

# Eriugena Against Metaphysical Dualism

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Since the writing of his masterwork, the *Periphyseon*, John Scotus Eriugena's metaphysics has suffered in more ways than one from being labelled as pantheistic.<sup>1</sup> What is especially intriguing about this misunderstanding of his thought is that it overlooks John's often strongly dualistic language and sentiments: one sometimes finds him expressing what appears to be a two-worlds metaphysical view, one the haven of intelligibility and divinity, the other home to the senses, ignorance, and sin. If not a pantheist, then was John the Scot a dualist? Despite what sometimes appears to be the case as one reads through the *Periphyseon*, his metaphysics in no way tolerates metaphysical dualism of any sort. Because, however, of his still-standing reputation as something of a pantheist, moreover, because his metaphysics presents a remarkable synthesis of what on their own would be pantheistic and dualistic claims, the theme of dualism in Eriugena is well worth considering in some detail. I aim to do so here, beginning with a number of glaringly dualistic claims that will suggest his overall philosophical perspective constitutes a dualism of some kind. After reviewing numerous confusions which follow from interpreting him in this manner, I will argue that Eriugena's metaphysics in fact strongly disallows any metaphysical dualism, doing so through a comprehensive reinterpretation of the initial passages. Apart from the correction of an interpretative error, what this study shall leave us with is keen appreciation for the metaphysical balancing act which Eriugena, and thinkers like him, perform. In their commitment to both a divinely ordered and an evil-plagued world, they strive properly to respect the former while not neglecting the influence of the latter. I shall conclude with comments on this dual commitment and related concerns.

<sup>1</sup> At various periods after its publication, though especially in 1225 (due to a papal condemnation of circulating copies), this work was condemned for purveying mistaken notions, particularly on the relation of God and the world. See M. Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène: sa vie, son œuvre, sa pensée* (Bruxelles: Culture et Civilisation, 1969 [1933]) 247, 384; also, E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1955) 613, n. 39.

## I. FROM PANTHEISM TO DUALISM

Within the Eriugenian corpus, passages such as the following seem to posit a clearly pantheistic identity of God and world:

For if the understanding of all things is all things and It [i.e., the divine] alone understands all things, then It alone is all things; for that alone is the gnostic power which knows all things before they are, and does not know all things outside Itself because outside It there is nothing, but It possesses all within Itself. (III.4.632D–633A)<sup>2</sup>

Further, one finds Eriugena making statements such as “when we hear that God makes all things we ought to understand nothing else than that God is in all things, that is, that He is the Essence of all things” and “only He truly exists by Himself, and He alone is everything which in the things that are is truly said to be” (I.72.51 8A–B). Then he says of the ontological relation of divinity to creatures that “the former, I mean the Divine Essence, is seen alone in the latter .... For ... in all things nothing else but itself is presented to those that have understanding ...” (I.10.450B). In light of these and other<sup>3</sup> such excerpts, one easily understands how readers in his day and beyond could label John’s metaphysics as pantheistic—and scandalous.<sup>4</sup>

As a matter of fact, however, such readers misunderstand Eriugena’s thought. This “pantheism” is only partly representative of the whole of his metaphysical outlook, and to focus upon it is to overlook a number of dualistic statements that surface in various places in John’s work.<sup>5</sup> To begin with, in the context of John’s commentary on Genesis (found in Books III–V of the *Periphyseon*), we seem to find the doctrine that the Fall of humankind was a fall not only into a deficient world; it was the creation of a deficient world. As testified by many passages, John appears to see the rebellion of our

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations come from I.P. Sheldon-Williams and J.J. O’Meara, *Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)* (Montreal, 1987), and will be referenced parenthetically wherever possible. The Latin text consulted is found, for *Periphyseon* I–IV, in the *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* series, vols. VII, IX, XI, XIII (Dublin, 1968–); for *Periphyseon* V, in the *Patrologiae Latina*, vol. 122, ed. H.J. Floss (Paris, 1865).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., *Periph.* III.4.633A–B, III.19.681A–B, III.20.683A, II.36.616B, I.72.517A–B.

<sup>4</sup> John’s writings reflect some concern over the effect his thinking had on contemporaries, as seen from exclamations from the *alumnus* concerning portions of the *nutritor*’s argument. See, e.g., his reaction to a doctrine that leaves him “bewildered and struck dumb as a dead man with stupefaction,” at *Periph.* III.9.646C–649D; cf. also III.10.650B–D, III.20.684A, III.27.700B, III.10.650D, III.35.724A, I.47.489C, and *carmen* #20 (*Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Carmina*, ed. M. Herren [Dublin, 1993] 109).

<sup>5</sup> My focus is on the *Periphyseon*, in particular, though some references to other works will be made; principally, *de divina praedestinatione* (*Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis*, vol. 50) and “Homily on the Prologue to St. John’s Gospel,” *Eriugena*, tr. John J. O’Meara (Oxford, 1988) 158–76.

human parents as the infelicitous fabrication of a new, albeit lower, creation, in which there is no true happiness and no lasting satisfaction.<sup>6</sup>

To express this same point more particularly, a variety of passages in Eriugena's corpus seems to characterize the sensible as the product of the Fall. These passages see in the visible, mortal, sensible aspects of reality a new creation; what is more, a deficient creation. To speak for the moment without any eye towards important subtleties in John's thought, the distinctive trappings of ordinary life in the present world, such as what the physical eye sees or ear hears, or the animal and vegetable processes of ordinary life, or common ignorance, falsehood, pain, or time, or spatial relations—all of these at times seem to be viewed by John as distinctive and deficient ontological material. They emerged out of the primordial Fall, in the form of a new city, Jericho, serving now as rival to God's city, Jerusalem (IV.15.811Bff.), and located in a "far off country of dissimilarity" (V.6.874B); or, the soul's fall constructs "upon the nature which God had created an abominable temple fit only for the habitation of the devil."<sup>7</sup> He uses many other images to signify this change.<sup>8</sup> But most interesting in this connection is that most infamous doctrine of Eriugena's, namely, that the human division into male and female is born of evil, not of the divine: "since he was unwilling to keep to the divine mode of multiplying himself he was degraded by a just decree to the bestial, and to the corruptible proliferation out of male and female."<sup>9</sup> This means, however, that everything in the visible world is far from the wondrous theophany that John elsewhere describes in his writings; now it appears to be *kakaphany*. What has been produced and is constituted as mortal and earthly seems to have come from sin, not God, and leads one away from, not towards, the fullness of being.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See his discussion throughout Book IV; e.g., IV.9.777A, IV.17.829A–830A, IV.6.761D–762B, IV.24.854C–D, IV.15.813C. Close analysis of aspects of his account can be found in C. Steel, "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil," in *Iohannes Scotus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics* (Leuven, 1996) 239–59.

<sup>7</sup> *Periph.* IV.4.747B; cf. II.25.583B.

<sup>8</sup> Such as from principles to generated images, angelic to animal life, health to corruption, purity to impurity, wedlock to divorce: see *Periph.* IV.7.769B–C, IV.9.777C–D, IV.9.779B, IV.25.855B; IV.5.761A, IV.6.762Cff.; IV.16.824B, V.6.872C–D; IV.20.837C–D; IV.25.855D–856A.

