims "Beware of all this!"<sup>75</sup>

In fact, Walther's *Phänomenologie der Mystik* began as a study written for the phenomenologist Alexander Pfänder's fiftieth birthday in 1920, on the 'inner constitution of consciousness of a unique essential ground (*Grundwesen*) as the core of personhood.' She begins from the phenomenon of the inner givenness of "the psychical" (*das Seelische*) to itself, which she wants to distinguish, following Husserl, from "the spiritual" (*das Geistige*), which is often used more broadly to express collective cultural phenomena. Walther employs phenomenology's way of analyzing one's own and foreign experiences to focus on mystical experience,

<sup>72</sup> Gerda Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1923), 248pp.

<sup>73</sup> Gerda Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Olten and Freiburg: Verlag Otto Walter, 1955). The second edition is expanded from 248 pages to 264 pages, with a new preface by Gebhard Frei. She now thanks Conrad-Martius and also Fr. Przywara (p. 18)—and gives more on Indian yoga philosophy. She says that between the wars she became more interested in theosophy, yoga, but could bring clarity to them with the help of Husserl's and Pfänder's phenomenological methods (p. 18).

<sup>74</sup> Gerda Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 159.

<sup>75</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren (Bloomington: Indiana, 1999), p. 58.

which she regards as a fundamentally basic or "original phenomenon" (*Urphänomen*) which has its own *sui generis* mode of "originary givenness" (*Urgegebenheit*), analogous to the givenness in perception, where colors and sounds are directly apprehended by the senses in their own ways.<sup>76</sup> Her basic claim is that mystical experience is unique and has its own essential structure that is not reducible to other lower-level experiences such as perception. Walther claims that in mysticism one encounters something with a kind of "bodily [*leibhaftig*] presence"; we apprehend the presence of the divine akin to the manner in which we experience other people in what Husserl and Theodor Lipps called "empathy" (*Einfühlung*). Walther begins from intentionality of experience understood as directedness towards something and speaks of the sense of "inner emptiness" that allows us to open to others (*Nullpunkt*).<sup>77</sup> To my knowledge, Walther is the first to speak of the "embeddedness of the ego" (*Einbettung des Ich*) not just in the body but in the irrational and unconscious world of drives and tendencies. At the end of *Phänomenologie der Mystik* she writes about the *unio mystica*, which she regards as a fusing of subject and object.

Walther's *Phänomenologie der Mystik* is primarily a phenomenological description in Husserlian terms of mystical experience, illustrated with references to mystics. For instance, she occasionally cites John of the Cross and also Theresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* (also discussed by Heidegger in 1917). Her philosophical references include not only the main phenomenologists of her day — primarily Husserl, Edith Stein on empathy, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Dietrich von Hildebrandt, and Scheler's *On the Eternal in Man*, but also (as Heidegger intimates) Rudolf Steiner, Otto Gründler, Rainer Maria Rilke and Stefan George. In the enlarged 1955 Second Edition, Walther adds many more references to Sufi mystics drawing on the work of the Romanian phenomenologist and philosopher of religion Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), who also drew deeply on phenomenology to explore the phenomena of the sacred).<sup>78</sup> In this Second Edition Walther also invokes Meister Eck-

<sup>76</sup> Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> For an interesting account of Eliade's involvement with Gershom Sholem and Henry Corbin, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Reli-*

hart, whose work is compared to Buddhism in terms of the spark (*Fünkelein*) in the soul, and the birth of the Son in the soul.<sup>79</sup> Disappointingly, however, Walther does not refer to Eriugena.

Gradually, not just Meister Eckhart but also Pseudo-Dionysius began to attract the attention of phenomenologists and post-phenomenologists such as Jacques Derrida, for instance in his "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials."<sup>80</sup> Indeed Jean-Luc Marion had already discussed Pseudo-Dionysius in his first and groundbreaking book *L'Idole et la distance. Cinq études* (1977) as one of three figures (the other two being Hölderlin and Nietzsche) who experience in distinct ways the absence of the divine. Marion cites Dionysius' principle "it is necessary to understand the divine things divinely" [*Divine Names* PG III.869A] and points to the impossibility of the human being joining that thinking of the divine.<sup>81</sup> Dionysius, for Marion, is prohibiting the thought of God as an *object* of thinking. In fact, it is part of Marion's overall critique of Husserlian phenomenology that Husserl regarded what is thought as in some sense an object. Marion, however, is interested in those experiences that disclose that which cannot be reduced to objectivity. Marion draws primarily on *The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology* in his brief and points out that Dionysius talks of "negative theologies" in the plural (a point reiterated by Derrida).<sup>82</sup> For Marion, Dionysius points to the infinite gulf between finite and infinite. The negation in negative theology cannot be absolute or it too becomes another form of idolatry. There has to be a negating also of the negation, in order to enter into the path of ascent that Dionysius talks about. God is beyond all affirmation and negation.

gion: Gershom Scholem, *Mircea Eliade*, and *Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>79</sup> Walther, *Phänomenologie der Mystik*, p. 160 and p. 183.

