Unusquisque in suo sensu abundet: Human Perspective in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*[1]

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Eriugena's valedictory quotation of Romans 14:5—"let everyone bring forth an abundance of interpretations"—appropriately caps the philosophy of human perspective developed in his *Periphyseon*.[2] If this passage has not always been recognized as a quotation, neither has its meaning been fully explored. I.P. Sheldon-Williams' translation of the passage[3] takes Eriugena to be faithful to the thought of Paul, who presents this admonition while discussing the insignificance of human customs when compared with the law of grace: "one man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." This suggestion of the insignificance of human thought carries over into the Sheldon-Williams translation. It is only the context that has changed, since Eriugena is here speaking about human knowledge rather than human custom: "let every man hold what opinion he will." However, the Latin edition used by Eriugena translates the Greek πληροφορείσθω, "be fulfilled" or "be satisfied," with the ambiguous *abundet*, "abound." The ambiguity of this term allows it to be taken as a command to be fruitful, rather than a command to be satisfied. I suggest that the former meaning more adequately captures the spirit of Eriugena's confidence in human perspective. In hopes of making this transparent, I will present two examples of how he attributes such priority to human nature that it threatens to break free of its moorings in his theocentric system. Following this, I will examine his attempt to contain such an elevated human nature within a theocentric system. Finally, we will have an opportunity to reflect on the success or failure of this containment.

1. This article incorporates material from the author's M.A. thesis, written for the Department of Classics at Dalhousie University.

2. V. 1022C, my translation.

3. As revised by J. O'Meara in *Periphyseon* (Montréal, 1987).

Dionysius, Vol. XIV, 1998, pp. 123–140.

I.

The division of nature which gives the *Periphyseon* its overall structure provides a good guide to locating human nature within Eriugena's system. Two forms are given to this division: the *alumnus*, whose conversation with his *nutritor* constitutes the *Periphyseon*, presents the division of nature as grounded in nature itself—nature is divided as a whole into its parts. The *nutritor*, on the other hand, presses on toward a vision of human nature as the source and ground of nature's division.

The *nutritor* presents the famous four-fold division of nature as follows: "the division of nature seems to me to receive four species, according to its four characteristics, of which the first is into that which creates and is not created, the second into that which both creates and is created, the third into that which is created and does not create, and the fourth which neither creates nor is created."[4] The *alumnus*' interpretation of these divisions is easily dispensed with: "the first is understood to be the cause of all things that are, who is God; the second to be the primordial causes; and the third those things that become manifest through coming into being in times and places."[5] The *alumnus* confesses that the fourth division of nature is a source of perplexity for him, and indeed, it is the fourth division of nature which begins to break down this tidy conception of the universe. The *nutritor* asserts that the fourth division of nature does not exist in nature at all: "in God, therefore, the first form is not distinct from the fourth. For in him they are not two things but one; in our contemplation, however, since we form one concept of God from consideration of him as beginning and another concept when contemplating him as end, they appear to be as it were two forms."[6] Apart from a perceiving subject, no division exists between the first and fourth forms. Is this also the case with the second and third divisions? It is not immediately clear. The *alumnus* cautions that "the other two forms, I mean the second and the third, not only come into being in our contemplation but are also found in the very nature of created things."[7] He then explains that the second and third divisions exist in created nature itself because created nature is a genus which can be divided into its species of causes and effects. On the other hand, uncreated nature is not a genus, and so only the human mind may predicate divisions of it, as it does of the first and fourth divisions. This argument does not take into account the *nutritor*'s immediately preceding assertion that none of the divisions of nature have

4. I. 441B. Except where noted, I have followed the translation of I.P. Sheldon-Williams and J. O'Meara cited above.

5. I. 442B.

6. II. 527B.

7. II. 528A.

been made as a division of genus into species; they are products of intellectual contemplation alone.[8] Elsewhere, the *nutritor* explicitly states that the second and third divisions are creations of the human mind: created nature "appears to its observers under a double mode, first when the divine nature is seen to be created and to create; ... secondly when it is seen in the lowest effects of the primordial causes, in which it is correctly said of it that it is created only, but does not create."[9] Sometimes the *nutritor* speaks more circumspectly: "the reason why we say that the universal nature possesses forms is that it is from her that our intelligence is in a manner formed when it attempts to treat of her; for in herself the universal nature does not everywhere admit forms."[10] Though nature does not everywhere possess forms independent of a perceiving subject, the *nutritor* leaves open the possibility that she may somewhere admit independent forms.

