The Neoplatonic Themes of *Processio* and *Reditus* in Eriugena[1]

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To the memory
of Jean Trouillard

> Πάντα στὸ νοῦ σου νά' χης τὴν 'Ιθάκη.
> Τὸ φθάσιμον ἐκεῖ εἶν' ὁ προορισμός σου.
> 'Αλλὰ μὴ βιάζης τὸ ταξίδι διόλου.[2]

"In the strict sense, 'Neoplatonism' designates the particular form that Platonism took on at the end of the ancient era, from the third to the sixth centuries after Christ". Taken in this strict sense, Neoplatonism "exhibits three principal characteristics":

> *First* it is an exegesis of Plato's dialogues, coupled with an attempt to systematize even disparate texts by appealing to a hierarchy among levels of reality.
>
> *Then* it is a method of spiritual life.
>
> *Finally*, and notably in the case of Proclus, it is a pagan theology seeking to systematize [and attain a rational grasp of] the revelations of the gods.[3]

I borrow this definition from a connoisseur of Neoplatonic doctrines, namely, Pierre Hadot. It serves my purpose, which is not to deal with Neoplatonism as such — a subject which lies much beyond my competence — but only to determine how two of the

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2. "Have Ithaca always in your mind. Your destination is to arrive there; but do not hurry your journey in the least" (C. Kavafis, *Ithaca*, in *The Penguin Book of Greek Verse*, ed. C.A. Trypanis, Harmondsworth 1971, p. 586). On November 15, 1965, Jean Trouillard offered me his translation of Proclus, *Éléments de Théologie* (Paris 1965) with a dedication containing an allusion to Kavafis' *Ithaca*. I think it fitting to quote a few verses from the same poem at the outset of an article dedicated to the memory of this great scholar and very dear friend.
3. P. Hadot, "Neoplatonism", *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* X, 334.

most famous Neoplatonic themes, those of *Processio* and *Reditus*, have been treated by John Scottus, also called Eriugena.[4]

John was an Irishman, as indicated by his two surnames, for *Scottus*, in the early Middle Ages, meant 'Irish', and the word *Eriugena* — coined on the model of *Graiugena* — means 'born in Ireland'. This Irishman lived on the Continent, at the court of Charles the Bald, in the third quarter of the ninth century. It may seem paradoxical to count this "barbarian" — I quote Anastasius the Librarian[5] — "living at the frontier of the civilized world" as a member of one of the most refined schools of philosophy of the ancient world, or to associate this Christian with thinkers who, on the whole, energetically opposed Christianity.

Let us not forget that Neoplatonism was often anti-Christian, though, of course, a number of Christians, particularly in Alexandria, neo-platonized (or sometimes platonized). In fact, Neoplatonism was not only a school of philosophy, but a school of spirituality, teaching conversion, and attempting to lead its adepts to mystical ecstasy. Perhaps it would not be inappropriate to say that the conflict between Christian Neoplatonists and Pagan Neoplatonists was less a conflict between a Church and a School, than a conflict between two Churches. Pagan Neoplatonists — at least those of the last period — were proud to possess, not unlike Christians, their own holy scriptures. Macrobius speaks of the sacred scroll (*sacrum uolumen*) of Plato's Dialogues. And Proclus quotes, as if it were the Bible, Orphic texts[6] and above all the *Chaldaean Oracles*," by which the gods themselves", he says, "spoke to us". Julian, the Theurgist, through whom the *Chaldaean Oracles* were revealed, is for him so great an authority that it is unlawful to disbelieve him: ᾧ μὴ θέμις ἀπιστεῖν.[7]

One can easily imagine that a conflict between the two Churches was inevitable. After Constantine's victory at Milvian Bridge (312) and after the so-called Edict of Milan (313), Christianity, long persecuted, began to enjoy tolerance and then imperial protection. It does not follow that the ancient beliefs disappeared all of a sudden. In the rural districts many peasants remained faithful to the ancient gods, to whom they had been taught to pray in order to obtain sunshine or rain. In Rome itself, particularly among members of the aristocracy, a pagan coterie existed that was able, towards the end of the fourth century, to produce what has been called

4. M. Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*, Louvain-Paris 1933. J.J. O'Meara, *Eriugena*, Oxford 1988.
5. MGH, Epistulae VII, p. 430, 18-21.
6. L. Brisson, "Proclus et l'orphisme", in J. Pépin - H.D. Saffrey, *Proclus, lecteur et interprète des Anciens*, Paris 1987, pp. 43-104.
7. Proclus, *In Timaeum* III, ed. Diehl, p. 63,24.

"a pagan revival".[8] However, the most durable opposition to the new faith came probably from philosophical circles. In Athens, particularly, the Platonic school continued to be a living centre of learning until the sixth century. Its last masters were conscious of being the lawful heirs and defenders of the old Greek culture. This is clearly indicated in the life of Proclus. Marinos, the author of this life, relates that Proclus (d.485) once had a dream, in which a beautiful woman appeared to him and said: "Our Lady of Athens wishes to dwell in your house".[9] Proclus understood that Pallas-Athena, the holy Virgin, Patroness of Athens and Goddess of wisdom, having been expelled from her Temple, had decided to take refuge in his abode. Historians agree generally that such a vision happened at the time when the most venerable statue of Athena, masterpiece of Phidias, was removed from Athens and brought to Constantinople.[10] From his house, south of the Acropolis, where he used to pray and to teach, Proclus could still contemplate the sacred hill topped by the white marble columns of the Parthenon, but he knew that the Temple was empty. His consolation was to think that the Goddess of wisdom — consequently Greek wisdom itself — was abiding under his roof. Alas! this place of refuge itself was not secure, for in 529 an edict of emperor Justinian ordered the closing of the Platonic school in Athens. In 531/532 seven of its masters chose to exile themselves and took refuge at the court of Chosroes I, King of Persia.[11]

It might be thought that Neoplatonism was definitely dead. Surprisingly enough, at the same time, it burst into Christian thought, thanks to a forgery. Forgery is probably inappropriate to describe a literary fiction, by which a disciple of Proclus (or of Damascius) attributed his works, in which Christian dogmas and Neoplatonic philosophy were fused together, to Dionysius, the Areopagite converted by St. Paul in Athens in 51 A.D. Under cover of this prestigious name an unprecedented bulk of pagan philosophy entered freely the temple of Christian wisdom. Modern scholarship, as we know, has established that the attribution of these works to the Areopagite is untenable. The Pseudo-Areopagite (or Pseudo-Dionysius), as we call their author, cannot

8. J. Flamant, *Macrobe et le néo-platonisme latin à la fin du IVe siècle*, Leiden 1977, pp. 49-54.
9. Ἡ γὰρ κυρία ᾿Αθηναῖς, ἔφη, παρὰ σοὶ μένειν ἐθέλει (Marinos, *Vita Procli*, 3). Cf. J. Pépin - H.D. Saffrey, *Proclus lecteur et interprète des Anciens*, Paris 1987.
10. *Marino di Neapoli, Vita di Proclo. Testo critico, introduzione, traduzione e commentario* a cura di Rita Masullo, Naples 1985, pp. 145-146.
11. G. Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy. IV. The Schools of the Imperial Age*, State University of New York 1990, pp. 447-449.

have written before the end of the Vth century A.D.[12] Certainly, Pseudo-Dionysius was not the first to conflate Christian revelation and Greek wisdom. As soon as they began to defend their faith against opponents, the Christians realized that they needed philosophical concepts. Now, these philosophical concepts were available mainly through pagan authors. In their opinion — at least in the opinion of the more openminded of them — to borrow philosophical concepts from pagan authors was justified by the precept of the Apostle: "Test everything; hold fast what is good".[13] Again, to borrow from pagan authors was to enrich Christian thought, and follow the command given by God himself to despoil the Egyptians in order to enrich the Hebrews.[14] Fathers of the Church, both Greek and Latin did not hesitate to despoil the Egyptians or — to use another Biblical image — to bring to their house the beautiful captive woman, part of a battle's booty.[15] Although Stoicism could — and eventually did — provide them with important philosophical concepts and an elevated ideal of life, the main source from which they drew was the Platonic one (Middle Platonism, Neoplatonism). Think of Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Nemesius of Emesa, Marius Victorinus, Ambrose, Augustine, to quote only the best known of them.[16] It is because of these important borrowings from the Middle and Neo Platonists, made by the Church Fathers during the four first centuries of our era, that Pascal could write: "Platon, pour disposer au christianisme".[17] Still, the most astonishing borrowing from Greek philosophy was probably that made by Pseudo-Dionysius towards the end of the Vth or the beginning of the VIth century A.D.