<sup>80</sup> J Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," in S. Budick & W. Iser, eds, *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 3-70. See also Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, eds, *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992).

<sup>81</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *L'Idole et la distance*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, *The Idol and Distance*, p. 140.

<sup>82</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance*, p. 145 n. 6.

Another way Christian Neoplatonic mysticism entered phenomenology is through the attempt to understand the breakthrough to modernity. The theme of the nature of modernity and the origins of the modern scientific worldview were intensively explored in the school of Husserl, both by Husserl himself in the *Crisis of European Sciences*,<sup>83</sup> and by his students, specifically Jacob Klein (1899-1978) who had written on Greek mathematics and geometry, and by Alexandre Koyré in his *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*,<sup>84</sup> neither of whom, to my knowledge, ever discussed Eriugena.

However, there was another important student of Husserl, Dietrich Mahnke, who did know Eriugena's *De divisione naturae*.<sup>85</sup> Alexandre Koyré, for instance, relies on Dietrich Mahnke for his own analysis in his influential *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, of the modern intuition that the world is infinite. He cites Cusanus as making the astonishing transference to the universe of the pseudo-hermetic characterization of God.<sup>86</sup>

Dietrich Mahnke (October 17, 1884 – July 25, 1939) knew both Husserl and Heidegger. He studied mathematics, physics, and philosophy in Göttingen from 1902 to 1906, particularly under Husserl.<sup>87</sup> From 1911-1914 he was a teacher at a Gymnasium in Stade. He was deeply interested in Leibniz and attempted to construct a new monadology bringing Leibniz into contact with Neo-Kantianism. He published his *Eine neue Monadologie* in 1917,<sup>88</sup> and even sent Husserl a copy, which may have influenced Husserl's own adoption of the notion of monadology in the *Cartesian Meditations*

<sup>83</sup> See Dermot Moran, *Husserl's Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. An Introduction* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>84</sup> Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957).

<sup>85</sup> Dietrich Mahnke, *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt: Beiträge zur Genealogie der mathematischen Mystik* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1937).

<sup>86</sup> Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, p. 18 and see also p. 279 n.19, where Koyré refers to Baumecker's edition and Mahnke's *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt*.

<sup>87</sup> See Karl Schuhmann, *Husserl-Chronik. Denk- und Lebensweg Edmund Husserls* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977), p. 70.

<sup>88</sup> Dietrich Mahnke, *Eine neue Monadologie* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1917).

and elsewhere. Already in this work he refers to Eckhart's notion of the becoming of the divine, citing the Diederichs edition of 1903.<sup>89</sup> In 1917 Mahnke published a pamphlet *The Will to Eternity* (*Der Wille zur Ewigkeit*) which he sent to Husserl with the dedication "Dem Meister der Wesensschau E.H."<sup>90</sup> From 1914 to 1918 Mahnke served in the Great War. Afterwards he was a teacher in Greifswald. He became interested in German Idealism, and especially Fichte. In 1922 he completed his doctorate in Freiburg with a thesis on Leibniz, directed by Husserl and published in his *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* (volume VII) in 1925. It also appeared as an independent monograph.<sup>91</sup> This enormous text (611 pages in the 1925 Niemeyer edition) contains a discussion of *Wesensschau* in Nicholas of Cusa. In 1926 Mahnke completed his Habilitation at Greifswald with a thesis entitled *Neue Einblicke in die Entdeckungsgeschichte der höheren Analysis*.<sup>92</sup> In 1927 he became an Ordinarius professor of philosophy at Marburg where he joined Heidegger (there is extant correspondence between them).

Mahnke's main interest was in the history of mathematics and especially the use of symbolism (leading up to Leibniz's *mathesis universalis*). He published a number of studies on Leibniz's then unpublished manuscripts. He was interested in Leibniz as a founder of symbolic mathematics and logic. There is an extant correspondence between Mahnke and Husserl, including an important letter from 4th May 1933, where Husserl says he is becoming more concerned by Heidegger's increasing antisemitism. Mahnke's most influential book, and the locus where he discusses Eriugena, appeared in 1937 as *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt. Beiträge zur Genealogie der mathematischen Mystik*.<sup>93</sup> This,

<sup>89</sup> Mahnke's reference is to *Meister Eckeharts Schriften und Predigten*, hrsg. H. Buttner (Jena: Diederichs, 1903), Bd. I, pp. 147-148.

