

*Stupefactus haesito maximoque  
horrore concussus titubo:*

Eriugena's Critical Use of Augustine on  
Paradise and Resurrection in the *Periphyseon*

*Benjamin Lee*

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Basic to John Scottus Eriugena's speculations on the final return of all reality to its beginning is his commitment to interpret the biblical narrative of paradise otherwise than in spatiotemporal terms: the garden of Eden to which human nature, assumed by the divine Word, is restored in the resurrection must be severely demythologised. In the final two books of the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena turns his attention to the creation of the human, the account of paradise, and the return, and there his philosophical exegesis of scripture and use of patristic authorities reaches the height of its dialectical power. By his own admission, Eriugena's interpretation of paradise and its eschatological horizon is sympathetic to the Greeks, who "saw things with greater insight [*acutius considerantes*] and expressed their thought with greater precision [*expressiusque significantes*]" than their Latin counterparts.<sup>1</sup> The most important of these includes Dionysius the Areopagite, the *divinus* and *summus theologus* accorded quasi-apostolic authority as the disciple of St Paul; Origen, whom Eriugena honours with epithets, *beatus* and *magnus*, which would have seemed suspect, if not scandalous, from the contemporary Byzantine perspective; Gregory of Nyssa, whose *De opificio hominis* (*De imagine*) John the Scot quotes more extensively than any other patristic text; and Maximus the Confessor, who among the Greek fathers exerted perhaps the most profound influence on Eriugena, because of how thoroughly his thought was integrated into the terminology and structure of the *Periphyseon*. Indeed, so conscious is Eriugena of his preference for Greek subtlety in these

1. John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, 5 vols., Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 161–65, ed. Édouard Jeaneau (Turnholti: Brepols, 1996–2003), V.955A. Further references to this text will appear in parentheses. I am indebted for the translations throughout to John O'Meara, trans., *Periphyseon*, Cahiers d'études médiévales 3 (Montréal: Éditions Belarmin, 1987).

matters, that he is anxious to show that he has not abandoned the traditional Latin authorities: "I do not wish it to be thought that I am only following the doctrines of the Greek writers about paradise, and am either ignoring the Latin writers or am incapable of finding among them support for this interpretation" (*PP* IV.830C). Hence Eriugena finds an ally in the venerable Latin father, Ambrose, who is nonetheless a philhellene, well acquainted with the Alexandrian interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis; and, as one would expect, throughout books IV and V, he makes frequent reference to Latin orthodoxy's predominant authority, Saint Augustine. But perhaps more surprising—and certainly more difficult to explain—is how Eriugena can claim to acknowledge the authority of Augustine as *magister* and *pater*, even when his references to the latter's opinions often indicate a strained and sometimes radical reworking of his views. Repeatedly in these books, in order to construe support in the teachings of the Bishop of Hippo for his own total theological system of creation, multiplied and reunited, Eriugena is compelled to perform considerable hermeneutical gymnastics.

Much effort in recent decades has gone into examining Eriugena's use of his sources,<sup>2</sup> both Greek and Latin, and the particularly vexing question of the Augustinianism of Eriugena has continued to generate scholarly interest.<sup>3</sup> That Eriugena owes a fundamental, extensive, and intractable debt to

2. See, e.g., the colloquia papers devoted to this in John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bierler, eds., *The Mind of Eriugena: Papers of a Colloquium, Dublin, 14–18 July 1970* (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973); René Roques, ed., *Jean Scot Érigène et l'histoire de la philosophie, Laon, 7–12 juillet 1975* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, 1977); Werner Beierwaltes, ed., *Eriugena: Studien zu seinen Quellen: Vorträge des III. Internationalen Eriugenas-Colloquiums, Freiburg im Breisgau, 27–30 August 1979* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980); G.H. Allard, ed., *Jean Scot écrivain: Actes du IV<sup>e</sup> Colloque International, Montréal, 28 août–2 septembre 1983* (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1986); Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten, eds., *Eriugena: East and West: Papers for the Eighth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Chicago and Notre Dame, 18–20 October 1991* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