<sup>9</sup> *Periph.* II.6.532D–533A; cf. II.6–7.533A–B, IV.14.807D–808A, IV.5.760D–761A, II.8.533C–534B, IV.23.846A, IV.15.813A [Maximus], IV.20.835D–836A. The relevant *sigla* for this and all following excerpts are as follows: parentheses indicate terms gapped in the Latin text and supplied by the editors; brackets indicate additions to the text from a variety of sources (my own being indicated by the inclusion of an "i.e." or "e.g.", or otherwise noted); arrow-brackets indicate additions to the manuscript in Eriugena's hand. For more, see Sheldon-Williams, *Introduction, Periphyseon I (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae VII)*.

<sup>10</sup> On the sensible as seeming *kakaphany*, see *Periph.* II.9.536B–C, IV.4.747A–B, II.25.581B–583C, II.23.571C–D, IV.18.833C, V.40.1021B, III.27.703B–C.

Several other lines of thought converge upon this one. One is that range of passages wherein he speaks, whether obliquely or directly, about many worlds. He speaks directly of the end and the beginnings *sensibilis mundi*, as distinct from the universal reasons of the sense-world (III.9.647D); sketches the temporal establishment of things in *hunc mundum visibilem*, things arriving according to a sequence known only to God (I.5.445A–B); also contrasts three separate worlds, discernible as stations on one's spiritual way.<sup>11</sup> Another is a collection of passages that draw a rather sharp distinction between sensibles and intelligibles for a variety of different purposes: to contrast Christ as substantial good with evil; to show that falsehood resides in corporeality; to clarify (and locate) the nature of incorruptibility; to contrast bodies of various sorts, or divinity with what is earthly.<sup>12</sup> Closely coupled with this are several of John's metaphysical and theological claims concerning the body. For instance, certain of his descriptions of the *imago dei* buttress a dualistic division of body and soul (or mind), since it is in the mind alone, he says in one place, that Man images God.<sup>13</sup> And behind this lies his often directly stated view that the body is evil, which lends easily enough to a dualistic interpretation of his thought, inasmuch as body, seen as evil, must constitute (or be constituted by) a material which is foreign to the larger theophanic creation of divinity.<sup>14</sup>

These several lines of John's thought, however, are grounded in a more general metaphysical consideration, which I shall call the 'two-levels' dilemma. As a first glance at this problematic Eriugenian theme, consider the following passage, the context for which is his commentary on Genesis:

<sup>11</sup> "Homily on the Prologue ..." xviii–xix, 293C–294C; see also *Periph.* V.3.867B–C, III.19.681B, and *Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Carmina* 66 (l. 46), 71 (l. 55), 81 (l. 33), 83 (l. 21). It should be noted here that this notion of many worlds, coupled with a contrast of substances, defines dualism for this study. A fuller historical clarification can be found in A.H. Armstrong, "Dualism Platonic, Gnostic, Christian," in *Hellenic and Christian Studies* XII (Variorum, 1990): 29–31.

<sup>12</sup> See *Periph.* IV.16.826A–B, V.3.867A; IV.6.760A–B; IV.12.800B–D, IV.19.833D–834A, IV.16.821D.

<sup>13</sup> *Periph.* IV.5.755C: "And so all human nature, in what it shares with the other animals, is truly human nature. What it shares with them is body; the life which controls the body; and the sense together with the memory which draws from it the phantasies of sensible objects. But insofar as it participates in the divine and celestial essence, human nature is not animal nature; for it participates in the celestial essence by reason and intellect and memory of eternal things... For in this part of itself it is made in the image of God: and it is with this part only, in men who are apt for it, that God holds converse."

<sup>14</sup> On this, see both what I have termed as 'diagnostic' passages, such as *Periph.* II.20.555A–IV.5.755C, II.16–17.549B–550B, III.37.733C, II.8.535A–B, III.20.684A, II.26.583C, 583D; and 'prognostic' passages, such as IV.5.756A–B, IV.19.835B–C, IV.25.855A, III.27.702B–C, IV.5.756A, V.3.868B, III.23.689C; cf. *carmen* #24 (*Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae Carmina* 115).

For in one way the creature is considered in its eternal reasons in God in accordance with which it is established, and in another way in itself under God inasmuch as it is a creature; and the first consideration is signified by the word "Light," but the second by "Darkness." For as light goes before darkness in rank, so the brightness of the eternal reasons in accordance with which every creature is made is preferred to the obscurity of the creature considered in itself .... (III.24.691C-D)

Here, the "reasons" of sensible existents, i.e., of generation into times and places, are distinguished from those sensible existents "considered in themselves," as he has said. The former are posited as the truly existing metaphysical component, i.e., the light. The latter are posited as obscure, dark, even as nothing.

The idea is traditional, as far as John's philosophical predecessors go, for its origins lie far back in the Platonic dialogues and throughout classical and religious literature.<sup>15</sup> It is a profound doctrine, and philosophically plausible. Platonic metaphysicians especially have consistently argued that a distinction must be made between sensibles and intelligibles, on the basis of which one rightly identifies only the latter with being, since only they exhibit the stability and unity that characterize real existence.<sup>16</sup> But this move throws us into a remarkable puzzle. Consider that despite John's characterization of sensible existence as a 'nothing existence,' it appears nevertheless to have some sort of being of its own. Even though it may be "nearer to not-being than to being" (II.15.547B), it is not completely vacuous, ontologically speaking:

For the cause, if it be truly cause, most perfectly pre-encompasses in itself all things of which it is the cause, and perfects in itself its effects before they become manifest in anything, and when they break forth through generation into general and visible species they do not abandon their perfection in it but fully and immutably abide (in it), and need no other perfection than it <alone> in which they subsist all at once and eternally. (II.15.547A)

<sup>15</sup> Coupled with anti-body statements in, e.g., the *Phaedo*, the famous passage at *Theaetetus* 176B, with its insistence that evils in this world will never be overcome, is one dialogic source for the position. On the other hand, one readily thinks of *Gilgamesh* and *The Odyssey*, which so vividly contrast the present shadows with divine light, or classic religious descriptions of divinity as supreme existence, of all else as mere shadows, such as one finds in Eliade, e.g., *Myth and Reality* (New York, 1963) or *Cosmos and History* (New York, 1959); cf. also Huston Smith in the Bill Moyers' video series, "The Wisdom of Faith": in summarizing the Islamic (and, in his view, the universal religious) view of creatures, he says cheerfully, "I hate to tell you this, but you're only partially real, Bill" (Vol. 4: "Islam" [Newbridge Communications, 1996]). For helpful commentary on this theme, see J.N. Findlay, "Religion and Its Three Paradigmatic Instances," *Religious Studies* XI (April 1975): 215-27, esp. 221-22.

<sup>16</sup> For consideration of these distinctions, see *Periph.* I.46.488A, I.60.503B, I.13.458Dff., IV.1.792C, 793A, IV.7.769C, V.6.872C-D; also *de div. praed.* vi.3 and xvi.7.



But what kind of existence is a "breaking forth through generation"? What does it exist as in contrast to its perfection—its reality—in its cause? John uses a variety of metaphors to signify the relation of these sub-existent 'things' to true existents: he compares them as words to thought (I.12.454A–C), clothing on a body (III.15.665D; IV.12.802A), or shadows to an illuminated object (I.57–58.501B–C). These metaphors indicate that the sensible is something; perhaps one should say, a "symbolic expression,"<sup>17</sup> for, completely dependent upon what it communicates, it is only what it communicates. And yet, the very fact that it is a communication supposes that it is not simply identical to its communication: it is both distinct and dependent, both original in some way and derivative.<sup>18</sup> John sometimes speaks in a manner after that of Gregory of Nyssa, saying that the sensible exists as a concurrence of intelligibility.<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, the sensible appears to be a way of apprehending, not a kind of being: it is a way of seeing being as becoming; i.e., it is the slowing down or spreading out of things in their unity. In this light, body is solely an appearance of being,<sup>20</sup> or, in another, more radical formulation, it is the *accidentia* that differentiate without adding to the *substantiae* of the forms.<sup>21</sup>

There is more to the puzzle. Inquiring into the separation of the sensible and the intelligible sides of reality, Eriugena asks, What can the sensible be on its own, i.e., if cut off from its real being? He answers that it becomes

<sup>17</sup> D. Duclow, "Divine Nothingness and Self-Creation," *Journal of Religion* 57 (1977): 120. His discussion of the relation of sensible and intelligible is made with the purpose to shed light on being as God's self-creation, hence he does not dwell on the question of the 'being' of the sensible as a "symbolic expression."