<sup>90</sup> Dietrich Mahnke, *Der Wille zur Ewigkeit. Gedanken eines Deutschen Kriegers Über den Sinn des Geisteslebens* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1917).

<sup>91</sup> Dietrich Mahnke, *Leibnizens Synthese von Universalmathematik und Individualmetaphysik* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1925).

<sup>92</sup> Dietrich Mahnke, *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Jahrgang 1925. Phys.-math. Klasse; Nr. 1 (1926), pp. 1-64.

<sup>93</sup> Dietrich Mahnke, *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt. Beiträge zur Genealogie der mathematischen Mystik* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1937).

to my knowledge, is really the beginning of the phenomenological engagement with Eriugena. Mahnke devotes a number of pages to discussing Eriugena's *Periphyseon* which he quotes in the *Patrologia Latina* edition.<sup>94</sup>

Mahnke based his own research on the then recently published edition of the pseudo-hermetic *Book of the Twenty Four Philosophers* (*Liber Viginti Quattuor Philosophorum*),<sup>95</sup> which had been edited by Clemens Baeumker (1853-1924) in 1927.<sup>96</sup> *The Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers* had been dated, at that time, to the end of the twelfth century, since it was cited by Alan of Lille. This short book consists of a number of enigmatic sayings (propositions) about the divine. It has been hugely influential in modern and postmodern discussions of the divine, e.g. Georges Poulet,<sup>97</sup> and more recently the phenomenologist Marc Richir.<sup>98</sup> Beierwaltes has also written a study of this work.<sup>99</sup>

The *Liber XXIV philosophorum* is preserved in a number of medieval manuscripts, which attests to its popularity. Françoise Hudry has now edited the standard critical edition in the *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* series.<sup>100</sup> The earliest manu-

<sup>94</sup> See Mahnke, *Unendliche Sphäre*, pp. 190-195.

<sup>95</sup> See Françoise Hudry, *Le Livre des XXIV Philosophes* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1989), postface by Marc Richir.

<sup>96</sup> Clemens Baeumker: *Das pseudo-hermetische 'Buch der vierundzwanzig Meister'* (*Liber XXIV philosophorum*), in Clemens Baeumker, ed., *Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiete der Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte. Eine Festgabe zum 70. Geburtstag des Freiherrn Georg von Hertling* (Freiburg/Breisgau 1913), pp. 17-40, and idem, *Das pseudo-hermetische 'Buch der vierundzwanzig Meister'* (*Liber XXIV philosophorum*) in Clemens Baeumker, *Studien und Charakteristiken zur Geschichte der Philosophie, insbesondere des Mittelalters. Gesammelte Vorträge und Aufsätze von C. Baeumker*, hg. von Martin Grabmann (Münster 1927), pp. 194-214 (korrigiert und erweitert).

<sup>97</sup> Georges Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967).

<sup>98</sup> Marc Richir, *Phénoménologie et institution symbolique* (Grenoble: Millon, 1988).

<sup>99</sup> See also Markus Enders, "Licht und Raum. Robert Grossetestes spekulative Grundlegung einer *scientia naturalis*," in Jan Aertsen and Andreas Speer, eds, *Raum und Raumvorstellungen im Mittelalter*, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*, Band 25 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), esp. pp. 344ff.

<sup>100</sup> Françoise Hudry, ed., *Liber Viginti Quattuor Philosophorum*, CCCM 113A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997).



script differs from the rest of the tradition in ways that suggested to Hudry that it may represent a much earlier text. In another recent study,<sup>101</sup> Hudry argues that this text, which first began to circulate in the Latin West in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is in fact by the fourth-century Christian philosopher Marius Victorinus, who is also an important source for Eriugena and often seen as the origin of Eriugena's fourfold division of *natura*. This claim has been disputed by others who suggest that the lack of reference to it from the fourth to the twelfth century is significant.<sup>102</sup> The *Liber* is based on a number of sources, as Hudry has shown, including Aristotle, Philo, and Plotinus. Hudry traces the work back to the lost *De philosophia* of Aristotle, and provides a helpful list of discussion of the God as a sphere in Marius Victorinus' *Adversus Arianum* I, 60, and elsewhere, but notes, crucially, that the description of God as infinite sphere seems unique to the *Liber XXIV Philosophorum*. This description of God as infinite is precisely what Mahnke thought was owed to Eriugena.