3. In addition to the contributions of John O'Meara, Goulven Madec, Brian Stock, Joseph Moreau, and Robert Russell in the above cited volumes, see Brian Stock, "Observations on the Use of Augustine by Johannes Scottus Eriugena," *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (1967): 213–20; Robert Crouse, "INTENTIO MOYSI: Bede, Augustine, Eriugena and Plato in the *Hexaemeron* of Honorius Augustodunensis," *Dionysius* 2 (1978): 137–59; *idem*, "Augustinian Platonism in Early Medieval Theology," in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. Joanne McWilliam et al. (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992); *idem*, "Primordiales Causae in Eriugena's Interpretation of Genesis: Sources and Significance," in *Johannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics: Proceedings of the Ninth International Colloquium of the Society for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies, Held at Leuven and Leuven-La-Neuve, June 7–10, 1995*, ed. Gerd van Riel et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 209–20; John O'Meara, "Contrasting Approaches to Neoplatonic Immaterialism: Augustine and Eriugena," in *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought: Studies in Honour of Édouard Jeaneau*, ed. Haijo J. Westra (Leuven: Brill, 1992), 175–80.

Augustine seems to be beyond dispute, but the exact nature, and the limits, of that debt remain difficult to discern. At least part of the reason for this is that, while Eriugena makes no attempt to hide the fact that his *Periphyseon* seeks to achieve a complex synthesis of the many and diverse Eastern and Western patristic authorities, the result of his painstaking labours to balance both sides, or “to craft a consensus,”<sup>4</sup> can and sometimes does hide certain striking differences in their overall patterns of thought. As Édouard Jeauneau has observed, referring to Eriugena’s harmonizing of Augustine and Dionysius, “[t]he Irishman, consciously or unconsciously, seems to have ignored the differences in order to stress the common tradition.”<sup>5</sup>

In any case, it is one thing to grant that, in particular instances, Eriugena himself ignores the differences between different strains of Christian Platonism for the sake of penetrating their deeper theological continuity; in this, one remains faithful to Eriugena’s self-understanding vis-à-vis his sources. It is quite another thing, however, to take account of those differences that Eriugena often attempts to minimize, and to understand to what extent Eriugena’s use of his patristic authorities operates on the basis of a creative misreading of them; such a task requires a critical reading of Eriugena’s own project of conciliation.<sup>6</sup> Concerning Eriugena’s use of Augustine, there is a very significant passage in which he does not downplay or ignore the differences between the Greek and Latin tendencies, and, for what it reveals, it

4. See John O’Meara, “*Magnorum Virorum Quendam Consensum Velimus Machinari*” (804D): Eriugena’s Use of Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram* in the *Periphyseon*,” in *Eriugena: Studien zu seinen Quellen*, 105–16; Giulio D’Onofrio, “The *Concordia* of Augustine and Dionysius: Toward a Hermeneutic of the Disagreement of Patristic Sources in John the Scot’s *Periphyseon*,” in *Eriugena: East and West*, 115–40; Willemien Otten, “The Texture of Tradition: The Role of the Church Fathers in Carolingian Theology,” in *The Reception of the Church Fathers: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. Irena Dorota Backus (Leuven: Brill, 1996), 3–50.

5. Édouard Jeauneau, “Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor in the Works of John Scottus Eriugena,” in *Carolingian Essays: Andrew W. Mellon Lectures in Early Christian Studies*, ed. Uta-Renate Blumenthal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 137–49, at 145; repr. in Édouard Jeauneau, *Études ériugéniennes* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987), 183. The contrast between the two great phalanxes, mostly about the interpretation of the opening pages of Genesis, is eloquently described by Giulio d’Onofrio, “The *Concordia* of Augustine and Dionysius,” 118: “Simply put, we can say that the position of the Greek Fathers (along with Ambrose) is mostly spiritual, privileging on the ontological level the nature of the causes over that of the effects and seeking to restore the effects to the causes. The Latin Fathers (along with Basil) tend to a historical and ‘materialistic’ reading of the sacred text, avoiding in particular every contact of suprasensible reality with individual entities dispersed in corporeality and sensibility, whether it is the fruit of fall or restoration.”