<sup>18</sup> Its originality, independence, and ontological significance are strengthened by the view that mind without matter would be unable to communicate; see *Periph.* IV.11.792A–D (quoting Gregory Nyssa).

<sup>19</sup> See *Periph.* I.57–58.501A–C, I.34.479B–C, III.14.663A–664B, 15.665D–666A, IV.6.765Cff. He quotes Gregory on this directly at I.59.502C–503A.

<sup>20</sup> But it would seem that form itself is simply an appearance, as well; i.e., not even forms may exist for John, at least not as static entities, since they are sometimes described as motions (*Periph.* II.23.575B–D, I.5.547Cff., 23.576A, I.4.444B), as undefinable and unknowable (*Periph.* II.17–18.550B–551B, IV.7.772B, II.28.586D, I.45.487A), even as darkness (*Periph.* II.17.550C–D). This oddity still supports the point made here on behalf of John's metaphysics: if there are no distinctive levels at all to be reconciled, only a passage from non-being into infinite being, then there is no sense in speaking of the sensible as something. 'Sensible' is only a term used to denote one degree of being, just as 'intelligible' denotes that same being but to a greater degree. For here Being would be direction and movement, definable more adequately in terms of its activity, or tendency, or point of orbit.

<sup>21</sup> See *Periph.* I.53.495D–496A, IV.7.770D–771A; cf. J. Gracia, "Ontological Characterization of the Relation Between Man and Created Nature in Eriugena," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 16.2 (April 1978): 164–65, on the difference between sensibles and their "notiones" as a matter of "accidentia."

something "hideous," "infected," "corrupted," as if "smitten by the ugly contagion of leprosy"; yet, he continues, this "contagion" never influences the real creature, for "in itself the nature which was created in the Image of God never did lose the bloom of its beauty nor the integrity of its essence ... for the divine form, though enabled by sin to acquire corruptible qualities, itself ever remains immutable" (V.6.872A-B). The fallen sensible is never truly cut off from its immutable source—not completely. If it were it should be non-existent. Still, John insists that while the sensible 'world' is in fact affected by the Fall while that from which it comes is not, the higher level is not diminished, is not affected at all, no matter what takes place on the lower level.<sup>22</sup> Thus, we seem to be faced with two different realms indeed, one corruptible, one incorruptible, one manifold, the other unfold, as the following passage, for example, would appear quite strongly to indicate. For while 'corruptible qualities' seem for John to be identical to 'sensible qualities', here the incorruptible is likewise identified with the intellectual:

We may then define man as...a certain intellectual concept formed eternally in the Mind of God.

That is an extremely true and very well tested definition of man; and not only of man, but of everything else which is formed in the Divine Wisdom. And I am not afraid of those who define him not as he is intellectually comprehended to be ... saying that man is a rational mortal animal capable of sense and learning; and what is more amazing, they call this definition a substantial one, although it is not substantial at all but describes what relates to the substance from the attributes acquired by the substance from outside itself through generation. But the concept of man in the Mind of God is none of these .... (IV.7.768B-C)

Here again, through contrasts of 'substantial' and 'from outside,' John suggests that being animal and sensible (etc.) is somehow other than (or outside of), even though it is also in, its source.

The contrast John posits between the perfection of a thing's existence in the cause and its imperfection in itself makes this two-levels problem interesting and difficult both. The two are made to seem separate in the above quotations, and indeed they are outrightly opposed where John declares Man has clothed himself "in the form of a beast and hurls himself from that which is the better down to that which is much inferior" (IV.6.762B), even while they are declared to be in relation. The fact that this division of superior and inferior includes other oppositions, most notably that between divine knowledge and human knowledge, adds to the scope of the problem.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See discussion below, section III.

<sup>23</sup> John (through his *nutritor*) states that he understands "the substance of the whole man to be nothing else but the concept of him in the Mind of his Artificer [whose] knowledge is the true and only substance of the things known" (*Periph.* IV.7.768B), and elsewhere affirms just as

Putting all of this together, we have what appears to constitute quite a strong case for some form of dualism. Arising especially from his Fall doctrine (and attendant views), John's metaphysics seems to constitute a two-worlds system. There is a divine world; there is also a fallen world. One is good, the other bad; one distant, heavenly, and intelligible, the other present, sensible, and bestial; the one a manifestation, the other barely an image, if at all. The former is genuine theophany, opposed by the latter, a region of *kakaphany*; and while intelligibility is available to knowing minds here and now, it is obscured by the inferior level of pseudo-knowledge and pseudo-being which is sensibility. If in fact these passages offer only partial or distorted views of Eriugena's thought, one must confess all the same that they are noticeable and seem to provide grounds for considering his thought to be dualistic.

## II. ERIUGENIAN DUALISM? CONFUSIONS

In actual fact, John's metaphysics is at root strongly anti-dualistic. Despite what we have just considered, the character of his thought as a whole veers sharply away from any dualism. This claim receives its initial substantiation from the significant confusions that follow from a dualistic interpretation of the above passages. (Given space considerations, I shall describe them only in brief terms here, leaving detailed examination for another occasion.) In the first place, the Fall is not always characterized by Eriugena as a fall into another world; sometimes, rather, as a fall *in* the world. For instance, he speaks at one point, in an excerpt referred to above, of the sinful mind perceiving "through the corporeal sense only the surface of sensible things" (IV.25.855A), which fact necessitates that mind ascend step by step into the truth from sensible experience as "from outer to inner."<sup>24</sup> This idea suggests that there is no new creation at all, nor any spatial separation, but rather a relational problem within what already exists.<sup>25</sup> Second, while sensi-

strongly that God's knowledge constitutes the true being of all things (see, e.g., *Periph.* II.20.559B and IV.9.778D-779A). Contrasted to this is the knowledge of humankind, which, though it has contact with the divine mind (see, e.g., *Periph.* IV.9.779B-C and IV.8.774A), gleams divine knowledge only through a glass darkly, as it were: "[t]rue knowledge of all these [created things] is implanted in human nature although it is concealed from her ... until she is restored to her pristine and integral condition" (*Periph.* IV.7.769B; cf. IV.9.779B). The case that has been made for two distinct and contrasting ontological levels in John's thought is supported by this contrast, on which, see also *Periph.* III.17.677A-B, II.15.546D-547A, 544A, 544D-545A, IV.9.778D-779A; *de div. praed.* ii.4; "Homily on the Prologue ..." vii.287B-C, x.288C-D, 289A, xix.294A-B; cf. B. McGinn, "Eriugena mysticus," in *Giovanni Scoto nel suo tempo* (Spoleto, 1989) 245.

<sup>24</sup> *Periph.* IV.25.855B; cf. III.35.723C, IV.16.824C-825C, II.14.544A.