The *Liber Viginti Quattuor Philosophorum* is an extraordinary work and medieval mysticism drew heavily on it. The book consists of a number of propositions. The first proposition is that "God is monad generating monad, reflecting light on its unity" (*Deus est monad monadem gignens, in se unum reflectens ardorem*). This is a text attributed to Hermes Tresmegistus. The second proposition states that "God is the sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" (*Deus est sphaera infinita cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia vero nusquam*), a claim that is taken up by medieval Neoplatonists including Nicolas of Cusa.<sup>103</sup> Mahnke points out that Eriugena himself does not use the term

<sup>101</sup> Françoise Hudry, Marius Victorinus, ed., *Le livre des vingt-quatre philosophes: résurgence d'un texte du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Histoire des doctrines de l'antiquité classique 39 (Paris: Vrin, 2009).

<sup>102</sup> See Paolo Lucentini, *Il libro dei ventiquattro filosofi* (Milan: Adelphi Edizioni, 1999). Lucentini refers to Eriugena on p. 36. See also Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2005), pp. 42–45.

<sup>103</sup> For a discussion of the conception of God as infinite and its transference to the universe and to the nature of knowledge in defining the outlook of modernity, see Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001). Harries discusses Mahnke's book as well as Alexandre Koyré and Hans Blumenberg.

"infinite sphere" (*sphaera infinita*) or "intelligible sphere" (*sphaera intelligibilis*).<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, Mahnke believes he finds some inklings of the thought behind the propositions of the *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers* where Eriugena does clearly express the idea of the divine infinity, e.g., at *Periphyseon* III.678C, where Eriugena says that God who is infinite manifests himself as finite (*infinitus finitum*) and that God is "uncircumscribed" (*incircumscriptus*). Mahnke also refers to a passage in *Periphyseon* III.682D where Eriugena is quoting Dionysius' *Divine Names* V, 8 to the effect that God is "above all things" (*super omnia est*) and "before all things" (*ante omnia*).

The fourteenth proposition states that God is *infinitum in se* (infinite in himself). God is presented as both remaining in himself and also going outside himself. God is an infinite being who remains in himself. According to Hudry, furthermore, the idea of the infinite is taken as synonymous with the idea of non-being, which again connects the text with the Eriugenian outlook.<sup>105</sup>

Mahnke, writing in the 1930s, therefore, believes that Eriugena is one of the sources for the *Liber XXIV Philosophorum*, especially in relation to the conception of the infinite sphere and of the coincidence of circumference and centre in the infinite nature of God who encompasses all things and is "beginning, middle and end" of all things (*principium et medietas et consummatio*, *Periphyseon* III.682C). He claims, moreover, that Eriugena's Latin formulations of Dionysius in his translation of the Pseudo-Areopagite specifically influenced the formulations in the *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers*. He argues that Propositions 21, 23 and 24 of the *Liber XXIV Philosophorum* show doctrinal and verbal parallels with Eriugena's translation of Dionysius' *De divinis nominibus*. Overall, in his research, Mahnke shows himself to be a fine textual scholar (he had been involved in editing works by Leibniz, as we have seen) who illustrates, citing the differences in brackets, how passages from Eriugena's translation of Dionysius differ from the version of the same passages as quoted in the *Periphyseon*. He

<sup>104</sup> See Mahnke, *Unendliche Sphäre*, pp. 194.

<sup>105</sup> Hudry writes: "Dans le néoplatonisme l'Infinité divine deviendra synonyme de non être, ainsi chez le Pseudo-Denys, Jean Damascène et Jean Scot Erigène," in *Le livre des vingt-quatre philosophes: résurgence d'un texte du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 47.

is doing original and groundbreaking research prior to the availability of the modern critical editions.

Dietrich Mahnke makes considerable use of Eriugena's translation of Dionysius' *Divine Names* in order to explicate the notion of the divine and the world as somehow infinite. Mahnke is particularly interested in Eriugena as a proponent of Pseudo-Dionysius and of his number and geometric symbolism for God and the world. Mahnke also cites from the very end of *Periphyseon* Book II (618A-D) where Eriugena is quoting (in his own Latin translation) Dionysius' *On the Divine Names* Book V, 6-7 (PG III. 820D) at some considerable length:

For in the Monad every number ... is presubstantiated [*ante subsistit*], and the Monad possesses [*habet*] in itself every number under a unitary mode, and every number is one in the Monad, but the further it issues from the Monad the more it falls into division and multiplicity. And all the lines of a circle co-subsist [*consustitutae sunt*] at the centre in their first unification, and the point holds in itself all simple lines unified in the mode of unity with one another and with the one principle [*ad unum principium*] from which they proceed, and while at the centre they are wholly unified, when they are distant a little from it they are a little divided, and when they recede further from it (they are) more (so); and (to put it) plainly, the closer they are to the centre they closer they are to unification both with it and with one another, and the further (they are) from it, the further they are from one another also (*Periphyseon* II.618A-B, CCCM 162: 127 ll. 3229-3250, transl. Sheldon-Williams).

