

The Reception of Eriugena in Modernity: A Critical Appraisal of Eriugena's Dialectical Philosophy Of Infinite Nature

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For Werner Beierwaltes

1 Introduction

The Irish philosopher John Scottus Eriugena's masterwork, the dialogue *Periphyseon*,¹ was popular in Northern France, as is evident from the spread of manuscripts from the 9th to the 12th centuries (having a significant influence on the "schools" of St. Victor and of Chartres).² The history of the evolution of

1 The main edition of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* for many years was the Patrologia Latina edition by Heinrich Joseph Floss (ed.), *De divisione naturae*, PL 122 (Paris, 1853). The current critical edition is Édouard Jeuneau (ed.), *Iohannis Scotti seu Eriugenaes Periphyseon*, CCCM 161–65 (Turnhout: 1996–2003). The *Periphyseon* (hereafter "*Peri*.") is cited according to the following translations: *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenaes Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, vol. 1, eds. and trans. I.P. Sheldon-Williams and Ludwig Bieler, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 7 (Dublin: 1968); vol. 2, eds. and trans. I.P. Sheldon-Williams and Ludwig Bieler, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 9 (Dublin: 1970); vol. 3, eds. and trans. I.P. Sheldon-Williams and Ludwig Bieler, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 11 (Dublin: 1981); vol. 4, ed. Édouard Jeuneau, trans. I.P. Sheldon-Williams and John J. O'Meara, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 13 (Dublin: 1995). There is a complete English translation in *Periphyseon: Division of Nature*, trans. I.P. Sheldon-Williams and John J. O'Meara (Montréal: 1987). For more on Eriugena's life and writings, see Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1989); and the classic study by Maïul Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène: Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (1933; repr., Brussels: 1969).

2 See John Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre: Logic, Theology, and Philosophy in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1981); and Paul Edward Dutton, "Eriugena's Workshop: The Making of the *Periphyseon* in Rheims 875," in *HE*, 141–68. Dutton contends that the Rheims 875 was Eriugena's working copy from his scriptorium, on which he (in the hand of i¹) and his students worked. The number of hands identifiable in the manuscript (beside i¹ and i²) suggests that Eriugena had a large cohort of students making interventions on the issues of the *Periphyseon*. As Jeuneau points out, i² (nicknamed by Jeuneau "Nisifortinus") even disagrees with i¹ at several points in the manuscript. See Édouard Jeuneau, "Nisifortinus: Le disciple qui corrige le maître," in *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: A Festschrift for Peter Dronke*, ed. John Marenbon (Leiden: 2001), 113–29. According to Dutton,

the manuscripts of the *Periphyseon* from the time that it emerged in Eriugena's scriptorium workshop is as complex as the philosophical doctrine it contains, but the very complexity of its transmission helps to explain the nature of its somewhat subterranean impact through the centuries until it emerged into the light in 20th-century critical scholarship.

2 Eriugena's *Periphyseon* and Its Influence in Medieval Philosophy

After its initial success circulating in Northern France, the *Periphyseon* was further popularized especially in the 12th century by the digest summary of Honorius Augustodunensis (1080–1154) in his *Clavis physicae* (c. 1125),³ which was a reasonably reliable précis of the work, as well as by the "edition" of the manuscript done by William of Malmesbury (c. 1095 – c. 1143),⁴ which is now preserved at Trinity College, Cambridge (and based in part on the 9th-century Rheims manuscript which itself shows the work of many scribal hands).⁵

Rheims was a working manuscript of low-grade parchment, the pages are of different sizes, the number of lines of writing varies, the size of the script varies, and it is, in general, not beautifully crafted. It served as the basis for the copy given to Eriugena's friend Wulfad at Soissons. Rheims itself shows evidence of it being copied from earlier manuscripts and Dutton also argues that some of it shows evidence of being dictated. For Dutton, Eriugena not only allowed the students to work on the text, but maintained a high degree of control, marking passages in the manuscript for additions and emendations and possibly giving students wax tablets or scraps of manuscript with text written on them. Eriugena's commentary on Martianus Capella exercised a strong influence on Remigius of Auxerre (841–908).

- 3 See Honorii Augustodunensis, *Clavis physicae*, ed. Paolo Lucentini, *Tem e Testi* 21 (Rome: 1974) for Part One (§§ 1–315); and *La Clavis physicae (316–529) di Honorius Avgvstodvnnensis: Studio e edizione*, ed. Pasquale Arfé (Naples: 2012), a critical edition of the Part Two (§§ 316–529). See also Paolo Lucentini, "La *Clavis Physicae* di Honorius Augustodunensis e la tradizione eriugeniana nel secolo XII," in *Jean Scot Erigène et l'histoire de la philosophie*, ed. René Roques, *Colloques internationaux du Centre national de la recherche scientifique* 561 (Paris: 1977), 405–14; and Eric Graff, "A Primitive Text of *Periphyseon V* Rediscovered: The Witness of Honorius Augustodunensis in *Clavis physicae*," *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 69, no. 2 (2002): 271–95. See most recently, Daniel Yingst, "Quae Omnia Concorditer Consonant: Eriugena's Universe in the Thought of Honorius Augustodunensis," in *EC*, 427–61.
- 4 See Édouard Jeauneau, "Guillaume de Malmesbury: Premier éditeur anglais du *Periphyseon*," in "Sapientiae doctrina": *Mélanges de théologie et de littérature médiévales offerts à Dom Hildebrand Bascour OSB*, eds. Roland Hissette, Guibert Michiels, Hildebrand Bascour, and Dirk van den Auweele (Leuven: 1980), 148–79, repr. with additions and corrections in *EE*, 489–521.
- 5 See T.A.M. Bishop, "Periphyseon: An Episode in the Tradition," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 7 (1980), 411–26; and idem, "Periphyseon: The Descent of the Uncompleted Copy," in *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, eds. Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick, and David Dumville (Cambridge, Eng.: 1982),

Anselm of Canterbury does not seem to have known Eriugena⁶ but Bernard Silvestris's *Cosmographia*⁷ shows the influence of the *Periphyseon* and Alain of Lille's work, for instance, also manifests close affinity with Eriugena.⁸

After the calamity of the condemnations of 1210 and 1225, with which the *Periphyseon* was associated (through its connection with Almeric of Bène), and pilloried as "crawling with the worms of heretical depravity" ("*totus scatens vermibus haeretice pravitatis*"),⁹ interest in Eriugena declined, more or less in line with the decline of the Platonist tradition of Christian theology, which was gradually displaced by radical Aristotelianism in Paris, Oxford, and elsewhere, ushering in the age of high Scholasticism. However, Eriugena's *Periphyseon* (and also his homily *Vox spiritualis aquilae*, circulating under the name of Origen,¹⁰ and, of course, his translation of Dionysius which had an impact

281–304. See also the excellent discussion of the descent of the *Periphyseon* manuscripts (including Bamberg, Rheims, Paris), in Lesley Smith, "Yet More on the Autograph of John the Scot: Ms Bamberg Ph. 2/2 and its Place in *Periphyseon* Tradition," in *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought, Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeuneau*, ed. Haijo Jan Westra (Leiden: 1992), 47–70. There are seven major manuscript sources (containing at least two books of the dialogue) for the *Periphyseon* found in Rheims 875 (probably written at St. Médard, Soissons), Bamberg Ph 2/1 and 2/2, Paris (mss 12965 and 12964), Cambridge Trinity College, and Avranches. The *Periphyseon* was heavily reworked during Eriugena's own life and immediately after (there are several identifiable hands at work). It remained a work in progress. Indeed, Eriugena himself clearly planned the dialogue in four books but could not prevent it becoming five books. In the later manuscript tradition, books IV and V became separated from books I to III.

- 6 See Stephen Gersh, "John Scottus Eriugena and Anselm of Canterbury," in *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction*, ed. John Marenbon (Abingdon, Eng.: 2007), 120–49. For Anselm as a negative theologian, see Dermot Moran, "Neoplatonic and Negative Theological Elements in Anselm's Argument for the Existence of God in *Proslogion*," in *Pensées de l'un dans l'histoire de la philosophie: Études en hommage au Professor Werner Beierwaltes*, eds. Jean-Marc Narbonne and Alfons Reckermann, Collection Zêtêsis (Paris: 2004), 198–229.
- 7 See Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, ed. Peter Dronke (Leiden: 1978); and *The Cosmographia of Bernardus Silvestris: Translation with an Introduction and Notes*, ed. Winthrop Wetherbee (New York: 1990). See also Peter Dronke (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Twelfth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1988).
- 8 See Paulo Lucentini, *Platonismo medievale: Contributi per la storia dell'Eriugenismo* (Florence: 1979; 2nd ed.: 1980).
- 9 Pope Honorius II's condemnation of 1225 can be found in *Chartularium universitatis parisiensis*, vol. 1, eds. Henricus Denifle and Aemilio Chatelain (Paris, 1899), 106–07. Eriugena's *Periphyseon* was championed by the Albigensians and this led in part to the ferocity of the condemnation.
- 10 Eriugena, *Jean Scot: L'Homélie sur le Prologue de Jean*, ed. Édouard Jeuneau, SC 151 (Paris: 1969). Jeuneau discusses the circulation of the *Homilia* under the name of Origen in his recent article, "From Origen's *Periarchon* to Eriugena's *Periphyseon*," in *EC*, 139–82, see especially 180–81. It was not until the 19th century, that Félix Ravaisson identified the author of the *Vox spiritualis* as Eriugena.