The *alumnus*' initial location of the division of nature has broken down over the course of his discussion with the *nutritor*. It seems that nature is not divided in itself, but only for the perceiving subject. Likewise, his initial answer to the question of "into what is nature divided?" yields to a more complex answer as the discussion proceeds. The *alumnus* initially defines the division of nature as a division into parts on a spatial model. God, the primordial causes, and the differentiated world occupy different places in nature. While the *nutritor* accepts this definition when it is offered, he later explicitly denies that the division of nature is that of a whole into its parts: "in the earlier book we spoke briefly of the universal division of universal nature—not as (a division) of a genus into its species nor of a whole into its parts, ... but by a kind of intellectual contemplation of the universe, under which term I include both God and creature."[11] He proceeds to treat the divisions of nature not as parts or species but as ways of looking at the divine nature in relation to the world: "when he *is looked for* above all things he is found in no essence—for as yet there is no essence—, but when he *is understood* in all things nothing in them subsists but himself alone."[12] Here, the *nutritor* has distinguished the first division from the second and third divisions as a different way of looking at the divine nature. As the *nutritor* and his *alumnus* elaborate these divisions over the course of the *Periphyseon*, it becomes clear that each division provides a coherent account of the relation between God and the world, an account which is nevertheless incomplete without its counterparts.

8. II. 523D–524D.
9. III. 689A–B.
10. II. 525B–C.
11. II. 523D–524D.
12. III. 683A.

The first division of nature, to which Eriugena devotes the first book of the *Periphyseon*, ostensibly intends to demonstrate the utter inaccessibility of the divine nature when it is sought in its essence. According to this mode of contemplation, inherited from Dionysius, nothing may be properly predicated of the divine. The effect of this mode of contemplation is to underscore the absolute difference between uncreated and created nature. Once this difference has been established, the only means by which the human individual may approach the divine nature is through a series of negations, by which the attributes of the world are denied to its principle.

At this level of contemplation, the content of revelation is to be accepted as myth, and not susceptible to rational investigation. The assertion of the trinitarian nature of God must be accepted without proof or explanation. In this regard, Eriugena cites Dionysius: "such knowledge and contemplation of it as there is, is inaccessible to all things that exist, being superessentially remote from them all."[13] Eriugena comments: "these words suffice on the necessity of following the authority of holy scripture alone, especially in discussions about the divine; while reason is wholly concerned with suggesting, and proving by the most accurate investigations into the truth, that nothing can be said properly about God."[14] Prior to this, the *alumnus* wondered why theologians have dared to call the divine essence a trinity, or, for that matter, a unity, if nothing can be predicated of the divine. The *nutritor* answered that these terms have been formulated not so that the divine essence may be expressed, for "it is not unity or trinity of such a kind as can be conceived by any human intellect however serene." Instead, theologians have formulated them "so that the religious inclinations of pious minds may have something to think and something to say concerning that which is ineffable and incomprehensible, especially for the benefit of those who demand from catholics a rational account of the Christian religion."[15]

A complete Neoplatonic account of the divine cannot be maintained if God is treated as solely transcendent. If this were the case, the divine could not properly be a cause, for, according to the Neoplatonic theory of causality, an effect always reveals a likeness to its cause. As Eriugena puts it: "that which is the cause can be reasonably expressed in terms of the things that are caused."[16] On the other hand, the divine cannot be identical with its effect, for then it could not continue to perform the role of cause. What is needed

13. *Ep.* I. 1065A–B. Quoted by Eriugena at I. 510B.
14. I. 510B.
15. I. 456A.
16. I. 458B.

is a mean between utter difference from the world and identity with the world. Eriugena finds such a mean in the Platonic and Neoplatonic theory of forms, which he calls "primordial causes."[17]