Mahnke gives the Latin – and shows the difference between this version in the *Periphyseon* and in Eriugena's translation of Dionysius:

... in monade omnis numerus ... ante subsistit, et habet numerum omnem (Div. nat.: omnem numerum) monas in semet ipsa (se ipsa) singulariter, et omnis numerus unitur quidem in monade: quantum autem (a) monade provenit, tantum discernitur et multiplicatur. Et in centro omnes circuli lineae secundum primam unitatem consustitutae sunt. Et omnes habet signum in semetipso simplas (lineas) uniformiter unitas ad se invicem et ad unum principium, ex quo procedebant (*procedunt*), et in ipso quidem centro universaliter adunantur. Breviter (Paulisper) autem eo distantes, breviter et (paulisper) discernuntur; magis autem recedentes, magis. Et (magis et) simpliciter, quanto (quantum) centro proximiores sunt,

tantum et ipsi et sibi invicem adunantur: et quantum eo, tantum et ...

Eriugena is quoting a passage where Dionysius is talking in Neoplatonic terms about the sun of the world giving light and life to all things. Each partakes of the same sun in the manner appropriate to itself. For Eriugena, the lesson is that the *paradigmata* are the divine reasons, or predestinations (*προορίσματα*), or 'divine willings' (*θεία θελήματα*). Mahnke stresses the fact that for Eriugena, the primordial causes extend to infinity (cf. *Periphyseon* III.623D).

In regard to these primordial causes, Eriugena makes some bold and sweeping claims at the end of *Periphyseon* II. His spokesperson Nutritor identifies the primordial causes with the Greek *ἰδέαι*, with "the eternal species or forms" (*species vel formae aeternae*, *Periphyseon* II.615D), as well as with the "immutable reasons" (*incommutabiles rationes*) according to which both the visible and the invisible worlds are formed. These are also what the Greeks call "prototypes" (*πρωτοτύπα*) and "predestinations" (*προορίσματα*).<sup>106</sup> In other words, the principles that govern all of creation are infinite and therefore the creation that issues from them is also infinite.

Mahnke explains that Eriugena makes use of the image of the sun's rays, of the circle with its radii and of the point that extends in all lines, the number one as the basis of all number to explain how the *natura creatrix* unfolds into the multiplicity of created nature (*natura creata*).<sup>107</sup> Mahnke further quotes Eriugena as claiming that the world is the manifestation or 'appearing of God' (*Die Welt ist die Erscheinung Gottes, theophania hoc est divina apparitio*).<sup>108</sup>

Mahnke notes that the externalization from and return of all things to God is a cyclical process that takes place timelessly in an "eternal now, an indivisible point of eternity" (*ein ewiges Jetzt, ein*

<sup>106</sup> For an interesting discussion of Augustine's interpretation of the Platonic Ideas in his tract *De ideis*, see Jean Pépin, "Saint Augustine and the Indwelling of the Ideas in God," in Stephen Gersh and Dermot Moran, eds., *Eriugena, Berkeley, and the Idealist Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pp. 105–122.

<sup>107</sup> Mahnke, *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt*, p. 191.

<sup>108</sup> Mahnke, *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt*, p. 191 n. 2.

unteilbarer Ewigkeitspunkt).<sup>109</sup> He trawls Eriugena's *Periphyseon* for references to God as infinite and especially comments on *Periphyseon* III (III.678C). There God is described as "infinite" (*infinitus*) and "uncircumscribed" (*incircumscriplus*), but becomes finite and circumscribed. In particular, Mahnke cites the wonderful passage in Book III.681C where Eriugena explains why the divine is best called 'nothing' (*nihilum*, III.681B):

Now the Divine Wisdom is rightly called formless [*informis*] because it does not turn [*convertitur*] to any form above itself for its formation. For it is of all forms the infinite exemplar [*Est enim omnium formarum infinitum exemplar*], and while it descends into the forms of things visible and invisible it looks back to itself as to its formation [*veluti ad formationem suam*]. Therefore the Divine Goodness, regarded as above all things [*super omnia considerata*], is said not to be, and to be absolutely nothing [*dicatur non esse et omnino nihil esse*], but in all things it both is and is said to be, because it is the Essence of the whole universe [*totius universitatis essentia*] and its substance and its genus and its species and its quantity and its quality and the bond between all things and its position and habit and place and time and action and passion and everything whatsoever that can be understood by whatever sort of intellect in every creature and about every creature. And whoever shall look carefully at the words of St Dionysius will find that this is their meaning, and it does not seem inappropriate to introduce a few of them here... (*Periphyseon* III.681C-682A, CCCM 163: 89-90, transl. Sheldon-Williams).