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12. J. Stiglmayr, "Der Neuplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sogenannten Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Uebel", *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16(1895), pp. 253-273 and 721-748. H. Koch, "Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen", *Forschungen zur Christlichen Litteratur-und Dogmengeschichte* 1, fasc. 2-3, Mainz 1900. H.D. Saffrey, "Un lien objectif entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus", *Studia Patristica* IX (=TU 94), Berlin 1966, pp. 98-105; "Nouveaux liens objectifs entre le Pseudo-Denys et Proclus", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 63 (1979), pp. 3-16.
13. I Thess. 5,21.
14. Exod. 3, 22; 12,35-36.
15. Deuter. 21,10-13.
16. R. Arnou, "Platonisme des Pères", *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique* xii, 2258-2392. W. Beierwaltes, *Platonismus in der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Darmstadt 1969, D.J. O'Meara, *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, State University of New York Press 1982. J.M. Rist, *Platonism and Its Christian Heritage*, Variorum Reprints, London 1985.
17. Pascal *Pensées* 219 (Brunschvicg).

Now, if Pseudo-Dionysius exerted a considerable influence over Western thought, it is owing precisely to the Irishman Eriugena.[18] How this man became acquainted with the works of the Areopagite is worth noting. Since Merovingian times there was, near Paris, a famous abbey, which the kings had chosen for their burial-place. The abbey had been well endowed and its abbots were influential. Nevertheless, of the life of its patron saint — a martyr named Denis (Dionysius) — very little was known. It is not before the ninth century (between 817 and 825) that an anonymous hagiographer had the idea to identify him with Dionysius the Areopagite (Dionysius Areopagita). Hilduin, abbot of Saint-Denis (814-840) popularized this legend, from which both the reputation and the income of the abbey could only benefit. The pilgrims were told that the founder of the Royal Abbey, at the tomb of whom they were kneeling, was none other than the Areopagite, disciple of the Apostle Paul. As a matter of fact, the abbey of Saint-Denis possessed not one of the works written by its patron saint. Hilduin must have deplored this absence, for Dionysius the Areopagite, supposedly repository of the secret teachings of his master Paul, had to enjoy an authority second only to that of the holy Apostles. Hilduin, however, was also chaplain of Louis the Pious. He was in a good position to obtain a Greek copy of the works of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite. Actually, such a copy was brought from Constantinople by ambassadors of Michael the Stammerer, and presented to Louis the Pious, in Compiègne in 827; but the home to which the Greek exemplar of Dionysius the Areopagite was destined was the Abbey of Saint-Denis. The imperial gift was solemnly transferred to the Royal Abbey on the 8th of October, that is to say, on the eve of the feast of Saint Denis. Soon after its arrival the book was translated into Latin; but for one reason or another, the translation provided by Hilduin had no influence. It was the merit of Eriugena to produce the translation through which, for centuries, the Latin world had access to the works of Dionysius the Areopagite. The task of translating — a very difficult one — played a decisive role in the intellectual development of Eriugena's thought. In the preface of his translation of Dionysius, John admitted that Latin texts would have sent him to sleep, had not king Charles the Bald awakened him and urged him to consider "the pure and abundant Greek sources".[19] It is true that Eriugena found in the very act of translating a new impulse for his thought. Before he translated Dionysius, his main source of Neoplatonic doctrines was the works of Saint Augustine. With

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18. S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena, An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*, Leiden 1978.
19. MGH, *Epistulae* VI, 158-159; PL 122, 1031 C.

Dionysius he discovered yet another form of Neoplatonism. While Augustine was indebted to the older form of Neoplatonism, that represented by Plotinus and Prophyry, Dionysius is indebted to a later form, represented by Proclus. For the first time in the history of human thought the two Neoplatonic streams converged. And they converged in a mind widely open, qualified to combine them harmoniously. An able student of both Plotinus and Proclus, Jean Trouillard, did not hesitate to declare that, in his view, Eriugena was the only true Neoplatonist whom the Latin world could boast of, not excluding Augustine.[20]

Needless to say my purpose is not to draw up an inventory of all the Neoplatonic elements which Eriugena could cull from the works of Pseudo-Dionysius. As I have said before, I shall concentrate on two themes, those of *Processio* (Procession) and *Reditus* (Return), and examine how — successfully or not — these Neoplatonic themes have been integrated into the Eriugenian synthesis. In fact, when I speak of two themes, I mutilate what, in the Neoplatonic view, is a *Triad* (τριάς, trinity), that is to say, a group of three terms. Neoplatonists were very fond of triads, the most famous of which is: One (ἕν), Mind (νοῦς,), and Soul (ψυχή).[21] Among the many triads, coined by Neoplatonists to explain the universe, i.e., to show how this universe is a κόσμος, a reality arranged in order (τάξις), the key-stone triad is probably the one which consists in the three following members:

μονή (immanence in the cause, rest)
πρόοδος (procession from the cause)
ἐπιστροφή (return to the cause, conversion)

Although it is possible to find this triad in Plotinus,[22] it is Proclus who clearly set it forth in proposition 35 of his *Elements of Theology*:

"Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it".[23]

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20. J. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, Paris 1982, p. 16.
21. Plotinus, *Enneads* V.2.1. The English version of Plotinus' Enneads quoted in this paper is that of *Plotinus with an English translation by* A.H. Armstrong . . . *in seven volumes*, "Loeb Classical Library".
22. "Molto interessante sarebbe studiare la terminologia con cui vengono indicati i tre momenti. Si avrebbe la sorpresa di trovare in Plotino . . . largamente anticipato Proclo" (G. Reale, "I fondamenti della metafisica di Plotino", in *Graceful Reason. Essays in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy Presented to Joseph Owens*, CSSR, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson, Toronto 1983, p. 167).
23. Πᾶν τὸ αἰτιατὸν καὶ μένει ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ αἰτίᾳ καὶ πρόεισιν ἀπ᾽ αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπιστρέφει πρὸς αὐτήν (Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 35 (Dodds, p. 38). Cf. Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne* III, 14, ed. H.D. Saffrey, Paris 1978, pp. 50-51.

We have here the three members of our triad: immanence (the effect *remains*), procession (it *proceeds*), and return (it *reverts*). Pseudo-Dionysius was too happy to take up this triad, and to apply it to divine love:

> "The divine Eros", he said, "is like an everlasting circle, moving by an unwandering whirl through the Good (διὰ Τἀγαθόν), out of the Good (ἐκ Τἀγαθοῦ), in the Good (ἐν Τἀγαθῷ), into the Good (εἰς Τἀγαθόν), always proceeding (προϊών), and abiding (μένων), and returning (ἀποκαθιστάμενος)".[24]

Again, we recognize here the three members of our triad. The universe of Pseudo-Dionysius, like the universe of Proclus, is built according to a triadic structure. While for Proclus, such a structure applies to the gods,[25] for Pseudo-Dionysius, it applies to the angels and to the Church.[26] The world of pure spirits is distributed according to hierarchies, the nine choirs of angels, i.e., the perfect triad (9: square number of 3). The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy echoes the threefold triadic model of the Celestial Hierarchy.