in Paris in the 13th century¹¹) continued to have a subterranean but important influence on later medieval thinkers, especially on Meister Eckhart¹² and the Dominican tradition of Dietrich of Freiburg¹³ and Berthold of Moosburg, as well as on Nicolas of Cusa (and through him to Bruno and modernity, being revived among the theologian followers of Hegel). Eriugena's conception of the infinite also influenced Giordano Bruno, although the line of influence may not have been direct.¹⁴

Because of the long shadow cast by the 1225 condemnation, Cardinal Nicolas of Cusa (1401–1464)¹⁵ was one of the rare few Catholic authorities willing to risk invoking Eriugena directly. Cusanus refers explicitly to Eriugena's *Periphyseon* by name as "Iohannis Scotigenae Περιφυσσεως," and he owned at least a partial manuscript copy of the dialogue, primarily Book One (in the London Codex Additivus 11035), which he also annotated.¹⁶ In addition, Cusanus possessed a

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- 11 On the influence of Eriugena's translations of Dionysius and also on the excerpts of the *Periphyseon* circulating in Paris in the 13th century, see James McEvoy, "John Scottus Eriugena and Thomas Gallus, Commentators on the *Mystical Theology*," in *HE*, 183–202. There is a collection of excerpts for the *Periphyseon* found in Paris Ms Bibliothèque Nationale 17341. For a discussion, see McEvoy, "John Scottus Eriugena and Thomas Gallus," 194–96; and Hyacinthe François Dondaine, *Le corpus dionysien de l'Université de Paris au XIII. siècle* (Rome: 1953), 137–38. McEvoy has identified the name of John Scottus written in the margins of Paris 17341 most often in relation to citations from Eriugena's *Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem*. See also Eriugena, *Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem*, ed. Jeanne Barbet, CCCM 31 (Turnhout: 1975).
- 12 See for instance, Bernard McGinn, "Exegesis as Metaphysics: Eriugena and Eckhart on Reading Genesis 1–3," in *EC*, 463–99; and Donald F. Duclow, *Masters of Learned Ignorance: Eriugena, Eckhart, Cusanus* (Aldershot: 2006). It is not easy to show the direct influence of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* on Meister Eckhart, but it is most likely that he was directly familiar with Eriugena's *Homilia* or *Vox spiritualis*. See Jeffrey Hamburger, "Johannes Scotus Eriugena deutsch redivivus: Translations of the 'Vox spiritualis aquilae' in Relation to Art and Mysticism at the Time of Meister Eckhart," in *Meister Eckhart in Erfurt*, eds. Lydia Wegener and Andreas Speer, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 32 (Berlin: 2005), 473–537.
- 13 See Mark Führer and Stephen Gersh, "Dietrich of Freiburg and Berthold of Moosburg," in *Interpreting Proclus from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Gersh (Cambridge, Eng.: 2014), 299–317; Lori Sturlese, *Dokumente und Forschungen zu Leben und Werke Dietrichs von Freiberg* (Hamburg: 1984); and Kurt Flasch (ed.), *Von Meister Dietrich zu Meister Eckhart* (Hamburg: 1987).
- 14 Vincenzo Mangano, *Scoto Erigena e Giordano Bruno Vita e pensiero di Giordano Bruno* (Palermo: 1907); and Henry Bett, *Nicholas of Cusa, Great Medieval Churchmen* (1932, repr., Merrick, N.Y., 1976). Eriugena's relation to Bruno needs to be revisited.
- 15 See also David Albertson's extensive discussion of Eriugena's influence on Nicolas of Cusa's reading of Eriugena in this volume.
- 16 See Werner Beierwaltes, "Eriugena und Cusanus," in *ER*, 311–43, repr. in *Eriugena: Grundzüge seines Denkens* (Frankfurt: 1994), 266–312. Besides Eriugena's translations of Dionysius, Cusanus, at the very least, was familiar with *Periphyseon* Book I, which he owned in

copy of Honorius' compendium, *Clavis physicae*,¹⁷ and, interestingly, he regarded both as exempt from the condemnation that affected Almericus of Bène and therefore felt free to refer to them in positive terms. Indeed, Cusanus mentions Eriugena twice by name in his own defense document, *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* (1449).¹⁸ So the revival of Eriugena leading into modernity can be said to begin with Nicholas of Cusa's interest in the Irishman as one of the practitioners of *docta ignorantia*.

3 The Modern Revival of Eriugena with Thomas Gale's Edition

Properly modern (i.e. 17th-century) interest in Eriugena's *Periphyseon* has a precise beginning with Thomas Gale's first printed edition of 1681, published

manuscript (British Museum Codex Additivus 1035) 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* (which circulated under the name of Origen). Raymond Klibansky identified the annotations as those of Cusanus and they have been edited by Joseph Koch in "Kritisches Verzeichnis der Londoner Handschriften aus dem Besitz des Nikolaus von Kues," in *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft*, ed. Rudolf Haubst, bk. 3 (Mainz: 1963), 16–100, especially 86–100. Cusanus also explicitly cites (under the name of Origen) Eriugena's *Vox Spiritualis* in several of his sermons, such as *Verbum caro factum est*, delivered several times, e.g. Sermo XI, delivered on 25 December 1431; Sermo XIX, delivered on Christmas Day 148, Heidelberg Akademie edition volume XVI/3, 291ff, and, on 27 December, 1453, Sermo CXL, Heidelberg Akademie edition volume XVIII, 90ff. See Jasper Hopkins (ed.), *Nicholas of Cusa's Early Sermons 1430–1441*, (Minneapolis: 2003), 248–49 and 319–20.

- 17 For an excellent study of the influence Eriugena and Cusanus, see Beierwaltes, "Eriugena und Cusanus," especially 311–43; Werner Beierwaltes, "Cusanus and Eriugena," *Dionysius* 13 (1989): 115–52. But see Werner Beierwaltes' more recent, "Theophanie: Nicolaus Cusanus und Johannes Scotus Eriugena: Eine *Retractio*," *Philotheos: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 6 (2006): 217–39. See also the monograph by Carlo Riccati, "*Processio*" et "*explicatio*": *La doctrine de la création chez Jean Scot et Nicolas de Cues* (Naples: 1983); Duclow, *Masters of Learned Ignorance*; Agnieszka Kijewska, "Divine Non-Being in Eriugena and Cusanus," *Philotheos: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 2 (2002): 155–67; and Cesare Catà, "Cusanus' Revival of Eriugena as a Renaissance Redefinition of Christian Orthodoxy?" in *Eriugena – Cusanus*, eds. Agnieszka Kijewska, Roman Majeran, and Harald Schwaetzer, *Colloquia Mediaevalia Lublinensia* (Lublin: 2011), vol. 1, 59–71. For Cusanus' knowledge of the *Clavis physicae*, see Lucentini, *Platonismo medievale*, 77–103.
- 18 References to Eriugena by name are extremely rare but Cusanus mentions him in a letter of 9 September, 1954, to Bernhard von Waging, as the person who translated Dionysius in the time of Charlemagne (*qui primo transtulit Dionysium tempore Karole magni*).

in the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford.¹⁹ Thomas Gale (1636–1702) was Regius Professor of Greek at Trinity College Cambridge, a noted antiquarian and one of the Cambridge Platonists. Indeed, it was he who (separately) coined the term “Neoplatonism” and who gave the work the title *De divisione naturae*, which is actually only the title of the first chapter of Book One. Gale based his printed edition on William of Malmesbury’s 12th-century manuscript edition. In turn Floss, in his *Patrologia Latina* edition, based his edition on Gale. Gale included some passages from the margins into the main text, in an effort to produce a smooth and readable text and this practice was followed by Sheldon-Williams in his edition (although he used different font sizes to distinguish the additions). Eriugena did not properly begin to receive critical attention until the early 19th century in the context of the rise of historical theology in Germany.

4 Eriugena’s Original Version of Negative Theology

The later medieval thinkers from the 14th and 15th centuries (Eckhart, Cusanus) were impressed with Eriugena’s effort to investigate the *via negativa* in relation to the thinking of the infinite divine One who is beyond being and non-being and who resides in superessential darkness. Nicolas of Cusa (1401–1464), in particular, was attracted to Eriugena’s paradoxical formulations that expressed the infinity and transcendence of the divine nature in explicitly contradictory terms – thus paving the way for the Cusan’s own *docta ignorantia*.²⁰ In *Periphyseon* Book One, for instance, Eriugena characterises God as the infinite One (*infinita Unitas*)²¹ that is “incomprehensible in itself” (*per se incomprehensibilis*, *Peri.* 1.450b), “the infinity of infinities” (*infinitas infinitorum*, *Peri.* 1.517b), and “the opposite of opposites and the contrariety of contraries” (*oppositorum opposition, contrariorum contrarietas*, *Peri.* 1.517c), and that “to which nothing opposite is opposed” (*cui nil oppositum*). Eriugena further characterizes God as “nothingness” (*nihilum*, *Peri.* 111.685a) and as the “negation of

19 Eriugena, *Joannis Scoti Erigenae de divisione naturae libri quinque diu desiderati: Accedit appendix ex Ambiguis S. Maximi Graece & Latine*, ed. Thomas Gale, PL 122, ed. Heinrich Joseph Floss (1853; repr., Frankfurt: 1964), 87–100.

