

Nature, Logic and Freedom in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*

Harry Critchley

INTRODUCTION

Nearing the conclusion of the fourth book of his *Periphyseon*, Eriugena surveys the character of human knowledge as reflected in the Genesis narrative of creation and fall,¹ distinguishing two forms of intellectual processes: one immediate and simple and the other extended discursively across time and a variety of concepts.

On the one hand, "if man had not sinned he would have contemplated the natures and principles of all things in a most pure manner with the utmost ease, not only with the interior intellect [*interiori intellectu*], but also with the exterior sense [*exteriori sensu*], for he would have been freed from the necessity of all logical discourse [*omni ratiocinationis necessitate absolutus*]" (trans. Sheldon-Williams, 855A). This is what Eriugena refers to as the 'natural order' of the human, namely the subordination of the mind in obedience to the authority of God; of the senses to the mind; and of the body to the senses (855C). He asserts that only by means of such an ordering can the human creature "be at peace and in harmony in itself and with its Creator" (ibid.).

On the other, after man's sin, "the mind perceives through the corporeal sense only the surfaces of sensible things [*sensibilium superficies*], with their quantities and qualities, [...] and the other aspects which submit to corporeal perception" (855A). Echoing Augustine's own assertion in the *De Trinitate*, he contends that "every work of wisdom, and every conception of the mind, and pure knowledge of truth takes its origin from the bodily sense [*a sensibus corporis*], for reason ascends step by step [*gradatim*] from lower to higher things [*ab inferioribus ad superiora*], and from

1. In this section, he is concerned with a specific passage concerning Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden, which in the translation appears as follows: "To the woman also He said: I will multiply your sorrows and your conceptions [conceptus tuos]: in labour shall you bring forth sons. And you shall be under the authority of the man [et sub viri potestate eris], and he shall be lord over you" (Genesis 3:16).

outer to inner [*exterioribus ad interiora*]” (855B). Through “the transgression of the Divine Mandate, this order [...] and this peace and communion between Creator and created, is upset” (855C), effecting what he later refers to as “a kind of divorce between the male and the female, that is, between mind and sense” (855D). Reminiscent of Plato’s *Theaetetus* in this regard, Eriugena therefore maintains that “not without the manifold labours of study [...] can [man] arrive by means of the same sense at a multitude of conceptions [*ad multiplices conceptus*], that is, at the rudiments of an understanding of intelligible beings [*ad inchoationes intelligibilium rerum intelligentiae*], and at the procreation of sons, that is to say, of right judgements concerning nature [*rectas rationes de natura deorum*]” (855B).

Though the possibility of this intuitive form of cognition undoubtedly appears striking, the reality of the fall seems immediately to preclude its realization. Against this view, Eriugena argues that the second half of the Genesis verse offers the promise of “the restoration of the natural order of human nature [*naturalis ordinis humanae naturae restitutio*], and the Return [*reversio*] of the condition in which it was first created” (ibid.). Our editor writes that Eriugena’s ‘optimistic’ reading of this passage is here highly original, asserting that his exegesis was made possible by his allegorical interpretation of the Biblical narrative wherein man stands for mind, woman for sense. Moreover, he notes that “the terms *restauratio* and *reversio* are traditional to designate the third element of the Neoplatonic triad” (note 309). He echoes Maximus in this respect (cf. 534A), who “regards the human (*homo*) as the last creature to be divided, i.e., into male and female,” and so “the first to be reunited” in the Return.² Eriugena therefore speaks of the restoration of the human nature as a transformation whereby the “discord and divorce of the mind and sense shall be changed into the peace of spiritual and natural wedlock [*pacem spiritualis naturalisque coniugii*]” (856A), later explicitly confirming that the human will not have a sexual body after the resurrection (cf. 896B-898D).