<sup>25</sup> See also *Periph.* IV.25.855D, IV.23.849B, IV.25.855C, III.35.723C, IV.16.824C-825C, II.14.544A.



ble reality is sometimes described as the product of the Fall—"super-added," as John says (II.23.572A)—it is elsewhere described as the product of God's initial creation or as a divine manifestation.<sup>26</sup> Third, the sensible in the two-worlds view is seemingly not theophany, yet Eriugena is emphatic that to exist as a creature is to exist as theophany alone.<sup>27</sup> Fourth, how can sin be productive? Since John instructs that every ontological deficiency (and human transgression) is an instance of non-being, and the act of rebelling against the divine will constitutes a decision not to be, then how can another world come into being out of the Fall? This confusion is directly related to and further illustrated in the next: a two-worlds view of reality, with its concomitant doctrine of the lower world as one of deficient existence, explicitly contradicts John's characterizations of evil as non-being or privation.<sup>28</sup> Sixth, Eriugenian metaphysics insists upon a non-spatial separation of the various portions of being, fallen (and deficient) or not.<sup>29</sup> Seventh and most importantly, the dualistic view contradicts a wide variety of 'one object' passages, that is, very striking descriptions and arguments that indicate how for John the sensible 'object' does not exist separately from its intelligible causes; indeed, that it is no 'thing' in the ontological sense because it is not independent from and does not add to substantial reality. Rather, the sensible is solely the appearance of substance. In John's words, "this does not mean that the essence of all things in the Word is something other than the essence of all things in man, but one and the same essence is contemplated by the mind under two different aspects, as subsisting in the eternal Causes, and as understood in the effects ..." (IV.9.779C). Such passages as this dictate that there is for John just one world; moreover, that all knowledge of and in it is ultimately of God alone.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See *Periph.* I.1.441B–442A; P II.2.526C–D and IV.27.860B–C; but also II.23.572A.

<sup>27</sup> See *Periph.* III.19.681A–B, III.4.633A–B, I.12.453D–454A, III.3.630A–632B, III.17.678C, 679A, I.72.518A–B.

<sup>28</sup> See *de div. praed.* x.5, viii.2, xv.8–10, x.2–3; *Periphys.* IV.16.826A–B, IV.16.828A, V.36.976A–B; cf. *Periph.* III.36.728C, V.31.944A–B, IV.16.828A, *de div. praed.* xvi.4, v.3–7, xviii.7, iii.1, xv.1, 4–5; and J.C. Foussard, "Apparence et Apparition: La Notion de 'Phantasia' Chez Jean Scot," in *Jean Scot Érigène et l'Histoire de la Philosophie*, ed. R. Roques (Paris, 1977) 344: "Où est la différence sinon dans l'intenti'o mentis? D'un côté, le *sapiens sensus* qui ignore les désirs désordonnés et pour qui toute beauté manifeste son Créateur; de l'autre le pécheur, en qui l'ignorance et la concupiscence sont nécessairement liées."

<sup>29</sup> See *Periph.* V.36.983C–D, V.6.871C–872A, V.36.983B, 983B–C (Abraham and the rich man), II.10–11.538B–539D, 23.574C, 15.547A, V.36.967C, 972C, 973A, 38.996Cff., IV.16.824C, III.27.700C–D and esp. IV.5.760A–B; also, *de div. praed.* xvii.8 and xix.3.

<sup>30</sup> See *Periph.* IV.7.772B, II.23.573C–Dff., III.28.704B, 25.693B, II.23.578A–D, IV.7.771A, II.24.579C–D; cf. IV.5.754D, II.787B–Dff.; also, B. McGinn, "The Negative Element in the Anthropology of John the Scot," in *Jean Scot Érigène et l'Histoire de la Philosophie* 320.

Altogether, these confusions, placed next to the several pantheistic passages with which this study began, suggest that the dualistic view considered initially cannot be taken strictly at face value; hence some reinterpretation seems necessary. Is this possible?

### III. ERIUGENIAN DUALISM: REINTERPRETATION

Unless we are to see his thought as inherently confused, the preceding section suggests that John Scotus Eriugena's metaphysics is not at root dualistic. What, however, can be done with the suggestive passages from the first section of this study? They can in fact be reinterpreted. Let us go through each dualistic point that appeared above and see how the dualism supposed in them can be redefined, doing so with reference to what I shall try to show is Eriugena's larger and more consistent metaphysical framework.

I begin with what was described above as the 'two-levels' problem, namely, the view that reality is divided into two ontologically independent (though perhaps epistemologically related) realms, one sensible, the other intelligible. To this, I first point out that John is generally quite careful to posit the strongest dependence of the former upon the latter. Not solely epistemological, this dependence is thoroughly ontological. What the sensible is, is the intelligible, albeit apprehended in less unified, less concentrated fashion.<sup>31</sup> John's distinction between two levels of existence need not be interpreted dualistically, then, because it is only the higher level, the intelligible, which can be said properly to be. As was just touched upon in reviewing the seventh confusion, there is no larger metaphysical grounding in Eriugena's thinking for, on the one hand, two *separate* levels of existence, nor, on the other, two opposed existences at all. There is only one world for the Scot, albeit one that opens to different levels of experience: it can be more or less truly, more or less comprehensively, experienced. In this light, we may leave fully intact the doctrine of two kinds of knowledge, earthly and divine. In fact, such a distinction now strongly supports this reinterpretation. What needs to be corrected is the dualistic (and false) corollary that there are two separate objects (or sets of objects) pertaining to these separate apprehensions: "For one and the same thing is made known by the investigations of contemplation in one way in its causes, in another way in its effects" (III.28.704B). There is ultimately just one object to be known in the world, though one knowable in more ways than one: through the senses in a di-

<sup>31</sup> One might wish to compare Plotinus: see *Enneads* VI.7.7.17ff., VI.6.18.23-28, 31-39, VI.2.1. Fuller demonstration of the Platonic point can be found in E. Perl, "Sense-Perception and Intellect in Plato," *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne* XVI (1997): 15-34.

verse, fragmentary, sensible (though still revelatory) way; through the mind in a unitive, intelligible, stable way.<sup>32</sup>

Added criticism of any dualistic separation of the two levels is found in the many passages where John refuses to accord being to the sensible. Quite a number of passages can be found on this point, passages which state that 'to be' belongs to the intelligible, not the sensible; that "no creature ... can be held to possess any other substance but that reason by which it subsists in the Primordial Causes within the Word of God."<sup>33</sup> Substance, then, stands at the level of the causes, and whatever else can be found within being cannot be another substance or set of substances. However the sensible may exist, then, it does not add more being to being nor definition to definition,<sup>34</sup> for "nothing exists in human nature which is not spiritual and intelligible, for even the substance of the body is intelligible."<sup>35</sup> The two levels must then be within one and the same universe, i.e., ontological framework.<sup>36</sup>

What, then, shall be done with those passages quoted above which seem to propose two rigorously contrasted levels of existence? Some of these are directly corrected by John.<sup>37</sup> As for uncorrected passages, there is a strong case to be made for interpreting the "sensible nature," which John himself says is now "distinct from the intelligible" because of the Fall,<sup>38</sup> solely in non-substantial terms, i.e., *not* as another thing or world. On the one hand, an Eriugenian tenet that has not yet been considered, namely, his 'nothing is

<sup>32</sup> It may be that one can ascend into even higher knowledge through yet another mode of knowing, a 'mystical' one of some sort, as is implied in certain of John's discussions of knowledge of God (e.g., *Periph.* III.23.689C, V.38.1017C-D), levelled theophanies (*Periph.* V.36.964A, *Expositiones in Ierarchiam Coelestem* iv.2 [*Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis*, vol. 31, 301-09]), and the special return of the saints (e.g., *Periph.* V.36.979A, V.38.1011B-1013Bff.).