Of course, Eriugena knew this triadic model, since he commented on the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius.[27] Nevertheless, my intention here, as I said before, is to examine only two of the members of the aforesaid triad, namely procession and return (*Processio* and *Reditus*).[28] In fact, these two notions constitute the *leitmotiv* of Eriugena's major work, the *Periphyseon*.[29] According to him, they are also among the most important themes

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24. Ὁ θεῖος ἔρως ἐνδείκνυται διαφερόντως ὥσπερ τις ἀΐδιος κύκλος διὰ τἀγαθόν, ἐκ τἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἐν τἀγαθῷ καὶ εἰς τἀγαθὸν ἐν ἀπλανεῖ συνελίξει περιπορευόμενος καὶ ἐν ταὐτῷ καὶ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ προϊὼν καὶ μένων καὶ ἀποκαθιστάμενος (Ps. Dionysius, *On Divine Names* IV, 14; ed. Beate Regina Suchla, Berlin-New York 1990, p. 160, 12-15; PG 3, 712D-713A). Cf. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 33 (Dodds, p. 36).
25. H.D. Saffrey [Introduction to:] *Proclus. Théologie platonicienne, Livre I*, Paris 1968, pp. lx-lxxv.
26. R. Roques, *L'univers dionysien*, Paris 1954, pp. 171-199; "Denys l'Aréopagite", in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 3, 268-272; [Introduction to] *Denys l'Aréopagite, La Hiérarchie céleste*, SC 58 bis, Paris, 1970, pp. xlii-lxxi.
27. *Iohannis Scoti Eriugenae Expositiones in Ierarchiam caelestem*, ed. J. Barbet, CCCM 31, Turnhout 1975.
28. For a more accurate discussion of the theme see S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena . . .*, pp. 217-229.
29. The references to the *Periphyseon* are given according to the columns of Floss edition (PL 122). The English text — with a few exceptions — is that of *Eriugena, Periphyseon. Translation by* I.P. Sheldon-Williams *revised by* John J. O'Meara, Montreal-Washington 1987. A critical Latin text of Books I-III, established by Inglis Patrick Sheldon-Williams, is available in *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, vol. vii, ix, xi.

developed by Maximus the Confessor in his *Ambigua ad Iohannem*, for in this book, the reader may discover

> what the *Procession* is, namely the multiplication of divine Goodness through all beings, from the supreme to the lowest, beginning with the general Essence of all things first, descending then to the most general genera, then to the less general of them, then from the less special species to the most special of them through differences and properties; again what is the *Return* — i.e., unification — of divine Goodness, through the same steps, from the infinitely various multiplicity of all beings up to the supreme unity of all things, that is in God and is God. And so God is all things, and all things are God.[30]

Apparently, we are dealing here with logical concepts. At this level the two themes of *Processio* and *Reditus* seem to be reduced to a movement to and fro, a going up and a coming down in Porphyry's Tree; but, as Eriugena says, one must never forget that dialectic is not a mere product of the human mind:

> The art which concerns itself with the division of genera into species, and the resolution of species into genera — which we call Διαλεκτική — did not arise from human contrivances, but was first implanted in nature by the Originator of all the arts that are properly so called, and was later discovered therein by the sages.[31]

This approach may remind us of Plotinus:

> Are dialectic and philosophy the same? It is the valuable part of philosophy. For it must not be thought to be a tool the philosopher uses. It is not just bare theories and rules; it deals with things and has real beings as a kind of material for its activity; it approaches them methodically and possesses real things along with its theories.[32]

The movement of *Processio* is also called *Multiplicatio* and *Diuisio*, for, starting from the absolute simplicity of the One, it ends with the manifold variety of beings. The movement of *Reuersio* (or *Reditus*) is also called *Congregatio* and *Adunatio*, since, starting from the manifold variety of beings, it returns to the supreme Unity.

The *Periphyseon*, as I said, is entirely pervaded by these two themes of *Processio/diuisio* on one hand, and of *Reuersio/adunatio* on the other. Its plan itself follows faithfully this twofold movement. Books I,II,III and IV correspond to the movement of *Procession*:

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30. *Maximi Confessoris Ambigua ad Iohannem iuxta Iohannis Scotti Eriugenae latinam interpretationem*, Epistula ad Karolum Regem, 27-35 (CCSG 18, p. 4). Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.3.4.
31. *Periphyseon* IV, 749 A.
32. Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.3.5.8-12.

from the *Nature which creates and is not created* (Book I) to the *Nature which is created and also creates* (Book II), and then to the *Nature which is created and does not create* (Books III and IV). Book V is entirely dedicated to the theme of *Return*: it explains how all things revert to the *Nature which neither creates nor is created*. Actually, the two themes are intricately intermingled throughout the *Periphyseon*. It is impossible to discuss one of the two without discussing the other, as Eriugena himself states it:

> The procession of the creatures and the return of the same are so intimately associated in the reason which considers them that they appear to be inseparable the one from the other, and it is impossible for anyone to give any worthy and valid account of either by itself without introducing the other, that is to say, of the procession without the return and collection, and *vice versa*.[33]

It follows that the title given to the *Periphyseon* from 1681 onwards — *De diuisione naturae* — was wrong. Not only because this work was never called so in the Middle Ages,[34] or because Eriugena himself refers to it as *Periphyseon*,[35] but because such a title gives a false idea of the purpose of the author. *Periphyseon* is not only a discourse about the division (or *Procession*), but also, and at the same time, a discourse about unification (or *Return*). And if the two themes, Procession and Return, cannot be considered independently from each other, it is because neither can be understood separately from the third member of the triad, i.e., *Immanence*. Books III and IV of *Periphyseon* belong to the literary genre called *Hexaemeron*, meaning a treatise on creation, in which the author follows the narrative of the six days of Genesis. The purpose of Eriugena, however, is not to show the temporal unfolding of the created multiplicity from the creating Unity. If it were that, his *Periphyseon* would be a Biblical commentary, not a philosophical dialogue. The purpose of Eriugena is not to give an historical account of creation, but rather to establish firmly its rational foundations. Now, the created universe (*Nature which is created and does not create*) is intelligible only if referred to its 'primordial causes' (*Nature which is created and also creates*). Again the 'primordial causes' are intelligible only when referred to *Nature which creates and is not created*. In other words, beings in time are

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33. *Periphyseon* II, 529A.
34. See M. Capuyns, *Jean Scot Érigène, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*, Louvain-Paris 1933, pp. 183-187, and I.-P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Title of Eriugena's Periphyseon", Studia patristica III, 1 [*TU 78*], 1961, pp. 297-302.
35. *Expositiones in Hierarchiam caelestem* II, 1038; IV, 101; XI, 102-103 (CCCM 31, pp. 48, 68, 160). Eriugena refers also to his major work as *Physiologia* (Periphyseon IV, 741C).

intelligible only by reference to what is above time. The rational foundations of our changing world can be nowhere but in eternity:

> For that is not true which does not eternally abide (*manet*), and in the words of St. Augustine, "that which begins to be what it formerly was not, and ceases to be what it is, is already not".[36]

Certainly, all things come *from God* and return *to God*, but, at the same time, never cease to be *in God*. Procession and Return would not be of any help in understanding the universe, if they were not related to Immanence.

One naturally supposes that the Neoplatonic theme of *Procession* will bring to a Christian's mind the Biblical notion of creation, and that the theme of *Return* will bring to it the spiritual odyssey of Christian life with its final achievements, Heaven or Hell. Are the two points of view — Biblical and philosophical — compatible? If the answer is yes, was Eriugena successful in fusing together Biblical and philosophical concepts?[37] These are the questions I wish to examine briefly. If I am not able to give a definitive answer, at least it might be useful to search for a solution. At any rate, I would like to avoid making either Plotinus and Proclus Christians against their will, or Eriugena a Neoplatonist against his will.[38]

Processio

It is well to begin with some remarks. The difference between the Neoplatonic notion of procession and the Christian notion of creation does not lie in the fact that the Plotinian or Proclean procession would abolish divine transcendence or contradict the freedom of the divine will. Scholars of Neoplatonic thought such as Jean Trouillard, John Rist and Giovanni Reale have clearly shown the contrary.[39] And so, we are deprived of the traditional *clichés*:

36. *Periphyseon* IV, 803A. Augustine, *De uera religione* 49, 97 (PL 34, 165).
37. "Così i momenti fondamentali della *storia sacra* — peccato di Adamo, incarnazione di Cristo, regno di Dio — si inseriscono nel ritmo intemporale della dialettica neoplatonica, rischiando di perdere la loro stessa storicità" (T. Gregory, *Giovanni Scoto Eriugena. Tre Studi*, Florence 1963, pp. 22-23).
38. Cf. D. O'Brien. "The Origin of Matter and the Origin of Evil in Plotinus' Criticism of the Gnostics", *Herméneutique et ontologie. Hommage à P. Aubenque*, 1990, pp. 181-202.
39. "Creation (in Plotinus) is as free, no more and no less, than the One itself. As for pantheism it is irrelevant" (J. Rist, *Plotinus, The Road to Reality*,

on one side an emanation ruled by necessity (Neoplatonic procession); on the other side a production of beings caused by a decision of the free will of the Maker (Judaeo-Christian creation). Can we still continue to find a difference between the two notions? I think so. One difference, if not the most essential, at least one of the most striking, lies in the images and metaphors by which the Biblical notion of creation on one side, and the Neoplatonic notion of procession on the other are represented.