6. In this respect, the focus of this paper on the artificiality and invention of Eriugena’s attempts at forging a consensus is in no absolute sense opposed to Eriugena’s own rules for resolving contradictory claims of his patristic authorities; the latter is most helpfully clarified by d’Onofrio, “The *Concordia* of Augustine and Dionysius.”

can serve well as my point of departure.

As indicated by the title of my paper, in the final book of the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena voices an oblique albeit poignant criticism, whose primary target (though he remains prudently unnamed) is almost certainly Augustine. To those aware both of Augustine's arguments on the resurrected body in the *De civitate dei*, and of his highest esteem in the Latin world, Eriugena's declaration of his own faltering shock appears as a shockingly bold move:

When I read of such things in the books of the holy fathers, I stagger, so to speak, amazed and horror struck (*stupefactus haesito, maximoque horrore concussus titubo*). Then I begin to ask myself how these most spiritually-minded people could have defended such teachings in their writing and handed them down to posterity. (PP V.986B)

Here, Eriugena's typical restraint in pronouncing critical judgment against the Latin doctors seems to have reached its limit. Such a disclosure of astonishment indicates his ostensible conflict with their historicizing and (at least quasi-) corporealist views of resurrection, as he sees it. Eriugena's expression of being aghast at carnally-minded conceptions of resurrection and, by implication, paradise, signals a problematic intersection in his thought of an anagogical metaphysics which somehow transcends spatiotemporality, and a salvation history which somehow preserves the integrity of human creatures, and indeed the universal creation, in the return of all things into their divine origin.

It is not the purpose of this paper to draw any general conclusions about the degree to which Eriugena substantially converges with or diverges from Augustine. Nor does the present paper seek to establish Eriugena's true sources for any particular doctrine. Rather, through an analysis of his purely allegorical interpretation of paradise and, correspondingly, his highly spiritual conception of the body of the resurrection, my aim is to show how Eriugena selectively interprets, modifies, and occasionally suppresses Augustine's thought, especially those aspects of it which exhibit more or less obvious contention with the Irishman's own cosmic physiology. I shall thus argue that Eriugena has a "critical use" of Augustine, in this precise sense: insofar as he fails to reconcile Augustine's actual teachings with his own views of paradise and resurrection, he can also be seen as failing to withhold an implicit judgment against him. My analysis will take the form of an exposition of the argument from book IV onwards, in which Eriugena's *stupefactus et concussus* in book V is carefully anticipated. It will become clear that Eriugena's sense of being "horror struck" at Augustine's teaching is just as much a patiently argued counter-thesis culminating in a bold confrontation with his more vulgar views. Special attention will be given to moments in the argument where Eriugena's respect for Augustine is clearly laboured, whether in concealing

his embarrassment at Augustine's thought, in interpreting Augustine against himself, or in attempting to use other rhetorical strategies to reconcile with his own account Augustine's historical literalism with respect to protology and eschatology which he finds blatantly incredible.

It should be mentioned at the outset that Eriugena's interpretation of *Genesis* is largely determined by his placement of all the events of the six days of creation entirely within the creation of the human, and also by his complete identification of paradise with human nature itself. Eriugena brings together a rarified allegorical interpretation of *Genesis* with the characteristically Neoplatonic double movement of procession and return which governs the overall structure of the *Periphyseon*. In books IV and V especially, Eriugena makes clear that the human lies at the very centre of this dialectic: the human is both the end of all division, and the beginning of all reunification; for just as the manifold effects of the universe, visible and invisible, have been made in and comprehended by the original paradisaic state of the human, so likewise will it be in and through the human, restored in the resurrection to its pristine state, that the whole created world will return into its primordial causes and thence into its Uncreated Principle.