20 Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia libri tres*, eds. Ernst Hoffmann and Raymond Klibansky, *Nicolai de Cusa Opera Omnia*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: 1932); *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance. A Translation and Appraisal of De docta ignorantia*, ed. Jasper Hopkins, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: 1985). Hereafter “DDI” followed by the book, chapter, and paragraph number.

21 Kurt Flasch, *Die Metaphysik des Einen bei Nikolaus von Kues: Problemgeschichtliche Stellung und systematische Bedeutung* (Leiden: 1973).

essence" (*negatio essentiae*, *Peri.* 1.462b) and says that God is "not this nor that nor anything" (*nec hoc nec illud nec ullum ille est*, *Peri.* 1.510c), all formulations that are taken up and developed with intense dialectical skill by Nicolas in *De docta ignorantia* (1440) and other works. Cusanus seems also to be invoking Eriugena when he refers to God as the "none of all things" (*nihil omnium*, DDI 1.16.43), Who is also, at the same time, "all things at once" (*omnia simul*, DDI III.3.197). Cusanus develops his conception of the infinite transcendent divine being as pure "oneness" (*unitas*, DDI 1.24.76) or "infinite oneness" (*unitas infinita*, DDI II.3.109), which, at the same time, is not a oneness to which "otherness" (*alteritas*) is opposed. Rather, since God is all in all (*omnia in omnibus*, 1 Cor. 15:28), as Eriugena also insists, God is pure identity *without otherness*. Thus, Cusanus argues that in God even "diversity" (*diversitas*) has to be comprehended as identity (DDI II.9.149). Everything that is not one, is subsequent to the One, and belongs to otherness, the sign of multiplicity and "mutability" (*mutabilitas*, DDI 1.7.18).²² There cannot be otherness in God. This is the reason why Cusanus refers to God in *De li non aliud* as the "not other" (*non aliud*),²³ a conception that also has its roots in Eriugena. Cusanus himself claims to be the original source of this concept of God as Not Other but acknowledges his particular debt to Dionysius:

Although I have read [it in] no one, nevertheless Dionysius (more than the others) seems to have come the closest [to it]. For, in all the things which he expresses in various ways, he elucidates *Not-other*. But when he comes to the end of his *Mystical Theology*, he maintains that the Creator is neither anything nameable nor any other thing whatever. Yet, he says this in such way that he there appears not to be setting forth any important point – although, for one who is attentive, he expressed the secret of Not-other, which secret he everywhere exhibited in one way or another.²⁴

For Cusanus God is the absolute Maximum and "to whom nothing is opposed" (*cui nihil opponitur*, DDI 1.4.12). Things can only have opposites if they are relative to one another in some sense, but God is absolute actuality without

22 Cusanus takes this from Thierry of Chartres, *Lectiones* 1, 33: "for where there is alterity there is plurality" (*nam ubi alteritas ibi est pluralitas*). The background source here is Boethius, in his *De Trinitate* 1, 6, who asserts that "alterity is the principle of plurality" (*principium pluralitatis est alteritas*) and Thierry develops this dialectic of unity and plurality in his two *Commentaries on Boethius*, both known to Nicolas of Cusa.

23 Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not – Other: A Translation and an Appraisal of De li non aliud*, ed. Jasper Hopkins, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: 1987).

24 *Ibid.*

relativity, since between finite and infinite there is no proportion. Hence God has no opposite. Cusanus declares:

Since the unqualifiedly and absolutely Maximum (than which there cannot be a greater) is greater than we can comprehend (because it is Infinite Truth), we attain unto it in no other way than incomprehensibly. For since it is not of the nature of those things which can be comparatively greater and lesser, it is beyond all that we can conceive.²⁵

And:

Therefore, opposing features belong only to those things which can be comparatively greater and lesser; they befit these things in different ways; [but they do] not at all [befit] the absolutely Maximum, since it is beyond all opposition.²⁶

The created universe is finite, or in Cusanus's terms "contracted," and is *infinitas finite*, the "infinite finitely," which formulation is very close to the famous passage in *Periphyseon* Book Three where Eriugena speaks of the "the infinite [becoming] finite and the uncircumscribed circumscribed and the supratemporal temporal, and the Creator of all things created in all things and the maker of all things made in all things. (Peri III. 678c), a passage which Cusanus himself underlines in his annotations to his copy of Honorius' *Clavis Physicae*.

Generally speaking Cusanus' arguments are presented in dialectical manner – and indeed he looks to Eriugena for the source of his exacting negative dialectics, although, of course, it must be borne in mind that Cusanus has access to the whole medieval tradition of dialectics, including the writings of such complex thinkers as Thierry of Chartres.²⁷ When, in his *Apologia doctae ignorantiae* (1449),²⁸ Cusanus was forced to defend his radical *docta ignorantia*

25 DDI I, 4, 11.

26 DDI I, 4, 12.

27 See David Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies: Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres* (Oxford: 2014). Albertson focuses on the impact of the quadrivium (and especially Neo-Pythagorean mathematical thinking) on Cusanus, but Cusanus' thought of this number symbolism also in dialectical terms. See Clyde Lee Miller, *Reading Cusanus: Metaphor and Dialectic in a Conjectural Universe* (Washington, D.C.: 2003). On Cusanus as a precursor to the Hegelian dialectic, see Dmitri Nikulin, *Dialectic and Dialogue* (Stanford: 2010), especially Chap. 3.

28 Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa's Debate with John Wenck: A Translation and an Appraisal of De ignota litteratura and Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, ed. Jasper Hopkins, 2nd ed.

against the harsh critique of the Thomist Scholastic Johannes Wenck, Cusanus makes clear that this complex doctrine is already found in Dionysius, Eriugena, Maximus, Eckhart, and others, and cannot be grasped by simple minds. Thus, he writes in his *Apologia*:

Men of little understanding chance to fall into error when they search out higher [truths] without learned ignorance. They are blinded by an infinity of supremely intelligible light in their mind's eye.²⁹

In fact, Cusanus is here maintaining the Platonic tradition (also found in St. Augustine and originally legitimized by St Paul's remark in 1 Cor 3:2 about the difference between milk and solid food) about the need for a higher understanding that is more sophisticated and informed by recognition of the need to apply the negative way or "learned ignorance." Cusanus is the first champion of Eriugena and he sees him as teaching a method – the method of learned ignorance.

5 Eriugena in German Idealism

In part, Eriugena's influence on modernity comes because he was widely regarded as a master dialectician. Thus, Leszek Kolakowski in his magisterial three-volume *Main Currents of Marxism* (1978)³⁰ lists Eriugena as one of the forerunners of Hegelian-Marxist dialectic. Indeed, it is precisely Eriugena's brilliant dialectical skills in relation to the expression of the divine nature, human nature and the cosmos as a whole that also attracted the 19th-century German theologians – both Catholic and Protestant – who praised Eriugena as a Hegelian Absolute Idealist *avant la lettre*. In 1838, just seven years after the death of Hegel, the German Protestant theologian Christoph Bernard Schlüter (1801–1884), who had already published a study on Spinoza, published the first modern edition (since Thomas Gale) of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* as *De divisione naturae libri quinque* following Gale.³¹ Schlüter in his preface (*Praefatio*)

(Minneapolis: 1984). See also Dermot Moran, "Pantheism from John Scottus Eriugena to Nicholas of Cusa," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (1990): 131–52.

29 *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, 29.

30 Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origin, Growth, and Dissolution*, 3 vols, trans. P.S. Falla (London: 1978), especially vol. 1, 23–31.

31 Eriugena, *Johannis Scoti Erigenae De divisione naturae libri quinque: Accedunt tredecim auctoris hymni ad Carolum Cavum ex Palimpsestis Angeli Maii*, ed. C.B. Schlüter, PL 122, ed. Heinrich Joseph Floss (Paris: 1853), 101–26. The *Praefatio* is found on ii–xxviii. It would

alludes to the previous studies of Staudenmaier and Hjort as well as to the positive assessment of Eriugena in Friedrich Schlegel and Franz Baader (writing in 1824), and is even aware of Hegel's reference to Eriugena in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (though he admits that Hegel had scant knowledge of Eriugena – and seeks to fit him into his dialectical system).

Subsequently, both the Munich Catholic theologian Johannes Nepomuc Huber (1830–1879), in his *Johannes Scotus Erigena: 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 Erigena* (1860),³² described Eriugena as a precursor of German Idealism in terms of his understanding of the dialectical unfolding of the divine into the cosmos.³³ Huber even describes Eriugena as “the father of speculative idealism.”