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the Maker of Heaven and Earth is generally represented as a craftsman. This is clearly indicated in the *Epistle to the Romans:*

> But who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder: "Why have you made me thus?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?[40]

A similar image appears to be employed by Plato in the *Timaeus,* where the Demiurge is presented as a craftsman, mixing and blending in a bowl the Soul of the universe and human souls as well;[41] but all the efforts of the Neoplatonic school have been precisely to purify the metaphors and images used by Plato. As far as they were concerned, Neoplatonists preferred, when they spoke of procession, to borrow images from arithmetic or geometry: as the rays in a circle proceed from the centre, or like the numbers proceed from unity, so beings flow from the One.[42] The two kinds of images — that of the monad containing all numbers, and that of the circle — are often simultaneously evoked by Eriugena in order to explain how all creatures both proceed from God and remain in Him.[43] I would like to mention only a few passages in which arithmetical images are used.[44]

Cambridge 1967, p. 83). Cf. J. Trouillard, "Procession néoplatonicienne et création judéo-chrétienne", *Néoplatonisme. Mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard (Les Cahiers de Fontenay,* 19-22), Fontenay-aux-Roses 1981. G. Reale, "I fondamenti della metafisica di Plotino e la struttura della processione", *Graceful Reason. Essays in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy Presented to Joseph Owens, CSSR,* ed. L.P. Gerson, Toronto 1983, pp. 153-175.
40. Rom. 9, 20-21. Cf. Isaiah 64,8; Jeremiah 18,6.
41. Plato, *Timaeus* 41d.
42. Ps. Dionysius, *On Divine Names* V, 6 (ed. B. Suchla, pp. 184-185; PG 3, 820 D - 821 A; PL 122, 1149 A-B). Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* I.7.1; V.5.5; VI.8.18. Concerning the images used by Plotinus to describe the procession of all things from the One — light, fire, spring, tree, circle — see G. Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy. IV. The Schools of the Imperial Age,* New York 1990, pp. 334-339.
43. *Periphyseon* II, 602 B-C; III, 621 C, 624 D - 626 B; 637 A; 639 C - 640 A; V, 882 A-B, 901 A.
44. For a more developed treatment of the theme see "Jean Scot et la

> All numbers subsist (*subsistunt*) eternally in the Monad and
> while they flow forth (*profluunt*) from it they do not cease to
> be in it, since they cannot abandon their natural state. For
> whether by multiplication or by division they proceed from it
> and return (*redeunt*) to it.[45]

One recognizes the famous triad: immanence (*subsistunt*), proces-
sion (*profluunt*) and return (*redeunt*). Book III of *Periphyseon* con-
tains a long dissertation on numbers, so long that, at the end,
the disciple has forgotten where such a dissertation is leading.
This gives the master an opportunity to make a statement which
shows how deeply Neoplatonism may have influenced Eriugena's
thought:

> *Disciple* - Concerning numbers enough has been said . . . But
> I am eager to learn where this is leading. For this has been
> introduced not for its own sake, but for the sake of teaching
> something else.

> *Master* - I am surprised that you have so quickly forgotten our
> own words. Did you not just now ask me for some examples
> from nature to bring you to an understanding of the things
> we are discussing, that is, how all things which are from God
> are at the same time both eternal and made, and especially
> how God himself is both the Maker of all things and is made
> in all things? For this is the main point of all our present
> reasoning.[46]

We will understand better this last statement if we examine some
other metaphors — also familiar to Neoplatonists — particularly
those of light and fire. About the Eriugenian use of the first
metaphor Etienne Gilson wrote:

> Nature is a light given by the Father of lights. In other words,
> all created beings are lights . . . and their very essence consists
> in being so many reflections of the divine light. Made up of
> that multitude of tiny lamps that things are, creation is only
> an illumination intended to show God.[47]

The metaphor of fire is the starting point for even more audacious
statements. We read in Deuteronomy: "The Lord your God is a
devouring fire"[48] and in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Our God is
a consuming fire".[49] These words were the pretext for Eriugena to

métaphysique des nombres", in *Begriff und Metapher*, ed. W. Beierwaltes,
pp. 126-141.
45. *Periphyseon* III, 653D-654A.
46. *Periphyseon* III, 660D-661A.
47. E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, New York
1955, p. 120.
48. Deuter. 4,24.
49. Hebr. 12, 29.

build a kind of metaphysics of fire, mainly inspired by Neoplatonic doctrines.[50] According to ancient physicists, fire is invisible in itself. One never sees fire itself, only "matter on fire" (*ignitam materiam*). Without matter, fire is invisible. Similarly, God would remain unknowable not only to us, but to Himself, had He not created a universe where He may appear. His apparitions are what Eriugena calls *theophanies*:

> It follows that we ought not to understand God and creature as two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same. For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God; and God, by manifesting Himself in a marvellous and ineffable manner creates Himself in the creature, the invisible making Himself visible and the incomprehensible comprehensible, and the hidden revealed, and the unknown known . . .[51]

To create Himself, God does not require an external matter:

> Otherwise He would seem to be impotent and imperfect in Himself, if He were to receive from some other source an aid to His apparition and perfection. So it is from Himself that God takes the occasions of His *theophanies* (i.e., divine apparitions) . . . And therefore even that matter from which it is read that He made the world is from Him and in Him, and He is in it in so far as it is understood to have being.[52]

In fact, when we say that God created the universe out of nothing (*ex nihilo*),[53] we must understand that He created it out of this sublime "Nothing" that He is himself, for God is above being, therefore no-being (Nothing). In Eriugena's universe, to be means to appear. Consequently, the words of the Apostle "God shall *be* in all things",[54] as explained by Eriugena, mean: "God alone shall *appear* in all things".[55]

According to Giovanni Reale, one of the most significant differences between the Biblical notion of creation and the Neoplatonic notion of procession is that in Hebraic culture the privileged sense is hearing, while in Greek culture, the privileged sense is vision. In the Bible, the world is created by God's word: *Ipse dixit et facta sunt*.[56] On the contrary, says Reale, "the Greek civilization is a civilization of vision and form. Philosophy was born as a pure vision

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50. See "Jean Scot et la métaphysique du feu" in *Etudes érigéniennes*, Paris 1987, pp. 299-319.
51. *Periphyseon* III, 687 C.
52. *Periphyseon* III, 679 A.
53. II Maccabees 7,28.
54. I Cor. 15,28.
55. *Periphyseon* I, 450 D; V, 997 D-998 A.
56. Ps 32, 9. This verse is mentioned by Eriugena in the *Homily on St. John's Gospel* VIII, 8 (SC 151, p. 238; PL 122, 287C). It contains an obvious allusion to Genesis 1,3: "God said . . ."

and contemplation of the form; the great Hellenic art is a worship and a celebration of the form".[57] The key-word of the Plotinian universe, according to Reale, is contemplation (θεωρία).[58]

If this view is correct, it would be wrong to claim that Eriugena has entirely forgotten his Biblical roots, for metaphors related to God's Word, by whom all things were made, are to be found in his works. Let us quote only an astonishing commentary on this verse of St. John's Gospel: "I am the voice of one crying in the desert':[59]

> The Word of God cries out in the very remote solitude of divine Goodness. His cry is the creation of all things, for it is He who calls things that are as things that are not.[60] It is through Him that God the Father cried out — that is to say created — all things He wanted to create.[61]

Again, in *Periphyseon*, Book II, we read:

> It is the prerogative of the divine Goodness to call forth from non-existence into existence what it wishes to be made. For the name *Bonitas* (Goodness) takes its origin from the Greek verb βοῶ (I cry out). But βοῶ (I cry out) and καλῶ (I call) have the same meaning. For he who calls very often breaks out into a cry. So it is not unreasonable that God should be called *Bonus* (Good) and *Bonitas* (Goodness), because with an intelligible cry He cries out that all things should come from nothing into essence.[62]