In what follows, I will concern myself with the tripartite relation Eriugena articulates between the human mind, truth and language, first with respect to the period of human history subsequent to the fall and then as it occurs in the return. Regarding the first of these

2. Willemien Otten, “The Dialectic of the Return in Eriugena’s Periphyseon,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol.84, No.4 (Oct 1991), 407.

periods, I want to note the role of both the Neoplatonic dialectic and the Aristotelean categories not only in ordering the human's capacity for thought and language in the post-Fall period, but also in giving shape to the spatio-temporal world as a whole. Together with the dialectical processes of procession and return, the categories therefore comprise the rational structures by means of which the world becomes an object of logical discourse. However, as evidenced by the quotation above concerning the restriction of human knowledge to the surface qualities of things, Eriugena makes clear that there is a certain 'artificiality' to this categorical form of understanding, which must be overcome in order to effect a return to the true natural order of human thought and language outlined above. What form this latter mode of cognition takes on will require a good deal of unpacking, but at this initial stage I want to note that it requires the re-establishment of the "relation to the nature of the Universe," which in turn necessitates a kind of language which speaks to the substance of beings as opposed to merely their qualities (870A).

THE REDUCTION OF NATURE TO REASON

Christophe Erismann notes that "Eriugena's ontology of the sensible world has two main foundations: the Neoplatonic understanding of dialectic" and "the *Categoriae decem*."³ He follows in the tradition stemming from Porphyry, which seeks to incorporate the Aristotelean categories into Neoplatonic metaphysics more generally, but is unique in large part as a result of the intellectual circumstances of his time. Erismann argues that "during a period in which Aristotle's *Metaphysics* could not be read, nor could Plato's dialogues such as the *Republic* or the *Parmenides*, [...] authors of this period [built] their metaphysical thought by using concepts which had originally been intended for the analysis of predication and other logical purposes."⁴ As a result, Eriugena tends to transform strictly logical concepts into ontological structures that can in turn be employed for the analysis of the sensible world. Erismann maintains that "Eriugena's masterpiece is based on the identification of the dialectical process of *divisio* or *diaretike* with

3. Christophe Erismann, "The Logic of Being: Eriugena's Dialectical Ontology," *Vivarium*, Vol.45 (2007), 207.

4. *Ibid.*, 204-205.

the ontological process of *processio* or *prodos*.”⁵

In this regard, Erismann contends that these two pillars of Eriugena’s thought find their sources in Augustine on the one hand and Maximus the Confessor on the other. Though the manner in which he receives and modifies these doctrines from the Fathers is undoubtedly of great interest, for my purposes at hand I want to focus on these two poles, namely the Aristotelean categories and the Neoplatonic understanding of dialectic respectively, as they are presented by Eriugena himself in his *Periphyseon*. So doing will give us the best sense of the manner in which his dialectical ontology of the sensible world serves to collapse the distinction between logic and nature.

The Aristotelean categories play a major role from the outset of the text’s first book. As evidenced by Eriugena’s repeated assertions in the first book excluding God from the categories (cf. 463B-463C), he resembles Plotinus, insofar as both thinkers “limit the scope of the categories to sensible reality alone.”⁶ Moreover, Erismann notes that Eriugena understands the categories in a Porphyrian way, namely “as the principles of multiplicity,” such that they “apply to the sensible world and are integrated into a wider metaphysics.”⁷ Perhaps the most striking feature of his treatment of them in these early passages is the manner in which, through their repeated treatment, the world as a whole begins to take shape. Eriugena’s treatment of the category of quantity is particularly emblematic in this regard. As the Nutritor asks, “does not the property of quantity seem to lie in the number, spaces, and measurements of parts, whether those parts are continuous, as in the case of lines, times and other things consisting in continuous quantity; or separate, [...] as in numbers and every multitude in which separate quantity obviously exists?” (trans Uhlfelder, 40). These repeated treatments of the categories in turn lead Eriugena to conclude that, though the accidental categories are themselves incorporeal, their “coming together in a remarkable union [produces] visible matter,” and so can be “perceived by the corporeal sense” (47).

Indeed, later in the fifth book, within the context of his consideration of the transformation of the earthly body into the spiritual, this principle regarding the categories is pushed to its

5. *Ibid.*, 207.