Eriugena identifies the primordial causes with the Greek *πρωτότυπα* (translated by Eriugena as *primordialia exempla*), the *προορίσματα* (translated as *praedestinationes* or *praediffinitiones*), the *θεῖα θελήματα* or "divine wills," and the *ἰδέαι*, which Eriugena understands as "the species or forms in which the immutable reasons of things that were to be made were created before they existed."[18] These definitions take into account nearly the entire history of the Platonic forms: their origin as the genera in which individuals participate, their transition into the thoughts of a divine principle now seen as acting deliberately, and finally their embrace of individuals.[19] Most importantly for our purposes, Eriugena identifies the primordial causes with Christ: "the Father, that is to say, the principle of all things, pre-formed in his word, that is, his only-begotten son, the reasons for all things that he wished to be made before (they came into being) in their genera and species and individuals and differences."[20] The *alumnus* and the *nutritor* refine this identification in their explication of *Genesis* 1:1: "in the beginning God made the heaven and the earth," a passage in which they understand "God" to refer to the Father, "beginning" to the Son, and "heaven and earth" to the primordial causes.[21] What, then, does it mean for the Father to create the primordial causes in the Son? That is, did the Son precede the creation of the causes in him, or are the Son and the causes co-eternal? The *alumnus* answers: "I do not see how the generation of the Word from the Father can in a temporal sense precede the creation of all by the Father in the Word and through the Word; but I think these to be co-eternal with each other, I mean the generation of the Word and the creation of all in the Word."[22] The *nutritor* elsewhere puts it even more starkly: "all things are not only eternal in the Word of God but also are the Word itself."[23] However, the *alumnus*, at least, resists the reduction of Christ to the causes: "these causes are not in all respects co-eternal with him in whom they are created. For things made can-

17. The term *primordiales causae* as applied to the forms appears to originate with Eriugena. There is an important Greek antecedent in Iamblichus: *πρωτουργά αἰτία*, (*De Mysteriis*, III. 1). The Latin sources have been noted by G. Madec, *Jean Scot et ses auteurs* (Paris, 1988), 68–69.

18. II. 529B.

19. For a general account of the history of the Platonic ideas within the larger context of the interaction between Platonism and Aristotelianism in the Middle Ages, see V. Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden, 1996).

20. II. 529B.

21. II. 546A.

22. II. 556C–D.

23. III. 641A. Cf. Eriugena's *Commentarius in Iohannis Evangelium*, III. 11.

not be co-eternal with their maker because their maker precedes the things which he makes."[24] Christ remains prior to the causes which he embodies, though this is a causal and not a temporal priority.

Because Eriugena identifies Christ with the primordial causes, the emergence of the divine trinity cannot be separated, in his system, from the act of creation: Christ differentiates himself in order to bring the primordial causes into being.[25] This results in a mutual dependence of divine trinity and created world that did not exist when the divine trinity was thought of as perfectly transcendent.

The act of separating the primordial causes from their effects and claiming divinity for the causes alone has not yet provided a complete account of nature, for the effects exist by participation in God no less than do the causes. If the primordial causes are divine because the divinity creates itself in them, then likewise will the effects be divine. This consideration of the entire created world as divine constitutes Eriugena's third division of nature.

The third division of nature accomplishes a grand levelling of the hierarchies established by the first two divisions. First, the difference between created cause and created effect is nullified by their mutual divinity. The *nutritor* arrives at this conclusion in his examination of *Genesis* 1:5: "and there was made evening and morning, one day." He has already identified light and darkness with effect and primordial cause respectively. Here the scriptures include both in one day, on which he comments: "for although between the obscurity of the causes and the brightness of the effects a division and a difference is understood, yet it is one and the same day, that is, they have one meaning. For it is not understood that one creature is made in the causes, another established in the effects of the causes, but one and the same is made, in the eternal reasons as though in a darkness of the wisdom most secret and removed from every intellect, and subject to intellects in the procession of the reasons into their effects, as though revealed in a day of perfect knowledge."[26] Cause and effect are two sides to the same creature—the creature as beyond knowledge, and the creature as manifest to knowledge. The second, more radical, levelling is that of the difference between the created effect and the *un*created cause. God and the creature are two

24. II. 561C.

25. In this, Eriugena has developed his primordial causes well beyond the Dionysian divine names. Cf. W. Beierwaltes, "Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena," in *Proceedings of the Dublin Conference on Neoplatonism* (Dublin, 1992), 6: "Dionysius cannot be said to have a trinitarian 'system' despite his affinity to triadic systematization as a structural principle of his thought; his thinking does not concentrate upon the innerworldly unfolding of the divine Tri-Unity in connection, let us say, with the incarnation of Christ."

26. III. 693A–B.

sides of one nature: "we ought not to understand God and the 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."[27] Following this mode of contemplation, there is nothing which the human mind can think or see which is not divine. To discover anything different from the divine, one must have recourse to the previous modes of contemplation.

II.

Our survey of Eriugena's division of nature has left us with a human subject which enjoys an interpretive freedom on account of its priority over the division of nature. The question of *how* human nature holds this singular position has not yet been answered. Eriugena finds an authoritative grounding for his human subject in the work of Maximus the Confessor, and so it is to Maximus that we will look for a second approach to Eriugena's placement of human nature.