It would be too simplistic to say that the metaphors of crying or of speaking are exclusively Biblical, for according to an etymology which originates in Plato's *Cratylus* (416 B-D), τὸ καλόν (the beautiful, the good) derives from the verb καλῶ (I call). This etymology, familiar to Proclus,[63] was available to Eriugena through Pseudo-Dionysius.[64] It is true, though, that in using the metaphors of crying or of speaking, Eriugena is more indebted to the Bible than

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57. G. Reale, "I fondamenti della metafisica di Plotino . . ." p. 174.
58. "I tre momenti della processione sono tre momenti strutturali della contemplazione" (G. Reale, "I fondamenti della metafisica di Plotino . . .", p. 168).
59. Ioh.1, 23.
60. Rom. 4, 17. See G.A. Piemonte, "L'expression *quae sunt et quae non sunt*: Jean Scot et Marius Victorinus", *Jean Scot écrivain*, ed. G.H. Allard, Montreal-Paris 1986, pp. 81-113.
61. Jean Scot, *Commentaire sur l'évangile de Jean* I,xxvii,92-96 (SC 180, p.142; PL 122, 304 D).
62. *Periphyseon* II, 580 C.
63. See H.D. Saffrey: *Proclus, Théologie platonicienne*,I, Paris 1968, p.153.
64. Ps. Dionysius, *On Divine Names* IV,7 (ed. B.R. Suchla, p.151,5-10; PG 3, 701C). See also Priscian, *Institutiones Grammaticae* I,2 (ed. M. Hertz: H. Keil, *Grammatici Latini* II, p.6,4-5).

to anything else. However, beside this Biblical imagery, Eriugena uses other images, related to sight, some of which were dear to the Neoplatonists. We have mentioned his using metaphors of fire and light, and we have said that he understands God's creation as a theophany (θεοφάνεια). It is, perhaps, not out of place to observe that according to one of the etymologies given by Eriugena, the word θεός (God) derives from the verb θεωρῶ (I contemplate), and means *He who contemplates*.[65] Again, it would be too simplistic to claim that such an etymology is totally alien to the Semitic way of thinking, for some Carolingian glosses support it with a verse of the Holy Scripture: "The Lord sees".[66] What does God see? Nothing that is outside Himself, because outside Him there is nothing. Exactly as God creates by speaking, so God creates by seeing.

> *Master.* We have clearly deduced, as I think, that the divine Goodness saw and always has seen those things that were to be made.
>
> *Disciple* This was concluded.
>
> *Master.* And the things that He saw were not other than the things that He made, but the things He saw were to be made were the things that He made.
>
> *Disciple.* This was granted likewise.
>
> *Master.* And all the things which He has always seen He has always made. For in Him the sight does not precede His act, since the act is co-eternal with the sight, especially as for Him it is not one thing to see and another to act, but His sight is His act. For He sees by acting and by seeing He acts.[67]

Curiously enough, this metaphor of vision, in which we are tempted to recognize an echo of the Neoplatonic θεωρία, may find support in a Biblical text: *And God saw that it was good*.[68] Here is how Eriugena comments on this verse of Genesis:

> God's seeing is the creation of the whole universe. For Him it is not one thing to see and another to do, but His seeing is His will and His will is His operation. But . . . "no one is good save God alone".[69] So *God saw that it was good* that is: He saw Himself (as) the Good in all things. For God sees nothing but Himself, because outside Himself there is nothing, and

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65. *Periphyseon* I, 452B-C, 459D-460A.
66. "Dominus uidet" (Gen. 22,14). Cf. *Etudes érigéniennes*, Paris 1987, p.648.
67. *Periphyseon* III, 678A-B. Cf. Proclus: Καὶ ἡ ποίησις ἐν τῷ νοεῖν, καὶ ἡ νόησις ἐν τῷ ποιεῖν (*The Elements of Theology*, 174).
68. Gen.1,10.
69. Luke 18,19.

everything that is within Him is Himself. And His seeing is simple, and it is formed from nothing else than from Himself.[70]

The connection of this theme of vision with Neoplatonic θεωρία may be found in the Commentary on the *Celestial Hierarchy*. Explaining why Dionysius used the verbs ὁρᾶν and εἶναι in preference to the nouns ὅρασις and οὐσία,[71] Eriugena states:

> He put infinitives instead of nouns. From this fact one may clearly understand that to God Himself, and to every rational and intellectual creature as well, it is not one thing to be, and yet another thing to be light; not one thing to be light, and yet another thing to see, i.e., to understand by gnostic power (*intelligere gnostica uirtute*), for to them, to be and to shine and to see is the same thing. Their being is light and vision.[72]

The most astonishing feature of this claim is that the three equivalent terms — being, light and vision — are predicated not only of God but also of the intellectual and of the rational creatures (angels and men). Should we then conclude that both human and angelic minds enjoy a creative power? Let us hear Eriugena:

> Just as the Creative Wisdom, which is the Word of God, beholds all things which are made in It before they come to being (*priusquam fierent*), and that very beholding of all things which are beheld before they come to being is their true and eternal and immutable essence,[73] so the created wisdom, which is human nature, knows all things which are made in it before they come to being, and that very knowledge of the things which are known before they come to being is their true and indestructible essence. Accordingly, the knowledge in the Creative Wisdom is itself rightly held to be the primary and causal essence of the whole of creation, while the knowledge in the created nature is the secondary essence and subsists as the effect of the higher knowledge.[74]

The late lamented Jean Trouillard greatly admired such passages. And one can easily surmise why, for according to Jean Trouillard the major discrepancy between the Judeo-Christian concept of creation and the Neoplatonic notion of procession lies in this. In the

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70. *Periphyseon* III, 704 B-C. Cf. 673C-677D. In *Periphyseon* IV,786 B-C Eriugena explains us that the verb *to say* in the phrase "God said" (Gen. 1,3) refers to the Son, while the verb *to see* in the phrase "God saw" (Gen. 1,4) refers to the Holy Ghost.
71. Pseudo-Dionysius, *On Celestial Hierarchy* XIII,1; PG 3, 301 D.
72. *Expositiones in Hierarchiam caelestem* XIII,253-258 (CCCM 31,p.173; PL 122, 240 B).
73. See Jean Scot, *Commentaire sur l'évangile de Jean* III,iv,21-24 (SC 180, p.218; PL 122, 318C).
74. *Periphyseon* IV,778 D - 779 A.

Neoplatonic procession "every spirit and every soul bestows on itself all its levels of reality including its proper and final determination."[75] This is not the case in the Christian doctrine of creation, in which the creative power is the priviledge of God alone. Eriugena is the sole Christian thinker to have dared to speak of a *Nature which is created and does create*. Jean Trouillard praised him for that:

> Christian theologies allowed themselves to be overtaken by Neoplatonic teaching; they have been extremely reserved towards the transmission of the creative power . . . Besides Eriugena no Christian doctor may be found who compensates for this deficiency and who rejoins Neoplatonism on that very point.[76]

It is not my intention to argue either for or against these statements.[77] Jean Trouillard had a subtle and profound knowledge of the Neoplatonic tradition. Having been an enthusiastic and sedulous reader of Plotinus and Proclus, he became, at the end of his life, more and more interested in Eriugena. In the course of this new enthusiasm he may have been too generous in attributing the Proclean self-constituting power (αὐθυπόστατος) to the *Nature which is created and does create*. Nevertheless, his illuminating paper *Procession néoplatonicienne et création judéo-chrétienne* is full of suggestive remarks and invites us to a new approach to this crucial problem.