As Schlüter acknowledged, Hegel refers to Eriugena in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Hegel himself learned of Eriugena primarily through the work of a Danish scholar, Peder Hjort (1793–1871), who wrote – and I am not clear why Hjort's attention was originally drawn to Eriugena (there is a suggestion that he wanted to display his gifts at writing in German) – a monograph entitled *Johan Scottus Erigena oder von dem Ursprung einer christlichen Philosophie und ihrem heiligen Beruf* [*John Scottus Eriugena or On the Origin of Christian Philosophy and its Holy Vocation*], in 1823.³⁴ Hegel's understanding of Eriugena is therefore indirect and based on an inaccurate textual source (he places Eriugena in Oxford, for instance, following the tradition of William of Malmesbury). Hegel writes that Eriugena offers a new conception of

be interesting to chart the relation of Eriugena to Spinoza in terms of the dialectics of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. In part, German Idealism is stimulated by the revival of Spinoza begun by Jacobi in 1785 and the debate over pantheism. See Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed (eds.), *Spinoza and German Idealism* (Cambridge, Eng.: 2012).

32 See Theodor Christlieb, *Leben und Lehre des Johannes Scotus Erigena in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der vorhergehenden und unter Angabe ihrer Berührungspuncte mit der neueren Philosophie und Theologie* (Gotha, 1860). Christlieb studied in the famous Tübingen Stift, and wrote his doctoral thesis on Eriugena entitled, “Das System des Johannes Scotus Erigena in seinem Zusammenhang mit dem Neuplatonismus, Pseudodionysius und Maximus Confessor” (1857). His 1860 book is an expansion of his doctoral thesis.

33 See Werner Beierwaltes, “Zur Wirkungsgeschichte Eriugenas in deutschen Idealismus und danach,” in *Eriugena: Grundzüge seines Denkens* (Frankfurt:1994), 313–30; and idem, “The Revaluation of John Scottus Eriugena in German Idealism,” in *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium, Dublin, 14–18 July, 1970*, eds. John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: 1973), 190–99.

34 Peder Hjort, *Johan Scottus Erigena oder von dem Ursprung einer christlichen Philosophie und ihrem heiligen Beruf* (Copenhagen:1823).

philosophy, inspired by Plato and Aristotle, and of theology as rational investigation, but at best provides a beginning to Scholastic thought:

Scotus [Eriugena] was also the author of some original works, which are not without depth and penetration [*die einige Tiefe und Scharfsinn haben*], upon nature and its various orders (*De naturæ divisione*), etc. Dr. Hjort, of Copenhagen, published an epitome of the writings of Scotus Eriugena, in 1823. Scotus Eriugena sets to work philosophically, expressing himself in the manner of the Neo-Platonists, and not freely, and as from himself. Thus in the method of expression adopted by Plato, and also by Aristotle, we are rejoiced to find a new conception, and on bringing it to the test of philosophy, to find it both correct and profound; but here everything is ready to hand, cut and dry. Yet, with Scotus, theology is not yet built on exegesis, and on the authority of the Church [*Die Theologie wurde nicht auf Exegese und auctoritates patrum gebaut*]; the Church in many cases rejected his writings. Thus, Scotus is reproached by a Lyon church council in these words: ‘There have come to us the writings of a boastful, chattering man, who disputes about divine providence and predestination, in human fashion, or, as he himself boasts, with philosophic arguments, and without relying on the holy scriptures and bringing forward the authority of the Fathers. And he dares to defend this on its own merit, and to establish it on its own laws, without submitting himself to the holy scriptures and the authority of the Fathers.’ Scotus Eriugena hence even said: ‘The true Philosophy is the true Religion, and the true Religion is the true Philosophy.’ The separation came later on. Scotus then made a beginning [*Dies machte nun so den Anfang*], but properly he does not belong to the scholastics.³⁵

Strictly speaking, although Hegel admired the system and rationality inherent in Eriugena’s thought, he did not seem to have been directly familiar with Eriugena’s writings since Schlüter’s edition would not appear until after Hegel’s death in 1838. Indeed, Schlüter himself cites Hegel.

35 See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Werke in zwanzig Bänden, bk.18 (Frankfurt: 1979), 550–52; *Hegel’s Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, vol. 2, *Philosophy of the Middle Ages* (London: 1955). Hegel gave these lectures regularly, first in Jena in 1805/1806, then in Heidelberg in 1815/1816 and 1816/1817, and subsequently in Berlin until his death. The lectures were edited after Hegel’s death by Karl Ludwig Michelet on the basis of some drafts and mostly student notes. Michelet’s edition is unreliable.

Separately, also in Copenhagen, in 1838, some years after Hjort, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard discusses Eriugena in his Journal “KK,” now published as part of his *Journals and Notebooks* (c.1836–1846).³⁶ Kierkegaard’s knowledge also appears to be indirect and he too makes reference to Peder Hjort’s 1823 study as well as to Franz Staudenmaier’s³⁷ important book from 1834 as well as Ferdinand Christian Baur’s (1792–1860) 1842 study.³⁸ Kierkegaard discusses whether Eriugena belongs to the “speculative tendency” in Christian theology that emphasizes the ultimate unity of divine and human and thinks of the God becoming human as one “moment” in the unfolding of the divine.

In fact, it was within this speculative theological movement, both inspired by and reacting to Hegel’s conception of the absolute and its dynamic process of unfolding and enfolding (which itself refers back to Cusanus) that Eriugena comes to the fore in 19th-century German Idealist thought. Franz Staudenmaier (1800–1856) was a Catholic theologian who studied in the Catholic seminar at the University of Tübingen and later became professor in the Catholic theology seminar of the University of Giessen, before moving to Freiburg. Staudenmaier was hugely influential as a representative of the Tübingen theological school of speculative dogmatics that sought to offer an alternative to Hegel’s and Schelling’s speculative philosophies. Later, for instance Carl Braig, the last representative of that school, would have an enduring influence on the thinking about Being of the young Martin Heidegger.³⁹ Ferdinand Christian Baur was a Protestant theologian deeply influenced by Schelling and Schleiermacher, and essentially the founder of the Tübingen theological school. He was particularly known for his use of the historical method, following Schleiermacher, but he gradually moved to a more Hegelian position and sought to apply Hegel’s dialectic to the evolution of Christian religion and theology. In 1843, the French intellectual (and even Minister for Education) Saint-René Taillandier (1817–1879), who was a student at the University of Heidelberg, wrote

36 Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Notebooks*, trans. George Pattison et al (Princeton, N.Y.: 2015), vol. 2, 329. This entry was written in 1838 and Hjort is referred to as “Hiorth.” In these entries Kierkegaard is primarily reviewing the books of Staudenmaier and Baur.

37 Franz Anton Staudenmaier, *Johannes Eriugena und die Wissenschaft seiner Zeit: Mit allgemeinen Entwicklungen der Hauptwahrheiten auf den Gebiete der Philosophie und Religion, und Grundzügen zu einer Geschichte der speculativen Theologie* (1834; repr., Frankfurt: 1966).

38 Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die christliche Lehre von der Dreieinigkeit und Menschwerdung in ihrer geschichtlichen Gottes*, 3 vols (1841–42; repr., Hildesheim: 2005). See P.C. Hodgson, *The Formation of Historical Theology: A Study of Ferdinand Christian Baur* (New York: 1966).

39 Carl Braig’s *Vom Sein: Abriß der Ontologie* (Freiburg, 1896) is acknowledged by Heidegger as a major influence in his development of the *Seinsfrage*.

a doctoral dissertation on Eriugena and the Scholastic tradition that invokes Friedrich Schlegel's and Franz Baader's positive assessment of Eriugena (probably following Schlüter's Preface).⁴⁰

The revival of Eriugena within German Idealism in the mid-19th century has been studied expertly, among others, by Werner Beierwaltes.⁴¹ In particular, Beierwaltes has placed considerable emphasis on the Idealist conception of the infinite divine as having a kind of *absolute* self-knowledge: it understands creation as the divine both alienating itself from itself in order to come to know itself better.⁴² Eriugena's radical conception of the divine ignorance might at first seem to stand this priority of absolute self-knowledge but, in fact, for Eriugena (somewhat in parallel to Socratic ignorance), the divinity's self-ignorance is the highest form of self-understanding. Eriugena writes:

For what the Holy Fathers, I mean Augustine and Dionysius, most truly say about God – Augustine says that He is better known by not knowing [*qui melius nesciendo scitur*], Dionysius that His ignorance is true wisdom [*cuius ignorantia uera est sapientia*] – should, in my opinion, be understood not only of the intellects which reverently and seriously seek Him, but also of Himself. For as those who pursue their investigations along the right path of reasoning are able to understand that He transcends them all, and therefore their ignorance is true wisdom, and by not knowing Him in the things that are they know Him the better above all things that are and are not; so also it is not unreasonably said of (God) Himself that to the extent that He does not understand Himself to subsist in the things which He has made, to that extent does He understand that He transcends them all, and therefore His ignorance is true understanding; and to the extent that He does not know Himself to be comprehended in the things that are, to that extent does He know Himself to be exalted above them all, and so by not knowing Himself He is the better known by Himself. For it is better that He should know that He is apart from

40 See Saint-René Taillandier, *Scot Erigène et la philosophie scolastique* (Strasbourg, 1843), especially 264–65.

41 Werner Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen: Studien zur neplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt: 1985); idem, "Die Wiederentdeckung des Eriugena im Deutschen Idealismus," in *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt: 1972), 188–201; and idem, "Zur Wirkungsgeschichte Eriugenas."