6. *Ibid.*, 206.

7. *Ibid.*, 207.

extreme. Having shown in the first book the manner in which each category serves 'to construct a world,' he here reaffirms explicitly that the spatio-temporal world is made up of the accidents of causal substance and not of any other matter. As he remarks, "when we were first created, body as well as soul subsisted without the capacity for corruption and death," such that in the return "the earthly, mortal and transitory mass, which is made up of the different qualities of the sensible elements, [...] shall be done away with and changed [...] into spirit and stable substance" (trans. Sheldon-Williams 884B-884C). This distinction he draws within the human between the natural and spatio-temporal bodies enables Eriugena to develop a principle for distinguishing substance from accidents. He notes that the "qualities of sensible objects change into one another while the substances of which they are qualities remain unaltered," and so "ever and immutably abide in their Causes; and never in any manner fall away therefrom into any other place" (885A). In this way, neither the Causes nor the substances of nature constituted in the Word can be considered to be creatures insofar as they do not submit themselves to the processes of generation and degradation that define 'creatureliness' (888A). Applying this ontological principle to the world understood as a whole, Eriugena concludes that "it must be from the qualities of these substances [...] that this world is shaped and compacted," such that "not only the Causes, but also the substances of all bodies, [...] which make up the universe exist in a realm above this visible world" (886D-887A). In particular, he makes clear that the world shaped by the accidents of substance is a world constituted on the basis of the necessarily inextricable principles of space and time (889A), which also will pass away in the Return (889D). However, though on a number of occasions he elsewhere refers to these accidental categories as 'super-added' to the simple nature, Eriugena contends that they are not completely lost in the return, but instead "in a miraculous and mysterious manner [...] continue to remain associated with their substances in an inseparable bond" (886D).

By locating the categories in nature, and indeed in making them responsible for the production of its spatio-temporal form, Eriugena follows Augustine in contending that the truths of logic are not human inventions, but are "the knowledge of the rational structure which God has inscribed in the midst of creation."⁸

8. *Ibid.*, 208.

This is equally true for the processes of dialectic, here equated by Eriugena with the Neoplatonic principles of procession and return. The rationalization of nature is especially apparent in Eriugena's consideration of evidence for the return found in natural processes. He cites the perpetual revolutions of the heavenly sphere of the fixed stars, as well as the movements of the sun and moon, as "sufficient evidence of the doctrine I am trying to affirm" (866B). Though these examples serve to make the procession and the return into "logical and/or ontological categories" of the spatio-temporal world as a whole, it is important to note that he is not merely concerned with reduction here.⁹ Indeed, he notes that "there is no visible or corporeal thing which is not the symbol of something incorporeal and intelligible" (866A). As such, with regard to the sensible world as a whole, "the end of it is also the beginning, which it seeks and in which it will rest" in "the return into those 'reasons' whence it sprang" (866D). Eriugena similarly locates instances of the return in those things which can be apprehended solely by the mind. For example, he argues that the liberal art of arithmetic "[starts] from the Monad, and, descending through the different species of numbers, returns once more [...] to the same Monad, beyond which it can ascend no further" (869B).

Perhaps the most striking feature of Eriugena's discussion of the liberal arts occurs in the distinction he draws between dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy on the one hand and grammar and rhetoric on the other. In contrast to these former arts, the latter "do not deal with the nature of the Universe, but either with the laws of human speech," which, following Aristotle, Eriugena does not take to be natural phenomena, but instead the products of artifice, and "are concerned with particular causes and persons" (869D-870A). By making this distinction, he thereby suggests that this first group of arts, particularly through the mediation afforded to them by dialectic, are themselves not merely a human invention, but instead are natural phenomena that stand in a privileged relation to nature more generally, simultaneously serving to elucidate its truths and to give it form and structure as a unified whole (870A). His suggestion here confirms an early remark he made in the third book, in which he claims that "the art [...] which is called dialectic did not arise from human contrivance, but was first implanted in the nature of things [*in natura rerum*] by the originator of all the arts [...], and was discovered by the