A five-fold division of nature is present in the work of Maximus, one of Eriugena's primary sources, who claims as his authority for this division a tradition handed down by the saints and originating with the apostles themselves.[28] Maximus' division is as follows: 1) nature is divided into uncreated and created nature; 2) created nature is divided into that perceived by the mind and that perceived by the senses; 3) the nature perceived by the senses is divided into heaven and earth; 4) earth is divided into paradise and the world we presently inhabit; 5) human nature is divided into male and female. Human nature is present to each of the divisions of nature. It is "the laboratory in which everything is concentrated," which "naturally mediates between the extremes of each division, having been drawn into everything in a good and fitting way."[29] Because human nature participates in every aspect of nature, it may be the means to nature's fulfilment: "humanity clearly has the power of naturally uniting at the mean point of each division since it is related to the extremities of each division in its own parts. Through that capacity it can come to be the way of fulfilment of what is divided, ... leading into unity in itself those things that are naturally set apart from one

27. III. 678C. Cf. III. 633A–B.

28. *Amb.* 41. 1304D. The division has parallels in Gregory of Nyssa (*De Hominis Opificio*, PG 44, 181B–C), presumably one of the "saints" to whom Maximus attributes the theory. Cf. A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London, 1996), 212, n. 3; also E. Jeauneau, *Homélie sur le Prologue de Jean* (Paris, 1969), 294, n. 1.

29. *Ibid.* 1305A–B, trans. Louth, *op. cit.* 156–57.

another by a great interval."[30] Maximus does not clarify the relation between nature and human nature. It remains unclear how human nature is to accomplish the mediation of nature if it merely participates in nature, and is not related to nature in a more radical way.

Eriugena explicitly takes the step which seems to be required in order for Maximus' understanding of human nature to be logically rigorous. Human nature does not merely participate in nature—it contains nature within itself. That is, human nature is the site of creation. A discussion between the *nutritor* and the *alumnus* on this subject goes some way toward explaining how Eriugena understands this to be possible. The *alumnus* has asked how all creatures have been created in human nature.[31] The *nutritor* responds by reminding the student that everything known by the intellect or imagined by the exterior sense is created somehow in the knower or senser. However, the knowledge of a thing is not the same as the thing perceived by sense, for knowledge of an object is prior to and better than the object as perceived by exterior sense. The object as known in the human mind is eternal and immutable, while the object as present to exterior sense is perishable and subject to change. What is eternal is prior to what comes to be in time, and the permanent is better than the transient. Because the knowledge of the object is prior to the object itself, we may say that the true substance of the object is in the knower and not in the object.[32]

Eriugena's development of Maximus establishes an equivalence between human nature and Christ: both contain the substance of the created world. That is, both may be identified with the primordial causes. Left alone, this identification would appear to limit the priority of human nature. Instead of grounding the divisions of nature within itself, human nature would identify itself with a single division, namely, the second. The division of nature itself would have to devolve on a being more comprehensive than the human. Eriugena's thought does not rest here. Having established human nature as the site of creation, the *nutritor* and the *alumnus* stumble upon a problem: human self-knowledge. Their subsequent discussion serves to dislodge human nature from its identification with the primordial causes and establish it as prior to the divisions of nature.

Based on their location of all things within the human mind, the two partners make a further statement which introduces a difficulty into

30. *Ibid.* 1305B–C, trans. Louth, *op. cit.* 157.

31. IV. 764C.

32. M. Zier, "The Growth of an Idea," in *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought*, ed. H.J. Westra (Leiden, 1992), 80 suggests that Eriugena only gradually came to understand the human as the unique place where creation subsists, and that it was the culmination of his reflection on human nature.

Eriugena's system: since the human mind may have knowledge of itself, this self-knowledge must be its true substance. That is, the true substance of human nature may be defined as self-knowledge.[33] However, the *nutritor* and the *alumnus* have previously defined the true substance of human nature as its notion in the divine mind—human nature as primordial cause.[34] Upon observing these seemingly incompatible definitions of human nature, the *alumnus* wonders whether one of them ought to be discarded as false. Rather than choosing one definition over the other, the *nutritor* introduces a passage from Augustine which renders them compatible by subordinating one to the other. The definition of the human as an idea in the mind of God Augustine calls its primary substance, while the definition of the human as its self-knowledge Augustine calls secondary substance. The two may be distinguished by their differing qualities: "the primary substance, constituted in the wisdom of God, is eternal and immutable, while the secondary is temporal and variable; the one precedes, the other follows; the primary is primordial and causal, the secondary derivative and caused; the primary contains all things as a whole, the secondary comprehends through knowledge as particulars as many things as are allotted to it by its superior, and are subjected to it; the secondary emanates from the primary and will return to it again."[35] This passage seems to suggest that human nature is composed of two separate substances, which, if true, would distance the divided human nature from the divine unity. To forestall this conclusion, the *nutritor* explains that the primary and secondary substances are only "one which may be conceived under two aspects. Under one aspect the human substance is perceived as created among the intelligible causes, under the other as generated among their effects."[36] The difference between the two definitions of human nature is here reduced to a matter of perspective.