Eriugena then goes on to quote Dionysius' *Divine Names* V, 4-5 (PG III, 817C-820A) on the manner in which God cannot be said to be and does not exist as such but is that which *causes* being. In his own text Dionysius refers to God not as τὸ ὄν (neuter) but as ὁ ὢν (using the masculine form). Eriugena comments on Dionysius as saying that God is not yet being, but is "pre-existent" (*ante-existens*, *Periphyseon* III.682C; anteΩN, *Periphyseon* 682B-C). He is the *esse* of all existing things (*esse existentibus omnibus*, *Periphyseon* III.682C). Quoting Dionysius, Eriugena says that God is the *principium et medietas et consummatio* of all things (*Periphyseon* III.682C – quoting Dionysius DN V, 8 [PG III, 817C-820A]), developing his more usual view of God as the beginning, middle

<sup>109</sup> Mahnke, *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt*, p. 192.

and end of all things. Mahnke does an excellent job of highlighting precisely the boldest and most radical of Eriugena's claims, which he also argues is the conduit through which Dionysian thought – and the Dionysian concept of the universe – enters into high medieval philosophy.

The *Liber XXIV Philosophorum* is subsequently cited by Eckhart and the idea of God as a sphere "whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" is taken up by Nicholas of Cusa who did know Eriugena's work and refers explicitly to him.<sup>110</sup> For instance, Cusa refers to this aphorism in *De docta ignorantia* Book II, 12<sup>11</sup> in which he speaks of the movement of the earth and the illusion of the observer who considers himself a fixed point around which everything moves:

Hence, the world-machine will have its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere, so to speak; for God, who is everywhere and nowhere, is its circumference and center. (*Unde erit machina mundi quasi habens undique centrum et nullibi circumferentiam, quoniam eius circumferentia et centrum est deus, qui est undique et nullibi*, DDI II.12.162).

Cusanus is interested primarily in finding appropriate ways to acknowledge and articulate the infinite nature of God. God, for Cusanus, is "absolute infinity" (*infinitas absoluta*, *De visione dei* 13):

<sup>110</sup> See Werner Beierwaltes, "Eriugena und Cusanus," in *Eriugena. Grundzüge seines Denkens*, pp. 266-312. Besides Eriugena's translations of Dionysius, Cusanus, at the very least, was familiar with *Periphyseon* Book I, which he owned in manuscript (British Museum Codex Additivus 11035) and annotated, as well as the *Clavis Physicae* of Honorius Augustodunensis (Paris Bib. Nat. cod. lat. 6734), a compendium of Eriugenian excerpts, and the homily *Vox Spiritualis* (under the name of Origen).

<sup>111</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, ed. E. Hoffmann and R. Klibansky (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1932), trans. Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance. A Translation and Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia* (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 2nd ed., 1985). Hereafter 'DDI' followed by the book, chapter and paragraph number. See also Jasper Hopkins, "Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?" *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26 (2002): 13-29; and Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Nikolaus von Kues in modernen Denken," in *Nicolo Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno* (Florence: Sanzoni, 1970), pp. 39-48.



Now according to the theology of negation, there is not found in God anything other than infinity. (*Et non reperitur in deo secundum theologiam negationis aliud quam infinitas*, DDI I.26.88).

All Cusanus' treatises, dialogues and sermons should be read as spiritual exercises for conceiving the *infinity* and *transcendence* of God. In *De possest*,<sup>112</sup> for instance, Cusanus writes:

For after having very often held very many exceedingly deep meditations with myself, and after having very carefully sought out the writings of the ancients, I have ascertained that the ultimate and deepest contemplation of God is boundless, infinite, and in excess of every concept.<sup>113</sup>

Alexandre Koyré comments on Cusanus' use of infinity as follows:

The metaphysical and epistemological conceptions of Nicholas of Cusa, his idea of the coincidence of opposites in the absolute which transcends them, as well as the correlative concept of learned ignorance as the intellectual act that grasps this relationship which transcends rational, discursive thought, follow and develop the pattern of mathematical paradoxes involved in the infinitization of certain relations valid for finite objects.<sup>114</sup>

Koyré cites Cusanus as saying the world has no circumference, "because if it has a centre and a circumference, and thus ... a beginning and an end ....the world would be limited in respect of something else, and outside the world there would be something other, and space, things that are wholly lacking in truth."<sup>115</sup> The point is that Eriugena already makes the move that Koyré thinks so significant and that is the transference of the idea of the infinite not just to God but to human nature and to creation.

Cusanus undoubtedly had encountered the themes of divine transcendence and immanence already in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*. In *Periphyseon* I, Eriugena characterizes God as 'without beginning' (*sine principio*, *Periphyseon* I.451D), "the infinity of infinities" (*infinitas infinitorum*, *Periphyseon* I.517B), "the opposite of

<sup>112</sup> Nicolas of Cusa, *De Possest* (1460), ed. and trans. Jasper Hopkins in his *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1986), pp. 64-163.