9. Otten, "Return," 415.

wise who make use of it in their subtle investigations of reality" (749A). In this regard, Erismann notes that Eriugena here follows Augustine, who maintains that "the liberal arts were not invented or instituted by men on the basis of convention, but reflect the order of things established by God according to an eternal and immutable reason."¹⁰

At this point, it is important to remember that Eriugena has earlier identified the liberal arts with the reasoning powers of the human (cf. 468B-468D). Combining this principle with the one reached here, we can therefore very nearly and entirely collapse the distinction between the liberal arts, human reason after the fall, and the spatio-temporal world. Moreover, to the extent that dialectic is the art that serves as the originator of the others, and so has the greatest claim to universality in this regard (cf. 868D-869A), insofar as it treats not only essence, but also quantity, quality, relation, situation, condition, place, time, action and passion, there exists an essential connection between this tripartite relation and the categories.¹¹

THE CHARACTER OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

Though the Nutritor and Alumnus agree that "it is possible for the rational soul to discuss within herself the liberal arts without recourse to the utterance of articulate speech or fluent disposition," the distinction they draw between the natural and the artificial liberal arts in turn suggests an important characteristic of human language in the time after the Fall (869B). As I have shown, as a result of sin, human knowledge is restricted to the surface features of things, namely their "quantities and qualities, their positions, their condition and the other aspects which submit to corporeal perception" (855A). However, even these accidental categories that stand open to cognition are not known "in themselves [*per se ipsa*], but through their fantasies [*per eorum phantasias*]," by means of acts of interpretation, in which the mind's "judgement very frequently errs" (ibid.). The already limited clarity of thought is further muddled when translated into language, which is itself a necessary

10. Erismann, "Logic of Being," 208.

11. Cf. J.C. Marler, "Scriptural Truth in the Periphyseon," in Iohannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics, Proceedings of the Ninth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, eds. Gerd Van Riel, Carlos Steel and James McEvoy (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 160.

evil given Eriugena's recognition that the human "is impelled by the necessity of signifying things" for making his intellect manifest and comprehensible (trans. Uhlfelder, 50). Having already made clear that neither speech nor writing is adequate to express principles transcending the categories, particularly in his discussion of apophatic and kataphatic theologies in the first book, his discussion of the artificiality of the laws of language renders questionable "the adequacy of speech even to express the categories, or any natures under the categories."¹²

For Eriugena, there are several problems associated with conveying truth in language. On the one hand, restricted to the accidental categories, human language is such that "what one thing is called is understood to receive its name not from itself, but from its opposite," and so terms are "joined to one another, [and] are inseparably linked by systems of ratios" (41). Considering one such example of linguistic error, Eriugena asserts that, as a result of man's failure "to distinguish the true nature [of things]," he "[devises] faulty designations" for the earth and waters, considering them to be places, and not "parts of the world circumscribed by their own places" (50). On the other, there exists an essential connection between language, reason and multiplicity. Since speech necessarily operates through temporal succession, "things which in reality are not divided according to the parts of time are always divided by time in speech."¹³ In a more general sense, just as the Aristotelean categories are conceived by Eriugena as 'principles of multiplicity,' so too does language—which works within the structures given to it by these same categories, and is itself an accident of sound (cf. trans. Sheldon-Williams, 647A-647B)—portray that which is simple and instantaneous as if it were multiple and spatio-temporally extended. One particularly clear example of this limitation of speech comes in the third book, when Eriugena notes that neither Basil nor Moses "could penetrate beyond [depicting] events as disposed in space and time," and so expounded God's creative act "as though it was spread over a succession of temporal intervals" (708C-708D). As he remarks, "[they] could not narrate instantaneously what God did instantaneously" (708D). Even the utterances of the incarnate Christ, which he "used in His speech with men when He was present in the flesh, [...] were transitory, as are the words of

12. *Ibid.*, 162.

13. *Ibid.*

others" (887C).