It is in relation to this question concerning the final stage of division, in which the human is divided into male and female, that Eriugena comes up against Augustine's teaching on the paradisaic human body as a problem. To appreciate what is involved in this confrontation, one must take account of Eriugena's exegesis of *Genesis* 1:26–27, in which he elaborates his theory of the double creation of the human, first *ad imaginem dei*, and second as *masculum et feminam*. What Eriugena learns from Gregory of Nyssa, whom he quotes at length, is crucial (*PP* IV.793ff). In a powerfully symbolic interpretation of man's creation, Gregory's thesis requires that the order of the biblical narrative be freely rearranged so as to explain that sexual difference is a logical consequence, as a punishment for man's disobedience—not a temporal condition. In its pristine status according to the image of God, human nature was first created as universal and indivisible, having an immutable and immortal spiritual form, equal to the angelic nature, and accordingly capable of a mode of procreation that was purely intellectual. But on account of its fall from this original dignity, which God pre-comprehended in his omniscient providence from all eternity, a kind of second creation, as it were, was necessary, whereby human nature at once received an earthly, animal body extended in time and space, and therefore subject to corruption, no longer united but divided according to male and female, and no longer procreating like angels but like irrational beasts. So Eriugena summarises what he takes from Gregory: “we can understand nothing else but that human nature abode in the paradise in which it was naturally created for no temporal interval and

without sensible effects, but that it quickly deviated from the way of truth and received as a punishment for the activity of its perverse will the division into the two sexes whereby it might propagate its kind after the manner of the beasts of the field" (*PP* IV.812C). Eriugena thus follows Gregory in judging that sexuality, the sexual organs, as well as the mortal, corruptible, earthly and animal body which bears them, are foreign to the first creation of man according to the divine image (*PP* IV.799A, 801C; cf. V.896B). However, it is unacceptable to suppose that the primordial founding of man was bodiless, for he reasons: if the first creation took place "in the soul alone, how can it be called man, seeing that it is agreed that man is composed of two natures, the invisible nature in the soul and the visible nature in the body?" (*PP* IV.800A). The critical question thus becomes, *what* body was made, together with the soul, to constitute the paradisaic human? Eriugena concludes that the only true and natural body is in fact the "spiritual body," that is, the interior, spiritual form of the body, which endures forever in its unchanging state (*PP* IV.801D–803A).

Another development that we must not overlook is the exact explanation Eriugena gives of how the double creation of the human relates to itself. Eriugena finds the doctrine in both Gregory and Origen, though he attributes its source ultimately to Origen's allegorical interpretation of the tunics of skin "as signifying mortal bodies which were added (*superaddita*) to the first human beings as a punishment for their sin" (*PP* IV.818D). Strictly speaking, since all that pertains to the animal, sexed, composite and corruptible body does not have its origin in human nature, it is conceived as "an accident superimposed (*superaccidit*) upon the form" (*PP* IV.801A–B). The earthly body is distinct from the true and natural form of the body, although just as there are not two human natures, but one, so there are not two human bodies, but one. On the one hand are the body's changing appearances, and on the other is the body's permanent and natural form. "You see how nicely Gregory distinguished the property of the first creation from those things which were added to it. For whatsoever in human bodies is seen to be immutable is proper to the first creation, but whatever in them is perceived to be mutable and variable, this has been superadded (*superadditum*) and subsists outside its nature" (*PP* IV.801C).