<sup>33</sup> *Periph.* IV.7.772B; cf. II.25.582C, 7.533B-C.

<sup>34</sup> See the 'nothing is new' passage at *Periph.* II.21.560C-561B; cf. I.42.484B, where John tells us that no wise observer gives being to what is sensibly perceived; also I.42-43.484C-485A.

<sup>35</sup> *Periph.* V.8.878D-879A: "In humana siquidem natura nil subsistit, quod spirituale et intelligibile non sit. Nam et substantia corporis profecto intelligibilis est ...."

<sup>36</sup> Armstrong speaks casually about the Platonic belief in "a duality of worlds," but then qualifies his comments, speaking about Plotinus in particular, by saying that some "understand his thought in terms of one world, one set of entities, apprehended in different ways at different levels, rather than two" ("Dualism Platonic, Gnostic, Christian" 47-48), which applies to Eriugena, as well.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Periph.* II.14.544B and 544A (the correction); also, IV.9.779B-C and 779C (the correction).

<sup>38</sup> *Periph.* II.9.536C: "sensibilis natura ab intelligibili in eo non discreparetur"; cf. the rest of the passage: "totus enim esset intellectus creatori suo semper et immutabiliter adhaerens et nullo modo a primordialibus suis causis in quibus conditus est recederet ...."

lost' doctrine, is relevant to this concern. The nature of the doctrine is simply that whatever can be found in and through sensation, or whatever can be found that is sensible and visible, can and will be found in and through intellection and can and will be contained in what is intelligible. To put it more simply, whatever is 'lower' in reality is already found in what is 'higher.' Such a view presupposes a distinction between two levels of being without dualizing these levels. Hence, as the question at stake here is how we can avoid interpreting the sensible as something independently other than the intelligible, this doctrine, though distinguishing between sensible and intelligible, instructs that however they may be distinguished there is no ontological feature of the sensible that cannot be found in the intelligible. Sometimes John will state that what is sensible can be found in the intelligible better, or more truly, or more fully (IV.5.759A–C, III.14.664C, II.16.546D–547A). Sometimes he formulates it as existence in the cause as distinct from existence outside the cause (II.15.547A), or as genus and species (IV.5.750B). Sometimes, curiously, he will suggest that even the deficiencies of life reside in the intelligible (V.36.972D). At times, he is speaking generally of differences and multiplicity (V.36.979B, IV.8.876A–B), at other times of animality (IV.19.835A) or of the sexes (II.12–13.541A–C, IV.18.833A–B), sometimes of all sensibles (IV.12.822B) or of sensation in distinction to (dia)noetic apprehension (IV.19.835A–C). The varieties of formulations need not concern us at the moment, for the point of relevance is that all that is *here* is *there*; what is sensible is in the intelligible. Therefore, the sensible is and can be only as an appearance: it can be 'other' only in the sense of being another way of viewing or knowing. It is an image of the intelligibility of intelligibles made somehow less, as intelligibility spread out, diluted, broken apart, slowed down. Thus the sensible can only be the intelligible and offer nothing but its being—only less adequately.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, and perhaps more concretely, the connection that John makes between sensible existence and apprehension "from the outside"<sup>40</sup> suggests that the reinterpreted Fall must take place in the world, rather than as a creation of a new world. It suggests further that such an ontological change, i.e., distortion, must be a matter of a change of perspective, more a matter of seeing awry than of 'going elsewhere.' A number of intriguing passages lend full support to this perspectival interpretation of the Fall of humankind.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> This point follows directly from the logical grounds of John's metaphysics, i.e., from his Platonic understanding of the cause-effect relation: see again the references in n. 16 above.

<sup>40</sup> See *Periph.* II.14.544A, wherein John discusses the perspectival creation of multiplicity on the part of the mind that apprehends creatures not in the unity of their causes but in their appearance in "places, times, qualities, quantities . . ."

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., *Periph.* IV.22.843A, 844B–C, IV.16.828B–829A, V.36.967D–968A and 970A–B, V.38.1012B–C, V.6.871D–872A, IV.23.849A–B.

Let us next consider briefly those passages distinguishing between sensibles and intelligibles, those which distinguish between different worlds, and miscellaneous others which label corporeality as the dwelling of falsehood or seem to restrict the *imago dei* to mind, not sense. In respect to the first two groups, John's doctrine of non-spatial difference,<sup>42</sup> along with the just-concluded argument against two dualized levels of existence, leaves no room for many worlds or any sharp ontological distinction between sense and form. Moreover, some of these passages are corrected by John himself.<sup>43</sup> In respect to those passages which seem to contrast two different bodies or two kinds of bodies, closer consideration shows that he is often contrasting two different appearances of the same body.<sup>44</sup> This should not be surprising in light of the 'one object' passages referred to above.<sup>45</sup> The point is also supported by his arguments that the body is an image of an image.<sup>46</sup>

A number of the other miscellaneous passages from above, such as those that seem to make spatial and substantial distinctions between sensible and intelligible realms, can be treated similarly. But those passages wherein John describes fallen humanity as ontologically deficient prove somewhat more resistant. We might consider that summary of the Fall whereby Man clothes himself, says John, "in the form of a beast and hurls himself from that which is the better down to that which is much inferior" (IV.6.762B); or, concerning the soul: "she has drifted so far from herself and her Creator and approached in likeness so near and so shamefully the irrational and mortal animals" (IV.5.761A). In the absence of John's arguments for one world we could easily interpret these dualistically. Even in light of those arguments, it is difficult to see what it could mean to identify oneself with the sensible portion of reality, as the passage in question indicates has taken place, if not consignment to another world. How could one drift away, if not into a deficient (sensible) world?

To answer this last question, as John sometimes does, "by some principle of unlikeness" (V.16.868A), is promising. This principle is described as the *nihil per privativum* and defined as the unsubstantial opposite of the divine *nihil*.<sup>47</sup> It is this thing (rather, no-thing) that leads John to see the present life as an abandonment of the source, a separate life which is separate because it

<sup>42</sup> See n. 29 above.

<sup>43</sup> His vivid description of three worlds (see "Homily on the Prologue ..." xix.294Aff.) is itself synthesized by John into a unity insofar as the third is a mediator which unites the first two.

<sup>44</sup> See *Periph.* IV.5.759A–C, 16.822A–B, 5.760A–B, V.8.879A–B.

<sup>45</sup> See again the references provided in n. 30 above.

<sup>46</sup> *Periph.* IV.11.790A, 790C, II.27.585D, V.34.952C. He sometimes contradicts this idea, however: see IV.16.817A, 12.797A (Gregory of Nyssa), 12.799A–C.