That being said, I do not want to suggest that Eriugena has an entirely negative view of the capabilities of language and speech. Marler notes that "since the necessary basis of scriptural authority is what the scriptures are in writing, and since writing is the token of speech (cf. 454B), what Eriugena has to say about speech seems pertinent to his understanding of the scriptures as the written embodiment of truth."¹⁴ The multiplicity of possible interpretations open to any given term or phrase makes language the ideal vehicle by means of which scriptural truth can be conveyed, especially because Eriugena makes clear that Scripture can properly be read in an infinite variety of ways. As he remarks, "for the Holy Spirit, who is the infinite founder of Holy Scripture, established therein infinite meanings [*infinitus siquidem conditor sanctae scripturae in mentibus prophetarum spiritus sanctus infinitos in ea constituit intellectus*]," such that "no commentator's interpretation displaces another, provided only that what each says is plainly consistent with the Faith and with the Catholic Creed" (690B-690C).¹⁵ Insofar as Eriugena allows that truth can be gleaned from Scripture, it follows that, even in this spatio-temporal life, there can be forms of speech and writing that, at the very least, can serve a positive function. One prime example of such a form of discourse is Eriugena's blending of apophatic and kataphatic language in his treatment of God's relation to the categories in the first book (cf. trans. Uhlfelder, 101-102). Just as the wise man, who, unlike his greedy counterpart, views the bejewelled vessel and, "by a simple mental process, entirely refers its beauty [...] to the glory of the Creator of natures" (trans. Sheldon-Williams, 828C), so too does Eriugena here display a remarkable self-consciousness regarding both the capacities and limitations of language.

As we turn to consider the restoration of human nature, I want to make clear that writing and speech continue to play a crucial role. Though Eriugena follows Maximus in taking the reversion of the sexes into the genderless human nature as the first division to be reunited in the return, we might also say that even this change carries with it a transformation in language. Given that Eriugena argues that human nature undergoes both a 'general' and 'special' return, it seems fit to consider a linguistic example drawn from

14. Ibid., 161-162.

15. Strangely, no mention of the prophets or their minds is made in Sheldon-Williams's translation of this passage.

each. In both cases, I hope to show how language goes beyond the role of mere description and is instead actively creative, either in a 'creaturely' or a 'divine' manner respectively.

Regarding the former, Otten asserts that the *reditus generalis* effects "the return of all humans to the original state of paradise."¹⁶ Eriugena's treatment of the speech of Adam in the fourth book is therefore exemplary in this regard. Considering Adam's naming of the animals (Genesis 2:19),¹⁷ he remarks that "it says, 'to see' [*ut videret*], that is, to understand 'what he would call them' [*quid vocaret*]. For if he did not understand, how would he be able to call them rightly [*quomodo recte vocare posset*]?" (769A). As indicated by this blending of 'seeing' and 'understanding,' Adam's language exists in accordance with the 'natural order' of the human (cf. 855C). Moreover, the Nutritor and the Alumnus both agree here that the 'name' which Adam assigns to each creature is "the very concept of [its] living soul," what Sheldon-Williams describes in his marginal notes as the creature's 'substantial name' (ibid.). Having already defined both the human specifically and all creatures more generally as "intellectual [concepts] formed eternally in the Divine Mind" (768B), this principle leads Eriugena to conclude that the "inner [concepts] which [are] contained in the human mind [constitute] the [substances] of those things of which [they are] concepts" (770A). Language, which here reflects the human's awareness of the multiplicity of concepts possessed within it, therefore serves to give voice to the very understanding which itself substantiates creaturely existence. In this regard, Eriugena draws a direct comparison to the creative power of the divine, noting that "the concept of nature, created in the human mind and possessed by it, is understood to be the substance of the very things of which it is the concept, just as in the Divine Mind the concept of the whole created universe is the incommunicable substance of that whole [*ad similitudinem videlicet mentis divinae, in qua notio universitatis conditae ipsius universitatis incommutabilis substantia est*]" (769A).