This conclusion has two implications relevant to Eriugena's philosophy of human perspective. First, it establishes the transcendence of human nature with respect to the divisions of nature. Depending on the perspective it adopts, the human subject may see its own nature in its differentiation (as fallen), or in its unity (as unfallen). Second, it reduces salvation to a static principle. Though this account arises from Origen's cosmology, in which unfallen souls occupied a paradise outside of time until they fell into time as punishment for their self-will, Eriugena also corrects the Origenist cosmology. Specifically, he corrects the Origenist temporal distinction between fallen

33. IV. 770A.

34. IV. 768B.

35. IV. 770C. Cf. Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram* II. 6. 12; *De Ordine*, II. 9. 26. The conclusion appears to be Eriugena's own: see G. Madec (*op. cit.*), 114–15.

36. IV. 771A. Cf. III. 693B.

and unfallen human nature. Eternity is not temporally prior to time, nor temporally posterior to time. Rather, they are two different dimensions—eternity embraces time. The Origenists present unfallen human nature as outside of time and fallen human nature as descended into time, but these are only two sides of the present—one is eternally present and the other is always receding. Eriugena refines this distinction so that we are not tempted to think of unfallen human nature as existing "back there" and fallen human nature as "what we are now." In this way, Eriugena's understanding arises from Origen. However, the two remain distinct in that Origen maintains the severity of temporality as a punishment for sin. Human nature is conditioned by time as a punishment for its τόλμα. When the difference between fallen and unfallen human nature becomes a matter of perspective, and each has a positive role to play, the Fall ceases to play a meaningful role as punishment.

III

We seem to have accomplished a complete *exitus* from Eriugena's explicit system, following out his most original speculations to a conclusion which is in manifest contradiction with his stated goal of relating all things to their divine origin. At this point, it seems that the human subject has an absolute priority, that it unfolds the world from itself without reference to a divine source or goal. Of course, we need not assume that Eriugena intends to reconcile the traditional structure of his philosophy with these more radical ideas. But I think that he does intend to reconcile even his most forward thinking speculations with the *exitus - reditus* structure of the Neoplatonism he inherits. His reconciliation comes about primarily through the interaction of Christ and human nature, an interaction which results in the emergence of the divine and human trinities.

For our purposes, the most direct way to approach Eriugena's personal adaptation of the already well-established doctrine of a trinitarian human nature is through the problem posed by a unified human nature. The problem manifests itself in Eriugena's theory of participation: "participation is nothing else but the derivation from a superior essence of the essence which follows and the distribution from that which first possesses being to that which follows it in order that it may be."[37] If human nature contains the essences of all things, then from where does it derive its own essence in order that it may itself exist? If, like the rest of created reality, it exists by participation in a higher essence, then it does not truly contain all essences. On the other hand, if it does contain all essences, then it must be the highest essence, self-containing and self-created. However, to posit human nature as

37. III. 632B.

self-created would remove it from the created world and rank it with the creator. As a result, it appears that human nature cannot both contain all essences and be created. Eriugena presents and solves this problem explicitly only in terms of the primordial causes—are they eternal or are they created? By the time he identifies Christ and human nature with the primordial causes, the problem has been repeatedly and emphatically solved—the primordial causes are both eternal and created. This solution draws the divinity down into creation to produce Christ; it also elevates human nature into the divinity. The descent of the divine beyond being into created otherness constitutes the creative incarnation, which Eriugena is careful to separate from the historical incarnation.[38] The eternal incarnation of Christ is not a doctrine which is peculiar to Eriugena. What Eriugena brings to the table is the concomitant eternal deification of human nature so that, as self-containing, it may become the place of the primordial causes. This has the effect of separating human nature into a divine aspect and a properly human aspect.