At this point, the *Alumnus* draws attention to the fact that this interpretation of the human body in paradise is in conflict with the teaching of the greatest of the Latin authorities: "What then shall we reply to the most holy and godly theologian St Augustine, whose teaching seems to go against these arguments? For in almost all his books he shows no hesitation in declaring that the body of the first man before the fall was of the animal form, was earthly and was mortal, although it could not have come to a mortal end if

man had not sinned" (*PP* IV.803B). Ultimately, Eriugena is forced to admit with perfect clarity that the teaching of Augustine on this matter does not transcend the corporeal sense, and that he cannot answer its difficulties, insofar as it cannot be reconciled with the teaching of Gregory. "But it is not our business," says the Nutritor, "to bring one [opinion of the holy fathers] into conflict with another, or to justify one against another" (*PP* IV.804C). Indeed, even the wish to craft a consensus in this apparent controversy would be to no avail, because the respective interpretations of Augustine and Gregory are irreducibly at odds. Nevertheless, Eriugena does not cease to be astonished that Augustine can suppose the animal body is spiritual and blessed in paradise (*PP* IV.805, 806D). In contrast, he maintains that the animal, earthly and corruptible body; the sex divided into male and female; the beastly mode of propagation; bodily needs; and the body's physical increase and decrease are all collectively the consequence of sin, added to man's nature by God at the time of creation, and remain external to that nature (*PP* IV.801C, 817D). In taking this position, Eriugena's preference to follow Gregory is evident, but seeing how he can do so "without contradicting other holy fathers of the spiritual doctrine who seem to have thought differently" (*PP* IV.808A, *marginalia*) is more problematic—especially in the case of Augustine.

Concomitant with his view of paradise as a symbol and prophetic allegory of true human nature, Eriugena claims that the paradise which God planted in Eden is to be understood as no localized place, and that "the first humans were in paradise for no temporal interval" (*PP* IV.809A). He insists that it must rather be equated with the whole of perfect humanity, which lies strictly outside the determinations of space and time. Since, following Maximus in his *Ambigua*, Eriugena assumes the inseparable logic of space and time so that they must always be treated together (see *PP* V.889A), if paradise has no here or there, it can include no before or after; and vice versa. The scriptural description of paradise does not refer to a terrestrial garden with flowering trees, flowing rivers, or really quadruped beasts, nor does it mean that any events occurred in some historical past. Eriugena instead takes paradise as the spiritual and interior reality of human nature, and relegates time and place along with the sensible body to that which is added, and exterior, to that true nature. This spiritual state of man is not something he once actually possessed and then lost; rather, it is, from the temporally divided human perspective, rather more like a future acquisition of an unprecedented status, but from the eternal simultaneity of divine providence, an immutable reality always already perfected.

All the more extraordinary here is Eriugena's argument that Augustine confirms this ahistorical reading of paradise. Extraordinary, indeed, because this interpretation of Augustine runs counter to the mature Augustine's ex-

pressly stated description of his own exegetical method. For instance, in his *De Genesi ad litteram* he sets out to do precisely what his title indicates, as he articulates in the opening of the eighth book: “The narrative of these books [of *Genesis*] is not in the genre of speaking of figurative things as in the Song of Songs, but simply of things that happened, as in the Books of Kingdoms and others like them.”<sup>7</sup> Augustine does allow that the paradise account richly conveys prophetic or figurative meanings (*res figurata*), but he insists that fundamentally it must be seen as reporting actual events or deeds (*gesta*), and, true to his exegetical purpose, his commentary on it concentrates mainly on this historical sense of the literal. Accordingly, the paradise in which God placed man must be understood as “nothing else than a particular place on earth (*locus quidam terrae*), where the earthly man (*homo terrenus*) would live.”<sup>8</sup> Despite his undoubted familiarity with such passages which clearly stand opposed to his own reading of paradise, Eriugena manages to achieve an agreement between Augustine’s text and his own by what one scholar has called “a somewhat desperate, grammatical argument.”<sup>9</sup> Referring to a line from *De civitate dei* (XIV.26), *vivebat itaque homo in paradiso*, Eriugena points out that it does not say that “man lived in paradise” or “had lived in paradise,” but rather that “man began living in paradise”; the key for Eriugena is to notice that Augustine did not use the preterite (*vixit*) or pluperfect (*vixerat*) past tenses, but instead the inceptive or inchoative imperfect tense (*vivebat*). This allows him to say of Augustine’s text that it seems to avoid the implication that “for a space of time man was in actual possession of perfect and sinless bliss in paradise,” and instead affirms “the inception and indication of some action which by no means necessarily reaches perfection” (PP IV.809A). Eriugena then pushes his reading of Augustine still further in a direction to support his own position: if Augustine had used the preterite, it would have had a future meaning, for the reason “that he was expressing the predestined and fore-determined blessedness which was to be man’s if he had not sinned, as though it had already occurred, when in fact, that is, in the effects of the completed predestination, it was still among those things which were destined to be created at some future time” (PP IV.809C). By an almost too ingeniously creative reading—one is tempted here to say a sophistic or deconstructive reading—of Augustine’s text, Eriugena uses the latter’s authority precisely to undermine the possibility of a straightforward