42 See Werner Beierwaltes, "Das Problem des absoluten Selbstbewusstseins bei Johannes Scotus Eriugena," in *Platonismus in der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, (Darmstadt: 1969), 484–516.

all things than that He should know that He is set in the number of all things.⁴³

This is extraordinary – the divine ignorance is not just our limitation, our limited intellect's failure to comprehend the divine infinity, the divine ignorance pertains to God itself. God does not know *what* He is. His unlimited knowledge is that he is apart from and transcends all things.

The Idealist characterization of Eriugena as a dialectical thinker of the absolute, then, is not necessarily to be rejected out of hand as entirely anachronistic. I have argued extensively that there are many aspects of Eriugena's philosophical-theological cosmology, his "system," as it were, that contain distinctly idealist themes, and on several levels.⁴⁴ Of course, I need to stress, I am arguing here concerning the philosophical import of the text rather than on strictly philological grounds.

6 Eriugena as a Dialectician

Although we have to be careful to understand the term *dialectica* in its proper medieval sense (where it is used as identical with *logica*),⁴⁵ Eriugena expands the meaning of dialectic to include also an ontological dimension.⁴⁶ But, crucially he incorporates negative theological assertions and denials applied beyond the domain of the divine. Eriugena self-consciously considered himself a dialectician and logician and, indeed, he quite deliberately presents his original fourfold division of nature in terms of the Aristotelian square of opposition

43 PP. 11.597D–598A, CCCM 162, 99–101.

44 See, inter alia, Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Eng.: 1989); idem, "Idealism in Medieval Philosophy: The Case of Johannes Scottus Eriugena," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999): 53–82; idem, "*Spiritualis Incrassatio*: Eriugena's Intellectualist Immaterialism: Is It an Idealism?" in *EBI*, 123–50; and idem, "Jean Scot Érigène, la connaissance de soi et la tradition idéaliste," *Les Études Philosophiques: Érigène* (2013): 29–56.

45 On the evolution of medieval conceptions of logic and dialectic, see E.J. Ashworth, "Language and Logic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.S. McGrade (New York: 2003), 73–96. Unfortunately, Eleonore Stump passes over Eriugena and Neoplatonic logic in general in her *Dialectic and Its Place in the Development of Medieval Logic* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 1989), but see the essay by Christophe Erismann, "The Logic of Being: Eriugena's Dialectical Ontology," *Vivarium* 45 (2007): 203–18; and also John Marenbon, "Eriugena, Aristotelian Logic, and the Creation," in *EC*, 349–68.

46 See Erismann, "The Logic of Being." See also Erismann's essay in this volume on Eriugena's understanding of logic.

(see *Peri.* I.442a–b; II.525a; II.526c–527a; II.527c; III.688c–689a; IV.743b–c; and V. 1019a–b), as he knew it from Martianus Capella and the Latin logical tradition.⁴⁷ In Book One Eriugena divides nature into four “species” using the tradition division *per differentias in species* (I.441a–b). At the end of the division, Eriugena proposes a recollection (*reditus*) according to which the second and third divisions collapse into one another (as the effect returns to the cause) and the first and the fourth are brought back together as expressing the one God (see *Peri.* V.1019a–c) but viewed through a *duplex theoria*.⁴⁸ Finally, the first and fourth and second and third are reunited back into the divine entity and its infinite theophanies.

Frequently throughout the dialogue Eriugena presents arguments and opposes them to counter-arguments in standard dialectical style, e.g. when he discusses the propositions “man is an animal [*Homo animal est*]” (affirmation) and “man is not an animal [*Homo animal non est*]” (negation) in *Periphyseon* Book Four (IV.752C). Indeed, right from the beginning of his career as a Liberal Arts magister, in his commentary on Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* and even in his expressly theological tract, *De praedestinatione liber*,⁴⁹ Eriugena presents himself as a dialectician. Furthermore, it was precisely because of his repute as a dialectician that King Charles the Bald engaged him to enter into the debate against Gottschalk. It is not an exaggeration, then, to say that Eriugena’s thought is dialectical through and through, drawing both on the Latin liberal arts tradition of *dialectica* and, a point I emphasize in this chapter, on the interplay of Dionysian affirmative and negative theology applied not only to God but to the dynamics of creation and also

47 For the medieval understanding of the square of opposition, see Gersh, “John Scottus Eriugena and Anselm of Canterbury” (see above n. 6), 137 n. 19; and Giulio d’Onofrio, “Über die Natur der Einteilung: Die dialektische Entfaltung von Eriugenas Denken,” in *Begriff und Metapher: Sprachform des Denkens bei Eriugena*, ed. Werner Beierwaltes (Heidelberg: 1990), 17–38. As Gersh points out, the square of opposition was a classificatory scheme deriving from Porphyry that applied to substance and accident, and also to the relations between numbers 1 to 10. Eriugena would have encountered it in Martianus Capella’s Liberal Arts handbook, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* Book 7, 738.

48 For a detailed discussion of Eriugena’s dialectical treatment of the four “species” of nature, see Giulio d’Onofrio, “*Cuius esse est non posse esse*: La quarta species della natura erigeniana, tra logica, metafisica e gnoseologia,” in *HE*, 367–412. D’Onofrio places particular stress on Eriugena’s discussion of impossibility as logical contradiction.

49 See Eriugena, *Iohannis Scotti de divina praedestinatione liber*, ed. Goulven Madec, CCM 50 (Turnhout: 1978). The *De praedestinatione* has been re-edited and commented by Ernesto Mainoldi, who puts particular emphasis on the book as an exercise in dialectic, see Eriugena, *Giovanni Scoto Eriugena, De praedestinatione liber: Dialettica e teologia al apogeo dell rinascenza carolingia (edizione critica, traduzione e commento)*, ed. Ernesto Mainoldi (Florence: 2003).

explicitly to the mysterious nature of human beings. Dialectics is at work in the very dynamics of the divine appearing and concealing, it is the underlying logic of theophany.⁵⁰

Eriugena is explicit that *dialectica* is not just a logical or rhetorical procedure located primarily in the human mind (as one of its arts or skills) but has an ontological dimension because it belongs to the very nature of things, *natura rerum*:

From this we may see that that art which concerns itself with the divisions of genera into species and the resolution of species into genera, which is called dialectic [δialeκτική] did not arise from human contrivances [*non ab humanis machinationibus*], but was first implanted in nature [*sed in natura rerum*] by the originator of all the arts that are properly so called and was later discovered there by the sages who make use of it in their subtle investigation of reality.⁵¹

This, of course, is not an original claim. Eriugena is here invoking St. Augustine, and specifically his *De doctrina Christiana* Book II.32, where St. Augustine asserts that the “truth of inference” (*ueritas conexionum*) is not something invented by humans but was “permanently and divinely instituted in the rational order of things [*in rerum ratione*].” But Eriugena does have an interesting and complex view of the liberal arts not just as domains of knowledge but actually as mapping intellectual skills. For Eriugena, furthermore, the arts are both eternal and innate in the human mind: “they always immutably adhere to the soul” (*Peri.* I 486c). For Eriugena, the rational order of all created things that emanate from the divine will is mapped by dialectic. Hence dialectic is a means to truth; it is not just about valid reasoning.

Eriugena’s sources for dialectic include the Latin authors, specifically Cicero, Augustine, the Pseudo-Augustinian *Categoriae decem*, Boethius, Martianus Capella and Isidore, as well as the tradition of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. But he also integrates the Greek Christian authorities, since he finds discussions of dialectic in Maximus Confessor in particular.⁵² It must be remembered that the

50 See the contributions of Erismann, d’Onofrio and Guiu in this volume.

51 PP. IV, 749a, CCCM 164, 12.

52 Eriugena uses Maximus extensively to modify the classical Latin logical tradition, e.g. in the understanding of Aristotle’s categories. See Catherine Kavanagh, “The Influence of Maximus the Confessor on Eriugena’s Treatment of Aristotle’s Categories,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (2005): 567–96; and idem, “The Impact of Maximus the Confessor on John Scottus Eriugena,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, eds. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: 2015), 480–99.