<sup>47</sup> For some of his discussion, see *Periph.* I.59.502A, IV.16.825C, III.19.681C, 17.679B–C.



is impoverished, deprived, made less than what is. To be deficient, in this light, is to fail to some extent to exist. This kind of deficient existence is the existence that moves away by becoming unlike—to be “nothingified,” as Gregory of Nyssa puts it.<sup>48</sup> The problem with this answer is that in specifying it John seems to identify animality with deficient life. Such an identification threatens to land us back in a bifurcation of sense and intelligibility. To what, then, does the *imago dei* pertain in Man? Is his animality included or not? Some of the excerpts from the *Periphyseon* that we looked at above answer this question firmly in the negative, based on the separation of mind, God, spiritual reality, etc., on the one hand, and sense, sin, and animal life, on the other. These are undeniably strong in their emphasis. But there is evidence to show that this opposition cannot, in the last analysis, find any systematic grounding in Eriugena’s metaphysics. For where in fact animality is not divine, not made *imago dei*, God himself is restricted: there is a portion of reality which is not God-breathed, and God’s omnipresence is not *omni* (unless animal, vegetable, and mineral life are taken as illusory, and for John this is out of the question<sup>49</sup>). Furthermore, in his view it is not actually animality that is deficient but human identification with animality.<sup>50</sup> In discussing the Fall and its consequences, John regularly identifies being fallen with a mis-identifying of oneself and a subsequent disordering of being. Hence for Man to look only below, as it were, and live according to biological necessities without recourse to divinity or the primordial causes is for Man to be deficient. For John, such a life is a severely truncated life; it refuses to transcend itself. Such transcendence, however, is yet one more way in which real humanity images its maker (IV.5.758A–759Aff.), thus its loss must constitute a deficiency and a transgression: it is to be an animal not by nature but by sin.<sup>51</sup> But even here we see that being an animal is not deficient; it is in fact in the image of God. Rather, deficiency is located in those who forgetfully see themselves as animals or as identical to their bodies, thus overlooking their full nature and, indeed, their source, rather than being located in animality or body themselves. This, in distinction to the dualistic description, is in fact how John sometimes characterizes the Fall, i.e., as a wrong activity, a mis-seeing, a dis-ordering.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, there are passages which show that for John the image in fact belongs to Man in his animality and spirituality both (IV.5.754D–755A), that body is immortal

<sup>48</sup> See Nyssa’s *In Inscip. Psalmorum* I.viii (Gregorii Nysseni Opera V.480M [62–63]).

<sup>49</sup> See again *Periph.* III.17.676C–677D.

<sup>50</sup> See *Periph.* IV.6.672A–B.

<sup>51</sup> These are described as two different states of being at *Periph.* IV.5.756A–B.

<sup>52</sup> See n. 41 above. I discuss this doctrine at some length in my dissertation, *Deficient Existence in a Divine World: Ontological Deficiency in the Metaphysics of John Scotus Eriugena* (Ann Arbor, 1999) 256–84.

(V.6.872D), that Man would have been animal even if he had not sinned (IV.6.763A), that even the "natural body" reflects God (V.6.872D), and, again, that our animality as such is not in fact a problem in itself (IV.6.761D–762B).

Further light is shed on this point by turning to the sole, though daunting, dualistic plank remaining from this paper's first section. The doctrine in question is that of *kakaphany*, a world made by sin, not theophanic, hence not dependent upon God, which contrasts sharply with the pantheism traditionally attributed to Eriugena. These are, without a doubt, two very different explanations of the genesis and nature of the sensible portion of reality. On the one hand, John describes the world as a product of God, through the Holy Spirit;<sup>53</sup> in conjunction with this idea, he makes universal statements to the effect that all that exists, including sensibles, are theophanic;<sup>54</sup> and elsewhere, he says that one blasphemes if one sees the world as made from anything other than God or things as existing other than through "participation in the one only Cause of all" (III.9.643B–644A). On the other hand, we have seen him describe sensible reality as the product of the Fall, sometimes as the creation of the fallen soul, somehow or other arising outside the theophanic creativity of God, thus problematically posing itself as somehow independent. For instance, he sometimes describes it as a penalty,<sup>55</sup> and some things have been added to our being, he says in some places, by the soul or by the falling itself, rather than by God; for example,

What wonder, then, if the first man, made in the image of God and (who) transgressed the divine commandment and for that reason (was) driven from the bliss of paradise, should create for himself from the clay of the earth a fragile and mortal habitation on the advice of the Divine Providence, so that, since he had in his pride refused to occupy and preserve the heavenly and spiritual body created by God Himself, he should in his degradation make for himself, as a punishment for disobedience, a mortal mansion taken from earthly matter, and by this punishment be brought to repentance and seek in chastened mood, by getting to know himself again and by mortifying himself, to return to the first state of his nature?<sup>56</sup>

A confirmation of this view can be found in statements John makes concerning the transience of sense and the visible body: they, unlike Intellect and the spiritual body, will pass away.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *Periph.* IV.5.749D–750A; cf. II.24.579C–D, 22.566A–C.

<sup>54</sup> Again, see *Periph.* III.19.681B–C, 23.689C, V.6.872D; also, several striking passages in his poems, e.g., *Carmina* 61 (lines 49–50), 77 (line 21), 85 (lines 12ff.), and 117 (line 20).

<sup>55</sup> See *Periph.* II.23.571A–B, IV.18.833C, 15.807C.

<sup>56</sup> *Periph.* II.25.583B–C; cf. IV.19.834C–D, II.23.571C–D, 26.584A–B.

<sup>57</sup> See *Periph.* II.23.569A–B, 21.561A, III.27.701B–C; but he says the opposite at II.23.572A, 8.534A–C, and V.25.926A (and see also II.21.561A–B).

How shall we understand this apparent contradiction? What can it mean to say that the world as we know it is both the result of sin and part of the creative activity of God? In a number of passages in the *Periphyseon*, John gives us a first hint of reconciliation with his claim that, indeed, the sensible creation is 'both-and'; for instance, in what follows:

But that which is derived ... from the qualities and quantities of the four elements of the sensible world ... pertain[s] to the composition of the superadded and, one might say, superfluous body. And the material and external body is like a garment and is not improperly regarded as the outward expression of the internal and natural body ....

*But seeing that the exterior body also is created by God, and is added by Him to the other, the greatness of the Divine Goodness and His infinite Providence towards all things which are was not willing that it should entirely perish and be reduced to nothing, because it comes from that Providence ....* (IV.12–13.801D–802A (emphases and brackets mine))

Both sides of the dichotomy are explicitly placed together here and in other passages like this one.<sup>58</sup>

Now, why this must be so is not explicitly elaborated by John; however, a handful of justifications present themselves. First, not to be from God would contradict his basic principle of theophany: it is God who is behind and in all of the difference, variety, and divisions of the world. Second, if not from God, then from where? From something outside God? But this, argues John, is impossible: it entails a dualism which may be blasphemous, and is certainly metaphysically unacceptable.<sup>59</sup> Third, God alone creates (II.24.581A). Fourth, placing the two explanations together neatly captures—*simul et semel*—a variety of John's attendant doctrines of Man and God, as can be seen in the following summary of the doctrine:

But I do not hesitate to say that this corruptible and material body which was taken from the mud of the earth ... after sin and as a punishment for sin, so that in it the negligent soul might be trained to keep the commandments <and to manifest her operations>, was created and is daily being created as though by some proper *action* of the soul. For it ought not to surprise you that Holy Scripture declares that God took clay of the earth and from it formed a body for man, because it is not unreasonable that the action of the creature should be referred to Him from Whom every natural action originates, since even among the celestial essences ... whatever (ministration) the higher order performs and completes upon the order below it by some action of its own is

<sup>58</sup> E.g., *Periph.* II.25.581B–583C, 9.536B–D, V.35.953A–954C, IV.14.807B–C.