7. Augustine, *La Genèse au sens littéral en douze livres (VIII–XII)*, Bibliothèque Augustinienne 49 (Paris: Desclée de Bouwer, 1972), VIII.1.2.

8. *Ibid.*, VIII.1.1.

9. Donald Duclow, “Denial or Promise of the Tree of Life? Eriugena, Augustine and Genesis 3:22b,” in *Johannes Scottus Eriugena: The Bible and Hermeneutics*, ed. Gerd Van Riel et al., 232.



literal, historical meaning of paradise. Moreover, he has outlined the logic necessary for thinking of paradise as symbolic of the pristine human nature, which will be, and in some sense already is, realized in terms of eschatological perfection or return. However specious Eriugena's handling of Augustine may be, the result has been a definite advance in his own argument: history as the experience of the world extended in space and time begins only outside of paradise, as symbolized by the human being's expulsion therefrom; according to this same logic, the end of history in the general resurrection of the body will be man's return to paradise, as it were, for the first time.

Another significant passage for my purposes is when Eriugena introduces his own treatment of paradise itself. At this point, Eriugena stresses his concern to follow accepted catholic authority rather than his own fancy, and brings to mind how extremely dangerous, insolent and controversial it is to approve one's own perception or that of those whom one considers best while rejecting that of others; so the *Alumnus* admonishes: "Let us therefore in this business proceed with caution, humility and moderation in the footsteps of the holy fathers" (*PP* IV.814B). Immediately Eriugena lays down a series of quotations, once again, from various works of Augustine, namely from his *De Genesi ad litteram* (VIII), his *De civitate dei* (XIV), and his *De vera religione* (XX). At issue is whether to interpret paradise according to the corporeal sense, the spiritual sense, or a third way, which Augustine is twice quoted as maintaining, according to both corporeal and spiritual. In order to marshal partial support for his own purely allegorical, that is spiritual, view of paradise, Eriugena sets up the third text against the first two, effectively pitting the younger Augustine in his bolder Platonic enthusiasms against the later, more historicizing Augustine. Hence, where Augustine formulates the expulsion from paradise in terms of the movement from "eternity into time ... from an intelligible good into a sensible good," Eriugena finds a clear implication that he holds paradise to be only one, and that it is intelligible and not sensible (*PP* IV.815A). In the end, Eriugena chooses to leave the matter unresolved, and, once again, eschews any intention to dispute against those who opine about the possible existence of a local, corporeal and sensible paradise. "For whether there be two paradises, the one corporeal and the other spiritual, we neither deny nor affirm. We are merely comparing the opinions of the holy fathers: it is not ours to say which should be followed rather than another" (*PP* IV.816D). This supposed stance of avoiding any refutation of authorities when they are in conflict Eriugena repeats numerous times (cf. *PP* II.548D–549A, IV.804C–D, V.876C). The irony here is that although Eriugena pretends not to adjudicate between diverse testimonies to the truth, his own position in fact does choose and prefer certain authorities rather than others; and to make a choice is to make a judgment according to the dictates of reason.