Taking his cue from Origen, Eriugena identifies this eternal incarnation and creation with the paradise described in *Genesis*. In the fourth book of the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena cites Origen as one of several authorities claiming that the paradise described in *Genesis* was spiritual rather than physical.[39] Later, he refers to Origen to justify his claim that human nature is simple and indivisible, and that all individual humans are one in it.[40] Eriugena also chooses to interpret several passages from Maximus after the model of the Origenist paradise. The Origenist tang which Eriugena gives to Maximus is especially evident in Eriugena's excursus on the resolution into unity of Maximus' five-fold division of nature. For instance, Maximus describes the unification of male and female by a human individual through the virtue of dispassion, so that the human individual becomes "simply a human being" (*ἄνθρωπον μόνον*).[41] The *nutritor* interprets this phrase as follows: "in these words, Maximus shows very clearly the divine plan for creation had God not foreknown that man would sin. For he would be 'simply man' created in the simplicity of his nature, multiplied in intelligible numbers, as the holy angels are multiplied."[42] The *nutritor* has transferred the end of the world to the beginning of the world; he has made the deliberate act of a human individual into the ontological state of human nature as a whole.[43] It is statements like these that get Eriugena in trouble with scholars who would ac-

38. III. 678D. On the general way in which corporeal events signify incorporeal realities, see V. 865D–866A.

39. IV. 815C; 818B–C; 832D.

40. V. 922A.

41. *Amb.* 41. 1305C.

42. II. 532C–D.

43. Eriugena does this repeatedly—see the rest of his excursus: II. 533A–C.

cuse him of Origenism, or at least a brand of Neoplatonism poorly suited to Christianity.[44] But, as we have seen, Eriugena places a critique of this cosmology side by side with his use of it. For instance, the paradise which Eriugena describes did not exist merely in some primordial state from which we have now fallen. Human nature continues to exist in this paradise even now, though it now stands opposed to sinful human individuals: "the evil will does not contaminate the goodness of the nature; ... that nature is in itself free and utterly untouched by any sin."[45] Nor does this creation exist in its own right. The human nature that bifurcates in the eternal creation only becomes fully trinitarian in its emergence from this creation.

The importance of an emergence from the eternal creation into an embodied, differentiated existence only appears in the later books of the *Periphyseon.* In the second book of the *Periphyseon,* the *nutritor* claims that the trinity of human nature is established in the soul alone and does not extend to the body, a claim which the *alumnus* justifies with an argument based on *John* 4:24: God is a spirit and not a body; therefore his image will be stamped on the spirit and not the body.[46] Once the *nutritor* and his *alumnus* have made strides toward a more embracing view of human nature, they redraw the image of God so that it includes body and soul, as well as the vital motion which mediates the two. The new image of human nature suggests itself in the context of Gregory of Nyssa's three-fold division of human nature into mind, vital motion, and matter.[47] The *alumnus,* who at this point is quoting and summarizing passages from Gregory, declares that all three terms are, in some sense, the image of God. The vital motion which governs matter shapes the image of the mind on matter; since the mind is the image of God, the image impressed on matter will also be the image of God: "and thus, in a way the whole man can be suitably described as fashioned after the image of God, although really and primarily it is only in the mind that the image can be seen to subsist."[48] This new triadic formulation distends the human trinity over the whole of nature. As the incorporeal *οὐσία* of all things, human nature remains outside the body; as embodied, it is *οὐσία* made manifest: *ἐνέργεια.* Body and soul are mediated by vital motion, the *δύναμις* which allows the soul to manifest itself in the body.

44. For example, J. Meyendorff, "Remarks on Eastern Patristic Thought in John Scottus Eriugena," in *Eriugena: East and West,* ed. B. McGinn and W. Otten (Notre Dame, 1994), 64; M. Colish, "John the Scot's Christology and Soteriology in Relation to His Greek Sources," in *Downside Review* (1982): 146.

45. V. 943C.

46. II. 567A–B.

47. IV. 790B–C.

48. IV. 790C–D.

This two-fold presentation of the trinity in human nature conditions a two-fold emergence from human nature as a genus into human individuals. On the one hand, human nature is a trinity, and so both human nature as a genus and human individuals possess their own *οὐσία*, *δύναμις*, and *ἐνέργεια*. On the other hand, human nature is the *οὐσία* from which all embodied individuals emerge as manifestations of that *οὐσία*. As early as Book One of the *Periphyseon*, the *nutritor* makes this paradox of human nature manifest: "whoever says that the essential trinity, namely, essence, power, operation, is constantly and incorruptibly present in all natures and especially in rational and intellectual natures does not, I think, depart from the truth; and this trinity cannot be increased or diminished in anything in which it is present. But the trinity that comes after it is understood to be as it were an effect of the preceding trinity. ... Nor is it strange if these three which are considered in individuals are said to be a kind of accidents of the aforesaid universal trinity, and its first manifestations."[49] In this passage, the *nutritor* first describes individuals as participating in a complete trinity, which cannot be increased or diminished in them. At the same time that this ensures the perfect possession of the image of God for each individual, it also renders individuals unnecessary to the emergence of the universal trinity. The universal trinity already has its complete expression before its differentiation into individuals. However, the *nutritor* immediately qualifies his initial description of the procession of the trinity by saying that the trinity as it subsists in individuals is an effect and manifestation of the universal trinity. That is, individuals are the means by which the universal trinity becomes accessible to knowledge. This latter account, which Eriugena develops in the later books of the *Periphyseon*, distends the universal trinity over the procession of human nature from genus (*οὐσία*) into individuals (*ἐνέργεια*).