Regarding the latter, the *reditus specialis* concerns the deification

16. Otten, "Return," 417.

17. On Sheldon-Williams's translation: "Therefore, having formed out of the earth every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens, the Lord God brought them to Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living soul that is its name [omne autem quod vocavit Adam animae viventis, ipsum est nomen eius]" (768D-769A).

or *theosis* of the elect, those who ascend beyond the original state of the human nature in unification with Christ (cf. 1010A-1015C). I will therefore return again to the earlier example concerning Christ's words in the Gospel to furnish a pertinent example. Both discussion partners agree that these "words of wisdom"—what the Nutritor later refers to as 'the words of the Word'—are not those which are conveyed "by the vibrations of the air," but instead are "nothing other than the Causes and substances, [...] [the] immutable 'reasons' of things, created in the Wisdom of God, in accordance with which all things visible and invisible were created" (ibid.). Marler remarks that they are therefore "not what Christ was saying on the Mount of Olives," but "the primordial causes, including 'truth through itself,' transcending every nature category."¹⁸ In contrast to their transitory counterparts, Eriugena argues that these "ineffable and immutable words," which "were heard by the Apostle when he was snatched into Paradise," shall "never pass away," remaining "eternally present in the Only-begotten Word" (887D). Eriugena's assertion here in turn echoes his treatment of the first day of creation in the third book. Noting the multiplicity of distinct interpretations offered by the Holy Fathers for Genesis 1:1-5, he notes that "the establishment of the primordial causes of things, and their processions into their effects [*earumque in effectus suos processiones*]" is signified by this passage (692B). As he remarks, 'And God said, Let there be light, and light was made,' as though one were to say [*veluti quid diceret*]: God commanded the primordial causes, [...] to go forth into clear forms and the intelligible and sensible species of things visible and invisible [*in formas perspicuas speciesque intelligibiles et sensibiles visibilium et invisibilium prodire*]" (692B-692C). In so doing, they substantiate themselves in being in such a way that they are "overspread with the light of intelligence and manifested to the intellects whether human or angelic" (693A).

FREEDOM FROM REASON IN THE RETURN

As the second and third examples demonstrate, Eriugena allows for forms of speech—admittedly greatly different from our own—in which "the Spirit of the Father speaks in [man] the truth" (trans. Uhlfelder, 102). Indeed, as Eriugena states in his famous prayer, "as

18. Marler, "Scriptural Truth," 163.

there is no place in which it is more proper to seek Thee [Christ] than in Thy words, so is there no place where Thou art more clearly discovered than in Thy words" (trans. Sheldon-Williams, 1010C). Having drastically reformed our conception of language, has the human entirely overcome the logical character of Eriugena's dialectic ontology of the sensible world? To reiterate, the primary negative features characterizing the knowledge available within this ontology include the restriction to the sensible surface qualities of things, the need to articulate simple and instantaneous truths as though they were multiple and spatio-temporally extended, and the necessity of conveying meaning in and through systems of relations and ratios. As we have seen, Adam's creative naming, which is the form of language most proper to the human and to which it will be restored in the general return, rectifies the first and third of these problems. Regarding the second, Eriugena's careful exegeses of Scripture demonstrate the manner in which this issue can be, if not completely solved, then, at the very least, kept at bay. Moreover, when the natural order of the human is restored in the return and his senses and intellect exist in harmony with one another once more, his freedom from logical discourse, which itself operates by means of the same principles of temporal succession as speech, will make this second problem a complete non-issue. However, the question remains whether this freedom from ratiocination is itself a freedom from the categories more generally, which Eriugena has thoroughly integrated into his metaphysics as a whole, but which nonetheless do not apply to God. As I have demonstrated, Eriugena follows Porphyry in taking the categories to be 'the principles of multiplicity,' which are treated by the art of dialectic with respect to their subdivisions into genera and species.¹⁹ Therefore, in this final section I want to consider the manner in which this freedom from multiplicity and a reversion to utter simplicity both is and is not accomplished by the end of the *Periphyseon*.