Eriugena's radically spiritual conception of paradise is systematically connected to his conception of the resurrection, and crucially the body in the resurrection is none other than the natural and immutable form of the body in paradise. With sharp dialectical precision, Eriugena presents the difference between the spiritual and animal bodies, clearly identifying the former as the body of the resurrection:

not this corruptible body which is the result of sin, but that which man had before the fall; not this composite and dissoluble body, but that simple and indivisible body; not this animal and earthly body, but that which is spiritual and heavenly; not this body begotten by both sexes from seeds through carnal intercourse, but that which was brought forth before the fall out of the simplicity of nature and which is to be in the resurrection; not this body which is known to the corporeal senses, but that which is still hidden in the secret place of nature; not this which was laid upon us in recompense for sin, but that which was already inherent in us in our uncorrupted nature and to which this corruptible and mortal body will be restored (IV.760B).

The simplicity of nature prior to the division of the sexes is the same man, both in paradise and in resurrection. In order to understand the resurrection in its proper metaphysical import, it must be situated within the return of the whole creation into God.

Although there are several different ways of diagramming the structure of the return in the *Periphyseon*,<sup>10</sup> let it suffice for us to refer to Eriugena's fivefold articulation, derived from Maximus, as the main framework for the discussion in book V. Here we can be brief in outlining the basic scheme (*PP* V.876Aff).

The *first* stage of the return is the physical disintegration of the body, that is, the dissolution of the mortal and earthly body made out of clay back into the four elements of the sensible world from which it was composed.

The *second* stage fulfills the resurrection proper, according to the traditional understanding, which is when each person will receive his own body reconstituted from the communal store of elements.

The *third* is when this resurrected body will be changed into spirit.

The *fourth* is when the spirit, and, indeed, the whole nature of man, will return into its primordial causes.

The *fifth* is when that nature together with its causes will be moved into God.

10. See Stephen Gersh, "The Structure of the Return in Eriugena's *Periphyseon*," in *Begriff Und Metapher*, ed. W. Beierwaltes (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1990), 109–25; cf. Carlos Steel, "The Return of the Body into the Soul: Philosophical Musings on the Resurrection," in *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and his Time*, ed. J. McEvoy and M. Dunne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 581–609, at 590ff.

Eriugena asserts that there is no dispute concerning the first two stages of the return, which are universally accepted by traditional theology. However, concerning the last three stages, “opinions differ greatly and almost every possible teaching has its supporters” (PPV.876D). Augustine, for instance, as we know from his conclusion to *De civitate dei*, does not care to speculate about a further ascent beyond the body’s return in its resurrection, and Eriugena indeed reports Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram* as denying that the human body can be changed into soul, or the human soul changed into God (PPV.877A–B). He thus presents Augustine, with Boethius in his company, as denying Maximus’ third and fifth returns. Eriugena concludes: “It is not possible to interpret the words of these authorities in any other way than that no corporeal nature can be changed into an incorporeal. Yet, far from raising any objection to their opinions, we freely accept it: but we are fully aware that the Greek theologians thought otherwise” (PPV.877C). The reason why Eriugena can freely accept the main argument he finds in the Latin doctors is that what his position affirms is not simply reducible to what their position denies, namely that the body or corporeal nature becomes incorporeal soul. Eriugena explains that in the return all things will not simply “perish,” but “will change into something better” (PPV.876B). The transmutation or transformation that takes place is not a destruction or abolition of the former substance, but a perfection in which the lower is preserved in the higher, each of the lower terms being assumed in the ascent to the higher mode. While it is true that Augustine already conceives the resurrection in terms of man’s spiritual renovation, *in melius renovabimur*, he is explicit that this “better” spiritual body would be one which Adam did not yet have.<sup>11</sup> The logic of hierarchical perfections, which we find in Eriugena, thus belongs most obviously to the philosophical heritage of Dionysius, not Augustine. Regardless, Eriugena effectively diffuses the potential conflict with Augustine by strongly recontextualising it within the terms of his own thinking.