As a complete expression of the universal trinity, the embodied, individuated human subject contains within itself its own pre-history: the divinity, the moment of otherness from the divinity, and differentiation. To describe the human trinity as it subsists in the human subject (prior to, though implicated in, the soul's procession into the body), Eriugena makes use of the triad with which Maximus describes the motions of the soul: *νοῦς*, *λόγος*, *διάνοια*. According to Maximus, the motion of the mind is "simple and inexplicable," and knows the divine "in a transcendent way that has nothing to do with any of the things that exist." The motion of reason is natural to the soul, and knows "all the natural reasons of those things that are known only with reference to cause, which are the forms." The motion of sense is "a composite motion," through which the soul "gains for itself some impression of the meaning of things" after being struck with sense-

49. I. 506B–C.

impressions.[50] Eriugena closely follows these definitions of Maximus, though, by identifying Maximus' triad with the triad of *οὐσία, δύναμις, ἐνέργεια*,[51] he gives them a cosmic significance which is not explicit in Maximus.

The *nutritor* defines the first motion of the soul as that by which the soul circles around the unknown god, and understands that the divine nature is absolutely transcendent, having nothing in common with anything created.[52] He says that the Greeks call this motion *νοῦς*, while the Latins call it *intellectus, animus,* or *mens.* This motion is the substance of the soul, but at the same time, it surpasses the nature of the soul. Since *νοῦς* surpasses the nature of the soul, and is also the soul's *οὐσία*, it appears that the soul's *οὐσία* does not belong to it, but to the divinity about which it moves. In all of this, Eriugena advances well beyond Maximus. Maximus does not claim that the motion of *νοῦς* surpasses the nature of the soul, for he does not rigidly identify the soul's motion with its object.[53] Nor does Maximus identify the *νοῦς* with the essence of the soul. Eriugena's identification of *νοῦς* and *οὐσία* is another expression of the deification which conditions human nature in its essence.

The second motion of the soul considers the divine nature as more cause than transcendent.[54] That is, this motion knows more about the divinity than merely "that it is"; it also knows that the divine is the cause of all things, and that the divine contains the primordial causes within itself. The *nutritor* says that the Greeks call this motion *λόγος* or *δύναμις*, while the Latins call it *ratio* or *virtus.* The intellect begets this motion, just as a wise artist produces within himself the art by which he intends to make his works of art. In this case, reason is the art in which the intellect pre-creates those things which it wishes to make. Reason is therefore not unreasonably called the form of the intellect, since it begins to make manifest the intellect which is unknowable in itself.

Like the primordial causes, reason understands the essence as a cause (undermining the transcendence of the essence), and it understands all effects as subsisting in a unity (undermining the intelligibility of the effects). In this way, reason is neither intellect (*οὐσία*), nor sense (*ἐνέργεια*), but it allows intellect to become sense by mediating between the two. At first glance, this appears to make reason a mere tool of the intellect. However, reason's

50. *Amb.* 10. 1112D–1113A, trans. Louth (*op. cit.*),100. Eriugena paraphrases this account at IV. 754D.

51. II. 570A: "there seem to be two trinities in which our nature is shown to subsist in so far as it is made in the image of God, but if the truth be consulted they are found to differ from each other not in reality but only in name."

52. II. 574A–576C.

53. Cf. L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator* (Lund, 1965), 110–13.

54. II. 576C–577C.

role as mediator invests it with a peculiar power. By being neither essence nor manifestation, reason emerges as the only thing other than the divine in the intellectual trinity. The soul's essence is divine, and since sense is the manifestation of its intellectual essence, sense is too in some way divine. Only reason escapes divinity, abiding in the difference between intellect and sense, between essence and manifestation.