In the fifth stage of the return, wherein the "spirit with its Causes is absorbed into God as air is absorbed into light," Eriugena acknowledges that "there is nothing but God alone," since "God will be all things in all things" (876A-876B). However, he immediately qualifies this statement, noting that he is "not trying to prove that the substance of the physical nature will perish" in the Return, but instead that "by these aforesaid states it will change

19. Erismann, "Logic of Being," 209.

into something better" (876B). Later in the fifth book, he considers this principle by means of the example of the voice, which, "when sounded with the others, [retains] the property of its own quality" (883D). This ambiguity is further reflected in Eriugena's silence concerning the problem of the individuation of souls in the return, which to my mind never receives a satisfactory resolution, despite being addressed explicitly on more than one occasion (cf. 994B; 995B-995C; 1002A-1002B). Even the concept of a 'special return,' which distinguishes between the common people who will be merely restored to the original glory of the human nature and the elect who will be deified, seems to speak to division within the 'all in all' of the return. The Nutritor seeks to rectify some of these concerns, particularly as they relate to the unequal distribution of the power of divine contemplation, by reminding the Alumnus that God similarly created a hierarchy amongst the angelic orders. As he remarks, "God made all things according to measure and number and weight (Wisdom 11:21), that is to say, in order," such that "the Universe which God created [might] possess beauty" as a whole (1013A).

Just as the final stage of the Return both is and is not a reduction of all things to God alone, so too in the deification do the elect both receive and not receive Christ the Bridegroom. Eriugena recognizes that the search undertaken by the souls of the elect for the vision of the Divine Essence is unending, yet "by some miraculous means [they] find what [they are] seeking for: and again [they do] not find it, for It cannot be found. [They find] it through theophanies, but through the contemplation of the Divine Nature Itself [they do] not find it" (919C). As he writes nearing the end of the fifth book, "Thou [God] art found in Thy theophanies in which Thou appearest in the mode of those who understand Thee after a manifold mode, as in a number of mirrors, in the way in which Thou permittest to be known not what Thou art, but what Thou art not: not what Thou art, but that Thou art" (1010D).

I take this fundamental ambiguity regarding the final result of the Return to be a fitting conclusion for the *Periphyseon* as a whole. Likewise, in lieu of a cohesive conclusion, I want merely to note that, though Eriugena frames the entire created order in terms of the logical—and indeed, as I have demonstrated, ontological—processes of procession and return, there is a sense in which all that is really accomplished is a greater awareness of that which has always already persisted, namely the eternal movement of the

human intellect, which “surpasses the nature of the soul herself and cannot be interpreted,” to the extent that it “moves about the unknown God” (572C). Indeed, one might say that, compared to the silent circulation of the intellect, which exceeds being due to its excellence, the whole drama of being—everything from creation and fall, through to resurrection and return—is nothing more than the “the apparition of what is not apparent, [...] the comprehension of the incomprehensible” (633A), especially in the light of Eriugena’s second mode of distinguishing being and non-being (trans. Uhlfelder, 4-5). That being said, such a comment would undoubtedly inspire polemics of a very similar variety to those by which Eriugena himself was attacked in his own lifetime.

WORKS CITED

- Erismann, Christophe. “The Logic of Being: Eriugena’s Dialectical Ontology.” *Vivarium*. Vol.45 (2007), pp. 203-218.
- Eriugena, Johannes Scotus. *Periphyseon: The Division of Nature*. Translated by Myra Uhlfelder. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011.
- _____. *Periphyseon: The Division of Nature*. Translated by I.P. Sheldon-Williams and John O’Meara. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987.
- Marler, J.C. “Scriptural Truth in the Periphyseon.” In *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics, Proceedings of the Ninth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies*. Edited by Gerd Van Riel, Carlos Steel and James McEvoy. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996, pp. 155-172.
- Otten, Willemien. “The Dialectic of the Return in Eriugena’s Periphyseon.” *The Harvard Theological Review*. Vol.84, No.4 (Oct 1991): pp. 399-421.