Neoplatonists had their own rather sophisticated account of logic and dialectic that did not fully endorse the Aristotelian approach.⁵³ As Christophe Erismann writes:

Through his [Maximus'] work, Eriugena came into contact with the Greek Neoplatonic notion of dialectic. Maximus' *Ambigua* transmits Porphyry's logical or ontological ladder, which goes from the *genus generalissimum* right down to the *species specialissimae* through the general genera, and the fundamental idea of division as a natural progression.⁵⁴

Dialectic is included as one of the liberal arts in the textbook of Martianus Capella. Indeed, Eriugena declares that dialectic is "the mother of the arts."⁵⁵ But Eriugena also, very cleverly, anchors dialectic in Holy Scripture. Indeed, Édouard Jeuneau sees the whole of Book Four of the *Periphyseon* not just as a Biblical commentary on the Six Days but as an exercise in dialectic.⁵⁶ As Jeuneau points out in his learned notes to Sheldon-Williams' edition of *Periphyseon* Book Four,⁵⁷ Eriugena also invokes Scriptural authority, saying that, according to Genesis 1:24, God said, "let the earth bring forth the living soul in its genus [*in genere suo*]" (*Peri.* IV 748d). Commenting on this passage, Eriugena explains:

Genus is mentioned first because all the species are contained in it and achieve their unity in it and it is divided into them, and achieves its multiplicity by division into the general forms and differentiated species, a process which is also revealed in the words: 'Cattle and reptiles and beasts of the field after their species [*secundum species suas*].'⁵⁸

53 See, for instance, Stephen K. Strange, "Plotinus, Porphyry, and the Neoplatonic Interpretation of the Categories," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 2.36.2 (Berlin: 1987), 955–74; and Lloyd Gerson, *Plotinus* (London: 1994), 79–96. See also the classic studies of A.C. Lloyd, "Plato's Description of Division," *Classical Quarterly* 2 (1955): 105–12; and idem, "Neoplatonic Logic and Aristotelian Logic," *Phronesis* 1 (1962): 58–72.

54 Erismann, "The Logic of Being," 208.

55 PP. v, 870b, CCCM 165, 17.

56 See Édouard Jeuneau, Introduction to *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, vol. 4, (Dublin: 1995), xv: "Although Book IV of the *Periphyseon* has the appearance of a Biblical commentary, dialectic plays a privileged role in the exposition."

57 Eriugena, *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, vol. 4, ed. Jeuneau, trans. Sheldon-Williams and Bieler (Dublin: 1995), 283–84.

58 PP. IV, 748d, CCCM 164, 12; Eriugena cites these verses of Genesis from both the Vulgate and also the Septuagint. Eriugena appears to be dependent on St. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* III, 11 (PL 34 [Paris: 1902], 285–86).

Eriugena further understands dialectic as having two main branches – division and recollection. An addition to the text of Rheims in the hand i-1 reads:

For, as we said before, correct reason [*recta ratio*] does not allow us to treat division of itself to the exclusion of the analytike [*ανάλυτικῆ*], but demands that we consult the truth about both together.⁵⁹

All things can be allocated through division into their proper genera and species. However, things are also unified by being gathered back together and collected under their genera until we arrive at the *summum genus*. Eriugena does not regard this as a merely logical operation – an act of classification – it is also the manner the divine creation itself unfolds.

In fact, Eriugena's exercise of division can offer different subdivisions. At one point, clearly inspired by Maximus, he says the division ends with the division of human beings into male and female (*Peri.* II.532a) and similarly the return (*adunatio*) begins from the overcoming of this division into male and female and continues with the reunification of earth (*orbis terrarium*) and paradise (*Peri.* II.533c).⁶⁰

In a recent article, John Marenbon has questioned whether Eriugena could literally have meant that creation proceeds from God (as *ousia*) through genera and species to the individual.⁶¹ Marenbon says that it is evident that Eriugena did not literally think of creation as proceeding from a more general living being through to vegetable and animal being, and so on. Rather, Marenbon says, here following Christophe Erismann's recent study,⁶² that Eriugena is proposing a form of "immanent realism" about universals. According to Erismann, Eriugena proposed a novel interpretation of the nature of universals in his *Periphyseon*, according to which genera and species as universals are real (mind-independent) entities, but they exist as "parts" of the individual

59 PP. II, 532a, CCCM 162, 12.

60 See the essay of Adrian Guiu in this collection.

61 Marenbon, "Eriugena, Aristotelian Logic and the Creation," 360. Marenbon situates Eriugena within the Roman tradition of Aristotelian logic that came down through Boethius and Cicero's *Topics*, which he then coupled with the tradition of logical division (*diairesis*) which he found in Maximus Confessor. For Eriugena, logical division is at the same time ontological procession (*processio*) and multiplication (*multiplicatio*), see his translation of Maximus Confessor, *Ambigua ad Iohannem*, ed. Édouard Jeuneau, CCSG 18 (Turnhout: 1988), ln. 27–32, 3–4.

62 Christophe Erismann, *L'homme commun: La genèse du réalisme ontologique durant le haut Moyen Âge* (Paris: 2011). Marenbon argues that Eriugena's definition of human being as an "idea permanently made in the mind of God" means that human being in its *ousia* is not an individual.

beings (according to the type-token form of instantiation) and do not have a separate existence. Eriugena's realism is not a typical Platonic realism on this account. The universals, then, are real but they do not exist outside individuals. Of course, the matter is complex. Following Plotinus and the Neoplatonic Christian tradition generally, Eriugena thinks of the universals as divine Ideas that are in the mind of God and expressed through His will.

Now these primordial causes of things are what the Greeks call *prototypha* [πρωτότυπα], that is, primordial exemplars, or *proorismata* [προορίσματα], that is, predestinations or predefinitions. They are also called by the same *theia thelemata* [θεῖα θελήματα], that is, divine volitions. They are commonly called *ideai* [ιδέαι] also, that is, species or forms in which the immutable reasons of things that were to be made were created before (the things themselves) existed.⁶³

In that sense, Eriugena could never have held something like Plato's view that the Ideas existed independently as archetypes in some third realm or *topos ouranios* (τόπος οὐράνιος). In his interesting paper, Marenbon claims that Eriugena is imprecise about the order of the divine causes and gives no fixed list; but this is, for Eriugena, precisely the point. The number of the divine Ideas is infinite and, therefore, there cannot be a fixed hierarchical order that places one Idea or archetype in advance of the others in some kind of hierarchy of being. Eriugena (and Cusanus will grasp this point exactly in his *De docta ignorantia* and elsewhere) recognizes that divine *ousia* is infinite and therefore the Ideas (*causae primordiales*) that it contains equally are infinite. If there is a genuine infinity of Ideas or Primary Causes, it is a matter of convenience whether one begins with Goodness or Being or Life or Justice, or whatever. All the Primary Causes as theophanies are revelatory of the divine *ousia* in their own way. There is not so much a distinct hierarchy of being, genera, species and individuals (proceeding outwards and downwards as in the tree of Porphyry) but rather one ought to think of the ideas as infinite radii of an infinite sphere (as Cusanus, following the *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers* will do). Furthermore, the author of all things, God, cannot be thought of as a genus in any sense: *Deus autem nec genus nec species est* (*Peri.* I.463c; cf I1.589a). If the primordial causes are unified in any way they are unified in the primordial cause that is human nature (*Peri.* II.536b) which is made in the image of God. Eriugena will go on to argue that all causes are contained in human nature which in its true essence is not in place or time: "The Divinity of Christ is not

63 PP. II, 529ab, CCCM 162, 7–9.

in place; so neither is His Humanity" (*Peri.* II.539c). As Eriugena will proclaim in Book Four:

For humanity is wholly in the wholeness of the whole created nature [*in uniuersitate totius conditae naturae tota est*], seeing that in it every creature is fashioned [*constituta est*], and in it all are linked together [*copulata*], and into it shall all return, and through it must all be saved.⁶⁴

Eriugena will conclude this discussion with his extraordinary definition of human nature as "a certain intellectual concept formed eternally in the Divine Mind" (*notio quaedam intellectualis in mente diuina aeternaliter facta*, *Peri.* IV768b).⁶⁵ The function of dialectic is to lead to definition.

7 Eriugena on the Modes of Being and Non-Being

At the outset of *Periphyseon* I, Eriugena begins from the basic opposition between being and non-being (*in ea quae sunt et ea quae non sunt*). Everything has to be classified as belonging either to the things that are or the things that are not. However, immediately he recognizes that one cannot simply assert what things are or are not without taking into account on what level one's own argument is based. We need to consider the different modes of being and non-being. This leads Eriugena to a most complex and subtle differentiation of the five different *ways* (*quinque modi*) in which one can speak of being and non-being. This is of course reminiscent of Aristotle's dictum that being can be said in many ways. Eriugena is aware that one cannot simply make assertions without contextualizing where the assertions are coming from and how their domain is to be restricted. As the French hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur puts it, the basic hermeneutic question is "*d'ou parlez vous?*" – "where are you coming from?" Eriugena's disambiguation of the different senses of being and non-being is a masterly display of dialectic.

Throughout the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena is at elaborate pains to distinguish the level of discourse and especially to consider whether one is speaking affirmatively, negatively, or symbolically. This will allow Eriugena, through the dialogue, to blend together dialectic of division and recollection with the

⁶⁴ PP. IV, 760a, CCCM 164, 27.

⁶⁵ See Dermot Moran, "*Officina omnium or notio quaedam intellectualis in mente diuina aeternaliter facta: The Problem of the Definition of Man in John Scottus Eriugena*," in *L'Homme et son univers au Moyen Âge*, ed. C. Wenin (Leuven: 1986), vol. 1, 195–204.

Dionysian dialectic of affirmation and negation. In fact, although Eriugena integrates Maximus into the Latin tradition of dialectic, in the background is always the dialectic of affirmation, negation and then negating the negation, that he found in Dionysius. It is this Dionysian dialectic in particular, that links Eriugena to German Idealism.