The third motion of the soul begins with the sensible.[55] Sense perceptions are gathered by the five senses (called *αἰσθητήρια* by Eriugena) and unified into a conceptual image by the exterior sense (*αἴσθησις*). Interior sense takes the conceptual image and strips it of its corporeal trappings in order to define it properly. Definitions of this sort (that is, stripped of all corporeality) are the objects of the third motion of the soul. Eriugena provides for this motion the Greek names *διάνοια* and *ἐνέργεια*, and the Latin names *sensus* and *operatio*. Although the conscious act of the perceiving soul begins with exterior sense and ascends through interior sense up to intellect, the causal act of the soul begins with intellect and descends through reason to interior sense. The intellect as artist creates the definitions in interior sense as its works of art through which it knows itself.

The *nutritor*'s identification of interior sense with manifestation means that the soul's conscious knowledge (though not its conscious*ness*) is the mirror of its divine essence. What the soul comprehends as qualitative forms joined with matter are, in essence, substantial forms cast out by intellect so that it may understand itself.[56] This seems to nominate intellect as the perceiving subject of the soul, but intellect is another word for the divinity as it comes to exist in the soul. The consciousness of the individual belongs rather to the soul as dialectician, that is, to the soul's reasoning element.

These three motions constitute the human subject. When this subject, in its unity, "brings forth an abundance of interpretations," and so divides nature into different, though coherent, interpretations, it reveals its own trinitarian structure. Though the divinity and human nature constitute themselves as the same essential trinity, Eriugena retains within this trinity a properly divine and a properly human aspect. The difference in priority between these two aspects serves to set this trinitarian system in motion. To the extent that this structure has a motion, descending from intellect through reason to sense and reascending, the *exitus - reditus* structure of reality remains.

55. II. 573A–C; 577C–578C.

56. This is an essentially Iamblichan account of human knowledge. See *De Communi Mathematica Scientia Liber*, 43. 19–44. 3 (cited by G. Shaw in *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* [Pennsylvania, 1995], 194). Proclus reiterates the account: *In Parmenides*, 895.33–896.12; *In Eucl.* 17.22–18.4.

IV.

The resolution I have just described can hardly be complete. A complete resolution of the divine nature as source and goal of all things with the human nature which finds its source and goal within itself would demand an equally complete identification of the two. To the extent that Eriugena approaches this, he moves beyond the Neoplatonism of his sources. Neoplatonism, whether the Plotinian and Porphyrian tradition which Eriugena receives through Augustine, or the Iamblichan tradition which he receives through Dionysius and Maximus, depends on a difference between the divine nature and the nature of the soul. It is true that Augustine, following a Plotinian model, posits an interior process by which the soul comes to stand face-to-face with its principle, a process which Eriugena recognizes in the Augustinian formula: *nulla interposita creatura est.*[57] However, for Augustine, these are still two natures—the human trinity establishes the human self as concretely different from the divine. All the more so for Dionysius and Maximus, who, following a Proclan model, posit the necessity of an *ecstasis,* a departing from everything correlate with the soul's own nature, for any approach to the transcendent divine nature.

Eriugena steps beyond these positions even as he develops them. His use of the division of nature as a division of theologies originating in the power of human perspective is not radical in itself. Already in Dionysius the divine unity is differentiable by human perspective into an aspect outside of being and an aspect manifest in being. However, Maximus makes certain modifications to the Dionysian tradition which provide the groundwork for Eriugena to expand the role of human perspective. Namely, Maximus introduces human action as the agent of the return of all things to their divine source, and identifies Christ with this same agency. Based on these modifications, Eriugena posits the dependence of the creation of the world and the emergence of the divine trinity on the differentiating capacity of human nature. This dependence entails a curious overturning of the Neoplatonic system, in that there can be no consideration of the divine trinity without a consideration of human nature—the two are interdependent. As the *nutritor* puts it: "we believe that man was most perfectly created in the image and likeness of God and that in paradise before his sin he fell short in nothing except in respect of subject." This difference "in respect of subject" is nothing other than that Christ exists through himself, while human nature requires Christ to exist. From two different starting points (the divine unity and human otherness), the divine and the human merge in the eternal being which is contained in Christ/human nature.

57. At V. 941D, for example.

Yet the difference in starting points remains, and with this difference, Eriugena retains the Neoplatonism of his sources. In every way, Eriugena begins from the fundamentals of Dionysian theology: a hierarchically ordered universe beginning with the God beyond being, a system of mediation which requires the descent of the human into the sensible, and a descent of the soul which completes the universe and manifests the goodness of the deity. The priority which Eriugena allots to the human is not a simple reversal of this tradition; it allows him to expand the tradition and to hold it in tension with the developments which seem to contradict it.