On the whole, in the argument I have followed, Eriugena attempts to find support in Augustine wherever he can. In some instances he contrives remarkably fruitful misreadings of the Latin *magister* and *sanctus pater*, in others he scrupulously minimizes the acknowledged conflicts between the latter’s thought and his own, and in still others he diffuses direct confrontation owing to their the differences as much as possible; though not without considerable strain, Eriugena’s argument has consistently sought to suspend judgment out of respect for Augustine’s great authority. My analysis has now come full circle, and can turn finally to one instance in which he is not so well restrained.

11. *De Genesi ad litteram*, VI.26.

The following is Eriugena's summary of the opinions of the holy fathers on the resurrection of the body which he finds so horrifying:

And here again they do not hesitate to declare that the bodies of saints have spatial extension and retain the same stature and the same number of parts as was theirs previously, and are distinguished by their male and female sex, only admitting that they are changed into spiritual qualities and most subtle substances resembling ethereal bodies so that all that was here earthly and ephemeral shall be there heavenly and eternal, and all that was here heavy and perishable shall be there free from all weight and all taint of corruption, so that they may still be in possession of their limbs and bodily organs, occupying the space that they occupied before, the eyes and the instruments of the other senses, the head down to the shoulders, the arms, the chest, the feet, and all other members disposed as in their previous life (*PP* V.986A–B).

Eriugena does not specify his sources at this point, referring only vaguely to “such things in the books of the holy fathers,” but his modern editor refers us to Augustine's *De civitate dei* XXII chapters 12 and 20. Suffice it to highlight the main difficulty Eriugena finds in such a doctrine, which, on the basis of my above analysis, should now be manifest: the resurrected body as described still retains the features which characterize man's animal existence. Eriugena categorically rules out any spatial extension of the resurrected body, because this is accidental and superfluous to its true nature. For according to Eriugena's argument, the human spiritual body in the resurrection will not include any of its former bodily members and parts. The notion that sexual differentiation is to be preserved in the resurrected body stands in greatest conflict with Eriugena's own theory of the resurrection, and upon that notion Eriugena's project of harmonization reaches its limit and falters.

There is one final strategy, besides again enlisting the authorities of Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus, and Ambrose in his support, to which Eriugena resorts to save Augustine and to find a way around his embarrassing insistence on the eschatological integrity even of the material. As John Scottus puts it: “The only reason I can conceive that they were induced to imagine and set down such things is that they might encourage at least those who are devoted to such earthly and carnal speculations and have only been nourished on the rudiments of faith, to ascend to the contemplation of spiritual things” (*PP* V.986C). In other words, Augustine's own language here is in condescension to the simple faithful, who because of their carnal minds could not otherwise accept the life after death. So, Eriugena supposes, Augustine esoterically kept his own more spiritual opinions to himself, and accommodated his rhetoric to those of weaker intellects.

Eriugena himself does not seem to be constrained by such pastoral considerations. It has not been my purpose to evaluate whether his metaphysically robust and radically spiritual conception of paradise, resurrection, and the

return of all things can claim to be fundamentally Augustinian; but, as I have argued, Eriugena's discovery—or one might say invention—of a Platonism in Augustine which is altogether like his own sometimes comes at the expense of the plain or historical sense of Augustine's own texts. I have shown that Eriugena has a variety of ways to deal with Augustine's teachings when they do not agree with his own. These include 1) simply quoting Augustine and, neither affirming nor denying his positions, acknowledging their differences of opinion and allowing them to stand; 2) selectively interpreting passages of Augustine against Augustine; 3) interpreting or manipulating or totally recontextualising Augustine's texts so that their meaning is brought into conformity with a position supportive of Eriugena's views but probably not Augustine's own intentions; and 4) denying that a text of Augustine represents his truest, or most spiritually profound, conviction. If my analysis is correct, it is difficult to see how he can ultimately withhold an implicit judgment against Augustine's determinately historical and (at least quasi-) materialist interpretation of human bodies, both in paradise and in the resurrection.