Eriugena, following Dionysius, regards God as “beyond all affirmation and negation.” The immediate inspiration for Eriugena regarding all speaking about God is Dionysius the Areopagite’s *Divine Names* and *Mystical Theology*.⁶⁶ But Eriugena also expands on this dialectic in his *Expositiones* on Dionysius’ *Celestial Hierarchy*. There he writes for instance about the division of dialectic into division and recollection:

There are two parts to the discipline of dialectic, one of which is called *diairetike*, and the other *analytike*. And *diairetike* possesses some power of division; for it divides the unity of the greatest genera, from top to bottom, until it arrives at the individual species, in which the division reaches its end. On the other side, *analytike*, ascending, gathers together and collects from the individuals themselves to the beginning, and by the same steps by which it descends, leads back those things into the unity of the greatest genera ...⁶⁷

Eriugena also wants to show that Dionysius’ thinking is actually merely making explicit certain insights that one already finds in the Latin Christian tradition. As a Christian theologian, Eriugena agrees with Augustine that God is the fullness of being, or is being itself. But he also finds different levels of discourse concerning being in St Augustine and ultimately he knows that St Augustine thinks that God is better known by not knowing. This is seen to be in exact conformity with Dionysius’ claim that Ignorance of God is the highest wisdom.

Eriugena argues carefully, and with much logical finesse, that, since God is infinite and limitless, God cannot be comprehended by any intellect – even

66 See also Michael Harrington (ed.), *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy: The Thirteenth-Century Paris Textbook Edition*, Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations 12 (Leuven: 2011).

67 Eriugena, *Iohannis Scoti Eriugenae Expositiones in Ierarchiam coelestem*, ed. Barbet, 106, 184c–185a: Due quippe partes sunt dialectice discipline, quarum una DIAIRETIKE, altera ANALYTIKE nuncupatur. Et DIAIRETIKE quidem diuisionis uim possidet; diuidit namque maximorum generum unitatem a summo usque deorsum, donec ad indiuiduas species perueniat, inque eis diuisionis terminum ponat; ANALYTIKE uero ex aduerso sibi posite partis diuisiones ab indiuiduis sursum uersus incipiens, perque eosdem gradus quibus illa descendit, ascendens conuoluit et colligit, easdem que in unitatem maximorum generum reducit ...

by His own. Thus, God does know his own essence entirely since his essence escapes all limitation. The nature of the divine knowledge therefore is a radical existential knowledge. At best one can say that God knows “that” (*quia*) He is but not “what” (*quid*) He is. God has an open, expansive, unlimited, existential sense of His infinite existence such that He cannot “circumscribe” Himself because His infinity is his greatest attribute. It is from this infinity that the other superlative characteristics (more-than-goodness, more-than-being, etc.) proceed. From that divine point of view, then, God’s *esse* cannot be considered to be identical with his *essentia* – or rather his essence is his existing. The divine essence, *ousia*, is at best an approximation of what can or cannot be said about the infinite transcendent divine One. Eriugena’s ontology of the divine is really, to borrow a term from Schelling, a me-ontology. The only true being is the divinity *beyond* being.

8 Eriugena on the Dialectics of Knowledge and Ignorance

Although deeply immersed in the Latin Liberal Arts tradition, Eriugena always shows a marked preference for the Greek over the Latin authorities and, indeed, he interprets St. Augustine as a negative theologian in the style of his beloved Dionysius the Areopagite. Thus, he likes to quote Augustine’s remark that God was “better known through unknowing,” *melius nesciendo scitur* (*Peri.* 11.597D). Our divine ignorance mirrors the divine ignorance that pertains to God itself. God does not know *what* he is. His unlimited knowledge is that he is apart from and transcends all things. Similarly, human beings too are in a sense unlimited and infinite (had they not sinned). Eriugena declares: “Thus, just as the Divine Essence is infinite, so human substance made in Its image is bounded by no definite limit.”⁶⁸

The Godhead is a transcendent unity or “oneness” (*henotes, unitas*). As Eriugena’s inspiration, Dionysius the Areopagite had put it in his *Divine Names*, the divine is “Oneness beyond mind” (*he hyper noun henotes*, DN 588B). The Godhead (*theotes, deitas*), in Eriugena’s conception, is both unmanifest and manifest, uncreated and created, hidden in the highest darkness but created in all things as those things themselves. Thus, Eriugena concludes in *Periphyseon III* in a statement many have interpreted as pantheist (in Spinozist manner):

It follows that we ought not to understand God and the creature as two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same [*sed unum et id*

68 PP. IV, 772a, CCCM 164, 45.

ipsum]. For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God; and God, by manifesting Himself, in a marvellous and ineffable manner creates Himself in the creature, the invisible making itself visible, and the incomprehensible comprehensible and the hidden revealed and the unknown known and being without form and species formed and specific and the superessential essential and the supernatural natural and the simple composite and the accident-free subject to accident and the infinite finite and the uncircumscribed circumscribed and the supratemporal temporal, and the Creator of all things created in all things and the maker of all things made in all things.⁶⁹

For Eriugena, the whole created nature, then, is in a sense divine, since it is the self-manifestation of the divine. Furthermore, Eriugena might be thought to identify the procession of the Son from the Father in the Trinity with the creation of the world through the expression of the Divine Word, which would indeed be pantheistic. In fact, however, he distinguishes the Incarnation (*Peri*. III.678d) from the “infinite descent of the Supreme Goodness” (*ineffabilis condescensio*, *Peri*. III.678d). Created nature, which means the primary causes and their associated effects, is conceived by Eriugena as *in essence* eternal, infinite, immaterial. It is only because of human transgression that the created nature takes on the appearance of corporeality, and the limitations of spatiality and temporality, and, of course, the finitude of death. Eriugena found this latter doctrine in his reading of Gregory of Nyssa’s *Peri anthropos merismou* (*De imagine*).

In order to explain how we can speak of the divine being who cannot be named, Eriugena invokes Dionysius’ distinction between affirmative (or *kataphatic*) and negative (*apophatic*) theology, which he found in the latter’s *Symbolic Theology* (*Peri*. I.458c). In answer to the question from his interlocutor Alumnus as to whether any of the ten Aristotelian categories can be predicated God, the teacher Nutritor answers that according to what the Greeks call apophatic theology, the Divine Essence or Substance is not any of the things that are, whereas kataphatic theology “teaches that all things which take their being from it can be predicated of it. For that which is the cause can reasonably be expressed in terms of the things that are caused. For it says that it is Truth, Goodness, Essence ...”⁷⁰ Eriugena here says that he is offering a division of the two branches of theology, according to the authority of St Dionysius’ *Mystical Theology* Book III. 1032C. He says that “on the authority of St. Dionysius

69 PP. III, 678c ff, CCCM 163, 85.

70 PP. I, 458ac, CCCM 161, 26.

the Areopagite,” theology is “divided into two parts, that is, ΑΠΟΦΑΤΙΚΗ and ΚΑΤΑΦΑΤΙΚΗ, which Cicero translates into ‘*intentio*’ and ‘*repulsio*,’ but we prefer to render by affirmation and negation with a view to expressing the meaning of the terms more accurately.”⁷¹

It is known that Dionysius was the first to make a division of theology into two branches – affirmative and negative, but how could Eriugena possibly associate this theological division with the Roman rhetor Cicero? How could Greek mystical theology be linked to Latin dialectic? Remarkably, Eriugena is actually showing his extensive and accurate knowledge of Latin legal and rhetorical theory that he is bringing to bear on the science of theology and its two divisions. According to a learned note in I.P. Sheldon-Williams’ edition of *Periphyseon*, the terms *intentio* and *repulsio* are used as the Latin equivalents of *kataphasis* and *apophasis* already in the *De rhetorica* of the 4th-century rhetor C. Julius Victor.⁷² In a law case, the prosecutor presents an indictment (*intentio*, *kataphasis*) while the defence must offer a refutation or defence, *depulsio*.⁷³ Cicero refers to this in his *De inventione* I, x, 13 – *fecisti, non feci*. However, Cicero does not use the Greek words of Hermagoras in his discussion, the very Greek words used by Eriugena.⁷⁴ In fact it was Julius Victor, whose work was known in the Carolingian era, who makes the identification of *kataphasis* with *intentio* and *apaphasis* with *repulsio* (sometimes “*depulsio*”).⁷⁵ Therefore, Eriugena is clearly aware of this legal and rhetorical tradition, found also in Martianus Capella; his novelty is to apply it to Dionysian theology, in keeping with his overall view that Greeks and Latins say the same thing, and that theology needs to be elucidated through *dialectica*. Eriugena links cataphatic and apophatic theology to rhetoric and dialectical affirmation and negation.⁷⁶ This is a clear example of the way dialectic applies in theology.

71 PP. I, 461ab, CCCM 161, 29–30.

72 One can assert: “Sextus Roscius killed his father,” or deny it: “he did not kill him.” The crucial question that the judge must decide (did he kill him or not?), in rhetoric is called “status.” This is a subject for decision (*to krinomenon*) in Greek law.

73 See Stephen Yarbrough, *Inventive Intercourse: From Rhetorical Conflict to the Ethical Creation of Novel Truth* (Carbondale, IL: 2006), 71ff.