<sup>113</sup> Nicolas of Cusa, *De possest* I. 40; Hopkins, p. 107.

<sup>114</sup> Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, p. 2.

<sup>115</sup> Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, p. 3.

opposites and the contrariety of contraries" (*oppositorum oppositio, contrariorum contrarietas*, *Periphyseon* I.517C) and "above being and non-being."<sup>116</sup> Cusanus too calls God "the opposite of opposites" (*oppositio oppositorum*, *De visione dei* 13, 55)<sup>117</sup>, but attributes this phrase to Dionysius (*Divine Names* V) who says all opposites are united in the first cause. He goes on to emphasize that God as pure Oneness is *beyond* and, as he puts it elsewhere "precedes all oppositeness" (*De coniecturis* I.5.21).<sup>118</sup>

Cusanus emphasizes that the transcendent infinity of God means that there is no analogy or proportionality between finite and infinite, and this of course is the point taken up by both Heidegger and Stein – given a kind of existential slant of the distance between human existence which is essentially finite and transcendence. The transcendent deity or Godhead is not approachable through any kind of analogical reasoning. Between finite and infinite there is *nulla proportio*. The infinite God, for Cusanus too, is "incomprehensible" and "inapprehensible" (*inapprehensibilis*, DDI I.2.8), dwelling in "inaccessible light" (*lux inaccessibilis*, 1 Tim. 6: 16). Human minds, according to Cusanus and indeed Eriugena, work using oppositions and these do not apply to God. God cannot be understood on the basis of any created thing. As he says in his *Apologia* 17, what is caused cannot be raised to the status of the cause. We nevertheless have to move from the image

<sup>116</sup> This passage is also contained in Honorius' *Clavis Physicae*, see Honorius Augustodunensis, *Clavis physicae*, ed. Paolo Lucentini (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1974).

<sup>117</sup> *Oppositio oppositorum est oppositio sine oppositione, sicut finis finitorum est finis sine fine. Es igitur tu, deus, oppositio oppositorum, quia es infinitus, et ipsa infinitas.* See Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism. Text, Translation and Interpretive Study of De visione dei (3rd Edition)* (Minneapolis: Arthur Banning Press, 1985), p. 705.

<sup>118</sup> See also Nicholas of Cusa, *Apologia* 15; *De li non aliud* 19. Cusanus acknowledges that the concept of a unity prior to opposites is already to be found in Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, see Glenn Morrow and John Dillon, ed. and trans., *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 429; Cousin, paragraph 1077. Proclus says that the One transcends all antitheses and as "cause of all antithesis is not opposed to anything, for in that case there would have to be some other cause of that antithesis, and the One would no longer be the cause of all things." Nicholas of Cusa is said to have valued Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* above all other books, see John Dillon's Introduction, p. ix.

to the exemplar. All forms of proportion or adding one thing to another will not give us the infinite. The "method" of attaining to the infinite will be to grasp it in terms of the very oppositions and contradictions that are the basis of our human rational powers ("reason cannot leap beyond contradictories", DDI I.24.76). Thus, *possest* as a term for God surpasses reason and awakens the intellect to a mystical vision of God.

Eriugena of course also wants to lay stress on the infinity and boundless and sheer incomprehensibility of the divine. The divine cannot be circumscribed by any definition. It is not just infinity but the "infinity of infinities." Furthermore, there are an infinite number of divine ideas which themselves are the primal causes of all created beings. Therefore creation too is infinite and nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the non-nature of human beings. Human beings do not have a nature or essence, they are not circumscribed into a quidditas; a human being is not a rational animal but transcends all definition.

Of course, following Augustine, Eriugena considers the whole process of creation in terms of the speaking of the word, *clamor dei*. The process of moving from non-being to being is the speaking of the word, the making manifest of sound and sense, the making visible of what is essentially invisible. Eriugena understands the mind as giving birth to itself in thinking the thought, akin to a silent speaking of the word. The mind in itself (*in se*) is a kind of non-being. Speaking the mental word is the beginning of thought and is understood as the self-manifestation of the mind. What is truly intellect is an intuition that has to be unraveled to become reason.

...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 (*Periphyseon* III.689A-B, CCCM 163: 99-100, transl. Sheldon-Williams).