Reditus

If the theme of *Procession* seems to have generated no important conflict with the Christian notion of creation, the situation is different with the theme of *Return*.[78] As much as he could have been

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75. J. Trouillard, Procession néoplatonicienne et création judéo-chrétienne", in *Néoplatonisme. Mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard [Les Cahiers de Fontenay, 19-22]*, Fontenay-aux-Roses 1981, p.11. Jean Trouillard alludes here to the Proclean theme of the *self-constituted* being (αὐθυπόστατος): Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* 40-51 (Dodds, pp.42-51). Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super Librum de Causis*, Lectiones 25-29. On St. Thomas and Proclus, see W.J. Hankey, *God In Himself. Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the 'Summa Theologiae'*, Oxford 1987, pp.46-56 and *passim*.
76. J. Trouillard, "Procession néoplatonicienne . . .", p.12.
77. One should not forget, however, that the phrase *causae primordiales* is to be found in Augustine: *De Genesi ad litteram* VI,x,17 (CSEL 28,1, p.182,24; PL 34, 346).
78. On this theme see T. Gregory, "L'escatologia di Giovanni Scoto",

attracted by the Neoplatonic elements he found in the writings of
the Areopagite, Eriugena was certainly, by his Irish background,
well trained in Biblical exegesis,[79] and by his position at the Car-
olingian court, devoted to a prince whom he addressed as "most
pious King",[80] "orthodox ruler of the Franks",[81] "the head of the
Christians".[82] His Christian faith imposed on him the belief in a
God who reveals Himself in history. The return of mankind to his
divine origin — allegorically expressed in the parables of the lost
sheep or in that of the Prodigal Son — takes place in history, an
history called precisely *the history of salvation*. On the other hand,
the Neoplatonic triad — immanence, procession, return — evolves
in the divine world, a world that ignores history, where there is
no room for Redemption or for divine Grace.

> The chief principle of Christianity — God who becomes flesh,
> remaining true God and becoming at the same moment true
> man — could not be accepted by Plotinus, either in its revolu-
> tionary significance as an historical fact or in its metaphysical
> and theological significance. Nor could he have accepted the
> doctrine of supernatural Grace. Plotinus wanted rather for
> man to become God. In addition, he remained firmly con-
> vinced that the powers of man are sufficient for this task:
> the mystical union with God, that is, the achievement of the
> supreme *telos* of man, does not happen . . . through super-
> natural grace, but through a natural spiritual energy which
> enters into the dialectical cycle of *procession* and *return* to the
> Absolute.[83]

Eriugena could not avoid the conflict which arose between the
two elements of his learning, Biblical on one side, philosophical
on the other. Moreover, Dionysius the Areopagite was not the
sole author who exerted a strong influence on him. Augustine
and Maximus the Confessor, for instance, played a major role in
the development of his thought. Augustine, by his teaching on

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Studi medievali, 3ª Serie, 16 (1975), pp. 497-535. P.A. Dietrich - D.F.
Duclow, "Virgins in Paradise: Deification and Exegesis in Periphyseon
V", *Jean Scot écrivain*, ed. G. Allard, Montreal-Paris 1986, pp.29-49.
79. Concerning the important contribution of the Irish monks to Biblical
exegesis, see B. Bischoff, "Il monachesimo irlandese nei suoi rapporti col
continente", *Mittelalterliche Studien. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde
und Literaturgeschichte*, I, Suttgart 1966, pp. 195-205.
80. *Ambigua ad Iohannem*, prooemium, 58 and Versus 8; CCSG 18, pp.5
and 13.
81. MGH, PAC III, p.546.
82. *Ambigua ad Iohannem*, Versus 7; CCSG 18, p.13. For more references
see: *Etudes érigéniennes*, Paris 1987, pp.101-102.
83. G. Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy*. IV. *The Schools of the Imperial
Age*, New York 1990, p.312.

divine Grace, prevented him from embracing any form of Pelagian-ism.[84] Maximus the Confessor, heroic defender of the Council of Chalcedon, prevented him from embracing any form of Docetism. At the same time, Eriugena learned from Maximus that the life of Christ — death, resurrection and ascension into Heaven — is the model and the prototype of the universal return of all things to their Principle. Eriugena does not deny that the birth, the death and the resurrection of Christ are historical events. In full accord with the *Epistle to the Hebrews*,[85] however, he also professes that these historical events have acquired an eternal value:

> All things visible and invisible, that is to say, the sensible and intelligible worlds, have been restored in Him (the Christ), and recalled to an ineffable unity: in hope now, in fulfilment in time to come; in faith today, in essence tomorrow (*in futuro in specie*); a testing now (*adhuc in argumento*), then in fact. What has been already done specially in that Man whom He assumed will be in the future perfected in all generally. Let no man therefore think it a slight matter that the Word of God was made man as though only human nature was saved thereby: but let it most firmly be believed and most clearly understood that by the Incarnation of the Son of God every creature in heaven and on earth was saved.[86]

Eriugena conceives two stages in the return: one is in hope (in Christ), the other in fulfilment (in time to come). But how to pass from hope to fulfilment? Maximus expressed this passage by one of the triads to which he was so devoted: *esse, bene esse, semper esse* (τὸ εἶναι, τὸ εὖ εἶναι, τὸ ἀεὶ εἶναι).[87] *To be* is the result of procession, *To be always* is the goal of the return. The keystone in this triad is the middle term (*To be well*), for exactly as we have said that *procession* and *return* cannot stand unless related to the third term, namely, *immanence*, we must say that *being* and *eternal being*[88] cannot stand unless related to *well-being*. In other words,

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84. B. Stock, "In Search of Eriugena's Augustine" *Eriugena, Studien zu seinen Quellen*, ed. W. Beierwaltes, Heidelberg 1980, pp. 85-104. G. Madec, *Jean Scot et ses auteurs. Annotations érigéniennes*, Paris 1988, pp. 63-137.
85. Hebr. 9, 11-12.
86. *Periphyseon* V, 913 A-B.
87. *Ambigua ad Iohannem* III,109-114; LXI, 1-56 (CCSG 18,pp.24-25,241-243; PG 91, 1073C, 1392A-D). Cf. Ps.Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* I,3. *On Divine Names* IV,1; V,8. *Epistle* IX,3 (PG 3, 373C-D. 696A. 821D. 1109C). Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 31,43,91,172,192 (Dodds,pp.34,44,82,150, 168).
88. Dodds rightly translates τὸ ἀεὶ εἶναι: "perpetual being" (Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 91; p.82). However, Sheldon-Williams, whose translation I follow here, felt free to translate *semper esse* by "eternal being".

the bridge between a natural life and the eternal life is a virtuous
life. And this is the task of human free will, not of free will alone,
but of free will assisted by divine Grace:

> Between *being* and *eternal being* there is an intermediary, which
> is called *well-being*. Without this intermediary the two ex-
> tremes, *being* and *eternal being*, although existing, cannot be
> said to exist truly: for if you take away *well-being*, *being* is
> not truly being, nor *eternal being* truly eternal being: only that
> which exists well and blessedly truly is and truly is eternal.
> But this intermediary, *well-being*, is a Grace of the divine Good-
> ness, associated with the free and good motion of the will of
> the intelligible and rational creature.[89] *Well-being*, in fact, is the
> product of two causes: free will and the divine contribution
> which Holy Scripture calls Grace.[90]

The necessity of divine Grace is also clearly expressed in a few
lines, in which Eriugena explains the Pauline distinction between
the 'unspiritual man' (*animalis homo*) and the 'spiritual man' (*spir-
itualis homo*).[91] As in the 'unspiritual man' one may distinguish
two elements, the human nature on the one hand, and the free
will tending to evil on the other, so in the 'spiritual man' we may
distinguish two elements: the human nature on the one hand,
and the free will assisted by divine Grace on the other. Actually,
we have, for this passage, two different recensions.[92] In order to
show clearly how they differ from one another, I think it necessary
to read first the Latin text of the first recension:

> *Similiter spiritualis, et secundum naturam consistens, et se-
> cundam bonam uoluntatem diuina gratia praeuentam, actam,
> uitiis purgatam,. uirtutum ornamentis redimitam, ad pristinam
> diuinae imaginis dignitatem reuocatus.*[93]

See PL 122, 903 C6,D5. On translating τὸ ἀεὶ εἶναι by "eternal being",
see D. O'Brien, "L'immortalité chez saint Athanase", *Studia Patristica* 21,
Leuven 1989, p.435.
89. "Illa insita medietas (hoc est *bene esse*) donum diuinae bonitatis est,
libero ac bono uoluntatis intellectualis et rationalis creaturae motu adi-
uncto" (PL 122, 904A). On *medietas*, see G.H. Allard, "*Medietas* chez Jean
Scot", *Begriff und Metapher. Sprachform des Denkens bei Eriugena* [Vorträge
des VII. Internationalen Eriugena-Colloquiums, Werner-Reimers-Stiftung
Bad Homburg 26.-29. July 1989], ed. W. Beierwaltes, Heidelberg 1990,
pp.95-107.
90. *Periphyseon* V, 903 D - 904 A.
91. I Cor. 2, 14-15, quoted in *Periphyseon* IV, 753 A.
92. See M.A. Zier, "The Shape of the Critical Edition of Periphyseon IV",
*Giovanni Scoto nel suo tempo. Accademia Tudertina. Atti del XXIV Convegno
storico internazionale, Todi, 11-14 ottobre 1987*, Spoleto 1989, pp.487-498.
93. *Periphyseon* IV, 756 B (first and second recensions).