<sup>59</sup> The former is suggested where John chides those who do not attribute all things to the creative goodness of God (see, e.g., *Periph.* V.36.972D–973C, V.36.982B–983B, *de div. praed.* xvii.5), the latter where he argues rather soberly that ontologically dependent things cannot subsist independently (see, e.g., *Periph.* V.34.952C, V.24.909C; cf. III.23.689C–D).

wholly referred to Him from Whom every natural motion springs and every natural action descends from the highest to the lowest. For ... the whole dispensation of the Divine Providence is referred to it because it is the Cause of all things.<sup>60</sup>

The responsibility of humankind for falling away, the diminishment that is sensible-experience, the fact that God is not responsible for evil, the punishment bestowed on humanity for its rebellion, and yet the compassion of God which shows itself in his providential care for Man after the Fall, i.e., after any fall—all of these are thoroughly part of John's metaphysics, hence lead him to affirm both sides of the dichotomy. As a matter of fact, it would appear that at this structural-point of John's metaphysics, both sides must be affirmed, because each is symbolic of that larger confrontation between his soaring visions of theophanic being and his tugged acceptance of the Christian doctrine of the Fall. The world is a good creation: it manifests the 'nature' of the super-essential God and is dependent on him. Yet, the world is also marked with deficiencies that come in a variety of shapes and sizes, but all of which are privative influences, stripping being of its character, order, and harmony. John's metaphysics posits both of these views: God has created and is in control of all even though the world is not entirely as God had aboriginally willed it to be; the world is in fact God's world even though marked by deficiency. John often gives eloquent and passionate defenses of the divine love and order which govern the world, even in its deficiency; i.e., evil, he argues, is made to enhance the good of the world.<sup>61</sup> In this light, the sensible creation, including animal and vegetable life in all their chaotic variety and mess, is the product of sin and also of God. It is both because it would not have existed if Man had not turned away from God; yet, despite its origins in human distrust and rebellion, it serves a beneficent and designed purpose for humankind and all of creation: it is "the spiritual medicine by which God willed to recall His Image to itself and into Himself" (V.35.959B). Hence its purpose is to help to restore our fallen reality to its pristine condition.

How, in such a case, is it theophany? John is less explicit than one would like him to be. In light of the principles that we have drawn out of his thought in this reinterpretation, however, at least one answer can be provided on his behalf. Simply put, it is that the sensible creation is as naturally capable of communicating the creator's will and nature as are intelligibles. The barriers will be more numerous, the lessons less clear, but the meaning of the whole can be found in and through sensibles, as theophanies, even as it is glimpsed

<sup>60</sup> *Periph.* II.25.582C–583A; cf. II.9.536B–D, 25.581B–C.

<sup>61</sup> *Inter alia*, see *Periph.* V.35.953C–954C, 38.1012C–1013A, II.20.684B, *de div. praed.* xvii.5–6, xviii.6, 8.

in fuller apprehensions of being. As an illustration, let us take the example of the sexes, i.e., their differentiation. For John, such differentiation is the result of the Fall. As the fragmentation of the prior unity of the human essence, with its manifestation in all of the social and personal conflicts in the 'battle of the sexes' (and in other concerns related to gender and sexuality), it may then be seen as a punishment (or portion thereof) which follows from Man's disobedience. And yet, even as a punishment, it is also a portion of the divinely prescribed medicine for fallen souls. In other words, on the one hand, taken by themselves (i.e., without any reference to source or principle), they might mean nothing at all; moreover, and what is worse, they could and, indeed, do lead to a variety of ills, e.g., the mis-use of another for the sake of one's own pleasure, alienation and fear, condemnations of the 'other' (hence a dualism of a non-metaphysical but divisive sort), disorders in society and self where passions begin to rule one's life instead of serving as part of it, etc. On the other hand, however, as images tied to the God-world theophanic relation, they may symbolize two becoming one, human desire (and need) for unity, the productivity of union, the joys of togetherness which are free from use and abuse, the mystery that is sameness in difference. They allow such manifestations to be made more immediately, discursively, simply. For the soul to be led in this way upwards, as it were, by the sensible portion of reality, easily lends itself to the Scot's doctrine of the sensible as medicine. What is visible, seen aright, helps those who have fallen through infatuation for the sensible to restore their original order.<sup>62</sup> The Don Giovanni figure, loving (rather, lusting) his way through the ranks of women he finds appealing, learns to see himself and those whom he previously ordered for his own pleasures in the light of the divine marriage of God and world: he marries himself to one; he orders his life to that one, no longer guided solely by his selfish desires but now shaping his life according to the larger whole. In this way, Eriugena's sensible becomes not only the scene for the decision to be at all, but the influence by which those who have fallen from being are enabled once again, albeit through small steps, to exist fully.<sup>63</sup>

As the weaving together of these two doctrines is no simple matter, more questions could be asked, most relevant of which is why, in light of all that we have said in defense of theophany, John should insist (if only at times) that the soul or sin creates the sensible or the sense-world. Such a claim

<sup>62</sup> They need not, of course, and some will not: the sensible can be taken simply on its own.

<sup>63</sup> The fact that we stand inbetween morally opposed forces of good and evil, and thus have at every turn the opportunity to move closer to or farther from nature, God, and self, lends added drama to the doctrine: see *Periph.* II.26.584A-B, V.35.959B.



throws doubt on the entire metaphysical vision which he labors so mightily to awaken, unless it can be taken as the perspectival creation of a *seeming-world*, or objects, or order. This 'perspectivism' is precisely what he suggests in places.<sup>64</sup> All the same, all of these points together illustrate John's doctrine that sensible reality is designed by God for the support of fallen creatures. Sensibility is a dispensation, foreseen (in some sense)<sup>65</sup> by God and unfortunate in respect to the unity of which the sensible by its very presence signals the loss, but providentially "super-added" to the original creation for the sake of maintaining in theophanic being creatures influenced by corruptive non-being.

#### CONCLUSION

I have just been at pains to reinterpret the dualistic passages and arguments reviewed at this study's beginning. I have given John's direct corrections of some passages. Further, I have tried to show, with special emphasis on his doctrine of a fallen creation, that more passages can be consistently fit under a theophanic metaphysics than a dualistic metaphysics. I conclude that we have no dualism in John's thought. There is for him just one world; the Fall takes place in it; thus, the deficiencies variously observed by western religions and philosophies alike, also by Eriugena, appear not as a dualistic opposition to divine theophany, but as parasitic influences within a divine cosmos. The cosmos, even though it can be more or less adequately known and participated, even though it only more or less allows its divine source to shine through its many parts, and even though there is deficiency to be found in it, remains a unified whole. John's very moving 'parable of the world,'<sup>66</sup> which compares the goods and evils of reality to the many-faceted spectacle of daily life in a "great and richly appointed palace," exemplifies this idea very movingly, illustrating that despite a variety of appearances there is no final metaphysical basis for any Eriugenian dualism at all, whether of body and mind, good and evil, idea and particular, or God and world. There is difference and variety in this one world; there is number and distinction and place; there is even a very real influence of evil and sinfulness. But for John, deficient existence is not and cannot simply be 'being in another world' or 'participating in another substance.' To exist deficiently is,

<sup>64</sup> See again *Periph.* IV.22.843A, 844B–C, IV.16.828B–829A, V.36.967D–968A and 970A–B, V.38.1012B–C, V.6.871 D–872A, IV.23.849A–B; also, his reference to the "artificial things" created by a fallen soul (IV.19.834C–D) and his description of 'surface-seeing' (III.34.723C); cf. nn. 41, 52 above.

<sup>65</sup> John is well aware that to say God foresees the Fall (and Man's need for sensible reality) is to mis-represent God's eternity and omnipresence: see *Periph.* IV.14.807A–808B.