We are identical with our acts of understanding: "for we ourselves are not other than our intellects" (*Non enim aliud sumus, aliud noster intellectus*, *Periphyseon* IV.780C). Eriugena goes on to see all creation as somehow embedded in human intellect:

If you look more closely into the mutual relation and unity (*reciprocam copulationem et unitatem*) which exist between intelligible and rational natures, you will at once find that not only is the angelic nature established (*constitutam*) in the human but also the human is established in the angelic. For it is created in everything of which the pure intellect has the most perfect knowledge and becomes one with it ... Moreover the angel is made in man, through the understanding of angel which is in man, and man is in the angel through the understanding of man which is established in the angel. For, as I have said before, he who has pure understanding is created in that which he understands (*Periphyseon* IV. 780A-B, CCCM 164: 56-57, transl. Sheldon-Williams).

The key to Eriugena's metaphysical outlook is that creation is modeled 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, moving from superessential non-being into manifest being.

God creates himself by manifesting himself in being. Creation is in fact defined as "manifestation in another" (*creatio, hoc est in aliquo manifestatio*, *Periphyseon* I.455B), which in this case means manifestation of oneself in another. God's self-creation is His self-externalization, 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, and likewise it is God's self-knowing which generates His manifest being and that of all creation. God knows Himself manifestly through his creation and of course through human nature which is created first and contains everything else because it is the *officina omnium* (*Periphyseon* II.530D; IV.755B). Furthermore, human nature is an idea eternally made in the mind of God (*Possumus ergo hominem definire sic: Homo est notio quaedam intellectualis in mente divina aeternaliter facta*, *Periphyseon* IV.768B). So human nature mirrors the divine nature – indeed it too is infinite and uncircumscribed and does not know what it is. Just as God is said not to know what He is (*quid est*) because He is infinite and incomprehensible, i.e. unbounded and undefinable, and to know only that He is (*quia*

est), similarly, human nature is, according to Eriugena, ignorant of itself and does not know its true nature and this gives it infinite scope. It is this bold sense of the infinity of human consciousness that attracted Eriugena to the phenomenologists.

Phenomenologists have been attracted to Eriugena as a philosopher of manifestation and hiddenness, givenness and withholding, immanence and transcendence and of course, and perhaps primarily, finitude and infinity. As I have shown, the first phenomenologist to give sustained attention to Eriugena is Dietrich Mahnke in his somewhat neglected masterpiece *Die Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt*. This book has regrettably not been translated into French or English. Mahnke's theme is, however, greatly developed first by another student of Husserl, namely Alexandre Koyré (1892-1964), and subsequently by Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996), but with more emphasis on Cusanus than on Eriugena.<sup>119</sup> Eriugena truly enters into phenomenology through Dietrich Mahnke's groundbreaking discussion and Mahnke correctly identifies the themes of infinity and non-being as those themes that mark Eriugena out for phenomenological attention. It is important that the phenomenological tradition continue to bring Eriugena's unique contribution concerning the divine nature and divine creation to the fore.

<sup>119</sup> See Hans Blumenberg, *Die Genesis der kopernikanischen Welt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), trans. Robert M. Wallace, *The Genesis of the Copernican World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987). Blumenberg wrote his Habilitation thesis on Husserl and studied with Husserl's former assistant Ludwig Landgrebe.

## THE RATIONAL MYSTICISM OF JOHN SCOTTUS ERIUGENA AND LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

JOKE SCHAKENRAAD

This essay engages Johannes Scottus Eriugena (especially his main work *Periphyseon*) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (his early writings, especially the *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*) on the question what role discursive language and thought can play in acquiring knowledge of God. It is remarkable that both works establish a connection between extreme forms of rational thinking and religious experience, i.e., between logic and mysticism. Since their investigations make use of analogous methods, their observed similarity aptly shows how discursive and logical thinking can indeed be deployed as a means to get closer to God. The authors use similar strategies to reach their goal. While for both authors the end (deification in Eriugena, religious / ethical discourse in Wittgenstein) is based on discursive speaking and logical reasoning, its realization lies one step beyond the text of their books, beyond the arguments used. The authors confirm this by taking a position outside their own discourse: Eriugena does so by addressing his reader in the epilogue, Wittgenstein by giving directions for the interpretation of the *Tractatus*. On reaching the final position, however, a paradox still prevails. The methodological principles used may not have shattered the knowledge that God is beyond the grasp of reason (Eriugena) or that the elucidating sentences are really nonsense (Wittgenstein), but they have yielded a deeper insight into what it is such knowledge entails.

In this essay I want to address the question what role discursive language and thought can have in acquiring knowledge of God, according to Johannes Scottus Eriugena in his main work, *Periphyseon*, and Ludwig Wittgenstein in his early writings, especially *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In the debates of the last decades on the relation between religion and rationality there has been a growing tendency to place speaking about God outside the bounds of any rational discourse. Explicitly atheistic authors espouse the view that rational thinking can only lead to arguments against

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