In other words:

> The 'spiritual man' both subsists according to nature and is
> recalled to the original dignity of the divine image in accord
> with a good will that divine Grace anticipates, moves, purifies
> from vices, and adorns with the wreath of the virtues.

In this recension, it is clear that divine Grace is needed for every
motion of the human will, for divine Grace anticipates man's good
will, moves it, purges it from vices and adorns it with virtues. In
the fourth recension, however, the past participle *actam*[94] and the
noun *uitiis* have been replaced by the phrase *actu et scientia*. Surely
the words *actus* (or *actio*) and *scientia* are part of the Eriugenian vo-
cabulary;[95] for *Actio* (often twinned with *Fides*) and *Scientia* belong
to a triad, the third member of which is called sometimes *The-
ologia*, sometimes *Sapientia*, sometimes *Contemplatio*.[96] This triad
punctuates the three stages of the spiritual life, that is to say, 'pu-
rification', 'illumination', 'perfection', a theme for which Eriugena
is largely indebted to Pseudo-Dionysius.[97] However, by introduc-
ing the ablative of means (*actu et scientia*) before the past participle
purgatam, the fourth recension seems to confine divine Grace to
the role of anticipating man's good will:

> The 'spiritual' man both subsists according to nature and is
> recalled to the original dignity of the divine image in accord
> with a good will, that divine Grace anticipates, Action and
> Knowledge purify, and the wreath of the Virtues adorns.[98]

Now, action and knowledge are part of the "toils and sweat"
(Gen.3, 17-19) to which man has been condemned after his sin.[99]
In insisting on the part played by them for purification, the fourth
recension stresses the role of man's will in the spiritual life; but

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94. The past participle *actam* is more clearly understood by comparison
with this Pauline statement: "Quicumque enim Spiritu Dei *aguntur*, hii
filii sunt Dei" (Rom. 8,14).
95. *Periphyseon* V, 1017 A 15. See Jean Scot, *Commentaire sur l'évangile de
Jean*, SC 180, Paris 1972, pp. 112 (n.8).
96. Jean Scot, *Commentaire sur l'évangile de Jean*, I,xxx,25-34; IV,iii,19—
25; VI,i,11-12; ii,15-24,61; iv,20-24,58-60; vi,7-11 (SC 180,pp.160,294,326-
327,330,336,344,348,356; PL 122, 308A, 334A, 340B, 341A, 341D, 343C,
344A-B, 345C-D).
97. *Periphyseon* II, 574 A; V, 981 A. For references to Pseudo-Dionysius,
see Jean Scot, *Commentaire sur l'évangile de Jean*, p. 318, n.3.
98. Here is the translation of Sheldon-Williams: "The spiritual man also
lives according to nature; but also in accordance with good will helped
by divine Grace, purified by act and knowledge and decked with the
adornments of the virtues, he is recalled to the former dignity of the Di-
vine Image" (Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, Translation by I.P. Sheldon-Williams,
Revised by John J. O'Meara, Montreal - Washington 1987, p. 398).
99. *Periphyseon* IV, 858 B

we know from Eriugena's Commentary on St. John's Gospel that action and knowledge are also gifts of divine Grace.[100]

Again, Eriugena asserts that the universal resurrection will be the work both of nature and Grace;[101] but the deification (*deificatio*, θέωσις) will be exclusively a gift of divine Grace:

> *Master*. Herein lies the difference between nature and Grace, *datum* and *donum*,[102] and the properties which are peculiar to each, as well as those which they share in common.
>
> *Disciple*. Yes, I think I understand, and I should like briefly to recapitulate your teaching.
>
> *Master*. Do so.
>
> *Disciple*. Nature, you said, is a *datum*, Grace a *donum*.
>
> *Master*. Yes.
>
> *Disciple*. You then gave a property of each: to nature that of having come from nothing and of abiding for ever, to Grace the power of deifying, that is, of bringing into God those men whom the accession of the divine Goodness freely and without the aid of nature or antecedent deserts raises up over all things that are and are contained within the bounds of the created Universe.[103]

This gift is bestowed, not on all, but only to the elect. Eriugena is well aware that such doctrine may seem esoteric to his Latin readers:

> These are blessed by their ascent from here and their deification There. But the use of this word, *deification*, is very rare in the Latin books. However, we often find it implied, especially in the works of Ambrose.[104] I am not sure of the reason for this reticence: perhaps it is because the meaning of this word *theosis* (the term which the Greeks usually employ in the sense of the psychic and bodily transformation of the Saints into God so as to become one in Him and with Him, when there will remain in them nothing of their animal, earthly and mortal nature) seemed too profound for those who cannot rise

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100. Jean Scot, *Commentaire sur l'évangile de Jean* I,xxiv,23-27 (SC 180, p. 112; PL 122, 299D-300A).
101. *Periphyseon* V, 902 D - 904 C.
102. According to Eriugena, the distinction between nature (*datum*) and Grace (*donum*) is introduced in the *Epistle of James* (1,17), a passage quoted by Ps. Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy* (PG 3, 120B). See Jean Scot, *Commentaire sur l'évangile de Jean*, p.252,n.3.
103. *Periphyseon* V, 906 B-C. Cf. 904 D - 905 B, 1015 A.
104. The verb *deificare* is not unknown to Augustine: *Sermo 166*, 4 (PL 38,909). *Enarrationes in psalmos* 117,11 (CCSL 40, p. 1661). *De ciuitate dei* XIX, xxiii, 133 (CCSL 48, p.693).

above carnal speculations, and would therefore be to them in-comprehensible and incredible, and thus the doctrine was not to be taught in public, but only to be discussed among the learned. For there are many divine mysteries that the Holy Fathers do not touch upon but pass over in silence for this reason: weak eyes cannot bear the brilliance of the light.[105]

Thus John Sottus distinguishes two kinds of *Return*: a general re-turn (*Reditus generalis*) common to all men, good or evil, virtuous or sinners, and a special one (*Reditus specialis*) reserved for the elect only. Such a distinction originated in Maximus the Confessor.[106] It allows Eriugena to reconcile, in some way, the Christian tenets concerning eternal punishments altogether with the requirements of the Neoplatonic theme of *Return* and another point of Christian doctrine, namely, God's will to save all.[107] Thanks to the general return, all men will recover the primeval condition, in which they were created. Thanks to the special return, some of them, the elect, not only will return to the primeval condition of their na-ture, but will be elevated beyond and above all nature, and enjoy the grace of deification. Not a single human being will be excluded from the universal return. Those who will not reach the supreme level, that of deification, will not be deprived of anything that be-longs to the integrity of human nature, since deification is beyond and above all created nature. Moreover, Eriugena believes that, in the after-life, after they have been separated from their bodies, the souls will be open to improvement:

> I think that "the days of the life" of the mind,[108] in which it tolls purging the earth of its heart signify not only those days through which the seasons of the present life pass and in which the body is sustained by the soul, but also that temporal interval (*spatium temporale*) in which the souls, relinquishing the control of their bodies, abide in another life until they take

105. *Periphyseon* V, 1015 B-C. A sharp analysis of the twofold teaching — esoteric and exoteric — of the Fathers is to be found in J.J. O'Meara, "Eriugena's use of Augustine in his Teaching on the Return of the Soul and the Vision of God", *Jean Scot Erigène et l'Histoire de la Philosophie*, ed. R. Roques, Paris 1977, pp.191-200.
106. *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 54, Scholion 18 (22); CCSG 7, pp.474-475; PG 90, 532 C.
107. I Tim. 2,4.
108. Eriugena is commenting here on Genesis 3,17: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life". This curse is addressed by God to Adam after his sin. But, according to an al-legorical interpretation which goes back to Philo through Ambrose, Adam represents the human mind (*intellectus*, νοῦς). However, Eriugena's com-mentary is a developement of Maximus the Confessor: *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 5; CCSG 7, pp.64-67; PG 90, 277B-280B.