<sup>66</sup> See *Periph.* V.36.972D–973C; cf. V.36.982B–983B, *de div. praed.* xvii.5.

rather, to fail to be in this world where there is only one substance, namely, the divine essence, which, in creating itself, creates the world, which is one and, in its every part, theophanic. Thus, our Irishman's metaphysics may take evil and sin seriously without thereby being committed to any metaphysical dualism.<sup>67</sup>

It is precisely this consideration that looms largest, here at the conclusion of this study. One rightly questions just how Eriugena (and Christian Platonic thinkers like him) could so easily slip into dualistic-seeming statements, statements with the force and energy of those reviewed above. These philosophers, after all, are allegedly the great unifiers (and supposed monists) of western philosophy. Yet now one sees that this near-dualism follows logically, perhaps necessarily, from John's commitment to the 'reality' of evil. Although for Eriugena the whole of being is theophanic, it is pockmarked here and there with the very real influence of a metaphysically unreal power: evil. His eagerness to affirm both sides, as it were, of our experience—that all is unified and whole even while all is influenced by corruptions—is very clearly demonstrated in the following passage:

So it is created and creates in the primordial causes, but in their effects it is created and does not create ... and therefore every creature corporeal and visible and subject to the senses, is wont to be called in Scripture not inappropriately the last trace of the Divine Nature, and this every contemplative mind, like a Moses ascending to the peak of contemplation, is permitted to penetrate, and as yet it can scarcely be fully discerned by wise minds owing to the distraction of the vapours of earthly fantasies and the thunderings and lightnings of mutable things which are suddenly born and suddenly pass away. For it is for very few, wholly detached from earthly thoughts and purged by virtue and knowledge, to know God in these visible creatures as the patriarch Abraham knew Him ... (III.23.689C-D)

John presents then corrects a dualistic-seeming view several times in this one passage. All is theophany, he affirms, but consider too the distractions of this life: all is marked with deficiency, as well.

This balanced interpretation of Eriugena is superior to any simply pantheistic or simply dualistic view. Like many others in the Platonic tradition, Eriugena's thought is constructed mosaically: one stone must be placed next to another one, piece by piece finding the whole, which emerges gradually even while being intimated wholly in each part, and its structuring principles. No easy task, to be sure. Yet, only this sort of painstaking hermeneutic,

<sup>67</sup> A.H. Armstrong speaks to this point on behalf of late Neoplatonists, reminding us that evil in the Neoplatonic cosmos can be seen as serving the good without producing a "cosmic optimism" that would be "too fancifully and inhumanely roseate" ("Dualism Platonic, Gnostic, and Christian" 41).

one striving to see through each piece of the puzzle in the attempt to glimpse the whole captured in this or that enigmatic part of his writing, can do justice to a thinker like Eriugena. Perhaps this review of his thought will not only make a contribution to philosophical thinking about dualism,<sup>68</sup> then, but also suggest corrections to any interpretations of his metaphysics that have not struck such a balance.

This being said, John's reliance upon dualistic statements seems in some places quite insistent. I have argued that even in these cases he knows better, metaphysically speaking; and yet, his language is sometimes more than suggestive. Despite the foregoing reinterpretation, we must consider that John's theophanic view may have been influenced by some other. Or could these be slips of the tongue? Or was he speaking for effect?<sup>69</sup> Or perhaps one could explain the dualistic passages in connection with larger cultural currents? In the early Middle Ages there can be traced a continuing trend away from late ancient Platonic and Stoic this-worldliness to a divine retreat, a metaphysical bifurcation, which in the later Middle Ages would more strongly emphasize the independence of the particular. Perhaps John's metaphysics is emblematic of such a transition, for in just a few hundred years, Anselm, Abelard, and then the High Medieval philosophies, which make sharper distinctions between nature and grace, reason and revelation, this life and the next, etc., will emerge.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, it may be possible to explain John's dualistic 'slips' as the result of a more basic dichotomy, namely, that between two separate visions of reality (including different lines of thought), one religious or Christian, emphasizing sin, Fall, and grace, and one philosophical or pagan, emphasizing limit, mutability, nature.<sup>71</sup> On this view, John would be struggling with two quite different ways of explaining the present life and its deficiencies. I think that there are, however, too few of these passages to

<sup>68</sup> Eriugena's metaphysics presents an imposing case to be made against dualism; moreover, it does so as something of a watershed in the history of Platonic metaphysics. We find in his thought an array of insights scattered throughout the history of Platonism which precedes him.

<sup>69</sup> The 'three worlds' passages in John's "Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of John" falls into this category, as its pastoral purpose would naturally be to exhort sinners to return to God, to fight influences from darkness—i.e., an ethical dualism of a sort.

<sup>70</sup> G.H. Allard argues somewhat along these lines in "The Primacy of Existence in the Thought of Eriugena," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (New York, 1982) 89–96, where he sees Eriugena shifting emphasis from essences to existences; cf. W. Otten, "The Dialectic of the Return in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*," *Harvard Theological Review* 84.4 (1991): 399–421, on the Scot's "hyperallegorical" or "performative" exegesis (419–20), which would contrast sharply with an exegesis that 'waits patiently for the Lord.'

<sup>71</sup> A. Wohlman works on the supposition that such a tension is woven into John's thought precisely at the point where Procession ends and the Return begins: see *L'homme, le monde sensible, et le péché dans la philosophie de Jean Scot Érigène* (Paris, 1987) 24–25.

pose any real threat to seeing John as a thoroughgoing theophanist. At any rate, philosophical consistency and coherence have been the aim of this study, hence I have labored mainly to correct John's divergent statements with what I have argued to be more fundamental metaphysical commitments.

One remaining ambiguity cannot so easily be set aside. In dealing with the question of the constitution of the creature vis-à-vis its divine source, the same kind of ambiguity is present that we have been dealing with in respect to evil (and sin) and being. Indeed, in this study I have favored John's thinking on deficient existence, rather than having focused exclusively on the possible dualizing of creature *qua* creature (rather than *qua* fallen) and God. But a similar (albeit weaker) challenge to his theophanism can be made on these grounds, i.e., very simply by existence itself. What is each existent, if not some combination of divinity and some extra-divine material or immateriality? John's arguments against dualism extend even to this consideration, as those infamous pantheistic passages well testify with their demand that the creature be seen as existent only 'in' or 'through' its ontological source. This emphasis is nearly everywhere present in John's discussion of the ontological constitution of the created world. And yet, he does not simply reduce everything to God. There is genuine 'standing out'—*ex*-istence—that takes place in his theophanic world. But, how? Not dualistically, as this study argues. As participations, John's thought will say: beings have being only "after" and always "in" God.<sup>72</sup> But what does this mean, if not a completely separate (if not opposed) thing? Here again, John's metaphysics demands balance of the finest sort. We must not have simple dualism. Nor must we have simplistic monism. We must have both. All is one through the differences which constitute it as All,<sup>73</sup> and the many are many because they are unified in and through their source. This kind of manyness-in-unity (or, theophanism) appears, at any rate, to be the source and goal of John's thought. In light of its importance (and difficulty), a more precise account of the Eriugenian view of the God-world relationship, its theophanic, not pantheistic nor dualistic, nature, will serve as the next appropriate and important step in understanding John's metaphysical vision of the world.

<sup>72</sup> See *Periph.* I.12.453D–454A, III.3.630A–632B, III.9.644A, I.62.506C.

<sup>73</sup> Of obviously close relation to such a 'both-and' metaphysics is the Arcopagite's hyper-affirmation of affirmation and negation: God is and is not all things; God is and is not named; etc.