74 Cicero, *De inventione*, ed. Theodor Nüsslein (Dusseldorf: 1998), 30–2.

75 Julius Victor, *Ars rhetorica*, eds. Remo Giomini and Maria Silvana Celentano (Leipzig: 1980), see 4 line 26 to 5 line 20.

76 See also “*principalis status est Occidisti, non occidi*,” in Eriugena, *Annotationes in Marcianum*, ed. Cora E. Lutz, Medieval Academy of America 34 (Cambridge, M.A.: 1939), 112, line 4 (218, 10), and also 101 (192, 2): *omnis constitutio duabus partibus constituitur, et prima quidem dicitur intentio, hoc est accusatio, secunda vero dicitur repulsio vel defensio, id est refellit accusationem, quae secunda pars constitutionis dicitur; and (193, 4) intentionis id est accusationis ... omnis homo animal est.*

The fourfold division of nature that frames the structure of the *Periphyseon* is similarly an explicit exercise in dialectic or logic – using a version of the logical square of opposition on which Eriugena elaborates to show that the fourfold division is actually a dynamic way of thinking from different points of view of the same infinite Nature that is the Beginning, Middle and End of all things. Eriugena introduces his *quatripartita diuisio* with typical dialectical skill and, indeed, flourish.

But besides the usual exercise in logical opposition there is also a restriction in the application of logic to the infinite. Predicates that are opposed to one another are not opposed in speaking of the divine nature. This is the key that will influence Nicholas of Cusa and this tradition. Eriugena deliberately shows that the four divisions of nature can ultimately be reduced to two and ultimately even those two can be reduced to one. Eriugena writes: “Alumnus: The fourfold division of universal nature I now most clearly see, and I recognise that it must be understood as both from God and in God.”⁷⁷

The fourfold vision is in fact a way of demonstrating both the negative dialectics of divine hiddenness and unfolding and also the absolute unity of all things in the divine One. God is infinite and manifests himself infinitely in his “theophanies” (*theophaniae*), which are the Primary Causes of all things, and also the Ideas in the mind of God. The primary causes are also infinite like all the radii than can be drawn in a circle. Given that for Eriugena, in genuine causation, the effect is “contained in the cause” then the created universe (the Effects), must also be infinite.

Eriugena retains a *via negativa* not just about the divine being but about human nature and indeed the cosmos (infinite nature) as a whole. Not just God’s essence is unknown to God and to the finite intellect (including angelic intellects); for Eriugena, no essence can truly be comprehended. The distinction of Dionysius between different kinds of speaking about God – between kataphatic and apophatic theology – allows the dialectician in Eriugena to generate something similar for discussions of being. From one perspective something may be said to be and from another perspective they are not. This dialectic of affirmation and negation can also be expanded to apply not only to God but to all created things:

[Nutritor] Therefore anyone who looks carefully at the nature of things will find no creature susceptible to senses or intellects about which it

77 PP. III, 690a, CCCM 163, 101: Quadripertitam universalis naturae diuisionem nunc clarissime uideo et de deo et in deo esse indubitantur intelligendam cognosco.

cannot truly be said: 'It always was and is and shall be, and it was not always nor is nor shall be.'⁷⁸

The created universe is both eternal (in one sense) since it exists as a Primary Cause in the mind of the eternal deity and it is also temporal since it exists as an Effect in the created order. Eriugena's overall view is that dialectic helps us to understand how things can be understood in two ways, depending on whether we are focusing on division or collection.

Human nature is equally to be approached from two different perspectives and in the discussion in Book Four the effort is to reconcile the two sides of human nature namely its animal and spiritual dimensions. Eriugena is inspired both by the standard philosophical definition of human being as a rational animal and by the theological description of human being as made in the image and likeness of God. That there are two aspects or dimensions to humanity is confirmed by St. Paul, 1 Cor. 2 14–15, who contrasts the inferior and superior human being, the animal-human, *animalis homo* and the *homo spiritualis*. In discussing how human beings can be both animal and spiritual, Nutritor refuses to believe humans have two souls: "Neither reason nor divine authority [*nec ratio nec diuina auctoritas*] would permit me to hold that in the one man there are two souls."⁷⁹ Eriugena affirms (following St. Augustine) that the soul is a simple unity without parts "for it is whole in itself and its wholeness pervades the whole of its nature"⁸⁰

Eriugena is struggling as always to reconcile various texts – the Platonic texts from Plato to Augustine that assert the unity and simplicity of the soul with the various tripartite and five-part accounts of the soul in Gregory of Nyssa and others. The problem of course is present in the different Platonic dialogues (simple soul in *Phaedo*, tripartite in *Republic*, more complex again in *Phaedrus*). Eriugena applies his dialectical training – all species are one in the genus (*omnes species in genere unum sunt*, *Peri*. IV.756b). But, Alumnus asks, how can contradictory species belong to the same genus? Nutritor replies by distinguishing opposites from contradictories. He gives the example of visibility and invisibility: "For visibility and invisibility are two properties which are separate from one another [*a se discreta*] but not mutually repugnant [*non sibi repugnantia*]."⁸¹

78 PP. III, 665c, CCCM 163, 67.

79 PP. IV, 754a, CCCM 164 19.

80 PP. IV, 754c, CCCM 164, 20: Tota enim in seipsa ubique est per totum.

81 PP. IV, 756c, CCCM 164, 23.

Contradiction is to be distinguished from difference. Differences occur within species, e.g. man is a rational animal and horse is an irrational animal (*Peri.* IV.757a). There is no contradiction here merely differences within the species “animal,” whereas contradictories (“man is a rational animal” and “man is an irrational animal,” IV.756d) cannot both be true or both false, one must be true and the other false.

Eriugena’s whole approach here is to apply rigorous dialectical argumentation to explain the nature of human being (just as he had done so with the nature of the infinite divine being). In both cases it is precisely the infinity of the nature that generates the contradictions and paradoxes and hence needs the application of a new logic, the dialectic of affirmation and negation. He uses the strict terminology of logic (e.g. proposition is a “*proloquium*”). In relation to the relative ranking of angels and humans, Eriugena again applies his dialectical logic. Thus, in so far as angels enjoy a richer mode of being than humans, if an angel has being then clearly a human being does not. But, on the other side, only of human beings – and not angels – is it said that they are made in the image and likeness of God. From that point of view human beings stand higher than angels. There cannot be an absolute hierarchy of being. If human beings can be said to be, then angels have to be considered as not being. It is precisely this dialectical logic of affirmation and negation that is used by Eriugena for ontological purposes.

Overall, all modern commentators have been attracted to and impressed by Eriugena’s dialogue *Periphyseon* as an exercise in reason (*ratio*). But reason is never static; it is in fact dynamic and is travelling on a difficult and tortuous journey. Eriugena speaks, invoking Homer’s *Odyssey*, of the mind or reason (*ratio*) embarking on a perilous sea journey:

Let us spread sail, then, and set out to sea [*Tendenda uela nauigandumque*]. For reason [*ratio*], not inexperienced in these waters, fearing neither threats of the waves nor the divagations nor the Syrtes nor rocks, shall speed our course: indeed she finds it sweeter to exercise her skills in the hidden straits of the ocean of divinity [*diuini oceani*] than idly to bask in smooth and open waters, where she cannot display her power.⁸²

The “ocean of divinity” is, of course, following Maximus and St. Ambrose, Holy Scripture. It was Ambrose who proclaimed: “The Gospel is the sea.”⁸³ The Holy Scriptures, moreover, for Eriugena, have, in stark contrast to the literalist

82 PP. IV, 744a, CCCM 164, 5.

83 Ambrose, *Hexaemeron* V, 7, 17, CSEL 32, 152.

fundamentalisms of modernity, an infinite depth of meaning. Eriugena proclaims: "Sacred Scriptures have an infinite interpretation."⁸⁴ Later in the dialogue, employing an original simile, Eriugena likens the number of interpretations of Holy Scripture to the innumerable colors in a peacock's tail:

For there are many ways, indeed an infinite number, of interpreting the Scriptures, just as in one and the same feather of a peacock, and even in one and the same point of a tiny portion of the same feather, we see a marvelously beautiful variety of innumerable colours.⁸⁵

9 Conclusion

Eriugena's philosophical dialectic, then, proceeds on several levels at once. It exhibits the ontological structure of infinite nature, it shows the outgoing and return of all things to the One, but it also partakes in a sophisticated and multiplex reading of Scripture. Eriugena's mature position is that philosophy through the exercise of dialectic gives humans insight into the being of all things. Furthermore, it teaches, if not a *docta ignorantia* (as Cusanus claimed), at least the need for *duplex theoria*. In both Scripture and Nature, great care has to be taken to approach and understand matters from the right level or perspective.

Ironically, the German Idealist theologians who revived Eriugena did not seem to notice this perspectivalism or indeed Eriugena's Heideggerian-style interest in being and non-being. They concentrated on Eriugena as a deeply "rationalist" thinker who recognizes the inner identity of philosophy and religion as two ways of thinking the Absolute. The truly radical nature of Eriugena's *physiologia* of infinite nature is only now coming to light.

84 PP. II, 560a, CCCM 162, 46: Sacrae scripturae interpretatio infinita est.

85 PP. IV, 749c, CCCM 164, 13.