back their bodies. For we believe that souls can be purged (*purgari*) both in this present life, which soul and body spend in company, and in the other life after the death of the body . . . until the end of the world and the resurrection of the bodies and the day of judgment.[109]

Although the word *Purgatorium* does not appear, this passage of *Periphyseon* may be included in the dossier of the few texts concerning what Jacques Le Goff calls "the prehistory of Purgatory".[110] If the doctrine of purgatory had been more developed in his time, surely Eriugena would have treated the fire of purgatory with the same ironical tone he used to speak of the fire of hell.[111]

On the whole, Eriugena managed, more or less successfully, to reconcile Christian tenets concerning Hell and the Neoplatonic theme of *Reditus*. I said "more or less successfully", because I am not sure that all Christian theologians would agree with his views concerning Hell. I am not sure either that philosophers would agree with the device he imagined to secure such a reconciliation, namely, a distinction between a general return and a special one. Nevertheless, we have here a laudable effort to reconcile Christian revelation with Greek wisdom, indeed — I quote Tullio Gregory — "the most remarkable attempt to integrate into Platonic metaphysics this Christian eschatology which, according to the *Acts of the Apostles*[112] is, to Greek wisdom, the most scandalous thing of all".[113]

Nevertheless, Eriugena's attempt failed to reconcile Christian eschatology with Greek wisdom in the matter of the salvation of the Devil, for, if the exigencies of the Neoplatonic *Reditus* and Christian teaching concerning God's will to save all men can be brought into harmony, why should the Devil's salvation be an exception? Again, Eriugena was not unaware of such a problem. Toward the end of his *Periphyseon*, he quotes a very interesting passage of Origen (184-253 ca.), in which the universal return — Origen uses the word restoration (ἀποκατάστασις) — applies to the fallen angels and to their master, the Devil. Here is this passage of Origen's *Periarchon* in Eriugena's own version:

Even the last enemy, the Devil,[114] who is called death, is said to be destroyed: so that there is no sorrow any more, for there

109. *Periphyseon* IV, 858 A.
110. J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago 1984.
111. Cf. *Etudes érigéniennes*, Paris 1987,pp.330-331 and 373-374.
112. *Acts of the Apostles* 17, 30-32.
113. T. Gregory, *Giovanni Scoto Eriugena. Tre Studi*, Florence 1963, p. 57.
114. The word *diabolus* (The Devil) has been dropped from the modern

is no more death, no more diversity, for there is no enemy. The destruction of the last enemy, indeed, is to be understood, not as if its substance, which was formed by God, is to perish, but because its mind and hostile will, which came not from God, but from itself, are to be destroyed. Its destruction, therefore, will not be its non-existence, but its ceasing to be an enemy, and [to be] death, for nothing is impossible to the Omnipotent, nor is anything incapable of restoration to its Creator: He made all things that they might exist, and those things which were made for existence cannot cease to be. For this reason also they admit of change and variety, so as to be placed, according to their merits, either in a better or worse position; but no destruction of substance can befall those things which were created by God for the purpose of permanent existence.[115]

Eriugena did indeed admire these lines, written by an author whom he calls "the great Origen, that most diligent enquirer into the nature of things".[116] It is, however, not without amazement that we see him hesitating to follow Origen as far as his ultimate conclusion:

I am not discussing now the substance of the demons, which the creator of all things created in them good and indestructible, nor am I enquiring as to whether that nature too when it is purged shall be brought back to its First Cause which by its transgression it abandoned, or whether it is to persist in its perversity and refuse to contemplate the Truth forever. With regard to that let us for the time being be content to be assured of this: that the demonic nature itself is not punished nor ever shall be punished but that the glory of its primal state before it waxed proud and seduced mankind, abides in it eternally and immutably without any diminution and shall ever so abide; while the wickedness which it contracted through pride shall be totally destroyed lest it should be coeternal with the Goodness of God. But concerning its salvation and its conversion or return (*reditus*) into its proper Cause we presume to say nothing, for this reason: that we have no certain knowledge of it from Sacred Scriptures or from the Holy Fathers who have

editions of the *Periarchon*. However, as Pierre Daniel Huet observed (PG 17, 1028B-C), Origen used to interpret the Pauline phrase *the last enemy* (I Cor. 15,26) as referring to the Devil: *In Leuiticum homiliae* IX,11. *In Iesu Naue homiliae* VIII,4 (GCS 29, p.439, 18-21. 30, p.340, 14-16; PG 12,524B, 867A-B).
115. Origen, *Periarchon* III,vi,5 (GCS 22, pp.286,10 - 287,9; PG 11, 336-338A-B). This text is quoted in *Periphyseon* V,930 C-D.
116. *Periphyseon* V,929 A.

dealt with this matter, and therefore we prefer to honour its obscurity with silence, lest in searching into matters which are beyond us we would rather fall into error than ascend into the Truth. Let us, then, rather, by God's aid, pursue our enquiries into a matter which does not lie beyond us, namely, our own nature.[117]

We have seen how Jean Trouillard praised Eriugena for having been bolder than any other Christian author, before or after him, in his treatment of the theme of *Procession*. He could not have said the same of his treatment of the theme of *Return*. In that respect, Origen had been bolder than he. On the other hand, the excuse alleged by Eriugena for not dealing with the problem of the salvation of the Devil is not very convincing. Generally, the fact that a matter has not been treated in Sacred Scriptures or in the writings of the Holy Fathers is for him an incentive to research. Why is it invoked here as a pretext for honouring with sacred silence the obscurity of a much debated question? Should this retreat be ascribed to weariness? In fact, toward the end of the *Periphyseon* (that is to say a few pages after the passage we have just read), the disciple addresses his master by these words:

> Please do return to the *Return*, and bring our pitching vessel and its weary mariners to the harbour.[118]

Fair enough. But where is the enthusiasm which we found in the beginning of Book IV?

> Let us spread sails and set out to sea. For Reason, not inexperienced in these waters, fearing neither the threats of the waves nor windings nor the Syrtes nor rocks, shall speed our course: indeed she finds it sweeter to exercise her skill in the hidden straits of the Ocean òf Divinity than idly to bask in the smooth and open waters, where she cannot display her power.[119]

I cannot help thinking that, in the text just quoted we have a sign of the Irish background of Eriugena.[120] Irishmen were famous for their love of travelling (*peregrinatio*): "To them", says Walafrid Strabo, "the custom of travelling has become nature".[121]

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117. *Periphyseon* V,941 A-B.
118. *Periphyseon* V, 1001 A.
119. *Periphyseon* IV, 744 A. Concerning the translation of this passage, see J.J. O'Meara, "Translating Eriugena", *Jean Scot écrivain*, ed. G.H. Allard, Montreal-Paris 1986, pp.124-126.
120. "It is difficult to resist the thought that this passage reflects Eriugena's earlier insular background" (J.J. O'Meara, "Translating Eriugena", p. 125).
121. PL 114, 1029 C.

One should also remember, however, that the theme of the wandering Ulysses was familiar to Neoplatonists. Indeed Proclus sees in the wandering of Ulysses an image of man's epistemological odyssey. Hence Ithaca is a symbol of "that mystical port of the soul, to which Homer brings back Ulysses after the long wandering of his life, and to which we rather must return".[122] The wandering of Ulysses has been a favorite theme of the Neoplatonists (Porphyry, Hermias, Proclus), of Church Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Ambrose, Maximus of Turin,[123] and in more recent times of James Joyce, himself an Irishman.

It is perhaps this theme of a perilous sailing in the hidden straits of the Ocean of Divinity, that may give us the key to the fair evaluation of the merits of Eriugena's intellectual odyssey. If we conceive Christian wisdom as a beautiful temple or a cathedral steadfastly rooted in the soil of reality, firmly supported by the metaphysics of being, and skillfully disposed according to the laws of Aristotelian logic, Eriugena's efforts cannot be but deceptive. After all, the vocation of this Irishman was that of a sailor, not that of an architect. The long wandering of his *Periphyseon*, the ceaseless digressions which, like songs of Sirens, slow the return to the "dear fatherland", are, perhaps, not deprived of interest in a time when man is more and more aware of being a traveller.

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122. Proclus, *In Parmenidem* V, ed. Victor Cousin, 1025, 1-37.
123. J. Pépin, "The Platonic and Christian Ulysses", *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara, Norfolk 1982, pp. 3-18.